Somewhere Along in the Bitterness

by HaroThar

Summary

I started writing this the day after the Homestuck credits were updated.

A "John is sad and Gamzee is still with his abuser and that is unacceptable" fic.
A Journey of a Thousand Miles

You pinch your lips together and turn your back on your friends. You made your decision, you’ve filled your obligation and told them, you’re not going to change your mind, so there’s no reason to look them in the eye. You expect it when someone pipes up to stop you. You somehow weren’t expecting Karkat to be the first to say something.

“John, wait-”

“I’m not changing my mind,” you tell him firmly without turning back to face him. “Besides, with my retcon powers, you probably won’t even notice, just blink and I’ll be back! Just there, a fight with a green shithead, and bam I’ll be right here again and Dave will be calling me a cool senpai and dumb shit.”

“I’m not trying to fucking stop you!” Karkat snaps, and in your shock you do turn around, then. He’s glowering at you, more determined than you think you’ve ever seen him.

“I’m coming with you!”

You’re touched, actually. It’s like a scene straight out of both of your movies.

“Aw, Karkat, I don’t mean to be rude but I’m way more powerful than you and I probably won’t-”

“I’m not going for your sake you writhing fleshmound!” Karkat surprises you again.

“I’m going back for Gamzee!”
There’s a certain quality to Karkat’s voice, more than his eyes, more than his stance with his feet spread wide and his fists hovering inches from his thighs and his horns lowered just enough that his bangs fall in his eyes. There’s an edge in his words, the kind you associate with someone who is about to cry.

“I’m going back for Gamzee!” he screams at you, and his voice is raw and angry and high. He screams like that when he’s frustrated himself into tears, when he shouts and shouts and nothing calms him down till he breaks from exhaustion and the crying comes, he screams like that for any number of things, but never have you seen him look so war like when he does.

Something reminds you of the glint in WV’s eyes, when he speaks of the rebellion he lead against the Black King. Something speaks to you of battle in his blood.

“The… purple clown guy?” you ask, because Karkat is alarming you and you also genuinely aren’t making sense of this, mentally. Dave is making motions to pat his shoulder and talk him down, but Karkat- for what you think is the first time you've ever seen- brushes his hand away.

“Yes, the purple fuckhead that is a zit upon the face of my mental fortitude, by which I mean the parts of me that overthink everything and refuse to let things go and also the parts that look for any reason to wallow in self-loathing. That guy. The stupid one.”

“Karkat, babe,” Dave starts- and Karkat actually hisses at him.

You’re starting to wonder if maybe telling everyone you were gonna go fight Caliborn was a bad idea.

Karkat rounds on you again.

“I’m going with you. You can fight shitty gremlins and robot bunnies and the entire fucking planet they’re standing on if that’s what you want, but I’m going with you and I’m bringing Gamzee home.”

Those who had lived on the meteor begin immediately protesting, one talking over the other, except Terezi, who is not there because she's out flying around a black hole in space somewhere.

Ten minutes of Karkat shrieking later, everyone is beaten into submission, though many are clamoring to come along with you as well and keep you and Karkat out of trouble. Roxy has snapchatted Terezi during that time frame, who then puts in her two cents as well. In the end, Terezi makes the decision for everyone. She thinks it would be best if you and Karkat go alone.

Before joining you, Karkat is snapchatted by Terezi as well.

“Be safe,” she sends, her face uncharacteristically sympathetic, and you cannot even begin to guess at the meaning.
Karkat’s hand is clammy and definitely shaking when you take it. You smile at your friends and wave, and only Roxy smiles back though Callie makes a valiant effort to do so. When you teleport, Karkat makes a small noise that you laugh at, because no matter how many years you’ve been friends with him he is still absolutely fucking hilarious to laugh at. He huffs and is about to scream at you for laughing at him (a reaction that you live for) when you both hear the sound of a gun loading.

“I see,” God this asshole matches an angry Karkat in volume, “That you have come. Despite the fact that that. Is truly a terrible idea. For dumb babies. Who are terrible. Like you.”

The cherub lowers his machine gun, which he had been dramatically pointing skywards, and takes aim at you. You shove Karkat out of the way and Become the wind, dissipating into an existence that almost feels more “you” than your flesh body does.

No. Fuck it. You’re in a Medium again and your friends can’t get concerned for your well being when they’ll never know your thoughts. You are more “you” in this state. In your Breath pajamas with the wind around you, in you, as you.

Caliborn laughs and lowers his gun for a moment, and when you reform with your hair flying everywhere you laugh too. You equip your Warhammer of Zillyhoo and shift into a fighting stance, toes of your shoes just barely skimming the ground as the wind around you cracks like whips and you grin at your opponent. You’re flying, you’re aflame, you’ve been itching for a something for a long ass time now and you think you may have found it. In turn, he lifts his gun again, and while it may be too big for his body and the end effect is a very clunky looking child, his glowing eyes and figure ripple the air you can feel abuzz around him. Time ticks irregularly around him in a red haze, and you can feel your heartbeat in your fingers where they clamp your weapon’s handle.

You dart forward first, and he pulls the trigger, but you just fly yourself in a million gaseous pieces around his bullets and revert back to your flesh body behind his stupid green skull. You bring your hammer down, but it hits the dead earth beneath where he stood, and all of a sudden you’ve got a machine gun in your face.

At first you think he’s flash stepping, which is stupid because you thought that was a Striders only thing. Then you remember he’s a fucking Time player and things make a little more sense. Heh. You’re being kind of a dumbass, probably.

“What the fuck. Are you laughing at. You fat nasty piece of trash?” Caliborn screeches at you, and it’s weird hearing Callie’s voice getting used like that! At least the face/body type thing you can work past since he’s red and carries himself waaaaay differently than she does, but the voice thing really throws you for a loop, even if their speech patterns are totally different from each other.

“Oh I was just being stupid. I guess I got so used to being a god that I forgot losers like you can have powers too!” you taunt.

His reaction is to shoot at you some more, and you Become the wind again. Now, you’re watching where he shows up when you swing at him and he uses Time to dodge you.

Wow he’s fucking stupid as shit. He almost always shows up three or four steps to your right and to the back a little.
You wait another round or so, making absolutely certain that he follows the same pattern, and then you go for an actual blow. You Become the wind, appear behind him, swing, and then change the direction of your hammer last second. You get him right in the gut, and his machine gun skitters across the rocky ground. You laugh, thrilled, and with a flash of red he’s back on his feet again, gun in hand, bullet halfway to your skull by the time you Become the wind. That was close.

He’s furious and shouting at you and somehow it is exactly as entertaining as when you put shaving cream in Karkat’s hand and tickle his nose. You think you might be a little bit of an asshole.

You repeat the process a number of times, and the idiot only barely manages to mix up where he reappears at after his Time dodging. You get a solid four blows in on him, but he actually doesn’t look any worse for wear. You frown.

“It seems. That you have finally caught on. You abomination. To god. Who is me. You cannot defeat me. When I can just speed up my own injuries.”

He does a cartoonish laugh, machine gun and open hand held out to his sides, face turned upward. You kinda wanna take a snap and ask Dave if it’s from one of Dirk and his animes. You sucker punch him in the sternum, your hammer momentarily forgotten, and his “oof” is honestly so satisfying.

But it is going to be a problem if he can sorta-heal and you can’t. But then again, a magician without a few tricks up his sleeves is a rather piss-poor excuse for a magician, if you ask you.

You put away your Warhammer and bring out an old gift. It’s been a long time since you’ve had use for Fear No Anvil, but you think if there’s any time for a weapon that can put a pause on Time shenanigans, now might be the one. Caliborn, the utter dumbass, simply tells you that the color scheme for this hammer is worse than the one for Zillyhoo, since he is an “expert” on color theory and a “master artist.” You believe him. This is your believing him face. You are so swept away by your belief in his artistry.

You laugh a little at yourself, and Karkat grumbles. He thinks your little “ehehehe”s are insufferable and it really only makes you want to do them more.

This time, when you catch Caliborn on the arm, you hear his bones crunch beneath the garnet on your weapon and he is thrown to the ground, shrieking and flailing and losing his machine gun once again. You see Time motifs glitching out all around him, but nothing happens, so you hoot in victory.

You hear a clicking of metal bits being lifted and moved and a very soft, very delicate goose noise as Caliborn stands. He catches his machine gun with his unbroken arm, and when you turn to look at who threw it you hear Karkat’s sharp inhale from behind a boulder with bullet holes in it.

“Gamzee!”
He doesn’t react. Like, freakishly does not react. When Karkat calls his name he doesn’t even blink, you can’t even see one of his pointed alien ears twitch under his hood-hat abomination. He just stands there idly with his eyes, half lidded, fixated on Caliborn, and you can’t spare the moment to worry about what the fuck is wrong with him because Caliborn is shooting at you again, laughing.

“You idiot!” the little fucking gremlin mocks with a high pitched cackle. “You are not only out bested. And out smarted. And out handsomed. By me. But you are out numbered too. Because I have useful ‘friends.’ And yours aren’t here right now. Except for a sissy loser. Who probably pees his shorts. Like a terrified bug baby.”

“He’s not even wearing shorts you unobservant douche,” you protest. Karkat ignores the both of you.

“Gamzee, hey, Gamzee, I need you to listen to me,” you hear Karkat say, and it’s that voice he uses with lost children crying near public fountains (or when Dave remembers something he shouldn’t and needs Karkat more than ever). You Become and spread yourself out, curious about what they’re doing. Part of you circles around Caliborn, keeping his admittedly small attention, while other parts of you wrap around Karkat’s limbs and Gamzee’s horns.

“Gamzee,” Karkat’s voice is a little strained, less placating and more worried. “Gamzee can you hear me?”

Karkat walks in close to the clown, but he still just stands there like a lifeless doll. Doesn’t twitch, doesn’t look away from where Caliborn is shooting at you as you swirl around him, he barely even blinks at the force of you against his lidded eyes.

“Gamzee!” Karkat shouts as he grabs his wrist. Gamzee lets himself be tugged closer a few inches, one foot stepping forward, but still does not react to either of your presences (admittedly, yours is probably less meaningful to him since you’re not even being a particularly forceful gust of Breath).

Caliborn starts cackling again though, and quits shooting uselessly at you to round on Karkat amidst your swirls of motion.

“The honk friend is mine. Not yours. You stupid idiot. There’s nothing left of him. Except what I have decided to let him keep. Because he is mine.” Caliborn does something Dave calls the Dreamworks Grin and you wind yourself up for a particularly forceful gust. “I’ll show you,” Caliborn promises right before you blast him off his crummy cherub feet. You knock the wind out of him (heh) but you can’t do too much damage to him by just body slamming alongside your Breath, so you turn to flesh again, pulling yourself back into a confined space. As you do, Karkat shrieks, and both you and Caliborn lose a distracted moment glancing over there.

Gamzee has a juggling club in each hand, and he’s moving. Karkat is rapidly backing away, eyes wide, as the taller troll grins down at him with red shot straight through his sclera. The dumb part of your brain thinks it’s kind of funny how his eye color matches Karkat's blood color now, while the smart part of you rounds on Caliborn with Fear No Anvil.

You can’t spare attention to Karkat for a while after that, but you can hear the scuffling of feet that means at least someone is still alive over there, and the clanging of weapons that means Karkat
isn’t totally defenseless. You swing and Become and fight with Caliborn, and he shoots and Time zaps and keeps himself away from your hammer for an infuriatingly long time. Even when you do manage to land a hit on him, he’s better about keeping his hands on his gun now and is ready to go again as soon as he stands up.

At first you’re pissy because he shouldn’t be able to speed up his injuries! But he’s not, you realize, he is sustaining damage, he’s just sustaining an infuriatingly small amount. You suppose that makes sense, since the battle imp next to the salamander who was farmin’ all those goddamn fuckin’ mushrooms took like fifty blows before you could kill it, and that was just a battle imp. But you were weaker then! Thirteen years and only just starting to grow into your mangrit. A shitty green child shouldn’t be able to hold his own against your twenty year old ass as well as he is.

You momentarily wonder if maybe you’re being a little immature for fighting an eleven year old. Then he snorts at you and grins and you remember you don’t care.

You finally manage to get his machine gun skittering across the ground again and instead of dawdling around and waiting for Gamzee to fetch it again, you zap over to where the machine gun is and you bring the garnet of your hammer down on it hard. The weapon breaks beneath the hammer of a god and you spin on him, grinning. Check fucking mate.

You are caught very, very, very off guard when the little shit flings himself at you with his claws and toenails poised and starts gnawing on the arm you throw up to defend yourself.

“Ah fuck!!” you yell and try to beat him off of you with your fist, flailing the arm with the hammer and tiny goblin on it wildly.

“Get the fuck off!!” you shriek.

“NNNN!!” Caliborn yells back, his voice all muffled through your fucking flesh!

You Become and let Caliborn flop down onto the hard ground. You dart over to where Karkat is to see if he needs any help, and find him locked in a battle of his own with his sickles and clown friend. Gamzee is talking, his voice fluctuating and half made up of honks that make it really hard to understand him. Sometimes some of the words he says are supposed to be intelligible noises, but end up coming out as honks instead.

“…I will become a MOTHERFUCKING SINGULARITY and all you motherfuckers will curse that you SAT AND ABIDED as I was TORN down down and motherfucking down into a pit I CANNOT CLIMB BACK OUT OF and forged into GORY PERFECTION and in my holy righteousness I will drown and take you with me SO SAY THE WORD OF THE LORD motherfucker…”

Okaaaaay, you are officially going to let Karkat deal with whatever the fuck he’s saying because you are kind of really not here for this. You note that while Gamzee is taller than Karkat by a lot, he probably isn’t that much of a threat. His motions are all jerky and really unsettling, something that people shouldn’t actually move like, and his body is all thin and young. He’s covered in blood of a lot of colors you don’t recognize, aside from his own purple that seems to be the freshest since it’s on top of all the other stains, so that’s terrifying, but mostly you think Karkat will be able to hold his own for a little while.

You go back to facing Caliborn.
So I made a post on my Tumblr about all my headcanons for Classes and Aspects but I'm not going to tell y'all everything here, I'm just gonna post the relevant ones:
Heir: One who Becomes their Aspect or uses their Aspect to Become other things
Knight: One who Protects their Aspect or uses their Aspect to Protect other things
Bard: One who Unbecomes/undoes their Aspect or uses their Aspect to Unbecome other things
Lord: The Ultimate of their Aspect
Muse: The Ultimate of their Aspect
Breath: Air and Freedom
Blood: Blood and Loyalty/Bonds
Rage: Negativity and Doubt
Time: Time and Choice

Seventy five swings and fifty landed blows later, the glowing asshole finally starts looking worse for wear. You, for all your superior strength and stamina, are not feeling too great yourself. You’re bleeding from where he bit you and he has a lot better luck with his crowbar than he had with his machine gun. With the machine gun, basically all you really needed to do was simply fail to stand there and take it. The crowbar, you have to actually move and dodge and block. It’s exhilarating. It’s exhausting. You’re pretty sure you’re losing.

You’re not sure how Karkat’s doing, but you really hope his clown friend hasn’t managed to do anything bad! Fortunately, looks like while you underestimated the green shitheel’s endurance, you severely overestimated his patience.

“Fuck all of this. And you. Fuck everything that’s going on here. I will simply make. A tactical retreat. And get my machine gun back. So I can kill you more easily. Since this crowbar isn’t working. Despite the many times I’ve bludgeoned your stupid fat face with it.”

Caliborn then time travels away, which, hey!, he shouldn’t be able to do since you’ve been smacking him around with Fear No Anvil! Though you suppose it has been a while between your last blow and now, and you had been focusing on stunting his “healing” rather than all his time powers. Still, it seems stupid to you that you should have to mentally specificate that you want to cut off all his Time powers. Then again, you suppose that’s exactly the kind of bull fuckery you would expect from something like the Game.

“A little help?” Karkat shrieks at you, and wow does he sound tired. You chuckle, and fly over there in a million airy pieces.

Karkat’s totally covered in bruises; you can only see his face and hands but you can tell. His sweater is torn in a few places around the elbows where it looks like he took nasty falls, and red blood is seeping out around the holes.

Gamzee is staggering now, his movements even more disturbing, somehow. He’s all jerky and woozy like he’s got weights on him, or he’s being yanked around or something. You body slam into him and he staggers away from Karkat, whose eyes dart around in search for you. Good luck
finding you when you’re only air! Heheh!

But you suppose you gotta help with this fight now. Actually, you’re pretty proud of Karkat. All accounts say he’s lame in a fight, but maybe he’s not actually? Strange. Either way, you pull yourself into your fleshy meat suit right next to him and get into a fighting stance, Fear No Anvil put away for your tougher, more damaging Warhammer of Zillyhoo. No Time shenanigans to worry about with this guy!

“Please don’t hurt him,” Karkat spouts at you, and his words are all rushed through his labored breathing. You scoff at him and roll your eyebrows, but get out of your lowered stance.

“Karkat, look at yourself, he’s been beating the shit out of you!”

“And I’ve given what I’ve gotten! I’m not the only injured party here you sack of nail heads, the fuck do you think I’ve been doing this whole time you’ve been prancing around with your little green sack of-”

“Honk.”

“Right,” Karkat snaps as he turns his attention back to Gamzee, who’s gotten his balance back (sort of). You wonder if maybe he’s moving all disjointed and disorganized because he’s bleeding a lot? It kind of looks like he’s bleeding a lot. It also looks like he was pretty injured since well before you and Karkat showed up!

“So what am I supposed to do?”

“Just, just fucking disable him. I can talk him down, I know I can, I just need to get him to listen to me for three goddamn seconds and stop with the lord bullshit he keeps spewing.”

Karkat sounds kinda desperate, and you’re not sure you believe him (you’re not sure he believes himself), but you’ll go along with what he wants for now. If nothing else, you can use this as leverage later when you whine at him to go get you a soda or make him go pick up takeout. The fact that you’ll be using something you did in a very serious situation to get him to do frivolous things will likely only piss him off even more, which is kind of what you live for in all honesty. Shit’s fucking hilarious.

Well, if disabling is what Karkat wants, you suppose you can do well enough with your Breath. You stow your Warhammer away and Become the air again, and Gamzee tenses up, ready for another body slam while Karkat lowers his stance and shifts his grip on his sickles.

You gust in hard enough to knock him off his silly elf shoes and a split second before you do, he activates one of his fraymotifs. You feel your Breath get drawn in towards him like your Breath was drawn to Roxy when she activated her Void-Breath fraymotif. She’d found it in one of her planet’s ruins, her consorts all dead unable to sell her the plethora of fraymotifs she instead just stole from the abandoned vendor’s stall. Your consorts only ever sold you combo fraymotifs for Time, Light, and Space, as well as your standard issue Breath-only fraymotifs. You cannot instigate with anyone outside those aspects, but can happily go along with when someone else utilizes theirs.

You jerk back, alarmed, very much not happily going along with the sudden combo. You’re attacking him, why is he fraymotifying with you when the Aspects are just going to dump themselves all over him. The fuck is he even thinking? Does he want to die? Or is this just some trick to get you to recoil, like you did. Ha ha, look at you, playing into his ploy like a fucking dumbass. Well fine.
You go at him again, this time summoning less Breath into your attack, really just gusting in and
body slamming without any additional force from your magic. He starts up the fraymotif again, but
you are determined not to be worried about it. He’ll quit when you call his bluff.

Your Breath magic starts doing things you didn’t tell it to, warped by the Rage it’s now coinciding
with. You may have just made a serious tactical error.
You retreat and unform revert back into your flesh a few feet away from Karkat, staring in alarm at the clown. He’s stopped moving and for a moment you wonder if he’s going to do something powerful and drastic that’ll knock Karkat off his feet and make your hair fly every which direction thanks to the power of his magic, but he doesn’t.

He just sorta… sinks to the ground. Like, all pathetic and shit. He makes a ‘thunk’ noise when he hits the dirt and just lays there all sad and a lot smaller than he looked when he was standing up with his clubs equipped and Rage magic flowing.

You check yourself, but don't really feel any different. “Hey, Karkat,” you call over your shoulder, tilting your head but not looking away from your enemy, “did his fraymotif affect you at all?”

“No,” Karkat says, and you think it's probably the least he's ever said without having to hold his breath.

“What’d he do..?” you mumble to yourself and re equip Zillyhoo. You start walking towards the body.

“Don't-”

“I'm not gonna hurt him!” you promise, “I just want to be able to defend myself if he springs up like a freaky Halloween jack in the box!”

Karkat hiss-shrieks at you. You “eheheh” at him because his hiss-shrieks are funny as shit. He's a few paces behind you your whole slow, cautious trek over to his clown friend.

Gamzee is breathing. You can definitely hear it; it's all raspy and sorta wet? Like he has pneumonia (god that was the worst disease of your entire childhood).

He coughs, and you jump like three whole literal feet into the air. Karkat, who is not a god and cannot fly, also jumps but to a lesser extent. Purple gunk- wait no it's probably his blood- splatters onto the ground in front of Gamzee and you can sorta hear a new hissing noise. Weak and patterned; his breaths are kinda short.

“Motherfuckers,” he says quietly, a sorta warbling quality introduced to his voice, as he props himself up woozily onto his elbows. “I suppose I owe you my motherfuckin’ gratitude.” At least he’s not doing the volume fluctuation thing anymore.

“Before I rend this goddamned universe thread from motherfucking thread.”

Maaaaaybe it was better for him to do the fluctuation thing. Since that didn't seem to involve rending of universes or sudden Rage magic glowy eyes.

“Gamzee, Gamzee calm down,” Karkat begs, and Gamzee laughs at him. He sounds sorta like one
of the villains from old movies where the laugh starts out all hard to hear because it's mostly air and then shifting all high pitched and teary-sounding and then going all raw so you can't tell if he’s still laughing or if it's morphed into sobbing yet.

“Calm down!” he shouts and you still can't tell if it's sobbing or not. “Calm down, you say to me, after all this time and all this SHIT you have the motherfucking nerve to tell me to calm down!”

Magic is definitely a thing that is happening. Everything seems to be pulling, which isn't the right word but it's the only word your brain is coming up with. Vortexing? Gamzee’s doing something and you're definitely sure it's bad. Which means mayyyyybe you're having a bad response to the situation. You should probably be freaking out. Karkat definitely is freaking out but Karkat’s always freaking out so he's probably not a good standard. You wish Jade was here, if she was here and she was freaking out then you would know that you need to freak out.

Gamzee staggers to his feet and you hear Karkat take a few steps back. Gamzee’s anger is palpable- literally palpable- and you kinda just… hover awkwardly off the ground with your hammer in your hands. Should you attack? Try to calm him down? Let Karkat handle this? So much indecision. You have all of the indecision, it's you.

Gamzee coughs up more blood once he’s standing fully and reaches up and unbuttons his hood, which falls and reveals the rattiest rats’ nest you've ever seen. He undoes the front of it too and takes a heaving breath. Was it too small for him? Should you care? The energy in the air around him shifts and instead of pulling the feeling is now that something is being lifted. It kind of reminds you of standing over an air vent in the sidewalk, back when those were things that existed, but instead of just making your pant cuffs flutter against your skin this makes you feel some approximation of pretty fucking terrified. But like distantly, through a lense. You're not sure if you're just suffering from delayed reaction again or if your brain genuinely thinks this kid isn't going to hurt you, but you're pretty sure you should be scared. Karkat definitely is. Karkat is screaming something again and you really should be listening but you get momentarily captivated by a pebble floating up off the planet’s surface a little to the right of you. Sand filters off of it as it rapidly shrinks until nothing is left but a string of fine sand, spiraling upward and out into eternity. It’d be really pretty, in a different situation. More sand flies up and off the planet’s surface, and your shoes now have a sort of hazy quality when you look at them due to how quickly the dust is clouding upwards.

It's beautiful, you think, but something in your stomach twists as though it is grotesque. You dislike this, you decide, no matter how pretty it is. You dislike the feeling of a planet undoing itself beneath your feet.

Gamzee is now screaming back at Karkat, so you turn back to them. His eyes are still glowing with Rage and there are tears streaming down his cheeks, unchecked. It's hard to connect him to the thing that’s tearing this planet (and, if he's not bluffing, the entirety of capital-E-Existence) to shreds. He looks pathetic. A bloody, beaten, crying child. Somehow it's that, not any of the magic or undoing or even Caliborn, that manages to break through your haze of clouded emotions and make you actually feel something.

“You abandoned me!” Gamzee accuses. “You got no right to come back for me now!” Yeah you should've been paying attention. Whoops.

“Gamzee, I'm sorry, but please, just, listen, just, c’mon man, think about when we were pupae-”

“You ain't never cared about me,” Gamzee spits venomously through his crying. “Even when I loved you hotter than all the white stars in the sky, you always saw me more a nuisance.”
Karkat looks visibly wounded, not righteously angered or huffily indignant and leaping to his own defense, and you find yourself appalled. You know trolls are different from humans, but actually caring about your friends is a base standard!

Gamzee does more laugh-sobbing, (sob-laughing? Gamzee’s doing more sobbing than laughing at this point) and grabs his arms, claws digging in and raising new purple to the surface. You flinch.

“You can't even deny it!” he squeaks out through his laughter. “You hated me, you abandoned me, you all left me to rot in the hands of a cruel god, and now I'm going to be the only one as has ever done myself a favor and I'm going to unwrite what has been written.” His volume slowly grows. “I'll erase it all from end back to beginning and save my own damn self by snubbing out the whole motherfucking narrative!”

“Gamzee!” you shout, because Karkat sure as hell doesn't seem to be helping any, despite initial good intentions, “I know you're upset. I know you're hurt and sad and scared and really kind of terrifyingly angry! But if you unravel everything, you'll never have the chance for things to get better!” You feel young and sound idealistic. You know you do, but what else are you supposed to say when a kid is self-destructing and taking everything down with him? Rose is the one who wanted to be a therapist, not you.

Gamzee does more of the awful sob-laughing thing and you feel even younger and stupider. "Better?" he screams, shaky hands lifting from his biceps to his head, “Brother, ain't nothing ever gotten better for me! I held out for better, I clung to it like religion and you know what I got?” He looks at you, claws in his hair, eyes wide and wild and weeping. “I only ever got things worse! I tried to make myself worth staying for and he only left more often and for longer! I tried to drown the loneliness but it rotted out my pan! I let my friends do as they please to me but that just made me more disposable! I clung to a fake-ass religion and when I was made to make broken revelations it turned out it only made things worse. I tried to call out for help even while under his thumb- but it turns out that conversation was what catalyst caused it all and he forgot why I came to him but remembered how motherfucking funny my distress was so I only made it worse! I've held out for things to get better!” he screams, hands jerking down to clutch at the Rage symbol on his chest as he bends in on himself. “I've held out but what’s it get me? Dead friends and more pain and a body that won't fucking die! I'm done hoping for better! There ain't nothing left for my soul! So I'll undo and Unbecome and I won't let myself get hurt no more!”

You wish you could help. You wish you had words that could comfort him, or guide him, or even just not make him feel worse. But you don't. You can't fix this; fix him. You have no proof things might improve and he very clearly has a lifetime of evidence that nothing ever will.

Okay,” you say, soft, pitying. “That's fair.” You approach him through the floating sand and dust, underneath a sky that grows blurry with its fraying edges way out somewhere in the Furthest Ring. He sobs openly, words spent, magic flowing off him and coursing through the air around him, and you shiver from his Rage but don't stop.

You hug him. First, he shrieks and you let go, but his hands fly out and cling to you with desperate fingers and he presses his face into your shoulder hard enough it almost feels like he's headbutting you. “Sorry I startled you,” you mumble, wrapping your arms around him again. You kinda doubt he heard you, though, because he's crying really loudly now. It's wet and gross and forceful and his breathing is noisy and uneven with sobbing, raw honks on his exhales and uncontrolled whining on the inhales. You've got tears and snot swiftly sinking through your shirt and when he tries to suck his snot back into his nose it makes a disgustingly voluminous, damp noise. He is the ugliest crier, it is him. You think his claws have poked holes through your Breath pajamas where he’s clinging to you, his shoulders all hunched and body pulled in on itself, small.
You don't want to hurt him. He's skinny and covered in cuts and probably bruises too, underneath his clothes. But whenever you remember your dad comforting you, it always includes how strong and firm he was, how safe and steady and solid, how he’d hold you so close. You hope Gamzee needs that more than he needs you to avoid his injuries.

You rest your chin between his horns and hold him tight and watch Existence become undone, everything spiraling up and out and away like suds down a million drains.
Take! Him! Home!

At one point you have to start hovering because the ground beneath your feet is nothing more than sand, very quickly flying upward, and you can't stand on it anymore.

You don't notice it happening at first, you're a little more focused on Gamzee sobbing and clutching at you and supporting his weight as you fly, holding him tight. But gradually, you find that you don't remember things you should remember. It's like you have moments A and C and you know, reasonably, that a moment B needed to happen between them, but you don't have it anymore.

You're terrified. You're genuinely afraid of the crying child in your arms. When it was just the planet and the Furthest Ring that were dissolving you weren't bothered, but now that it's affecting you on a personal level- in the part of you no one should be able to touch- you're bothered. He meant it when he said he would erase it all. He's tearing everything apart, and that includes erasing events from the past- your past.

But you don't let go. You're scared and you don't know him all that well, but that's not going to stop you from holding him, supporting him up off the dirt. He's shaking. He's crying. He needs you. Somehow, despite how jarringly, horrifyingly frightening it is to lose parts of yourself, you feel rather warm at that thought. He needs you. And you've got him, and if this is how the universe ends, you suppose there are worse ways to spend your final moments.

But this isn't how the universe ends, it turns out. It's just how the universe frays a little. Gamzee weeps a long time and most of the planet is gone, but the Furthest Ring is terribly large and Gamzee cries himself out long before his Rage can do much more than dent it. The holes in your memory are still alarming, but when his wild sobbing winds down to exhausted whimpering and sporadic sniffles you realize that those holes aren't getting any bigger, thankfully.

Gamzee’s breath is still shaky and erratic, but the air around him falls flat and uncharged. The dust and sand settles on what's left of the planet’s surface, and Karkat digs himself out of it. Whoops, you sort of left him hanging there for a while. You can't bring yourself to feel bad. You can barely stop yourself from giggling at him. Gently, you float down to the sandy surface and settle your feet back on the ground. It's sort of like standing on a beach. Except the sand is finer than any you've ever stood on and beaches usually have ends to them.

You swallow and search for words. Now that Gamzee’s stopped weeping violently you should proooobably try and talk to him again.

“Gamzee,” Karkat beats you to the punch. He opens his mouth to say something else, and you are met with the incredibly rare sight of a wordless Karkat. You almost wish you had Dave’s way with words so you could make some rambling yet strangely apt comparison about how truly rare this speechless Karkat is.

The silence hangs pregnantly in the air and stretches out. You really wish you could think of something, but you're as much at a loss for words as Karkat. You're still gonna tease him about it later, though.

Gamzee sniffles and shifts where he clings to you, his face turning away from your shoulder and in towards your chest a little so his mouth is free. “Karkat,” he says, all croaky and hoarse from crying, still retaining that alien warble to it.

Karkat approaches you, and Gamzee flinches at the first footstep but otherwise doesn't move
“May I touch you?” Karkat asks, his hand hovering not far from Gamzee’s shoulder, his voice strangely quiet.

Gamzee lets Karkat hover there for endless moments, then finally nods. Karkat’s palm goes to his shoulder and he stands to your side, close enough to hold his hand if you felt like letting go of Gamzee. Gamzee shifts his head a little again, back to how he had been earlier, turning away from Karkat.

“Can I help you?” Karkat asks. He sounds unmoored and adrift. Lost like you are but less able to exist in silence.

Gamzee inhales deeply, his chest shaking with leftover crying. Then he turns his face to Karkat fully, and reaches out one hand (yeah you totally have holes in your shirt) and he grabs Karkat by the shoulder of his sweater. Karkat easily caves to the tugging from Gamzee and slides his arm across Gamzee’s shoulders, and his other hand comes up around your waist and he hugs you too.

Another silence hangs itself in the deadened air. This one is a little more comfortable though. Nothing’s unraveling. Karkat isn't hovering awkwardly to the side. It's nice. You like it.

Then Gamzee hiccups and his hands freshly squeeze on where he clings to your and Karkat’s shirts. The start of a whine starts up in his throat and you think he's about to start crying again.

“I never wanted to hurt no one,” he tells you, high pitched and desperately unhappy. “I never wanted to do none of that shit; I never wanted to do such cruelties on my motherfucking friends!”

You pat between his shoulder blades and shh at him, and he hiccups a little more.

“I never wanted to!” he insists, “I never did, I never did, I always wanted it to stop!” He pulls on your clothing and presses in closer to the both of you. “I didn't-” He chokes and starts crying again, breathy and coughing sporadically.

“We believe you,” you tell him. You do, you believe him entirely. You're not… entirely sure what's going on. Kind of at all. But you're pretty sure that in amongst all the information you're missing on the situation, Gamzee’s probably going to know better than you. Also, he hardly seems like a liar- though maybe that’s your John-style naivety at it again. You don't feel bad for speaking on Karkat’s behalf. If he doesn't believe Gamzee, he can bring it up later when Gamzee’s had a chance to calm down and right now it's pretty fucking clear, even to you, that what Gamzee needs is support.

“I didn't want to enjoy it! I didn't want to smile and laugh at that shit!” he sob-screams at you. His knuckles are an ashy white in Karkat’s sweater, and you're sure in yours too but you can't see that hand.

“Shhhhh,” you hush him, still patting his back. “We believe you, it's okay.”

He pulls down on Karkat’s sweater and Karkat comes in closer, squeezing Gamzee’s shoulder in return.

“I'm sorry Gamzee,” he says, “I'm sorry I left you hurting; I'm sorry I ever doubted you. I'm sorry I wasn't there for you, I will be from now on.”

“I didn't want to,” he repeats, still tugging on Karkat’s shirt, lifting his head all the way off your shoulder so he can look at Karkat fully, and you have a bad angle but even what you can see of his
expression is enough to break your heart.

“I- I believe you, Gamzee, I believe you.”

Gamzee slumps so quickly you think he’s passed out. Maybe he has. But quick blackout or no, he’s conscious when your knees hit the sand and one of Karkat’s lands on top of your thigh. Ow. Dickhead. Gamzee’s breathing is doing the shuddery thing again, but he seems to have tamed the crying for the moment. Just ragged, uneven breathing while you all sit in the sand and you and Karkat hold him upright.

“We should bring him home,” Karkat tells you, one hand holding Gamzee across the back and the other brushing some of his hair out of his face. You “mm” in agreement and get ready to stand when Gamzee honks miserably and shakes his head.

“He ain't gone all the way from my pan, brothers,” he says, not looking up from the sand. “He’ll come back for me, and I won't be able to tell him no any more than I have been able to.” He sways his head your direction and his horns bonk lightly on your skull. “This motherfucker’s powers of motherfuckin’ air and shit done went and worked enough to give me one opening and this one only, he’ll Time himself back here and claim me again and I can't tell him no, brothers, I can't say no to him, I can't- I can't never-”

He cuts himself off and shakes, then heaves in a deep breath. “He’ll come back, and he’ll take me, and he still owns me well enough that I will obey his will when he sends it my way. My tryin’ to undo everything was the only way I could escape it, but I'm so motherfucking tired and I don't wanna hurt no one…” his voice trails off and upwards in pitch at the end, and you pat his back. “I ain't never wanted to hurt no one,” he repeats, like you don't believe him or you might have forgotten.

“So we’ll take you away. Out of the Game, where Caliborn can’t get to,” Karkat says.

“It wouldn't work…” Gamzee says miserably.

“Are you sure?” you ask. “Why not?”

Gamzee opens his mouth, closes it, shrugs and mumbles, “English said so.”

“Jake?” you ask. Karkat smacks you backside the head.

“No, moron, Lord English.”

“Oh.”

Gamzee honks at you and at first you think the shaking in his shoulders is more crying but it turns out to be wheezing laughter. Pros to being a dumbass: it cheers up traumatized clowns.

He sobers swiftly. “The lord ain't one to lie on matters such as these, brothers. Least, not such that I can tell. Might be that if you take me with you I ain't never gonna get him all gone from my pan and he’ll take me back and follow me to the home you went and done made for yourselves outside the Game. Wouldn't hardly want that.”

That is a scary prospect, and one you legitimately have to weigh. Risk Lord English escaping the Game and coming and killing you all (again), or leave Gamzee here. It seems an unbearable cruelty, but you also have every life of a whole planet- your friends, your sorta dad, the trolls and humans and carapaces and consorts- to think about and take responsibility for.
You are not the hero of Time. If you were, you would remember that two timelines are inevitably born in the moment of your choice. What you might not know is that sometimes different sessions have different Alpha timelines, and what is an Alpha timeline for a Lord of Time might not match up with the Alpha timeline for a Knight or Maid or Witch of Time. The Lord of Time’s timeline depends on you electing to leave Gamzee and rally your friends, then come back and attempt to defeat Caliborn with the support of your companions, with devastating casualties ensuing.

Your Alpha timeline depends on the heart in your chest that bleeds for Gamzee, and the Karkat that immediately spouts, “Then we’ll kick his ass a second time! We’re not leaving you behind!” He turns to you with a jabbing finger and a hiss in his voice, “We are not leaving him behind!”

“I wasn't going to!”

Karkat looks vaguely satisfied by that, and nods sharply. He turns back to Gamzee and his face twists up in confliction. “You've been facing all of this-” he waves his hand at what is probably everything, “-on your own for way too long. Come home with us.”

Gamzee nods and shifts towards him a little closer. Karkat squeezes Gamzee’s shoulder and leans forward all hesitant to click his horns against Gamzee’s. You're not sure what the gesture means. It's probably a troll thing. You and Karkat help Gamzee to his feet, you glow blue, and you take Gamzee home.
Warm water... Good....

Chapter Summary

This chapter took me forever to write because I kept on getting embarrassed and needing to leave.

Also!!! There has been an edit done to Chapter 2. I am no longer thinking that Terezi would've been present on Earth for John darting away, since she was still near the black hole during the Halloween snapd8s. A minor tweak, but one that is going to impact later chapters, as it turns out :3

Karkat's living room is immaculate as always, and definitely not where you planned to arrive at. You suppose Karkat’s idea of the “home” he wanted to bring Gamzee to was literally his house. You were sort of expecting to end up in the common area where you left all your friends, but you can work with this! Dave and Karkat’s house-hive-thing is a lovely place and you like it well enough. It's probably a good place for Gamzee to be, too, since you have no idea how the rest of everyone is going to react to Gamzee being here.

Oh, how will everyone react to having Gamzee here? Last you checked, most of them didn't like him. And you can hardly explain “hey I think Gamzee is actually okay” when you have no fucking idea what's going on with him other than a vague “he was definitely suffering” and some recollections of his big and confusing rant at you. You think… something about rot? Geez, you really don’t actually have any idea what’s going on! You’re acting totally on impulse!


“We should get you cleaned up,” Karkat says, and he’s blushing for whatever reason. “I sliced you up pretty badly when we were fighting, we should make sure those don’t get fucking infected while we’re at it. Get some bandages on you and get you out of those goddamned ridiculous fucking Bard clothes.”

“I like the Bard attire,” Gamzee protests mildly. He goes willingly towards the bathroom (should you call it an ablutions block? It’s Karkat’s hive-house but you’re also still definitely not a troll. Would it be impolite to call it a bathroom when it’s Karkat’s place?) and you are glad Karkat is taking control of the situation. Between the two of you, you might actually be able to balance out each other’s floundering and get things accomplished! The powers of teamwork!

Gamzee is unsteady on his feet, and looks more likely to pass out or fall over than shower. Karkat notices this too, and whimper-hisses. You snort at him, cause it’s funny and also when you mock his cute little noises it gets a reaction, and he hisses louder at you, snapping his teeth, so you laugh. Your laughter cuts off quickly when you both notice Gamzee’s flinch.

“Shit, shit, sorry, I’m fucking sorry that wasn’t aimed at you I’m so-”

“Ease, Karkat, I know your meaning well enough. Gettin’ your play on at the blue brother here.”

Karkat grunts a little and nods, then takes a deep breath and his eyes skitter between the shower
and Gamzee. Oh, god, Karkat’s not thinking what you think he’s thinking is he? That’s so hilarious. That’s so inappropriate. Holy fuck the look on his face is priceless though like what the hell but also *what the hell* you can’t just help Gamzee bathe that requires him being *naked*.

“Gamzee, I don’t suppose the universe would deign to grant us all mercy and you can tell me that you’re capable of showering your own fucking self?” Karkat asks, and he sounds like he’s given up on hearing a good answer and is asking just ‘cause he has to ask. Gamzee shakes his head and honks negatively. Karkat whimper-hisses a little louder, with more whimper to it, and flushes a brighter red. You laugh at him again, and he turns to you with a look of utter, tired, exasperated annoyance. His shoulders are sorta slumped and he looks so incredibly annoyed and defeated and you feel a thrill of something electric and semi-victorious.

All the same, Karkat doesn't look like he’s in much shape to be taking care of himself, much less other people, and you're doubly reminded of that when he rolls his sleeves up and turns the shower on. He’s coated in bruises, absolutely a mess of mottled grey and red. You press your lips thin at that. You all fought hard battles. You're all tired and injured. But you also all probably need to push through, at least a little while longer.

“So, uh, just to be clear, in light of events, you and I…” fuck, this is so hard to say out loud, “we’re gonna, uh, help Gamzee shower?”

Karkat stands stone still for a moment, eyes wide and lips pressed thin and face so very fucking red. You love that face. You'd love it a lot more if you weren't also probably looking like that.

“Yeah,” Karkat says, tight and higher than a helium balloon. He coughs, and tries again. “Yeah, that's what's fucking happening right now. We are all sliding ass first into the greatest display of debauchery together, alllllll three of *fuck*...” Karkat says the last part really quietly, losing steam, and you agree, this is pretty embarrassing! But it's just one naked alien body, right? It's definitely weird but not like- you're not doing anything bad! You once went to a summer camp that had communal showers, and that was weird but not bad! Hey you should say that maybe that’ll help the situation.

“You know, I once went to a summer camp that had communal showers, so this can't be that much worse!”

Karkat does not look comforted. “I hate humans I hate humanity I hate human customs and I hate you, John Egbert, most of fucking all.”

“Hey!” You pout, “I was just trying to help!”

“Stop helping. Except not, start doing something useful, help me get Gamzee into the shower.”

You turn to Gamzee, who is sitting on the toilet and looks to be having a very hard time staying even that much upright.

“Hey,” you say, your voice automatically dipping softer as you talk to him. You bend a bit so you're more eye-level and your shoulders reflexively curl inward to mirror his own position. “I'm gonna help you outta your clothes now, okay? We gotta get you cleaned up.”

Gamzee nods and you help him stand. The codpiece goes first, and honestly good riddance. It's weird! His shirt goes next, with the weird hood and mantle going with it. You feel your eyes widen and you go still with shock, swallowing dryly.

His torso is coated, absolutely *mutilated* with bullet wounds. Most of them are scars. Old, slightly
shiny, a paler grey than the rest of his skin. Some are scabs, some look fairly new.

“Shit…” you breathe. Gamzee chuckles dryly.

“The Child Lord does love his gun, brother, ‘bout as well as he ‘loves’ me.”

“Holy fuck,” Karkat says, having turned and also seen. You shake yourself and force a sneeze, bringing yourself back into reality. Nothing you can do. You'll just disinfect those wounds when you clean up the rest of him.

“Pants next!” you say brightly, a little too forcefully cheerful but hey, fuck it. Gamzee holds onto your shoulders while you get his pants off and wow, you didn't think he was a girl! Wait no, no wait shit there's a word for that. Uhhhh. You’ll ask Jade she always seems to know a ton about gender stuff! Anyway, he’s a boy if he says he's a boy and you politely do not look at his junk as much as you are physically able. (Sometimes you wish you could turn off your peripheral vision!)

Karkat and you get Gamzee into the shower and Karkat takes the soap (thank god) so you take the shampoo. You hover behind him and bolster him with your Breath, not really minding that your pajamas are getting wet. You have plenty of normal clothes you can wardrobify yourself into after you're done here. Karkat’s sweater is also getting wet, despite his rolled up sleeves, and you can't help but feel he looks so fucking stupid with his sleeves rolled up.

“What the fuck are you laughing at at a time like this?” Karkat asks you, and you think you might detect exasperation underneath all the embarrassment saturating his voice.

“You look dumb as shit with your sleeves rolled up.”

“Hey have you considered fuck you!?”

Gamzee chuckles, barely audible, and you sink your hands into his hair, working up suds. You detach the showerhead from its holder and rinse out the shampoo, careful of Gamzee’s eyes, and then use conditioner. As you scrub that in, Gamzee starts purring. It's cute as shit, but also kind of alarmingly rattly.

“Uh, are purrs supposed to sound that rusty?” you ask in concern.

“Nah, brother blue, just means I ain't used mine in a long ass time.”

You rinse out the conditioner and silence falls.

“Karkat, you're being uncharacteristically quiet lately,” you say, mostly to fill the silence but also maybe just maybe hoping to goad a reaction out of him.

“That's because this is embarrassing as shit and I'm trying to operate as a functional individual so it'll be over faster,” Karkat spits out, terse. Gamzee chuckles at him and you join in, always down for a laugh (especially when it's aimed at Karkat).

The shower gets turned off and you wrap Gamzee up in a towel. Karkat gnaws at his lower lip (a habit he picked up from spending so much time with Jade) and tells you he’s gonna go find his medical kit. You focus on drying Gamzee off, who is even less awake than he was at the start of the shower.

“Hey, stick at it a little while longer okay? We gotta patch up your cuts.” Your eyes flick to the bullet wounds and something mournful squeezes at your heart. You ruffle his hair. “We’re gonna take care of you.”
Gamzee whines at you (it's a cute noise) and rests his horns on your shoulder. “And how’s am I supposed to do that when a brother says things as make me feel so safe like this?”

You pat his back and sit him down on the toilet again, and Karkat returns with the med kit. Gamzee falls all the way asleep not even halfway through the two of you cleaning and patching his cuts, and Karkat takes a HUGE sigh of relief when he notices.

“Dude what is with you I thought you were the one who wanted Gamzee back?” you ask, frowning at Karkat.

“Oh pardon me for feeling anxious around someone who very obviously hates me!” Karkat hisses at you, keeping his volume low so as not to wake the sleeping naked boy. Actually, you kinda don't really notice he's naked anymore. You sorta got over that shortly after it happened. Nice. Wait shit no focus on the matter at hand.

“He doesn't hate you,” you say with a roll of your eyes. “He’s angry, and it sounds like he has a lot of good reasons to be, even if I don't understand any of them.” You press another bandaid onto Gamzee’s arm. “Did any of his ‘it'll never get better’ rant make any sense to you?”

“Some of it,” Karkat says, looking miserable. “We weren't… we were cruel to him, on the meteor. I feel bad about that.” Karkat shrugs. “Also, his lusus abandoned him a lot as a pupa. He didn't complain about it much, just let us know how long it had been since he’d last seen the thing, and since past me is a fucking dumbass I thought it didn't actually bother him that badly.”

“Rough. If you were all so mean to him, why’d you go back with me? Did you figure out he was… that he didn't actually want to do bad things?”

Karkat looks like he’d rather you hit him with Zillyhoo.

“No,” he admits, sounding ashamed. “I did it because present me is just as much of an unforgivable oil stain that blights the universe as past me was and future me will be. I- I did it to soothe my own fucking conscious. I thought I could rescue him and do something actually important and assuage my own goddamn guilt and I never even thought about what all of this might be like for him and basically this can all be summed up as yet another behemoth fuckup on my long list of ridiculously gargantuan fuckups.”

You smack Karkat backside the head. “Quit making this all about you all the time!”

“That's what I'm saying, shitwrist! I was being selfish and I did this partially out of concern for my own goddamned self because I am inherently irredeemable and-”

You smack him near the base of one of his horns. “You're doing it again! Stop wallowing! You always wallow! Help me finish patching Gamzee up.”

Karkat opens his mouth to argue, and while normally that's super fun and great and all you're kinda not about that right now. You want to zap home and take a shower yourself and go the fuck to sleep and you can't do that until Gamzee is safely in a bed somewhere and Karkat is not helping.

“You're doing it again! Stop wallowing! You always wallow! Help me finish patching Gamzee up.”

Karkat mutters, fangs instinctually bared and shoulders hunching up. You blink. Whoops. You were totally glaring just then. Oh well, at least it seems to have knocked Karkat out of whatever weird bullshit that was.

You two finish caring for Gamzee’s injuries and you pick him up in a towel-clown burrito. He looks different without his face paint on. Kinda older? Less like a fucked up child and more like a fucked up teenager (young adult? How young even is he compared to the rest of you?)
“He can sleep in my coon. I’ll stay in Dave’s bed, fuck knows I’ll have plenty of fun explaining the situation to him…” Karkat looks like he would rather swallow pine needles than try to talk to Dave about this. You think of your lone, empty house and snicker. No weird explanations for you! All of that shit can wait until the morning.

“Should we try to wrestle him into pjs or…” you ask, looking down at the (still naked, wow) body in your arms.

“Why the fuck would he need pjs if we’re just putting him in the ‘coon?”

You blink at Karkat.

“Wait you sleep commando?”

“I hate every single event that has ever led to the act of your creation, John, I hope you know that.”

“Oh, fuck you too!”

The two of you help settle Gamzee into the slime (ew) properly and leave the room.

“Can you really breathe in that stuff?”

“It’s good for troll respiratory systems,” Karkat informs you, looking at his phone.

“ Weird.”

“Oh thank fuck, Dave decided to stay at Jade’s place.”

“You three are tighter than peas in a pod, why don't you all just move in together?”

“You realize Dave and I have sex, right?”

“Oh, ew, yeah, I forgot.”

“How the fuck do you forget-!” Karkat cuts himself off and takes a deep breath. “Never mind.”

You laugh at him and he chucks a stress ball from his sylladex at your face. You laugh louder and he hisses and you hover a few feet off the ground.

“I'm going home, night Karkat!”

“G’day. Make sure you clean out your injuries too, being a god doesn't make you invincible!”

“How do you know?” you ask, sticking your tongue out at him.

“Dave and Rose engaged in a shitload of reckless behavior on the meteor, which I lived on, with them, for multiple years.”

You flip him off.

“You gonna be okay over here with Gamzee?”

“I’ll be fine,” Karkat tells you. You don’t believe him at all, but you also don’t know what else there is for you to do here, and you are tired and grumpy to boot.

“Try not to overthink it too much, if you don’t get any sleep tonight don’t come crying to me in the morning.”
“The only thing I’ll be doing to you tomorrow evening is disemboweling you for being a fucking dumbass, par the fucking course.”

You laugh, and zap home.
You wake up to your phone ringing.

“Nnung?”

“John, John please come the fuck over.” Karkat sounds panicked.

“Dave..?!” you ask, still mostly asleep, figuring that dumbass did something like try to triple backflip off a roof without using his flying abilities (again) or mockingly stick his fingers in a blender and feint jabs at the on button only to fuck up and actually turn it on (again) (thank god for Jane).

“No, dumbass, he’s still at Jade’s place, and honestly thank all the horror terrors that be because I don’t think I’m emotionally prepared to deal with any of this right now.”

“What..?”

“John will you please come over I can try to explain once you’re here but Gamzee’s going to wake up anytime now and I don’t know what to do when he does so fucking come on just get over here do I need to prostrate my worthless body before you and plead for your shitty fucking presence I’m just asking you to come to my place okay so just get your filthy fucking human ass up and moving fucking please!!”

“Okay, okay, I caught most of that, I'll go. Give me ten.”

“Make it less than that!”

“No.” You hang up.

You yawn and float yourself out of bed, wiping at your eyes and refusing to touch your feet to the bathroom floor. You were given flight for a reason and that reason is for not having to touch the cold tile first thing in the morning. You pee, brush your teeth, and clean your glasses, then float back to your bedroom to get dressed. You choose an old Ghostbusters shirt that has paint stains and a small hole in the left armpit- you figure comfy yet able to get messy is appropriate attire for the day. You’re gonna be dealing with trolls. You’re gonna be dealing with troll emotions. Ew. Worn jeans and you god tier shoes go with, and then you yawn again. Ugh, why are you up so early?
Gamzee was dead on his feet, he can’t possibly be waking up yet!

“Why the fuck did you take so long?” Karkat hiss-screeches at you when you apperate in his hive-home. You wave at him.

“Morning Karkat!”

“Fuck you and your greeting,” he hisses.

“Wow, you look like shit, Karkat!” He has bags under his eyes that are waaaay bigger than you’ve ever seen them, except maybe that one time briefly when you glimpsed him through Jade’s portal to throw a bucket at his head (you haven’t done that in a while, and now here you are, in his hive, with doorframes upon doorframes to lay your schemes). He’s still wearing the sweater from last night, and to top it all off he just looks overall, across the board exhausted.

“I didn’t sleep well yesterday. I’m not sure how anyone would.”

“Maybe… you could try… sleeping,” you say, because you’re a jackass. He halfheartedly chucks a stress ball at you and you catch it, then toss it back at him.

“Why did you need me here so early? Is Gamzee awake yet?”

“No, but he will be, and honestly I’m still fucking panicking over that thank you for reminding me; this whole situation is going to go rapidly downhill and we are all going to tumble horns over heels into the depths of hell and it’s going to be awkward and terrible and he’s going to tell me off and I’m going to deserve every moment of it because I’m terrible and he has every right to hate me and John do you have any idea how badly I fucked up last morning. Like, you’re exempt because you’re a human and were also clearly looking to me to take the initiative which I did and I made bad choices again which just goes to show that no one should ever trust me with anything ever because I can’t handle one single goddamned thing without fucking it up and,” Karkat goes on for about a minute after that but you sorta space out. It’s morning and you’re still sleepy and all he’s doing is screaming self loathing in your general direction which you’ve heard before, this isn’t anything new, so you just sorta… float. Once he finishes you yawn again and shake your head in an attempt to wake yourself up.

“Okay, so explain to me what exactly we did that was so bad last night?”

Karkat makes a strangled “hhrnnnggg” noise and buries his face in his hands. “Gamzee was vulnerable and I took advantage of it! We stripped him and gave him a bath and took care of his injuries like we were fucking involved with him, when in reality his most recent memories of me is when I didn't fucking stop Vriska from locking him in a fridge full of corpses and now suddenly I'm pretending things are fine enough for me to expose him to two people at once, myself included, and fucking play pale at him when he wasn’t even capable of telling us no because I’m disgusting!”

For once, your brain actually manages to attach itself to the important part. “Wait, WHAT? You mean- the fucking fridge on the lily pad?” you ask, feeling cold fury congesting in your core.

Karkat flinches and his lips press thin, eyes wide like he’s been caught in an act. He nods.

“Gamzee was in that? The whole time?”

Karkat isn’t looking at you. He nods again.

“And you knew,” you say, distantly aware that your voice has gone flat. Not accusatory, not loud,
just flat.
Karkat nods again, looking very much like he’d rather not be here.

“Did Rose know? Did Dave?”

“Everyone who had been on the meteor knew.”

You take a deep breath. You don’t know what you’re feeling. It’s probably rage. It’s definitely disgust. You think it’s also disappointment. “You all knew, and none of you said or did anything to stop it?”

“I think Dave went over and talked to her about it once, but yeah, we abandoned him. All of us, but me especially.”

Gamzee’s big rant at you is starting to feel a lot more justified. Not that you hadn’t thought it justified, it’s just now you have a bit of context to make it actually feel that way.

“Karkat,” you breathe, quiet, “what the fuck is wrong with you?” Your hands are shaking. You feel like you’re going to explode or vomit or scream or start crying.

“No you clearly don’t!” you shout. Screaming it is then. “You very obviously don’t fucking know! What the hell Karkat, are you seriously telling me that there was a person alive and locked in a fridge and you were just gonna let him- fucking, what, become a corpse? You were gonna let him die in there? And none of you did anything and Dave was the only one who even said anything? What the hell Karkat! What the hell!”

Karkat is recoiling from you and the wind that’s kicking up around you, knocking over the potted plant Jade had left in the entryway.

“I’m trying to make amends!” he shouts back. “I know what I did was fucked up! The reason I wanted to go get Gamzee in the first place is because I haven’t stopped thinking about him or it or what was done since we made it to this universe! I guarantee I’m just as mad at myself as you are at me right now! That’s why I want to try and, and apologize, and make it up to him somehow! If I can at all, which I am rapidly growing certain that I cannot, because why the fuck would he ever want to make amends with me! Get it John, you’re not telling me anything I don’t already know!”

You force yourself to take a deep breath and try and chill. Okay wow, calm is not coming to you at all. You Become the air and just… exist, for a little while. Hard to stay pissed when you’re made of nitrogen and oxygen and little else. Karkat hastens off somewhere while you chill, and you just… breathe. You spin idly in the entryway of Dave and Karkat’s home and lose yourself in motion and pattern. Don’t think, just move, just chill.

When you squeeze yourself back into your flesh you go in search for Karkat. Actually, fuck it, he can wait a little while longer, you should go see if your shouting woke Gamzee up.

Karkat’s respite block/bedroom (sans the bed) is pristine like the rest of his place; moreso, even, since Dave doesn’t get a chance to add his casual Dave-esque mess to the area. Karkat keeps his room sterile. The rest of the hive-house is just clean. Dave insists that being messy is Strideran but honestly you think it’s silly for a trait that he, his brother, and Dirk all happen to share be labeled “a Strider thing” like that’s supposed to make it cooler somehow. It’s not cooler, it just makes Dave sound dumb, or like something out of one of Rose’s old fanfictions from when she was 13 and you were all terrible.
You are so fucking pissed at those two you can’t hardly stand it.

But you’re trying to be not angry about that right now. You did a great job calming down while you were the wind, you’re gonna try and keep that. You peek inside the ‘coon thing and Gamzee’s form is in exactly the same position as you left it. You can see his chest rising, which indicates he’s still alive, which is important since he’s literally submerged in green goo. You’re glad you’re not a troll, you don’t think you would ever be able to handle literal slime going into your lungs. But hey, aliens man. Aliens.

You go back downstairs and find Karkat with his head in his hands, sitting on the couch.

“I’m not sorry for yelling, but I have calmed down now,” you tell him. “Gamzee slept through it. He doesn’t look like he’s gonna wake up soon, given that he still looks like a kid that just needs to fucking sleep.”

Karkat takes a deep and shuddery breath and you wonder, belatedly, if he was/is crying.

“You okay?”

“What the fuck is okay about any of this, John?” he asks, and he doesn’t even sound self-loathy anymore; he just sounds defeated. “I’ve been ignoring it for the last four years but now it’s here, and nothing is okay or likely to be okay ever again.”

“I thought you were thinking about it non-stop these last four years,” you tease. He drops one of his hands so he can glare at you tiredly, and yeah wow whoops he was definitely crying.

“Bad time.”

“You fucking think?”

You plop down on the couch next to him and instinctively rest one elbow on one knee and your face on that hand.

“Just,” Karkat starts, inhaling deeply, “stay here? You’re one of the people that hasn’t hurt him in one way or another and you were there with us last night and I guarantee your presence was the only thing that made any of that bearable for either of us so just stick around, please?”

“Well I’m not leaving you alone with him,” you say before your brain can shut your mouth. “Shit, fuck, sorry, didn’t mean to say that!”

“But you were thinking it.” Karkat runs his hand through his hair. “Honestly, I’m grateful. I don’t want to be alone with him. I want to make things better and I want to take care of him but by god I do not want to be alone with him. I’m sorry if I’m using you like a safety net but I don’t think I can be fucking trusted to be around Gamzee without fucking it up, again, spectacularly, like I always do. We need- I need someone to help keep me from doing stupid shit.”

Your brain helpfully supplies information that is totally relevant to this, and a troll culture thing to boot!

“So I’m like your auspistice! I’m mediating for you two!”

Karkat flops against the back of the couch and groans loudly. “No, John Egfuck, no you are not like our auspistice. You are absolutely positively nothing like an auspistice. That is the entirely wrong emotion set for the feelings flying rampanty about right now.”
“But… mediation?” you ask, leaning against the back of the couch as well.

“Gamzee and I aren’t likely to kill each other or even fight hard enough to go for each other’s throats. You’re stopping me from being an inconsiderate asss about and hurting him unintentionally, hopefully. That’s the goal. Auspisticism involves a lot more exasperation and the outer leaves fighting each other.”

“I dunno, they sound pretty similar to me!”

“One day I will sit you down and we will marathon the cheesiest, most cliched romance movies I can find and you will see, in full cinematic mastery, what the quadrants look like in their idealized forms.”

“Okay I know this is gonna sound rich coming from me but I’m pretty sure you can’t base real life stuff off of movies you watch.”

“Touche.”

An awkward silence falls.

“We could watch one now, while we’re waiting for Gamzee to wake up?” you suggest. Karkat looks relieved by the suggestion.

“I’ll look for ‘In which two squabbling legislacerators are mediated by a rustblooded agriculturalancer who has called on their services in order to avenge the death of her indigoblooded moirail, who was murdered in suspicious circumstances etcetera etcetera.’ It’s a classic from Alternia, the only copy left in all of existence.”

“I’ll go raid your fridge, I haven’t eaten yet.”

“You are not showing the proper level of awe for my incredible cinematic relics.”

“Yeah, yeah, you like lame movies, well so do I! I still have my old Con Air poster hanging up in my room. Man, why wasn’t that remade? It’s a shame this universe never had a Nick Cage!”

“You’re the only one who feels that way.”

“Fuck you!” you call from the kitchen, opening up the fridge/hull. There’s some troll food and some human food and some universally constant food, and you take from the two latter groups.

“You want anything?” you call.

“No.”

“Have you eaten yet today?”

Karkat doesn’t answer.

“Kay, I’m making you something too!”

“I won’t eat it!”

“Yes you will!”

“No I won’t, Egshit, I’m emotional and food is for the mentally tranquil!”
“You’re eating something or else I’m telling Jane!”

“FUCK YOU!”

You eheheh to yourself and make enough food for three people. You cover a third of it, figuring Gamzee will need to eat whenever he wakes up, and bring out two plates to the living room. Karkat has the movie ready to go and the two of you sit, pressed up against each other, and eat your breakfast.

Two hours later, you’re wide awake and maybe crying a little. Karkat is definitely crying. You had no idea mediating two people could be such an emotional rollercoaster. You definitely have a new view on auspisticism. But Gamzee still hasn’t shown his head and it’s getting on towards afternoon now.

“Should we go… wake him up?” you ask as Karkat puts the dvd away and meticulously files it away on his movie shelf. It’s alphabetized. He is suddenly very interested at staring at the shelf instead of you.

“Should we?”

“I’m asking you.”

“And I’m not fucking sure!”

You snort and float over to him, humming thoughtfully to yourself.

“Probably? He needs to eat and possibly drink things. If he wants to take a nap after that, he can?” Karkat nods, “That’s probably the most reasonable thing I’ve ever heard come out of your mouth.”

“I have good ideas every now and then!” you agree with a laugh, then swoosh over to the stairs. You hover one hesitant moment, then fly up them and into the bedroom again. This time, Gamzee is not exactly like you left him last night. This time he’s curled up on his side and as deep down in the ‘coon bed as he can possibly fit himself, eyes open.

“Uh, hello!” you call, hovering near the mouth of the ‘coon, one hand resting on the lip. Can Gamzee even hear you in that slime? Yes he can! He turns and looks at you, and you wave at him with a smile, because the best course of action is a friendly course of action (your dad taught you that). He blinks at you, expression unreadable, and then sighs deeply. Ew, slime, that is so gross, he just put so much green goo inside his lungs, you are never going to be over that.

He presses his feet against the bottom and pushes himself up, emerging slowly from the slime like a graceful water beast, goop dripping off him in slow motion. You float back from the ‘coon, giving him some space (and putting some space between you and the goo). He releases a deep breath, slime falling out of his nose and mouth in syrupy rivers, and you are so, incredibly, fucking disgusted.

“Ew.”

He laughs at you and blows his nose, green slime rocketing out of his nose and into the pod. You make a face of the purest disgust you can manage, and he laughs at you again, honking as he does, green gunk spilling out of his mouth.

“That is so nasty oh my god you do that every morning?”
Gamzee rests his armpits on the lip of the ‘coon and starts wringing out his hair. “Ain’t so unnatural as to me, brother blue. Though, been a while since I been in one of these.”

He stares down at the slime sorta wistfully. “Been thinking as I lay in it. Thinking as to bake this shit. Won’t, though, been thinking on it, but I won’t. Baking means getting up and I got plans to stay submerged in here the rest of all else.”

You snort and swoop in a little closer. He eyes you kind of dreamily and rests his head on the exterior of the pod, arms falling limp against the outside.

“As much as everyone wishes they could just stay in bed and avoid life for the rest of forever, I’ve never met anyone who could turn that dream into a reality. You should get up and get something to drink and also eat. I made breakfast a little while ago; we can throw it in the microwave.”

Gamzee groans and sinks down a little lower into the pod, his arms lifting up as he slides.

“Hey, don’t go back in!”

He groans again and sinks even further.

“If you go underneath then you’ll have to blow your slimy nose again and that’s gross! Don’t go all the way under!” you complain, and he snorts at you.

“What if I do anyway, just cause you told me not to?”

“Doooooon’t that’s grooooooooss!” you whine. He rolls his head to the side and rests it on his arm, smiling at you, eyes half closed. Then he yawns, sharp fangs suddenly in full view. Kanaya’s a vampire-rainbowdrinker and Karkat has mutant nub teeth, and Terezi’s been gone forEVER, so your brain has sorta forgotten that normal trolls have really pointy teeth. It’s… kinda really kickass? In a cute way? But like cute in a sharp way?

You hover and stare at him, and for a little while he stares back, then moans and sticks his tongue out at you. You laugh.

“Hey! Don’t blame me! Sometimes you gotta get up in order to do things!” You remember he mentioned something about baking. “That includes baking things. What do you want to bake? I could see if we have the ingredients here. If not, I can fly by Jane’s place, she and Uncle Crocker are basically guaranteed to have whatever it is you need.”

Gamzee shakes his head. “Nah, brother, don’t need nothing more for what I’m thinking than slime and a pie tin. ‘S a bad idea though. Fucked up my pan real bad, left it rotting and weak. Don’t mean I don’t wanna do it though.”

“Wait.. like, you want to eat slime? Wait, hey, hang on, if eating it is bad why do you all breathe it!?”

Gamzee honks and laughs at you, kinda wheezing. “Slime goes where it goes during daylight hours, brother, ain’t no harm to come of that. You gotta bake it before it makes as to do bad shit to your pan. Heat it up enough that it goes all chemical and sour-sweet. Like lemon pie fresh outta the oven but with less sugar and more heresy miracles.”

“I think… that probably sounds bad.”

“Yeah, breathbro. Did myself a terrible disfavor, I did, by baking and eating that shit.” Gamzee shrugs. “Still kinda want to though. Maybe it rotted at me but it was one hell of a fix.” He gives
half a smile. “Addiction, ya dig? ‘S a terrible power, even now all these sweeps later, even knowing as I know of it.”

Ohhhhhh shit. You put Gamzee in a bed made out of almost-drugs that he’s a recovering addict from. You think. You’re pretty sure that’s the meaning here; you’re a little dumb!

“I’m so sorry,” you say, “I didn’t know that when we put you in there!” Gamzee smiles and lifts himself up enough that he can rest his head on the lip of the pod.

“Ain’t no harm done, brother. As you said, you didn’t know, and I can’t do nothing bad with it as it is now. ‘S’all good.” He yawns again. “I still don’t wanna get up though.”

“You have to get up eventually, you might as well do it now.”

“Nnnnnnnnnnnnn,” he whines, theatric. Then he tenses up. “Fuck.”

“What’s wrong?” Did he reopen an injury or something?

“This is Karkat’s hive.”

“...yes...” you say cautiously.

He whines louder and sinks back low into the slime again, which alarms you.

“Hey wait!”

“Nooooo,” he groans quietly, chin dipping into the goo.

“Aw gee,” you say, hovering close to the opening of the pod. “So, like, you really do hate him then?” you ask. Looks like your reassurances to Karkat were pretty empty after all.

Gamzee honks weakly, sounding sad and also kinda hysterical-laughter-y. “No, brother, I don’t hate Karkat none. Got myself a right resentment for him, got a lot of anger born outta pain I can direct his way, but I don’t know if I have the mind to actually full hate my- him. Don’t know if I ever can.”

You float down and hover close, your arms resting on the lip of the pod, right next to Gamzee’s face. You prop your chin on your forearm and kick your feet up into the air behind you.

“He’s upset at himself too, if it’s any consolation. I mean, Karkat’s always upset at himself, it’s like his thing I guess, but specifically about stuff relating to you, he feels bad about it.”

Gamzee nods. “I do have my appreciation on for that. Wish it had happened a near four sweeps ago, but I’ll take it now, too.” He chuckles but you don’t really hear any mirth in it. “I’m motherfucking pathetic.”

“Hey, hey now, easy,” you say softly.

“For all my rage and all my loneliness and all my resentment, I still motherfucking pity him and wish for him to pity me.” He honks. “Ain’t that one hell of a punchline?”

“The...” You feel really bad! “There’s not really any nice way to say this, but Karkat’s dating Dave right now.”

“Wrong pity, brother.”
“Ohhh, the moirail thing?”

“Yeah, that one bro. That’s the pale pink pity I got slashing anger at my pusher towards that brother as is residing in this hive.”

“So… shouldn’t it be good that you can see him now?”

“Bruh.”

“I’m sorry! Relationships are hard and I don’t know what’s going on with yours!”

“I haven’t seen him in near abouts two sweeps and last morning we made all kinds of motherfucking conciliatory in that there ablutions block.”

“Oh, yeah, Karkat’s sorry about the showering thing by the way; apparently you were too vulnerable? And he feels bad because you couldn’t say no?”

“I could’a said no well enough had I a want to, brother.”

“Well you’re gonna need to tell him that eventually. Anyway apparently it was really awkward for all of us so that’s a thing I guess.”

Gamzee smiles lazily at you. “I wasn’t hardly awkward, brother, though I don’t wish for you to feel that way either.”

“Yeah? I would think you’d be the one finding it the most awkward out of all of us.”

He shrugs. “Weren’t so bad. Gettin’ undressed was a time but mostly I was too tired to think on things like embarrassment or body shame. I liked it, brother, liked the feeling of hands all gentle on me and the sound of you two bickering all domestic-like over my head as you took care. I like that you took care, breathbro, I really motherfucking liked that bit. Means more to me than I think I know how to put into words, or that you might know how to hear them.”

“That’s sad!”

He honks at you and starts wheezing with laughter. “Yeah, I done figure it motherfucking is,” he says, shoulders shaking with his laughter. He lifts an arm back up out of the goop and splays his hand over his forehead, shoving his messy hair every which way, his head resting just above the surface of the slime.

Gamzee takes a deep breath and smiles at you. “You’re one hell of a human, brother. I can see why Dave and Rose didn’t hardly never shut up about you.”

“What?”

“I’ll get up. Don’t feel so unwitting towards the waking or walking as I did.” He grabs you by the sleeve. “You’re gonna stick around, right? You ain’t gonna zap away while I shower off this here slime?”

“I’m sticking around! I’ll be downstairs when you’re done!”

Gamzee sighs in relief and wow, you’re not sure but it really does feel like you’re sorta-auspisticizing him and Karkat, since that’s totally probably who he’s thinking about right now. Maybe it’s not auspisticism in the traditional movie sense but in a sense nonetheless! Maybe you should just call it mediating and leave auspisticism off the table entirely, for Karkat’s delicate
romcom sensibilities.

“Uh, brother, before you go,” Gamzee says as you turn to leave. “I don’t have my sylladex no more, shit’s in Caliborn’s possession. You don’t happen to have shit that ain’t my bloodied god tier for me to wear?”

“Uhhhh, yeah! Here!” You decaphcalogue a dark, navy blue hoodie, boxers, and a pair of Dave’s leggings. “Okay so it’s not much but I also didn’t plan on dressing anybody today, so this is all I have in my sylladex. The rest is at home since I don’t have a portable wardrobifier like Kanaya or Dirk. You can totally borrow the hoodie, I can ask Karkat if you can borrow a pair of sweatpants or zap home and get regular pants or something.”

“Those are fine,” he says, pointing at the leggings.

“You sure?”

“Yeah. They look nice. I’m gonna get out of the ‘coon and shower off now. An’ while I know you saw me naked as a grub yesterday I’d also sorta appreciate you not watching me now. Mighta been too tired for shame in times past but I ain’t quite so tired right now.”

“Sorry! I’ll head out!” You caphcalogue the boxers and leave. You head downstairs again and float into the living room, where Karkat is typing away on his phone. He looks up when your feet tap against the floor and tilts his head in question.

“He’s up! He’s showering off slime. Did you know that if you bake that stuff and eat it it becomes a drug?”

Karkat’s expression remains static for about two whole seconds and you can hear water running through the pipes. Then he sighs and hisses softly, hands raising to press into his eyes as he slowly slides down the couch.

“Oh my god I am the stupidest, most incorrigible scum of three planets, holy shit how did I forget something like that I am such a fuckup why the hell would I think it was okay-”

You throw a pillow at his face to shut him up. “You’re wallowing again!” you helpfully inform him, sunshine and singsong.

“Fuck you and your fake ass cheery attitude, shitfucker.”

“Nah, thanks for the offer though. Are you gonna be okay in the same room as him? You’re not still freaking out?”

“Of fucking course I’m still freaking out why the hell wouldn’t I be?”

“Well, I can confirm he doesn’t hate you so that’s something to look forward to!”

“Wait really?”

“Yeah, but he is still angry at you though so I don’t know how this is all going to play out. I’m gonna go heat up breakfast for him.”

Karkat watches you float off with an exasperated squeal and you eheheh at him. All times are good times when it comes to picking on Karkat. Once in the kitchen you throw the food into the microwave for Gamzee, and you hear the pipes turn off shortly after the timer dings. Damn. Fast shower. Like, kind of alarmingly fast? Whatever though, you’re not his dad, as long as he’s not
oozing slime all over you it’s not like it’s gonna matter to you. Also you did help thoroughly clean him last night so it’s not like he’s gonna be smelly.

He appara-tes behind you a few moments later, which makes you leap up into the air and inhale sharply. Shit. You did not hear him come down the stairs at ALL! And- holy fucking mother of the mothergrub what the shit. He’s wearing your sweater and Dave’s leggings, which you were expecting, but proudly resting on his bony little hips is that goddamned. Motherfucking. Codpiece.

“Hey,” you greet from your perch five feet up in the air, plate of food still in your hand.

“Hey,” he echos back at you.

“So uh, what the fuck are you wearing?”

He glances down at himself. “You said I could borrow them.”

“That is… not what I am referring to, dude.”

“Oh.” He honks at you, grinning wide. “That’s my motherfucking codpiece, brother.”

“I gathered.”

“I like it.”

“Okay.”

“You can come down now. Don’t mean a brother no harm.”

You float down and make yourself sneeze, throwing your emotions back into place. “You just startled me, that’s all! This is for you,” you say as you hand him the plate. He takes it and smiles at you.

“Thanks, my brother, it smells all up and heavenly. Don’t suppose you could direct a motherfucker towards where a glass is at?”

“Oh! Sure, they keep them…” you float up to a cupboard and pull out a tall, blue cup, “here! I think they have apple juice and ice tea in the fridge, if you want any.”

“Water’s fine, breathbro, thank you kindly.” You nod and head over to the sink. “Uh, so hey, brother?”

“Yeah?” you ask as the glass fills.

“Could you, maybe not make like as to mention how I feel towards Karkat to anybody? I’d like to keep that personal for a time.”

Yikes. You feel sorta guilty about blabbing that Gamzee didn’t hate Karkat, now. “Sure!” you say, not feeling up to admitting the mistakes you already made.

“I appreciate it,” he says, and you hand him the water. He downs most of it in one go, and you refill it for him.

“Should we go out to the living room?”

“Which one is that?” he asks, shoveling food into his mouth after he does.
“The uh, respite- no wait shit that’s the bedroom. The recreation block! That’s probably where Karkat still is.”

Gamzee makes a displeased “mhngnmngnnm” noise and looks away from you, still eating though.

“You two can’t avoid each other forever.”

“Aight, I hear what you’re saying, but also have you considered that avoiding him forever sounds really motherfucking nice? When has running away from my problems ever let me down before?” He chuckles at his own expense. You get the joke! But you’re suddenly feeling less in a joking mood.

“I think sorta frequently, from what I’ve gathered? Speaking of which, you… kinda really need to explain- like in full detail- what all you were ranting about back in the sandstorm armageddon. I believe you! I just don’t know what I’m believing, kind of at all really. And that needs fixed.”

Gamzee’s ears are pinned down flat against his wet hair. “Yeah, brother, figure I do up and owe you one hell of an explanation. Karkat too. Though, that’s less of me owin’ him and more he owes me the listening of such. Didn’t get no chance to before, save one brief ass moment that did more harm than good.” He sighs. “Recreation block it is, then.” He shovels the rest of the food into his mouth and puts the plate down, which wow, okay, he’s doing everything really fast today, you guess.

“Are you still hungry? I could make more. You’d have to not eat it that fast though cause you might get sick and throw it back up?”

Gamzee squints at you. “That sounds fake as shit.”

“You’ve never heard that eating too fast makes you hurl?”

“Maybe it’s a human thing?”

“No, I’m pretty sure it happens with all species… well, except horses. Did you know that they physically can’t throw up?”

“Woah.”

“But yeah I can make you more food just don’t eat it so fast.”

Gamzee shrugs and sticks his hands in the hoodie pocket. “Kay, brother, if that’s what you’re up and sayin’ is the right thing to do I ain’t gonna question it too hard. And I would be motherfuckin’ grateful if you could send more food my way.”

“Yeah you look like you’ve been fucking starved,” you comment. He snorts at you.

“And my wicked siblings did tell me that I ain’t got a sense for tact.”

“Sorry! I wasn’t trying to be rude!” You open the fridge again and pull out eggs and bacon. Hard to go wrong with eggs and bacon! Probably toast, too, give him a breakfast half-sandwich.

“You weren’t brother, least, not in any way I mind. Just find it funny.”

“Well that’s great, because I’m hilarious,” you say offhandedly, focusing on laying the bacon flat on the frying pan. Gamzee comes up next to you and leans on the counter, his fucking codpiece bumping against the cabinet door. He’s watching you, but you don’t mind. You’ve been more into
cooking and baking these last few years than you ever were on the ship or when you were a kid. Part of that is born out of living alone and needing to make your own food, and part of it is just you really missing your dad.

“This is nice,” Gamzee comments, very soft and quiet, as he watches you beat the eggs. You put a slice of bread in the toaster and ruffle his hair (it’s still really wet) before you flip the bacon. The eggs go into a different pan, along with shredded cheddar, and you stir them periodically. This is nice. You’re both ignoring the shit out of the pending Karkat encounter + long and detailed explanation of events, but for now the kitchen is warm and the food smells good.

You hit the toast with a thin zigzag of honey, layer the bacon over that, and pile the cheesy eggs on top of that, then hand the plate back to Gamzee, who’s looking at you like you’re a wizard or maybe a knight in slightly battered armor. He looks a little bit purple in the cheeks but you are ignoring that. You are putting a pin in that and absolutely never taking it back down.

“Thanks again, brother blue. For your gentleness.”

“No big! It’s Dave and Karkat’s food anyway, I’m just cooking it.”

“They live together, nowanights?” Gamzee asks before taking a big bite out of the food.

“Eat slow. And yeah, they’ve lived together since we moved to this time period.”

“Where’s the pallid brother now, then?” Gamzee asks, mouth still half full.

“He spent the night at Jade’s place! I don’t know when he’ll be getting back. Karkat’s probably texting him right now, though, they’re both really clingy!”

Gamzee snorts. “I did up and notice, brother, I’ve got my remembrance on for that.” He finishes the toast and sets the plate down in the sink, staring at it like it personally offended him.

“So… not to be that guy, but I’m gonna be that guy. Karkat and explanations now?” Gamzee sighs and whines.

“Yeah, brother blue, let’s go.”

He grabs the glass of water and refills it, then you both leave the kitchen to go find Karkat and the couch. Luckily, they’re both in the exact same location! Karkat doesn’t seem to have moved much since you left, but he shoots up onto his feet when you two enter. Gamzee grips the sleeve of the hoodie with his free hand and the two stare at each other around you. Two cases of awkward foot shuffling, at least one muttered “uhm,” and one Gamzee hunching his shoulders later you roll your eyes and sigh loudly.

“Okay, so the two of you can have your awkward reunion thing later, I’m letting you postpone that, can we get to the part where Gamzee explains everything?”

Karkat sneers at you. “How gracious,” he says sarcastically. You flip him off and sit your ass down on the couch next to him, intentionally shoving yourself right up into his personal space. He hisses at you and pushes your face away from his, and you grin maliciously. Your Gambit always jumps off the charts whenever you’re around him. Gamzee sits down, a lot more cautiously, on your other side and pulls his legs up onto the couch too, knees near his chin. Once Karkat has successfully thrown you off of him, you turn your attention back to Gamzee.

“So!” you start, “What happened?”
Gamzee nods slowly, despite the fact that that was not a yes or no question, and he fidgets with the hem of the sweater sleeve.

“You want an explanation of what all I shouted back in the dust?” he clarifies, and you “mhm” affirmatively.

Gamzee’s eyes go to the far wall, thoughtful.

“Things ain’t hardly never been good in my life, brothers,” he starts out softly. “When I was a pupa my lusus got in his head that he didn’t want me no more, so he left me often and he left me long. I’d try- I’d do what I could to make him love me again, but the things I did only ever made him stay away longer. Or, ‘least it seemed that way. Maybe it was just him doin’ his thing over the course of time and it wouldn’t have mattered what I did or didn’t do. But it felt like he was leavin’ me more on a basis of my own actions, you know? Him being gone as often as he did meant I got into dumb shit that other pupae didn’t do, and also that I was real motherfuckin’ lonely. And, on top ‘a that, hungry oftentimes. I wasn’t good at rationing, on account of bein’ real small, you know? So I thought at myself, all young and stupidlike, ‘hey, slime is supposed to be good for trolls, I’ll just eat that’ and so I knew you ain’t supposed to eat raw shit unless it’s real fresh right off the carcass so I put that shit in a pie tin and I baked it and I ate maybe a sixth of it before it hit me that first time and I couldn’t get my ass off the floor for a near six or seven hours I was so astral from that shit. But it felt good, weird but welcome, and I wasn’t cold or lonely or even hungry, just felt high. High and careless so I started doin’ it more often, whenever the old goat had been gone for too long or I was lonely or hungry or sad. Got to a point where I did it just to do it, all those good feelings spinning up in me, and I figured out how supply drops worked and I found myself a religion to take comfort in and I made more friends and I got less lonely step by step but I didn’t stop ‘cause I couldn’t have stopped, not even if I’d a want to, brother. I didn’t see it as bad, bro, I saw it natural as drinking. As mundane and commonplace as waking up in the evening, you know? Just a thing that I did, and other trolls didn’t do it but that didn’t mean nothing wrong to me. I gradually had to eat more in order to hit the same high, but I didn’t mind it none.

“But it was rotting out my pan, you see. I didn’t know it, but all that slime baked ozone and sour-sweet made holes in my penmatter like as though my brain was swiss cheese. And so the thing as I had done to make things better was actually only making shit worse. You follow?”

You nod. You are definitely listening, and it’s already making you sad.

“And then, on the meteor, my slime did run out. Had nothin’ left to bake, and the withdrawal hit me motherfucking hard. Got blast full in the face a sense of wooziness and misdirection. Couldn’t tell up from left and my memory was foggier than a misty morning on the seaside. Felt the holes, then, but ignored them because I don’t do shit with my problems. And I talked to that red fucker you both do love so much. Hadn’t talked to humans, often, other than Jade a couple times but she was always right cross with me so I figured not to mind. But so I talked with Dave, and he did make a mockery out of me, showing me my religion was all falsehood and jeering at my epiphany most unwanted. And thus my comfort in religion turned out to only make things worse.

“So I ran off to clear my head. Wasn’t even trying to avoid problems, then, just wanted some space to cry and have my breakdown in solitude where other eyes might not see me. But that was the worst mistake I made of all, because in my wanderings I stumbled on a chest that housed an unholy vessel. The puppet, Lil’ Cal, it held the soul of Lord English in it, and the moment its eyes made contact with my own I became the motherfucking puppet, and it the puppeteer. And thus I made things motherfucking worse.

“And so then, in the flailings of my soul versus that of Lord English, with his power and
determination, I called out blindly for help. First person on my recent contact list, my soul tried to make my mind and body say things that would alarm and alert and perhaps solicit help. I told Dave, I told him that his brother’s freaky puppet was what was the cause of all my struggles, but I guess it came out garbled through the filter the lord had already clamped across my tongue. And, and it turned out that by contacting Dave, and rapping with him and speaking with him then, I actually prompted the conversation when he sent me the video as crushed me enough to send me crying in the first place, and so I only made things worse.”

This is exactly as complicated and bullshit as The Game has conditioned you to believe life to be, and you’re glad you ate breakfast so long ago because otherwise you might have thrown it up. Gamzee takes a deep breath, and continues, because of course he’s not fucking done yet.

“I killed my friends. My hands were the ones with blood on them, my words and deeds the ones that put them in the grave, but I never wanted to. I never, never wanted to, I never wanted to hurt Equius, for all he was aggressive at me. I never wanted to hurt Nepeta, never thought I could, she was always a bundle of sweetness and motherfucking hellfury; a goddess of heart and hunt alike. I-they were my friends! I liked them! I never wanted to see them hurt, much less dead! And then the lord called me to go down and chase Terezi, and Karkat, and any other motherfucker as was still alive on that meteor, and I did, because I can’t say no to him brother I can’t never say no to him he motherfucking owns me, motherfuckers, I can’t tell him no I can’t.”

“Shhhh,” you hush, placing your hand on Gamzee’s back and patting it gently. He wipes at his eyes and takes deep breaths, and you may or may not magic some air at him and help him with the deep breathing thing. You’re no medic, but you can at least do this. Karkat’s making some kind of noise behind you but you’re not really paying attention to him right now.

“I’m good. Sorry.”

“You’re fine,” you and Karkat chorus. You glance at Karkat and see a sorta-kinda desperation there. The “I want to help but don’t know how” face. Ugh, that feeling sucks, you feel sorta bad for Karkat.

Gamzee takes another deep, still sort of shaky breath, swallows some water, and continues. “I went to do the lord’s bidding at Terezi, and probably would’ve made success, but then you showed up, brother blue, and startled me so shitless I locked up. Terezi went to kill Vriska anyway, and you showed yourself again to punch the spiderbitch in the face, which would’ve been a moment of motherfucking hilarity if I’d been able to appreciate it.

“But then Vriska saw my proneness and sought to take motherfucking advantage of it, and my mind went enslaved to two masters. She did me one kindness, and that was to keep my body and fettered tongue away from Terezi, as the lord did and put all sorts of unforgivable atrocities onto my to do list towards that sister, but in all else Vriska showed me cruelty upon motherfucking cruelty.” Gamzee laughs mirthlessly. “I was always one hell of an easy target, you know? Even before Lord English, I was always such an easy motherfucking target. Vriska always did scare the shit out of me, but after the lord took claim I was a motherfucking perfect sparringsack for her to take out her desires on. Did use me when she needed me and practice her tricks on my brain, couldn’t tell her no any more than I could resist the lord. Less, even, as she did not puppet like the lord did but instead force her claws in my pan and strip me of all save my appearance. Once I went full non-verbal on that floating rock she used me to brag at as well, I was her perfect captive audience as couldn’t tell Terezi what sinister she was spinning, or warn Rose of any schemes she told at me full plain. And then she made my own hands shove keys down my own motherfucking throat for some reason most elusive, and chained me in a fridge filled with the corpses of my dead motherfucking friends and there weren’t no air but get this, brothers! I can’t die! I still can’t
motherfucking die, the lord ain’t gone fully from my pan; his curse of immortality will linger and linger yet unless I can pry him from me down to the last. So I died in that fridge, motherfuckers, I died but did not stay dead, and so I died again and again, revived godlike but without the tier, trapped and motherfucking desperate and able to hear but not cry for help as there wasn’t enough air to even breathe."

That, to you, sounds like the worst death. You have always felt that you could die in a house fire or bleed out or get eaten by zombies easier than you would be able to suffocate to death. The thought has always terrified you, and he had to endure that death repeatedly. You take back what you said before finding the house juju. You no longer think that Vriska is just dangerous, you no longer think she’s someone who had good intentions and a fucked up way to go about them, you are convinced that she is actually, wholly awful and you are sickened by the thought that you ever liked her or enjoyed being friends with her.

“And then the fighting started, as I could hear it. Equius was a sprite then, and I heard him laughing which was trippy as shit but I was also dying a lot so whatever. Heard two adults aside, and the fridge I was trapped in got flung around and motherfucking jostled like all hell. Broke any number of my bones in that thing, but the chains didn’t break so I just kept on motherfucking suffocating, and then after that there was an explosion and I woke up at the feet of Lord English amidst the scattered remains of my motherfucking prison and friendflesh.

“He handed me an egg and told me build a hive for it. Gave me no instruction on the workings of cherub bodies, only told me to raise and he would return for me. Dropped instruments at my feet as I was supposed to get my figuring out on and left in red clockwork watermarks. I found a hot crater for the egg and an old building for the hive and I made from it what I could. Set up computers and the sarswapagus and made food stores of sweet and meat and raised the very demon that would later possess me.”

Gamzee goes really quiet, thumbing the hem of the sweater. Fuck Caliborn. Fuck Caliborn so hard oh your god there’s adding insult to injury and then there’s shit like that.

“And his sister. I only knew her a sweep and a half, but she was the—” his eyes are all teary and his voice is wavering, more than just his normal warble. “She was the one good thing that came out of any of this, brothers, the one star I can find in all this blackened sky.” He swipes at his eyes with the hem of the sweater sleeve again. “In all that I have done and that has been done to me, raising her is the only thing I would ever choose to repeat. I don’t know if I can say that all events leading up to that were worth it, and I would avoid to endure them a second time had I the chance, but god, if any good occurred at the ends of my own hands in all my life it was when I was caretaking at her.”

Gamzee starts crying again, choked sobs squeezing their way out of him and you hug him around the shoulders, feeling teary eyed yourself.

“I was allowed some semblance of agency, those near forty two perigees. Not- not enough to be myself in full, not even all the way like this half-freedom you’ve offered me, but I could think and move more than I had. He didn’t want to take part in child rearing, ‘s dirty to him, so he left that at me but in part I could still think some thoughts that were my own.”

He takes a deep breath but chokes halfway through and sobs again.

“And then he made me abandon them! I was forced to leave them like my lusus left me; I didn’t want to! I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to, I didn’t want to leave them tiny motherfucking’ pupae all on their lonesome, but I couldn’t— I couldn’t say no to him! He took my children from me- I don’t even hardly care that one of them was him, he was still mine and I got torn from them! Only to
reunite moments later for me and sweeps and motherfucking sweeps later for my child, who, murderous, had killed his sister short hours before I found him. I went from holding them to motherfucking having lost one and you know what the greatest punchline of it all is, motherfuckers? I lost my will again when he reclaimed me! The disgust he had for raising them little ones gone, he chained my neck and tongue again and bound me to servitude of his younger self which I did motherfucking carry out!”

Karkat gets up so he can walk around you and kneel in front of Gamzee, holding Gamzee’s free hand in both of his own while you hug him and he clutches the water glass like he can break it if he just squeezes hard enough.

“And he’s still here,” Gamzee says quietly, high pitched through his crying. “He’s still got one frond in my pan, brothers, he can still come take me back again!”

“We won’t let him,” you reassure at the same moment Karkat says, “He won’t, I promise.”

Gamzee snorts and coughs and sniffs loudly, hauling back snot (he is still the world’s ugliest crier). “Thanks,” he says wetly, nuzzling his head against yours and squeezing Karkat’s hand. He holds in his breath two seconds, then lets it out again with more sobbing. You press your lips to his wet hair and shush him, rubbing his shoulder a little and holding him close against you. Karkat watches Gamzee, face twisted with empathy, and makes a few aborted motions before slowly reaching up one hand, cautious, slow, like he’s overstepping, and places it on Gamzee’s cheek.

Gamzee keens and jerks down towards Karkat, and personally you would’ve taken that as a bad sign but Karkat just goes, “Woah, okay, easy, shoosh, shooosh, Gamzee, shoosh,” and pats- no, wait, paps Gamzee’s face. Trolls are kinda sticklers for the proper usage of the words pat versus pap. With Gamzee leaning down towards Karkat like this it’s hard for you to keep hugging him like you were, so you just smooth nice, firm circles into his back. Karkat shooshes and paps Gamzee, who continues to cry, while you rub his back and digest everything you just heard. You’re pretty sure you can make sense of everything now?

“It’s kind of hard to believe no one noticed that you literally got possessed by a demon,” you mumble, thinking out loud. Gamzee whines, high pitched and loud and Karkat starts apologizing, his hand motions growing in fervor. Shit. You and your big mouth.

“Sorry, sorry,” you say alongside Karkat’s apologies. “I shouldn’t have mentioned it.”

Gamzee shakes his head. “It was weird! It was motherfucking strange! I ain’t never gave anybody reason to think I’d do such cruelties to my own motherfucking friends! I didn’t never want to hurt anyone, or do anybody wrong! I didn’t- but nobody-” He cuts off crying again and Karkat stretches up to hug him around the neck, the hand not holding Gamzee’s going into Gamzee’s hair. You rub at his back with both hands and you and Karkat both shoosh Gamzee, though you think Karkat has a better knack for it than you do.

You ruminate some more when he shows signs of calming down, and one or two things could use a little clarification but for now you think it can wait. Gamzee’s shared a lot with you and you don’t want to keep on pushing when he’s distressed and/or just calmed down. Once the sobbing delves into airy breathing and chest shudders and little hiccups, Karkat pulls back and caresses Gamzee’s face, looking him in the eyes and shooshing him some more. Gamzee bends and knocks their horns together, and you note that neither of them has let go of the other’s hand.

“It’ll be okay,” Karkat says, “We’ve got you now, I won’t let the universe continue taking its raging, fiery dump on you, not anymore, we’ve got you now, you’re safe.”
“You’re safe,” you echo, patting Gamzee on the shoulder, and he takes a deep, shuddering breath.

“I’m so tired, brothers,” he confesses, and you hum.

“Rest,” you tell him gently. “You’ve had a bad time. I think a nap would be a good idea.”

Gamzee nods. He tugs on Karkat’s hand, one of his fangs worrying at his lower lip.

“Yeah?” Karkat asks.

Gamzee takes a deep breath. “I-” he starts, stops, looks away. “You've been awful kind at me, since last night. You've been- very soft. Does that- should I take it to mean…”

Gamzee leaves the question hanging in the air and Karkat is blushing bright red again. You still think it's hilarious that he actually managed to hide his blood color in the past.

“If you want to,” Karkat says, sounding as unsure as Gamzee looks.

“Might be nice. Might blow up, brother, I don't know- I can't trust myself.”

“Neither can I, if I'm being honest, but I'm willing to give it a chance, if you are.”

Gamzee nods and smiles weakly at Karkat. “A chance is a thing I offer more than motherfucking willingly.”

“Wait, what are we discussing?” you finally have to butt in and ask. Karkat inhales sharply and Gamzee laughs, and you can tell that you ruined the moment. Oh well! They shouldn't have conversations that you can't understand while sitting/kneeling directly in front of you if they don't want you to chime in!

“Moirallegiance, John, we’re negotiating the start of a moirallegiance,” Karkat explains to you tiredly.

“Ooooohhh.” You guess that makes sense, given the context of their words. Even so, “Wait, aren't you two like, waaaay too messy for that right now?”

“Probably,” Karkat says at the same time Gamzee goes, “Eh,” and shrugs.

“Seriously, neither of you want to even be in the same room as each other unless I'm there to oversee it, how will this not end terribly?”

Karkat grumbles but doesn't retort, which means he knows you're right. Gamzee is less easily deterred.

“Then you can join in with us, and keep shit from terrible endings? Take care of us as we’re taking care?”

“Oh my god we’re actually doing this,” Karkat mutters and you sigh.

“I don't know if I want to be your couple counselor but it kinda looks like that's what’s gonna happen anyway, so sure! I guess!”

“This is depraved,” Karkat mumbles.

Gamzee bonks his horns on your skull, and it's becoming a gesture that you are sorta warming up to. “My thanks to you, brother. My thanks to you both for this mira- this gift, that you've bestowed
on my sorry self.”

Karkat croons at him, and Gamzee chirps tiredly back.

“We’ll take care of you,” Karkat says, caressing Gamzee’s face. The gesture is half-ruined when Karkat’s fingers get caught in Gamzee’s hair. “Starting with your fucking mane. John, can you go grab a hairbrush? There should be at least one in the ablutions block.”

“Sure,” you say, and float up. You hover a moment before leaving the room, but chide yourself for being silly. They're fine. You can leave them alone for three seconds. You float back upstairs and remember that oh yeah, you were gonna prank Karkat while you're conveniently here! You grab a bucket from the bedroom (you check that it is both empty and clean) and prop it up on the doorframe of Karkat’s respite block. You chuckle to yourself as you drift towards the bathroom, and try to get it out of your system so you can talk to Karkat with a straight face and not ruin the surprise. You find two hairbrushes, one on either side of the sink, and choose the softer looking of the two. Gamzee should be touched with soft things, you reason.

When you return to the living room, you are greeted with two things. One is Karkat sayin, “Jesus fuck John what took you so long did you get fucking lost in a hive you've been visiting for the last four years straight?” The other is the sight of the two of them, cuddled up on the couch together. Karkat has the spot you were previously in, and Gamzee is twined around him and sitting in his lap. It's a fun and sorta artistic image, you think, how Karkat is all small and round and Gamzee is long like spaghetti and about as thin, his limbs gangly and hooked over Karkat’s shoulders and spreading out sideways to the couch, his head barely finding a place to rest with how compact Karkat is, especially in comparison to him. Gamzee looks ready to fall the fuck asleep like that, and you find the two of them just too cute!

“Hang on, hold that pose,” you say, decaphcaloguing your phone into your free hand, “I’m gonna put this on snapchat.”

Before the app even has enough time to load, you are all startled into jumping fucking high at the sound of the front door being kicked off its hinges.

“Gamzee Makara!!” the intruder bellows. Davepeta storms into the living room in all their multicolored, glowing neon glory. Their trenchcoat is a flurry of motion, their fists are balled, and their wings are fluffed to maximum feathery capacity with a few feathers scattering into the air.

“Where the fuck is my boyfriend!??”

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact, I started crying while writing about Gamzee losing his children.
Davepeta

Chapter Summary

Ahahaha I would like to formally apologize to that one anon on tumblr that I cockteased the living DAYLIGHTS out of.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Well, boyfriend-slash-brother,” they correct, glancing to the side momentarily. “The part of me that values him as my brother is significantly less in control than the part of me that values him as my moirail, which is weird because I have been almost entirely stable these last couple of years so it's sorta strange to be thrown out of balance like this again, but that's not the point.”

They get themself back on track and jab a finger at Gamzee, who is on his feet and cowering behind Karkat, who has placed himself between Gamzee and Davepeta. They both look terrified. You probably do too.

“My boyfriend. Where is he?” they demand.

Gamzee’s ears are pinned flat and his eyes are wide, both hands grabbing at Karkat’s sweater.

“I, uh. I don't rightly know, brosis,” he says quietly, and you drift in closer, also positioning yourself between Davepeta and Gamzee. Reasonably, you know for a solid fact that you and Karkat stand approximately no chance against Davepeta in a fight, but you can all hopefully prevent that from ever happening!

Davepeta hisses, dissatisfied with Gamzee’s answer. The energy radiating off of them is tight and distressed and all hells of distressing and you're not sure anybody in the room is feeling particularly rational at the moment.

“C’mon dude, you were hanging around Lord English, right?! ARquius told me that he was going to go try and do something big and game changing and important and he’d meet up with me later; well it's later! And he’s not here! So tell me where ARquius is and if you can't do that then tell me where the unfriendly green giant is and I’ll find out from the source itself!”

Davepeta’s wings flutter in agitation, and they look ready to shred something or start crying (or both).

“I- I don't, I don't know where the lord goes, sibling, I only know the places and times in which I served him, he didn't-” Gamzee hunches down behind Karkat a little further, which doesn't work well with their size difference but he does it, as Davepeta starts hissing, low but continuous, “he didn't lay clear to me any of his schemes or planning, he told me exactly as I needed to know to do what he said- and sometimes less. I don't know, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.”

Davepeta half “uuuurrnggg!”’s in frustration and half hisses, a mix of troll and human irritation. Gamzee’s eyes are teary, but he isn't all-out crying again just yet.

“Please, brosis, I tell truth, I don't.”
“Davepeta will you calm your fucking multicolored neon tits and leave him alone-”

“All three of you start speaking at once and end at about the same time, and thankfully Davepeta does take a deep breath and forcibly unclenches their fists.

“Look. I tried to give you some time to get your legs back under you, I did. When John didn't immediately show back up and Dave told us that the three of you were here, I waited, I have been trying to be patient but I have waited for my boyfriend to come home to me for four years now and I am sick and furricking tired of sitting here twiddling my goddamned thumbs!” Davepeta’s voice goes higher and louder, their wings twitching and shuddering. “I just want my boyfriend back okay?!”

“I’m sorry,” Gamzee whispers, face the picture of terrified misery.

“All three of you start speaking at once and end at about the same time, and thankfully Davepeta does take a deep breath and forcibly unclenches their fists.

“Okay so how about everyone here takes a deep breath!” you suggest. Davepeta and Gamzee both comply immediately.

“Karkat that includes you.”

You breathe in tandem with him, and he’s glaring at you but who the fuck gives a shit.

“Davepeta-” you start, and they shake their head at you.

“Davepeta did you double punch the door down?!” you ask incredulously, and apparently it’s a dumb enough assumption to make them pause and snort gracelessly at you.

You float over to them and grab their hand, bending over to look them in the eye. They look sad-mad. Smad. You were good friends with Davesprite back on the ship. In all reality, he’s the only friend you have left from your timeline and your original friend group. You love your friends!!! All iterations of all of them. But Davesprite is the last one that’s yours and sometimes that's a little isolating, and you assume it might be the case on Davepeta’s end too. Nepeta seemed nice, from what very little you saw of her, and Davepeta has been a dear friend to you these last four years.

“Hey,” you say, aiming to comfort, but then grow rapidly distracted by the wet and sticky sensation on your hand.

“Woah, hey, Davepeta, are you fucking bleeding?” you ask, holding up Davepeta’s hand in alarm. Their fingers are all scratched up and their knuckles are raw and sticky with orange and green plasma. You grab the other hand as they start to protest and examine that too, finding it the same, and notice little moons in their palms that ectoplasmic blood is slowly seeping from.

“Davepeta did you double punch the door down?!” you ask incredulously, and apparently it’s a dumb enough assumption to make them pause and snort gracelessly at you.

“No, no, nothing like that,” they say, and they try to take their hands back but you are absolutely not about to let go right now.

They wilt. “I've been… impatient, these last 19 hours. ...may or may not have involved literally
clawing at the walls in agitation."

“Davepeta holy shit!” you shout as Karkat pipes up with “Oh my fucking god don't fucking do that there are better ways to-”

“Yeah! There are better ways to deal with things? Wanna know what the issue is here, Karkat?” Davepeta shouts, suddenly loud again and making everyone in the room flinch. “I don't have my fucking moirail!”

Karkat wilt this time, Davepeta hissing in agitation. You hold their hands in one of yours, keeping them from pressing even more bloodied crescents into their palms, and begin idly preening their closest wing, which is still fluffed up and poofy (which makes it very easy to see the feathers that are out of place). You and Jade used to do this whenever Davesprite was having a particularly bad day. You're pretty sure grooming is a friendly, calming behavior for cats, too, so it should all still check out. Man, you haven't done this in ages. Your fingers are unsure with lack of practice.

You realize you've missed Davepeta. They've been your good friend but you… you don't see them, not as much as you should.

You don't see a lot of your friends as much as you should.

Yeah you're gonna put a pin in that and deal with it later. Now is time for Davepeta. “Chill,” you tell them, “what can we do to help?”

Davepeta snorts and leans into you a little closer. “Unless you can help me find my fucking boyfriend I don't think there's anything anybody can do. Gamzee was sort of my last… resort? I don't want to say last hope beclaws part of me is still definitely holding out for ARquius to come floating in eventually. Just like. Fly outta the sky like some miniature red comet you know? Crash land straight into my waiting arms and we’d laugh and roll around in a million anime flowers right before I would smack him backside the head and scold him for making me wait so long and we’d doki doki off into the sunset to live happily efurr after amen the end.”

You preen their feathers some more, your thumb stroking idly at their wrist.

“You could make like Terezi? Go fly around the endless void of whatever and look for him?”

Davepeta laughs bitterly. “I don't even know what the fuck Terezi is doing out there. She won't find Vriska; Vriska’s dead and double dead and I told her that and even if she wasn’t the chances of finding precisely the right Vriska in all of that mess before she gets sucked into the hole would be a green sun’s worth of numbers to one.”

They sigh, and continue. “Besides, last time my moirail told me to wait for him somewhere and I didn't, it ended up with him dead and me dead and I couldn't even avenge him furst.”

They perk up and their feathers fluff back out (you had just smoothed them down!). “I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone in the room that the only reason I died the way I did was beclaws I was emotionally distressed and my emotions were clouding my judgement! If I had taken ten minutes to cry about it and get my shit together I would nefur have lost! The only reason I died was because I jumped headfurst into the situation, and I did that beclaws my moirail was fucking dead and unable to hold me back! I would not have lost to Gamzee; he is a wimp and a weakling!”

“Uh, yeah, brosis, I been meaning to ask on why you don't seem more upset with me about that.” Gamzee looks still frightened and still not too far off from crying, but befuddled too. While you were smoothing Davepeta’s feathers it looks like Karkat was papping Gamzee’s face. Or maybe
Gamzee was papping Karkat, since he seems more put together too? Mutual papping? Oh the obscenity; how will your virgin human sensibilities ever manage with the knowledge that they were, like, gently caressing each other’s faces?

“Seems like the first concern a sibling might have when meeting the one as killed them might be, you know, the motherfuckin’ death thing, not the whereabouts of their moirail- not that I’m complaining! I just, unless you were listening in on all I just laid clear to these here brothers, I don’t see why you ain’t mad…?”

Gamzee’s voice turns up at the end and drifts off, making it into a question, an invitation to explain.

Davepeta waves dismissively. “I talked to Equius about it in the dreambubbles- not my Equius of course, my Equius was about as easily found as the splinter of a toothpick all snuggled up and hiding in some haystack out in the wild west. The rancher has plans to feed all his goddamned moobeasts with that shit but he can’t until he gets that fricking toothpick splinter out becaws he doesn’t want his domesticated ranch beasts to get that splinter in their maw so the moobeasts keep on mooing and the rancher keeps on searching but he can’t find that goddamned toothpick because guess what! The splinter has void powers now and I am so. Furrustrated. With my moirail.

Anyway, yeah, no, I couldn’t talk to my Equius, but I found a bunch of other timeline Equius's who had come to terms with their lives and deaths and whatnot, and each and every one of them thought it was awfully strange that you, of all trolls, decided to straight up maul the shit out of the two of us, and it was weird claws I hadn’t even thought about it until he said something but he was absolutely right. But when I tried to bring it up to the othpurr trolls in the bubbles, no one even batted an eye! Except Horuss, and other Nepetas. Most people furgot that I even had those confursations with them shortly after they literally happened! So yeah, I don’t know what’s going on with you but I’m gonna furmly label it as ‘weird shit’ and move right on along to the impurrtant stuff.”

Davepeta takes a deep breath. You don’t blame them; they’re pretty long winded!

“Which would be the location of my moirail, if you knew, or if anyone knew, or if I could fucking find the people that do know!” They make a noise of agitation and you reach out and start stroking the ridge of their wing, which makes them smile tightly at you. Gamzee honks quietly behind you and you hear (feel, feel in your very bones) Karkat expel a breath.

“So, if you’re not here to attack anyone, could we maybe all sit back down and have you explain what the fuck you mean by Terezi is out near a giant, shitswallowing, universe collapsing black hole in search of somebody who she knows is fucking dead?”

Davepeta rolls their eyes and huffs. “Shit. Should’a figured I was too emotional to keep my lid on that. Should’a thought to myself that hey, maybe I’m emotional, that never ends well, I have a bunch of secrets I’m not supposed to share with anybody, Karkat top of that fucking list, maybe I should keep my meowtherfucking meowth shut about it.”

They wave at Karkat before he can respond. “Yeah, yeah, I’ll explain. Cat’s outta the bag now anyways.”

Davepeta goes to an armchair and flops down on it, their wings sprawling out on either side and resting messily on the floor. Karkat sits down in the middle of the couch, cautiously eyeing Davepeta for sudden signs of springing back into action, and extends one arm out across Gamzee, who sits on the far side of the couch, fearfully staring at Davepeta.

Yeah, you’re really not sure how anyone can think this kid is scary or murderous.
You debate taking a seat, but instead hover over Davepeta’s other wing and start preening that. It’s rhythmic and nice and calming for the both of you, plus they look like they haven’t taken care of their wings in ages! Somebody’s gotta do it!

“So, Terezi, fucking explanation, please and a shitstained thank you,” Karkat demands.

Davepeta rolls their eyes. “I can’t believe half of me ever had a crush on you. I can’t believe alternate half of me is dating you. What the fuck.”

“Oh fuck off!”

“Anyway. So I was at the fight with Lord English, right? Kicked some ass, took some names, got a few solid blows in on him before he knocked me outta the ring. Didn’t die though, so hey I did better than most of them. But as I was getting back on my feet and rearing to pounce back into the heat of battle, Vriska and her swarm of the army apprroached and she released the house juju…” Davepeta leans forward, hands extended in earnest exasperation, “But she released it behind her.

“She put herself between the thing she was hoping would defeat a giant green skull demon, and a call of the double death. I really, really do not know what she thought was gonna fucking happen.” They lean back against the seat again and halfheartedly fling their hands into the air. “But whatefur it was, it didn’t happen. Lord English let loose the Vast Honk at the door and she was right there in furront of it. Efurryone behind the door was safe, but she got caught in the middle of the blast. I don’t care how lucky you are, nobody survives that.

“The blast ended and the house juju had a bunch of cracks in it, and Vriskers was nowhere to be seen. Surprussing no one. But then English started charging up again and we all scattered a bit, and when he started attacking the house a second time I decided that I would rather be on the lily pad than figure out whatever the fuck was gonna happen when the juju broke all the way. Y’all had already gone through, so I just followed you with Jasprose.” Davepeta shrugs.

“I figured it’d be best if I didn’t bring it up to Terezi. I purrsonally couldn’t stand Vriskers, but I know Terezi really hated her. Or… I guess, pitied her? In this timeline? I don’t know what’s going on there, but trust me whatever it was it was bad. Terezi and Vriska are all wrong fur pale! It’d be like trying to auspisticize Kanaya and Rose! Detrimeowntal and furrurstrating! It’s a miracle Terezi is still alive, in my entirely honest opinion. But whatefur, Terezi loved Vriska and that’s the impurrant thing. So I figured I’d just leave it be! Vriska’s too much of an attention whore to stay out of the spotlight- or efurryone’s business- for longer than, what, eight minutes? So when she didn’t show up I thought Terezi would rightfully asmewm the worst and put two and two together and figure out she’s dead. Terezi’s smart! But I guess also really codependent now, which is a reasonable outcome since she went pale with her kismesis.

“But I digress. Terezi didn’t put it together, I guess, beclaws she announced her plans to go back and search fur her. So naturally I told her! I told her I had watched Vriska die, with my own two multicolored and rapidly vacillating neon eyes! And the worst thing is, she believed me! But she still insisted on going back in there! I don’t know what she’s doing, I don’t know what the everloving frick she’s looking for, but she’s there. And she asked me not to tell anybody, especially Karkat, claws she doesn’t want people to worry about her.”

Davepeta huffs. “So yeah. Terezi’s searching for a ghost that doesn’t exist anymore and she knows it, and I have no idea why."

“What the fresh bulgeshitting fuck."

“Yeah I know!”
“Has she just been avoiding all of us these past two fucking years? If she needed space she could just ask for it instead of flinging herself into the aether and sending us snaps of our dead friends as they fly by her at a million miles an hour! Did you know she’s started a point system? Each snap she sends with an accidental person flying by her is one point, with two extra points for every consecutive person in the photo after it. Blank photos of only the black hole are negative points. She does this so fucking often. And she’s risking getting sucked into that thing, for literally nothing? Nothing! At all?!”

Davepeta shrugs. “Look, from what I know of Terezi, and that’s fairly sizable given the circumstances, it’s best to just not question her motives.”

“I second that,” you pipe up from where you hover over their wing. You have a small collection of feathers you’ve tugged loose. You’re getting better at spotting them. With Davesprite they were all a single, static color, but since Davepeta is constantly shifting you just have to look for the feathers that remain one color while everything around them changes! And then you can just pluck them out and make room for the new feathers coming in!

“I will absolutely question Terezi’s fucking motives!” Karkat screams, standing up in agitation. “She could die! That is a very real possibility! We made it out of that fucking hellgame alive and she went back in to look for her significant other who is fucking dead and she knows she’s fucking dead so what the hell is she even fucking doing in there like some deranged, chalk licking, red obsessing, savannah cacklebeast of a troll—”

“Brother,” Gamzee says, all soft and quiet, his hands extended to grab Karkat gently by the arm, “quiet yourself, motherfucker, you scream with no direction save to unleash that which you are penting up. Hush now, that brosis over there cannot fix your motherfucking problems.”

You and Davepeta watch, vaguely transfixed in an idly curious way, as Gamzee coaxes Karkat back onto the couch and hushes him. Karkat leans into his bony shoulder and does the click-click-screeching thing that Karkat does, but quiets. It’s magic, you are now a firm believer that magic is not all just tricks and sleeves, it is an actual real thing that you are experiencing right here, in front of your face. What a beautiful thing, this troll enchantment called moirallegiance.

“Purrfect.”

“We do not need your input, Davepeta!” Karkat half-shouts cantankerously.

“I always mew you two would be a good match. Glad to see you figured it out on your own!”

“Thanks, brosis,” Gamzee says softly as he strokes Karkat’s hair. You can feel Karkat’s breath whizzing between his teeth, even if you’re not close enough to hear it, and you let yourself be amused by his irritation. He’s literally just so much fun to rile up, you may or may not have a little bit of a problem.

You hear your phone vibrate in your sylladex and decaphcalogue it. Oh, you have a snap from Dave.

TG: yo karkats not answering and normally id be totally cool about that in every way imaginable but right now youve got a hellclown murderman at my house so im kind of wondering if youre all still alive or if i should let everyone know we need to break out the coffins and also the pitchforks

You are suddenly reminded that you are very, very pissed off at him.

EB: We’re fine Dave! Gamzee has been crying a bunch and Karkat’s been shouting at Davepeta,
we’ve been a little busy with explanations and emotions and long term trauma over here. Speaking of which, you really should be ashamed of yourself, how the hell could you just leave somebody locked inside a fridge when you knew he was ali

You run out of space on the snap but send it anyway, positioning the text so he can still see your frown, then open up your pesterchum.

EB: Alive! None of you did anything to stop it? None of you! Karkat told me about the corpse fridge and how you were all just fucking bystanders!

TG: woah shit okay not the reaction i was expecting here

EB: Honestly how could you Dave?! What if it had been me in there? Or Rose, or Karkat, or anybody! What if you were the one in there, wouldn’t you want somebody to actually come and let you out? He died in there Dave! A lot of times! And you all let it happen, both of you! I don’t know a lot about trolls but I do know that I never, never once in my entire life, thought either of you had that in you!

TG: i can see that you’re really upset right now and would like to apologize for interrupting whatever is happening over there and also let you get back to that

EB: Absolutely not! I am not letting anybody avoid this! You are hauling your ass home right now and explaining to me what the fresh hell was going through your head when you let somebody lock somebody else inside a fridge!

TG: oh god do i gotta

EB: Right now, Dave!

TG: fuck

EB: Right now!

You are seriously considering continuing to spam Dave with your anger (what the hell what the hell what the hell you have never wanted to feel this way about any of your friends (you never thought you would have reason to)) when Davepeta startles you out of your glaring contest with your phone by running their claws ever so gently through your hair.

“Now looks who’s riled up,” they comment. You “heh” lightly and lean your head against the armrest of their chair, hovering criss-cross over their wing. They trust you not to randomly fall on them, and you would never be careless enough to drop your weight on something as important as a very-easily-broken body part. They pet your hair and you breathe deep. It’s nice.

“Dave is on his way,” you tell the masses. Karkat looks pleased, Gamzee, worried, and Davepeta looks like they couldn’t really care either way. But… my my, do you detect a wink of mischief in their eye? Although, Davepeta kind of looks perpetually mischievous. It’s like, par the course of having a cat grin and little inhibition.

“So Gamzee,” Davepeta says after a minute, and the whole room goes tense. “Mind telling me about what exactly you purr doing with Lord English? If not being his right hand toady?”

You feel the deep breaths both Karkat and Gamzee take, and you groan a little.

“You can give me the cliff’s notes version. Purrsonally I don’t really feel like sitting through a bunch of dandruff but I am curious about what went down with the clown. Also, you are aware that
you’re still wearing the codpiece, right?”

“Yeah, I know, sibling.”

“Okay claws it’s weird.”

Gamzee honks. “I up and motherfucking have my knowledge on of that fact. I like it though.”

Davepeta shrugs. “Whatever floats, I guess. But like, English though? I am serious about giving me a definitely abbreviated version though, like I do not want to know whatever nonsense you got up to in your night to night life beclaws all of that is still furmly labeled ‘weird shit,’ I just want to know the general gist of what the fresh everloving fuck even happened with that situation.”

You flip idly through your sylladex for a distraction- you just got done hearing this, after all- and find the hairbrush you’d gone upstairs to fetch. Oh yeah. You float over to Gamzee and hover over the armrest of the couch, cause why would you sit when you can fly, and you start at the tips of Gamzee’s hair. Gamzee’s ear flicks at you, momentarily distracted, and then he resumes focusing all of his uncomfortable and fidgety attention on Davepeta.

You brush Gamzee’s hair as he starts his explanation again, only half listening. It’s definitely a watered down version of what he told you and Karkat earlier, but it’s basically the same. He was vulnerable and got possessed by a puppet and was forced to kill his friends as part of his newfound service to English. He gets about halfway through the story, quiet and a lot calmer than he was with you and Karkat (or maybe not calmer, maybe just more unwilling to show his emotional weakness to Davepeta), before you feel someone else’s breathing pattern enter your peripheral range. You can only really tell people you’re close to apart by their breath, and usually only when they’re close by, but you figure Dave is the only person who’s going to be up in the sky and coming this way, so you assume that’s him arriving. Well, you were just about done with this half of Gamzee’s head anyway (not that you have it perfect or anything, but it’s about as presentable as your hair is on any given day).

“Karkat,” you say quietly, trying not to interrupt. Gamzee gets distracted by your voice and motion anyway, though, so you mentally shrug and hand Karkat the hairbrush.

“I’m going to step outside for a bit,” you tell the three of them. Davepeta lifts two fingers at you, and their face is all scrunched and thoughtful. Karkat looks a little uneasy at the idea of you leaving with no vocalized destination or return time, but honestly! He can handle being alive and existing without you in the room! He’s not even alone (with his moirail) either, Davepeta is still here!

When you float outside and look up, you can see Dave descending. Most of you wear your godtiers when you fly high, they’re more comfortable in the upper altitudes, so the bright red dot is definitely the boy you’re here to yell at.

Your stomach makes an unhappy noise at you, all twisted up in knots, and you are mad but you are, more than that, disgusted, and you cross your arms as you wait for him to land.

Chapter End Notes

I had to rewatch the credits in order to figure out when we first saw that Terezi had left (it was on John’s 18th birthday, two years after their arrival on new Earth, in case you
were wondering) and I hope you all appreciate the blood, sweat, and literal tears I am putting into this fic.

Super duper extra special thanks to archive guest savon for telling me how to format pesterlogs!!!! Ur the best!!!!!
Dave

Chapter Summary

To those of you who were looking forward to see John screaming at Dave: I am so sorry.
I might go back and actually flesh that scene out later but I hate writing arguments
aaaaaand my fic my rules :3
This chapter came out way shorter than I was expecting it to, but nothing else was
really pinging my attention and I am also SUPER hype for the next chapter, which I'm
sure y'all will be eagerly awaiting 3;D

Chapter Notes

I CAN'T BELIEVE I KEEP ON FORGETTING
http://namppa.tumblr.com/post/153385867913/a-gift-for-imhereformysciencefriends-
because-i
NAMPPA MADE ME A THING
LOOK AT THAT
IS THAT NOT THE MOST GLORIOUS THING YOU'VE EVER SEEN
I'M LOVE

You scream at Dave for a while. He tries to explain himself a grand total of once, claiming that the
situation was a little harder than just letting somebody get locked in a fridge. He says that Gamzee
had killed two people, and nobody could come up with a better solution than keeping him
restrained and unable to attack anyone, there was nothing else to be done, and that Vriska was the
one in charge of that situation and there was no way in hell he was going to try and tell her what not
to do. You resent his spinelessness and the idea that that broken person inside the house behind
you might have ever been murderous, and remind him that Kanaya and Terezi and Vriska all had
their own laundry lists of deaths, but he trusted them. After that, he goes silent, and looks down at
his feet, appropriately chagrined, as you scold him for his lack of compassion.

When you go back inside you feel a lot more drained and somewhat less pissed at Dave, which is
good, because you hate feeling mad at your friends, you never want to feel mad at your friends, it’s
dumb as shit that you are currently in a situation in which you have to be mad at your friends.

Davepeta lifts two fingers in greeting but doesn't look up. They seem deep in thought, puzzling
over the information Gamzee just gave them. Gamzee is resting his head on top of Karkat, who has
his arms around Gamzee and is reaching up to brush at the hair you already brushed. Apparently
your work wasn't satisfactory for him. Nyeh!

“Dave,” Karkat says, perking up when he sees you two in the doorway.

“Sup babe. What happened to the front door?”

Karkat jerks a thumb at Davepeta who snickers viciously. “Sorry,” they say, not sounding
apologetic in the slightest.

Dave sighs tiredly and you try not to grumble. You're the one irritated with him right now, he's not allowed to feel peeved by literally anything! Except that's dumb and probably a bad thing for you to think.

Dave crosses the room and sits next to Karkat, and they exchange a quick kiss before Dave looks awkwardly to Gamzee. Gamzee has been staring at him apprehensively ever since the two of you entered the room.

“So uh, hey,” Dave greets with a little wave, his inside hand reaching down and clasping Karkat’s, who has paused in his fussing over Gamzee’s hair.

“Hey,” Gamzee echoes, very quiet. He's leaning into Karkat a little closer now, his mouth obscured by Karkat’s hair, and Karkat squeezes him reassuringly around the waist with the arm that's still holding him.

“So I guess I owe you an apology.”

Gamzee lifts his eyebrows. You drift over to Davepeta, who doesn't make any motion to acknowledge you but you know that they’re aware of you. Like a cat “ignoring” you when actually they’re just chilling.

“For uh, not really being concerned about you getting locked in the fridge.”

Gamzee honks softly and rubs the hem of Karkat’s sweater between his thumb and forefinger.

“And also calling you Muderclown Sascrotch for basically the entirety of the meteor ride and making fun of your weirdass religion every time you came up in conversation and for screaming at you through the vents about the brownies that one time.”

Okay, that stuff you didn't know about, and you are peeved anew. Dave! You mean, that definitely sounds like something he’d do and maybe in a different situation you would find that kind of thing funny, but you are very upset about basically everything pertaining to Dave and Gamzee right now and this is not helping you be less mad!

Gamzee honks again. “And the video,” he prompts.

Dave blanks. “What now?”

“The video you sent me, in your malice, that was all up and meant to make me shake down into my core and feel mirthless and upset. You sent me a video with intent to trigger a deep unhappiness in me.”

“Oh,” Dave looks much like he did while you were yelling at him. “Shit, uh, fuck, that old thing? Oh, god, I'm sorry, at the time I thought you were trying to troll me like Terezi and Karkat were and I didn't take your schizophrenic religious rap-screeching seriously, I didn't- wow okay yeah that was a major dick move of me, I apologize.”

You huff, dissatisfied with just that, and Davepeta flaps a wing up to bap you on the butt. You startle and stare at them in offense and they waggle their finger at you. Literally waggle! So you stick out your tongue at them and float in closer, bumping your shoulder against theirs.

Gamzee is quiet for a few solid moments, and Karkat lifts his hand to pap rhythmically between his shoulderblades.
“I appreciate your apology, and I see that it is a genuine one,” Gamzee starts, careful with his words, “but you wounded me deep when you did such things to hurt me, and acted as a link in a chain of events to great suffering on my part. I ain’t… give me time. I would like your companionship and resent that I could not have had it these last four sweeps, but I don’t believe myself capable of enjoying it as I am now.”

Dave nods. “Time is something I have plenty of.” He pauses uncomfortably. Gee, so many pauses! This conversation is as long as the time Dave decided to ramble about how smart Jade is back on her birthday (in what was meant to be a touching and heartfelt toast and turned more into Dave, standing on his chair, delivering a soliloquy to his glass and making an extended metaphor about bees). “So, can't help but notice that you are considerably more lucid and less murdery than you were on the meteor. Also, you know, verbal now. What's up with that?”

Gamzee sighs deeply and Davepeta stands, folding their wings up against their back.

“I'm out!” they announce.

“Hey, no, why,” you protest. You like having them here!

“I've already heard this, not interested in hearing it again. Besides! No interesting ships are gonna develop between anybody gathered, so this situation is no longer relevant to me. I'm gonna go T.P. Jade’s house, and I'm gonna use yarn instead of T.P. claws I need to stay cat themed. Later!”

You whine a “hmph” and watch them leave with slumped shoulders, then sneeze and shake it off. Oh well. You take their seat and settle in for yet another round of Gamzee explaining the situation. Karkat’s holding both of his boyfriends’ hands and if the situation were a little different it would actually make a really cute picture!

Gamzee starts in, sounding way more tired of telling all this than you are of hearing it, and you notice that his voice sounds sort of scratchy. Less warble and more grating harshness. You float up and fly into the kitchen to get him another glass of water. You don't know what he did with the other one but you're not going to interrupt him just to ask. When you fly back and hold it out to him, he looks about as startled as if you’d just dropped a baby on his lap.

“Thanks, brother,” he says quietly, taking it from your hands like the plastic cup is fragile as fairy wings.

“No big,” you dismiss, and swing on over back to your chair. You float down onto it with your legs up over the armrest and scroll through your sylladex again. Oh fuck, right, sylladex. Gamzee mentioned he didn’t have one of those. You decaphcalogue your phone and start up a log with Jake.

**ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering golgothasTerror [GT]**

**EB:** Hi Jake! Do you have a moment?

**GT:** Why hello there John! Glad to hear from you, Dave left looking quite sour a while back, claiming he was going home. Is he over there with you now?

**EB:** Yeah, and he’s learning about what went down with Gamzee. Which is sort of why I started pestering you! Would you, oh brave and noble ruler over SkaiaNet Industries, be willing to send over a sylladex? Standard size and array modus should be fine.

**GT:** My, my, what flattery! But yes, I can absolutely get you a standardized sylladex. Why though, if I may ask? Does Gamzee not have one? Or is the modus simply not workable anymore?
EB: His got taken by the evil green goblin child

EB: I think

EB: Either that or English I don’t remember right now but one of the Caliborn iterations has it

GT: Gadzooks! That’s quite the rude thing to do!

EB: Yeah you don’t even know the half of it.

GT: I’m sure I don’t. I’ll phone Jessica and have her mail one, I’m at Jade’s right now. To what address should I have her send it?

EB: Uh…

That’s a good question! You’re not really sure. You look up at Karkat and Gamzee, who are firmly attached at the side, and figure this house is probably where Gamzee’s gonna stay. But then again, they’re awkward with each other, despite how clearly they both want this, and Gamzee should probably not sleep in slime if he used to have an addiction to it, and also this is Dave’s house too and neither of them looks particularly fond of each other. It would put pressure on a very flimsy peaceableness if Gamzee stayed here. They both expressed a willingness to get to know each other, you definitely don’t want to go too fast or too much and break that!

EB: My place, please!

EB: I don’t think he can keep on sleeping at Karkat’s and Dave’s

GT: Righto, cheerio!

EB: Sounds great, frosted flake!

GT: Oh :P you!

EB: (ehehehe) Thanks Jake! How are things over there on your end?

GT: Well we’re all terribly excited to hear how your adventure went!

GT: Were the fistcuffs all you’d hoped they’d be?

GT: Did you give that nasty skeleton boy a good drubbing?

EB: I did! I caught him a bunch of times with my hammers, I had to break out my old Fear No Anvil in order to even stand a chance against him though, which is lame!

GT: A fearsome title for a weapon! Any special properties?

EB: Yeah it puts a pause on time shit

EB: Though not enough of a pause! He started using his crowbar after I smashed his machine gun and then managed to zap away to a different point in time!

GT: That is strange!

GT: Maybe ask Callie for some tips before you go running off next time?

GT: Nobody really wanted to stop you this time around, you seemed terribly gung ho about the
whole ordeal
EB: I should do that!
EB: But yeah I was pretty kickass and the fight was great
EB: We also found Gamzee, which has been significantly less great, since everything that’s happened to him has been terrible!
EB: I’m glad we found him though, he was with Caliborn for way too long
GT: Too long?
EB: Yeah like five billion years too long the only appropriate time to spend with Caliborn is never
GT: I couldn’t agree more my chap!
GT: So he’s alright then, that Gamzee fellow?
GT: Kanaya, Rose, and Dave all seem terribly apprehensive about him
EB: He’s fine!
EB: He’s a good kid!
EB: But man you would not believe the shit he went through, it’s totally nuts and mega evil even by The Game’s standards
GT: Cripes and Jiminy Cricket!
GT: But you’ll have to tell me all about it, and your tussle with the cherub boy, at a later date, if I’m to call Jessica before SkaiaNet closes for the day
EB: Oh right!
EB: Man, it got late fast
EB: Is it seriously almost five?
GT: Time flies! In our case literally, since Dave is just as altitudinally inclined as the rest of us
EB: Talk to you later Jake, thanks again!
GT: Tally ho!
golgothasTerror [GT] has ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]
You smile at your phone. Jake is such a cool cousin to have. Then your phone buzzes and you are greeted with the handle of another great family member.
gardenGnostic [GG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]
GG: hi you!!!
EB: Hello me!
GG: :P
GG: im glad youre safe!
GG: weve all assumed youve been pretty busy lately, you finally catch a break? :o

EB: Sort of!
EB: Gamzee is explaining what happened to him to Dave, and I’ve already heard this like two and a half times so I don’t need to pay attention

GG: you never pay attention :B
GG: i used your special bucktooth emoticon just to show how silly and adorable and airheaded you are

EB: Thanks :B
GG: youre welcome :B
EB: I appreciate it :B
GG: no problem :B
EB: :B
GG: :B
EB: This is stupid
GG: yes, but its very fun!!!!
EB: Eheheheh true
GG: but yeah!!! tell me whats going on over there!!!!
GG: youre not injured or anything are you??
GG: also hows gamzee?
EB: I’m fine! A bunch of bruises from where the gremlin nabbed me with his crowbar, but nothing worse than superficial!
EB: Gamzee has seen better days
EB: And those days were not good days, but they were better than the days he has been having the last
EB: uh
EB: Yeah Gamzee’s not having a great time
GG: :O!!!!
EB: But things should be on an upswing for him now
EB: Finally
EB: and hopefully
EB: Jade everything our friends told us about him was wrong :( 

GG: oh no!!!!

GG: what do you mean?

EB: Okay so first of all he never meant to do anything bad, he got demon possessed by Lord English 

GG: 8O

EB: And I guess nobody noticed that he literally got possessed by a demon? 

EB: Davepeta can confirm that there is some weird shit going on with that 

GG: davepeta is very smart, for such an annoying DICK!!!!!

EB: You still mad at them for the soap thing?

GG: no!!!!!

GG: that was ages ago!!!!

GG: now im mad at them for the candle thing!!!

GG: and the vase thing!!!!

GG: SO MANY VASE THINGS JOHN!!!!

EB: And the yarn thing?

GG: what yarn thing? :o

EB: Whoops

GG: JOHN!!!!

GG: what yarn thing?!?!?!

EB: 3:B

EB: Maybe you should look outside your window

gardenGnostic [GG] has ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

EB: eheheheheh

While you are, indeed, a prankster yourself, it’s still a riot to ruin other people’s pranks. You and Jane have gotten into quite a few wars the last few years, along with her dad/your sort of dad, and you all have a great time pranking and foiling each other. Nobody’s managed to beat Uncle Crocker though (everybody except for Jane calls him that, even though he’s totally more of a dad than an uncle). Nobody. The Prankster’s Gambit is his bitch, and he, the pimp in the crib that drops it like it’s hot.

Shit. You were telling Jade about important things and she ran off. Who’s the airhead now, Jade?! ...Probably both of you.
You look up and are pleasantly surprised to see that Gamzee is almost done with his explanation. He must’ve gone even faster than he did with Davepeta. That’s probably due to the fact that this is his third time explaining this, and also he has bad memories of Dave that might close him off even more, you figure.

You float up off the chair and then swoop over to the couch, taking the empty glass from Gamzee’s hands and nyooming into the kitchen again to refill it. Fluids are important! Especially since he was crying earlier. He’s finished by the time you get back, and he takes it with another small thank you. You pat his shoulder and smile brightly at him, and actually pay attention to your surroundings again.

Dave looks horrified and sort of like he’s about to vomit. Good. You’re still sort of mad at him which is gross but you do feel vindicated by his discomfort and pretty obvious guilt. Well, obvious to you, since you know how to read Dave. Even after all this time, he still keeps himself closed off whenever he’s not making an active effort not to.

God, you’re all pretty fucked up, aren’t you?

Maybe you should back off; you’ve yelled at him and he’s apologized and he looks guilty. You can be softer with your friend, now.

You’re still gonna tear Rose a new one, though.

Bluh this whole situation is so gross you kind of really just want to go back and get rid of Caliborn before he ever gets a chance to be a thing that exists! But no, no. Callie is also a thing that exists, and you could never, ever do that to her. Not to mention, you’re kind of tired of using your retcon powers to birth new timelines. You think once is good enough for you.

“So,” you start, aiming to break the very tense silence that has fallen, since you know at least three people in this room aren’t good with silences. To be honest, you’d rather fumble over yourself than give Karkat a chance to start screeching, or Dave, rambling.

“Now that awkward explanations are out of the way, I think it’s about time for Gamzee to go take a nap, since- no offence dude- you kind of look dead on your feet.”

“None taken,” Gamzee says with a smile your way. God, he looks so fucking exhausted. Karkat asks Gamzee if he wants to sleep on the couch, since that’s probably the best location in the hive, and then all three phones in the room buzz simultaneously. Huh, who’s sending out a group message?

It’s a snapchat from Terezi.

GC: LOOK WHO I FOUND >:]}
**Terezi**

**Chapter Summary**

Lmao @ all y’all who were making guesses none of you were thinking big enough

**Chapter Notes**

In which John does not understand trolls and their romance
Also have a warning: DaveKat is still a thing I love and it shows up more in this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The picture is horizontal and four trolls are featured in it, none of them Terezi. One you distinctly remember from right before you touched the house juju and got your retcon powers. Aramia! Ara-Ada- Adrima? Yeesh, it’s been ages, you totally forgot her name. She’s still wearing her bright red godtier and is beaming at the camera with a smile that is just as wide and full of fangs and vaguely terrifying as you remember, and she looks positively delighted there in the mid-right of the picture. To the right of her is that lame dude with the eyepatches, who you also remember from the dream bubbles. His eye patches are flipped up and his eyes are swaths of red, much like Terezi’s. You hope she didn’t lick them, though you have no doubt that Terezi’s interest is the reason the eye patches are up. He’s smiling too, close lipped, and his shoulders are a little slumped and you think you can see bags under his gorey eyes and his hair is very messy, but he looks happy. Ararara has her arm around his shoulders and is making a friendly wave hello at the camera. You have no fucking clue what his name is, but you do remember that he was the loser who tried to make a dramatic exit, and then had to be carried out. What a nerd. To the left of Adarada is a troll with gills and ear fins, who you only vaguely remember. She was Nepeta’s friend! The one who also had to help bail nerd-guy out when his dramatic exit flopped. She’s grinning, wide and fanged and terribly excited, her hair seemingly bouncing everywhere despite the fact that it’s a motionless picture, and her arm is around Adarada’s shoulder with her hand smooshing into Anadapa’s cheek, pressing their heads together. She looks friendly, if not definitely somebody you wouldn’t want to meet in a dark alleyway. Her freckles are cuter than you remember, and her eyes are white with death. You also have no fucking recollection of her name. To the left of her is a troll you’ve absolutely never seen before, at least, not that you know. He’s also got gills, fins, and white eyes, and his horns are shaped like lightning bolts. You think that Roxy would like his scarf. It looks like a nice scarf. He’s the only one in the picture that isn’t smiling. Instead, he looks surprised, and is a little blurry. You can tell that Terezi snapped the picture when fish lady troll was pulling him in for the photo; she’s got her arm around his neck and he is totally off balance. The two dead trolls look very young in comparison to their friends.

You take a snap of yourself smiling and sending her a thumbs up.

EB: Cool! What makes these four different than the other bajillion people getting sucked into the black hole?
You open both snaps in quick succession, admiring how Terezi is now part of the group. In the first, she’s smiling and you can tell she has definitely been crying recently, or at the very least tearing up, and she’s pressed up against eyepatch boy. In the second, Arafalalalalala and Freckles are making funny faces and crowding into the frame with them, Lightning McScarf poking his head up in the background, mostly obscured.

EB: That’s great! We’ve missed you!

She doesn’t send back any words, just a picture of the lily pad waaaaaaaaaaaaay way off in the distance with a little teal circle around it.

You look up to see Karkat furiously typing away on his phone, Gamzee looking over Karkat’s shoulder, and Dave taking a selfie. Heh, you guess if Terezi sent this to everyone she’s probably gonna get spammed a lot.

“Well this is exciting,” you say zipping over to Dave and shoving yourself into the frame with him when he takes his next response. He pushes you playfully, but you can tell he looks relieved. Well that’s dumb, it’s not like you could stay mad at him forever (even if you’re still a little bit peevish). The next snap Dave gets is very similar to the last snap you got, just a picture of the far off lilypad with yet another tiny teal circle drawn around it.

“Looks like she’s done talking to you too,” you observe.

Karkat snarls and his ears flatten, and you tilt your head at him.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing really, probably,” Karkat hisses, then glances in worry at Gamzee. Uh oh. “Terezi wants us to bring Gamzee to the entryway- exit? The place we’re all going to rally and meet up with Terezi and our long-dead friends and technically no longer dead friend. She’s being very adamant about it.”

“I don’t mind,” Gamzee offers quietly. “I ain’t that tired just yet, and I figure if she wants to see me then she deserves that much.”

Karkat looks up at Gamzee in concern. “You sure?” he asks, to which Gamzee shrugs and nods once, jerking up his chin.

“What went down between you two?” you ask.

“Things that never came to bloom, thank motherfuck. But, that don’t mean I wasn’t made to make the motions of such at her. I did intend to do motherfucking terrible things to her, but was stopped.”

Oh, yeah, he said something like that earlier when he was explaining things to you. You need to stop being so forgetful!

“Maybe she figured out that something freaky was going on and that’s why she wants to talk!” you say optimistically. Gamzee shrugs.

“In all things honest, I’m uncomfortable will anything having to do with that sister,” Gamzee admits quietly, glancing at Dave afterwards like he wasn’t welcome to hear that confession.
“Well, this will be a good first step in becoming less uncomfortable!” you announce, trying to keep a positive spin on things. You don’t really see what the big deal is? Nothing happened, right? And it’s not like Terezi is bad, just sort of annoying and hellbent on making everyone around her uncomfortable. Apparently she had a brief crush on you shortly after The Game ended? But like, that was the weirdest thing that really ever happened with her, (and you hardly even noticed!) so you’re not too concerned. She’s smart. Nothing bad is gonna happen!

“We should probably get going then,” Dave suggests, “Can’t be late for the big event. Especially with me here, like could you even fucking imagine. ‘Yeah where are the others?’ ‘Oh they’re late.’ ‘You mean the group with Dave, Knight of Time and slayer of sick beats, is late?’ ‘Sure do, and it’s a goddamned embarrassment to the rest of the gods of creation.’ Nobody wants that shit to go down so what I’m saying is we should get moving. Our place is the furthest from the exit point and we’ve got the most people at the moment.”

You all nod and get up, and you remember that Gamzee doesn’t have any shoes! And it’s not like this is your house, so you really can’t make an offer.

Luckily, Gamzee points this fact out to Karkat, sounding really awkward and shifting his gaze between Karkat’s shoulder and Dave’s knees as he explains, shuffling a little. You swoop in and pat his shoulder, which startles him but also makes him smile gratefully at you. You are the best tension-easer. It is you. You are doing great at your job.

Karkat’s feet are waaaay too small for Gamzee to be able to wear his shoes, so Dave has to awkwardly offer up a spare pair of flip flops, which are also a lil too small but still big enough that Gamzee can walk in them comfortably. It is as Gamzee is putting them on that Dave double takes and then proceeds to stare at Gamzee’s legs. He floats up an inch off the floor and drifts your direction, and you smile down at him.

“John.”

“Dave,” you greet back brightly.

“Are those the leggings I left at your place?”

“They sure are.”

“Kay, just checking.”

You giggle at him, which makes him roll his eyes dramatically and shove at you. You let yourself be pushed, weightless, and then dart back in and bodycheck him. You both end up snickering and you tousle each other’s hair and poke at each other’s side for a moment, before Karkat starts screeching at the two of you to stop being such fucking morons (he targets you especially- which is cute because Karkat is actually trying to be nice to his boyfriend) and get a move on.

Dave picks up Karkat, who still refuses to go bridal style for some goddamned reason. He says it brings up uncomfortable memories, but Dave and Rose both swear up and down that they never flew with him like that back on the meteor, and who the fuck else can fly?

Whatever, though. Gamzee does not have such inhibitions against sensible flying methods, and you shift into your godtier pjs before picking him up. His arms go instantly around your neck and he rests his head against yours, chirping at you which is adorable as all hell.

“You good?” you ask before you take off, preferring to move limbs now, rather than a million miles up in the air. Actually, the fucking codpiece is jutting into your diaphragm a little, so you
shift him a bit to get that thing off you. You really wish he would just get rid of it.

“I’m good, brother,” he says, and there’s a sort of breathlessness to his standard warble.

“Nervous?” you ask, floating up just a few feet at first so he can acclimate, watching Dave and Karkat take off at a significantly quicker pace.

Gamzee snorts a honk at you. “Not even hardly.” He reaches up to move some hair of his, and then nuzzles his face a bit closer against yours. “Though maybe a little, at being in your arms like this.”

You can’t really make out his tone in that last sentence. He doesn’t sound scared!

“I won’t drop you!” you promise, “You’re light as hell, there’s no way my arms are gonna get tired between here and the exit point!”

“I- ah, yeah, okay, I trust you.” He sounds vaguely disappointed? Ugh, whatever, you’re a wind god, not a mind reader. If something crops up, he’ll tell you. If not, you’re not gonna wait forever trying to figure out what he’s implying.

“Then we’re off!” you say cheerily, and accelerate with less vigor than you would if you were own. You still go faster than Dave, though, because what’s the point of flying if you’re not going to soar? Catavros is the only one who’s on the same wavelength as you when it comes to flying.

Gosh, you haven’t seen Catavros in ages. You hope he’ll be at the big meetup that’s about to take place. Though, he has no reason not to be. Gamzee’s clinging to you tighter now that you’re up in the air, and you keep to lower altitudes. He might be wearing your sweater, but he’s also only wearing leggings on his legs and flip flops on his feet, and weighs like five whole pounds so he’s bound to get chilly sort of no matter how low you fly.

“Still good?” you ask loudly, hollering over the wind.

“What?” he shouts back. You use your powers to move the air around you at the same pace you’re going, giving the impression that you’re in still air.

“I asked if you’re still doing alright!”

“Mother of fuck,” Gamzee says, awed, looking around and then down, seeing the ground fly past underneath you while the air is seemingly motionless. He stares a moment, then jolts.

“Yeah, bro, I’m good. You gonna keep this up the whole flight there? Seems a mighty act to perform.”

“I could, it’s not hard, but I like the feeling of buffeting wind. Oh, but you’ll probably get cold if I let the wind at us, huh?” You try not to sound too disappointed and probably fail.

“It’s alright if you want to let it go, brother blue, I don’t mind the cold when I’m all cuddled up next to you like this.”

You snort, then release the air around you, letting it do the things that air does. Moving air is actually pretty easy, as long as you’re actually moving air. The only thing air doesn’t like to do is be still- which means that’s the shit that is the hardest for you to do. You can move air in any direction you want to move it, but as soon as you try to make it stay still- especially if it was moving before you started trying to control it- that’s the moment using your powers becomes physically exhausting.
Hm. You suppose that if you’re going to be flying places with Gamzee, it might be a good idea for you to try looking into temperature manipulation with your powers. You tried your hand at it back when Jade was first setting up her greenhouse, but it was really hard for you to get even a little bit of a result and oftentimes you would make things cold when you wanted them hot, so you gave up. Besides, you had more interesting things to do at the time! Now, though, it’s sounding like an invigorating challenge, with results that will be more immediately useful than warming up Jade’s greenhouse that was already being electrically warmed.

Your group is last to arrive, excluding Terezi and the dead-not-dead trolls. Karkat and Dave gravitate to Kanaya and Rose, and you touch down near Jade. Gamzee’s hold on you tightens and his legs clamp down on the hand that’s holding him there. You glance at him, continuing to walk toward your friend on autopilot, but you can’t see his face. It’s sort of buried into your neck at the moment.

“Hi John!” Jade greets, and you turn your attention back to her.

“Hi Jade!” you greet in return, “How’s it going?”

“I’m good! Is this Gamzee?”

“Yeah,” you look at him again, and he removes his face from your neck and pries one hand off of you to offer Jade a small wave. She smiles in her typical Jade fashion and waves friendlily back. That seems to ease some of his tension, and he loosens his legs and other arm from their vices on you.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Jade!”

“Hey, sister,” Gamzee greets quietly, and you wonder if maybe you should’ve kept the air around you ‘still’ cause now that you’ve landed you can feel him sort of trembling. Or maybe he’s scared? Being scared of Jade seems terribly silly, but you’re also not a severely traumatized ex-slave of Lord English. Jade also isn’t mad right now, which adds significantly to the fact that you are not scared of her. You’re reasonably certain that Gamzee would shit himself in fright if he saw Jade while angry. Hell, who wouldn’t though? Your sister is kickass. And an absolute hellhound when she wants to be.

Jade does not want to be a hellhound at the moment, though, and giggles cheerfully at Gamzee, bending a little so she’s more level with your shoulder. “Hey, bro!”

You bonp your head against his, trying to mimic what you’ve seen him doing with Karkat. He chuckles and settles into your arms a little easier, and you turn your attention fully back to Jade.

“You know, you’ve landed, you can put him down now,” Jade reminds you, and you jump a little.

“Oh yeah! Sorry!” You put Gamzee’s legs down, and maybe you’re imagining it but he seems a little reluctant to let go of your shoulders? You leave one hand between his shoulder blades, just in case you’re not, and he hovers very closely inside your personal space. Jade blanks, and stares very obviously at Gamzee’s codpiece. Three or four seconds in, her left ear twitches, and then she blinks very slowly. She shakes her head and shoulders, then turns smiling back to you.

“Well this is all very exciting!” she says, ears perking up to Full Excitement Mode.

“No kidding!” you agree, a little gust of wind zipping past you and circling her ankles before drifting off. You see Catavros approaching in your peripheral, heading over this way.

“First you go and fight Caliborn and Karkat gets Gamzee, and now Terezi is coming home and
“she’s bringing four whole people with her!”

“That’s ‘cause John and Karkat are wusses and it takes two of them to do a fourth of what I do!”

You all look skyward, and the energy of the group palpably skyrockets. Terezi has a big grin on her face, a dragon themed jetpack on her back, and Mr. four-horns bridal style in her arms. He looks incredibly frazzled, eyes wide and lips pressed tight. You recognize silent screaming when you see it.

She lands hard on the ground next to you, grinning viciously and invading your personal space with her jetpack wing, then dumps her friend unceremoniously on the ground. She then proceeds to pay you no more attention, stepping over TiredFrazzled and striding into the middle of the group.

“Hey y’all, I hear tell that you losers missed me!” The group converges on her, multiple people speaking at once, and you and Jade and Gamzee stare at gemini as he stands, muttering under his breath. He’s ditched the eyepatches and is wearing some very strangely shaped 3D glasses now, his red eyes visible and unmoving. In your peripheral, you can make out Karkat heading this direction.

“aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA/“

Something loud and bright red rockets past you, stirring up wind in its wake, and bulldozes straight into Catavros. The two figures tumble for a considerable distance, going from one side of the group to the other, twisting up and rotating so fast that your eyes are tricked into seeing purple where red meets glowing blue. When they finally skid to a halt, Aradara is perched atop Catavros, who has his tail all twisted up around her waist, and her hands are on his face, fur poking out between her fingers, while his hands are at her armpits. Both are screaming. You admire her lung capacity.

“TAVROS!” she hollers excitedly.

“Aradia!” (That’s her name!!)

“IT’S YOU!”

“It’s me!”

“YOU’RE PART MEOWBEAST!”

“I am!”

“I’M SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU AGAIN!!!”

Catavros starts laughing, clearly elated, and Aradia joins in, and you feel yourself getting excited with warm fuzzies yourself. Aradia suddenly stops though, and you see her lift up a hand to brush at Catavros’s face. Presumably he’s started crying? She bends down and bonks their horns together, laughing again, her spirals fitting just right off the sides of her head to meet his large broad ones, stopping their foreheads what looks like can only be an inch from each other.

“I’ve missed you,” you can only just make out Catavros say, and yeah he is definitely crying. You think that’s really sweet.

“I’ve missed you too, you big goof,” she says, still loud and commanding the attention of everyone in the area, stealing the hell out of Terezi’s thunder. You glance Terezi’s way, and can see that she doesn’t particularly seem to mind.

The fish trolls float over to Aradia and Tavros, the one you’ve met before hovering in close and
sharing in the excitement, also greeting Tavros excitedly. McQueen McHorntroll floats a little farther back, seeming a tad uncomfortable. The two of them are sort of transparent, and definitely ghostly. From what you’ve heard, the dream bubbles (and space around the black hole) left ghosts looking mainly normal, except for the eyes, but now they are very clearly apparitions.

Your musings are interrupted by Karkat entering the area, loudly emotional, hands extended towards 3D boy.

“Sollux, Sollux oh my god I thought I was never going to see you again,” Karkat says as he walks close enough to put his hands on Sollux’s shoulders. “You fucking left us and never came back like a blooming bulgeflower growing up into its full fucking potential, fertilized by the shit of paradox space’s moobeasts and your fucking abandonment of us all you humongous fucking jerk I’ve missed you so fucking much!”

Sollux is laughing, an “eheheh” much like your own, and his arms have come up to Karkat’s shoulders as well (it’s considerably less of a reach for him). “I’ve missed you too KK. Hard to imagine I’d actually want to hear your endless screaming and bitching, no matter how long I was gone from it.”

“Fuck you with a rusted chair leg, you fucking defective lampshade! I can’t believe the first words out of your mouth after being separated for seven fucking years is just you being an obstinate prick like fucking always can you not muster even a modicum of emotion in that cold and heartless pan of yours to meaningfully…” Sollux smiles and huffs as Karkat rambles on, and pulls the shorter troll in for a hug. Karkat clings immediately, and everyone in the area rolls their eyes fondly when he starts- predictably- sobbing into Sollux’s shirt.

“There there, you blubbering goddamned pansy,” Sollux says, endearingly exasperated, as he pats Karkat between the shoulders.

You notice that the boy ghost has floated over to Kanaya, who has her arms crossed and is watching him with cool standoffishness. He’s rubbing the back of his head and working his jaw, looking at the ground, and you decide you’re gonna be That Guy. You Become and flow over to them so you can eavesdrop on their conversation, twisting idly above their heads where they won’t feel your motion.

“So uh, I’d like to apologize for the whole shooting you through the stomach thing, and also say that you were definitely justified in sawing me half in return,” the ghost says. Woah. He’s the guy who turned her into a vampire? Dude, no wonder he’s a ghost, Kanaya is the troll you want to fuck with the LEAST. You’re pretty sure the only person who could even attempt to take her is Davepeta, maybe Jade if she had enough space between her and the chainsaw and enough time for the bullet to get there.

Kanaya responds well, though, uncrossing her arms and softening her expression.

“You’ve grown some,” she says, softly admiring that fact.

The ghost boy huffs. “Well it’s been about two and a half sweeps, Kan, I can’t exactly remain perfectly stagnant, even if my body can. I’ve had a lot of time to think about things and talk things out with Fef and Ara and even Sol; I’m doin’ better. Trying, at least.”

Kanaya actually brightens up at that, literally as well as figuratively. “Then I suppose it is nice to see you again, Eridan.”

Score! Now you’re only missing ghost girl’s name.
“You too, Kan. How are things?”

“Exceedingly well. I have human married my matesprit, Rose, and the two of us live and work together. We have a cottage near a set of brooding caverns, and we help attend to this region’s Mother Grub and her clutches.”

“Hell, Kan, that’s great. You manage to uh…”

“Roxy Lalonde created a new matriorb and gifted it to me, back before we exited the Medium. Your destructive actions caused me a great deal of worry for a sweep and a half, but ultimately did not impede my ability to bring about a new society. In fact, I believe having such an important goal assisted Roxy in her quest of self improvement, so ultimately your bad behavior had good results.” She smiles, a little wicked and a little playful, at him, “Don’t think I’m about to let you live it down, however.”

Eridan shrugs and quirks a quick smile. “Figure that’s fair. I’m… I’m real relieved to hear that.”

Kanaya nods. “I suppose we all have things that we wish we had not done.”

You zip away, and it’s probably bad that you heard even that much. That was a very touching moment of forgiveness! Probably not meant for you to observe, buuuuuuut you can’t help it! Sometimes a dude just has to snoop!

You shove yourself back into flesh near Davepeta, who is talking to the animated fish ghost. She’s quite lively, for somebody dead!

“…so yeah, we figure that as long as we stay in range of Aradia nothing bad should happen to us,” the ghost is saying. “Oh! Shello!” she greets when she notices you, “I didn’t even sea you shore up! I’m Feferi!” She extends a ghostly arm to you, and you sorta-clasp it. Your hand phases through but if you’re veeeeeeery gentle you can pretend she’s more substantial than a particularly thick fog.

“John! Nice to meet you too!”

“I was just telling Davepeta that my silly goofball of a best friend and I need to stay within a certain range of Aradia, or else we might start to pass. She’s a medium and a necromagi so she can keep our shoals intact as long as we make like barnacles and stick close!”

You get the feeling that her nautically themed puns are very intentional. No wonder Davepeta and Feferi gravitated towards each other!

“Cool! I will expect to see you three as a trio from here on out!”

Feferi giggles and balls her fists, vibrating them a little, “I’m so EXCITED to be back in the realm of the living, even just as an honorary member! This is gonna be so much FUN!”

You don’t hear Davepeta’s response, suddenly remembering that you left Gamzee alone with Jade and you feel vaguely responsible for him. You scan the area, completely detached from the chat you’d been having.

Neither Gamzee nor Terezi are anywhere in sight.

Oh. You’re not sure how you feel about that? You turn your attention back to the conversation, which has delved into Davepeta rapidly explaining basically everything to Feferi, who listens with rapt and very excited attention. You chime in now and then, getting your new ghostly pal up to speed. As soon as Davepeta is done she immediately starts pestering them with questions, her fists
A while later, Davepeta gets distracted halfway through a response, and you do too. Terezi and Gamzee have rejoined the commotion, Terezi striding in, looking thoughtful, Gamzee sticking to the edge of the group, looking absolutely exhausted.

“Talk to you later Feferi! I’m gonna go chat with Terezi.” Davepeta doesn’t really wait for a response before beelining for her.

“I’m gonna head out too,” you say, “It was really nice meeting you!”

“It was nice to meet you too, John! I’m gonna go sea how Eridan’s apology went. He’s been worrying himself silly over Kanaya ever since Terezi found us!”

Feferi zips off like a shot, and you idly think that it will be really fun to go flying with her. Well, if Aradia can keep up and wants to, that is. Man, those two are gonna have to stick to her all the time, that’s actually kind of sucky. But whatever. You fly off yourself, and you intend to beeline for Gamzee, who is mostly hidden now and obscured from the eyes of the group, when you pass Terezi and Davepeta.

“Just, while you were flying around, did you smell him at all? Anything about him?” Davepeta is asking. You look and can see Terezi’s face falling from her vicious grin, going soft and sympathetic, and you slow. Before she can answer in what will obviously be the negative, Davepeta continues.

“Did you hear anything? Did any ghost you encountered have anything to say about him? At all? Were there even clues or the scent of his dumb sweaty hands lingering on…”

You can hear the hope fade out of their voice as they talk desperately on, finally drifting to a halt and pressing their lips together.

“I’m really sorry, Davepeta,” Terezi says, “but there was nothing of him to be found. I don’t know where he flew off to but it was somewhere impossible to get to.”

Davepeta makes a noise of wet frustration and you drift over to pat their shoulder. They angrily rub at their eyes, glasses going all askew, and they start knocking the heel of their palm against their hip. Pressing their lips thin, they look up to the exit point, and make another deeply unhappy noise.

“What if I just…” they start, but drift off and start hitting their hip a little harder. “I can't, I can't, he told me to wait for him and if I go back he might come home and I’d miss him, I can't go looking for him but-” they cut off with a crack in their voice, pressing the heel of their other palm against their eye.

You rub their back and offer them a hug. They take it and continue hitting at their hip, face planted on your shoulder, their other hand moving to knead their claws in your godtier pjs. Lucky for you these things magically mend themselves. Terezi has slumped shoulders and thin lips, quirked sideways, a clear desire to help written on her body language.

“You don't have to stay here just because he told you to,” Terezi starts, attempting encouragement. “Go look for his ass! He probably got himself stuck on a tree branch somewhere.”

Davepeta shakes their head miserably against your shoulder, knocking their hand a little faster.

“It’ll jinx it again. We died cause I didn't stay put when he said to I can't go after him again, I can't, I'll jinx it again and I'll never find him.”
“Davepeta,” you say softly, rubbing their shoulder gently.

“That's not how luck works!” Terezi says, “You can't just jinx something like that, what happened last time was a bad coincidence and definitely not your fault!”

“And what if I don't ever find him? It took you two years to find our friends; what if I spend ages and ages inside the Medium looking for him and I never do, what if I go in and he comes out and I spend the rest of my life searching for him while he's waiting for me here, what if he doesn't wait and he goes back in after me and we both look for each other in the medium and never pass each other? I can't, I can't, I just- hng!”

You shush them a little, not making anything like an “oo” noise because trolls are sensitive about that sort of thing, and rub their shoulder.

Davepeta forces a deep breath and then another, choking back their crying. Davesprite was never one to show emotions this openly, so Davepeta is probably embarrassed about crying in front of you now.

“So, changing the subject,” Terezi says, and Davepeta nods, lifting their head from you and wiping their tears again, sniffling. You let go but leave a hand on their shoulder.

“What do you mean I was gone for two years?”

Davepeta sniffles loudly and you feel yourself squint. “What?” they ask.

“You said I was gone for two years,” Terezi says, frowning, “I was only gone for one.”

You and Davepeta stare at her, then each other.

“Uh,” they say, still looking at you.

“Terezi,” you say, “Do you maybe mean one sweep? Since troll units are different from human units? Because you were definitely gone for two years.”

“No, I was gone for one year,” she insists, “half of a sweep. Both of you…?”

You three stare (sniff?) awkwardly at each other, and the uncomfortable silence of a dawning realization you haven’t quite arrived at yet is shattered by a friendly fairy lady with very large fangs and an even bigger grin.

“Hey!!! How's it going over here!!!?” she asks cheerfully.

“We think Terezi is a little off her rocker,” you supply immediately, on reflex. She flips you off.

“We were just arguing over how long I was gone. They say I've been gone for two years- a sweep- but I've only been gone for one year- half a sweep.”

“No you were definitely and abosmewtely gone fur two years, Terezi, we know, we've been here the whole time. Maybe it felt shorter fur mew beclaws mew were busy and didn't have a timekeeping device?”

“But I do have a timekeeping device! My phone! Smell for yourself!”

She holds it out and all three of you converge on it to look at the date…

Oh, oh wow, yeah, it's off by a year. You decaphcalogue your own phone and light up the lock
screen for comparison’s sake. You all stare.

“Holy hell you guys this is so exciting,” Aradia says, and Feferi swoops in to look at what you’re all staring at. “Time flows differently out here than it does in The Game!!”

“Does it?” Feferi asks. Aradia stares up and to the left, red time motifs watermarking their way around her hands. She laughs brightly.

“It is!! It’s flowing faster out here than it was in The Game! I didn’t notice at first but it’s moving twice as fast!!”

“Wait, does that mean we’re aging twice as fast?” you ask, worried, fearful of being old and grey at the age of forty.

“No, silly, time doesn’t work like that! You’re in this timeflow, which means you’re reacting to it normally, and the rest of us were in The Game’s timeflow, and we were reacting to it normally, but now we’ve crossed over into this timeflow and we’re moving in it normally, but we’re a little behind you all in terms of how much total time we’ve spent existing, despite being in the same temporal location as each other now!”

You… yeah you missed about all of that.

“It means you’re a little older than us. Because time travel.” Aradia is a gem and you are so glad she’s willing to dumb things down for you because that would’ve been embarrassing to ask a mostly-stranger for.

You really hate time travel.

“Wait, wait so…” Davepeta sounds desperately hopeful again, their wings lifting slowly from where they’d slumped. “ARquius has only been floating around like an asshole for two years! A sweep is a perfectly reasonable amount of time to take for some big grand scheme, he hasn’t- from his perspective he hasn’t-” They break off. “Don’t look at me like that!” they snap, and you fear they’re talking to both you and Terezi, “I don’t have a lot of things left to cling to, okay? Just give me this!”

You try for encouraging. “Two years isn’t too bad,” you agree, patting their shoulder some more, “he might even be in the process of doing something big and dramatic right now, and we’ll have three groups of people coming home in quick succession!”

They smile, half gratefully, at you, and you try to smile cheerfully back.

“Wow I have missed out on so much these last few sweeps. Well, okay, years, last few years. You said a sweep is about two human years?” Aradia asks the three of you who’ve been on new Earth before.

“Six sweeps is precisely equivalent to thirteen years,” Terezi offers.

“Then that would make me… about nineteen human years! Sollux is eighteen, and Feferi and Eridan are eighteen trapped in thirteen ghost bodies. Er, thirteen year old ghost bodies,” Aradia glances over her shoulder at Feferi, “Am I doing my math right?”

“Sounds a-boat right to me!” Feferi replies, also hauntingly cheery.

“Why are you nineteen while the others are eighteen?” you ask, trying to do that math in your head and not getting any of it.
“Time travel. As the Maid of Time, and also sort of goddess of death and dream bubbles—” Feferi giggles and the two share A Look, “—I did a lot of time travelling, probably about half a sweep, so, nineteen human years!”

“So Terezi would also be nineteen then,” Davepeta muses.

“And you losers are all twenty, then?” Terezi asks. You nod. “My twentieth birthday wasn’t too long ago!” you inform her.

You wonder how old Gamzee is.

Oh shit Gamzee!!!! You were gonna go check on him!!!

“Anyway, I’m off, bye!” you say suddenly and dart off. You leave the vaguely terrifying women and vaguely terrifying person to their musings of time and how it moves.

Gamzee is sitting on the ground, hidden behind a bush, and he looks like he is having a Very Not Good Time. “Gamzee,” you say, soft so as not to startle.

He startles anyway, jumping and snapping his head up at you to stare fearfully. You float back a good three feet, alarmed and not meaning to seem a threat, and he softens when he recognizes you.

“Sorry,” he mumbles, eyes drifting down and hand moving to clutch at his arm, “Was fallin’ asleep. Got spooked.”

“Didn’t mean to scare you, I just wanted to check in. You look even more exhausted than when we left.”

“I feel as such, brother blue,” he says, drooping. “I can-” he cuts off to yawn, grey tongue curling like a cat behind those long fangs.

You glance around and spot a park bench sitting near the sidewalk, sort of off from the group but close enough you can still keep your eye on it.

“Hey,” you say softly, floating back in. “How about you go chill out on that bench over there? I’ll have Jake signal that nobody should talk to you, and when we’re done I’ll go over and pick you up and we can go back to my place, okay?”

“Why not Karkat’s?” he asks, sounding mildly disappointed.

“Dave lives there.”

“Oh, yeah.”

“So, you chill with that? I don’t think you should continue sitting on the ground against a bush, I’m not a doctor but I’m pretty sure that’s bad for you.” You extend your hand and he takes it, and you help him up.

“Ain’t nothing wrong with being on the ground,” he protests as he stands, “Bein’ on the ground is good, more motherfuckers should support being on the ground.”

You snort and walk him to the bench (he walks, you drift like a particularly comical balloon he’s holding onto), and once he’s thumped down on it you pat him on the head and tell him to just chill out here, you’re gonna go get Jake to put a sigil on him, so don’t be surprised when a sudden mini lightshow starts happening on his body.
He nods, trusting, and you feel kinda warm on the inside. It’s nice to have someone depend on you like this? Scary?? You could break him?? But also nice.

“Hey, Jake!” you call and zoom up to him.

“Why hello there chum! It’s been absolute ages since we last chatted,” he says with a wink your way. You laugh at his joke, but stay focused!

“Could you put a halo up on Gamzee? He is so very down for the count on sociability but I don’t want him to keep hiding behind a bush.”

“Ah, the old bush trick, I’ve done that a few times. Where is the fellow then?” Jake asks, eyes searching. You point his attention to the bench and he nods. A flare of Hope rises up around his hands and a ring appears around Gamzee, the social symbol of “Don’t talk to me; I need some time alone.” You all made it for Jake’s sake, hence why it’s linked to his powers, but there’s an understanding that if anybody has the halo on, you don’t talk to them.

Eridan wants to talk to you next, since this is a big meet and greet for everybody, and you do your best not to worry too bad about Gamzee. He’s fine. He’s got some space and is chilling out on the bench, and nobody is talking to him because as soon as the halo went up everybody who knows what it means explained it to everyone who didn’t.

You still glance that way frequently, and often find him unmoved.

Karkat has refused to remove himself from Sollux’s side, instead meeting everybody Sollux wants to meet in tandem with him. Sollux… doesn’t actually seem to mind, which is good you guess. You figured Karkat must’ve lost some close friends when his group of twelve went down to four and a half on this side of the universe, but given what you’re seeing here you think that maybe Sollux was one of the closest?

After you have been thoroughly introduced to everybody, you all gather to discuss living arrangements. Feferi and Eridan have to stay with Aradia, obviously, and she is hellbent and adamant about staying with Catavros, who is more than happy to take her home with him. Sollux is invited to Karkat’s hive, but Dave counters with a tired sounding “babe.” Terezi then offers her hive, and voices a hope that he doesn’t mind dust, cause she hasn’t lived there for two human years on this time plane.

Jade is the one to tell her that some of the carapacians have made it their sworn duty to maintain her home for her in her absence. She’s at first baffled, then laughs.

“I’ll have to thank them!”

People start drifting after that, Dave and Jake being the first. They both seem eager to get home, and you move to leave almost immediately after Jake does. Gamzee is still on the park bench, and he is very much asleep. The halo fades as Jake flies out of range, but that’s fine. You shake his shoulder gently, testing to see if he’ll wake, but no, he’s out cold.

Gingerly, as though he might break as soon as he might wake, you lift him bridal style once again. It’s harder with him asleep and unable to hold onto you, or position his own head on your shoulder, but you manage. Then you lift up into the air and slowly accelerate, being careful with him.

Your house is cooler than you remember it being, so you nudge the thermostat with your Breath as you pass it by, closing the door with your magic as well. You take Gamzee to the guest bedroom, thinking to yourself that he is unlikely to wake up anytime soon, if he didn’t wake the whole way
It’s sort of funny. Dave had spent the night here a while back and forgot his leggings on the floor, hidden underneath the comforter, and you’d caphcalogued them so you could return them next time you saw him and then promptly forgot. These leggings have made it all the way back to your guest bedroom before they ever made it back to Dave! You chuckle to yourself and you set Gamzee down on the bed.

When you decided to turn your dad’s old room into a guest room, you had to invest in new furniture. Well, you’d had to do that for the whole house, but you went for starkly similar objects for the rest of the house, replacing what the battle imps had destroyed with nearly identical replicas. But this room, you took creative leeway with. Not only do you not remember the contents of this room very well, having only seen it a handful of times, but you really, really didn’t want to replicate what you do remember. Your brain was very adamant about that. So instead you have a king sized bed commanding the middle of the room, a small bedside table with a lamp (a tasteful housewarming gift from Rose and Kanaya), a dresser, a towel rack, and some bare hangers in the closet. There’s enough room for a desk, but only just, and when you were making decisions you decided, rather on a whim, that a desk probably wouldn’t be necessary.

The bed has the world’s plushest mattress, because if your friends are going to visit you then you’re going to spoil them. The comforter is similarly fluffy; big and thick and sewn into large squares to keep the stuffing from shifting around all over the place. The pillows are, likewise, obscenely decadent, and you often joke when your friends are visiting that you’re going to make them sleep in your room and take this bed for yourself.

Of course you don’t, though, because if you wanted a bed like this you could easily have it. Something just feels better in your brain about keeping your old room much the same as it was before The Game.

You hope Gamzee likes plush things. You know trolls sleep in slime, but you can’t exactly replicate that! Large and cozy will have to do, in the meantime or for the all time. You get him situated on his back underneath the comforter, horns poking a little at the backboard, and carefully brush his hair out of his face. He has so many scars. So many scars and so many injuries, and he only ate like once today! That can’t be good. You promise to yourself that you’ll get more food into him tomorrow, but for now you’ll let him sleep. He needs it, that much is obvious.

Before you leave, your eyes are drawn, almost inevitably, to the little bump in the covers that his goddamned codpiece makes. You sigh. You kinda wanna just… take that off of him. But you’re not going to undress him for no reason and it’s like, the only possession he has that’s his right now? That doesn't stop you from being exasperated though. Why does he do these things that he does? This one very specific incredibly off-putting thing that he does?

Your phone goes off and you leave the room, not wanting to stare or just hover awkwardly, typing while he sleeps. You shut the door quietly and nyoom down to the kitchen to make yourself some food, of course answering your phone before you do.

**turntechGodhead [TG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]**

TG: hey so my boyfriend is slowly losing his shit and insisting that hes not actually losing his shit

TG: you took the clown home with you and hes like

TG: safely snuggled up next to you like some cuddly and oversized crustacean right
TG: hi ho captain it looks like the bottoms of our ships have been seized

TG: except instead of ships its our actual bottoms

EB: Yes, Dave, Gamzee is here!

EB: He fell asleep back at the meetup so I took him home and put him to bed

TG: sweet see i told karkles that even you arent that much of a dunce and that you had the situation on lock

TG: no clowns just randomly wandering around new earth being vaguely odd and sorta just jutting his weirdass codpiece around in some poor carapacian childs face

TG: he knows that thing is weird right

EB: Yeah. But he likes it I guess?

TG: are you chill with that

EB: eeeeeeeehhhhhhhhh

TG: see man im telling you

TG: weird

EB: You don't gotta tell me! But it's his and he likes it and I'm not going to tell him to get rid of it!

EB: Even if I want to

TG: even if you want to

EB: I will persevere

TG: you will carry on

TG: you will survive

TG: for as long as you know how to love you know youll stay alive

EB: Don't go Gloria Gaynor on me Dave

TG: fuck you my mother is an icon of disco and incredibly pretty ladies how dare you talk about her like that

EB: Okay.

TG: fuck your eye roll too

EB: You can't even see me right now!

TG: yeah but i know dude

TG: i know

TG: i am as aware of your eye roll as jane is aware of who ate the last slice of cake
TG: everybodys trap is sealed and were all ride or die in this bitch but does that stop jane

TG: hell no

TG: jane just up and finds out whodunnit anyway like a proper goddamned sleuth

TG: she doesnt even do anything about it she just really enjoys the satisfaction of sniffing out the culprit like dont let terezi and her on a crime case together theyll get it done in the first three minutes of the episode and the rest of the time will just be the two of them being insufferable and smug together

TG: john?

EB: I’m still here!

EB: I’m making dinner for myself while you talk.

TG: oh sweet whats cookin good lookin

TG: shit i havent said that to karkat in ages i should go do that to him tonight

TG: or right now since nobody is cooking anything right now like we havent even left the communal area and knowing him we wont until terezi hauls this douchey looking douchebag away from karkat and then i can finally just take my boyfriend home like goddamn

EB: Yes, Dave, we all know you’re a clingy fuck who can’t handle like ten minutes without your dumb gross boyfriend

TG: fuck you egbert if you were in love like this youd understand

TG: clearly these are just the throes of one so enamored that he cannot function

TG: he being me

TG: your cold and dead little heart cannot comprehend the levels of love i have for this piece of fuck

TG: im a goddamned cup that keeps on overflowing

TG: behold me

TG: for i am your new god

EB: eheheheh, you two are cute!

TG: thanks

TG: i really love him lots john

EB: I know

TG: like so much

TG: i mean look at him standing over there still crying because hes just so goddamned happy that his friends are alive and he didnt lose them for forever like he thought he did like im gonna have to deal with a deeply dehydrated boyfriend when i get back home
EB: I thought he was freaking out about where Gamzee was

TG: yeah he was but i told him you had the situation on lock for realsies and i was texting you and he chilled his jets and went back to being sociable and adorable and stupid and perfect and did i mention that i really just love him a lot

TG: most mornings i wake up thinking about how goddamned lucky i am to have found him like what the fuck kind of cosmic bullshit blessing even is this

TG: when did i sign my soul over to the devil because this kind of thing obviously cant come around on its own like you know

TG: #blessed

TG: the other mornings i wake up thinking about dick

EB: That’s what you get for playing dickouiji Dave!

EB: They plague your dreams and haunt your mornings!

TG: ooooo dark should i let rose know that you're coming into her fold

TG: the witchcraft of cock

EB: Nah, tell her thanks for the offer though

TG: that offer i made for her

EB: Yeah that one

TG: cool

EB: I gotta stir things now Dave, talk to you later!

EB: Have fun being dumb and gross swooning over your boyfriend!

TG: thanks i will

ectoBiologist [EB] has ceased pestering turntechGodhead [TG]

You make your dinner and eat it alone, and normally that’s like, regular and totally what you expect but having somebody in your house and not eating with them is making you feel a lot more awkward about eating alone than you normally feel. You do the dishes quickly and feel that your home is too empty, too quiet. You bring your laptop down to the living room, feeling disquieted at being alone in a house you are not actually alone in. Roxy, ever perfect and practical in her sociability, has opened up a huge group chat with everyone in it so you now have access to the other trolls again. You’d blocked most of them (and never bothered to unblock them, because anyone who really wanted to talk to found a way to do that regardless of blocking) and when you upgraded your technology all your recents got wiped off your chumroll. So now you have people like apocalypseArisen and twinArmageddons and cuttlefishCuller on your roll. Cheerful. You sometimes forget how morbid trolls can be when they want to (old universe trolls (these new trolls are so much softer, raised kinder and in a gentler world)).

You spend a lot of time getting to know caligulasAquarium, who is Eridan. You mentally label him as “purple and wavy” and you have a lot of fun talking to him! He’s a little odd and you have a hard time reconciling some of the things he says. He’s not bad! Just… sometimes he sounds normal
and regular and stuff, but sometimes he’ll reply instantaneously like a kid might. He usually backtracks and/or apologizes when he blurts out stuff that makes you question his maturity, but it’s weird.

Chatting with Feferi is like sunlight in Seattle. Brilliant, beautiful, a little overwhelming at times, and sporadic. She keeps flitting in and out, but you’re no stranger to excessive distractibility so you don’t mind in the least. She sounds like she’s going to be a LOT of fun to get to know.

Sollux declines your attempt to try and talk to him, but that’s fine. You’re hardly going to try and chat up Jake after a big group event, so you can respect being done with talking to strangers for the evening.

Terezi also doesn’t want to talk to you, though, which is a little weird. Maybe you’re just used to her having nothing better to do and always answering your snaps? Or maybe she’s hanging out with the real life friend she’s got in the house she hasn’t been in for two years.

Aradia doesn’t even answer you to say “hi sorry I’m busy” and you leave your cheerful “Hello!” unfollowed in that chat log. She’s also probably busy with the other troll she’s now living with. She clearly missed Catavros a ton! And you bet they have a lot of catching up to do!

Around midnight, Eridan has to go.

EB: Aw really?

EB: Wait do ghosts even sleep?

CA: yeah Ara’s got to sleep wwhich means Fef an’ I need to also not be awwake because if wwe’re awwake wwhile Ara’s sleepin’ it’s gonna havve bad results

CA: wwe might vvery wwell conk out as soon as she does wwhether wwe wwant to or not anyway

CA: and ghosts “sleep” the same wway computers do technically it ain’t sleep like you livving folks do but wwe gotta or else bad shit’s gonna happen ovvertime

CA: exercisin’ too much soul energy in spans a time wwhen Ara isn’t up an’ able to keep us from hurtin’ ourselfves

CA: also she wwants to shut dowwn her husktop wwhile she sleeps wwhich means I have to givve this thing back to her noww

EB: Okay! Goodnight Eridan, sleep/not sleep well!

CA: thanks you too

caligulasAquarium [CA] has ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

It’s earlier than you usually go to bed, but you’re feeling tired from the day anyway. Karkat woke you up early this morning and you’ve been busy! You might as well just go to bed now, too.

When you pass the guest room, you poke your head in and check on Gamzee. He’s exactly as you left him, and you have the sudden irrational fear he died in here but no, in your panic you fling out your power and you feel him breathing. Steady, deep, unbothered. Good. You smile at his figure, and gently click the door closed again, maintaining your awareness of his breathing in case you accidentally wake him up as you putter around doing your nightly routine. The door closing doesn’t
change the pattern, and you feel the rhythm (subconsciously matching your breathing to his) as you change into pjs (regular ones, with sweatpants and a graphic t) and brush your teeth. You fall asleep surprisingly fast, no staring blankly at the shadows on your ceiling tonight, just the feeling of Gamzee breathing.

Chapter End Notes

Number of times I had to pause while writing this and cry a little: 4
Chapter Summary

Y'all fuckers ready for talk of aliens and gender bc I am hype about my headcanons. Also, can anybody say: Longer than I intended (Seriously this chapter ran so long and I didn't even do everything I had initially planned I'm shoving a bunch of stuff into the start of the next chapter)

Chapter Notes

So I have gotten fanart from multiple people (I'm so sorry Zeke how tf do I keep on forgetting to mention yours) but I AM POSTING THEM NOW!!! :D
http://steep-slope.tumblr.com/post/154411417866/it-was-supposed-to-be-saitb-fanart-but-i-guess-it (((Davepeta fanart it's great ily))
http://bepiscola-official.tumblr.com/post/154229227020/i-drew-fanart-of-imhereformysciencefriends-s-fic (((Also Davepeta and by the same friend ur just really stellar ilysm))
http://lunyhime95.tumblr.com/post/154325848886/httparchiveofourownorgworks8399101chapters1 ((((SUCH A PRETTY STYLE!!!! Back from the early chapters))
http://doodzedood.tumblr.com/post/153465870197/call-out-post-for-imhereformysciencefriends-for ((((MY LOVELY ZEKE DRAWING ily baby ur always so nice to me ahhhh) (fun fact that song has been my main repeat song while I write for the majority of this story)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You are awoken to the harsh and grating noise of your phone alarm going off at 8 in the fucking morning. You turn it off, deeply confused, trying to remember when or why the hell you would set an alarm for this early, but when you get your eyes on the lock screen and see the label for the alarm you can feel your confusion pop like a balloon. The alarm is titled “Hoo hoo hoo :B” and you roll over with a groan. When did Jane even get the chance? It’s not like you’ve asked her to hold your phone in recent memory! The only time you left it unattended was… like, three weeks ago at Dirk’s place, when a bunch of you had gone over for a visit in an attempt to knock Dirk out of his hyperfocus on his latest project. You’d run to the bathroom, and you had been texting, so possibly you had left your phone where she could see it? Stupid! But why would she plan this far ahead?!?

You grumble to yourself about dumb looney cousins and try to go back to sleep.

But… you got about eight hours, and your body has determined that you are awake now. UGH! You sit up and send Jane two snaps. The first is of you, sitting in bed, hair askew, eyes half lidded, and frown apparent. The second is the exact same except you’re flipping her off. Fuck her. Fuck her up the ass with a DIY cactus made of moldy sponges and rusty sewing needles.

You float up and go to the bathroom, and make your way through your morning routine, humming
one of the new world pop songs to yourself, thinking of literally nothing else, but sometimes spacing out and staring at your reflection or the wall or the middle drawer of your dresser before snapping back to reality and continuing on with your routine, still humming. It’s catchy, a mix of carapacian rattles and human electro swing.

Downstairs, you pour yourself a bowl of cereal and munch your way through, still sort of humming. You slurp up the milk and yawn. Ugh, fuck Jane for this so much and fuck your body for being a piece of shit that wants to do things before your brain is ready for that. You debate just going back and taking a nap, but you know that’s just gonna make you even more aggravated with your body. So you’ll dick around on your computer. You go back to your room, but it’s not on your desk? Did Jane make Roxy use her powers and steal away into your house while you were sleeping?

You remember that you had been using it downstairs, and subsequently remember that you are not alone in your house. Ohhhhhhh shit that’s right there are like six more trolls on this planet than there were two days ago.

...That would also explain why your elbow has been bugging you all morning. There’s a bruise there. From where Caliborn hit you with a crowbar. Wow you are SO FAST in the mornings, like, look at you, absolutely the speediest ever, you are. Dave could compare you to Sonic X in his next SBaHJ comic and it’d be so true to life.

You float up to Gamzee’s room- you mean the guest room- and knock softly, reaching out with your powers and seizing his breath. It doesn’t so much as hitch when you knock, still deeply asleep. You open the door and float over to the side of the bed, looking down at him, at an impasse. He fell asleep in the early evening, so he should probably wake up soon, right? Also, he barely ate yesterday, so he needs to do that, and fluids are a daily deal.

“Gamzee,” you say softly, touching the spot in the blankets where his shoulder should be. “Gaaaaaazeee.” You kick up some air around his face, blowing his hair about and ruffling him. “Gamzee, Gamzee, Gamzee!” you call gently, almost singsong. “Gaaaaaaaaaamzee.”

He stirs, and you stop touching him, floating back a foot and calling again, “Gamzee.”

He blinks awake and rolls onto his side, facing you, and searches around blearily before looking up at your hovering blue form.

“Wake up sleepyhead! You’ve been asleep for like, fourteen-ish hours.”

“Mmmmmmmng,” he complains wordlessly, snuggling farther down under the covers, “five more minutes,” he asks softly. You laugh.

“C’mooooon, it’s time to get up! You need to eat and drink and I’m pretty sure lethargy becomes a thing if you sleep for too long.”

“Just a little longer,” he pleas, and he looks up at you with an expression that makes your heart go all weak and flipfloppy.

“....nngh,” you whine, torn between trying to be responsible (something that does not come naturally to you) and giving him literally anything he asks for. You float down and sit on the edge of the bed, and try to make him want to get out of bed all on his own, leaning on your hand that’s not too far from his horns.

“C’mon, Gamzee, you can’t tell me you’re not hungry right now.”
“Ain’t such a thing that I haven’t had worse of,” he counters.

“Dude that’s really depressing. Aren’t you thirsty?”

He grins blearily at you and blinks deliberately, squints, and then sorta half winks? It starts out as a blink but he opens one eye back up. “Fuck,” he mutters. He’s a silly sleepyhead, and you snort at him and eheheheh.

“C’mon Gamzee, time to get up,” you coax softly. “Carpe diem and all that shit.”

He reaches out and grabs you by the forearm, looking up at you pitifully. “Or you could just stay here?” he asks, all soft and unsure. You stare at those eyes and the scars all over his face and the bandaids on the wrist that’s exposed, your sweater riding up his arm, dragged by the weight of the blanket and the looseness around his body, and you feel your will crumbling.

“Fine. We can cuddle for a little while. But then I’m hauling your ass to the kitchen and feeding you!” You lay down next to him, on top of the covers, and his arms encircle your midsection and he presses his face into your sternum. Your arms thread around the back of his head and you decaphcalogue your phone. “I’m probably just gonna be on my phone for a while,” you let him know. Your chin rests on his head and you get a mouthful of wild clown hair for your efforts. You can view your phone easily enough, framed by his waving horns.

“Mmm’kay,” he mumbles, and you’re aware enough of his breathing (this close, it’d be impossible to turn your awareness off) that you can feel him drop right back off to sleep. Heh, wish it was that easy for you.

Cuddles are fun! Comfy and warm and a nice way to spend time with basically anybody. You go through your chum roll, but nobody’s online yet, so you play a mindless dot game for a little while, feeling the way Gamzee breathes steadily in and out, once again accidentally matching your breath to his, lost in the flow and rhythm and the mental emptiness of your game.

When you wake up, your phone has dropped onto the pillow beneath your hands and Gamzee is still snuggled up close to you, solid and alive and asleep. You mumble, pick up your phone, and shuffle halfway up. 9:46. Wow.

“Gamzee,” you call softly, and this time he snorts and startles awake, the hand that’s on top of your body moving around and grabbing at your shirt, then hip.

“Wha..?”

“Gaaaaaamzee,” you call, a little louder, and lean your face down close, almost laying down again. “Wake up, it’s been a little over an hour, time to get up for real this time,” you say and bonk your head against his. You lack horns, but the idea should get across right.

At the bump he falls into a mess of chirring and his hand tightens on the hem of your shirt. “Nooooo,” he whines.

“Gamzee I know getting up is like, the hardest thing that has ever existed in any morning ever, but c’mon you gotta do it.”

“Don’t wanna,” he whines, reaching up to grab you by the collar and haul you back down to lay with him again. You could easily resist, but you don’t, instead flopping back down onto the arm that has to be uncomfortably asleep by now.

“Dude, at least move your arm so I’m not laying on it anymore.”
“Don’t want to,” he mumbles, “Don’t want to let you go.” The hand that he can still feel/move tightens around your back and clutches your shirt a little tighter.

That does something warm and tight to your heart, but the fact that you are laying on his yardstick of an arm will not bend for fuzzy feelings.

“Here, c’mon, let’s just-” you float up and reach under you, grab his arm, and position it so it’s bend and smushed between your bodies. Not exactly comfy, but more likely to get blood circulation than underneath your body. “-there! Better?”

He’s smiling at you when you look up at his face, and nods, eyes sorta dreamy. Gee, he must wake up about as easily as you do.

“But I’m still gonna keep nagging you to get up and eat something. And drink something. And also probably use the bathroom.”

Gamzee whines theatrically and thunks his face into the pillow. “Jooooooohn,” he moans.

“Gamzeeeeeee,” you whine right back, teasing him.

“Instead of getting up, we could lay here and not do that?” he suggests.

“You can’t just sleep the whole day Gamzee.”

He whines wordlessly and you can practically hear the childish “why not” in his tone. “What if we lay here and not sleep?”

“I’m pretty sure you’ll fall asleep again if we keep on lying down.”

“Not if you’re talking to me,” he says, sounding shy(?)

“Uh…” you guess that’s a fair compromise, “Okaayyyyy you win. What do you want to talk about?”

Gamzee goes quiet, and you key into his breathing to make sure he’s actually thinking and not just falling back asleep on you.

“Tell me- tell me on Kanaya? I seen Davepeta and I spoke with Terezi and I did spend enough time with Karkat to fall all pale and diamond shaped with him like some kind of motherfucking dream, but I ain’t seen nor heard much of her.”

“Okay! Well, she and Rose got married-”

“Honk?”

“What- oh, uh, human married. It’s.... okay so it’s this big party celebration thing where you and your matesprit- well okay for humans it’s matesprit I don’t know if that would change for trolls? But you and your significant other call all your friends and family and loved ones and everybody comes to this big celebration that the two of you throw, and you stand in front of everyone and there used to be a priest but those don’t exist anymore, and you take turns saying stuff along the lines of ‘this is the person I love the most in the whole wide world and I’m going to keep on loving them for the rest of my life, and I brought you all here so you can know that I love this person and always will,’ and then you kiss where everyone can see you and usually your friends start crying and then everybody throws this big party with dancing and food and usually a HUGE cake and everybody dresses up really nice but you and your matesprit dress up the nicest because it’s, like,
“Tell me on the brooding caverns, and Kanaya’s choosing to be there? She did make choice, right?”

“What do you mean?” you ask, seeking clarification. Gamzee looks away from your face and thumbs at the cloth of your shirt.

"Kanaya did speak to me, sometimes, when I was high outta my goddamned mind and she thought I wouldn’t remember the things she said at me. I probably often did not, but some things stuck. I remember she had a terrible conflction in her, brother, a deep desire to tend and caretake but an even deeper resentment that she lacked the motherfucking choice in such. I remember her spewing salty hatred for the chains of others’ expectations, always so cool and collected like fire that burns frostdeath upon its touch. She did go there on her own choosing, right? She had all the options of this world laid out to her before she picked up her choice and went down caveside, right?”

“Oh, yeah! I think Roxy and a bunch of carapaces were trying to woo her and Rose into living with them, but Kanaya was like ‘No I Want To Tend To A Giant And Scary Bug And The Smaller Slightly Less Scary Bug People It Shits Out’ and then they did.”

“Good,” Gamzee says with a soft laugh at your Kanaya impersonation. “Tell more on the brooding caverns?”

“Little more specific?” you ask.

“Like, she used to talk- also when thinking that I wouldn’t remember the next evening- how she thought it dumb as shit that only jades could tend the Mother Grub. Said it was dumb and restricting and the Mother Grub surely wouldn’t mind none if trolls other than them as shared her blood color made to take care of her. Is the- are the brooding caverns still all segregated? Can’t imagine so if a human is working there but Rose is a god so I figure if there was to be an exception…” he trails off, looking at you inquisitively.

“Oh, yeah, I think Kanaya brought that up once. All sorts of trolls, and even some humans who are just really interested in giant baby shitting bug queens, work down there. They have uniforms where their signs are in Kanaya’s color, since she’s like, the goddess of the Mother Grub and whatever, and it’s supposed to be out of respect to her? But that’s the only color on them that’s changed and they wear their normal signs when they’re not on the clock.”

Gamzee lets out a long, rattly purr, and shifts a little on the mattress. “I’m glad for her,” he says softly. “She did earn such happiness.”

“Mmmm,” you hum, reaching up to scratch idly at his hair. “Were you good friends with her?”

“Not as such,” Gamzee says softly, a little sadly, “I did annoy her, I knew such plain and clear enough, but she wasn’t cruel on me for it. A patient sister, that one, when her patience ain’t
extended towards things as might cause harm to that which she protects. Her moirail didn’t never listen to her, not her advice nor her needs nor her common motherfucking sense, so sometimes she did need let out words where they wouldn’t do no harm and I was out of it as often as not- more often than not- and didn’t shy away from nothing so long as my friends were talking at me. It didn’t mean much of anything to neither of us but I do remember her frustrations- ‘least some of them, anyway.’

“Wait… like… a pale hookup sort of thing?”

“No,” Gamzee says with a loud honk, laughing, “Nothing of that sort, I was horns over heels for Karkat and she didn’t never seem interested in any romantic sense, not that I could tell.”

“Okay ‘cause I’m pretty sure she’s gay.”

“…honk?”

“Okay, so gay is when you only like one gender and that’s the same gender as you. Straight is only liking one gender and that gender is the opposite of you.” You’re pretty sure you’re like, the worst candidate to be talking about this sort of thing! Can’t he go ask Dave, or Roxy? Wait no not Dave, like Roxy or Jade or somebody who actually knows about that sort of stuff?

“And then liking all motherfucking genders is normal,” Gamzee muses, “Okay, that makes sense. I dunno about Kanaya but I do think she didn’t never like me like that.”

You want to contradict the ‘normal’ thing but feel like that would be too much effort. “So instead of pale hookups those conversations were…?”

“Not all acts of friendship and kindness fall full into pale, brother.”

“But if she was contacting you when you wouldn’t remember,” you protest, thought half formed but still sniffing around at what sounds like possible cheating????

Gamzee, however, just laughs at you. “She’s proud motherfucker!” Well… okay yeah you’ll admit that she does have An Image that she is pretty dedicated to upholding. “Less embarrassing to talk on your problems when the person won’t remember your weakness. Trust me on this, brother, it wasn’t motherfuckin’ pale. Sometimes you just gotta be friends, and sometimes friends gotta pick up little pieces of the slack that a moirail don’t take when that moirail don’t do as they should. ‘Cause that’s what friends are motherfuckin’ for. Lettin’ off steam, not stopping the water from boiling, ya dig?”

“Sorta.”

“Kay,” Gamzee says easily, unfazed by your level of understanding or lack thereof. Troll romance sure is hard! He goes quiet for a little while and you try to think of other things about Kanaya that he wouldn’t already know. Gee, you’ve lived four years with her now, you’d think that it’d be easier for you to think of literally anything to say about her, but your mind is as blank as when your friends ask you what you want for Christmas.

Gamzee chuckles, pulling you out of your useless brain wringing. “I figure it makes sense, that a lady so ladylike would be interested in only other ladies.”

“Oh?” you ask.

“Yeah, y’know, since she’s like, the highest femme as ever did high femme.” Gamzee gestures vaguely to his face and then waves his hand skyward, “Like, the biggest lady of ladies.”
“She does act pretty effeminate,” you agree. Gamzee snorts.

“And looks, and lives, and is in all manner of things. Her body does show her of highest femininity.”

“I don’t think she can help her body, Gamzee,” you say with an eye roll. She’s a very pretty lady! But pretty ladies can act like dudes if they want to, even you’re not that dumb!

“Well, no… but it does grow itself after the thoughts she holds, so… high femme.”

You squint. You’re just shy of 100% sure that that’s not how anything works, at all, but you’re willing to give it one more shot before you start talking about how that can’t possibly be right.

“What… exactly do you mean by that?”

“Like, you know how them hormone things work?” he asks, squinting. Ugh, it’s been forever since anyone was in school. Rose is the only one from your friend group who went back for her GED; everyone else was sort of content learning things off the internet and existing with your current knowledge.

“Sorta?”

“I- okay it’s been a long while brother, but hormones, thems the things that make your body shape the way it is, so if you got a lot of lady hormones in your system then your body goes all kind of lady shaped, right? So Kanaya, she got big rumblespheres and real developed hips, since she acts and thinks and behaves so femme all the motherfuckin’ time, right?”

“How does her behavior affect anything though?”

Gamzee squints, and you’re not sure which one of you is being stupid.

“Brother, that’s the only way hormones do get produced,” he says, sounding half uncertain, “I- no, brother, this is one of the schoolfeeds I did do while sober, I remember most of this shit. You act and react and think and feel and behave in certain ways, and your brain does go all ‘oh time to let this motherfucker out into the body’ and the body changes on if it gets regular exposure to that hormone type.”

“…this is really alien to me but I think what you’re saying makes sense.”

“Okay, right, so like, since Kanaya does emote and behave as she does, her body follows.”

“Okay.” You think you’ve got this.

“And then trolls like Tavros, who act almost always masculine, get a big throatfruit and real developed shoulders,” Gamzee continues, “And folk as aren’t consistent one or the other get halves or parts of each development pattern, yeah?”

“Okay.” You think over that. “I think that makes sense? But why doesn’t your body just make the right hormone type on its own? Why does your brain have to wait for emotions and actions?”

Gamzee squints at you. “How the hell would a body know as which gender you are without your brain’s say?”

You flounder, trying to think of a way to explain it. “Well it depends on which.... organs you have!” you say, feeling a little uncomfortable.
Gamzee stares at you, puzzled as all hell but you’re not willing to go into more depth than that.

“Motherfuckin’ aliens bro.”

You laugh. “Motherfucking aliens indeed!” You brush a clump of hair out of his face and scratch briefly between his horns. “Wait, you said Catavros was really masculine?”

“Yeah,” he says with a grin, “Them broad shoulders and awful prominent throatfruit of his,” he says, running his fingers over your shoulder as he stares off into space, “All gentle and manly like he is.”

“But he doesn’t act, like, macho or aggressive or anything!” you protest. Catavros is the biggest wimp you know! Even more than Dave, even more than you!

Gamzee is staring at you in sheer, stark confusion now.

“Why the motherfuck would aggressiveness be linked to masculinity?” he asks, sounding baffled and a little horrified.

“Uh… cause… that’s… wait, are you saying that’s not a masculine trait for trolls?”

Gamzee shakes his head. “Aggressivity is motherfuckin’ feminine in all its quality, bro.”

You think on all the trolls you know, and suddenly a lot of things start to click into place. “Oh.”

“And, well, I mean,” Gamzee looks to the side and starts wagging his hand that isn’t smushed between you, “gender is a huge and large, motherfucking confusing as shit big deal and everything, I ain’t saying it’s as simple as aggressive versus docile and dominant versus submissive but like, those are the big ideas?”

“Yeah, same for humans,” you say, “But flipped.”

“But… Rose… and Dave…”

“Yeah, well, gender is a big huge large confusing thing for us too,” you say, laughing a little, “No hard lines anywhere except in stereotypes.” It’s something you yourself are working on, and have been basically your whole life. You’ve always wanted to be upright, and your dad lead by example, so you’re pretty sure you’re doing alright but also know that there’s always room for improvement!

Gamzee doesn’t look convinced, but settles himself in a little closer to you. You pull the blanket up over his shoulder, worrying that he’s getting his arms cold while the rest of him is nice and toasty.

“Well, however it does play itself out for all y’all motherfuckers, I’m glad it did as it did for you,” he says, brushing his fingers up along the span of your shoulders.

“I get the feeling you like ‘masculine’ shoulders.”

Gamzee grins. “I like a whole deal of masculine things,” he tells you, looking up at you from underneath his lashes.

“Oh, hey, what’s a throatfruit?” you ask, and he looks briefly exasperated before reaching up and tapping your throat. Well excuse you for being dumb! It’s not like you have this kind of conversation with Karkat!

“Oh! Humans call those adam’s apples.” You reach up and touch Gamzee’s. He tilts his head back to let you at it a little easier, and you snort and resist putting a raspberry there. It’s the kind of throat
that’s just begging to be raspberried, but you think Gamzee’s still probably a little too traumatized for sudden surprises, even of a benign nature. Later. You will thoroughly prank his ass like you prank everyone else’s, but later.

“Speaking of apples!” you announce, “We should go get food!”

Gamzee whines loudly, frustration mixing with his bitching about getting up, so you figure he’s awake enough now.

“You gotta!”

“I don’t wanna,” he complains, “I wanna lay here and get my snuggle on with the kindliest brother I have met in long sweeps.” You cluck, feeling flattered, but not flattered enough to be dissuaded! You start drifting upwards, slowly floating off the bed.

“Well, I am getting up and going to the kitchen, so if you’re gonna stay in bed then I’m gonna leave you all alone-”

“NO!” Gamzee lurches up and grabs both your arms, clutching too tight for those bony hands to be able to clutch, suddenly sounding and looking desperate and terrified. “No, no, not alone, please, don’t leave me by myself, please, not all alone please not with nobody else around, no.”

Wow. Uh. Wow. Okay. You are… gonna not actually deal with that. You are just not going to touch that, nuh-uh, not right now. You swoop back in and hug him, arms under his armpits, and scoop him up off the bed with you, making him yelp a little in surprise and accidentally dragging the blanket up with you, pressed between your bodies.

“I got you!” you exclaim cheerfully, willfully changing the subject. You are ignoring the shit out of whatever the hell that just was. His arms wrap around your neck and he clings, and you spin sharply, swinging him about like a child and kicking up your Breath to circle around the two of you. You are rewarded with a startled giggle, and Gamzee settling against your body, less sharp and panicky breathing from him and more playfulness that you strive for. You’re pretty sure it’s playful for Gamzee, anyway, it’s a familiar pattern but you also haven’t spent a terrible amount of time around Gamzee so you can’t be totally sure.

You fly out of the room, and the blanket catches on the doorframe when you round the corner, friction finally enough to drag it out from between your bodies, and you are unfortunately reminded that he is still wearing that motherFUCKING codpiece as it presses up against your leg. Whatever, though, whatever. You can deal with it. You nyoom down the stairs, making him shriek and lift his legs up to clamp around your hips, and swish to a stop once in the kitchen. Gamzee is laughing, which was the desired response, and you laugh along with him. His laugh is loud and honking and he snorts a lot, and he’s really easy to laugh along with. Comfy, sunny, contagious. You set him down on the counter and float to the fridge.

“Okay so I could cook something, or you can have what I had which is cereal and I’ll make something fancier for lunch.”

“Lacking fanciness for breakfast?” Gamzee asks.

“Well call me out why don’t you,” you say before sticking your tongue out at him. “I live alone, so I don’t really go shopping all that often unless I know people are gonna be coming over. I’ll go… soon.”

“Sound like me, brother.”
You shrug and send him a smile, then turn back to the fridge. “There are worse things to sound like. But yeah basically I have eggs or cereal which do you want?”

When you look back at him he’s smiling and looks to be tearing up a little.

“Hey, hey, Gamzee, hey, I’m sorry did I say-” He shakes his head and cuts you off, then paws at his eyes.

“Sorry, brother, just that the things you say can catch a troll off guard sometimes. I’ll take the cereals you made mention of, if you don’t mind.”

“Okay,” you say, glancing at him in worry, but not knowing how else to fix it. So you’re gonna pretend that everything is perfectly fine and not draw attention to whatever weird shit his emotions are up to because you don’t wanna add embarrassment to the mix. You take out the milk and shut the fridge, then pull down a box of cornflakes, cheerios, and lucky charms.

“That one has marshmallows in it, if you like those,” you say when he reaches out for the lucky charms box. He runs his fingers over the front, staring at the picture on the front of the box intently.

“Yeah, brother, I’ll have at this one, if I may.”

He seems really enraptured with his lucky charms, which is a little strange, but oh well. A knock on the door draws your attention, and you float out. You can hear the clatter of a bowl on the counter and feet hitting the tile, and Gamzee is hanging off the doorframe of the kitchen when you whirl back around. Oh. Shit. Right. You just went over this like four minutes ago.

“I’m just going to answer the door,” you tell him, floating back over and grabbing his hand. “I would’ve been right back.”

His lips press thin and he looks up at you, and he looks impossibly young in this moment, ears turned down and holding onto your fingers almost like he wants to break them.

“C’mon then, we’ll open the door together, you silly goose.”

He honks at you, and you laugh, finding it fitting. The mood lifts, and you open the door right as whoever it is starts knocking on it again.

“Oh! Pardon!” she says, jumping back from the door a little. A delivery girl! With a package under her arm!

Oh, Jake must’ve asked for next day shipping! He’s too good to you.

“My bad! And good morning!”

“Good morning! If I could have your signature please?”

You sign for the package and thank her, then wave her off, Gamzee sorta lurking, half hidden by the doorframe. Once the door is shut again, you hold out the package to him.

“This is for you! Since your last one got taken from you!”

“What…?” he asks, gingerly taking the box from you and then looking up to your face.

“Well open it and find out!” you encourage. It’s hardly much of a gift or surprise, but you find yourself caught up in an air of surprise gift giving anyway! And you can absolutely never tell
somebody what is in the box before they open it!

He sharply inhales once the lid is up, and he pulls the sylladex out. It’s nothing fancy, but he can upgrade to things he likes once he’s settled in a little more and has a chance to peruse modus options and expansions he might like.

“Oh my god John,” he says, sounding more like you gave him a diamond ring than a plain, very simple sylladex.

“You kinda gotta have one of these, I figured, so I had Jake send one over. He’s in charge of SkaiaNet so he basically gets to do whatever the fuck he wants with- oof!”

Gamzee is hugging you and probably crying and you awkwardly pat his shoulder, then return the hug, settling your chin in his hair and rubbing his back.

“Hey, there, easy now, it’s not that special.”

“It is to me,” he says, high pitched and tight. His breath goes all shuddery and you hug him and shush into his hair. “It is- you’re so kind, brother, you’re so good I’m so blessed that you have found me.”


His crying grows louder, not quieter, and he clings to you and goes a little weak in the knees to the point where you’re pretty sure he’s crying about a lot more than just the sylladex now.

“Hey, hey, hush now, here, let’s get this equipped,” you say, taking the box away and leaving the sylladex alone into his palms. He equips it and it vanishes from the physical plane, then he wipes at his eyes. You scoop him up and float back into the kitchen, letting him cry himself out, and fill a glass with water. You caphcalogue both the glass and his bowl of cereal into your own sylladex (it might get soggy, but neither will get warm). Then you pick him back up off the counter, his arms going right back around your neck as he keeps sobbing, and carry him to the living room where you settle the two of you onto the couch.

“Easy now, Gamzee,” you say to the troll on your lap, decaphcaloguing the glass of water into the hand that is not supporting his back. “Here you go, you gotta stay hydrated dude. Easy, easy, there there now.”

He takes the glass and cries over it, taking little sips here and there and only occasionally spewing water back out thanks to a choked sob or more rattly whining. Trolls.

“Deep breaths Gamzee, it’s okay. Easy now, it’s okay, it’s okay.”

“I just-” he gasps out at one point, but cannot continue. You pat his back, and flick the TV on for some background white noise.

He does not settle for a long while, but when he does the water glass is empty and he slumps against you bonelessly.

“You okay?” you ask, quiet.

“Mm,” he hums shortly, nodding against your shoulder. You tilt your head and kiss his hair, then nudge him up. “You think you can eat something now?”

He lifts and stretches a little, then offers you a purple eyed smile. “You are motherfucking train-
minded on that idea of putting food in me.”

“It's kind of an important thing to do, y'know, on a regular basis!”

You're not going to mention the number of times you've had microwave dinners at three in the morning as supper, he doesn't need to know that right now.

Gamzee chuckles and nods and flops back against you. You guess crying violently first thing in the morning is a good enough excuse to be tired. You pull the cereal out and observe it.

“Okay, so we can pour you a new bowl if you want, but this one is still cold, just soggy.”

“What's wrong with soggy?” he mumbles.

You light up. “See, that's what I'm always saying! Dave says it's weird to eat soggy cereal but I don't understand that? It tastes basically exactly the same!”

Gamzee nods, and takes the bowl from you to start diligently spooning himself the food. “Dunno if I've ever eaten cereals before they get soggy. Used to space out like a motherfuck and not snap back till well after all the crunch had gone,” he tells you between bites.

“Eheheh tag yourself,” you say, the phrase a habit you picked up from Roxy.

“Uh… I'm the troll as spaces out.”

“Heheh. It's an old meme. Well, old by Roxy and Dirk’s standards. I don't know if it's existed yet on this Earth? Or if it ever will? Things are pretty different here from old Earth, and from what I hear basically entirely different than Alternia!”

Gamzee is chewing when you finish so he just “mm”s at you. He finishes the bowl and you stare at the TV, distracted by the moving picture, until he sets the empty bowl onto his lap.

“Would you like more?” you ask him, attention finally drawn away from the vortex of audiovisual.

“Mm, maybe a little?” Gamzee asks.

“Kay, I can get you some if you're tired!”

“Don't leave me alone,” Gamzee says, rushed, quiet.

“I would just be in the other room,” you tell him gently, patting him on the back.

“I'll come with,” he says, getting up, and you can feel the way his hands are shaking when he has to brace himself on your shoulder to get out of your lap. You dart up and grab him by the hands, ducking your face close to his.

“Hey, hey, easy,” you say softly, “Gamzee, what’s wrong? Why are you so against being alone?” Is this because of his dadlusus?

“I'll wake up if I'm alone,” he says with conviction.

“Gamzee...? You're already awake, what do you-” You cut off because he's shaking his head, not looking at you.

“No, no, I’ll wake up brother, from this, from all of it, from everything. This ain't even about me still being the possession of him that owns me this is about how none of this can't possibly exist!”
You touch his face and hope it counts as friendly reassuring instead of romantic papping, since you're never quite sure where the lines get drawn on that.

"Gamzee, I'm right here, you're already awake," you say. He shakes his head again.

"You can't be," he says, sounding scared and panicky and overwhelmingly exhausted. "Things like this don't happen to me, not to me. This is a fantasy I'm being allowed to play out- a motherfucking fantasy! How else would Karkat go back for me? How else would Karkat go motherfucking pale for me? My pupahood crush that I ain't never gotten rid of, pitying me back and taking me all neat and diamond shaped, how is that supposed to be anything other than imaginative figmentation?"

You want to butt in and reassure him, but he's rolling now, words spilling out of his mouth almost too fast for him to say them. He's got his fingers clutching at his arms and is speaking his sermon to your carpet.

"And Dave, up and motherfucking apologizing for that thing that haunted me, telling me his malice was misunderstanding and a playful gibe, like as not to wound deep but meant to merrily incite. And Nepeta! Found in new form and understanding strangeness where people as who lived with me didn't! But Terezi, listening, hearing my words and not hating me for them, acting as if to believe me. And all sudden other friends are coming home and reunions most jubilant occur, and I'm allowed to sleep and rest and you and Karkat push so sweet to keep me fed and drinking, caretaken, and the spiderbitch is dead and incapable of coming back and haunting my corners every time I turn again like a blessed and bloodied miracle."

He looks up at you, his ears splayed out sideways from his face, eyes earnest. "And you, brother, you. How could you be anything but purest fantasy? Kind to me, so soft, so patient and gentle and gorgeous as the moons, you gotta be made up. My mind playing tricks on me, a dream, the scrambled memories of a new dead soul seeking some kind of reconciliation, anything. It ain't- it ain't possible that all this, this rest and gentle mercy on my shattered soul, is anything more than my brain doing a broken mercy on itself."

Oh wow. Ohhh wow yeah okay you were pretending everything was fine but this guy has issues and you have no clue where even to begin helping him with them. He reaches out to you and you hold his shoulders as he clutches at the front of your shirt, eyes pleading with you while you hover kind of uselessly a few stunned inches in front of him.

"So please, brother, please don't leave me alone, because the moment I'm alone again is the moment the illusion breaks. Please, let me cling at this comfort a while longer yet, please," he begs, and you move on autopilot to pull him into a hug. Wow. You can't... you don't even know where to start emotionally or mentally processing all of this information.

"Easy Gamzee," you say, rubbing his back. "Easy, it's alright. I'm right here, and I'm not fake. I promise okay? I am very much not fake."

He takes a deep breath and clutches desperately at the back of your shirt, and he doesn't disagree with you but he doesn't agree either.

"Gamzee, hey, easy now, c'mon dude just think about what you're saying for a second. Your brain can't possibly be hallucinating all of this! Seriously just take a critical eye to the situation for like three seconds there is plenty of evidence that this is not fake!"

He shakes his head. "I am not one to question gifts, brother. I have been given a chance to make palest love to Karkat, so I gratefully take it. I have been given opportunity to rest, so I take it with gratitude in my pan and on my tongue. I have been given remorse and forgiveness and the beauty
of your own motherfucking self so I do not question-” his voice gets shaky with unleashed crying again, “...these kindesses. Brother. I cannot break this mirage, please, not yet, please, not yet, let it linger a little longer, I do not wish to examine, I do not hold any desire to scrutinize, just let me fill my role in this play most soft and kind to me for a little while longer, just a little-” He hiccups and you hush him, figuring that Gamzee breaking down crying is probably going to be a very regular part of your life for the foreseeable future. Well, that's fine! You can get cried on with the best of 'em! You have two shoulders that you hear are very attractive that are perfectly available for crying on!

He hiccups and you can feel in his breathing that he's trying to restrain this one. He's breathing with intentional measure, ruined by shuddering gasps now and then, but mostly he gets himself back under control pretty quickly! Especially given his track record for crying. He honks softly at you and mumbles a sorry.

“...It's fine! And okay, I won't make you break the illusion or think to hard about whether it's really a fantasy or not, but know that I think that this is all real and you can totally come to that conclusion anytime you're ready to! How about we go get you more cereal and also probably more water again? Do something else?”

Yeah, you're totally changing the subject, but you don't know what else to really do in this situation. He looks grateful enough for the shift, though, so hey you must be doing something right. You grab his hand and turn to lead him to the kitchen when three very loud knocks on the door set you both to screaming and lifting up off the floor. By the time the immediate alarm passes you can idly register that Gamzee is pressed up to your side, claws digging into the skin of your shoulder. Ow.

“Coming,” you call shakily, grabbing Gamzee’s hands and gently pulling them from your flesh.

“I didn't mean to give you a scare!” a bubbly voice calls from the other side of the door, and you recognize it as probably Aradia. Maybe Fefali? No, wait, that's not her name, Fef- Fet- Feeeehhhhh- Ferrari. Fuck. Ugh, oh well you’ll have to wait and see if anybody else uses her name so you can remember. You should make a cheat sheet for yourself or something.

The door opens and you find a very perky troll with a grinning ghost companion and a curious looking scarf boy.

“Hi John!” Aradia chimes. She’s ditched her godtier pjs and is now wearing what looks to be a pair of Jake’s cargo pants (one of the ones with EXTRA pockets, like, so many extra, nobody needs that much pocket), a tank top with her sign on it, and a very swarthy hat that looks like either Jane’s or uncle Crocker’s.

“Hi,” you greet as she bustles past you, inviting herself into your home. You were gonna do that anyway, but you get the feeling that she is both an unstoppable force and an immovable object. You close the door behind the three of them, and Gamzee gravitates immediately to your side.

“Hi Gamzee!”  Ffffffffffffffffuckwhatshername greets cheerfully, her hair flowing as though underwater.

“Isn't it crazy how we can walk around in sunlight now?” Aradia exclaims, kicking off her boots just inside your door. How polite of her! Even you don't do that.

“Uh, yeah, motherfuckin’ shit be wicked crazy.”

“So what are you all doing here?” you ask. Wait, was that tactless? That might've been tactless.
“I am here to be the only reasonable adult in a group of utterly senseless adults,” Aradia says, sounding affectionately exasperated.

“Gamzee!” she says, volume suddenly spiking and pointing a finger at him. He jumps. “You need to make a public forum post or something and tell everybody what happened to you. Like from start to finish, full detail!”

“I- well, I was-”

“Ah ah ah! Nope! Tell it to the computer screen buster!” She and Ffffeeeeehhhhperson share a giggle at the word ‘buster’ and you instinctively chuckle along.

“You shoal-d just tell everybody all at once,” Fehfehfeh says brightly, “instead of explaining over and over and over!”

Gamzee nods, and you can totally see the sense in it! Why didn’t you think of that? (Probably because you’re dumb as a piece of shit).

“You can borrow my laptop, it’s on the coffee table,” you offer. “Here, I’ll unlock it for you.”

Gamzee settles in to type out everything he told you and Karkat, maybe with a little less emotion (probably a lot less emotion) and you sit next to him, offering Aradia a seat next to you on the couch. She’s moving around the living room with purpose, drawing open the blinds on all your windows and leaving the area sunny and cheery. Eridan hovers between Gamzee and your shoulders, arms crossed, kind of looking like a genie. Ffffffff you really need to just ask hovers near your other shoulder, and Aradia plops herself down next to you.

“So, sorry, but what’s your name again?” you ask the cheerful ghost, and she giggles at you.

“Feferi! And you’re John! Don’t worry a-boat it, there was a lot of exciting hububble going on last night- last day!- and I’m shore you met a bundle of new people!”

You match her smile with one of your own and chuckle. She’s so cute!

Your phone buzzes and you take it out. Oh, it’s a snap from Dave! He usually is barely awake this early, he can’t be past the ‘if I have to be out of bed so do my blankets’ phase of his daily routine!

Sure enough, your friend has his sunglasses off, his hair unbrushed, and a thick and fluffy blanket around his shoulders. He’s giving you a thumbs up, camera angled to catch Karkat, a bucket overturned on his head, in the background. You laugh. Score! You got ‘im! Feferi floats over your shoulder and makes a scandalized noise, then laughs uproariously with you, which calls the attention of Eridan and Aradia. You screenshot it in case they don’t make it in time, though they do, and Eridan does the ‘oh my god that’s so indecent’ kind of laugh while Aradia’s is all-out mockery.

Gamzee makes a soft, barely audible noise (it might not actually be audible, you might just know about it because you can feel his breathing) and looks at you sideways. You don’t want him to feel left out, so you pull up your camera roll and show it to him as well, and he snorts and honks at it.

You captchalogue your phone and move to put your arm around Gamzee’s shoulders, intending to lean gently on him while you chat with Aradia and the ghosts, but Gamzee yelps and you startle out of your physical form.

Gamzee and the guests stare at where you were as you flow up to the ceiling to collect your thoughts. Woah. That caught you so off guard. You laugh at their expressions though, all bug eyed and shocked. Gamzee and Aradia lift their gazes to stare at each other from across the couch and
you laugh hard enough to jostle a lampshade. You force yourself back into physicality and sneeze, taking their attention to the middle of the living room, where you now hover in your god tiers. If you ever Become while wearing anything but, you immediately change into them with whatever cloth you were wearing beforehand going into your sylladex. It’s pretty neat!

“Sorry! I just got really startled! Gamzee, are you okay?” you ask, crossing over to him. You caress the side of his face with the back of your fingers, looking at him in worry, now that you’ve stopped laughing and remember why you Became in the first place.

Gamzee blushes and looks down, eyes on the computer screen but not computing. “Nothing, brother,” he says softly. “Karkat sliced me fair deep on that shoulder and I wasn't expecting your touch on it, got spooked, ‘m sorry.”

“I'm sorry! I'll try to be more careful!” you promise. Stupid! How could you forget that! Yeah, the only skin he's showing is his hands (which have bandaids all over them) and face (which has massive scars), but you should remember that he’s coated in cuts and bruises!

He reaches up and holds onto your hand. “Ain’t no harm done, just got a wicked surprise. Seems I got you back well enough, since you did go poof yourself out of existence like you did.”

You chuckle weakly. “Yeah, that happens sometimes.” You settle back down next to him and hold an arm up in offering, not wanting to risk hurting him again but liking the sensation of cuddling as much as any other person might. He leans into you and pulls his legs up onto the couch, laptop precariously angled on his legs, and you gently, geeeeently settle your arm around him. Then you turn your attention back to your ghostly guests.

“So how are you three?” you ask.

“Peachy!” Aradia tells you while Feferi says, “Eeling well!” Eridan doesn’t answer until you look at him, at which point he shrugs.

“Been worse.” Eheheheh, his voice does a weird accent on the w’s in real life too! Now that you have a typing quirk to associate it with it’s way more pronounced than when you were eavesdropping on him and Kanaya.

“And how are you, John?” Aradia asks, decaphcaloguing a rubber wire. One of those stim toys that you can bend around and it keeps it shape and it has a nice smooth texture.

“I’m okay! Jane set my alarm for altogether way too early this morning, because she’s a lousy and terrible cousin who does evil things,” you complain idly, wondering why your living room looks so different now. Surely a little sunlight and some extra people cannot make it look this different. You have people over all the time!! “So much has been happening lately, it’s a little hard to keep up with it all!”

“Right?” Aradia agrees enthusiastically, “I wish I could be in more places at once, so much is going on and I can’t possibly be there for all of it!”

You more of meant that your brain isn’t really processing that all these things are happening but you guess that’s fair.

“Ahaha, no kidding.” You remember something you forgot to bring up during the group meeting yesterday, “Hey, actually, so I’m not sure if Terezi explained this while I was off doing something else, but what does make the three- well okay and Alex too- four of you different from the other trolls near the black hole? Terezi said you weren’t getting sucked in?”
Aradia and Feferi laugh at you, and Eridan snorts.

“I’m gonna call him that from now on,” Eridan says, and Feferi ghost-slaps him.

“His name is Sollux!” Aradia tells you brightly, twisting the wire into a coil.

“What? No, wait, I could’ve swore…” Ugh, you’re doing the thing where you have a misconception and the right memory and your brain is making you think that the right one is the misconception. Bluh!

“Nope! It’s Sollux,” Feferi chimes in, also sounding far from displeased. “And we’re not shore why we weren’t suckered in!”

Aradia glances at Feferi before nodding at you. “It was terribly strange for all of us.”

“At first we thought that other trolls were actively flyin’ towards the hole, ‘till we got close enough an’ saw that they were gettin’ sucked in. We saw plenty of Terezis an’ Vriskas an’ other Aradias tryin’a fly away, but it kept on pulling,” Eridan tells you.

“Other Terezis’ jetpacks weren’t working?” you ask, concerned. What if your Terezi’s jetpack had stopped working too!!! She assured you that she wouldn’t run out of fuel early on, but you didn’t really consider what would happen if it broke down until now! (To be fair, you hadn’t known about the giant universe-swallowing vortex until that snap she sent after she had left you all (and right before your birthday too!))

“No they were working,” Aradia tells you, “They just weren’t working well enough to keep them from getting sucked in.”

“I guess a bit of fire-propelled momentum wasn’t enough to pike back against the bass of two universes collapsing in on themshellves,” Feferi adds with a shrug.

“But whatever the reason was, we weren’t included in the whole shriekin’ an’ flailin’ as we get sucked into the black hole deal,” Eridan concludes.

“That’s so weird,” you say, unable to even start trying to puzzle that out. It sounds hecka complicated and you can’t guess at the ramifications, “But I’m glad you all managed to stay alive! And not sucked in!”

“It’s really weird,” Aradia agrees, “We hardly even felt the pull of a literal black hole not too far from us. It was more of an inconvenience than anything, but everyone else was flying towards it faster than you could blink! Our poor friends,” Aradia pouts briefly, and Feferi pats (paps??) her shoulder, which sets her to smiling brightly again.

“But whatever went on there, there was nothing any of us could’ve done to stop it, so we just made the best of it. And then, lo and behold, we caught sight of a Terezi that wasn’t being pulled in, and here we are! On your lovely sunshine planet!” Aradia says brightly, eyes darting to the windows.

Feferi giggles and swoops across the room much like you might, over to the open window, “And water pretty planet it is! I krill can’t get over that we can walk around in daytime without sea-rious conch-equences!”

“No kiddin’,” Eridan says, receding a little into the shadows as sunlight filters through Feferi’s body. “It’s unnerving as shit.”

You catch a lock of Gamzee’s hair between your fingers and idly roll it between your thumb and
forefinger, toying with it almost entirely subconsciously.

“I guess it’s pretty normal for us humans, but Karkat and Terezi had some similar reactions when they first got here,” you mention.

“Tell us!” Feferi demands, whirling from the window to face you, grin wide and hair flowing every which way. You wonder if maybe she was underwater when she died, and that’s why her hair is like that? Her skirt, too, for that matter, but the skirt isn’t nearly as noticeable as the hair that flows around her face and shoulders like the word ‘beauty’ is for lesser creatures. “Tell us everyfin!”

“Well, uh, Terezi was like ‘I can go outside without burning out my eyeballs or getting terrible, tree-shaped burns where I didn’t pass out in the shade now’ and Karkat was like ‘that doesn’t mean you should’ and Terezi was like ‘don’t tell me what to do’ and Karkat started screaming about how he wasn’t trying to tell her what to do, he was just trying to encourage healthy, non-self-destructive behavior that went directly against their- your- species’ survival instincts but it was too late, she had already left the safety of the groove and was running around in this giant ass field we found and Karkat did more screaming at her that I wasn’t paying attention to but he was too scared to leave the shade so Terezi just kept on rolling around in the tall grass and cackling like a lunatic while the rest of us watched with varying levels of curiosity and exasperation. Kanaya and Jane were the most exasperated, with Rose coming in a close second.

“Then we started helping the carapacians build up a life sized can town and that was nice, and Karkat sort of got over his aversion to existing during the daytime, and Terezi got a sunburn because she didn’t listen when Rose told her that just because the sun doesn’t immediately burn anymore doesn’t mean it won’t slow roast people but Terezi didn’t care? She just started picking at the skin that was flaking off whenever she got bored and left raw-looking patches of teal-grey behind. Then we teleported to this time period and Rose and Kanaya went out and got like fifty gallons of sunscreen for Terezi in as many varying scents as humanly possible so she would actually want to wear them and it worked, every time she came over she smelled like a new kind of fruit or spice and the stench of sunscreen that can’t quite get drowned out by the other smell and everyone was a little bothered by it but you know what, it made her happy, and also she liked leaving oily fingerprints all over any screen she could possibly get her hands on which drove Roxy up the walls because you’re not supposed to leave grease stains on electronics. She’s really particular about that. Terezi also licked Roxy’s screen more than anybody else’s. She’d sometimes cross the room just to shove her way into Roxy’s space and take over the computer for three seconds and leave slobber all over the screen. Karkat still doesn’t like going outside during the day but it doesn’t bother him as much anymore and Terezi stopped going out in the sun quite so frequently but she still wore the sunscreen since it smelled ‘nice’ and then she ditched us to go fly around the void for two years. Karkat wears his sweaters everywhere so nobody’s too worried about him getting burned? Sometimes the bridge of his nose and cheekbones get a little ruddy but he’s rarely outside for that long.”

You know. Sometimes you really have to just be baffled by your own brain. You can’t remember the name of the guy you met just yesterday (you’re thinking Alex again, goddamnit, you JUST got reminded of what his name actually is) but you can remember with clear detail Terezi cackling like a maniac in the tall grass while Karkat screamed at her from four fucking years ago. You are an enigma unto your own gosh darned self.

“That sounds so exciting!!” Feferi tells you, zipping back over to the couch, the sunlight lingering in her hair until it slowly shifts to match the shade. Watching her hair makes you aware that you have your fingers idly toying with Gamzee’s, and you drop the lock. How long were you doing that? Gee, this is Gamzee, not Jade, you can’t just randomly start playing with his hair without any
warning. You haven’t exactly spent three years bored out of your collective skulls with Gamzee, now have you!? He’s probably been weirded out by it and too shy/overwhelmed by the other three/both to tell you.

Though actually, now that you’re thinking about Jade and hair and stuff, you really want to brush Aradia’s.

“What’s sunscreen?” Aradia asks, eyes sparkling with entertainment at your tale.

“Uh, it’s like this lotion that keeps the sun from burning you quite so badly.”

“That exists?” Eridan asks, sounding baffled.

“Yes! It’s pretty commonplace! Humans live in the sun, you know, so we kinda don’t wanna get slow roasted by it.”

“Just be nocturnal,” Eridan says, like it’s that simple. “Wait, no, that’s a terrible plan and would never work.”

More immediate blurting and then taking it back. You wonder if Eridan has always been like this. Maybe it’s a ghost thing? Or part of him trying to grow as a person, like he was telling Kanaya.

“Where exactly does one acquire such a potion?” Aradia asks, leaning her elbows on her legs and steeping her fingers, looking at you inquisitively with her hair falling over her shoulders. It’s really nice hair.

“Uh, convenience stores? Gas stations? Target? It’s kinda… anywhere really.”

“I’m gonna get myself some. I have every intention of becoming a new age daywalker but I don’t think getting burned sounds very fun!” She laughs at her own joke, and you laugh along. You remember you got a little weirded out by her last time you saw her (you still think she is absolutely not somebody you would ever want to fuck with (or meet late at night with nobody else around and only a single, flickering lamp post to guide you)) but right now you find her entirely pleasant! Maybe troll girls just have a thing with grinning really, really widely and Kanaya is the outlier that should not be counted.

“Well, it IS important to take care of yourself! I’m sure if you go to a carapacian run store they’ll probably just give you one if you’re in your god tiers. They’re really good at recognizing ex Game players!”

“Oh we’ve swam into quite a few already!” Feferi tells you excitedly, “They were singing Aradia’s praises. As they shoal-d!” Feferi gives an affectionate look at Aradia who scrunches up her eyes and shakes her nose at the ghostly girl. They must be very good pals!

“They recognize me as a goddess of Time and have apparently been eagerly awaiting when I would return to them next!” She taps her rubber wire against her horn a few times, drawing your attention to her hair at the ghostly girl. They must be very good pals!

“Next?” you ask. What next? She just got here!

“Oh, they remember me from different points in this planet’s past, since I’m going to time travel there and get into shenanigans! I mean I was already planning on doing that anyway but now that I’ve heard it’s actually happened that’s just further solidifying my conviction!”

“Oh.” Wow okay you sounded way more disappointed right then than you meant to. “Well, I hope
you have fun!”

Aradia has been here for not even a full day and she already has plans to go out and about and do big things. That’s good! But it makes you feel a little inadequate, here four years down the road and still living off the fame of having helped create this planet (if anyone could even call it that, everybody else did all the work). Also, you feel a little let down. If she goes off time travelling now, you won’t really get a chance to get to know her! Or the ghosts!! And you like them so far!!! A lot!!!!

Luckily for you, they all laugh at you (though Eridan does more of a snort) “Whale it’s not pike we’d be gone FOREVER!” Feferi says, “We’re planning on time hopping! We’ll cycle back and visit plent-sea!”

“Oh!” You brighten, “That sounds really nice, then!”

“We think so too!” Aradia agrees, wrapping the rubber wire around her wrist. You really wanna brush her hair. You should text Jade. Jade should come over here and let you brush her hair because you’ve met Aradia like twice before and this is something even you can put two and two together on and figure out that it’s not socially acceptable to ask to brush her hair when you barely know her. But like. Her hair is so long. And it looks really curly, which is new, Jade’s is more wavy, and it looks soft and nice and also messy (probably from how active she clearly is) and really you just wanna brush her hair.

“When do you think you’ll go first?” you ask, wanting to brush her hair. “Like, what time period, not when are you leaving.”

“Well, that sort of depends on what Eridan thinks!” Aradia says brightly, her hair that you want to brush smushing up against the back of the couch as she leans back and waves her hand in his direction. “He’s been reading over the historical texts for this planet, just the really wide-sweeping general schoolfeed ones, and once he’s sort of caught up to speed he’s gonna give me recommendations!” Her smile has turned very smug. “I’m gonna be able to look at all the cool shit and not even do any of the work!”

“It’s not work if it’s interestin’, which it is you goddamned pleb.” Eridan rolls his eyes and recrosses his arms, fingering his scarf huffily. Aradia and Feferi snicker at each other and then share a glance like they’re indulging in some sort of inside joke with each other. Feferi has really nice hair too but she’s a ghost so you can’t brush it, but seeing it only heightens your desire to brush Aradia’s.

“A sound strategy, if I ever heard one,” you comment, eyeing her hair. You’re trying not to hyperfocus but it is not working.

“Thanks, I pride myself on being one of the only sensible members of my group,” Aradia says with a giggle. Eridan rolls his eyes but you think you detect a smile, and Feferi giggles along with Aradia, offering her a high hive. Aradia’s skin actually makes the slap noise when they collide. Necromagic powers? Probably. She’s a necromagi with nice hair is what.

Ugh okay you really need to just ask and get the idea out of your head.

“Hey, so, would you mind if I brushed your hair?”

Aradia blanks and tilts her head, then smiles and snorts. “Sure?” Oh hell yes.

“Sweet! I’ll go grab a hairbrush!” You take your arm from around Gamzee’s shoulders and pat his
back as you stand. He looks up from the computer screen, and you’re proud of him! He’s been typing away diligently for a while now!

“I’ll be right back, okay?”

Gamzee jolts in alarm, then looks between you and Aradia + ghosts. “Wh- just you or-”

“Aradia and Feferi and Eridan will still be here!” you promise, “You’re not gonna be alone!”

Gamzee settles back down against the couch and nods, his toes curling against the couch cushions. You send him another smile and then dart upstairs, zipping along and rattling a painting with the wind in your wake. You grab your hairbrush and nyoom on back. In your absence, Aradia has bent her rubber wire into something vaguely square shaped and is holding it up by the corner towards Feferi while making the peace sign. Feferi makes a peace sign back, and you plop back down on the cushions.

“Kay!” you chime, holding up the hairbrush. Gamzee, reassured by your returned presence, turns back to the computer. Aradia gathers her hair over her shoulder and you grab it by the bottom, and omg this is so soft. It feels exactly as fluffy as it looks. You are delighted by this.

“So tell me about what you were up to during The Game?” you ask the three of them. “Any of you. I haven’t heard much of anything about you guys, other than like, really big stuff, like somebody was supposed to be an empress and one person killed Kanaya but then got killed because she’s a vampire, and also I met you like once in the dreambubbles,” you say, focusing on the tips of Aradia’s hair first.

“Well, I met plenty of yous!” Aradia says brightly. She starts in on her stories, and your whole group settles in. Eridan interrupts to ask to borrow your phone at one point, which you hand over easily, and when you ask what he’s gonna do he says he found an online database for schoolbooks and you make a face because ew. Schoolwork. You did not die for this. Then you go back to listening to Aradia and Feferi chat, and they are very animated! They can finish each other’s sentences, which is cute, and sometimes they pause to giggle at each other. Feferi, you note, will sometimes do the thing you’ve caught Eridan doing, where she’ll blurt something and then immediately reword it. You’re gonna call that either a fish troll thing or a ghost thing. Does it matter? They’re both both.

Aradia’s hair is really soft and soothing to brush while you listen, and she twists her rubber wire around as she talks. Whenever Feferi brings up a topic that particularly excites her, she’ll ball her fists in front of her and shake them, and when she’s really excited she shakes open palms, fingers rigid and fangs gleaming in the sunlight of your living room. Your house is a little bit toastier than you usually have it, thanks to turning up the heat last night, and you find yourself to be incredibly comfortable.

Your stomach growls at you a little before you finish with Aradia’s hair, and she and Feferi snicker at you.

“Would you all like to stay for lunch?” you offer, since it would be totally rude not to and also you’re enjoying listening to them. Well, okay, you’re not listening to Eridan, but you’re chilling with him and you like his presence here.

“Shore!” Feferi says, “Eridan and I can’t eat, but Aradia needs to since that’s a thing that living people have to do!” Feferi props her fists on her hips and delivers this speech to Aradia, who scrunches her head down towards her shoulders and looks away, grinning bashfully.
“But there are so many other interesting things I could be doing,” Aradia protests, voice small. Feferi swings her head down violently and her horns collide with one of Aradia’s, which, uh, you guess is a thing that just happened.

“Shelly gill,” Feferi scolds, “I swear you’re as bad as my goofy matesprit sometimes!”

“Oh I am better than Sollux!” Aradia protests (that’s his name!!! You gotta write this shit down somewhere). She sounds positively affronted to be compared to him. You’re gonna go ahead and guess he has shitty eating habits too.

Heh, join the McFucking club. At least you’re not alone in this.

You caphcalogue the hairbrush and stand, stretching so your pajama top almost slides up over your belly. Man, when The Game made these things it made them right. Perfect size. When you take them off they don’t even take up a card in your deck, they make a new caphca card specifically for them and if you forget them somewhere and somebody else tries to caphcalogue them they magically appear in your sylladex. Truly the world’s most advanced form of apparel. May Kanaya weep that she never received hers.

“Gamzee,” you say, placing your hand on his shoulder. He’s already looking at you, attention drawn by you standing up, “We’re gonna move to the kitchen now, okay?”

He nods and then turns back to the laptop, one hand going to the lid and hesitating. Should he close it? The kitchen isn’t a far walk. You’ve had the same argument with yourself basically every night since your house was rebuilt.

You scoop him up and save him the decision. He “eep!”s and clutches your laptop to make sure it doesn’t fall, which you appreciate, and you set him down on the breakfast table next to the sink when you arrive in the kitchen, right next to your copy of Sassacre’s text. Man you haven’t taken a crack at that in ages. You go to the fridge and Aradia hovers over your shoulder.

“Oo!” she chimes, and reaches past you to take a container of guacamole off the top shelf.

“You can’t eat that!” you may or may not shout in alarm. Everyone gets startled and Aradia suddenly isn’t holding the container anymore, rather it is floating a few inches away from her hand, surrounded by crackling red energy.

“Uh,” you say, staring at it.

“Sorry,” she says, dropping the container on the shelf where she took it from. “Special to you?”

“No, trolls are allergic to avocados,” you say. “My top shelf of my fridge is dedicated to human-only food, so you can’t eat anything off of it. Sorry, didn’t mean to shout.”

She ‘hahaha’s at you and it sounds a little forced, but she gives you a genuine smile after so whatever. “No big! Just caught me off guard! Alright, I will not make grabby hands for the curious looking green thing!”

You make yourself sneeze and offer her a smile right back. “And I won’t include it in any of the food I make!”

You have three people to feed, and you haven’t gone shopping lately, so you decide that pasta with veggies is gonna be your best bet here. You start boiling a pot of water and Aradia gets put on chopping duty, while Gamzee diligently types out everything he has to say. Feferi keeps you all entertained by sharing a story of one time, in the dream bubbles, she got into a fist fight with a
version of Meenah who hadn’t come back from chilling out in the Void yet and was very perturbed to be brought back into company before her say. Feferi kicked her ass. It was awesome.

You’re glad. God knows a certain version of her (certain versions? You can never be sure with dream bubbles) tried to put a fork in you enough times. And it’s not like you want her dead (double dead) or anything! But a good fist in the face sounds like it would’ve been hella hilarious to watch.

Eridan still has your phone, so when it buzzes, he floats over to you and taps your shoulder. He feels more corporeal than Feferi felt yesterday when you shook her hand.

“You got a text,” Eridan tells you, handing you the phone. You stir the pasta idly with one hand and Aradia magics the veggies into the pot while you open it up.

**turntechGodhead [TG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]**

TG: yo john heads up karkats been psyching himself out all morning but he finally worked up the nerve to head over to your place so he should get there

TG: eventually

TG: he said he didn’t want to fly which just makes me think that hes giving himself a way to back out like a whimp but thats okay if he does

TG: i am perfectly okay with loving a chicken thats fine

TG: but anyway i dunno if hes gonna hail a cab or literally walk all the way to your house but hes on his way

EB: Thanks for letting me know!

EB: He been over analyzing everything again?

TG: oh dude you know it

TG: does he ever stop

EB: Schroedinger's self-doubt

TG: dude how did you even manage to spell that

EB: I’m too lazy to turn autocorrect off

EB: My phone just sort of does things for me now

TG: right right

TG: anyway

TG: im going to crawl back in bed and pretend being awake isnt a thing that happens

EB: Dave I’m pretty sure that’s bad!

TG: okay but

TG: no one’s here to stop me B)

EB: Dave no
TG: dave yes

TG: dave is off on an expedition of eating every little crocker hostess crossover snack in the house in one sitting and watching invader zim on my laptop in bed for the rest of my waking hours

EB: Dave why??

TG: rose is like 90% of my impulse control

TG: and karkat is the other 10%

EB: dude

TG: maybe thats an unfair distribution

TG: kanaya probably counts for at least 3

TG: so rose is like 88% and karkat is like 9

TG: anyway

TG: later

EB: If you vomit it’s your own dumb fault!

TG: read 03:47am

EB: Dave that is not even close to the current time

TG: i know

TG: irony B)

EB: You’re impossible you know that?

TG: if trying to restrain me is your mission then would that make it

TG: mission impossible

EB: ehehehehe okay that was kind of funny :B

TG: i am as hilarious as jerry blowing toms asshole wide open with a stick of dynamite

TG: anyway later

EB: At least keep yourself hydrated!

TG: no promises

TG: but if its for you then ill try

turntechGodhead [TG] has ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

Ugh he is so lame! But the pasta is done now, so you pour it over the strainer and shake it out. You put it back in, pour in the powder cheese sauce, and add spice. The door receives yet another knock (third time today!!!! This is absurd), and you give stirring duty to Aradia while you fly over. You open it expecting Karkat. You do not get Karkat. You get Davepeta! Which is a wonderful if
entirely unforeseen surprise!

“Oh,” you say, quite intelligently and with utmost eloquence.

“Heh, expecting somebody else?” they ask, flying into your home like they live here.

“Yeah, actually, Karkat’s on his way over!” you say, shutting the door. “We’re all in the kitchen. I made plenty of pasta, want any?”

“Oo, yes please,” Davepeta says, and the two of you fly into the kitchen together. Davepeta understands you. Walking is for losers.

“Hi Aradia!”

“Davepeta!!” Aradia exclaims, and Feferi hovers over her shoulder, a surprised :o morphing slowly into a giant, fanged grin.

Davepeta laughs and extends their arms out to the sides. “It’s me!”

“We weren’t expecting you!” Feferi exclaims and flies over to hover near them, “This is so exciting!”

“I am the life of efurry party, it is me!” Davepeta says cheerfully. “I claw-t wind that mew three were over here and I came to pester you fur infurmation!”

“Oh?” Eridan asks, looking up from your phone.

Davepeta grins and pulls out their tablet. “You have to tell me all of your relationships. All of you; tell me about Sollux’s mew!” Davepeta pauses, “He still with Terezi?”

Aradia and Feferi share a sideways glance and grin. “It just so happens, he IS still with Terezi!” Feferi tells them. Davepeta gets in on the grinning, and you think you’re missing a few components here.

“Good. Maybe she’ll mew-ve on and see how pawful it was fur her.”

Feferi sighs and nods. “Be patient with her sugar, it’s not exactly ea-sea, especially when you love the otter person.”

Davepeta pauses, looking suddenly uncomfortable with eyes staring off in the distance behind their sunglasses, and you are really lost!

“Yeah… yeah, you’re right.” They tap their tablet loudly, hauling whatever attention was lost of theirs back to the present. “But that is neither here nor there! Ships! Tell me!”

You take the pot from Aradia and start doling out pasta into four bowls. You made enough for another bowl or two after this, and put it into tupperware. (Your tupperware is actually just recycled deli containers, because why the fuck would you buy fancy plastic when you can just collect these?)

“Whale, Sollux and I are still flush, that hasn’t changed at all.” Feferi says, and you listen idly as you pour. “Eridan and I aren’t dating, but we are still very close! And Aradia and I have been moray-eels for the last sweep or so.” You get startled enough to almost drop the pot.

“Wait you two are dating?” you ask, turning to look at the group. Davepeta looks up from their tablet to stare at you, Gamzee looks up from his computer to do the same, and the other three are
just sort of… blank.

“You didn’t notice?” Feferi asks.

“I- no!”

“I made a diamond and held it up to her while making a half-diamond with my fingers,” Aradia reminds, “You walked in on it.”

“You sort of did,” Gamzee says very, very softly. Davepeta bursts out laughing at you and you feel dumb. Well excuse you!

“John, nefur change!” they say, readjusting their glasses. They go back to tapping at their tablet.

“Feferi’s love life is sort of the most interesting,” Aradia says with a small sigh, “It was just the four of us after everything started falling apart, and before that I didn’t have time for any serious relationships outside our core little group, I was kind of busy bumbling around the dream bubbles and all that.”

“I’m still single, in all quads,” Eridan says, sounding tired.

“Which means Sollux is too,” Davepeta muses. “Oh well, that just means plenty of opportunities are open fur mew all!”

Eridan snorts, but looks genuinely entertained by that. “That’s a positive way ‘a lookin’ at it.”

You had Aradia a bowl, then Davepeta, then you grab Gamzee’s and your bowls. “Hey, Gamzee, can you pause and eat something?”

Gamzee looks up. Wow that is a big block of purple text he’s got on that screen. Are the letters… vacillating? Gee, no wonder it’s taking so long to type it all out! Though, from what you hear, his fingers have been tapping pretty quickly, so maybe he’s quick about the alternations and just has a lot to say?

“Yeah, brother, figure as long as I don’t ex out or refresh the page it won’t go and disappear on me.” Gamzee sets the computer down on top of Sassacre’s book and hops off the table. You don’t really have an official dining area (your dad never did either) so you all migrate back to the couch and eat there, Davepeta hovering cross-legged in front of you. You should really invest in like, bean bag chairs or something. You’ve been meaning to for the last few years. But eh. Eeeehhhhh.

While everyone eats, Davepeta fills Aradia, Feferi, Eridan, and Gamzee in on the ships that have taken place in their absence.

“So when the meteor tokyo drifted to a grinding halt, Rose and Kanaya were dating flush, and Karkat and Dave were BASICALLY dating but hadn’t made it official yet beclaws Karcat is a whiny baby who has a stick up his ass about certain things adhering SPECIFICALLY to quadrant norms, because bluh and also fuck that guy. Terezi and Vriska had, appurrantly, gone pale.”

“What,” Aradia, Feferi, and Eridan all deadpan at the same moment.

“Yeah, I couldn’t believe it either,” Davepeta complains. “But they did! Which was why Terezi was flinging herself around the void, looking for Vriska’s grody ass. I’m glad she found you instead.”

“Whale… maybe we’re not getting the full picture?” Feferi says, with that fake-optimistic voice
where she knows she’s wrong but she wants to put a nice option on the table anyway because that’s just what she’s gotta do. “Maybe they had a, a nice moray-eel-gance. Maybe it worked out whale?”

“She turned Terezi into her motherfuckin’ welcome pad,” Gamzee says, quiet, but very blunt. You are so uncomfortable with this conversation oh my god. But it looks like everyone else is too, so Davepeta flaps their wings and calls attention back to them.

“Shortly after The Game ended and we all settled down into this time period, Roxy Lalonde, Jane Crocker, and Calliope The Literal Angel Who I Love got together in flush. All three of them.”

“Oh, we tried that once!” Aradia mentions. “Sollux can feel affection for more than one person in each quadrant so he and I tried falling back in flush for a little while, but it didn’t really work out so we agreed to be better off as friends.”

Feferi giggles. “It was sort of fin to have my moray-eel also be my matesprit’s matesprit, though!”

Aradia brightens and tilts her horns Feferi’s direction. “It was fun! Despite being short lived!”

Davepeta seems to be taking notes. “That sounds really cute! I wish I could have seen you all!”

You feel sort of bad for Eridan. Has he seriously been left out of ALL the shipping shenanigans?

“Dirk Strider and Jake English haven’t gotten together with anyone, but sometimes Dirk hooks up with people he likes and I become very conflicted over wanting to actually ship him with them or not. Jake appurrantly doesn’t want any relationship with anyone other than a nice, chummy friendship, which I can respect. Even though he and Catavros sometimes seem purrity pale! But if they say they’re just furriends then they’re just furriends, I won’t judge. Catavros has empty quadrants, and while Jade hasn’t gotten together with anyone don’t get any bright ideas about her pitch quadrant beclaws that one WILL be mine. Despite the fact that I know and recognize that humans don’t do quadrants the same way trolls do, I will be taking the human equivalent of her pitch quadrant and that is final.”

“How’s wooing her going?” Feferi asks, snickering, propping her chin up on her hand and crossing her floating legs.

“Great and pawful all at the same time. She’s so much fun!! And in action she’s reciprocating but she doesn’t seem to be getting that I like like her, I’m not just kicking her ass in Mario Kart for the fun of it- well okay I am but you get my point!”

“Jade’s a very pretty lady,” Aradia agrees, “And very smart and very friendly! I always enjoyed bumping into her in the dream bubbles.”

“Ugh she’s perfect I hate heeeeer,” Davepeta whines, wings drooping. You’re still trying to process that this crush is apparently a thing. But then, you guess it makes sense? They’re ALWAYS pestered her? Eheh, maybe this one was kind of obvious! Dogs and cats. And besides, Davesprite and Jade were so cute in your timeline!! “She’s brilliant and mewtiful and I might have messed up dating her in one timeline but I’m a different purrson now- literally a different purrson not just somebody who’s changed and grown from their experiences but literally not even the same purrson anymore- and this timeline Jade didn’t date any versions of me so it should purrobably work but like also, have you seen her?? She’s purrfect??? And absolutely pawful??? I want her to punch me in the face??”
You all laugh at Davepeta’s remark; oh Davepeta! They can’t possibly mean that last part.

“But yeah, those are just about all the noteworthy developments in our love lives. I’m still waiting for my meowrail to return to me, someone still needs to auspisticize Terezi and Karkat, and Rose and Kanaya got human married,” Davepeta lists off, like this is the boring, final part of their list of things to discuss.

“Oh we heard a-boat that!” Feferi exclaims.

“It sounds like an incredible ceremony, we’re so sorry we missed it!” Aradia adds. “Though maybe I’ll go back in time and watch from the shadows, so I don’t mess up any of the temporal mechanics but can still see my friends have their love party!”

“Eheheh, ‘love party,’” you parrot, “That’s such a cute way of saying it.” It’s actually really heartwarming? Aradia seems like such an adorable person now that you’re not wandering around the incredibly dangerous vastness of Paradox Space with a group of morally ambiguous strangers!

“Uhm,” Gamzee says, real quiet, just so you can hear it. You turn to him and tilt your head, offering him a smile.

“What should I do with this?” Gamzee asks, holding his empty bowl.

“Oh, I can put it in the kitchen. Do you want more?”

“Nah, brother, though I thank you,” Gamzee says, pulling his legs up on the couch as you stand and take his bowl from him.

“I’ll grab the computer while I’m in there. Anyone else have dishes they’re done with?” you ask.

“Dude I’ve been talking I’m not even halfway done,” Davepeta tells you, and Aradia also holds up her still-half-full bowl with an apologetic smile.

“No worries!” you chime and float yours and Gamzee’s dishes to the sink where you rinse before putting them in the dishwasher. Or, you would put them in the dishwasher, if you had remembered to unload it after last time. Ugh, uuuugh. Ugh. Ugh. You leave them in the sink with your other dishes and grab your computer, handing it back to Gamzee when you reenter the living room. Davepeta has taken your spot, in true cat-like fashion, so you decaphcalogue your hairbrush again and hover up behind them, floating next to the ghosts while you brush their multicolored hair. Conversation turns comfortable about talk of what Davepeta has been up to these last few years, and when you finish brushing their hair (it’s too short! >:B) you float behind Gamzee.

“May I brush yours?” you ask, quiet so as not to interrupt Davepeta and the ghosts and Aradia.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, bro, sure, go ahead,” Gamzee says, and turns back to typing. Not long after, his fingers still and you can catch sight of him gnawing on his lip.

“You stuck?” you ask while the others carry on with their conversation.

“Finished, brother. Nervous about its posting.” You pat him between the horns. “What if some folk make decisions not to believe me? Your humans as I never got a chance to meet, or Kanaya, or Rose, or Terezi changes her mind?”

“Hey,” you say softly, “Easy buddy. Kanaya is a very smart person and I highly doubt Terezi is going to go ‘oh wait I was wrong, here in the face of more evidence.’ And the others will totally believe you, they have no reason not to!”
If Rose doesn’t believe Gamzee’s explanation you are going to yell at her so hard. You’re already going to yell at her so hard. You’re still mad. Your anger is depleting the longer this goes on, so you should really yell at her soon, but being mad at your friends is exhausting and you haven’t seen her since the meetup and you forgot to do it then and also didn’t talk to her one-on-one at all, but uuuuugh you hate this why is this a thing? Couldn’t you just be done after yelling at Dave?!

Gamzee makes his forum post, refreshes the page once (so much warbling purple text), and then shuts your laptop. You pat his back encouragingly.

“There, you did it!”

“I sure motherfuckin’ did, bro. You, uh, would you…” he lifts your computer up towards you and you capchalogue it. “Thanks.”

“Don’t be worried,” you say, scratching him behind the horns, “I’m sure it’ll go over just fine.”

He has to angle himself really weird, but he manages to bonk his horns against your arm and calf.

“Want me to keep brushing your hair?” you offer.

“Please,” he says, and you set yourself back on your task. He leans against you and you think he might be getting a little sleepy? Or maybe just tired from writing all that out again. You don’t really have any experience to speak from but reliving bad things over and over and over again in order to explain them doesn’t really sound like a particularly invigorating time. But like, therapists talk to people about their problems, so maybe this is a good tired? Whatever. Either way, you keep brushing his hair, working out all the tangles because his hair is nice and it’s something to do.

Conversation drops off shortly after Gamzee posts his big long superhuge explanation, as Aradia, Feferi, and Eridan are now all reading it on Aradia’s phone. Davepeta takes the chance to really go in and pretty up their shipping spreadsheet, which has sprouted some new colors since you last saw it! Karkat and Dave still hold the front, but Aradia is now in between Dave and Catavros, who Davepeta has left with the color brown on their spreadsheet, with Sollux between Dirk and Davepeta themself. Jake, Jade, Kanaya, Jane, Terezi, and you remain where you are, but now Gamzee has been placed in after ARquius with Rose between him and Eridan, followed by Feferi, and still ending with Roxy.

They’ve got a separate spreadsheet, you know, for “out of cohort” individuals, whatever that means, like Jasprose and Uncle Crocker and the Mayor. You guess “out of cohort” means people they can’t ship with “in cohort” people? You think it’s a troll term. You don’t know why Jasprose isn’t included in the “in” group, but at the same time you haven’t seen her… since Rose and Kanaya’s wedding? Sometimes you get “SPOTTED” news flashes where someone on the other side of the planet will post a blurry picture of her on their blog and you think she showed up for like, two seconds two years ago on Halloween? Allegedly, someone dumped a bucket of black paint on their head in a parking lot behind a Denny’s and invoked the name of Oglogoth and she showed up and kicked their ass, but you’re a little skeptical about that one. Maybe Davepeta isn’t including her in the “in” group because she’s fucked off to go become a new world cryptid. You hope she’s happy, out there doing whatever it is that she’s doing.

A while later, you’re a little over halfway through brushing Gamzee’s hair when Aradia slowly lowers her phone to her lap and lets out a low whistle. Feferi swoops over to Gamzee’s other side and places a ghostly hand on his shoulder. Nobody says anything for a second, but Feferi gives him a very sympathetic frown, eyes sad for him.

“Wow,” Eridan comments, “wow, yeah, you got the rawest cut, it was you.”
“That’s so fucked up,” Aradia comments. “Like that’s just really fucked up.”

“So, question,” Eridan says, brow furrowed, “What was Vris schemin’? Sounds like she was up to nasty shit.”

Gamzee shrugs and leans back a little further, closer to you. “Hard to remember specifics, brother. But she told me on how keeping Terezi pale with her would both keep her and keep from making a nuisance of herself. She loved Terezi best, whatever twisted way it came out, and didn’t want Terezi to never leave nor betray her, so went to tell her such things like ‘moirail knows best’ and keep Terezi submissive to her without risk of breaking up their scourge again. Laid out plans on how she would be the main motherfuckin’ event regardin’ English, took Aradia’s music boxes from Terezi and used them to jump ahead and meet them other humans and make use of their sprites. She took something motherfuckin’ important out of John’s lusus’s wallet, but I can’t remember what. It’s… hard to get my remember on for anything more specific than that, siblings. But she wanted Terezi hers and the rest of the cohort quiet and obedient when as she would do things.”

Aradia sighs. “You know, there are some versions of her I really root for, and some that just never seem to learn.” Aradia bites lightly on the tip of her rubber wire, then swishes it from side to side. “So what ever happened with the keys? You swallowed them and..?”

“Vomited ‘em up back later. Caliborn shot me ceaseless upon his first remeeting of me- first meeting, near as he remembered, as he was too motherfuckin’ small when I was made to leave to get his recollection on for me- and the bullets he put in my belly made the keys come back up. They were important to his quest.”

“Okay so there was a reason,” Aradia muses.

Gamzee shrugs. “Hell if I know if she knew that though. Seemed at the time that she had no knowledge about them keys other than I would need them, and saw fit to make use of my stomach instead of my sylladex. Told me I might lose them if she placed them cozy in my miracle modus.”

“Ugh!” Feferi exclaims. “You know, I try to be open minded a-boat people, and I r-eely try to be forgiving, but this is all too cod damned much!” You feel like you understand. Sometimes you can be patient, and patient, and patient, and make excuses for others and try to rationalize their behavior, but everything has a breaking point. You’ve reached your threshold for Vriska nonsense, and it looks like Feferi has too. “What the shell,” she mutters.

“I’m sure other Vriskas ain’t quite so bad as this motherfucker,” Gamzee says, as though he doesn’t like anybody saying anything too harsh, even about a lady who shoved keys down his throat and locked him in a fridge. “Just got a bad apple in this time or some such.”

“Glub glub BLUH!” Feferi pouts, sounding exasperated. “Waterever though, let’s change the sub- ject.” At first you don’t get where the pun in that word is but, oh, sub, like a submarine, haha, wow you’re really bright there aren’t you.

“Hey, so what’s a sarswapagus anywave?” Feferi asks, her ghostly finger padding over Aradia’s phone, scrolling up.

“It’s… it’s a bed for cherubs? Before they fight for dominance and only one controls the body. It’s their motherfuckin’ method of switchin’ the controls over who sleeps and who wakes and walks. It was a strangeness, that much I do know, but they slept and woke and switched souls as did pilot the body just fine so it was functional in its purpose, if motherfuckin’ unnerving to look upon.”
“You mean like your cod-piece?” Feferi asks, and you get caught off guard enough you pffft loudly, your lips insufficient to hold your breath back and making a high pitched noise of not-actually-restrained laughter. Aradia snorts and Feferi giggles at your reaction, and Eridan gives a smile as well.

“Yeah, sister, like my motherfuckin’ codpiece.” Gamzee sounds mildly entertained as well, and you think you detect a note of pride? You suppose you can respect a guy who, even while severely traumatized, can keep his dedication to a joke.

Oh you just had the BEST idea. You and Dave and Gamzee should all get/wear codpieces and hang out with Karkat all day like that. You bet he’ll lose his shit if you do that, omg you have to now. Could you get Rose in on this- oh fuck you’re still pissed at her but fuckit you’re not gonna think about that right now you’re gonna think about that later not right now not right now- you bet you could. Kanaya might even be convinced, since, for such a classy lady, she sure does have one hell of a dirty mind! It caught you off guard at first since she’s so elegant but even then you could look back and see that Kanaya has always made jokes, just very, very subtly. Jane would totally be down if you phrased it like a prank, you’re not quite sure about Uncle Crocker but you bet if you did some convincing… Roxy might. Dirk would and he would do it completely deadpan, the straight man to your hilarity. Jake, you don’t think would take a lot of convincing, that boy already puts ridiculous things on his body. What if you just got literally your entire friend group to hang out in codpieces and piss off Karkat with you? Oh that would be the BEST prank ever you should save this idea for next April.

You finish zoning out and snap back into reality, catching the tail end of what was probably another “you know that’s weird right?” “yeah” “okay if it makes u happy i guess” conversation.

You get another knock on the door, and you think that surely, surely, Karkat must finally have arrived. He had to have given up on walking and hailed a cab at some point or another, there’s no way he walked all the way here.

It’s not Karkat. It is, however, Jane!

Chapter End Notes

number of times I started crying during this chapter: 1
Also, if you’re wondering, yes, I do have a reason why the five of them weren't getting sucked into the black hole. You'll just have to wait and see :3
Please leave comments!!!! I love your feedback!!!! Tell me what you liked, what you didn't, if I made a mistake anywhere, if you're hopeful for something, anything at all!!!!
Jane, Roxy, Callie

Chapter Summary

Some wounds are healed, while others get the chance to start healing.

Chapter Notes

I have received a few BEAUTIFUL pieces of fanart, and here they are!!!
http://mesmiraculouslymirthful.tumblr.com/post/154781158033/imhereformysciencefriends-i-made-you-a-thing
http://steep-slope.tumblr.com/post/154820723976/callout-post-for-imhereformysciencefriends-i

Thank you everyone who has ever made fanart for this like ur art sustains me I guarantee I have stared at it for at least 500 hours a piece <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Oh, Jane!” you greet. She has her hands on her hips and looks to be on a warpath.

“John Egbert!” You don't know what you did, but you appear to be in for it. “We have an injured party in our midst and you didn't think to contact me?”

You open your mouth to reply but she thwaps you on the head. She bustles past you as you “heyyyy” and rub at the spot. It didn't really hurt, but it’d hardly be appropriate if you didn't complain at least a little.

“Hello, there,” she says, her voice dipping softer as she greets Gamzee, who has curled in on himself on the couch. He swallows audibly and then waves, small, and you can feel the way his breath has gone all shivery. Your heart twinges for him. Yeah, Jane is intimidating, but she's not here to be mean! You swoosh over to the couch and pat your hand on his shoulder.

“Don't be scared! Jane is nice!” you tell him.

“And I'm here to help,” she says with a patient smile at him, which turns to a disdainful frown when she looks at you again. She's really good at screwing up her nose so it's perfectly wrinkled to show her disgust, like, movie-level on point emoting going on there. “I would've been here sooner if someone had bothered to tell me that a new member of our group was hurt!”

You shrug. “I didn't really-” well, okay, you had thought of her between getting back and now. You had also thought of her healing powers. So, you really have no excuse. “I'm a dumbass Jane, what do you want from me?” you ask softly, wind gently caressing the cuffs of your pants.

“Tell me when there are injuries!” Jane snaps at you, and you cross your arms and look away from her.
“Well excuse me for being stupid!”

“H-hey, sis, you-” Gamzee starts timidly, sounding terribly uncomfortable, “you ain’t gotta get your scold on for a brother, he’s been takin’ real good care of me.”

Awww, that’s so cute! He’s standing up for you!

“I’m glad you feel that way.” Jane tells him patiently, “But I’m the one with magical healing capabilities; he should’ve contacted me about coming and patching you up instead of trying to handle it all on his own with the help of Karkat, of all people.”

“You could’ve come over anyway, miss healer! I was in a fight with Caliborn, it’s only natural to assume I’d get hurt! So don’t act like you’re so much smarter than me!” you quip. Just because you’re dumb as rocks doesn’t mean you like it when other people make you feel that way.

“I knew full well that you would have a couple busted elbows, buster! I was letting you wallow in your own bruises so you’d think twice about darting off recklessly to go fight an unpleasant little goblin we’ve already beat! But I had no idea the new member in our midst would need healing and how would I?! You blokes didn’t tell me a darned thing after you came back from your little jaunt into the aether!”

You hunch up your shoulders and float back, not looking at her. Okay so… yeah, this is all on you.

“Really, sis, ain’t no need to get your sharpness on at him,” Gamzee says, and you both turn your attention back to him. He’s kneading his claws into the baggy sleeves of your sweater, and you swoop back in to pat his shoulder again.

“It’s okay!” you promise him as Jane moves a step back. You feel her take a deep breath. “Jane’s just calling me out for being a dumbass; it’s nothing new. She’s not ‘getting her sharpness on’ at me!”

Gamzee doesn’t look like he believes you.

“I don’t mean to be the cause of no strife…” he protests quietly.

“You’re not, sweetheart.” Jane promises, gentleness making its way back into her tone. “I’m just rather peeved at John for leaving me out of the loop.”

“Sorry,” you mutter.

Jane huffs at you, too subtle to notice unless you’re, you know, a breath god. You’re so much more aware of others’ exasperation with you, now. It’s another reason why online communication feels easier for you. But she turns her attention to Gamzee in full, which makes him shy away, pressing even further into the cushions of the couch.

“May I heal you, please? I’m a hero of Life,” she explains.

“Yeah Jane’s the bomb dot com,” Davepeta says. They- along with Aradia and the ghosts- had been observing your little conversation with Jane silently, though you note that the new trolls are all looking at you curiously. “And totally a sweet lady, don’t let her intimidating hotness and also assertiveness fool mew.”

“Oh stop it you!” Jane chides bashfully with a swat at their shoulder. Davepeta giggles and makes their fingers into a heart, but you are almost 100% certain that it’s just normal playful heart shape making and not relationship heart making. Otherwise they would’ve told you!
Jane turns her attention back to Gamzee, and he doesn’t really move or do or say anything. In fact, his eyes look kinda vacant? Should you be concerned about that because you are definitely concerned about that.

“Gamzee?” she prompts, and he jolts a little.

“Sorry,” he says, very fast and quiet.

“It’s alright, you haven’t done anything wrong,” she reassures. You have all collectively agreed that that is the response for when somebody apologizes and the rest of the group doesn’t know why.

The Game isn’t kind to its players.

Another few moments go by, and Jane tries again. “Gamzee, I would very much like to heal you, may I?”

He swallows and seems to struggle internally with something? You can’t read faces well and you definitely can’t read minds, but his expression does something wonky.

“Yeah, sis, if that’s what you up and feel you should be doing.”

“Thank you.” Jane’s hand starts glowing her pretty shade of teal and Gamzee flinches, but after that things go smoothly. Jane has to spend a lot of time clouding Gamzee in Lifelight, but also… Well, you saw his injuries. You know full well what she needs to spend time healing.

The cloud dissipates and Jane takes a whopper of a breath. “My!” she exclaims, “but you did need that, didn’t you!”

Gamzee stares at his arms and hands, slowly flexing his fingers. “Thank you,” he says, terribly quiet. Your heart twinges for him again. “You didn’t need to go through all that trouble,” he adds, still soft, looking at her face with concern.

“Oh no trouble at all. You should see some of the things those Striders get up to, I’m up to my eyeballs in fixing their shenanigans! But you’re feeling better then, hm?” Jane asks as she stretches out her spine and then plants her hands on her hips. You wonder if you will ever look as competent or commanding as Jane does while she’s in Wonder Woman pose.

“Yeah, sis. Don’t remember the last time my flesh did feel this nice. My bones don’t even ache or nothing.” Gamzee seems to be cautiously exploring his newly healed body with his hands, patting at his shoulders and chest and stomach. He very gently presses down on his soft belly flesh, pulls his hands back, then presses again, a little harder. One hand drifts down and presses on his thigh and slides down to his knee, the other still resting on his belly, and then he snaps back to attention and seems to realize you’re all sort of staring at him (whoops).

“Thank you,” he tells her again, voice going extra warbly from emotion. Jane seems to go a little awkward (it’s not like you know how to deal with teary emotions any better, but you still laugh internally at her) but is saved by the door being opened. You did leave it unlocked, but they could’ve knocked!

“Sup babes!” Roxy crows as she kicks the door closed with the heel of her boot, pink leggings disappearing into the softness of her ugggs. “Janey ran off to do her healer mc’smealer stuff, so I followed on along like the cutest girlfriend in the world, which I am not, because I’m dating both of said cuties. Hi!”
She crosses the living room, either throwing her uggs into the void or her sylladex because they are suddenly not there anymore. Look at all your houseguests, being more polite to your carpet than you ever were and ever will be. Except Jane. It might run in the family? Davepeta doesn’t count cause their feet don’t really touch the floor much.

“My name’s Roxy! I was gonna go say hi to you yesterday at the big reunion but you already had a halo up!” Roxy extends her hand toward Gamzee, which he reflexively recoils from before reaching out and timidly shaking it.

“This here hive is turnin’ into a motherfuckin’ reunion gathering all of its own,” Gamzee remarks, “So I figure you didn’t miss out on nothing as can’t be made up.” Roxy laughs brightly and when she releases Gamzee’s hand she props an elbow up on Jane’s shoulder, who, you must agree, is the perfect height for elbow leaning.

“There does seem to be a whole crowd already gathered!” Roxy agrees, waving at Aradia and co, who excitedly wave back (well, Eridan more of does a two finger salute, but you’re starting to get that he’s a lot more reserved than most of the people you interact with. That’s cool. He might get along well with Dirk, you think).

“Janey get you all patched up?” Roxy asks, still smiling in a persistently friendly manner. Gamzee offers a weak smile back, Roxy’s energy contagious (you know from experience).

Yeah, sis, she did work miracles on this skin of mine.”

“Hella,” Roxy plops herself down on the armrest of the couch. “So you’re Callie’s dad, huh? You the guy I gotta ask for her hand?” Roxy winks teasingly and you smile. Aw, she’s being cute! You always do appreciate it when your friends are in love.

“My- her what?” Gamzee asks, worry and confusion taking over his expression.

“Mmmm, I’m gonna go,” Davepeta announces, standing up and stretching their arms out over their head. “I’m bored. Talk to you all later!”

“Davepeta!” you say, exasperated. They always do this!

“Sorry bro, but if attention isn’t coming my way and I don’t have anything fun to keep me occupied I get restless. I’m gonna go pick on Jade or sniff around Terezi or something.”

“There is quite a lot to do and see,” Aradia agrees, also getting up, “And it’s gotten kind of crowded here. We’ll let somebody else have a turn on the couch.” Aradia cannot swooce out like Davepeta, since she is polite and her boots have complicated laces. “I’m gonna go find sunscreen! Have a nice day y’all!”

Aradia leaves and you all tell her and the ghosts goodbye. Feferi leaves a gentle pat between Gamzee’s horns and Eridan eyes Roxy curiously before slipping into the sunlight.

“So uh, sis,” Gamzee says, voice sounding kind of urgent, “You said something happened to Callie’s hand?”

“Huh?” Roxy asks as she flops down on a couch cushion, Jane settling in on her other side as you continue to hover.

“I know Caliborn chewed his own motherfuckin’ leg off like a dumbass but I didn’t know Callie was hurt,” Gamzee elaborates, “And I don’t got it, but I could help her look…”
“Oh, oh no!” Roxy holds up her hands and bites her lower lip with restrained laughter. You think it’s a little funny too, for all that you don’t like seeing Gamzee distressed. “No, that’s human slang for an old world custom. Callie is fine honey. Alive and in one piece and cuter than a kitten with narcolepsy.”

You can all feel the shift in mood, Gamzee gone wide eyed and alert and suddenly leaning forward. “Alive,” Gamzee breathes, “by some miracle she lives? Not a ghostly apparition like my fishy motherfuckin’ friends but actually…”

“I got her a magic anti-death ring. It was supes romantic,” Roxy informs, crossing her arms behind the back of her head and grinning proudly.

“Oh,” Gamzee says, smiling wetly, “That’s good. I’m-” he pauses to swallow hard and wipe at his eyes. “I’m so happy to hear that.” His voice is all tight and you can note that Jane is tearing up too. It must suck, being a sympathetic crier. You just hover awkwardly, though, so which one of you is worse off? “I just- that she is-”

You swoop in and offer a one armed hug, and use your other hand to pat between his horns. He breathes hard and laughs, honking and wet, and buries his eyes in the hems of the sweater sleeves. Roxy also pats his back, smiling softly.

“Easy buddy,” Roxy tells him.

“I’m so happy!” he cries quietly, voice still all tight and small. He honks wetly. “I’m so- hic- I’m just-!”

All three of you shush him and hum reassurances as he cries, Roxy and yourself with arms on his shoulders as he hiccups into his palms. He's still just such a terribly ugly crier. You note that Roxy is holding her girlfriend’s hand as well, since Jane is so easily swayed by others’ tears.

“Deep breaths dearie,” Jane soothes, and you feel Gamzee do his best to comply.

“There you go, you got this,” Roxy encourages.

“Sorry,” he says tightly. “I’m just so glad…”

“That’s understandable!” you chime brightly. “You thought she was gone forever but now she’s not! Roxy stole her back for us, it's all okay!”

He honks loudly and sobs, raw and messy. He keeps trying to breathe regularly and you all remain patient with him as he calms down.

“I thought I saw her ghost, but to hear that she is well…” he starts again, “You have brought me good news of great joy, sisters. Sweet tidings of comfort and endless mirth.”

“Always happy to help out,” Roxy says, sounding perhaps flattered. Gamzee sniffs loud and wipes harshly at his eyes, taking a few more deep breaths as he regains his composure.

“So,” he starts, voice forcibly loud to hide the remaining shakiness in his voice, “what about her hand, then, human slangwise?”

Roxy snorts. Gamzee also cracks a fragile smile her way, and you feel your kokoro going doki doki. The mad anime feels up in here. Your heart is squeezing up so tight at the sight of him all teary eyed and smiling. “It used to be that people would ask the parents of somebody before asking that somebody to get married! So I was joking around that I needed to ask your permission to marry
“Oh!” Gamzee lights up, looking real excited, “Ain’t no such thing that you need to ask my permission on! You do love her so dearly?”

Gamzee seems to be taking the joke a little seriously, but you can’t really blame him. Roxy laughs and scratches at her ear.

“I mean, maybe? We’re not in any rush though, just us gals being the very best of pals.” She winks. “I promise I’ll take good care of your girly, don’t worry.”

“Ah… so it’s a big ass decision you ain’t sure on makin’ yet, I’m getting the feeling of?”

“Precisely,” Roxy says with double finger guns and another wink. “Janey an’ Callie an’ I aren’t in any hurry, buuuut we also sure as shit ain’t opposed or nothing.”

Gamzee inclines his head so he can smile at Jane.

“You too, sister?”

Jane chortles brightly. “Indeed! I also swear on my empire of confectionaries that I will be good to Callie- and why wouldn't I!”

Gamzee nods, looking pleased. “If there was ever a little one as deserved happiness, I figure it's that sweet girl of mine.” He gives a tiny jolt and his expression falls.

“Gamzee?” you ask.

“She ain’t… she probably don’t-”

A timid knock sounds from the door and you suspect that it is still, indeed, not Karkat. You all collectively feel like this might be a speak of the devil moment. But with less devil. Considerably less devil. The exact opposite of a devil, as it happens.

You zoom over and open the door, and there she is indeed!

“Hi Callie! We were just talking about you!” you greet.

“O-oh?” She looks terribly nervous. You suppose you would be too, if you were about to meet the dad you hadn't seen since you were like, three. Who had also been possessed by your shitty brother. Point is, she is understandably nervous!

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“Yeah, c’mon in,” you encourage, darting back so she has room to enter. Jane and Roxy’s eyes are on their girlfriend, but you turn to look at Gamzee and his reaction to this. He looks stunned, kinda awed? You have no idea how this is going to play out but you are 101% sure it's going to result in more crying at some point.

Callie, ever proper, takes off her shoes and hangs up her jacket, eyes glued on each individual task. Her back is to the room and she's keeping it that way, her motions deliberate. You drift over to the couch and hover over the armrest near Gamzee. He hasn't moved or probably even blinked since Callie came in, frozen in shock, lips slightly parted so you can see the tips of his fangs, eyes wide with the tiniest flecks of indigo in the yellow sclera, fists ashy around the knuckles where he grips the opposing sleeves of his sweater. You very gently pat him between the shoulder blades, and he blinks but still does not otherwise move.
Callie pauses a good two or three seconds after her jacket is hung before turning around. She does, though, because she kind of has to, and smiles timidly at the group.

“Hey Callie honey,” Roxy greets with a bright smile and little wave.

“Hello dearie,” Callie says, glancing at Roxy and waving a little in return. Her attention goes back to Gamzee, though, who inhales deep and slow.

“Why don't you come cozy on up next to me,” Roxy offers, scooching closer to Jane, who also shuffles, and makes room between herself and Gamzee. Callie is small and Gamzee is rail thin, so they can totally fit four people on the couch, even with Jane’s impressive size factored into the mix.

Gamzee and Callie don't really stop looking at each other as Callie approaches and sits in the newfound space, and Gamzee’s breath catches the moment their legs press up against each other.

“Hello there,” Callie greets.

“Hey, little girl,” Gamzee whispers, so soft and breathless.

“Uhm, I read your forum post,” Callie says. “We all did, it's, uh, why we’re here. I- uh, you were, the one who raised me, then?”

Gamzee nods. “I did, chica, that I motherfuckin’ did. Do you- remember me?”

Callie looks away from Gamzee's half-hopeful, half-wistful face and fidgets with her charm bracelet. “N-no, sorry,” she says quietly. Gamzee's face goes soft and fully wistful, but, if you're reading right (which you might not be, you've never claimed to be bright) not particularly disappointed?

“Figured as such, little girl, your brother didn't neither.” He sounds sad, but like distantly sad. Like he's remembering something instead of sitting right here hearing the news that his kid was too young to remember him when he got pulled away from her. Gamzee reaches out a hand and very, very gently taps it to the ring on Callie’s hand. “This the gift as that pink sister who loves you was telling me about?”

“Oh! Yes, this is the ring of life my dear Roxy gifted me.” She holds up her hand so Gamzee can see it better.

“May I..?” he asks quietly, hands hovering out near Callie’s hand.

“Just don't take it off, I rather need that thing in order to keep on being alive, heh,” Callie says amicably enough. You notice Roxy place a hand on Callie’s back as Gamzee gently lifts his palm beneath hers, her fingers reaching maybe a little past halfway down his. Her hand is so small in his palm (you always have enjoyed her tiny hands!) and he gently, reverently, taps his fingers against her ring, then her knuckles. He slides his finger pads over the minuscule little cherub scales, so tiny and smooth you missed them the first million times you interacted with her, and seems to try and find the meaning of the universe somewhere in the cool texture of her tapering fingers, hard and sharp where they end.

“Uhm,” she starts again, and you all look to her face. Her green cheek spirals are a bit luminescent, indicative of her blush. “While I might not, remember you, exactly, I think some small part of me might?”

Gamzee’s breath catches again. He sits at attention, eager, hands lingering motionlessly in the air
even after Callie slips her palm from between them. She fiddles with her ring and looks away, speaking quickly now.

“So, well, you see, I've always had this- fascination- with trolls. I've known of trolls and humans for as long as I can remember but trolls were always what- uh, intrigued me, the most. I hope I don't sound like I'm, being disrespectful or rude or anything, but it- trolls became something of a special interest of mine, so much so that I even, well, you see, I liked playing dress-up. Uhm. Oh I'm sure I'm making quite the fool of myself but I'm afraid it's not everyday I get to meet my estranged father.” She moves from fidgeting with her ring to tugging on her fingers, her knuckles occasionally popping. “I made this thing called a trollsona? Where I, uhm, played pretend at being a troll myself. And, well, you see, the horns for my sona just so happened to, uhm…”

Callie decaphcalogues the headband with her trollsona horns attached. You've seen her wear this maybe twice, and once was on Halloween. Apparently there's a lot of discourse over whether or not it's disrespectful to dress up as a species that you're not a member of unless you're dressing up as an icon/character? Something about whether it's appropriation or not. You tend to avoid people like that.

“...look a great deal like yours,” Callie finishes after a moment. Gamzee is staring, stunned, at the fake horns and their waving nature.

“These are…” he breathes, a smile slowly, brokenly making its way across his face. “They do,” he says, laughing a little. Ah, here come the waterworks, you've been expecting them. “May I-?” Gamzee asks, reaching out only to stop and look up at Calliope. She smiles timidly and “mm”s with a nod, and he brushes his fingers over the material. He doesn't actually take the horns from her, just touches them, and you can hear the quiet laughter that will descend into sobbing start up.

“These are finely made,” he praises, warble in his voice pronounced and eyes glued to the painted waves. “And you- have a whole sona to go along with these?”

“Uhm, yes, Callie Ohpeee. I- is this okay?” she seems distressed by Gamzee’s tearing up and covering his mouth with the fingers that aren't gently skimming the underside of Callie’s left horn.

“Yeah, little girl, yeah of course,” Gamzee has to pause and breathe deep, “I'm just awfully touched.”

“Ah,” Callie smiles at him and reaches out to hold the hand that's not on his face, “I might not- ah, remember, exactly, what you did while you raised my brother and I, but whatever it was, I do believe you left quite the impression.”

Gamzee hiccups and makes a high noise, so you rub circles between his shoulders. Jane gets up and Roxy seems startled and confused by the motion, but raises as well.

“Why don't we leave you two alone for a bit?” Jane suggests gently. Callie tenses up briefly, and you drift up a little, fingertips still on Gamzee’s back, but Callie smiles and nods with a glint of determination in her eye and you're not sure what to make of anything. Jane grabs your free hand and drags you to the kitchen like a balloon and you are glad she's here because you are maybe not the best at social niceties.

Oh! But Gamzee’s been crying and is gonna be crying a lot more, so you should get him some water. Might as well for Callie, too, and you should offer for your other guests.

“Anything you want to drink?” you ask as you pull down two glasses. You fill both of them with water as Roxy voids herself some oj and Jane asks if you have any cider. You do! Because cider is
great, so you tell her she can help herself and move to float out into the living room.

“John!” Jane scolds and you scrunch up your legs to your chest.

“Whaaat?” you whine. You're not doing anything bad!

“That would sort of defeat the purpose of leaving them alone!” Jane says with an emphatic wave to the doorway. Roxy snickers and takes a sip of her juice.

“I'm not going to interrupt!” you protest, “Gamzee’s been crying a bunch and needs to stay hydrated! Even you can't magic that away!”

Jane looks chagrined, pressing her thick lips thin and taking a half step back.

“Pardon, then,” she huffs and Roxy snickers again. Jane glares at her. “Oh you think this is just such a hoot.”

“Sorry baby, but you two are such sibs and it's hilaribad sometimes. Like I feel like I'm watchin’ some cheesy daytime drama where the Bro and the Sis can't get along for shit but you know deep down they love each other they're just squabblin’ for cheap realism points.”

You chuckle and Jane chortles, and you're both pretty sure Roxy is spot on. Oh!! But!!! You gotta give Gamzee the water, so you dart out again.

He is in full, open, ugly weeping mode when you pass through the door, but your heart twinges happily because his arms are around Callie, his face in her shoulder. She’s crying too, smiling big and holding him in return. Her tiny green hands are like paw prints on the back of his sweater and Gamzee has a hand on the back of her skull and one arm around her waist. It's picturesque. It's raw. Emotional in a way you fear yourself incapable of.

You set the two glasses down on the edge of the coffee table and Callie’s eyes open briefly. You smile at her and wave, then dart back to the kitchen as quiet as you can. You don't think Gamzee noticed at all.

Jane has a glass of cider in hand when you return and looks troubled, Roxy with a hand on her shoulder. “Hey Johnny boy, have the provisions been safely delivered to their destination?”

“Surely have,” you chime, trying for an oldtimey western accent and probably just sounding stupid. Roxy giggles though so you got the intended effect one way or another.

“Are they still discussing the trollsona?” Jane asks. You're pretty sure she knows they're not, since the record for Universe's Ugliest Crier goes to Gamzee and you're literally only a room away and Jane has functioning ears, so you guess she's asking for deets on what you saw.

“Nah, they're hugging and sobbing openly, but Callie was smiling so it's probably definitely good crying.”

Jane smiles but looks away shortly after, something on her mind, and Roxy “d’awwww”s.

“You okay?” you ask Jane.

“Frustrated, is all.”

You nyoom over and sit cross legged on your counter, looking at her as inquisitively as you know how to look.
“I really dislike that you didn't even think to contact me with that boy in your care and injured like he is,” she says bluntly, and you flinch, screwing up your face.

“I'm sorry,” you say, because yeah, that's all on you.

“I don't like being excluded John,” Jane sighs, “I don't like not knowing what's going on around me, like with what went on with you and Karkat- I had to wait for a very injured new party to write a practical dissertation in order to know jack squat, or how Gamzee is suddenly living with you now, when you've steadfastly refused any offers to come live with me and my father, and it just makes me feel so gosh darned irritable! So even something like not knowing you were going to give people water makes me upset and I'm terribly sorry but I am in one dickens of a mood right now.”

“Easy babe,” Roxy says, patting her shoulder, obviously more used to Jane’s fits of temper than you.

“Maybe we should go home? Leave Callie here with her dad and John?” Roxy suggests.

“No, no,” Jane says, sounding defeated and mopey, “I don't want to do that. Just give me a moment to be irritable and mad, I'll get it together in a bit. Consider a halo up for a while.”

“Sounds good honey,” Roxy says agreeably. She plants a kiss on Jane’s cheek and turns, smiling, to you. “Looks you get to play house host and keep this lady entertained in your kitchen for a while, Johnny boy!”

You laugh with her. “Oh no, how terrible!” you tease and pour a glass of water for yourself. You spend a long while chatting amicably with Roxy, and Jane does eventually join back in. It isn't until nearly an hour- maybe closer to 45 minutes?- later that Callie pokes her head around the door, one hand on the wood and one behind her and towing Gamzee. You can hear him sniffling still. Poor guy.

“We believe we’re done catching up, if you’d all like to join us in the living room once again,” Callie says, smiling brightly at you all. Gamzee enters the kitchen and beelines it for you, but doesn't let go of Callie’s hand, so she ends up tapping along in her fancy dress socks with him and all five of you make a little circle for a brief moment. You give Gamzee a hug, since he looks like he needs one (when the actual hell does he not look like he needs one, that's the million dollar question).

“Hey,” you say as the trio of lovebirds filter through the door back to the couch. Gamzee plants his face on your shoulder and you gently pat the hand that's on his back.

“Thank you,” he says, which makes you chuckle.

“What for?” you ask, your thumb stroking gently.

“This, all of it, bringing me here, letting them here, I don't know, I'm just so grateful for these blessings as are getting heaped and motherfucking heaped upon me so deep and quick I could drown in them, I feel like I gotta get my thank on for somebody. So thank you John,” he says, emotional and heartfelt. You kiss him by the hair and he clutches the front of your godtier shirt and presses his face into your shoulder harder. “I saw my little girl again John,” he says, soft and reverent and still teary, “she's alive and I got to hold my little girl again, nevermind that she's all grown and same as I by now she's still- and I have been returned to her.” He laughs and you pat his back. “I'm so happy, brother, I'm so happy as to burst, I don't know if I'm fit to handle any more than what I have already been blessed and received, it's all just so overwhelming.”
Overwhelming, you get. “You wanna just chill in the kitchen for a while? I bet Jane and Roxy are interested in hearing what Callie has to say about you.”

A loud series of bangs resounds from your front door and you are filled with the deliciously irritating noise of Karkat screaming, “OPEN UP FUCKERS IT’S ME.”

Chapter End Notes

Number of times I cried while writing this chapter: 7
Waffling is Better Served on Plates and not in Decision Making Processes

Chapter Summary

Sorry it's so short and also late! I've been busy lately! This isn't proofread, so I'll get around to that probably tomorrow, so if you wanna wait for the better content feel free. In the meantime, if you spot anything, please let me know!!!

Chapter Notes

I have received more lovely fanart!!! <3 Thank you lovelies, your work absolutely makes my day!!!

http://imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com/post/155318279887/i-thought-that-since-i-hecked-up-with-forgetting

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gamzee holds your hand and lets you lead him out to the living room, which has seen more people in the last few hours than it has in the last probably month. Roxy is at your door, grinning down at Karkat, who looks like he's an alien in hostile territory and doesn't speak the language, unsure of his fate in the hands of his grinning pink captor as she bares her gleaming pearly teeth at him.

“Sup sup Karkalicious! You here to see your booooooyyyyyyfrieeeeeeend?”

“As a matter of fucking fact, I am. Please enlighten me as to why you are the one to open the door to John’s fucking hive instead of the bumbling blue moron himself, in all h- Gamzee.” Karkat’s voice takes a nosedive in volume when he sees Gamzee, your presence not even pinging on his register, and even his body language goes soft and concerned. Karkat pushes past Roxy (his shoes are already off, why is everyone better about this than you are) and Gamzee lets go of your hand and meets him midway across your living room.

“Hey, how are-” Karkat starts, holding out his hands like he wants to grab Gamzee by the wrist or something, but Gamzee slumps to the floor like he got hit over the head with a frying pan. Just. Down. Like whump, there he goes. You’d be concerned, except for the fact that Gamzee is now hugging Karkat like they’re lovers reuniting and Karkat has just stepped off the boat coming back from war, not like they’re new boyfriends that just saw each other yesterday. Although, you suppose if Gamzee is living under the impression that this is all an illusion, he might not have thought he’d ever see Karkat again.

You… you really hope he brings that up with Karkat… you’re really not sure how to deal with that, or if you’re even the person who should be dealing with that.

Karkat huffs and hugs Gamzee back, one hand in his hair and the other along his shoulders.
Gamzee isn’t so tall that he can press his face into the top of Karkat’s shoulder while kneeling (although, that would be fucking hilarious), so instead Gamzee’s just sort of smushed his face into where Karkat’s boobs would be if he had any. “I don’t know why I was even worried,” Karkat mumbles and bends so he can press his face into Gamzee’s hair.

“Hey,” Gamzee greets, muffled by Karkat’s body.

“Hello, you unmitigated disaster.”

“’M missed you,” Gamzee continues, and Karkat blushes and does the click click scree thing he does, just with significantly less volume than normal. His shoulders hunch up and you snort at him.

“Oh fuck off, John!” he shouts, lifting his face from Gamzee’s hair, and you laugh outright. You swooce on over and float to the side of him, propping your elbows between his horns.

“Make me,” you say, grinning like a douche, and Karkat screeches at you. You laugh at him, and Roxy and Jane laugh at the both of you, and Callie laughs probably just because people are laughing and she has a very strange definition of “good time” (weird juju drugs and strange hyperbolic behaviors tend to be her favorite things ever). Gamzee reaches up and paps Karkat on the cheek, which grinds the affronted screeching to a halt, and you snort some more. Like scissors, Gamzee just… cuts off the shrieking. Like hitting a pause button, or a CD hitting a jump. One moment: screechy Karkat; the next: none.

“Chill, my pale brother, there be a whole room of eyes to watch such indiscretions.”

“John’s entire fucking existence is just one giant and bumbling indiscretion. Your entire existence is just one giant and disastrous indiscretion. Is there anyone I know who isn’t actually just a walking indiscretion on footnubs? I don’t think I know anyone with a single sense of decorum in their entire body. I am the sole survivor from the discretionpocalypse. It is me.”

“Karkles you’re the like, least discreet person I know lmao,” Roxy chimes in, drinking what looks to be either fruit punch or red powerade now. Callie is nodding along with an apologetic smile and Jane is rolling her eyes fondly.

“It really is true,” Jane agrees, and Karkat flips you as a collective off. You rotate around, still airborne, and lick Karkat’s outstretched finger, specifically because you know it pisses him off. Sure enough, you get more irate and rapid clicking, but Gamzee just pats at Karkat’s face some more and again, it’s like hitting a fucking off switch. Then the irate clicking sorta starts back up for a few mumbled moments (does Karkat’s brain take a few minutes to catch up to the situation too? You think you would’ve noticed that before now, or maybe it’s a pale romany thing?) before putting out.

“Lmao I know this is like a normal troll thing to do but this is mad cute just so you know,” Roxy says, and Karkat huffs.

“It’s supposed to be a normal, private troll thing, but Gamzee has the sense of shame of a newborn musclebeast so is anyone really surprised?”

“We can go somewhere more private,” Gamzee offers idly, like he doesn’t really care one way or another.

“Okay but before you do that,” you butt in, scrolling through your phone, “Dave texted me that you were on your way here hours ago! How the hell did it take you this long?”

Karkat looks embarrassed, so Gamzee strokes his palm over Karkat’s cheek. “I walked the whole
“You realize we’re gods and have free access to all and any taxis basically ever right?” you point out ‘helpfully.’

“Yes, John, I am fully fucking aware of that fact. Maybe I just wanted to go for a nice little fucking stroll. Ever think of that? You know, use my legs instead of floating like an asshole my every waking moment! Take the scenic route, stop to smell the roses, drown myself in personal failings and insecurities on a park bench, scream at a cooing cityfowl or four, pet a domesticated barkbeast, you know, actually get outside of my fucking hive more than once every other fucking week!”

You feel that last statement like the pointed jab it is. “Oh well excuse me for liking the comfort of my own home,” you huff, crossing your arms and looking at the corner of the ceiling.

“There’s being a homebody and then there’s being a self-isolating dickhead and since I spent the first six sweeps of my existence as the latter I should fucking know the difference.”

“Okay Karkat, thank you for your advice, don’t you have a boyfriend to shooshhands papsoothe?”

Karkat’s face goes flat and his voice deadpans while Gamzee honks loudly and starts laughing.

“Why are you like this?”

“Holy motherfuck John,” Gamzee wheezes out between his laughter.

“Legitimately why are you fucking like this and why has paradox space decided I am the one that must be blighted with your asinine idiosyncrasies?”

You cross you legs midair and grab your ankles, smiling, and shrug with a happy “nn-uhnuh” that sounds much too self-satisfied even to your own ears. You just really like bugging Karkat, it’s one of the things that brings you the greatest joy in your life nowadays. Also, Gamzee laughing is kind of great??? You’re not entirely sure what you did but he’s laughing at you and that makes you feel warm.

“Woah, hey, you okay?” Karkat asks, attention drawn back to Gamzee. You frown, he sounds fine? You’re not catching any of his laughing-to-crying transition noises (you remind yourself that he’s new, you don’t know him that well yet, and Karkat has more experience on this front than you do). Though, his fingers do look to be clutching at Karkat’s sweater kind of hard?

“Tired, brother, I’m, I’m real motherfuckin’ overwhelmed and just, so much,” Gamzee confesses, and now that you’re actually paying attention you can sort of see that he’s leaning his weight on Karkat? Maybe?

Karkat paps at Gamzee’s head and squeezes him a little closer while Jane says, “Maybe we should head out then. You seem to have seen a lot of traffic through this house today, it’s hardly a surprise that he would be running on fumes by now.”

You’re kind of grateful for Jane being the one to bring it up. You never want to make people feel like you’re kicking them out, but you’d be lying if you said you’re not feeling a little socialled out yourself! And you’re, y’know, a pillar of health in comparison to Gamzee (you’re not really a healthy individual, but that’s moot point for the comparison’s sake).

Gamzee stands, letting go of Karkat, and smiles briefly at Jane and Roxy before heading over to Callie.

“You headin’ out then too, little girl?” he asks quietly, and you settle yourself down on Karkat’s
shoulders, legs draping onto his chest and arms resting behind his horns. He hisses emphatically at you and immediately proceeds to attempt to dislodge you, but gravity means nothing to you and you can maneuver yourself back onto him much faster and easier than he can shake you off. You catch Callie and Gamzee hugging again in the midst of your wrestling but don’t pay it a whoooole lot of mind, you have a Karkat to annoy and you like to take pride in your craft. You’re laughing and he’s screeching but you’re winning and that’s the super fun part.

“Bye John!” Roxy calls, loud enough to catch your attention over Karkat’s click-screeching.

“Bye Roxy! Bye Jane! Bye Callie!” you call back, waving with one hand and clinging to one of Karkat’s horns with the other. You appreciate that they’re rounded so you’re not gonna accidentally stab yourself, but they could be a little longer. It’s hard to get a good grip on them like this.

Gamzee comes back over and separates the two of you, picking you up off of Karkat and sliding you to the side. You float and let him, because he is not Karkat, and Karkat just screeches wordlessly at you for a few more seconds (although you think you catch a “fuck” here or there amidst the clicking). You float up behind Gamzee’s shoulder, prop an elbow on him, and then pull down your lower eyelid and stick out your tongue with a “nyeh!” The reaction you get is hilarious.

“Chill yourselves, brothers,” Gamzee suggests calmly, unbothered by your antics.

“Aww, but picking on him is so much fun!” you protest.

“John Egfuck I swear upon the horrorterrors that cast their thousand eyed glares upon our sessions I will eviscerate your stupid grinning mug and have you taxidermied and mounted on my fucking wall with a plaque saying ‘here hangs the most annoying human ever to exist in the history of all of paradox space, and yes that includes Evil Guy Fieri from the Rogue of Void’s timeline. This is the most annoying one, fuck this guy.’”

“Awww, love you tooooooo,” you coo at him, and he screeches at you with truly impressive volume. Gamzee laughs lightly but sinks to the floor again, slumping and wrapping his arms around Karkat’s waist.

“Oh fuck I'm so sorry you're tired and we’re probably not making it better fuck we’re being so stupid I'm really sorry, fuck.”

“Ease, brother,” Gamzee says softly, head resting on Karkat’s hip and legs splayed out in front and to the side of him. “I’ve always got energy for you.”

“That's romantic as fuck so one: fuck you and two: e’mon dude let's get you on a fucking multicushioned seating unit or singlecushioned seating unit or a bed or something, you can't just sit and cling to me on the floor all night.”

“But being on the floor is nice,” Gamzee protests, “and I don't wanna move.”

“John, help me pick him up.” Karkat orders you, and for the first time in a long time you comply without a fuss. You get his legs and lower body while Karkat wrestles with his armpits, and you two move him onto the couch. He keeps clinging to Karkat though, so Karkat ends up sitting down and the two of them end up cuddling on your couch.

“D’awww,” you coo, and Karkat uses the hand not in Gamzee’s hair to flip you off. You float over and settle yourself on the armrest near Gamzee’s feet.

“Sorry it took me so long to get here,” Karkat mumbles, eyes on Gamzee’s hair where his fingers
are gently scratching.

“Ain’t no thing, brother. You walked, shit takes time.”

“Yeah, and you have really tiny legs!” you helpfully supply.

“John, fuck off, I’m trying to be soft right now and you are not helping!” You laugh at him, and have to slide your glasses back up your nose.

“Why did you make your decision on to walk, though?” Gamzee asks quietly, and you’re not sure what about the atmosphere has changed but you take your cue to go quiet.

“Nerves,” Karkat mumbles, “I kept waffling, I’m sorry.”

Gamzee reaches up a hand and paps Karkat’s face, “Don’t apologize, lover, you’re here, and that’s all I truly could need.”

“I could’ve shown up sooner,” Karkat says, and you frown because he’s doing the mopey thing again, “I could’ve shown up a whole hell of a lot sooner.”

“Shooooosh shooshshooshshoosh,” Gamzee soothes, “Shit as was strange and weird did make its occurrence these last number of sweeps, palest lover mine, quiet yourself and be here for me now.”

“I promise,” Karkat whispers, taking Gamzee’s hand away from his cheek and pressing the bony knuckles to his lips, “I’ll do my fucking best, regardless of how terrible and failing of any and all base standards that is.”

“Ain’t hardly such a thing, brother, ain’t even hardly. You were so good to me before the devil took his hold, Karkat, even in your wrigglerish ways you were always kinder to me than your rough edges did dictate.”

“I was a piece of shit and we all know it.”

Gamzee laughs at that, but doesn’t respond. Just snuggles up a little closer, purring with his face against Karkat’s chest. “Missed you,” he whispers.

Karkat presses a kiss to the top of Gamzee’s head and rubs at his shoulders. “How are you feeling?” he asks, “If you’re really tired, maybe you should take a nap before dinner?”

“But you’re here now,” Gamzee protests, “I don’t wanna leave.”

“I’ll still be here when you wake up, fartnugget.”

Gamzee whines and squeezes a little harder around Karkat’s torso, and you clear your throat. You’d been meaning to bring this up anyway, and this seems as opportune a moment as any.

“Gamzee, maybe you should talk to Karkat about the illusion problem you’re having? Since he’s your moirail-boyfriend?”

“Illusion problem?” Karkat repeats, sitting up just a little bit straighter. Not enough to dislodge Gamzee from their cuddling position, but he’s clearly on high alert now. Really, he’s like a goddamned spring, it takes like absolutely nothing to get him tense.

“‘S nothing,” Gamzee mumbles, turning to give you what would be a pretty impressive glare if it weren’t for the fact that, you know, he can’t actually glare like basically at all and it is definitely more of a pout than a glare. In fact, you’re pretty sure there is nothing about Gamzee that could
turn into impressive glaring. Even when he was tearing down the universe in rage his face was more distressed than glaring.

Fuck, you feel so bad for him. He’s a pitiful mess of a person and you just, like, wanna make it better.

Karkat swats his horn lightly, just a tap, and clicks at him. “It’s very obviously not fucking nothing. Are you seeing things?”

“No,” Gamzee mutters, sounding very much like a pouting, tired child. “Nothing, nevermind it.”

“Gamzee thinks everything that’s happening and has happened between now and us getting him from Caliborn has been one elaborate mirage-fantasy his brain is coughing up,” you tattle, because you really hope this doesn’t come back to bite you in the ass if Gamzee figures out about any of the problems you don’t want your friends to know.

“Gamzee,” Karkat coos, “This isn’t an illusion.”

“You can’t know that,” Gamzee whispers tightly, squeezing Karkat a little closer. “You can’t possibly know that, brother, you can’t- you can’t promise you’ll still be here when I wake up, I can’t be sure none of this will-”

Alright, time out for the traumatized clown, that’s you, shut your fucking mouth for a second because I’m going to yell at you now,” Karkat interrupts, “This is not a fucking fantasy. I am not sure why you would think this is a fucking illusion, but it is not. This is not a dream or a mirage or anything else you want to fucking call it. I am real, John is real, you are also real and so is the multicushioned seating unit we are currently cuddling in pale debauchery upon.” Karkat grabs Gamzee’s face and makes him look him in the eye. “You can see me. You can hear me, god knows you’d be fucking deaf if you couldn’t from this distance. You can smell me and touch me and if you really fucking wanted to, you could taste me! Do not actually do that.” Gamzee sticks his tongue out of his mouth and licks Karkat’s hand, which makes Karkat pause, blink very, very slowly, and sigh. “Why do I fucking bother with you?”

Gamzee chirps and nuzzles Karkat’s other hand, and Karkat wipes the slobber off of Gamzee’s sweater (your sweater, you’re the one who wears that on the regular, you are distantly miffed by this).

“The fucking point is, I am real.”

“Can’t trust my senses,” Gamzee admits quietly, talking with closed eyes into Karkat’s palm. “Can’t never be sure of that, though, and if it’s all a game as my mind is playing on me, why should I trust you, motherfucker?”

“Because I am your moirail and I am saying things because they will hopefully fucking help you and you’re allowed to take a tiny little wrigglerstep of faith with me.”

“I’d leap,” Gamzee says, returning the weight of his skull to Karkat’s chest. “I’d leap in faith, if you’re the one as telling me to trust.”

“Stop being a romantic piece of shit for three seconds and listen to what I am saying you fucking beanpole of a failure,” Karkat screes, blushing bright red again. “I am real. Can you at least attempt to believe that for me?”

Gamzee is silent a long while. You start wondering if he’s fallen asleep. You check his breath; nah,
he’s awake (Karkat’s is nervous though (you know Karkat’s emotions based on breath patterns because you’ve been around him so much. You sorta just have to go by ear with Gamzee’s, depending on the patterns instead of the familiarity)). You also notice that while you’ve been sitting/ floating there, you’ve been toying with the end of your windsock. Given how fuzzy-numb your fingers have gone, you guess you’ve been rubbing it for quite some time.


“You don’t have to be,” Karkat says, “It’s okay that you are, but you don’t have to be. You’re safe here, I promise.” Karkat presses his mouth to Gamzee’s hair. “Nothing bad is going to happen okay? This planet and these people are so soft, and I’ll look out for you, and so will John and Dave and everybody. You don’t fucking need to be scared anymore, we’ve got you.” Karkat is working his fingers like a cat works their front claws, pawing at Gamzee’s sweater and bunching it up, letting it go, bunching up, letting go.

“I-” Gamzee honks, tries again, “I can’t promise motherfuckin’ success, but I’ll try? I want to believe you, Karkat, I want to, I want to believe this is real so motherfuckin’ much, but I just- I can’t it’s all- if- what- I can’t-”

“Shoosh, Gamzee, shoosh, if you’ll try that’s good enough for me. Now c’mon, you’re dead on your feet. Take a nap, we’ll wake you up for dinner. John’s guest bed is ridiculously decadent, it’s nice there, let’s go.”

Gamzee whines in protest.

“I can carry him,” you offer.

“Karkat comes with,” Gamzee demands, not moving from where his face is pressed to Karkat’s sweater. You scoop him up and he curls up against you, arms threading around your neck immediately.

“Karkat gets to walk on his own two legs!” you agree cheerfully.

“Hey asshole fuck you.”

“Nah.”

Karkat hiss-screeches and Gamzee laughs at you both again, sleepy and quiet but you feel his laughter against your chest and in his breath. Karkat makes a show of stomping behind you, which makes you chuckle. In the bedroom, you use your Breath to kick the blankets up so you can set Gamzee down on the sheets. Gamzee is slow to let you go, but quick to check and make sure that Karkat actually came with. Of course, Karkat did, and Gamzee reaches out one hand toward him, hanging onto your shirt with the other. You’re mildly concerned over how clingy Gamzee is, but you also know Karkat is already overthinking and over-worrying, so you probably don’t have to, but like it also makes you feel kind of nice? Wanted. It’s not the worst thing in the world, according to you.

“I’ll grab your water glass,” you tell Gamzee. You know you can never sleep without drinking something first, and also you’re pretty much perpetually worried about him staying hydrated. This is just your job now. You accept it. “I’ll be right back.”

You are right back, but during the time you were gone Gamzee managed to talk Karkat into joining him in the bed and get the covers over both of them. Or maybe Karkat went without prompting.
You’re still not entirely sure how moirail-boyfriends work. Hell, you’re still not really sure how Karkat works, and you are definitely out of your depth with Gamzee-works. You’ve known him for a very, very small amount of time. You’re actually kind of baffled by that? Like just perpetually. Like wow, you actually and really know nothing about this guy. Except “traumatized” and “in dire need of someone to be nice to him.”

Meh. You set the water on the side table and sorta stare at Karkat curiously for a moment. He hisses at you and flips you off, which makes you smile. All is well! You float on out and leave them to their own devices.

You pull out your phone and notice you missed a notification.

gardenGnostic [GG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

GG: hi john!
EB: Hi!
EB: Sorry I was MIA, there have been like a billion people through my house today!
GG: no big!
GG: i figured you were probably busy with your new houseguest!
GG: speaking of
GG: i should really meet him!!! :o
GG: also how is he?
EB: Well, I think Karkat managed to convince him to try believing that reality isn’t fake
EB: And Jane stopped by and healed him, so he isn’t physically injured anymore!
GG: those are both good things! :O
GG: he thought reality was fake?
EB: I think he still does, and is trying to stop doing that
EB: Apparently everything is too nice and he doesn’t believe good things can happen to him anymore
GG: that’s really sad! D:
EB: Yeah.
EB: But Karkat is here now and likely to help with that!
GG: let’s hope :/
GG: in my experience karkat “helping” has only very very rarely been a good thing
EB: Karkat also bullied you for like, most of your childhood
GG: but we’re friends now!!!
GG: i really like him! :D

GG: but that doesn’t mean i’m going to ignore that he is a fucking problem

EB: ehehe, you know Rose and I used to take bets on when you were going to punch him in the face?

GG: are you still making those bets because i might, john

GG: i just fucking might

GG: i love him but god he’s so irritating >;/

EB: I don’t get why you’re so bothered by him honestly

EB: I think he’s hilarious

GG: you also rile him up and then leave dave and me to deal with the aftermath D:<

EB: I do not!

EB: I always stick around to see the Karkat theatrics to the sweet, yet bitter end!

GG: okay FAIR but karkat whines and bitches and moans for like forever after you leave anyway!

EB: But his screeching is so funny

GG: well maybe to YOU!!

GG: but to the rest of us it’s just annoying!

GG: even dave just really waits for it to pass

GG: sometimes he tries to cheer karkat up with memes and that works half the time

GG: sometimes he does something stupid and romantic and cheesy and that usually works

EB: gay

GG: they’re so cute!

EB: eheheh they really are

GG: sometimes i kinda want something like what they have

GG: but then i remember that they’re gross and icky and they DO THINGS and i’m like nah i’m fine

EB: eheheh, I feel that

GG: hey, when am i gonna meet gamzee? :o

GG: it seems like that should be kinda high on my to do list!!

EB: I mean I’m basically never doing anything, so you could come over tomorrow if you want

EB: Gamzee and I are kinda both socially burned out today, and I still have two people in my house
GG: good luck!

GG: oo! oo!!!

GG: or you could come here!

GG: gamzee could see my flowers and I can make you all tea and also lunch!!

GG: we all know you haven’t gone grocery shopping at all lately john

EB: Whoops

GG: it's not that hard john!

GG: it’s not like we’re hurting for money or anything

EB: But it’s haaaaaard

GG: it’s really not

GG: but that’s neither here nor there

GG: bring gamzee over for a lunch date tomorrow!

GG: or dinner!

EB: Dinner sounds good.

EB: We could show up sometime after lunch and just hang!

GG: why are you so averse to setting times? :/

EB: Too restricting, next question

GG: pft, okay okay mister windy boy!

GG: i’ll see you and gamzee tomorrow, SOMETIME ;P

EB: See you Jade!

EB: Love you!

GG: love you too bro! <3

**ectoBiologist [EB] has ceased pestering gardenGnostic [GG]**

Chapter End Notes

I didn't cry at all while writing this chapter :3
Okay wow! Sorry I just sort of evaporated. The semester started back up and things have gone from regularly scheduled to very much not! Thursdays are no longer good update days for me. I don't know when I'm going to be able to update during this semester, so I'm going to sort of play it by ear from now until I find a good groove for me to be in. Thank you for being patient with me!

Also I keep meaning to mention!
My tumblr is imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com!! Go ahead and check me out if you're interested! (Warning for lots of strong opinions and gifs of cats)

You wait a little while for Karkat to come back downstairs after staying with Gamzee long enough for him to fall asleep, but that doesn’t happen. You wonder if Karkat has also fallen asleep, and decide that if that is the case then you absolutely have to have a picture. The blackmail opportunity is too good.

You go upstairs, your feet actually landing on the last few steps- just taps- because fuck Karkat. You don’t fly everywhere. Just most places. Your phone is already in your hand but when you approach the guest room you hear voices, not snores. Gamzee is not asleep.

“- thought it was funny, did it just ‘cause he could most oftentimes, thought it so motherfuckin hilarious-” Gamzee is saying, voice a high pitched whine, and you can hear as well as feel Karkat shooshing him. Oh shit you are not meant to be here. You backpedal quickly and head back to the main floor. You can still feel their breathing, though, hyper attuned to them now that you're trying to pay attention to literally anything else. What’s that psycho-babble Rose says about white bears and thinking about things? Bluh, either way, you can hear (feel, feel in your soul) the shaky crying-breathing of Gamzee, irregular with what is likely talking, and Karkat’s steady exhales and sharp inhales, probably continued shooshing. You can’t stop thinking about it. The way they’re breathing is apparently the only thing your brain is capable of focusing on now, of course, because why should anything be reasonable with you??

You suppose you should maybe try to think of dinner things? How is it already so late???? Time is fake. You’re going to demand Dave to fix it sometime. Or maybe you can ask Aradia, she seems nice. Davepeta you don’t trust with that kind of request, they’ll find some way to turn it around and prank you and while, SAME, you also do not want to invite pranking upon your person. It simply is unbecoming of a trickster of your caliber.

You really do need to go grocery shopping. Especially now that you have more than one person living here. You might be able to sustain yourself on ramen, eggs, and frozen veggies, but you
shouldn’t do that to Gamzee. More than once. You should also probably pick up vitamins for him, and iron supplements. Maybe fish oil? You never figured out what that’s supposed to be good for, but you know it’s supposed to be good. You might need to do some research on troll nutrition. Nobody you know is really a nutritionist, Jane and Uncle Crocker are sort of the most food savvy out of all of you and while you love your adopted uncle/biological son, he’s still only human and Gamzee is still very much not.

You set a couple packs of ramen on the counter and get a pot of water set to boiling, then start chopping up veggies. Once you're done chopping, you remember that ramen is actually REALLY quick to make (which is why you get it so often) and you don't need to be doing prep for a while yet. They only recently headed up there. So you stick the eggs back in the fridge, turn off the stove, and put the veggies in a container that you also stick into the fridge. The ramen is in packets so you can just leave them where they are.

You sigh. Gamzee’s breathing has only gotten heavier, still crying, and you are so incredibly tempted to float another glass of water up there. Karkat’s is still a rhythmic slow out, sharp in, and they're both still at the forefront of your head. You go to the living room, pull your laptop out of your sylladex, and put your earphones in. You put on electro swing, telling yourself you're just turning it up loud because you like it so much, but it doesn't block out their breathing so you sigh again and turn it back down. Of course it doesn't block out their breathing, John, quit being so fucking stupid. You know you don't “hear” their breathing so much as feel it, know it. You know the breath of the people around you like you know every extension of your body- every particle- when you are scattered into a million pieces and feeling like yourself. But you're back on Earth, now, so you need to keep a lid on your desire to be the wind or your friends are going to start giving you concerned looks and talking behind your back because they're worried again.

You've gotten pretty good at hiding it, these last four years. You would never have been able to hide those things about yourself that make them worry from your Jade. She knew you as well as Rose knows Dave. She could read you like a book. But this Jade- your sister, you love her, a gift and a goddess to your life- is not, actually, truly, your Jade.

Davepeta sees it, those moments when your guard slips for a moment or three. Davepeta sees it like looking in a mirror, and is even less equipped than you are to deal with it. So you both pretend you don't see it and you help them with their emotional secrets as much as you can, because as much as you really don't want to change anything about yourself (you're not “having issues” or “struggling to reintegrate,” you're FINE, you just don't want the others to worry) you will absolutely never hesitate to help Davepeta or Gamzee or anyone you see in need.

Rose and Dave saw it, back at the beginning, and you can tell that some of your “quirks” are concerning to them even now, but everyone came out scarred after the Game and everybody else is a whole lot more fucked up than you so they leave you be. They just offer their affection and their friendship and really that's all you actually need. You don't need them to know about the days you don't leave your room (weeks), you don't need them to know about the way you leave all the windows in your house open- even when it rains- so you can feel the wind without having to go outside (despite the way you leave the curtains drawn), you don't need them to know about your diet (even your white lies cause Jane and Uncle Crocker to harrumph at you), you don't need them to know your inclination, your urge, your craving, your need to turn into the wind and never turn back. You just need them, and you have them, anchoring you, and that’s enough.

You turn on the TV for white noise. That's all it ever gets used for, save when you have friends over. You do actually manage to get friends over fairly often. They don't leave you alone, nor you them, and you have a nice system of sort of just… living in each other's back pockets. It's nice. You're rarely the one to instigate interactions though. You never do anything except visit with
them, so you never have anything to say. Even back before the Game, though, you were infrequently the one to start conversations. They always came to you, and they still do.

The part of your brain that sometimes screams at you to shove a paring knife through your eye or let yourself fall out of the atmosphere in flesh form will occasionally tell you that some day they're all going to stop coming to you- that you can see it happening little by little, even now, as the years go by- but you're reasonably good at telling that part of your brain ‘shut up Craig’ and moving on.

Slow out, sharp in. Shaky, irregular, increasing pace. Their breathing is STILL overwhelming in your mind, like the ticking of a particularly noisy grandfather clock but you don't have any ear plugs to use against this. The rate at which Gamzee is breathing now is really concerning, though. You fear he’s having some sort of panic attack. You pause your music and can hear muffled, quiet, but still clearly distressed babbling from upstairs and press your lips thin. What do you even do in this situation? He’s with Karkat! Karkat should be the best person for him to be with, they're moirails, but you also don't want to just SIT THERE! Do you help? Would it be an embarrassment if you helped? A slight to Karkat’s honor? Are you even capable of helping in this situation or would you just be a regular goddamned nuisance?

You take out your earphones and start settling them on top of your keyboard, preparing to go upstairs and do- something- when Gamzee’s breathing suddenly cuts off. You shoot up into the air in alarm but no- no- he's not fucking dead- he just… passed out? You don't know if that's sleep breathing or unconscious breathing, but you can feel Karkat take a deep breath. You imagine it’s an affectionate huff. That seems like the most likely action for Karkat to take.

Okay so now he’s probably gonna come back downstairs and join you? You uneasily float back down onto the couch and put your headphones back in. You're waiting, unable to start something other than a mindless dot game on your computer because you need to be ready when he shows up. But you don't want to look like you're anticipating his arrival either. You don't know how to behave. Having people over and not directly interacting with them is weird. You don't know what to do with yourself. But Karkat at least seems calm? His breathing is less than notable, though still so fucking prominent in your brain, and you wonder when he's gonna get up. What should you do when he does?

You worry and fidget with the dot game until his breathing drops off too, drifting asleep instead of snapping out of consciousness. Oh. So they're both asleep now. Okay. Uhm. What… do you do…?

You're gonna talk to Jade. No, no, you did that not too long ago, saying hi to her again this soon would be weird. You also don't really have anything to say, still, to anyone really. Karkat and Gamzee are the most exciting things going on and while you're kind of freaking out it's not like that’s gonna be able to turn into a whole conversation.

Oooooh, you know what you haven't done yet? You haven't yelled at Rose. You're mad at her and you haven't yelled at her yet. You should do that while you're still mad, it'd hardly be fair if you only yelled at Dave and also this is a thing that Rose deserves to get yelled at for.

But you don't want to. It's exhausting being angry, and you love her, and yelling at her means confrontation and while you know confronting Dave usually ends well (as well as it can, anyway) Rose is so, so much smarter than you and is a lot better at fighting back and also has a mean streak where she’ll just REFUSE to lose, on anything, ever, and sure she’s tactful about it usually but just because she isn't frothing at the mouth like a mad dog doesn't mean she won't clamp her teeth in deep.

You whine out loud. Nobody’s here to hear you- nobody awake that is. You hate this. You hate being in this position and for a brief moment you hate her for putting you here.
Then you feel guilty because of course you don't hate Rose, you love her, you're just so angry at her for her inaction. She’s never had Dave’s problems with standing up and throwing down. Even when he was at the height of his coolkid veneer she was still 1000% more ready to fight than every other human that has ever existed. Why would she, of all people, Rose Lalonde, let herself get shuffled into inaction?

You're so angry. Your chest hurts. Your heart hurts. You need to think about something else.

Slow in- slow- hale- inhale. Slow ex- slow- hale- exhale. Gamzee’s breathing is just half a beat behind Karkat’s, but it stays there. They're both constant, just a little off. Slow in- slow- hale- inhale. Slow ex- slow- hale- exhale. You willfully breathe along with. You don't need to think of anything else, just breathe. Your breath can’t sync up fully with one or the other, attention always caught by the one you're not matching and staggering off. So you force your breathing to go even as theirs, and wedge yourself in the middle. Slow in- slow- hale- in- slow- hale- inhale. Slow ex- slow- hale- ex- slow- hale- exhale. You don't need to be anything more than the air flowing in and out of these three pairs of lungs. You calm down and just flow, just breathe. Slow in- slow- hale- in- slow- hale- inhale. Slow ex- slow- hale- ex- slow- hale- exhale. You force yourself to sneeze. You need to go yell at Rose, and while you might never be “ready” you’re less unready than you were ten minutes ago.

You Become, because you fly faster that way, and head out your open window. You don't even have any blinds in your way this time (maybe Aradia is onto something)! You shoot up, a twist of leaves and sand twirling upward in your wake, and shoot off to the northwest, where this region’s brooding caverns and- subsequently- Kanaya and Rose’s cottage are.

Rose is outside when you arrive, and you get a terrible feeling that little miss Seer over here knew you were coming. You force yourself back into your flesh body and touch down in front of her.

“Hello, John,” she says, looking up with surprised eyebrows and closing her book. She sets it on the wicker table next to her chair and stands up, “I thought it fortuitous to spend some time outside today, but I didn't think you were coming, what with your houseguests.”

“They're asleep in the guest bedroom and I'm here to yell at you,” you tell her, and she nods. You are rapidly losing hot air. You are starting to feel like a child in a similarly speedy fashion.

“Dave told me about you yelling at him, so I figured it was only a matter of time. One moment please.” You hover there uselessly as Rose goes through the astoundingly well-maintained garden that takes up the entirety of their yard and hollers in through the door. “Kanaya darling, I'm going to be a little busy for a while. If you hear shouting please don't be alarmed!”

Kanaya shouts something back that you don't hear, and Rose closes the door and returns to you. Your anger at her is now about half personal humiliation, half dogmatic insistence that she is in the wrong. When she arrives you probably look constipated but you're rounding cowed and coming right back to furious. She holds her arms out to her sides briefly and then clasps them in front of her, and you explode at her.

You shout at her for her negligence; her carelessness and self-absorption. You know she has a spine, why didn't she use it? You know she is hellfury and black ichor, why was she passive just because it was happening to someone she didn't particularly care about? You don't bring up yourself, you keep it focused on Gamzee, because if she's going to make you feel like you're acting like a child the least you can do is remind her you're mad for a good fucking reason. She keeps her hands folded in front of her and her eyes down, and you are vindicated with the sight of her lips pressing thinner and her shoulders sometimes flinching- minute- as you strike your points.
And then you're out of hot air and you feel stupid and cruel and you're red in the face and kind of want to cry.

Rose nods, and you feel so fucking childish you can't breathe for a moment, chest clenched tight.

“Everything you’ve said has been true.” Rose looks up and stares just above your face, a little to the left. She swallows, rocks on her heels a little, and tilts her head briefly to the side, painted black lips pressed to invisibility. A deep inhale, “Truth be told, I've been thinking of this myself. Since you and Karkat went back for Gamzee, and doubled and doubled again when Dave contacted me after you yelled at him.”

Of course she's already been thinking about this. Stupid boy, why would you ever think you could tell her anything she doesn't already know?

“You're right, and you're completely entitled to yell at me about it.”

“I'm sorry,” you say quietly, pressing the heel of your palm up under your glasses. Dumb, stupid boy. What were you even hoping to accomplish.

“Don't, hey, John, don’t. You're completely right.” Rose comes closer and puts a hand on your shoulder and you whine in wordless frustration. You're angry at her, but she's one of your best friends and you love her but you're angry but you feel so stupid but but but but.

You pull her into a hug because emotions are hard and yours are dumb. She hugs back.

“I'm sorry, John.”

“I'm not the one you should be apologizing to,” you mutter. You feel her flinch and she nods against your shoulder.

“You're right, of course.” She sighs. “I wish you'd been on the meteor with us, John. I don't know how any of us let this mess get to where it is.”

Her tone says “not finished” so you wait a while before you speak, giving her a chance to continue, if she needs to.

“I feel awful,” she tells you quietly. You pull back from the hug, feet like lead where they meet solid ground, and look her in the face.

“Hey, hey, Rose, don’t-”

“I feel stupid and cruel and useless. I'm supposed to be a Seer, but I couldn't even see that something was wrong when it was right in front of me! I have no excuses,” she says, sounding like she's walking on a tightrope between crying and shouting. Condemning herself. “I feel awful and I absolutely deserve to.”

You cup her cheek and leave your other hand on her shoulder from the hug. “Rose, hey, stop that, no you don't-”

“John,” she says, voice getting teary and hands gripping at your wrists, “you just read me a particularly angry laundry list of reasons why I do deserve to feel terrible! And you're right!”

“You- should feel bad, but not terrible!” you flounder, backpedaling and adrift. She snorts gracelessly and leans her head into your hand.
“You're too forgiving for your own good,” she tells you, “You made your points now stick to them you silly boy.”

“I will be as wishy washy as I damn well please,” you say stubbornly. She chuckles mirthlessly at you, and nods.

“Of all the things I know about you, John, that's one thing I have never once forgotten.” She pauses, and you flounder for something else to say, something to make this better. She sighs, and you feel only worse.

“I'm sorry,” she repeats, “I was selfish.”

“Yeah,” you agree, because she was, and saying she wasn't will just make you sound dumb and wishy-washy again. You wish you had more to tack onto that, some silver lining, but Rose’s mouth works faster than your brain.

“It's okay that you're mad at me, I would be too- in your position.”

“I'm gonna keep being mad until you apologize to Gamzee,” you say, pulling her back in for a hug.

“That's reasonable,” she says into your hair.

“I hate feeling mad,” you tell her shoulder as she balls the fabric of the back of your shirt under her jade painted nails, “it's gross and awful and it’s like feeling sick.”

“The same might be said for me, and feeling guilty.” You feel awful and she feels awful and you regret even coming here at all.

“Come inside?” she says, and it's less like she's offering and more that she’s asking you to. So you agree, feeling bad for making her feel bad and still kind of angry and still feeling stupid and you have so many emotions and none of them are good right now and why is this so hard?

“I'm going to pour myself a glass of iced fruit tea, want any?” Rose offers as you go through her door, feet heavy on the path to her threshold.

“Yeah,” you say, and slump down at her pretty breakfast table. The furniture is made of dark wood and has floral cushions and skulls carved into the wooden frames with tentacles looping gracefully in wooden petrification. They're basically exactly what one might expect people like Rose and Kanaya to own.

The silence is synonymous to agony. Your ears are hyper aware of the sound of the refrigerator door opening, of the clinking of glasses as she sets them on the counter, the slosh of liquid. Your mind is wired to her breathing, reminding you of her uneven distress. The social atmosphere is heavy and cumbersome, and you want- you want- something. Something, anything, just a craving for something different than the thing that is happening now.

Rose sets a glass down in front of you and you pry yourself up off the surface of the table (also made of dark wood, also with flowers, skulls, and and tentacles carved into the edges and legs).

“Thanks,” you say as Rose lifts her glass to her lips.

Her eyes widen as you lift yours and she starts with a, “John, wait-” as you are already sipping.

Oh. Alcohol. She put cherry wine in with her fruit tea and handed you the wrong glass.
You interrupt her by quickly downing the entire glass. She cuts off with a small noise of shock, then laughs softly as you firmly place the glass down on the table again.

“I guess that’s fair,” Rose remarks, looking embarrassed and also not at you.

“I’m not gonna blame you for wanting a drink. It’s not like you’re gonna get shitfaced with both me and Kanaya here.”

“And it seems you had a want for one as well,” Rose remarks. She gets up and brings over the wine bottle, then pours a solid amount into her glass, almost to the point where you’d worry she might spill her drink over the lip. She takes a hefty swig and you shuffle your chair along the kitchen tile, closer to hers. You plant your face in her shoulder, sighing. Your glasses hurt but you’re too tired to move now, and she rests her head on top of yours.

“What a fine mess,” she remarks.

“Nng,” you grunt.

She drinks and you breathe and you're both miserable but you're miserable together and that alleviates at least some of it.

“I want Dave,” she tells you quietly. A confession, something small and vulnerable she doesn’t show to people she doesn’t trust. “I want my mom. And no- as much as I love Roxy she doesn’t count.”

You nudge your head against her jaw, trying to be comforting without words, since you don’t have any to say. She’s biting her lower lip again and trying really hard not to cry, but you can feel her shoulder tremble slightly underneath your nose and cheekbone.

“I understand,” you say, also quiet, “the same might be said for me, and Uncle Crocker.” You try to mimic that thing she said earlier, though you can’t be sure of the result.

“Oh John,” she says, voice going a little high and staying very small. You shrug. She takes another drink from her glass and you take a deep breath, then have to force your feet back into being less wind shaped and more feet shaped. Now is definitely not the time to dissipate into the air in a cloud of bad emotions.

“Well aren't you two a fine sight,” Kanaya says as she enters the room. “I take it the shouting didn't go so well?”

“You might say that,” Rose says, sniffling loudly and finishing off her tea. You grunt again from her shoulder, glasses finally pressing into your face enough to genuinely hurt and make you want to move, but her head is still on top of yours so meeeeeehhh. Also, you don't wanna look at Kanaya. She was a bystander too, but you don't know her like you know Dave and Rose, or even Karkat, so would it even be your place to be mad at her? You get the feeling trying to scold her would go even worse than yelling at Rose.

Kanaya puts the wine back in its place, and pours Rose a glass of ice water. She kisses her forehead and leaves, and you sigh.

“I should probably go home soon,” you say, feeling like gunk coats the insides of all your organs, black sludge and oil and grease.
“You do have housemates in your guest bed.” She doesn't sound like she wants you to leave. Or maybe you're just projecting.

You say goodbye tiredly and kiss her cheek, then she kisses yours, and you don't know how to fix this mess and you don't know if it'll fix itself but she does promise to formalize an apology to Gamzee for her inaction and that makes you feel a little better. Still childish and stupid and useless, but less angry.

Back home, you can feel the steady breathing of your guests. Still asleep, still pressed so close together you have to wait until you're actually in the building before you can distinguish where one breath starts and the other’s breath ends. The packets of ramen are still on the counter, and it's about dinner time, so you start a pot of water boiling and get the veggies and eggs back out of the fridge. Cooking is nice. Patterned, rhythmic. There is a clear next step and since you know what you're doing it's pretty hard to fuck it up. Eggshells are always a pain but meh, they're not so bad. Once done you bowl it out in three portions and set them on the counter, still piping hot, and go to wake up Gamzee and Karkat.

Your mood has improved considerably since you left Rose’s, the familiarity of cooking and the steadiness of their breathing working marvels to calm you, so you're smiling faintly as you tap on the door with your knuckles. Neither wake, so you float on in. Hm. You should wake Gamzee up first. Karkat is loud when he wakes up (and always, but waking up is still a noisy endeavor) so if you woke him up first he’d probably be shouts and startle Gamzee and you don't wanna startle Gamzee. Gentle things for the-

You can see the codpiece making a slight bulge in the covers. Okay, after dinner you are making Karkat make him take another shower, and you are going to put out clean clothes and make him quit wearing that abomination to god. Maybe you can offer to have it dry cleaned. It seems hand sewn, from what you remember, probably not good for washing machines, and it would get it away for… a day or two? You have no idea how long it takes to dry clean things. You don't even know what goes into dry cleaning. Chemicals maybe? But aren't those wet? Do people just like, use brushes and barely-damp rags? But how would that get stains out?

You realize you've been spacing out thinking about crotch bulges and laundry for a little too long and have forgotten your original quest. Right. You grab Gamzee’s shoulder and feel his breathing go uneven, so you shake lightly.

“You're gonna have dinner now!” you call, trying to keep your voice a helpful mix of soft-yet-cheerful. Gamzee chirrs rapidly and shifts, rolling more on top of Karkat and snuggling in. “Noooo, Gamzee, that is not awake, that is just being really fucking adorable in your sleep!”

He mumbles something that is 100% unintelligible, then opens his eyes and croons, pressing his lips to Karkat’s cheek. It's stupidly endearing. He nuzzles Karkat’s face, clicking in a way that makes you assume it means something specific to trolls, and then seems to notice your hand on his shoulder and, by extension, you.

“Hey, brother,” he says quietly, sleepily. His voice is all grody from temporary disuse and his words are heavy and syrupy.

“Hi Gamzee! Can you stand up for me now? It's time to wake up and eat dinner!”

He makes sleepy-unhappy noises at you, but lets you put your arms beneath his armpits and haul him to his feet. It’d be awkward, given how much taller he is than you, if it weren't for the fact that you can float.
“Thanks, Gamzee! Okay, fair warning, things in this room are going to become very active and very loud, right about… now. HEY KARKAT!” you shout, flinging yourself up into the air and body slamming down onto him, the mattress briefly swallowing the both of you. He, predictably, immediately starts screeching and tries to punch you in the face, but can't get a good angle. The two of you tussle for a bit, but gravity and the blanket end up as the victors as the two of you accidentally roll off the bed. Gamzee is laughing and Karkat is screeching and you're not in love, but if you were, this is what it'd feel like.

“Dinner’s ready!” you announce cheerfully, and Karkat just screech-clicks at you louder. You float up, blanket and Karkat getting dragged upwards with you, all in one tangle, and Gamzee helps you both from remaining attached at the cloth forevermore. Karkat is yelling at you but you're just laughing, and Gamzee is smiling blithely and papping him and you get the feeling that on the inside he's laughing along with you.

Dinner is cool enough to eat once everyone gets downstairs and you nudge Karkat’s water glass at him from across the coffee table. He's been shouting! Gamzee is between the two of you on the couch, and you almost want to buy a dinner table specifically so you can sit next to Gamzee and still have a good angle to kick Karkat’s shins. As things are, Gamzee’s between you, and you don't want to accidentally hurt him in the process.

Gamzee bonks his head on top of yours halfway through his bowl. “Tastes great, brother,” he says happily.

“Tastes like fifty sent insta-nourishment with vegetation and eggs to cover up the fact that it's depression food,” Karkat rudely adds.

“Ramen isn't depression food!” you protest. Also, you're not (usually) depressed. At least, you don't have it as bad as any of the others. You're fine! You are handling things perfectly fine, you just have a few hangups every now and then.

“Ramen is cheap and fast and favored by the impoverished and depressed. You are not impoverished.”

“And I'm also not depressed!” you argue. Karkat snorts and resumes eating.

“Hey, now, brothers, ain't no need for you to make as might genuinely unsettle at each other.”

Heh. He’s right. Pestering Karkat is fun and it can be fun to get pestered back (mostly because he’s hilariously terrible at it), but this conversation is just likely to end with you both upset in a not-fun way. You make yourself sneeze, and Gamzee blesses you.

“Thanks!” you chime. Karkat finishes first, Gamzee second, and you third, and Karkat chats with Gamzee about life events before you suggest showering and changing clothes. Gamzee looks a little bashful, and asks that you maybe not help out this time. Karkat also doesn't want to help out but Gamzee coerces him via puppy dog eyes and high pitched plead-whining.

“Thanks!” you chime. Karkat finishes first, Gamzee second, and you third, and Karkat chats with Gamzee about life events before you suggest showering and changing clothes. Gamzee looks a little bashful, and asks that you maybe not help out this time. Karkat also doesn't want to help out but Gamzee coerces him via puppy dog eyes and high pitched plead-whining.

“Also, we should get your codpiece drycleaned. It's got blood all over it and also probably smells.”

“We could just stick it in the wash…” Gamzee says, fiddling with the waistline, suddenly a little anxious.

“Isn’t it a little delicate for that?” you ask, trying to not sound like you want to get rid of it for as long as physically possible without offending him.

“…yeah,” he says, dragging the word out like you're prying it from him.
“So you don't wanna ruin it!” you say. And on one hand, you are being genuinely helpful. You don't want one of his comfort items to get ruined! You just… also don't want said comfort item within 839,273 feet of you. So, compromise! And who says you're not a Slytherin? (You're not, you are 100% Hufflepuff. Badger pride!)

“Yeah,” Gamzee agrees, sighing. “You're right, bro. ‘S just…”

“It's alright, it won't disappear!!” you assure him. Karkat affirms your assurance, and Gamzee is still not terribly happy about it but willing enough to go along. Before Karkat and Gamzee go bathe, Karkat pulls you aside to order you to contact Roxy and get her to use her software and programming prowess to find the dry cleaner that takes as long as possible while still maintaining a good quality. You're on it.

Once you hear the water start running, you pull out your phone.

**ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering tipsyGnostalgic [TG]**

EB: Hi Roxy!

TG: sup sup johnny

TG: wow its been aaaaages since we last saw each other ;)

EB: ehehehe

TG: wink wonk

TG: but really tho

TG: sup

EB: Karkat and I (and Gamzee I guess) have a favor to ask you!

TG: well if that aint a helluva lotta ppl vying for my favorisms

TG: this gurl knows how to get them bois

EB: Positively swimming in bitches at all times

TG: u kno it

EB: eheheh

EB: But we need your technical expertise!

EB: Expertise please!

TG: aw hell yeah what u boys need i am queen of the technical shmeccicals

EB: We know

EB: *bows royally to Ms. Queen*

TG: pffft John u r the bestest u kno that?

EB: Oh definitely
TG: but ok so what am i doin w these rad comp smart skillz of mine

EB: Can you use your powers of the internet to find a dry cleaner that has really good quality, but takes a REAAAAAAAALLYYYYYYYYY LOOOOOOOOOONG time?

TG: this smells like mischief

EB: Gamzee has blood stains on his cod piece

EB: So we’re gonna help a brother out and get it cleaned for him!

TG: 4 a v v long time

EB: The longest

TG: isnt that a lil

TG: rude :


EB: It… might be

TG: johnny boy!

TG: i nvr took u 4 a scoundrel

EB: I have to start wearing an eyepatch and grow out my mustache

TG: whut mustache

EB: Replace my hand with a hook and

EB: Hey!!

TG: sorry bby but Jade has more of a mustache than u and she shaves like daily

EB: I shave too!

EB: I come from a very long family line of impeccably shaved men

TG: ez 2 do when u dont have nething to shave in the first place

EB: :PPP

TG: ur gonna have to face them facts sometime

EB: I grow facial hair just fine thanks!

TG: lol im just teasin bby

TG: but ok

TG: ill help u n karkitten w ur behind the back help not helpin doublecrossin cahooty nonsense

TG: but only bc ur cute
EB: Karkat isn’t cute ew gross

TG: yeah but his name has cat in it and i am a lady that is easily wooed

TG: *swoons*

EB: Karcat

TG: karkitty

EB: Kittykitten

TG: omg call him that

EB: I kinda want to now

TG: Imao yes do it he is HIGH-LARRY-US when u rile him up like the worlds tiniest teakettle

EB: Right???

EB: It’s so funny!!!

TG: so hey how local of a dry cleaner we goin bc ive found sum koala tea places that seem to take a while

EB: Just go ahead and assume that distance is not an issue

TG: what a considerate friend u 2 r

EB: ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

EB: I have never once claimed to not be an asshole

TG: tru

EB: and to be fair, this is /one/ half-bad thing that we’re doing

EB: and it’s only our intentions!

EB: The action itself is that we’re still helping Gamzee out by cleaning the weirdass freaky clothing choice he’s so attached to

TG: dangerous line a thought johnnyboi

TG: mebe chat w d stri abt that sort of thing he does it a lot

EB: I’m assuming you mean Dirk and not Dave, since I do chat with Dave fairly often and haven’t picked up on that the whole lifetime of knowing him I’ve had

TG: ye

EB: No offence but Dirk is a little high intensity for me to be having a conversation with him about the pitfalls of self-justification with morally ambiguous motivations at their roots

TG: well at least u kno and acknowledge that ur doin it

TG: i swear sometimes he thinks hes the smartest boy in the room which at any given point in time
he totes IS

TG: but it makes it REAL HARD to talk sense in2 him when hes bein a dumbass

EB: But you do a really good job of it!!!

TG: thx

TG: he sure doesnt make my job ez tho

TG: the trolls are right we r in a committed relationship of me haulin ass to make sure his stays out of trouble

TG: lay out the bed and fuckin roses

TG: gettin our romance on up in here

EB: Ah yes, nothing says romance like shouting “Don’t be a fucking dumbass” for the thirtieth time in a row

TG: plot twist he still wont listen

TG: its not until that 31 time when he fucks up so bad hes gotta face real lyfe consequences he finally realizes i was right the whole goddamned time

EB: *pats*

TG: thx

You and Roxy chat a very short while after that, but you already talked with her a bunch earlier that day in the kitchen so you kind of feel like you’re the least interesting conversational partner in the universe. Then you hear the water turn off and tell her goodbye. She makes a big fake huff about being abandoned by her gentleman suitor and whatever will she do, and you suggest she go cry into the bosom of one of her two girlfriends. She sends you a middle finger emoji and asks you if that’s supposed to be a challenge because she is definitely about to go cry in both just to show you up.

The evening goes by in something of a haze, something of a blur after that. Karkat and you both decide, instantaneously and simultaneously, that tonight is a good night for a movie or two. You squabble, as you do, over what you should watch, and Gamzee watches you two with the occasional chuckle. He’s wearing your sweatpants and another one of your sweaters, this one an olive green that you haven’t touched in ages. You don’t remember why you stopped wearing it, but you remember something happened or was said to make you shove it into the back of your closet. How’d he even find…? Nevermind. Gamzee lays on top of Karkat on the couch and you lay on top of him, a pillow under Karkat and a blanket draped over you all.

After that you and Gamzee fly Karkat home, Gamzee in your arms and Karkat clinging to your back. You can’t even jostle around and do loops like you want to, since Gamzee is with you. The fact that Karkat’s mouth- the thing he screams with- is right next to your ear is inconsequential to the desire.

Gamzee actually starts tearing up when Karkat has to go inside and Gamzee can’t follow him. It leads to the most elongated and (for you) awkward goodbye you have ever been forced to stand to the back and a little to the side of in your whole life. At one point Dave comes out, glass in hand and silly straw in mouth, and leans on your shoulder and watches his boyfriend and his boyfriend’s
boyfriend say goodbye as he sips on his apple juice.

“Are Karkat and I this insufferable?” he asks you quietly towards the end of the teary eyed farewells.

“I don’t… think so?” You’re honestly not sure. But then, the fact that you’ve never seen them do this sort of thing probably means that they generally haven’t.

“Cool. Just checkin’. But hey if we do ever start being this insufferable you have my full permission to decapitate me.”

“I thought that was Dirk’s thing?”

“I’ve seen a lot of dead Daves John. Decapitation is just the first thing that came to mind.”

You pat him on the shoulder.

“Heard you had a chat with Rose,” he mentions, like this subject could possibly be offhand.

“Did she tell you how incredibly fucking stupid I was for all of it?” you ask, maybe a little bitterly.

“Nah. She did say that you were totally right and she was being stupid for all of it and y’all had a nice pity party together afterward though.”

“She wasn’t being stupid,” you say, frowning.

“Yeah well, argue with her about that.” Dave’s looking at you weird and you can’t parse it. So you just shrug- dislodging him from where he’s leaning on your shoulder, and cross over to Gamzee and Karkat. You break it up, since it looks like they’re not going to on their own, and take Gamzee home with you as Dave hauls Karkat inside.

Once home you settle Gamzee into the guest bed and lay with him until he falls asleep, then make your way quickly to the bathroom and to your bed before your breathing syncs up with his and you fall asleep as well.

Chapter End Notes

I cried somewhere around 5 times this chapter.

Be sure to leave a comment with your thoughts!!!
So You've Had a Bad Day

Chapter Summary

Ahahaha wow sorry this took like, what, three weeks? School's been kicking my ass. I'm still not entirely pleased with this chapter but I'm gonna post it anyway, cause I want to move on to more interesting things.

Chapter Notes

So I have received more lovely fanart!!! Thanks again to all who do that for me, they always make my day!!

http://imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com/post/157426790947/dankgemestho-gamjohn-inspired-by
Also thanks @Draeth for quite possibly my favorite description of Caliborn ever I used it in this chap.

You don't even open your eyes before you know that today is a bad day. A “one of Those Days” day. A day when hauling yourself out of bed is going to cost you half your energy and trying to spoon yogurt out of the tiny plastic canister will cost you the second half. You won't be able to finish the yogurt before your body tells you it doesn't want anymore food, and you'll listen and put the half empty container, silvery foil glistening in the internal refrigerator light and streaked with pink where the strawberry paste touched it before opening, back on the shelf and crawl back into bed and the covers will almost be too heavy to move back on top of you if you couldn't pull wind in through the open windows to help alleviate their weight. It's a day when your phone will buzz and you'll unlock the screen in hopes you'll find the energy, somewhere in your tired body, to respond in any manner, any manner at all, but after reading the texts you receive you will let your arm flop back down onto your mattress and leave the chat logs void of cobalt blue. Maybe in the afternoon or evening you will crawl from your bed with a restlessness that compels you to do something, but all conceivable tasks will be dissatisfying and your attention will flit with fickle mediocrity between mundane tasks and old interests that no longer feel interesting. Maybe you’ll ponder going out for a jog, but the concept of using that much energy will make you flop restlessly against the back of your couch because while you’ll need to do something, you'll still be so fucking tired.

You hate days like these. You don't want to get up and start the inevitable cycle rolling. So you snuggle farther back under the covers and chase the blissfulness of sleep and whatever dream you were just having, knowing even as groggy as you are that sleep is lost and a 24 hour cycle of suffering is upon you.

Oh. Oh no.
Gamzee.

Why the hell did you sign up to be the one to look out for another person you are the least qualified for this job. You instinctively stretch out your mind (not far) and snatch up awareness of his breathing, still asleep, and then curse yourself because now you're not going to be able to unfocus on that. You should get up. You know Gamzee is scared of waking up on his own, you should be there when he wakes up. You should. Get up. You should get up. You should move your legs. Your arms. Your arm. You're even facing the right direction to get out of your bed, you just have to move the covers off of you, swing your legs off the edge, and sit up. Then stand. Just. Up. Even just moving a limb at all would be a step in the right direction. You hate yourself so much this isn't fucking rocket science it isn't even something that would require you to be smart! You just need to get moving but you're not. You have fully functional limbs but you're not moving them and god you just want to lay here and be useless all day but someone is actually counting on you but you're so. Goddamned. Tired.

You lay like the world's most useless sack of shit for an undefined span of time after that, arguing with yourself and still not moving, until Gamzee wakes up on his own. You feel even worse, knowing that you're not there but you're still not moving even as he's waking up and god you are so fucking worthless why does anyone even bother with you? Gamzee’s breath stays slow then sharply spikes, and you're still in bed even though you know he's breathing faster but your limbs still aren't working and you can hear him moving around with your ears and not your Breath but your covers are undisturbed and god why are you like this? He opens your door in a panic, and that is finally enough to get you to jolt, but not sit up. Not do anything meaningful.

“John,” he says, and you can hear his relief. You can look at him with unaided eyes and even through the blur that everything is when you're not wearing your glasses, you can still see his shoulders slump and his posture rapidly unwind.

“Hey,” you mumble, shifting but not sitting underneath your blanket, “sorry.”

“Aw brother don't pay no mind,” he says. Forgiving to a fault, eager for anything just as long as it means you're still there.

“Mm sorry,” you mumble again, and he approaches you.

“You tired?” he asks, sitting down on the edge of your bed and looking down at your face.

“Mhm.” You can't look him in the eye. Stupid, useless..!

He chuckles lightly and trails thin fingers through your hair. “C’mon, brother, ain't you thirsty?”

Maybe a little, but not enough to compel you to move. You can see what he's doing though, and you snort.

“Nnn.”

“Ain't you hungry?” he asks, sweet and light, giving your scalp a nice scratch. He twists and halfway lays down next to you, leaning on his elbow and stroking your hair.

“Nnn.”

“Don't you gotta take a piss?” Gamzee asks, nearly singsong. You chuckle a little bit, and yeah you kind of do need to pee but- again- not enough to compel you to move.

He crawls under the covers with you and lays close, nose to nose, with you and the pair of you slip
your arms over each other and you let yourself feel less guilty over everything. Still definitely not great, but not horrible enough that it consumes all of your active thought.

“Mm, you know, brother, I’m pretty motherfuckin’ sure this real sweet dude I know once told me that if you lay in bed too long, lethargy or some motherfuckin’ shit like it becomes a motherfuckin’ thing.”

“Well you can tell that dude to fuck off cause I’m not moving,” you mutter, unable to help a small grin.

“C’mon, brother,” Gamzee jokes quietly, nudging his forehead against yours, “carp dime and all that shit.”

You snort loudly before breaking into quiet giggles. “Gamzee, it’s carpe diem,” you correct.

“Motherfuckin’ same fuckin’ thing,” he says casually, shrugging without concern. He shifts a bit, scooching closer, and hooks his leg up over yours.

“Might as well be,” you agree. There’s something a little off, but you can’t figure out what it is so you ignore it. If it’s important, you’ll remember later.

“C’mon brother,” he coos at you, turning his face into the pillow beneath his head, sounding very much like he is not actually trying to get you out of bed. You could laugh at how similar this is to the time when you went to wake him up, so you do. Just a chuckle. He’s trying to make it funny, after all! Now all that needs to happen is for you to conk the fuck out and for him to say he’s gonna dick around on his phone for a little while but then-

Ohhhh fuck. You should… get him a phone. That’s probably actually really super important for him to have one of his own.

“John,” he says, quiet.

“Yeah?”

“I woke up alone.”

You flinch, guilty. “I’m sorry, Gamzee, I didn't mean-”

“No, no, brother, I woke up alone and you're still here!”

Oh. “Of course, Gamzee, I'm not going anywhere.” You snuggle him a little closer and his leg is like a vice over your hip. The hand on top of your bodies reaches up and he holds your jaw, bony fingers pressed against your cheek.

“You're here,” he repeats, almost too soft to hear, forehead pressed tight against yours.

“I'm here,” you echo, comforting him. You pull back and press a kiss to his nose, and his face moves a little like he's trying to facilitate the touch but you accidentally almost end up kissing his lips instead of his nose and the whole thing is an awkward mess but you manage to get your lips to his nose and after you laugh, chest unclenching and going light at the awkward silliness. He laughs along too, and then presses his face to your collarbone, top hand moving so his thin arms can curl around you like tiny serpents.

“Brother, he says, voice still rough with morningness (you fail to notice that it wasn't this rough earlier, when he was trying to coax you out of bed), “how’s a motherfucker supposed to believe this
shit ain't high fuckin’ fantasy when you keep doing things as make it fantastic like this?”

You laugh a little more. “I guess I’m just great like that. Here, let’s try again.” You scooch your arms up and cup his face, then guide him as you kiss his nose. He honks as you do, and you both laugh.

Woah! His face is like, actually tinted purple! That's so weird. Even though, sure, you live on a planet where ¼ of the population is troll, you’ve really only interacted with like, two trolls these past two years and one of them was a vampire so that hardly counts. You interact with Catavros and Davepeta and Terezi too but Terezi was only through snapchat and Catavros is a sprite and Davepeta is a sprite AND half human so really Karkat is the only normal troll you've spoken with and he’s red like humans are and wow-

Wait what were you doing? You sneeze. “Sorry, spaced out there for a second!”

Gamzee jolts, turns a little more purple, and pulls his face back from yours. “Uh- yeah, brother, ahaha motherfuck me too. So uh, John..?”

“Yeah?” you ask. You stroke your thumb along the hard arch of his pronounced cheekbone. He's so thin.

“Do you wanna make- I, fuck,” he blurts, stops, drifts off.

“Do I wanna make..?” You echo, confused. You’re reminded of the slime pie conversation you had with him back at Karkat’s place but you don’t think he means that.

Gamzee opens his mouth, closes it, mumbles, “Breakfast, brother, you wanna go make food with me?”

“Oh, sure! There's no need to be nervous about asking that!”

Gamzee shrugs and smiles bitterly, turning into your hand and mumbling into your palm. “Often occurrence that I would misinterpret, brother, and overstep my bounds. Ruin a good thing I had by asking too much. Don’t- don’t wanna do that with you.”

You feel your heart squeeze just a little harder for him. “Ohhhh, Gamzee, hey,” you coo at him, “asking to go eat is not overstepping your bounds, not at all! I’m glad you want to eat! Eating is important for living and also gaining weight!” How could asking to eat ever be ‘overstepping??’ Next time you see Caliborn you are going to swing your hammer so hard!!!

“Heh, yeah, brother, asking to eat,” he repeats, mumbling still, not meeting your eye. You’re too mad at Caliborn to really notice.

“C’mon, then, let's go eat!” you announce, half persistently cheerful for Gamzee’s sake, half bubbling anger under the surface. Fuck Caliborn. Fuck Caliborn so hard. Just. Just god what the fuck!

Gamzee clings close to you and it's not until you have the eggs in the frying pan and the half-finished bag of shredded cheese open that you notice you're up and out of bed. Huh. Guess there's nothing like getting seriously pissed off at a little ugly hulk to beat those morning blues. Like when you remember you have an opportunity to piss off Karkat and get out of bed anyway- except you don't actually like Caliborn and kind of wish he was dead and eradicated from existence.

Scrambled eggs with cheese get eaten, both of you leaning against the counter top. You pull out your phone and check your messages: one from Jade, reminding you about this afternoon/evening,
one from Rose, which you don't open yet, and one from Roxy. You read Roxy’s, and you realize what felt wrong earlier, when Gamzee’s leg was over your hips.

“Oh! Just remembered, your codpiece! Roxy found a dry cleaner, five star reviews for it. Should get it nice and clean without damaging it. We can drop it off whenever you're ready!”

Gamzee smiles at you. “Thanks, brother, and thank that chica for me. I’d a motherfuckin’ preference for us to go soon? Soon as possible? So I can get it back soon as possible?”

You feel a tiiiiiiiiiiiiiny bit bad. Just a little though.

“Sure! We could drop it off after I get ready?”

You haven’t showered in a while (whoops) so you kinda really super need to do that, and probably try to brush your hair and wear regular clothes again. You've spent so much time in your god tiers lately!

“Yeah bro, I'm up and motherfuckin’ down for that.”

“Sounds good. I'll go shower then, it shouldn't take me too long. You okay to be on your own, for that?”

Gamzee bites his lip and frowns, staring at the plate in his hands, small pebbles of yellow and translucent streaks of oil on the ceramic.

“Yeah, brother. I should be good.”

You give him a one-armed hug and bonk your forehead against his hair. You almost knock into his horn but only just manage to avoid it.

“Cool, I'll be quick about it!” you promise. You leave your dishes in the sink (still haven't unloaded the dishwasher (lazy boy)) and dart off. Once you're naked in the bathroom, you stare at the showerhead. Ugh. Uuugh. Showering is so much work and the surge of energy you got from wanting to murder Caliborn is gone now. You feel small and heavy again, but you're already naked and you GOTTA shower (your friends will notice if you haven't (Jade especially, with her half-canine nose)) so you twist the knob and stand beneath the spray. You try to make it fast, but you keep spacing out so you end up taking half an hour anyway. Oh well. Shorter than most of your showers, these days.

You towel off and something sounds off but you can't pick it out. You stretch out your Breath, searching for Gamzee, and find him right outside the bathroom door. You throw on your pants (they're not that dirty (they're the least dirty jeans you own (you need to do laundry))) and shirt (genuinely clean, you have enough of them to keep you going for at least two months without needing to repeat) and wipe your glasses of steam before leaving, still toweling your hair. Gamzee doesn't look up when the door opens. He's sitting on the floor and staring into space, back to the wall next to the bathroom door.

“Hey,” you greet, draping the towel around your neck. He doesn't look away from where he's staring at the wall, doesn't even blink.

“Gamzee?” You're a little concerned now, speaking louder. He blinks, but is still off somewhere else.

You crouch down next to him, staring at his face. Gently, you reach out and touch his shoulder. He blinks, a moment passes, and then he turns and looks at the intruding presence. Then his eyes
trail up your arm and to your face, and his eyes meet yours, which are staring at him with open concern.

“Hey,” you repeat, “you okay?”

“Hey, brother,” he says softly, just a breath. He shudders and squeezes his eyes closed really tight before looking back to your face. “Yeah, yeah I'm good.”

“Okay. Cause you didn't respond when I said stuff to you earlier.”

“Did I?” You shake your head. “Sorry, brother. Wasn't- was somewhere off in my pan. ‘S a little empty in there now, honk, sometimes- sometimes gets a little foggy in all that space. I get lost in all of it. I don't- I'm sorry I just-”

“Hey,” you cut him off, “easy, Gamzee, easy. Shush. It's okay.” You give him a hug, glad for your gravity defying powers, and he clings to you again, face pressed to your shoulder. “There we go, easy, I've got you. You're fine, Gamzee, you don't have to be sorry for getting lost in your own head.” You kiss his hair. “Glad to have you back.”

“John,” he whines, and you can hear the tearing-up voice, “why are you so nice to me?”

You don't really have a good answer so you tell him, “Well, someone’s gotta be. You deserve to have people be nice to you, Gamzee.”

“How can you even know that?” Gamzee asks. You think you recognize the tone. The desperate searching, not for an argument against you but because he’s losing the argument in his own head. You hate that sort of thing, because when you’re not even the opponent how the hell are you supposed to win?

“Everyone deserves to have at least someone be nice to them. Otherwise how are they ever supposed to have a chance to be nice themselves?”

“I did go and get that chance blown, brother.”

“Yeah, someone else blew it for you. Just cause they were your hands doesn’t mean there weren’t puppet strings attached.”

“Even before,” Gamzee says, and you feel your gut sour. You thought Gamzee was a goofy sweetheart before Caliborn???? “Even before, brother, ain’t nothing as was worth loving in me. I was self destructive and stupid and annoying and only ever a bother and a burden, my own motherfucking lusus didn’t even want shit to do with my broken-ass self why should I deserve-”

“Gamzee.” You meant for you voice to be a little sharp but it came out sharper than you intended. He flinches and you flinch but you've already started so no backing down now, “You deserve people to be nice to you. Even if you’re annoying or stupid or whatever, you still deserve to have people who care about you. Your lusus wasn’t your fault and Caliborn-” he shudders when you say his name out loud, “-wasn’t your fault and none of it was ever your fault okay? You tried to be good, right?”

He nods, “I only ever wanted such, brother.”

“Then that’s what matters. You tried to be good, and you’re still trying to be good. It’s okay to have failings, everyone has failings, and hey, look at me! I’m stupid as hell and intentionally annoying, but I still have people care about me! And if I deserve niceness then so do you!”
“Brother I ain’t hardly comparable to your sweet self—”

“Ah! Yes you are!” you cut him off. “You say you’re stupid and annoying and on top of that being very wrong it also does not mean you are any less worthy of niceness than me.”

“But I’m not—”

“Are you saying I’m not worthy of niceness?”

“Of course not!” Gamzee clutches at your shoulders a little harder and OUCH, claws, you need to ask him to trim those, “I would never, brother, never!”

You scritch between his horns, “Then you aren’t either. Having faults doesn’t make you a bad person, Gamzee, doing things to hurt others on purpose when you’re in control of your own body does. You deserve to have people be nice to you.”

Gamzee whines and curls up tighter, so you just scoop him up and let his legs circle your waist and carry him, one arm supporting under him and one hugging him around the back.

“C’mon, Gamzee, take it easy,” you hush as you carry him to your room, where you toe on your shoes. Socks are for people who have weak ankles and also standards.

“It’s hard, John, it’s hard to believe you when so much of me knows I ain’t worth any of this effort, much as I crave for the kindness you offer up so easy like mercy cultivates itself on your exhales.”

“Oh Gamzee, I know,” you say. Dave and Gamzee aren’t too different, you think idly. There are a lot of things that you think the two of them could bond over. “But it’s okay, I’m not going anywhere and neither is Karkat, we’ll keep taking care of you even if you can’t do the mental mathematics of your ‘worth’ for it, okay?”

“Thank you, John,” he cries, face buried in the crook of your neck and tearing up again.

“Sure, Gamzee, anytime,” you say, sitting on the edge of your bed and waiting for this to pass. You’re awfully tired and you’re not sure how good of a job you’re doing about all of this, but you’re doing your best. You’re not sure what else you can do.

It passes about as quickly as it came, and Gamzee apologizes for crying all over you again. You divert by suggestion the two of you go to the dry cleaner. He once again looks relieved to have a distraction, and goes and finds the flip flops Dave lent him.

It’s as he’s searching for them that you notice what was off about your perception when you came out of the shower. In the kitchen, the dishwasher is on and running, making a steady white noise. The counter tops have been wiped off and there’s a small stack of dishes that don’t have readily found spaces to nestle into, that Gamzee probably couldn’t find the places for.

“Oh, Gamzee!” you exclaim, staring at the clean kitchen, “You didn’t have to!”

Gamzee wanders in, flip flops in his hand, and slips them on as he smiles bashfully at you.

“Figured I oughta help out at least a motherfuckin’ little, bro. Didn’t mind none, got myself all acquainted with your culinary block and it was something to do.”

“Thank you,” you say, feeling both self conscious and very flattered. As a distraction, you pull out your phone and look up where the address is.
The dry cleaner is actually… pretty far away. Which isn’t good or bad, since you’re a god, but you also don’t want to make it SUPER obvious that you’re going out of your way to get rid of that goddamned codpiece for as long as possible.

“So hey, Gamzee, how do you feel about teleporting over there?” you ask. You’d prefer to fly, feel the wind on your face, but you have retcon powers sooooo.

“I’m down, brother, any way you want I’m chill to be up and doing.” Gamzee sounds like he genuinely doesn’t care one way or the other, which hopefully means he doesn’t suspect you and why you want to teleport when previously you flew!

You scoop him up and he readily snuggles close to you. You’re reminded of your conversation about “masculine shoulders” and giggle a little. All the better for troll clowns to hang onto, you guess!

“Uh, John?” he asks.

“Yeah?”

“Are you meaning to leave this here hive with the absorbency plane around your shoulders?”

“Huh- oh! My towel!” You set Gamzee down and nyoom back to the bathroom to deposit the towel, then return, pick him back up and teleport. Then it’s a simple matter of dropping off the codpiece (which gets you both VERY WEIRD LOOKS (from the troll employee, whose eyes widen at the sight of the variety of colors stained onto its surface (thank god the carapacian doesn’t seem to care, only shows delight at the fact that you, Heir of Breath, have chosen their services))) and then you teleport home. You and Gamzee eat lunch, which is reheated pasta from when Aradia and Davepeta were over, and then flop on your couch for a while. You make an offer to start up an episode of an anime or something, but you two sort of chat instead.

Gamzee tells you about his interests, back before the Game took everything. He tells you about clowns and music and rapping and religion, but only very briefly about religion. You really only know that he had one, but not really anything about what it was. You tell him in turn about your dad’s fixation with clowns which might have actually stemmed from this one time when you had a Game nightmare and drew all over your walls but couldn’t see it because of bullshit Game reasons.

“Actually, ah, brother,” Gamzee says, face falling quickly. Oh no, what did you say? “I think, that that might be my motherfuckin’ fault too, by way of puppet hands. I did- I don’t remember why I did it at you, when Dave was the one I was pissed at, but when I got my rage on at him for sending me that video I did take out anger on you too, and sent you nightmares most unwelcome.”

“I fucking hate Caliborn,” is all you can really say to that. Gamzee shrugs uncomfortably, so you bop your head against his.

“Hey, don’t worry about it. A lot of fucked up shit happened to everyone, and it wasn’t your fault.”

“I know, brother, but that don’t stop things from feeling like my fault.”

You kiss his forehead, unable to offer a lot of comfort past that. You still kinda feel tired and shitty, but you like listening to Gamzee talk, even if you don’t really have the effort in your body to respond thoroughly.

You figure going to Jade’s place will give you more to do. She’ll talk and do things and you won’t have to put effort into talking and doing things quite so much.
“I told you we’re going to Jade’s today, right?” you ask.

Gamzee frowns, squinting. “Maybe? I don’t remember, brother, but I’m chill at whatever.”

“Ugh, sorry.”

“Nah, bro, you probably did, but I do have a mighty forgetfulness in me.”

“Heh, I suppose I can relate,” you say, rubbing idly at his shoulder. You get up and put socks on before getting your shoes, this time, since Jade complains about your feet smelling if you don’t, and Gamzee refinds his flip flops and then you scoop him up again.

“Mind flying?” you ask, wanting to kill time and feel the wind. Gamzee grins at you and blinks like he caught something in his eye.

“Anything as means I get to spend more time cuddled up with you, brother,” he says, his warble extra pronounced. You awww.

“I like spending time with you too!” you say brightly, and shoot up into the air. Though, he really does need to eat more if he’s going to be a good cuddle buddy. Of all the words to describe him, soft is not exactly one of them. Well, yes it is, but he’s like a soft boy in his heart, not his body. His body is too bony for soft but his personality is a very soft one. Caution: FRAGILE. Be gentle with the clown. You waste a lot of time on that train of thought, then sneeze and come back to reality. You fly fast, soaring with Gamzee in your arms, and swoop down into Jade’s front yard, which is really just a very large and extensive garden. You ring her doorbell and it’s yanked open a short moment later, Jade beaming at you. She’s wearing overalls and has dirt smears on her wrists and face, a little ring on her wrists where her garden gloves ended between clean hands and dirty arms.

“Hey!” she greets, excited and happy. Simply seeing her makes something in you loosen and brighten up a little. You have the best sister, it is you.

“Hey!” you chime back, and Gamzee waves a little as you set him down.

“Nice to see you again,” Jade tells Gamzee, holding out a hand which he smiles and shakes.

“You too, sis,” he says, staring at her ears instead of her eyes.

“Aren’t they cool?” she says, flattening them and then perking them back up.

“Hell yeah, sis. Didn’t hardly make note of them when last we were getting our acquaintance on.”

“To be fair, I couldn’t make note of much of anything! There was a lot going on.”

“Yeah,” he agrees, finally looking down at her eyes and smiling at her. “Nice place you got, chica,” he says, glancing around at her garden.

“Thanks! I could show you around if you like!” Jade says proudly. She deserves to feel proud of her garden! Gamzee happily agrees and Jade shows him all the different types of plants and can name all of them, and tells you two some of the things various plants are good for, if not food. Then she wants to show him her backyard greenhouse, which has even more plants, and so you float along idly behind them, glad you don’t have to engage for a little while. You like listening to Gamzee’s questions and Jade’s enthusiastic answers.

Once inside, Jade flops down on her couch, ears still perked up. She demands Gamzee tell her about himself, and you two sit on the couch next to her. Gamzee leans against you, and you lean
against the corner of the couch, and you idly braid and unbraid and rebraid and unbraid his hair as he chats, rather idly, about juggling and unicycles that are too long for his legs and scary movies he used to watch because he liked the tension and release of adrenaline that came with getting himself scared shitless in ways that didn’t involve him actually being in danger.

“Horror movies are lame though,” you comment, feeling a little more playful now that you’ve had time to idle amongst friends.

“Bro, bro no, bro horror movies are the best movies,” Gamzee argues idly as you twine locks of hair around each other.

“I gotta agree with John on this one,” Jade says, appearifying a bottle of apple juice from her fridge.

“Oh hey grab me one too,” you ask, and Jade zaps it to you.

“Want one?” she offers Gamzee, already teleporting one into the space above his chest. He fumbles, but manages to catch it.

“Thanks, chica. You’re both wrong about horror movies though.”

Jade laughs and takes a swig from her bottle. “Horror movies are lame though!” she protests.

“All they do is make you jumpy and paranoid,” you agree.

“What, naw brother. They’re all motherfuckin’ fake as shit so you don’t gotta be scared of ‘em, but you still get that jump as if you had been motherfuckin’ chased by daycrawlers or motherfuckin’ sunghouls or some motherfuckin’ such.”

“But what’s the allure of that?” you ask, “Why would that be fun?”

Gamzee opens his mouth, frowns, and then shrugs. “Motherfuck if I know, bro, but it was fun and there’s a whole motherfuckin’ genre for it so’s some other fuckers gotta have their appreciation on for it too.”

“That doesn’t make it less weird,” Jade says, sticking out her tongue.

“What kind of movies do you like, sister?” Gamzee asks.

“Musicals!” Jade says brightly. “Sometimes if the songs are simple enough I can play along by ear on my bass!”

“Yoooo, sis, that’s rad as shit,” Gamzee says, eyes going childishly wide with awe and you smile proudly. Yeah he thinks your sister is cool as hell! She totally is. Jade is also sitting a little straighter, smiling with pride. She deserves all the praise and pride she gets, in your opinion. She has earned it.

“I could play a little, if you’re interested!” she offers, and Gamzee eagerly agrees. She pulls her guitar out of her sylladex and settles it into her lap, then starts strumming away. You and Gamzee both listen, you still playing with his hair, and it’s so calm and nice. Just you, some friends, and a chill atmosphere.

You listen to Jade play until your phone goes off. It’s a snap from Dave! You’ve snapped him every day since you got snapchat on your phone, and have the longest streak with him out of all your friends. Karkat and Jade also have pretty significant streaks, though. He’s sent you a picture of
him and Karkat. He’s sitting on Karkat’s lap— who has his mouth open and is frowning, so you’re assuming he’s being loudly bitchy again— and is making a really atrocious duck face at the screen.

TG: when you’re tryina be cute but bae just wants to scream about some irrelevant actor

There are hearts and crying emojis all over the picture. You send back a snap of the three of you, having to really stretch your arm to angle it so you get everyone in the picture.

EB: When your sister has hella natural talent and you’ve been braiding your friend’s hair for like, an hour now

Karkat sends you a snap as well, shortly after your snap sends. It’s a very blurry picture of him rolling his eyes and Dave shoving his face into the frame, grinning like a shithead.

CG: WHEN “BAE” IS ONLY SAYING AN ACTOR IS IRRELEVANT BECAUSE HE WANTS TO MAKE OUT LIKE A BOUNCEBEAST IN HEAT BC YOU KNOW FOR A FACT THAT HE WORSHIPS THE GODDAMNED GROUND THIS ACTOR WALKS ON IN MOST SETTINGS

The next snap has cartoonish blue tears scribbles onto Dave’s face, coming out from under his sunglasses.

TG: help im being slandered

Another snap, of the blurry ceiling.

TG: and also i am not being kissed which is an even greater atrocity

Another snap, blurry carpet.

TG: but i guess this is just my sisyphus task like i push this boulder up this goddamned mountain of amateur movie critic hour tryin for that sweet achievement of rad makeouts but every time i think im boutta get the smooch my karkat boulder goes tumbling back with a shouted AND ANOTHER THING

You send both Dave and Karkat a snap of you smiling with a red heart drawn on next to your face.

EB: You two are adorable

Karkat sends you two middle fingers, which is hilarious in its own right because it means he had to have asked Dave to take the picture for him.

CG: FUCK OFF

Dave sends a picture of him smooching Karkat’s cheek, Karkat’s mouth open and his hands making a plus sign that he sometimes makes when he’s really invigorated over something and feels the need to karate chop his own palm.

TG: arent we though be jealous egbert this could be you but you playin

You send him a picture of you rolling your eyes, smiling.

EB: Yeah okay “Strider” I’m so jealous of you and your disgusting boyfriend. Hey poke him in the side for me will you?

The next snap you get is from Karkat, flipping you off one handed this time and no longer cuddled
up with Dave.

CG: I FUCKING DESPISE BOTH OF YOU

You laugh and send him another snap of you grinning, winking, and blowing a heart emoji at him. The pink one with sparkles. He doesn’t respond but Dave sends you a picture of Karkat with his face in a pillow, probably screaming.

TG: dude what did you send him

You send a near-replication of the snap you sent Karkat to Dave as well. He screenshots it and sends back a picture of Karkat with his hands in his hair and his elbows on his knees, sitting down again.

TG: oh

Another picture of the carpet.

TG: thatd do it

Jade reaches the end of that song and smiles at you and Gamzee. Gamzee applauds her and you captchalogue your phone to join in. She laughs at you both, putting her bass away as well. She stands and gives a darling little curtsy.

“Thank you, thank you!”

“You play real motherfuckin well, sis,” Gamzee praises, and you agree enthusiastically. You’re still kinda tired, but you’re in a good mood. Sleepy and chill instead of exhausted and heavy.

Jade laughs, and then herds the two of you to the kitchen so you can make dinner together. She and Gamzee talk as you all work together. She’s making a casserole, which is something you’re pretty good at, not to toot your own horn. You like baking, but sometimes it’s really hard to do on your own. But with Jade and Gamzee, it comes as naturally as playing the piano.

You miss your dad.

You grind bread crumbs and feel Jade’s excited breathing, slow exhales with her chatter and sharp inhales so she can continue talking, and Gamzee’s even pace that shifts whenever he responds or asks questions. Now it seems to be Jade’s turn to ramble about herself, her music and gardening and science.

“Don’t forget that you’re a fucking furry!” you chime playfully as she places the casserole in the oven.

“I’m not a fucking furry!” she lies. “I just… really enjoy anthropomorphic animals.”

“Jade I’ve seen furry porn on your computer.”

“Lies and slander!” She’s blushing a little and swats you. “I’m totally not interested in furry porn!”

“So why was it on your computer then?”

Gamzee is laughing at your banter, and leans on your shoulder. “Yeah, sis, do tell,” he says, very quiet, like he’s not sure whether he’s allowed to join in or not.

“Oh, fuck both of you!” she whines, and you laugh at her, Gamzee chuckling with you. She fake-
punches your shoulder. “Asshole,” she grumbles.

You return to her living room while the casserole cooks, and you pull out your phone again. Oh shoot! You forgot to open Rose’s text!

**tentacleTherapist [TT] began pester[ing ectoBiologist [EB]]**

TT: John, when you have a moment I have a favor to ask. I’ve finalized my apology to Gamzee for my negligence, but I would appreciate it if you read over it first and checked that I am not forgetting anything of importance

EB: Sure!

EB: Sorry, I’ve been doing things and haven’t had a lot of energy today

TT: A low day?

EB: eeeehhh

TT: It’s alright that you have those, you know

EB: Thanks :B

TT: It’s normal, especially for those of us who suffered through The Game

TT: And given the events of yesterday, I’m not feeling particularly plucky myself

EB: You okay?

TT: Fine

TT: A bit tired, though, in the way that does not occur from lack of sleep

EB: Yeah

EB: Same here

TT: Shall I email you my apology?

EB: Go for it!

EB: We’re at Jade’s place tho so no promises about when I’ll read it

TT: At your leisure

TT: How is your guest?

EB: He seems to be doing okay?

EB: I wasn’t there when he woke up this morning but he didn’t panic much over that and he’s only cried once today and it was pretty short at that and he was spacing out too hard to hear me at one point which is kind of concerning especially since this isn’t the first time he’s done that but at the same time he’s smiling and joking around and he and Jade have been chatting pretty non-stop since we got here and none of it has been uncomfortable so I think he’s doing pretty good today!

TT: Quite the list you’ve got there
TT: I’m assuming he has cried a great deal, then?

EB: He’s really fucked up Rose

You remember that you’re a little pissy at her, but shove it down. She’s trying to make amends. She’ll do better.

TT: I see

TT: Actually, I would really appreciate it if you managed to peruse my email at your earliest convenience

EB: Will do!

TT: Kanaya is calling me now, however, so I will converse with you later, John

EB: ttyl!

EB: <3

TT: Must I?

EB: Yes! >:B

TT: Know that I am rolling my eyes right now

EB: ehehe but you’re gonna

TT: Yes, I suppose I am

TT: <3

tentacleTherapist [TT] has ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

You open the myriad of snaps Dave has sent you, all of them are of him artistically draped over a complaining Karkat, who seems very steadfast on his desire to argue today. Dave’s positions grow continuously more ridiculous and involve more and more of his legs at awkward angles on Karkat’s body as they wear on.

TG: john

TG: bro where’d you go

TG: john did we scare you away because were giant flaming homos

TG: its okay john i know its hard to handle this much gay but i promise its not contagious and also neither of us are in love with you

TG: jooooooooooooooooooooooooooohn

TG: did you know that when on a phone you cant just hold down a letter i had to individually type out all of those os john

TG: bro pay attention to me

You send him a snap of you rolling your eyes.
EB: Wow, needy much?

He sends you a picture of him successfully sucking face with his boyfriend, without any words attached, so you assume this means Karkat doesn’t know Dave was sending you the picture. You teasingly send back a face of pure disgust, your tongue sticking out.

EB: Gross

“Hey, sis,” Gamzee says, and something about his tone makes you snap back into reality, “where can a brother find the ablutions block?”

“Oh, upstairs and down the hall!” Jade tells him, and he gets up and goes, casting a smile your way before leaving. You wave at him a little. Before he’s even fully out of the room, you scooch down the couch and start toying with Jade’s hair, feeling pure ecstasy as your hands sink into the mess.

“Fun fact, Aradia was over the other day and I got to brush her hair for her,” you tell Jade, fingerling through the strands and tugging out tangles.

“That must’ve been nice,” Jade says with a giggle. “I know how much you like playing with people’s hair!”

“It’s basically the best ever,” you agree. Unprompted by anything, you remember a question you had a few days ago. “Hey, Jade, you’re good with gender stuff.”

“I am,” Jade says, cautiously interested in where you’re going with this.

“What’s that thing where you’re actually not your gender, you’re the other one?”

Jade does that breath thing where she starts a deep inhale, but stops short and preemptively lets it out. You’re being very stupid, apparently.

“You mean trans?”

“Yeah! That thing!” You could probably braid this. You’d have to tug out some tangles in order to separate it all into three parts but Jade’s hair is always so pretty in one big, heavy braid, with little flyaways framing her face like the world’s most precious sunflower child.

“That thing I am?”

“Wait what?” you ask, hands going still with her hair half parted. Jade’s eyes widen in bafflement, making a stunned noise.

“John, you lived on a ship with other me for three years!”

“I- yeah but, you never told me you were a trans… Wait, is it trans boy or trans girl do you say the one you started with or the one you are now?”

“I’m a girl, John, trans girl.” She sounds exasperated with you, which you think is a little unfair!

“Sorry! No one’s ever talked to me about this before, I don’t know these things!”

“I- John you lived with me for years! And during puberty! I’m having a hard time believing you never noticed!”

You shrug and resume sectioning off her hair, “I mean what was there to notice it’s not like I ever walked in on you naked or anything!”
Jade gestures to her whole body, eyes wide and perplexed. “John, I’ve shaved every day of my life since puberty hit! Most girls don’t exactly grow beards!”

You shrug, frowning uncomfortably at her hair. “Some girls are hairy! I wasn’t gonna judge! It’s not your fault if your body grows stuff in weird places!”

“I had to use my space powers to grow myself boobs,” she says with a point at said boobs.

“Well, I wasn’t exactly there for that.”

“I have an adam’s apple, John.”

“I- well yes, but- like,” you don’t really have an excuse for not noticing that, “I don’t know much about girl bodies, it could happen!”

“My voice was continuously cracking, John.”

“Puberty comes for us all, Jade, my voice was cracking too!” You start folding the locks over each other.

“Yes, because you’re a cis boy.”

“A what?”

“The same gender you were assigned at birth, John.”

“Ah.”

“You seriously just never noticed?” Jade asks, like she just cannot bring herself to actually believe you somehow missed something like this.

“How was I supposed to know if you never told me, Jade!?” You perhaps braid her hair a little tighter than you normally do, feeling attacked and more than just a little dumb. You don’t mean to take it out by being forceful with the braid, but you probably do.

“I probably just assumed you’d figured it out on your own and were being polite by not treating me any differently than you’d treat anyone else! I don’t think any version of me could’ve predicted you just, not noticing!”

You drop her braid to slowly raise your hands and shoulders in a shrug, pressing your lips together and shaking your head minutely. “I’m really stupid Jade what do you want from me?”

You hear the slap before you feel it, then “Owww!” and rub at the back of your head.

“Don’t say that about yourself!” Jade scolds, “If you say that kind of thing too much you’ll start believing it’s true!”

Whoops too late for that.

“Woah, motherfuck what did I up and miss while I was takin’ a shit?” Gamzee asks, coming down the stairs and looking at you two with concerned, wide eyes.

“Jade has a dick and apparently I was supposed to magically figure that out without anybody telling me,” you say, a little bitter about getting cuffed backside the head, flinging your arms up in the air in irritation.
“John, there is a lot more to being trans than just having a dick!” Jade scolds, frowning at you with flattened ears. You whine loudly and flop off the couch, your shoulders hitting the floor first and then the rest of you sliding down with gravity, your legs the only things remaining on cushions.

“What does any of that stuff matter, you’re a girl, why is this so convoluted!?” Jade pauses, and then you hear the air whoosh out of her in a sharp laugh that descends into giggles.

“Okay, but, why did you want to know?” Jade asks, her ears back to perked upright and friendly.

“Human gender is convoluted and weird and I can send you resources too if you want them,” Jade says brightly. Gamzee shrugs and leans back on the couch, well, sorta on the couch but mostly on you.

“Sure, sis.”

“Here, we can use my laptop and look at things!” Jade offers, and the three of you crowd around
the screen and she helps him look through options. You put in your two cents every now and then, but there’s a reason you’re asking her to do this. Mostly you are just used as the lap that holds the computer, what with you being in the middle and all. Gamzee and you spend more time looking at phone cases together than Gamzee and Jade spend discussing actual phones, and he gets something that’s all rainbowy and shimmery. Kinda psychedelic. It’s very pretty though.

The timer dings and you all eat dinner together, after which you nyoom off to the bathroom. Jade is on the phone when you come back downstairs, and Gamzee is rinsing off dishes and putting them in the dishwasher.

“Who’s she talkin’ to?” you ask him quietly, floating up to his shoulder.

“Dave,” he says, also quiet, and glances at her. She pokes her head into the kitchen, ears perked up.

“Hey Gamzee, John, do you mind if Dave and Karkat come over?”

You shrug and turn to Gamzee, who bites his lip. “Yeah, sis, sounds like a good time. What all up and is their reasoning for comin’ such?”

“Karkat misses you and Dave wants to see me and John.” Shouting can be heard from her phone’s speaker, definitely Karkat. Having his honor slandered or something by Jade letting Gamzee know that so bluntly. God. Drama. Everything has to be so fucking acrobatic when it comes to romance for that guy. “Also, Dave Karkat and I just sort of perpetually live in each other’s back pockets. I’d say we’re married except we’re not and also I don’t like either of them like that.”

“Dude, you’re a little married,” you tell her, and she giggles pleasantly.

“I know, we love it. Yeah, Karkat, you and your gross boyfriend can come over…” Jade goes back to talking on the phone. Didn’t Dave have the phone though? Did Karkat seriously take Dave’s phone out of his hand just so he could shout at Jade for telling Gamzee he missed him? God, he acts like he’s still 13 sometimes. You press your face into Gamzee’s shoulder, floating behind him, and your glasses are in the way again but goddamn it if you’re going to move them.

“You okay bro?”

“Yeah, yeah,” you say lifting your face to talk and thus taking your glasses out of the divots they were carving in the sides of your nose, “just tired. It’s been a tired day.”

“Never would’a motherfuckin’ guessed.”

“Hey, I’m allowed to have them too. Karkat’s just a little high energy you know? Maybe we’ll watch a movie and do something chill. Being with them sounds nice right now but doing something with them sounds like a lot of work and I am unemployed.”

Gamzee honks and tosses his head so he bonks you. “I get that. Had a motherfucker I was friends with where he did talk to me every night, and I appreciated that well and motherfuckin’ truly for all it seemed he never enjoyed me, but he was an awful high-strung motherfucker and I did sometimes not know what all to do with him.”

“Why’d he message you nightly if he didn’t like you?”

“Hell if I know,” Gamzee says with a shrug, closing the dishwasher and turning to face you. He strings his arms around your shoulders and you give him a hug.

“Was it the pitch kismesitude thing?” you ask.
He locks up; you feel it. You almost regret saying anything but you don’t know what you said wrong?? You pat his shoulders, baffled all of a sudden.

“Oh my god,” he breathes, like you’ve just told him the greatest revelation. ”Oh my god.”

“Uh, Gamzee?” you ask.

“Holy mother of motherfuck, brother, I think you’re- ohhhhh my god and he would- that was all. Oh my god holy motherfuckin’ shit bro he was flirting with-” Gamzee pulls away from you, staring off into the distance with wide eyes, and he covers his mouth with one hand. “Ohhhhhh my motherfuckin’ god.”

You guess you were right then. You pat him between the horns stiffly, unsure what you’re supposed to be doing as your guest-slash-pet-project-slash-trauma-friend has an epiphany about an old friend of his having a spade crush on him.

“Everything makes sense now,” Gamzee says, still really quiet and breathy.

“Uh, I’m glad?” you say. Gamzee looks up to your eyes and takes your face between his hands.

“No, brother, everything makes motherfuckin’ sense. The things he said, how he was always so insultin’ and bossy but whenever I did cave to the bossiness he backpedalled like he never did want my acquiescence- he wanted me to fight back, brother, boss him around instead. Well,” Gamzee looks to the side, still smushing your cheeks, “boss him around in general, I guess, since he was a motherfucker as was into that, but no motherfucker brother listen,” he looks back to you, eyes intense, “Listen bro, listen, he insulted me because he hated me! Like, pitchwise, not deathwise! I- ohhhhh, my fuckin’ goooooood,” Gamzee lets you go and runs his hands into his hair.

“You okay there?” you ask, starting to find this all very comedic.

“I am a motherfuckin’ dumbass.”

“Hey, hey, it’s okay, I don’t get it when people are flirting with me either!”

“Oh my god,” Gamzee says again, and then bonks his head down onto your shoulder. His arms go limp and hang down, pointed at the kitchen floor.

You should start a talk show: Dating Revelations in the Kitchen. Davepeta will be your number one guest star and also most avid follower.

Dave and Karkat live pretty close to Jade, much closer than you live to her, or them, and so they’re there near moments later. Gamzee rushes out to the entry way as Jade is giving Dave a hug hello and animatedly says, “Karkat, Karkat, brother you are not gonna believe the revelation my brother blue has bestowed on me this night!”

“Is it that he’s a fucking moron because that’s really just common knowledge at this point,” Karkat says and you flip him off with a cheerful smile.

“Nah, brother, Karkat, Equius was pitch for me!” Gamzee tells him, eager to share with him this good(?) news.

Karkat stares blankly at his moirail as Jade hugs him, stiff and unyielding to her touch, not moving to reciprocate at all. He continues to stare after she pulls away, and you expect shouting. You do not get shouting. You get Karkat, with no deep breath or single word, quietly sitting down on his haunches and bringing his palms to his face. He doesn’t sigh there, either, or start speaking, just
sits on his tiptoes with his ass on his calves and breathes.

“Uh, babe?” Dave asks, staring with the confusion you’re all feeling written plainly on his face. He even flips his sunglasses up into his hair so he can stare at the spectacle of a silent Karkat better.

“I need a moment,” Karkat says, at a perfectly reasonable volume. Like, even his tone is entirely unremarkable. You think he’s broken. Gamzee wanders over to him and sits on his haunches right in front of him, leaning in so his nose pokes in close to Karkat’s hidden face.

“I’m bein’ motherfuckin’ stupid again, ain’t I brother?”

“Yeah,” Karkat says, and he doesn’t breathe back in after he speaks. He rubs at his eyes and then claps his hands together, the tiniest puff of sound slipping from his fingertips, and looks Gamzee in the eye.

“Equius,” he says, and normally you’d hear him barely restraining his volume but he still does not seem to be on a screampath right now. “Equius, the most blunt fucker I have ever had the displeasure of speaking with. Equius, the guy who everyone knew trolled you every single night to profess how deeply he detested you. Equius, who I actively avoided because he is fucking distasteful and uncomfortable, and yet still somehow managed to hear about how much he hated your guts. Equius, the raging asshole who couldn’t keep his sweaty eyeballs off your back every single time you were in the same room as each other on the meteor, which was unfortunately frequent as I was in those rooms too. You didn’t… you didn’t know that Equius hated you?”

Gamzee shrugs.

“And what prompted this… truly stunning epiphany?” Karkat asks, sounding like he’s in mild pain.

“Johnbro and I were talkin’ about shit and I brought up how Equius didn’t never seem to like me and John asked if it was pitch and it was like my eyes had motherfuckin’ opened up for the first time, brother.”

“John,” Karkat says, and his voice is a little sharper now which you’re taking to mean a good thing. “Congratulations. You no longer hold the title of the densest piece of chirpfoul feces in three universes. Your title has been fucking taken from you, asslord, you stood no fucking chance. You’re three miles behind on the racetrack, the gold medal was never once meant for you, even you will never be this dense. In what reality can anyone possibly be this dense?” His volume still isn’t screaming but he’s like, loud, so you think things are fine now. Karkat grabs Gamzee’s face between his palms and he smushes Gamzee’s cheeks. “What the fuck.”

Gamzee shrugs again and stands back up. Karkat sighs and stands as well, and Dave brings attention back to not-Karkat by flipping his shades back down onto his face and saying, “We brought Forbidden Island.”

Forbidden Island is a fun game, and you like it because it’s cooperative. You kind of wish you could spite Karkat during it, but games you can spite fellow players in means anyone can spite you and you’re sort of expected to spite everyone and really it’s just Karkat that you want to bug. But this is a close second, everyone working together towards a common goal!

Jade and you are pretty much on the exact same wavelength the whole game, which is nice. Karkat and you take turns explaining game mechanics to Gamzee, and he’s pretty fun to play with. Mostly he just takes advice from the rest of the table, but he seems to be enjoying himself. You notice that Gamzee and Dave are very… cautious, around each other. A sort of exaggerated friendliness. Too
casual to be genuinely casual. Dave is better at the fake-casual shtick than Gamzee is, and probably will ever be, but luckily nobody really brings up anything. You don’t tense up or get excited as the island continues to sink like you normally would, but other than that the evening goes very smoothly. It’s not as low energy as you might have hoped, but it’s also not particularly difficult to make yourself enjoy.

Even so, you and Gamzee cop out earlier than you do at most social gatherings. No staying up until three in the morning debating the relevance of playing cards to the cosmic scheme of things.

“That was fun,” Gamzee mentions when you two get home.

“Yeah, I’m kinda tired though, I think I’m gonna go to bed.” You had a pretty good day. It started out sucky and you’ve kind of been exhausted for all of it, but in spite of that you’re feeling good right now. That’s… yeah, that’s good. You’re happy for yourself. You go with Gamzee to the guest bedroom/his bedroom now you guess, and change into your god tier pajamas because they’re faster and easier to change into than your regular pajamas. You crawl in under the covers with Gamzee because you’re a lil chilly and tell yourself you’ll brush your teeth after Gamzee is asleep. Goddamnit. You gotta make Gamzee start brushing his teeth sometime. That’s dumb. Who left you responsible for a teenager? You’re pretty sure he’s a teenager. He got left in The Game for a while so he’s like, 18 at OLDEST and you’re pretty sure he’s younger than that? You’ll ask later, now is time for him to go to sleep so you can go to your bed and also go to sleep. Damn. You’re so tired. You idly stroke at Gamzee’s hair, and between the two of you radiating body heat it’s very nice and warm under the blankets so you don’t even feel cold anymore, and the mattress is very soft and the pillows are even softer. Maybe you will buy yourself a fancy mattress one of these days, instead of steadfastly keeping a replica of your childhood, you think drowsily. Gamzee’s breathing isn’t slowing much, but you’ll just lay there with him until he falls asleep. Warm and soft and close to him.

And then it’s morning.

Chapter End Notes

The Depression Feels™
Please leave a comment!
Gone Shoppin'

Chapter Summary

Spring break has finally come for me I have spent the last 11 consecutive hours on this chapter and I am so READY for the chance to write again!!!!!!! WELCOME BACK BABIES!!!!!!

Chapter Notes

Once again I have lovely fanart from one of my dear readers!
http://imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com/post/158323911717/uni-has-been-kicking-my-butt-this-week-but-i-did

Y'all are so good to me <3 <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You wake up and your first… ‘thought’ you guess, is that you left your glasses on before going to bed like a fucking dumbass again. Then you note that it's really warm and almost instantaneously after you remember you have a Gamzee in bed with you. You open your eyes, take off your glasses so the divots in your face get a chance to stop feeling so smushed, and smile at Gamzee. You kiss his forehead and hum, feeling very warm and affectionate.

Gamzee stirs beneath you and you kiss him again, this time right on his hairline, and then you wonder if you're being a little gay. Well, you're not being gay! You do this with everyone! Gamzee is no different, you are just so comfortable in your heterosexuality you can be cuddly like this, is all. On a more grave note, he's like, a baby (you're pretty sure) so this is definitely not gay. Entirely off gay limits!!

"Morning," you greet sleepily. He chirrs at you all sweet and high and nuzzles up against your face, which is cute as hell.

"Morning," he greets, voice all groggy and thick. His arms squeeze around your midsection and you reach up to scratch his hair.

"Hey, Gamzee, idle question, how old are you?"

"Uhhh… motherfuckin’...” he goes silent a few moments, and you pet his hair softly as he thinks. You suppose if he’s been enslaved to an evil alien for a while time would be kinda hard to keep track of, so this might be a bit of a hard task to be dropping on him right after waking him up!

"About ten sweeps I'd say?"

"Woah, what?” It's early so you're not entirely sure on your math here but what? Isn't that like, twenty years old??

"Ugh, motherfuck, you got a calculator a brother could borrow? ‘S real early bro, ain't sure if I'm
“Sure,” you say, baffled. You put your glasses back on and take out your phone. You load up the calculator app and hand it to him, and he types on it, mumbling as he goes.

“So, I was six as when I started the Game, spent a sweep and a half, about, on the meteor, spent a sweep and a half, about, raisin’ them pupae ‘a mine- though that bastard sun did go and get itself cycled a little over twice in all that time- and then I up and motherfuckin’ thiiiiink I spent about a sweep followin’ after the childlord and serving his bratty ass self.” He presses a button definitively. “So yeah, that up and equals out at ten motherfuckin exactly. Dunno how much in human that makes me, though.”

You take your phone back in bafflement. You hadn't thought Gamzee could possibly be older than eighteen, but you're pretty sure he’s at least twenty. You do the math and your phone spits out a 21.66666 on into forever. Gamzee is 21 and a half years old. Gamzee is older than you are. What the fuck.

“Aw shiiiiit, bro, you wanna know what I just remembered happens short after a troll’s tenth?” Gamzee does not seem to notice how stunned you are by all this information.

“Huh?” you ask hollowly, still just trying to process that Gamzee is 21 years old.

Gamzee makes a displeased face, his nose scrunching up and wrinkling in a way that would be cute as hell if you could focus on it. “We up and motherfuckin’ molt. Shit be gross as hell, I ain't wanna do that fuckery…” he nestles in closer to you and sighs. “At least I got some time ‘fore it happens. If I get my remember on right the average start time for the molt is near halfway through the tenth sweep.”

“You're… an adult,” you say, still really stunned. It is altogether too early in the morning for this kind of revelation.

“Yeah bro, somewhere near the same age as you, ain’t I?”

“I'm twenty,” you say, hand moving back up to his hair to scratch between his horns because your fingers need to do something.

“Dunno what that is in comparison to troll time, bro,” Gamzee tells you idly, reaching up to caress a lock of hair out of your face. You show him your phone screen and he looks passively at the numbers. “Is that supposed to be how up and old I am?”

“Yeah.”

He honks, and then laughs, and you're brought back from your stunned state. His laugh is terribly pretty.

“Shiiiiit, bro, you're smaller than I am!”

“Oh hardly,” you say with a dramatic roll of your eyes, then poke him in the ribs. “I don't think anybody could be smaller than you!”

Gamzee hums, smiling, and brings your hand up to his lips so he can kiss your knuckles. “But you are doing your motherfuckin’ best to change that, ain’t you brother?”

“Yeah I am. Speaking of which, we definitely don't have anything but cereal and a couple packets of ramen in the house. Mind going grocery shopping with me today?”
Gamzee brightens up at the idea, which is very cute and you kinda wanna kiss his nose, so you do as he says “yeah bro!” but it is still in a not gay way, even as he honks and laughs at your touch. Like now it would be perfectly okay if it was gay cause he's not a fucking child anymore- or you guess, he wasn't this whole time but it would have definitely have been bad for you to have gay thoughts about him before now which you didn't! You totally didn't! Except for maybe this morning which is why you asked because hearing he was like sixteen would’ve reminded you that your actions are definitely not gay which you totally aren't either way and kissing his nose is not gay kissing his nose you're just friend kissing his nose and you know what? You hope he finds a very nice person who will kiss his nose in a gay way eventually but it definitely won't be you because you're straight.

Anyway. You've been spacing out again. You sneeze into your shoulder and look back to Gamzee, smiling.

“Anyway, breakfast?” you say brightly. Gamzee doesn't respond, and you note the far off look in his eyes. You gust some air into his face and he blinks, jerking his head back from you. He blinks some more and you can see him slowly focus back in on reality.

“You there?”

“Yeah, bro, sorry. Got lost again.”

“It’s okay!” Which it is! It totally is, it just makes you worry. You sit up and smile down at him, concern probably making the smile less convincing. “I was just saying we should go eat breakfast before we leave. Cereal for us.”

Gamzee smiles up at you- not entirely happy either, sorta soft and sad but only sorta- and nods.

“Yeah, brother blue, sounds like a motherfuckin’ plan.”

Cereal poured, you two eat in relative silence, and you pull out your phone while you eat. You finally remember to read over Rose’s apology so she can send it, cause it would be super dumb if you’re the reason she’s delaying in her apology, and you’re predictably impressed.

Dear Gamzee,

I would like the chance to apologize to you. I have come to the realization that the way I treated you during our mutual three years upon the meteor was unacceptable, and for that I am sorry.

While I now understand that your actions were not your own in the years between our arrival in your session and this last week, these past seven years I have been under the impression that they were. For that, I am sorry. I understand that the things you said were hard to reconcile with your past, and even each other, but I never examined you closely enough to notice the discrepancy and was unable to offer you any aid. I blindly allowed myself to go along with Vriska’s authority regarding you, despite knowing that Vriska’s authority should be taken with a grain of salt in all matters. By abandoning you to her whims, I did you another injustice, especially but not limited to standing by idly when she locked you in the fridge. As a Seer, it was my task to illuminate different aspects of our mutual sessions, and yet I never once sought to gain knowledge about you, instead content to remain idle and unenlightened to the demon in our midst. For that, I am also remorseful, for if I had done my duty to you as well as the members of our team I would have been able to help.

I promise that while I have been negligent in the past, I will do so no longer. I will devote attention to my surroundings and to you, so as to avoid future missteps on my part, and will think more critically of the actions of others and make every attempt to hold more empathy for those around
me.

I would like to make amends in any manner possible. I feel terrible for neglecting you as I did, and would like no bad blood between us. I am here to listen, if you ever need an ear, and would like to offer the chance to compare your own experiences against mine when grimdark, should you find the resemblance a fitting one worthy of discussion.

My sincerest apologies,
Rose Lalonde

You think Rose is very eloquent and formal, but you guess that’s sort of the point of a formal apology, heh. You don’t really see anything wrong with it. Is it the thing you would have sent in her position? Probably not, but you’re not the one in her position so you think this works fairly well?

**ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering tentacleTherapist [TT]**

EB: Hey Rose!

EB: I read your email

TT: Oh good

EB: I didn’t really see anything wrong with it!

TT: Also good

TT: Shall I send it to him then?

EB: Sure!

Your cereal is done, and you debate getting more. You suppose you should. If you’re hungry, you should eat.

TT: Actually, I don’t have his chumhandle

EB: Oh right!

EB: We ordered a phone for him but it isn’t here yet!

TT: Ah

TT: In that case

TT: Would you please allow him to read it off of your phone?

TT: I really would like to

There’s a pause but she doesn’t finish her sentence. Heh. You guess everyone has hard times wording sometimes.

EB: Yeah I get what you’re trying to say

EB: Soon as possible, right?

TT: Yes
ECTOBIOLIST [EB] HAS CEASED PESTERING TENTACLE THERAPIST [TT]

“Hey Gamzee,” you say, looking up. You see him spacing out and are afraid he’s lost again, but his attention snaps to you with a small jolt and a startled “hm?”

“Rose emailed me her apology to you, would you like to read it?”

“Oh, uh, motherfuckin’... yeah, sure man.”

You scroll up to the top of the email and hand him the phone, and get yourself another bowl while he reads. You ask him if he wants any more and he says he’s full, so you munch away contentedly as he reads. You’re not sure what you’re expecting his reaction to be, but when he quietly sets his phone down and wipes at his eyes you’re not exactly surprised.

“You okay?” you ask softly, reaching over and resting a hand on his shoulder.

“Yeah, motherfucker, ‘s just. Motherfuckin’.” He sniffs loudly, hauling snot (ehheh gross) and shakes his head so his messy hair flies all over everywhere like a halo. “She’s bein’ too hard on herself, brother. Ain’t hardly her fault, Seer or no. I’m- I’m awful glad she did send this though. ‘S nice to hear.”

He leans on you and you hug him around the shoulders. He rubs at his eyes a little more and sighs deeply. “She was one of the nicer fucks too. Nicest person on the meteor, ‘least to me.”

“Oh?” you ask.

“Yes. There were times when I wasn’t strung up in the head or hiding from my death when I’d sit peaceable near the common area, back toward the start before my soul did get itself really and truly fucked and shattered. She found me a small handful of those times and would speak at me with an idlesort of curiosity- always curious, she. Then she’d tell me to hustle on back to the vents 'fore her matesprit found and would rend me.” He presses his eyes to your shoulder. “Was nice.”

You rub his shoulder and press your nose to his hair.

“I liked her, as much as I could with my brain in strings and webs.”

“I’m glad,” you say, “She’s a good friend of mine and I love her a lot. It’d be wonderful if you two could become friends!” You’re trying to cheer him a little, thinking of good prospects.

“Yeah,” he says, lifting up your phone again. He stares at the lock screen, since he doesn’t know your password (you only put one in order to prevent Jane from doing shit but it never works. It has literally never stopped her). “I think,” he starts, speaking in the halting manner that indicates thinking out loud, “I might take her on that offer she made of possession and grimdarkness. I know a little more on the grimdark than I would wholly like to, it’s narrow closeness to chucklevoodoos
and shit being stuff Kurloz taught me on.”

Gamzee goes very suddenly quiet after that, his breathing cutting to slow and shallow as well. It makes you realize you’ve been tuned to his breathing without really paying it much attention. This happens all the time, when you’re in group settings or after you’ve gotten used to it. It’s like realizing your tongue is in your mouth. Your brain pokes at the fact that now you’re thinking about your tongue in your mouth, but eventually you forget and it goes back to being normally in your mouth, and other people’s breathing go to normally being in your brain.

“Hm?” you prompt, very softly.

“Nothing.” He hands you your phone back. “Just thinking on people left back in the Game, s’all.” You rub his shoulder again. You got lucky, and you’re fully aware that you got lucky (all thanks to Rose, your local lady of luck, you think). All your friends AND sorta relatives made it out, god tiered and mostly unscathed. None of the trolls’ relative-ish-people made it out alive and most of the trolls died or got abandoned or the like.

“Maybe talk to Karkat about it? I know he had a hard time adjusting to… everything really,” you say, suddenly derailed from your thoughts with memories of Karkat just being overwhelmingly underprepared for every single thing that happened to him.

“Aw, I’m sure that brother wasn’t half so troubled as you make him sound,” Gamzee says with a chuckle.

“No, he’s basically just terrible at everything,” you say, confident enough in your assessment that you don’t really sound forceful or assured, like an offhand comment on recent crazy weather or something.

Gamzee laughs again and lifts his head enough to kiss your shoulder. “Y’all motherfuckers are cute as hell,” he comments, and you laugh.

“Thanks!” you say brightly. You’re glad he’s entertained by your and Karkat’s idle bickering.

Then the two of you go get ready, and you don’t really want to brush your hair but since you’re making Gamzee brush his you sort of have to brush yours too. You need to do laundry. Ugh, whatever.

Then the two of you go grocery shopping, which is a significantly more enjoyable chore when you have a second person with you. Even though you’re a god, you still go to new-world Walmart which is a subsection of Crockercorp called Crockpot. Crockpots, like Walmarts, kind of just have everything. You have to go through all the aisles so you can look at things and remember them, like a toothbrush (fangbrush?) for Gamzee, a third lightbulb to replace the one that went out in your laundry room like four months ago, some hair ties, and then like five different kind of one-a-day vitamins for trolls and also like every other vitamin you can get your godly hands on because you’re not sure what Gamzee needs but you’re perfectly capable of covering your bases. You also pick up fish oil, because you keep thinking about it, although fuck knows what that might be useful for. If it turns out trolls don’t need it, you can always just donate it to somewhere later as long as you don’t open it first.

Shampoo and conditioner (troll hair is different than your hair, and you don’t want to make him keep using yours when his hair could be better with his own), troll deodorant (troll sweat is mostly the same as humans’ but is, apparently, less salty? You think you learned that somewhere…), claw clippers (the keratin on troll claws is denser than human nails), and another tube of toothpaste
makeup while you're there and you tell him sure, and the two of you spend the better part of half an hour really, really overwhelmed by the sheer scope of options there are for makeup. You’re not even at a store that deals exclusively in makeup!!! Why are there SO MANY???? You end up nudging him towards the more expensive brands (that means they’re higher quality right?) and so you end up with a bunch of tubes and containers and a whole rainbow in lipstick and nail polish as well.

Then you have to go back to the frozen foods section and the fridge areas because you were dumbasses and put cold foods in your cart even though you’re going to be here a while longer yet. You put them away, swearing to remember to come back for them later, and then head over to the clothing + shoe area of Crockpot.

“Woah, brother,” Gamzee says, pulling out a dress. On it is a very nice artistic depiction of Jane, with the words Goddess Of Commerce scrawled in looping font across the gold coins that drop from her hands in rivulets.

“Oh, yeah, sometimes people put our faces on things. Dave bought a body pillow of me once to be ironic and Karkat shredded it like a week later cause I put ghost peppers in his soup. Did you know trolls have a higher tolerance for spicy foods than humans?”

“Woah,” Gamzee comments, trying to get the hanger back in its slot sandwiched between two other dresses. He seems very focused on it, and also a little purple in the face. You pat his shoulder.

“Don’t worry if you can’t get it back in all the way properly, some of these racks get really overstuffed!” He nods and takes a deep breath, which reminds you that you can feel (very clearly) every single person in the entire Crockpot and their breathing. You sneeze and the “noise” dies down back to a level you can handle it, and turn back to Gamzee. You help him make choices on clothing, though you’re kind of in the boat of “if you like it buy it” in regards to anything he wants. He gets a couple dresses and skirts, which makes you snort, but they’re cute and most people wear dresses/skirts in this universe! It’s like a totally normal thing! Dirk does it all the time, and tells you he’s kawaii as desoo-neigh. You’ll stick with pants, but you’re more than happy to encourage your friends to wear whatever they want! Gamzee also gets a large quantity of sweaters and jackets, with varying thicknesses, and plenty of brightly colored shirts. There’s a shelf with tubes upon tubes of fabric paint, and Gamzee picks up a tube of black and two tubes of indigo. You pick up a third, just in case he needs it. You’ve seen some trolls’ signs take up really big portions of their clothing, it probably takes a lot of fabric paint to draw them on! Actually, just to be super extra sure, you throw in a fourth as well. Gamzee finds a very flowy shirt with that reeeeeeally low neckline thing where the tops of the shoulders happen before the top of the shirt does, with super drapey sleeves and a pleated belly area. He holds it up in front of himself in front of one of the mirrors scattered about on the support beams and you dart off, only to come back and plop a decorative flower crown on his head as he looks at it.

“Aw shit brother, that’s cute as hell!” he says, distracted from the flowy shirt to meddle instead with the band of fake flowers.

“Aren’t they? There are like a million over- wait, wait Gamzee we have to stop everything,” you say, head snapping up to stare in the direction of the entrance to Crockpot.

“Wait- what?” Gamzee asks, frowning in confusion at you.

“Gamzee,” you say, grinning at him and patting excitedly at his shoulder, “Gamzee there’s a dog. Gamzee. Gamzee a dog just came in Crockpot we have to go pet it Gamzee let’s goooo,” you say,
dragging Gamzee by the wrist. He laughs and deposits the shirt in the shopping cart as you pass, leaving it there in your trek (float) to the dog. She’s panting and wagging her tail at all passerby, her owner sitting in a wheelchair behind her.

“Hi!” you greet the dog’s owner, smiling brightly. They seem entirely taken aback to be approached by a god, which you’re used to enough by now that you can just keep going without even blinking. “Can I pet your dog?”

“Oh, uh, sure,” they say, and you crouch down in front of her with your hands extended in greeting. The pup doesn’t even sniff them first, just shoves her face into your hands and you laugh and coo excitedly at her, pressing your forehead up against hers and rubbing her floppy ears between your hands.

“Her name’s Jade,” the owner says, almost timidly, and you laugh brightly. You’re pretty sure Jade has been the most common name for dogs since the dawn of this planet’s time.

“Can I pet her too?” Gamzee asks, hovering behind you as you cross your legs and pet enthusiastically. He gets the go ahead and joins you, close to your side, and Jade pushes her snout into his face and licks him delightedly in greeting, which startles him before making him descend into giggles. He’s like a feather, so he gets knocked back onto his rump, and she advances on him with her tail a-wagging, licking him some more as he scratches her fur.

“Oh, Jade, behave yourself,” her owner says worriedly, and you laugh and wave at them easily. “She’s fine!” you tell them, and they seem terribly nervous to be actually talking to you but meh. You’re a little more interested in their dog to be totally honest. And the way that Gamzee’s laughing, leaning back on one arm to brace and petting the top of her head with his other, smiling and trying to move his face out of licking range without actually moving it and succeeding in no way. His flower crown has fallen off and is resting on the linoleum near his hand, and he starts honking in his delight. He’s awful cute when he’s happy.

A short while later you both thank Jade’s owner and say goodbye, then return to your cart. Gamzee picks out a few other flower crowns to go with the one you plopped on him, and then you move on to more functional clothing. Underwear and socks are easy enough, and you buy a few bundles of really basic shit, then have fun going over kooky socks and decorated underwear. He gets some with fairies on them and some with superheroes and some with funny sexual words across the ass, which you both giggle like fucking children over. Shoes are next, and you get him his own flip flops so he can return Dave’s, plus a pair of dress shoes, “high” heels (they’re barely elevated but they are still in fact heels), and two pairs of regular shoes. He really needs to trim his toeclaws.

Then you just sort of wander around Crockpot for a while. He finds a really kitschy shag rug with 80s lookin’ designs on it (not that this planet’s 80s were anything like yours) and you laughingly agree to buy it and put it near the guest bed/his bed now you guess. His room even has carpet in it! He doesn’t need a rug but he thinks it’s pretty so literally why not. You encourage him to just sort of grab whatever, it’s not like you can’t afford it, and he gets himself things like a few notebooks, a sketchbook, some fancy pens meant for art that you normally don’t care enough to buy, some colored pencils and markers, and a large stuffed rabbit. You snicker, and he tilts his head at you.

“Put the bunny back in the box,” you say, grinning, and he blinks blankly at you.

“It-” he looks to where he got it from, then back at you, “It was on a shelf, brother.”

“Oh, dude, have you not seen Con Air?” you ask, perking in excitement.
“Ohhh, that was a motherfuckin’ reference I ain’t catching!”

“Dude, dude you have to watch Con Air! It’s one of my favorite movies ever!” You pause, “Man, even I haven’t seen it in ages!”

Gamzee laughs and agrees amiably, and you chatter excitedly at him about it, pushing the cart and floating behind it, and he gets himself some sunglasses and one of those plug into a socket air fresheners. It’s pumpkin scented, which on your Earth would have been a fall-only thing but since Jade and Jake and Roxy all are associated with pumpkins in this world it’s a year-round thing, here.

You take a snap of yourself and Gamzee with “Grocery shopping at Crockpot!” written on it, and are about to send it to Dave, Karkat, Jade, Rose, and Terezi when you pause.

“Hey Gamzee, do you mind if I put this on my snap story?” you ask, showing him the picture again so he can know totally what you’re asking for.

“Oh, sure bro, ain’t no need to ask.”

“Well, I’m followed by like five billion people on my story,” you wish that was an exaggeration, “so it’s probably a good idea to get your consent!”

“Woah, really?”

“Yeah, our godly snapchats are sort of public so basically anyone who has a snapchat follows our stories. Roxy fucking loves it, she posts the dumbest shit on her story just for kicks.” You send the snap as well as posting it. Nigh instantaneously, Dave sends back a picture of him and Karkat at one of their dig sites, Dave sending a thumbs up and Karkat flipping you off, their other arms around each other. They must have asked Jade to take the picture. Gamzee looks over your shoulder and asks if he can send a snap on your account, and you say sure and hand it over.

He smiles at the camera and makes a peace sign, a tiny bit purple in the cheeks, and you drift over and prop yourself up on his shoulders. A few seconds later Karkat sends you a snap, which Gamzee opens, and it’s a picture of him not quite looking at the camera and blushing bright red and making a peace sign back. Oh wait, wait! They’re making a diamond!!

“Awwwww,” you coo, “that’s cute!”

Gamzee hands you back your phone and you send Karkat a snap of your own, cheerily flipping him off, your elbow still propped on Gamzee’s shoulder and his hair invading the side of your photo. Then you resume your wandering around and eventually get a snap from both Dave and Jade of a red faced Karkat, Jade rolling her eyes and typing out “this is what i mean john!!!!!!” and Dave smirking like a jackass and sending you many thumbs up emojis.

You get into line and Gamzee watches you while you pull a cherry Dr. Pepper out of one of those mini-fridge things, and then jumps as if startled.

“Bro we gotta go back and get the cold food-shit,” he reminds you, and so the two of you have to leave the line, go recollect all the cold/frozen stuff you’d planned on buying (plus a couple more impulse buys), and then return to line. God your cart is so fucking full. You probably should’ve gotten two.

Luckily, you can just sorta teleport everything, including yourself, so you don’t have to worry about finagling all the various shopping bags into a car or anything. Putting stuff away is a bitch but Gamzee helps you out, learning about where everything goes in your kitchen as he does, and teaching him makes sorting things waaaay more interesting for you. Then you help him haul his
clothes and stuff upstairs, and the two of you get things put away in the closet and dresser. Shit. You forgot to pick up hangers while you were out. You have a few in there but not nearly enough.

“Hey, you keep putting away the stuff you want in the dresser, I’m gonna go pick up some hangers.”

Gamzee bites his lip, and shit how do you keep forgetting that he doesn’t want to be left alone? But he nods and gives you a smile, looking half-worried but also half-determined. “Yeah bro, go on ahead. I’ll be here.”

You smile encouragingly at him and zap yourself to the Crockpot again, pick up the hangers, purchase them, and zap back quick as you can. The dude at the register smiles knowingly at you to see you back here and buying only one thing, and you share a laugh of mutual understanding for forgetfulness with him.

Gamzee’s right where you left him, but your reappearance startles him enough he drops the pants he’d been folding. Instead of picking them back up, he smiles at you and approaches. You accept the hug he pulls you into with a small laugh.

“You okay?”

“You okay?”

“You okay?”

“You okay?”

You kiss the top of his head, hovering there with one arm on his shoulders and the other extended so you don’t bonk him with the pack of hangers. You rejoin him in the putting away clothes thing, and then get his toiletry stuff set up in the bathroom while he changes and trims his toeclaws and also regular claws you guess. You’re sure you appreciate it, since you have a couple holes in your shoulder from where he’d grabbed you that one time.

You have a drawer near the sink you have a couple odds and ends in, and you clean it out so Gamzee can put his makeup there. You watch him as he applies the various stuff. First, he covers his scars in grey paint that’s pretty much the exact same color as his skin, then the rest of his face in what looks like a less-thick grey paint of the same color, then a grey powder. He looks at himself in the mirror and touches his face, three fingers on the bridge of his nose and either side. His scars are basically invisible, now, only there if you search really hard for them. He stares, statuesque, at the blank, unmarked face that stares at him in return, and then hics quietly and shudders, shoulders jerking slightly. He breathes deep and presses the heels of his palms to his eyes.

“Hey,” you start, touching him lightly between the shoulder blades.

“Gimme a second, brother,” he says, voice high and tight, “Don’t wanna ruin my makeup.” You rub his back but remain silent as he calms down, breathing deep, and then he looks back up and shakes his head a little. He puts away the... you think you’ve heard it get called foundation? And then he takes out other stuff. He’s got pretty steady hands for someone who was just about to start crying, you note, as he carefully lines his eyes. He very lightly applies eye-shadow of a pretty, dark blue hue, and then has a lighter, more purple blue lipstick he puts on. Just looking at him, the only thing you’d be able to identify as painted would be his lips, but the eyeshadow and liner both make his eyes really pop and it’s nice that he’s managed to successfully paint over his scars. You haven’t really thought on them much as anything other than things that are simply there, but it’s good that it makes him happy enough to start almost crying to have them covered.

You make lunch, which can actually be nice now since you have real life ingredients, and tell Gamzee to make sure he leaves the avocado you bought and your old guacamole alone, because
trolls are allergic. You end up having a short conversation that leaves you looking up online what about the avocado is poisonous for trolls, and turns out it’s something called persin that seems to... only be found in avocado? You know trolls are allergic to other foods that humans can eat too, like calabaza and acorns (used in many, many more dishes on this planet than your original Earth), and also humans are allergic to stuff like boulbgourds and bluepommes. That conversation leads to a conversation about how you’re allergic to peanuts and oh hey so is Jake and you just meander aimlessly through conversation as you cook and eat and then lay out old newspapers (technically they’re all just the ads you get from various stores, you don’t actually get NEWS newspapers) and pull out the fabric paint and Gamzee’s many shirts and dresses and sweaters. Guess you didn’t need to put all of these away earlier. Whoops. But it’s fine! You’ve got plenty of time to kill and the two of you are just laughing at your own silliness. Gamzee starts with the dresses, carefully picking out where exactly he wants to place his sign, and how big, and can it be incorporated into the design and cut the items already have. Clothing already in his color of indigo get painted with the black paint, since otherwise the sign wouldn’t show up. You help him out, painting his sign as careful as you can in the places he tells you to paint it, and the two of you spend mutually agreeable but mostly silent time together. It requires a lot of focus! And you don’t want to get Gamzee’s sign wrong, it’s like getting his name wrong! You know trolls really, really value their sign as an identifier, so much so that even though Vriska was god tier, something that she would naturally brag endlessly about and want to show off at every opportunity, she almost never wore the pajamas because they didn’t have her sign on them. Bluh. You don’t want to be thinking about her. But your brain instead then starts thinking about how Gamzee’s been without his sign since he started wearing the codtier outfit (ew you’d managed to forget about that thing for a while whoops) and you feel sad. You really want to make sure you get his sign on his stuff properly!

“Hey, Gamzee, mind if I put some music on?” you ask, and Gamzee agrees with a smile your way. You put some electro swing on your phone, and set it next to your thigh as you work. It helps you focus on things that aren’t your own thoughts, and keeps you on track to paint carefully.

You get through the better portion of his clothing before someone knocks on your door, and you answer it expecting one of your friends. But it’s not one of your friends! It’s the same delivery girl you met when she brought Gamzee’s sylladex. This time, she has brought you Gamzee’s phone! You thank her and chat briefly about the weather, which has been very lovely recently, and she seems to think you’re responsible for that cause she’s acting kind of grateful and as hilarious as it would be if you could give Karkat his own personal raincloud you cannot actually control the weather, just the wind. But you don’t tell her that because that’s a little more in depth than you really want to get with her, and you bid her goodbye and give Gamzee his phone.

“I can finish painting your sign on things if you want to get it set up,” you offer, “You just have to tell me where to draw!”

You paint while Gamzee fiddles, getting connected to your internet and downloading various apps like pesterchum/trollian (same app, two names) and snapchat and shit. One thing the people on this planet did right was just use internet for everything, so you don’t have to worry about minutes or texts or anything it’s literally just all through the internet. You call people through the internet, text people through the internet, im them through pesterchum which is on the internet, everything’s the internet. Good civilization, best technology.

After you finish, Gamzee is still fiddling with his phone, so you pull out yours. Jade, true to her word, has sent you links and shit via pesterchum, so you open the first of them. You read over a pretty broad yet (you think) comprehensive article about trans individuals and end up knowing a lot more than you did!!! You’re pretty certain it’s just the real basic information but it’s important and a good place for you to start!! You’ll try to commit it to memory, though you’re probably going to need to read through all of the articles before the stuff really starts to stick. Bluh. Oh well, you’re
always learning!! And this isn’t gross dumb school shit this is like actually important having to do with people stuff, so you’ll have an easier time remembering it than, like, the fourth digit of pi or whatever.

“Hey, bro, I got myself all set up,” Gamzee tells you, “What’s your handle?”

“Oh here, Roxy made a masterlist, so you can just add everyone!” You give him the list and he types away diligently.

taintedCadence [TC] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

TC: HoNk :o)
EB: eheheheh, hi Gamzee! :B

taintedCadence [TC] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

You pfft and nudge him, and he honks at you and chuckles back.

Dave sends you a snap of a picture of him, dirty as fuck with mud up to his elbows, half hugging Jade who is also dirty as fuck with mud up to her elbows with a distinct mark from where she was wearing gloves, because she’s not a dumbass, and between the two of them they have a really shitty jpeg artifact. You cannot even begin to fathom the image it started out as before it got pixelated and filtered to all hell and back and 3D printed before getting buried for however many goddamned years.

You chat with him on pesterchum, and he ends up whining about you never coming to see him anymore and he’s just wasting away and blah blah blah and he makes you giggle. Gamzee looks over your shoulder and reads over your conversation, which you don’t mind, and he scoots a little closer to you.

“Needy fucker ain’t he?” he asks, and you laugh at him too.

“Yeah, but it’s not a bad thing! You wanna go over and see Karkat and I can lavish Dave with the attention he is sooooooo clearly needing?”

Gamzee looks conflicted. He seems irritated with Dave’s want for your attention, which is stupid cause Dave is like your number one best bro, but also Karkat is his boyfriend soooo.

Gamzee changes into one of the shirts where the fabric paint has dried while you text Dave that the two of you are coming over. You’ll bring Yahtzee. Gamzee remembers Dave’s flip flops, which is good because you had completely forgotten about them, as well as his leggings. You think you should probably leave the leggings here until you’ve done laundry though, since it would be a little gross to give him back his leggings when Gamzee’s been the one wearing them.

Your arrival is marked with much hugging, Gamzee sinking fluidly to his knees and planting his face in Karkat’s chest, and you and Dave hugging like the bros you totally are. He then grabs your hand and acts like he’s going to do that handshake-swipe-fistbump thing the two of you occasionally do, and you get your hand buzzed and are startled enough to let out a little yelp. Dave laughs at you and holds up the buzzer on his palm and you laugh as well.

“You got me!” you admit, and then swoop close and kiss Dave on the forehead, cause you love him like that. “But you scared the piss outta me, so now I gotta go to the bathroom,” you inform him, and also sort of Gamzee and Karkat. You nyoom off to their bathroom, relieve yourself, and wander back to the living room where they’re all chilling together. Gamzee and Karkat are on the
couch, and technically there’s room on Gamzee’s other side for you, and Dave is on the armchair, making an atrocious face and sending it to somebody or other. Probably Karkat, who is absorbed in the fact that Gamzee now has a sign on him again and looks to be ready for blubbering but is, most unfortunately, not currently paying attention to Dave.

You decide to let Gamzee and Karkat have the sofa, and sit yourself down on the armchair- right on top of Dave.

"Oi, John, the fuck, get off of me," Dave protests, his arms flailing briefly before coming up to your sides and shoving lightly, not enough to actually dislodge you.

"Mmmmm, nah," you say with a smile, and slide your arms around his shoulders and kiss his temple.

"Dude your bony ass is digging into my thigh."

"Uhm, excuse you!" you protest with a huff, a dramatic hand pressed to your bosom. "My ass is the plushest and the rumpest, thank you very much!"

"Your rump has like seven ass bones and all of them are currently aggressing my thigh."

"My ass has no more than six ass bones and we all know it."

You laugh together and Dave leans his head on your chest, which is at an appropriate height for head leaning, and you both watch Karkat and Gamzee with a sort of idle curiosity. Now that it’s apparent you’re not going to join them on the couch, Gamzee has pulled himself into the corner Karkat had previously been occupying and has Karkat on his lap.

“Gaaaaaaayyyyy,” you call at them, and Karkat hiss-shrieks at you with a middle finger in the air. Dave laughs at you and squeezes his arms around your waist briefly tighter.

“Yeah dude, they’re gay, you’re surrounded by filthy fuckin’ queers, how ‘bout them apples.”

You gasp. “Dave!” you say with mock astonishment, “you’re gay?!”

He nods solemnly and takes off his glasses, leveling you with an impressively stony face, “I’ve been waiting for the right moment to tell you.”

You try to think of a response but you burst out laughing first, giggling at how well Dave manages to keep himself in character.

You play Yahtzee, which actually gets all four of you out of your seats in excitement/anger at one point or another, playfully knocking elbows with each other when one of you is about to make a high risk roll or something, and eat dinner sometime between round two and round three. After your fifth or sixth game, you all decide you’ve gotten a little bored with it, and one thing leads to another and you’re somehow left alone with Dave in the living room watching a poorly animated pokemon fanstory on youtube, your head pillowed on his lap and his hands in your hair. You chat with Jade during most of it, but when the squirtle onscreen says “How could you!?” Dave suddenly stops petting you and turns down the volume.

“Dude, have you heard about the drama going down with Terezi?” he asks, and you put your phone down.

“No, what?”
“Okay so you know how Sollux is living with her right?”

“Yes,” you say, even though you’d forgotten that. You remember it now that he’s brought it up though!

“Well, so apparently the two of them had been waxing pale back before people started dying and Rose and I blew up the Green Sun and everything, like, way pale. Like waxing so hard this car can’t be driven waxing, too shiny of a polish and even the most delicate of moonlight reflecting off it’s shiny-ass well-waxed surface will refine the light like floodlights on the sportiest of sports that ever did sport underneath the blinding white lights of Terezi’s and Sollux’s pale waxing.”

“You’re getting better at looping your metaphors back to their sources,” you comment.

“Thanks. Anyway, so you know how Terezi went pale with she-who-must-not-be-named?”

“Oh no.”

“Oh yeah. The two of them were talking about it with Davepeta and Kanaya there and apparently Sollux went off on her.”

“Oh no!” That’s terrible! You hate relationship drama.

“Yeah. Davepeta actually had to step in and mediate between the two of them for some of it.” Dave is spinning the fidget ring Karkat got him with his thumb. Dave likes spinny stims, you have learned.

“Yikes.”

“Yeah, I dunno what all happened exactly and apparently they managed to get a lid on that shit before the conversation ended but things are frosty in the Pyrope-Captor hivehold now.”

“Did he apologize?” you ask, frowning.

“Mhm, dude does that thing where he goes 0 to 100 with no stops in between and comes back down to 0 just as fast and apologizes.”

“Sorta like Karkat?” you ask.

“See that’s exactly what I said but I have from multiple sources that Sollux- and Eridan too apparently- both do the 0 100 thing way more and way faster than Karkat does on a fairly regular basis.”

“Mm,” you hum dubiously, “See, that’s just not realistic.” Dave laughs at you and resumes petting your hair.

“But yikes, I hope the two of them sort out their shit soon!”

“Me too. It’s not even like they were officially dating beforehand so it isn’t like she cheated on him or anything she just had a different moirail and to be fair it’s a little bit his fault for fucking off into the aether with Aradia instead of, you know, staying on the meteor with Terezi and Karkat and us and everything, ya dig?”

“Yeah, that is a stupid thing to get upset about when he had the option of staying with her!”

You end up spending the night at Dave and Karkat’s hive-house. By the time Gamzee and Karkat are done doing their moirail thing it’s super late and Dave is really warm and you’re already in
your (godtier) pajamas and so is he and his bed is right there and Gamzee and Karkat share
Karkat’s ‘coon which leaves them both blushing when you ask where Gamzee’s gonna sleep but
while Karkat does get briefly screechy Gamzee soothes him down and makes him start purring
which is adorable as all shit so of course you have to tease him about it and Dave has to haul you
away in order to prevent you from riling everybody back up.

“It’s kinda nice,” Dave mumbles sleepily, thoughtfully, as you place your glasses on the nightstand
next to his shades.

“Mm?”

“Gamzee being here. I definitely like him better without the demon in him, but like also on a
Karkat level. Usually Karkat’s impossible to calm down, I love him but he’s a little exhausting
sometimes.”

“I can see that being the case.” Personally, you love shouty angry screechy Karkat, he’s just
literally so hilarious, but you understand that you are the only one with that sentiment.

“But now Gamzee’s here and he’s just like ‘shoosh bro,’ and Karkat’s like ‘aiight I’m shooshed’
and you know what I’m saying?”

“Yeah, I get you,” you say, snuggling in with Dave, smushing your arm between the two of you
and looping your arm over the top of him. You use your Breath to nudge the covers up a little and
he keeps mumble rambling at you.

“Like I’m kinda scared at how quickly I’m just getting used to it, you know? Like oh, Gamzee’s
here, guess Karkat’s gonna actually calm down within a reasonable timeframe when the things
he’s getting upset about are really stupid or petty. Well- not stupid, Karkat’s not stupid and he’s
totally allowed to have his emotions and everything I’m not trying to say that he’s stupid-”

“Yeah I know, you love him, but he is dumb Dave you’re allowed to say that.”

Dave snorts and swats your side tiredly. “I’m just sayin’ I appreciate Gamzee being boyfriends
with my boyfriend.”

“You should be friends with your… not in-law…”

“Quadrant corner.”

“Quadrant corner!” you repeat. That’s the word. Phrase. Yeah.

“Yeah I want to be. But like also you have not failed to miss the part where he was possessed for
many years and also I was a jackass to him.”

You kiss Dave’s forehead. “Give it time.”

“Well, I am the god of that,” he says, and the two of you fall asleep.

You and Gamzee spend the next week and a half or so settling into life together. You get him a
desk for his room, which is definitely his room and not the guest room anymore, and while you’re
at the furniture store you get yourself an actual table and dining chairs. You also get a few other
things, a bookshelf here, some wall hangings there, stuff that didn’t exist in your life before the
Game but do now that you have Gamzee in it. Little things, but your house is changing. Wind has
been blowing more and more often, you notice one day, as you sit in Davepeta’s lawn and space
out of the conversation Aradia is having with Eridan about the historical accuracy of something or
another. You visit Aradia, Feferi, Eridan, Davepeta, Jade, Karkat, and Dave a lot. You’d like to visit Rose, but understand that Kanaya and Gamzee are uh… yeah. So you just snap and message Rose a lot and keep her in the loop while the two of you try to think of ways to get your respective housemates to be open to the idea of having an inevitably uncomfortable conversation together. You and Gamzee visit Terezi and Sollux once too, and it’s sort of awkward but then Aradia and co show up and the sheer number of people to carry a conversation is enough of a bolster to keep things comfortable. The two of them do seem to have resolved whatever hard feelings were happening, which you’re glad of, but Terezi and Gamzee don’t seem to have any idea how to act around each other and you’re perpetually torn between the need to piss Sollux off for kicks and seeing that impulse rapidly backfire on you in the most spectacular and genuinely not-fun of ways. You also go visit Roxy, Jane, and Calliope a few times! Roxy and Jane don’t get a whole lot of chances to talk to Gamzee, because whenever Callie is in the room he’s fully and entirely absorbed in her. It’s almost reverent, the attention he pays her so meticulously. But you like your friends and he likes his daughter so it’s a good time all around, there.

Dirk, Jake, and Catavros invite you and Gamzee over once, but Gamzee grows inexplicably tired that day so the two of you just stay home and you finally show him Con Air! It’s really great, cause you haven’t seen it in years! You’re pretty sure the last time you watched it was with Jade back on the ship.

And then you remember why you haven’t watched it in so long. Nostalgia has allowed you to forget that you actually really, really do not like John Cusack in this movie. You “ugh!” loudly and grumble complaints all through the scene with the crane, which makes Gamzee look at you weird. At the end of the movie, you ask him how he liked it, and he says it was nice but brings up the crane scene, asking why you’re so bothered by it.

“Ugh, he’s just so…” you start, at a loss for the words you need to truly describe how you feel about him, “He’s dumb and stupid and bluh!” You can feel yourself getting worked up about it again, angry at his existence, at his redundancy, at how useless and unnecessary and worthless he was and how you as an audience were supposed to really like and root for him. “He’s fucking dumb as shit,” you reassert, your neck getting hot and chest feeling a little tight. “Fucking worthless piece of garbage character that doesn’t even belong in the story in the first place.”

“Why you got such a strong dislike for that brother?” Gamzee asks, tilting his head at you in concern, his face all creased and his eyebrows hitting an almost anime-tier inward swoop, “Near as I can tell he ain’t done nobody wrong.”

“Ugh, see that’s just the thing! He’s so lame! I explained this to Jade once, in my timeline, but John Cusack is such a terrible character in this movie! He didn’t add anything to it, basically at all. He was like, the second hero or something, but lamer and less important, he just ran around and goofed off and when he finally got a chance to do something big and showstopping all it was was that he ended up operating a crane. Like wow! A crane! I’m so astounded and thrilled by his exploits. He’s a weenie. And lame and unimportant. He couldn’t be of help to anyone if he was given an instruction manual on how to do it.”

Gamzee reaches a hand out to your shoulder, looking timid, and you feel bad for raising your voice. Does Gamzee think you’re mad at him? Gamzee turns to face you fully in his seat, his butt on the edge of the cushion, and he offers you a small smile.

“Uh, for what it's worth, brother, I don't think you should make all those harsh noises at yourself.”

You roll your eyes and pshaw at him. “I'm not mad at myself, I’m mad at this character! They’re not even remotely similar!”
Gamzee laughs a little and pulls his hand back to scratch at the inside of his thumb. “Brother, I know what self-loathing sounds like, even if you're usin’ a proxy.” He shrugs a little and tries to smile at you again. “Uh, John, I…”

You want to butt in and tell him you are totally not self-loathing right now but he seems to have something important to say, and even you can read the mood sometimes! It has dropped rapidly from something sort of lighthearted and movie-viewing to you pitching a dumb baby fit and then changed to something grave. You wonder what exactly he has to say, that his breathing and the atmosphere have both gone so somber, heavy with the weight of some confession.

“I know I'm not- the world, or the universe, or even anything particularly big, but I want you to know that, for what it's worth, you did save me. I'm not, the great protagonist of any movie or your mission or whatever, I'm just one guy out of a lot of guys, but you, John, you saved me, and that means a lot to me, if no one else, if nothing else. I- I owe you everything, brother, without you I would still be- there- and hurting and dying, probably. Or- maybe I woulda succeeded, you know? I ain't never wanted to hurt nobody, but that's awful hard to remember when I was so motherfucking alone. Maybe my rage woulda consumed me wholly and I woulda torn down existence from its hinges, had you not acted. But- John- brother, you… you stood and stared at the unraveling of everything, John, but even at the end of the universe you chose to be kind. You chose to comfort me, you chose to show me mercy where anyone else would've tried to stop me by doing more harm, you showed me compassion and- and John, if that don't count as some sort of heroism then I don't think nothing does! I- that you should show me kindness in my darkest moments means more to me than- than someone operating a crane at some opportune moment, you know?”

You are definitely red in the face and maybe tearing up a little. Gamzee’s speech is heartfelt, earnest. You laugh, nerves overtaking you, and tug at your shirt collar.

“Gee, Gamzee, you're making me blush,” you say, looking away from him awkwardly, swiping at your eyes. His horns bonk lightly on your skull and his shoulder bumps against yours.

“Wouldn't mind doing it more often, should I find the words or ways to do so,” he admits, and it sort of feels like a confession of something you are very much not yet ready to examine so you sway into him and jostle his horns and shoulder.

“I was just doing what anyone would have done, it wasn't that spectacular…” you mumble.

Gamzee laughs at you. “You say that because you're humble, brother. Humble and so kind it's as second nature to you as the breaths you take. You wear kindness as natural as clothing, John, so regular to you you forget that others do not do the things you will.” He gently places his hand on top of yours on the couch, and if your eyes do not deceive you, he looks a little flushed in the face as well. “It's why you're the hero you are, the leader you are.”

You snort. “I'm not a leader, Gamzee, people need to quit calling me that. I'm just your friend! All of yours!”

“That's why you're our leader too,” he says with a smile, and you bump his shoulder hard enough to set him to chuckling.

The two of you sit in the ensuing silence. It feels warm but also tense, and you're experiencing a lot of emotions!

“Thanks,” you tell him. You mean it. You don't feel like a hero, and you definitely don't think you're as kind as he seems to believe you are, but it's nice to hear, all the same. And you guess he is right about the saving him thing. And possibly the entirety of existence, by extension. That’s…
kind of pretty fulfilling, actually, to know that yeah, at least for one person, you really do make a difference.

Chapter End Notes

This last segment I wrote months ago, and finally got the ability to put it in! Here's hoping it's as emotional as I hoped it would be.

I cried like 3 times during this chapter. It's not even got anything serious going on but I'm a blubbing pansy.

Be sure to leave a comment! <3
A Diamond Has Four Corners

Chapter Summary

If y’all thought you were safe from my betakid poly paleshipping you were 100% wrong. Like, so incredibly wrong, not a single thing of that concept was correct. Prepare your asses, I love these kids.

Chapter Notes

New tags have been added! Also, warning for self harm in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The dry cleaners call you and tell you they got your… item clean as new, and you thank them and ask if they can hang onto it for another day or two, when it’ll be more convenient for you to go pick it up. You only feel a tiny bit bad about throwing your godly weight around. You can, of course, go pick it up whenever you feel like it, but you’ve gotten pretty used to Gamzee. You know. Not wearing it. And you really don’t want to go back to him wearing it. He bought plenty of nice booty shorts that he wears over leggings of his own while you were out, those should be fine, right?

You and Gamzee go see a movie, which is a cool mythic thing with werewolves and vampires and fairies. This planet has no concept of werewolves and vampires being natural enemies, and you think the dynamic of the two species actually works a lot better when they’re collaborating instead of fighting all the time. Like, it makes sense, right? Vampires bleed the corpse of the bear or person or whatever out, and then the werewolves eat the meat! A mutually beneficial relationship.

Gamzee seems contemplative by the end of it, though, and you’re really kind of wondering what the hell Gamzee could see deeper meaning in in this movie. It’s really well-animated but still fairly mindless entertainment.

“What’cha thinkin’ about?” you ask him as you refill your pop before leaving.

“Them fairies were real pretty,” he says, refilling his as well.

“Yeah,” you agree, expecting more out of him. He doesn’t continue though, so you just shrug and move on.

Flying with Gamzee is fun, because he’s pretty content to let you move at whatever speed you really want. He’s gotten used to it by now, so you can zoom along really easily, and he even enjoys just going out for flies with you! Sometimes you toss him up into the air and let him drop a ways before zipping back in and catching him, but you’re always very careful to make sure Gamzee doesn’t become the next Gwen Stacy. You don’t catch him in any way that might break his back or neck or anything!

Not. Not that he’s a love interest or you’re spider man. Ha. That’d be.
Anyway, still not really ready to examine that.

You don’t toss him on the way back from the theater because he’s carrying your pops, but you do zip along quickly with his head on your shoulder and his body cradled safely in your arms. He’s contemplative the whole ride home, so when you touch down you ask again.

“Seriously dude, what’s on your mind?” you ask as you unlock your front door. The two of you wander in and you head to the kitchen, finishing off your pop and wanting to throw it away in the larger trash can.

“Can we go visit Tavros sometime?” Gamzee blurs, then seems to realize that wasn’t actually an answer to your question and blushes a little bit.

“Uh, sure?” you say. “Don’t see why not. He and Dirk and Jake did invite us over the other day! I’m sure they’d be happy that we’re rescheduling!” You should’ve actually probably rescheduled way before now, whoops.

Gamzee nods gratefully and sips his pop quietly, going back to thoughtful. You float up next to him and lean your face in close until he notices you.

“That didn’t actually answer my question,” you say.

“Sorry,” Gamzee says, “But I don’t want to.”

“Oh.” You’re not sure how to react to that. Fair enough, you guess. Gamzee doesn’t have to tell you every little thing on his mind. He seems troubled by it, whatever it is, though.

“Do you want to visit them today?” you ask, changing the subject. Gamzee jumps a little and stands awkwardly straight at the suggestion.

“No!” he says with a blush on his ears, and then seems to only get more flustered. “No, no, brother, not today. I mean, I want to see him, but I can’t- not like this, I don’t even know what I’d say and- maybe tomorrow?” Gamzee babbles. He seems to be thinking only of Catarvos and nothing of Jake and Dirk, but you guess that’s okay. Gamzee doesn’t really know either of them that well. You think he’d get along really well with Jake, but you honestly have no idea how a Dirk and Gamzee interaction would play out.

“Dude, chill.” You pat him between the horns and he takes a deep breath, “He your ex or something?”

He stares at you with wide eyes and purple cheeks you can see even underneath that layer of makeup he’s got on.

“Uh, touched a nerve?” you ask, feeling yourself heat up in embarrassment as well. He presses a palm to his cheek and looks away from you, eyes still wide, and then crouches down on his haunches, leaning back against one of the cabinets.

“M I still that obvious?” he asks. You crouch down next to him, also sitting on your haunches, and place your far cheek in your palm, instinctively mimicking him.

“Hey, it’s okay, sometimes people have crushes that don’t work out! It happens to everybody, but it would be a shame if you lost a friendship just because you lost a romance!”

Gamzee nods. “I don’t. I don’t even think I feel that way for him for sure anymore, but I did and then I did things under English that I can’t… I, I know there were things he made me do and I
know I acted in some ways because he made me act but there were some- sometimes I would do things that- that it couldn’t have been him making me do it, brother, there weren’t no reason for him to have me act like that ‘less it was me doing the desire and him laughing at what mine own desires could let him make me do but they were still my desires brother and—’ he pulls his hands in close in front of his chest, scratching anxiously at the inside of his thumb, ‘-and, and he was- I did things brother I did things to his corpse I did them while he was dead and sure it might’ve started out as me frantically trying to kiss him back alive cause I knew fishsis had done that with sparkbro but it didn’t work and so I kept trying—’ his scratching increases in intensity and you’re torn between concern over what he’s saying, words flowing out of him like a broken fount, and concern over those claws that are thankfully short but still fucking claws, ‘-I didn’t even know when one emotion bled into the next but I wasn’t- I wasn’t doing it to revive him no more I was doing it because I liked it motherfucker I liked it and—’ you reach into the little ball he’s made his body into and pull his hands away from each other. The inside of his thumb is bleeding now, and you’re a little bit scared, not gonna lie.

“Hey, Gamzee,” you try to start, but his body convulses and he jerks his arm so hard he manages to free it from your (admittedly unsuspecting) grip. His claws go to his arm right underneath where you’re gripping his other wrist, and you are momentarily grateful that he keeps his claws trimmed and filed. Or Karkat keeps them filed? You think you’ve seen him doing it as an activity of theirs. Now’s not the time to ponder, though. You reach in again and pull his fingers away more forcefully, keeping his wrists in a good grip as his breathing goes absolutely off the fucking charts. You are violently reminded that you need to get better control of your own powers, because you’re mimicking him, your breath picking up in speed and losing depth rapidly, and you force yourself to breathe deep but get derailed as he yanks hard again, this time not escaping you.

“Let go of me!” he booms, voice suddenly full of venom and lips pulling back to reveal his fangs. You release his wrists like they’re hot irons and his hand goes straight to his forearm, scratching up and down the length.

“Gamzee,” you say, but your voice is shaky and weak and you can hear how absolutely out of your depth you are. You’re sure he can too. His breath is coming out ragged and juddering, and he’s squeezing his eyes shut tightly. You’re not sure what to do at all but you’re panicking and he’s having a goddamned panic attack and he keens sharply, high and loud and almost enough to make you want to cover your ears.

“I’m sorry,” he whines, rocking a little and still scratching at his arm. He curls in somehow tighter on himself and presses his forehead to his knees, face hidden beneath his hair and behind his shoulders. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry John I didn’t mean to yell I’m sorry I’m sorry,” he continues, and you timidly reach out and put your hand on his shoulder.

“E-easy Gamzee. Should I call Karkat?” you ask, but your phone’s already in your left hand and you’re pulling up pesterchum as you’re talking.

“No,” he says, a gasp of breath you’re not really sure he has to spare. He’s shaking all over, and you are filled with your own inadequacies. You don’t know how to help. “I- brother, can you call up that cleaner place and we go there early? I don’t care if they done or not yet I just really—” he gets cut off by his own shaking, his mouth going open and no sound but a choked crackle of air coming out before he whines and inhales rapidly three times through his nose, rocking a little harder. “I need it back, okay? It can still be dirty I just really need my motherfuckin’ codpiece back now, please,” he begs, and you are the biggest piece of shit in the entire universe, it is you.

“Yeah, Gamzee, okay,” you say, your gut twisting from the warring directions of panic and self-
loathing. You reach out and touch your fingers to the hand that’s scratching, and he whines again
but allows you to slowly slip your palm under his and twine your fingers together. You pull his
hand away, your brain going a mile a minute. You could lie. You could call them while Gamzee’s
in the bathroom and tell them you’ve had a change of plans, they wouldn’t complain. You could
tell him you’d gotten the call that morning and had just not told him because it didn’t come up, or
you were excited about the movie, but you had been planning on getting it back for him today.
You could pretend it’s a happy coincidence that his codpiece is clean, and oh you didn’t know
anything about that.

There are a lot of ways you could lie, in this moment, but your guilt tells you that Gamzee deserves
an honest answer. Ugh. You and your goddamned guilty conscience. He’s gonna be so pissed at
you.

“Uh,” you start, because there’s no easy way to say this. “They actually, called me this morning.”
The words “I just need to give them a call before we leave” are on your tongue but will that count
as honest? No, no it would not. You can feel your dad rolling over in his grave at how godawful
you are, you’re a terrible son and a terrible friend.

“They finished cleaning it. I told them we’d pick it up sometime tomorrow or the next day, so I’ll
just give th-”

“John!” Gamzee keens, the hand that isn’t holding yours going up into his hair and pulling.

“I’m sorry,” you say, because you are, you really are, you were a selfish piece of shit who valued
your own comfort more than his. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have, I’ll call them now and we can go get
it.”

“Motherfucker,” he says, and you absolutely deserve it. You call them with your free hand, hastily
explaining that actually you’re going to go pick up the codpiece right now, and they- predictably-
are more than willing to accommodate you. Gamzee hiccups and tries to breathe the whole way
through, and you use your magic to help force air into his lungs at something resembling a
reasonable rate, although you can offer no help restraining the way he lets it woosh all out of him
in a second long gasp. Deep inhales, slow inhales, those you can aid. Only a little, his breathing is
still panicky and ragged, but you can help.

It is not enough.

“Do you want to come with me?” you ask, remembering his aversion to being alone and figuring it
would probably only be made worse by him, you know, literally panicking. But it would also
probably be embarrassing for strangers to see him, you know, literally panicking, so this isn’t really
a decision you are remotely capable of making for him.

He lurches at you and clings, his hand flying from his hair to your shoulder blade. “Please!” he
shouts- more like shrieks, so high pitched as it is. “Please, don’t leave me alone right now oh god
brother not right now not like this please please please-”

“Easy, easy,” you say, patting at his hair uselessly in an attempt to calm him. God, you made it
worse, you dumb fuck. “It’s okay, you’re coming with, you’re coming with, I won’t leave you
alone, I’m sorry Gamzee. I- I was worried you might not want other people to see you crying I
wasn’t trying to leave you or anything it’s okay, it’s okay,” you say, knowing damn well that
nothing about this situation is currently okay. “I’m sorry,” you repeat, as though it’s any fucking
help at all you godawful piece of shit why do your friends even bother with you.

You teleport, no point in wasting time (or letting him see how far out of your way you went to be a
terrible person) and Gamzee stands next to you, crying and breathing raggedly. The troll cashier doesn’t even pretend to not be staring, and the carapacian acts like it’s just their daily business that sometimes customers come in mid-panic attack. You’re grateful for their casual attitudes, if not entirely baffled.

As the carapacian goes to get the codpiece (you still hate the sight of it, even knowing now how much of a comfort item it is for Gamzee) you ask the troll cashier “So uh, this happen often?” because you are genuinely confounded at how unfazed they are about Gamzee panicking in their lobby. He’s clinging to your arm and crying into your shoulder, shaking and working his blunt claws in and out of the fabric of your shirt (which is luckily not his own skin (he’s bleeding)).

The troll shrugs. “The God of Recovery goes through phases, yeah? Like recovery itself.” They don’t seem to notice you blank. “Wouldn’t be the first time he’s randomly shown up at some point in time or space crying, ‘least as far as the history books say.”

Ah. God of Recovery. You are uh. Gonna get yourself a nice little google session sometime here soon. What the fuck?

Gamzee doesn’t even go to the public bathroom ten feet to the left, he just straight up puts the codpiece on over his leggings right there in the middle of the lobby. You try not to be made uncomfortable about this, but on the flip side there is a pretty immediate and visible decline in Gamzee’s panicking once he has it on.

You teleport back to your house, Gamzee in your arms, and take him to your bathroom where you clean and bandage his forearm while he anxiously (good god you’re not looking you’re not looking- fuck’s sake Gamzee this is so uncomfortable) toys with the codpiece in his other hand. You focus very diligently on the task of patching him up, once again really, really wishing you could turn off your peripheral vision.

“Are you sure you don’t want me to call Karkat?” you ask, gentle, “Or we could just zap over there and show up, fuck knows everyone shows up unannounced often enough.

“I,” Gamzee starts, fingers clenching and unclenching around the puffy band on the top of the codpiece. “Yeah, brother, yeah, let’s go there, please,” he agrees, and you scoop him up again.

Once there, Karkat very quickly takes Gamzee and squirrels him away in his block-room, leaving you and Dave both hovering awkwardly in the living room. You rub your upper shoulder, feeling guilty still for getting rid of Gamzee’s comfort item for too long and lying to him about it. You kind of want to turn into yourself the wind. Dissipate into the air and never turn back. It’s not like there would be much for your friends to miss.

“...Wanna go hang out with Jade?” Dave suggests, and you agree readily. Jade sounds like a really, really good idea, actually.

The two of you fly to her house, which she is not at. Dave offers to text her, and you let him. You pull out your own phone and text Jane.

**ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering gutsyGumshoe [GG]**

**EB:** Hi Jane

**GG:** Well hello John!

**EB:** So you know how you got really mad at me last time Gamzee had injuries and I didn’t tell you?
GG: I’ll be right over

EB: He’s at Karkat’s right now!

EB: They’re moirailing

GG: Ah

EB: I was just letting you know so you could

EB: Like

EB: In the FUTURE

GG: Yes I see what you’re saying

GG: I’ll make a note of it on my phone

GG: Speaking of, he has one now, so I’ll just drop him a text so he can chat with me about visiting him at his leisure.

EB: Sounds like a plan, ma’am!

GG: Indeed it does, cuz ;B

**ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering gutsyGumshoe [GG]**

“She’s downtown,” Dave informs you, staring at his screen. “Stopped by the garden center for a new trowel. Says she was just gonna dick around down there for a bit and invited us to join her.” Dave puts his phone in his pocket, the jeans pocket not his weird vest-thing pocket. You don’t really understand half the stuff Dave wears, but you’re preeeeetttty sure he’s a hipster. He looks nice, whatever he wears.

“Hey, dude,” he says, his feet still on the ground as yours lift another few feet off it. You halt your ascent, and float back over to him, toes skimming the tips of the grass. “He’s gonna be fine,” Dave assures you, reaching out and grabbing your hand. “He’s with Karkat, they’re pretty good about taking care of each other by now. You don’t have to hold their hands and babystep them anymore and you haven’t for a while.”

You shake your head. You appreciate what Dave’s doing, but he’s off-base. “I fucked up,” you say, squeezing his hand. He frowns at you, and you know it’s just because he’s confused but you can’t help but feel a little like he’s judging you. Which he would have every fucking right to do. Because you’re the worst.

“What, like, he’s freaking out because of you?”

“No. He’s freaking out because… of reasons,” you say. You’re actually not… entirely sure what he’s freaking out about. “Stuff Lord Dingus made him do, but he feels is his fault,” you say, and Dave snorts at the nickname.

“So what’s eating you?” he asks, and you touch your feet down fully on the ground next to him, lift your glasses up on top of your head, and faceplant into his shoulder.

“You know how I sent the codpiece to a drycleaner that takes a really long time?” you ask.

“Yeah, Roxy and I were chatting about it. Or Rose and I?” Dave pauses briefly. “Some flighty...
“Those hysterical dames,” you mutter, smiling despite yourself. “But yeah. And you know how that thing’s like, a comfort item for Gamzee?”

“Oh no.”

“Yeah. They called me this morning and told me it was done and because I’m a dumb piece of shit I told them I would pick it up the next day or two and then Gamzee and I went and saw a movie and he started panicking and he wanted it and,” your words descend slowly into mumbling, ending with you drifting off into wordless grumbles at yourself while pressed into Dave’s shoulder. Dave pats your head, almost knocking your glasses off on that last pat, and tells you to hush.

“So you fucked up,” Dave says casually, like this is a baseball game instead of your friend literally having a panic attack and you being a piece of shit that made it so he didn’t have access to a comfort item, “It was only a little out of malice and more aimed at the item itself than at Gamzee. But you know, a good bro of mine has enlightened me to the merits of putting your big boy pants on and fucking apologizing when you fuck some shit.”

You snort. “Yeah yeah, who decided to let you be the responsible one?”

“I have my moments.” You snort again and lift your head to kiss his cheek.

“Thanks,” you tell him, bumping your forehead softly into his temple and gently closing your eyes. You take a deep breath, tuned in to Dave’s breathing now. Familiar, very familiar, calm and unbothered at the moment. You heave a sigh and lift your brow from his, and resituate your glasses on your face. “To Jade then?”

“Hell fuckin’ yeah,” Dave says, lifting up off the ground. You fly together, and you do lots of loops and acrobatic maneuvers around Dave’s body and he will occasionally hold up fingers like scorecards, giving you ranks for your tricks. So far he is the most impressed by you spiraling your body around his rapidly as close as you can without actually touching him, and least impressed by you flying backwards and upside down, which only gets you a measly five out of ten fingers.

Jade is waiting for the two of you on a park bench, petting a dog while the owner stands, flustered, in front of her. The two of you swoop in and land, changing out of your god tiers that you were only wearing for the high altitudes back into your t-shirt and jeans and moon pendant (a gift from Kanaya) and Dave’s t-shirt, weird sort of vest, jeans, and quartz pendant (a gift from you).

“Hey guys!” she greets cheerfully, then turns back to the dog’s owner. “Thank’s for letting me pet her!”

“Oh, not a problem!” the person says, and Jade gets up and comes over to the two of you. She winks and jerks her head in the direction of the receding dog and human.

“One of my namesakes,” she says, fiddling briefly with the bead bracelet on her arm and the pink rubber band on her thumb to get the fur out of them. She’s got one of those… jumpers? No, not a jumper. A. Fucking. A dress that ends in shorts instead of a skirt. And it’s like, cinched around the waist. Whatever it is, it’s cute and pastel and Jade’s got one of those necklaces on that has like five chains and all the beads and charms and basically the three of you are all looking cute as fuck today. “I was about to get up and get ice cream ‘cause you two were taking so long but then I met the dog and everything was right with the world.”

“Gee, sor-rrry!” you say dramatically, rolling your eyes with no small level of theatrics. She giggles
at you and kisses your cheek, which makes you smile and laugh back, and then she goes to Dave and kisses his cheek too. She links arms with both of you, white ears perked and happy, and starts hauling you two forward.

“It’s fine, you can just buy me ice cream as payment.”

“Jade we have the same access to funding as you do.” Dave protests mildly.

“So it’s no problem, right?” she says blithely.

“Hey, you know what we should do?” you say, and the two turn to you, “We should invite Rose along!” You decaphcalogue your phone.

“And here I was thinking you’d never ask,” Rose says, and you all look up, startled. Rose is perched on one of the park’s lamps, legs crossed and elbow leaning on her knee. Her chin is propped in her palm and she looks altogether too satisfied with herself as she smiles down at your little group.

“Why, hello miss Seer!” Jade greets with a big grin, releasing you and Dave so she can extend her arms to Rose. Rose hops down, fancy shoes tip-tapping lightly as she lands on the sidewalk, and Jade eagerly pulls her into a hug and kisses her on the cheek. Rose chuckles and kisses back, leaving a faint black smudge on Jade’s cheek, and you and Dave tag team her with cheek kisses. She’s got black high waisted shorts on and horizontal black and white stripes on her shirt with three-quarter sleeves, and a black pearl necklace Karkat gave her on, thus continuing the trend of the gods of the new universe looking cute as fuck today.

You get a strawberry shortcake ice cream bar from the park vendor’s little cart, and chomp on it as the four of you go for a walk. Just being around the three of them boosts your mood and you find yourself laughing along with Rose’s dry humor and holding hands with Jade. Rose is aaaaaaaaall the way on the other side of Dave but you will occasionally lock eyes with her and waggle your eyebrows.

“Romper!” you suddenly exclaim, your whole body jumping. Jade, being closest to you, jumps as well, and fixes you with a wide eyed stare of surprise.

“What?”

“You’re wearing a romper, I just remembered the word.”

Your friends pffft at your silliness and Jade bonks her head against yours again. You let go of her hand so you can reach up and scratch her between the ears and she takes a bite out of your ice cream.

“Hey!” you protest, and she laughs at you.

“Idiot tax!” she chimes brightly. You shrug.

“I mean, if that’s the only way idiots can get strawberry ice cream then I guess,” you relent, and she swats you before offering you a bite of her orange creamsicle.

Conversation meanders and so do the four of you. You have to have rounded the park at least three or four times, sometimes talking about the fuckability of nagas, sometimes talking about whether a new world comedian named Winchester Craig is being ironic in his jokes and if he is does that add another layer of humor or not, sometimes debating the relevance of swordfighting when guns exist, sometimes making asses out of yourselves with your powers and idly striking awe into local
passerby. You’d think they’d be a little used to living in the same city as gods by now, it’s been like four years, but you guess not. Whatever, it’s not really any concern of yours.

“So, John,” Jade says, and uh oh. Usually that tone means trouble, and if she’s bringing it up in front of both Dave and Rose you’re pretty sure you’re not going to be able to disagree by the end of whatever conversation you’re about to be having.

“Yeah..?” you ask cautiously.

“You’ve been spending a lot of time with Gamzee lately. And by that I mean this is literally the first time I’ve seen you without him since you rescued him.”

“I… guess so?” you say. She stares at you a moment, ears sorta poking out sideways. Not upset, but not happy either.

“Is that bad?” you ask, looking to Rose and Dave as though they might clue you in on what you’re missing.

“A little,” Jade says, and Dave and Rose do the pinch-one-half-of-their-lips and tilt their heads in agreement with a tiny shrug thing.

“Okay?” you say. You don’t… really get it.

“Listen, John, I’m really happy that you’ve been spending so much time socializing! And I’m really happy that Gamzee and the new trolls seem to be cheering you up and getting you out of your depressive slump!”

You were a goddamned moron to think she hadn’t noticed.

“But there is such a thing as too much of a good thing and you and Gamzee have kind of been attached at the hip, and I’m worried you’re investing too much of your happiness in one person and it’s going to have a negative outcome in the long term.”

“Okay,” you say, “I think I get it. Like how sometimes when you live with someone you start noticing all the little things that annoy you and you need to take a break from them.”

“Yeah, sorta like that. Or, like, you become dependent on one person for your well-being and when that person inevitably fails things take a turn for the worse. Or, maybe,” she looks more uncomfortable, “you become so attached to one person that you start distancing yourself from other people in your life. Not that you have! You’ve actually been going out and doing more with the rest of the group than you had been before! But just… something to be concerned about for the future, yeah?”

“Aw, I’m sorry Jade! I didn’t mean to make you worry!” She’s right, after all, you’ve only really ever not been in the same space as him when you’re giving Gamzee and Karkat alone time.

Jade looks relieved, which you’re not sure you get but okay.

“So you think I should have some time to myself and also with people who aren’t Gamzee,” you confirm, and all three of them nod. You shrug. “Sure?”

“You’re taking this better than expected,” Rose comments. You shrug again, this time lifting your palms up flat and tilting your ear into your shoulder.

“To be entirely honest I wasn’t even aware that I was spending all my time with him until you
pointed it out.”

Dave sighs and Rose honest to god laughs out loud at you. “John,” Jade says with a small eye roll, “you two have been spending more time together than a newlywed couple.”

“I wouldn’t go that far,” Rose says through her snorts. She doesn’t like laughing with her whole body like this, since she’s a little obsessed with her image and as soon as she goes past coy giggling she breaks out in loud, ugly snorting, except you don’t think it’s ugly at all! You like the way she snorts. Like that one princess from Mulan 2.

“Yeah, you and Kanaya have basically always been insufferable and inseparable,” you comment, and Rose sticks her tongue out at you, the rest of her face completely flat and expressionless to contrast. You stick yours out back at her, exaggerating the rest of your expression in response.

“But so, you get what we’re saying here?” Jade says, dogmatic (puns) on her point.

“Yeah, I getcha. How about this, tomorrow you and I can hang out, just the two of us?” you offer, and Jade beams at you. Gee, you kind of wish they’d brought this up sooner, if it’s been such a concern for them!

“Speaking of insufferable and inseparable,” you mention, turning the conversation away from you, “How’s Kanaya doing?”

“Well. She’s spending the day with Jane, since it’s an off-day for us and I’m spending my time with you hooligans.”

“The hooliganest,” Dave agrees.

“Nothing but ruffians, us,” Jade adds in.

“Absolute scoundrels,” you say.

“Rascals, even,” Dave continues, and Rose bumps into him, who bumps into Jade, who bumps into you, and you all end up sniggering.

“But Jane, huh?” Jade says, “The two of them do get along really well, I've noticed.”

“Very well,” Rose agrees, and there’s a quality to her tone that has you all arching eyebrows and tilting heads. She smiles, pretending not to notice, and you poke Dave around Jade’s shoulders.

“Dave, Dave poke her with something, she's hiding secrets,” you demand.

“Why, me?” she asks, sounding “shocked” and pressing a hand to her chest, making her necklace jangle. “John, I’m offended that you could even consider leveling such an accusation.”

“Oh we’re sure,” Dave says mildly, but to his merit he does poke her. “C’mon sis we can all tell you’re dying to tell us whatever it is about Kanaya and Jane you’ve got holed up in your trap. Unbind the seals keeping those secrets locked away, chant your gothic hymns and summon from the depths of space your eldritch enigmas and unprivatize your private affairs.”

“Fess up!” you add, your short bluntness a contrast to Dave’s long windedness, and Rose snickers at you. You do not notice the slight way Dave’s ears turn red.

“Very well. Now, don't tell either of the two of them, but Davepeta and I have been talking and it seems to us that a certain pair of ladies are waxing a bit conciliatory.”
“Ooooo, scandalous gossip!” Jade says with a giggle. “Not ashen, are they?”

“No, no, they’d both want to be the middle leaf,” Rose says, waving her hand a little. “No, they’re definitely leaning pale. And honestly I am terribly glad of it.”

“Oh?” Dave asks, and you and Jade make quiet noises of interest as well.

“Kanaya is… proud,” Rose says, choosing her words. “For good reason, she is a pillar of strength to all who speak with her, cohort and coworker alike. But she is. Private. She does not like discussing her problems, and if she gets to a point where she’s actively seeking help from others it’s usually because the situation has already escalated past a place of reasonable repair.

“Part of me thinks she doesn't know how to ask for help. She's so used to other people looking to her for guidance, what’s supposed to happen when she’s the one needing guided?”

“Makes sense,” you say, thinking about it. Yeah, Kanaya is one of those people who, no matter what the situation is, you can picture her remaining composed and in control. Even when she's angry the ball’s still in her field, her strength and tenacity leaving her in charge.

“So it’s very hard for her when she needs support. I do my best, and I know she does too, but she doesn't often feel it necessary to tell me when things are going wrong.”

“So she's got a suffer in silence complex,” Dave says with a shrug, “that's nothing too new.”

“Unfortunately,” Rose sighs. “But Jane is much the same! Always the boss, always offering aid and encouragement, stubborn as an ox and someone others look up to.”

“Also, they're both very fussy,” Jade points out.

“Yeah,” you agree, “so if they're both the fussy ones of their friend groups, who’s fussing over them?”

“Precisely. I think it'd do my wife some good to have someone who doesn't cotton to nonsense and will actually make her talk about her issues without tolerating her prideful poppycock.”

“They’d make a cute couple,” Dave comments, “like, even just on an aesthetic level.”

“And they’re both pragmatic,” Jade muses. “Very straightforward and direct.”

“God knows Jane could use some help taking a fucking chill pill,” Dave says, slipping his hands into his pockets, “Especially when she gets pissed.”

You nod and give a short hum in agreement. Pissed off Jane is a terrifying Jane, you think you’ll stick with your bulls in china shops.

“And Kanaya isn’t easily cowed and certainly isn’t frightened by the anger of others,” Rose says.

“Isn't Kanaya really scary when she’s pissed, too?” you ask.

“Jane could take her,” Dave comments, sounding thoughtful.

Jade taps we now ice cream-less stick against her chin, then giggles, “They’d be really cute!”

Rose smiles and sighs a little wistfully, “I certainly think so. I really hope something develops between the two of them, it seems to me they could both really use a little pale affection.”
The four of you go out for dinner, Dave snapchatting/texting his lame gross boyfriend the whole time and also uploading his meal to his Instagram. He has the most followers on basically every single social media site available, which you don’t really know how he manages to do since there are like five million of those and only one of him and also he’s always doing stuff like archeology or hanging with Jade or sucking face with his dumb boyfriend.

Dinner ends with all four of you leaving outrageous tips for your friendly waitress, and Rose complains about her shoes. Apparently they’re new and she hasn’t broken them in all the way yet and you four have been doing a lot of walking, and a show of dramatics breaks out in the restaurant foyer as Dave dips her, her hand thrown theatrically across her forehead as she bemoans the state of her delicate feet, and then Dave scoops her up, boasting about being a knight for the tortured princess of the Light. You and Jade both giggle like children all through it, delightedly entertained by the degree of their ridiculousness and the straight-edged delivery of such. Dave just casually doesn’t put her down and the four of you walk out like that. Jade, not to be outdone, scoops you up and you all laugh some more. You send Rose a little wave and she sends a wave back.

“Quite the situation we’ve gotten ourselves into, haven’t we John?”

“I’m not complaining,” you say with a grin, and Jade kisses your cheek again. First the four of you go to Rose’s home, where Kanaya is glowing in the fading light of the sunset and tending to her garden. You, Dave, and Jade make faces and gagging noises as Rose and Kanaya ~tenderly embrace~ and kiss each other, which prompts Rose to blithely flip you all off before spinning a little and tipping her wife into a dip. Then you and Dave drop off Jade, and as a goodbye you both pick up one of her hands and kiss her cheeks simultaneously, sandwiching her with that good affection.

You and Dave get maybe half of the way up to the altitude you usually fly at when you cast him a grin.

“Hey Dave!” you holler. He doesn’t shout back, but arches an eyebrow in question.

“Race you back to your place!” you shout, and then you Become the wind before he has half a moment to accept or decline. You zoom forward, filling the sky with your body, blasting yourself forward enough that the movement feels like singing. Dave can flashstep in the air, but only for short distances, since most of his life spent flashstepping he had the ground to draw power from.

You beat Dave back to his house and slip in through an open window, too content in your self to force yourself back into a flesh body just yet. You calm your airflow to gentle drafting so you don’t, ya know, knock over everything in their hive-house, and float into the living room where you can hear Karkat and Gamzee talking quietly. You subsequently float in on something you absolutely were not meant to float in on.

Karkat’s crying, his form bent over Gamzee’s head which lies pillowed on his lap. His hands are in Gamzee’s hair, and Gamzee is curled so his back is to the living room, face turned towards Karkat’s belly.

"Gamzee, you hated me," Karkat says, voice soft and shaking badly, "back in the Medium when John and I found you, you hated all of us but I was the one there and in that moment you hated me. And for good reason, I did terrible things to you even before the Game started, you had- have every right to hate me for that shit. Don't tell me that's just... gone away, I know it hasn't, don't tell me you're just not mad at me anymore."

"Brother," Gamzee says, voice heavy, and while his tone isn't going high pitched you can sort of hear that he's going to start crying again as he speaks, which he does, "I don't want to think about
that anger. Brother, Karkat, I don't want- Karkat I've spent sweeps living in that hell, I don't want to think about it, I don't want to spend time on that anger. Brother I just-" he chokes, and now his voice starts rising, "I just want to be better, Karkat, haven't I hurt enough? Haven't I been hurt and lonely and angry enough? I just want to be okay, I don't want to be angry at you, I don't want to think on the loneliness or the puppet strings or my rage that did consume me in my pain- I didn't want it brother, I don't want to be hurting and mad anymore I just want to be better." He reaches up and paps Karkat’s cheek, which Karkat then also reaches up and grabs a hold of, thumb stroking over Gamzee’s hand.

You leave, you get the fuck outta dodge, you have seen too much and do not have the tools to deal with any of that. You pull yourself back into skin and bones in front of Dave’s door right as he’s touching down and shake your head with a hand making “no” motions in front of your neck.

“They’re definitely still moirailing,” you tell him, and he snorts.

“Jamming, John, the term is jamming.”

“Well, they’re doing it. We probably shouldn’t interrupt, sounds like they’re discussing heavy shit.”

Dave shrugs. “Probably why he’s barely responded to my texts all night and hasn’t sent back any snaps. He’s been opening mine though, the fucker.”

The two of you end up shooting the shit on Dave’s porch. He takes a can of pepsi out of his sylladex, but you’ve always preferred cola. You get into a dumb no-coke-is-better-no-pepsi’s-better argument for a few minutes, fully aware that you’re being dumbasses, and you pull out a coke and crack it open (you need to put more coke in your sylladex when you get home). You briefly picture the two of you, sitting on Dave’s porch with aluminum cans in hand, and wonder if you look like middle aged dads with beers discussing football. You chuckle at the mental image, then explain to Dave, and he starts pulling terms and phrases from every sport in existence out of his ass just to make you laugh. He takes a swig of his pepsi and starts “drunkenly” rambling about things “back in my day” and you take a drink of cola and play along.

Karkat eventually opens the door, glaring at the two of you and your empty cans and the way you’re playing connect the dots with the stars. Gamzee’s in his shadow and you swap Dave for Gamzee, Karkat pulling in Dave, who kisses him, and Gamzee allowing himself to be scooped up in your arms. He feels tired, the way he holds himself in your arms, or perhaps it’s the fact that he barely holds himself at all. He lets his weight settle limply however gravity pulls him, and you kiss his hairline, which makes him chirp weakly at you. You guess you would be exhausted too, if you spent half the afternoon and all evening talking about heavy emotional stuff.

As you fly home, you wonder if maybe they took breaks? You’ve been gone for hours, surely they couldn’t have been talking about feelings that whole time. If nothing else they would have had to stop for dinner, although the mental image of Gamzee sitting on the counter talking as Karkat listens, eyes trained on a skillet as he cooks, does make its way into your brain pretty easily. As does Karkat ranting and ignoring his food while Gamzee listens with his mouth full, scooping indistinctly blurry food onto a fork and leaning over his plate. Okay so they could have talked all day but you doubt either of them has the emotional stamina for that. They probably took breaks, conversation flowing in and out of gravity as they spoke.

Gamzee seems a little more awake by the time your toes touch down in front of your front door, and your thoughts turn to the last moment in which the two of you were in this building.

“So, uh,” you start, feeling guilty again. “Sorry. About your codpiece.”
Gamzee bonks his head against yours and you set him down, though his arms stay wrapped around your neck and you don’t move your hand from his back. “’S chill, brother, Karkat did lay plain to me there’s differences between a fun uncomfortable and a genuine sort, and you did have your reasons for not wanting to see it ‘round.”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t make it okay.” You’re glad he understands, though. It really is just such an… yeah there’s no other way to describe it except uncomfortable. It’s an uncomfortable discomfort, it makes you discomforted. Just. The opposite of comfort, which is unfortunately opposite of the way Gamzee views it.

“I’ll keep it for times I need it, yeah?” Gamzee says, leaning his head against yours. “I don’t mean a brother no harm.”

“I know you don’t, but I am still sorry for- yeah.”

“I forgive you, brother blue.”

“Thanks.”

Your door is no longer half so foreboding, now that you’ve apologized, so the two of you go inside and putter about in your nightly routines. You shower, since Gamzee showers in the mornings, and the two of you brush your teeth/fangs and get into pjs. You tell him goodnight and head to your room, which briefly feels too small, and think that’s going to be the end of it for the evening. It is not.

“Bro,” Gamzee says softly, his knuckles tapping on the frame of your doorway. He’s got on a really baggy shirt, made out of that super nice soft stretchy material that nightgowns are sometimes made of, the hole for his neck too large and sleeves extending down to his elbows, and cotton pajama pants with checkerboards on them. Thank god he doesn’t have the codpiece. You have just stuck your feet under the covers, so you pull them back out and spin to face him.

“Ah, don’t get up,” he protests quickly, and you pause in your movements before leaning back.

“What’s up?” you ask, putting your glasses back on.

Gamzee is quiet a moment, fidgeting with the hem of his night shirt, and then approaches you. “Mind if we talk a moment?” he asks quietly.

“Shoot,” you say, because all this buildup is kind of starting to make you nervous. Maybe it’s nothing, like Jade earlier with how much time you’ve been spending together. Maybe Karkat told him the exact same thing, and he’s going to try and tell you that he wants to spend a little less time with you! Wouldn’t that be hilarious.

“So, I was talking with a brother Karkat all this fine night, right?”

“Right,” you say, pretty sure now that he’s going to bring up the constantly-together thing and subsequently no longer worried. He seems emboldened by your lack of concern, and sits down on the bed next to you, talking at his knees and bouncing his leg as he speaks.

“And so we were talking on all manner of things both serious and not, and uh, John,” he looks up at you, making eye contact, and you smile softly at him, “you’ve gotta stop leading that brother on.”

Your smile drops and your brain does a loop, then tries to catch up. “What?”

“Johnbro, I thought you two dating and domestic. It didn’t even come to me to question that the
two of you were settled in sweetest hate.”

“Wait, wait, back up a step,” you protest. You and Karkat, dating? Domestic? You’re not sure where this is coming from.

“John,” Gamzee says, looking at you but rubbing at the fabric of his nightshirt anxiously, “I thought, upon seeing you that first time without the Lord in my pan, that you were settled and established in pitchest kismesitude. It did not occur to me for one singular moment that you were not.”

“I, I don’t-” you say, agape.

“And when my brother and I were talking earlier this night, he revealed unto me that you are not, and I thought myself getting lied to for jokes and did not believe him for the first three minutes of his telling me so.”

You’re really baffled right now, but Gamzee just keeps on going.

“John, you do all things pitch at my palest love, so much that I would have been a damned fool not to think you two hateful and domestic, you understand me bro? Like, you’re always at each other with pitch affection on your tongues and fingers but Karkat did reveal to me that you think this mere hatefriendliness and as much as I can get my appreciation for that, this,” he points to you, “is not hatefriendship. This is you stringing my brother along and him acquiescing because you did turn him down once and he wants to respect that. He don’t want to bring it up because he knows you don’t feel that way for him but doesn’t want to ask you to stop neither because he likes the way he can lead himself on as you drag him by the pushertendons.”

Gamzee sounds mildly accusatory now, and you feel like you’ve fucked up in a way you don’t fully understand.

“You gotta stop.” Gamzee says, and you’re pretty sure this is the first time in the two weeks you’ve known him he’s ever put his foot down like this- about anything.

“I- sorry?” you say, because this feels like something you should be apologizing for. “What am I doing wrong, exactly?” you ask. If you’ve been hurting Karkat in some way you definitely want to know! Karkat is a good friend of yours and you don’t want to be stringing him along or anything!! But as far as you know all you’ve been doing is being buds with him?

“You’re flirting with him damn near constantly without giving him the motherfuckin’ satisfaction an’ closure of actually dating him,” Gamzee says, still sounding vaguely accusatory.

“Okay,” you say, feeling your spine bristling a bit. But you’re not gonna get defensive about this! If your friend is saying this you should listen and not try to defend yourself (you wouldn’t be sure what you’re defending, anyway). “How?”

Gamzee frowns and tilts his head at you, his knee bouncing. “What do you mean?”

“How am I flirting with him? I’m pretty sure I’ve never expressed interest in him like that.”

Gamzee’s leg bounces harder, and his ears tilt back. Gee, you might have only known him a short while but even you know he doesn’t like confronting things, at all. Bringing this up with you must be really nerve wracking for him! But, you note with a twinge in your heartstrings, it’s a testimony to how much he loves Karkat that he’s doing this for him. And also it’s a testimony to how badly you have apparently been fucking up.
Why hasn’t Karkat told you? Or, if he’s too embarrassed, Dave?

“Bro,” Gamzee says, like even he’s amazed you somehow don’t know, “Every time you two are in a room together one of you says somethin’ of a jackass to the other and you flip each other off and you tease him and prank him and John, John, brother, you dumped a bucket on his head as prank even during the time I have been here!”

“Yeah?” you agree warily, “It’s a pretty traditional prank.”

“Not for trolls it’s not!” Gamzee protests, “At least not from Alternia, I don’t know in full how trolls function here, though I do assume that bit can’t be too different. But, at least for trolls like Karkat, any prank involvin’ a bucket is gonna carry real motherfuckin’ heavy sexual connotations!”

“That’s part of what makes it funny,” you protest, but it feels weak to your own ears.

“Bro,” he says, face falling flat with a sort of “c’mon man” expression. You shrug and “eehhh” and he rolls his eyes at you. “John, brother, you gotta be getting your recognition on of this shit.”

“But I don’t hate him!” you protest, and that one you’re certain of. “I really really like Karkat! I just like annoying him and poking fun at him!”

“And pranking him,” Gamzee adds.

“Yeah,” you agree.

“And getting him riled up,” he continues.

“Yeah…”

“And you do go out of your way in order to best him at games, liking cards and boards and consoles that give you chance to spite him at any and every turn.”

“Well, yeah,” you say, “But that’s just friendly competition!”

“And you clingin’ on him and holdin’ on his horns as he tries to wrestle you off, all a-screeching during?”

“That was really fun,” you say, remembering it fondly.

“And that one time when you woke me up all soft and gentle like and then did fling your body into Karkat’s to get him jolting and swearing and screeching.”

“Also hilarious,” you say, remembering the warm glow in your chest that having the two of them there with you, laughing and cussing, had caused.

“And you want him safe,” Gamzee says, as though he’s checking, which, duh!!

“Of course!!” you say, “I wouldn’t want anything actually bad to happen to Karkat!!” Your brain goes to the mental image of kismesitude you have, of rivals and fangs and blood and heated, violent passion. Of constantly aiming for the other’s throat and the backstabbing you’re sure must come with, coupled with the idea of hate sex. Yeah, no way, that is totally not what you feel for Karkat at all, you wouldn’t hesitate to protect him if the situation called for it, you just like making him screechy and beating his ass at Jenga. Two ENTIRELY separate concepts.

“And you wouldn’t never turn on him or cause him true grief, you just like to pick and poke and
“Yeah!” you agree. “That’s it! *That’s* what I feel for Karkat!”

“Brother I did just describe the very definition of pitch and have you confirm it over and over,” Gamzee tells you bluntly, leg bouncing.

“Wait what.”

“John,” Gamzee says, “You’re pitch for Karkat.”

“No I’m not!” you protest, “I don’t want to hurt him! I just told you that!”

“But you do like to wrestle and knock heads,” Gamzee says.

“Yeah but those are like, minor inconsequential injuries!” you say, frowning.

“Right,” Gamzee says, “John, please, think on this for two seconds and examine your own feelings on the matter.”

“I don’t want to hurt him!” you reassert.

“Right!” Gamzee agrees, like you’re agreeing with him.

“So it’s not pitch!”

“It *is* pitch!”

“How is it pitch if I don’t want to hurt him?”

“Brother, to want to hurt your partner in serious is to be a sickened tar!” Gamzee says, sounding as baffled as you feel, “You’re not supposed to want to hurt your kismesis truly, it’s supposed to be fun on both sides when you brawl- physical or mental!”

“I…” you start, but you don’t have anything to say. Have you been having one giant misconception on an entire quadrant of troll romance for this long?

“Brother, pitch is about romantic rivalry. Bettering yourself out of spite for the other, poking fun and making nuisance but never doing lasting damage. It’s about laying light on flaws that need tough love and elbow grease to wipe out, on not tolerating the shit your partner does pull but not thinking them any less of an equal for it. It’s supposed to be a game of balance, always trying for the one-up but only half the time getting it. Bro. Bro, you care about Karkat, he’s your good friend and you don’t ever want to see him hurt but you motherfuckin’ *adore* pressing his goddamned buttons- I’ve seen the delight your face does form when you get him riled don’t even try to think on protesting that.”

You weren’t. It’s true, you live for the way you can needle him, it’s sometimes been what has compelled you up out of bed on low days. Actually… now that you’re thinking about that through *this* lense…

“You love him and hate him and I’ve seen you scold him on being a dumbass a few times this last week, being sharp with him where pale firmness or flushed softness won’t cut it and you punk him at every chance and jostle him with your hips or shoulders and John brother you are pitch as spades for my best friend.”

“But I don’t want to kiss him,” you say, and Gamzee’s breath cuts out at that. He opens his mouth,
but all that comes out is a very, very quiet little “ahhhh…” and he looks away from you, his knee no longer bouncing but his fingers back to rubbing at his sleeve.

“I…” he says, then drifts off again. You think you’ve won(?) this… argument and/or conversation?

He plops into your shoulder and you pat him on the back. “There there,” you say. He made a good case, but you’re just friends with Karkat. No kismesis feelings from you! Oh, but if you’ve been making it seem like you DO as thoroughly as you have been, you can see why Gamzee is upset at you for accidentally stringing Karkat along! You’ll have to apologize to him.

“I’ll try to cut back on the hatefriendly accidental advances,” you promise him, because you don’t want Karkat to feel like you’re a viable romantic option when you’re not. “I’m not entirely sure what all I’m doing but if you point it out to me when I’m doing something pitch I’ll be able to stop, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Gamzee says, lifting his head up and smiling at you. “Thanks, brother.” He bites his lip and rubs at his arm, but he’s not using his nails (the bandages are in the way anyway) so you don’t get too terribly worried.

“You sound anxious,” you say, carefully rubbing his back and eyeing his face with concern.

“Karkat’s gonna be pissed at me. He told me not to bring it up with you, but I can’t just sit here and not do nothin’ while my best friend gets his emotions all dragged around, especially since you ain’t doing harm on purpose!”

“Yeah, no, I’m glad you told me,” you say, knocking your head gently against his so your horns would clack if you had any. “Like I said, I don’t want to actually hurt Karkat’s feelings!”

Gamzee leans up and kisses your cheek. “And I’m glad of that, brother. I’m gonna go to sleep now,” he yawns at the very mention, “Day, brother blue.”

“Night! Sleep well Gamzee,” you tell him, and watch him leave before turning back to your covers, putting your glasses on the table, and then turning out the light.

That, truly, should be the end of it. It’s late, you’ve had a good day, you’ll text Karkat in the morning and tell him you want to meet up so you can apologize to him and ask him how you can be less accidentally pitch, end of story. You don’t want to kiss him, you just like annoying him.

Except. Now you’re thinking about kissing him. As a matter of fact, the longer you lie there in the dark, the more you think about kissing him. You try to turn your thoughts to other things, but your brain seems to have boarded the one-way express train to kissing-Karkatville and you can’t actually stop thinking about it. Or him. Or his lips which…

It’s true that you really like Karkat, and really really like bugging him. You’re have no reason to lie about that. Given everything Gamzee was telling you about the emotional and like, relationship-al part of kismesitude, it sounds like pitch might actually be something you could potentially enjoy with Karkat? But then there’s the, you know, concupiscent aspect of a relationship and you’re not gay! In a sex way or a kissing way, except now you’re kind of thinking about kissing Karkat and it sounds-

You picture the two of you, wrestling around as you often do, fighting over something stupid like the remote or which movie you’re going to watch or even that day back when he and Gamzee were both asleep in your guest bedroom and you two got tangled up in the bed sheets but now you’re picturing it ending differently, you’re picturing bending down mid-wrestle and kissing him as he
tries and fails to shove you over so he’s the one on top and kissing you back and grabbing at your shoulder blade and woah. Okay brain. Okaaaaay brain. Time to take a fucking time out. Except now you’re thinking about things like wandering up to him in the kitchen and kissing the crook of his neck only to leave a little bite and him swatting you with a spatula and getting mushroom grease on your jeans- and now you’re thinking about leaning in reeeeeeal close during an argument and getting him all riled up as fuck about movies or coding or a game you just beat him at and cutting off his shouting by kissing him and now you’re picturing just straight up making out on the couch with him and BRAIN. Brain shut up!!!!

This is all well and good and everything but you are not gay and Karkat is very nice but you don’t want to grab him by the hair and gently pull your faces close enough to feel each other’s breathing only to stop short of contact just so you can savor his anticipation and make him swear at you for being a goddamned tease with that gravely irritation of his and this is not helping!!!!!!!

You don’t!!!! Want!!! To think about this right now!!!! You’ll think about it in the morning!! But the idea of morning only makes you think of waking up next to Karkat in a morning, pushing your lips lazily to his cheek and neck and then blowing a raspberry on the grey skin there and making him thrash and scream at you and ugh!!!! Why is your brain doing this to you!!!! You’ve never once thought about kissing Karkat before now why is your brain suddenly churning out scenario after scenario of poking his sides when you come up behind him only to slide your arms around his waist, of you getting ahead of him in chess and getting the board flung at your face as a precursor to him lurching across the table and yanking you by the shirt into a kiss, of you cuddling on the couch like you normally do, but this time punctuated with little kisses and lovenips every now and again??? You’re a good person (mostly) you don’t deserve to have a gay crisis in the middle of the night!!!!

You eventually manage to fall asleep, but only after much tortured daydreaming of Karkat’s lips and voice and the warm way your chest squeezes up whenever you get particularly breathless from him. The next morning you wake to your phone buzzing, and it’s Jade! You put your glasses on and yawn, big and wide, and don’t bother sitting up in order to respond, gay thoughts temporarily outrun.

gardenGnostic [GG] begun pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

GG: morning john!!

GG: i just realized we didn’t set a time for today! :o

EB: Oh shoot you’re right

EB: I just woke up, so give me at least an hour to get up and dressed and shit

GG: heehee

GG: okay!! :D

GG: would you like to just come on over whenever you’re ready?

EB: I mean I’m down for that

EB: Just at your place or are we going else where?

GG: if we wanna go somewhere we can but i wasn’t planning on anything fancy

EB: Coolbeans!!
You’re actually really glad you’re going to go see Jade today. Now that you’re a little more awake, your gay thoughts from last night have caught up to you. You cannot outrun them. You get up, stretch a little, and then go to knock on the doorframe of the guest bedroom. Gamzee stirs, then mumbles incoherently, as you’ve grown fond of him doing. You enter the room and bend down to kiss his hairline. You think briefly on kissing Karkat like this, then shove the thought out of your head. You’re kissing Gamzee, not Karkat, and you’re kissing his hair good morning, not his lips.

“Mmmm, evening bro,” Gamzee mumbles.

“Morning!” you greet brightly. “I’m gonna go make breakfast, want anything in particular?”

“Pancakes,” Gamzee says with an uncommon decisiveness for this soon after waking up. You snort and ruffle his hair affectionately with a bright “okay!” and head downstairs, still in your pjs. You hear the shower turn on as you pull out the ingredients. You beat the batter with a hand whisk, not really needing an electric mixer for something this simple, and heat up the pan before letting batter sizzle down onto the metal, nearly perfectly circular. You flip when you judge it to be about right, and are greeted with a perfect golden brown. You’ve got your last pancake in the pan when Gamzee comes downstairs, showered and dressed in (thankfully) clothes that do not involve the codpiece. You flip it up onto the plate, where you’ve got a sizable stack of pancakes, and Gamzee grabs two plates, silverware, syrup, and butter for you as you turn off the stove and carry the plate with the food out to the table you now own. It’s really weird eating at a table just for like, regular meals, but weird in a good way. Neither you nor Gamzee feels particularly compelled to speak during breakfast, and on one hand the silence is companionable but on the other you have nothing to distract yourself from your ongoing war with your brain, that continues to send you images of you and Karkat, liplocked, despite your constant protests against such.

Gamzee eats more than you, which is good because you couldn’t have eaten half of that stack anyway but also because he’s still so thin. You swear, he’s eating at least 4000 calories a day but his body absolutely refuses to expand at anything resembling a reasonable rate. You’ve only recently been able to stop counting his ribs, but whatever. He pushes back his plate when he finishes, licking his chops, and sends you a lazy smile.

“Thanks, brother, tastes like a mi- shit was hella fine, ‘s what it was.”

“Thanks!” you chime, taking a swig of milk. “So Gamzee, Jade invited me over to her place today,” you tell him, since heh, he should probably know.

“Cool,” he says easily, “When we going?”

“Oh, uh, actually, just me. I’m gonna leave you here or maybe drop you off somewhere and head out as soon as we clean up but-” you cut off, watching Gamzee’s face twist into something resembling horror crossed with panic.

“Hey, Gamzee,” you say, instantaneously worried, getting up.

“Please,” he says, voice trembling and his breathing kicking up in speed. Oh no, this isn’t good.

“Gamzee, hey, eas-” you try to comfort him, to reach out to him and soothe him down from whatever it is you just accidentally triggered, but he cuts you off.

“I’ll be good, I’ll be good, I promise, please, please don’t leave I swear I’ll be good!” He collapses to the floor as he begs, which you kneel down next to him on out of reflex. Wow, okay, how do
you keep on forgetting that “crippling abandonment issues” is on your list “The Traumas of Gamzee Makara”? You scoop him up and hover a foot off the floor, legs crossed and Gamzee curled in your lap. You support his back with one arm but use your other hand to grab his, pulling it away from where he’s scratching at his bandages.

“Easy, Gamzee,” you say, scanning your sylladex for a stim toy of some sort. You have a rubik’s cube, close enough. You pop it out into his lap and hand it to him, and instead of turning the blocks he just sort of squeezes it but hey whatever works you guess. “Easy, shhh, I’m not leaving, I’m right here, I’m right here Gamzee, I’ve got you,” you say, but even as you speak he continues to beg, weak pleas as he curls in on himself, tears slipping down his face but not sobbing. It’s absolutely heartbreaking, and you make a mental note to strike “leave” out of all and any conversations you have with Gamzee.

“Please don’t leave,” he keens, quiet, too quiet, gripping at the cube hard enough you think he might break it.

“I’m not leaving,” you promise, trying to keep your voice, keep it steady, not betray how much you’re freaking out right now.

“You’re going to,” he sobs, the first note of his ugly crying that then flows freely like a burst dam. He honks and sobs and is generally a gross and noisy crier, but it’s better than that soft, aching crying that felt…

Resigned. Begging with a helplessness that meant he knew you were going to hurt him anyway.

“Shush, Gamzee, easy, easy, it’s okay, take it easy.” You don’t know what to do. “I’m not leaving, okay? Try to calm down and then we’ll talk about what’s wrong, but deep breaths first.”

You help him breathe. You are distinctly lacking in ideas for anything else to do. Once he’s (sort of) calmed down enough, you start going over things you want to say. You have suggestions: call Karkat, go somewhere and sit down, maybe make tea, but you’re afraid that by suggesting going and doing something you’re going to frighten him again and you’ll be back at square one.

“Gamzee,” you say, soft as you can manage, voice shaking. “I want to establish right now that I don’t want to hurt you or cause you distress, okay? So we’re gonna talk about things, and I’m going to say things, but none of what I’m going to say is going to be something I intend to freak you out with, okay?”

Gamzee takes a shaky breath, hiccuping in the middle, and nods.

“Okay good,” you praise gently, “I’m gonna help you sort through all of this, so please try not to panic if something I say scares you, I won’t be insistent, I’m just throwing ideas out there. Do you want me to call Karkat for you?”

“No, I- yes? Maybe? I don’t know, brother,” Gamzee says, squeezing on the rubik’s cube so hard his grey knuckles go white.

“That’s okay, we can call him in a minute then,” you say, petting his hair with your free hand. “Do you wanna go sit down on the couch?”

Gamzee shrugs and curls in a little closer around himself.

“It’s okay,” you promise softly, scratching between his horns. “I’m gonna float us to the living room, you can keep on sitting on my lap when we get there if you want.”
“Yes,” he whines, still crying a little bit. God, you feel so bad for him, you wish you could somehow magically make this better. Make him better. You settle onto the couch and he only presses his face into your shirt miserably.

“Gamzee,” you say softly, “can you please tell me what’s wrong? You’d been doing fine on your own, recently, why the sudden panic?”

“You going to the bathroom or chilling with Dave while Karkat and I jam ain’t the same thing as you leaving,” Gamzee says, and you continue petting his hair.

“Okay,” you say, cautious, “Why? It’s not like I’d be gone for-” you remember his lusus. How he’d abandon him for weeks at a time, “-that… long. Oh, Gamzee,” you say, chest aching with pity, “hey, I’d only just be gone for today, and then I’d be back! And I wouldn’t be leaving you all alone unless you wanted it, I could drop you off at Karkat’s, or Davepeta’s,” you note his bandages, “or Jane’s! It’s okay, Gamzee, I’m not abandoning you.”

“I can’t know that,” Gamzee protests, pressing into your chest, toes leaving indents in the cushion next to your thigh.

“Sure you can, Gamzee, I wouldn’t lie to you, not about something important!” You press your mouth to his hair and continue fiddling with it, as much for your sake as it is for his, if you’re being totally honest.

“Here, Gamzee,” you cup his face and tilt his chin up so he can look at you, “I promise, I’m not going to leave you alone for extended periods of time, okay? You can know that because I live in this house, I have to come back here.”

“You could sleep at the hives of your friends,” Gamzee points out, but does in fact seem calmed by your reassurance. Or maybe he’s calmed by the effort you’re putting into reassuring him? That would be preferable, since you’re not really quality debate team material, but you do have honest intentions!

“Yeah, but if I did that, I would text you and let you know where I am! And I can’t stay over at friends’ places for days and days and days, I’d have to come home eventually and get a change of clothes at the least.”

“Could just turn around and leave right after that.”

“Gamzee,” you say, petting his hair again, “I’m not going to do anything to hurt you, not on purpose, okay?” Your thoughts get unhelpfully dragged back to the codpiece and your fuckup and you feel guilty again, but now is NOT the time. “I promise, I’m not leaving for good, just for the day. Possibly not even the whole day. But you and I can’t do everything together, it’d leave us codependent.” And wow, okay, so maybe Jade’s fears for you were a little unfounded, but would you look at the consequences she was scared of playing themselves out anyway, right in front of your very eyes.

Gamzee nods again and sniffs. “Promise you’ll come back?”

“Promise,” you say, extending your pinky finger. Gamzee chuckles and hooks his with yours, the pinky swear being a universally known pact, it just is.

The two of you sit together and just breathe for a little while, both of you calming down from varying degrees of panic, and then you awkwardly dislodge yourself. You go and get changed, putting on a slightly worn cotton shirt just in case Jade wants your help gardening today, and jeans
that aren’t exactly shabby but could hardly be considered nice.

Downstairs, Gamzee is on his phone, and he looks up at you. “Mind dropping me off at Jane’s?” he asks. “I know I can’t follow you everywhere, but I still don’t want to be alone, and this sister has made most joyous noises at the concept of my coming over.”

“Of course!” you say brightly. He seems to be doing better, which is good, and helps some of the tension in your own gut dissipate. You don’t want to be worried about him, and it might sound a little callous but you’re kind of pretty used to Gamzee breaking down like this. Concerning, sure, but ultimately something you’re growing acclimated to.

You drop him off at Jane’s, which is not actually the same house as Roxy and Callie’s. Jane still lives with her dad; she just spends most of her time at her girlfriends’ place.

You send a snap of yourself to Jade, telling her you’re on your way, and Become on your flight there. She’s not inside her house, so you have to pull yourself back into flesh so you can open the door to her greenhouse, which she is, in fact, inside of.

“John!” she greets, and bounds over to give you a big hug. You scoop her up and spin her around, a tiny bit careless but she doesn’t knock over anything important so it’s cool, and the two of you beam happily at each other.

You help her in the greenhouse for a bit, she’s just finishing up, and then the two of you go inside and she puts tea on the stove. You tell her about Gamzee’s panicking, from the day before and also from that morning, and she listens sympathetically.

“So, turns out, you did have every reason to be worried! Just not about me,” you finish, accepting the cup that she Spaces into your hands.

“And you too, I’m just lucky enough that it turned out you’re doing okay.” She pauses. “You are doing okay right? You know you can talk to me about anything.”

You now know she knows about your… slumps. Not depression, you’re not depressed, but just, the moods you get into. You also know that’s what she’s asking about, but haha! You can avoid that conversation entirely by having a different, but still relevant to her offer, conversation!

“...Hey Jade,” you start, and she sips her tea. You wait until she’s finished sipping, not quite aiming for a spit take right now (although those are always hilarious). Also, your thoughts are a little bit a mess, but in hopes that Jade will be able to make your thoughts less a mess you ask, “How did you find out you like girls?”

Her eyes blow wide and her ears go straight up, and she all but lurches to her feet. “Oh!” Jade’s looking at you like you told her something profound about yourself rather than simply asking an idle question, and you feel yourself get a touch flustered, “Oh, John, I’m so glad you came to me!”

“...Hey Jade,” you say, damning yourself and knowing you are, but still needing to protest a little while longer. “Just, just, I’m-” you exhale shortly and try to sort yourself, “I’ve been thinking a lot, lately, about… stuff and things. And I just. Want to know what it was like for you.” And by thinking a lot, you mean you may or may not have been having gay thoughts about Karkat for the last… nine or ten hours. You were asleep for most of those hours, but they still stand between you and the start of your gay thinking.

Jade leans back, still grinning, and picks up her tea again. “What it was like for me, huh…” She’s thinking, one ear cocked, and sips her tea again.
“I’m not really sure when exactly I found out! I’m sure growing up away from society probably helped a bunch with that. The only civilization I really knew was Prospit, and let me tell you carapacians barely have a vaguely-solid concept of gender, much less sexual orientation.” She sips her tea again, frowning off into a corner. “I dunno! I guess part of it has to do with the fact that I’m demi-demi, so it’s not like I feel romantically inclined towards anyone at the start, but hey if a girl is nice and I get to know her really well then why the fuck not?” She looks back at you. “You know?”

You shrug, “No, but I get what you’re saying.”

“Sooolooo,” she says, grinning devilishly, “what prompted this?”

You “pah!” and lean back in your chair as well, but hey, there’s not really anyone you trust more than Jade, so if you’re going to be having this conversation it might as well be with her. “So, Gamzee and I were talking last night,” you start, feeling your cheeks flush.

“Uh, huuuuuuuuuh,” she says, cheeks propped on her palms.

“And it turns out I’ve been acting really pitch for Karkat!”

She blinks, grin momentarily wiped away. “Oh. Yeah! Yeah, Davepeta and Kanaya complain about that a lot.”

You snort. “I didn’t even realize it? Also it turns out kismesitude is actually a lot different than I thought it was.”

“Yeah kismesitude is kind of a weird concept, not gonna lie,” Jade says. You spend the next few minutes explaining kismesitude as Gamzee explained it, and she listens to you with wide eyes and a vaguely stunned expression.

“Huh. Okay, so that makes a lot more sense actually.”

“Yeah I was under the impression that it was all like, violence and actual hatred and junk,” you say.

“Me too. Continue, then. Cause yeah that sounds a lot like your relationship with Karkat, actually pretty much to a t.”

“And that’s what Gamzee was saying, but then I was like ‘but I don’t want to kiss Karkat’ and he was like ‘that’s fair I guess’ but then,” you say, getting a little animated now, “I tried going to sleep last night and I just. I kept. Thinking. About Karkat.”

“About kissing Karkat?”

“Yes!” you say, mildly distressed by this. And also now once again thinking about kissing Karkat and how actually, genuinely fun it sounds. Your brain flits very briefly to the idea of kissing Gamzee, and how fun that would be, but you’re still not ready to examine that so you put a pin in it, you put a pin right in that and do not plan on taking it down anytime soon. You are so confused, you have all of the confusion, it is you. “So much kissing Karkat, Jade! I thought about kissing him so much!”

“That’s cute,” she coos, and you groan.

“Thanks but it’s Karkat! I’ve never even considered thinking about kissing Karkat before in my life and now suddenly it’s like it’s the only thing that’s on my mind! And yes okay so it literally only
started up last night so maybe I’m just being dumb and sudden and it will go away once the novelty wears off but what if it doesn’t? What if I’m bi, Jade? I could have been bi this whole time and I never even realized it!”

“It could be that you’re demi, like me,” she suggests. “Do you usually feel romantic attraction to people, like, just in general? Or sexual, for that matter.”

Your thoughts instinctively “blurgh” at the idea of sex. Not that you think you wouldn’t enjoy sex, it’s just… not something that you like to think too heavily on.

“I don’t know, Jade, I don’t think I feel sexual attraction?”

“That sounds about right.”

“Like at all.”

“That’s called being ace, John.”

“I am ace,” you joke, meaning it in the “cool” way not the “asexual” way but you know what, fuck it, you might be both. Right now you’re a little more concerned about whether or not you like boys.

“But romantically…” you say, and your gaze drifts off to the corner of the room. “I don’t know! I think I had a crush on Roxy but it was very short lived? And I don’t even know if I had a crush on Roxy or just thought she was really super neat and really wanted to be her friend?”

You think on this kind of hard, actually, and Jade gives you the space (puns, eyyy) to sift through your own thoughts.

“Is there a word for like, feeling romance but not romantic attraction?” you ask, because even beyond the level of you liking boys, you’re not sure if you feel attraction to anybody.

“Proooooobably?” Jade says, tilting her head and scratching at the base of one of her ears. “I mean, I’ve never heard of it but it’s probably a thing that exists. I’m not an expert.”

“You’re an expert compared to me,” you say, and she snorts.

“That’s because I go looking for this information, John.”

You shrug. “Fair enough. But I think that, whatever ambiguous concept that is, I’m that? Like, maybe I just need somebody to be like ‘hey romance’ and I can be like ‘oh yeah hey! Romance!’ you know?”

“I think so. So in relation to Karkat this would mean?”

You think about Karkat, about kissing Karkat and maybe you do feel pitch romance for him! You just didn’t notice ‘cause you don’t really feel attraction, just feel the romance itself. Possibly. Everything is so hard! Also you really only recently actually figured out what pitch romance actually is so how could you possibly have noticed you were feeling it?

“I think I might like kissing him,” you say. “But Jade! Jade!”

“That means you might like boys, John,” she says knowingly.

“But I don’t- aauuuuhhhhhrrrrr,” you gargle, throwing your head back over your seat. “This is so weeeeeeird!” you complain.
“It’s not that weird. You were kind of the last straight person in our whole friend group, you know.”

“Yeah well,” you grumble.

She shrugs at you, “Talking about it is a good first step though!”

“Yeah,” you agree, feeling better about the fact that Karkat’s lips; they plague you. “Thanks.”

“No problem! You can always talk to me about anything!”

“Right back atcha sister,” you say, and you pick up your tea again.

You sip at your tea together, and you’re not sure what she’s thinking about but you know you’re definitely thinking about Karkat and boys and the potential of you liking them.

“Jade,” you start again, “Okay, so say I do like Karkat. Does this mean I like boys by default or is there like, an exception that happens sometimes?”

“Exceptions happen sometimes,” Jade says, “At least, I’m pretty sure they do. You can be straight and have a crush on a boy or girl or be a lesbian and have a crush on a boy or a gay dude with a crush on a girl or whatever. The exception does not break the rule, it just means you’re attracted to that one person, instead of that whole gender.”

“Okay,” you say, more comfortable with that idea than you are with liking boys like as a group. You know there’s nothing wrong with it, but you’ve been pretty comfortable in your identity of heterosexuality and you’re not sure you’re ready to give that up.

“But I do know that it’s pretty rare, too. Like Kanaya, for example. She’d never date a boy, in any quadrant.”

You snort, “Yeah, I know she’s kind of a raging lesbian.” And honestly who wouldn’t. Sure, you can’t remember her ever saying it out loud, but even you’re not that stupid. “It’d be a little bit funny, though,” you say, thinking out loud, “If I was into more than just girls plus Karkat. Everyone in our whole original team would be into both. And nonbinary people.” Don’t wanna forget Daveteta! You’re genuinely not attracted to them in any way, but you don’t want to exclude them from hypotheticals!

“Oh yeah, how bout that,” Jade comments.

“Would I be interested in boys outside of Karkat?” you ask, still thinking out loud. “Am I interested in anyone outside of Karkat?”

“Well if you don’t feel attraction to other people, just like, romance itself, I guess it’d be kind of hard to figure that out.”

“I guess.” You sigh. “That’s a problem for a different day, though. Bluh!”

“Bluh!” she echos, and you both smile, feeling a little silly.

“Do you have anything you want to talk to me about?” you ask, and Jade shrugs slowly and shakes her head, her lips pinching to the side as she stares off into the distance.

“Not that I can think of! Life’s been lively, Aradia’s been over here a bunch and we hang out a lot. She’s really great! So are Feferi and Eridan, but I think I like Aradia the best out of that bunch,”
she confides, and you zip your lips with a wink.

“I don’t know if I have a favorite out of the new trolls!” you say, thinking on them yourself.

“You mean besides Gamzee?”

“Oh, yeah, besides Gamzee. But like, from the group Terezi found, I like them all kinda equal? Sollux is a little annoying though.”

“He’s pretty… like that,” Jade agrees, and you both laugh lightly. “Seems that he and Terezi are getting along pretty well, though, with a few bumps here and there!”

“Yeah,” you agree, “I hope Davepeta is right and they go pale. It seems like she could really use a good romantic partner.”

“I agree!” Jade says emphatically, “Terezi’s had enough of a hard time, she deserves a nice moirail who loves her and will look after her well-being and also some goddamned rest!”

“Couldn’t have said it better myself,” you agree. Your thoughts turn to Gamzee, who has also been in a pretty perpetual state of needing some nice people and also rest. You and Jade discuss him a little more, this time not talking about his recent panicking, but the way nobody seemed to notice that he was possessed by a literal demon. You show her the apology Rose typed up and she is as impressed as you had been by it, and you talk about how baffled you are that Rose and Dave could have just… been bystanders. You migrate to her couch midway through the conversation, leaning on each other, her legs on your lap, and you pet her hair as you talk.

“Jade, what if I would’ve done the same?” you ask at one point, voicing an insecurity you’d been holding onto for a while but not letting yourself think about. The idea that you could’ve done the same as Rose and Dave, that you could’ve blithely allowed another person to get tortured by Vriska while possessed by a demon, is one that haunts you so thoroughly you’ve become a master of ignoring it, but with Jade here it’s hard to keep any secrets, and she hears your fears at about the same time as your brain finally allows you to acknowledge them. “What if I ignored him too? And let all that bad stuff happen to him?”

“You would never,” Jade comforts, but it’s not a comfort you can take.

“I didn’t think Dave or Rose would be able to either,” you point out, “but they did. So did Karkat, and Kanaya, and Terezi. They all did. How can I know I wouldn’t have? If everyone else was doing it, and if Vriska was so persuasive and if literally nobody noticed the demon… and then there’s that stuff Davepeta was talking about, how in the dream bubbles they would have conversations with trolls that weren’t Equius and those people would forget they even had the conversations in the first place!”

“Weird shit was going down,” Jade agrees, brow furrowed.

“I might’ve hurt him,” you say, and the thought makes your stomach roil like you want to vomit. “I might’ve just, let him get hurt, and not cared.”

“I might’ve too,” Jade says, sounding as scared of the possibility as you are of yours. But the idea of Jade being a bystander is somehow even more appalling than the idea of you. Jade, your Jade, your sweet Jade who has only ever been good and done her best, cruel? It’s frankly unimaginable.

But if Dave had the potential, and Rose had the potential, and you, theoretically, had the potential, that means she, theoretically, did too and that’s just too much for you to even bother trying to comprehend so you just kiss her forehead and stroke her hair. You hold hands with her and
entertain garish “what if”s for a little while, but then she snaps both of you out of it with a, “Well, what’s done is done, and we’ll never get the chance to find out! What matters right now is that we’re here for him in the aftermath.”

“Yeah,” you say, bolstered by her words. You might’ve hurt him, but fate played out that you didn’t, so now you get to help him.

You and Jade make lunch together, working seamlessly in her kitchen, and then plug in an old movie you’ve both seen plenty of times for background noise and chat some more on her couch.

“...and so Aradia was showing me her whip collection which is basically the most badass thing I have ever seen in my life,” Jade says, and you sit up a little, shifting and popping your back in the process. She’s laying on top of you, because cuddling is still the absolute best, and you’re playing with—surprising no one—her hair.

“Yeah?”

“She knows how to use them too. We went out front past my garden and she showed me all her moves and it’s like ribbon-dancing but deadlier—and then we did have a conversation about ribbon dancing and I think I might’ve accidentally talked her into wanting to sign up for classes or something—but then we ended up sparring!”

“Oh?”

“Not with her whips or my rifle though, just some wraps to keep our knuckles and wrists from damage and some knee pads. It was probably the best strife I’ve had in a long while. She and I are about the same proficiency, physically, since apparently her actual fighting style involves using her psionics to crash either the largest boulder in the area into her opponents, or her opponents into the boulder.”

“Sounds a little terrifying,” you say. Yup. Definitely don’t want to meet her in a dark alleyway at night. Like her a lot; still maintaining a healthy fear of her.

“But aggressing her was so fun! Her hair looks really nice pulled up in a bun and she packs a good punch, but I feel I held my own pretty well,” Jade says, fiddling with a brightly colored rubber band that she loops and unloops around her fingers, and you continue petting her hair. “Then we went out for slushies cause we were both hot and sweaty and I got to show her my rifle collection. She thinks it’s pretty hilarious that Eridan sent me the code for his rifle back when I hated all of them. It’s actually not that bad of a gun, now that I’m not predisposed to dislike anything coming out of his mouth.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, that was a whole fiasco in and of itself. Also, she thinks my Iron Lass Suit is totally awesome, and we ended up showing each other the outrageous outfits that we made during the Game.”

“Did you play dressup?” you ask, half teasingly.

“Dressup is fun! And also she’s very cute and I’m very cute and honestly why shouldn’t we?”

“Fair points,” you concede, “Fair points.”

“She’s just so fun and nice and friendly and everything’s a joy for her and she’s got a lot of energy and she’s fun to talk to and her interests are really cool and her hair is soft and I think she’s a really
neat friend,” Jade says.

“Sounds like you’ve got a friend crush going there, Jade.”

“Oh definitely. I would like nothing more than to be good friends with her. Also, John, John I know you are but John are you aware of how soft her hair is?”

“Her hair is good hair.”

“Also her horns look like cinnamon rolls. Cinnamon rolls on the cinnamon troll.”

You snort. “I don’t know about her being a cinnamon roll. Maybe a ‘looks like a cinnamon roll but could actually kill you’? you suggest.

“Ooo, yeah, you’re right, you’re totally right.”

“Her horns are a… distraction,” you say, parodying Dave’s old comic, which none of the four of you (or Dirk) will ever allow to die.

She giggles and then settles against you, going quiet for a second.

“Actually, John, can I talk to you about something serious for a second?”

“Of course,” you say, stilling your hands in her hair before gently rubbing your thumb over the back of one of her ears.

“I- okay I know this is dumb and wrong and I know that but it doesn’t stop my brain from being dumb.”

“Mhm,” you prompt, knowing what she’s saying and trying to get her to tell you what the actual issue is.

“I’ve just. I’ve been feeling like nobody really likes me and all my friends just pretend to like me because I’m annoying and nobody actually needs me and I’m just the spare part that got picked back up at the end of the Game.”

You kiss her hair and give her ear a gentle squeeze. “Of course not,” you say, because you are no stranger to dumb brain things. “We all love you lots and think you’re the bee’s knees.”

Jade sighs and loops a pink rubber band around her thumb so tightly she has to be majorly cutting off her bloodflow. You gently reach down and undo two of the winds, and she huffs before decaphaloguing an orange silly band in the shape of a monkey and winding that around her ring finger.

“Thanks. I don’t feel like the bee’s knees, though.”

“Do you feel like the cat’s meow?” you ask, half a joke. She snorts at you.

“I’m not exactly cat themed, John.”

“Yeah but the dog themed one of those is ‘dog’s bollocks’ and honestly I don’t think anybody present wants to be thinking about that kind of thing.”

“Maybe I do John. Maybe I want to think about dog di-” she breaks off giggling. “Yeah, okay, I can’t finish that sentence.”
“That’s so gross Jade,” you say softly, also laughing a little, “You fucking furry.”

“Me? A furry?”

“It’s more likely than you think.”

She snorts at you again and pulls out a fifth rubber band, this one dark blue. She ties it just above the teal one on her pinkie, rubbing the backs of her fingernails along the inside of the stretched rubber.

“Jade,” you say, soft, pressing your lips to her hair right between her ears. “You’re so important to all of us. Me especially. You’re brilliant and positive and quick-thinking as hell. You’re creative and sure you’re a little goofy but who isn’t? You’ve got a big heart, Jade.”

She huffs at you and if she were Dave or Rose, she’d make a joke and try to play off the weight of your words but she isn’t so she doesn’t, she just unwinds her rubber band from her pinky and grapevines it along the rest of the fingers on that hand.

“And that’s what matters. You love with all you’ve got and don’t ever hold anything back. When you’re mad you don’t try to sugar coat it and when you’re happy you make everybody else in the area happy too just because nobody can be sad when you’re around, local sunshine goddess here to be the life of the party.”

She snorts. “Rose is the Light goddess.”

“Rose couldn’t have a sunny disposition if you paid her to. It’d be like The Grimm Adventures of Billy and Mandy when Mandy tries to smile. But instead of Mandy smiling it’s Rose pretending to be saccharine and the cosmic pillars crumble and the cloth of space and time unwind and we would all curse the twenty bucks and the triple dog dare that led to Rose trying to be sunny.”

“How terrible. However will we prevent such a fate?”

“Prevent? I was thinking about stopping by an ATM and working on my triple dog dare skills.”

Jade giggles and swats you playfully on the side. Then she heaves a deep breath.

“Thanks, John.”

“Of course.” You kiss her right at the base of an ear. “You’re wonderful, Jade, you deserve to feel good all the time always.”

“I don’t think that’s psychologically possible. I’d get synaptic fatigue.”

“See, this is exactly what I mean. You’re smart as hell. What did you just say? I don’t know. But I know it was smart and cool, like you.”

She props herself up and kisses your cheek, thanking you again, and offers you a smile before bonking her forehead against yours. It feels good to be able to help her! You spend the rest of the afternoon and the first half of the evening with her, but then she gets an invite to go have dinner with Aradia, Catavros, and the ghosts and you get invited along as well but you pass. You’re pretty sure the Crockers are expecting you for dinner.

You fly over to Jane’s house, and Uncle Crocker insists that you and Gamzee stay for dinner; wow, you are so surprised, who could have ever guessed? But you hardly mind! Uncle Crocker has the best cooking, it is him.
“Oh, hey bro,” Gamzee greets you as you plop yourself down in the middle of his and Jane’s card game on the living room floor. You are very aware that you are in the way and altogether too smug about it.

“Sup!”

“Crockpop in there says I gotta come over more often,” Gamzee says, sounding a little humored. What a funny name for your uncle! But you guess it’d be a little odd for Gamzee to call someone twice his age “bro.”

“Oh?” you ask.

“Says I’m too motherfuckin’ skinny and got manners from a ditch, and he’s gonna get his feed and schoolfeed on for me,” Gamzee elaborates, and you snort. Your uncle, like your father, seems to be of the impression that a guest is not a well-kept guest unless they’re sufficiently overstuffed by the time they leave.

“Oh he did not,” Jane says.

“Did so, just not in so many words,” Gamzee argues.

“He was much more tactful.”

Gamzee shrugs, “Yeah, but that don’t mean I didn’t hear him loud and clear for what he meant.”

“Whatever,” Jane says with a playful eyeroll, and starts shoving you off their pile. You get doled a hand after they finish the round, and the three of you play cards until Uncle Crocker calls you into the dining room. Dinner with them is nice, and Gamzee seems to get along really well with Jane and your uncle. The four of you spend most of your conversation cracking jokes and laughing, and after your plates are clean you delve into playing ring around the table with one person thinking of a joke right after the next.

Then Gamzee asks about Jane’s work because he didn’t quite catch one of the jokes and she tells him all about her job as the chief executive of Crockercorp, as well as her sort of role as the Goddess of Commerce and Trade in this universe. He mentions that he saw her on a dress, and she laughs.

“They do like to do that!” she says with a bit of a sigh. You understand; sometimes the attention is a tad much.

“Johnbro, how about you?” Gamzee asks.

“Hm?”

“She’s goddess of coin, what are you god over?”

“Oh, wind. Catavros is like, my demigod underling I think? I’m also supposed to be a trickster god but I think they might’ve flubbed that one a little, since I really only prank my friends.”

Gamzee honks. “That’s neat though!”

You shrug and grin, “It means I can get away with doing a lot of stupid shit in public though! They’re like ‘oh what’s going on over there?’ and someone else is like ‘oh it’s just the trickster god being a dumbass again’ ‘wild and mysterious are his ways!’ and stuff like that.”
Gamzee honks and Uncle Crocker tries to give you a “stern” look but in all honesty he looks pretty amused.

“But yeah. I’m just the windy boy.”

“You’re a fair big more than that, in my book,” Gamzee says, smiling at you and propping his chin up on his palm, and Jane chortles at him.

Uncle Crocker informs you all that he’s going to take a smoke and you take that as your cue to leave. You don’t necessarily mind other people smoking, exactly, and the smell of tobacco inside a house reminds you of your dad, but for someone to be smoking in the same area as you makes you very uncomfortable. You’re pretty sure it has something to do with the fact that as a wind god, you really, really don’t want anything to go inside of your lungs except actual air.

The night is still pretty young, and Gamzee, for once, does not seem to be in need of rest. “Would you like to go wander around downtown?” you offer, feeling just a tad impulsive.

“Sure, brother!” Gamzee lights up and you fly him over in your arms. The two of you touch down, the streetlights and neon signs of open businesses illuminating the pavement with a backdrop of the fading false dusk in the sky. You two mostly window shop, taking snaps of yourselves here and there, though you both agree to go inside the weed store. It’s part of a little strip mall alongside a busier street, just on the outskirts of the really honest-to-god downtown, and it boasts a variety of smoking implements. You don’t know why you felt a desire to come in here, since, as you had just recently been reminded, you get squicked out by the idea of gunk entering your lungs, but then you get distracted by the fancy pipes. They’re very pretty. One of them looks honest to god like an antique, all carved. It’s blue and black, and you think it’d go really well with your general color palette. The pipe is sturdy too, and you really just sort of want to buy it for the aesthetic value alone, but it’d be a shame to buy a thing you aren’t even going to use. But the thought of smoking it, putting stuff in your lungs…

Oh you just had the best idea.

**ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering timaeusTestified [TT]**

EB: Hi Dirk!

TT: Sup?

EB: Okay so you and Jake both know your ways around like, equipment and tools and shit, yeah?

TT: I would say that’s a fairly accurate assessment, yes.

EB: Can I commission you or him or both of you to turn an antique tobacco pipe into a bubblepipe?

EB: Like keep it pretty and looking like it’s real and shit but when in actuality it’s a fucking bubble toy?

TT: Sounds doable.

TT: You’ve got a pipe in mind?

EB: Yeah I’m gonna go buy it.

Oh!! You just remembered. “Hey, Gamzee, you still wanna reschedule and meet up with Dirk and Jake and Catavros, right?”
Gamzee sets down a very pretty looking bong, one with scale-like rainbow patterns on the bowl, base, and the upper half of the smoke chamber. “Yeah?” he says, walking over to you and looking quizzically at your phone.

“Mind if I reschedule for tomorrow night?”

“Sure, brother,” Gamzee says, propping his chin on your shoulder. “Sounds good to me,” he murmurs.

EB: Also!

EB: Are you three still down for hanging out with Gamzee and I?

TT: Gamzee and me, John.

TT: You’re usin’ the subject form when you should be usin’ the object form.

EB: Well Gamzee and me are gonna kick your unhelpful ass, Dirk

TT: Wrong again.

EB: :B

EB: Do the three of you want to hang tomorrow or not?

TT: Yeah we’re down.

EB: Sweet!!!

EB: See you tomorrow around 6?

TT: We’re lookin’ forward to it.

**ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering timaeusTestified [TT]**

“Rude ass motherfucker,” Gamzee mutters, and you kiss him on his temple.

“That’s how Dirk plays! He… takes a bit of warming up to. But I’m sure the two of you will get along just fine once you get used to him!”

Gamzee honks at you and asks if he can buy the rainbow fishscale bong. You purchase both your items, and Gamzee snuggles up to your side while the cashier removes the tags that get put on shit to make sure people don’t slip them into their sylladexes to steal things. Back when your dad was a kid, there were metal-detector things that’d go off whenever someone tried to take something out of a store that hadn’t been bought, but now the tags themselves will start beeping if someone tries to pocket them.

“You sleepy?” you ask.

“A little cold. I dressed while the sun was up and warming this here place, didn’t pack a jacket.”

You rifle through your sylladex and offer him the same navy blue sweater you gave him back on that day after you saved him. That’s still so weird to think about. You saved him. As in, like, he would be suffering if you hadn’t made the choices you had. He owes you. Like, not in a “he’s got to pay you back” way obviously!!! But like, owe as in- bluh, you’re flustering yourself with your own thoughts. Point is, you did something of actual gravity that had a direct and enormous impact
on someone else’s life.

Freaky.

Gamzee looks good in your sweater. The two of you wander around a while longer, looking at boutiques and restaurants and chattering passerby. Gamzee holds your hand and you like it, because holding hands is great and holding Gamzee’s hand is even better, cause you really like your friend, and the two of you sit on a bench near a public fountain and people watch for a little while, listening to conversation and leaning on each other. It’s a good silence, a silence filled by the sounds of everything around you, a silence you don’t really feel any need to start speaking in order to fill. Gamzee is comfortable, you’ve found. Not comfortable like Dave or Rose and certainly not comfortable like Jade, but someone you just really, genuinely enjoy.

Once home, Gamzee- who you think has been suborned by Jane- asks you if you’d like help getting laundry started. You kick up a bit of a fuss, but the two of you get a few loads done before it’s time to go to bed. You’ve got a big day ahead of you, and now, with no distractions and back in the place where it all started, your thoughts are drawn like pins to a magnet back to your gay thoughts.

ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering carcinoGeneticist [CG]

EB: Hey Karkat, what are you up to tomorrow morning/afternoon?

CG: MUST I CONTINUE TO BE FUCKING PLAGUED BY THE IDIOT BRIGADE EVEN NOW?

EB: Only for as long as you’re an obstinate douche about answering my question! ^-^

CG: FUCK YOU

CG: YOU ARE A BLIGHT UPON EVERY GANDERBULB THAT HAS EVER HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF FUCKING GLANCING YOUR DIRECTION YOU GELATINOUS PISSLAKE

EB: Awwwwww!

EB: *swoons*

CG: I AM GOING TO PROJECTILE VOMIT ON EVERYTHING YOU LOVE AND HOLD DEAR

EB: ehehehe

CG: I’M NOT UP TO ANYTHING TOMORROW AT THE MOMENT

CG: DAVE WILL PROBABLY WANT TO DO SOMETHING WITH HIS MOST RECENT FINDINGS AT YE OL’ ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG SITE

CG: ASK HIM

EB: But you’re the one I want to talk to!

EB: Or well

EB: Need to have a conversation with
CG: WHAT DID I DO THIS TIME

EB: ehehe you didn’t do anything!

EB: I can assure you that the thing I need to have a conversation about is probably good and also definitely needs to be in person and not over text but don’t start freaking out!!

CG: TOO LATE

EB: God, again with the drama!

EB: Seriously, it’s always blah blah blah with you!

EB: I told you, it’s probably going to be good

EB: And you’re stiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii freaking out

CG: IF THIS IS A PRANK JUST TO GET ME WOUND UP AND JITTERY ALL DAY WHEN I’M TRYING TO GET SOME GODDAMNED SLEEP I AM GOING TO LOVINGLY AND TENDERLY DETACH YOUR HUMAN SHAMEGLOBES FROM YOUR FESTERING MOLD FERMENTED CARCASS THAT PASSES ITSELF OFF AS A BODY

CG: WHO AM I EVEN KIDDING

CG: THIS IS DEFINITELY A RUSE TO GET ME RILED UP ISN’T IT?

EB: So, like, 10?

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

A second later you get a snap. It’s a picture of both of Karkat’s middle fingers, plus one of Dave’s middle fingers coming in off the side of the screen.

CG: FUCK YOU

A moment after that, you get a snap from Dave, making duck lips.

TG: idk what that was about but karkat was hellbent on the fact that two middle fingers was not actually enough to accurately portray his contempt also so youre coming over tomorrow morning then huh

You send back a snap of your dark room, your screen black.

EB: Yep!

Dave sends you a picture of his shoes.

TG: cool well ill see you then then night <3

Another picture of your darkened room.

EB: Night! <3

You plug your phone on the charger, which means you’re done with it for the night, take off your glasses, and lay in the stillness of your room for approximately 4.13 seconds before the gay thoughts come at you again. You really hope this is a kind of affliction that can be solved by giving
into the desire because you are very much not about getting plagued by thoughts of Karkat’s shoulder with bite marks on it and the way the tips of his ears will blush (you hope) when you duck down to kiss him out of nowhere.

God what if he doesn’t want to date you? What if you and Gamzee are totally wrong about this? Would you like that better? Are you invested enough in the idea of dating Karkat that a rejection would be upsetting to you?

But… now that you’ve started thinking about using his horns as handles, not just for wrestling but also for kissing him spiderman-style, now that you’ve started to think about him with his lips at your jaw, now that you’ve begun your downward spiral into very, very gay thoughts, you find yourself kind of liking it? You don’t want to do anything that involves clothes being removed except for like, going to the pool or something, but like just, just being, like, partners with him.

God, you’re red in the middle of the dark with your palms pressed into your eyes and thoughts of dating Karkat in your head and you really hope this crush phase is going to be over very, very soon because you’re pretty sure this is what a crush is like and it has come at you out of nowhere and you do not appreciate what your brain is doing to you!!! Ugh. Ugh! This is gonna be one hell of a conversation. But you’ll take care of it in the morning.

Chapter End Notes

It's 2:30 in the morning, please leave comments.
Chapter Summary

This is 24,170 words. One chapter. What the fuck how did it get this long how did it get this ANGSTY I wanted this to be cute. But then again isn't that just the summary for the entire goddamned fic.

Chapter Notes

Thank you all so much for your patience! Finals are finally over and I am now able to work on personal projects a little more! Special thanks to everyone who's been leaving comments, I go back and read over them whenever I'm feeling unmotivated and y'all make me feel so <3 <3 <3

By way of fanworks we have this lovely fanart!
http://imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com/post/159141989932/zeke-since-you-insist-have-it-me
And THIS lovely fanart!

However, now adding to the list of things I have never expected, behold, a fanFICTION of my fanfiction :O!!!! http://archiveofourown.org/works/10596456

Seriously you are all such blessings in my life I'm so grateful for all y'all <3 <3

Also, a reminder that I am available at imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com and you are all encouraged to follow me and/or drop by my messages and say hi/chat with me about my fic/ideas/whatever!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gamzee has kept, for whatever reason, both the codpiece and the mantle of his old godtier outfit. The weird hood of the latter has been removed, leaving a sort of… infinity scarf? It’s the best term you have for it, other than, well, “mantle.” He wears that in the morning, after you have woken him from his sleep and the two of you have eaten breakfast in your pajamas. He’s got a loose shirt and jeans on too, and the overall effect, you think, is very cute. Soft and huggable. So you do hug him! You’re dressed up a little yourself, having shaved and combed your hair more than three loose swipes. You’ve got a black, slightly nicer than usual shirt on, one with a lower than normal neckline that’s made with firm material, one that hugs your (still, you’re proud to say, pretty nice) form, plus a pendant. It’s simple, just a circle set in silver casing, but it’s onyx, and you know for a fact that Karkat is enough of a cheeseball that he’ll notice. Well, at least, once you’ve started the discussion of potentially (hopefully) going pitch with him. You wear your nicer jeans, which, happily enough, are also your darkest pair of jeans.

“Hey, so, brother,” Gamzee says, before you get the chance to bring up your plans for the morning with him. “Karkat’s been texting me. Apparently you’re worrying him like hell, bro.” Gamzee pulls out his phone and waves it at you. “You goin’ over there?”
“Yep! I want to talk to him about the pitch thing you pointed out to me.”

His eyes scan you. Shit, are you trying too hard? Nothing is even confirmed yet!

“Right,” he says, tone carefully neutral, “I’d best leave you two brothers to that then.”

Now there’s a surprise. “Oh, you don’t gotta! I was figuring you might want to come along?”

“Nah, bro, I did go make a nuisance and invite myself over to your pale sister’s place.” You know he means pale in the moirail way but you can’t help but snort at the very idea of somebody describing Jade, who is of Pacific Islander descent and spends all day in the sun to boot, as pale. “Mind swingin’ me by there, brother blue?” He offers you one of those sweet, warm smiles that you can never quite put your finger on the emotion behind it. “Carry me over in them big ol’ arms of yours.”

“Of course!” you say happily. You’re always happy to see Jade, and given what you’re about to attempt to do you could probably benefit from seeing her. Even just saying hi to her tends to bolster you, and you feel you could use a little bolstering.

Gamzee’s breath does something you don’t understand, but maybe it’s just a troll thing, because Karkat does it a lot too. You pick him up, the two of you easily falling in sync, his arms around you and yours around him, and you nyoom over to Jade’s, playing with him in the wind, dropping and tossing and catching him while he laughs at your antics.

Jade is happy to see you, happier still when Gamzee tells you that you scared the piss out of him on the fly there and he’s gotta run to the bathroom, which you use as time to tell her what you’re up to.

“I’d prefer nobody else know until I’ve got, like, it all sorted out?” you tell her, and she zips her grinning lips with perked ears.

“Good luck! I’m sure it’ll go well!” she tells you, and you can’t help but smile back, your chest feeling warmer and your shoulders squared bolder. It’ll go well. Jade thinks it will, and Jade is the smartest person you know.

You holler a goodbye to Gamzee and kiss Jade on both cheeks, then Become on your way out the door. The air around you buzzes with energy- your energy- as you fly. You’re nervous, certainly, but you’re also… really excited? Even far out past where you normally passively influence, the wind is tossing clouds like bowling balls and making the trees wave their encouragement. You can picture Jade in those bending bows, her natural green thumb transferring into the life of the planet below you, signing “It’ll go well” as your own natural propensity dances around her, causing her to wave in the first place.

You would sneeze, if you had a body, but you don’t so you don’t. You just ride this feeling, not snapping yourself out of your silliness, your airiness, and fly.

Dave heads out the door as you pull yourself back into a flesh body- er, your flesh body. It’s a little trickier this morning, but it is in no way an actual problem that might indicate consequences further down the road. You shove extra hard and manage to get your legs back, but your hair is still feeling a little… floaty.

“Sup,” Dave greets, and you smile at him. “Karkat’s flipping the fuck out over whatever conversation you two apparently need to have. Like some truly impressive gymnastics going on in there, got that triple somersault while rotating through the air and then flip-walking down the gym mat flipping the fuck out.”
“Well that’s dumb,” you say, and sneeze. Your voice sounds a little less solid than your friends have deemed acceptable, even immediately following unforming reforming into your flesh body. “I told him it was probably good.”

“Probably.” Dave isn’t arching an eyebrow with his face yet but he’s definitely doing it with his voice.

“Probably! Depends how the cards all fall! But given the likelihood of cards and gravity, they’re probably going to fall down, which would mean everything’s good.”

“Unless a certain wind god blows the cards sideways,” Dave says teasingly, and you snort. You know he doesn’t know what you’re up to, but you think in this analogy, it means you might be able to fuck up asking to be Karkat’s kismesis-sort of, which is a definite possibility.

“I’ll try to contain myself,” you say with a wink.

“Okay so you’re going to make me ask, I’m going to have to prostrate my ignorance before you oh mighty god of the universe, this is me bending over ass up and asking the question I’ve been waiting for you to answer without prompting: What the fuck is going on?”

“I,” you start slowly, “was not answering your unasked question without prompting because I’m not entirely sure myself!”

Dave’s eyebrows do arch now.

“I just!” you hasten to continue, “I need to talk to Karkat about some things and I don’t want to say anything beforehand in case I’m wrong! You’ll know in like, a little while.”

“Sounds complicated,” Dave remarks, leaning back on one heel, “This about Gamzee?”

“Nope! Well, okay Gamzee was involved but this isn’t actually about him.”

“So Gamzee knows.” Dave looks like he wishes he could eat those words the moment they’re out of his mouth, but you don’t see anything particularly embarrassing about them?

“No, actually. Jade’s really the only one I’ve talked to about what I’m thinking,” you step around Dave on the porch, moving towards the front door, “Which I am trying to fix! So I’m going to go try and convince Karkat to get off those gymnastics bars he’s flipping himself over and chat with him now!” Not that you don’t enjoy talking to Dave, but he’s not the one you’re here to chat with!

“Cool. I’m heading out, let you two have your space and whatever. Hang with Jade. See ya.”

You turn to tell him bye and that Gamzee is also hanging with Jade, but he’s taking off faster than he normally does. Huh. He must think that this is going to be awkward. Dave does have some avoidant tendencies, but then again who in your friend group doesn’t? Well, Kanaya, and Jane, but like who else?

Karkat is storming into the foyer, likely to give you or Dave or both a piece of his mind, but you disarm him by swooping forward really quick and poking him in the belly, causing him to loudly screech and swat at you. You’re monitoring your own reaction as closely as you’re enjoying his, now, seeing how you feel, if this kind of gesture is one that sparks a desire to kiss him or even just feel romantically inclined towards him. You realize it does. On both accounts.

God, okay, yeah, this is happening.
“Hi Karkat!”

“Fuck you and fuck your ignorance prob and fuck your dumb fucking face you fucking eggfuck I cannot fucking believe you tell me you need to have a fucking conversation with me and then fucking leave me with that all night and then you waste however fucking long talking to my fucking boyfriend on the front fucking porch so clearly whatever it is you’ve had to say can’t be that fucking important if you can just dally around and waste time like the fucking pan-maggoted shit sphincter you are!”

Ohhhh god this is happening.

“It is important though! And it’s good to see you too!”

“Fuck off and die, asshole.”

“You’d miss me,” you tell him with a wink and he does that frustrated shriek-click that you find disproportionately adorable.

You suddenly realize that you have, in all the time you’ve been considering this, not actually come up with a plan of action or even a way to broach the topic. Whoooooops.

“I’m gonna pour myself a glass of apple juice,” you tell him, stalling for time now as your thoughts frantically scatter. “Want anything?”

“Some goddamned peace of mind and sanity.”

“Please,” you huff, “you’d get bored! You wouldn’t last five seconds without making something up for you to twist yourself in knots over!”

“Just because you’re right doesn’t mean I hate you any less!” he calls, and now that you’re thinking of him meaning that in a hate-hate way, you feel a little… tizzy. A slight buzz of energy in your chest. Is this what pitch feels like? Oh god you hope this is what pitch feels like. You want this to be what pitch feels like.

“Water, then,” you call back and start filling glasses.

“Fuck off!”

“You’re welcome!” you quip cheerfully.

Karkat’s seated at the table- which you suppose is a good thing- and has his hands tightly clasped on each other. You note the claw marks that continue to grow in quantity along the edge of the table, and the fact that they will continue to grow in quantity until around mid-June, when Karkat and Dave annually replace said table.

Your ass barely touches the seat of your chair and you don’t even get a chance to scoot in before Karkat is talking. “John if you’re pissed at me about something you need to fucking tell me right now and not leave me worried like this okay? I get that I do things that leave people reasonably furious and wanting to get back at me but you cannot fucking-”

“Karkat shut up before I upend this water on you,” you cut him off, trying not to sigh. It is a testament to how badly he is worked up that he actually does. Eugh. You’re already fucking this up. “I told you, it’s probably good. It’s just something that needs discussed you anxious horse.”

“Fuck you,” Karkat says reflexively before reaching out and taking the water. “So if it’s not bad
then what the fuck is it because I can tell you I’ve been thinking about it all night and I don’t fucking know.”

“Shit, sorry.” You shouldn’t have texted him last night. You’re still scrambling for a way to bring up what you’re trying to say, to put it eloquently instead of just shoving garbled garbage out of your mouth. “I didn’t mean to—”

“What is it?”

“So don’t be mad at Gamzee,” you blurt, since that seems an important thing to get out in sort of the start. His eyes widen in some mix of horror-fury-shock and that is not what you should have led with.

“He told you,” Karkat says hollowly, quietly, an empty breath.

“Don’t be mad at him,” you repeat, brain whirring to try and get yourself on top of the situation, introduce some element of control.

“He fucking told you!”

“And it’s a good thing he did!”

“Even when he promised he wouldn’t!”

“I wouldn’t have figured it out otherwise!”

“That fucking lying—”

“-didn’t even know what pitch was—”

“I trusted—”

“-and I’ve been thinking about it—”

“-trying not to be desperate or creepy—”

“Do you want to make out?” you shout, cutting both of you off. You face goes bright red, but at least his is going that way too. “With me,” you clarify, although you’re not sure why your brain decided that could have possibly needed clarification.

“What.”

“So,” you take a deep breath, wanting to explain yourself, wanting to talk fast enough that Karkat doesn’t get the chance to work himself back up again, “Gamzee told me. Yes, that happened, but only because he didn’t want to see you upset anymore and you sure as hell weren’t telling me.”

“Because—”

“Shut up! I’m trying to explain!” In your agitation, you accidentally gust, and you’re pretty sure that your hair wouldn’t lay flat right now even if it normally did.

“He said I was stringing you along and that it wasn’t fair to you for me to yank your heart- er, spade?- around like that. Which he’s right about, it wasn’t- it’s not.” You see Karkat wince as though in pain, slowly closing his eyes and clenching his jaw tight, lips pressed thin. “And he told me about how he thought that we were dating ‘cause we act like it apparently and I told him I’m not pitch for you—” he sucks in a sharp hiss of air, too quiet to hear but you’re close enough you
couldn’t have missed the feeling of it if you had wanted to, “-but then he explained to me what pitch like, actually is, and I started thinking about it.”

You take another deep breath, trying to collect yourself. “And as I thought more about it, I came to the conclusion that I think I really like it?” You look up at him, nervous energy buzzing through the air around you. “And I’d kind of like to try going pitch with you?”

The question hangs there and his face goes on a truly impressive journey, one you’re not quite practiced enough in the verse of Karkat to parse entirely. You get the gist of it, which is confusion, joy, and overwhelming skepticism.

“Are you fucking pulling my leg right now? Because John, if this is some twisted prank you need to leave,” he tells you. You snort and roll your eyes, trying not to feel too exasperated by the pervasive self-loathing that prevents him from understanding that other people like him and value his company.

“No, Karkat, I’m not joking.” Somehow, his worry has obliterated your own. The air in the room goes still, and while you do still fear rejection you don’t actually fear much of anything now.

“You want to go pitch.”

“Try it at least.”

“With me.”

“That’s what I said, yeah.”

“What the fuck?” Karkat stands up, palms flat on the table (they shake), “What the fuck!? Last time I asked, you-”

“Last time you asked I was thirteen and stupid and the only thing I had ever seen about same-sex attraction was as the butt of jokes in popular media,” you cut him off, frowning, “Last time you asked I was a fucking child. Don’t act like seven years isn’t enough time for a lot of things- for everything to change!”

Karkat winces and sits back down. “Sorry.”

“You’ve changed too,” you point out, “Imagine if we all held you to the same standards and expectations we had of your thirteen year old self.”

“Oh god,” Karkat says, making a face that makes you giggle. He turns to glower at you, but it’s short lived. “You mean it though,” he asks softly, “about the wanting to date me thing?”

“Did you miss the part where I asked if you wanted to make out?”

Karkat opens his mouth and floundering half-words make it out, and then he hisses like a tea kettle. “Might. Have forgotten that part,” he admits. You laugh at him, and he chuck a stress ball at you. It bounces off your shoulder and only makes you laugh harder.

“You’re a fucking moron,” you tell him fondly.

“I am your god,” he reminds you, “Cower before me, you worthless dirtnoodle.”

You giggle some more and wonder if it would be appropriate to swoop across the table and kiss him. You feel elated. You. Wow. You have a boyfriend. This is actually a lot to take in.
“Oh, but,” you say, sobering fast, “kismesitude is one of the concupiscent quadrants, right?”

Karkat’s sigh is long-suffering. “Yes. John.”

“Karkat,” your tone makes him meet your eyes, “I don’t want to have sex with you,” you say firmly. This, you won’t budge on.

He doesn’t waste a single moment before saying, “Okay, yeah, I can work with that. I can totally work with that.”

“I dunno how I feel about sex just sort of in general, but I do know that I definitely don’t want to have hate sex. So as long as that’s okay..?”

Karkat nods vigorously. “No sex is fine. I’m more of a romantic anyway,” he seems to be hastening to provide explanations, assure you that he’s the exact opposite of bothered and that he isn’t interested in letting that be a roadblock for the two of you. “The simple fact that you want to be in a relationship with me at all is- is more than enough, we don’t have to fuck in order to be a successful relationship, nobody ever does, the physical aspect is perfectly fine when limited to-okay to what? Kissing, you said, how much touching is cool with you?”

Talk about boundaries, sweet, yes, okay, you are definitely good at introspection and know exactly what you want at all times, okay. The fact that you want to talk about boundaries does not actually mean you have prepared yourself for a talk about boundaries.

“Uh,” you start, “I am… not sure? Kissing is good, and encouraged. Touching is… also good?”

“Yes but how much touching and where. I’m well a-fucking-ware that you enjoy flinging your useless body at me in an attempt to wrestle like some overzealous slybeast kit.”

“Oh but I win like, at least half of those so don’t act like I’m only attempting.”

“This is for you,” Karkat tells you, extending his middle finger. Grinning, feeling impulsive, you lean forward quickly and kiss the back of his claw, which is not actually sharp (you would’ve kissed it anyway). He shoves his whole palm in your face and straight arms you away, which makes you snort. “But seriously,” he says as you lean back, “boundaries. What are yours?”

You make a noise and shrug. “Tell me yours?” you suggest, hoping that will give you a clue and also give you something to structure yours around.

“Anything,” Karkat says, looking you dead in the eye.

“Karkat I don’t think that’s how boundaries work.”

“I am fine with anything you are okay with doing. John, I don’t think you understand the depths of my willingness, my fucking full throttle eagerness to take whatever the hell you are capable of dishing out.”

“That’s gay.”

“I have had,” he takes a deep breath, “so many fantasies about you Egbert, their multitudinous alone enough to send me into the tenth ring of hell, which is only a never ending state of constant mortification at the mere mentioning of their abundance. I have had the most adamant, stubborn, persistent, relentless, unshakable, mulish crush on you for seven fucking years. Do you seriously think that by this point there is any single fucking thing you could do to me that I do not already want you to do to me?”
“Karkat this is starting to sound a little like a marriage proposal and while I am flattered, I’m going to need to ask you to tone it down for like, a day or two.”

“Fuck. Sorry.”

“No, no, it’s okay. But, heheh,” you rub sheepishly at the back of your head, “wow. So uh, you really like me then. Hate me?” You frown, momentarily befuddled over which terminology you’re supposed to be using here.

“Yes, John,” Karkat says, fiddling with the hem of his sweater sleeve. “I really, really fucking hate you. So fucking much god dammit John I hate your fucking guts,” he says softly, bringing his hands up to his face and hiding his blush. You click your tongue and “awwww” at him and he gargle-shrieks at you.

“This is exactly what I fucking mean! How am I supposed to not hate you when you fucking pull shit like that!”

“You’re adorable!” you croon, propping your chin up on your palm and staring at him with just a small tilt to your head. He stares at you and slowly flares his nostrils and scrunches up his face as he lifts two middle fingers to flip you off, and you snicker.

“You are a blight, John, you are the leftover tacky substance left on the firmer paper at the bottom of a pad of sticky notes.”

“And you’re dating me!” you chime, then have to take a second to be red faced and flustered because holy shit. Holy shit you’re dating Karkat. What the actual fuck okay. Okay wow. You’re boyfriends with him. You are boyfriends with Karkat Vantas. Dating. Involved. You are seeing him, courting him. Karkat has been wooed. Although maybe it’s less Karkat that’s been wooed and more you who has figured out there was mutual wooing?

Holy shit you’re dating Karkat.

“Boundaries!” you remember, along with the fact that you still don’t know what yours are. “Uhm, let’s just say…” You gasp lightly, exasperated with yourself. “No touching anything that would be covered if I go to the beach,” you start, because that one is simple enough. “Maybe my butt, but you’d have to ask first.” You snort. “Butt but.”

“I’m dating an actual two sweep old,” Karkat complains.

“I know, right? Dave is so childish,” you say, knowing full well that Dave pulls the same immature bullshit as you do.

“I mean are you even wrong on that one?” he asks, and you laugh, him laughing along with you.

“Oh,” you say again, still trying to figure shit out. “Oh, no clawing or biting hard enough to make me bleed! Or if you do, it’s on accident. Like,” you squint, “you don’t have to treat me like I’m fragile or anything but I’m not fond of the idea of getting scratched up just because we’re dating now.”

Karkat nods, “Reasonable. Especially fucking considering your feeble human body isn’t built to withstand more than a feather wafting gently in the still breeze to caress your delicate skin.”

“Hey what did I just say about treating me like I’m fragile?”

“Weak.”
“You’re weak!”

“You, weak, pathetic little breakable whelp.”

“I *win* against you all the time!”

“HA! As if!”

“You wanna go dude?”

“Let’s go right now!” he says, standing up.

“Let’s do this bro!” You rise as well, sidestepping the table so the two of you can get right up in each other’s faces. You have to bend in order to get in close enough for the gesture to matter.

“Let’s make this happen!”

“Come at me, I’m wide open!” you half shout, flinging your arms out to your sides in display. The two of you are leaning in now, foreheads almost touching, and you are 10000% percent more aware of the locations of both your and his lips than you ever have been before while doing this.

His hands rise up to your shirt, on either side of your pendant, and his grip feels somehow unbreakable, even though you’re physically stronger than him. “I’m going to punch you in your stupid, perfect face,” he tells you, leaning in somehow closer. Your eyes feel disoriented, too close to his face to focus on anything, but you don’t want to close them just yet. Somehow, it would feel like losing. “Softly,” he adds, almost as an afterthought, “to protect your flimsy human constitution.”

“And what part of your body are you going to be punching me with?” you ask, pretty sure your voice doesn’t sound that breathy because you’re halfway to Becoming. Actually, you don’t think you’ve ever been so inclined to remain in your flesh body as you are right this moment.

Instead of answering you, Karkat pulls you down by the shirt and presses your lips together. On one hand, it’s just skin touching, nothing special, and your body doesn’t really feel any different. On the other, your brain is *reeling* because Karkat is *kissing* you and you’re boyfriends and this is happening, this is honest to god happening. You bring your arms up to the backsides of his shoulders and help support him, because even though you’re bending down he’s still on his fucking tiptoes. You both pull back and you realize oh. You had. Uh. Forgotten to breathe there for a second. Ahaha, wow, look at you, Breath god, forgetting to breathe as you kiss your boyfriend. You feel vindicated when you realize Karkat’s been forgetting to breathe too.

“Karkat,” you whisper, soft, getting his attention for the next thing you have to say.

“Yeah?” his voice is also quiet, and his cheeks are as red as yours feel.

“You’re still so fucking short.”

“I *FUCKING-*” he shoves you back by where he holds you by the shirt and you start cackling, “*-CANNOT BELIEVE YOU!!*”

You sit hard into the chair you left pulled out, laughing uproariously at him, heart pattering and feeling full, excited, swollen to three times its size. He shouts at you and you can’t focus on his words through your laughter, tears crowding the corners of your eyes, and then suddenly there is a Karkat with his arms around your neck, squeezing you, hugging you tight. You hug him back, coming down from your own hilarity, and he hisses in your ear, “God John I hate you *so fucking*
“Are you gonna start crying?” you ask teasingly, rubbing his back.

“Maybe! What does it fucking matter to you!?”

“And I’m the delicate one.” You huff affectionately as he does, in fact, start crying, and you lift him up into the air with you, still hugging each other. It’s just a weird angle with you sitting and him not sitting on you but the two of you still hugging and him crying. Also he barks a quick fuck you, because you know he doesn’t like it when you scoop him up into the air, and you do love to hear him gripe.

“I just—” he says, all watery and high, “-I’ve hated you for so long and I tried to get rid of it, I really did, but I just couldn’t stop hating you and your stupid teeth and your stupid smile and your stupid, perfect laugh and you’re so fucking annoying John, do you know that?”

“I try very hard to be fucking annoying. Especially to you,” you inform him cheerfully, saccharine, almost.

“God, see, this is exactly it!” he whines, voice still all tight and shit from crying into your shoulder as you float there. “This is what I fucking mean! God, you’re perfect! You’re fucking pitchbait and attractive and stupid and dumb and you’re such a moron John I really hate you I really, really do, I could never quit hating you, not after years of not seeing you and certainly not after years of living with you on this new planet like this.”

“Maybe it’s like—” oh hey wait Karkat has a word for this, “Maybe it’s fate. Maybe we’re serendipitous.”

He sobs and, even though you’re still hovering, both your legs hanging uselessly below you, a foot or so off the floor, he hugs you tighter.

“I was hatched to hate you,” he whispers, a quiet and honest confession, “I really truly believe that John.”

“There there you blubbering goddamned pansy. God, the cheese with you!”

But your heart is doing wonky things at his words that you can’t really deny. You drift back down to the floor, two pairs of feet tapping on it lightly, inaudible under Karkat’s crying, and you pull back enough that you can lift a hand up to his chin, then lean down again, guiding his lips back to yours. It’s still just skin, just two lips on your own two lips, and your body still doesn’t really have much more to say about the sensation, but your brain is still doing mental loop-de-loops at the fact that this is a thing now, you’re touching him, kissing him, he’s crying because he’s literally just that happy that you hate-love him back. He’s got his hands back in the front of your shirt and you’re just. Kissing him. And it’s good. It’s not like the movies made you think it would feel, like the lips of a romantic partner were somehow supposed to feel different on your skin than the cheek of your sister or the forehead of your best bro or the nose of a precious friend, but your heart is fluttering all the same.

“John,” Karkat says as you pull back. You grin.

“Yeah?”

“That was the most romantic thing you have ever done.”

“How would you know?”
“I watched your entire life unfold and have lived with you for the last four years of it.”

“I might have done someth- wait no…” On the ship it was just you, Jade, and Davesprite, and Jade is your sister and you didn’t know you liked boys(???????) at the time so you hadn’t really had any romantic options. Your spritely nanna was equally out of the question.

Karkat snorts at you. “Yeah, exactly.”

You frown at him, then counter by shoving your mouth against his neck and blowing, hard. The raspberry gets him to stop crying, but the tears are replaced by agitated shrieking and Karkat attempting to fend you off. You do your level best to get at him again, but through a series of maneuvers your brain and eyes do not actually manage to follow, Karkat and gravity tag team against you and he manages to get you thudding down onto the dining room/consumption block floor.

“Checkmate, asshole,” he tells you from his place above you. You grin.

“Wow, Karkat, from this angle, you actually look like you might only be a little bit short!”

He kicks your thigh- not hard enough to actually hurt- and you start laughing as his foot repeatedly prods at your side. You roll over to avoid it, but he just continues prodding, now at your back. You roll all the way onto your hands and knees, then swoooce upward swiftly, flying now, knees pulled up towards your chest, grin wide as your hair floats around your face. Given your dark jeans and black shirt, your pendant bumping against your chest lightly as it gets tossed by your wind and motion, you figure you must make a fairly attractive sight. Well. And the fact that Karkat is suddenly blushing again.

“Does the Karcat got your tongue?” you ask, flexing maybe just a tiny bit as you loom over him.

“Fuck you,” his voice sounds dry.

You shrug. “Nah. You can go fuck yourself, though!”

Karkat has to jump to get both of his hands behind your head, and then gravity hauls him back down and he tilts you, your body rotating instead of sinking, and he kisses you again. You kick your legs out and up behind you, crossing them at the ankle, and you get a hand on the outside of his upper arm, the other on his waist, kissing him back.

“God I hate you,” he says again, then kisses you before you get the chance to respond.

“Hate you too,” you say, still grinning, between another set of kisses. You get more into it, feeling a lot less like this is just lips touching other skin and a lot more like this is a gesture that is genuinely enjoyable in and of itself, not just for the ‘your brain is screaming excitement’ at you aspect. You bring your legs down, feet solid on the floor, and you move your hands back around Karkat’s back, hauling him up, in close to you, pressing his chest in close to yours. One of his arms gets thrown around your shoulders while the other hand slides further into your hair, gripping it now. Not enough to actually hurt, but just enough to sting, to remind you that this is Karkat and he hates you and he’s strong enough to take you.

The two of you accidentally knock teeth/fangs and you both jerk back on reflex. You taste a tiny amount of blood and feel a sharp sting of pain on your lip, but you’re not sure if you’re bleeding or just a bit scuffed up and he’s the one bleeding or what. He’s licking at his own lips, eyes wide.

“John,” he says, “Holy fuck.”
“Seriously,” you agree, breaths coming out faster. Your breathing is synced up to his, you imagine that it synced a long time ago, and you feel tied to him. Your boyfriend.

God this is so weird. Good weird! Definitely a good weird. But still really fucking weird.

“So as far as boundaries go,” you say, because you’re not really sure you ever managed to reach a close on that conversation. He thons his head down on your shoulder and mumbles about forgetful assholes, so you’re pretty sure you’re right and the two of you just got (really) distracted.

“Can we just say, like- our relationship prior to this has been pretty pitch, right? To the point where Gamzee didn’t believe you when he found out that we weren’t.”

“It took me five goddamned minutes to convince him I wasn’t pulling his leg,” Karkat mutters. You think you remember Gamzee saying three, but Karkat’s always been one to blow things out of proportion.

“So what if we just say, our relationship doesn’t change at all?” And really, that’s what you want the most. “We’re still good bros and we still do all the dumb shit we’ve always done, but now we have a title to our relationship and also we make out.”

Karkat presses a little kiss to the crook of your shoulder and you smile, a little shiver of electricity crawling up your spine.

“It would be my full fucking pleasure to just continue on as we have been, but finally get the chance to actually call you my kismesis.”

“Great!” You give him a little squeeze, hugging him just a little tighter. A knot in your chest that you hadn’t really been aware of loosens, and you feel relieved. Nothing’s going to suddenly turn awkward or mushy-gushy between the two of you. You know exactly how to act around him, and that’s the same as you always have. Plus kissing. Which you think you want to do some more, now.

The two of you end up on the couch, him sitting on your lap, alternating between insulting each other and kissing. You wind down eventually, though, and he huffs at the discovery that he has no less than twelve snapchats from Dave and at least twice as many texts. You don’t have any texts from him, but you do have eight snaps from him, three from Jade, and one from Gamzee.

Dave’s are all of him in weird poses, asking you what the fuck you two are even discussing and why it’s taking so long and did either of us kill the other. Jade’s first snap is of Gamzee in her greenhouse, making friends with a lady bug. She has decorated the snap with flower emojis and glittering stickers. One is of Dave, sprawled dramatically across her couch, with the words “he’s complaining” on it. One is of the backsides of Gamzee and Dave, seemingly discussing the flowers in front of them, and Jade has sent a “they both like verbenas :D” on that one. Gamzee has sent one of himself in Jade’s kitchen, his smile a little tight.

TC: s0 Thls bRo iS FrEaKiNg tHe fUcK OuT OvEr yOuR ChAt yOuRe bEiNg hAvInG WiTh mY BrOtHeR AnD I WaS JuSt wOnDeRiNg iF YoU WeRe gOinG tO bE DoNe sOoN AnD CoUlD TeLL mE WhAt tHe mOtHeRfUcK Is gOiNg oN?

Wow. Uhm. That. That sure is one hell of a typing quirk. You guess you’re pretty lucky that you’ve only seen like, one or two letter responses from him and have mostly been able to communicate with him in person. You knew about it of course, but like, seeing him type out his tragic life-story over his shoulder and actually having to read the things he types are kind of different, if you’re being fully honest.
“So hey, Karkat? Do you just like, want to go over to Jade’s?”

“That does seem to be where everyone who wants my attention is at,” Karkat mutters, typing something.

“I want your attention,” you protest teasingly. He rolls his eyes.

“Fine. Everyone who matters,” he amends, and you snort. You carry him piggyback style, because he thinks that will make it harder for you to toss him into the air. You have to do some wheedling to get him to let you do even that, instead of just calling a cab or his boyfriend to come pick him up, but being the new boyfriend must give you some extra points in his book. Points that you immediately and nigh-instantaneously blow, of course, the moment you get high enough up in the air. You Become and he falls right through you, and you’d whoop a laugh if you had the lungs so instead you just swirl around him as he flails and screeches. You go solid and catch him in your arms, and he shrieks at you that you’re “blah blah blah” and he’s “blah blah blah” and you’re never “blah blah blabbity blah!” You throw him into the air, wind blowing at your beckoning, and he gets shoved along a good distance ahead of you, so you nyoom into a shallow dive in order to scoop him back up again.

“I hate your fucking guts!” he howls over the wind.

You laughingly call back, “I hate you too!”

You land and Karkat storms into Jade’s house with a “I am never flying with you ever again!”

You laugh some more and float along closely behind him. The three of your friends are gathered in the kitchen/dining room, on the dining room half. They’re gathered around the table, which is very prettily adorned with flowers, and all three of them greet you as you enter. Dave and Gamzee are sitting, Dave’s elbow propped on the table and Gamzee’s entire upper body sprawled into every space that flowers aren’t. Jade is floating nearby, her hair splayed around her head like the world’s furriest halo, and she has something in between her hands that she caphcalogues before you can identify it. She looks at you and Karkat, ears perked, eyes expectant.

“So,” you start, grinning in a way that is only partially nervous and pointing finger guns in the air, “guess who’s dating Karkat! There are three right answers.”

Gamzee and Dave both go bug eyed- sitting up suddenly straight- and Jade whoops, coming over and giving you a high-five that turns into an excited hug.

“You knew?” Karkat asks, sneering at her. She blows him a kiss with a wink, one arm still slung around your shoulders as you grin at his irritation.

“I’m his human moirail, remember?” she says sweetly.

“Bitch.”

“So uh, hey, brothers...” Gamzee says, “Not that I ain’t happy as shit for y’all- because I motherfuckin’ am- but Johnbro, I was under a mighty impression that you didn’t actually hate Karkat in that way...?” Gamzee tilts his head towards Karkat meaningfully. “Cause, you know, that’s as you motherfuckin’ told me.”

“See,” you dislodge yourself from your sister’s hug and hold your hands up to him, placating, “I didn’t think I was pitch for Karkat when we had that conversation, so I promise I wasn’t lying!” That’s the part that you think is the most important. You don’t want him to think that you were lying to him or trying to mock him or anything.
“He just needed some time for the gay thoughts to catch him,” Jade says smugly, propping her elbow on your shoulder.

“And to talk to Jade about those gay thoughts because I was not having an easy time figuring them out on my own.”

“How does one single person manage to be so woefully incompetent?” Karkat asks. Dave has gone to him and is pressing his thumb to Karkat’s lip, checking it out. Karkat is waving him away.

“I’m just really stupid man,” you say with a shrug, and Jade cuffs you on the head.

“You stop that.”

“So you… do hate Karkat?” Gamzee asks. He looks like he really, really needs the clarification. To be fair, you had sent him off to bed with a pretty definite assurance that you didn’t want to kiss Karkat, and at the time you weren’t lying! So you had the full brunt of genuine honesty on your side. Just. Honesty that was short lived!

“Yeah, pretty sure!”

“And you want to kiss him?”

You grin. “I have been kissing him.”

“You lucky dog.” Dave curses softly, but you hear it and so does everyone else in the room so you guess it wasn’t quite softly enough. You all turn to look at him and Karkat inhales deeply, reaching up to pinch the bridge of his nose. Dave is turning a very, very bright red, not looking away from Karkat to see any of your eyes on him.

“Dave you literally live with him,” you say, chuckling at you best bro’s neediness.

“Well I haven’t had my makeout quota filled all morning,” Dave says, latching onto the topic with what you might call unusual vigor. Like, the thing he does to cover up something he doesn’t want other people knowing instead of just his regular running with a topic and rambling about it. But in this case you’re pretty sure he’s just being a big gay sap. “Like dude, I’m dying over here, thirsty for kisses like a man crawling along in the desert. Why doesn’t he use his legs, you wonder. Why doesn’t he just get up and walk, wouldn’t that be more energy efficient than crawling along using only his arms? But those are the words of someone who does not understand the deprivation the way the parched man does. I’m crawlin’ here.” For emphasis, Dave flops himself over Karkat, who “oof”s and swats his butt. “My legs, they have capsized from the paucity of kisses.”

Karkat rolls his eyes, but gives Dave a little kiss, and Dave stands on his own two feet again.

“It’s a Christmas miracle,” Dave says, arm still slung around Karkat’s shoulders.

Jade and you giggle, and you float on over to Gamzee. He smiles at you, looking sort of like he still doesn’t totally understand how you managed to do such a total 180 in such a short amount of time, and then you note that his bong is on the table. There is a vine coming out of its mouth, and where the bowl should go there’s one of those glass balls that is like, an automatic water drip thingy. It’s a smaller version than the ones you see around Jade’s place. But then you remember that not only is she like magic with plants, but she’s literally magic with space, and probably just shrunk down one of hers and gifted it to him.

“What’s this?” you ask, and Gamzee turns to it with a smile. He extends an arm toward it and you kind of understand how people who want to take pictures of everything might want to take a
picture of this, his scarred arm resting gently on the dark wood of the table, fingertips just barely brushing against the leaves of the vine cascading down onto the table.

“Ah, it’s…” Gamzee scratches behind his ear with his other hand, chuckling a tiny bit, nervous sounding. “It’s gonna sound dumb.”

“Nah! Nah, it looks cool dude!” you tell him, and the others gravitate over as well.

“It… so, I got a bit of a mind for symbolism and shit,” he says. He’s cute when he’s embarrassed, you find, all purple on his cheekbones and ears. He’s not wearing any makeup today so you can see it clearly, especially through the paler skin of his scars. “I… know that the shit as was done to my pan was bad. I also know that the shit as gets placed in these does similar to the sopor, but with less pan-eating and more of just the good feelings. Probably should’ve done smoked instead of baked sopor myself, but I was a real… real dumb pupa.” He reaches up and holds the bong, his thumb stroking over the smooth texture of the glass.

“I wanted. To take something as could symbolize what I done did to myself. The drugs as got me high but laid me well and truly motherfuckin’ low. And then I wanted to do something beautiful with it. Wanted. Wanted to grow something out of it. Make new life from inside the thing that. Yeah.” Gamzee mumbles a tiny bit more, but it’s not anything intelligible.

Karkat places a hand on Gamzee’s shoulder and smiles down at him. “I’m proud of you.”

“Yeah, brother?”

“Yeah. I know it’s supposed to be like, helpful or whatever to do symbolic shit. It’s good for you to do this.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.” Karkat bonks his horns against Gamzee and Gamzee pulls him in for a hug, chirring at him. You observe the vine a little more. It really does look pretty, coming out of the pale rainbow scales adorning the thing.

“What kind of plant is it?” you ask Jade, who is looking at Karkat and Gamzee’s display of pale debauchery (as Karkat is very currently calling it) fondly.

“Hm? Oh! Sweet autumn clematis. They’re little white flowers, they should bloom fairly soon! They usually bloom in either summer or fall, so they’re approaching their due date!”

“Yeah, and soon,” you agree. Dave comes over and you elbow him, winking teasingly. “You needy fuck.”

“I can’t help it, I gotta get those boyfriend kisses,” Dave says, blushing again despite how the rest of his face is that flat thing that he does. He knows you can see through it and you know he knows you can see through it and see that he’s embarrassed and adorable so you don’t know why he insists on being all “oh look at me I don’t have a facial expression right now because I’m a cool gay nerd.”

“I had him for like, a morning,” you tell him with a huff, rolling your eyes extravagantly, getting your whole head involved in the eye rolling.

“Dude it’s after lunch.”

“Is it?” you ask, “Huh. Didn’t even notice. I was too busy kissing your boyfriend.”
“Haha, yeah, you sure were, you lucky son of a bitch.” Dave sounds uncomfortable. You frown.

“Hey, Dave,” you start slowly, reaching up to pat the back of his shoulder. “Are you… is this okay? That I’m dating Karkat? I know trolls do quadrants like, always all the time as totally normal, and a lot of humans on this new planet do too, but we’re from the old planet and where we’re from…” You bite your lip. “Is this gonna make you uncomfortable?” You can feel Jade’s eyes on you but yes you absolutely will call it off if Dave doesn’t want you dating his boyfriend. You’re sure Karkat would feel the same!

Dave shrugs. “Nah. I mean- I used to have a thing about polyamory? But at the same time I had a thing about gay people and also both of us were straight.”

You snort.

“Yes, you were so straight,” you tease.

“Don’t act like you knew.” Dave elbows you this time. “We both had a lot of shit to process when we were small and tiny idiots.”

You float down so you’re standing flat on the floor, and you’re still taller than Dave (not by a terrible lot, but you are taller) and you dwarf him with your width.

“You’re still a small and tiny idiot,” you tease, maybe holding your nice, broad shoulders out just a little stiffer in emphasis of just how noodly he truly is compared to you. Jade comes up on his other side, an inch or two taller than you and while she might not be nearly as broad, she’s still wider and more muscular than Dave.

“You’re still a small and tiny idiot,” you tease, maybe holding your nice, broad shoulders out just a little stiffer in emphasis of just how noodly he truly is compared to you. Jade comes up on his other side, an inch or two taller than you and while she might not be nearly as broad, she’s still wider and more muscular than Dave.

“Cute,” she comments, “Bite-sized, even!”

“Like a mini M&M,” you agree.

“Or one of those little itty bitty cheese cubes!”

“But pitch, huh?” Dave asks, blatantly changing the subject. Jade snorts and leans on him. “Isn’t that. A little intense? I mean, I know Karkat really digs you, like, really really digs you, but I didn’t figure you’d, ya know, reciprocate.”

You briefly tell him what Gamzee told you about pitch, about how it’s supposed to work and how the movies over-dramatize everything, and Jade chimes in on your conversation. Gamzee and Karkat seem to be a little wrapped up in each other at the moment (and in front of other people, too! The depravity).

“So yeah, not so interested in the violent hate-sex stuff, definitely interested in the pissing Karkat off for fun and profit and also kissing him stuff.”

“That. Actually makes me feel a lot better about the whole pitch thing,” Dave admits.

“I know, right?” both you and Jade chorus.

“And also,” you can’t put your finger on it, but something about his tone has shifted (you think), “you like dudes. That a, uh, recent development?”

You snort. “Gee, Dave, why so awkward!” Though in truth, you find this subject a little awkward too, and you’re just poking at Dave as an easy escape from your own discomfort.

“Ehhhehehehhhh… well, the short answer is I don’t know. I do like-hate Karkat though, so,
that’s… I’m not 100% all the way completely heterosexual, I guess?”

Dave nods. “Cool.”

Jade looks like some strange mix between smug and proud.

“Hey where’d the Mister Honeymoons go off to?” you ask, noting that the two of them are no longer in the kitchen/dining room.

“Oh- really?” Jade complains loudly, shouting so that they’ll be able to hear her, “In my house?”

She mutters a bit and a few seconds later you all get a snap. It is a picture of Karkat’s middle finger.

You take a snap of all three of you, Jade looking at her own phone and Dave making double peace signs. They’re not together so he’s not making a diamond or anything but you wonder if Karkat will interpret it as two half diamonds anyway.

You make yourself lunch and bring a plate to Jade’s… fourth? Fifth? floor, where Gamzee and Karkat are now cuddling on top of a pile of old world junk. Mementos of her grandpa. Gamzee is purring, eyes closed and smiling, and even Karkat screeching at you to not interrupt- yes even if he hasn’t eaten lunch yet- does not stop him from purring. He just reaches up to Karkat’s cheek and paps him and croons out a long, low shoosh.

“I’ll feed him,” Gamzee tells you, which makes Karkat blush and screech more. You and Gamzee seem to be on the same page of finding that adorable, and you’re both grinning at him as Gamzee sits up to take the plate from you.

“C’mon best friend,” Gamzee coos, and you can hear the teasing lilt in his voice, “don’t you wanna get your nutrition on with me?” Gamzee picks up a potato chip and you know that reasonably you should leave these two to their own gay devices but the way Karkat is reacting is hilarious and really how could you truly be expected to leave. You float, wind whirling beneath your feet animatedly, catching a dust bunny in its whorls.

“Not in front of John I don’t!” Karkat screeches, turning his head from the salty offering of nourishment.

“But best frieeeeeend-”

“No! Why the fuck would I want to fucking eat off your spindle fingers like we’re the pallid stars of some fucking diamond porno while there is a third fucking person in the room? And my kismesis of all people!”

Gamzee bonks his forehead against Karkat’s temple, smile and voice both going a little softer. “I got my desire on to remind everyone as has eyes or ears or means of perception that you are motherfuckin’ mine,” he says, and you d’awww cause that’s adorable. “After all these motherfuckin’ sweeps, I finally have you.”

“John, get OUT!” You laugh, but finally oblige, swooping down the spiral steps of Jade’s home. The first floor is different than the one she had in the Game, renovated to look more like an actual house, while the upper floors remain pretty much the same. Her bedroom is different, too, up at the
top of the tower, but that’s more in a “life has changed and so have I” way than a “Yes mrs.
construction worker, please change the literal way this floor of the building is shaped” way. Jade
and Dave are in her living room, which is sunken down a foot or so from the front door + rest of
the first floor, and the carpet is the thickest shag you have ever dug your toes into and there are
bean bags everywhere. You plop down in a red one and Jade tosses you a controller before setting
up Mario Kart.

“So,” Dave says as you select your characters. You go for toad. Lightweight and fast, which means
all you really have to do is not get hit. Jade picks Princess Daisy. “The all black, that’s a look.”

“Huh?” you look away from the screen, “Oh, yeah. Well, my jeans aren’t black! More like just a
really dark blue.”

Jade pfffts at you and Dave selects Wario. “Yeah yeah, you get what I’m saying though.”

“Yeah, I figured maybe wearing black would be a good seduction technique for letting Karkat
know I want to kiss him? In a pitch way.”

“Bold.”

“Is it?”

Dave shrugs. “Maybe?”

“It makes sense,” Jade says, selecting DK’s course because of course she does. “Wearing black is
supposed to be, like, sexy or something anyway.”

“Or something,” Dave echos, and you toss a pillow at him.

“Dude, don’t deny it,” you say as the cloud man counts down with the stoplight in hand, “I am the
sexiest piece of ass this side of Universe B.”

“Oh yeah man, you are so sexy,” Dave agrees easily enough, making Jade snort again.

“Exactly!” you say.

“Like the body hugging shirt? Hot as hell dude. Don’t know who wouldn’t be hecka fucking
seduced by that shit. You can see like, all nine abs in your eight pack.”

You laugh as Dave rambles on, complementing the way your shirt hugs your shoulders and how
the neckline is just ever so fuckin’ swarthy and wow your ass looks so great in these jeans and your
eyes just really fuckin’ pop when you’ve got your black glasses on plus black everything else and
the single necklace bouncing gently against your man titty is just so fucking sexy and he manages
to keep it up for the entire first race on into the second. You redshell him and that gets him
swearing at you instead of commenting on how well sculpted your calves are.

After an undetermined passage of time, Karkat and Gamzee join you, and you have a great time
losing and taking Karkat down with you. You get all up in his personal business, blocking his view
and getting your view blocked in turn, making him screech and push you and you push back and
honestly it doesn’t even matter that you come in- reliably- in fourth, the only thing that matters is
that you come in ahead of Karkat.

“-cuntsniffing, bulgesucking, cocklicking, assfucking, nookwhiffing piece of fermented slimey
toadstool shitdick greasefucker!” Karkat is cursing at you, and you have both legs on him, your
body half spilling out of the bean bag chair and you not caring as you shove your sock into his face
and try to dislodge him from his own bean bag with the other leg. The other three are being sensible and giving you two plenty of elbow room, Gamzee nestled between Jade and Dave in what looks like a puddle. They’ve done some slouching of their own, it looks like, but rather than almost falling out of their chairs from exertion they’ve simply almost slid all the way off because of gravity and the natural inclination to lay on top of each other. You’d be more happy about the fact that your sister and best bro (especially Dave, let’s be honest here) are getting along with Gamzee, and the fact that Gamzee does not seem to mind Dave in his personal space, but you’re a little preoccupied with trying to piss Karkat off as hard as pissingly possible.

Your phone timer (and thank god you set one) goes off and you remember your dinner date with Dirk, Jake, and Catavros. Gamzee rakes his fingers through his hair nervously, and you hope him meeting up again with Catavros goes well. It’s about time though, he’s been here for ages!!!! He needs to reunite with his old pal. Even if that pal is an ex. Sort of ex? Did he ever confirm if they’d been dating or not?

Jake is out in the lawn, which is not actually a lawn as much as it is a field of whatever the hell has ended up growing there. You don’t believe Jake, Dirk, or Catavros have ever touched a lawn mower in any of their collective lives. Jake seems to be engaged in combat with one of Dirk’s modified sparring bots. Modified to not be potentially lethal, that is.

“Hi Jake!” you call as you swoop down, Gamzee in your arms, anxiously fiddling with his own hair.

“Oh, blimey! I plum forgot about your visitation today! Pardon me ol’ chaps, but I’m in terrible need of a quick washup and a fresh pair of platoons before I’ll be in any shape to host company!”

“That’s fine!” you tell him. He does look like he needs a shower. He’s shirtless and you can see the sweat glistening on his torso, plus the way his hair is plastered to his forehead and the nape of his neck. He thanks you before darting inside, and you and Gamzee follow at a more reasonable pace.

“You okay?” you ask him. He’s purple in the face and staring after Jake in what you really hope is isn’t horror.

“His arms,” Gamzee says, ears pointing straight out from his head and tinged purple, “that ass holy motherfucking fuck, brother, did you see his- his-” Gamzee whines loudly, cutting himself off. You pat him between the horns a little awkwardly. You don’t... actually look at your cousin-father-son that way at all, but you know a lot of other people do! It’s a little weird, actually, seeing his ass on tv as often as you do. You’ve sort of just gotten used to it, as much as you can anyway.

You get to the door and hear Jake holler, “John and Gamzee are here! I’m going to hop in the shower for just a jiffy!”

Catavros hollers back with a “Oh, okay!” and Gamzee suddenly and kind of viciously shoots out his arm and grabs onto your bicep.

“Ow!”

“I change my mind, let’s go home,” Gamzee says, too quiet for anyone anywhere else in the house to hear, “Please I- nevermind we can visit them some other time please brother let’s just go home please let’s- please, please John pl-”

You’re trying to think of a way to calm him down, tell him it’s alright and that it’ll go over fine when Catavros floats into view, effectively silencing Gamzee mid-begging.
The two stare at each other, and you’re pretty sure it’s not your Breath powers that make the air in the foyer go suddenly, rigidly still. You’re actually more impressed by the fact that Catavros is doing that while his mind is elsewhere than you are worried about its implications. Like, you can’t get the wind to stay still on a good day, not without a shitload of wrestling and straining, and here he is with the air in the area caught like his breath is. Like both their breaths are.

“Hey, Gamzee,” Catavros says, giving a smile. His fangs poke out and he scratches at the scruff on his cheeks.

“Tavbro,” Gamzee says, swallowing hard. He pries his fingers from the flesh of your arm. You pray, for Gamzee’s sake and the sake of Gamzee’s pride, that he is not about to start crying. His scars are suddenly very visible, you feel, and you think he must feel that too because he ducks his face behind his hair a little, horns carefully tilted to the side, away from Catavros. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Catavros repeats, rubbing at his arm, “It’s, uh, been a while.”

Gamzee honks. “That it- that it has, brother. You- you’re uh.”

“Part meowbeast?”

“That too,” Gamzee says with a chuckle.

“Ah, then uh, what was the other thing, that was also a thing you were going to comment on?”

“You look good,” Gamzee says with a small smile Tavros’s direction. “Missing from the bottom down but near as I can tell that bit of you has been up and up again for motherfuckin’ debate a number of times too many.”

Tavros laughs and pulls his sprite tail up for better observation. “Yes, I suppose that would count, as an accurate assessment of the continuing state of my lower body.”

The two share a chuckle and it’s not particularly loud, but it’s not as uncomfortable as it could be, you guess.

“You look- like, uh…” Catavros trails off and Gamzee anxiously tucks a lock of hair behind his ear, looking away from Catavros and swallowing hard.

“A mess?”

Catavros floats closer and gently, ever so gently, reaches out a faintly glowing blue hand and touches Gamzee’s scars, Gamzee’s pupils shrinking to pricks at the touch. “A survivor.”

Gamzee breaks down crying right then and there, and both you and Catavros swoop in closer and hug him, both of you crooning at him that it’s alright. Gamzee grabs Catavros’s wrist in both hands, then shifts his palm so he can brace Catavros’s, pressing a kiss to the blue skin(?) and sobbing loudly.

“I’m sorry,” he cries, all but shouts.

“It’s okay,” Catavros says, reaching out with the hand not trapped in Gamzee’s to brush his hair from his face, “It’s okay.”

“I’m s-sssorry, I’m so sorry,” he continues.

“Gamzee, Gamzee hey,” you try to soothe.
“On the meteor-” he sobs into Catavros’s palm.

“Gamzee, none of that was your fault,” Catavros says, shaking his head (and consequently, massive fucking horns, like wow is it any wonder all the doorways in this house could double as loading docks?!), “Gamzee listen to me, none of that was your fault.”

“No, listen, I, when I was- back when- I,” Gamzee gasps.

“I read your forum post,” Catavros says, trying to brush away Gamzee’s tears but they’re coming a little quickly for that.

“No- not- not that-”

“It’s okay,” Catavros insists.

“No, Tavros, listen, I didn’t- I didn’t tell all on the post my brother, I didn’t say all as I had done, only that which English-”

“Gamzee, please calm down first,” Catavros is trying to coax him down but you know Gamzee well enough by this point that you’ve really just gotta let it run its course and simply be there for Gamzee while it’s happening.

“Tavbro please you gotta understand- I did things to- to them as I cared about!”

“I know, Gamzee,” Catavros says gently. You rub circles in Gamzee’s back and pet his hair to the best of your abilities.

“No you don’t Tavros! You can’t! I- when you were dead, I- I tried to-” Gamzee chokes on a sob and has to turn away to cough. You keep rubbing his back.

“I know, Gamzee,” Catavros says, a little firmer.

“No- Tavros, you do-”

“Gamzee!” Catavros grabs Gamzee’s face, one blue, slightly furry palm on each cheek. He makes Gamzee look him in the eye and holds him there a moment, before nodding forward, “I know.”

Gamzee sobs, high and tight, and covers his mouth with his hands.

“It’s okay.”

“How-?”

Catavros chuckles, though it doesn’t sound like there’s a lot of mirth to it, and let’s go of Gamzee’s face to gently pull his hands from his mouth, holding them in his own. “The Horror Terrors see a lot of things, Gamzee, and, uh, when you try your hand at, communing with them- which is a bad idea, by the way- but, sometimes you get, information.”

“I’m sorry,” he cries, and you half wish you had just scooped him up and darted out of here the moment he’d asked you to, this is a lot of emotion and you are not good at processing emotion in large doses.

“Gamzee, none, of what happened after the, uh, puppet, was your fault. I know that now, so, it’s okay,” Catavros assures him again, giving his hands a little squeeze, “I was, definitely weirded out at the time, and for most of the dream bubbles, but I, understand now, okay?” Catavros presses their foreheads together and you can see the strain in all four of their hands, holding onto each other

Gamzee lurches forward and Catavros hugs him back, his tail coming up and wrapping around Gamzee’s waist and hips.

“I’ve missed you,” Gamzee whines, high, so high. “I’ve missed you, I’ve missed you so much Tavbro I’m sorry, I’m sorry I been avoiding you but I just- so ashamed and-”

“I’ve missed, you too, Gamzee, I’ve misssed you too, I’m sorry I didn’t, uh, try harder to get in touch with you, back after you first showed up, I thought, maybe, you didn’t, uh, like me anymore, or were avoiding me for, other reasons.”

“No,” Gamzee gasps, “Not you, Tavbro, never you.”

“Should I…” you ask, trailing off and pointing towards deeper in the house. Neither of them answers you so you take that as a yes and skedaddle. Wow. You are not actually- yeah no. Just wow.

“Whatever’s goin’ on in there,” Dirk says, and it takes you a second to locate his voice from behind the fridge. He’s perched on the countertop like some bird, headcock and everything, “it sounds emotional.”

You’re always amazed by how pronounced his Texan accent is, despite the fact that he grew up pretty much basically alone.

“Yeah.” You shrug, half uncomfortably. “How’s it going, Dirk?”

“Fine. I’ve been trying to convince the Nakodiles to do what I tell them to but nothing’s working.”

“Pfft. They are obstinate and immune to manipulation or persuasion?”

“One day I’m going to move to an area populated by sentient beings of higher thought and then I will become unstoppable.”

“And that is exactly why you chose to settle down with Jake and Catavros and a large population of consorts. Because none of them buy your shit anymore- or, at all, in the consort’s case I guess.”

“I haven’t done jack to Catavros, thanks.”

“Okay but Vriska did and she is arguably like eight million times worse than you, so you’re small fry to him.”

“I resent that notion.”

“Only because it’s true.”

Dirk gives you a fist bump and you smile brightly. This, this you know how to deal with. The pedantic neurosis of Dirk Strider is much more familiar ground than Gamzee weeping over his you-don’t-even-know-at-this-point-friend and is a very nice contrast to the mess you left behind you.

“How’ve you been?” Dirk asks, hopping down from the counter just so he can cross his legs at the ankle and lean on it. His arms are folded over the red text on his shirt.

“Oh, busy,” you say, “Also less straight than I originally thought I was.”
Dirk arches an eyebrow.

“So, guess who’s pitch-dating Karkat now!” you say with a grin and a singular finger gun his way, your other hand on your hip.

“Well that’s at least three developments all in one.”

You squint. “What’s the third one?”

Dirk holds up three fingers and taps on a different one with each point he makes. “Not straight. Interested in pitch. Xenophilic.”

Oh yeah. Technically Karkat is an alien. That’s. Yeah, that’s xenophilia, you guess.

“Weird,” you comment, and Dirk shrugs and sticks his hands in his pockets. It is then that you catch sight of the words on his shirt, and you burst out laughing. It’s a meme shirt, but it’s specifically a meme shirt about Dave. The words "’hey i just met you and this is crazy, but here’s my personality, Validate Me, maybe?’ - Dave Strider, probably” are proudly displayed in Dave’s bright red color and Dirk looks down at his shirt at your laughter. When he looks back up, you can see him smiling just a little at the corner of his mouth, but you know he’s amused as well.

“So the getup, that part of your pitch mating ritual?” Dirk asks, and you glance down at your own self.

“I figured I might as well wear something fitting.”

“Yeah, tight fitting. Looks hot.”

“Thanks!” you say. You know Dirk’s gay but you don’t think he’s being gay for you, right then. At least, you hope he’s not being gay for you. Yeah, you might be dating Karkat now, but that’s not really an open invitation for other gay dudes to hit on you.

Bluh! You’re overthinking this. You’ve never had a problem with this sort of thing coming from Dirk before! You’re exactly the same as you were three days ago, just with more kissing Karkat involved now. That’s it.

Dirk tells you about how he really wants the Nakodiles to give him their soup recipes because Nakodile soups are exquisite (that, you totally agree on, nobody makes soup like the Nakodiles) but they’re not sharing with him and he really wants to get them for Jane for Christmas, and he’s starting early because he knows they’re going to take some whittling down. He also tells you about his robotics projects, how he and Jake have been taking judo together, how he and Catavros are working on wordsmithing and plan on attending a slam poetry night at a little local coffee shop a town over. Be gods, make their fucking nights, cool shit like that.

When he asks after what you’ve been up to, you tell him about your social life and the movie you went and saw with Gamzee. Technically, your social life isn’t a whole hell of a lot to talk about, but at least you’re not deflecting and redirecting the question after two or three minutes or something. Normally you’d just say you hung out with Jade and Dave and Karkat or Jane and Roxy and Calliope or went and said hi to Rose and Kanaya or something, but since everyone has lived with everyone these last four years there would’ve never been anything more to elaborate about on those. Now, though, things are happening. Maybe nothing like personal robot projects or martial arts or poetry, but still things. Things that are not spending eight consecutive hours on one video game, getting up from your computer only to go pee and refill your water bottle.

Jake joins the two of you looking quite perturbed, and you ask if Gamzee is still crying.
“Yes, Catavros too! I wonder—should we go help those blokes?”

“Nah,” you tell him, “they’re just having a tearful reunion. Avoiding each other because they thought bad shit was gonna happen but it turns out they’ve been missing each other like, mutually and shit.”

“Ah, so those are pleasant waterworks!” Jake says, less perturbed but still not looking like he’d want to go interact with them.

“John and I are hiding in the kitchen until aforementioned waterworks quit.” Dirk opens the fridge and pulls out a drink. He offers you a can of orange soda while he’s in there, and you ask for grape pop. He stares at you a long few seconds, you grinning at him the whole while, and then tosses a can of grape fanta at you with what can only be described as pure, unadulterated disgust. You laugh and Jake chortles— you’d never actually heard someone chortle before Jake; not, not really. But he does it, and fairly frequently!

“So! Jake says, clapping his hands together in front of him, “What shall we have for dinner?”

“Don’t you guys live on like, pasta and microwave dinners?”

“Catavros knows how to cook!” Jake protests.

“But yeah, we do,” Dirk finishes. “What kind of sauce do you want on your pasta?”

“Cheesier the better!”

“What, like you?” Dirk asks flatly, pulling fettuccine out of the cupboard. Jake and you both chuckle and Jake gets out a white sauce from the fridge. You find a package of shredded mozzarella and figure you’ll sprinkle that on top.

“We want any like, veggies to go with this?” you ask.

“I think we have makings for a nice side salad,” Jake says, pulling out half a head of lettuce. You find a block of cheddar that you figure you’ll just cube, and there’s ranch. Dirk, because he is a godless heathen, wants cherry tomatoes on his salad. Fucking ew.

Jake also butters some bread and sprinkles garlic salt on it before putting the slices in the toaster oven. Sure, it’s not garlic bread like all the way through or anything, but it tastes good.

Gamzee and Catavros come in about halfway through cooking and are relieved that you three don’t really need their help. Gamzee wants to hear every detail of Catavros’s life. Gamzee continues to want to hear every detail of Catavros’s life during dinner, though Jake, Dirk, and you pipe up every now and then to add to stories or confirm or question specifics. Gamzee seems entranced by everything that passes through Catavros’s lips, and you wonder just how deeply he’s been silently missing this dude. You’re glad, now, that you didn’t run away when Gamzee asked you to. This clearly has been a long time coming.

You all help clean up and Jake suggests you all go for a jaunt through the local zoo together, which you’re agreeable to. You have to pee before you leave, though. It’s a shame that you’re in the bathroom when Catavros quietly and gently tells Gamzee that he needs to talk to him—privately—and pulls him to the kitchen, because after you’re done in the bathroom you think to yourself that you want another can of pop for your zoo goings. You Become (you’ve been itching to, but that hardly matters) and nyoom by the others into the kitchen at a truly inopportune moment. You’re starting to wonder if maybe fate is real, and it wants you to overhear things you probably maybe shouldn’t.
“Gamzee, I can’t reciprocate your feelings,” Catavros blurts, perhaps because he’d been bottling it up all evening—though that’s just your best guess.

“O-Oh, brother- I didn’t mean—”

“I appreciate them,” Catavros hastens to continue, cutting Gamzee off. “I really, uh, do. I appreciate that you feel that way about me, especially since, I often find it, pretty hard to think that anyone would, uh, feel that way about me, but as much as I like you, and, value your friendship, I can’t. I don’t feel that way about you. And- and it wouldn’t be fair to you for me to try and- or, get into a relationship with you thinking I’ll grow to feel that way about you when I don’t, and, I’m sorry Gamzee.”

Catavros’s tail is twitching up a storm and he’s tugging at the fur on the back of his hands so hard it almost looks like he’s trying to pluck them. You should, reasonably, leave, but while you’re horrified by the emotional display happening in front of you you’re also fascinated and don’t actually want to look away. You’re an asshole, what can you say.

“Tavros,” Gamzee says, “Brother, Tavbro, I- I did feel that way on you, once. Long. Long and many night ago.” Gamzee takes a deep breath, ‘But a lot- motherfuckin’ so much has happened since we were pupae and I don’t—” Gamzee honks. It’s not a particularly pleasant sound, but it doesn’t sound… too terribly bitter either. “I don’t feel that way about you no more neither. I value you, Tavbro, the kindness as you showed at me back then and this here motherfuckin’ night ain’t things I am ever as going to forget, not one word of the sweet sayings you’ve laid on me, brother, but…” Gamzee tucks a lock of hair behind his ear. “I maybe will always feel a little flush for you, Tavros. I wonder if there ain’t anything that could stop me from feeling just a little flush for you. But on a whole I don’t want you as my matesprit, brother. Just want you as my friend. You—” Gamzee smiled tight, “You were a good friend to me all them sweeps. I don’t wanna ever lose the good thing we had just cause of some quadrant bullshit.”

Catavros seems to relax and smiles softly, reaching up to thumb at one of Gamzee’s eyes, which do indeed look a little bit wet.

“I’m sorry about what happened in the Game,” Catavros says quietly.

“Me too brother.”

“Nah, I left you all alone just so I could scrape after the attention of some jerk who didn’t actually care about me. I was supposed to be your server player but I hardly did a damn thing for you.”

“You had your problems,” Gamzee says, “I didn’t mind waitin’ none, and when I got to them gates I did like to travel from planet to planet. We had twelve of ‘em, all perfect gems to be explored and travelled and marvelled at. I didn’t mind it none at all.”

Catavros reaches out and cups Gamzee’s face again, pulling their foreheads together softly.

“One night you’re gonna, find someone who won’t make you wait anymore.”

And you think that’s the end of their conversation, probably, so you go just outside the kitchen door, become flesh, and walk in, because you are actually serious about that getting another pop thing.

“Hey,” you greet, casual as you can manage so as not to let them know you were just snooping. “You two… having a moment or…” you ask, gesturing at the fridge and slowing down just a step. The two pull their heads apart and you smile at them. Gamzee is staring at you a little weird but
you figure he’s just embarrassed about you seeing him bonping foreheads with Tavros and almost crying yet again. He does do a lot of that… but it’s nothing to be ashamed of!

“You okay?” you ask him, pop can in hand, because you’d notice the teary eyes normally.

“Ah, yeah, brother,” he says, wiping at his face. “Tavbro and I were just having a moment.”

“You and Catavros are finally reunited! It makes sense that you would have those!”

Gamzee honks and flops his head down onto your shoulder, which you guess is not only broad but apparently nice looking in a tight fitting shirt.

“Why do you keep calling him that?” Gamzee asks. You pause so you’re not trying to talk over the hiss-snap of you opening your pop, and then “Hm?” at him.

“’Catavros.’ I get he’s part meowbeast but that ain’t his name.”

“Actually, uh,” Catavros butts in, “It, sort of is? It was originally GCatavros, back when I first formed, but then the green sun was destroyed so the, uh, godly aspects, of my more feline self, were rendered null and void, which meant I uh, just sort of became Catavros, instead of GCatavros. Well, GCatavrossprite, I guess, but having the sprite on the end of my name seems rather silly, especially since I am not attempting to distinguish myself from any other preexisting GCatavroses- or Catavroses- out there.”

“Oh,” Gamzee frowns, ears pointed down and out. “So, should I, motherfuckin…”

“Oh, uh, no. If you want to keep calling me, just Tavros, that’s fine. Catavros is more, an indication of my role, especially as a Game sprite, but since you know me as, just your friend, and, uh, just outside of the context of me having, preprogrammed functionality to my cosmic purpose, Tavros is, just fine.”

Well, that makes you concerned. “Hey, if the Cat part of your name is just for, cosmic function, should any of the rest of us be calling you that?” you ask.

“Oh, I don’t really mind either way,” Catavros tells you, but that doesn’t really sit well with you.

“Are you sure? Because if it’s just gonna be some, function title I don’t think we should be calling you by it.” You are sir frownsalot, it is you.

“Eheh,” Tavros scratches at his cheek fur. “I guess, I would appreciate just having my name used, then.”

“Tavros it is! I’m gonna say sorry in advance for all the times I’m going to forget to do that.”

“It’s really, not something that bothers me,” Tavros says as Gamzee slides his arms around your own, effectively hugging you but like, just your arm, his face pressed against your shoulder. It’s a good thing you can float- and are basically always floating- otherwise he’d have to be at one hell of a weird angle in order to manage that.

“Even so, I’ll do my best!” Tavros’s eyes are flickering between you and Gamzee, but he smiles at you.

“I really, appreciate that, John.”

You go to the zoo. Tavros is the zoologist god, and many zoos have titles with stuff like “breeze”
or “zephyr” or “bullhorn” in them. Actually, that reminds you! You Gotta look up the God of Recovery soon. Like. You legitimately have to. But after the zoo. For now, you’re appreciating the fuck out of Earth C’s unique fauna, like peacocks that don’t quite look like peacocks, two mouthed big cats with golden and brown circling designs, and pigeons. Just like, normal pigeons that you used to see everyday in Seattle, back when Seattle existed. Now, they’re rare birds. You’re not sure how pigeons are rare birds. You enjoy the sound of them cooing, though. Sort of reminds you of the life you left behind.

You’re nostalgic for it.

You’re not thinking about that now, though. You’re thinking about reptiles and the fact that Tavros can hunch down in front of the glass panels and call them to him, sprite tail curled underneath him like he’s a snake in his own right. The zoo volunteers are perfectly happy to let him take animals out of their enclosures as long as he puts them back, so Gamzee gets to pet cool things like danger noodles. Dirk refuses to call them snakes, only comes up with more and more elaborate euphemisms for them that grow steadily more sexual in nature. He is a god, but that does not stop one particularly plucky employee from asking you five to please leave the reptile exhibit. You, Jake, Dirk, and Catavros- fuck, Tavros- all put in a good word for her when you leave. If she has the mettle to not, you know, throw palm fronds at your feet, all members of your group are willing to do just about anything you can to encourage her to keep her spine thick. The manager at the zoo is pleased into a tizzy that you’re all so fond of one of his employees, so you’re pretty sure that if she’s looking for a promotion, she’ll get one. The praise of not one, but four, gods is enough to grant anyone some heavy sway.

Before you leave, though, you visit the aquarium. Gamzee adores it. He doesn’t want to leave. You buy him like seven different things from the gift shop- all of them the most garish plushes of the most brightly colored fish in the aquarium and honestly you’re just delighted that he’s having such a good time. Tavros has a harder time communing with fish than he does land creatures or birds, primarily because fish have very simple brains. He says it’s because he’s more of a beast tamer, but you all call bullshit on that.

“Did you go to zoos much, back on Earth A?” Tavros asks you as you all leave.

“Yeah! My dad took me about once a year!”

“What were they like?” Tavros asks.

“They-” you stop. Well, you keep floating forward, but you stop talking.

“I… don’t remember…” you say with a frown. “I know he took me but I can’t… not even fragments.”

That’s alarming. You know you’re forgetful, but to forget multiple years worth of zoo experiences… Just, all of them, every last memory- gone?

Oh. Oh, right. Gamzee destroyed some of your memories. Well, some of your experiences. You can’t recall them now, because they literally no longer happened. They’re just shredded pockets of spacetime where you technically didn’t actually go to the zoo, even though in actual yes reality you did…?

Why is nothing easy.

“Nevermind, I guess,” you tell Tavros with a tight smile.
You chill with the three of them at their place for a while, just chatting, having a nice conversation, and once it’s late enough you figure you’ll go home.

“John,” Dirk says as you’re standing up, “don’t you have something for us?”

“Have some- Oh! Oh right!” You pull the antique pipe out of your sylladex and hand it to Dirk, who examines it before passing it over to Jake.

“Hm?” Gamzee chirps at you (holy fuck. Oh god that’s adorable).

“Oh, I’m commissioning them to turn that into a bubble pipe!”

“Aw, shit bro, that sounds mighty cute!”

“I’m just going to enjoy having an official looking pipe with bubbles coming out of it,” you chuckle, and Gamzee chuckles along with you, caught up in a good mood. It’s good to see him smiling and laughing like this. You wish you could keep him smiling and laughing all the time.

You drop by the library on your way home, which Gamzee doesn’t mind. You don’t… tell him that you’re checking out books specifically so you can research him. That would… that just feels like it would be a weird thing to tell somebody. You check out an encyclopedia of the gods, and smile tightly at the librarian. You’re lucky enough to live in a large city where the library is 24/7. You’re also lucky that this person seems to just take your choice in books with a grain of salt and simply tells you when your due date is and to have a nice night. You’ve avoided books like these, all four years of you living here. News articles, snap stories, tabloids, you don’t want to hear what other people have to say about your life- the religion they’ve made up regarding your life- your lives! Your friends, yourself, people you know! It’s. It’s just really weird okay. But you’re curious enough about the God of Recovery and how the hell Gamzee is supposed to be god of anything that you slip it into your sylladex and go find Gamzee in the back corner, looking at- of all things- a book about the historical rise and fall of the penny-farthing.

“You ready to go?”

“…yeah.” Gamzee tears his eyes away from the page after a moment and slips the book back into its slot.

“Did you want to check it out?”

“Nah, brother. Lotta words in there, ain’t sure I got the attention for them, but it was interesting to look at the pictures and diagrams and read the descriptions on their undersides.”

“Cool.”

You get home, tell Gamzee you’re gonna go read in bed for a little while, and say your goodnights.

The book is arranged so that each god is a chapter, starting with you, then Rose, Dave, Jade, Jane, Roxy, Dirk, Jake, Karkat, Aradia, (Cat)Tavros- which they actually spell like that. You guess there’s some kind of significance to that, but you don’t care enough to look into it. The table of contents is color-coded, so you just skim down to the bottom where Gamzee’s hue is, you look at the page number and flip to that.

The God of Recovery
Bard of Rage
Recovery, Rage, Purification, Letting Go, Patience, Miracles, Belief, (minor) Healing, (minor)
New Beginnings
The God of Recovery, Gamzee Makara, is the seventh Prospitan god, the first and only Bard god, and the first and only Rage god. However, rather than being one who incites Rage or requires fury from his followers, his role as a Bard makes him one who Unbecomes, or undoes, Rage. He is the one who, because of his vast knowledge of wrath, best knows how to let it go, channel it into something constructive, or work through it, depending on the type of rage and the situation that has provoked it.

Due to a childhood of neglect and a heroic tale of tragedy, the God of Recovery has suffered greatly. In light of that suffering, he developed a number of maladaptive and detrimental coping mechanisms, but helpful coping mechanisms as well, as he aged. Through him, we can know that recovery is, first and foremost, a cycle. A pattern of seven steps forwards and six steps back, there will always be highs and lows within recovery, and, like our god, we must not be ashamed to exist within our lowest points as well as in our highest. By example, he has shown that in order to recover, one must seek help, certainly from professional therapists but also from friends, family, and quadrants. To suffer alone is the greatest affliction, and the first step must always be to reach out for aid.

A capricious god, Gamzee Makara has the least consistency throughout all of his historical appearances. In many, he is a smiling and laughing god, offering to uplift the spirits and guide the misguided with the wisdom that comes through experience, a cheerful god of miracles, purification, and blessings. In many others, he is a weeping god, a god who is tormented by the tragedies that have afflicted him who must cry for all his feelings. This, too, is an example by which he leads us. We must never be ashamed of our tears, whether they be from pain, sadness, anger, or joy. Some appearances he is silent, a shadow in the backdrop of the other gods, while in others he is a god of screams and honks. Due to the variability of his nature, two masks, one laughing, one weeping, have been carved as a symbol of his blessed grounds, and are often found in theaters, therapy buildings, and shelters for the abandoned, acting as a reminder that all who laugh may still weep, and all who weep will one day laugh again.

He is considered to be one of the most sympathetic of all the gods, a beacon of empathy and compassion to those who come to him. Having known suffering, he can feel for the suffering of mortals, and having known rescue, he then in turn rescues those who flock to him, again acting as an example to those of us who are saved by others. We must do as he does, and when we are helped, help others.

Contents for this Chapter:
0. Introduction
I. History
   ...A. Pupahood
   ...B. The Game
   ...C. Lord English
   ...D. The First Era (0-1000)
   ...E. The Second Era (1001-2000)
   ...F. The Third Era (2001-3000)
   ...G. The Fourth Era (3001-4000)
   ...H. The Fifth Era (4001-5000)
II. Current Times (5001- ?)
III. Coping Mechanisms
   ...A. Maladaptive
   ...B. Adaptive
   ...C. Therapy
IV. Relationships
   ...A. Karkat Vantas (Knight of Blood)
...B. John Egbert (Heir of Breath)
...C. Dave Strider (Knight of Time)
...D. Equius Zahhak (Heir of Void)
......i. ARquius (HeirPrince of VoidHeart)
...E. Sollux Captor (Mage of Doom)
...F. Eridan Ampora (Prince of Hope)
...G. Calliope (Muse of Space)
...H. Jade Harley (Witch of Space)
......I. Jane Crocker (Maid of Life)

You skim over the extensive table of contents (you sort of check out and don’t really pay attention to the names), flip the page, and are dismayed to see that the chapter contents go on for another page after that before starting in on history and you… You close the book. You don’t want to know Gamzee’s alleged relationships with everyone, or anything about his past that he hasn’t already told you, or what he’s going to be doing as he time travels to various points in times in the last five thousand years. You’re tempted to look at his relationship with Dave and see how it’s going to play out, but that. You don’t. That’s time travel and you have all of Karkat screaming at you backwards through time to know why time shenanigans are kind of a bad idea. You just. You take the book and put it back in your sylladex. The intro had all the information you needed anyway, right?

Though you guess it gave you a little something of time shenanigans. Therapy, huh? You. Yeah you should probably get Gamzee to see an actual trained medical professional about his issues. Karkat is great and you do your best, but you should really probably… be a responsible adult. And stuff. If anyone has ever needed a therapist, Gamzee is definitely the person.

You’re kind of surprised nobody’s brought it up until now, actually. And with Rose having once wanted to BE a therapist, too. You guess maybe admitting that one member of your group needs to see a therapist would be like admitting that most members of your group need to see therapists. And really, it’s not like you haven’t ever talked about the idea.

The thing is, what therapist is supposed to help- really, actually help- you all with the Game’s marks on you? There’s no one on Earth C who knows what all of you went through except each other. No one who can possibly understand why Dave will exist near burning wood and instead smell melting metal. Why Rose glares daggers at the rain like it’s her own personal failing, why Jade pores over book after book about astral projecting, hoping she can learn how to do it again someday, why you-

Sure, therapists can get the root of the problem. Dave suffered trauma in situations of intense heat, Rose associates rain with her uncompleted mission, Jade’s fundamental years were spent in elongated periods of astral projection, but nobody can really get the way the Game has affected you all. Not really. It makes more sense to just stay with your in-group, with the people who were there, who experienced the destruction, the failure, the fact that- that you’re not human anymore. Not all the way. You know you’re worse than your friends in that aspect, know that you’re more wind than boy, while they’re still more flesh than magic. But Rose dreams the unfathomable, you know, you know she can’t escape the visions when she’s sleeping. You know that Dave, for all that he tries- he fucking tries- to cut himself off from the Time, has a constant ticking in his head, knows intimately the location of every clock in the area, that his music has improved at the cost of him being hyper-aware of the rhythm of everything, that his comedy works so well because comedy is all about the timing. You know that Jade surrounds herself with plants only in part because of her lifelong hobby, but also in order to fill the space around her, that the clutter of her house is to fill the empty air, that she goes grocery shopping more frequently than any of you because she doesn’t like to have any cupboard with empty slots, any shelf missing a presence.
You just don’t want to be real anymore. You want to dissipate and never condensate into skin ever again. You love your friends and they are your anchor, but you know that if something were to happen to them, if you didn’t have them, nothing would be stopping you from Becoming and never coming back. Some days you wonder if even they are enough, if one day you might just float away anyway. But you know that those days are just bad days, and like all bad days they will pass. You love your friends, you love Dave and Jade and Rose and Karkat and Roxy and Callie and everyone. You only notice the blanket slowly sinking through you when you decide to get up and get yourself a glass of very, very cold water. Ah. Looks like you’re a little too late. Your hands look less like actual hands and more like a child’s drawing of hands during their first attempt at water colors. Thicker in some places than others, kind of streaked with solidity, and far too fat and rounded. There’s a vaguely bluish hue to your body. Do you even have two legs anymore or are you like the genie from Aladdin, just sort of a trail of blue smoke extending down from your crux. The only thing that remains vaguely solid on you is the Breath symbol on your pjs, right over the core of your chest, and you inhale deeply. It’s. It’s a very hard task, to breathe when you’re like this. But in order to breathe, you need lungs, so you continue trying to, still being a creature of Breath while forcing yourself back into physicality.

It takes you fifteen minutes of eight seconds in, twelve seconds out in order to get your brain off of therapy and the scars the Game left slashed across all of your souls, fifteen minutes of focusing on your lungs- which act as the centerpiece that the rest of your body can construct itself off of- instead of how isolated you all truly are from the rest of the waking world.

You steadfastly do not think about the stuff that caused you to go ghostly in the first place, and go pour yourself a glass of ice and plop some water into it. You drink it slowly, paying attention to how the ice pushes against your upper lip, to how cold the glass is on the inside of your palm and fingers, to the way the water feels in your mouth as you swallow it. You stomach doesn’t feel real, but you know that since your hands are capable of holding a glass it must be, since your stomach is closer to your lungs than your fingers are. You keep focusing on deep breaths, the temperatureless, textureless marble of the counter, the cold glass in your hand and at your lips.

Gamzeee honks behind you and you turn.

“Same idea, bro,” Gamzee tells you. He’s got a pretty nightgown and baggy rainbow polkadot pajama pants on. The color schemes are something that would strike you as “not matching at all” but it’s brightly colored. You think Gamzee, like Terezi, goes for a more “whatever’s the most colorful/intensely colored” approach to fashion.

“Woah,” he says, looking at you after he’s pulled down a glass, “brother, your eyes.”

“Hm?” You pull out your phone and open snapchat. Oh. They’re glowing. “Ah, that happens sometimes,” you tell him.

“Just up and motherfuckin do that for no reason? Your voice, too?”

“Well, it, it has more to do with the fact that I’ve recently- sometimes when I Become the wind I have a little trouble pulling myself back together.” Yeah, your voice does sound distinctly breathy, airy, almost whispery. “It’s fine though. I should be able to just sleep this one off.”

“Uh… huh…” Gamzee doesn’t sound like he believes you but really, when do your friends ever believe you about this shit? Honestly, you’re a fully grown fucking adult, you know your own powers, you know your own fucking body, yes you’re aware that maybe having troubles turning back into your thick, heavy skin with your cumbersome tongue and squishy, sticky flesh and fat and hair and pores is a bad thing- but guess what? You always pull yourself back, don’t you? You stay anchored, you stay where you are in a body that doesn’t even feel like it’s yours anymore half
the time and you know that body. You are unfortunately aware of how that body works, how this works, you’re the one who lives with the ever-gnawing desire to not have these bones of tar and tack and puddy. You’re suddenly angry, bitter at how your friends refuse to believe you when you say you’re fine because you are and you don’t need them fucking condescending you because they think they know the ebb and flow of your powers better than you do.

You set the glass down and you’d love to say you did it harder than you meant to, but you absolutely mean to set it down that hard. You walk out of the kitchen, feet firm on the ground not to try and ground yourself, but so that Gamzee can hear your footsteps.

“I- John, brother I didn’t-” Gamzee calls after you but you just jump up into the air and fly up the steps. You shut the door of your bedroom too loudly and immediately regret everything. What kind of terrible fucking person even are you?! Getting pissed over fucking nothing and making Gamzee feel like that’s somehow his fault. God. You are the trash can, it is you. You are a heaping receptacle of garbage that spews waste all over the place every time you move.

You need to apologize. You can’t leave Gamzee feeling like you’re mad at him, even if you are, because you are being entirely unreasonable. You’ll text him. You don’t think you can do face-to-face contact with anyone right now but you can text him.

ectoBiologist [EB] began trolling taintedCadence [TC]

EB: Hey, I’m sorry about that

TC: NaH, nAh bRo

TC: JuSt wOnDeRiNg wHaT A MoThErFuCkEr dId tO GeT A BrOtHeR AlL Up aNd uPsEt fOr?

TC: I DiDn’T mEaN To

EB: That wasn’t your fault

EB: I’m just being a dumbass

EB: You didn’t do anything wrong

TC: BuT I ToUcHeD A NeRvE

EB: It doesn’t matter

You’re starting to feel aggressive again. You don’t want to talk about this. You just want to apologize and go to sleep.

TC: :o(

TC: BrOtHeR BlUe iF I MaDe cAsUaL MeNtIoN Of sOmEtHiNg aS UpSeTs yOu i nNeD To kNoW So aS To aVoId iN FuTuRe tImEs

EB: There’s nothing to avoid

EB: I’m fine

TC: JoHnBrO If i dOn't kNoW tHeN I CaN’t FiX JaCk aLl mOtHeRfUcKiN ShIt

EB: What part of I’m fine are you not getting
You regret that too, just as soon as you hit send. You could’ve avoided sending that too. You knew it was a bad idea but you typed it out and hit send anyway. God you are the worst kind of garbage, what is even wrong with you right now? This is so uncalled for.

EB: Fuck

TC: I’m sOrRy

EB: No, no, I’m sorry

EB: I shouldn’t have sent that

EB: Listen just

EB: I’m sorry

TC: I’ll BaCk oFf

EB: You haven’t done anything wrong and don’t deserve to feel like you have

TC: GiVe yOu yOuR SpAcE

EB: Will you listen to me please!

EB: Shit

TC: sOrRy

EB: No, I’m fucking this up

EB: I, John Egbert, am fucking this up

EB: I’m being really terrible right now and

EB: Look, I’m sorry okay?

EB: I’m going to bed

TC: OkAy

EB: I’ll apologize properly in the morning

TC: I’m sOrRy

EB: Goodnight.

**ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering taintedCadence [TC]**

God, you feel like Karkat must feel on the regular. How the shit are you fucking up this badly, how the FUCK are you this upset over something that doesn’t fucking matter? You just, you need to sleep this off and pray to whatever higher power exists that you feel better in the morning. You’re already in your pjs and you do not care enough to leave your room to go brush your teeth, so you just turn off the light, take off your glasses, and plug your phone in. You get maybe 20 seconds tops before your phone buzzes. You hold your glasses up to your eyes, not dedicated to the idea of putting them back on entirely.
carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

CG: JOHN YOU’D BETTER HAVE ONE HELL OF AN IMPRESSIVE EXPLANATION FOR WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON

Speak of the fucking devil.

ectoBiologist [EB] is now on Do Not Disturb!

CG: OH DON’T YOU FUCKING DARE

CG: EGBERT

You lock your phone screen and all incoming notifications will not make the phone light up or vibrate. Karkat can type himself into bloody fingers for all you care, you're not responding. You are sleeping.

You feel utterly, predictably shitty in the morning, but at least the weird pissy mood from last night is gone. Thank fuck. You get up and shower, because you feel gross, and try to think of things that are not Gamzee and how bad you fucked up (while simultaneously thinking only of how badly you fucked up and how hard you are trying to think of things that are not that), brush your teeth, dress in your god tiers because they’re soft and easy and familiar, and knock on Gamzee’s doorframe. He’s curled up in the far corner of his bed, pillows and blankets making something of a nest around his tiny form. You distantly note that his bong is on top of the dresser, vine resting in the slats of sunlight that filter in through the blinds. He doesn’t get up when you knock, but it… you check your phone. Yeah, it’s like, almost 11. It’s time to get up, probably. If nothing else but so you can apologize and get this over with, because if you back down and start making excuses to avoid it you’ll keep avoiding it and also you want to clear your guilty conscious. It’s selfish but you do.

“Hey, Gamzee,” you say gently, heart squeezing up at the sight of him curled so pitifully like this. You float onto the bed next to him, air flowing in tiny circles around you. Not harsh, not as agitated as you feel, but certainly not the still air of indoors. You touch his shoulder and he wakes, and when he looks up at you you can see him flinch and his ears shoot straight down. Well. Ear. You can only see the one, but you’re pretty sure the other one is going down too.

“I’m sorry about last night.” God you feel slimy. Like the entirety of your skin is tacky with sweat or ooze or something.

He sits up and a blanket gets caught on his arm but he pays it no mind. “Oh, John, me too, it was clear enough that you were pissed I shouldn’t have pushed-”

“Hey,” you cut him off softly, trying to be as gentle as you can be while still getting his attention. You reach out, hesitant, and touch his shoulder. “Maybe so, but that doesn’t mean I’m not the one in the wrong here.”

Your gut is twisting sour again and it’s not because you’re fucking up this time. It’s the fact that Gamzee isn’t upset with you, that he isn’t miffed that you were being pissy and childish. You should be asking for his forgiveness, and he looks like he’s desperate for yours. It’s not fair. This isn’t how tiffs should go. It’s not fair that he’s like this and you wish you could fix him somehow.

He leans in like he wants to flop his weight against you and you pull him in for a hug, because of course he’s wearing it-
you’ve upset him, and who else is here to give him comfort when you’re the one upsetting him? You slide your fingers into his hair, tangled like it hasn’t been in a long while (you get the image of him rolling around, unable to find a comfortable position, unable to fall asleep and messing up his hair in the process) and you hold him and you can feel the occasional twitch and shiver that makes his body shake as you help him breathe.

“I just don’t know what I did wrong brother,” he whines at you, and you hush him.

“You didn’t, Gamzee, I’m telling you, that was all on me. I was in a weird mood and I’m not entirely sure why myself, other than the fact that I was still a little, eh, breezy? You didn’t do anything, you were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

He nods against your shoulder and you kiss his hair.

“Good news,” you say, trying for cheerful, “I’m not feeling really fucking weird anymore so I won’t do that again!” You hope. God you hope you never get into that weird headspace ever again. You don’t like it.

Gamzee squirms closer to you and you lay down so he can curl on top of you/around you better. You pull over blankets and rearrange pillows and his codpiece is definitely currently pressed up against your crotch but now is not the time to care about that. You kiss his forehead and nudge him, sorta half-nuzzling, but you want his attention.

“Hey, when Karkat gets like that- or, well, he’s kind of always like that but sometimes he’s more like that than others, do you… Like, you took last night really badly- which is fair! You had every reason to and I’m not trying to imply that you overreacted or something because you’re allowed to feel emotions and whatever but just. Does Karkat cow you this easily too?” Because you have no idea how their moirallegiance is working out if that’s the case.

Gamzee shakes his head and presses his face a little harder against your shoulder. “Karkat I’m all kinds of motherfuckin’ used to. I know there ain’t no bite in his words, and he always does come apologizing like a kicked barkbeast later. You, though, I ain’t never seen get in a mood like that before. Ain’t never heard of such moods from your pallid-haired brother or sister, for all they loved to talk on you.” Yeah you’re still not entirely sure how you feel about that. Confused? Curious? Flattered? Probably at least a little baffled. “Didn’t- figured that, if you were pissed at me it was cause of something I did done fucked up. Haven’t heard on you getting into that screechy headspace where you do make motions all aggressive and say things as are sharp to hear.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” Gamzee says, lifting his head and smiling at you, and it’s shaky but looks genuine. “I know now, yeah? I- if you get in that kind of mood again, I’ll leave you alone? Won’t- won’t keep questioning?”

You feel bad and absolutely never want to get weirdly pissy ever again but that seems like a responsible thing to agree to. “Yeah, just give me a little air, I’ll blow off steam and calm down.”

Gamzee reaches out and caresses your hair, making you smile at him as well. “Okay brother. Good to know.” Gamzee yawns and you feel a little guilty again.

“How’d you sleep?” you ask. He looks away uncomfortably and half shrugs.

“I wouldn’t mind you laying here all warm and soft and solid with me while I get my doze on, if that’s as what you’re offering.” He sounds hopeful. So naturally, you agree, it’s the least you can
do to make it up to him.

A little after noon the need to pee is no longer something you can fend off. You try to slip away without waking him but of course he does, and he yawns and figures he may as well get up. You make blueberry waffles while he showers and dresses and once he’s joined you at the table Gamzee makes a lot of frowny faces at his phone.

“So uh, brother,” Gamzee says, “My palest bro does say that you’re ignoring him?”

“Oh shit.” You pull out your phone. “I put myself on don’t disturb last night. I probably have like a million messages from him.”

You don’t have a million messages, but your guess isn’t far off. Karkat, your phone helpfully informs you with the little red notification bubble over the corner of the pesterchum app, has left you two hundred and three messages overnight into this morning.

“Holy shit,” you mutter, opening the app. Okay so nine of those messages are from Dave, but that still leaves 194 messages from Karkat. You are NOT reading all of them. As a matter of fact, you’re not reading any of them.

**ectoBiologist [EB] is no longer on Do Not Disturb!**

CG: JOHN FUCKING EGBERT IT IS ABOUT GODDAMNED TIME

CG: GAMZEE HAS MESSAGED ME AND TOLD ME YOU HAVE APOLOGIZED AND THAT ALL IS WELL

CG: BUT LET ME TELL YOU RIGHT FUCKING NOW THAT ALL IS NOT FUCKING WELL

CG: I WILL SEE YOU GROVEL FOR UPSETTING HIM LIKE THAT AND THEN FUCKING IGNORING ME ALL DAY

CG: NIGHT

CG: WHATEVER FUCKING ARBITRARY IDENTIFICATION YOU WANT TO PUT ON THE PERIOD OF TIME IN WHICH YOU WERE SLEEPING

CG: YOU HAVE FUCKED UP JOHN

EB: No worse than you usually do!

CG: EXCUSE YOU?

EB: Look I got into a weird, pissy mood, did some things I shouldn’t have, said some things I wish I could take back, and accidentally hurt someone I care about

EB: Or, two someones, if you’re really that upset about me ignoring you

CG: DAMN RIGHT I AM

EB: But then I calmed down and apologized for being a fucking shithead

EB: And *I* didn’t even feel the need to start screaming at Gamzee as a projection of insecurities and personal failings turned outwards onto the people around me so unless you’ve been doing some pretty impressive grovelling in places I haven’t seen it I don’t think you have a lot of room to talk!
CG: I
CG: FUCK
CG: YOU’RE RIGHT

EB: Exactly, so I don’t want to hear it!

CG: FUCK YOU
CG: UGH, SHIT
CG: I’M DOING IT RIGHT NOW, AREN’T I?

EB: A little bit
CG: I SUPPOSE THIS IS THE PART WHERE I APOLOGIZE THEN

EB: I mean I’m not going to say no to an apology :B
CG: YOU KNOW WHAT
CG: FUCK YOU SPECIFICALLY

EB: Nah, but I think both Gamzee and I could go for some cuddles
CG: DAVE IS DOING SOME PHOTOSHOOT THING SOMEWHERE AND WON’T BE BACK UNTIL AROUND 3 BUT MY DOOR IS WIDE OPEN

EB: See you in a bit then!

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

You put your phone away, see that Gamzee is looking at his, and opt to finish off the rest of your final remaining waffle while he texts.

“So we’re going over to Karkat’s, then?” Gamzee asks, looking up at you for confirmation.

“I figured you’d probably like to, so if that’s cool with you then yeah.”

Gamzee nods and puts his phone away too. “All but read my motherfuckin’ mind, brother blue.”
He honks softly. “We got a weird pattern of talkin’ on my shit three times durin’ our jams and his shit every third. Guess since last night- day? Motherfuckin’... shit and whatever, we were talkin’ on him goin’ all sweet spades with a brother now it’s my turn to talk on stuff.”

“I really am sorry,” you repeat, still feeling bad.

“Oh, brother I ain’t meant to imply that you aren’t I’m just- still upset?”

You nod, that’s fair.

“Like, like I ain’t mad upset or nothing just,” Gamzee bites his lip and hunches his shoulder, “it did make a hurt at me, brother, I’m hurt.”

You go to him and he’s on his feet and hugging you in an instant, and you pet his hair and hush him and hold him. He doesn’t sound panicky and his breathing is normal, so you’re not worried, but you hurt your friend so he deserves all the hugs he wants. His hands stroke lightly up and down
your back, then go up to the backs of your shoulders and hold onto your floating form, his face pressed into the crook of your neck. He starts purring somewhere in there, making his breath go all vibrating and soothing.

You could stay like this all day, but Gamzee wants to go see Karkat and so do you. You kind of want to punch him for acting like you’re somehow worse than him in literally any way, and a big part of you wants to see if you can try kissing him again, because kissing him is a fun activity that you have immensely enjoyed. However, you can’t even get out of your house just quite yet.

Your mailbox is absolutely overflowing and you, at first, believe this is some kind of mistake. Gamzee also sees it, though, so you’re not just imagining things, and he slowly breaks down into laughter.

“Johnbro what the motherfuck!?”

“What the shit?” you say hollowly as you pull letter after letter out of your mailbox, none of the names you recognize. Sure you get fanmail every now and then but you have a p.o. box that you go check once a week or so (or once a month if you’re forgetful), your home address is only for stuff that you, specifically, have asked for. And you have no idea why there’s suddenly such a large amount. You open a few right out there on the lawn and they’re all congratulating you on your new kismesitude with Karkat.

“What the fuck…?” you say quietly, flabbergasted. Gamzee helps you get all the letters inside and is positively busting a gut over how everyone seems to be tripping over themselves to congratulate you and Karkat on your new relationship.

The last letter, the one at the very bottom of the pile, you get to when Gamzee has been reduced only to giggling and has sent like ten snaps of you being very baffled and astounded by people well-wishing you. It’s blank on the front, which means it was hand-delivered to your home, which means this is the letter sent by the culprit who put stuff from your p.o. box (and all the letters are, indeed, addressed to the box and not your house) into your actual mailbox. You think it might be Jane, as you pry open the seal, since Jane is the one you usually think of regarding pranks.

hey john u want sum fuk?
-karkat

It is very clearly from Rose, with her elegant, flowing calligraphy and her custom-made purple pen ink scrawled artistically in the meme words. There are also fancy spades drawn all over the rest of the page that is not filled with the simple text, and you sigh. Okay. So Rose has successfully expunged your Prankster’s Gambit of its contents. She has wiped the fucking floor with you. She has absolutely gotten your goat with all of this. You hold the piece of paper up next to your face and send a snap of yourself, looking very unimpressed, to Rose.

EB: really?

She sends one back of her, reclining on Kanaya on their couch, looking smug as all hell and like she is probably giggling at you.

TT: I’m quite certain I have no idea what you could possibly mean

You hold the paper up with your Breath and point at the scarce words on it.

EB: You sending me this and then also filling my mailbox with letters from my po box!

She sends a picture of herself shrugging, smile pursed, looking off to the side.
TT: That’s what you get for telling both Jade and Dave but not me. I had to find out via DAVE’S snapchat, John. Honestly, the offence! I might take this to mean you no longer like me, John

Oh, gee. You are just going for the gold of fucking up lately, aren’t you? Really chasing Karkat for that crown. You send a snap of you looking thoroughly chagrined.

EB: Sorry! I hardly ever see you anymore :(  

She sends you a picture of an elegantly arched brow and an unimpressed expression 

TT: So come see me, binch.

You feel a pang of- something. It’s not happy. You take a picture of yourself and make sure you catch Gamzee in the shot. He’s scooping up the letters off your floor and putting them in the closet that you keep all the other many, many letters you get in. You rubber band them by date you open them so they’re slightly more organized than just one giant heap and they’re like fucking bricks sitting one on top of the other.

EB: Would that be okay? Would I bring Gamzee with?

tentacleTherapist [TT] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

TT: Our respective housemates can figure out their problems on their own time. I’m sick and fucking tired of pussyfooting around this issue and sculpting my own life around two other people’s inability to make amends. I love Kanaya more than my own life and I am shocked that she, of all people, is exhibiting an inability to confront the issue, but I am a singular breath away from evoking the old gods of horrors past and throwing a truly calamitous temper tantrum.

TT: I miss you.

Oh Rose.

EB: I miss you too

TT: What are you doing tomorrow?

EB: Nothing, as near as I know

TT: Wrong. You’re coming over and spending the day with me. I am going to shirk my cavern duties and we are going to go out and do something fun.

TT: Or stay in, I’m not entirely inclined to be picky.

TT: But you are coming and you are depositing your clown companion with some other individual and you are going to fucking visit me.

EB: Wow, bossy much?

TT: The bossiest.

EB: Maybe I don’t even WANT to see your cute face, ever think of that?

TT: Yes.

EB: Oh.
EB: Rose I’m trying to make a joke out of this don’t go and make me sad.

TT: But do you?

EB: Of course I don’t!

EB: Rose you’re one of my best friends!

TT: “Don’t” what?

EB: I don’t want to not see your face!

EB: Or, I do want to see your face

EB: I want to see you!!!

EB: It’s just, with the Gamzee and Kanaya thing that they’ve got going there

TT: I couldn’t give less of a damn about Kanaya and Gamzee’s relationship problems right now, John.

TT: It feels an awful lot like you’ve been avoiding me and maybe I’m reading too much into the situation but even when we do end up spending time together it’s always with me getting tacked on as the afterthought of the whole group of you, Jade, and Dave.

EB: Rose, hey, I would never

EB: I swear, it’s just the Kanaya Gamzee thing, okay?

EB: We can ditch them for a day

EB: Like you said, they can sort out their own problems

TT: Are you still mad at me over him?

EB: What

EB: No

EB: You apologized and promised you would never do it again

EB: Rose, I left there feeling like I’D been the one to do something wrong

TT: That does not make me feel like less of a piece of garbage, John

TT: That just makes me feel like high quality refuse that manages to make my friends feel bad over my own fuckups.

EB: That’s not what I meant

TT: That’s what you said

EB: That's not what I was trying to say

“Uh, hey, brother?”

Your head jerks up, adrenaline spiking from the shock of being startled out of your conversation.
You think you might lose a leg for a second there but you pull yourself back together in a blink.

“Woah, motherfuck, I was just gettin’ my inquiry on on when we’d be headin’ out?”

“Uh,” you glance back down at your phone, with its new purple text, “Give me a minute? Rose and I are discussing something important.”

“Aiight, that’s chill. I’ll let Karkat know we’ll be a bit?”

You nod, already looking back at your phone. “That would be appreciated, thanks.”

TT: So tell me what you are trying to say, John

TT: You’ve never seemed to struggle with this whole full-frontal honesty thing that I am currently attempting.

EB: And I appreciate that you are talking to me straightforwardly instead of trying to hint me into realizing you’re feeling left out!

TT: Thanks Dave suggested it.

TT: The hypocrite.

EB: I’m trying to say that it’s very clear that you knew you fucked up, and that you already felt bad about it and you didn’t need me coming in and shouting at you in order to remind you of it more. You’re a smart, adult woman who knows how to recognize her own mistakes and apologize for them and you didn’t need me to come make an ass out of myself and make you feel even worse than you already did and I feel bad that I did

TT: I did need you to do that, however.

TT: Note how I didn’t actually apologize to him without you kicking me in the pants and provoking me, stock prod and all, into doing it.

EB: I

EB: Guess that’s a fair point

EB: But still!

EB: Please don’t continue feeling bad :( 

TT: You underestimate my power

EB: Star wars quotes have no power here

EB: I’m gonna make you feel less bad

EB: And significantly less like I’m mad at your or avoiding you

TT: You know the best way to do that would be to come and visit me tomorrow

EB: Which I am doing!!!!!

TT: You hadn’t confirmed that prior to this, John.

EB: I thought it was obvious
EB: You’re my good friend and you have invited me over to your place tomorrow

EB: I will venture there straightaway and comfort you out of those silly old doubts!

TT: One is not easily shaken from the bloodfester doubts, John

TT: They are stubborn throes.

Oh thank god, she got the joke. It’s been seven years, by all reasonable standards you both should’ve forgotten about the stupid shit you said when you were thirteen, much less try and quote it inexactly.

EB: I see the situation is more dire than I realized

You’re trying to apologize, do that roundabout thing and to make it better through humor.

EB: I will lend you a moment of levity to help you bide until my arrival!

TT: I shall eagerly await both occurrences

EB: Wanna hear a joke about a ghost?

TT: Sure.

EB: That’s the spirit!

tentacleTherapist [TT] has ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

You get half a second to think you said something wrong before you get a snap from her. She’s covering half her face with her hand and not looking at the camera but you definitely see the smile.

TT: That is the dumbest thing I have ever witnessed. Terribly original, John.

You send her back a snap of you smiling, looking maybe a little too relieved but also happy with yourself at getting a laugh out of her.

EB: Thank you!

A picture of her ceiling.

TT: So I’ll see you tomorrow then

You send her a picture of your carpet.

EB: Yes you will! You’d better prepare yourself for one hell of an ass-whoopin, I am going to cuddle the everloving shit out of you <3

A picture of her, smiling and looking at you.

TT: Bring it on, windy boy. <3

You put your phone away and take a deep, long breath. You feel like you just finished a bout in a training ring, though technically you weren’t moving anything other than your thumbs.

“Bro?” Gamzee asks, looking up from his phone and stowing that away too.

You smile at him and stand, pushing down the feeling of fatigue. “I’m ready to head out if you are!”
Sorry, Rose was just feeling down and I needed to cheer her up a little. I’m going over to her place tomorrow, by the way, so you might want to make plans with somebody or something.”

Gamzee nods. “Cool. Might go chill with fishsis and sharkbro a bit or some shit.” He comes over to you and you pick him up, and oof, he can’t have put on this much weight since the last time you carried him so you just must be feeling tired.

“Brother blue, you alright?” He touches your face and looks at you with concern, and it fills you with a need to make him stop doing that.

“Yeah, yeah I’m fine! Chatting with Rose just left me a little winded,” you wink with your own pun, “since, you know, helping people with their problems-” You can’t say that it’s draining. You help Gamzee with his problems more than anybody else, he’d feel so guilty! “-can get really intense sometimes!” It’s... not a lie.

“Is the sister alright?” Gamzee asks, all sweet with concern for your friend’s well-being.

“She’ll be okay, she’s just been feeling a little lonely lately.” Also not a lie, but you can’t really tell him all of Rose’s feelings. That would be a gross invasion of her privacy.

Gamzee nods and rests his head on your shoulder. “I can see as why she’d want you, then, brother.” It’s a compliment, and you do take it as one! You do! But it also only makes you feel more exhausted, for whatever reason.

You stop by the library for two seconds in order to get rid of the book you borrowed, tossing it into the exterior book return so you don’t have to bother with going inside. You then fly to Karkat’s and the thought of your hateboyfriend is actually a really nice one. It keeps you from wanting to Become too badly on your flight there, which would be a capital-b-Bad idea seeing as you’re carrying Gamzee, who cannot fly.

You feel better- less exhausted, less shifting and restless- the moment you see him open the door. The very sight of him sparks something playful and antagonizing in you, something that wants to poke and jeer and kiss. Oh yeah, kissing, that is a thing that you want to do nowadays. That you can, probably, do. Are you at a relationship point where you can just swoop down and peck him on the lips hello? That is what Gamzee and Karkat are currently doing but they’re also like, not you. You literally just started this relationship. You decide to just bend in and kiss his cheek, and when you pull back a little to judge his reaction you are awarded with a bright red blush and some stuttering that is in no way compromized of words. You grin, egged on by this response, and then press a raspberry to his neck, really quick and louder than you’d anticipated doing. He shrieks and shoves you, hard, so you just ball up and float backwards through the air, doing a little somersault and laughing.

“Fuck you so much honestly!” he shouts at you, and you just swoop in to kiss his other cheek. It turns into a whole fight, right there in his doorway, you trying to get your face in close enough and him pushing and shoving at you while screeching and screaming insults at you the entire time. You have to caphcalogue your glasses in order to avoid breaking them and the fight only stops when you’re laughing so hard that you can no longer make an honest attempt at kissing him anymore. You float there, about his height, snorting and guffawing and smiling so hard your cheeks hurt, and he rolls his eyes with a huff but then stomps up to you and kisses your cheek before nipping at it- not hard enough to break skin. It fills you with something warm and fluttery, but also something... adrenaline isn’t an adjective but if it was, you’d be feeling that too. Something that makes you want to tug on his hair to get his attention and say something rude. Something that makes you want to kiss him and hold him close to you and win. You’re not even sure what you want to win at, you
never are, but now that you’re putting the idea of pitch romance on your need to be victorious it is making a lot more sense.

Glasses on, the three of you settle into the couch, Karkat in the middle and you pressed up tight against the armrest. You could fit a fourth person on the other side of Gamzee and not feel any tighter packed than you already do. You should take Karkat out on a date. You love Gamzee plenty and respect the fact that they need each other (and in the time since Gamzee’s come here, you have noticed a significant decline in Karkat’s irritability, and the way the bags under his eyes have slowly, slowly begun to fade, even with Gamzee living with you instead of him, you know that Karkat does need Gamzee too) but you really really want to kiss Karkat right now and you don’t feel like that would be entirely appropriate in front of another one of your friends. Sure, Rose and Kanaya do it all the time but they’re married and Karkat and Gamzee do “pale debauchery” stuff in front of people also all the time but you think that might be kinky? You kind of don’t want to be kinky, much less pitch kinky. Well okay you’re not against the idea of being kinky any more than you’re against the idea of sex; it’s something that you might enjoy but not with Karkat and it is not something you want to spend a whole lot of time really thinking about.

Yeah, you’re totally ace, aren’t you. But like you’d be fine with having sex, theoretically! You just… need to talk to Jade about all of this again sometime. God, you’re so needy with her, maybe you should try looking this up on your own time and quit wasting hers. It’s not like it’s her job to sort your shit out for you.

Oh speaking of which.

“Hey Gamzee,” you start when you feel that conversation has flowed to somewhere where you can change the subject.

“Yeah brother beloved?”

Karkat smacks his face and takes a deep breath, but you’re a little too busy trying to think of a nice way to phrase this to really worry about figuring out why. You do not actually notice what Gamzee calls you, your brain registers the “brother” and does not pick up the word that follows after it, so inside your own head are you.

“Have you ever considered seeing a therapist?”

“A who now?” Gamzee asks, tilting his head.

“A conciliatory hire,” Karkat supplies, and Gamzee’s cheeks tinge purple, “specifically of a diamond variety, since ashen hires are usually called ‘couple counselors.’”

“Why would I up and motherfucking do that? I got my diamond all quadranted, ain’t need any other,” Gamzee tells you, and you think you may have accidentally pissed him off. You open your mouth but you hadn’t actually been expecting this, but luckily enough for you Karkat talks over you, and you are grateful for that for maybe the third or fourth time in your life.

“No, no, he has a point. I’m not trained in psychiatry.” Karkat shifts a little so his back is more pressed up against you and he has a better angle to look at Gamzee. “As much as I pity your skinny ass, I’m no professional. Somebody who knows how brains and advanced trauma actually works would actually be really fucking helpful, now that I’m thinking about it.”

“Am I advancely motherfucking traumitized?” Gamzee asks, sounding a little like he resents that.

“Yes,” both you and Karkat answer flatly. Gamzee has the most advanced of trauma, it is him. His
eyes get a far off look and his leg starts bouncing, his hand reaching up to scratch at the side of his face.

“There are some as had worse, brothers,” he says quietly, and your heart aches just in preparation of hearing what he’s going to say next.

But that turns out to be nothing. He falls completely silent, his eyes still clouded and distant.

“Hey, hey, Gamzee,” Karkat says, growing sharply worried and reaching out to pap his face firmly. Gamzee snaps back with a jolt and a rapid set of blinks, then sort of melts into Karkat’s hand. “Don’t check out on me, okay?”

“Okay, best beloved,” Gamzee says- more like chirrs- and nuzzles his face into Karkat’s palm. You d’aww. You can’t help that, it is the cutest shit. Karkat hiss-clicks at you, only at half volume, and Gamzee paps him and snuggles in, bending oddly so he can press his face into Karkat’s significantly tinier shoulder.

Dave arrives to his home some amount of time after you do, looking sharp as hell. He’s wearing Four Aces Suited and his hair looks a little more combed than it usually does. He must not have flown today, so he could look especially crisp for his photo-thing.

“Sup, fuckers,” he greets, “y’all get your shit sorted?”

“Shit has been all up and motherfuckin’ packaged and shipped out, brother,” Gamzee says lazily, purr evident in his voice. You can barely even hear his natural lilting-warble over the deep thrum of his chest vibrations.

“Sweet,” Dave says, heading to the kitchen and pulling something out of the fridge. “Any of y’all want anything?” he asks, and you all shout or mumble back something vaguely negative. He returns to the living room and looks like he’s going to take the armchair, but Gamzee clears his throat.

“There’s room on the couch for a fourth brother, if he’s a mind to make fill of it,” Gamzee says softly, reaching down and patting the cushion next to him. You see Dave’s eyebrows slowly creep up his face, and Gamzee swallows but doesn’t rescind the offer. Dave takes him up on that, and you wonder if this is really okay. They were so… back at the start. But maybe that’s part of the point? They’re pushing themselves, wanting to make good on their offer to be friends. They did it at Jade’s- though that was more coincidental- so they can do it intentionally now, right? And if there’s anything you know about both Gamzee and Dave, it is that the two of them both really enjoy cuddles. Physical affection of any kind, really, as long as they can see it coming. You wish so many pranks didn’t rely on surprising your victim, it really limits what you can do to Dave without, like, modifying his house-hive or something.

Dave’s posture starts out tense and he doesn’t really touch Gamzee for the first fifteen minutes after he gets back, but he takes a few drinks from the hard cider he pulled from the fridge and eventually slouches. After half an hour he’s slouched enough to be sorta-kindaa leaning on Gamzee, and forty five minutes in he has officially been absorbed into the cuddle conglomeration.

It’s really nice, you think. Your boyfriend on your lap and your good friend purring on top of him and your best bro acting as your partner bookend. You feel warm and soft and Gamzee’s purring is really, really just. So nice. Why can’t humans purr? Why didn’t the trolls give you the ability to purr when they made your species, this is a huge oversight on their part. You have been jipped. Cheated. Bamboozled.
You might just take a nap and you half think Gamzee already is, when the sound of the front door being kicked off its hinges sends you all jumping halfway to the ceiling, Karkat spilling out of your lap as you Become and fill the room in a sudden gust. Actually, he falls all the way off the couch, which you spiral around in amusement at briefly before trying to collect yourself back into a solid form. You’re in the process of coaxing flesh back into existence when Aradia rushes into the room, running so fast she can’t quite stop herself from half body-slamming the living room door frame.

“John!” she shouts, “You need to come with me right now!”

“Wh- right now?” you ask, brain not catching up with this at all.

“Right now!! Right right now! This very actual current moment!” she continues shouting, rushing across the room and grabbing you by the wrist. You are too off-balance to even consider resisting being pulled along like a balloon. “Actually, you know what? Dave, you’re a god, you come too! Actually, everybody come! Karkat’s the only one with Blood powers and Gamzee’s the only one with Rage powers, everybody come, everybody everybody! C’mon c’mon c’mon time waits for no one! Well, except me. But come on!!”

“What exactly is happening?!” Karkat shouts, getting up along with the others and half-hesitantly rushing out the doorway after Aradia. She spins on her heel, so abrupt you have to float back sharply in order to avoid slamming into her, and instead get run into by Karkat. She grins, wide and as terrifying as you’ve ever seen her, eyes blown wide with a wild ecstasy and her untamed energy absolutely palpable as sunlight frames her horns and hair and glints off her fangs.

“Necromancy.”

Chapter End Notes

Lmao I literally just googled “flowers that mean recovery” and “flowers that mean healing” and verbena showed up in both searches so that’s what I went with. Stellar research on my part.

Dave: “Here is, in detail, everything I find sexy about your body”
John: “Ahaha wow Dave is so rambly what a cool bro :)”

Thanks to archive user awespic for the text on Dirk’s shirt

It’s my personal headcannon that after Gamzee got the ability to leave his planet, he roamed around the other planets, talking to his friends, exploring their lands, maybe feeling a fit of whimsy and solving a puzzle or two for them or something, which they then thought was just a pre-solved example puzzle meant to help them figure out the other puzzles. A good and soft bard.

My kink is everyone being in love with/having the hots for John and John literally never realizing it ever.

I only cried 6 times while writing this chapter and most of them were involving Tavros (it is so nice to have gotten to a point where John is no longer thinking of him as Catavros and I don't have to type that name in the exposition anymore)

As always, please leave a comment!!!! Your feedback is my nourishment and my wife
and children are starving. Please. Give me that good shit.
Dave carries Karkat and you carry Gamzee as Aradia hurries you all over toward Tavros’s hive. He lives pretty close to both Dirk and Jake’s houses, in fact you’d say their three homes make something of a perfect triangle. It’s an area halfway out in the countryside, where they all have lots of space away from large crowds of people (except the Consorts that make the trek out there) and plenty of wildlife and all of Tavros’s various domesticated beasts. The fairybulls come and snuffle at your group as you touch down in a large, mostly empty stretch of grass. The grass here is kept “mowed” because of the fairybulls, pronghorns, cattle, and other grazing animals Tavros has befriended.

Tavros, Jake, and Dirk are gathered around another Aradia who is also grinning madly, a third Aradia is seen at the center of the pasture-ish-area with Feferi and Eridan, and a fourth is touching down at about the same time you, Dave, and your Aradia are, with Roxy, Jane, and Callie in tow. You skip landing with Dave and Karkat and swoop over there, knowing Gamzee’s just going to head over to them anyway.

“Hey little girl,” he greets, thoughts of you all but abandoned as he slips out of your arms and approaches her, smiling.

“Hello hello!” she responds cheerfully, arms reaching up to give Gamzee a hug. She’s so short and cute. You say hi to Roxy and Jane and other Aradia, who giggles when you call her that.

“So seriously what’s going on?” you ask her, and she huffs and rolls her eyes.

“I’ll tell you when everyone gets here!” she says, “It doesn’t make any sense to repeat myself a million times!”

“Okay, that’s smart, but have you considered that I’m curious now?”
She swats you playfully and tells you to go pester someone else. So you do! You go pester Aradia #3, who is discussing something with Feferi and Eridan. Since she’s the one who the ghosts are floating around, she’s the alpha Aradia, right? The other Aradia’s are like, time… hers… Look you’re the wind god not the time god but you can be pretty sure that since the ghosts are near her, that means she’s the main one. In your peripheral, you notice Jade’s and the two Nannas’ breathing enter the area.

“Fef, listen to me, I’m just sayin’ that if somefin’ does go wrong, it’d make more sense for me to be the one experiencin’ troubles.”

“Fish puns will not sway me, Eridan,” Feferi says, hands planted on her ghostly hips, “If somefin’ goes wrong, I’ll just die again and Aradia will snatch my soul right back up, but nofin is gonna go wrong and I am going first!”

“But what if somethin’ does Fef?”

“Eri, I appreciate your concern but I don’t need you coddling me.”

“You coddle everythin’ all the damn time!”

“Hey!” Feferi barks sharply, “I’ve been working on that! It’s somefin’ I’ve been made aware of and I’ve been trying to reel it in.” She seems genuinely upset and Eridan looks a little chagrined.

“Look,” Eridan sounds half defeated, but is still going, “I’m just tryin’a say that if one of us has to be writhin’ in agony waitin’ for death to come at us again it should at least be me, god knows I’d deserve it more than you.”

“I am having none of your attempting-martyrism carp! I am going first and that is final, Erifin!” Feferi raises her voice, sounding irritated. Eridan looks like he wants to argue more but her face and words are such that he just whine-hisses instead, frustrated but not arguing anymore. Aradia #3 laughs and pats him on the back.

“It’s probably best if you just give up, she’s not gonna budge!” Aradia informs him cheerfully.

Eridan’s earfins point down and do a little waggle thing and you snicker at him.

“Hello John!” Feferi greets you excitedly. She seems to welcome the distraction.

“Hey! What’s up?” you greet.

“We’re gonna make me a body!” Feferi tells you, and Aradia huffs.

“You’re seriously going to explain that to every single person who comes up asking you?”

“Yes!!! I am so excited!!!! I’m going to rejoin the realm of the living and I am seriously unstoppable!”

Aradia laughs and kisses her cheek, which makes her grin somehow wider. Her hands are balled in fists and vibrating faster than a drummer’s. Eridan huffs and crosses his arms to the side of them, still looking like he wants to argue.

You remember what Gamzee told you about gender and dominance and whatnot, and observe the physical manifestations on Aradia and Feferi’s bodies for a moment. Feferi’s still in a thirteen year old ghost body but even from what you remember of being thirteen you guess she looks pretty feminine, and Aradia definitely has developed hips and boobs.
“Hey,” you start, not entirely sure where you’re even going with this, “You two are like, pretty like, dominant and dangerous, right?”

Aradia and Feferi glance at each other and then “pfft” loudly. “Yeah, I’d say so!” Aradia says.

“Why do you ask?” Feferi questions, grin wide.

“Oh, just trying to figure out gender stuff,” you say with a shrug.

“Oh, in that case, let me assure you that Aradia is very feminine,” Feferi says, swooping in and bumping shoulders with Aradia.

“And Feferi,” Aradia says after a quick snicker, turning to face her more in full, “is an heiress for a very, very good reason.” Aradia lifts her hands to pinch Feferi’s cheeks and the two giggle at each other, in on a joke you don’t have the source for. They’re both flashing their fangs, Feferi’s sharp and needle-like while Aradia’s look more like a jack o’lantern’s childish triangles. You scrutinize Aradia and Feferi while they grin excitedly and poke at each other and you decide that yeah, they could kill a man. They’re friendly and cheerful and you’re not currently scared of them, but you can definitely picture either one of them killing a man.

You turn and glance back at your boyfriend, who is shorter than Rose (the shortest human of your group) by like five inches. He has the look of weighing 100 pounds soaking wet, his greatest asset is the fact that he can scream really loud followed immediately by the fact that he’s really empathetic and emotional, and no one really thought he would be competent in a fight until he held his own against Gamzee back in the Medium (and even then, you’re the only one who really saw that).

You turn and look at Gamzee, who is smiling happily at Callie and chatting with her and her girlfriends. While Callie might be short, she still looks to be thicker than him. He is the ultimate in waifish, thin and delicate and very inclined towards crying. He avoids his problems and hates conflict and is extraordinarily eager to please.

You look over at Tavros, who, while physically larger than the other two you’ve been considering combined, is very sweet and soft-spoken, stubborn in some cases but never aggressive or dominant. You can’t picture him in a fight. Hell, there’s a version of him that created an entire army just because he nice’d them into being friends with him and made them want to help him out because he was so sweet and encouraging.

Yeah…

Troll gender, man. Troll gender. At least it’s sort of starting to make more sense, now that you’ve got your conceptions flipped around the right way again.

Davepeta, Terezi, Sollux, and another Aradia have arrived in the time you’ve spent chatting with Aradia #3, Feferi, and Eridan, and you can see another Aradia with Rose and Kanaya flying down into the area. You make a beeline for that group, eyes on Rose. She smiles when she sees you and you scoop her up into a big ol’ hug.

“Why, hello Mister Egbert, I can’t believe it’s been so long since we last spoke,” she greets playfully.

“Why hello Mrs. Maryam-Lalonde! It’s just been ages,” you agree, and the two of you share a chuckle over that.

“I think that’s everyone…” the Aradias muse. You look over your group and tally the people up in
your head. You, Dave, Rose, and Jade are here, plus the four other humans and Callie. You start counting on your fingers on the trolls, you’ve got Karkat, Gamzee, Tavros, Terezi, Sollux, Feferi, Eridan, Davepeta, Kanaya, and a whole hell of a lot of Aradias. Yeah, that should be everyone. You’ve even got two Nannas, but no Uncle Crocker. But then again Uncle Crocker doesn’t have magic, and the Nannasprites seem to have been hanging out with Jade.

“Yeah, looks like everyone.” With a clap of magic the majority of the Aradias vanish in a flash of red, leaving only the one accompanying Terezi and Sollux. And maybe Davepeta, you’re not sure if they were on their own or if they came with Terezi and Sollux.

“Alright! Everyone listen up!” the one remaining Aradia shouts. Feferi and Eridan float over to her, Feferi grinning with wild energy, Eridan looking apprehensive.

“As you all know, my lovely moirail and good friend here are both ghosts! This makes a lot of things kind of difficult. As you also all know, we are fucking magic.”

“Oh please tell me you are not about to suggest the thing that I think you are about to suggest!” Karkat shouts over Aradia and she sends him a withering glare. Yikes. And here you were just thinking about how she’s one of the last people you’d want to pick a fight with. Your hand threads with Rose’s, wanting her to know that even though you can’t really talk right now you’re thinking about her and you love her lots.

“Anyway, so Equius isn’t here to build soulbots anymore-”

“Thanks,” Davepeta says flatly, face blank.

“Sorry, Davepeta. But, so, that means we have to explore other avenues in order to get the fish into actual, like, bodies! So, we’re gonna make some! All of us working together, it can’t be that hard!”

By now your group has gone from vaguely spread out over the pasture to mostly bunched together around Aradia and the ghosts, so she doesn’t really have to shout anymore. But she’s excited enough that you’re pretty sure she’s just doing that because of her natural energy, not because she thinks you can’t hear her.

“Actually, making a body sounds like one of those things that is, in fact, going to be significantly difficult,” Kanaya says, sounding a little miffed by Aradia’s assumption that it might not be.

“I say we give it a shot!” Terezi says, and Aradia sends her a double pistols and a wink, which she sniffs and sends back a thumbs up.

“Yeah! That’s the spirit Terezi! No need to be a wet blanket about it!” Aradia chimes, which only makes Kanaya straighten a little more, stiff and looking kind of like one of those old time movie nannies whose boss just said something rude. “Besides, I’m fairly certain everything will be fine! Sollux!” Aradia spins and points a finger at him, making him grumble sullenly. You’re almost impressed. You would’ve jumped to have all that manic energy suddenly levelled on you.

“Can you hear either of their voices with your Doom senses?” Aradia asks, and Sollux heaves a sigh.

“No, no I can’t.”

“Listen real hard for them! I know you’ve been trying to learn how to control the Doomy thing and block it out but listen really hard!”

“I can’t hear them, AA. But for the record I’m with Kanaya; this is stupid.”
“Yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah, Rose!” she spins again and you do jump this time, which makes Rose snicker at you.

“Yes, Aradia?”

“What do your Seer eyes see?”

Rose purses her lips briefly. “It doesn’t quite work like that I’m afraid. But…” Her eyes get a far off look for a moment, and her body glows, just minutely, before she blinks hard and comes back. “I can say that the most fortuitous outcome is, in fact, one that involves Feferi and Eridan receiving bodies of flesh and blood. I cannot vouch that we will achieve that outcome, but it is among the possibilities.”

“Any idea what we can do to increase the probability of the luckiest outcome?” Aradia asks, sounding spritely.

“Ah… well, my powers are a little difficult to really, control like you seem to be wanting me to, but I’d say that when we fraymotif we should not try to include Nanna or Nanna and we should make sure that all the Aspects and Classes are represented by at least one member in the group.”

“Glad I brought Gamzee and Karkat then! Okay so we’ve got…” Aradia huffs. “Does anyone here have a catalogue of classes and aspects?”

“No,” Davepeta says, “But I have a list of people and I know the classes and aspects of each, so if you give me a second I can run through and check if there are any gaps?”

“That sounds great Davepeta, thank you!”

“I still think this sounds incredibly reckless,” Kanaya fusses, “We’ve never attempted to build a body before-”

“And now is as good a time to start as any!” Aradia interrupts.

“No, I don’t believe it is! Jane can revive the dead, certainly, but to revitalize what is already there is entirely different from creating flesh from scratch, no one here has intimate knowledge of biology-”

“And that’s where you’re wrong,” Aradia interrupts again, “Feferi did a lot of studying out in the dream bubbles and has advanced impressively. She’ll be the one guiding us all, since she is also a Life player, and a Witch at that, and we’ll be lending our talents and abilities to her knowledge.”

“The knowledge of a six sweep old is hardly what I might call sufficient to construct an entire body while we engage in- what, are we all just going to be fraymotifing together?”

“That’s the idea!” Feferi chimes, unperturbed by Kanaya’s doubts. Actually, like, at all. She isn’t showing the slightest bit of concern, while you must admit that you’re growing a little anxious about this idea yourself.

“And may I remind you that Equius was six when he built me a fully functional soulbot that only- and I do mean only- exploded because my soul was being violently ripped out of it due to Derse being destroyed and my dream self god tiering!”

“Equius was a savant!”

“And Feferi has been studying very hard these last two and a half sweeps!”
“Trust me Kanaya,” Feferi says, still smiling without concern, “I know what I’m doing, though you two flirting is dolphinitely adorabubble!”

“We’re not flirting!” Kanaya snaps quickly, turning green in the face. Rose snorts but pretends to be looking at her nails the next moment.

“Anyway,” Davepeta says, calling literally everyone’s attention back to them and away from possibly-flirting-Kanaya-and-Aradia, “We’ve got all Classes and Aspects accounted for except Thief.”

Kanaya gestures pointedly at Davepeta, looking sharply at Aradia and propping her other hand on her hip. Aradia doesn’t even bother looking up at the taller troll, only hmmms thoughtfully and starts brainstorming.

“Well, a Thief is one who takes for their own benefit. If you’ve got Rogue powers, and you’re taking for the benefit of others, it could probably substitute?”

“It might work better without a Thief too,” Roxy says, “Since we’re trying to do something for Feferi, not the Thief in question.”

“An excellent point!” Aradia agrees excitedly, and Feferi flaps her fists in anticipation.

Eridan floats over towards you and Rose and quietly asks, “Is it really gonna be okay with a Class missin’? I mean, Princes are destroyers but there are still two ‘a us tossin’ in with the rest and it’s not like we’ll be destroyin’ anythin’. If we gotta collect all twelve I can probably talk sense into ‘em before we do somethin’ stupid…”

“Really?” you ask, because you are an asshole, “I don’t believe you.”

“Shut up John.” You snort and laugh at him, while Rose’s eyes go kind of far off.

“No… I don’t believe complications should arise. There’s a possibility, of course, but since it is only one missing Class out of twelve, and we have all Aspects gathered, the checks and balances the Game has put in place regarding other Classes and Aspects should carry over the gap seamlessly enough. I would encourage you to try and stop them if we were missing two or more, but one gone is low risk enough that I think we should be able to handle it. Well, thirteen Classes I suppose, since we have a Muse on our side, which…” Rose looks at Callie contemplatively, “Actually, I don’t think the missing Thief is going to cause us any problems at all.”

“If you’re sure…” Eridan says, and floats back over to Aradia and Feferi, who are now discussing the way Rogue powers work with Davepeta and Roxy. Everyone is buzzing with their own mini conversations, and you try to get a feel for the emotion of the crowd. Generally talk seems to be positive, mildly concerned but also excited. You can’t help but feel the same. This feels big.

Making a body, a whole body, using all the Aspects and most Classes, merging your powers together in a huge soup of magic and energy only to have it condense around a single person. It sounds fun. Your powers as an Heir of Breath will probably be helpful? Since you know what it’s like to pull a flesh body from thin air.

Aradia walks over to Karkat, who then goes “OKAY EVERYONE LISTEN UP” at the top of his tiny little Karkat lungs. Wait shit does his lung capacity have something to do with why you hate-like him? Are you being thematic?

Nah, you just really like bugging him. No need to read into things, that’s all just gay shmaltz (though, you might share the observation with Karkat later, when you feel like making him sappy,
since he *is* a romantic).

“Everyone’s going to need to work together with everyone else around them, so like John is going to be our: Breath of Life,” Aradia says and she sends you double pistols and a wink and you, Gamzee, and Tavros all laugh at her pun. Karkat mutters a “fucking simpletons” at you all but you just keep smiling, “And Karkat’s going to be our Lifeblood and yada yada on it goes. So we need to figure out who’s gonna stand next to who so we can get this fraymotif going! I’m gonna be the one who connects to Feferi after we all get the power flowing, so we really just need to focus on fraymotifying with the person on either side of you and Feferi being in the middle.”

It seems a simple task.

It takes the better portion of an hour to figure out the best place for everyone to be in the circle, which is really more like an oval because apparently the gods of the new universe are not the best at geometry. During that time one of the Nannas goes off and gets Uncle Crocker, who is now on the sidelines with a Nanna on either side of him, watching on in concern but making no motion to try and stop you all. In fact, he seems pleased that you’re managing to figure this out on your own, despite the duration of your squabbling and pointing out of points and so on and so forth.

You hold hands with Karkat and Davepeta, who ended up on either side of you, and Aradia starts the fraymotif spinning.

And it really is *spinning*. The energy, once it stabilizes past the first spark of raw power, is thrumming, pulsing even. You once went to a baseball game with your elementary school class, and your dad had been one of the parents who had volunteered to help supervise. You remember doing the wave, thousands of bodies all working together to create a pulse around the oval of the stadium. This isn’t a stadium, and your numbers don’t even break triple digits, but it’s got the same feel to it. Energy rounding, extending up above your little oval as well as pulsing around the chain of hands, and you feel your head swelling, your body thrumming along with it.

Then Feferi fraymotifs not only with Aradia, but the rest of you as well, and it’s like the floor drops out beneath you. You feel like you’re standing underneath a waterfall of power, no longer something any of you except Feferi is controlling, a current you’re caught under and you’re not sure if you really want to be caught up in it. You kind of want to flee, but more than that you’re feeling yourself swelling with something you haven’t felt since your fight with Caliborn. A purpose, an outlet, a dumping ground for energy and a nameless emotion in your core that you can feel unspooling. Your body *throbs* and you feel a pulse, not yours, not Karkat’s or Davepeta’s or the energy’s, but Feferi’s, Feferi’s with the power of a dozen and a half gods helping it beat.

There’s a body, and you can’t see it because you can’t see anything right now other than this sorta vague, whitish *concept* that you feel more than you see, and you take a deep breath in, then you push it out, Breathing Life into the body you now feel, mind gone except to blindly follow this single purpose. It is your only purpose, now, all thoughts of all else completely gone. You are the energy, you are her lungs, her breath, her Breath, you are a cosmic force of nature and nothing else, nothing less, nothing physical or gaseous or *anything* other than simply this.

And then the moment’s over and everyone’s ass is hitting the dirt like cards in a game of 52 pickup. You cannot, for a brief moment, feel the breath of anyone around you, and it fills you with such a sudden sense of panic that your whole body actually *jerks*. Sorta like how when you’re falling asleep your leg will randomly twitch and wake you up, but instead of just your leg it’s your whole body. Then you can feel them breathing and you can breathe again yourself. Did the temperature in the area increase? It feels hotter than earlier, though that might just be your body reacting to the strain.
“Ugh,” Sollux moans, “Did it wor-”

“IT WORKED!” Feferi screams, and you lift your head up out of the grass just enough that you can see her literally leaping for joy. She’s wearing her god tier pjs, which is weird because ghost-her wasn’t god tiered and you’re pretty sure Vriska and Aradia were the only trolls who managed to god tier in the first place, but more notably than that is the fact that she looks majorly different than she did ten minutes ago, and not just because you can no longer sorta see through her.

Gone are her 13-year-old baby cheeks, gone is the childish pitch to her enthusiastic voice. What you see before you is a young woman- younger than you, if your guess is right, but an adult. She’s got more muscle than her childish self. Nothing like you or Jade or Tavros or Kanaya or Terezi or anyone, but- again, if you are guessing correctly- swimmer’s muscles. Lean, wiry strength meant not for heavy lifting and fatty padding but for motion and strength in the water. She’s about medium height, you’d say, with even longer (and more billowing) hair than her ghost-self had had plus some large ear fins and pronounced freckles. Her wings are a very pretty fuchsia.

Aradia staggers up to her feet and rushes, stumbling, over to Feferi, who then scoops her up and spins her around. Both of their wings are fluttering and they’re laughing together and Feferi looks so goddamned happy you start giggling a little yourself.

“It worked! It worked!” Feferi is calling, and Aradia is still laughing and then the two of them are kissing each other all over their faces and the rest of your group is staggering to your feet.

“Well, that was one whopper of a blow to my energy reserves,” Jake comments, hands on his knees. You laugh weakly, breathing hard, and agree. Gamzee isn’t even trying to sit up and Karkat goes to him, grumbling, but you can tell he’s worried. Dave has sat up but seems to have no inclination to move further, and Eridan is hovering anxiously around Feferi and Aradia.

“See? I told you it would be fin!” Feferi tells him, grinning at him.

“Holy shit she grew up hot,” Sollux mutters, and you’re just barely in range to overhear him. You have to agree with him on that one. Feferi’s cute new body is definitely banging. Not that you would ever, ever say that out loud, but Feferi is definitely hot. Like supermodel tier hot. Like her ancestor but less evil and therefore more attractive hot.

Eridan and Feferi seem to be simultaneously arguing and… celebrating? At the same exact time. Like Eridan is relieved enough that he’s just kind of fighting with her for familiarity, you think. And Feferi is indulging him because she’s happy and also maybe gloating about being right. But mostly everyone seems really excited. You catch a wiff of pipe tobacco and look over to Uncle Crocker, who has removed his hat, has his pipe between his teeth, and is running a hand over his hair. He looks a little baffled but in a resigned way not necessarily a stunned or flabbergasted way. Like a “well-I’ll-be-damned” way.

Holy shit.

You just created a whole entire new person. Like not the soul, but you made a body and it works and is alive and the soul made it into the body and she’s a person like, on the physical living plane and holy shit.

“That actually worked,” you say, floating over to Rose. You scoop her up and she seems startled at first but then accepts the sorta-hug as you float there, staring at Feferi who is animately trying out the limbs on her new body. They’re longer than she’s used to, you’re guessing, because she keeps stumbling and needing to flutter her wings and shit.
“So uh, quick question,” Tavros says, squinting at her, “Why do you have wings, and are also apparently god tiered, when that never actually was a thing, that, uh, happened?”

“This is my compensation for fucking dying,” Feferi says, her face grinning devilishly and her voice making you remember that you are absolutely fucking terrified of her. You like her lots. You definitely enjoy being friends with her. You NEVER want to be on the business end of any of her weapons. You get the feeling that with her, all ends of weapons are the business ends. Then she’s back to sweet and excited. “Seriously though, in order to god tier you have to come to terms with your own morality, or have people who have come to terms with your morality and will move your corpse to your quest coon for you! I think I’ve had plenty of morality coming to terms with over the last few sweeps, so now that I’m alive it only makes sense that I should come back god tiered!”

“I mean, if you say so,” Tavros says with a pout, and Feferi rolls her eyes at him.

“I’m alive!!! I’m a god!!! Tavros I am EXCITED!”

Tavros chuckles and uncrosses his arms. “That is good! I’m glad it worked out! And that you, didn’t have to redie violently, because we made a mistake the first time!”

“Dolphinately a good thing! I agree!”

“Whoo!” Jake stands up straight, stretching his arms up above his head, “So, are we doing the same for Mr. Eridan here now?”

“Absolutely not,” Kanaya snaps at him, “That was far too draining for us all, we can do this again tomorrow at the earliest.”

“I could go another round,” Aradia says, smirking at Kanaya (seemingly pointedly(?)). “Unless you’re really just that exhausted?”

“I’m sure that while all present company is capable of going another round, that does not mean it would be a sound decision to make so shortly after expending as much effort as we just did into making Feferi’s body. And, may I remind you, that one of the only reasons why you believed it would work in the first place was because Feferi had studied the body intensely and knew how to construct one for herself. Eridan, unless you’ve failed to mention something, has no such information.”

“I would be fraymotifying though! I’ve got all the information, I just need to funnel it his direction!” Feferi says cheerfully, “And I am perfectly capable of pushing energy at someone else! In fact, I eely feel like I have too much of it right now!”

The rest of your group starts putting in two cents in about who feels like they can go another round, who doesn’t want to have leave, come back, and try and remember where everyone was in the oval (a big argument in favor of going again right then), who feels too tired, who’s worried about whether Eridan will be able to pull the energy in and create life the same way Feferi- Witch of Life- was able to, and people who are riding the fence. You’re all split pretty evenly on the matter. Uncle Crocker claps his hands and settles the matter for you.

“How about this, you all stay loosely in the order you’re in now and we all have a nice picnic. After supper, you can do it again. Nannas and I can go gather blankets and food for dinner. Everyone think that sounds good?”

And like that, the arguing is over and everyone is chatting amicably with their neighbors. You float back to your spot and remove one (1) of the amicable moods by immediately making a nuisance of
yourself to your boyfriend. Uncle Crocker and the Nannas return with many various picnic blankets and a couple coolers of sandwich makings, plus some family sized bags of potato chips and like a million apples. It’s fun, it’s nice, Feferi is refusing to sit down for any of it and is much too excited about her new living 18 year old body to bother with things like food or taking things slowly. You’re pretty sure you’ve seen her fall into the grass more than should be reasonable. Most people would, you know, slow down, not continue running, or use the giant pink wings on their back, but not Feferi. She kind of treats tripping her own feet like their own special delight? The physics of having a body are a delight to her, even the parts that end up with her getting scuffed knees and a mouth full of grass.

You’re pretty sure that the sheer energy and joy radiating from her is enough to tip the scales in favor of doing Eridan’s body today. There are only like three people who aren’t fully on board with making Eridan’s body by the time that dinner is done with. It occurs to you that since you had breakfast/brunch as late as you did, you didn’t actually have lunch officially. That would be fine, if it were only you. But Gamzee is still so fucking thin you really, really can’t have him missing meals. You’ll make sure he eats again before he goes to sleep tonight, a skewed eating schedule is better than one with gaps in it!

Eridan is trepidatious but willing to fraymotif, so that’s the most important part of the group. The energy is more expected this time, and yet when the drop happens and the swirling energy starts funnelling, it moves towards Feferi instead of Eridan. You’re almost worried enough to try and stop but then you’re caught up in it again, losing yourself, only energy, only this, Breath, Life, and the energy shifts and moves and you move with it until you’re all hitting the ground again, more winded than the first time, and you realize at one point Feferi must have pushed the energy from where she was sculpting it into Eridan, because when you curl on your side (you are not about to get up right now) Eridan is standing, staring at his own body.

The Prince god tier outfit is really just so unfortunate. Eridan’s body is less noticeably changed than Feferi’s is, you observe dully. He’s taller but not by much, and you don’t think he has added any muscle to his figure between his ghost self and living self. He looks like a capital-N-Nerd. Which, given his affection for history books and supposed aversion to actually going swimming, you guess it makes sense.

You’re not putting any more brain power into contemplating Eridan’s new body. You are closing your eyes and resting in the grass and trying to pull enough air into your lungs given the exertion you just underwent for the second time today.

You hear Feferi and Eridan being excited, Eridan less so than Feferi but you get the feeling the dude’s just subdued by nature and isn’t prone to shouty theatrics. Dramatic theatrics? Absolutely. But not the loud, electric, buzzing kind.

You think you pass out for like two minutes because next thing you know you feel like you’re waking up and things are a little different than they were a moment (two minutes?) ago. You grumble and sit up and use your magic (it is so good to be a god) to float on over to Jade. She and Roxy are flopped on each other.

“I am too hot and pretty for this,” Roxy is saying, winded to all hell and sweat plastering her pink bangs to her forehead. Having access to hair dye means hers changes colors on a pretty monthly basis. It sees a lot of sun and motion so the dye fades and all that’s left is the bleach and she’s cute and blonde for a while and then she’s cute and colorful again and so the cycle continues on.

“You are very pretty,” you agree mildly, flopping down next to your sister. She has changed out of her god tiers into a tank top and short shorts, arms outstretched, also sweaty.
“I am too hot in both senses of the word for this,” Jade complains, and Roxy high five’s Jade’s limp hand.

“Hell yeah you are!”

“Thanks Roxy,” Jade says with a weak laugh. You call to the wind and thank fuck it’s easier to move that shit than hold it still because it takes very little energy out of you to get a nice, steady breeze moving over your whole group.

“Johnny sweetie, have I ever told you, in full detail, just how much I love you?” Roxy asks after you get the wind flowing.

“Last June when I did this during that one god-awful heat wave,” you mention, thinking back to that day. Everyone smelled of sunscreen because no one was putting any kind of clothing on their body that wasn’t necessary for nudity laws or a sunhat. You’d all gone to the beach but everyone was at the beach so you ended up hanging out in the grass instead of the sand and Dave and Dirk had been arguing over something and Karkat was louder than normal and everyone was pissy thanks to the heat and crowd and you’d just BLASTED the entire beach with wind. People’s umbrellas were tumbling like looming enemy props in a video game, spiraling their way down the sand with reckless destruction, napkins were caught up in the gusts, flip flops were flying, nothing was safe. You had kept it up long enough that some of the crowd cleared and your group was able to secure a spot in the sand and go swimming and purchase ice cream, but you had kept up a stiff breeze to keep things cool for your and your friends as you went about your business. Roxy and Dave had gotten into a little bout of one-upmanship in singing your praises and you had been half-convinced one of them was about to start staging a production in your honor until Calliope had come and interrupted them with ice cream and forked-tongued kisses.

“Kay well get ready cause it’s coming back. I’m talking live-action Disney remakes of coming back. I fucking love you.”

She seems a little too tired to continue and you snort.

“Is this symbolic of how the remakes were never as good as the animated originals?” you ask teasingly.

“Fuck yes,” she agrees without hesitation, and Jade moves to palm at both of your faces.

“Shhhhhshshsh enough talking. Now is time for breathing and resting.”

You lick her hand and she just. Sighs.

“Thanks John. Thanks Roxy.”

You laugh and send Roxy a thumbs up from across Jade’s body and then lift an eyebrow as Dirk floats over and flops down next to Roxy.

“Kanaya was right,” Dirk says.

“Aww, Dirky, did you overestimate your abilities?”

“Fuck you,” he mumbles, followed by a “yes.” Roxy clumsily pats at his face, narrowly avoiding stabbing her hand on his glasses, and he seems too tired to struggle against the handy onslaught.

A few minutes later you sit up and note the murmuring crowd. Uncle Crocker is carrying his daughter, which is really impressive because Jane is bulky as hell and has her smaller, greener
girlfriend in *her* arms. Sollux is facedown in Terezi’s boobs, Aradia is a loose sack of potatoes over Feferi’s shoulder, who is still talking excitedly with Eridan, Tavros and Davepeta are still laying down in the grass, his tail over their torso, chatting, and Kanaya, Rose, Jake, Karkat, Dave, and Gamzee seem to have joined forces in a no-moving puddle that you think must have been put together by Rose, Dave, and Jake, since moving limbs seems to be a collective “no” right now. You are pleased to note that Kanaya and Gamzee are in the same space as each other. You know that they’re on opposite sides of the laying-down-army, but still. Same space! Improvement, probably.

“Okay but like my status if being an aquatic insect-based alien is… kinda hot,” Dirk says, nudging Roxy and staring at Eridan. Well, he could be staring at Feferi, they’re in the same area, but Dirk is gay soooo.

Roxy snorts and thwaps him on the shoulder while Jade sits up as well, leaving Roxy the only one of your little party still laying down so she grumbles and follows suit.

“Dirk,” Jade says, sounding pleasantly surprised, “Do you like Eridan?”

Dirk shrugs, eyes still on him. Honestly you’re not really sure what could be considered attractive about Eridan’s new body but… well, he’s not necessarily ugly?

“I like talking to him,” Dirk says, casual in a way that makes you think he’s probably trying to sound casual, “I think he’s interesting and intelligent and it’s nice interacting with someone who isn’t… needlessly optimistic.”

You think Dirk is trying to say that he likes talking to somebody who feels ugly feelings and doesn’t try to sugar coat it. You’ve noticed that about Eridan too. Whenever you hang out with him + Aradia and Feferi he’s generally the downer of the group, unless Sollux is also there in which case they’re both little black holes of negativity (you briefly recall Erisolsprite), but you can see why Dirk would like Eridan. That Prince kind of neurosis that’s very hard for you to try and put into words.

“Dirky has a cruuuuuush,” Roxy teases, leaning on Jade’s shoulder and smirking at her human-moirail. “And now his crush has a not-baby-body for him to ogle.”

“I am not ogling,” Dirk says, turning to “frown” at her.

“Go scope out that ass, babe,” Roxy tells him with a thwap on his shoulder. She stands, legs sorta jiggly so she quits trying that and instead floats. When you all changed into your god tiers sometime between starting the first fraymotif and after you hit the drop, she ended up with her mask and hood on, which she doesn’t usually wear most times. Actually… you reach up. Yep, your hood is up too. Huh.

“I, feeling less hot but still hot, am going to go hit up my cute girlfriends and get myself some golden sunshine loving.” Roxy then does exactly that, floating over to Uncle Crocker and joining the gaggle of gals he’s got held up by… sheer force of will alone, you’d have to guess.

“Oh!” Jade says suddenly, and you and Dirk turn to her, “Prospitian. Since Jane and Callie are both Prospitian. That’s- golden sunshine.” Jade sighs and rubs at her forehead. “Sorry.”

You pat her back and have a chuckle at her expense. “It’s alright! Everybody’s a little winded from all of that!”

“I’m not!” Feferi calls to you, Sollux under one arm and Terezi leaning on a hovering Aradia for
support. Their group joins yours and Feferi helps Sollux be vaguely upright and you, Jade, and Dirk shamble to your feet. Feferi and Aradia both look very pretty and are still grinning in a way that makes your brain scream “deadly” at you, Terezi is grinning but looks more tired than the two of them, also pings your brain with “deadly,” and Eridan continues the trend of boys looking like you could knock them over with a stiff breeze. Sollux, your gender musings get hung up on.

He’s… yeah so he’s tiny and skinny and looks like someone who lives in his mom’s basement but he’s also got, like, not normal troll proportions? His hips and shoulders are about the same width as each other, which you only really notice because you’re looking because for humans that’s totally normal but for trolls you’re getting the definite impression that it’s not but here’s Sollux, proving that you can never really put things into neat little boxes.

Then he’s complaining about how it’s still fucking hot in the field (probably because you’ve let the breeze die down and there’s still plenty of residual body-making energy) and he’s taking his shirt off and welp. He is wearing a bra. You couldn’t really see his boobs through his shirt because it’s huge and baggy on him and his tits are small but he is definitely wearing a sports bra. Naturally, of course, your brain is going to offer only meaningful and relevant things to say about this.

“You’re wearing a bra!” you blurt. Very eloquent, truly. Rose, move over, there’s a new new-world Shakespeare in town.

Sollux looks at you, lip curled in something that looks like confused disgust (which is something you see Sollux do a lot of, really). “A what?”

“A heft satchel,” Terezi supplies. That is the dumbest name you have ever heard for a bra but you’re not about to tell aliens how to live their lives.

“Yeah,” Sollux says sardonically, and you are feeling pretty embarrassed! “My tits go in it.”

“I thought only girls have boobs,” you say, because while you are feeling stupid that doesn’t mean you’re not still curious. And bewildered. And honestly you just can’t really stop yourself.

“Right. Girls have rumblespheres and hips, dudes have throat fruits and shoulders, and people who are bigender,” Sollux jerks his chin up- either to show off his also-small adam’s apple or as a gesture of challenge you’re not sure- “get all of the above, just in smaller quantities. Since apparently that isn’t fucking obvious.”

“I’m not a troll!” you protest, the tips of your ears feeling hot, “I don’t know these things, and I also don’t know your gender unless you tell me! Everyone just calls you a he.”

“I am a he, right now. Sometime in the future I’ll be a she. And then I’ll be a he again. Amazing, how I-“

“Shoosh,” Terezi cuts him off, papping his face a few times, “John’s stupid, give him a break.”

“John’s not stupid, you take that back right now!” Jade says, eager to jump to your defense. You just look to Sollux and shrug, then remember he can’t see you.

“Oh, I just shrugged, by the way,” you tell him.

“I know.”

“Wait I thought you were blind?” you ask, and this one you feel less dumb about. You are very pretty sure that that dude’s eyes are red because they have atrophied bigtime and are in no way functional anymore. And also, like, you’ve hung out with him these last few weeks! (Month? It feels like it’s been over a month since they all got here). He is definitely not capable of seeing you!
“I am blind.”

“So how do you know John shrugged?” Jade asks. You can see Feferi and Aradia staring at your group in excitement. You hope it’s because Sollux is about to tell you something cool and not because these pretty and friendly yet definitely spooky ladies are gonna see shit go to hell in a handbasket.

“Psii-based echo-location,” Sollux says, tapping his horns. The spark and your skin crawls briefly with red and blue lights. “I send out little pings of energy and feel my environment. Unfortunately, at the moment my environment includes you.”

“Rude,” you comment.

“That’s so cool!!!” Jade exclaims. “Do it again!”

“I’m doing it right now dogbreath, I have to actually put effort into shit in order to make it audible or visible. Normally it’s just a pulse that’s tiny enough to compare Eridan’s brain to it.”

“This is why no one lets us hang out alone together,” Eridan says bitterly. Feferi giggles and kisses Sollux’s cheek, making him grumble but it stops him from continuing to insult members of your party. You think that’s a good thing. You’re kinda pissed at this guy for calling Jade “dogbreath” and also being just a generally insufferable piece of shit.

“Hey, John,” Jade says, fanning herself, “Mind taking it easy on the wind there?”

“What?”

“You’re blowing hot air straight at us,” Jade informs you as Sollux dabs at his face with his shirt. Oh. Would you look at that. You are.

“It’s so nice being able to feel temperatures again,” Feferi says, undoing the buttons on her hood and letting loose even more hair that you had no idea was hidden inside her clothes. Good god damn she has a lot of it. You are momentarily too stunned by this alien fish-goddess’s hair to do what your sister asked you to.

“John,” she says, a little more forcefully, and you jolt a little.

“Yeah, yeah,” you say, and you call to the breeze. It calls back, in the way that is not actually anything resembling sentience but is something that you’re capable- as an heir- of feeling anyway. You’d call it maybe something like a mirror? But a mirror in like, a house of mirrors where they’re all warped and wonky.

The air cools, which you’re pleased by.

“That’s the first time I’ve ever done that on purpose!” you say proudly. Jade thumps you on the back.

“Being an asshole or stopping?” Sollux mutters. You wonder if maybe…

You gust a blast of hot air right at him. It works, since you, Jade, Feferi, Eridan, and Aradia are still getting cool air, but Terezi is unfortunately caught in the crossfire.

“Alright, I’m gonna go harass some other sap,” Terezi says. “Later.” She then proceeds to pick Sollux up, which is not really much of a feat given how skinny he is, and he’s not exactly what you
would call tall either. He’s not short, he’s actually among the tallest of the Dersites, but he’s not
tall, so for a girl who spent the majority of her childhood/pupahood climbing trees and FLARPing
and then fighting Game monsters, he’s probably no more impressive than a scalemate or a
particularly gangly doll- even exhausted as she is.

Where the hell did Dirk go?

Oh, he’s over with Davepeta and Tavros.

Actually… now that you’ve gotten to thinking about height and Dersites and golden sunshine
Prospitians, you’re sorta looking.

Not only are Prospitians, on a whole, taller than Dersites, but you’re broader too, by a lot. Karkat
and Gamzee look to be your only exceptions, with Gamzee taller than you but skinny as a twig
(although… given time to get fat and muscle actually on his body that might change…), and
Karkat not only short but also petite. You think Vriska might have also been an exception to the
tall/large Prospitian thing? God, you really don’t remember. It was so long ago, you just sort of
remember her hair. And horns and eye, you guess. But even the shortest of Prospitians, Jane, is a
tiny bit taller than Dirk, who’s like… third tallest Dersite? Sollux and Roxy are taller than Dirk,
but you don’t really see anyone else in the area…

Dersites seem to have long muscles, where Prospitians have stout ones. Like a dancer/swimmer
kind of muscle compared to a heavy lifter bulk you all seem to have. Hell, Kanaya’s even literally a
lumberjack for fuck’s sake! But that certainly doesn’t mean you want to mess with Davepeta’s
apex-predator body or Feferi’s deep-ocean-surviving sea dweller might. Aradia seems to be the
exception to the Dersite rule, soft bulk sitting on her with the grace of a queen. You wonder if she
would look different if her fighting style didn’t rely so heavily on her brain smashing mountains
into things. But then, so does Sollux’s, and he’s like...

You look to where Terezi- as tired as the rest of you are from making a whole two bodies- is still
holding him.

Wasn’t ARquius really bulky too? You barely saw the guy but he was definitely also an exception
to the Dersite rule.

Calliope is trickier, since you have no frame of reference for any other cherub except her brother,
who has the exact same body type as her since technically it’s the exact same body. She’s middling
height, about middling weight, but she’s not really muscular, in the lean feline way or the thick
weightlifting way. You guess being chained up inside a room her whole life probably wouldn’t do
much for muscles. But Lord English was ripped as hell and he was Dersite- but maybe Calliope
would have also come out ripped as shit if she hadn’t died?

“Earth C to airhead!” Karkat is shouting pretty much directly into your ear. You dissipate, startled
and not appreciating the sudden ear pain. You are all the air in the area, now, but most of your
focus is centering in on Karkat.

“Yes, yes, very nice asshole. Reform and come get Gamzee home, okay? Or I’m taking him home
with me, but two bodies in one day was altogether way too fucking much for him and he needs to
go sleep.”

He needs to go eat, too, you think to your many, many, many particle selves. You don’t really want
to go all fleshy and icky though. Can’t you carry Gamzee home like this?

You prod at Gamzee’s limbs, then really focus. All you manage to do is kick up quite a fuss and
blow everyone’s hair around over there. Kanaya’s and Rose’s skirts are a-flapping and Dave’s cape is in Jake’s face and Gamzee’s hair is caught up in your body gusts. Guess you have to carry him.

You squeeze down into a body again- your body. Your body. And you smile at Gamzee.

“Hey, ready to go home?” you ask him. He opens his eyes into slits, no wider, and his mouth barely twitches into a small, tiny smile before falling down blank. He mumbles something and you think you catch “sleep” and “on the” so you just go ahead and scoop him up.

“Yeah, let’s get you to bed before you fall asleep on the ground,” you agree, assuming that’s what he meant. He half-shakes his head into your shoulder, decides it’s too much work, then gives up with his face pressed into your neck. This is adorable. It would be more adorable if it was just from general sleepiness instead of exhaustion, but it’s adorable. You kiss his forehead and take off lightly.

“See you tomorrow Rose!” you call to her, and she waves tiredly at you from her place in the grass.

Gamzee falls asleep in your arms on the way home, and you settle him onto the couch. You’re tired too, but food is important. It doesn’t matter that you very, very recently had lunch, you gotta get him to put more somethings into his body. You get the feeling that once you and he go to bed for real, there will be no naps, only sleeping into tomorrow morning, and you gotta get him to eat again before tomorrow morning. When you had gone grocery shopping you had looked into foods that were good for healthy weight gain, so you have a bunch of trail mix that you pour into two small bowls, one for each of you, and then you cook up some loaded potatoes with plenty of cheese and chunks of ham.

“Gamzee,” you say, nudging him with your Breath and holding two plates, the bowls of trail mix balanced on them. Gamzee is very slow to wake, so you set the plates on the coffee table and actually haul him upright, tapping at his face a little.

“...John?” You’re gonna go so far to say that he’s glaring at you.

“Yeah I know it sucks but you gotta eat something before you go to sleep tonight, okay?”

His scowl softens to a pout and he mumbles but you get his plate and fork into his hands before you go off and get juice. Juice is good. It’s not a large meal but you don’t really have a lot of room in your stomachs, so you’re trying to pack as many calories in as you can.

Gamzee finishes most of his, the peel of the potato mostly intact with white starch still clinging to it, but the trail mix is gone and so is most of the potato so you count that as a win. He mumbles at you about carrying him to bed.

“Finish your juice first and then yeah, yeah it’s bedtime for both of us.”

God, you should really shower, you’re sweaty all over, but you are absolutely not in a mood for any more standing today. The two of you down the last of your drinks and you scoop him up. The dishes can stay on the coffee table, you’ll… in the morning. You’ll everything in the morning.

“Oh, Gamzee,” you tell him, “I’m going over to Rose’s tomorrow. Dunno when I’ll be back.”

“You told me,” Gamzee says.

“I did?”

“Yeah bro, up this morning when you made that plan.”
“Oh yeah…”

Gamzee chuckles at you and lifts his head off your shoulder to kiss at your jaw/cheek. Somewhere in there. You get him into bed, decide fuck it, you don’t wanna go back to your own room, and crawl in with him.

“’m staying here,” you inform him, mumbling. Gamzee only latches onto you and drops the fuck off to sleep.

In the morning you shower before Gamzee does, because you are awake before Gamzee is. You have a few messages from Karkat asking if the two of you made it home safely, which you tell him you did, a message from Rose telling you to come over whenever, and a few snapchats from Dave talking about how tired he is (from the night before) and how Jane got him good this morning by swapping his toothpaste with something that is not that.

You send Jane a picture of yourself giving her a thumbs up, then draw little black sunglasses on your face and a red circle with a zig-zag through it on your shirt. You send Dave a picture of yourself looking particularly smug.

Jane sends you with a picture of herself looking to the side, a palm “bashfully” over her smiling lips. Roxy is in the background of the picture, wearing her cute pink nightgown with the faux fuzz on the hem and straps, eye mask on her head like a headband and her “World’s best girlfriend” mug in hand. She fuckin’ loves that mug. You know for a fact that Jane angled her camera so you would be able to see more of Roxy in the frame than her.

GG: Hoo hoo! :B

Gay.

Dave looks flatly unimpressed, and his hair is uncombed and his blanket is around his shoulders still so he must have also only very recently woken up.

TG: shut

You laugh at him and heat up a bagel for breakfast. Gamzee joins you, and asks you to drop him off at his daughter’s place. You compliment Jane on her recent prank in person, exchange a few barbs that means it’s fucking on (you need to think of a good way to prank her before she gets you. Sure, the prank war will endure for a good week or two if you two are the ones involved, but getting the first blow is always a boon to your Gambit). You kiss Roxy on both cheeks and she scoops you in for a hug and kisses your cheeks right back. Callie offers you a wide smile and you hug her warmly, then you wave at Jane (a hug would be ASKING to get punked this soon after engaging in another volley of promised pranks), and you’re off.

You let yourself into Rose’s house and find her, Kanaya, and Feferi sitting at the tentatable. Feferi looks… fitting, sitting on a chair of wooden horrorterrors with floral upholstery on the cushions. Maybe it’s because tentacles are aquatic-themed, and so is she? You sneeze.

“Hello John,” all three of them greet, with varying levels of warmth and enthusiasm. You float over to Rose, giving her top priority of the ladies in the room, and kiss her forehead.

“Hello everyone! Nice to see you!” You smile at Feferi. “And not attached to Aradia’s hip!”

Feferi giggles. “Having the autonomy that comes along with having a body again is dolphinitely exciting! As much as I pity Aradia with my whole diamond, it’s nice to have a little bit of a space bubble between us for the first time in two and a half whale SWEEPS!”
“Yeah, I can imagine that’d get tiring for anyone,” you agree, and Rose and Kanaya nod along.

“Feferi and I are going to go clothes shopping,” Kanaya informs you.

“Ah, so that’s why you look ready to vibrate out of your seat,” you tease. In truth, Kanaya is not brimming with excited energy- that’s all Feferi- but you do note that she’s sitting up straight, bright eyed and smiling, with a sort of… not animated energy about her but definitely something that’s saying she’s happy and eager to be doing this with her friend.

“She’s been delighted about this since yesterday,” Rose informs you, looking straight at Kanaya, and you and Feferi share a chuckle at Kanaya’s shrug and sideways glance.

“It’s a rare thing that someone asks me to help pick out an entire wardrobe,” Kanaya admits. “And I’ve also been missing the companionship of a certain overly-energetic someone,” she adds with a happy look Feferi’s way.

“I’ve missed you too Kanaya! I only ever saw otter-yous briefly in the bubbles!”

“Well, now that I will not be leaving my dear wife all alone, I say we hop to it,” Kanaya says, rising like a normal person instead of her carefully manicured vampire-elegance. It’s nice to see Kanaya being happy and enthusiastic, it reminds you that she’s just a regular lady. Well, regular goddess of the new universe, hailed as the Godmother (and you don’t need an encyclopedia about the gods to know that that’s her title) near and far, venerated and respected so dearly that the people working in the caverns change the colors of the signs on their uniforms out of respect to her over their own blood color. But she’s still just like. A troll.

A troll who is very excited about shopping and gossiping with her very pretty ladyfriend on her day off from work. You say goodbye and offer Feferi a hug, if she’s the kind of person who likes that kind of thing, which she absolutely is. She, shorter than you by plenty and half as wide, scoops you up in a big ol’ bear hug (fish hug??) and squeezes you so hard you think you meet troll Jesus for a moment. Then the two of them are gone and you’re left a little dazed.

“She’s quite something, isn’t she John?” Rose remarks casually.

“Idle question, is she single?” you say, mostly (like 95%) joking. (Okay maybe a little less than 95%).

“No, she’s pale with Aradia and flush with Sollux,” Rose says, which, oh, right.

“Oh, right. That guy.”

Rose arches an eyebrow at you. “This is a new development. You don’t like him?”

“He’s an asshole!” you complain, getting up and pouring yourself a glass of whatever tea she’s having. Smells like… fruit.

“That didn’t bother you before, and I was aware that you had gone over to Terezi’s to visit with them not too infrequently.”

“Yeah but he’s worse now!” you insist, “He was a tool or whatever then but it was like, just him being a tool.”

“Mm-hm.” Rose hums, head tilted but not prying. Probably not enough of a reason to really get invested.
“And he called Jade a mean name,” you say, locating the source of your newfound ire all on your own.

“Ah. That would do it. He seems to insult everyone though, so it probably wasn’t personal.”

“Yeah but he’s still a dick.”

Rose giggles at you and you have some of the tea. Ow, hot. You blow on it to cool it and try and see if you can do that temperature thing you were doing yesterday to make your breath cooler. You sip again and it… appears to have worked? You can’t tell if it’s regular you’ve been blowing on it cool or magic you’ve been blowing on it cool.

“So what did you want to do today?” you ask, smiling at Rose, “Whatever you want!”

“Ah, whatever I want?”

“No summoning eldritch gods,” you say immediately.

“Damn. My whole day, ruined.”

“No talking to them either with your mind majyyks,” you insist.

“See, now you’re just being a fun sucker for fun sucking’s sake.”

“You can’t ask your sassy yet begrudgingly helpful familiar to summon or commune with them for you either,” you continue.

“Alas, sweet Viceroy never managed to make his way to this realm,” Rose says, with a tinge of genuine sadness in her voice.

“Uh, her name was Casey, and she was my beautiful and loving daughter,” you say, also kind of missing her. She was a good pseudo-sentient salamander. Wherever did she get off to?

“He was the gentlest and most helpful companion a young wizard could ever ask for,” Rose reminisces, “never gave me a lick of trademark familiar trouble, only stood staunchly by my side in his adorable little robes.”

You heheh, and lean against Rose a little. “She did look cute in that little wizard getup you gave her.”

“It’s because I have impeccable taste.”

“You mean like that one time you insisted that soy sauce tasted good straight out of the bottle so Dave dared you to drink a whole thing of it and you sent the video to all four of us because you refused to back down and admit you were wrong?”

“I can still taste the salt,” she says, haunted. You laugh at her and she joins in.

Then, abruptly, she sets her tea down and stands. “Let’s go out,” she says, “Get some fresh air, go do something. It always seems I’m down in the caverns or cooped up inside someone’s house nowadays.”

“Well, if a bit of fresh air is what you need,” you say, pointing both thumbs at the shoulders of your plain t-shirt, the one with your favorite little green monster on it. The original is, of course, far too small for you now, but you got another one in your size and you continue to love it to bits.
“John, John, John,” she says with a small tut, “That would go over a lot better if your words were actually fresh.”

“Savage.” You both change into your god tiers and take to the sky. You’re happy to follow her anywhere- and heh, doesn’t that sound sappy and grand when you give a second thought to it- but mostly she seems happy to be up in the air with you. You can sympathise, the best place to be- other than in bed- is where the ground is nothing more than a pattern below you and you can wave at the airplanes as they glide by beneath your feet. You kind of wish you knew how to make clouds the way they are in cartoons, soft and semi-solid and fun to bounce and play on. But you can’t, you’re still trying to get a hold on this temperature thing, so instead you just reach out and hold Rose’s hand while you fly. She squeezes yours briefly, flashing you a smile, and you beam at her, wind twisting up around you two in an echo of your affection. It’s kinda cold though, way up here, so you try…

The wind is slow to warm, but it is… it is doing it. You have to focus but it’s doing what you’re asking it to.

“John, are you doing that?” Rose calls, and you grin at her.

“I sure am! Or at least I’m trying to!”

“What? I can’t hear you over the wind!” Rose shouts. Whoops. Looks like you can only really hear her thanks to the fact that you are, sort of, the wind. Not like you’ve Become right now or anything, but like magically you’re entwined with it and everything. You speed up a little, pulling Rose along with you, and then you set the wind to match your pace, giving the illusion of still air.

“I am! At least, I’m trying to!” you repeat. Rose smiles.

“That’s incredible, John! I thought you couldn’t?”

“I didn’t used to be able to, but Sollux pissed me off recently and I blew hot wind in his face so now I sort of know what I’m doing? Ish? Like, I have the… it’s a vague…” You wave your free hand abstractly.

“The foundation?” Rose supplies.

Yeah! I have the foundation of what I’m doing! Working on the kinks!”

“I know plenty of people who would gladly help you work on kinks,” Rose says with a trademark Coy Smirk and you blast her in the face with cold air. She briefly shrieks in offence, then gives you the face that lets you know you’re in for it. You try to let go of her hand but now she’s gripping you like a vise and you could Become, but that would make winning a little too easy.

You two briefly wrestle, but then she releases you to pull out Echidna’s Quills or the Quills of Echidna or whatever they’re called, you’re not really sure at the moment, but you do know that she’s sending surges of light into the needles and grinning in a rather dastardly manner as she shoots the bolts of light at you. You whoop and dodge and get the wind around you gusting, swirling into a little mini vortex and blasting her from side to side. She does attempt to dodge your gusts, but you have the upper hand, up here in the sky with nothing but clouds and air (and sunlight, so maybe you don’t have an advantage? That and Rose can sorta guess at where you’re going to be, since she’s got those fickle Seer powers that no one is really honestly sure of how exactly they work (or maybe your movements are just predictable)). Her hair is irrevocably mussed.
You dodge the bolts of light, but luckily she’s not actually trying to kill you so when she does land a blow it’s just briefly very hot where the bolt strikes and you’re left with a not-as-nasty-as-it-could-be sunburn. You take out your pogo hammer, also not wanting anything that will do too much damage in case you can’t stop your attacks in time (Rose never pulls her punches, the jerk (though… it’s not like she can)) and you gust your way up to her. The clouds in proximity are swirling and tearing apart around you, making the two of you damp and cold. Her hair sticks to her forehead and cheeks and you can feel yours doing the same (oof, you need a haircut) and the two of you are grinning at each other. Rose’s grin would probably be terrifying if you didn’t know her so well, the light from her wands throwing her face into distorted shadows, and you’ve got the power of the open sky thrumming like the adrenaline in your veins.

It’s a good strife that lasts a while longer than it maybe should, Rose and you breathing hard and making only weak-ass attempts at each other by the end of it. Then she chuck a quill at your face and you both end up laughing and calling it quits. You catch the quill in the wind and send it back up to her, and then see if you can do the warming up thing again.

“Oh, John, this is a useful and marketable power,” Rose says, appreciative of the warmth on her wet skin. She rustles her hair, trying to shake the excess water from it, and you shock your head like you’ve just gotten out of the pool. Droplets still cling to your skin and clothes, though the warm air helps it be less unenjoyable.

“Yeah, either practice is helping out or warming air up is easier than cooling it down,” you remark, “Because I tried to cool down my tea earlier and I have no idea if that worked or not.”

“Hm. You’ve mentioned that air is easier to provoke into motion than stillness, correct?”

“Yeah,” you say, wringing out your windsock as you approach her. Then you hold her hand again.

“Heat actually has to do with agitated particles!” Rose informs you, and that sounds like science of a variety you were never actually in school for, “When molecules vibrate faster, heat is produced! Therefore, since your powers are linked in greater part to the motion of air molecules, heat should be far easier for you to achieve than cold.”

“Then why didn’t that happen with Jade’s greenhouse way back when?” you ask, not doubting Rose for a moment but confused at how you managed to flub up something that spectacularly.

“You were trying to hard?” Rose suggests, drifting downward. You let her pull you, like the weight on the base of a balloon.

“Maybe.” You shrug. You roll your shoulders and feel your back pop. That’s better.

“Rooooooros,” you complain.

“Jooooooohn,” she echos mockingly.

“I have sunburns all over now!”

“That’s what you get for-” she has to pause and think about it.

“Blasting you with cold out of nowhere,” you supply.

“Blasting me with cold out of nowhere!” she repeats, looking smugly at the dark marks she’s left on your skin. “I’ll be honest with you though, I was just really itching for a fight.”

“When aren’t you itching for a fight?” you ask with an eyeroll, “I don’t think there was a single person in the history of the entire Game who was waiting with baited breath for the chance to beat
the shit out of battle imps in person like you were."

“It’s true,” Rose says, pleased with herself, “I was on absolute tenterhooks, awaiting the moment I would finally be supplied an opportunity to sink moderately-sharp household implements into something without legal consequences.”

“That remark has a story behind it.”

“Once upon a time,” she says, turning in her descent to face you and hold your hand clasped between both of hers, “back before you ever sent me the knitting kit, a young girl named Rose was having a birthday party. For that birthday party, her mother hired a clown to come amuse the young protagonist.”

“Oh no,” you say.

“Oh yes,” Rose says. “I don’t remember why exactly but I do recall that I did not approve of aforementioned clown. I took it upon myself to arm myself with knife and fork—”

“Oh my god.”

“-and have at the vicious entertainer!”

“Oh my god Rose,” you say, laughing, placing your second hand atop hers.

“The battle was great, and ended up with my poor mother having to pay the man quite a pretty penny for my misbehavior.” Rose looks momentarily exasperated with her younger self, a soft smile with undertones of “what the fuck even?”

“That sounds like a mess,” you agree.

“I was an unbelievable little shit,” Rose tells you, “Why my mother let me get away with the things I did, I will never know.”

“Probably because you were adorable and she loved you to bits and pieces.”

“I was not adorable, I was a terror. Did you know that ‘tea time’ with me was actually just ritualistic sacrificing of the doll of the day?”

“I remember you telling us about that once!” you say, giggling at the mental image of Rose, surrounded by teacups and stuffed animals, stabbing a Raggedy Anne doll on a tiny kids’ table.

“I was insufferable!” Rose says, like you don’t believe her.

“Yes yes, you were the most emo and angsty of preteens,” you agree, falling just a little bit faster so you can duck in and kiss her forehead. “Adults keep out! Only kids allowed! No mom you can’t take my picture don’t you know it’s the hot new trend to be disgusted with the idea of being caught on film?”

“I did truly hate having my picture taken,” Rose remarks, “I think the only pictures of me smiling that my mother managed to snag were the ones where I didn’t know she was taking them.”

“Nerd.”

“You know, John. I get the feeling you’re not really taking my prepubescent woes seriously.”

You pull up and continue holding Rose’s hands, causing her descent to slow and body to turn so
that her feet tap lightly down onto the sidewalk. You’ve landed in some kind of park, it looks like, but you must be a town or two over. You’ve been to all the parks in your city. Oh, maybe this is that one, like, garden thing. The Amphitheater Gardens? No that’s not quite right. The Am- The Annnnn… The Amphiracle? The Amphorae Gardens!

Looks like you snuck in without paying the gate fee. Makes you feel accidentally sneaky.

You nudge Rose and are about to tell her about the mischief you two accidentally found yourselves in when you hear a “Hey you two!”

Jade and Aradia are fast approaching, hand in hand, Jade not actually dragging Aradia behind her in puppy-like excitement. Kudos to Aradia.

“We saw your light show!” Jade tells you, grinning.

“Looked like one hell of a strife,” Aradia adds, beaming bright and only a little terrifying. You change out of your god tiers and Rose changes out of hers, and you offer the two of them a smile as Rose agrees and brags about the grand yada yada and tumultuous forces colliding in the throes of something or other. You note that there’s something odd about what Aradia’s wearing- but it’s just overall shorts with a floral tee. Nothing you haven’t seen on Jade a million times before.

Oh. You’ve seen that exact outfit on Jade a million times before.

“Why are you wearing Jade’s clothes?” you ask, not really upset or surprised or anything, just very suddenly curious.

“Oh, I don’t have any of my own,” Aradia says, looking down at herself. “Except my god tier, but that gets a little boring to wear after a while. Especially when you’ve been wearing it for the last five human years straight.”

“And since I have not only excellent fashion taste, but also clothes-sizing powers, I figured I wouldn’t mind lending Aradia some of my stuff!”

“You look lovely,” Rose compliments, and you agree! Aradia is a very pretty person. Very squishy, definitely huggable. Terrifying. Ever so terrifying. But you get the very distinct impression that she does not intend to be terrifying and that’s really just a byproduct of her general Aradia-ness so you like her lots!

“Thank you Rose! Also, terribly fancy meeting you here,” Aradia says, stepping in closer to Rose with hands clasping behind her back, grin on her face as she rocks back on her heels.

“Well hello there,” Rose says at the newfound proximity.

“Hi yes hello Rose; I have a question about your wife.”

“I have an answer,” Rose says with an arched eyebrow, smiling (smirking? With Rose it’s hard to tell sometimes) in curious amusement.

“Is she single pitchways?” Aradia brings her hands in front of her and presses them flat together, pointed at Rose, “Because Rose I gotta tell you, your wife is hot and irritating.”

Rose smirks further. You, on the other hand, are surprised.

“Irritating?” Rose prompts.
“God, so much! Look it’s not that I don’t understand that she’s trying to look out for us but she’s always fussing and nagging and meddling and really, I do appreciate it, I’m touched, but it’s annoying.”

You guess how you can see how a person might feel that way. Especially if someone doesn’t like being bossed around or told what to do, which you’re going to go ahead and make an educated guess and say that Araida doesn’t.

“And like to be fair, Kanaya and I were flirting back even before the Game even started, with her always meddling and me being begrudgingly appreciative while still doing things just to spite her. I even kept it up after I died! But Kanaya and I didn’t really see a whole lot of each other other in the dream bubbles beyond what I spent on most of the people I was helping through the afterlife so now I’ve got to make up for lost—” she sends Rose a double pistols and a wink, “-time-” she goes back to a regular stance, “which mostly involves me acting horns over heels and tripping over myself at every available embarrassing opportunity. That whole body-making argument really cemented it for me though; like Kanaya thanks but no thanks I know what I’m doing.”

Jade pats Aradia between the horns and she huffs.

“Yeah but so anyways. Your wife, her spade, empty?” Aradia looks hopeful.

“Indeed, I’m the only quadrant she’s managed to fill- though she has briefly auspisticized a few workplace altercations.”

“You know you could’ve just asked Davepeta,” you tell her, “They know basically everything about quadrants and keep tabs.”

“Yes!” Aradia agrees cheerfully, “But I don’t want my tab being kept until it’s confirmed or not!”

You shrug. Fair enough.

“So what are you two doing here?” Jade asks, “The strife just took you this far out?”

“Yep!” you say brightly, “How about you?”

“I was showing Aradia around! These gardens are ranked best in the continent so I thought it might be a nice pla-”

“We’re on a date!” Aradia cuts in, grinning at you and Rose and playfully shoving Jade in the face. Jade laughs and tries to shove her back, and it results in a mini slap fight.

“We are not!” Jade protests, giggling.

“We totally are! I was just about to guide you romantically over to that sorta half-hidden bench behind the weeping tree and we were gonna smoooooooooch.” Aradia makes exaggerated kissy noises at Jade, who only giggles harder and attempts to push Aradia off. She has to float in order to get at Jade’s face, which is adorably scrunched up. Rose also floats, and props an elbow on both of your shoulders and her chin in her hands over top of your head.

“Well they look like they’re out for a good time,” Rose comments. You nod with an “mm!”

“They seem like great friends!” you agree. You feel Rose huff and/or sigh and she pats your head. Aradia, having wrangled Jade into a chokehold, turns her attention halfway back to Rose.
“So yeah if you have any tips on ways to irritate your wife that would be super appreciated, not because I think I can’t handle it on my own or anything but because I’m definitely in this for a leg up any and every way I can find one.”

“She dislikes disco and downtempo music- Dave has a beatbox you could probably borrow- and grows very irritated when people track in mud,” Rose says bluntly, immediately throwing Kanaya under the bus.

“Rose!” you say with a laugh.

“What?” she asks “innocently,” “Don’t worry, I would do the same for you.”

“Gee, thanks!” you say, still chortling.

“Okay but I already know about the mud thing,” Aradia says, “What else can I do that’ll really burn her?” Jade seems to be slowly wiggling her way out of Aradia’s hold.

“Hm. Putting dirty dishes in the sink instead of the dishwasher but I think that might be something I’ve learned because I live with her, and is generally not expected of guests.” Rose huffs a little. “I’m wondering what is even good advice to give. I’m afraid all of my hands-on experience has come from a misguided crush of Eridan’s.”

“Speaking of Eridan!!” Jade shouts all of a sudden, bolting out of Aradia’s grip, grabbing her by the horn, and shoving her sideways in excitement. “John! Okay so you know how I was telling you the other day about how Eridan gave me a gun back when we were like 13?”

“Yeah?” you ask, all interested now that Jade is this excited about it.

“Okay so he got his body back and we hung out a little after that whole thing yesterday- you and Gamzee copped out early but we were chatting- and he showed off his gun and you know what the thing about his giant mega-power super-rifle is?”

“What’s the thing about his giant mega-power super-rifle?”

“There’s no recoil!!” she all but shouts. “Like, look okay all of you look at this!” She decaphcalogues a… yeah yup. That sure is a rifle. It’s very. Purple.

“Okay so I’m just gonna shoot it straight up into the ozone, but watch me! Don’t watch the ion beam or whatever this baby has in it I’m still gonna go home and take it apart and figure out what makes it tick so I don’t know for sure what kind of laser blaster this thing is just yet but watch me okay?”

You all give varying levels of affirmatives, and Jade points it pretty much straight up, just at a little bit of an angle. She pauses, probably checking to make sure she doesn’t accidentally hit a bird, and then fires. You watch her, not the sudden bright beam of vaguely blue light, and the whole area is shrouded in brief, blue coloration.

“Did you see that?!?” Jade asks excitedly, putting the gun away. “There was no recoil!! None at all!!”

“Your shoulder did indeed fail to move from the forces of physics,” Rose comments.

“Are you sure that’s not just because you’re skilled with guns and have the physique of a goddess?” Aradia asks.
“No, no, listen to me, a blast like that should have a recoil to level a mountain and the gun didn’t fucking budge,” Jade says, grabbing Aradia’s hand in excitement.

“Have you shown this to Roxy?” you ask, “I bet she’ll freak out about it too!”

“That’s an excellent idea! I’ll do that right after I take it apart and put it back together!”

You open your mouth but Aradia beats you to the punch, “Hey John what’s your last name?”

“Uh, Egbert?”

“So does that mean that was an-” Aradia sends you a double pistols and a wink this time, “-eggcellent idea?”

Jade looks delighted while you and Rose groan, and the two of them high-five.

“No,” you say, floating between them and pushing at their hands, “No high-fiving. That was terrible.”

Aradia and Jade laugh at you and Rose asks, “Say, Jade, if it’s such an impressive weapon, should you really be taking it apart?”

“I was gonna ask that!” you chime.

“Oh it’s fine! Eridan says he alchemized a lot of these and they’re just floating around in his specibus, so he wouldn’t even mind if I blew this one up!”

“Woah, woah, it could blow up? You could get hurt!” you protest immediately.

“It wouldn’t be heroic or just,” she says, waving you off, “I’d be fine. That or I could just call Jane.”

“Not if both your hands are missing!” If there is a possibility of Jade getting really hurt tinkering with that thing you might just pilfer it and keep it away from her.

“John it’ll be fine!” Aradia says, “Jade’s incredibly smart and brilliant and intelligent and bright, she’s not gonna blow herself or the gun up!” A pause. “And even if she does it’ll be fine. She’s a god and Eridan really did just make so. many. rifles…”

Something about her tone makes you a little scared to ask just how many rifles Eridan ended up alchemizing. Probably somewhere around the number of computers Jade ended up alchemizing, eheheh.

“Why thank you Aradia,” Jade says brightly, a little pointedly, and you “bluh!” and throw your arms up.

“Oh anytime,” Aradia says with a wink her way and you roll your eyes.

“Yes, yes, you two are smug and insufferable,” you say. You zip back over to Rose, who looks terribly amused by all of this. You feel your phone go off, and it’s a text from Karkat! You don’t open it. Instead, you go to the Snapchat app, and get a picture of the four of you with the willow tree and some… peonies? You think those are peonies. In the background of the shot. You type “Hanging out in the Amphorae Gardens with some very nice ladies!” and send that to basically everyone on your roll, including the three of them because they deserve to have the photo too. Then you answer Karkat, who is basically being shrieky and long-winded, as he usually is, and you
are playful and inciteful in return, as you usually are.

The four of you settle into a nice little chat, you pausing to text Karkat and/or Dave every now and then. You all get a snapchat from Feferi, who has sent a picture of Kanaya to the groupchat Roxy made for all the gods + sprites + your uncle. Kanaya has shopping bags over one arm, iced coffee with whipped cream in her other hand, and Feferi has written “The most ADOR-BUBBLE personal shipper a gill could ask for!” over the image. Aradia screenshots the photo and says something about hot people and who even allowed them to be like that. You all share a chuckle at her, and wind up talking about any manner of things for a bit. Aradia is a very complimentary person! You don’t really pay close attention but you notice by the end of it that she has had a lot of very nice things to say about Jade! And honestly, why wouldn’t she? Jade is the absolute best!

Eventually you split back into groups of two, Aradia and Jade wanting to go rock climbing on this big old mound of stones, which you think has a waterfall in it somewhere if your ears are right, and you and Rose go for the more floral pathway.

“That was nice!” you comment after parting, “Aradia is very friendly!”

“Quite. I wonder how that all is going to work out for the two of them,” Rose muses.

“What all is going to work out?”

“...John...” Rose says, like she’s holding out on a hope that you’re just pulling her leg, “Please tell me you are aware of the romantic overtures that we just observed.”

“Wait, the what?” you ask, stunned enough you think you lose your toes there for a second. Rose slowly facepalms with a long-suffering sigh, and the gesture would’ve been a lot more graceful and arduously beleaguered if it weren’t for the fact that her hair is still an atrocious mess from your earlier spar.

“The both of you, I swear…”

“The both of what? Hey, wait, what do you mean?” you ask, floating around in front of her and frowning in confusion.

“John, Aradia was flirting with Jade for nearly- no, dare I say the entire conversation we just had.”

“Uhm.”

Rose grabs you by the face, one palm on each cheek, and then pulls you in to kiss your nose. “You are a certified disaster.”

“Better than someone who could be mistaken for a Hot Topic employee,” you quip easily. So you miss it when people are flirting, what else is new? It’s not like it’s some flaw of your character or anything.

“How dare you,” Rose says with mock offense, placing her (black painted nails) fingers to her bosom, appalled, “Hot Topic employees provide a very useful service and are lovely individuals.”

You laugh and swoop back to her side, and this time she reaches out and holds your hand. “I’m sure. But wow! Aradia and Jade, huh?”


“All those life and death motifs. Jade is basically, like, the goddess of the earth, the one who gave
“Mm. And Aradia is the one who guides the souls of the dead to peace and, inevitably, their final resting place.”

“I wonder if that’s gonna hold true now that she’s not in the dream bubbles anymore,” you wonder.

“Well, either way, that’s certainly her role in this world’s mythos.” Rose sighs, and you quirk a smile at her.

“Our zealous and adoring masses sure are something, huh?”

“I’m sure it will get easier to handle as time wears on,” Rose says, “At least it’s better than the life we were coming from.”

Eheheh… yeah…

You can’t make yourself agree, but you certainly don’t want to disagree, so instead you find a quick and easy distraction in the scenery around you. Rose doesn’t know a lot about plants, not like Jade, so it’s kind of nice to be on the same tier as her, intellectually. You oo and ahh over various plants and put up a lot of pictures on snapchat, some of them just scenery and some of them involving your faces. At one point Eridan starts pestering her so you dedicate a few minutes of undivided attention to your boyfriend, sitting on a park bench with Rose leaning up against you. She’s so short. It’s adorable.

CG: I’M JUST SAYING THAT IF YOU’RE GOING TO BE A GIGANTIC PIECE OF SHIT YOU MIGHT AS WELL DO IT TO MY FACE

EB: Okay!

EB: Hey Karkat want to go on a date with me?

CG: A PITCH DATE

EB: I think that’s generally the idea, yes

CG: YOU WANT TO GO ON A PITCH DATE

CG: WITH ME

EB: Well there’s no one else I want to go on a date with!

CG: HOW THE FUCK DID I END UP BEING THE ONE THAT’S SO UNLUCKY

EB: Ehehehe you love me!

CG: I FUCKING HATE YOUR GUTS

EB: <3<

CG: <3< FUCK YOU

EB: No thanks, but you’re more than welcome to go fuck yourself!

CG: SO I’VE HEARD
CG: I’M AVAILABLE TOMORROW?

CG: WHEN WERE YOU THINKING?

EB: Tomorrow sounds nice!

EB: Like, I dunno, spend the afternoon together?

EB: What do people even do on pitch dates

CG: JOHN SHUT THE FUCK UP

CG: SHUT THE FUCK UP AND SIT THE FUCK DOWN. YOU ARE NOT PLANNING THIS FUCKING DATE ANYMORE YOU HAVE HAD YOUR DATE PLANNING PRIVILEGES REVOKED. I AM NOW PLANNING THIS DATE, YOU WILL SHOW UP AT MY HIVE AT 12 TOMORROW AND YOU WILL DO WHAT I DECIDE ON DOING

Are you supposed to argue? You don’t really want to argue. Karkat knows more about pitch dating than you do and it’s nice to let someone else think about things so you don’t have to. Also, if you are supposed to argue, and you don’t, well, that’ll just piss him off more, won’t it?

EB: Okay! :B

CG: FUCK I HATE YOUR GUTS

EB: D’awwwww

EB: I’m looking forward to seeing you!

You send him the kissy emoji a few times and Rose huffs, claiming your attention. Her breath (which you are, of course, acutely aware of) had been growing steadily less placid. Not like she’s exercising or panicking or anything. Just that she doesn’t sound like a happy camper.

“What’s up?” you ask, putting your phone away so you can drape one arm over her belly (seriously, she’s so short, tiniest of all the humans, you could fold her up and tuck her away in your breast pocket (if you even had one of those)) and scratch at her still-messy hair with your other hand.

“Eridan seems to have kept that little pitch crush of his. That or he just really does not like me.” She swats at your hair. “You’re going to mess up my hair.”

“You’re hair is already messed up!” you protest. She goes a little quiet. “Because of the strife we had, remember?” you prompt, getting the delighted feeling that she had indeed forgotten about that.

“Oh my god, and our whole conversation with Jade and Aradia…” she says, quietly pained.

“Super messy for all of it,” you confirm. She groans and presses her phone to her face, hiding her eyes behind it, and you laugh at her, feeling your Prankster’s Gambit jump without you even having to try!

“It’s alright Rose, the messy I woke up like this bedhead is totally in nowadays!” you tease.

She groans a little louder at you.

“I’m sure Jade and Aradia totally understand what someone who just got their ass handed to them
looks like, it’s no big!”

“Are you saying they’d have been so distracted by your appearance that they wouldn’t have noticed mine?” she quips, and you raspberry at her.

“Hey, I gave you a sound ass-thrashing up in those clouds!”

“Oh yes, now do remind me, I’m having trouble recalling, which one of us was the one complaining about smouldering skin and the bite of light?”

“Not half as bad as it must burn you to know that you lost!”

You exchange a few more quips and get to walking again, observing the gardens—which are very lovely, you’re here right at the start of fall so everything looks very nice—and eventually make your way to the front, where you pay your gate fees and Rose googles how to get back to your city from here.

Lunch happens in a Denny’s not too far from the gardens. It’s nice to know that for all things change, at least Denny’s is a universal constant. Though, you’re pretty sure it’s more of a liminal space anyway, so it makes sense that it should continue to persist. You get seated in one of those roundy booths that’s meant for a lot of people, and you’d protest (there are only two of you! Even gods don’t take up that much space!) but you and Rose can sit right up next to each other like this and you are nothing if not a slut for physical affection from your friends. The first thing she does, before she even sits down, is go to the bathroom and fix her hair. And maybe makeup. You’re a little dumb when it comes to makeup, but you know that the people who wear it are very pretty!

You take a picture of the two of you while you wait for you food and put it on snapchat, annoy Karkat a bit, and then decide to pester Eridan. You’re half tempted to say he’s probably just pissy today or something and Rose is worried over nothing, but while you talk with him the conversation is exactly as pleasant as all the conversations beforehand. Rose complains on how he’s bugging her, and you compare conversations.

“Well, we can rule him being in a bad mood out,” you say, trying for at least something optimistic.

“It does indeed appear to either be caliginous flirtation or unnecessary antagonism.”

“He totally thinks you’re hot,” you say.

“Well, he’s right, but I would appreciate him thinking I’m hot in a less annoying fashion.”

“But it wouldn’t be pitch if it wasn’t annoying,” you helpfully observe.

“Fair.”

“And you and Kanaya are already dating flush so it’s not like you’d even be a viable option!”

“I don’t know, there’s a certain… propitiation, that comes with people flirting with you despite knowing nothing will ever come of it.”

“Eheheh, don’t you think that’s a little scandalous, Rose?”

“I am a vain and ostentatious bitch, John, I thrive on the worship of my devout and adoring followers,” she says simply, as though merely discussing the weather. You can look over her shoulder, though, and note that her next reply to Eridan is a little more scathing than she normally is.
“So?” you ask, “Do you like him then?”

“I hardly know the fool,” Rose says, eyes on her screen, “And indeed, he must be a fool if he thinks he’s up to the task of soliciting me.”

You wait. You know Rose well enough to give her her dramatic pauses.

“But I’m not necessarily opposed.”

“I mean, if anyone would probably really enjoy a kismesis, it’d be you!” you mention, “Earlier you were chomping at the bit for the chance to get a good fight in with me. You can use your quills and he can use his magic science stick Kanaya told us about!” Two wizards, duking it out with their magic wands. The image is almost too precious.

“I was not chomping at the bit,” Rose protests, “I was champing at it.”

“Tomato, tomatoh, you’re always down for beating the shit out of something. Give it a try! If it doesn’t work out, you two can still be friends!”

“...I think you’re right,” she muses. “He’d been terribly unappealing as a thirteen year old but who knows, now that I’m no longer fed up with him and his ilk, maybe I’ll find banter with him enjoyable.”

“All banter is enjoyable to you.”

“Not with Callie,” she corrects, waving her phone briefly in your direction. “With Callie I am utterly incapable of keeping any meaningful kind of volley going.” She goes back to leaning on you and staring at her phone. “But with everyone else, yes.”

“Here’s hoping it’ll be fun!” you say. Then you chuckle. “I guess pitch is in the air lately! You and your new pitchamore-”

“Oh, good one.”

“-me with Karkat, Davepeta and Jade, though that seems pretty one-sided,” you mumble, “Kanaya and Aradia- maybe.”

“It’ll certainly be interesting, if anything comes of it.”

“I wonder if Terezi or Sollux or Gamzee or Feferi are gonna go pitch with anybody.”

“Hm,” Rose taps her phone to her chin. “I can’t think of anyone that they’d be at immediate odds with. Maybe Roxy and Sollux would engage in friendly intellectual competition, given their shared interests?”

“Maybe!”

You gossip a little more, coming up with more and more oddball pairings, like Feferi and Tavros or Terezi and Jake. Rose tells you about how she once stumbled across fanart of her and Jake being shipped flush together, and you make a confused noise of… not even disgust, just, what?

“But you’re married!”

“Goddesses of love and marriage, the two of us. Anytime there’s a “The Lovers” inscribed or ensconced in mythos, it’s Kanaya and myself,” she agrees cheerfully.
“They can’t ship you with Jake!”

“Oh people can and do ship me with everyone in our group. I just made mention of the one with Jake because it was part of a series in which we were all shipped with each other’s parent of the opposite sex. So you were shipped with Roxy, Dave with Jane, and Jade with Dirk.”

“But he’s gay!”

“It was positively freudian in nature,” Rose continues on delightedly, ignoring you. “Alas, old man Sigmund was never alive to cast his dubious pseudo-psychology into the intellectual sphere of this world, so all my happy blathering about oedipus complexes must, alas and alack, be saved for my friends and family.”

“Rose that’s gross.”

“God I miss the disaster that was rudimentary psychology. It was inaccurate but at least it was fun.”

“Yeah, and I miss doing scales on the piano every day for the entire hour,” you say sarcastically.

“Doing scales, at least, is useful.”

“Freud blabbering wasn’t?”

“Well, it was, in that it was the launchpad into actual science. An accidental founding of a field via gratuitous bullshit.”

“But fun bullshit,” you say around a mouthful of eggs.

“But fun bullshit,” she agrees.

After lunch you just… walk. Well. Float. Neither of you really has feet on the ground, but you meander. She tells you about work, about this one little teal wriggler with mismatched horns— one arrow, one scythe— that absolutely refuses to leave her alone, like it’s a little duckling. There’s a new recruit who thinks she’s hot shit and needs to be taken down a peg, but both Rose and Kanaya are so happy that there’s someone backsassing gods that they’ve had to delegate the task to someone else. Rumor has it Kanaya might need to go take a look at a Mother Grub on a different continent, to see if she’s sick or dying of old age. Rose isn’t sure why they want Kanaya to go do that, Kanaya’s never been near a Mother Grub who’s died of age. You suggest maybe it’ll be educational. Rose snorts.

You wind up in a park near the edge of your city, and you spot a broken hunk of wood in the shadow of some bushes. “Hey Rose, do you dare me to ride that down that railing?” you ask, pointing first to the wood and then to the metal divider between two halves of staircase. The railing is fairly long, but you can fly so it’s not like you’re gonna end up tumbling down the steps.

“Yes,” she says without missing a beat, decaphcaloguing her phone. You grin and grab the wood, float up above the railing, and then turn to face her with a peace sign and a wink.

“Sup, my name’s John Egbert, I’m twenty years old, and I’m gonna ride this random hunk of wood I found sitting on the ground down this park railing,” you tell the camera.

As your feet touch the wood and the wood touches metal, you hear Rose shout “Do it for the vine!” and you take off. You make it past the first little flat bit with minor wobbling but when you hit the second little landing area your plank goes flying and so you do too, very nearly missing
becoming unfortunately well-acquainted with the concrete. You’re laughing and Rose is whooping at you, and you discard the wood back where you found it before returning to her.

You get a snap from Gamzee, and you share it with Rose. It’s a picture of him, Calliope, and Roxy. They are surrounded by Callie’s artwork, loose pages and open sketchbooks littering the floor and desk they’re sitting in front of. Gamzee’s face is only half in the frame, clearly wanting you to get a better picture of Callie (and Roxy, who is also only half in the frame).

TC: JuSt lEtTiNg y'aLl mOtHeRfUcKeRs kNoW We'rE HaViN A BiTcHiN TiMe oVeR HeRe aNd i'M hOpIn yOu ArE tOo

“That’s awful sweet of him,” Rose comments.

“I think this is Gamzee’s way of being a proud dad,” you say, holding up your phone and turning it to a front facing camera.

You send a picture of you and Rose.

EB: We are! It’s good to know you’re having a good time!

You stop by a Crockpot, just kinda for the sake of going into one. Crockpots, like Walmarts, are just sort of good places to waste time with friends. You waste some time pointing out outfits, alternately indicating that you think something is cute or making fun of it, dick around in the movie section (Dave and Karkat have seen most of these, and talked to you about them in excess), and wander around the home decor section.

You notice some of the bedding there looks very nice. Your ghosts sheets are great and everything, but you wonder if maybe it’s time for some change. It’s weird, to be standing (floating) there, looking at home decor shit, and feeling that you want it.

“John?” Rose asks, touching your arm.

“Sorry! Spaced out there for a second.”

“It’s very nice,” Rose comments, looking at the little cube of bedding that you’re staring at. It’s a deep blue with seafoamy-colored designs.

“Mhm,” you muse. You don’t get it, but you think you might come back. Or start looking for shit. Like, at other stores and stuff. Something to think about.

The two of you do, however, end up buying a case of something Dave likes to call fruitbeer. Since the inhabitants of Earth C have wildly better taste than those of A or B, beer as a drink is considered something of a rarity, not because it’s hard to produce but simply because a lot of people don’t really drink it. Liqueur made from fruit tastes (and therefore is) better, so that’s what gets produced en masse. Punch purchased and in hand, the two of you go back to Rose’s place.

The two of you walk in on Kanaya and Feferi sitting at the table, a whole mess of makeup containers on the wooden surface, as Kanaya applies what looks to be either eye shadow or eyeliner to Feferi’s face. You’re not at a good angle to really tell.

“Hello!” you greet on your way past them to put the drinks in the fridge, and Feferi’s earfins waggle.

“Shello!” she calls back, and Kanaya releases her face so she can turn and beam at the two of you. She’s wearing this bright pink poncho over what you’re assuming is a white tank top (you can’t
really see if it has sleeves or not) and a loose-fitting blue skirt. Around the house-hive are bunches of shirts and dresses, all with her sign painted on and drying. You catch sight of a few bottles of fabric paint and remember Gamzee and you doing that together fondly.

“How was the trip?” Rose asks, gravitating toward Kanaya and kissing her briefly.

“It was super fun!” Feferi tells you animatedly, “It’s nice to have clothes that aren’t my work swimsuit from back when I was six or that drab god tier— not that I’m not happy to be god tiered!” She flutters her wings, which are still out and very pretty and are… fairly similar to her sign, really. They’ve got the two big parts of butterfly wings but also a third, smaller part separating the middle of each wing that kind of makes it look like her symbol. “But the color scheme for Life is absolutely terribubble.”

“The palette really is un-conch-ionable,” Kanaya says, and Feferi squeals in delight and claps.

“Another converted to the puns!” she crows, and Kanaya preens.

“It was a very entertaining outing,” Kanaya moves on, grabbing Feferi’s face again to finish touching up her makeup. Wow. She’s super pretty without makeup and in a “drab” god tier outfit, but wow. She’s also very excellently pretty with makeup and bright colors on. “Now if only you could convince your moirail to let me take her out shopping as well,” Kanaya continues, putting her makeup cases away when she’s finished with Feferi’s face. “She can’t continue wearing only her god tier and clothing she’s stolen from others.”

“I think you’ll find she clam! But she eel-ly shouldn’t. I know Eridan is going out shopping either today or tomorrow, too, maybe she’ll go with him?”

“She was out with Jade today, wearing Jade’s clothes,” Rose remarks, “So I doubt anything will be happening on that today.”

“I’ll pester her about it some more,” Kanaya says decisively. You glance briefly to Rose, who is also glancing at you, and you both shrug. Normally you’d suggest Kanaya lay off via assurances that Aradia can handle it, but if this is a pitch thing then…

You catch Feferi looking at the two of you, lips painted a pretty pink, and she winks while Kanaya is fussing with the zipper of her makeup bag.

You’re sure it’s just to signal that she’s aware that the two of you are in on the Kanaya-Aradia pitch thing that may or may not be happening, but it certainly doesn’t make you think that she is any less pretty or worthy of your visual admiration. She’s just. Very pretty and nice to look at. So you do. You enjoy looking at her like you enjoy looking at posters of Liv Tyler.

“Woah!” you exclaim when you think you see something. You approach Feferi and sure enough. “You have webbed hands!” you say excitedly, gently reaching out and grabbing one of her hands so you can bring it up for further scrutiny.

“You have webbed hands!” she agrees brightly, and you softly touch the skin there. It’s just skin. But it’s webbed skin so it’s, by its own merit, so cool!!!

“Most sea dwellers only have webbing up to the first knuckle, which is why Eridan can wear rings and ship, but mine aren’t really built for decoration.” She wiggles her fingers at you, then balls the hand you’re examining into a fist. The webbing of her thumb covers the lower side of her fist.

“Which is a good thing, too, since Kanaya tells me you all got docked a few times each during your fight with my ancestor!”
“My face will never return to its original state,” you complain, rubbing at one of your cheeks. But yeesh, wow, yeah, you ARE glad that fish hitler hadn’t been wearing things on her fingers when she beat you all soundly. Thank god Roxy had been there to get the drop on her. She’d probably had to do a Voidy thing in order to escape the Condesce’s notice.

“John,” Feferi says with a giggle, “you’re adorebubble!” She then claps both your hands between hers, unseeable-fast. “We should hang out together sometime!”

“Yeah!” you say agreeably. That sounds really fun! Maybe the two of you could go flying together.

“Seems like quite the haul,” Rose comments, looking over the clothes spread out to dry and poking into bags with what you assume are pants and skirts and shorts and shit. She gets a puzzled look on her face at a… “shirt”… actually you’re not sure what that one is either.

“What’s this?” Rose asks, and Feferi giggles and goes over to her.

“The only reason Kanaya and I figured it out is because we saw it on a store mannequin,” Feferi says as she tosses off her poncho. “The straps are really complex!”

You “Gah!” as Feferi then proceeds to remove her tank top (and you were right, it is a tank not a tee) and look away, holding up a hand over the side of your face.

“Hm?” you hear Feferi make in mild confusion, “John, somefin wrong?”

“You’re changing!” you splutter, red faced and staring at Rose and Kanaya’s cabinets.

“Just my shirt! Don’t worry, I don’t have any naughty bits out or anyfin!”

“Your boobs!” you protest, your brain not coming up with any kind of sentence or explanation other than that.

“What a-boat them? They aren’t ina-port-riate, and even if they were, I have a heft satchel on!” she informs you cheerfully. “And it’s super cute! Kanaya and I spent forever in Tiffany’s Things. I wanted to buy, pike, the whale store!”

You brain distantly supplies that Tiffany’s Things is a chain vaguely synonymous to Victoria’s Secret and you steadfastly continue not looking at your friend’s underclothed body.

“It is quite lovely,” Rose agrees, not even trying to hide the fact that she’s staring.

“Quite,” Kanaya echos. Absolute harlots, both of them.

“Okay pupa, I’m wearing a shirt again!” Feferi tells you, and you think she’s teasing you but it would have been entirely ungentlemanly of you to look at a lady when she was only wearing her bra! You can practically feel your dad rolling over in his grave at the very thought!

“It is terribly complicated,” Rose says, walking around Feferi who is posing with the shirt-thing. It’s… yeah. Overcomplicated is the word to use there.

“But it also looks cute as shit on Feferi though so…” you comment aloud, still a little flustered and definitely still warm in the face. You make an appreciating noise as she shows off the shirt and then even spins and lifts her hair so you can see all the dangly bits crisscrossing on her back.

“Braggart,” Kanaya comments mildly, though she looks as amused by Feferi’s mini-fashion show as you and Rose are.
“Well duh! I’m the hottest piece of ship this side of the post-scratch universe! I eel like I deserve to act like it,” she says with a wink Kanaya’s way.

“And so modest,” Rose comments, amused.

“Whale, somebody otter be!” Feferi says with a giggle. Then she whips off the complicated shirt with speed she should really not be capable of and you’re “aahhh!!”ing again. It’s too late. You look away but the damage has been done. You got a full eyeful of her (okay yeah, very fuckin’ cute) pink-and-white bra.

“Oh stop being such a guppy!” Feferi chides you. “Reel-ly, it’s just a bra! You act like you don’t even wear one!”

“I don’t??” you say, baffled by the insinuation that you would. You can feel Kanaya sighing.

“Oh.” Feferi says, and she picks up her poncho out of the corner of your eye so you assume it’s safe to look. “Whale, you should. Where else do you put your ship when you’re wearing a dress?”

“I… don’t wear dresses- and also my sylladex?”

Feferi gives you a once over. “You could. You look tough enough to pull a dress off.” She giggles and comes over to kiss your cheek. “Even though you’re a big wriggler on the inside!”

“You’re a big wriggler on the inside!” you tease back, instinctively playful but still a little baffled. Does Karkat wear a bra? Does Gamzee? You didn’t buy Gamzee any bras when you went out clothes shopping with him.

“Generally,” Kanaya starts, and she sounds just a tiny bit exasperated, “boys don’t wear bras, as they do not actually grow the rumblespheres necessary to fill them.”

“Sollux-”

“Is an outlier and also bigender.”

“Why wouldn’t everybody wear heft satchels?” Feferi looks actually genuinely confused by this. Are you, for once, not the person who is missing shit in this situation? Could it be that there is a person who knows less about a thing than you?

“Because not all people are dirty seaweed-smelling grimemonsters who braid sand into their hair,” Kanaya says with an affectionate eyeroll.

“Don’t hate me cause I’m pretty,” Feferi says mildly, but she’s smiling too so you just chuckle along. You float over to Rose and bump shoulders with her, and she floats up so she can lean her arm on your shoulder. She’s so tiny. It’s adorable.

“I don’t hate you and if I did, it would be because you smell perpetually of saltwater and probably have deceased aquatic ex-lifeforms in your hair. Your behemoth of a ‘do is their final resting ground. How could you?” Kanaya asks, mock-sorrowfully.

“Oh Kanaya!” Feferi says, grasping Kanaya’s hands in her own and looking up at her ardently, “I can tell this is just a ruse, a mask you’re putting on to hide your true eelings! Don’t worry a-boat it though: I promise, just because I’m prettier than you doesn’t make you ugly!”

You burst out laughing and Rose hides her smile behind her hand, choking back laughter. Feferi, egged on by her audience, continues.
“We’re both very lovely ladies! You’re glamorous as they come, Kanaya, just not quite on-par with me!” She pats Kanaya’s shoulder briskly, smiling with self-satisfaction, and Kanaya starts laughing too, which leads to Rose finally cracking and you all have a good laugh over it.

“But!” Feferi spins on her heel, facing you, and her wings flutter all rapid and soft so she can swoop up to you and prop an elbow on your other shoulder, “Seriously, we should hang out! When are you available?”

“Uh,” not tomorrow, “day after tomorrow?”

“Sollux and I have a date,” she tells you.

“Day after that?”

“Shore! But I have a hair braiding appointment in the afternoon so it would have to happen in the morning- unless you want to come with and keep me company?”

Feferi looks very much like she would like you to come keep her company during her hair appointment, and honestly when are you ever one to say no to something involving hair? Also, no way in hell are you getting up so you can do something in the morning. You get the feeling she probably knows that and is being tricky, but she’s not that slick!

“Sounds like fun!” you agree.

“Great! Meet me at Tavros’s hive at pike, 10? 11? No later than 11 though, my appointment starts at 11:30.”

“10 sounds good,” you say amiably. Hang out with her a bit, go to a salon, hang out with her a bit more. Or a lot more. She has a LOT of hair.

“Wonderfall! I’ll see you then! And I’m sure we’ll be texting between now and then! I still have my old shellphone that came with me in my sylladex, since that junk all managed to carry over.”

“Oh that’s good! Eridan too?”

“As much as yours when you god tiered! I just don’t fit in any of my old clothes.” Feferi shrugs, “The elastic would’ve worn out by now in most of that ship anywave.”

Kanaya offers to help Feferi carry her new belongings to Aradia’s place, and she accepts the help probably more for the company than for the sake of her sylladex slots. You all have an absurd number of captcha cards, you know, and Feferi can probably store multiple bags in one card thanks to the ability to captchalogue stacks or piles of things, so it’s really probably just because she wants to keep hanging out with Kanaya. Or… drag Kanaya back to the shared living space with her moirail, who just so happens to have a crush on Kanaya.

She ain’t slick.

You and Rose settle in on her couch and pop a movie in for background noise. Neither of you really watch past the opening ten minutes, opting instead to chat with each other. She tells you a story about some shit Dave and Terezi did on the meteor with like, fifty fucking dream bubble Nepetas, you tell her about a Christmas you’d had with your Jade and Nannasprite, and for a brief moment you feel…

Disjointed. Like the Rose pressed up all warm and soft and familiar against your side isn’t your Rose. Like you’re an imposter, sitting with the loved ones of the person you’re masquerading as.
Then the moment is gone and Rose is Rose again. It doesn’t matter that if she talks to Jade, she’ll get an entirely separate set of stories, an entirely different three years worth of experiences that you were not and could never be there for. It doesn’t matter at all.

“John,” Rose says, concern in her words, “You’re feeling significantly less substantial all of a sudden. Are you turning into wind again?”

You can see, in a flash, the way this conversation is going to play out. You’ll snap back into physical form, tell her it’s fine, she won’t believe you (she never fucking does), and it’ll end with well meaning yet misplaced concern and sore feelings.

“No, Rose,” you say, slipping a grin into place and not trying to turn fleshy one whit. She gets half an eyebrow arched before you shout, “I’M GOING GHOST!” and fully Become. She yelps— a hilariously undignified sound— and falls through where you used to be onto the couch cushions.

“John!” she complains, loudly, and you rattle her windowpanes in amusement. “Yes yes, funny man, I have been thoroughly japed. Will you cease your pilfering of my Gambit and come sit back down?”

“Maybe,” you say, body half formed. You’re see-through like this, organs and veins visible, skin translucent, only shadows where your bones should be. “Give me one good reason to.”

“Actually you can stay just like that and let me stare at you,” Rose says. You roll your eyes and call the rest of you down into flesh.

“You’re so weird!” you complain, plopping back down on the couch.

“And you’re an abomination to the eyes like that. Next time you do that remind me to take a picture of you. I’ll share it with the cultists.”

You snort. “Yeah, because eldritch abominations are definitely a hot fad right now.”

“You either flatter yourself by comparing that cute little display to an eldritch monstrosity, or seem to believe that there is not actually a cult that I am very actively part of and participating in.”

“...Rose...”

“I’m sure my friends would love to see you at your most in-human. While still visible to the naked eye, of course.”

“Roooooooooose.”

“Well, friends slash acquaintances, I can’t know all of them of course.”

“Rose, there should only be one religion on this planet. The, you know, literal presence of gods as this universe’s creators should kind of make it hard for other religions to make a lot of headway.”

“That is true, in greater part. Little fits and bursts of other religions have been entertained throughout the years, but almost none of them gained any traction.”

You squint at her.

“Except one.”

“RooooooOOSE!”
“It’s fine,” she says in a way that makes you absolutely think she’s having a good laugh at you about this, “It’s just the basic horrorterror cult, trust me, it’s nothing I’m not well familiar with."

“Roooooooooose,” you groan. “Do I need to come save you from the festerthroes again? I’ll come pry your fettered tongue from the chains of empyrean, I’ll do it.”

“My hero,” she says with a small giggle, kissing your cheek. “But really John, don’t worry about it okay? I have an aesthetic to maintain, and also cult stuff is fun.”

You guess it makes sense that if anyone will tamper with forces that she already knows are beyond her ken just for the aesthetic, it’d be Rose.

“Just promise me you’re staying safe?” you ask, and she nods.

“Really, truly, John, it’s just the simplest occult stuff, we had it on Earth A. As someone who had an upfront and personal encounter with the horrorterrors themselves, this is child’s play for me, I promise. I really am just in it for the ominous music and gothic clothing.”

“I guess that’s fair.”

You can’t be totally sure, but you’re pretty sure that the next breath you feel Rose exhale is one of relief. You kiss her hair and text Karkat, needling him for needling him’s sake. You also text Roxy, who is perpetually lovely to talk to, and learn from her that Kanaya has apparently swung by asking after Roxy’s girlfriend, and finding that Jane was not there, but rather Gamzee, absconded with great haste.

As you’re replying to Roxy, Rose shows you a snap Kanaya sent her of her and Jane out in front of a building you don’t know if you’ve ever seen before.

GA: You’d Think Jane Would Be A Little Easier To Track Down.

“Gay,” you comment, and Rose snorts.

“She is indeed one of the fabled,” Rose’s tone goes a little hushed, ”homosexuals.”

You fake a gasp. After the movie ends you two make and eat dinner, chatting idly with bouts of companionable silence. After dinner you pull out the fruitbeer and flop back down on the couch together. You’ve got three drinks apiece, if you even decide to drink that many, and the alcohol content is low enough in these that you’re really, really not worried about anyone getting drunk.

“Nothing like mac n’ cheese, dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets, and alcohol to really make me feel like an adult,” you comment and Rose nearly pfts while she’s taking a drink. Damn. You were close. Any day you can get Rose to spittake is a good day.

You watch a movie that’s so bad it’s wound it’s way back around to good, and by the time it’s over you’re on your second drink and feeling a bit warm in the face. Things that are normally funny are hilarious now and things that normally only make you chuckle are making you laugh outright.

You should go plug in another movie, but neither of you wants to get up so you let the credits roll for a while.

“John,” Rose says, and it’s different from the tone of the rest of the conversation you’ve been having… all evening.

“Rose?”
“Did you know that there’s a lock on information right now?”

“There’s a- what?”

“The internet has a huge portion of its contents, nearly 70% if my Sight isn’t lying, under lock right now. No one can access information having to do with certain keywords or historical facts. No one is allowed to post related information on social media, and by thunder no one is allowed to mention the lock.”

“Wh-... why?” That doesn’t make any sense.

“I ordered it.” Rose finishes off her second drink.

“Elaborate,” you say, reaching up to rub at your face.

“Future me, who I am not yet, went back in time and ordered a lock on information. Specifically, I ordered the lock to be fully in order the day before our arrival into this time period. Nothing of our past throughout this planet would be available online save the most basic and fleeting of mentions, and then the other stuff that I don’t know what it is would be unavailable to us as well. There are things I don’t want us knowing yet. And you know what the most scathing, awful part of it all is?”

“What?”

“Library access is still open. The firewall on the information that I’m supposed to be hiding from is so remedial I could get a coding for assholes book and get through it myself. No one is expected to stop from saying things out loud or try to be secretive. I could ask any random stranger to tell me what I asked to have an information lock on and they could absolutely tell me, should they so desire it. I have only the flimsiest barrier between me and knowledge, I could go to a library right now and rent an encyclopedia or five and learn everything future me has kept hidden, and future me knows that the best way to get me to not rise to the challenge would be to make it too easy. She’s probably smirking right now, thinking on this very conversation, because she knows that I’m not going to do a damn thing to get that information until,” Rose makes little sarcastic air quotes, “‘the right moment’ comes along and reveals to me that it’s time. And I’m not going to, because I know that the only reason future me would be doing this is because she- I- have a good reason!”

Rose throws the empty bottle across the room at the far wall, aiming only at plaster, and you slow it’s travel with your Breath so it just makes a low thudding noise before it drops to the carpet. You pet her hair (which you were already doing, but now you’re petting it with purpose).

“Hey, shhhh, easy Rose, easy,” you say, pressing your mouth to her hair. “You’re starting to sound like Karkat,” you tease.

“I am one thousand times more composed than Karkat is about this future past self bullshit.”

“Of course,” you say, voice simple and easy. Rose huffs and turns a bit.

“What don’t I want us knowing?” she asks.

“I’m sure you’ll figure out sooner or later. Aradia’s gonna start on her expeditions into the past soon, right?”

Rose nods. “Especially now that the ghosts aren’t mandated to go with her.”

“So maybe she’s gonna discover something cool and important and stuff!” you pat her. “Either way, you’re right you know. Little miss Seer will know when it’s the right moment or whatever.
You probably just wanted to give us all a chance to get settled in properly, it’s not like there’s any more Game bullshit for us to take care of!”

Rose does not respond.

“There… Rose, there isn’t any more Game bullshit for us to take care of, right?”

“I don’t know, John.”

You breathe in deep and sit up a little straighter. You rub at your eyes under your glasses, feeling suddenly very, very tired.

“Who else knows that we are not 100% certain that Game antics have ceased?”

“You’re the first person I told.”

“Not even Kanaya?”

“There’s no sense in worrying her. Or Dave or- anyone really. I just, you’re the one with retcon powers so if something does crop up you’ll undoubtedly be at the heart of it. Figured you deserved at least some shadow of a warning, since my powers are utterly useless at providing literally anything more substantial.”

You sigh and ruffle her hair, much to her chagrin. You talk while she fixes it.

“What, exactly, makes you think Game bullshit might not be over?” you ask.

“I don’t know, John. Paranoia? A sense of loose and fraying ends? Dissatisfaction with the perceived end of it all? Generalized restlessness?” You let out a deep breath.

“Nothing you’ve Seen.”

“No, no, nothing my powers would deign to enlighten me about, either in comfort or in preparation.”

“Well hey, it’s probably nothing then, right? You can’t See if there are Game shenanigans left to deal with, probably because they’re done. You’re just looking to get one last punch in at the cosmos.”

Rose snorts. “Probably. I just can’t shake the feeling that… like, that’s it? We fought the Condence and won, she’s dead, they fought the Jacks and won, Vriska fucked off and died fighting Lord English, the rings were destroyed, the forge was lit, the universe spawned, that’s it?!”

You kiss her hair again and close your eyes, resting against her head.

“Something’s missing, John. There’s some kind of puzzle I haven’t puzzled out. The riddle seems to be an absence in and of itself, and is that not the most diabolical riddle of all?”

“Well you know what they say. ‘Absence diminishes little passions and increases great ones,’” you quote, really not feeling up to the task of helping Rose right now- but like. You owe her this much! You’ve been making her feel left out and it sounds like she has some very serious shit on her mind! So you just kind of say the first thing that pops into your head.

“As wind extinguishes candles and fans a fire;” she finishes for you, “Wasn’t it… Walt Whitman who said that?” She cracks open her third drink.
“I’m pretty sure that was Walt Whitman.”

“Are you telling me I should get a non-cult hobby and use my feelings of ennui to channel listlessness into productivity?”

“I mean if taking care of alien bug babies isn’t intellectually stimulating anymore you might want to consider it,” you say, because no you hadn’t really been going for that but hey, something profound managed to get salvaged from the random shit falling out of your mouth. Trust Rose to make you seem way more useful than you actually are.

“Hm. I wouldn’t say my workplace is where I find issue. Indeed, I think that’s where I worry about things the least.”

“Okay so this is gonna make me sound like a total basic bitch, but maybe being in a cult is like, adding to your sense of paranoia?”

Rose takes a big swig of her drink.

“Maybe…” she sighs. “Whatever. I wanted to have fun with you tonight.” She looks up at you and quirks a smile that looks like she wants something.

“Hey windy boy, care to fly over there and change the movie?”

You groan loudly and put your bottle down. You float over there, sure to complain plenty as you do, and plug in a genuinely-bad movie for the two of you to laugh at. When you get back to the couch you “insist” that Rose let you scoop her up so you can lay down with her on top of you.

“Ohhh nooo,” she drawls, smiling and “struggling” against you as you pick her up. “Avast, ye foul cur!”

“Nay I say!” you say, settling the pillows so your shoulders aren’t digging into the arm of the couch, “By my socks, I shall have thee cuddled!”

Rose, tipsy enough to find that absolutely uproarious, snorts loudly before laughing at you, and you join in, the heavy, tired thing in your chest alleviating a little.

“By your socks?” Rose asks, snorting and still chortling.

“And the lint in my back pocket-” you snigger and Rose bursts out into another round of laughter, “-but I don’t think- ahaha- you would really care to know about that-” And it’s really not that funny, but you are just tipsy enough that it absolutely is and also shenanigans are such a welcome shift from the conversation you were just having.

“Uuuh. Bluh. Rose, am I spending the night?” you ask, suddenly remembering that you have, like, responsibilities and moral obligations and shit..

“Mhm,” Rose hums, cuddling in a little closer and squeezing you like she means to convey that you’re not going anywhere.

“Cool.”

telectobiologist [EB] began pestering taintedCadence [TC]

EB: Hey Gamzee!

EB: I’m gonna spend the night at Rose’s place, okay?
ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering taintedCadence [TC]

You and Rose spend the movie either laughing or talking shit about said movie (which leads to more laughing). Rose finishes off her third drink and you get about halfway through yours by the time those credits are rolling, and both your stomach and face hurt from how hard you’ve been laughing. You feel good. One hand in Rose’s hair and one dangling off the couch, bottle balanced between your fingers, laughter in the air around you as much as it’s in your lungs, you feel warm. Home. Solid.

“Well aren’t you two a sight?” Kanaya asks, entering the living room. She smells like pipe tobacco and baking pastries. You know this 1. because she’s in the room and you’re in the room and there is air in the room 2. because she has to bend down close to you to give her wife a kiss hello.

“Rose, I thought you were done with getting drunk?” she fusses.

“I am not drunk,” Rose says, lifting up a finger. “I am definitely tipsy, but I am not drunk.”

She’s still like, speaking totally coherently and not slurring words or anything, so you’re inclined to believe her. You, however, are also tipsy, warm-faced and laughing at just about anything that is even a shadow of funny, so perhaps Kanaya’s judgement is better to trust than yours? No, no, Rose not slurring words is a good indicator, you shouldn’t doubt yourself on every little thing just cause you’re a tad sauced.

Kanaya seems amused by the distinction and kisses her again. “Well, definitely tipsy, I am going to ‘coon.”

“Oooo~” Rose waggles her eyebrows at Kanaya.

“There’s nothing sexy about that, love,” Kanaya says with a tiny head shake.

“Everything about you is sexy,” Rose counters.

“Good night Rose,” Kanaya says through light laughter, and kisses her once more before heading upstairs.

Rose twists and starts slipping off of you so she can watch Kanaya go of the stairs, big, goofy grin
on her face. Then she does a positively textbook dreamy sigh.

“Hey John, John,” she says, still staring at the spot where Kanaya left.

“Yeah?”

“I’m married to her.”

“That’s gay.”

“She’s in love with me.”

“Like mega ultra gay.”

“We’re married and in love and raising a million babies together.”

“I’m pretty sure you’ve ascended past normal gayness and have achieved a gay singularity.”

“How the fuck did I end up this lucky?”

“Well you are the only Light god left,” you muse, “So like, that sorta makes you the luckiest person ali-”

“John I love her so much,” she cuts you off, planting her face into your chest, and you give her scalp a little skritch because it sounds like she’s tearing up.

“You’re a big gay mess,” you say affectionately. You finish off your drink in one go, and then scoop Rose up again.

“And where are we going now?” Rose asks, flushed in the cheeks and holding onto you as naturally as breathing.

“Kitchen, for water, then bathroom because otherwise we’re gonna have to get up and pee in the middle of the night and that’s never a fun thing to wake up at like, 3am to, and then bed,” you say, because that is a simple enough course of action that your tipsy + sleepy as fuck brain can manage it without getting derailed. God you didn’t even realize how sleepy you were until moving was a thing that was happening. You set Rose down in the kitchen which is nice because while you’re strong and she’s small, you are- again- sleepy as fuck.

Water drunk, pisses taken, and teeth brushed (so THIS is where you left your travel toothbrush, back into yourylladex with that thing!), the two of you change into your god tier pjs and flop into bed together. You shift close and Rose cuddles right up to your side, fitting neatly into the crook of your arm. You barely get your glasses off before you are both passed the fuck out.

Morning comes in the form of Kanaya- fully dressed for the day in a cheerful Jade shirt, a flowing red skirt that you still believe is just altogether too much fabric for one article of clothing, and dangling bangles- throwing open the curtains with a cheerful “Goodmorning love!”

Rose groans and then honest to god hisses at her, scrunching down in your hold and turning her face so her eyes are entirely hidden in your shoulder.

“Absolutely not,” she groans, voice scratchy from sleep.

“Rise and shine, Rose! It’s beautiful out and you promised to go with me to the Farmer’s Market today!”
Rose makes some unintelligible gurgling and does not actually move from her spot on you. Kanaya tosses off the covers.

“Up and at ‘em sweetheart!”

“You know,” Rose says, lifting her head and twisting it just enough to give Kanaya a one-eyed glare, “having a hot gothic vampire girlfriend would be a lot more aesthetic if you weren’t so damned sunny in the mornings.”

“I’m a morning person, what can I say? Up up up,” Kanaya taps Rose’s calf rapidly, high pitched tinging coming from her bracelets. Then she turns to you, “Good morning John.”

“Morning ‘naya,” you greet, lifting the arm Rose isn’t on to give her a quick two finger wave.

“My apologies for the impending invasion of your personal space,” she says, and then proceeds to scoop both you and Rose up, Rose flopped on top of you and you cradled in Kanaya’s arms. You blink rapidly and pat groggily at Rose’s hair, hoping she’s comfortable all bent like this.

Kanaya deposits you on the couch, in much the same position she found you in last night, and then makes her way to the kitchen. “What would you two like for breakfast?” she calls.

Rose mutters something that could be anywhere from festertongues to disgruntled morning mumbling, and you call back, “Coffee and muffins, please!” The please, of course, is your addition.

Fuck. Your glasses are still on the side table upstairs. You squint and take a deep breath in, then let your Breath out. You can… not see, but perceive your glasses, and you call up a wind to lift them and guide them toward the stairs. It’s hard. Air doesn’t like to be constrained, but you have to be careful with what you’re doing with your glasses. You don’t want to drop or break them, or hurl them at a million miles an hour into the nearest wall or cabinet. Still, you don’t actually want to have to get up (even though this might be taking more energy) so you continue to swirl your Breath around your glasses as you guide them over the railing of the stairs, into the living room, and all the way over to the couch where you pluck them out of the air. Rose pokes you in the tongue, which you had been sticking out between your lips in concentration.

“Hey!” you bark, sharp and playful at her. She chuckles and you slide your glasses onto your face.

“Incredible,” Rose says softly, admiring. “Wish I could do something actually useful with my powers like that.”

“Hey,” you say, frowning. “What are you talking about? Your powers might be a little fickle but they’re far from useless!”

“Oh please, John, like our session would have been even remotely changed had I not been there,” she says, voice still rough with morning, “I served absolutely no functional purpose.”

And you’re honest to god floored. Not only because Rose- your Rose- your Rose who your whole session hinged on, needed, required, is saying this, but because it’s your own thoughts about yourself coming out of someone else’s- someone so much more precious’s- mouth.

“Rose don’t be ridiculous,” you say, pushing her hair out of her face, “We wouldn’t have been able to do jack shit without you there. Rose, we all need you, so much, you’re such a vital part of our team, we never would’ve gotten off the ground without you!”

She opens up her mouth and you know what! You are not going to sit here and listen to your best
friend talk shit about herself. “No, Rose,” you interrupt, “No weird self-loathing out of you. We 
needed you, bigtime. You’re so important to everything that happened-and you know what? Fuck 
functional purposes!” You’re getting a little caught up in it now. “I’m fucking sick of everything 
being about function! Who cares what our function in some malicious cosmic Game was? Fuck the 
Game! And fuck the idea that it’s allowed to dictate which lives are useful and which aren’t!
You’re our friend and you kept us alive and I know for a damn fact that you’re the only reason we 
all survived, and even if you had been free-loading like me or some shit that still wouldn’t matter 
because you’re our friend!”

Rose stares at you a beat, and then- bitterly, bitterly, bitterly- starts laughing.

“Free-loading like you?” she asks, disbelief clear in her voice. “You? You, John, our leader and 
savior?”

“Oh quit with that bullshit will you?” you ask, too tired for this, letting your head fall back against 
the cushions propped against the armrest and closing your eyes for a moment. Rose props herself 
up over you, fires in her eyes and mouth squared into a frown.

“No, you quit it with the bullshit John. You do not get to help every damn last one of us in the 
Game and then call yourself a free-loader, and you do not get to help every damn last one of us 
with our emotional problems at the drop of an overly-accommodating hat and then refuse to talk 
about your own problems.” She jabs a finger into your chest. “We’re going to talk about the mire 
that is currently muddling up your brain and you are going to feel cathartic about it.”

“Yes mom,” you say, caught a little off guard and trying to cover up with humor. Well, not cover 
up exactly, more like… lower the intensity?

Rose’s hand comes up to your face and you lean into her palm, cherishing her warmth, the fire that 
flows through her veins like wind flows through yours.

“No, you just said so yourself, we are not defined by our function in a Game that only 
ever wanted to use us.” She kisses your forehead. “And even if we were- which we’re not- you did 
so much for us, John. We never would’ve succeeded without you.”

You bite back a “no, you never would’ve succeeded without my powers, which I stumbled ass-
backwards into and anyone could’ve gotten.” She’s trying to comfort you. You should let yourself 
be comforted. It’s morning and she’s warm and dear to you and you don’t want to argue about the 
fact that she was successful because she was smart and quick thinking and resourceful, and you 
only managed to help because you had people holding your hand every step of the way and 
happened upon magic that you hadn’t even worked for.

Instead, you wrap your arms around her and press your face into the hood of her pjs, her hair 
tickling at your eyelashes where it slips under your glasses, and take a deep breath. She smells like 
Rose and Rose smells like home and you anchor yourself in the 
her of it all, take solidity in her 
warmth and stave off the sudden need to Become with the weight of the woman in your arms, 
bright and burning as the sun she summoned, brilliant as it’s light.

She pets your hair and you hear the sound of the oven being opened coming from the kitchen. 
Then Kanaya reenters the living room/recreation block and you loosen your hold on your friend.

“Hey love,” Kanaya greets, and Rose squints at her, right up until Kanaya is bending and kissing 
her.

“I’m still mad about this whole morning thing,” Rose says, and Kanaya laughs and fusses with her
hair a little, the bangles on her arms tingling with the motion.

“How’s the hangover?” Kanaya asks, licking her thumb before attacking a little cowlick.

“Mm, hardly noticeable. Could be just the body-unhappiness of a regular morning variety, since it is, as you might have observed, morning.”

You snort and Kanaya lifts you up so she can sit on the couch too, Rose sandwiched between the two of you. You get fully and solidly third-wheeled, Rose lifting her legs up onto Kanaya’s lap and using you as a backrest as the two give their good mornings. Bah. Married people. It’s cute though.

You use the time to text Dave, and then take a selfie with the two of them being disgusting and in love in the background to send to him.

EB: I have been reduced to nothing more than a chest for her to prop herself up on :(

Dave sends back a picture of him, wrapped up in a blanket, leaning on Karkat, who is dressed in- to your ultimate shock and surprise- not his normal sweater. You’re so busy staring at Karkat’s regular, perfectly plain t-shirt (he… has arms..?) that you almost forget to read the words during the ten seconds of the snap. You get the first few words but end up needing to replay it.

TG: lmao gay also did you know that karkat is really fucking pumped about this whole you two going on a date thing he even woke me up early with this shit

ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering carcinoGeneticist [CG]

EB: Gay

CG: WHAT

EB: Dave just told me about how you’re all excited and shit

CG: THAT TRAITOR

CG: ALSO WE ARE STILL ON FOR TODAY RIGHT?

EB: Duh!

CG: I’M JUST CHECKING

EB: <3<

CG: FUCK YOU <3<

carcinoGeneticist [CG] ceased trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

You send Dave another snap and then go back to regular pestering until the timer beeps at you and you all meander into the kitchen. You have coffee and cinnamon muffins, mostly quiet and companionable, until you sigh and rub at your eyes. You hate to break a mood, but you suppose this is just a mood that needs broken.

“So hey, Kanaya, you’d say you’re a pretty pragmatic person, right?”

Kanaya tilts her head, just a little. “Yes…” she says cautiously.

“You deal with things, like, sensibly. And you don’t cotton to nonsense.”
“Generally, that is what I attempt.” Rose doesn’t seem to know where you’re going with this either.

“Okay so please don’t get mad or think that I’m bossing you around,” because you really don’t want to pick a fight with Kanaya, of all people, “but you and Gamzee should really try to reconcile. Or at least talk to each other.”

Annnnd yep. There goes the good mood. Kanaya immediately avoids your eyes, shoulders hunching, but at least she doesn’t look like you’re being presumptuous or something.

“You are… correct, yes.” Okay excellent score you have put a foot in the correct direction now you just need to not put it in your mouth.

“I can like, mediate if you need me to? Be there to break the tension or something?”

“John, while I appreciate it, you do not need to solicit me. I am capable of talking to Gamzee on my own, I just don’t want to.”

“Kanaya, you’re very pretty, but I don’t actually like you like that at all and also you’re married.”

“I meant in ash.”

“Oh.”

“And while I’m sure you’re very handsome, I do not like boys and any attempts at swinging ash with them has ended drastically, so thank you but hard pass.”

“Look not everything has to be romantic okay? Obviously if you don’t want me, like, involved in the conversation that eventually needs to happen that’s fine but I could be like, a mood… person… or something.”

“John does help alleviate tense situations,” Rose says in your favor.

“I’ll consider it. But yes, you’re correct, I know, I need to talk to him. I’m just… uncomfortable with the idea.”

“Because you feel guilty?” you ask. Kanaya presses her lips thin and hunches her shoulders more. It occurs to you that that was probably maybe not the most tactful thing to say.

Kanaya softly folds her arms on the table and lays her head down in them.

“It’s okay! We all do shit we’re not proud of sometimes,” you say, like right now for instance. “You’re just suffering from hindsight, it happens to everybody! Once you talk to him about it it’ll be better,” you promise. “It helped Dave and Rose. And Terezi, apparently, since I guess that’s what they were doing during our big reunion thing? I don’t really know, but they’ve been hanging out on pretty much good terms!”

Kanaya sighs, sits back up, and nods. “Yes, yes, I’ll- I’ll get on that. Not today though.” She turns to Rose and puts on a smile, “Today, someone special is taking me to the Farmer’s Market.”

“I did, indeed, agree to such an activity.”

You smile. Crisis successfully averted. You chat a little about Kanaya’s plans for the day, and then you stand, stretch and head out. You kiss Rose on both cheeks and give Kanaya a hug, then Become and take to the sky.

You suppose if Karkat is dressed up(?) for your date then you should put, like, nice clothing on
your flesh body too, as like a way of being polite and also because you’re going to look better than Karkat. That’s a pitch thing to think, right? Dressing up for a pitch date specifically because you need to be hotter than them at all times? That feels pitch.

So you funnel yourself down in through your windows and into a body, and rifle through your closet. Would it be tacky to wear the same thing you wore when you… the only word coming to mind is “proposed” but that is absolutely not the thing that you did. Solicited him? Asked him out! And probably, yeah. You end up wearing a white shirt and throw your dark blue jacket on over top of it. You wear your nice jeans, too.

Oh fuck you forgot about picking up Gamzee! God, what the hell, you could’ve brought him home with you! Oh well. You guess you’ll just make two trips. You fly over to Callie and Roxy’s house and let yourself in. You are met with the sight of Jane and Callie on either side of Gamzee, holding his arms as he attempts to balance on a unicycle. Roxy is on the other side of the house, furniture scrunched to the side so there’s like, a sort of clear path through, and she’s encouraging Gamzee to start moving, things are easier to balance once in motion.

“Hey guys,” you say quietly.

“John!” Gamzee shouts, looking to you so suddenly that even with Jane and Callie holding him up he manages to lose his balance and fall off the unicycle. He does not seem bothered, only scoops the thing up and bounds over to you.

“John, brother, Jane is a miracle-worker,” he tells you, and he all but has little cartoon stars in his eyes he’s so excited about this. “Turns out my unicycle was all up and set to it’s highest long adult setting and that’s why I never did was able to reach the pedals!”

“Oh,” you say, because uh- even you would’ve known how to adjust a unicycle, you’re pretty sure.

“And Jane then did shrink it down and I fit on it now! I’m all up and learnin’ how to get my ride of it on!”

“That’s great!” you say, happy for him. Roxy comes over and flings an arm around your shoulders, dramatically sagging on you.

“So how you doin’ John?” she asks, and you tell the four of them about your day with Rose yesterday, plus Kanaya being all sunny and unhelpfully cheerful this morning. Callie seems positively delighted by the news of Aradia and Kanaya, Rose and Eridan, and Jade and Aradia.

You wonder if she’s going to draw fanart (that’s a dumb thing to wonder, of course she is).

“Does Davepeta know?” she asks you.

“No, and I’m pretty sure Aradia doesn’t want Davepeta knowing about her crushes just yet. And by pretty sure I mean she said that outright.”

“Rumormill’s a churning now, John,” Jane tells you. The two of you have been doing a “casual” dance of ring around the foyer, her inching closer to you and you inching away to keep your distance. You don’t know what prank she’s trying to pull, but you’ll not be the first to lose a battle in this war of the Gambit. “Davepeta’s going to hear sooner or later.”

“Well, let’s just hope Aradia gets girlfriends before that happens then!”

“You and fishsis going to get her hair done sounds like it’ll be fun,” Gamzee says. “You figure she’d mind if I dropped in for a part of it? I ain’t sure if I’m one to spend the whole while in a motherfuckin’ salon, but it could be fun for a time.”
“You’d have to ask her, but I don’t think she’d mind!”

“Yeah, Feferi’s a sweetie,” Roxy chimes, “One of the loveliest girls alive!”

“She’s very pretty,” you agree. Roxy giggles at you.

“That too.” Oh, she meant lovely personality. Well, Feferi is definitely both!

You check the time, and if you’re going to get Gamzee home and still have time to fly to Karkat’s instead of just zapping there, you should probably get a move on.

“Well, I’ve got a date with Karkat today—”

“So we’ve heard,” Roxy cuts in, waggling those wiggly eyebrows of hers at you. You blow a raspberry at her.

“—which means I should probably get a move on. Gamzee, you ready to head home?”

“Actually brother, I’ve got something I want to give to Karkat, so we just go thereways together, yeah?”

You shrug. “Works for me.” You say goodbye to Roxy and Callie, then desperately fish around in your sylladex. Do you have a hand buzzer anywhere? No, no that would be really fucking obvious (plus, you don’t), so you just wave goodbye to Jane, knowing glints in both your eyes.

“So am I taking you home after you give your thing to Karkat or what?” you ask, speeding up the air around you so it’s not deafening anybody, but not matching it to your speed enough to give the illusion of still air.

“I can make my way on my own, take myself on a walk and get my thoughts all out and airing, brother. See sights or what have you. You and Karkat just go have your fun,” he tells you, nuzzling your cheek with his nose, which is (momentarily) breathtakingly adorable. You feel a brief urge to kiss him, but really the only part of his face that is readily available is his lips and while you want to, that would be a bad place for you to kiss. So you settle on bonking the side of your head against his, and he chirps at you in a similarly adorable fashion.

You touch down on Dave and Karkat’s porch and change back into your regular-person clothes. Karkat, the ass, has locked the front door, so instead of just letting yourself in you actually have to knock, what the fuck. He opens it and his mouth is already open, but whatever his first word was going to be gets cut off when he sees Gamzee with you, smiling all soft and sweet at him.

“Hey bro,” Gamzee says.

“I wasn’t fucking aware this was going to be a double date,” Karkat says, and you chuckle.

“Nah, bro,” Gamzee says easily, unbothered, “Johnbro here did give me a lift on his way from Rose’s hive to yours, and I have something for you so here I am!” Gamzee decaphcalogues a purple folder and opens it, pulling out a picture. You float around and hover over Karkat’s shoulder, staring at it as well.

It’s a picture of Karkat, a side profile. The style is a little wonky, in a way that you think is half intentional and half unpracticed, but it’s very nice.

“I know it ain’t the best,” Gamzee says, scratching at his hair and not looking straight at Karkat, “but I did get to thinking on you last evening when Roxy and my little girl and me got to makin’ art
together and I’m awful out of practice but—"

“Shut up.” Karkat interjects, “Shut up you fucking disaster, shut up you stop it right there, it’s perfect.” Karkat reaches up and aggressively swipes at an eye with the heel of his palm and you swing around to look at his face.

“Oh my god you’re tearing up!” you “helpfully” observe.

“John shut the fuck up and fuck the fuck off!” he screeches, going suddenly loud. He wipes a little more aggressively at his eyes, momentarily trying to use the sleeve of the sweater he is not actually wearing and then shoving the picture back at Gamzee to hold while he dries his eyes.

“Fucking shit you’re adorable,” you say, and laugh when he screech-clicks at you and shoves his hands into your belly. Karkat grabs Gamzee’s hand and hauls him into the hive-house, stomping his tiny little feet, and you catch sight of Dave, who has his computer on his lap and is a little human blanket burrito on the couch.

“Hey,” he greets, and you swoop over to him while Karkat and Gamzee head up the stairs.

“Hey!” you say, sitting on his chest with an impish smile.

“Yo, Egderp, what have we said about the assbones and my person?”

“Uh, you love my ass and wish you could touch it with your gross sweaty palms like some crazed casino goer fondles the lever of a slot machine when they’re convinced that tonight’s their lucky evening?”

“Damn, you got me there,” Dave says. You don’t remember when he used that metaphor, but you do remember him saying that to you… sometime or another. “However, you are still in the way of me seeing my computer screen.”

“Pity that,” you say simply, kicking your legs a little. Dave stares at you, face flatly unimpressed, and the longer the silence stretches on the more you are compelled into giggling. Finally your laughter causes Dave to break too and he huffs in humor through his nose.

“You’re ridiculous,” he says fondly.

“And you’re one to talk,” you counter. Karkat returns and grabs you.

“So!” you start, “What are we up to on this date you’ve prepared?”

“I would prefer not to,” you say mildly. “Bye Dave! Bye Gamzee!” you call over your shoulder. Dave gives you a wave from the couch and Gamzee, a smile from the stairwell. You silently hope Gamzee has a safe and uneventful walk home, one that lasts significantly shorter than Karkat’s walk to your place back right after Gamzee first showed up, and then reach out and grab Karkat’s hand. Because what is the point of a quadrant if you can’t hold hands with your boyfriend when you’re on a date? Karkat mutters but gives your hand a squeeze.

“So!” you start, “What are we up to on this date you’ve prepared?”

“Well you’ll find out, now fucking won’t you?” Karkat asks, and you pfft. You stare at his arms. You don’t even mean to, you just sort of end up staring at him as he drags you along like a balloon. Specifically his arms.

“Looking at something, asshole?” he finally asks as you two stand at a crosswalk, waiting for the
“Your arms,” you say, because what the fuck.

“Yeah I gathered. I have those, you know.”

“I never see them though.”

“Oh my god John will you please stop staring at my arms like I’m walking around with my fucking nook out or something? They’re just arms! You have them, Dave has them, Jade has them, just about fucking everybody has arms! It’s not that weird!”

“Okay but I can see yours now.”

“This is ridiculous.”

“Your arms are ridiculous,” you comment as he hauls you across the concrete. “Like seriously I’m pretty sure they’re like, a full three shades of grey different from your face!”

“You shut your whore mouth.”

“They’re so cute honestly?” you say, half making a big deal out of them to be an asshole and half doing it because what- in Karkat’s words- the taintchafing fuck?

“If you’re seriously going to be this easy to impress I might as well turn around and take you home now, fuckwind, clearly your nibblet-sized brain isn’t capable of processing anything even remotely outside of your perceived norm and anything beyond this will cause your panmatter to spill out from your ears in oozing grey fleshsquiggles.”

You do not reply with words, merely reach out and poke his forearm.

“God DAMNIT John you are so unbelievably impossible about every little fucking thing you fucking-” and so starts the rant, which you listen to only for enjoyment’s sake and do not actually remember anything of. Karkat’s a real funny dude. He keeps it up until you reach your destination.

You find yourself at an arcade! Oh, this will be fun! You’re going to beat Karkat at all the games. All of them!

You start with DDR. You drape your jacket over the back bracer and grin at Karkat, who is looking pretty smug himself. Oh, you’ll see how quick you can wipe that grin off his face. You ask him if he wants an easy song to start and he says only if you think you can’t handle him, and it is so on.

You fail miserably.

You’ve got better rhythm than him, only by a little but you do, and it’s the only thing that saves you from getting your ass absolutely handed to you. Karkat’s more active than you and a whole hell of a lot more fleet-footed, plus you’re a little (quite possibly a lot) more top-heavy than he is.

You lose with unbelievably spectacular flying colors, it’s really quite impressive. He wins some rounds, you almost win others, but it’s fun to dance and you’re sweating and breathing hard by the time you finally call it quits, giving Karkat the satisfaction of you being the one to throw in the towel.

“Loser buys the winner lunch,” Karkat says, and you protest. You then remember that he has access to the same communal pool of wealth as you and the rest of the gods (bless Roxy for getting all the new trolls into that system so you didn’t have to, bless Roxy and her brains and her
charitable heart so much), but you protest. You don’t want to do jack SHIT for Karkat, especially after being so thoroughly trounced. He makes you though, by logic of he beat your ass so bad, and he really, really did.

You blow your straw wrapper at him when you sit down and chew with your mouth open very deliberately in his direction for a few bites. Then you grow annoyed with your own antics and close your mouth, and listen to the sweet sound of Karkat calling you a disgusting glutton who likes to roll around in your filth.

“Is that why I’m dating you, do you suppose?” you ask, and he kicks your shin under the table. You kick back and that goes on until one of the employees starts whispering to another employee, looking your way, and you two have to settle yourselves down. No point in continuing to roughhouse when you know that if you were any other person, you would’ve been asked to please either contain yourselves or leave.

After lunch you soundly defeat him in those racing games arcades have. He throws in the towel before you get past halfway in your quest to win as many rounds against him as he won against you in DDR. His early defeat is vindicating, but you want to get a couple more points on him in a game you know you can win. Oh well. You move on to skeeball, and that one’s a little more even, you winning just about as many rounds as Karkat. You keep at that until you’re both bored of it, and then go play some fighter games.

You chat while you’re there, of course, talking about your day with Rose, Karkat’s adventures with Dave and Jade to a pool before fall really sinks its teeth into you and makes it too cool to swim, a movie that’s come out recently that Karkat recommends and you have yet to see. You both text Dave while you’re there. You don’t know what Karkat and Dave are talking about, but in your pesterchum he is avidly telling you a new comic idea that seems to be about 90% bullshit and 10% blink-and-you-miss-it subtle imagery. He seems very excited about the cows.

It’s a slow upward climb, but when you finally break even with Karkat’s DDR score, you immediately insist that you’re bored of the arcade and don’t want to do these games anymore.

“John,” Karkat says, scoffing at you with a disgusted look of disdain, “Do you seriously think you’ve been the only person keeping score? I know you just want to get out of here with your pride pieced back together and adhered with children's glue.”

“Pfft, what? Nooo,” you say. You are the most convincing liar, it is you.

“...Wanna play lazer tag before we leave?”

“Oh HELL yes,” you say immediately, changing your mind at the drop of a pin. You have to zip up your hoodie, or else your white shirt will make you a walking, visually screaming target. Karkat’s black shirt is much more practical and his smirk lets you know that he knows that.

The other arcade goers are excited to be playing with gods, and you promise them that you won’t use your flight or Breath powers to get the upper hand. That would take the fun out of obliterating Karkat’s ass!

“Funnily enough, you thought you were going to win at DDR, too,” he says, examining his blunted claws with “interest.”

“Funnily enough, I’m more competent in a fight than you are,” you counter.

“Neither of us use riflekind as our primary specibi, John.”
“And yet, somehow, I’m still better than you,” you say with a pleasant tone of voice and an airy shrug.

“Don’t count your cluckbeasts before they’re hatched, moldbreather.”

You hear a titter of giggling from those around you, and then the game is on. You’re part of the blue team, Karkat’s on the red team, but scores are individual. It’s all a matter of who gets hit the least and who hits the most, in this game.

You don’t last long before your brain goes somewhere… not bad, but- off. You’re taking the people around you seriously, like you’re in an actual fray, like your opponents have actual guns. You play a little more by the book than your mortal coplayers, checking behind the props, glancing over your shoulder, keeping moving and hitting Karkat and your other opponents as fast as you can and then darting away with laughter. You can’t help it. You’re trying to just relax and have a good time and you’re also trying to win but you’re also trying not to die, which is not a reasonable fear but here you are, acting like your opponents might be able to injure you even though you know for a fact in your brain that they can’t.

You beat Karkat by three points, which gets you whooping and bragging loudly, making sure to be as obnoxious as possible and let everyone in the arcade know that you beat Karkat’s sorry ass in lazer tag (and, by extension, the entire arcade). He insists that you leave and you link your arm with his, folding your legs up underneath you and floating along so you can be at a comfortable height for arm linking.

“Was that a little weird for you?” you ask Karkat, “The lazer tag.”

“Oh thank fuck; it happened to you too? The…”

“Game mentality?” you suggest. You know he doesn’t need the clarification that you’re talking about the Game, not lazer tag.

“Yeah. Which is weird, because none of the imps even had guns.”

“Heheh… well, I still had fun though!”

“Me too, it was just,” Karkat squints. “A little weird,” he says, echoing your earlier phrasing.

“It helps that I gave your ass a good beating.”

“You won by THREE points!” Karkat shouts, affronted.

“Yes but I won,” you agree, grinning at him. He elbows you but you’re floating and linked at the arm so it doesn’t work as well as he hoped it would. You want to ask if that was the whole date or if you’re going to go get dinner now, because you did spend a LOT of time in that arcade. Time flies when you’re trying to beat your boyfriend enough to strike even with him.

Boyfriend. People… generally kiss boyfriends. Like on the mouth, especially during dates.

“Hey Karkat can I kiss you?” you ask halfway between an office building and an ice cream shop. Karkat splutters at the abruptness of your question, grinding to a halt on the sidewalk, and gives you a look of exasperation.

“Yes? God, fuck, John, where did that come from?”

“I dunno, I was thinking about how you’re my boyfriend and we’re on a date and I want to kiss
“Well- okay!”

“So like I can kiss you right now or..?” you ask, definitely not stalling because you’re the one who brought it up and stalling would be stupid.

“I was under the impression that since you asked, right now was in fucking fact the time you wanted to do it, yes,” he says with an eyeroll. You set your feet down on the sidewalk and stand in front of him.

“Like in the middle of the sidewalk?” you ask, feeling warm in the face.

“Where exactly did you think we would be conducting our kissing?” he asks, also going a little flushed.

“I dunno, don’t people usually squirrel away in some dark alley to make out or something, instead of clogging up traffic on a perfectly respectable slab of concrete?”

“You sound like Dave and also like you want to make like a cheap concupiscent hire for a quick and dirty.”

“Ew.”

“So are we kissing or not?” he asks, and you kind of wish he would take charge and you kind of wish you hadn’t opened your big mouth.

“I- guess so?”

“Okay, well, I’m amiable to the idea so if you would stop hesitating like a tepid little writter that shits in his diaperstubs about it then maybe-”

You are incited and nervous enough that you bend down really quick and press a kiss to his lips, cutting off his string of insults, and then pull away shortly after. You’re both blushing hard. God, it’s not like you haven’t even done this before, at greater length, back when you first got together. Karkat drops his head to your chest and laughs, and you start laughing too, nervous tension bubbling up out of you and you lace your fingers with Karkat’s.

“We’re disasters,” you say affectionately.

“Yes, but we’re eachother’s disasters and fuck, my brain is still fucking reeling from that.”

“Were you really pining that bad over me?” you ask, a little disbelieving and a lot wanting to hear it.

“John there are not words to describe how hard I’ve been pining over you. A lot of fuckasses have been pining over you, but I’m the asshole standing with you in the middle of downtown flipping his shit over kissing you so take fucking that, losers: Karkat one; Universe a billion!”

You laugh and nudge him so you can press another kiss to him. It’s still just skin but it’s also still a gesture of affection and romance, a gesture that you are levelling at Karkat, and he is levelling at you, and that’s still making your lungs do weird things in your chest.

“You wanna go somewhere… not public?” Karkat asks, and his blush skyrockets as his eyes skitter away. You feel your ears heat up too, also suddenly unable to look directly at him.
“Sure,” you say, “where to?”

“Dave’s at my place.”

“And Gamzee’s probably made it back to mine by now.”

“Speaking of that asshole,” Karkat says, letting go of your hand and digging his phone out. He texts, waits a moment, and texts again. “Okay, he’s fine.” He puts the phone away and then turns back to you. You try to think of somewhere kinda secluded that you two could possibly make out. Your thoughts flit briefly to a hotel but that is WAY not something you’re willing to do, the connotations alone would embarrass you too badly for you to do anything. Although there is a certain hilarity to the idea of renting a hotel room specifically to not stay the night AND not do anything dirty in it.

“We could go out into the middle of nowhere and kiss in a tree like a couple of teen novel protagonists,” you suggest.

“And how do you suggest we go from downtown to a tree in the middle of nowhere?” he asks. You grin, and he tries to dart away from you but to no avail! You can fly and he has short legs! You scoop him up and he screeches at you, and then you use your retcon powers to zap yourselves to a tree in the middle of nowhere. You send a silent “you’re welcome” to the fake romantic teen novelist who is writing your tale, allowing them and all your avid, adoring readers to appreciate the fact that you have retcon powers and can just do this kind of shit on a whim like this. You have plenty of time to do it as Karkat has opened his mouth and is screaming to high heaven. A flock of birds takes off in the distance.

“Can I just-” Karkat screams, panting loudly, “fucking reiterate- how much I FUCKING hate you?”

“Sure,” you sing, playful and smirking, Karkat balanced on your lap and your ass sitting nice and pretty at the highest branch of the tree you’re in that you’re pretty sure won’t break with your shenanigans. Karkat, emboldened with fear and adrenaline both, grabs you by the jacket and kisses you. You giggle, which makes you accidentally nick one of your lips against a tooth of his, and so naturally you have to nip him in order to get him back. You get a hand up in his hair and hold him around the small of his back with your other arm, solid and keeping him close to you. He couldn’t fall even if he wanted. Eventually his hands move from your jacket to encircle your neck and dig into your hair, which you are the exact opposite of opposed to.

Kissing in itself is a tiny bit boring after a little while, once the “Yes Karkat gesture-of-affection yes!!!” dies down, so you make it your business to find plenty of other ways to keep yourself entertained, like tugging at his hair and pinching at his hip and letting the arm that’s holding him relax juuuuuuuust enough that he starts slipping and he starts screeching so you can snatch him back close to you and kiss him again. He keeps you from getting bored too, blunted claws scratching occasionally at your scalp, pulling at your hair (a lot harder than you tug at his, too! The jerk), digging his nails into the back of the crook of your neck where he clings to you altogether to hard. His fangs are a joy to navigate too, all almost-danger and fun puzzle to figure out how to kiss without harm coming to your delicate human fleshlips.

The thing about makeout sessions is that they eventually have ends, and it’s a little awkward to wind down with kissing your hate-boyfriend, while sitting in a tree, with no fucking idea about what you’re doing and just pulling shit out of your ass as you go.

“So uh…” you say, not really wanting to be the one to say you want to leave in case Karkat gets the wrong idea and goes into hysterics.
“Yeah,” he says, as if that could mean anything in this situation. Well, you guess it can mean anything, and that is why it is so unhelpful.

“Wanna get out of the tree now?” you ask, pretty sure that Karkat will agree immediately and loudly to that, which he does. A split second later you get the best idea, and instead of zapping back to where you were, you instead take the boyfriend who is already conveniently in your lap and unable to descend the tree without your help, and you take off in flight.

“John!” Karkat screams, clinging around your neck. You laugh at him and soar only higher, nuzzling in between his horns.

“This is not fucking cute!!! You are terrorizing me for your own personal enjoyment you fucking fuckhead!!!”

“I think it’s adorable!” you shout back over the wind, which is twisting and twirling around the two of you in heady excitement. You’re buzzing and holding him close to your chest, his legs kicking at yours, and you try to finagle him into flying bridal style but he is even more obstinate about that.

“Absolutely not!!!” he shouts at full volume, and you huff (the sky huffs too) but let him dangle in your arms.

“You’re so weird!!” you complain. Then you let go of him with one arm to take out your phone and send the group chat a picture of the two of you, Karkat screeching at you to put your phone away and hold him, asshat, and you grinning with devilish delight.

EB: He still won’t let me carry him normally!

Dave replies almost immediately with a picture of himself in the kitchen, the door of the fridge just barely visible on the side of the photo.

TG: yeah hes a little weird about that shit but hey im not one to make sweeping commentary on the state of a dudes flying hangups

You would reply, but Karkat’s tone makes you think that it’s probably time to actually listen to him and go back to the ground. You zap to a patch of sidewalk a little ways away from where you were, about halfway between the arcade and his hive-home, and he wheezes, hands on his knees and redfaced. You roll your eyes at his theatrics.

“Gee, and people call me a weenie!” you tease, wondering if maybe you pushed it a little too far this time.

“Shut your fucking face you blithering, feculent shithole! I am going to eviscerate the ghastly husk you pass off as a body and string your entrails from every flagpole so that the entire fucking world can see your detestable impudence!”

Nah he’s fine.

You pat him between the horns condescendingly and he screech-clicks at you. You open a snap from Terezi, which is of her, leaning on Davepeta, Jake in the background of the image chatting with something that’s glowing and making his face look kinda blue so you can only assume it is Tavros.

GC: 1S H3 ST1LL B31NG 4 WR1GGL3R 4BOUT OUR “L1TTL3 MOM3NT”

What.
“What?”

“What?” Karkat asks, still breathing hard but seemingly having calmed down enough to interact with people without screaming insults (or wordless screeching).

You show him the snap and- you hadn’t figured this possible- he turns a little redder.

You send back a snap of Karkat, which he tries to avoid by throwing his hands up to block your camera but he is too late!

EB: He just turned even redder what do you mean by “little moment”

You send her another snap, fending off Karkat’s attempts to grab your phone one handed (it helps that he’s short and you’re flying).

EB: Terezi you can’t just say that and then not respond!!

Terezi sends back a snap, and even though her eyes are all red and pretty much look exactly the same across all spaces of their surface you can tell she’s rolling them at you right now. Davepeta’s hand is in her hair.

GC: 1T’S NOT 4CTU4LLY 4NYTH1NG SP3C14L. 1 FL3W 4ROUND ON LOT4F W1TH H1M ONC3 4ND H3 W4S SO P4N1CKY 4ND SCR33CHY H1S F4C3 H34T3D UP 4ND 1 3V3N G0T TO SM3LL H1S BLOOD COLOR

She sends another snap quickly after that, this one with Davepeta making a rude gesture in the background and grinning at you.

GC: H3 W4S SO SNOTTY 4BOUT B31NG 4N 3MB4RR4SS1NG L1TTL3 PUP4 TH4T H3 M4D3 M3 PROM1S3 NOT TO T3LL 4NY OF TH3 OTH3RS 4BOUT HOW H3 FL1PP3D H1S SH1T JUST B3C4US3 1 TOOK H1M FLY1NG

Another snap, and you’re flying out of Karkat’s reach now, taking screenshots of all of these because this is absolute pure gold and what kind of boyfriend would you be if you weren’t absolutely positively evil to Karkat, who is shouting at you to come back down here and you are in so much trouble.

GC: SO 1 C4LL3D 1T OUR “L1TTL3 MOM3NT” TO G3T H1S 34RTH GO4T, B3C4US3 H1S IS TH3 B3ST 34RTH GO4T TO B3 GOTT3N, 4ND H3 COULDN’T CORR3CT M3 W1THOUT OUT1NG H1MS3LF 4S 4 DUMB CRY1NG WR1GGL3R WHO SH1TS 1N H1S D14P3R STUBS >:]

You laugh. Karkat swears. “What the fuck is she telling you!?” he asks, and you eheheh even harder.

“Just that you’re a dumb wriggler who shits in his diaper stubs, nothing new!” you call down, and Karkat sets to... you’d almost call it dancing if it wasn’t so pissed in nature. You take a short video and send it to Terezi, his swears coming through loud and clear on your phone speaker.

EB: His goat REALLY is the best one to be gotten :B

She sends you a picture of herself with Davepeta crowding into the screen, face pressed up next to hers making a kissyface at the camera.

GC: 4H4H4H Y34H 1T 1S! >:]
“Fuck Johnbert if you don’t get down here right this fucking instant I will leave you and walk to Jade’s and tattle.”

You grin at him, waiting for what he just said to hit him.

He very slowly closes his eyes, neck and shoulders tensing and scrunching up, and he facepalm 2X combos on you.

“I meant John Fuckbert.”

“That’s not what you said though.”

“Maybe it’s what I fucking meant, consider that? Maybe your new name is Fuck, dubbed thee by your fucking god and hereby renamed after the singular emotion that you are capable of inspiring in others!”

“Fuck is an emotion now?” you ask, swooping down and hovering next to him.

“Yes and I feel it every single goddamned time anyone so much as mentions your person even in passing. People could say ‘oh it’s windy out today’ and I will feel, in the pit of my digestive sac, the deep and visceral emotion of ‘fuck.’”

“So glad to know that you keep me in your thoughts!” you chime cheerfully, which makes him swat at you so you just swoop on in and kiss him. Yes, your gay thoughts were right, it is entirely too satisfying to cut Karkat off with kisses, this was the best idea.

“You are a barfstained crotchnugget, you know that John?” he asks you, a whole hell of a lot quieter now, ears all cute and red.

“And you,” you poke his nose with a finger, which he attempts to bite, “are dating me!”

You watch him try not to grin, and fail, and he grabs you by your jacket again and thunks his head down onto your chest. If his horns were longer, they might be poking into your sternum, but they’re not so they don’t. You pat his shoulders and try to think of something flippant to say, but you’re grinning like a moron too so you guess this is a point in both of your books.

You lift up and he tightens his grip in your jacket. “Oh no, you ballooney asshole, you are staying right down here where I can hold your fucking hand.”

“Ohhhh noooo, not hand holding!” you call, allowing yourself to be dragged down to an appropriate hand-holding altitude.

You pick on him the entire walk hive-home, and he insults and screeches at you much the same. You spot a hose that’s on in one of the yards you’re approaching, and subtly (luckily for you, you don’t have to be that subtle, Karkat’s totally absorbed in his quest to insult you) use your Breath to snake it over to you. It’s got one of those sprayers on the end, so you’re hoping the pressure is gonna come out nice and hard when you snatch it up off the ground, level it straight at his face, and pull it on. He gets soaked like a dream. He also swears at you like a dream, hissing and spitting and clawing at you, which you- being able to fly- can easily avoid, hovering just out of his tiny little reach and laughing at him like an asshole.

You may or may not be laughing so hard that you forget that jumping is a thing that people are able to do, and Karkat can accomplish a whole hell of a lot when he’s feeling particularly determined.
Your head hits the dirt so hard your glasses go all askew, and you “oof” when Karkat’s ass hits your gut. He’s straddling you, snarling, dripping water from his hair and shirt and arms, and you— you just grin. Lift your hands up like you’re halfway to stretching, a mockery of surrender, twist your head so he can get a good look at your throat, lift your belly up off the ground with you shoulders digging into the grass simply because he’s small, and you can, and him having you pinned means nothing. You swear you see the yellow of his sclera go blood orange.

Then he’s kissing you and dripping water from his hair onto your forehead, fists in the collar of your tee and fangs at your lip, not breaking the skin just yet, but a reminder that he can. You laugh and slide your tongue along his top lip, just to see if it feels anything other than weird. It doesn’t. But his lip is soft so you do it again and grab both his cheeks. You feel another person’s breathing enter the area, or, well, hover inside the newly opened doorway of their house, and you suppose you should shove Karkat off and leave. You would’ve found it weird to have two gods making out in your front yard, one of them soaked to all hell and the other giggling like an asshole (which you are). But, like, you’re an asshole, so you stay right where you are until Karkat pulls back, and subsequently notices them, and gives a little squeak of embarrassment, which you laugh at as well. He hauls you to your feet with rapid, stumbling apologies, and you just laugh and laugh and laugh.

“You asshole!” he quietly shrieks as he storms away from them, mortified, “You knew they were there!”

“For like, a solid minute, yeah!” you say happily, fully aware that they can hear you and delighting in that. Karkat delves out of intelligible words and merely gives you a guttural, clicking-chirping noise. It’s adorable and humiliated and you love it. You sneeze and check yourself for damage. You’ve got two spots of wet dirt on your shoulder blades where they dug into the grass, which you brush off easily, and your forehead is a touch damp, but you definitely came out the winner in that exchange.

“I’m fucking changing,” Karkat mutters as the two of you enter his home, and you snort at him as he storms up the steps. Then you’re caught a little off guard. Gamzee has not gone home, apparently, Gamzee has stayed here, with Dave. They are cuddling, unprompted, by themselves, on Dave’s couch. Neither seem to have noticed the two of you enter, but to be fair they seem pretty engrossed in what they’re talking about.

“...Like, I don’t really have anyone to talk to about this y’know? Like Rose is my human moirail or whatever and I love her to bits and appreciate everythin’ she’s done for puttin’ the splinters of my shattered psyche back together, it’s no easy fuckin’ task, I owe her fuckin’ everythin’ for helpin’ me sort out the massive piles of shit that is my PTSD assbrain, but she can’t- like it was clear that for all her faults her mom still loved the shit out of her, y’know? She had issues that Rose has every right to be sufferin’ from but she loved her.”

“Uh-” you interrupt, “-should I leave?”

“Hu- oh, hey John,” Dave greets, and his face is a little flushed. You note that he has a bottle of hard cider in hand, and Gamzee has a bottle of hard soda. Nothing to make you think they’re drunk, but definitely something that makes you think that the two of them are a lot more comfortable around each other than you had thought they were. ‘Nah, dude, we’re just talkin’.”

“Ohay,” you say and float over, a little unsure of yourself. “I thought you were gonna go home?” you ask Gamzee, not even hiding the fact that you’re delighted (if befuddled) to see him here with Dave.

“Yeah man, but then this brother and I got to talk’ bout our feelin’s an’ shit.”
“We got cider and soda in the fridge if you want any,” Dave offers, holding up his bottle as an example. Neither of the two of them seem keen on moving from their position taking up the whole couch, Gamzee sprawled out on top of Dave with his head on his chest, Dave backed up against the arm of the couch.

“Thanks; are Karkat and I… interrupting anything?”

Gamzee waves at you and Dave shakes his head. “Nah, dude, I’m not saying anything I wouldn’t tell you two anyway.”

“Same here, brother,” Gamzee says, and he sounds kinda sleepy. Which, like, it’s not even dinner yet, but he is drinking alcohol so you guess that’s reasonable. You give Gamzee’s hair a ruffle and then leave to get yourself a cider, which gets Dave protesting your lack of him-touching mildly, more routine or reflex than actual insult that you didn’t muss his hair. You crack open a cider, and take a sip as you float back into the living room/recreation block. Dave and Gamzee have shifted so they are no longer laying on the couch, but sorta sitting/reclining on it. Gamzee is still definitely on Dave though.

You sit next to Gamzee quietly, not interrupting Dave’s rambling trail of, “But like my brother, right? The fuck was his problem?” He finishes off his cider and sets the empty bottle down. “I’ll tell you what was wrong- that asshole was Lord Fuckin’ English’s puppet. He had that thing since- what- his whole life? No way in hell he didn’t make eye contact with that freaky thing. And you,” Dave nudges his head gently against Gamzee, “can confirm that that shit fucks ya over. I was raised by Time Demon Extraordinaire, once removed. That’s what was wrong with him. And that is so much bullshit.”

Dave’s Texan accent is a lot more pronounced when he’s tipsy, flustered, or emotional, and you think he might be all three at the moment.

Gamzee croons sympathetically, and you take another swig from the bottle. You feel like you should say something, because your friend is talking about deep shit and as his friend it’s like, your moral obligation to help, but the atmosphere kinda reads like you’re an outsider to this conversation, someone who cannot fully understand Dave’s plight.

And Gamzee… can? Definitely about the possession thing, yes. You’ll ask one or both of them about Rose’s mom later, you guess. What does Ms. Lalonde have to do with things?

There’s a lapse in the conversation, and you can hear Karkat stomping around upstairs.

“...Hey John,” Dave starts.

“Mm?”

“If I say a thing, can you just like, not remark on it or bring it up in future conversations ever? Preferably just straight up forget about it and leave the remembering to Gamzee only?”

“I could leave the room?” you offer.

“Nah, just like, shit I don’t want you to get concerned-tee-em about.”

“Okay?”

“I miss him,” Dave confesses, sudden and before the word has even fully left your mouth.

"Oh brother," Gamzee breathes, putting a hand on Dave’s knee. His other one starts bouncing and
he reaches up under his shades to briefly rub at his eye.

“It’s dumb and stupid and I absolutely, positively never want to see him or his shadow ever again, I am so fucking happy he’s dead and that I don’t have to deal with him anymore, but I miss him.”

Your heart squeezes in your chest. Oh. That’s what Rose’s mom and by extension all of your parents/guardians have to do with anything.

“I know, brother,” Gamzee says into Dave’s shoulder, “I understand.”

“It’s dumb,” Dave says, voice a little higher than it should be, breath a little tighter, and you should’ve left the room because you can’t just sit here and do nothing, but Dave asked you to.

“Hey Dave,” you say, so soft you almost fear he didn’t hear you.

“Yeah?” He reaches up under his glasses again and Gamzee gives his knee a squeeze.

“Can I- would you like a hug?”

“Dude, always,” he says, tone joking but you know he means it. You set your cider down and go to his other side to hug him, his body sandwiched between you and Gamzee.

“Hey,” Karkat says in concern once he’s down the stairs, hastening over and taking Dave’s face into his hands. Dave laughs, and it’s a little wet but he’s not crying- which shouldn’t be a surprise at all but you guess you’re kind of used to Gamzee now. “Hey, shitfit what’s wrong?” Karkat asks softly.

“Just talking about feelings,” Dave says, leaning into Karkat’s palm.

“Disgusting.” Karkat gently pushes hair out of Dave’s face.

“I know right, who the fuck ordered these? Send ‘em back with a strongly worded letter to the manager ‘bout unethical products and the sheer audacity in sendin’ me things I ain’t ordered.”

Karkat kisses Dave briefly, and your mind quietly flips to wondering about what kissing is like for Dave, if Karkat’s lips are more than just, like, skin, or if he too must do things to complement the kissing and keep it interesting, and how that would even work when you’re not pitch. Maybe you should think less of kissing Karkat about that and think of kissing someone you’d be “flush” for, but you don’t really have anyone so your brain uses Dave as a filler token. Would that be interesting? Would you like kissing Dave? Well, not Dave, obviously, but a person like Dave.

“And you,” Karkat says, turning to Gamzee and giving the hair at the bottom of one of his horns a scratch, which makes him trill, “I wasn’t expecting you to still be here.”

There’s an inquisition after an explanation in there, and Gamzee smiles up at him and shrugs. “Got to talkin’ with this here brother, we got more in common than I figured and he’s a real chill bro to slam with.” Your brain shifts to wondering if kissing Gamzee would be interesting. In a totally platonic way!! You clearly do not actually want to kiss Gamzee, but you’ve just got an idle hypothetical about how interesting kissing Gamzee would be.

“Oh god, you two are going to rapidly become insufferable aren’t you?” Karkat asks with mild horror and all three of you chuckle at his expense. Kissing Karkat is interesting because you do other things to make it interesting but kissing Gamzee- how would that work?

“Don’t go throwin’ a tantrum over this brother,” Gamzee says with a lazy grin, “I’m sure between
the three of us here we could find plenty better for you to get yourself all worked up over.” Would kissing Gamzee involve- what? What could you do during kissing Gamzee? His hair is nice. Long. You could play with it while you kiss him. In a totally hypothetical situation, of course! You’re not gay. Just gay for Karkat! Karkat only.

“Nah, man, don’t you know?” Dave asks, smirking and eyeing Karkat.

“Lay it on me brother,” Gamzee says, looking at Dave but also smirking. You’re just straight up grinng like an asshole and Karkat looks unamused.

“No one except John can win at Karkat tantrum bingo anymore. The gold medal is all his, rookies, you want that shit? Too bad, it’s John’s. Bitches be tryin’ but John here be flyin’, sendin’ Karkat straight up to the stratosphere, but my ears are clear, and I can hear him screaming though I can't never catch the meaning, cause when he gets frothing there’s no signs of stopping and.”

“Okay, we get the point asshole!”

“You love me,” Dave chimes, smiling smugly at his boyfriend. You might be preening a little. You are the winner of Karkat tantrum bingo. You have your little place marker set down squarely on top of his spade, that bingo prize is all yours. And the prize is kissing him and also more tantrum bingo, which you will continue to win.

“I absolutely do and also all of you are in time out, since you are apparently a gaggle of fucking pupae.”

“Kay,” Gamzee chimes sleepily, letting his head flop back down on Dave’s shoulder, and Karkat huffs.

“Looks like we’re staying for dinner guys,” you say, still grinning, “Oh no! Anything but that!”

“S been too long since we ate dinner together anyway,” Gamzee says, and you roll your eyes.

“I’ve been gone for like, a day,” you protest.

“You been gone for too damn long is what you been gone for, brother.”

“Isn’t he just the worst,” Dave teases, turning to Gamzee, “Like seriously here we are, dying of attention starvation, and he goes off and spends time with other people!”

“Hey! You’ve been seeing plenty of me lately,” you tease back, “you’re just a greedy little attention whoring cuddleslut.”

“I’m gonna get that on a shirt.” You know Dave well enough to know that, with virtually unlimited access to funding, that is an honest promise.

Dinner is pizza rolls and bananas, which is a meal type that you are pretty used to and clearly not depression food, since the four of you are eating it as a regular meal. Jade and you text through all of it, her telling you about the exciting stuff she’s up to and you able to share your day enthusiastically in return! Apparently she and Feferi, now no longer dead or being a little dreamy-creepy just for shits and giggles, have hit it off really well! She sends you a snap of the two of them with slushies, and you are reminded that Feferi is a very pretty, pretty, beautiful, gorgeous pretty lady. You wonder if kissing her would be interesting on its own merit. She has so much hair, you could keep yourself so entertained playing with it if kissing got boring.

Do you have a crush on Feferi? Is this what a crush feels like? This might be what a crush feels
like. You know you like the way she looks, a lot, and she’s friendly and personable and you’re looking forward to spending time with her. But is that just regular wanting to spend time with her? Well, maybe not regular-regular, but like, she’s new! She’s cute! She’s fun and friendly! You felt much the same about Roxy, so is this a crush? Was what you felt for Roxy even a crush? You don’t know if what you felt for Roxy was actually a crush or just really liking your new, pretty, smart and exciting friend. You guess that you have a crush of Feferi if you had a crush on Roxy, since it’s about the same feeling, but you’re not even sure if that feeling was just a want-to-be-friends crush or a like, romantic crush in the first place!

Also during dinner, Dave accidentally slurps his water really loudly, then decides to beatbox into the glass. Gamzee starts pulling words out of thin air and all you can actually tell is that they’re rhythmic and they rhyme (usually). You honestly have no idea what he’s saying, but it’s not like you can pause and rewind in real life so you just smile delightedly as Karkat expresses agitation. He claims that his kismesis is now the only one who is failing to assault him, and isn’t that irony Strider? And you just really can’t have that, so you take your mostly-empty bottle of cider and start hooting on it in time with Dave and Gamzee, who briefly cheer and then resume.

“I’m not fucking talking to any of you assholes anymore,” Karkat pouts, and it’s adorable. You laugh at him, which throws the other two enough off-rhythm that you all quit.

“Dude, you are fuckin’ terrible at rapping, what the shit, that was the best shit I have ever heard come out of anyone’s mouth, holy fuck,” Dave tells Gamzee as you slide up close to Karkat, grinning.

“Hey Karkat.”

“Aw, shit, thanks bro? Motherfuck, I’m just in it for a good time.”

“Karkat. Karkat.”

“And what a hell of a time that was. Ohhh, my god, I don’t even think I would’ve understood half the shit coming out of your mouth even if I was fully sober and raptly paying attention, takin’ notes like a scribe on that shit but damn I can’t puzzle it out.”

“Karkat.” You poke him, he continues to ignore you.

“Shit bro, just gotta let anything that up and flows in you flow out, ya dig? Can’t be up and dictating as all what the rhythm asks. Just gotta go with what my heart says is right.”


“Sweet.”


“What the bulge shitting, dogcock sucking *fuck* do you want John?” Karkat eventually cracks. You shrug.

“Stop ignoring us.”

“I’m going to shove this fork through your eyeballs.”

“What, like, both of them? At once?”

Karkat chucks a stressball out of his sylladex at you, close range and high speed, so your only
option is to Become like an asshole and render his efforts null. He screeches at you and Gamzee huffs affectionately, reaching over and petting Karkat between the horns.

“Oh no. You do not calm me from this. I am not to be calmed, not regarding this *fucking windy asshole* who needs to get his *ass corporeal again* so I can kick it into the next calendar year!”

“Oh please,” you say, pulling yourself down into flesh specifically to counter, “You’re too tiny to kick my ass out of the fucking air, much less displace me in time!”

Karkat is about to do something but Gamzee butts in, having gotten up and encircled his arms around Karkat’s tiny little waist.

“Maybe John ain’t gonna be a determining factor in whether I do take your sweet self and calm it down,” he says, and you don’t know a whole hell of a lot about pale romance but that really sounded like a “John had his turn, it’s mine now” kind of statement. Karkat’s certainly blushing. You d’aaawwww just to be on the safe side. Dave floats over to you and dramatically plants himself on your lap, which is more like the two of you are hovering in tandem and you just so happen to have your legs crossed, and he sticks his leg out really far.

“Great, you two go do boyfriend shit and I’m going to do shit with my friend boy Egbert here.” You snort and laugh at him, hugging him loosely with a contented smile. You have such good friends. You just. Thinking about Jade and Rose and Dave makes you so happy, you feel so warm and you just adore them all to itty bitty pieces.

Karkat snorts and rolls his eyes at his boyfriend, and then allows his other boyfriend to nuzzle him sweetly and the four of you sorta migrate back to the couch, Dave splayed out across all of your laps because he is indeed king cuddleslut. Oh hey, that’s actually a good one.

“Smile for the camera!” you tell Dave, and he of course does, because he is always ready to have his picture taken so long as he sees it coming, and you use the red finger pen to write *King Cuddleslut* around his face and decorate him with an emoji crown before posting it to your story and the group chat.

The four of you cuddle, Gamzee paying special attention to Karkat and wanting Karkat’s undivided attention in return. You play with Dave’s hair and he and you shoot the breeze (eheheh). You actually have more going on in your life to talk about than him, for the first time pretty much ever. You talk to him about Rose and Feferi and Kanaya and wait oh that’s right.

“Hey Gamzee,” you call, and his head snaps up in honest to god surprise. You’re sitting on the same couch as each other, and Dave quite literally has his legs on Gamzee’s lap, but you suspect he might have forgotten that the two of you are there.

“You and Kanaya need to-” you don’t even finish your sentence before he starts groaning, “-talk to each other soon, okay?”

“Bro,” he whines.

“Karkat, talk sense into him,” you order, because you love your friends and will gladly help them at every opportunity, but you don’t necessarily have to when his Life Coach Boyfriend™ is sitting right there.

“Fuck off, mayhaps?” Karkat quips, but then the four of you settle back to your groups of two. You tell Dave about the arcade date and he tells you about hanging out with Gamzee. The two apparently managed to fully, finally break all of the ice. Not even little cubes left bobbin’ around in
the top of the water, identifiable only when you take a sip and realize there are little see-through slips of ice left not fully thawed. That ice is broken and motherfuckin’ melted up in this bitch, they are tight bosom buddies now. You think this is maybe a way of Dave thanking you and also assuring you that the two of them are good, now. You also think that this is Dave being very excited over a Confirmed New Friend™ and honestly it’s adorable.

You, however, are tired. It’s been a busy… month. But you also woke up (got woken up) early this morning, and have had a busy day, so you pry Gamzee away from Karkat and kiss Dave’s cheeks goodbye. Karkat, you bid farewell by giving him a wedgie, then immediately scooping Gamzee up and zapping home. You don’t even bother flying away, too much of a risk he’ll catch you, even though hearing his reaction would’ve been absolutely decadent. You’re cackling anyway, and Gamzee is asking you what happened. You tell him what you did and he honks and laughs along with you. You are the best boyfriends, clearly. Karkat’s boyfriends, of course, not each other’s boyfriends. A couple seconds later you get a snap from Dave of Karkat, in their front lawn, screeching at the air.

TG: dude

You send back a picture of Gamzee and yourself, smiling “guilelessly.”

EB: Oh, did I do that?

Another picture of Karkat, much the same, but this time zoomed in and kinda blurry.

TG: dude

You send back a picture of you and Gamzee laughing.

EB: Sorry not sorry!! Have fun with your (our?) screechy boyfriend Dave!

A picture of his middle finger, no text.

You shower (you need one) and Gamzee and you brush your teeth together, you in your god tiers and him in a soft shirt three sizes too big for him and pants so ugly you could probably get a headache if you stared at them too long.

“Night!” you call to him and head to your room. You halt in the doorway. You feel Gamzee’s breathing, steady and unbothered, as it moves from the bathroom to his room, hear the door click, and feel Gamzee’s breathing bob as he settles into bed. You do not enter your room.

It feels small. Small and cold and unwelcoming. It looks exactly as it always had, the air is the same as it’s always been. It’s not stagnant, you have windows open (blinds shut). It’s not stagnant air, it is physically incapable of being stagnant air. The room cannot be small because it is the exact same size as it has always been. It is not cold, though that one it could be. It’s fall, things are cooling down, but the temperature is the last thing that is bothering you about this room. It’s not small, but it is. The air isn’t stagnant, but it is, it is, it’s small and still and wrong.

Your room, your home, the most familiar place in the whole world, suddenly feels much the same to you as looking at a stranger who has greeted you by name.

You shut the windows. Keep the cold out. You use your Breath, and do not enter. Instead, you go to Gamzee’s room, knocking softly on the door and feeling dumb but you don’t want to be alone tonight, not in that room, not that room that is too small, too static, suddenly alien.

Gamzee opens the door, and you feel bad because you had kind of expected him to just call out that
it was okay to enter or something. “Yeah, brother?”

“So uh,” you scratch at the back of your head. You fleetingly, briefly wish that Gamzee was feeling sad or lonesome or something so you had an excuse to be there already, comforting him with your presence. You wish you were more tired and had an excuse to just collapse in bed with him. Wish you had gone with him straight from the bathroom, instead of standing in your own doorway like a dumbass child frightened of the boiler in the basement. “You know how sometimes I sleep with you?”

Gamzee looks (surprised? awed? You can’t place the emotion) and then smiles at you, all warm and soft. He grabs your hand and leads you in, thankfully removing any need to further explain yourself. You float, weightless, and follow him to bed, where you curl up under the blanket with him. You can feel him breathing and you reach up to gently caress his hair with the arm that isn’t pinned under his body, holding him close.

“What are you doing tomorrow?” you ask.

“Whatever you’re doing?” Gamzee asks hopefully, and you pull him forward by the back of the head so you can place a kiss on his forehead.

“Sounds perfect.” You want to spend the day with Gamzee, you know that much. “G’night Gamzee.”

“Easy dreams, brother,” he snuggles in a little closer and you drift off to the feeling of his breathing.

The vine in Gamzee’s bong is blooming, perfect explosions of pale petals, the flowers absolutely littering the vine. It cascades down the side of the glass and has crawled all over half of the top of his dresser, the tip tossing over the side and dangling down the side of the wood. The leaves look like little blooms of their own, poking through with the white of the blossoms, simple but pretty as the flowers they grow alongside. You know well what it looks like, because you spend an indeterminate amount of time after you wake up just sitting in bed, blanket pooled in your lap, staring at the thing. Your brain isn’t capable of a lot of things immediately after waking up, so you are granted the quiet that comes with only observing the plant and wondering what the fuck it’s even called. You know you asked Jade. You remember asking Jade. And yet, “Autumn Clementine” is the only thing coming to mind and you know for a fact that those flowers are not oranges. Sweet Clementine? Was “sweet” part of the name? They look sweet. Sweet Autumn Clam. Sugary Fall Calabash. Wait. Isn’t calabash like, actually a plant? No, no that’s like a gourd, right? Or is that a type of music?

You have no idea how long you sit there, just staring. Then you remember google exists, and come up with the term “sweet autumn clematis” as well as figuring out that yes, calabash is indeed a gourd. You sneeze and sniff. It is WAY too early in fall for seasonal colds to start being a thing, also you’re a god so the fact that you can still get minor illnesses is bullshit, that sneeze had better have been innocuous. Gamzee wakes up from it though, jumping a little, then mumbling and curling into the pillow a little closer.

“Morning,” you greet softly, leaning back down so you can kiss his hairline.

“Mnmng bro,” he mumbles in return. You chuckle, pressing your smile to his forehead, and cup the back of his head before scratching lightly at his hair.

“I’m gonna get up,” you say. You feel… productive. You have energy. You wanna do things. You are going to clean your entire house.
You don’t get into these moods often, but you know better than to waste them. You get up and give Gamzee a brief, awkward hug, and then leave the room, feet on the floor. You go straight to your room, which still feels small and still but no longer intimidating, and you walk right in. Ideally, cleaning house would involve things like picking up the clothes on your floor and putting them in a hamper, maybe even doing laundry, but what you go for first is actually the posters on your walls. You pry them down, one by one, carefully. You use your hammer to pull those nails from your walls as one might use the bow of a violin, purposeful, certainly, but with love, a steady hand, and a certain amount of grace. You love these posters. You are careful not to rip them. But you think it’s time for a change, something different, something new. You even take down the SBaHJ poster and the “you’re welcome” picture Dave gave you. One by one, you lay poster on top of poster on the mattress of your bed, your sheets still scrunched at the base from the last time you kicked them off you and didn’t make your bed. You should do that. The unmade bed is bothering you, now. You pause, 3/4ths of the way through removing posters, to set the ones you’ve already collected down on the floor so you can make your bed, then put them back up there. Then you take your hammer back out, and you resume prying nails from walls.

“Uh, whatcha up to bro?” Gamzee asks blearily, standing in your doorway and rubbing at his eye before yawning.

“Taking my posters down.”

“Cool. Why?”

You shrug. “I dunno. It’s time for a change, don’t you think? I’ve had these things up since I was like, twelve. Some of them since I was eleven or ten.” A very small quantity have been up since you were thirteen, and thirteen just, but you don’t really feel the need to mention that. Thirteen on the dot is still basically twelve. “I feel productive today!”

Gamzee honks softly. “Time for a touch of vernal hivecleaning?” he asks.

You pause to make sense of that, so focused on your task that the meaning of the rarer words escape you for a second.

“Yeah! Spring cleaning in the fall, eheheh.”

“Cool, bro,” Gamzee says mildly, then wanders off.

You line all your posters up by the upper left corner, various sizes more apparent when you’ve got the top and left sides aligned, and then you roll them all up together and stick them in a poster tube you had laying around in the laundry room. Your walls are absolutely barren without the posters on them, but it doesn’t feel bad. You want to put things on it, but new things. Different things. And for now, the room feels so much larger without them there. You open the windows again, blinds too, enjoying the immediate tingle of moving air on your skin as it hits you. You still feel invigorated, so you gather up all your clothes and shove them in your hamper. You should probably do laundry, but you’re not feeling that particular brand of productive right then and there’s no sense wasting time on something that’ll just sap your productivity.

You just made your bed, but you unmake it, putting all the sheets and pillowcases and blankets you own in your hamper, which is now stuffed, meaning you have to do laundry but not right now. You just couldn’t. You couldn’t stand the sight of your ghosts sheets on the bed right then. How long has it been since you washed those sheets? They must be filthy.

You put some discs back on your CD rack, and shove the pendant you wore when you asked Karkat to be your kismesis into your magic chest. Bluh. This chest is… well, it was nice when you
were a kid. But you’re not twelve anymore. You should really get something more. Something less. Something not this, to put in this corner. You have your drawers but you can only fit so much in those, and also that piece of furniture is pretty short now that you are not. It might be time to replace some things. Get yourself an actual dresser, put it where your magic chest is now, get one of those antler things to put your various pendants on like what Rose has (hers is carved out of actual antlers, and has an elaborate “goth fae” vibe to it). You should get a mirror in your room too. You have to go to the bathroom for everything, but an actual dresser with a mirror on top sounds like a solid idea.

You could buy yourself a new mattress while you’re at it, too. Hell, you could get yourself an entirely new bed, get a double instead of a twin. Sure, you can fit a second person on there easily enough, and given how close you cuddle to your friends it’s not hard, but you could get yourself a bed where you can fit two people comfortably and a mattress like the one you have in the guest room. Maybe a new desk chair. Your desk is still perfectly serviceable but you could probably go for a better model of chair.

You pass Michael Cera and briefly pat the corner of the poster. He can stay. The clown pictures that your dad liked, however, you don’t want up anymore. You don’t want them at all. You take them down, and then gather up all the harlequin statues in your living room too. You shove them all into one captcha card that you label “clown shit” and resolve to deal with them later. You go into the study, which is also mostly unchanged. You have a safe, and your dad’s old art pieces, a desk that is empty of everything except a deck of cards, a hat stand with some hats and an umbrella hanging off of it, and the piano. You collect the things your dad put there- would have put there- and decaptchalogue your clown shit just so you can recapchalogue the whole entirety of it into one card. You remove the card from your deck (it’s not like you’re hurting for captcha cards) and put it into the safe. You don’t lock the safe, but if you did you have the number for it written on the bottom so it wouldn’t be hard. You don’t have much in the safe. Just an old pipe, a rumpled hat, and now the card. You’d put the first two in there just for the sake of putting something in, but now it seems to have turned into a little hull of things that remind you of your dad. You’re not trying to forget him, though it feels like that’s what you’re doing. You’re just trying to move on.

That’s where Gamzee finds you, cross-legged and guilty, in front of the open safe.

“Hey bro,” he says, “You did get your productivity on in the recreation block too, I did take note.”

“Yeah,” you say, “I don’t really want those posters up anymore. Clowns were more my dad’s thing. Even though it kind of turns out that they were his thing because he thought they were my thing?” You feel terrible now, but you try to keep it out of your voice. Keep yourself neutral, if not friendly, at the very least. You’re not trying to forget your dad. You’re not. You wish he were here (god you wish he were here) to tell you it’s alright that you’re doing this, that he understands. That you’re allowed to let yourself let this go.

Gamzee honks. “As is my fault,” he says, coming over to you. “Sorry.”

“Nah. Looking back, it was a lot of fun, but it’s time for a change, don’t you think?” You’re seeking validation for your own internal quagmire from someone who has no idea that you’re even doing that to him, but you want someone, even superficially, to tell you it’s okay.

Gamzee hands you a plate. He made cheesy eggs with bacon on toast for the two of you, and you set the plate in your lap so you can lift up the toast and take a bite out of it. “I wasn’t the dude of Time,” he tells you, “but if you are all up and sayin’ time has come to do its changing thing, I ain’t gonna argue with you here in your own hive.”

“It’s your home too!” you say around half a mouthful of egg, thoughts of your father settling
around Gamzee’s easy assurance and speared by the implication that Gamzee doesn’t have just as much a right to this space as you do. You hold a hand up to your lips, chew fast, and swallow. “I know, how about you help me redecorate? Do you wanna go furniture shopping later this evening?”

“Like what we did for the desk and table?”

“Yeah! But like, for new stuff to hang up and also for some furniture for my room. I’m thinking about remodeling a little.”

“Sounds like the motherfuckin’ bitchtits, bro,” Gamzee says with a smile. “You gotta eat first before you go flyin’ off though.”

“Yeah, not right now!” you say, picking up your toast again. “I wanna do more around here too like it’s been… forever since I last cleaned this place. Oh, you know what, I should send Karkat a snap of me cleaning, he’s been bugging me about how my place is a sty ever since always.”

Gamzee honks. “He does get a bit particular about cleanliness, that brother,” Gamzee agrees. You take a snap, Gamzee leaning in and smiling, still in both of your pjs, and send it to Karkat.

**EB:** House cleaning today!

You eat your toast and survey the room. You should do something with this space. An empty desk and emptier walls don’t really fill you with joy. Maybe you could turn this into a new guest bedroom, since Gamzee is living with you now?

You’ll decide later. You get a snap from Karkat, freshly showered and in Dave’s bed, Dave’s arm slung around Karkat’s waist just at the very bottom of the picture. You can picture the two of them, Karkat going to wake Dave up and Dave hauling his boyfriend into bed so he can cuddle instead, but Karkat being stubborn and remaining sitting up anyways. The mental image lights something warm and soft in your heart, and you’re so happy for your friends (kind of out of nowhere) that you have to take a deep breath and reel yourself back in. Sometimes emotions are just a lot.

**CG:** IT’S ABOUT FUCKING TIME. DO YOU WANT HELP? CAN I GO OVER THERE AND HELP YOU? CAN I CLEAN YOUR FUCKING HOUSE FOR YOU I DON’T TRUST YOU TO DO AN APPROPRIATE JOB ON YOUR OWN

You take a picture of Gamzee, who obediently smiles for the camera.

**EB:** I’m not on my own, I have Gamzee here with me!

Karkat sends back an eyeroll.

**CG:** BECAUSE GAMZEE IS EVEN MORE OF A TRUSTWORTHY HIVECLEANER THAN YOU ARE, YES, HOW COULD I HAVE FORGOTTEN?

You send him a picture of you sticking your tongue out.

**EB:** Well we will do just FINE by ourselves so no you can not help!

Dave ends up sending you the next snap, from Karkat’s phone. It’s a picture of him, still very much laying down, shades not yet on his face and a little dot of eye gunk visible in the corner of his eye.

**CG:** okay good bc this asshole is a damned fool if he thinks i am letting him go to jack shit today he jade and i have plans dude big plans
You send both Dave and Karkat’s phones a snap of you smiling.

EB: Have fun!

Having finished breakfast, you stand and offer to take Gamzee’s plate.

“Nah, bro, I got ‘em,” and then Gamzee has the audacity to take your plate for you. You let him with a raspberry and then go get a duster, which is in and of itself dusty so you go out back real quick and bang it off, shaking off a few spiderwebs and then rubbing them against the house when you remember that spiderwebs are not things that can be shaken off. You zoom around your house, using your Breath as much as your duster, and work from top to bottom. In your room, you pause and get dressed in a grey shirt and jeans, then continue. You end in the study again, dusting off the desk, safe, and then piano. At the piano, you pause, and gently lay your fingertips down on top of the wooden key protector. Is that what it’s called? The lid, maybe. Then you fold it back and run your fingers over the keys, setting down the duster on top of the piano so you have both hands free. You swallow, and then try to remember how the music went. You spent hours here in front of this old apparatus, surely you can pluck out a tune.

You can only remember one, as it happens, a sweet song you used to call a haunting refrain back when haunting was nothing more than one of Rose’s favorite words. You should get a piano bench. You’re too tall for it to be at perfect playing height anymore. You play, and you can no longer do it with your eyes closed, they’re open and focusing on the keys despite the fact that this is more by remembering the feeling, of how it sounded and moving your fingers to the keys that can follow the memory. You let the last note hold, proud of yourself and feeling a little sad again. Well, no, not sad. Some big long word that Dave or Rose or Jade would probably know off the top of their heads.

“Lovely,” Gamzee comments, when the music finally fades, and you get snapped out of your thoughts (that feeling) to look at him. He has also changed for the day, and he’s got a dirty looking piece of fabric folded over his arm, which you realize that is the banner from up on your balcony.

“Oh, good thinking!” you praise. It’s four years old and the last time you took it down you had just turned 17. After your 18th you just… stopped caring.

“Where should I put it?” Gamzee asks, holding the banner out a little and looking at it.

“Uh.” Where did you put it last time you took it down? “Maybe just toss it in the safe for now?” you suggest. Gamzee lays it on top of the captcha card and grabs the almost-entirely-unused bottle of window cleaner out of the laundry room that Karkat “gifted” you once a while back in a not-so-passive aggressive attempt to get you to clean up a little more often. He’d been very clear about the fact that he wanted you to take that bottle and use it on your windows, and you’d countered by spraying it at him for like two seconds and then forgetting it on the shelf that you keep your laundry detergent on. Actually, that shelf is home to basically all of your cleaning supplies, so you swap your duster for some disinfectant wipes and the bottle of clorox + a rag. You clean the bathroom, then you vacuum while Gamzee sweeps and mops the kitchen. Gamzee gets laundry going, bless him, and you empty out the dishwasher and hire the kid who lives down the street to mow your lawn for you again. She’s the only one who mows your lawn, and you have her number in your phone. She admits she was gonna come over and knock on your door here soon, since your lawn is messy and she’s trying to save up money for a new video game. You kind of want to buy the game for her as payment, but you remind yourself that there’s a sense of accomplishment that comes with working hard for a thing that you want and then buying it yourself. Just because the world has handed itself to you on a platter that you guess you helped make it on, doesn’t mean you need to do absolutely everything for everyone around you. You tell her you hope she earns the
money quickly and she texts back telling you she’ll be over with her dad’s lawn mower soon.

“I think this is a pretty clean house!” you praise, surveying your work with Gamzee. That went so much quicker with a second person.

“Motherfuck, I dare do agree my brother blue,” Gamzee says, looking proud as well. “You wanna go get that shopping on now?”

“Hell yeah!” you say excitedly. You quickly measure the dimensions of your room before you leave, since that’s an important thing to know, and then you’re off!

You two are absolute menaces in the furniture store, laying down on all of the beds just because no one is there to tell you to stop being jackasses, trying out various couches even though you’re not really in the market for a couch, and then deciding to buy a couch anyway. It’s blue as the sky at 5 during summer, and longer than the one you have now. All the better to have multiple friends over with, plus it’s super comfy. Like comfy enough to take an 8 hour nap on comfy. You end up really enjoying this one hutch, too, that has whimsical whorls carved into it, mostly brown but with bronzy, yellowy, orangy colors seamlessly worked in too. You could put the figurines in this hutch. Not shoving your dad away somewhere you’ll never see, but just gathering it all into one spot, on display but out of the way. You’ve got plenty of space in the empty study for it to fit.

You get a new bed, office chair, an actual bureau that comes up to about your diaphragm with a decently sized mirror on top, a chest of drawers that comes up to your shoulders instead of your hip (not even that), a piano bench, and a new small bookshelf. Technically your old bookshelf that you have in your closet is fine, but it’s old and gave you a splinter a few months ago.

You stop for lunch, because it is definitely lunchtime, and you sit on Noodles and Company’s patio to eat. The breeze is stiff, today. Not particularly hard but constant, and you can feel the breath of everyone in the area like you hear the hum of the fridge or the white noise of a fan. Gamzee’s voice is sweet and lilting, as it always is, and the sky feels more open and inviting, there as you sit beneath the umbrella that offers shade to patrons, than it has felt in a long while.

You take a picture of you and Gamzee, your arm around his shoulders, with your half eaten food in view and big smiles on your faces. You send the snap to everyone on your roll.

EB: Feeling great today!

Dirk and Dave respond in quick succession, and you open Dave’s first. It’s a picture of Jade and Karkat arguing over something, and you can’t be sure but you think that Aradia’s wingtips might be the red half-circles on the side of the picture.

TG: same here dude its a good day to be alive imho

Dirk has sent a picture of Jake and he, sweaty and also smiling (Dirk to a far lesser extent, of course), with Sawtooth 2.0 and Squarewave 2.0 in the background.

TT: So are the 2.0’s; they’re in rare form and kickin’ our asses.

“The what?” Gamzee asks.

“Oh, Sawtooth and Squarewave two point oh’s. You know the robots Dirk had with him in the medium?”

“He… made new ones?” Gamzee asks, sounding uncomfortable about that.
“Yeah?”

Gamzee doesn’t say anything, just takes a drink of his limeade.

“Is- does that bother you?” you ask, a little baffled.

“Just seems a touch weird that he would make robros the *exact motherfuckin’ same* as what he did before, don’t you figure?”

“I mean, I had my house pretty much the exact same as before the Game until you came along,” you say, uncomfortable now. “That’s why we’re out buying new things.”

“Hives and androids ain’t the same thing,” Gamzee says with a frown.

“I think you might be anthropomorphising them,” you say, “They’re just robots, and Dirk still had the blueprints and everything!”

Gamzee shrugs, “I’m wary ‘a the word ‘just’ in regard to somethin’ as person-like as them two seemed, but if you say then I guess it’s fine, yeah?”

His smile seems tight, so you pat his shoulder.

“Yeah! Just because they look human and have faces and automated voices doesn’t mean they’re not just wires and bolts and lines of code. Just really sophisticated wires and bolts and lines of code! It’s fine, and Dirk knows what he’s doing.”

Gamzee nods and you send Dirk a snap of your face.

EB: Careful not to get hurt too badly!

He sends back a picture of Jake with a pistol posed dramatically against Squarewave 2.0’s head.

TT: I included failsafes in their programmin’ this time.

A snap of your plate.

EB: The “this time” does not instil me with confidence, Dirk.

“Hey, brother,” Gamzee says, and you look to him. “Mind if next time we visit those bros I get my askance on to visit with the personalityless robros you do think ain’t nothin’ more than metal? I got… thoughts.”

“I mean that’d be up to Dirk, since they’re his bots.” You shrug. “But yeah? They’re harmless unless you prompt them into sparring mode, don’t worry.”

He gives you a smile and bonks his head down onto your shoulder. “Thanks bro.”

You kiss his hair and give his shoulder a brisk little rub, then turn back to pleasant, idle chit chat about how Jake’s ass has wound up on TV so… so fucking often. Gamzee laughs and jokingly says he’ll have to look up compilations that Jake’s fans have undoubtedly made sometime when he gets home. You laugh, but wonder how much he’s actually joking. It’s fine that he likes how Jake looks but thinking about someone else thinking about your cousin/son/dad like that is a little weird. A weird you’re used to, you guess, because it doesn’t really bother you that Jake has many, many drooling fangirls and fanboys and fannonbinaries, but actually hearing about Gamzee, like, enjoying Jake’s body on more than just an aesthetic value-
You two go to Crockpot and wander around the home living section with actual purpose this time. You get that bedset that you’d been looking at last time you were here, and you two find some really nice wall decorations. There’s this diamond shaped wrought iron thing with swirls that looks to be held together by sheer determination that you get. You find a clock that has a bunch of gears and metal lines coming out of it that is definitely inspired by the fabled Land of Heat and Clockwork that local god Dave Strider had to brave in order to create this new world (it’s pretty). After that, though, you have to get a thing for all of your friends to hang on your walls, so you pick out a painting of a sun where instead of little triangles as the sunlight it has tentacles, blue clouds hovering around it, and a “sticker” of plants springing forth that would take up a large wall. You think you’ll stick that behind the couch, hang the diamond and painting over the staircase where the clown pictures were, and put the clock over the fireplace. You ask Gamzee and he agrees on the sticker and sun painting, but suggests putting the clock over the stairs and the swirly four-quad on the stretch of wall near the front door, next to the picture of your dad. You go “huh?” He explains that the diamond actually has all four quad signs in it, if you look for them. You go “oh.” You’d just noticed that the big overall shape had been a diamond. He honks a laugh at you.

You end up going to new-world Lowes’- which is called Zahhnick’s- too. There you decide that it could be fun to change the light in your living room into a light with a fan, and select the one that has a big main lightbulb, but four smaller “lanterns” in Jane, Roxy, Dirk, and Jake’s colors. It has three cords attached to it and you can pull them to turn on/off the main light, the four lanterns, and the fan. While you’re there you also get a large poster to hang up in the study where the Cirque de Soleil large poster had been. It’s a poster of a starmap, up top, and a scene of changing landscape on bottom. Gamzee reaches out and touches the carnival looking part of it when you unroll it to get a look at it all.

“Land ‘a Tents an’ Mirth,” he says softly. “Shit. I ain’t seen that in…”

“You wanna look around and see if there’s anything Callie themed that you’d want to put up anywhere?” you ask as well.

“Yeah, brother, I am motherfuckin’ all kinds of down for both of those things.”

You go to a few other buildings, after Zahhnick’s, and you pick up a painting of crows. The lighting in the picture is very orange, and the frame is gold. Crows are kind of a religious icon, thanks to Dave and Davesprite’s association with them, sorta like peacocks were associated with Hera in Greek myth back on Earth A. And Earth B, technically. The orange lighting is enough to make you think Davesprite, and Gamzee chooses a figuring of a wizard, white wand in gloved hand, spinning magic in a swirl of skirts and lowered hood, and the base of the figure is just an explosion of creation, plants and animals and creatures of myth and stars all coming to life beneath The Muse’s billowing robes. It doesn’t actually look like The Muse, but nobody on this planet ever saw The Muse’s god tier outfit so you can’t blame them. You spot a picture of a pink cat, and then decide to go looking around for a painting that reminds you of Jasprose. How could you have forgotten her? She really needs to stop being a cryptid and come say hello sometime, you miss her. You settle on a picture of a sleeping cat as viewed through soap bubbles, and it’s very pretty artistry as well as vaguely pink in color.
Gamzee puts the Muse figurine on the table that your dad had once had a jester’s bust on, near the door, and you use your super mega awesome flying powers to attach the fan. You hang up your decorations where you thought they’d be, and then it’s a matter of furniture. Gamzee helps you load up the hutch with your dad’s old stuff, putting the figures behind the glass and the posters, rolled up, in the base, and you can put the empty captcha card back in your deck. You feel better about doing all of this after you put the figurines in the hutch, and you’d forgotten that you’d even felt bad, out doing all this with Gamzee like you were. But now they’re there, stored away but not forgotten, and you can swap out the stuff in your bedroom for the new stuff you bought. You hang up the Davesprite crow painting and Jasprose’s soap bubble cat painting in your bedroom, over the long side of your bed. It feels right to have them there. Gamzee approves too.

You order pad thai gai, Gamzee gets pad thai goong, and you both order a thing of pork fried rice to split. It’s dinner but neither of you really wants to cook. Then you both pull out your computer/husktop, and you just chill on the (new!!) couch together. You log into an MMO you haven’t touched since before you went to go get Gamzee, and everyone in your guild is happy to see you again, wondering where the hell you could’ve possibly gotten off to. You tell them that the God of Recovery came into this plane of existence and your life has been upside down ever since, which is not a lie, and they all get excited, asking if you live close to the gods, wondering if you’ve met/seen Gamzee or Jane or maybe even Jade, who is collectively heralded as the world’s prettiest goddess amongst members of your guild. They have good taste, but then again you’re always excited to hear people sing the praises of people you care about. You tell them that yes, you live in the same city as the gods, and yes you do see them sometimes, which are again, not lies. You just very much do not say anything about the fact that you are a god. These people only know you as Windsong, the goofball tank who they can count on to cover them when they heal you or they need to get somewhere without dying.

Halfway into the evening you take you and Gamzee’s trash to the kitchen to throw away, and pull out cookies Jane sent over back before your most recent prank war was initiated. Speaking of which. You hand Gamzee the plate in offering, a cookie already in your mouth, and you get online. You heard of this recent “send your enemies glitter” website and a quick google search reveals that yes indeed, it is a new website that you are going to be definitely using on Jane. You send her the tube and use Dave and Karkat’s house/hive for the return address (she’ll check, and recognize yours) (Roxy and Callie SHOULD be a way to get her to open it, but she’s crafty and will text her girlfriends. Dave will play along immediately because he is a good bro who has your back and is also always down for mild mayhem that he can be in on, should she text him). You click around a bit, looking for prank ideas, and then decide that this has been a good first move and you’ll work more on it later. You’re feeling a little tired now. Well, not tired. Mellow. Pranking should really be something you’re awake to be doing. Now you’re just sorta chill and shit.

You play video games until you have to stop and stretch your wrist, and you look over to Gamzee to ask if he wants anything cause you’re going to go grab something to drink from the kitchen. You plan on getting him something to drink anyway, because hydration is important, but stop right after setting your computer down on the coffee table. Gamzee hasn’t responded to your question at all. He’s just staring at his phone screen, which is off and dark.

“Gamzee?”

No response. You touch his shoulder but even that doesn’t work, so you lift him up and pull him onto your lap. He moves then, but it’s just to flop against you, head on your shoulder and arms around your waist, legs curling in close to his body. You should take the Strider’s advice and let Dirk make you a pair of iShades. Or, like, put computer functions in your actual glasses, since you need those to see, because you’re silently flipping your fucking shit and kind of wish you had the option of word vomiting at like Rose, or Jane, or someone who could possibly make this better.
Instead, you just wait it out, and Gamzee eventually comes back.

“Hey,” Gamzee says, blinking and looking up, then around, disoriented.

“Hey,” you echo softly. You reach up to brush hair out of his face. “That was a bad one.”

“Sorry.”

“You okay?” You glance at his phone, “Did something happen?”

Gamzee follows your gaze, and reaches out to grab his phone so he can put it in his sylladex. Then he goes back to hugging you, head on your shoulder. You hope that’s comfortable.

“Nothing feels real.”

“Oh Gamzee,” you say, sad and soft and petting his hair.

“I’m sitting here in a hive that’s warm and did get my help on to decorate it, with a boy as is soft and sweet and beautiful as the stars all hung pretty over the horizon, with a moirail that I can just sit down and get my chat on with, and my daughter is safe and alive and in love and I can just, just eat, and wear my sign and think and rest when I do get tired and I can’t-” Gamzee whines and starts shaking, so you pet and shush him, careful to avoid any “oo” noises. “I just can’t seem to get my acceptance on of it! Some days I do, some days I go all my waking without thinking on how ain’t none of this seems possible and now I got my acknowledgement on of the fact that this is happening but it doesn’t feel like it is. I ain’t got a fear of waking up no more but do have a feeling of shit not motherfuckin’ touchin’ me.”

You don’t know what to say. “It’s alright,” you say, because that’s rote and the only thing you can think of. “It’s alright, Gamzee, it’s real even if it doesn’t feel that way.”

He whines again, high and unhappy, and you wish you could make it better.

“I know-” he flounders for words, “I know I ain’t gonna wind up back there, not unless the Lord comes and plucks me from this place which seems less and motherfuckin’ less likely every day I do get to breathe without his interruption of the act, but- I don’t. I feel like half of me is still on that planet, digging with my fingers for keys, splinter singing in my pan and talkin’ over all thoughts I might have. Half detached, brother. Half not here. Like all of this is just- just a- not dream but not…”

You pet him as he tries to gather his thoughts.

“My pan is broken,” he says, so quiet you could miss it. “I don’t know what’s wrong but it’s broke and nothing feels real.”

You kiss his hair and rock a little. You really… really do need to get him to see a therapist because you have no idea how to help him, as dearly as you wish you could this is outside of your capabilities.

“Do you ever wish,” he starts, falters, continues, “Do you ever wish you could go back?” You blink. “Back to before the Game, back before all the motherfuckin’ shit that happened to us, when we were dumb and stupid and maybe things sucked but they ain’t never sucked as bad as what we did get put through in the Medium?”

“Yeah,” you breathe, because yes, yes you do, you do often.
“I wish I was six,” he says, and your shoulder starts to feel wet. “I wish I was a dumb pupa who still believed in miracles and mirth, who had a crush on a boy just because he was nice and made music and who ate shit I wasn’t supposed to and whose biggest motherfuckin’ concern was the fact that dad was never home.”

You can feel yourself tearing up too. “I wish I was thirteen,” you say quieter, “I wish I was a stupid kid whose dad was still alive and whose only friends were three strangers I met online, who felt that there was still plenty in life left for me and whose biggest concern was how many pastries my dad had made that day.”

Gamzee laughs and hiccups a little. He reaches up and touches your face and brushes his thumb along the underside of your eye.

“It’s okay if you want to cry too, bro,” he tells you gently, demanding nothing but letting you know that you can, you’re allowed, it’s okay to.

“Thanks,” you say, and your face feels tight but you don’t actually feel like crying right then. “Maybe sometime.” You bring up a hand to hold his to your face, and lean into it. He cries on you and starts talking, rapidly vomiting out his feelings about how his life sucked but never this bad, never as bad as all this, sure he was broken but at least he wasn’t absolutely ruined like he is now. You, in turn, share your own desires to go back to when things were simple, when things didn’t necessarily make sense but they didn’t need to, because you were young and still learning. You miss your dad. He misses his too. And of course, you can’t talk about this with your friends, that would be so selfish of you. Jade lived alone, isolated from human touch, on an island with only the Prospitians in her dreams and her pet dog for company. Rose was lonely and her mother was a drunk. Dave was straight up abused by his guardian, badly, physically, daily. There’s nothing worth going back to, to them. They’re loved, adored by friends and family they can touch, safe and cared for now. What is in the past, to them?

What’s in the past to Roxy? To Dirk? To Jake? Only isolation. What’s in the past to Jane, except that which she has now, just with more assassination attempts and less girlfriends. What’s in the past to Karkat, except crippling fear over his blood that marked him for death? What’s in the past for Kanaya, except a duty she didn’t have a choice in and a world without her wife?

“John,” Gamzee says, and he sits up on your lap to put his other hand on your other cheek, looking ardently, honestly, into your eyes, “my brother, you are never selfish.” He brings your foreheads together, still crying softly. “And you are not alone in this.”

You hug him. You don’t cry, but you hold him tight, a need for his warmth against your chest tight inside your core, a desire for the feeling of his hair itching in your fingers, a craving for connection that you have found, at least in part, in him. You do not cry, but as you hold him, some small form of catharsis does come for you.

You don’t want to sleep alone that night, and both of you are curious about the new bed, so he joins you in your room after you’ve showered and the two of you have brushed your teeth. You don’t know if you’ve told him about Feferi’s hair appointment and are about to tell him, but then you remember that he does know, and will probably swing by to say hello, so you just settle down to sleep. His fingers brush at your hair.

“You know you can talk to me, yeah brother?” he asks softly.

You snort. “Nah, that wasn’t me about to tell you anything that was me forgetting that you already knew that I was going to hang out with Feferi tomorrow before remembering halfway through opening my big mouth.”
He honks at you and kisses your nose, and it makes you feel warm. Your last thought is an idle one, an appreciation of how nice it is to fall asleep to someone else’s breathing.

Your alarm is a very unwelcome noise on purpose, because it will actually wake you up, but it is also annoying and unwelcoming and you grumble at it. Gamzee yawns and tells you to have fun with Feferi, then rolls over, taking all of the blankets with him. You pft and give his hair a peck before getting up and getting dressed. You’re not too self-conscious, and Gamzee does not seem to be looking, plus you’re not even changing your underwear or anything so you don’t bother leaving the room. It looks like he just fell right back to sleep anyway. You give your hair a brief comb through and wonder if the place you’re going to trims hair/takes walk-ins. You really, really do need to get it cut. You wear a light blue shirt with a cartoony picture of pastel pink cotton candy on it, the pink reminding you a tiny bit of Feferi, and wear a yarn bracelet Dave made for you back when Rose tried to get him into knitting. You think he still makes stuff sometimes, but with finger knitting instead of with needles and also very rarely.

You drop off an envelope with Judy’s lawn mowing money into her mailbox, and then check your phone. Jane is giving you a very glittery middle finger, and you feel your gambit spike.

GG: The first guerdon goes to you, but know that my retribution will be swift and sweet

You send back a snap of you grinning delightedly.

EB: Big words for someone who’s gonna be cleaning sparkles off of herself for the next week!

You take to the sky in a gust of air, body dissipated into you and you fill the sky. It’s another beautiful day, and everything is so blue and full and open you could stretch yourself for miles, or at least you feel like you could. Alas and alack, you’re at Tavros’s hive altogether too soon, and instead of spreading yourself out to your furthest limit you instead have to condense yourself down into flesh again. But that’s okay, because then there’s a very excited and pretty girl giving you a hug and an enthusiastic shello!

“Hi!” you greet in return, scooping her up off her feet and giving a little spin, because it’s fun and feels like the right thing to do. You are rewarded with very bubbly giggling.

“I’m so excited you agreed to come with to my hair braiding! It’s gonna take a long bass time!”

“You have long bass hair!” you say with an eheheh. You hear Sollux groan from upstairs, and Aradia comes out of the kitchen in pjs you don’t recognize and novelty sheep slippers, coffee mug in hand. She gives Feferi a kiss on the cheek and tells her to have fun, she’s going to Roxy’s so she and Eridan can talk about things.

“Eridan is at Roxy’s?” you ask.

“Mhm, the two of them were talking until late last night so he just stayed over,” Aradia informs you with a drowsy smile. Not anywhere her normal, terrifying variety, and you note that she is very cute when she’s still early morning (10am) sleepy. Her hair is even poofier.

“Did K- where did you get those?” you ask, gesturing to her slippers and sorta by extension the rest of her clothes.

“Oh, Kanaya took me shopping yesterday. Was a right asshole about the whole ordeal. Kept wanting to play dressup and making me try things on because I apparently,” Aradia does sarcastic little air quotes, “‘Reliably Favor That Which Is Too Large And Need Supervision So As To Prevent Ill-Chosen Purchases.’ Like who cares if it’s baggy? Loose clothing is easier to move
around in anyways…” she mumbles the last bit into her mug as she takes another sip. Feferi pats her back with a giggle.

“So it went well then?” you ask, trying to look at this from a pitch crush perspective.

“I’m gonna fuck the shit outta her, John,” Aradia said with sudden determination and ferocity. “We’re not dating yet but John. John, I am so. Painfully. Attracted to her.”

“Kanaya is very pretty,” you agree, a little off-balance at Aradia’s intensity. Feferi giggles again.

“Kanaya is absolutely lovely,” she says mildly, kissing Aradia on the horn, “and a-porpoise-ly frustrating to be a pitch partner to a certain special someone.”

“We’re not together yet but I swear on every god that exists, we will be.”

“You could do the really cliche thing and show up in her front lawn with a boombox,” you suggest, which is really just a copied suggestion from Rose. “Show up in an outfit that you get on your own and make it ugly just to piss her off?”

“A good idea,” Aradia says, thoughtful. “I don’t know enough about fashion to know what she would consider ugly, though.”

“Gamzee and Terezi would both be good options to ask,” Feferi suggests. “Just ask them what they’d pike to wear, and then get that in a size too large!”

“I’m gonna show up in a carnival tent,” Aradia says, eyes blown wide with the sheer goodness of her own idea. You and Feferi both break out laughing at the mental image, and you get the best idea.

“Socks with sandals! Socks with platform sandals!”

“The most obnoxiously barge ones we can find!” Feferi agrees.

“Mismatched earrings!” Aradia tosses in.

“GIANT neon green sunglasses!” you say.

“Douse yourself in glitter and walk all over her house and also her!” Feferi suggests, then turns to you, “Jane sent me a snap. Nice one!”

You high five her and then tell Aradia of your achievement.

“Oh my god I have to send one of those to Kanaya, oh my god, what website was it?”

“I dunno man, google it.”

“Fair. Okay, so I’ll stop by Dave’s sometime and ask to borrow his boombox, and then start my quest for the most obnoxious outfit I can find. But right now I am seriously going to go find Eridan. He says he found interesting stuff about the past for me to look at before I embark on my travels and also Roxy and Callie are great.”

“They are,” you agree as Feferi chimes, “Say hi to them for me!”

“Oh, are you, heading out?” Tavros asks, floating into the room, also with a cup of coffee in hand. Aradia walks over to him and kisses him on the cheek, hand coming up to his upper arm, and she clicks her horns against his.
“Sure am,” she says pleasantly. You expect her to go upstairs or at the very least change into her god tiers, but what happens instead is that her wings unfold and she takes to the skies, Tavros’s mug in hand and novelty slippers still on her feet.

“Does she… get dressed in the air?” you ask, the only one in the room who seems baffled by this.

“Oh, she just, changes whenever the mood strikes her,” Tavros says, “She did this, when we were pupae, too.”

“Okay,” you say, shutting the door for her.

“I just finna accept waterever she does nowanights,” Feferi tells you, and you are pulled into the kitchen with the two of them. “Aradia and I get up to so much weird ship it would be shelly if we kelp-t getting thrown off by it!”

“That’s fair,” you accede, “So, was that Sollux I heard upstairs?”

“Yep!” Feferi says with a bright grin, pulling out a mug and giving herself juice. She probably doesn’t need caffeine, and you appreciate the choice. You get offered something to drink and you ask for juice as well, which Tavros gets for you, because he is very polite!

“So, I thought Sollux was living with Terezi?” you say for smalltalk’s sake, and also because something about him being here is pinging… not an alarm bell, certainly, but you feel like there’s a puzzle piece you’re missing.

“He does!” Feferi says, and her grin says she’s in on something that you’re not.

“So why is he upstairs?” you ask, squinting a little.

“He spent the night.” You really don’t appreciate Feferi’s knowing smirk, and as Tavros hands you a glass of grapejuice he pats your shoulder.

“They’re matesprits,” he prompts.

“Oh,” you say. Whoops. You forgot sex was a thing that happens, again. “That’s why you’re smirking.”

Feferi breaks out giggling and Tavros snorts into his coffee.

“Like it’s totally normal that people sleep over at people’s places but you were giving me a face.”

Feferi giggles and hops up on the counter. “I’m very excited a-boat this whale, ‘having a body again’ thing that’s happening. And the ‘it’s an age-accurate body’ thing too, dolphinately that bit too.”

“Yeah you are,” Sollux grumbles as he slouches into the kitchen. “Hey TV, where do you keep your aspirin?”

“Oh, right here,” Tavros says, turning to the small cabinet above the coffee maker and pulling down a bottle.

“Are you okay?” you ask. Did... was their sex that rough that he still needs aspirin in the morning? EeEeeeEEEeeEeeeh you do not want to think about that.

“Headache,” he grumbles, swallowing three of the pills dry.
“Sollux!” Feferi scolds, “Take water with them! You’re going to burn a hole through the lining of your esophagus!”

Sollux groans and hunches his shoulder and she thwaps him on one of those huddling shoulders, frowning hard. “Drink water you dunce!”

He hisses at her and she picks him up by the collar of his shirt, all lean swimmer’s muscle and compact fury. You find it attractive. Sollux, who has stopped hissing and started blushing, seems to as well.

“Water!”

“Fine, fine, I’ll do it next time!”

“You’ll have some right now, too!”

“FF I literally already swallowed them there’s no reason-”

“The reason you need to drink water when you take gills is because they facilitate the descent and make shore nofin gets stuck in your throat where you don’t have the pain receptors necessary to alert you to the fact that there are highly acidic or alkaline components demolishing the interior of your throat!”

You’re very glad that you do not possess the ability to swallow pills dry, and have therefore never done it. You’re not even fucking guilty of the thing she’s scolding about and you’re chagrined as all hell. She’s got one hand on her hip and the other at his scruff, angler-fangs visible and horns tilted just a little bit forward. She’s intimidating. You’re intimidated. Sollux is too. Tavros, seemingly unaware of the fact that Feferi is smart and pretty and terrifying, holds out a cup, which Sollux takes and drinks from.

“Thank you Tavros!”

“Sure thing, uh, Feferi. I once had, a sick fowl, that I accidentally made sicker, by not making sure that her meds, were accompanied by something that was wetter to swallow, and it would, uh, be very sad if that happened to Sollux, too.”

“Aw,” Feferi says, face and stance instantly softening at Tavros’s misfortune. “I’m sorry to hear that!”

Tavros shrugs. “The thing, about animals, is that things happen to them, even more than things happen to trolls, on Alternia. It’s okay, to enjoy them, but not really to the point of getting, too attached.”

Feferi nods, but you feel like that’s a very sad way of thinking! But then again, from what you know Tavros has only been able to get into keeping domesticated critters since coming to Earth C, and was more of the local wildlife man on Alternia. Interacting with nature, helping when needed, but only ever keeping his lusus. Which you guess was less him keeping Tinkerbull and more Tinkerbull raising Tavros.

“FF,” Sollux cuts in, “you can put me down now.”

“I will put you down when you finish that glass.”

Sollux looks at the glass, affronted, because it is one of Tavros’s larger cups, and then back to her, brow furrowed. “FF!” he protests.
“The whale thing!”
“FF this thing is huge-”
“The whale thing!”
“This cup is a whale!”
“All of it!”
“FF!”

Feferi turns and smiles brightly at you. “So John, how have you been since-” she looks to the side, “two days ago!”

“I’m good!” you say brightly, as Sollux continues to look at Feferi in exasperation. You tell the three of them about hanging out with Rose, your date with Karkat, and going furniture shopping with Gamzee. You keep it very broad, but you figure you have plenty of time to go into detail with Feferi later. Tavros shares how he’s been hanging out with Terezi and Davepeta a lot lately, and Davepeta will be coming over again later today!

“Oh how fun!” you say, “How have they been, it’s been ages since I saw them last.”

“There’s been a lot going on!” Feferi agrees.

“They’ve been, good. Excited about the new, bodies, in our midst, and the shipping possibilities therein. We’ve been rapping at each other, and thinking, that since Dave and Gamzee are on probably okay terms, we should meet up and do a group slam sometime.”

“That sounds like a trainwreck just waiting to happen,” you comment, “You’re inviting me to come watch. And also Dave and Gamzee are on good terms now! Karkat and I got back from our date and the two of them were cuddling and talking about their feelings and stuff! They seem to really enjoy each other’s company, which is really relieving since it didn’t sound like they got along on the meteor at all.”

“Gamzee being possessed, uh, probably had something to do with that.”

“Mm,” Feferi agrees, “I still feel terribubble that that happened to him. Wish I could’ve been there, done something.”

“Me too,” you sigh.

“There’s a lot, that happened during, and because of, the Game that was generally, utterly and entirely fucking bullshit.”

“Here here,” Feferi says, lifting her glass; the three of you lift your glasses in return and you all take a drink.

“So, what have you been up to, lately, Feferi?” Tavros asks, and you think he’s just asking to be polite or for conversation since she technically lives in his house. Hive. Fuck.

Feferi is about to answer when Davepeta enters the kitchen. “Sup furrickers!” they greet loudly, and you turn with a smile.

“Davepeta, hey!” you greet, setting down your glass so you can give them a proper hug hello. “We were just talking about you!”
“What did Pawlux do?” they ask, shooting a cat-like grin his way.

“I swallowed pills without water, which apparently translates to FF making me drink this entire damn glass before she puts me down,” Sollux says, pointed and bitter.

“It’ll kelp the idea get through that stubborn skull of yours, and also you don’t hydrate half as often as you probubbly should so it works in my favor anywave.”

“Excuse you, I hydrate exactly half as often as I should.”

Davepeta laughs, Tavros chuckles, and Feferi gives a huff, pout, and truly dramatic eye roll. “Why don’t you try hydrating twice as often as you otter!? That stays in-theme betta than by half, right?”

“Too much work.”

“Sollux I’mma smack the ship outta you.”

“That would be bad,” you comment, teasing, as Davepeta and Tavros chuckle.

“Hnn? Oh! Oh no! No! I’m just playing! No, I would never hurt my quadrants!” Feferi rushes to assure you. “Sollux is just being a dumb-bass and I’m giving him a hard time over it.”

Sollux, seemingly enjoying the uncomfortable turn this conversation has taken, asks, “What, you don’t think I’m capable of defending myself against my matesprit who has literally not put me down this entire conversation?”

“If you think you can outlast me you’ve got another thing coming, buster,” Feferi says with an unamused look to Sollux.

“You have to go to your hair appointment eventually.”

“Sollux Captor you will drink your bass of glubbing water so kelp me cod!”

You eheheh at them, entertained by their squabbling. You feel a touch bad for the misunderstanding, but Feferi doesn’t seem to have taken it to heart. Davepeta props an elbow up on you. They’re shorter than even Dave is, which is fucking adorable, but they’re floating right now (so are you, but they’re floating higher).

“So what’s been up with mew?” they ask, and you tell them about your date with Karkat since you’re pretty sure that’s the thing they’ll be most interested in. Your brain keeps on “helpfully” reminding you not to say anything about Aradia to Davepeta, which, thanks brain, but you do successfully not say anything about Aradia to them. Tavros joins in on your conversation, and Davepeta reaches out to half-attentively toy with his cheek fur. Pros to being part-cat, you guess.

You gently tug at one of their wings until it’s splayed out over your floating lap, and you start idly preening it, a nice thing to have to do with your hands as you chat, and Tavros drapes his tail over your shoulders.

“Hey, John?” Feferi eventually cuts in, “I hate to prove my matesprit right, but Ido need to start heading to my appointment.” She hands Sollux to Tavros, who can easily carry his weight, since Sollux is a bundle of pins and Tavros is a lancer who works with large animals. “Make him finish his water for me, please!”

“I’ll, uh, try my best?” Tavros promises weakly, looking at Sollux with something of mild panic. Sollux does not look like Tavros is going to be able to make him do a damn thing, but you guess that’s not any of your business. You suppose Davepeta might be able to make him, since Davepeta
is like, kind of pushy? Doesn’t take no, at the very least.

Whatever. Not your problem! You and Feferi head out, changing into your god tiers for the high altitudes.

“Hey John!” she calls with a big smile.

“Yeah?”

“Wanna race?”

Your pulse *thrums*, wind surging with you, around you, and your heartbeat picks up at the very prospect, but you have to reel it in for like, two seconds.

“I don’t know where we’re going!” you protest, “I have to follow you!”

Feferi and you get out your phones and you get the address plugged into your phone, mentally mapping out where you need to fly to, and then you nod, smiling at her, wind around you thrumming with energy.

“Ready?”

“Set!”

“GO!” she shouts, and the two of you are off. Her wings are nothing more than a blur, her hair tossing wildly behind her, and you flatten your arms against your sides to decrease resistance. You *could* Become or use your Breath, but that would be mega cheating, so you don’t, you just fly as fast as you can push yourself, until you actually feel the strain of flying. You’re giddy delighted. Normally only Tavros is willing to push you this fast, to the point where it’s work to keep your lips from flapping in the wind like a particularly comedic cartoon character. Even so, you feel Feferi’s breathing, right there next to you. Just out of your peripheral, just exactly in your blind spot. You’re not sure what you’re feeling but it’s something vibrant and delighted and maybe a little scared but like in a good way. In a roller coaster way, if roller coasters were still a thing that were capable of entertaining you.

The hair salon comes rapidly into view and you drop altitude quickly, Feferi going into a nosedive and you have to copy in order to keep pace. The ground is approaching very swiftly. Very, very swiftly. Feferi is not going out of her nosedive. The ground is like, right there. It’s concrete. You’re neck and neck, and you don’t want to lose, but you have to pull up and slow down. Feferi does too, a beat after you, but her descent is slower and she lands hard on the street, her legs bending under her weight. You almost expect the sidewalk to crack, like in superhero movies, but it doesn’t. You land, also a little hard but not nearly as hard as her, a beat later, and you stare at her in awe.

“How are your legs not broken?” you ask, because yeah she’s a Witch of Life but that doesn’t mean she should be willing to snap her own legs on a landing just because she wants to win.

She tosses her hair and rolls her shoulders, framed by posters of pretty women with various braiding styles proudly displayed in the front windows of the salon you’re about to enter. “If 16,000 pounds per square inch isn’t gonna bother me at the bottom of the ocean, neither is a little light drop like that,” she tells you, sounding smug. You are reminded of your fight with the Condence, how your hammers hardly seemed to touch her, how it took something sharp to actually defeat her and magic to do more than just inconvenience her, and you are reminded that while Feferi is a very sweet and precious person, you do not. *Ever.* want to get on her bad side.

She chuckles and pinches your cheek with a wink, and wow yeah you are probably definitely
blushing, and she spins, changes back into her yellow and purple sundress, and walks to the hair salon. You sneeze, change as well, and follow in.

“Yeah some punk sent in for that whole time slot but they used the name of a god so let’s see what kinda prank this ends up being,” a very pretty lady in an apron is saying to another pretty lady in an apron, as they seem to be surveying the contents of the clipboard in front of them.

“Shello!” Feferi greets with a pleasant smile, “I’m here for the 11:30?”

The two women stare at her with wide eyes, the one who had been talking even going so far as to drop her jaw at the sight of actual real-life Feferi standing in their salon. You can’t see it through the darkness of her skin, but you’re fairly sure she’s blushing at this, and her more umber friend is visibly darker in the cheeks.

Feferi waits a beat, and then tries again. She gives a little wave, her other hand hidden in the folds of the skirt of her dress. “Shello!”

“I’m a lesbian!” the woman who had been talking previously suddenly blurts, and Feferi smiles charmingly at her.

“I don’t know what that is, but good for you!” She pats the employee’s shoulder and you’re pretty sure you see her soul ascend to a higher plane. Whether from embarrassment or the fact that Feferi just touched her, you’re not sure. Probably both. You suppose if there’s anyone to have a gay meltdown in the middle of your own place of employment over, you can best understand it being Feferi. Dave has sparked plenty of gay meltdowns of his own, of course, which you also understand, as has Jade and Rose and Jane and definitely Roxy and most certainly Jake, and also Dirk that one time, but what you’re saying is you have a very attractive friend group and they all deserve the adoration they receive.

“So do I sit there?” Feferi prompts cheerfully, all friendly like, clearly enjoying the attention but trying to save the two of them some dignity in the situation.

“Yes, please, go ahead. I uh, gotta go make a phone call real quick, this is Naya she’ll be your stylist today,” says the lesbian. You float in a little closer and get a look at her nametag, which says “Janet,” and give her a little smile and wave. Then you float over to Naya as Feferi sits down in a chair in front of a sink.

“Mind if I chill out here and keep her company?” you ask, because you want to be polite.

“Yeah, sure, I mean- yes.”

You give her a hopefully disarming smile. “You don’t need to be anxious or anything, around me especially,” you assure her, hoping she won’t be this tense the whole time you’re here. That would not only be really stressful for her, no doubt, but also really annoying for you. That’s a terrible thought to have. You did have it though.

“No, no, dude, you want to be here right now,” you can just barely hear Janet saying. She’s probably not aware of how much better your ears are now that you’re the Heir of Breath. Sometimes you have normal hearing but sometimes, especially on days when you’re not feeling particularly solid but also sometimes just on random days, you can hear anything in your immediate area with oft-unwelcome clarity. “I got an appointment from a god and turns out, it’s literally an appointment from a god. Gods of Rejuvenation and Wind are very currently here… just get your ass over here!” She rejoins you and Feferi and immediately resumes being flustered.
Naya seems to get over it faster than Janet, but to be fair Janet did pretty hilariously embarrass herself. Naya washes Feferi’s hair and she explains that she’d like box braids. You watch the process with rapt attention, enjoying the visual of Feferi’s hair under water. Most of the sinks in here are regular sized, but for Feferi’s hair they put her (she put herself?) in front of a very deep sink. Her hair takes up most of the basin anyway. Naya works shampoo and conditioner through all of it, which also fascinates you, and you hover close to the lip of the basin, awed. Then Naya towels it off and Feferi needs to move to a different chair which is not in front of a sink, and her hair, now damp and weighed down, thwaps against the tile.

“Oh my god I’m so sorry,” Naya says, visibly flustered again, and picks up Feferi’s hair to rinse it off again really quick.

“Oh don’t even mind it,” Feferi says easily, “When I lived on Alternia I would surface and get sand all over the tips of my hair, it’s no big!” You kind of want to point out that a lot more than just the tips of her hair hit the ground, but you figure she’s smart and probably noticed and just genuinely doesn’t care.

“Well, I’ll try to be a little more professional than that,” Naya jokes with a slight chuckle, and the door tings with the arrival of another customer. Janet has to pay attention to him, but you’re sure he won’t mind that she’s staring mostly at Feferi, since he is too. You’re staring at her too, specifically the hair that has been draped over an unoccupied chair to keep it from laying on the ground that is now being combed and blow-dried. Feferi has so much hair, like holy hell. You wonder…

“Hey Naya,” you say brightly, “Mind if I help out?”

“Oh- yeah, go for it,” she says, gesturing with the blow dryer at all of the hair. You let your fingers become and feel out the air coming out of the drier, getting a taste of the temperature, then pick up a comb and bring your hand back down to flesh.

“Badass,” Naya says, staring at your newly reformed hand.

“Ha, thanks!”

“You’re using the wrong comb though,” Naya says, and plucks it out of your hand, replacing it with the one in hers before grabbing another one of the “right” combs. You guess you grabbed one where the teeth were too small? You guess that’s fair. You summon your Breath and try to make it hot, around the same temperature as the hair drier, and hold your hand up against Feferi’s hair. Wind passes through your fingers, heating up as it slips by.

“Dude, yo, that is so cool,” Naya says, the two of you both blowing and combing but only one of you holding a blow dryer.

“Thanks! I only figured out how to do it recently.”

“Do what?” Feferi asks, “I can’t see you back there!”

You swoop around to face her, hold your hand out, and give her face a little blast of hot air. She giggles and her earfins flutter, which is fucking adorable. You hear Janet drop something on the other side of the room, and then rejoin Naya at the ends of Feferi’s hair.

“So John, tell me more about you hanging out with Rose!” Feferi prompts, and the three of you have a nice conversation, Naya speaking significantly less frequently than you or Feferi but hey at least she does in fact join in. Feferi’s hair dries… ridiculously fast, and you make note of it.
“Oh that’s because I’m a sea dweller!” Feferi says, with the same voice that Jade uses when you accidently stumble across a Cool Science Fact. “See, since sea dweller hair is so dense, our ancient ancestors would actually grow mold in their hair when it didn’t dry out properly! So evolution chopped that out pretty glubbin’ fast! Our hair is literally structured differently from land dwelling trolls’ so it’ll dry faster, because only trolls with the ‘weird’ hair structure didn’t die from mold-related diseases and lived long enough to add to the slurry!”

“Wow.”

The door opens and a man with beautiful cornrows enters, and looks awed but not particularly surprised to find you and Feferi there. He waves, and you and Feferi wave back, and he beelines for Janet. They share something that you ignore by focusing instead on keeping your temperature steady, and it mostly works. You only catch a few words that are meaningless without context. Then he disappears into an “employees only” door. After you finish drying out Feferi’s hair, Naya has to move the spare chair so it continues to not drop onto the floor, but it’s fluffier so the chair can’t be as far back as it was. “I’d ask if you want extensions but I don’t think there’s any need for that,” Naya says, and Feferi and you giggle at that. “Box braids, right?”

“Shore is!”

You float around so you can hover behind Naya, once again watching with rapt attention. The new dude comes back out in an apron just as a third customer walks in, and is also floored by your presence. You ignore them, focusing instead on how Naya’s fingers are moving with Feferi’s hair and Feferi’s chatter about troll evolution. You try to pay attention, you really do, but a lot of the words she’s saying are words you’ve only ever probably heard Jade use before and the hair has a lot of your attention.

Naya finishes the first braid and starts in on the second, and you float back over to the other side of Feferi’s head. “May I..?” you ask, fingers hovering over Feferi’s hair. You’re asking permission from both of them, which they both give.

You section out a portion right above Feferi’s earfin, since that’s where Naya started, and she “mm-nn!”s at you and comes around.

“You wanna section out something square, so more like this,” she corrects you, cutting the little rectangle you made by half it looks like, and adding a little vertically.

“Thanks!” you say, and she watches you start the braid.

“A little tight,” Feferi says, and you start over. This time, Feferi doesn’t protest and Naya doesn’t correct you on anything, just watches for a bit before going back to her side of Feferi’s head.

You all talk for literal hours. Feferi has so much hair. Marquette (the third employee, whose name you learn when Janet shouts it) does a food run after he finishes his client’s hair, and you don’t have cash on you but Feferi does so she buys you two lunch, because she is prepared. You were not. But you’re not unhappy. Feferi’s hair is so nice, and the rhythm of braiding, once you get into the flow of how to section off spaces for the braids, is soothing as all motherfuck. You could honestly do this all day, just floating here, hair in your hands, chatting with Naya and Feferi and occasionally Janet and Marquette when they have something to say/work up the nerve to. Janet and Feferi actually end up taking over the conversation at one point, which is as hilarious as it is adorable because she is definitely still tripping all over herself regarding Feferi. At one point she has some truly incredible Freudian slips, all in quick succession, and you nudge Naya with a snicker. She snickers and nudges you back.
The atmosphere is companionable and easy, Feferi’s hair is soft and has that beautiful texture that only Jane’s hair has in your whole group with a million times the length, and the smell in the air is a nice one. Vaguely fruity and vaguely... the best you can say is the smell of a hair straightener, except none of those are here, much less doing anything to the hair involved. A few more people come and go, none of them with hair like Feferi’s so none staying nearly as long. Naya takes a break to flex out her fingers, drink some water, and rest her hands for a bit, but you don’t really feel the need to so you just keep braiding.

Feferi tells you all about what she’s been up to, which mostly involves hanging out with people who aren’t the same three people she’s spent five whole years with, every single moment, because while she loves them dearly and definitely wants to still spend plenty of time with them, she doesn’t want to be with them every moment always. She tells you about cuttlefish at one point too, and you’re not really sure when conversation transitioned that way but she knows a lot about them. She knows about marine life in general, and has a lot of interesting things to say about aquatic respiratory systems and underwater camouflage and various methods of swimming and the pros and cons and efficiency and motion patterns of those methods, and you mostly just listen. You ask questions every now and then, but not nearly as often as you find yourself not understanding what she’s saying. Like, you get the gist of it? And Feferi is just so excited to talk about how stingrays are basically just weird puppies and how cuttlefish have unparalleled cloaking abilities and just sea life in general that you can’t help but be excited with her.

Gamzee does come in, fairly close to the end of the braiding, and he joins in on the conversation, even more boggled by Feferi’s vast knowledge and the big words she’s using than you are. He tells her about what he’s been up to as well, and you get to hear all about his visits with Jane and Roxy and Callie, and how earlier today he’d swung by an art store and started painting again, then tried to get some practice in on his unicycle, since he fits on it now. You wonder if you should use the study as an art studio of Gamzee’s, maybe. It’s a possibility.

Naya takes the last braid, and you float around in front of Feferi so you can chat face to face with her and Gamzee. Feferi doesn’t make eye contact and she talks with her hands a lot. You sorta noticed how much she talks with her hands but wow does she need to move those things while she speaks. It’s cute!

You and Feferi both thank Naya, and she thanks you two for coming and you, specifically, for helping her out, you cut the braiding duration by a lot, she thinks.

“Yeah! I had dolphinately been expecting to stay here until closing time,” Feferi admits, and Gamzee chuckles and comes over to you, grabbing onto your arm very casually. Feferi pays and leaves a tip that matches the cost of the braiding, and you three bid them all goodbye. Feferi immediately starts playing with her hair and tells you and Gamzee to feel the braids. You spent the last... however many hours feeling her braids, but you’re still more than happy to comply and Gamzee is too.

“Yo, fishsis, these braids the motherfuckin’ shitbitches.”

“Aren’t they though? Those are some of the ones John did,” Feferi tells him.

“Even more bitchin’.”

Feferi giggles and you preen a little. You feel like you did a good job! You all go out for dinner together and you get seated in a booth, so Gamzee slides up close to you and Feferi sits across. You order breakfast for dinner, Gamzee gets steak served rare, and Feferi goes for a seafood platter.

Talk during dinner is friendly, even though Gamzee has to pause the conversation to let Feferi...
know that she's being very loud.

“Sorry! I don't even notice when I do it,” she says, voice going from pretty loud to very soft.

“Yeah, fishsis, I dig, just feel like all them folk around us maybe ain't the most keen on hearin’ all you’re sayin’.”

“Probubbly not,” she agrees with an abashed giggle.

You and Gamzee fly Feferi home, where Aradia has Dave, Jade, and Karkat held captive with her and Eridan’s history findings. You spend the rest of the evening with them, and then go home, Gamzee wanting to sleep in your room again.

“I spent all this morning on my own,” he mentions as you set your glasses on the bedside table.

“I’m proud of you,” you say, since he seems a little awed by his own actions.

“Like I didn’t need nobody to come round and give me company or direction, I just up and went out and did my own shit for a bit.”

You kiss his forehead before saying, “I think that deserves some celebratory snuggles.”

Gamzee grins and cuddles in close. “Motherfuck, you know it brother.”

You blink, and suddenly it’s been eight weeks since you went back into the Medium to fight Caliborn. It doesn’t feel like that much time has passed, but somehow also feels much longer than that.

Gamzee does indeed turn the study into a makeshift art studio, and you decide to take up the piano again. Kanaya and Gamzee talk it out in a conversation you are not present for, and Gamzee comes back puffy-eyed and smiling wide. You’re glad for the two of them. That means all of his old friends and he are on speaking terms again! He rapidly gains the ability to unicycle, and unicycle well. He and Callie spend a lot of time together, unicycling and drawing/painting and Callie starts making music, which Gamzee is an avid listener of. He and Tavros grow close (again(?)) and the two of you do go over there about as often as you visit everyone else, one of which times Gamzee asks to speak with Sawtooth and Squarewave 2.0’s.

You watch him try to talk to them from a bit of a distance, observing alongside Dirk.

“He’s right, you know,” Dirk says, taking a sip from his can of orange soda.

“About?”

“Those two. They’re not like the originals.”

“Maybe you programmed them differently?” you suggest. You shrug. So robots are a little different, what does it matter?

“See, that’s what I thought at first too, so I ran over their codes a few dozen times. Nothin’. I’ve tweaked and altered everything I can think of but they lack the personalities of the originals.”

“The personalities,” you say slowly, “of the robots.”

“Yes. Squarewave was hella more enthusiastic and Sawtooth would never have let me get away with talkin’ about them like I don’t know that they can fuckin’ hear me.” He says the last bit pointedly, but the 2.0’s continue to just “stare” mildly at Gamzee as he tries to have a broken
conversation with Squarewave 2.0.

“Don’t robots just do what you tell them to?” you ask, taking a puff on your bubble pipe. Dirk and Jake did a great job on it.

“They’re highly sophisticated AIs, John—” you giggle at how he pronounces your name, an exaggerated Jawn, “-they adapt to the situations around them and the input they receive. Or at the very fuckin’ least they should. These two are just flat, they do what they’re told to.”

“The robots,” you say again, “are doing what they’re told to. I was under the impression that robots did that, usually, and also that it’s a good thing.”

Dirk sighs. Gamzee comes back over, looking uncomfortable.

“You uh, sure do got some robros there, scalene brother.”

“Nice meme ref,” Dirk applauds, “And yeah, I know there’s somethin’ wrong with them. When’d you ever get the chance to meet them, anyway?”

“They got left in the aftermath ‘a the motherfuckin’ lilypad. Found their way round time and space for a bit, ended up chillin’ with me in my dreams when my consciousness did get thrown out into the aether- said they’d met me in a different data-life but I ain’t had any knowledge on what that meant. Just- these ain’t them, you dig?”

“Yeah I’m aware,” Dirk says, and has the 2.0’s power down for the rest of your visit.

Aradia gets started on those expeditions into the past. She always shows up a second after she leaves, twigs in her hair and Grin™ on her face. Sometimes Feferi, Jade, Jake, or Eridan will go with her, sometimes not, but she has started now with no signs of stopping. Jade does indeed tinker with Eridan’s gun, and she thankfully does not explode! She tells you all about how it works, and you retain jack diddly squat of what she says. It’s fun to play with her hair and listen to her talk about the things she’s interested in, though. Jade, Dave, Karkat, Gamzee and you spend a lot of time together, as well as with the rest of your friends, and you’re in a near constant state of social exhaustion but it’s a good kind of exhaustion, like when you work hard and your muscles are sore in a satisfying way.

Quadrants start filling up like Quadrants’ Week is just around the corner. Aradia and Kanaya do end up going pitch, and you’re not there for it but Feferi sends everyone videos via snapchat as well as posting them to her story. Aradia looks like a hippie had an accident with a clown clown, with the most fugly romper that you’ve ever seen, too many clashing colors with bellbottoms for the pants, some pretty obnoxious looking jewelry and platform sandals that are so tall you’re not sure how she moves in them. She took the giant sunglasses suggestion to heart, and you’re pretty sure those things are so massive that they’re only staying on her face because of her horns. Kanaya comes out, stomping, and for a brief moment you think she’s going to punch Aradia but instead Aradia captchalogues Dave’s boombox and the two of them make out with a kind of heated passion you don’t think you’re capable of. You’re glad you and Karkat’s kismesitude didn’t start out that way. Jade comes to you one day in a tizzy, telling you about how Davepeta confessed to pitch feelings for her, and after a long conversation with you she decides she might like to return the feelings, or at the very least give it a shot. You think your own kismesitude with Karkat helped bolster her. Eridan ends up dating Dirk, Tavros, and Rose, in flush, pale, and pitch respectively, and Davepeta tells you it is a matter of who quits posturing and fluffing his own feathers first before Dirk and Sollux go pitch as well. Jane and Kanaya officially go pale, as Rose delightedly informs all of you in the group chat and the entire world by posting it to her snapstory. Terezi starts pitchflirting with Roxy, or you guess resumes, since she tells you she was flirting with Roxy even
before she left for the Medium, and Roxy, now with plenty of black romance in the air around her, tells you all she thinks she's gonna reciprocate on the flirty bit. Not sure she wants to date Terezi, but flirting is always hella nice and she wants to try out her new paint rifle on someone.

You and Jane’s prank war ends with her as the victor, plundering the last of your Gambit in one fell swoop of an entire hammock’s worth of water balloons dropped on you with devastating accuracy as you pass under her one day. Your Gambit empty, you have no option but to cede and Jane makes you post a video of yourself reading Dirk’s Pony Pals edits aloud online. You flub up and start laughing every other page but Jane doesn't let you edit anything out.

With autumn comes the start of another academic year, and on an impulsive, sudden dime you decide to enroll yourself in a college of hair design. You get your acceptance email quickly (pros of being a god that you are willing to take advantage of) and seeing you enroll in a college is the tipping point that sends Rose back to school too. She tells you all that she’ll still help in the caverns part time, but ever since she got her GED she'd been craving academia and you high five her. College buddies! Jade is smarter than all of Rose’s professors will likely be so she just congratulates the two of you and Dave squints at Rose a long while before asking if this is her telling him to go back to school too, in a weirdly elaborate passive aggressive way.

You don't understand those two sometimes, but that's okay because you love them anyway.

Dave does not enroll in a damn thing and tells you via snap, text, and the twitter you never check that he's not enrolling in anything, and you guess that's fair. You're not even sure why you did, other than the spur of the moment. That and like… it’s hair… you love playing with people’s hair… You’re going to learn how to play with it *professionally*!

The night before college (and how hilarious is it that you're going to college before you ever set foot in a high school) starts you're chilling on the couch with Gamzee, playing with your guild and feeling simultaneously idle and very excited. You've never been to college. You hope since it's a hair college it's going to be more hands-on than middle school was because you *really* couldn't focus for shit in middle school. You’d always end up bouncing your knee and doodling and spacing off or causing a ruckus. You like to think you're more mature than your 12 year old self, now, but you still really don't want to go back to sitting in a desk for hours on end clicking your pen nigh-constantly just so you could have something to do.

But it's hair! You'd suffer through it for hair.

You get up to take a piss and refill your water glass, grabbing Gamzee’s for him too, and when you sit down he turns to you so you don't go back to your computer.

“So, brother,” he says, slow to start, sounding kind of nervous.

“Yeah?”

“So… I- I’mma lay a metaphor on you, if that's chill.”

“Shoot,” you say easily, taking a drink of your water. Have you been leading Karkat on again? You're dating, so you feel that would be hard, but last time Gamzee sounded this serious it was about that.

“So like, say a motherfucker has a pet, yeah? And the pet is somethin’ the motherfucker’s roommate don't particularly like, like a cockroach, yeah?”

Ew. “Yeah I can see why someone wouldn't like that.”
“Right,” Gamzee says, like that is vital information you just confirmed. “Now, say the motherfucker has been having this pet cockroach and it does make him happy, and he values it and shit.”

“Okay.”

“But say it starts hurting, cause half of it is missing? Say, it got in, in something that did tear off its wing and legs on one side.”

“Aw, that’s sad!”

“Yeah, so the motherfucker knows it can’t go living like this, because it ain't just a happy little bug, it's a bug that ain't made for nothing more than suffering now. So the motherfucker knows he's got to kill it, and he tries but he can't. See, he loves that little bug and even knowing that it's just gonna hurt more an’ more the longer he don't kill it, he can't kill it. It's half missing but he just- he just can't, you follow?”

You nod. Gamzee is bouncing his leg and fiddling with his fingers, staring at them instead of you.

“So he wants to ask his roommate to kill it for him, cause that brother ain't got no attachment to the bug and would be able to, yeah? But the brother doesn't know the motherfucker’s been keeping that there roach all that time they been livin’ together, and the motherfucker is scared that once the brother learns that he's been hiding it, he won't trust him or look at him the same no more, because he’s a liar.”

“Aw, that would be awful of the roommate! Hiding a weird pet isn't any reason to stop trusting someone!”

Gamzee looks up at you, eyes earnest and kind of distressed, worrying at his lower lip. You reach out and push a lock of hair behind his ear, concerned about what this could possibly be a metaphor for, since it's got Gamzee so worked up.

“John, I…” Gamzee starts, and you see him hesitate.

Chapter End Notes

Me, gay? For Feferi? Using John as a vehicle to project my personal feelings? It’s more likely than you think.
Should I add “Slow Burn” to the tags? Actually, do you have any tag suggestions?
http://paradoxspace.com/lalondian-tourism/3 please do yourselves a favor and go reread these pages. Rose is so good.
http://paradoxspace.com/soul-fraying-games/3 like PLEASE
Jade suffers from chronic “can understand everybody’s relationships except her own” syndrome. John suffers from chronic “cannot understand anybody’s relationships ever” syndrome. I love these good kids.
hc that Aradia's method of flirting is putting on sunglasses while saying "Subtlety? I don't know her."
John, your first mistake was in assuming that Dirk knows what he’s doing. As someone who has read Homestuck, I can assure you, he does not.
Cry times - 5
And as always, PLEASE for the love of me, your lovely author, leave comments!!
Your comments are my lifeblood!! You could even just go the minimalist route,
copy/paste your favorite line or two and post some keyboard smashes after it just tell
me your THOUGHTS my friends.
John Egbert, Master of Introspection

Chapter Summary

Lmao have fun kids

Chapter Notes

Just so y'all remember, I'm available to contact at my tumblr any time you want to come talk to me! You can ask questions about my fic (that I won't promise I'll answer ;P) or come shoot the shit or just anything really.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I…” Gamzee’s mouth quits working and then he hunches in on himself, hugging his arms with shoulders pushed up to his ears. “Nevermind.”

You can hardly blink in surprise before he’s on his feet and headed for the stairs.

“Hey, Gamzee, hey!” You get to your feet and then float up after him in bewilderment. You catch him easily at the top of the stairs and grab his wrist. “Hey, hey, what’s wrong? You can’t- hey, look, I- whatever it is, I swear it can’t be that bad, okay?”

He tugs on his wrist and you just float with it, and he leans against the wall at the top of the stairs, then slides to the floor.

“I just don’t want you to think differently on me,” he mumbles into his knees, holding his one arm up where you’re attached to him. You let go and float down to his side, sitting next to him and pulling your knees up to your chest too.

“Gamzee, hey,” you reach out a hand and brush some hair back behind his ear. You try to think of something you can say to reassure him and his obscure fears. You settle on a warm smile and a, “It’s just me.”

Gamzee looks at you with soft awe a moment, lips parted just enough that you can see the tip of a fang. Then tension seems to drain from his body, not all the way, but in part. He grabs your hand and presses his lips to your knuckles, eyes getting a far off look.

“I’m flush for you.”

Well.

Uh.

That.

Takes a moment to process.
“I know you don’t feel the same,” Gamzee says, words rushed and haphazard, “I know, you see me no more than you see anyone else in our cohort, I’m fine with that, please know I’m fine with that, but I don’t want to keep things from you and brother I can’t- can’t squish this crush just by knowing because I keep going ‘what if’ like a desperate fool and if you can just- tell a motherfucker as your feelings are I need- I don’t want you to think different on me though, please John, I don’t- I couldn’t handle if you-” His hand squeezes tighter on yours as he speaks, and your brain catches up enough that you remember that you’re supposed to do things. Respond. You move to hug him, on reflex, body trying to move with the barest prompt from your brain- but no, not yet, not when you haven’t said anything yet.

“Hey,” you grab him by the shoulders, wanting to hug but not yet. “Hey, easy Gamzee. Okay, you’re right, I don’t feel the same, but I’m not going to treat you any differently okay? You’re my bro! We’re good friends, it’d be silly if I started acting differently just because you like-like me on top of regular liking me!” Okay, okay, you’ve established that you don’t like him, “Can I hug you?”

“Yes,” Gamzee whines, leaning in toward you so fast you almost fail to catch him in your arms. You succeed though! “Brother blue, please, please don’t treat me different, please.”

“Shhhh, I’m not going to. That’d be stupid and cruel of me.” And while you might be stupid, you’re not cruel.

Gamzee takes a deep, shaky breath of relief and you help him with it, your Breath in his lungs. “Easy Gamzee,” you murmur, helping him calm down as he leans on you, so much more solid than when you first found him. You’re happy he’s gained as much weight as he has, not only is it healthier by a shitload but it also makes him better for hugging.

You “heh” and try to lighten the mood. “Congrats though, you’re pretty much the first person ever to have a crush on me!”

It’s honest, but said as something of a joke, and he lifts his head to give you the most skeptical, bordering on disdainful eyebrow-arch. “The first person. To have a crush on you.”

“Well okay I don’t really think Terezi’s like, very very very temporary pitch-crush counts, cause like she barely knew me and we hadn’t talked in like three years and it was just generally very flimsy.”

Gamzee still looks like he can’t believe what’s coming out of your mouth.

“Oh! Karkat, duh!” Now you get why he’s looking at you like that. “Whoops, accidentally forgot about my own boyfriend, eheheh. Okay, so you’re the second person ever to have a crush on me- but also he had a pitch crush on me? Does that count as a regular crush? I feel like the dynamic is different. How about this: you’re the first person to ever have a flush crush on me!”

“Motherfucker…” Gamzee says, quiet, a breath of a word. He looks to the side, brow furrowed, and bring up a hand to cover his mouth a moment as he seems to process something or another. “Mo- Bro. John. Brother. Are you even to be hearing the shit coming out of your mouth right now?”

You try to think over what you could possibly be missing.

“I don’t think Rose ever actually had a crush on me. I mean, maybe sure? But we were thirteen and it’s really easy to confuse being in love with your best friends with just loving your best friends, and also Karkat’s chart was just for future-propagation of the species while accounting for incest
and matching genitalia purposes- which I guess doesn’t even count anymore since we were wrong about Jade- but like point is we were thirteen and everything is fake.”

“Bro.”

“I really can’t think of anyone else who could’ve possibly had a crush on me. You’re gonna have to clue me in here.”

Gamzee stares at you with open-faced exasperation, and then honks. He starts laughing and you join in, because laughing is a welcome change from almost-crying and also it’s really easy to get you to laugh along with others. You are the laugh track’s bitch. It is you. He tugs at you and sometime between starting and stopping laughing the two of you maneuver him into your lap.

“Brother, you are beyond somethin’ motherfuckin’ else,” Gamzee breathes, chin on your shoulder and arms around the back of your head.

“You’re pretty special too,” you say, “But I still have no idea what I was missing.”

“Nothing, brother, just a misconception ‘a mine, I guess.”

You shrug. You want to kiss his hair but you’re not sure about that now. Or, wait, if you’re not treating him any differently, then you totally should, since you would’ve done that before. Or are you blowing this out of proportion, taking an idle opportunity and wondering if you would’ve done that sort of thing before his confession or not? It’s possible your brain is just looking for excuses to over-analyse all your actions, now.

You stall long enough that you decide to just not do it. Instead you squeeze him briefly tighter and then float up, separating the two of you by the necessity of gravity working on him and not on you.

“C’mon. My guild is probably wondering why it’s taking me so long to use the bathroom, and you were probably doing something too.”

Gamzee smiles at you, soft and only just a little bit sad, and nods, following you back down the stairs. He continues to hold your hand, right up until he’s forced to let go so you can get your laptops back on your laps. You cast a glance at his screen, curious now about what he is up to, and only catch “Works Matching ‘hanahaki’” in the tab. Huh, wonder what that is. Looked like it was some kinda fanfiction site?

Your guild, predictably, gives you shit over being AFK for so long, and you throw yourself into the game with your all, doing unnecessary mental loops in order to avoid thinking about the thing that you are absolutely not thinking about.

Okay, you’re thinking about it anyway. Gamzee seems hesitant to lean back into you, like you’ll reject the touch, and you’re kind of flipping your shit a little. It still hasn’t fully hit you, but like, the part that has been hit is screaming, Gamzee likes you. In a flush way! What the hell! God, you hope this doesn’t become awkward. You really, really value Gamzee! He’s sweet and his company is comfortable! He says he doesn’t want anything to change but what if he changes, because he thinks you’ve changed and you might reject what was previously okay? What if you do change and you just don’t notice it? What if he tries to act the same but is too busy searching for little signs or cues that you don’t like things that he makes stuff up in his head about you rejecting him further—what if you react in little ways without knowing and he misinterprets those?! God this has such potential to go terrible.

You take a very, very long shower to make up for the fact that you’re showering early, and you go straight to your room after. God, okay, so that’s maybe acting weird, but like. Bluh!
ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering gardenGnostic [GG]

EB: Jade Jade Jade Jade Jade I’m freaking out

GG: :O!

GG: whats going on?

EB: Gamzee is flush for me!

GG: did you figure this out on your own or did he tell you? :O

EB: He told me?

EB: Why, was he like crushing really hard?

GG: so hard john u.u

GG: so hard

GG: im pretty sure youre the only person who didnt know? ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

EB: Damn

GG: but what did you say????

GG: you didnt leave him hanging just so you could come freak out at me did you? :O

EB: No!

EB: He was having a bad time anyway so it’s not like I could have

GG: oh no!!!

EB: It’s okay he’s fine now we spent the evening chilling like we had been before

GG: what did you say!?!?

EB: Okay okay sheesh!

EB: I told him I didn’t return his feelings, but I didn’t want anything to change between us

EB: Which was mostly because he’d been freaking out really badly about the idea that after he told me I wouldn’t like him or want to hang out with him anymore or treat him differently or something

EB: Which is stupid but I mean I guess it happens a lot with people who get crushes and get crushed on

EB: Plus I really have no idea what’s going on with his love life other than he had a crush on Tavros once and a long crush on Karkat and Equius apparently had a crush on him?

EB: So I guess I don’t know a lot about whether or not he has a whole lot of reason to be scared I’d start treating him differently or start avoiding him or if he’s just generally scared of that because that happens in like, books and shit

EB: Jade?
EB: Jade don’t just leave!!!
EB: Jade I’m freaking out you can’t just go AFK!
GG: sorry!!!!
GG: i needed to scream at dave!!
EB: Oh okay what shit did he do this time?
GG: just general stupidity things
EB: Fair enough I guess
EB: But Jade, Jade, Gamzee like-likes me!
GG: yes he does!
EB: Holy shit!!!
GG: yeah
EB: What am I even supposed to do?
GG: what do you want to do?? :o
EB: I don’t know?
EB: Mostly I just don’t want things to be different between us

You word vomit at Jade a bit about your insecurities, about how you’re scared that things are going to change anyway even though you and Gamzee both don’t want them to. Jade offers to have you come over to her house after class ends for you tomorrow and you can play with her hair and cuddle and freak out in person at her, since you’re pretty much guaranteed to still be freaking out tomorrow, and you accept gratefully.

EB: I just don’t know what to do Jade!!!
EB: I really love him lots and I don’t want things to go weird just because I don’t love him like THAT
GG: well maybe
GG: just possibly
GG: have you considered that you might love him like that?? ‘.:)
EB: Jade please I appreciate that you’re trying to joke around but I’m still kinda flipping my fucking lid
GG: im not joking around!!! <:
GG: you dont usually realize you feel things right away
GG: right?
GG: so you might have a crush back!
EB: Jade don’t be ridiculous

GG: just think about it?

GG: please?

EB: Why, do I do things?

GG: you do a lot of things john but you’re also a naturally affectionate person so i guess its just impossible for me to say what you’re feeling

GG: you’re just going to have to do that on your own!! :)

EB: Bluh!!!

EB: Obviously I don’t like Gamzee like that, he’s my good friend and I love him lots but not like that

EB: I love him like I love you!

GG: well thats concerning ;P

EB: Jade!!!

EB: Please take this seriously!!!

GG: and please take what im saying seriously!!!!!! >:O

GG: i swear john youre the best ever and i love you so much but sometimes you can be REALLY DENSE

EB: So can you!!!

GG: nuh-uh!!!

EB: yuh-huh!

GG: name ONCE!

EB: I can’t yet :P

EB: Well I mean I guess I can

EB: Davepeta

GG: that wasnt obvious though!!!

EB: ……

GG: im proving your point arent i?

EB: Big time

GG: okay but theres someone else?????

GG: someone who hasnt said anything yet that you can’t say anything about??? :O
EB: Yep!
EB: Which means you’ll just have to wait and find out!!!
GG: >:P
GG: youre the worst
EB: <3
GG: heehee
GG: love you too <3
GG: even if youre EVIL sometimes
GG: and also dense
GG: seriously john
EB: I’m not dense
GG: just THINK about it okay?
GG: yes you are
EB: Okay okay I’ll think about it
EB: I think I’m gonna try and sleep now
GG: okay!!
GG: sleep well!!! <3
EB: <3

ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering gardenGnostic [GG]

turntechGodhead[TG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

TG: so word on the street is a certain somebody just got confessed to

ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering gardenGnostic [GG]

EB: JAAAAAAAADE!!
EB: You told Dave?!?!?!
GG: oh no was I not supposed to??? D:
EB: I…
EB: Guess not???
EB: But I hadn’t really been planning on talking to anyone other than you about it tonight
EB: I’m still kind of processing everything myself!
GG: sorry!!!

EB: eh it’s fine I guess he would’ve figured it out eventually anyway

You go back to the chat window with Dave.

EB: Word on the street has a fairly high percentage chance of being accurate!

TG: sick

TG: so like you two all snuggled up and bosom buddies now or what like am i gonna have to get my trike out so i can third wheel like a junior sports olympian

TG: sir is that a god on a tricycle

TG: it does appear to be that way

TG: did he just do a flip

TG: rad

TG: but like yeah i guess congrats unless you totally didnt accept his heartfelt appreciation of everything that is good about you which is just literally everything

TG: so like that would be nice to know if youre like all quadranted up in your little human flush quadrant like a swooning maiden or whatever

EB: Well maybe if you let me get a word in edgewise! ;P

EB: But no, I told him that I don’t love him that way

TG: oh wow sucks to be him i guess

TG: another has fallen prey to the egbeharcrocklish family

EB: oh ha ha

EB: I’m rolling my eyes right now

TG: dude what you four are like objectively the hottest people earth c has like

TG: jane crocker?

TG: more like serving up more than just sweet confections with looks like those lets bring back 40s swing dresses and slang cause she is the textbook definition of one hot mama if you get what im sayin what im sayin

EB: ew

TG: also i think jakes ass speaks for itself like hot

TG: d

TG: a

TG: m
TG: n
EB: ew again
TG: jade too like wow what a perfect goddess absolutely stunning 10/10 would worship
EB: :P
EB: All eight of us are very pretty!
EB: Callie and the trolls too!
TG: and then there's you like holy fucking shit on a gilded stick
EB: Yes, yes Dave!
EB: You talk about me enough to my face you don't need to rehash it all over text!
EB: Especially since I was about to go to sleep!

**tentacleTherapist [TT] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]**

TT: So I heard from Dave who heard from Jade who heard from you that something of terrible excitement has recently occurred

TT: Dave is being terribly cagey with the details, care to enlighten your local goddess of Light?

EB: Gee, everyone in the whole city is going to know by the end of tonight with all of you gossiping gossipbirds!

TT: And will the whole city be receiving good news?

EB: Not... really?

EB: Just news I guess

EB: I don't feel that way about Gamzee but we agreed that we didn't want it to change anything so we're still good friends and everything!

TT: I suppose it could be worse.

EB: :P

EB: To be honest I'm a little worried it's going to get awkward anyway?

You switch chat windows.

TG: oh nighty night then dude

TG: its beddybye time bro

TG: time for that eight hour nappy nap

TG: gotta go take a fucking sleep babes

TG: the temporary trance
TG: a hibernation of a particularly short variety
TG: go get some slumber plumber
TG: see thats spelled like it should rhyme but it doesn't and you wanna know why
TG: because english is bullshit
TG: can't be damned to follow its own fucking rules
TG: which i guess just makes master wordsmiths like myself even cooler than we already are
TG: but yeah you go have yourself a little night long siesta
TG: a snoozy snooze
TG: hit that second star on the right and go straight on until morning
EB: You're ridiculous
TG: oh hey you're back
EB: Yeah sorry Rose was talking to me!
EB: Because someone decided to broadcast Gamzee's lovelife to his sister I guess :P
TG: whoops a touch more than my sister tho
EB: You told Karkat too?
TG: nah
TG: well yeah
TG: but he already knew because gamzees been texting him and i guess he actually kept his mouth shut about stuff for once?
EB: Woah
TG: yeah
TG: but i meant more that i'm talking to some other people too

**tipsyGnostalgic** [TG] began pestering **ectoBiologist** [EB]
TG: eyyyyyyyyy
God fuck it.

**cuttlefishCuller** [CC] began trolling **ectoBiologist** [EB]
CC: Glub glub glub!! 38D

**caligulasAquarium** [CA] began trolling **ectoBiologist** [EB]
CA: john
CA: hey

timaeusTestified [TT] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

TT: Sup

TT: So Dave is flippin’ his fuckin’ shit over somethin’ and I’ve managed to masterfully derive the fact that it involves you

gustyGumshoe [GG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

GG: John, dear, if it isn’t too much trouble would you go talk to Dave for a quick pinch?

uranianUmbra [UU] began cheering ectoBiologist [UU]

UU: hello john!

UU: i’ve heard quite the hubub about you tonight

UU: first from my IUsUs and now from seemingly everyone else, though accounts conflict!

Ohhhhhhhhh nooooooooooo.

“Striiiiiiideeeer,” you groan out loud. When did he even… he messaged you right after you said goodnight to Jade, even for a Time god this shouldn’t be possible! Though you suppose Callie, at least, you can give some clarification to.

EB: I’d believe my dad if I were you

EB: What did Gamzee say?

UU: that it was quite the tumultuous affair, but it was duly resolved by your gentle rejection and the promise that you two would remain friends!

EB: Yeah listen to Gamzee on this.

EB: What are other people saying?

EB: WHO are the other people, for that matter

UU: dave, roxy, and jane have all been messaging me.

EB: And what have they been saying?

UU: dave believes that the world is ending and armageddon is upon us, which honestly seems a tad overzealoUs to me.

UU: apparently gamzee’s confession has triggered a cosmic rift of some form. ^u^ 

UU: but dave is usually silly.

UU: my darling jane has said that you and gamzee are together now, which is causing dave enough distress that he is bothering her.

UU: my dearest roxy also seems to be under the impression that you and gamzee are now together. u.u
EB: Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuugh

EB: If there’s a misunderstanding floating around then that means I have to fix it!

UU: oh my u.u

EB: Thanks for letting me know, I guess :/

EB: I gotta go clear up some misconceptions now

UU: thank you for clarifying for me, john!

UU: best of luck with all of this

_uranianUmbra [UU] ceased cheering ectoBiologist [UU]_

Uuuuuuughhhhhhhhh

EB: Quit telling people we’re dating!

EB: I just told you that we’re not!!!

TG: yo what i didnt tell anyone that

EB: Well you must’ve implied it pretty damn well because my chumroll is blowing up!!

EB: This is Gamzee’s and my business you shouldn’t just broadcast it to the entire friendgroup!!

TG: fuck

EB: Seriously that’s really rude of you!

TG: i didn’t think i told that many people

EB: :I

You switch windows again.

TG: wow lmao davey is all ovr the place 2nite wats going on over there john?

TG: i am getting multiple reports

TG: all the reports

TG: i am the super hot secretary and dave is my poor army of middle aged office workers

EB: The official report is that Gamzee and I aren’t dating but we are still good friends help spread the word

TG: cool k thx im gonna screenshot that and send it for maximum authenticity

TG: i gotchu bby <3

EB: Please do!

EB: eheheh thanks <3
tipsyGnostalgic [TG] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

turntechCatnip [TC] began hassling ectoBiologist [EB]

TC: B33< details.

TC: >B33< meow.

EB: Goddamn it are you one of the gossip perpetrators?

EB: Or I guess purprrpetrators

TC: B33< while puns are excellent and apurriciated they will not save you from my claws of inquisition

TC: B33< what the FUCK is going on?

TC: B(<< gamzee blocked me as soon as i started typing

TC: >B((<< i didnt even get the chance to say anything!

EB: That’s probably because a lot of people know things about his private purrsnonal life all of a sudden and it’s making him uncomfortable!

EB: I mean personal.

TC: DD:< WHAT THINGS

TC: B33< efurrything is conflicting and

TC: B33< well i guess roxy just sent me a screenshot of yours

TC: B33< so that clarifies that

EB: Oh thank god

EB: Okay you’re good at spreading information at ridiculously high speeds so I guess could you also be on “fixing the misinformation problem” duty?

TC: B33< leave it to me

turntechCatnip [TC] ceased hassling ectoBiologist [EB]

TT: Things are only as awkward as you make them, John.

TT: Though I suppose there is a certain surety to the fact that it might take the two of you some time to fall back into the way things were before.

TT: However, if you both truly do care about each other, and Gamzee’s feelings aren’t too terribly sore to need a break, then it should be fine.

TT: That’s not to say that you shouldn’t be aware of Gamzee’s feelings, of course

TT: If he needs you to back off with your delightful yet excessive affection, attempt to restrain yourself.

TT: But in all likelyhood after the feelings involved in the situation change, the two of you will be
closer than ever

TT: If you're not, I'll eat my hood.

EB: Sorry to go MIA all of a sudden, everyone and their dog has been messaging me!

TT: Oh my.

EB: And Gamzee actually asked that I not back off with the affection!

EB: He doesn’t want me to treat him differently just because he has a crush on me!

EB: And I don’t want to treat him differently! I’m just worried that I will without thinking about it :(.

TT: If you’re conducting a conscious effort, the chances are fairly low.

TT: Unless you fall prey to overthinking and work yourself up into knots, which you seem to be doing.


TT: Relax.

TT: All is fortuitous.

EB: Are you saying that as my friend who likes psychology or as a Seer?

TT: Yes.

EB: Phenomenal.

TT: Now, as much as I love you, I have class tomorrow morning, so I’m going to go to sleep.

TT: Best of luck with all of this.

EB: Ugh I do too I need to wrap this up quick

EB: Night Rose!!! Sleep well and thanks for the luck!

EB: You’re probably the best to be getting it from ;P

EB: <3

TT: Avast, ye

TT: Plaguing my chatbox once more

TT: Cajoling me into your blarney

EB: I’m absolutely twisting your arm

TT: Prevailing upon my poor sleep deprived consciousness

EB: Wheeling and dealing with the best of them!

TT: Sweet dreams John
tentacleTherapist [TT] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

EB: Glub blub yourself!

CC: 38D

CC: Glub glub glub!!

CC: I (ear t)(at lots of -EXCITING T)(INGS are )(appening!

CC: Or maybe

CC: ON-E -EXCITING T)(ING IN PARTICULAR 38D

CC: Glub glub glub!!

EB: I’m so glad you and Jade have managed to settle whatever badblood was between you

CC: It was )ardly bad blood!

CC: I scared )er as a JOK-E bes)(ore she managed to get to the dream bubbles!!

CC: I thoroug)(ly japed )(er and swindled )(er )(ARD -EARN-ED GAMBIT from )(er!

EB: Ehheheh that’s fair I guess I do that a lot too

EB: You must’ve just caught her not in a joking mood

CC: 38( yea)(

CC: But t)(at’s just FIN now!! 38D

CC: I’m oar interested in your FLUS)(-ED QUADRANT!

CC: You turned Gamzee down? 380

EB: Yeah I like him alot but not like that but we’re still friends who care about each other bunches

EB: And that’s really all there is to say on the matter

EB: So I’m just going around clarifying things since this turned into one hell of a shitfest after I told ONE person and then I need to go to sleep since I have class in the morning

CC: Oh right!!!

CC: You need to SL-E-EP!

CC: Goodbay John!

CC: Sweet dreams!!! 38)

EB: Goodnight! You too!

ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering cuttlefishCuller [CC]
TT: Nevermind I guess.
TT: Shit’s been handled.
TT: Night, bro.

timaeusTestified [TT] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

Well that’s a welcome thing to switch windows back to! One less person to talk to.
carcinoGeneticist [CG] began trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

Annnnnnnnd the laws of equivalency exchange haunt you.

CG: TO CLARIFY BEFORE I BEGIN

CG: I AM AWARE THAT THE PERSON I AM REALLY PISSED OFF AT IS JADE
CG: REST ASSURED THAT I AM DISEMBOWELING MY FURY ATOP HER WRITHING FORM IN A DIFFERENT CHAT WINDOW
CG: BUT ALSO KNOW THAT I’M ABOUT TO TAKE A SHIT ALL OVER YOUR DESK TOO
CG: YOU FUCKING MORON

EB: Oh give it a rest!

CG: GAMZEE IS HIGHLY DISTRESSED BY ALL OF THIS AND I AM FUCKING PISSED OFF AS A CHOLERBEAR IN THE SPRING
CG: I WILL BE GIVING NOTHING A REST
CG: IT WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR YOU TO BREAK HIS HEART LIKE THAT TODAY HE DOESN’T NEED ALL THIS OTHER STRESS ON TOP OF EVERYTHING ELSE
CG: ALSO TELL YOUR HUMAN SISTER MOIRAIL TO NEVER EVER PULL THAT KIND OF FUCKING MORONIC SHIT EVER AGAIN
CG: SHE TOLD *****DAVE*****
CG: IN WHAT UNIVERSE WOULD THAT NOT BACKFIRE SPECTACULARLY

You let Karkat type himself out and handle a different chat window.

CA: so i get that youre probably busy or wwhatsoever
CA: but you could at least say hello

EB: Sorry, I have definitely been busy!
EB: And I’m afraid I’m not going to be able to say much in this chat now that I’m here
EB: Gamzee confessed, I turned him down, we’re still friends
CA: ah
CA: well that’s a little underwhelming when you put it like that

EB: I’m sure you’re getting plenty of drama from the rest of our friends :(

EB: Everyone seems to be talking about it and that really isn’t nice to Gamzee

CA: we all quadrant gossip about everyone

CA: it’s what we do

EB: Yeah but everyone else’s relationships have ended favorably

EB: Instead of getting rejected and then having your entire friend group come and ask you to tell them about how you got rejected

CA: shit

CA: you’re right

CA: seems like he’s blocked everyone anyway

EB: Ugh, I should probably go try to talk to him before I go to bed, see how he’s doing

EB: Gotta slough through my chum roll first though

CA: I’ll leave you to that then

EB: Thanks Eridan!

EB: Have a nice night!

CA: yeah sleep well have fun at school tomorrow

CA: been thinking a joining one myself

CA: how late do you think roses college accepts submissions?

EB: You’ll have to ask someone else!

CA: right

CA: shit

CA: sleep well

EB: You too!

cetoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering caligulasAquarium [CA]

CG: I MAY BE AN IDIOT BUT EVEN I DO NOT LOVINGLY GRATE MY PANMATTER OVER THE CURDLED DAIRY SHREDDER

CG: WHICH I’M ASSUMING JADE HAD TO HAVE DONE IN ORDER TO ASSUME THAT TELLING DAVE SOMETHING OF PRIVATE NATURE WOULD EVER IN ANY FUCKING TIMELINE EVEN ONCE BE A GOOD IDEA

CG: WHY NOT JUST TELL ROXY OR DAVEPETA?
CG: THEY CAN’T SHUT UP EITHER
CG: OH WAIT
CG: MY MORON BOYFRIEND DID THAT TOO
CG: ALSO BE ASSURED THAT I AM PLENTY PISSED AT MY BOYFRIEND FOR UPSETTING MY MOIRAIL
CG: MY RAGE IS NOT NEARLY SO LIMITED
CG: I AM AN ENDLESS FOUNT OF FROTHING FURY
CG: BE DOUSED IN THE OILS OF MY IRE
CG: AND FEEL JUST HOW BADLY I AM BURNING OVER THIS

EB: So you’re pissed at me because I told Jade about Gamzee’s feelings- even though that’s what friends and human-moirials do- because she then told Dave who told everyone who started harassing Gamzee over it

CG: THAT DOES SUM IT UP PRETTY NICELY

EB: Well I’ve been talking to people trying to get everything sorted out

EB: What have you been doing?

carcinoGeneticist [CG] has blocked ectoBiologist [EB]!

EB: I talked to Dave, we all clear?

GG: It seems so, sorry to bother you!

GG: I hear tell that you’re an awfully sought-after fellow this evening!

EB: You have no idea

GG: Well, I’ll leave you to that, goodnight John! <3

EB: Night Jane! <3

ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering gutsyGumshoe [GG]

EB: Okay maybe it’s less fine than I initially thought

GG: im sorryyyyyyyyyy D:

GG: but also karkat is doing his damndest to tell me so too

GG: or at least he was

GG: he randomly quit like just now

EB: Yeah I shut him up he’s probably off wallowing in selfloathing or something now

GG: you are a master among gods and have my reverence
GG: heehee!!
GG: but seriously good job
GG: and also THANK YOU!!!!!
EB: I gotcha sis
GG: now go to sleep!!!!
EB: I’m trying!
EB: Night Jade! <3
EB: For real this time!!
GG: heehee, night john!!! <3

gardenGnostic [GG] ceased pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

EB: I can’t believe you
TG: sorry
EB: I’m also going to sleep now though
TG: i really am sorry
EB: Eh it’s probably fine
EB: Night Dave <3
TG: <3

ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering turntechGodhead [TG]

WHEW.

Damn that’s a lot of pesterlogs. You’re really glad everyone else in your group didn’t also start messaging you at the same time.

gallowsCalibrator [GC] began trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

ectoBiologist [EB] blocked gallowsCalibrator [GC]!

Nope. She can ask someone else.

You get out of bed and go to Gamzee’s room, and knock quietly on the door. You hear a noise that is definitely not the signal of something good, and hover anxiously for a moment.

twinArmageddons [TA] began trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

ectoBiologist [EB] blocked twinArmageddons [TA]!

twinArmageddons [TA] unblocked twinArmageddons [TA]!

TA: fuck y0u
twinArmageddons [TA] blocked twinArmageddons [TA]!

“Uh, Gamzee? Can I come in?”

taintedCadence [TC] began trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

TC: YeAh bUt i aIn’T fEeLiN’ vErY ChAtTy

taintedCadence [TC] ceased trolling ectoBiologist [EB]

You open the door and go in, finding Gamzee curled on his side with his arms clutched around a pillow.

“How you holdin’ up?” you ask, aiming for gentle but accidentally going so quiet you fear you might not have actually said certain syllables in there.

You’re about to clear your throat or sneeze and try again, but he just shrugs and mumbles out a tiny, “Miserable.”

The sad ache is a thousand times worse now and you feel your heart break for this boy. “Hey, hey, Gamzee. Hey, shhh. Hey, I know we sorta had this unspoken agreement that we wouldn’t tonight, but would you like it if I slept here tonight?” All you want to do is hold him close to you and pet his hair until he isn’t sad anymore.

“Yes!” Gamzee whines, tugging on your pant leg. You slip under the covers easily, moving the pillow so it’s under your head and taking it’s place, hugging Gamzee near to you and wishing there was an easy solution for things.

Chapter End Notes

A touch shorter than the last one, eh?

Thanks for reading, and as always, Please Please Please leave comments!!!!
The Chapter Before

Chapter Summary

Alright alright! I suppose I've left you hanging long enough! Here's the next chapter :3

An unfortunate touch of news: Updates are going to need to slow down I'm afraid. We're midway through June and I have barely touched my senior thesis, so I'm going to need to rededicate my efforts there. I'm sorry friends, I promise I'll keep updating but it's going to be annoyingly slow here on out :'(

Chapter Notes

A special thanks to two lovely folks who have made me fanart <3
http://imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com/post/161556550397
http://imhereformysciencefriends.tumblr.com/post/161555660547/gaykatvantasm-fanart-for-harothar-those-are

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your first thought is that your alarm- well, no, your first thought is a “HOLY FUCK” in mental all-caps while your body jerks violently- but your second thought in the morning is that your alarm was set to be much too loud. You had figured that you might sleep through it, since you’re used to a much more lax sleep schedule, but whoo boy you underestimated the amount of noise it was going to make.

“Sorry, sorry, shit I am so sorry!” you apologize to Gamzee as you fumble with your phone, hands shaking badly enough that you miss the off button a few times. Gamzee, in his waking fright, managed to fall off the bed, ears flat against his skull and fangs bared in the most pathetic threat display you’ve ever seen.

“Shit, sorry,” you repeat into the now-quiet air, feeling your heartbeat in your ears. You can feel Gamzee’s breathing, too, and it’s not pleasant. You get up, then kneel down next to him. “You okay?”

“Nnnnn,” he whines, and you offer a weak laugh and smile.

“Sorry about that. Wanna go back to bed?”

Gamzee takes a deep breath, then shakes his head. “Mind if on your way to your schoolfeeding you drop me off at Karkat’s?”

You nod. That makes sense. “I’m gonna go get ready, we’ll need to leave in like an hour?” It doesn’t take you that long to get ready in the morning, but you set your alarm early enough so that if you hit snooze or just take forever to get out of bed you will still have time to like, dress and eat and stuff. Gamzee makes a tired noise of affirmation and rubs at his eyes. You kiss his forehead and remember the events of the night before.
“How you doing?” you ask softly, mood sobering instantly. You feel a sad ache for him once again.

Gamzee knows exactly what you mean and wilts, eyes turning to the carpet. He gives a weak shrug.

“Humiliated,” he says in an equally soft voice. He starts scratching at his arm and you grab his hand, gently pulling it away from his arm. He closes his eyes and pinches his lips. “Feel exposed; on display an’ motherfucking’ mortified.”

“Oh Gamzee,” you say, lifting your other hand to his face, and he leans into your touch.

“Didn’t figure on no one learning on my rejection save my moirail an’ yours, least, not quite so… soon.” Gamzee hunches in further on himself as he speaks, shifting uncomfortably.

“Aw, I’m sure Dave didn’t mean for things to get so out of hand. Sometimes he just doesn’t think before he opens his mouth!”

Gamzee chuckles and shifts so he can lean his head on your shoulder. “I get my figure on that there wasn’t much motherfucking connection between his open mouth and his panmatter as of that last night.”

“No, he was fondling the idiot ball pretty fucking hard last night,” you agree. “I mean, Jade shouldn’t have told him either, but Dave was the one freaking out at everyone. He’ll apologize,” you say definitively, because if he doesn’t on his own then you know Karkat will make him, and if Karkat somehow also fails, you will make him. But Dave will apologize on his own; he was just being a dumb fuck.

Gamzee sighs and gives you a very, very small smile. Like “Dirk would be jealous of how small that smile is” levels tiny. “Mind helping a motherfucker to his feet, brother?”

You are more than happy to do so, and help Gamze up by both hands. You hesitate, just briefly (hopefully, hopefully unnoticably) before floating high enough to press a kiss to his hairline.

“I’m gonna get dressed now.”

“Okay, brother.”

You nyoom to your room and toss your clothes on. You’d picked them the night before, in your excitement about going back to school/attending college. It makes you feel kind of like a kid again, how enthusiastic you are about your first day. You’re sure you’ll quickly go back to being fidgety and loudmouthed and re-earn your title of “class clown,” this time with no parent to report to or likely anyone with enough of a spine to give a god a serious telling off, but for now the idea of learning is shiny and enticing.

You go downstairs and make scrambled eggs and toast for breakfast. Gamzee joins you in sweatpants and one of your hoodies, which you are absolutely certain you saw while you were rummaging around through your clothes yesterday so that means Gamzee went into your room and took it after you came downstairs. That’s fine. It’s probably something comforting to him, now, since it’s like the first thing he got to wear that wasn’t his codtier.

“You know, you can just go ahead and keep that, if you like it so much,” you tell Gamzee, who has the sleeves pressed up against his nose as he sits at the table. You can feel him taking deep breaths, and hope he isn’t freaking out. Maybe it’s just, like, preventative deep breathing.
“Nah, brother, just like swiping it from you here and then.” You shrug and bring him a plate, then sit close to him, pulling up a chair so that your thighs touch when you sit down. You eat your food but Gamzee really just pokes at his, nibbling once for every bite or two you take of yours.

“Gamzee? What’s wrong?”

“Not feelin’ hungry.”

You frown sympathetically and pet his hair. “You still need to eat, Gamzee,” you remind him softly.

He shrugs and leans away from you, and you stop petting. “One breakfast ain’t gonna make me starve. ‘M fine.”

You want to argue, but feel like it would be a losing battle, so instead you just ask, “Try to eat half of it?”

Gamzee also looks like he wants to argue, but seems to find your request reasonable enough to begrudgingly agree. You check your backpack- new for this (it’s blue and green with Breath and Space motifs all over it (which mostly involve open skies with stars in the daylight and a lot of plants blowing in the wind))- that you have a notebook, a pen, a couple pencils, and the textbook that you went and bought a few days ago. It seems a touch odd that you need a textbook for hair stuff, but that’s also okay. Mostly you think that you’re going to “lose” this somewhere highly visible in whatever constitutes a library at hair school (if there’s even such a thing) and “accidentally” write “For public use just don’t remove from the room” on the front, and then listen to an audiobook version. Or maybe you’ll need to keep it so you can look at pictures and maybe read along while you listen to an audiobook. Is there an audiobook? You keep telling yourself you’re going to look and then you never actually start looking. Maybe you can make Dave make an audiobook for you, since he likes talking so much. Or Karkat. That would be HILARIOUS oh god, you should totally have Karkat make an audiobook of this and then listen to it while you look at the pictures.

Gamzee hasn’t quite made it halfway through but you decide he did his best and you’re not going to ask him to push himself any more than he already has.

“Ready to go?” you ask. He has a crush on you. That’s so weird. Are you doing an okay job of not acting differently? You feel like you keep on forgetting that he likes you and just remember the fact that people distressed him last night. Is that you being forgetful or you blocking things out? Or just you being distracted. Could be all three.

Gamzee curls up close to you the moment you pick him up, which is adorable as always, and you enjoy the feeling of his breath directly on your neck. It used to be that moving air on your neck tickled something fierce, but now you just like it.

“Do you wanna fly or teleport?” you ask, and you feel him take a breath of relief.

“Shit, forgot that was even a motherfuckin’ option. Zap there?”

“Sure.” You do just that, and while you could retcon yourself straight into their living room, you would run the risk of startling Dave by appearing out of nowhere, and you try to avoid doing that as much as you can. Instead, you just zap to the front porch, and let yourself in. Dave is not even awake yet (not even in blanket burrito form!) and Karkat is in the kitchen making muffins angrily. You wouldn’t think that muffins could be angrily made, but Karkat can accomplish anything.
“Hey brother,” Gamzee greets and you remember to set him down.

“Gamzee, fuck, hey,” Karkat sets the bowl down and goes to him, wiping his hands on Dave’s “Fuck the cook” apron and then taking it off so he can hug Gamzee without getting flour/batter on him. “Hey.”

“Hey, best beloved.”

“Hey. How are- how’s- fuck.”

Gamzee honks. “Yeah, about that.” Gamzee sinks to his knees and buries his face in Karkat’s chest. “Motherfuckin’ right about fuckin’ that.”

Karkat curls around him and click-hums into his hair rapidly. You wave a little at the two of them, neither of them see you, and then you pour hot sauce into the muffins while no one is looking. Trolls generally don’t mind spicy food- and you know Gamzee once squirited sriracha straight into his mouth because Roxy was explaining to Callie that while people can, they really shouldn’t, so Gamzee’s fine with spicy- Karkat has incredibly low tolerance for heat and so does Dave. Like the worst either of them can do is spicy vegetarian chicken nuggets (even then, the two of them complain).

You take a picture of Gamzee and Karkat and send it to Karkat.

EB: Hey, can you try and make sure Gamzee eats? He barely touched his food this morning

You then take a picture of yourself and send it to all your recent contacts.

EB: I’m off to my first day of college! :B

You’re in the air when Rose snaps you back. She’s dressed up nice, in bright oranges and deep purples and a see-through scarf draped around her shoulders and upper arms.

TT: Me as well. I’m terribly enthused about the whole ordeal.

You take a picture of yourself, in your god tiers and sky high, wind tousling your hair.

EB: Someone looks nice!!

Rose gives you a close up of her eyeshadow, which is purple and glittery, with a line of perfectly winged eyeliner really emphasizing how nice she looks.

TT: I might have gotten a touch overzealous.

You laugh and send her a bright smile.

EB: Nothing wrong with that!!

You send snaps of your school, which is really just a giant GIANT hair salon looking place. You’re desperately excited. Holy shit why didn’t you think of this sooner??

You keep your feet on the ground, and you’re dressed nice but fairly normally, but there’s really not going to be any stopping the stares you’re getting. Is that John Egbert? That’s totally the god of wind. What’s the god of trickery doing at cosmetology school? You try to ignore the murmurs, and focus on sending your friends snaps.

You all get herded into the main office, where your boss/teacher/professor- Jill- shows you how to
work the computer system, how to clock in and out, and shares the list of main phone numbers and
e-mails with you all just in case you didn’t get her email (you did, so you just pass the paper on
along). She impresses on you all the importance of remembering to clock in and out every time
you’re there, since that’s how your hours get tracked.

Then you get split into two groups. Dale, Jill’s partnerboss/fellow teacher/associate professor,
takes one group and you continue to follow Jill. Both of them are available to speak to and ask
questions of, but it’s more efficient to split into smaller groups. You’re informed that if you’re
following Jill now, you’ll be learning with Dale eventually. They want to facilitate an atmosphere
of comradery here, nobody is going to be a stranger by the end of this. You hope that means you’re
going to stop getting looks soon. It’s not like school didn’t always involve people giving you looks,
but you’d at least like to do something to get them all staring at you. You try to convince yourself
that your hair is an atrocity from all the wind whipping around you while you were flying- and also
in dire need of a haircut- and they’re judging you for it, instead of staring at you, John Egbert, God
of Wind, one of the creators of this universe.

Maybe they’re looking at your buck teeth! Though, between you, Jade, Jake, and Jane, enlarged
front teeth has become something of a beauty quirk in this world. Maybe they think you’re hot!
Ha… hahaha… yeah right.

Bluh!!! Jill opens a door at the top of the stairs and you, god of wind and the universe, take a seat
in the classroom you all have been led to. The windows here take up one whole wall, the glass
giving you full view of the world outside and flooding the room with light. The desks are set up in
a sorta circular fashion, with one smaller circle inside the larger, outer circle, desks staggered so no
one is directly behind anyone else. There’s a potted plant in three of the four corners of the room
(the fourth having a door in it), and instead of chairs you have stools. It looks… significantly nicer
than your middle school, that’s for certain. You can’t tell if it’s because Earth C architects like
people more in this universe or because this is college and everything is shiny and cool in college.
Holy shit the stools spin when you rotate your hips this is the best thing ever.

Jill starts talking and you listen, but you spin your hips the whole time. No one seems particularly
bothered by this. You’re not sure if this is because you’re a god and they don’t wanna start shit,
because you’re a god and that’s way more interesting than the fact you’re spinning, or because it’s
genuinely a thing people don’t care about. Jill informs you that about half of the first semester will
be spent in this classroom, so you’ll be here for the rest of fall and on into early winter. The
following half of the first semester you’ll be out on the floor. Apparently you will not have
homework, but “homeplay,” because they like to “inspire creativity” and “keep things fun.” You
suppose you can appreciate that.

Then she starts painstakingly going over the syllabus, which you follow along with, all the while
spinning on your stool. You’re so glad it doesn’t make noise when you spin. This is nice. Policies
and rules take up the majority of it, followed by dress code (aww, you won’t be able to show up
wearing only a speedo and nipple tassles! Damn!) and then you move on to the school catalogue.
The catalogue is a touch much, you even stop spinning because your brain gets a little super
focused on it. There are so many choices??? So many things. Wow. Your phone starts chiming out
the ghostbusters theme song halfway through the policies, and you messily fumble with it, turning
it off before shoving it back into your sylladex.

“Sorry,” you awkwardly tell the room, bright red in the face.

After the catalogue it’s time for icebreakers. You guess you thought college was too sophisticated
for that kind of thing? Jill seems like the kind of person who’s super mega chipper though, so you
guess she probably feels very strongly about “getting to know the other Future Professionals(TM)"
you’re in class with and forming a “lifelong friendship” thanks to you all “learning more about each other” and “fostering an environment of love and support among cosmetologists!” You get the feeling that Jill (and by extension, Dale) really want you all to be friends, and you’re honestly not sure if this feels childish or just fun. Meh. No use worrying over whether something is childish or not (that, and you are childish, you are so very childish), you decide to just have fun. You “take time to become part of the family” and try to learn everybody’s names. You split after everyone’s gone around to get to know each other “a little more personally” and end up giving your chumhandle to a gal named Aillie, who has very straight hair for a sea dweller and tells you about the flat-ironing process that goes into maintaining her look. You ask if she ever burns herself, with her flat iron that hot, and she shows off a nasty looking burn mark on the backside of her earfin. She also knows a whole hell of a lot about the properties of moonstone. You ask if she’s part of Rose’s cult, and she tells you that while the cult of horroretters is where she got the witchy information from, she’s not nearly dedicated enough to actually join anything and instead looks up stuff like the defensive and cleansing powers of rosemary or the longevity blessings of quartz online. You tell her about the MMOs you frequent, and she asks if she can pass your chumhandle on to a friend of hers, who also likes some of the MMOs you’ve mentioned. You tell her sure, and ask if her friend is in any guilds. She tells you he’s not, and you perk up at the idea of getting another friend- then falter.

“Actually, could you not? I’ve got an online-anonymity thing going, I don’t want my guild to figure out I’m actually a god,” you wave your hands and roll your eyes. You’d cross your legs up under you, but you’re kinda determined to keep your feet on the ground today. Allie snorts. “It’s tough to be a god,” she teases, but you get the feeling she understands. Hell, the whole reason you were willing to give her your handle was because she treated you much the same as she treated everyone else: willing to be friendly but definitely a touch rude. A touch rude but still amicable is kind of your comfort zone when it comes to interactions with other people.

“You have no idea.”

“Well, I don’t know how you don’t know this, but I’m basically a big deal,” she says, pushing her hair behind her ear with a grin your way. You laugh, caught up in her playfulness.

You get a dollhead with the promise that you will be obtaining many, many, many more dollheads to conduct your hair coloring/cutting/styling on. You go get lunch with Aillie, who tells you her friend Lailah- the outer leaf of an auspisticism that Aillie is mediating- will be joining the two of you.

“Ails,” a cerulean troll (who you can only assume is Lailah) says with something of exasperation. She approaches your table in the Ihop, eyes flicking between the two of you rapidly. “What the fuck.” It’s too tired sounding to really qualify as a question, you feel.

“John, meet Lailah.”

“Aillie, you’re sitting next to a god.” Lailah sits across from you, staring at Aillie and looking a great deal like she wants to lay her head down on something cool and dark.

“Uh, excuse you? A god is sitting next to me, thanks.”

You laugh and Aillie props an elbow up on your shoulder, and Lailah does lay her head down on the table at that. “Okay,” she says, weak and defeated.

Aillie’s confidence and casual attitude towards you gets Lailah interacting with you too, quickly, and the three of you make small talk by way of getting to know each other. It’s nice, since most
small talk for you involves people who already know you inside-out. You learn that Lailah is thinking about getting licensed in behavioral training for animals like dogs and cats and shit, but decided to take a break year between molt and going back to school. Her folks (her mom and all five members of her mom’s quadrants) are very encouraging that she tries out different educational pursuits and are glad she’s taking a year to explore and expand her horizons. Aillie’s parents (her mom and her mom’s diamond, heart, and spade) are glad Aillie chose something that’s less likely for her to get injured in, since her previous goals had involved olympic swimming, olympic gymnastics, and televised risk-taking. Lailah informs you that Aillie refuses to let anyone be better at the things she’s doing than her. Aillie says Lailah sounds like someone talking from second place. You hear a little about their quadrants, then, and they ask after yours (your human-moirail (a term they find hilarious, since all humans on this planet utilize what used to be the trollish quadrant system) and your kismesis (they remember that going viral)). They’re both very relieved that Mimior, the other outer leaf, is more interested in accounting and finance than cosmetology, and is not here. From the sound of the guy, you’re glad he’s not here either.

You notice a barbering class as you leave that afternoon. The class is held a building over from yours, (which you pass when you leave the Ihop) on a much smaller scale. Barbering is sort of a niche field, since only humans grow facial hair, and only 50% of humans, even less, really, actually grow facial hair at that. But still. You stare in the window a moment, and make a mental note that when you’re done with cosmetology, you’re going to come back here again for barbering. You sneeze. Something for a later day. You turn your phone back on, ready to text Jade that you’re on your way over.

3 missed calls from Karkat. 22 missed calls from Dave.

Your stomach plummets. If those were texts or snaps or a mixture of both, you’d be fine, that’s a normal (some days even small) number of things to receive from those two, but these are missed calls. Gamzee is with them. Gamzee has not been having a good time. You’re not sure what you’re currently fearing, but you think “the worst” accurately sums it up.

“Uh, Dave?” you tell his answering machine, not feeling any less uneasy about this from the fact that Dave isn’t answering his phone, “This is John. You and Karkat didn’t leave any messages, so, I’m just going to head over now!”

You teleport there and hurl yourself through their front door- which you guess defeats the purpose of teleporting to their porch in the first place but Dave is not in the foyer or living room to startle so you guess it’s fine. It’s fucking freezing as hell is not, why is the air conditioning on so high!?

Then you see Gamzee on the couch in the living room and the tight, panicked thing in your core melts. He’s asleep, piled high with what looks to be every blanket in the house. You float over to him, letting relief cycle in and out with your every breath. He’s fine. He’s sleeping and turtle-shaped with blankets. He’s fine.

Now where are Dave and Karkat?

You only have to go one room over, and you find that the reason Dave did not answer your call is because he is perched on the counter, bent at a hilarious angle, making out with his tiny boyfriend, who is standing encircled in Dave’s legs (and has his hands up Dave’s shirt).

“Hi,” you say, and you know Dave doesn’t like being jumpscared but to be fair this one was his own damn fault, you weren’t being sneaky. Karkat shrieks at a hilarious pitch and you chuckle. “You two are gross.”

“Hey, hey John, guess what?” Dave says, grinning like a fool and resting his chin between
Karkat’s horns, arms draped limply over Karkat’s shoulders now and legs still hugging him close.

“What?” you ask over Karkat’s angry muttering, which is probably only not angry screaming because Dave is talking.

“I’m like dropping hints that I love Karkat Vantas.”

“I know Dave.”

“I’m love Karkat Vantas.”

“I know Dave.”

Dave drops his head to kiss Karkat’s cheek and you float up to Karkat’s side, grinning down at him with a flutter of affectionate mischief. Every time you see Dave gushing over Karkat it just makes your heart feel so warm.

“Also!” Karkat suddenly spouts, as if he’d been mumbling things substantial enough to warrant an “and another thing!”

“Also?”

Karkat grabs you by the collar of your shirt with one hand and yanks you close, “How fucking dare you pour hot sauce in the muffins this morning! Do you have any idea how god awful they were?!”

Your Gambit spikes and you grin. “Wish I could’ve seen it!” you say as Dave echoes Karkat’s complaints. You sober, remembering why you’re here in the first place and not at Jades. “But I have a bigger wish to know about the phone calls?” You pull out your cell to illustrate your point.

“Oh, shit, yeah, that was way early this morning,” Dave says.

“I know, I was in class for the first one and then turned my phone off; what happened?”

“Apparently Gamzee has periods of time when he just zones out on another level. Like astral projection shit but a lot less intentional and hard to wake him up from,” Dave tells you.

“Which neither you nor he decided you wanted to fucking mention,” Karkat says, not bitterly but certainly not happily.

You shrug. “I kinda figured he’d told you about them during your feelings jams?”

Karkat sighs and rests his face on Dave’s chest. “That’s fair. That’s very fucking fair. It’s what he should have fucking done, the moron.”

“So that’s what he did earlier?”

“Yeah dude we were both flipping our collective shit like we had no warning that that was gonna happen and all of a sudden fuckin’ boom, Gamzee has gone to non-responsive land, the clown is not in the carnival he is fuckin’ off somewhere else. Where? Hell if we know. But yeah I might have freaked out and called you a few times.”

“A few.”

“Just a few. Then he came back and told us he was fine and neither of us motherfucking bought that so he had to explain about how he fucks off to la la land’s evil twin land and I guess it happens kinda often?”
You hold up your hand, waggling it in a so-so kinda way. “Eh. He has them every now and then but they’ve been getting better lately. How long was he out?” He hasn’t had a bad one in a while, but there will be little moments, here and there, over the last few weeks where he would blank out for anywhere from 10 seconds to 2 minutes.

Karkat looks at Dave, who sucks in a cheek on one side, calculating time in that Time way he has.

“Ten minutes and eleven seconds.”

Oh yikes.

“Gee,” you breathe, “He hasn’t had one that bad since I redecorated.”

“Well at least that’s a fucking relief,” Karkat says, rubbing at his eye. “We brought up therapy again after he woke up, talked about it, actually started googling shit. Gamzee got tired and to be entirely fucking honest I don’t know if he’s just sleeping to avoid his responsibilities or because getting panfucked exhausts him, but we quit and he’s been asleep since lunch.”

“Getting panfucked sounds like somethin’ that’d take it out of a dude,” Dave comments, and you’re inclined to agree. God, you keep only remembering the therapy thing like, when you’re in the shower or right about to go do something else. You’re glad Karkat is taking care of it though, you’re probably not the dude to trust with that kind of responsibility.

You take a deep breath. “Well, I’m glad that he’s okay. I turned on my phone and it was like-bam!” You jazz hands to get across the explosion properly.

“Yeah dude, sorry, probably shoulda left a message or something.”

“Yeah probably.” You shrug, and then look over your shoulder back into the living room.

Then you remember the excellent idea you had. “Oh hey, Karkat, while I’m here!”

“Oh this can’t fucking end well.”

“Oh this can’t fucking end well.”

“Okay, so, since you’re basically married to the sound of your own voice, you should do a thing for me.”

“Absolutely not.”

“So for my class we have to read this textbook, but reading is boring and hard to focus on,” you continue as if he hadn’t said anything, “so I thought to myself hey! I’ll find an audiobook! And then I thought to myself.”

“I know where this is going, and I am staunchly refusing right fucking now.”

“Karkat!” you say brightly, still ignoring the fact that he’s saying things, “You should read my textbook out loud and make an audiobook for me!”

“Hell. The fuck. No,” he says slowly.

“See, I knew you would agree!” you say brightly, wind twirling with your own mischief around your ankles.

“I’m not fucking agreeing!! Read your own goddamn textbook!” Karkat is keeping his voice impressively quiet, but it’s still screechy and you and Dave both look on the verge of asshole-giggles.
“You know, Karkat, you should probably be a little nicer to the guy who disabled your moirail long enough to talk him down from his ‘Lord bullshit,’” you say with air quotes, absolutely referencing the fact that he totally still owes you from back in Chapter 5 the Medium when you were fighting Caliborn.

Karkat levels you with the most unimpressed look and Dave goes a little shocked. Yeah you might be making a social faux pas, but honestly that’s part of the fun.

“Are you seriously standing-”

“Floating,” you correct.

“-in front of me, right here right now, referencing something of severe- even fucking life-threatening, dare I say- fucking gravity, in order to get me to do something trivial and asinine?”

You “mm-hm!” brightly with a quick nod, folding your legs up underneath you in the air. You don’t even see the stressball coming until it’s hit you in the face.

“Hey! Watch the glasses!” you say with a laugh as Karkat tries not to wake Gamzee with his screech-clicking, obviously attempting to muffle himself but only really half succeeding.

“You- fucking- bulgesitting cocksucking- garbagepanned- fucking- disgusting ass excuse of a-where do you- the fucking audacity- grubfisted- shitlicking- turdsniffing- fucking-” Karkat is insulting you, voice tight and stilted with his rage. You’re grinning, and only really notice that you are because your cheeks start to hurt. Dave is giving you a “what the fuck” look but honestly you’re just really terribly chuffed at the moment.

Karkat leaps at you, also something that you are not fast enough to dodge, and he yanks you into a kiss. You laugh, definitely catching a lip on one of his fangs. This is not what you’d expected but you are not actually minding. He makes a noise similar to a toddler entering tantrum mode, a whine that gradually increases in volume and pitch, fury vibrating from his body, and you grab two fistfuls of hair and kiss back.

“Fuckin’ incredible,” Dave comments. You pull back with a laugh and blow Dave a kiss, winking playfully at him. He looks a little done with your bullshit. Karkat is telling you he’s done with your bullshit. You are fucking thriving off your bullshit.

You decaptchalogue your textbook and hand it to Karkat. He thwaps your arm with it, but doesn’t throw it at you. In fact, he captchalogue it. Score.

“I need to have the introductory chapter done by the end of the week.”

“Get the fuck out of my kitchen,” Karkat orders you, glaring and trying to breathe steadily enough to calm himself down. You shrug.

“Kay!”

You float out into the living room, then over to Gamzee, and hear Dave mutter something that makes Karkat snort loudly, breaking his angry froth. You sit down on your haunches so your face is just about level with Gamzee’s and pet his hair, which causes him to stir and blink awake.

“Hey,” you greet softly, gently, your spritely mischief vanishing in a wisp. “Heard you had a bad spell.”

Gamzee’s whole body shudders in the process of waking up and he takes in a deep breath, a hand
sliding up under the weight of all the blankets to poke out and lay on the back of your hand.

“Mhm. Brothers got real freaked,” Gamzee mumbles sleepily, half the words barely intelligible. He reaches out and strokes a thumb over your lip, carefully not touching the injury there but sleepily worried all the same.

“You probably should’ve told Karkat about your episodes before now,” you say, gently pulling Gamzee’s hand from your mouth and holding it instead.

Gamzee tries to shrug. “‘Nuff to worry about.”

“Gamzee,” you scold very, very gently, then kiss his forehead. “You feeling better now though?”

Gamzee smiles at you, pulling his arm back into the warmth of the blanket. “I always feel good ‘round you.”

“Thanks,” you say with a light laugh, “I like hanging out with you too.” You thumb at his cheek a moment, appreciating how soft he looks when he’s just waking up, then kiss his hair and stand up.

“If you’re okay, then I’m gonna go over to Jade’s now. She’s probably wondering where I am. You good?”

Gamzee nods and sits up, sorta. More like goes up on an elbow as the blanket mountain shifts on top of him. “Okay, brother. Where’re Karkat n’ Dave?”

“They’re being gay in the kitchen.”

Gamzee snorts. “Ain’t they always bein’ flushed as all motherfuck?”

You ponder that a moment.

“They’re in the kitchen, the gayness of their interaction being a given.”

Gamzee honks and the two of you chuckle good-naturedly. Karkat comes out of the kitchen at that and bends down in much the same place you just occupied, but instead of sitting on his haunches he instead leans his hands on his legs and bends at the waist. Tiny boyfriend. The tiniest.

“Hey shitlord, you’re up. How’re you feeling?” Karkat asks, pressing his palm over Gamzee’s forehead and smoothing the hair out of the way. Gamzee purrs up at him, smiling, eyes going all squinty and one of his fangs poking out just a tiny bit. It’s critically adorable.

“Mmm pale for you,” Gamzee mumbles out. Karkat’s about to say something but you pinch his ass. Karkat tries to punch you in the gut but you manage to dodge this time, Becoming so his fist just floats through you.

“Don’t you have Jade to go annoy?” Karkat asks the open air, which you guess technically is just as much you as any other space in the room. Your awareness kinda stretches, and you are cognizant of Dave in the doorway, leaning on the frame and observing you all with a special sort of fondness quietly. You rustle his hair, just a touch, just so he knows that you know he’s there. He lifts two fingers, acknowledging your acknowledgement. Your heart- if you had one, anyway- surges with affection for your best bro. You just. You really love your friends.

You unform and sneeze, changing out of your god tiers back into your day clothes.

“I do indeed! So while I love you all, I’m gonna head out. By Dave, by Gamzee, by bitch!” you say
cheerfully, waving at each of them. Then you head out. Whoops, looks like changing back into your clothes was kinda arbitrary, heh. Oh well!

**ectoBiologist [EB] began pestering gardenGnostic [GG]**

EB: Sorry I’m running so late!

EB: Gamzee had a bad spell so I had to go over to Karkat and Dave’s.

GG: oh no!!! D:

GG: is he okay??

EB: Yeah he’s doing better now!

EB: I freaked out there for a minute though like Dave called me 20 times and Karkat called me too

EB: I thought someone was dying or something

GG: yikes!

GG: what happened?

EB: Oh Gamzee does this thing where he zones out for a while except worse where it’s like Advanced Zoning Out

EB: Dave and Karkat were flipping their shit

EB: He’s fine though

GG: :/

GG: oh but!!!

GG: terezi is here

GG: fair warning!!!

GG: she says shell probably head out whenever you get here

EB: Oh cool I haven’t seen her in

EB: However long since the last time I saw her!

GG: heeehee!!!!

GG: were out in the garden! <3

EB: I’ll see you there! <3

**ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering gardenGnostic [GG]**

You take to the skies in your god tier, and allow yourself to waft into a million particles. It’s a slow kind of Becoming, a gentle falling to pieces that feels much the same as falling into bed after a long day of exercise. It feels like relaxing, turning into a puddle except this is so much better than a puddle. You let yourself stretch out, leaving pieces of yourself over Dave and Karkat’s hive-house and pushing the rest of you forward, towards Jade’s. You stretch and stretch, slowly becoming less
of an oval stretched between your start point and destination and more of a line.

You make a good ways of the way there before you grow fearful enough to let the parts you left behind snap close, like a rubber band. Wind that is not you (that is less you. All wind is you, and you are all wind, but that wind does not have your consciousness in it) surges past the wind that is you, caught by your rapid motion.

You started losing yourself, the further you stretched. You grew even more windy and even less boy. You wonder, achingly wonder, what would happen if you kept stretching, stretched against a nameless pressure that you felt just now, what would happen? Would you learn something cool about your powers? About yourself?

Would you cease to exist?

You twirl rapidly, creating a small cyclone of self, and then continue on once you feel able to. You arrive above Jade’s mere moments later, and when you unform you rapidly sneeze three times. You float down into her garden, where she’s sitting cross-legged in the dirt in front of Terezi, who is leaning on one arm and has her legs out to the side.

“Hi!” you greet as you touch down, and Jade beams up at you.

“Hi John! I was just telling Terezi about how this flower looks like it belongs to one genus but actually doesn’t!”

“And I was just not listening!” Terezi says, just as brightly.

“Rude,” Jade says, and then plucks the flower she was apparently talking about and puts it in Terezi’s hair. Terezi giggles (a terrifying sound, coming from her), and sniffs the air loudly. She then takes the flower out of her hair and eats it.

“If John is here, I’m gonna head out!” she announces brightly, standing and patting dirt off her pants. “Don’t want his icky weenie germs getting on me!”

“You’re a weenie!” you retort.

“John, you are a total weenie. The biggest weenie.” She hipchecks you as she passes you, and gets her jetpack on just about as soon as she clears the line of Jade’s garden and won’t accidentally hurt any plants in her takeoff.

“So how was your first day of class!?” Jade asks excitedly, patting the dirt next to her. You flop down on the ground, laying your head in her lap, and smile up at her.

“It was good! I made a new friend!”

Jade pretends to gasp, hands flying to her cheeks in comedic exaggeration. “A friend!! Who would ever have guessed!”

“Eheheh. Her name is Aillie, she’s a troll. She’s pretty funny! I met one of her friends too, Lailah. She’s also a troll. Aillie is in my cosmetology class, Lailah just met us for lunch at Ihop.”

“Cool!”

“Yeah! Class itself was actually pretty great?”

“Mm, I remember you not really liking middle school,” Jade says. You recall some of the
conversations you had with her about school, mostly just you complaining about having to sit still all day or getting in trouble for “acting out” or that one AWFUL science teacher you had who insisted that your leg bouncing was interrupting his ability to teach. The pen clicking you understand, that was disruptive, but your leg bouncing was hurting nobody!

“Yeah, middle school sucked. College is really cool so far though! I’m making Karkat make an audiobook of the textbook for me, so I don’t have to like, read it all by myself because I probably won’t be able to focus that great, even though it does have plenty of pictures which is basically a huge relief. The hugest.”

“You want to listen to Karkat shrieking at you over a mic?” Jade teases, and you reach up and bop her nose.

“If it means I don’t have to read unaided I do! Besides, I like Karkat’s voice. It’s…” you ponder that a moment, “gravelly?”

“I would’ve gone for ‘hoarse’ myself.”

“Yeah but like, I like the way he sounds is all.”

“Well that’s good, since you’re gross dumb boyfriends now.”

“He is my gross dumb boyfriend!” you say proudly.

“Gross.”

“I have a dollhead,” you tell her, decaptchaloguing it so you can show her. “I’m gonna practice hairstyles on it. And like, how to dye it and how to cut it.”

“That hair won’t grow back,” Jade says.

“Yeah, that’s why I’m gonna be getting a lot more dollheads in the future! This is just my first one.”

“Rad.”

“Yeah! And then we just like, went over policies and the school catalogue and got to know each other and shit. How was your day?”

“Oh, pretty okay! Kanaya called me this morning and we had a nice conversation while I made breakfast. Apparently Rose doesn’t wake up early enough in the morning and Kanaya was feeling chatty.”

“No, you and Kanaya just wake up too goddamn early.”

“You’re just lazy.”

You lift a hand and raise your eyebrows. “Shit, you got me there,” you say, and the two of you briefly chuckle.

“So yeah. Then after that I played this new choose-your-own-adventure visual novel I found online, then Terezi came over, and now you’re here!”

“What did you and Terezi get up to?”

“Oh, nothing much. Just shot the shit, really.”
“Must’ve been fun. You have impeccable aim.”

“That I do,” Jade says proudly, showing off her arms as though muscle has anything to do with hand eye coordination.

Jade props her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, grinning down at you, her hair making a wavy curtain and blocking out the sun (and also getting in your mouth, pfftftfttt!!!”)

“Sooolllllooo,” Jade says, and you have clearly dropped the ball on whatever it is she thinks you are going to understand based on that look.

“So?”

“So, Gamzee!”

“What about him?” you ask with a frown. “He really is fine, the space-outs are-”

“No! No! About him liking you! And you liking him back- potentially,” she tacks on as an afterthought. “So?”

“Ohhh, shit, you know what, I told you I was going to think about it and then I had a lot of other stuff going on and didn’t actually do that.”

“John!!”

“I was busy!” you protest, hunching your shoulders. “Last night everyone was screaming at me and by the time I finally waded through all the messages I was too tired to think about wanting to date Gamzee, and then today I was at school!”

Jade rubs at her eyes, then drags her hands down her face. “Okay, so think about it right now then. What do you think about dating Gamzee right now?”

You think briefly of Gamzee and then shrug. “I dunno.”

“You took like point-five seconds to think about that try again.”

“Jade!” you protest.

“John!”

“I don’t know! No?”

“You’re not even trying to think about dating Gamzee!”

“It’s not just something I can sit down and magically do!”

“Can you think about kissing Karkat?”

“Not right now!”

Jade groans and flops down into the dirt, leaving her legs crisscrossed so you can continue laying in them.

“What am I gonna do with you, John?”

“Oh, love me unconditionally and feed me snacks?”
“Oo! Snacks is a good idea!”

“I have those sometimes.”

Jade sits up and pats your head. “You have those lots of the time! Let’s go get snausages!”

“Heeeell yeah!” you say. Jade’s association with the word snausages has resulted in them being finger food here on Earth C, like hot pockets or popcorn. Little mini breaded tubes of meat.

You two float inside, you still in your god tiers and her in her capris and tanktop. It’s starting to cool down outside but Jade is one of those stubborn people who refuses to wear weather-appropriate clothing until mother nature out-stubborns her. She’s the kind of girl who’ll wear long sleeves on a tropical island simply because it’s April and it’s supposed to be cool, the kind of girl to wear short shorts in autumn’s first half-season just because that’s what’s at the top of her wardrobe.

God you love your sister so much. She’s the absolute best ever and you would die a thousand times over for her. Though, heh, thanks to time shenanigans, you guess you technically have?

The two of you both get plates of snausages and you chill out on her bed upstairs, all the way up on the top floor. You lean against a pile of stuffed animals, which are mostly squiddles, and she lays on her belly next to you, a book with a bookmark in it pretty close to her face.

“Hey John.”

“Hey Jade.”

“Could you please try thinking about your feelings for Gamzee? You don’t need to answer soon, so like, no pressure? But just, try to process your own emotions?”

“Introspection is for bitches, Jade,” you tell her, lifting up a leg and settling it across her back.

“And you’re a bitch, so what’s the problem.”

You raspberry at her, but then settle in. “Yeah okay I’ll think about it.”

“Thank you,” she says, opening her book and ignoring you. Her having something else to do while you think makes you feel better about sitting there for an extended period of time, thinking about things and not engaging with her. You’re supposed to be here to hang out with Jade! Well, okay, you arranged to come over because the two of you thought you’d still be freaking out about Gamzee liking you, but jokes on both of you, you haven’t thought about him much at all!

Oh. You guess Gamzee saying that he always feels good around you earlier was probably flirtatious. You didn’t even notice! He says stuff like that all the time! Oh.

Oh.

He says stuff like that all the time.

Oh wow you’re dumb. You… says stuff like that back all the time too. But Gamzee still knew you didn’t reciprocate, right? So you must… do something or another, you guess.

You shift down, setting your plate to the side and curling up close to Jade. She flops an arm over you and you cuddle in close, Jade lifting the book to hover in the air with her Space powers so she can read and cuddle you at the same time. You are grateful for that and take the opportunity to
bury your face in her chest, feeling safe wrapped up in her arms.

“You’re the best sister ever,” you tell her, mumbling.

“I know.” She kisses your hair. “And you’re the best brother.”

“We really are just the best siblings.”

“Mhm!”

The two of your return to your mutual silence, the only sound an occasional page turning in her book.

Okay. So Gamzee likes you. This is evident through the sweet, admiring things he says to you, you guess. You really only know because he told you. You have two options: 1. You don’t like Gamzee. This is evident because you treat all your friends like you adore them. 2. You do like Gamzee. This is evident because…

You really don’t have a good argument in your brain for why you would like Gamzee. Like, like-like him, anyway. Of course you like Gamzee, he’s great and super sweet and soft and good to cuddle and he makes you smile and the more comfortable he gets with living on Earth C the more he makes you laugh. You like spending time with him and you like making him happy and you like when you can do things to help him. Is that different from how you feel about your friends?

At least with Karkat it was kinda clear! You like pester- ing the shit out of him! You’re a little bit of an asshole to everyone, sure, but there’s no one you enjoy being an asshole to as much as you love annoying Karkat. But with like, normal run of the mill romance how are you supposed to distinguish!? You love everybody! What would potentially lead to different emotions for Gamzee, if you were to have those?

You guess now is time to take down a few of those thoughts you have pinned. Little memories of weird emotion towards Gamzee. Is that weird emotion love? Like, romance-love. Not just the love that you know you do feel towards him. Weird emotion love. Weird love. Romance is weird. And hard!!!

“Jade?”

“Mm?”

“What’s even the difference between friendship and romance?”

“It’s a weird feeling that’s hard to explain.”


“Maybe what?”

“Maybe I do like-like him? Like, like him like that.”

“Mhmmmm,” Jade prompts. You fall silent again, and she pets your hair idly. Oh that feels nice.

You’ve definitely had weird moments that you haven’t wanted to examine at the time of their happening. Weird, warm moments when you’re filled with affection. Weird moments when you have briefly pondered doing like… kissing things with Gamzee.

Well. You guess you figured out you liked Karkat by thinking about kissing him romantically. Do
you wanna kiss Gamzee? You think hard on that, eyes closed, face pressed to Jade’s chest. You think Gamzee looks nice, certainly, as far as anyone looks nice. You already like, kiss him on the cheek and nose and forehead and stuff, and definitely want to continue doing that. Would kissing his lips be fun? In what scenario would you want to kiss his lips?

Like… you’re cuddling on the couch or something, or maybe in bed. You’ve just woken up, he’s there, asleep, so you lean over and kiss his forehead. That gets his eyes fluttering but not quite opening, so you chuckle and caress his cheek and kiss down the bridge of his nose, the tip of his nose, then finally his mouth, feeling the way he moves and shifts into wakefulness as you gently kiss him awake-

Okay yeah you might have a crush on Gamzee.

“I think I maybe probably do,” you say. “At the very least, I think kissing him would be nice, probably.”

“Probably?” Jade prompts.

“I’ve only been just now thinking about it,” you say, sitting up. “I- I’ll sleep on it. Gamzee’s having a day today anyway-”

“Have a day.”

“Have a day!” you echo, memeing briefly. “But yeah, I’ll keep thinking about it, sleep on it, see how he feels tomorrow morning- or, probably after class, actually, I don’t think that would be a good conversation to have early in the morning when I have to rush out right after.”

“I guess that’s a solid plan.”

“What would you do?”

“I, personally, would like you to go over there right now and kiss Gamzee right now, but that’s just me.”

You blow a raspberry down to her and she blows one back, sitting up as well.

“You’re really convinced that I like him, huh?”

“I’m pretty sure the two of you are the only ones convinced that you don’t like him.”

“Does Rose know? Does Dave?”

“Yeah of course.”

“Huh.”

Jade ruffles your hair and you use your Breath to ruffle hers, and the two of you agree to let the sleeping dog lie for a little while. You’ll keep thinking on it, see how you feel in the morning. The two of you then go play videogames until dinner, and you agree to invite Dave, Karkat, and Gamzee over for dinner at her place. You make grilled chicken and baked potatoes, with a large bowl of peas. Karkat and Gamzee favor the chicken, while you and Dave favor the potatoes, and Jade waits until you’ve all doled out your portion of peas and then starts eating straight out of the bowl with the serving spoon. Dave and Gamzee sit on either side of you, Gamzee leaning on you once he’s done with his food and Dave being impossibly gushy over his boyfriend. You observe them, thinking, wondering if you would like being like that with Gamzee, or anybody.
You think you might? It looks nice. Dumb and gross, for sure, and you tease the two of them loudly whenever Dave says anything, but like it’s a nice dumb and gross. A soft, warm dumb and gross. A dumb and gross you may possibly wish to partake in. Potentially.

Dave and Karkat stay at Jade’s place when you and Gamzee leave, probably because the three of them are attached at the fucking hips, and you fly home with Gamzee cuddled up in your arms. You like carrying him, you note, you like how he leans his head on your shoulder and holds you around the neck. Like the way he breathes, like the way he laughs. That’s potentially a gay thought. Right? You’re being potentially gay right now. Schrodinger’s gay. Except when you open the box it doesn’t solve anything because it’s all clouded by “what even is romance” paradox goop.

You put on sweats and a worn t-shirt when you get home, going barefoot, and dick around on your computer for a while as Gamzee cuddles up to you and messes around on his. You glance over and see him reading more fanfiction, still of a hanahaki vein. You still don’t know what that is, and still don’t actually care enough to google it.

This is comfortable, safe, warm. You’re a little tired, socially, from school and hanging out with Jade and Gamzee and Karkat and Dave. It’s nice to just exist together, close, so close you couldn’t fail to feel his breathing even if you wanted to, but quiet.

turntechGodhead [TG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

TG: sup
EB: Sup!
TG: s’all good over here
TG: you know
TG: chilliest dude this side of paradox space with a couple of Beauty’s finest bitches

He then sends you a snap of Jade and Karkat talking about something, both of them smiling. Then he switches back to pesterchum.

TG: though tbf were all fucking hot as satans asscrack over here
EB: You’re all very pretty! :B
TG: thanks
TG: hows it going over there
EB: Good
EB: Chill
EB: It’s been a busy day for me!
TG: yeah you were telling us during dinner sounds like class was nice but probably tiring
EB: Yeah, and then also I’m trying to figure out this Gamzee situation
TG: ?
EB: Like
EB: I know I LIKE Gamzee
EB: But do I like-like him?
TG: do you?
EB: I don’t know!
EB: That’s the problem!
EB: I have no idea! I don’t know if I like-like ANYONE for that matter!
TG: well like you hate-love karkat right so like you have the capacity probably
EB: Karkat’s different
EB: Or, I guess PITCH is different
EB: It’s not as hard to differentiate between friendship and romance when it’s pitch
EB: Regular romance is just like… bluhhh….
TG: i mean i cant relate but i get what youre saying
EB: Was it easy for you then?
TG: eh yes and no
TG: did i know i have a crush on karkat?
TG: fuck yeah
TG: did i only realize that after processing years and years of heteronormative and outright homophobic bullshit that stunted my emotional development right alongside a lot of other bs that i also went through?
TG: an unfortunate fuck yeah
TG: i thought i was straight dude
TG: after i got past that it was like
TG: bam
TG: i am here
TG: i am pan
TG: i am very much about kissing the shouty alien who has an asshole for a mouth
EB: eheheheh ew
EB: But okay your main thing was figuring out you’re not straight
TG: figured thatd be a hangup for you too
EB: It definitely has been!
EB: But I think I’m okay with it?

EB: When I think about it less in terms of “I’m not a heterosexual” and more like “I like boys sometimes”

TG: hey man however you make that self discovery

EB: But aside from me not being straight

EB: I just don’t know what romance feels like?

TG: it feels like crying when he smiles and his ears wiggle

TG: it feels like staring wistfully at his oversized chompers and thinking about how much you like them

TG: it feels like pressing your face into the collar of his ridiculously oversized sweater and feeling safe and warm and like nothing can hurt you there

TG: shit man

TG: it feels like making dick jokes for the twentieth time in just as many minutes for no goddamn reason other than you’re making them at him and that’s fun for whatever reason

EB: eheheh you’re gross

TG: im fucking gay is what i am

TG: shit i love boys

TG: my sexuality is everyone is hot and intimidating as hell

EB: Speaking of which have you hung out with Feferi much since she got her body?

TG: boi have i

TG: fucking hell

TG: is there a person alive who is not ready to murder Sollux out of envy like that’s the real question here

TG: little green seventh deadly sin sitting on my shoulder weeping

TG: hes not equipped to handle this much envy

TG: where’s the envy coming from then cry the envious bystanders looking at Feferi flexing majestically

TG: i dunno says the little envy demon

TG: needs to excuse himself to a different room so he can compose himself

TG: spoilers it doesn’t work he starts crying again the moment he comes back because he saw Feferi kissing Sollux and wiggling her earfins

EB: eheheh, she’s very pretty!
TG: goddamn she’s so fucking hot

EB: That does seem to be the general consensus

EB: We were hanging out with Dirk the other day and even he had to admit that even though he’s gay, he definitely sees the appeal there

TG: a superpower only feferi can be trusted to use responsibly

TG: she turns everyone around her into girl-inclusionist sexualities

EB: eheheheh

TG: but can this freckled wonder tell what makes kids love the taste of cinnamon toast crunch?

EB: Can she tell what sexuality I am and if that includes Gamzee?

TG: i dunno man i think thats a you-thing that needs to happen

EB: Eugh I think I definitely might????

EB: Probably

EB: Jade thinks so but Jade isn’t actually in my head

TG: aight so imma lay it on you

TG: if you like him

TG: cool

TG: if you dont

TG: dont tear yourself up about it

TG: youve got a real want to accommodate people john like i love you but youre kind of a huge pushover

EB: No I’m not!

TG: says the guy who once got himself murdered by a troll girl simply because she told him it was a good idea to fly around on a jetpack and go fight your denizen at an incredibly low level

EB: That was trickery, not pushovery

TG: anyway

TG: look im just saying

TG: dont force yourself to like anyone you dont

TG: if you do like him its unlikely to go away anytime soon

TG: and if you dont then hey thats fine youre still friends and whatever

TG: take your time
You chat with Dave a while longer, sending each other snaps. Your replies slow down when you start playing your MMO with your guild and he and Jade and Karkat fuck off to do something or another. You ask your guild teammates what crushes feel like and they give you varying responses, most of them playfully teasing you and asking you who your crush is on (you tell them it’s not like they’d know who it is anyway, then say it’s Gamzee Makara, God of Recovery and they’re all like “no really who is it”). They don’t really help you any more than your friends help you figure out what romance even IS, but they help you think on it MORE and the more you think on it the more you think yeah, maybe. Dave’s reassurance that you don’t have to like Gamzee probably helped, too, in a roundabout way. Took some of the pressure off. He’s such a good friend to you, you love him so much.

When Gamzee comes into your bed that night, you welcome him in with open arms. He’s soft, he’s warm, you like him.

Now do you like him like that?

You think you do.

You think you do all through the next day, and think about it so much you miss what Jill says every now and then. It’s not too big of a deal. All of the basic stuff she’s going over you actually… kind of already know? Like, you wouldn’t have been able to put it into words like she’s doing now, but you have an intrinsic instinct of some sort for most of this. You touch and move and “style” your friends’ hair so much that you’ve got a good feel for this stuff, a sense of the way things flow and how they don’t.

You, Aillie, and Lailah have lunch together again. This time it’s just sandwiches you get from the fancy vending machine (most vending machines on Earth C are fancy, it’s the absolute best) and some chips and juice, but hey it tastes good and you all end up on a picnic bench, the two of them sitting together on one side and you on the other.

You’re still thinking about Gamzee, and romance, and have decided that you probably-definitely do like him like that. Everything you understand about romance- which is, admittedly, not a lot- seems to be pointing you in the direction of like-liking Gamzee, and you’re… pretty okay with that! Worst thing that happens is the two of you break it off and agree to still be friends, and you end it all there, so you won’t keep on yanking Gamzee around. Yeesh, you’ll have to apologize for turning him down the first time and then changing your mind. That’s awfully rude of you. But hopefully he’ll understand that you’re just stupid and needed a day or so to think about it. Because you’re thinking about Gamzee and romance, you decide to crowdsourc e a little more.

“So hey mind if I ask a weird question?” you ask partway through lunch, when the sandwiches are all eaten and you’re all left drinking juice/soda and munching on chips.

“Shoot,” Aillie says.
“What does flush romance feel like?”

Lailah perks suddenly. “Oh are you finally-” Aillie smacks her arm. Hard.

She hisses at Lailah- earfins pointed straight down as Lailah rubs her arm- and speaks in a way that should be a little too quiet for you to hear but your hearing has only increased over the last four weeks, growing stronger as you spend more time outside. “She doesn’t want us talking about that,” Aillie reminds, then turns back to you. “Why do you ask?” she asks at a perfectly reasonable volume.

“Uh, did future-Rose put a lock on information regarding me?” you ask instead. Lailah snorts.

“Nice hearing,” Lailah praises, and Aillie looks a touch embarrassed. Like, stiffly embarrassed, sitting up straighter and puffing out her chest embarrassed.

“Lady Luck has put out a… request, regarding a lot of things,” Aillie tells you.

“Aillie and Lailah glance at each other, then shrug. “I’d put my guess at another year? I dunno; to be totally honest the lore regarding y’all didn’t really interest me that much during school,” Aillie tells you. She sips from her soda, then adds. “No offence.”

“None taken,” you say with a shrug.

“But flush romance,” Lailah says, bringing you all back on track.

“Oh, yeah,” Aillie sets her soda down, staring off into the distance over your shoulder. “Uh, it’s different for everybody? For me flush romance feels like a lot of sexual desire with a solid helping of mutual trust and maybe friendship. The friendship piece is usually pretty up in the air though.”

“Maybe that’s why you’ve never managed to hold down a matesprit for longer than two seasons,” Lailah quips.

“Maybe someone should mind her own business,” Aillie quips back with an irritated fin twitch.

“For me it feels like… hm. An equal exchange?” Lailah says to you, “I don’t like partners who need a lot from me because that tires me out, but I also had this one guy I dated who always wanted to do everything he could for me and I felt like I wasn’t getting a chance to invest. So, flush feels like balance? Well, no, pale feels like balance, but flush is a balance between emotional needs. It’s- like a sport! Like tennis, where the ball only stays in play if the people work together, or volleyball or something. But less trying to make the other person lose. It’s mutually rewarding emotional fulfillment.”

“And sex,” Aillie says.

“And sex,” Lailah agrees, “Definitely an incredibly important aspect.”

You nod, feeling less sure now. You get some of the stuff they’re saying, like mutual trust and an even balance of giving and receiving, but… well, you get the feeling that you might be doing a lot more for Gamzee than he does for you? You don’t really need Gamzee to talk you down out of panics or hold you until you come back from la la land’s bastard cousin. Sure, he helps you, having him around has been helping you a lot actually, what with your eating schedule and getting up out of bed and out of the house regularly, things are so much better with Gamzee, but is it really an even balance? Would Gamzee feel like you do too much for him, later on down the road?
And also you don’t really see sex as an “incredibly important aspect.” Sure, yeah, sex sounds like it could be nice (could sex with Gamzee be nice? Your gut instinct says no, and now isn’t really the time to think about it), but you don’t want to enter into a relationship that labels it as “incredibly important” while you’re over here going “meh sure.”

“Thanks,” you say thoughtfully, “I’ll keep what you said in mind!”

“Good luck!” Lailah tells you brightly, smiling in a way that reminds you that she probably knows things about you that you don’t. She, nearly a perfect stranger. Fuck. Being a god is weird and you’re not exactly upset or anything- and you’re certainly not upset at her- but you’re reminded of why you avoid contact with non-gods as much as you do.

After lunch you go home, snapchatting with your friends on the flight and texting Rose in pesterchum. She has an idea to have little study dates after class(es) every day, since she has a lot to do now and you need to read your book/start practicing. You think study dates are a great idea.

Gamzee is at Dave and Karkat’s place, having spent the day with them and Jade before Jade took a blast to the past with Aradia. Your sister is now in her home, fast asleep, and Gamzee is texting you that he’ll ask Dave to fly him home, so he can hang out with you after class today, since he was kinda out of commission yesterday.

You want to send “yes,” you want to tell him to come home and spend the evening with him, talk about your feelings with him, run your fingers through his hair and touch his face, maybe… maybe date him?

But you’re also very, very terrified of that, and now desperately unsure. You don’t know if you can give him the kind of relationship he’s looking for. You’re not sure that you won’t change your mind. You’re not even sure if what you feel for him even is romance, or maybe just a warm, protective friendship. You’re not sure of anything!

EB: Yeah! Hey, maybe Dave and Karkat want to come over too?

You’re an indecisive coward.

Chapter End Notes

Everything I know about cosmetology school I looked up online, so pardon any inaccuracies
HC that John was an absolute hellion during class and also has an attention disorder that caused him to act out during school
So for those of you who know my fic To Banish The Cold, you might recognize Aillie! She was "Hellsinger" in that one!
The Chapter When They Finally Smooch

Chapter Summary

This is the chapter when they finally smooch

Chapter Notes

The chapter when they smooch, finally.

Alrighty folks I am BACK very briefly! I still have a LOT of headway to make on my thesis, but I decided to reward myself for completing my summer class by writing a chapter of SAitB! I'm sure you all don't mind ;) On that note, however, updates are still going to be very, very slow (provided I can get my act together), so please try not to worry about me abandoning this fic! I promise I still love it more than anything else in the world, I just have stuff I NEED to work on instead. This fic is not abandoned, just on hiatus.

Special thanks to my friend Bep for drawing Lailah and Aillie for me! Featuring Aillie in some very bright colors, and Lailah the dirty grunge sapphic.

I would also like to give a very special shoutout to Odds, who came up with the base of the calendar system for me and a number of the names as well! They're always really supportive of my fics and ideas and help me brainstorm, so if you like this chapter go send them some love!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

TC: yEaH bRo! :o)

EB: Great!

EB: I’ll see you three soon then!

ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering taintedCadence [TC]

Okay well now you have to decide what you want to make for dinner. Maybe… maybe you’ll just order pizza. Or two pizzas. Get a meat lovers or something for Gamzee and Karkat and a supreme for you and Dave. Oh and breadsticks. That sounds nice, actually. You’ll ask for sure what everyone wants when they get here, but pizza and breadsticks sounds like a really appealing option.

When they arrive, you go to greet your friends, who have forgone knocking, and pft loudly when you catch sight sight of Dave. He’s wearing a pale blue shirt with the words “ATTENTION WHORING” written in curving, rainbow, glittering sequin script across the front.

“My eyes are up here, John,” Dave tells you, smirking insufferably, and you laugh. He spins and shows off the backside, posing like the most uncomfortable anime girl with his ass out and his hands planted on his hips, tossing his head over his shoulder like the dramatic bitch he is. The
word “CUDDLESlut” is written in the same sparkling font on his back, and you break into open hooting.

“You did it!” you chime.

“Told you I would.”

You float over and kiss his cheek. “Didn’t doubt you for a second.”

You turn to Karkat, who you are about to go kiss/heckle, but are stopped by the sight of him angrily handing out a flash drive.

“Your,” he decaptchalogue your textbook, “fucking,” he throws the book at you and you scramble to catch it, “audiobook!”

You laugh and take the flash drive, putting the textbook and drive into the same captcha card under “school shit” and you kiss his face while he makes a big stink about having to record shit for you.

“You’re the beeeeest,” you tell him, feet on the ground and still towering above him.

“I fucking know I am and also I hate you.”

“Hate you too!” You kiss between his horns and then turn to greet Gamzee hello, but find he is not here.

“Bathroom,” Dave tells you, and you “ah” quietly.

“So I was thinking about getting pizza and breadsticks for dinner.”

“The true college kid experience.”

You stick your tongue out at Dave, floating over and sitting on one of his shoulders. “So yeah what kind of toppings do you want?”

“Supreme,” Dave says the same moment Karkat says, “Meat lovers.”

You nod. “I was thinking I’d get two. Maybe three, if Gamzee wants something that isn’t either of those two.”

“Gamzee should probably eat supreme. Get something of nutritional value into him,” Karkat mutters. Something in the air shifts around him, a little more serious than it should be. “He’s not gaining weight fast enough for what he’s eating. I’m worried about nutrient deficiency.”

“I try to keep the food we eat here fairly rounded,” you say with a frown, worried now too.

“I know; he tells me all about the amazing dogshit you make.”

“Is the dogshit part from him or from you?”

“Me, obviously. Like Gamzee would ever insult your cooking.”

“Just double checking!” you say brightly. “You’re probably worried about nothing. Maybe he’s just naturally skinny and his body’s hit its own healthy weight?”

“Highbloods are fucking gigantic John. At least, Alternian highbloods. I don’t know what exactly
Roxy did when she Voided up the Mothergrub egg for this world but we’re not really all that identical to our progeny.”

That’s so weird to think about. That the non-god humans around you all probably have at least a tiny bit of your genetics in them.

Eugh. Weird thoughts, weird thoughts. Putting that on a shelf and never touching it again thoughts.

“You mean how even though the first ones came up outta our genetic paradox goop when their slurry” Dave emphasizes the word like a douchebag, “got processed a whole lotta shit changed? You mean like how they had sex and now troll castes were like, five years apart in difference? None of your freaky Alternian mathy j-curves anymore, thank god for all those buckets of modified genetic ma- pfft.” Dave gets cut off by Karkat shoving his hand directly into Dave’s face. You laugh along with Dave, because you’re both douchebags who love seeing Karkat suffer, and he mutters about how you’re terrible and he hates you both.

“For such a smart dirtgrub she kinda dropped the ball on that one,” Karkat resumes complaining, his brain stuck on this track of conversation now. You listen idly. “Fucking wow. Sea dwellers live to 130 pathetic human Earth C years, and rusts live 80 just like the rest of you disgusting humans! Meanwhile, fuchsias live forever, whose great idea was that? Fucking Roxy’s.”

There’s a pause.

“Are you crying?” you ask.

“No!” Karkat says angrily, hand coming up to swipe at his eyes but he jerks it down because he knows if he does, that means you’re right.

“D’awwwww, you’re crying!”

“I am not, shitsphincter! I’m just. Really happy about the fact that people don’t have to deal with that bullshit anymore, okay! Like sure, I’ll probably die at 30 but everyone else my color can actually lead full, successful lives and age alongside their cohorts and it’s really fucking nice, however it happened!” Karkat has to wipe at his eyes.

“Maybe Roxy knew, and she wished really really hard while making the egg to change it, so things wouldn’t be so stratified anymore. Like, on purpose and shit?” you suggest. “You could probably just ask her instead of speculating in my foyer and crying like a douchebag.” He’s not actually crying anymore but you’re going to tease him to hell and back for tearing up before even fully getting inside.

“I’m not crying!”

“He’s got a touch of truth in his words there, brother.”

“Fuck all of you,” Karkat huffs as you float over to Gamzee and kiss his forehead hello. You definitely aim only for the forehead. You do not start out aiming for his cheeks and then get distracted by the idea of his lips and then reroute because your emotions are a mess and everything’s confusing, haha, that is totally not what is happening here!

“Anything for you babe,” Dave retorts, and Karkat gives him an expression you can’t place, but looks dirty.

“We were thinking of ordering a large meat lovers pizza and a large supreme for dinner,” you tell Gamzee, getting yourself back on track, “And breadsticks. Sound good to you or is there something
“Meat lovers sounds motherfuckin’ hella, brothers,” Gamzee says with a smile, hugging your arm and smiling up at you as you float an inch above him. Dave calls and places the order, and the four of you end up collectively flopped on top of each other on the couch. You knew getting a big couch was a good decision. Excellent for bro cuddles. And boyfriend cuddles. Specifically referring to Karkat and Dave, there, and also Karkat and you, and Gamzee and Karkat, but… maybe also Gamzee and you?

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaa this is hard!

You are absolutely thinking about it, “it” being dating Gamzee and the potential of you wanting to, but you try not to think too hard about it. You’ve got your boyfriend and your best bro over, you want to have fun and chill with the three of them and pet Dave’s hair and feel Gamzee’s fingers in your hair and get kicked in the shin because you keep “accidentally” ghosting your hand over Karkat’s knee and tickling him.

You just want to have a good time and not think about stressful things. Luckily you have the best friends in the history of paradox-ever and it’s easy to settle back into the routine of simply having fun. You love them all to pieces, you just, they’re just so good, so wonderful and great and you really love all of them so much.

Pizza is good, and so is playing video games. Especially when the games you’re playing are not of the universe-destroying, soul-crushing variety. You play a racing game based on a new-world movie franchise, Smash Brawlers (which is really just Smash Bros but with more really really jacked women), a Pokemon game you carried over with you from Earth A, and then you take turns at wii sports. Then you play the Pokemon game until you’re all tired and Dave mumbles something about staying the night. Which, of course they are! Gamzee is quick to offer his bedroom to Karkat and Dave, saying he’s fine sleeping in your bed, and you are of course fine with Gamzee sharing sleeping space with you so you don’t feel the need to comment on it.

You take the empty pizza boxes and cups to the kitchen to either throw away or put in the dishwasher, feeling warm and a little sleepy and listening to the sound of Karkat and Dave talking about something or another in the background, when Gamzee touches your elbow and you turn to see him looking at his toes.

“You don’t- mind, right brother? I up and said to sleep with you before my brain caught up to my words and I didn’t- I could take the couch or something if you ain’t feeling for, y’know,” Gamzee’s words grew increasingly mumbled and you pat his hair.

“Hey, hey, chill. No way, I’m totally cool with it! I like sleeping with you!” you assure, crouching down so you can try and smile where he can see you.

He smiles back, relieved, and leans into you. “‘M sorry. Makin’ shit awkward again.”

You laugh and pat his back, hugging him with your other arm. “‘M sorry. Makin’ shit awkward again.”

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“Oh hell yes motherfucker,” Gamzee replies without missing a beat, grinning back with near instantaneous excitement. “What we pullin’ on him?”

“Oh hell yes motherfucker,” Gamzee replies without missing a beat, grinning back with near instantaneous excitement. “What we pullin’ on him?”

“Well, Dave has a strict no-jumpscare rule, so I’m gonna freeze his cereal. He eats exclusively captain crunch whenever he visits and he’s always the last one up,” you explain as you pull a bowl
down off the shelf and go get the cereal. Gamzee pulls out the jug of milk and pours it while you get the spoon. You set it in the freezer and return to Dave and Karkat, who are curled up in the corner of the couch and kissing each other unhurriedly, laughing and murmuring at each other between slow kisses.

“Gaaaaaaay,” you drawl, and Dave bonks his head against Karkat’s forehead with a slightly louder laugh.

“Shit, you caught us red handed officer,” Dave says with a grin your way. Karkat is also sending something your way, and it just happens to be two middle fingers.

“I’m the gay police, I’m afraid you’re both under arrest. You’re being too cute.”

“Ohhhhh nooooo,” Dave drawls sarcastically, “What are you doing to do? Handcuff me?”

“Please stop wiggling your eyebrows at me,” you deadpan.

Dave does not.

“Dave. Dave that’s gross.”

Dave waggles them harder.

“Dave keep your weird kinky sexlife to yourself.”

“Yes, officer.”

“I regret this.”

“And I’m fucking tired,” Karkat announces, standing up.

“Hi fucking tired, I’m John!”

Karkat stops dead in his tracks mid-route to the stairs, turns, and levels you with a face of bewildered disgust. You pfff for as long as you can hold it and then laugh loudly at him.

“Fuck off,” Karkat says tiredly, quietly, “Just fuck all the way off. Go that direction.” He points back the way you came and you are vindicated by the fact that Dave is laughing along with you.

Dave floats up to Karkat and the two head upstairs, and you start to follow but turn and find Gamzee is staring out the window.

“Gamzee?”

No response. Oh gee. You float to him and touch down, then reach out and touch his arm. He startles and spins his head to look at you.

“Woah, don’t hurt your neck!”

“Sorry,” he says quietly. He’s, he’s looking at you, but his eyes have a far away look like he’s not really seeing you and that’s concerning. His arms come up to hug himself and he looks down at the ground. “Motherfuck, shit, sorry.”

“Hey…” You don’t even have time to reach out all the way before Gamzee is flopping his weight against you. “Hey, what’s wrong?”
“Just, headspace. Just real bad, real empty headspace. Hit me in the middle of all y’all havin’ a nice time, too, sorry.”

“It’s okay if you space out while we’re talking, I’m more worried about you not responding to your name.”

Gamzee shrugs against you. “It was short this time. I just feel bad cause- I don’t like it when it happens when I’m with other people, you know? That’s the worst time for it to happen. We’re all havin’ fun an’ enjoyin’ life an’ shit and all of a sudden I’m checked out for however long and I miss pieces.”

You pat his back. “That does sound like it sucks.” You kiss his hair. “Can I help at all?”

You’ve asked a million times and there’s always nothing you can do, but compulsively you keep asking, hoping that somehow this will be the time when Gamzee doesn’t shake his head against your shoulder and you hug him a little tighter since it’s the only thing you’re capable of.

You carry him upstairs, to your room, and he clings to you once under the covers. You pet his hair and then snuggle in, hoping that maybe he’s just tired and that was a normal spacing out instead of his Gamzee-brand alarming spacing out.

He’s soft, and he fits up against you nicely. The comforter is thick on top of you, and the pillows plush beneath you, and the bed is filled with your mutual warmth and the comfort of your bodies lying together like they’re fitted for it. It’s enough to put you both easily to sleep, and more than enough to make waking reluctant. You yawn and fumble with your phone alarm, which has Gamzee yawning and stirring unwillingly. You kiss his nose groggily, warmth escaping from the blanket as you shift and let cool air in, and you crack open a window when you get up and stagger to the bathroom to piss and brush your teeth. Gamzee showers and you get dressed, and you knock on the door to Gamzee’s room loudly to wake Karkat and Dave. You get startled, angry grumbling, and Dave takes a sharp intake of breath.

“Rise and shine, I’ve gotta go to class!” you greet cheerfully through the door.

“Fuck off,” Karkat gripes.

“Eheheheh.”

You pour shredded wheat for yourself and Karkat, lucky charms for Gamzee, and you pull Dave’s cereal out of the freezer. Karkat’s down shortly after you, and you hand him his bowl, which he takes with a glare at you.

“If you did fucking anything to this bowl, I’m dumping it over your disgustingly attractive face.”

“Morning Karkat!”

“Fuck you and fuck you looking nice.”

“I woke up like this,” you lie.

“In a squealhog’s eye.”

Gamzee joins you all shortly, and Dave, likely upset about everyone being in a room he’s not in, shows up faster than he usually does most mornings. He has the comforter from your bed around his shoulders, instead of the one from Gamzee’s, and you slide his bowl of cereal his direction as he plops his ass into the chair and his face into Karkat’s shoulder in one smooth motion.
“Morning love,” Karkat greets, familiar and only just a tiny bit gruff.

“Mmn’n love.” Dave grabs the spoon, lifts, and the whole bowl follows. He stares at it, unimpressed, and you and Gamzee bite down on your giggles as long as you can before he slowly lowers the bowl back down, turns to look at Gamzee (who starts laughing), turns to look at you (you quickly follow suit), and then just. Sighs. Your Gambit is elated.

“Pricks.”

“Well, at least that explains why he didn’t do anything to my bowl,” Karkat mutters quietly, spooning a miniwheat into his mouth.

“I licked the entire interior of the bowl before I put the cereal in,” you say, smiling brightly and still chortling over pranking Dave.

Karkat squints at you, and Dave hauls himself to his feet with a laborious sigh. “Like hell you did,” Karkat says, but he doesn’t sound certain.

“Oh, I totally did! You’ve been eating John spit for like, a few minutes now!”

“I don’t believe you.”

You shrug. “Suit yourself.”

“It’s a mind game,” Dave says as he pours more captain crunch. “Makes you think there’s piss in the bottle when there’s really not. Don’t succumb to his wiles, Kitten.”

You pft loudly and grin between Dave and Karkat. Karkat thumps his head down on your table and Dave pretends his cheeks aren’t heating up. A “oh I totally meant to call my boyfriend ‘kitten’ in front of his moirail and kismesis that is definitely the thing that I had full intention of doing” sort of look to him.

None of you are particularly chatty over breakfast, and you have no qualms over leaving your boyfriend, his boyfriend, and your housemate where they are as you head off to class. And class is fun! It successfully captures your entire attention during the whole duration that you’re there. Aillie and Lailah want to know if anything came from you asking about flushed romance yesterday, and you laugh and tell them you were just asking because you were curious. They do not seem satisfied with that answer, but you divert their attention.

“John,” Aillie says after you’ve paid the Ihop waitress, and you’re about to leave. Lailah is already out the door, and it’s just the two of you now. She’s making uncomfortable eye contact, scrutinous and very, very direct.

“Aillie?”

“...” She examines you uncomfortably a moment longer. “You know, Lailah and I are two people on a planet full of people. Our experiences and thoughts shouldn’t be disappointing to you.”

“I’m not disappointed!” you’re quick to say, worried.

“That’s not what your face said yesterday,” Aillie tells you, “And that’s not what your actions are saying either. What’s right for people like us isn’t what’s right for people like you, John. Don’t be a dumbass.”

“I am a dumbass,” you say reflexively, not sure what to make with the way that Aillie is reading
you.

“Naturally,” she says, waving her hand and finally looking away from you. Your chest deflates from the tension it was causing. “But don’t be extra stupid. We’re two practical strangers, our opinions shouldn’t influence you that badly. If your feelings are different, that doesn’t mean they’re not real.”

“Why are you saying this?” you ask, feeling a bit like Aillie would be a Seer, in this particular moment.

“Because if there is one thing I have always been good at, it’s figuring out how to make people do what I want them to. And that requires reading folk. And you, John Egbert, are an open book.” Aillie leans back and sips the final dregs of her lemonade up through her straw, eyes wandering over your face. “Some advice? Don’t take yourself too seriously. You’re not the god of that.”

“Who is?” you ask, half a joke to lighten the mood.

“Oh Dirk, definitely. Eridan too, but he’s the lesser god.”

“Not Karkat?” you ask, chuckling a little. Aillie chortles as well, and you feel yourself take a deep breath, past whatever the hell kind of mood that was.

“Him too. Definitely him too.”

Your phone buzzes, and you take that as your excuse to leave. As you text, you fly home.

**gardenGnostic [GG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]**

GG: hi john!!! :D

EB: Hi Jade!!! :D

GG: so you were pretty quiet all last night

EB: Oh yeah, Dave and Karkat stayed over so Gamzee and I hung out with them all evening!

GG: >:I

EB: What?

GG: i guess no gamzee-talking happened then?

EB: Oh

EB: So

EB: Uh

GG: oh my god

EB: I know I said that I probably had a crush on him

GG: ooooooooooo0000000000000000oh my
goooooooooo0000000000000000000000000000000000

EB: Look feelings are really hard for me okay!
GG: joohhhhhhnnnn
EB: I’d like to see you do better!
GG: :<
EB: I just
EB: It’s hard Jade
EB: It’s really really hard
GG: BLUH
GG: i guess thats fair
EB: You guess
GG: i guess
EB: I’m so grateful to receive your begrudging acceptance
GG: make up your mind and smooch the clown already!!!!!
EB: Maybe I’m not going to make my mind up to smooch him!
GG: john i swear if you fuck over your almost boyfriend just because you dont want to listen to me im going to fight you
EB: :P
EB: Well that would be bad
EB: So I guess we’l have to not do either of those things
EB: But Jade, seriously?
EB: The pressure is not helping
GG: sorry
GG: thats reasonable
GG: im just frustrated
EB: I don’t see why MY relationships are even so frustrating for YOU
GG: ¯\_(ツ)_/¯
EB: Bluh
EB: Whatever
EB: I’m home now, and Rose and I have a study date, so slow replies!
GG: have fun!!!
ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering gardenGnostic [GG]

Gamzee is not at home, but Rose is. She’s on your couch, book open on her lap, one of your mugs in her hand.

“Hi Rose!” you greet, happy to see her, not particularly surprised to see her on your couch without anyone else in your house. You swoop over to her and kiss her forehead, bonking your forehead against hers afterwards in a habit you picked up from Gamzee. “Jade says she loves you. Whatcha drinkin’?” you ask, floating in the direction of the kitchen.

“You had hot cocoa, and I decided that sounded really nice.”

“In early fall?”

“All seasons are good seasons for hot chocolate John.”

“You enjoy that then,” you say, getting yourself a drink as well. You get your book and laptop set up, plug in your headphones, and are prepared to listen to the audiobook Karkat made for you while Rose reads her own classwork, but you hesitate before pressing play.

“Hey Rose,” you start, taking your headphones out. “What… do you feel towards Kanaya?”

Rose looks at you, eyebrow arched, over the top of her book, then sets it down and sits up straight. “I feel only the deepest and most impassioned love towards my wife. Why?”

You suck on the inside of your cheek real quick, then shrug. “I’m trying to figure out what love feels like.”

“What do you think love feels like?”

“I don’t know!”

“That’s why I am asking what you think love feels like.”

That gives you pause.

Aillie’s words come back to you, urging you not to take the opinions of others too seriously.

What does love feel like? You know, of course you know, what regular love feels like. You feel it for Rose, sitting right here next to you. You feel it for Jade, and Roxy, and Jake, and Dave, and Davepeta. You feel it so deeply sometimes you are left breathless from it, a veritable puddle of emotion and affection. What, then, is romance, aside from an extension of love? A way that it can manifest?
“I think… romance feels like love, but different.”

Rose tilts her head. “Yes, I do suppose that would be accurate.”

“Does that even make sense?” you ask in exasperation, because you certainly don’t feel like you’re being intelligible.

“It makes enough sense, yes. Romance- and I am assuming that that is the subject here-”

“Yeah.”

“- is tricky. Remember the words of Descartes: We think, therefore, we are.” You roll your eyes at her need to be a drama-goth even at times like these. “Be honest to yourself, John. If you think it’s romance, it is. If you change your mind later, it ceases to be. Don’t sweat the details.”

You nod, and slowly return to your earphones, letting Rose’s words sit in your head for a little while before you try to genuinely emotionally process them. Content that her work here is done, she returns to her book as well. You find that having someone else in the room with you while you study does miracles for your attention span. So does having an audiobook to listen to and read along to. This is the best situation for your ability to focus and you’re genuinely pumped for the rest of the semester, if it’s going to be like this. Karkat’s voice is familiar and interesting and nice, and you get a chuckle at his muttered commentary that’s dispersed throughout the reading. Also, you’re getting Rose cuddles, and who are you if not a slut for constant physical affection?

You finish the entire audio tape Karkat’s given you, which is just the introduction. You should convince Jane to send both you and Karkat sendificators, since she owns the company that makes those, because you’d really like to be able to just pop your book back to Karkat without having to go over there. You’re hanging with Rose right now!

Rose who is texting her wife and boyfriend, you find out when you scooch up the couch on top of her like a particularly wriggly cat.

“Why hello John,” Rose says, mildly amused. “You know, you make it awfully hard to type like this.”

“Are you bein’ gay?”

“Whenever am I not?”

“Gaaaay,” you drawl, then smooch her cheek. She laughs, a quiet and breathy thing, then takes a snap of the two of you.

TT: Once more I am besieged by this relentless rapscallion. When will the onslaught of affection cease?

You watch as she scrolls through her recents list, then selects the group chat, then goes back and deselects everyone except you, Kanaya, and Dave. You keep forgetting the groupchat exists, if you’re entirely honest, and also you have streaks with people that you’d like to maintain. Shortly before going and getting Gamzee, you’d lost your streak with Rose, so now that little number next to the fire sign is pitiful and only in the double digits. You have lost time to make up for!

Then you just sort of doze. You’re done with your homework, and Rose is warm and comfortable, and it’s sort of soothing, the way her arms move minutely to type out replies on her phone. You drift on the tightrope of consciousness, face resting in the crook of her neck, until Gamzee gets home, and with him Kanaya! You wake up pretty fast at that.
“Hi Kanaya! Hi Gamzee,” you greet, smiling at the two of them and detangling yourself from Rose. “I didn’t know you two were hanging out together!”

“We went out for coffee,” Kanaya informs you, pulling out her phone, “four hours ago.”

“Long conversation,” Rose remarks, floating over to give her wife a kiss as you float to Gamzee and kiss his forehead.

“That it was,” Kanaya remarks with humor, linking her arm with Rose’s. “Oh, dear, the pumpkin spice options are back at Ivanna Cone!”

“Oh lovely!” Rose says, and you perk up at that news too. Pumpkin flavored stuff is the best, and Ivanna Cone only serves it in autumn, because apparently it’s too cool to serve pumpkin year-round like everywhere else. It’s a damn shame, too, that place has the best ice cream. “I suppose that makes sense. It’s Tzadkiel, after all.”

“Motherfuckin what?” Gamzee asks.

“Tzadkiel. It’s- oh, here, I’ll explain the whole thing. Did you all give names to your perigees on Alternia?”

“Nah, sis, we just gave ‘em numbers.” You and Gamzee let yourselves be herded back to the couch and Rose sits down between Kanaya and Gamzee, looking excited and a little smug to once again be the smartest person in the room, and once again be able to explain things to someone who knows less than she does.

“On Earth, we named our months. Earth C has inherited the habit, though instead of months or perigees- which were relatively similar in length- they have half seasons, which are made up of six weeks. We are currently in the half season called Tzadkiel, which you’ll get the hang of eventually. It means the first half season of fall, which is John’s half season!”

“Oh, shit, y’all got half seasons named after you?”

“Somewhat. They’re named after our symbols, and associated with us. Each season is also associated with one of the four core elements, wind, water, earth, and fire.”

“Walk me through it, sister?” Gamzee looks interested, and Rose is all too happy to oblige.

“The start of the year is spring, the element is earth. Jade starts the year out with the half season Skýlos. Next is Dirk, the second half season of spring, called Ahpex. Summer brings the element of fire, and the first half season, Lolliga, is mine. Following me is Jake, his half season being Necron. Fall is governed by John and Roxy, their half seasons named Tzadkiel and Felis, respectively. Theirs is the element of air. Finally, there’s the element of water, during winter, Dave’s month being Vulnus, and Jane’s ending the year with the half season of Extola.”

“So motherfuckin… spring earth, summer fire, autumn air, and winter water?” Gamzee clarifies. “Shit, you got a strong ass recollection for all this. And names too, like shit, sis, I’m gonna have ‘nuff trouble rememberin’ which one a you humans gets attached each perig- each half season.” Gamzee smiles at her. “You’re summer fire though, right?”

“Indeed. Fitting, given that I’m the light goddess.”

“Yeah! And your fiery personality!” you chime in, unable to resist the pun.

“Jake tends to go into things guns blazing,” Rose counters, turning her attention to you with a glint
in her eye,

“Jane has a way with frosting!”

“Dave is well versed in rhythm and flow.”

“Nice.”

“Dirk often maneuvers himself between a rock and a hard place,” Rose continues.

“Roxy is an unstoppable force of nature!” you add, thinking of a tornado.

“And you’re a touch air-headed.”

“Jade is just a dirty girl,” you finish off, naming the last of your friends.

Rose bursts out laughing. Gamzee and Kanaya join in.

“Like seriously! One time I watched her just pick up a clump of dirt and put it in her overalls! There wasn’t even anything in the dirt it was just a hunk of soil that she thought was interesting!” you elaborate to their laughing faces.

“John oh my god!” Rose says, snorting from laughter.

“She’s a dirty, messy, muddy person Rose!”

“So it seems indeed!”

“Well, speaking of,” Kanaya says, standing up, “I would like to take my wife home with me, now that I have seen Gamzee safely home to his abode, and conveniently found her to be in this very domicile.”

You have no idea what that has to do with anything you were just “speaking of,” but you think maybe that means that it’s a joke? You laugh lightly, and bid your farewells.

“So this half season is called Zek… Motherfuck. Forgot already.”

“Tzadkiel. You’ll get it eventually! If I could go from June and July to Lolliga and Necron, you can figure it out too!” you encourage.

“And motherfuckin’ Tzadkiel is your half season,” Gamzee says, scanning you over lazily. “I’ll make note on remembering that one specific.”

You laugh, then feel your cheeks heat up. That was a flirty thing to say.

“Uhm, Gamzee…”

“Sorry, brother,” he interjects, face heating up as well and looking away from you. The casual ease he had is gone now, and he’s hunched and can’t meet your eyes.

“No, no! That’s not- no, that’s not what I was going for at all, hey, I don’t mind, hey Gamzee, look at me, I don’t mind! I am the exact opposite of minding!” You touch his shoulder and hunch a little as well, trying to make yourself put out signals of “Friendly!!! Not Imposing!!!”

Gamzee looks to you, surprised, then smiles and his eyes skitter back down to the floor, his hand lifting across his body to rest on top of yours.
“Thanks, brother. I really- I really don’t mean to make shit awkward.”

You haven’t had time to think things through. You haven’t sat and given long, hard thought to what Rose has said, to what Dave’s said, to what Jade is pushing you towards. You haven’t examined your feelings very thoroughly, and you still have no idea what romantic love actually feels like. But, you think, that’s okay. You’ll have plenty of time for that later, and nothing’s ever going to happen if you don’t do anything, and right now, you’re caught up in a desire to do exactly that.

“Well, I’m about to make it awkward on purpose so brace yourself.” His fingers squeeze reflexively on your hand. “… like it when you say that kind of thing,” you start, since you have no idea what you’re doing. “You remember how I thought I didn’t have a crush on Karkat, and then someone brought it up to me, and then I thought about it for a while, and then realized I did?”

Gamzee looks up from the floor, stunned and disbelieving.

“I don’t- look, I don’t know what I feel, okay?” You’re tripping over your own tongue, trying to get the words out fast enough. “I don’t know how I feel about you. I know I care about you, a lot, and I know I want you to be happy, and I know I really, really like being the one to make you happy, whenever I can. I- I like touching you, and I like sleeping with you, and I like your laugh and I like your smile and I like the way you get all squinty eyed when you purr and- and I don’t know! I don’t know, okay? I just. Like you. And, you like me. Like, in a like-like way. Fuck this is a lot of likes. I’m just- Look I’m just saying, I don’t know what’s going on in my head, okay? I don’t know how I feel, I don’t even really know what romance even is. But.” You’re not meeting his eyes now, though in your peripheral you can see that he’s still looking ardently at your face. “But- if you’re, still down, and you’re okay with me not being sure of anything, I’d… I’d maybe like to try?”

“Try dating me. In flush,” Gamzee clarifies.

“Yeah. In flush.” You force yourself to sneeze, then look at him. Your face is hot, and he’s purple to his ears. “Just, if you’re okay with knowing that I’m not-”

“Yes!” Gamzee bursts, snapped out of his relative silence. You can feel him start to tremble underneath you. “Yes, John, yes, I’m okay with it, that you would even be willing to try on a motherfucker like me is- I’m-”

“Hey!” you snap sharply, though not too loud, “Hey, quit with that implied self-degradation! You’re great, Gamzee. You’re wonderful, and I love you, and I don’t- if I, do love you romantically, I think I’d really, really like to. So, don’t act like you’re bad, cause you’re not.” You hold his hand and look away, smiling awkwardly. “You mean a lot to me.”

Gamzee starts laughing, and because you are easily swayed by the laughter of others you join in a beat later, tension releasing, and Gamzee leans in against you, curling his legs up onto your lap on the couch.

“Motherfuck!” he says through his laughter. “Motherfuck, god, brother, I didn’t never think you’d- ahaaa motherfuck John!” He looks up to you with a grin, looking bewildered and delighted. “May I kiss you?”

Something nervous flutters in your core, but it’s not a bad sort of nervous. It feels like standing on a precipice. The top of a high dive, the ledge of a zipline. All that’s left to do is drop.

“Yeah, yeah I would like that.”
You both hesitate, staring at each other with bright faces, before he leans in and presses his lips to yours. It’s chaste, and it’s awkward, but Gamzee kisses you.

You both break into nervous giggles, holding hands and bonking your foreheads together.

“Motherfuck,” he breathes, “Shit, god, I get all my motherfuckin’ dreams handed at me on this here couch and I don’t know a god damned thing what to do with it.”

“Well, at least I’m no better!” you say with a smile. You nudge his forehead hesitantly, then press your lips to his. His fingers squeeze yours where you hold hands, and his other hand curls in the fabric at your shoulder. Instead of pulling away, you try pulling Gamzee a little closer to you by the small of his back, hugging him close. Your lips part briefly to giggle a little more, then your mouths are back together again and you think both of you moved that time. You kiss slowly, all lip, and it is the weirdest 2X combo of very soft and very, very nervewracking. Kissing Karkat is never like this. You never get this, this fluttery, like you’re about to float up off the couch or vibrate yourself down to your particles. It’s the weirdest rush you’ve ever had. At least when you’re fighting or hate-dating you have a general idea of your game-plan, but right now you’re just fumbling with your mouth and feeling…

God, what even are you feeling. Giddy? You think this is giddy. You think this is nervous and flustered and giddy, but your brain is, once again, behind in the game because Gamzee is getting more enthusiastic with the kissing thing and you want to reciprocate. He moves his hand from gripping your shoulder to encircling your neck, his shoulder hitched up by his ear and fingers now buried in the fabric of your opposite sleeve, hugging you close and pressing himself in close to you. You hug him tighter in reciprocation, and neither of you release where your fingers are threaded together. You think you have drool on your chin. You don’t mind, if you do. He’s close and you’re kissing him and holy fuck you think you might actually be in love with him.

That revelation is accompanied by you breaking wind. And oh no, it’s not just some small toot that can be quickly passed over with more lip-touching. You break out the biggest, loudest, smelliest fart you have had in a long ass time. The trumpets weep tears of brass at the glory of your noisemaking, the sound sets flocks of birds across the world into flight, the room had been silent save for your breathing and your flatulence is deafening!

The two of you are sent into stitches. You almost fall off the couch, you’re laughing so hard, kept on only by the weight of Gamzee in your lap. He’s weeping genuine, real tears from how hard he’s guffawing, and your sides and cheeks ache. You hold onto him as you laugh and laugh and laugh, and he laughs too which just encourages you to laugh more and it’s just so fucking funny! There you are, macking on your very new and very tentative boyfriend, nervous as all hell, and you just cut the fucking cheese like you work in a dairy store.

“Oh my god brother!” Gamzee finally gasps, having to try a few times (only to get cut off by his own laughter) before he can squeeze it out.

You’re laughing too hard to respond properly, but you do manage a tight "Yeah!"

You have to wipe at your face to get rid of your own tears, the two of you trading off on who bursts into another tiny round of giggles as you try to calm down, which makes the other giggle, which sets the two of you off again like firecrackers. It’s a long time before the residual giggling finally retires, and by then your stomach, sides, and face are aching with overuse and the two of you are laying on the couch, his head on your chest. He uses your shirt to dab at his face.

“Motherfuck, bro, but are you sure you ain’t the god of perfect motherfuckin’ timing?”
“It’s a gift,” you say, faux-arrogant, and the two of you take a moment to just smile at each other. Is it suddenly warmer in here? You feel your breath catch in your throat.

“Oh! You know what we should do! We should tell Jade!”

“We should tell motherfuckin’ everyone, brother, on our own terms this time.” Gamzee crawls up so his head is level with yours, and you both pull out your phones and open up snapchat. He kisses you cheek, side-eyeing the camera happily, and you beam. You both send the pictures you take to the group chat, plus everyone on your rolls.

EB: So uh, guess who’s dating! :D

TC: ;o) <3

Chapter End Notes

This was the chapter in which they smooched, finally.

As ever and always, please leave comments!!! Tell me your thoughts!!!

Fuck okay I keep forgetting to mention this but there is now a third act to this fic!!! If you go past the sex act there's a timestamp act, where I'll be posting blurbs for this universe's canon, just those not told from John's point of view, or stuff that happened before this fic!
Life is good, and that's the way it should be

Chapter Summary

Boys love boys and boys.

Chapter Notes

Okay I know I SAID I was going to focus on my thesis but I'm justifying this by saying that I got this whole chapter down over the course of a day and I'm not REALLY wasting time. :P Ideally, the next update is going to take longer, because IDEALLY I will be working on school stuff.
Special thanks to colanom for the fanart!!!! <3

Your greatest mistake was challenging Gamzee to a game of Twister. You had a floating impression that he was pretty flexible, but you had no idea how flexible until you had lost six consecutive games to him. He’s laughing at you, sprawled out on the mat once again as he easily keeps himself all curled like a corkscrew to match the dots’ dictation.

“Fuck you,” you deadpan from your place on the floor.

“Anytime,” he says with a wink and you both giggle at the childish joke.

“Alright, new game!” you demand, floating up from underneath him and glaring determinedly.

“You sure, brother?” he asks lazily, grinning in self-satisfaction and easy confidence.

“Seventh time’s the charm!” you chime. And it will be! Because this time you are going to cheat.

You both flatten out the mat so it isn't quite so woefully wrinkled at the start, and you start spinning. When you reach a hard position, you float. Your limbs are still all twisted up and hitting the dots, of course! You're pretty sure you look convincing, but this time you will not be falling onto the mat because you are hovering.

“Struggling there, brother?” Gamzee asks, and you can hear him smirking.

“What, no, this is a breeze,” you say, calling up a bit of Breath to puff at his face and making your voice sound strained. He’ll catch on if you don’t sound like you're trying hard! He laughs at your pun and you pretend to grunt.

“Just spin the damn spinner already!” you urge. He is slow to comply, taking his sweet time reaching over and flicking it, and you stick your tongue out at him.

“Left foot red,” he says, and when he starts moving you wait until he’s at his most off-balanced before you hit him with a gust of Breath, successfully knocking him over. He honks loudly and you laugh, placing your foot on a red dot.
“Looks like I win!” you crow.

“That’s cheating!” He shoves you and you laugh harder, floating to the side a few inches and drifting to a halt.

“You been floating this whole time?”

“Well,” you say, grinning at him and twisting so you're upright, “not the whole time!”

“You motherfucker!” he complains and you laugh harder at him. He chuckles as well, easily swayed by the laughter of others, and you have no warning before he tackles you, shoving you down onto the ground with a yelp on your part. You start giggling again because oh, so that's how this is gonna be! His grin tells you yes, this is how it's gonna be, and you feel yourself light up.

As a kid, you’d never had any siblings, and all your friends lived in different parts of the country (world? Jade was on an island), which meant you never really got any playmates to wrestle with. You had your dad, of course, but that’s not really the same. Not in a bad way, just a different way! But now, you have Gamzee right here and just begging for a good tussle, so you flip the two of you over so it’s Gamzee who’s on his back. He takes a playful swipe at your face and your glasses go a little loose, and you try to grab his wrist but he's too wily! He manages to get you both flipped back over and your leg comes up to bump his hip, the two of you still giggling like dorks. You shove a hand up against his shoulder and you manage to flip the two of you over again.

Your scuffle continues like that for a little while, both of you smiling and laughing with intermittent grunts of effort, Gamzee sometimes playfully snapping his fangs at your nose. You could overpower him easily, you know. You're 20 years of mangrit in the making and he’s a particularly unruly mop, but you don't want to risk hurting him or taking the fun out of wrestling. But that also places you at an impasse; who can be the winner? Well, you got into this by cheating, might as well get out of it that way too.

Next time you're on top, you lean down and kiss Gamzee, your arms sliding underneath him to help pin him to you and subsequently keep him pinned under you. He makes a high pitched troll noise of pleasure and kisses back, arms going easily, eagerly to your back. He goes from playfully aggressive to melted putty in moments. Ha, you win again! But you can't tell him that because you are very occupied with keeping your lips firmly attached to his and also maybe getting your tongue into a mouth that is not your own. Alien mouths are really cool, as long as you're careful of the fangs and don't get jumpscared by the long, grey tongue that is way more flexible than your own. Everything on his body is more flexible than yours, but that's okay, because it results in situations like this.

You break the kiss and automatically start peppering his cheek and temple and the side of his forehead with kisses too, which makes him croon happily at you. He makes a motion to kiss you back, and you let him get one big smooch on your cheek before you bend down and kiss him on his neck, which he then bares for you with a soft “oh.” You kiss down and up the side of his neck, and he shudders ever so pleasantly in your arms.

“John,” he says, voice gone all breathy, “we’re in the recreation block.”

“Mhm,” you hum before pressing your lips to the hollow of his jaw, right over the pulse, and you give it a little suck. He makes a small whimpering noise and you smile wickedly. Let it never be forgotten that, at your very core, you are still an asshole.

“PBBBBBBT!” You rasberry his neck loudly which makes him squeal and thrash beneath you, legs kicking up reflexively and claws clutching the shirt on your back. Worth it. He laughs and
squirms underneath you.

“John!” he whines amidst his laughter, and you press kisses to his cheek again, grinning and giggling with him.

“Hmm?” you hum, still feeling playful.

“Fucker,” he accuses, and you’re about to agree when he shoves his hands up underneath your shirt to tickle at your sides. You jerk and start laughing as well, instinctively releasing him and floating up a few inches.

“Ha!” he shouts like he’s won, and you just grin and descend right back on him, your hands going up his shirt to poke at his ribs and underarms, making him wriggle and squeeze your sides even harder.

You’re both laughing and squirming and neither of you is backing down; you've got little gusts of Breath zipping around every which way, out of your control, and you feel truly, genuinely happy and caught up in the moment. His face looks so perfect when it's split wide with a smile and his laugh is the dorkiest, stupidest sound that you have ever heard and you have never loved any noise more. You give his ribs a good squeeze and he honks extra loud, which gifts you with the opportunity to bend down and kiss him again, not relenting in your quest to tickle him senseless. He kisses back but it’s tricky when you're both laughing so hard it's difficult to breathe. You move one hand down to his grubscars and belly, and he counters by going for your ribs. His legs are clamped around your hips, preventing you from leaving- as if you want to! You're both all twisted up around each other and laughing hard, kisses sloppy and not always making their target of the other’s mouth, when someone walks in.

“Get a block!” Karkat shouts at you both, and you and Gamzee look up at him with matching, breathless smiles.

“Hey best friend,” Gamzee greets, and his exhales are tiny honks.

“Fuck off,” you pant, and he flips you off as he walks over to where you two are entwined on the floor. He kneels down and presses a kiss to Gamzee’s lips, chaste and soft. Gamzee croons at him, all soft and deeply loving, and a purr putters to life in his chest.

“Hey,” you say, shoving Karkat’s face away, “back off buddy, he was mine first!”

“Fuck you, I’ve known him since we were three!”

You and Karkat set immediately to squabbling and Gamzee wriggles out from underneath you so he can drape himself- purr a-thundering- over Karkat and rub their faces together. In the half-season that you and Gamzee have been dating, things have settled down a lot for your group as a whole. Gamzee still blanks out every now and then, but aside from that, things have been chill. Gamzee has found a therapist that works well with him, and it has really, really helped. You go to school and have even brought Aillie and Lailah to a couple of friend meetups (they’re hesitant to introduce you to their own cohort, however), you practice at home and listen to the audiobook that Karkat dutifully and angrily records for you, you braid and unbraid and rebraid Gamzee’s hair in a million different ways on a million different days (well, more like 46, since that’s how many days are in a half season), you and Rose have almost daily study dates, and in helping teach Gamzee piano you’ve been relearning the instrument yourself. Uncle Crocker is delighted about the two of you getting into it, and is positively chuffed to act as tutor for you.

Davepeta, Tavros, and Aradia spend a lot of time together. Sollux, Terezi, Feferi, and Eridan have
all settled into routines here, too, each of them pursuing their own interests. You have it from both Aradia and Feferi that during one blast to the past (which Aradia insists you need to go on with her) Feferi invented cheerleading, and that is why she’s the patron god of the sport. You believe that, actually. Eridan and Jade have grown close, and he is currently interested in botany and environmental conservation, both of which he is allegedly the god of. At least, he says he’s going to be the god of them, and you believe he has the conviction for it. Rose’s college did indeed accept the late admission from a god. Roxy, Terezi, and Sollux hang out bunches, which means Terezi and Sollux also hang out with Jane and Calliope a lot, which means they see Gamzee pretty frequently which means they see you fairly frequently and really your whole friendgroup is just a chain reaction of people seeing people. It’s fun. It’s lively. Your toes haven’t randomly disappeared on you in a while.

As you, Karkat, and Gamzee get ready for your triple-date, you pinch Karkat’s ass and hide behind Gamzee and let a sort of awareness settle over you that you are really, truly happy right now. Your boyfriends are here and your windows are open and the trees are casting the world in reddish-gold and life is good.

It had taken an incredibly short amount of time after starting dating for you to realize that you do, indeed, genuinely love Gamzee like that, and Jade was so right, and you actually hand-wrote her a thank you letter for giving your ass the sharp kick that it needed. Sure, you weren’t particularly appreciative of the pressure when it was happening, but it did provoke you into action and you’re grateful for her help.

You’ve still got a firm no-sex rule and your boyfriends are very understanding of that. Lucky for you, that also makes intimacy more achievable for you. Since you’re not worried about anything being construed as sexual, you are perfectly capable of pantsing Karkat in the middle of a friendly gathering OR while it’s just the two of you, and you can stick your hands up Gamzee’s shirt to tickle him without worrying that he’s gonna get the wrong idea. It’s great. Also: showering with Gamzee. This is something that has only very very recently been a thing that has happened, and you were flustered and uncertain, but it was actually just really nice? The two of you made weird shapes with your hair (which you had let Aillie cut for practice a while back) out of shampoo and Gamzee had booped suds on your nose and you’d had to catch him when he accidentally slipped in the tub- yay the powers of flight! It had just been, well, nice. Intimate in a way you’re not used to, and affectionately playful in a way that you certainly are.

Karkat’s kind of anal about everything, which means he showed up in your living room half an hour before you had planned to go on your first double date that is actually triple since there are three relationships going on here. You shower quickly, since twister made you sweaty, and wear a plain shirt with a vest. Gamzee wears one of his super-long-dresses-for-absurdly-tall-people, and Karkat’s in short sleeves again. You… yeah, you stare. It’s been over a half season and you are still very much staring.

“So what’s the motherfuckin’ game plan tonight, brother best beloved?” Gamzee asks Karkat, smiling lazily, lips painted purple and his foundation thick enough to cover his scars. You’re walking side by side, since your house is apparently close enough to wherever Karkat wants to go and you all actually enjoy long walks with your partner(s). Karkat was in charge of planning the date, first of all because he’d insisted on it and second of all because he is, indeed, better at that sort of thing than Gamzee and you combined.

“We’re going to the new art exhibit that recently came to the Joslyn and then we’re going out for sushi.” Karkat swats at you. “It’s not weird! Quit staring!”

“It totally is weird though,” you insist, leaning in over him and staring extra hard at his arms just
for kicks. You even put your feet on the ground so he can know just how much you are totally and absolutely taller than him. Gamzee, on Karkat’s other side, bends down to hold Karkat’s hand and smiles.

“Sounds like a perfect motherfuckin’ evening, diamond mine.”

“I have the two doofiest boyfriends in the entire fucking universe what did I do to deserve this?” Karkat deadpans as he is flanked by the two doofiest boyfriends in the whole world (who are also so much taller than him it’s fucking hilarious).

“You lowered your standards,” Gamzee and you both say at the same time, and then laugh because that was neither scripted nor something that you’d ever expressed before.

“And don’t forget Dave! Also a big goof and also probably involving lowered standards!” you jest, bright eyed and walking close enough to Karkat that your space bubble nudges him into Gamzee, which has Gamzee teetering on the edge of falling off the sidewalk. Now, do you keep invading Karkat’s bubble and run Gamzee off, or be nice to your flushed boyfriend? Well. You are an asshole. You keep at it.

“It’s true, I have the lowest standards in all of paradox space. My standards rest gently clasped in the many tentacled grasp of Feferi’s deceased lusus, swaddled close to its eldritch bosom and resting in the Deliada trench. May it rest in fucking peace.”

You flick his ear. He screeches at you, and you laugh and ask him why exactly he thinks that there is any piece of him that could ever be peaceful. Gamzee watches with placid amusement as you rile him up and then paps him twice and shooshes him.

“We are in fucking public, both of you!” Karkat screeches. Alas, in his squealing at you, you’d been forcibly moved back to your third of the sidewalk. Another day, then.

“Oh, yeah, are you gonna be this loud when we’re in the museum because I don’t think the other patrons are going to appreciate that Karkat,” you say, faux-casual, floating up so you can cross your legs and lean back with your fingers threaded behind your head. Gamzee has to physically restrain him, picking Karkat up with a shoosh and a kiss between Karkat’s horns as he flails at you and screeches.

Upon your arrival at the Joslyn, you three quickly come to terms with the fact that you have highly differing opinions on art.

“No, no, motherfucker look I know my shit okay? I know I don’t know a whole motherfuckin’ lot but this shit is tight like look at this, you can fuckin’ see the motherfuckin’ beads on this shit-”

“It’s ugly as hell, Gamzee,” Karkat says flatly.

“-and the motherfuckin’ colors bro. Like, look at this shit. It’s all motherfuckin’ red over here where the hair gets shaped all jagged-like-”

“Absolutely fucking hideous.”

“-and over here where the water is it’s all blue and sick-green-”

“You’re not going to fucking convince me.”

“-and over HERE it’s all motherfuckin’ life-green where the hands are. Brother, brother, this is motherfuckin’ art and I do wish I had formal schoolfeeding as would let me talk on this more
intelligent-like but from what I do motherfuckin’ know I can see that this is absolutely mind-blowing.”

“It is a hideous hodgepodge of mismatched colors and shapes that make my eyes fucking weep at the fact that you have forced me to stare at it as long as I have.”

“I think it’s pretty cool,” you say, just to involve yourself in the conversation.

“John you’ve said that about every single fucking thing in this entire goddamned exhibit!” Karkat almost-yells in exasperation.

“Well, it’s not like they aren’t here for a reason, right? They’re in a museum because they’re nice!”

“I cannot believe I thought this would be a good idea. Why do I go anywhere with you chucklefucks?” Karkat asks the inside of his hand, which is currently pressed up against his face.

“Aw brother don’t be like that. Let’s go look at something you think nice, yeah?” Gamzee offers, and you end up staring at a hyper-realistic wall-sized picture of a lady’s face. You’re pretty amazed at what people can do with colored pencil. You can see her pores.

“See, now this is impressive art!” Karkat says, gesturing at the thing.

“Yeah bro, they put hella time into this thing,” Gamzee agrees.

“It’s pretty nifty!” you chime, and Karkat rolls his eyes. The pattern, however, continues. Karkat likes art of people and scenery and cool woven stuff and woodworking and sculptures that look like actual things, Gamzee finds art in all the weird emotional-colorful-picasso lookin’ stuff, and you think just about everything is cool. The one thing you are all unanimously negative about is the large square of orange canvas. That’s it. It’s even titled “Orange Canvas.” It’s just. A square. Painted orange.

“I… I’m motherfuckin’ tryin’, brothers, but… I ain’t seein’ anything meaningful as can be grasped from this.”

“That’s because it’s a piece of garbage that someone charismatic tricked the moron curator into buying.”

“Maybe the curator just really likes the color orange,” you say.

“Maybe,” Gamzee mumbles. You three walk on past that without much other thought.

After you’re done, you go out for sushi. The place is nice, low-lit with a blue hue cast over the restaurant. The chairs and tables are low to the floor and you and Gamzee sort of end up with your legs everywhere, knees banging against the table when you forget there’s not a lot of leg room.

“Fucking, restaurant for ants,” you mutter as you bang your knee in the exact same spot for the third time in a row. Ugh, you’re probably going to have a bruise there.

“Serves you right,” Karkat tells you, smug as all hell. *His* legs are doing just fine. Gamzee creates a solution for himself by leaning on Karkat, his legs going out to the side, and therefore not banging against the table.

“Leaving me all alone to suffer with big legs in solitude, huh?” you tease him, sticking your tongue out. Gamzee nuzzles Karkat’s forehead and purrs loudly in response.
“Disgusting,” Karkat quips, not looking up from the menu, prompting Gamzee to nuzzle him some more and press a kiss to his cheek. “Absolutely repulsive, who let you out in public?”

Naturally, this results in both you and Gamzee (though, Gamzee to a lesser extent) being gigantic assholes to Karkat all through dinner. Gamzee has problems with chopsticks, so you offer to help. Instead of teaching him, though, you just use yours and feed him from across the table, propping your chin in your other hand and staring at him as dreamily as you can. Gamzee giggles so hard he almost spills the food out of his mouth and Karkat sends a visible prayer up to whatever powers might exist out there. You then try to feed Karkat and he 1. picks the sushi up with his fingers and eats it that way 2. smacks the chopsticks out of your hand.

“Rude.”

“Fuff oo!” Karkat says with his mouth full, sending you two middle fingers.

“No thanks!” you say brightly, and Karkat slowly leans forward until his fingers are smushing into your face. You giggle and bat his hands away, and Gamzee has to pull Karkat away from you before the two of you can get into an all out catfight in the middle of a nice restaurant.

The sun has set by the time you’re done, but false dusk still rests on the western horizon, stars just barely creeping a twinkling blanket across the sky from the east. It’s beautiful, and just a little too chilly to be comfortable, so you, Gamzee, and Karkat zap up on top of the sushi place’s roof and cuddle in together, two tall assholes flanking the tiny asshole once again, and stare at the sky. You call forth a warm wind (a skill you’ve all but got nailed by now) to tousle your hair and theirs, and watch stars wink into life, one by one.

“Figure there are constellations on this here planet, siblings?” Gamzee asks.

“There are,” Karkat tells him, bringing their clasped hands up to his lips so he can kiss Gamzee’s knuckles. “I just don’t know them.”

“I think that string of stars right there, the spiral looking one, is supposed to be Caduceus,” you say.

“What’s that?”

“It’s Callie’s symbol, the twisting snake and staff?” Gamzee’s eyes light up and he looks back to the star cluster, paying more attention. “It means like ‘the staff of creation’ or ‘the staff of beginnings’ or something like that. Carapacian is a little hard to translate perfectly.”

Gamzee nods, eyes not leaving the sky. Karkat watches him, face unreadable but you believe deeply affectionate, and you pull out your phone and play Neko Atsume for a moment. You snuggle together, stargazing, making up bullshit constellations that are both fun and funny for a while, until you’re all tired and ready to go home.

Because you are gentlemen, you and Gamzee see Karkat home safely, the two of you kissing him in distinctly different manners as you say your farewells, and then you fly Gamzee back to your place, your boyfriend snuggled up in your arms and mouthing at your jaw, unhurried and lazy.

He washes his face and you brush your teeth and Gamzee nudges you in the direction of your bedroom, where you both slip into pajamas, neatly into bed, and up against one another. He kisses you with soft eagerness, his mouth gentle and hungry both, and your reach up into his hair, fingers trailing along the soft fabric of his nightshirt on their trek. He rolls so he’s sorta on top of you, one hip on the mattress but most of his torso draped across yours.

“This okay?” he asks softly, and you smile up at him with a nod.
“Mhm, just keep your pants on and we’re all good.” Gamzee honks softly at you and bites your nose, the pricks of his fangs an empty threat as they gently parody a chomp. You giggle as well and kiss his throat, moving a hand out of his hair to hug him around the back. The blanket traps your heat and creates a hazy, languorous atmosphere where the two of you just move with slow and loving laziness, kissing and touching and holding simply for the sake of the kiss and the touch and the hold. At one point your back starts complaining so you roll over, dragging Gamzee across your body so he’s on the other side of you now, and you kiss him on the nose. He giggles and snuggles into you, kissing some more, and you two keep at it until you accidentally break with a yawn.

“Mmm, Monday tomorrow,” you tell him, “I’ll have to get up.”

“Kiss me on your way out,” Gamzee mumbles back, and the two of you fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

This is the final chapter before the Drop, which is a sequence of chapters that I have had planned since the beginning of SAitB almost a year ago. Buckle your seatbelts kids ;}
Step on the Tightrope

Chapter Summary

Welcome back.

Chapter Notes

Alright a couple things!
1. I have additional materials for SAitB! There is a part for sexy stuff, but beyond that I also have a timestamps part that currently features some Terezi stuff, so please go give me validation look at it.
2. YALL READY FOR THIS??? SAITB BOMB WHOOP WHOOP MOTHERFUCKERS
3. I have some more lovely fanart!!! So thank you forensicsoda for these lovely fanarts!
4. I have changed up my Classpects headcanons list a little bit. Nothing major, but this is what I'm working with for this story so you might want to give it a gander if you wanna know about the nuance of the magic in this verse.
5. warnings for self harm and the r-slur this chapter

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“...about depression is that it’s cyclical, it’ll go away for a little while and leave you questioning your own judgements, leave you thinking you’re just being whiny for no reason, and then a few weeks later you can’t get out of bed again and you’re curling in tighter under your own chastising, thinking you shouldn’t be like this...” Rose is reading the rough draft of her paper out loud to you. You’re mostly just there to be an audience, because she’s stopped to mark her own paper up or jot down revision ideas far more frequently than you’ve had anything to say. You ask for clarifications on a couple psychological terms you’d previously been unfamiliar with, but mostly you’re just impressed with how smart your friend is.

Gamzee and Feferi are out at a water park today, and he’s been sending you snaps. Karkat is with Sollux off doing something, and Dave and Jade are hanging out. You and Rose have your house to yourselves, for now, and your study date is going pretty swimmingly. You’re all caught up on your textbook and you’ve done your “home play” which is really homework and you’ve also given Rose’s hair a temporary makeover, and she looks kind of... off, without her hairband. Cute though!

“No… that’s not the word,” Rose interrupts herself. “John, what’s the word I’m looking for here?”

“Ostentatious?”

“Close… close, I’ll pencil that in for now, see if the thesaurus is any help to me when I take another swing at this thing.”

“It sounds pretty polished to me, Rose!”
“I appreciate that, but it is still only the first draft. I’ve plenty of room for improvement.”

You float over as she bends over her paper, penciling in even more revisions that you haven’t even got to hear yet, and you kiss her on the cheek. “You take yourself too seriously,” you chide playfully.

“It’s a tough job, but someone’s got to do it.” She straightens again and pushes on your shoulder gently, and you float- balloon-like- back to your spot on the couch.

“Alright, ostentatious use of- you know what John I don’t actually think ostentatious is the word I want to use here at all.”

“So what?” you say casually with a shrug, “You’re gonna go over it later anyway. It’s a first draft, it’ll work for the first draft.”

Rose makes a displeased noise, but continues, finishing out her paper with only a few more pauses to note or underline certain bits. In the silence that follows, you hear the doorknob turn and look up to see who’s coming in. You’re expecting Gamzee, but some of your friends don’t really knock. It is Gamzee, though, and you smile delightedly at his entrance.

“Heyyyy brother,” Gamzee calls to you, beaming back.

“Hey Gamzee! Rose is here too!” you say, pointing at your friend.

“Hey smartsis, how’s it?”

“Fine, fine,” Rose says, eyes focused on her papers. “Revising a paper for my class.”

“She’s gonna show off and set the bar way too high. No one else in the course is gonna be able to get an A.”

“I’m sure plenty of others will get As,” Rose tells you, and you allow her her dramatic pause. “I’ll just be the most deserving of it.”

You and Gamzee both laugh at her joke, and Gamzee offers her a high five and an encouraging “hell yeah” before flopping down on the couch next to you and nuzzling your face. You giggle and complain briefly of cooties, then kiss him.

“How utterly repulsive,” Rose comments mildly. “The gays are at it again.”

“Rose, shut the fuck up, you’re like, the gayest out of all of us.”

“I’m going to have to protest that John. I think my beautiful lesbian wife is the gayest out of all of us. But yes, I am a close second, thank you for noticing.”

“What about Dirk?” you ask.

“What about him?” Rose counters, finally looking up so she can look you dead in the eye.

“Isn’t he gayer than you, by merit of being full gay instead of half gay.”

“John!” Rose scolds, mock-affronted, “Being bisexual is not equivocal to being half-gay, half-straight. Wait. Fuck. Did I say equivocal or equivalent?”

“Equivocal,” Gamzee tells her.
“Fuck, pretend you didn’t hear that, that is absolutely not what I said.”

You laugh, because Rose mixing up big words is hilarious, and Gamzee laughs because it’s easy to get him to laugh along, even if his understanding of the situation is dubious at best. Or, well, *equivocal* at best. You mentally high-five yourself on what you feel is a pretty clever thought.

“Shithead.” Rose glares daggers at you.

“Yeah,” you say with a shrug.

“Also I’m the gayest, second only to Kanaya. Dirk can kiss my ass.”

“Dirk can eat your dust?”

“Dirk can motherfuckin…” Gamzee tries to join in, but can’t think of anything to add. “Shit. Sorry.”

You laugh at him and kiss his cheek. “It’s okay.”

“Well, I think I’m going to go home now,” Rose says, packing up her stuff.

“Go think about something else for a while and then look at your paper again, you’re just gonna stress yourself out if you keep on harping on it,” you tell her, getting up to give her a proper hug goodbye.

“There is merit, I suppose, to looking at something with fresh eyes.”

“And not driving yourself crazy over one single paper.”

“Hush.” Rose swats your side and gives Gamzee a fistbump goodbye, since the two of them aren’t particularly touchy with each other yet.

You and Gamzee decide to have a movie night, since you’re feeling like something… chill, tonight. Something low energy. You don’t really feel like talking, or even like listening to someone else talk, you just want to do something, well, casual. Since you’re not quite as worried about Gamzee and his weight lately, your brain forgets that eating regularly is a thing you’re supposed to still be doing, so dinner doesn’t even cross your mind.

The worst part is, nothing even triggers it.

The worst part is that you’re just having a normal evening.

The worst part is that you’re sitting with someone you love, doing something you enjoy, and it has no reason to happen.

You are filled with a sudden, *violent* need to self-sabotage. *It* is altogether too much. You’re dating Karkat, you’re dating *and* responsible for Gamzee, you’re a god of an entire goddamned *universe* and you feel tied down, suffocating under the social weight. You want to break ties. Dump Karkat, dump Gamzee, move Gamzee to one of your friends’ houses, tell Jade and Rose and Dave fucking nothing and cut off contact with everyone you know and never speak to your friends again.

It’s a violent, pressing need. You’re scaring yourself. It’s too much, the need, the *need*. The pressure gathers in your skull like when you’ve outgrown a bike helmet and the swelling gives you a headache. It builds in your eyes, threatening to make you cry. Your chest is tight, hard to breathe.

"Brother?” Gamzee asks as you stagger to your feet, stumbling towards the window. You don’t
want to talk to him. You want to- you need to leave. You need to stop- stop, stop.

"I- I'm leaving-" you say, you don't want to scare him but a twisted part of you absolutely does. You want him to think you're abandoning him, make him hate you, make him find comfort somewhere else.

"Bro?" Gamzee asks, rising as well, alarmed.

"I-" your brain scrambles. How can you make him let you go? You don't want to hurt him you do; make him hate you but you can't stay here right now. "Jade!" you blurt. You remember, moirails, it'd make sense if you want your human-moirail. He should get that. "I'm going to Jade's," you lie.

He frowns, face distorted in confusion, but nods hesitantly. Good enough. You don't, actually, want Jade. The thought of your best friend suddenly makes your stomach roil. Too constricting, an obligation to love her, to like her. Too much. It's all too much. The pressure is too much.

You push through the screen mesh on your window, still half human, not taking the time to disperse all the way before you're out of the too small house, away from Gamzee, away from expectations and commitments, away from everything.

You finish Becoming and feel instantaneously better. You can't have a headache if you don't have a head, you can't cry if you don't have tear ducts. You curl upwards into the atmosphere, breathing with your whole entity, flowing, moving, free, you've escaped the pressure, dispersing in every direction, unrestrained, unrestricted, you're as big as a house- as big as a field, as big as a stadium.

You move. You flow. You're free. You gust with energy, expelling everything in you that desires to break what you have- what you love- and focusing it into pure, reckless motion, cutting through clouds, leaving spiraling cumulus in your wake.

You may not have a voice, but that does not mean the wind cannot howl.

You rattle windowpanes and loose shingles, twist trees into gyrations and strip them of dying leaves prematurely, shake and loosen and pry open any number of things as you swirl, gust, billow.

But of course, you are still a conscious being, and so the relief of being in your body is short lived. What are you even doing? This is stupid, you’re being stupid, you’re freaking out over nothing and throwing a tantrum like a child. You stupid, selfish fucking moron, you just left Gamzee like that- aren’t you supposed to love him? Aren’t you supposed to be an adult? Why’d you just leave like that? What the fuck is wrong with you? What the actual fucking fuck is wrong with you?!

You know that if you turn back, your gut will twist with the guilt that now pulses through you in gusts. You know your resentment will manifest itself in your fleshbody turned against itself, and it’s so much easier to evade your guilt when you can sidestep its physical ramifications. But you should at least pretend like you’re a decent human being, at least pretend you care about your fri-

You don’t.

Fuck.

You do, you do, you care about them, you do.

You don’t want to, you don’t care what they think, fuck them, what should it matter if they’re upset about you disappearing like this fuck them no no that’s cruel, you can’t think that, you shouldn’t think that but you fucking do, don’t you? You’re fucking thinking it, because you’re terrible, because fuck them why should you even matter to them you suck anyway, they’ll just
move on and forget about you in a lifetime or two.: you’ve all got forever- oh god oh god you’re going to be stuck alive forever, like forever-forever; there is a vastness that stretches out in front of you with no windblocks in sight and that is terrifying as much as it is beckoning- except it’s suffocating. Forever, with the same people. Forever, with the same exact peers you’ve known all your life, the relationships you get into now may very well stick with you until this universe is ignited by the recurrence of the Game, you could be trapped with the same people and the same faces and the same emotional fucking rut forever and you can’t, you can’t, you hate them, you fucking hate them you hate your friends why do they exist why do you know them- no. No. No. You love them you do you really do you do you swear it you swear you do love them you promise your brain is just fucking broken right now, you don’t mean it, you can’t mean it, you’re not that kind of person, right? You’re not the kind of person who would ever hate your friends, you don’t want to be bad- but you do. You want to forget about them and make them forget about you and that’s the kind of thing a bad person thinks so you may as well just accept that you’re an absolute piece of garbage and speed the process up, right? They’re smart, they won’t want to be friends with you forever, so really you’d be doing yourself and everyone else a huge fucking favor if you just cut off ties now and spare yourself the slow and agonizing deterioration of friendships and romances that would just make you all miserable and hurt and look at you, you think you’re special don’t you, trying to justify your actions like this, trying to pretend you’re being anything other than so fucking selfish.

You force yourself to breathe, your lungs as fragile as wet paper mache but still there. You force yourself down, into a back alleyway somewhere, and your lungs expand. They’re thinner than the special paper in those fancy bibles and breakable as a well-worn balloon, but they’re working. Your heart and arteries and esophagus are pulled together slowly, but they’re there too, eventually. The blood in your arteries forces the more distal parts of your body into physicality, and when your stomach is firm enough to sustain the damage it roils. Your body jerks forward, and in order to counter you shove your fragile self back against the brick behind you. Guilt and disgust mingle in equal parts, but hilariously enough the disgust is not aimed inward. Nah, you have the guilt for that. The disgust- because you are a disgusting human being- is aimed at the idea of staying in this form, in going home or talking to anyone you know. You think you could handle talking to a stranger, right now (well not right right now) but your friends? People who care about your undeserving ass? You are repulsed by the mere concept.

But you have to, you’ve gotta, what the fuck is wrong with you this shouldn’t be hard! You’re not yet solid enough that your body can absorb the shock, so you can actually feel each and every organ that is involved in the process of you vomiting. You empty your wispy stomach, retching a steamy liquid that you think might be stomach acid that simply didn’t have a chance to fully solidify before you expelled it from your body.

You wipe hard at your mouth, which is how you realize that you are breathing way too fast through it. You’re having a lot of trouble deforming. Pulling yourself into flesh has always been hard but never this hard.

Maybe you need help. You gag again, the taste of acid nostalgically familiar in your mouth even as you try to swallow the bile back down. You resist the urge to sink down onto your ass or knees, there’s vomit on the ground- gaseous as it is. You knock your head back against the wall you’re using for support and try to focus on breathing. You had a good whirlwind, it’s time for you to pull your shit together now. Starting with your corpse- your body, your fucking- your fucking body. It is yours. You might not like that fact very much right now but this animate glob of meat with blood inlays is, in fact, your body. You need to breathe, just breathe, focus on your too short breaths, focus- fucking. Fuck. Okay. Breathing isn’t working to ground you right now, you just want to disperse with every exhale. And you just so happen to be exhaling a lot right now.
You claw at the brick wall behind you with your left hand. At first your fingers just pass against the coarse surface, not receiving traction as they’re still too intangible to do anything other than flop against it in an almost liquidy manner. You focus on that, then, focus on prying your fingers into existence so that when they claw against the wrinkled rock you feel the scrape of them. Your desperate clawing continues until you can’t bend your swelling, bleeding fingers- and when did that start happening- so you rub your palm against the crags and keep doing that while you go back to your breathing.

You reach up, press your hand to the brick close to your face, and drag your knuckles down, doing the most damage to the index and middle fingers’ knuckles but your ring and pinky’s aren’t exactly spared. You inhale deeply, telling yourself that this is enough. Your hand is throbbing; you can feel each heartbeat pulse through it unhappily. Your breathing is even, if a touch- heh- winded.

You’re a jackass, but you go ahead and laugh at that inner joke anyway, knuckles still pressed against the warming brick, the taste of bile on your tongue and your skull resting solidly against something stronger than you while you straddle a pile of your own smoking vomit in an alleyway.

How long were you the wind? How long have you been dragging yourself kicking and screaming back into the realm of the solid? It’s past sunset, now, you missed all of it, and the only indicator of time is the false dusk that still sits on the cusp of the western horizon.

You should go home. You don’t vomit, this time, when you think that, but you do gag. Like when you’re brushing your teeth and you go a little too far back on your tongue and your uvula pitches a fit. You need to go home, you’ve been acting like the fucking retard kids used to call you. Hey, these are your thoughts, right? No one can hear you. You’re a fucking retard.

That’s cruel. You shouldn’t think that. You’re pretty sure Davepeta is autistic, you seem to recall them saying something like that? You’re a terrible friend to them, thinking things like this.

Ugh! So, yeah, if your brain could shut the hell up for like, long enough for you to get home, that’d be great. You’re distantly so tired of your own shit. Grow up. Get yourself together. Stop having internal arguments with yourself like a fucking loon and do what needs done. That part of you is more mildly annoyed than distressed, and you wish the part of you that is currently going through and probably magnifying said shit.

You stagger forward, legs shaky, and take a deep breath. You’re exhausted. You leave the alleyway and feel a little more balanced, clutching your left hand inside your right and feeling the throb of it. You need to go home, and take care of your hand, and go to bed. You’ll feel better in the morning. Whatever the fuck is wrong with you will be gone if you just sleep it off. You fly upward, and make it maybe two feet into the air before you disperse back into your body. It’s a relief, and the pain in your hand is gone now (so’s your hand), and you decide you’re too tired to wrestle yourself back into a physical form right now. You’ll shove yourself into… that when you have somewhere where you can plant your feet on the ground.

You made it pretty far out, while you were having a fucking meltdown. You zip home with dread and guilt and repulsion twisting themselves around you like braided air. The window is as open as you left it, and you slip in with hardly a rattle of the screen in its pane. Gamzee is in the living room, eyes teary, pacing and glancing at his phone with obsessive frequency. You think you can see/hear his hands shaking, and his breathing is not what you would describe as a good thing. Your dread at coming back and the repulsion at the idea of being around people you’re tied to drown under the noise of your guilt surging to a forte; you know this is your fault. It’s your fault Gamzee is panicky and teary and distressed- and the worst part is you wanted him to be, earlier. You
wanted him to think you were abandoning him so he wouldn’t care about you anymore, wanted to hurt him deep where you know it pierces the worst.

You think back to the conversation you overheard Gamzee having with Tavros. About how Gamzee would someday find someone who wouldn’t make him wait. Someone who wouldn’t leave him. You want to be that person, you have to be that person. You’re his boyfriend, you should want to be there for him and you do! Of course you do, you want to be there for him more than anything. So you force yourself back down into flesh but as you do it feels like something is cracking— not bones or skin or joints, but something. Something important. Something in you, brittle as plastic with fractures running through it now. You focus on your lungs, focus on breathing, focus on getting them working well enough that every inhale doesn’t feel like it’s accompanied by glass shards down your windpipe. You’re fine. What’s more important now is that you’re here for him.

“John!” Gamzee’s relief is all but tangible, and as you pry your flesh from your body he crosses the living room and catches you in his arms. You sigh, and the little breaking thing in you breaks slower, here as he’s holding you. There’s something that feels— well, not safe exactly, but the illusion of safety, maybe— about how he holds you. You hug him back, left hand pulsing in pain with every heartbeat as you angle your wrist so the blood doesn’t smear too badly on his shirt.

“Holy motherfuck, brother, we was fuckin’ worried, couldn’t neither of us find you anywhere and you were so distressed on your leaving I didn’t think it just—”

Gamzee can’t finish his sentence and you can’t ask him who “we” is before a flash of green and Jade interrupt with, “I checked th— John! You’re back!” Jade takes two long strides and before adding, “And you’re bleeding!!!”

Gamzee pulls away from you and agitation courses through you. You don’t want to be worried over. Your face is bright red, you can feel the heat, and you move to hide your hand from them despite knowing there’s no chance for you now.

“Oh my god, John, what happened?!” Jade asks in loud distress as she holds your wrist below where the blood seeps out. Your irritation spikes. You wonder, bitterly, if Gamzee told Jade you were freaking out as payback for back when you tattled to Karkat that he thought reality wasn’t real. Gamzee’s fingers on your cheek, cool where your skin is so hot, annoy you too.

“You been cryin’ also,” Gamzee says, so soft and pitying you hate him for it. You turn your head and squeeze your eyes shut, trying to close off your expression before he can see it and you make everything worse.

“M fine,” you assert through gritted teeth, snatching your hand back.

“John!” Jade sounds openly, horrifically exasperated, but you’re too irate to care. Too a lot of things to care. “John you are a lot of things but fine is so far off the table we’d have to go on a three year journey through the void in order to go get it!”

“I am fine,” you say again, taking a step back from your lover and sister.

“John!”

“Just drop it!”

“Then where the fuck have you been for the last—” Jade flounders briefly, “— three and a half hours?”

“Whirlwinding,” you say honestly, “It’s something I do to calm down, and it worked, and I’m
“Okay, you’re right, of course, why would I ever think to argue with you, it’s not like you’ve ever been wrong in your entire life!”

Jade’s ears flick back, briefly affronted, and you squeeze your eyes shut and suck air in between your teeth. You’re saying things you don’t mean. You should stop talking.

“You’re… not my Jade.” You don’t meet her eyes as you say it, barely keep your peripherals on the hand that she snatches away from your uninjured wrist like hot coals at your words.

The air is still. You’re waiting for her reaction, and even Gamzee holds his breath.

The silence stretches on far too long and something ugly, twisted, and heavy settles itself in you.

“So,” Jade swallows audibly, “so there’s, stuff, that I can’t comprehend because I wasn’t there, is what you’re saying?”

You regret everything, you regret your words, wish you could go back and pluck them from the air before they ever reached her ears, why did you say that, you hurt her, you just hurt Jade, you know you did you can hear it in her voice you hurt her you hurt her

“Okay!” she says, fake-bright. “That’s, that’s okay, John, I know you probably miss her.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, no, it’s fine, but, hey! Now at least I know-”

“No, no, I’m sorry, I’m so sorry I didn’t mean to say that, I shouldn’t have said that I’m sorry,” you stumble over your words, looking at her now, and you can see the tears building in her eyes but she’s trying so damn hard to smile at you and tell you that it’s fine and you know damn fucking well that you’ve hurt her down to her core but what can you possibly do to fix this? Say you didn’t mean it? You did.
“It’s okay, John, thank you for telling me.”

“No, no, Jade, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have, I didn’t- Jade I’m sorry that’s not it I’m sorry I shouldn’t have said that.”

Jade slaps you on your right shoulder, her palm heavy and grounding, solid as the earth, “No, John, it’s okay.” She takes a deep, shaking breath, tears still dammed but brimming near to burst. “It’s fine.” There is, you think, an offer to a truce in those words. She’s not fine. You know she’s not. She’s saying she is. You’re not fine. She knows you’re not. You’re saying that you are.

“... I’m gonna go clean up my hand,” you whisper, voice hollow and hoarse like it has no business being. She smiles at you, tight and pained, and nods. You hurt her you hurt her you hurt her you hurt her you hurt her.

“I’ll head home.”

You get no chance to respond before she’s vanished in a puff of chartreuse. You take a deep breath too, and now that Jade is no longer in front of you you get a full, unobstructed view of Gamzee, whose face is about what you might’ve expected it to be.

You half turn to go upstairs and do what you just said, but you’re cut off, like your ankle pulling taut against a chain, by a quiet “Brother.”

You look back to him, to his trembling body and his breathing that can easily swandive into something so much worse. You can’t. You wish you could, you want to, you genuinely, truly, honestly want to, but you can not deal with this right now. You can’t be the patient one. You can’t be the one that helps somebody else right now. You cannot, not right now, dear god please not right now.

“Come help me with my hand.” You don’t know if it’s an invitation, an order, or an offer, but those words come to you as though inspired by the Muse. Gamzee nods, and follows your silent trek upstairs. In the bathroom, he cleans and bandages your hand, you sitting on the rim of the tub and Gamzee kneeling before you, your hand cradled in both of his.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers hoarsely. You know you should reassure him, make him feel better somehow, make sure he knows that this is in no way his fault and nothing about this is for him to take the blame.

“I’m sorry too,” you say instead.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thank you so much for reading, and please leave a comment <3
How curious, the human capacity to believe their own lies

Chapter Summary

If you thought that last chapter was the worst of it, I'm sorry.

While you do feel better in the morning, that sure as hell doesn’t mean you feel good. Your room, thank god, doesn’t feel as claustrophobic as you had feared it would before you opened your eyes, but there’s still an itch in you to leave it. You shove at the windows, making sure they’re as open as they’ll go, and only belatedly realize you’re not entirely solid when your hand passes through the screen. The unbandaged one, that is, the other remains firmly within its jail of cloth. You rest your forehead against the glass pane and breathe deep, feeling the world outside stirring with autumn’s cool blusters. You’re not going to class today. Fuck, on a list of things you are not currently capable of handling, school is definitely one of them. Sticking around this place isn’t appealing either, though.

God, what’s even wrong with you?

The desire to self-sabotage from last night hasn’t fully abated, but you feel you can probably handle it right now. You go to the bathroom, open the windows in there too, but you leave the blinds closed. You don’t want light, really, just wind. Air. Your element is a flexible one, capable of passing through the things that block other things out. You splash cold water on your face before you leave the bathroom, feeling no less asleep and no more grounded for it, just a little less comfortable.

You take your computer to bed with you and click on one of your mmo’s. Interacting with your guild seems exhausting, though, and the gameplay itself sounds less and less enticing the longer you stare at the loading bar. You exit out.

turntechGodhead [TG] began pestering ectoBiologist [EB]

Oh god. God, no, nope. Not right now, you cannot.

TG: hey so uh

TG: dude

TG: what the fuck happened between you and jade last night

TG: she doesnt want to talk about it

EB: I don’t either

ectoBiologist [EB] ceased pestering turntechGodhead [TG]

TG: okay well thats cool and everything but im actually really worried about the two of you

TG: like

TG: did you have a fight or something
You let Dave ramble to an empty chatroom for a while. You’re sure your brief answer and very obvious “I DO NOT WANT TO TALK RIGHT NOW” are probably only worrying him more, but he has Rose and Karkat and Roxy he can go talk to if he really needs somebody. You’re not in the mood.

Ectobiologist. You stare at your handle for a little while. It reminds you of the conversation you had with Terezi, all those years ago, and in a way this thing that has so long felt like just another way to identify you is now anchored to another person. This isn’t your handle, it’s Terezi’s old batshit nickname for you that turned out to have some cosmic importance in a Game you wish you’d never played. You hate it, suddenly, it makes your stomach roil and your teeth clench and you want to go get a hammer and break something. You should start stocking normal, household hammers in your strife specibus again. A warhammer to your computer screen seems overkill.

You force a deep breath. Then another. Then you sneeze.

God, okay, when’s the last time you sneezed, you needed that a lot actually. Your head feels a little clearer so you sneeze a few more times, just for good measure. The tight, sick thing in your chest loosens a little and you shake your head, dislodging your glasses a little so you have to reach up and settle them back on your face. Ow, okay, wrong hand, use your other hand dipshit.

Destroying things with hammers is probably a bad idea. There are much simpler ways to get rid of the thing that’s causing you an irrational amount of anger and irritability. You pull up dictionary.com and two online thesauruses, and begin clicking through things, absorbing yourself in a simple task. Something that feels like you, you want something that could be an identifier for you, John Egbert, and not any old shmuck that entered into a Game first and got dealt a hand from fate.

**ectoBiologist [EB] has changed their handle to gybingTepidity [GT]!**

That’s better. You’re not sure if it reflects an accurate portrayal of your character, but you like it, and it makes you kind of happy, so you go with it.

Your stomach gurgles at you and you distantly recall that you haven’t eaten since lunch yesterday. It’s about lunchtime today, so that’s about 24 hours you guess. Bluh bluh, stupid flesh bodies and their stupid demand for sustenance. You know what would be easier? Death. Not having a body at all.

You go downstairs and are filled with a need to flee. You sneeze, and the desire abates, but the claustrophobic feeling gradually climbs. You want to rend this building seam from seam, reduce it to rubble in a vortex. You want to leave and get as far away from this place as possible. You want to blow out the walls and you want to go back up into your room where you can’t see the door to your dad’s study, which is actually Gamzee’s studio, where you can’t hear the familiar creak of the cafe doors as you enter into the kitchen, where you can’t notice how the fireplace is empty and has been for years and it feels you’ve broken some domestic, mythic contract in your soul by letting that flame die. A fire **belongs** in a fireplace, dammit, categorically, at all times, without exception. It’s just too much work to keep a fire stoked.

You spread cream cheese over a bagel while your brain screams at you about how wrong everything is and how much you don’t want to be here. You are, in some small part of you, annoyed at yourself for feeling these things, which just makes your headspace an even unhappier place to be.

You should apologize to Jade. What- again? What’s another meaningless “sorry” going to do to change a situation you yourself have fucked so royally? But you can’t leave things how they are.
You hurt her (you wanted to, you piece of shit, you wanted to), you can’t just leave it at that. Maybe wait? Let her contact you? That’s a coward’s way out. You hurt her, you fix it, your father raised you better than this.

You sneeze and little bits of chewed up bagel hit you in the back of the hand. You blink back tears that had ambushed you at the thought of your father. You miss your dad. You wish he was here, god, you miss that home-safe feeling of having a competent adult who loves you here, present, taking care of things because god you cannot take care of anything right now. You miss being a stupid kid who thought the world skewed toward kindness and your dad was stronger than anything that could’ve hurt you. You long for that certainty of invincibility, the deep-set knowledge that your dad was undefeatable, indomitable, indestructible.

But he wasn’t. He was just a mortal, human man, with a beating heart, and damnation to die only once.

You’re so, so, so, *cripplingly* jealous of Jane, who got to keep her father. He acts, in every way, your family, but he’s not your *dad*. He’s not your *dad*. Jade isn’t *your* Jade, not the one you spent three years with. Davepeta isn’t *yours* anymore, they’re their own person with a much more interesting life outside of your old friendship. Nanna, maybe, is yours, but you never knew her while she was alive and after death she was merged with a giant clown doll and seemed half like a quirky game consort, and only half an actual person. Roxy’s yours, sort of, but the ones she lost were so close in time (time being relative) to the ones in this timeline that replaced them that she can’t possibly understand. Rose and Dave and the trolls, you guess are as much yours as anyone, since three years separation meant you didn’t really get to know them anyway, but that doesn’t change that deep in your soul, right here right now, you still feel that they are not *yours*.

Something’s broken, in you. Something stupid and shameful, because you’re standing in your kitchen, bent over your counter biting back tears, and you just want to go *home*.

But you’re homesick for a place that doesn’t exist.

“John?”

Oh god oh no oh god oh no right now not right now please god please Gamzee *no*. His fingers on your back leave dents, threatening to pass through you like you might not quite be solid enough. They’re a small comfort, though, and you try to focus on the touch instead of the dread that’s quickly flooding your system like oil (rank, dark, coming at you from every opening, all around you, inescapable, suffocating). You’re braced and waiting for words, for a demand to talk and explain yourself and make yourself emotionally present and the anticipation alone is enough to make you want to vomit up that half a bagel you managed to get down.

“We don’t have to talk about nothin’ if you don’t want to, brother,” Gamzee murmurs as he presses himself in close behind you, hugging you around your midsection and leaning so he can rest his head down on your shoulder. Your relief is a visceral, physical thing, the tension leaving your arms and gut and back so fast you could’ve fallen over if you hadn’t already been bracing yourself against the counter. With the relief comes a sob, and you cannot stop yourself from weeping. It comes out of you ugly and uncalled for, and your body is pathetic and weak and you slowly sink down further onto the counter, pressing your forearms to the surface and letting your face rest supported by something other than your own neck. Your lower lip and chin wobble outside of your control, and trying to quell them only makes them shake distressingly harder. Your hands- even the hurting one- form fists and you can’t even pick out a main emotion for why you’re crying, you just are. It’s so much, your brain is so much right now, and all of it hurts in its own way.

“Oh, brother,” Gamzee croons pityingly, letting go so he can shift to your side, lift you and gently
remove your glasses, and pull you into a proper hug. It’s weird as hell, being the one to cling, being
the one to cry, being the one to hide your face in someone else’s shoulder and tremble. Gamzee
pets your hair and holds you close and tells you it’s okay, easy John, it’ll be alright.

You feel compelled to explain yourself, but you can’t think of words other than “I don’t know why
I’m like this” and Gamzee makes no demands of you. Part of the painful thing in you is just a
straight shot of relief at the fact that he isn’t making you talk right now, so you try to convince
yourself not to get all tied up in knots over not saying anything for a little while. You try to let
yourself just cry, and eventually- mostly thanks to Gamzee’s petting and murmuring- you do. You
slip into a headspace where you can just weep and cling and let that tight and painful thing in you
loosen, a little. Crying is- hard for you. You don’t feel any actual compulsion to do it, when the
situation says it would be reasonable to cry, and then when you do feel like crying it’s over
something inane and stupid or entirely made up in your own head and it’s embarrassing and makes
you feel like a total wuss.

“You good?” Gamzee asks you very, very quietly when you’ve mostly wound down. You’re
exhausted. Crying takes so much effort, goddamn. You’re not- the urge to self-detonate is still in
you, crying didn’t manage to wash that out, and your problems remain firmly rooted right where
they are in your stupid fucking brain, but you feel better. Like sneezing, but a lot more energy
consuming and grosser and maybe possibly deeper.

“Not really, but I feel less bad. Thanks.” You pull back and rub at your face, then locate your
glasses.

“Of course, brother.” Gamzee’s hands are on your shoulders, soft, as his eyes- full of pity and
concern- search your face. “I’m always as can be a shoulder to cry on, should you ever find a
need.”

You almost want to laugh at that. It seems absurd, that Gamzee, with his mess of problems so
much larger than your own, could possibly be a person you could regularly turn to. You couldn’t
ask that kind of thing from him in the first place, much less actually expect him to be able to do
anything for you.

But this is nice. You in no way plan to make a habit of this, but it is nice.

“Thank you, Gamzee.” You wash your face off and blow your nose while Gamzee eats the other
half of your bagel (you really don’t want to eat anything more than what you already have) and the
two of you go chill on the couch for a while. He doesn’t ask you about missing class or why he
found you crying over nothing in the kitchen or what happened yesterday, and you are stupidly
grateful. He mostly just sort of texts, using your head as a resting table, and strokes your back
while you lay on him. You don’t want to do jack shit on social media, despite your phone buzzing.
Oh, but, like, you have streaks on snapchat and everything you’re kind of dedicated to keeping.
You’ll just be more upset with yourself later if you lose something you’ve worked hard to keep just
because your brain is being stupid for a day. You send almost everyone a picture of the carpet.

GT: I changed my handle, it’s gybingTepidity now

You don’t send it to Jade, because after last night you have no idea what to say to Jade. You feel
your brain start to go back down the same track that led you to crying in the kitchen earlier so you
try to force your thoughts elsewhere. Too late, though, you’re thinking about dumb emotions and
trying not to think about them doesn’t actually work. Your brain is especially fucking stupid
because yeah, sure, you still have that weird impulse to cut ties and stop existing and all that stuff
that means never talking to anyone who knows you ever again, and you really, really, really do not
want to have to talk to Jade about what’s going on in your head and try to put words and
explanations on your dumb fucking piece of shit hell-organ, but.

But you really just want your best friend, right now.

You don’t know how to reconcile any of the wants and urges in you and your phone buzzing as incessantly as it is starting to irritate you, so you turn it off. Gamzee’s eyes track the motion, but he leaves you be, thank god and everything else, just goes back to his own texting.

He’s not ‘mine’ either, your brain provides, unsolicited and unwanted. He’s from the same timeline as most everyone else; there was a Gamzee you didn’t know. A Gamzee who wasn’t locked in a fridge, sure, but a Gamzee you never helped. A Gamzee you left behind in the Game, left behind in hell, who died with Caliborn’s fangs in his soul and his puppet strings uncut. There is a Gamzee, not your boyfriend but a Gamzee that is “yours” nonetheless, that you have never met.

Jasprose. Her name comes to you like an answer to a quiz question that you’d spent half the test time staring at. Maybe she- you haven’t spoken with her in, since the wedding but, possibly you could- where would you even start? You have no method of contacting her, she’s not on social media anywhere except in cryptid photos taken by others. Would she even want to see you? Could she possibly understand? Why has she basically just disappeared off the face of the earth? You thought that she was just being a kooky half-cat gamesprite with an affection for the otherworldly and a lack of inhibitions that would prevent her from becoming a backwoods mini-nightmare, but now you almost hope that she’s isolating for the same reasons you have been- whatever those reasons even are. You’re not. The most introspective person. Also, you shouldn’t wish ill on your friends, that’s bad. You just, you just really want someone in the same spot as you right now. Someone who understands that you lost everything, and these people you love aren’t and cannot be replacements.

You turn your phone back on and get to googling. You are negative five hundred percent surprised to learn that finding Jasprose has an almost cult-like following. You turn off notifications for pesterchum like three minutes in, then also snapchat, because apparently every single one of your friends has at least one thing to say and one of your friends (Dave) has a lot of things to say. Like. So many. Dave is just generally a very chatty person and you love him but you’re not feeling it right now.

The most reliable method of summoning Jasprose to your location, it turns out, is to dump a can of black paint over your head behind a Denny’s at either 2 or 3am and chant an incantation that looks kind of like English but not enough to make you question it’s eldritchian authenticity.

Bmoaek Gmikkikg Giml
Nouve Lost
Nouve Lost
Nouve Lost
Megmets Yme Piled Tyll
Topplikg
Befome
Cokfessiok

You screenshot the chant, just in case you accidentally close out of the tab or something. You’ll need to probably practice the pronunciation there a few times. Gamzee makes dinner and lets you remain useless and dumb on the couch, and you feel guilty because why the fuck are you enough of a sack of shit that your friend feels the need to take care of you. You’re not doing anything and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Gamzee continues to not make demands of you as you eat and after dinner onwards, and you
continue to be stupidly grateful for it. You open pesterchum, but you don’t really have anything to say, so you end up just staring at Jade’s window. She’s messaged you once, just a simple “hi,” but what should you say to that? You’d just apologize, which would be as meaningless and idiotic as all the times last night, and Jade will inevitably ask if you’re okay. You think what you want, really, is kind of what Gamzee’s doing, where he’s offering his physical presence but not asking questions. You kind of just want to fall asleep on top of Jade, but you still feel really gross, and you can’t. You can’t… You promise yourself that you’ll talk about it later, when you actually want to talk, because, well, she can’t force you to talk. Nobody can, that’s all in your power.

You tell Gamzee you’d like to sleep alone, tonight. After Gamzee goes to bed, you zero in on his breathing. Not that you’re not pretty much constantly aware of it, given how close the two of you are to each other, and how often you’re in each other’s company, but now you’re waiting anticipatorily for when his breathing hits that mellow balance of sleep.

About the moment he conks out, you Become and slip out through your window. You’re not sure what, exactly, you think will happen if you manage to find Jasprose and potentially make a connection, but the idea is a goal and you’re going to pursue it dogmatically, because it’s something you can do in this situation, and a flimsy goal is better than wildly scrabbling at a brick wall with undirected energy.

You’re starting to think that maybe your problems might be a little more complex than you’re giving them credit for.

You fly to Crockpot, because it does indeed have a small section with basic paints and shit, and you look between “Coal Dark” black and “Void Expression” black. They’re the same price- wait that doesn’t matter- and as near as you can tell, they look kinda the same? Coal Dark looks more brown and Void Expression looks more blue but you can only say that because you’re looking between the two. On their own they both just look. Black. You decide to go with Coal Dark because it’s closest to your uninjured hand, and when you turn to go to the checkout you see Gamzee and nearly have a heart attack, dropping the can of paint.

It’s not Gamzee, of course, he’s home asleep. The troll in front of you doesn’t even look like Gamzee, aside from horns which are vaguely similar. Gamzee’s have a more distinct wave to them, and everything else isn’t the same at all. The guy’s about as short as Rose is and has adorable tiny eyebrows and his hair is chin length and wavy, instead of super poofy and wild. He’s got a basket that is 3/4ths full of toothpaste and mouthwash.

“You okay?” he asks you, both of you reaching to pick up the can of paint you dropped. You get it first.

“Yeah, sorry! You just startled me.”

“You- uh-” Okay, here comes the ‘you’re a god wow that’s so neat’ thing. “You’re John, right?” He looks like he immediately wishes he could eat those words, turning a little olive at the cheeks. You have a laugh at his expense, though it’s not as jovial as it might have been.

“Yeah, that’s me.”

“I’m a friend of Aillie’s,” he tells you, shoving his spare hand in his jacket pocket.

“Oh! Hi! Does she talk ab- What’s your name?” you ask in an attempt to seem vaguely polite.

“Veysha Manira. And yeah, she’s pretty excited about knowing you and everything. Says you’re cool.”
“Well, that’s nice of her. Fun running into you, what a wild coincidence.” You excuse yourself hastily and leave, and maybe you’re imagining it but based on his breathing (which you’re now very aware of) you think you feel him walk to where you were standing, considering the paints.

You pick up some towels you can just get rid of, a change of clothes that you’re also intending to just toss after this, make your purchases, throw it all in your sylladex, and Become on your way out the door.

You go to Denny’s and settle in on the roof. You unBecome and pull your phone out, then start trying to pronounce the chant. You also set up an anonymous account on the forum that you got the Jasprose summoning information from, since they have politely requested that all results be meticulously recorded for allegedly scientific reasons. There’s a 65% success rate on the bucket-of-paint-behind-a-Denny’s method, as opposed to the 60% success rate on finding a precipice and a newborn kitten (success plummets if the cat in question is older than a month) with which to hold skyward towards the rising sun while screaming “Nants ingonyama bagithi baba.” A tempting method, but you’re going for the one with the highest chance of finding her, and also you don’t really have access to newborn kittens right now. There’s a 30% success rate on drawing a pentagram and placing five out of a list of 24 items inside the pentagram, and candles have to be lit. There’s a 40% summoning rate on getting a bunch of cool rocks, putting them inside a meticulously-preserved specific kind of gourd, and rattling it indefinitely until she shows up. The kinds of rocks used are specified with each attempt to summon her using that method, and you notice that most of the favorable ones include bloodstone or sardonyx- specifically the green variety of sardonyx. Actually, all the lists that have succeeded that way have one or the other. Weird. Actually, wait, there’s one exception, and that’s when the rocks were shaken inside of a raccoon skull instead of a gourd. Smoke signals have a 2% success rate, but one person did in fact successfully summon Jasprose that way.

You parse through the chant again, and someone exiting the Denny’s overhears you.

“Don’t you gods have an way to contact her?” they ask quizzically after watching you for a moment.

“Jasprose is an enigma unto us all,” you tell them flatly, looking up briefly to look them in the eye. You can feel the wind around you moving your hair slightly, and then you look back down at your phone. They leave in a bit of a rush.

At 1:30, about, you decide you’re as practiced as you’ll be for the time being, and Become for a bit. You spiral yourself over the Denny’s, causing the nearby trees and bushes to sway with your motion, and it feels nice to gust for a bit. Rhythmic, and all that.

You don’t actually know how much time passes, you’re not keeping track. Spiraling feels good and helps you feel- not the things that you feel when you’re…

Human! Human, is the word, the term for the thing that you are supposed to be with regular frequency. You go ahead and force yourself back down out of your form, taking lungs and veins and arteries again. You pull out your phone, and notice that you’ve pretty much got like three minutes left before 3am, the second and last timeslot for the evening. Oops. You change into the clothes you bought, set your phone upright on a pipe out back of the Denny’s so you can see the chant, rehearse it one last time, and then pop the paint can open. You watch the clock on your phone change to 3:00 exactly, and upend the bucket of paint over your head. You laugh, initially, finding this whole business absurd and entertaining in a simplistic, childish way, and then chant.

Bmoaek Gnikkikg Giml
Nouve Lost
You wait a moment, then another, and then it’s 3:23 and you get the feeling Jasprose is not, actually, going to appear. You Become, the paint falling through your body and splattering against the pavement, and you gust a little before you shove yourself back down into flesh so you can pick your phone up. The paint is in a massive puddle in the parking lot, so you float above it, not wanting to get your god tier shoes in it, and you roll your eyes at yourself a little at buying the towels. You were all air underneath the paint, your skin is fine, it’s just the pair of clothes that now nestle fine and safe in your sylladex that are ruined. You pull up the forum.

Results:
I tried the bucket of paint behind Denny’s method, at 3am, nothing happened. I’m fairly positive my incantation was pronounced correctly, but I’m inexperienced and no one was here to check me, so I can’t know for sure. I used one gallon of Crockpot’s “Coal Dark” black paint, which is now creeping slowly over the pavement behind the Denny’s at 17th and R St. Between upending the bucket of paint and saying the incantation, I laughed a little.

You try to think of something else to add that happened, but can’t think of anything, so you just post the thread. You glance around again. Part of you had been hoping she would show up while you were typing things on your phone, but no such luck.

You can’t help but feel disappointed. You feel your hands start to shake and you bite your lower lip. You don’t know why this failure seems so bad, but it does. Your hopes were disproportionately high. You still don’t even fucking know what you were hoping for, but. You take a deep breath, and note that your hands are no longer shaking because you don’t have them anymore. Your ankles, too, and most of your calves have disappeared, swirling beneath you in glowing blue energy that is the exact opposite of solid. You’re tired, it’s 3:30 in the morning, you should go home.

But home- home is... different than a house. And your house, right now, feels nothing like home. You don’t want to go back there, you want to stay out until you’re exhausted enough that you won’t even be able to notice the walls and the smells and the layout of something so familiar that doesn’t feel right anymore. God what is your damage?

You go into the Denny’s and order a short stack and a coke. You ignore the stares from the limited patrons of the establishment and stare out your window, not bothering to force your feet, ankles, and lower legs back into this goddamned flesh. Now without a goal again, the feelings from before are back and loud as ever. You don’t want to be here, anymore, in this city, on this planet, in this universe, but the only other place you have access to is being actively swallowed by a giant black hole so you guess you’re stuck here. You are struck, once again, with homesickness for a place that doesn’t exist, a need for somebody who is yours, and just a simple want for your best friend. But Jade is dead. Your Jade is.

Davesprite. You know he’s “dead” too, in the way of “he doesn’t exist anymore and you can’t talk to him,” but Davepeta is still around and maybe, if you ask really nicely, you could convince them to try to- what had they called it? You think there’s a word for when one half of them predominates over the other without spritesploding, but you can’t think of it. Maybe you could ask the Nepeta half to just, chill on a backburner for a little while. Would that be rude? You don’t want to treat
Davepeta like they’re not their own unique person, because you know they are and you know they’re not Davesprite, their existence is entirely independent of Davesprite, but you’re out of options and you’re desperate for someone, even half a someone, who is yours. You’ll feel better if you can just- you will, you will feel better, you know you will.

It’s 4:50 in the morning by the time you make your way through your food. You keep losing yourself in headspace, and sometimes you can’t hold the fork because your hand isn’t solid enough. Your bandages keep your other hand trapped enough that you can reliably hold the knife, at least. That’s something that you should probably not be repeatedly dropping on the table, even if it’s just a dinner knife. Your waiter, bless him, doesn’t remark or even look at you for all the times your fork goes clattering down. You also down like, seven cokes while you’re there. It’s a mostly absent thing, you just. Drink when you’re not paying attention, which happens to be a lot. The straw is right there, and your brain is not, and the fizzy feeling of carbonation is nice, so you just end up drinking a lot. Glad this isn’t alcohol.

The caffeine does start to make you a little (or a lot) jittery though, so that’s a fun addition to the buzzing where your legs would be, if you cared about that sort of thing right now. You can see the veins in your wrists really, really prominently, networks of blood that stand out against flesh that isn’t particularly solid. You sneeze before asking your waiter for the check, sneeze again so you can pay, and then Become right out of your booth.

You’re wide awake, the caffeine in your physical system transferring over to your true form through some bullshit magical means, so you fly around for a while. You stretch, again, finding that line of pressure that tells you “this is too far, this is too fucking far, no further,” and you ride that tension for a while, entertaining ideas of pushing anyway, of breaking past it. For a few brief moments, here and there, you forget why you’re not doing that, why you shouldn’t just let the tension snap. Then the fear of the unknown returns to you and you shrink yourself back into a healthy margin of space. You cycle and spiral and gust and blow and fly, dancing with the sunlight as it lifts ever higher, and delay unBecoming. There’s no rush, right?

When you do finally muster the will to go fleshy again, it results in blood in your mouth. You must’ve bit your tongue when you were unforming. Your tongue doesn’t really hurt, but it’s the only explanation you have for why so much blood has welled up. You swallow, then swallow again, press your tongue uncomfortably up against the roof of your mouth like that might do something, swallow again, and decide that’s as handled as you’re going to get that particular situation. Your mouth tastes like metal but you can just sort of deal with that. You wipe at your lips, an angry streak of red coming away with your arm. Some of it must’ve spilled out before you swallowed that first time. Huh. You must’ve really bit your tongue pretty hard- you guess you’re fortunate it doesn’t hurt that bad. You approach Davepeta’s house, pulling out your phone to send them a text to see if they’re even awake right now. The bit of your reflection you catch in your unlit phone looks god awful. You’ve got bags (no shit) under your eyes and your hair’s a mess.

Distracted by how you look, you forget that you were going to text Davepeta and just knock on their door. You use the time after knocking to make sure that your fleshbag is fully present and you’re not missing any toes. For a moment, you think Davepeta’s asleep and they won’t be waking up for your knocking. It’s like, daybreak, who the hell is awake at this time of day other than idiots who stayed up all night?

Jasprose, apparently. Seeing as she’s the one who opens the door. She has bags under her eyes, you notice immediately, and she’s not standing fully upright. In fact, you’re going to go out on a limb and say that the way she’s leaning on the door is a product of her being extraordinarily intoxicated right now.
“Ssjohn,” she slurs loudly, half turning her head to call over her shoulder. You wonder if perhaps you should update your forum post. You found Jasprose, just, not the way you had planned on it. Fate being sneaky or something. You’ll think about it later.

“You okay?” you ask her, stepping past your surprise and into her space to extend your good hand to her, ready to catch if she falls over, which she looks like she’s about to.

Jasprose makes an extended “pfffffffttt” noise, spittle coming out of her lips for the first second of it, “No. Haven’t b’n in…” She starts laughing, and you slip your arm around her waist so she can lean on you because she is very much not staying upright right now. Your bandaged hand goes to her hair, careful of the princess hat. You wonder if it’s like. Attached to her. You haven’t seen her in years, literally, and even beforehand she didn’t really stick around in one place for long.

“Never. I have never once in my life b’n okay, John.” You’re impressed by how coherent her speech is managing to be, since her body is kind of all over the place with inebriation. Her head is a heavy, lolling weight, and then Davepeta, in all their multicolored glory, shows up.

“Hey,” they greet, coming up behind Jasprose. They grab her around the waist and she leans on them, slinging an arm around their shoulder with wild motions and sinking her weight into them.

“Hey,” you greet back, brow furrowed in concern. God, you’ve never seen… this. “Is she…” You don’t know what you’re trying to ask.

“Yeah, sometimes we just get together and get drunk and talk about our feelings sometimes,” Davepeta says, lifting a peace sign up to their sunglasses and posing theatrically. Jasprose decaphcalogues another bottle, and you can’t make out what the label says but your alarm spikes.

“Uh, Jasprose, should you be-”

“Oh piss off John,” she says before taking a disturbingly large swig. “I can’t die, s’fine.”

“Okay, uh, Jasprose, I understand that we all kind of collectively have a problem of saying things are fine when they’re not, but I really don’t think you should be drinking right now.”

“Yeah lemme just weep for you guys’s problems,” Jasprose mutters, and Davepeta whaps her backside the head with their wing.

“Exmewse her, she’s been getting more and more purrickly when she’s drinking lately.”

“Uh, okay- is there something I can do to help?” Davepeta smiles wryly, then reaches up under their glasses to rub at an eye. They’ve got big old bags under their eyes too, mold-green and spray-tan orange.

“We’re just moping, dude, gotta get our bitchfits up in this. What are we mewing with our lives if not petting drunk like a couple shitty emo teenagers who stole their mom’s stash of bourbon and pawed onto an Ed Sheeran official video recording? Fuck, that was weak, gotta take that back and hammer out its kinks like the hottest dominatrix in the biz.” Davepeta rubs at their face again.

“Anyway.”

“So… what are you moping about?” you ask hesitantly, worried as hell about these two and simultaneously wide awake and exhausted as fuck. Your brain is maybe not operating at 100%.

“John,” Jasprose says, leaving Davepeta’s support so she can lurch forward at you, her mouth says “angry” but her eyes say “pained.” You reach out to catch her but she evades your touch, leaning on the doorframe instead.
“John, do you know what it’s like to watch the love of your life die in front of your eyes? And you, you specifically, you will never get her back. And then, and then, and then you go to the wedding of other you, and other her, and they’re happy, and they get to spend the rest of their fucking lives together, but you don’t. You don’t get her back, there’s no ‘other timeline’ for you to hop into, and, hey, GAMES OVER!” she flogs her hand upward, liquor spilling out the top of the bottle, “So you’re stuck on a planet with everyone being happy and alive and she’s fucking together with the love of her life and you’re not, and you’ll never be, because she’s back in the dreambubbles and you’re not and so you do a bunch of random, stupid shit, hoping your sprite will explode, but you’re merged with a cat and that cat loved you a lot during his life so there’s no conflict! Nothing!” You stop her from falling but she slaps your hand away a moment after, hissing and snarling so an oversized canine glints in the rising sun. “So here you are, doing off the wall stuff, because why not! Why the fuck not!? She’s dead and you saw her die and I was right there I was right there and I couldn’t do jack shit to protect her and I just died right along with her and I’ll never get to see her again, John, the only version of her I’m ever going to see ever again is married and happy and in love with a different me!” The snarling drowns out under sorrow, her mood rapidly sinking as tears start to spill.

You let Davepeta catch her, this time, and this time she stays slumped, bottle falling out of her hand and spilling all over the doorway.

“About furricking time,” Davepeta mutters under their breath. They haul her up and you make an aborted motion to help, but you’ve finally gotten it through your skull that you’re not needed here. “She mewsually passes out way earlier than this.”

“Does she… always drink until she passes out during your- uh, gettogethers?”

Davepeta props their hand on their hip and gives a very forced laugh, smile awkward on their face. “Well. Mew see. Aaaahahahaha well yeah. But,” Davepeta shrugs, “her life kind of really sucks, so I can’t furry well blame her.” They cast a sympathetic look to Jasprose hanging off of their shoulder. “She’s lost efurrything, mew know.”

You swallow hard around something sharp inside your throat. “Can I help?” God please let me be able to help.

Davepeta shakes their head, then floats forward to give you a kiss on the cheek. “Mew can’t do anything, John.” They yawn so hard their jaw clicks and you have to close your eyes against the sensation their words drop into your core. “Sometimes life just sucks ass. We’ve been up all night, so now that she’s out I’m not fur behind. Whatefur you’re here fur is gonna have to wait, sorry. G’night.”

“Sleep well,” you croak out to the shutting door. You bite your lip and turn your face skyward, eyes shut against tears. All this time, Jasprose has been suffering. Self-sabotaging. And you didn’t even know. Didn’t even- it seems obvious now that she’s said it. Why else would no one have seen her since the wedding. God, you can’t imagine how painful that must’ve been for her, and here you are, pitching some stupid, childish tantrum over fucking nothing. You were wrong to think you could possibly connect with her; what in your life could even begin to compare?

Davepeta, at least, has also lost, and lost irrevocably. ARquius is gone, and they can’t get him back. The two of them have both lost someone precious and irreplaceable, and you’re just sad out of nowhere, for no goddamned reason. You’re gone past your knees, a swirl of blue motion, and your hands are wispy where they comb through your hair, chin curling in towards your chest. You’re so stupid, so useless, the only reason you feel alone is your own damn fault it’s not like you’ve genuinely lost anyone permanently, not like they have.
You search for him again, Becoming before you retcon. You fling out one last, hopeless attempt that this time, maybe you’ll find him. Maybe this time, you’ll be able to achieve something meaningful. You’re blindly searching for him, because- because- you don’t know why, you don’t know why you’re doing anything anymore, you’re just looking for him because you are. You have no mouth, and cannot scream in frustration when your retcon powers just spit you out in a random time and location instead of taking you to wherever ARquius is.

This time, it’s Rose’s living room. Rose is sitting on her couch, and Dave is sprawled out across it, head in her lap and sobbing grossly.

“It’s stupid,” Dave whines around messy wails.

“It’s not stupid,” Rose says patiently, petting Dave’s hair, “Your crush likes someone else, you’re upset about it. It’s normal to get upset.”

“I have a boyfriend! I’m already datin’ the love of my life- I love Karkat! But he’s-”

Whatever this conversation is, you’re not welcome here. You retcon away, and end up blindly zapping to Jade’s garden. Not her home, her garden. The distinction seems very important to you, as your body slowly expands. You shouldn’t hang around here, Jade probably doesn’t want to talk to you right now, after the bullshit you pulled. You go- where? Your body bloats outward like a balloon, leaving in all directions but which way should you go? You can’t go back to your house right now, you can’t you can’t you can’t. But you have to leave, you have to get out of here, you have to go.

You create a sphere of yourself, then a dome, when the ground prevents you from stretching further downward. You push out, out, out, away. You push and reach and stretch your body

your

body. You stretch and hit the pressure, the rubber band like tension. That limit, that tantalizing barrier. You inch along the strain, feeling it, testing it.

Then you surge; further, faster, wanting to be anywhere as long as it's away.

And then

you

b
r
e
a
k
This wouldn’t be Homestuck if there wasn’t an intermission.

Chapter Summary

Intermission time whoop whoop

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to colanom for the lovely fanart! Technically they made me this a few days ago, but I didn't post it with yesterday's chapter bc it was important to leave that one entirely blank. All of your reactions absolutely fuel me thank you all so much <3

Hello viewers this is Joey Sinclair and it’s time for today’s weather forecast. It’s a chilly Felis eighth with highs in the bottom 60’s and lows currently unpredictable. As has been the trend with the last few days, winds are running absolutely wild and our meteorologists are stumped. If things go as planned, you can look to see winds with an average speed of 3 units per second, and a wind chill of about seven degrees.

--

Back to you Aaron.

Thanks Ben! In today’s news, we have reached day ten of no one knowing where the God of Wind is. His last reported civilian sighting was in a Crockpot at midnight, Felis second, and no one has heard from any of the gods about his whereabouts since. No one has heard anything from the gods, indeed, at all, since Felis fourth. Even the normally chatty God of New Beginnings has gone radio silent across all forms of social media, not updating his snapchat, instagram, or personal forums at all as of late.

--

More and more frequently, we’re seeing massive hurricanes forming nowhere near the shore. There is little doubt among the public mind that these hurricanes are caused by the missing Wind God, as they happen nowhere near where hurricanes naturally form, and they also disappear upon coming in contact with boats that are out on the seas. We have for you some footage taken from a fishing vessel just yesterday; the crew saw the approaching hurricane but when it got close enough for the winds to start affecting the boat itself the twister mysteriously vanished.

[A video plays out, exactly as the newscaster reported it. Shouts of terror can be heard in the background, followed by the camera getting rattled about by the wind. Exclamations of confusion are then heard, as well as the individual holding the camera offering up a prayer. The only distinguishable words are “John” and “mercy.” The unthinkably massive hurricane disperses slowly, fading out as the winds twist along closer to the boat, while remaining strong outside of the boat’s range. After a few moments, only clouds, and a mysterious red dot remain.]

--
This is a public, sfw forum

ER: tllis PROVES tllat Jolln is still sentient!

YT: I’m a little more concerned with THIS

YT sent a photo! im1.jpeg

YT sent a photo! im2.jpeg

DD: Ar w just going to ignor th GIANT FUCKING HURRICANS that show up with XPONNTIALLY INCRASING FRQUNCY?!?

PF: John’s not letting them hurt anyone

ER: Exactly! lle is still in control! I’m certain of it!

DD: Listn man I hat to b th on to brak this to you but JOHN’S GON INTO TH VOID w’r not getting him back anymtim soon if at all

PF: I think it’d be unfair to say he’s lost ALL sentience

DD: Wll it’s fucking looking lik it. H literally BCAM th wind. It’s what h dos. And air DOSN’T HAV THOUGHTS

YT: Can we focus on what I was saying?!

--

[A news ticker proudly displays CARAPACIAN NEWS: BY CARAPACIANS FOR CARAPACIANS. The channel is public, but generally does not reach a human, troll, or consort market. All news broadcast from this station is told through Carapacian clicks, hums, and trills, and the closed captions are in morse, not English.]

This is a clear sign of the gods becoming dissatisfied with us! The Wind God is gone! All hope is lost!

You don’t know what hope being lost looks like! I was there when the Page was murdered in our very Prospit-

Yes, yes, a lot of us have been around forever, blah blah, more importantly we need to find a way to FIX this!

An offering to the gods, surely! We must appease them! The Wind God is missing and the others have forsaken us! We must appease!

But whatever can mortals offer to the gods? Oh dear oh dear this is ruinous!

We could seek out the wisdom of the Wizened Veteran; he lived among the gods for three years, perhaps in the texts he left-

Those texts are five thousand years old! And although we have legible copies, they are far more focused on the detailing of how society must be built and run and maintained!

But even with his focus on the genesis of democracy, perhaps he might have left direction for when the gods-
Oh if only he were here to guide us-

Talk of WV will get us nowhere-

We must think currently of the gods-

Perhaps if we can offer something to bring joy and celebration-?

[The panel of Carapacian politicians delves into many people chattering all at once, ideas, worries, speculations, and laments all being tossed about like waves under the wind.]

--

Dear Diary,

Today I met a god, sort of! I didn’t think she was a god at first. She was wearing sweatpants and a dirty tank top, and her hair was really messy and her eyes looked sort of like Dad’s when he gets back from one of his super long shifts at the hospital. She was also standing in front of the ice cream section in Crockpot with the door open letting all the cold air out. Mom and Dad are always so serious about not doing that, it’s a little hard to believe that a god does it too. She was doing it for a long time, too, the door was all misted over so when she closed it I couldn’t see any of the ice cream

I don’t think the gods know what happened to the Trickster. That might make me sound like one of those “mad conspiracy theorists on the deep web” but dad can suck it, I think it’s true. I think she wouldn’t have been standing in front of the freezer staring at the choco-chunks like that if this was happening because the gods were angry, like Mom says. I think she’s just sad. Or maybe most of the gods are mad, and she’s just sad, because she doesn’t like it when the other gods are mad? That seems like something Roxy would feel.

I hope she finds him soon. She looks like she really misses him. I hope she finds him so everybody stops freaking out, too, but I think seeing a god wearing “depression pants” in a Crockpot has sort of made this more real for me. There are all those stories about hurricanes and falling trees and stuff but that’s all stuff that happens “to somebody else,” which I know is silly because everybody’s somebody else to somebody else. But like, I saw a god me myself in person, you know? And she’s sad.

I don’t want to tell my parents, because they’ll tell news reporters and stuff and Roxy looks like she’s probably too tired to deal with people screaming about how one of the gods finally made contact with us mortals again, what does it mean, blah blah blah. They’ll probably hound her really bad, if they can find her, and I think she should just sleep, so this’ll be our secret, okay?

Less exciting, but happier news, Daniel and I are going to have a study date this Friday, which I’m suuuuuper pumped about cause he’s really cute and he promised to bring his skateboard…

--

[Felis 39th at 3:09pm, Dave Strider uploads a video. The length is short, and the god sounds tired, and it is a vlog taken from his bedroom saying that he and the rest of the gods are sorry for dropping off the face of the earth for a little while, they have no idea where John is, and they’ve all been searching for him, but at this point everyone except Davepeta and Gamzee have resigned themselves to the fact that John will not be found until he wants to be found. Dave does not say they think the Wind God might be dead, but a number of the comments below the video ask about the option, so many that someone with access to Dave’s blog eventually removes the ability to comment altogether.]
...and ever since Dave Strider’s vlog, the social atmosphere of our society has been as turbulent as the literal atmosphere outside! Treasured viewers, it has been nearly a whole half-season since the Wind God went missing, and now- especially after that message- folk are starting to wonder if he will ever be coming back…
Breathe in

Chapter Summary

It's short but I wanted it to be its own chapter which is why it's happening during a rapid set of updates, instead of being left on its own, bc it hardly feels like anything but hey I like it

Chapter Notes

Some excellent art of an excellent scene from a lovely viewer :3
Only two days left! Wow this is going by really quickly :o

Breathe in.
Breathe in.
Breathe in.
Breathe in.
Breathe in.
Breathe in.

Take your body and breathe it in. Condense it into two lungs; compress yourself back into density and breathe in. Inhale.

Breathe in.
Breathe in.

You open your eyes.
Breathe out.

“John!!!”
Chapter Summary

Happy anniversary of the end of Homestuck y'all!
My gift to you is emotions™

You are not solid, but you are solid enough.

“I’m sorry,” you tell Jade as gravity drags you down against her. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” you apologize, not sure what you are sorry for, just certain that you are. You try to catch yourself on her shoulders, hold onto her to keep yourself upright, but your body is so heavy, and your limbs aren’t moving how you want them to. You are fortunate, because your sister is strong, and solid, and warm, and holds you close against her, supporting the weight you cannot currently bear.

“John, John oh my god!” She’s crying. You are distantly aware that that is your fault.

“I’m sorry,” you repeat. Thoughts are… thoughts are very hard right now. Your brain feels thick with wool, with fog, and everything’s dizzy. You need- to apologize, to Jade. Apologize properly. You owe her one hell of an apology (over what? Over what? You can’t remember why). You need to- make amends for something. There’s something you need to set right. Is that why you’re here? No. You were off… somewhere. You were somewhere, but you came here to not-somewhere because… of Jade, yes. You came because of Jade. You’re here, in your heavy, heavy body, because you missed your best friend.

You’re unconscious for a long, long while after that.

Your body is so heavy. What the shit. Why is your body so heavy? Why are you- you have arms? That’s not right. You shouldn’t have arms. Or flesh. Like, just, in general, something’s off about that. Not that there should be, because you’ve had arms most of your life, but like something about the fact that you have arms right now is pinging you as outside of the norm. You should… contemplate that, but you’re becoming aware of noise around you now. Voices. It occurs to you that those voices have been making noise for as long as you’ve been awake- not… that you know how long that is. God, okay brain, let’s try to… try to get some shit together.

Jade is here. Her voice isn’t one of the ones talking right now, but you are absolutely certain that your sister is nearby. How do you know that? You’re not sure. You are- on someone’s lap.

God okay, okay you’re just going to have to open your eyes if you want to make any sense of the situation. Your eyelids are fucking heavy though, and it’s so much easier to just lay on- whatever it is you’re laying on- like a useless lump. The lap under your head jiggles a little and Jade’s voice, clear and very close to you, commands the room.

“He’s waking up!”

You groan. Now you have to force your eyes open. You do, and turn just enough (moving is so hard what the shit) to look up at Jade. You are not wearing your glasses. You know this, because her face is very, very blurry, and you cannot make out her expression.
“rr my gl’ss’s?” you mumble, tongue thick in your mouth and voice sluggish.

“On your face, John,” Jade tells you.

“Oh.” You blink hard, then force yourself to sneeze.

Oh god bad idea bad idea!!!!!! Bad idea!!!!!! If you weren’t already laying down sneezing would have made you collapse. As is, your head gets slam dunked into a vat of vertigo and your body goes all limp and jelly-like. Ohhhhh god, okay, sneezing is way too much right now, got it. On the upside: you can see clearly (well, more clearly) now, even if your brain remains somewhere amongst a fog.

“John?!” Jade asks in alarm. Your expression might betray your sudden distress.

“Sneezing was a bad idea,” you say, tongue a touch more cooperative now. Somewhere beyond you, a few people chuckle nervously. You turn (slowly, as best you can) and find that the room (Jane’s living room, your brain distantly supplies) is full of basically everyone you know. Kinda impressive.

“Hey,” you say, awed at the sheer quantity of people before you.

“Hey?!?” Karkat shrieks, and some lofty thing in the room snaps, tension flooding over as Karkat stomps up to the couch, hands already a-waving. “You disappear for 43 fucking nights and the only thing you have to say to any of us is ‘Hey’?! What the fuck happened you blister upon the asscrack of the universe?!”

His voice is physically painful for you, and you’d recoil away from him if moving didn’t feel like dragging your body through molasses. “Karkat, I love you, but you are very loud and I cannot handle you right now.”

“Sorry,” he says with an instant drop in volume, curling his hands in close to his chest and deflating like a popped balloon. All you’re left with is a very, very worried boyfriend.

“Me too,” you say, remembering, now, that you are. God, what are you sorry for, again? You’re sorry to Jade. And everyone, but mostly Jade. Thoughts are so hard.

“Brother,” Gamzee says, and you see exhaustion and concern on his face, “seriously, what happened?”

“I… am not sure,” you say, because you’re not. God, you’re so fucking dizzy...

“John, please!” Jane scolds, worry apparent in her voice too. Actually, you’re pretty sure every single person in this room is just really really worried about you or life or everything, to some degree. Worry seems to be the baseline.

“I’ll explain when I know,” you say, blinking rapidly again and trying to move your arms. They’re heavy, still, so heavy, but they’re moving a little more cooperatively now. “Sorry, but I have only just very, very recently started being a person again, I need to… remember how to exist first.” Your fingers are shaky, but they close into fists when you ask them to, and flatten back out well enough.

You try to sit up, and not even halfway up off Jade’s lap the vertigo becomes so strong you actually lose the ability to form coherent thought for a second. Jade catches you under your shoulders and helps you sit, and you drag your legs off the couch so you can turn and lean back against the cushions. You’re lucky gravity pulls your legs to the ground for you, because moving
them with anything other than floppy incoherency is not looking like it’s going to be an option for a while. You breathe hard, closing your eyes for a second, and Jade and Dave’s hands both come to your face, cradling it. You crack open your eyelids enough for your eyes to dart between their faces.

“Dizzy,” you explain, still breathing hard. Fuck, sitting up should not leave you this winded.

“God, John,” Dave breathes, and you tilt your head sort of into his hand. He sits on the newly-vacated spot on the seat next to you, and given how hard it was to get your legs down you highly doubt they’ll be needing it back anytime soon.

“Do you need water?” Jade asks, and you minutely shake your head. You don’t feel thirsty. Shaking your head does make you feel dizzy though, which you keep forgetting like a fucking dumbass.

You catch your breath, and try to process things. What did happen? Do you know? You had- some kind of wild mental breakdown. You were having a really bad time out of nowhere and acting stupidly and then you got all panicked and frantic and-

Hm. And then what? You- there was Jasprose, and Davepeta, and Gamzee and Jade- (oh, oh Jade, oh you owe her such an apology), and then there was. Rose. And Dave. Crying, sometime in the past, or maybe future, sometime in someplace you weren’t invited to. Then a garden.

Then the tension.

Then the snap.

There’s tittering in the room around you, people having quiet conversations with those near them as you try to collect the spilled contents of your brain. But it’s like trying to scoop a puddle up off the sidewalk.

“Rose,” you say quietly, coming to the conclusion that before anything else, you want the four of you here on this couch together. She comes to you, and you just sort of tug her down. As best you can. You’re pretty weak, but she gets the idea. She ends up on Dave’s lap, holding your hand, and Jade and Dave are pressed into your sides. Good. This is right. This is right.

“So, I stopped existing for a little while,” you tell the room, which is now focused on you again. “I, shapeshifted,” you don’t want to say Became, because you have a very new definition for that now, one that is less friendly, “and then I stretched too far, and I snapped, and I was just- just the wind, for, however long.”

“A fucking half-season,” Karkat snaps, “You were gallivanting about-”

“Best friend,” Gamzee says, hand on Karkat’s back, trying to rein him in.

“-as the air for a fucking half-season! Did you not think that maybe we’d be worried?”

“I wasn’t thinking at all,” you tell him, distantly aware that you would be irritated by Karkat’s yelling at you if you weren’t so heavy, and if he wasn’t quite so right. At least the volume doesn’t feel like it’s going to break your eardrums anymore.

“Yeah, obviously!”

“Best-”
“Literally,” you say, trying to sound firm, but probably just sounding tired. “I literally wasn’t thinking, guys. At all.” How to explain this? God, thoughts are so hard...

“John, what do you mean by ‘snapped’?” Rose prompts, and she gives your hand a little squeeze. It helps you pull your brain together, and you try again.

This part of your body, you can move. This part, it’s thoughtlessly easy. You spin the air of the room around, kicking up skirts and scattering the paper in Jane’s printer. “Air, doesn’t, think,” you say, and hilariously enough you feel a little more grounded when you’ve got air whirling in the room around you. You let it die down, and use the wind to put the paper back in the printer (when did you learn how to do that?)

“Normally, when I- Become-” the word feels wrong on your tongue, “-I’m just shapeshifting. All the parts of me are still me, I’m just the wind. There are limits to what I can do, to how far I can stretch, and I shouldn’t go past those limits because those are what keep me, me. Inside those limits, I can still think, I know what I’m doing, I’m still a person, just in a different form. But this time I wasn’t. I wasn’t a person anymore. I wasn’t anything anymore. I was just the wind. And wind doesn’t think.”

The room is silent.

“John holy fuck,” Davepeta whispers with feeling, and you look at them. Sighing, you close your eyes.

“It wasn’t a good time-”

“John?” Davepeta sounds a little panicked, and you crack open an eyelid before closing it again.

“Mm?”

“John, seriously, are mew about to pass out again beclaws I don’t think I can handle if you pass out again.”

“They laugh a sharp, hard syllable and a moment later you hear the rustle of feathers over your head. Davepeta’s hands go into your hair, and you hum.

“I can still talk with my eyes closed, though,” you say, proving your point. “But- I don’t know what else there is to say. I freaked out, Became the wind, and now I’m back I guess,” you say, “Sorry, everyone. I’m really, really sorry.”

“If… you couldn’t think, how did you make it back?” Tavros asks, and you have to think about that too. What did haul you back in from wherever you were?

You roll your head and bonp it down onto Jade’s shoulder, cracking your eyes open to look up at her (for all the angle is shit and you can’t really see her anyway). “I missed you.”

Her breath shudders, and then her whole body shakes, and then your precious sister is crying and hugging you and you’re probably crying too you think and also other people are crying? Tears are happening.

You either pass out or fall asleep. One of the two. You’re woken up by Uncle Crocker picking you up, and the crowd around you has dispersed significantly. Jade, Dave, and Rose are still right there, Roxy, Callie, and Jane you can feel breathing somewhere close, and Gamzee and Karkat are also
A conversation happens. You technically participate, but you’ll be damned if you know what exactly it is that you have said. You know that it results in Uncle Crocker very gingerly setting you down on the floor, and then having to continue holding you as Jade, Dave, Rose, and Gamzee (who showed up at some point, along with Karkat, wow) also support you while you try to get legs and being upright and in general not being a floppy noodle to be things that happen. You struggle to catch your breath just with the simple act of standing and it’d be mortifying if you didn’t trust and love these people as much as you do. Dave and Karkat, you think, will probably tease you about it later, but right now everyone’s just concerned.

In the end, you find yourself cradled in Jade’s arms. Gamzee and Karkat both kiss you- Dave has to physically pick up Karkat so he can reach, ha- and tell you goodnight, they’re going back to Karkat’s place, which Gamzee has moved into this last half season. That’s good. You’re glad he didn’t stay waiting for you in an empty house, that would’ve sucked for him to be all alone in there for an indefinite amount of time. Roxy, Calliope, and Jane pop in to say goodbye as well, Roxy’s hand lingering in your hair, and then Jade zaps your group to your house.

It’s chilly, inside. All your windows are as open as you left them. You wonder if maybe Gamzee had left before the weather took a turn for the cooler, or if he left them that way in hopes you’d come floating back in through one of them. That’s sad. You’re glad he lives with Karkat and Dave now.

You don’t want your friends to leave, and to your immense relief the idea doesn’t even seem to cross any of their minds. While Jade helps you position yourself on your bed (your arms are cooperating better but your legs are still fucking ridiculously difficult to move, you shouldn’t be this winded you shouldn’t this is actually kind of scary), Dave goes around closing windows, muttering to himself under his breath, and Rose leaves to change into actual pajamas instead of just her god tier pjs. She’s got a cute knit sweater and pants with vampire fangs and “BITE ME” dotted all over them. She vaults over you and takes the side of the bed closest to the wall, and Jade presses up against your other side. You’d worry about Jade falling off if the two of them weren’t both snuggled in close to you, and when Dave joins you he just sort of flops himself down on top of your body like a lump. It makes you “oof” and laugh, and you’re struck again with how right this feels.

“So while you were gone,” Dave starts, and you four settle in to listen. Jade plays with your hair and Rose interjects every now and then as Dave proceeds to ramble about pretty much every single detail you could’ve missed. You know more about what happened the last half season than you do the whole year before you went to get Gamzee. Well, fight Caliborn, Karkat was the one who went for Gamzee, but you brought Gamzee home so you think that’s probably the more important temporal marker in that situation. Dave tells you about Jasprose coming back into the social sphere, sort of, looking frazzled as all hell apparently and saying some stuff that didn’t really make sense to anyone. Mostly people were just looking for you, and you made a bunch of hurricanes and tornados and high winds and caused a couple avalanches and generally made the weather unpredictable as fuck- which you only just sort of remember. Dave went out looking for you a few times to the largest of hurricanes, behemoths he described as looking like a massive storm out of a ghibli movie or something, they were so big. Apparently they were less of vortexes and more of city-sized cylinders of death. Except you never hurt anyone- you’re relieved when he clarifies that. Sometime during Dave’s rambling, Jade gets up and comes back a few moments later, and you lose attention during that part, your side feeling barren and cold without her there. It is only when she is back, solid and warm and pressed close, that you feel at ease.

“Tell him about the little trio you’ve formed,” Rose prompts, and Dave looks suddenly bashful.
Jade snickers close to your ear and pokes Dave’s side.

“So, okay, monogamy is basically out the window and whatever, we’re gods and quadrants are things and whatever whatever, so, uh.” He pauses, and you ruffle his hair with the air in the room. He sticks his tongue out at you, only to be assailed by Rose poking at his other side. He swats at her and she pokes again, not one to lose, and Jade reaches across you to separate them while you laugh at the antics.

“Gamzee moved in with Karkat and me after you left, and this last month-er, half season- has sucked fucking ass for everyone so we talk about our feelings a lot and Gamzee and I have ended up as moirails now, I guess. So like, he’s dating Karkat and me at the same time in pale and I’m doing my human pale promiscuity thing I guess and Karkat and I are still boyfriend-matesprits so it’s. Nice.” Dave seems nervous as he tells you this, which you don’t really understand.

“That sounds great, Dave,” you tell him, and Rose hums in your ear.

“You should have seen him when he brought it up with me. Tripping over himself with talk of how humans don’t even have moirails anyway where we’re from so he’s not trying to trespass upon our sibling-moiraillegiance by having a boyfriend-moirail using a similar social marker to his sister-moirail.”

“It was a weird situation, Rose, how was I supposed to know how anyone would react to it?”

“I suppose you could try not being a knave.”

“Fuck off, this is why I’m diamond-dating Gamzee now. At least someone cares about my emotional vulnerabilities.”

You laugh again at their squabbling, and use your arm to pull Rose in closer to you, since she’s laying on it, and it breaks their banter when you kiss her forehead. You four go quiet a moment, and you feel incredibly warm and also solid, here pressed between the three people in your life who matter most.

“You know,” you start, breaking the silence, “You know I love you, right? All three of you, I just, I love you so much.” You are apparently breaking into tears, too, and then there are hands on your face and in your hair, gentle voices murmuring and hushing you and telling you you’re loved, you’re okay, it’s going to be alright. You sob openly, and the act of crying is exhausting to your heavy body and it feels awful but it feels kind of good too. Cathartic. And you’ve got your arms tight around Rose and Jade, as tight as you can make your weak limbs pull them, and Rose’s lips are at your temple and Jade’s are at your cheek and Dave is above you, kissing your forehead, telling you he loves you while their hands cradle your skull and each other. They’re crying too, their bodies shaking and tears hot on your face in the places your tears are not. You sob, almost choking, almost too weak for the intensity of your own weeping, and you cling to them. Your friends, your family, your everything, they’re here holding you as you cry and you love them so much. So much. More than you will ever have words to say, more than you could possibly know what to do with.

There, enclosed in the bodies and the breathing of the people you cherish so dearly, you think you understand why trolls call this a diamond.

It feels diamond shaped. Feels “pale,” for all that word has had a terribly evasive definition to you before this. Feels pink and bright and unshatterable- like nothing could ever happen that would truly break the four of you. “I love you,” you weep softly, words coming out weak against the wobbling of your lower lip, and Dave hushes you and Rose kisses your cheek and Jade tells you
“we love you too.”

You are most unfortunately interrupted by a timer beeping. “That’s the soup,” Jade tells you through her own tears, laughing a little. You laugh a little too, because you almost died and you love your friends and you’re crying super grossly but soup needs taken off a burner. When was soup even a thing that happened? You have no idea.

Dave has to go save food and Jade and Rose help you upright, and after crying your fragile body is positively exhausted by the act of sitting up. You lean and close your eyes for a while, trying to catch your breath (making the air in the room stir around you helps, you find) and Rose pats your face while Jade goes to help Dave with food. The three of them get like a whole bowl and three fourths of soup into you (it is only after you can smell the food that you realize you’re starving) and two glasses of water besides. They eat too, taking turns helping you, and you’re stupidly grateful but also embarrassed. Why is your body… like this? This is dumb.

“I… am tired,” you inform the three of them, and you are grateful when everyone agrees and also stays. You fall asleep entirely trapped by three bodies, and you’re glad of it.

In the morning, your friends are still there. Dave has moved off of directly on top of you to sit near the wall and has his laptop in his lap, but is recording himself talking on his phone. Rose is still near the wall, and Dave’s legs are sprawled on top of hers (and his feet are on top of you). It doesn’t look comfortable, but Rose is on her phone and ignoring Dave and how squished she is so you guess she doesn’t mind. Jade is next to you, dozing, based on her breathing.

“Morning,” you mumble, and Jade automatically perks up.

“Well, speak of the wind god. He’s awake. John, say hi to the public,” Dave says, tapping twice on his phone screen and aiming it at you.

“Hi public,” you say, “I am not dead.”

“Straight from John’s mouth himself. He is not dead. Y’all can stop leaving comments on my media that would suggest otherwise now, thanks.”

“People have been telling you I’m dead?” you ask. You said that as a joke, mostly.

“People have a lot of thoughts and theories bro, sometimes they like to bring it up to me as much as they conceivably can all at once.”

You reach out (your arm is a little less heavy, but still not “normal”) and pat his knee.

“Thanks bro.”

“John,” Jade says, “How’re you feeling?”

“Uh.” That’s a pretty intense question to level on a dude who just woke up, you think. You’re like… barely here. The Matrix hasn’t even finished warming up or anything. “I… think I might be hungry?”

“That’s manageable,” Rose says. “I’d get up, but alas, the world’s most annoying cat has planted himself on my lap.”

“Meow meow I guess. Fucking pet my hair and tell me I’m the prettiest kitty in the world while I ignore you stoically because I’m tsundere.”
“Actually!” Jade starts, and you listen to her talk about cat psychology for a second. Cats aren’t tsundere, apparently, humans just misinterpret what they’re trying to communicate.

“Furry,” you tell her when she’s done, and she swats you lightly while the three of you laugh at your joke.

“...John,” Jade starts again, and you frown in concern. That’s not a good tone. “You need to see a therapist. You’re not okay, okay?”

Ugh.

“Ugh.”

Yeah, she’s right though.

“Yeah, yeah, you’re right.”

Jade, Dave, and Rose all audibly exhale, and their breathing shudders through your senses.

“Thank god,” Rose says quietly while Dave says, “That went well.”

Jade’s head bonks down on yours and she takes a deep breath. “Good.”

“You have to too.” All three of them lock up. “If I’m not allowed to keep on pretending I’m fine, neither are you. Dave, Rose, you should probably get help too, while we’re at it.”

“I have multiple moirails, I’m fine,” Dave says.

“So do I, as far as I’m concerned,” you say, gesturing to Jade, Rose, and then Dave respectively. “I love you all but you’re not professionals and we’re all kind of fucked in the head. I’m just the one having a stupid fucking meltdown first.”

“It wasn’t a stupid meltdown, John,” Rose tells you firmly, bending over to kiss your head. “It was a perfectly valid emotional reaction to something going on in your head that we don’t understand. Stop telling yourself you’re not allowed to feel upset.”

“It was childish,” you protest quietly.

“You’re allowed to do ‘childish’ things, John.”

“We’re not judging, we’re just worried about you,” Jade adds.

“Besides, we do childish shit all the time, don’t gotta feel guilty about it,” Dave joins in too.

Your friends are so good to you, and you don’t deserve them.

“I’m feeling better now,” you say, not really protesting, cause yeah, Jade’s right, but you are feeling better.

“Doesn’t mean that will continue or become the norm,” Rose says firmly. “You need a therapist.”

“I know...” you say.

You watch a movie with the three of them on your bed, and you glad you bought a new one because this one is big enough to house all of you. You nod off a couple times, have lunch, and then fall asleep. That evening after dinner, your boyfriends visit you, and your bed becomes even
more crowded on account of you are not getting up except to pee. It’s embarrassing, needing to lean on two other people just so you can walk to the bathroom. You worry about running out of energy with your pants down, but you power through each time.

Gamzee and Karkat are worried about you, you would know even if they weren’t telling you as much. Gamzee clings to you the moment he sees you, breath shaky, and you hold him tight to you as best you can. Karkat clings too, elbows Dave to the side a little so he can smack you upside the head and yell at you never to do that ever again while he pushes his face into your shoulder.

“Well, on the upside, this whole fiasco means I can’t really ignore things anymore and Jade and I are gonna start seeing therapists now,” you tell them, because you are absolutely holding Jade to the fact that if you can’t ignore things, neither can she. She doesn’t look too happy with you lumping her together with yourself, but she can deal. Tough love’s a two way street.

“Good,” Gamzee says, “Alex’s a real motherfuckin’ miracle for me, siblings, y’all should find folk as can help you as well.” Gamzee gives Karkat and Dave quick glances, but doesn’t say anything more.

“We should all see therapists, in all likelihood,” Rose comments, examining her nails. “I suppose none of us really want to, however.”

“Might be easier to get people to do it if it’s like, a group motion,” you suggest, “If Gamzee, Jade, and I are all doing it, and you three also get help, maybe we can just… all collectively try to talk to people about shit.”

That hangs in the air a moment, but none of you feel particularly inclined to continue talking so you as a group sort of silently agree to change the subject. Dave suggests another movie, which you’re all amenable to.

This one, you can’t really focus on though. You’re kind of sleepy but you know you’ll be going to bed after the movie is over, so you pull out your phone, kind of amazed you’ve managed to forget about it this long.

Dave’s laptop sort of becomes background white noise as you stare at the number of notifications on your phone. Across all your apps, you have well over a thousand messages. You make a silent bet with yourself that at least 500 of those are Dave.

Some of the logs are short, “short” being a relative term when held up against, oh, say, Dave, or Gamzee, but like, you can read through them pretty quickly. Feferi and Aradia both start out with mild concern, then “it’s not funny/funny anymore/alenemore”s, then asking you to please contact at least someone because everyone’s really worried. Sollux pretends not to be worried but it’s kind of sweet how obviously worried he actually is? Kanaya fusses but doesn’t really hit any escalated worry, you suppose she probably thought that if no one else texting you was working, her texts wouldn’t either. Jane flat out says “Well, if you’re not going to text back I won’t keep shouting to the void. Let me know when you decide to come home. :B” Dirk asks you what the hell is going on and leaves it at that. Terezi poses a line of inquiries that you can’t really discern tone from.

Tavros expresses increasing concern, but then, surprising you, begins to detail very pleasant little observations he makes. You read over lines like “TODAY, FEFERI BRAIDED ARADIA’S HAIR” and “THERE’S A BIRD IN THE PARK WHO IS ALL BLUE AND SINGS WITH A VERY STRONG VOICE, IT REMINDED ME OF YOU” and snaps of prettily colored trees and sorta-scenic moments and you’re sort of touched. They’re just. Little tiny happy moments that he felt inclined to share with you, either to lure you back or as a gift waiting for you when you finally did
make it back, you’re not sure. But you’re struck with the warmth of your friend.

Eridan is long winded, and seems to have been worried, angry, and yet also sort of... You don’t want to say any word that would make it seem like he was pleased by your absence, because he very clearly wasn’t, but the way he chats at you seems to have been him using you as something of a diary/screaming into the void tool. You’re glad he got to vent some of his thoughts to your empty chat, but don’t really pay them enough attention to exert emotional energy on them.

Jake and Roxy tell you to please get your head out of your ass and come home already, then swandive into worry. Uncle Crocker simply asks you what’s wrong, and then tells you you’re always welcome in his home, if ever you need someone to talk to or just even to take a break for a night or two. You feel terribly nostalgic at Uncle Crocker’s messages, so similar to what you know your own father would have done, but instead of causing that awful breaking sorrow in you, this time you’re just kinda grateful. The Nannasprites contact you too, via some technological means, to tell you they know it’s hard but it’s about time for you to come home and stop worrying your friends now.

Jade and Rose follow a similar pattern to the rest of your friends, just more persistent and long winded. You read over them, the fears and worries and anger and confusion of your friends laid out where you can see them. You could even obsess over them if your brain decided you wanted to read over these conversations over and over again. You’re going to try and not do that.

Davepeta doesn’t even start out confused. Davepeta seems to understand what you were doing well before anyone else did.

**turntechCatnip [TC] began hassling gybingTepidity [GT]**

TC: :((< john
TC: :((< john im sorry
TC: :((< please
TC: :((< i didnt
TC: :((< john i didnt know im so sorry please come back
TC: :((< ill help you this time
TC: :((< im so sorry
TC: :((< i swear i didnt know if i had known you were that close to the edge i nefur would have brushed you off like that
TC: :((< plesase
TC: :((< jonh
TC: :((< john please imm soryr im sos orry
TC: :((< john dont do this dont leave please
TC: :((< ive already lost arquius
TC: :((< i cant lose you too
You check the times on when each of those messages were sent. Some were grouped together, while days would go between other lines.

You open Gamzee’s chat window next, dreading it a little.

taintedCadence [TC] began trolling gybingTepidity [GT]

TC: So uH BrOtHeR
TC: YoU WeReN'T HeRe wHeN I WoKe uP
TC: AnD WhAt wItH YoU RuNnInG OfF To nOt jAdE'S PIAcE YeStErNiGhT Uh
TC: I'M PrErTy wOrRiEd bRo
TC: CoUlD YoU PIeSe jUsT TeLL mE WhErE YoU'RE aT?
TC: BrOtHeR PIeSe
TC: JoHn

You scroll down a bit, there are a lot of messages and you’re pretty sure you’ll be able to get a gist by picking and choosing sections to read.

TC: YoU SwOrE YoU WoUlDN't dO ThIs tO Me!
TC: BrOtHeR YoU PROMISED
TC: PIeSe
TC: YoU PrOmIsEd yOu PrOmIsEd YoU WoUlDN't jUsT Up aNd lEaVEns LIKe tHiS MoThErFuCkEr yOu tOLD Me yOu tOLD Me wHeNeVeR I NeEdEd hEaR It
TC: WeRe yOu lYiNg?!
TC: WeRe yOu jUsT SaYiNg wHaTeVeR SwEeT CaMe tO MiNd fIrSt wItHoUt mEaNiNg NONE Of iT?
TC: JoHn PIeSe!
TC: YoU SwOrE YoU SwOrE YoU PrOmIsEd YoU SWORE

You scroll down some more, away from Gamzee’s anger.

TC: PIeSe
TC: JoHn I'm tRyInG I SwEaR To yOu I aM
TC: I'M TrYiNg
TC: I'M TrYiNg I'm tRyInG So hArD JoHn
Oh god, that’s depressing. You lean over to Gamzee and kiss his shoulder (you’re too short and slumped down on the bed to reach his cheek). He makes a tiny little inquisitive noise at you and you hold up your phone.

“I’m sorry,” you tell him quietly, under the volume of the movie.

“Shit, brother, you reading all that?”

“Skimming it, you sent a lot of messages.”

Gamzee chuckles mirthlessly. “I had a lot of emotions, brother.”

“I can tell.”

You scroll down some more and are met with just a wall of fear. Gamzee desperate and terrified at your absence and what had happened to you. You close your eyes and settle yourself with the sound of his breathing, pressed up so close to you. You might’ve been gone for way too fucking long, but you made it back to him.

Dave’s you really have to just skim through. You win the bet with yourself, the number of notifications goes down by 517 when you open that chat specifically. He starts out using humor at the top (god, so much scrolling) but then you are met with the sight of your best bro just being openly terrified, and over the internet at that. Normally he’s slightly more composed online than he is in person… you can only imagine how much of a mess your absence must have left him.

Karkat’s screaming sparks fondness in you. He starts out furious at you, angry at you for evaporating and distressing Gamzee like this. Then he gets scared-mad, his fears morphing into anger because that’s a safer emotion for him, but you can see the terror between the lines of grey walls he sends you. His anger slowly burns out, the longer he wears on (and good god does he wear on), leaving just the fear and insecurity. At some point he blames himself for your leaving, and tells you that if you’re mad at him, could you at least do it in a way that doesn’t distress everyone else too, please? Then he rounds back to furious and tells you he’s going to kick your ass so hard when he finally gets his claws in you.

You kick Karkat (moving your legs is still hard, but you make yourself do it because fuck your boyfriend) and he startles, then glowers at you. The effect is sort of dampened by his confusion over why you’re kicking him.

“I’m reading the texts you sent me while I was gone,” you say, and he turns red, “Don’t blame yourself for everything, dumbass, that whole thing had nothing to do with you.”

“I’m your kismesis-boyfriend, fucknub, stuff that happens to you has at least a small fucking part to do with me.”
“Wow, Karkat, you’re so self centered,” you drawl, rolling your eyes, and he hisses and swats at your side, which makes you laugh. “Seriously though, don’t blame yourself every time something bad goes wrong. Lots of stuff goes wrong and only like… 80% of it is your fault.”

“Wow, thanks!”

You blow a kiss at him with a wink and Rose swats you both and tells you to watch the movie.

You’re pretty sure that’s everyone you know, so you’re kind of confused by the remaining four notifications on your pesterchum. You have to fuck around with it for a second before you realize someone new added you, and for a brief, brief moment you think it’s Caliborn again, like on Snapchat. But no, you don’t think Caliborn would name himself that. Actually, you’ve got a pretty good idea who this is before you even accept the request.

tentacleTabby [TT] began hassling gybingTepidity [GT]

TT: John I'm sorry.
TT: I didn't know.
TT: I
TT: fuck

tentacleTabby [TT] ceased hassling gybingTepidity [GT]

It’s a little weird, but you’re sort of… oh god this is awful but you’re a tiny bit pleased by all of this. This overwhelming proof that you were missed. That your friends’ lives were not better without you in them, that they wanted you, that the idea of a life without you in it was terrifying to them. It’s reassuring in a way that sickens you, but you’re too tired to hate yourself too much for taking some strange sort of comfort from the fact that you have proof, right here, real, undeniable proof, that your absence would be mourned.

You put your phone down and are out before you even have time to let people know you’re tired.

The next few days (three you think? Maybe four) all sort of blur together. People come and visit and it is very, very hard to move your body, but you get slowly, slowly better at it. You sleep a lot, pretty much equal to a baby, and you sort of feel like a baby, all weak and just eating and sleeping and shitting, but hey at least you know words so you’re not always screaming and crying, right? Haha. Ha…

Jade, Dave, and Rose stay with you until you’re able to walk to the bathroom and back, and are less ridiculously fucking tired, and Gamzee and Karkat visit daily. Davepeta does too, after that initial day with just the six of you, and you hold them and cling to them and let them cling to you and you both end up crying and it’s a mess but so’s your whole life so that’s probably fine. They’re sorry they didn’t help you when you needed them, and you’re sorry you’ve made them feel like that was somehow on them to fix.

When you ask about Jasprose, they look pained.

“She… doesn’t really want to see mew. Or anyone, right meow.”

“Is… she isn’t okay,” you state.

“She really isn’t.”
“It wasn’t her fault either. I texted her that but I don’t know if she saw it. She hasn’t responded. This wasn’t on either of you, okay?”

“Okay,” Davepeta says, but you don’t know if you really got your meaning through to them.

The others come in and out to visit you, though some of the trolls are content to just contact you online. You’ll admit you’re grateful in both cases. You love your friends, but most of the time you’re asleep while they’re over.

Once you’re moderately more capable of moving yourself places, Rose goes home to Kanaya. With space freed on your bed, Gamzee moves back in, and after a few more days Dave moves back to his and Karkat’s place. You can, by that point, make it downstairs, make yourself food, and get to the couch without needing to sit down, and you take that to be a win.

It’s terrifying, though. How long it’s taking your body to warm back up and start working again. You’re frightened by your own fatigue, how exhausting moving this hunk of skin and bones is. You are, on occasion, sometimes tempted to Become again just so you can move freely, but even you’re aware that that probably isn’t going to actually fix anything. Not long-term. And considering the only privacy you’re getting right now is when you need to piss, you’re 100% certain you can’t Become without freaking Jade and Gamzee out.

Actually.

That’s.

You’re never alone, you notice now. Even when you’re just quietly existing in each other’s space, at least one person is in a room with you at any point in time. The term “suicide watch” comes to mind, and you think… that that is probably what’s happening. Either intentionally or subconsciously, you think your friends have put you under a suicide watch.

That is fair. You. Yeah, you deserve that. Besides, it’s nice. You’ve been away from them a whole half-season, you’ve got a lonely ache in you that needs smoothed out by having them here.

A week and a half after you make it back to them, Gamzee is away, visiting Karkat, no one is visiting you, and Jade and you are on the couch.

“Here’s a therapist you might like,” Jade mentions, and you look over to her computer screen. A bright face accented by tightly curled purple hair smiles up at you, and you read over her information, location, and areas of focus.

“She seems nice,” you mention.

“Qualified. She’s been practicing for over fifteen years,” Jade muses.

“Add her to the list of people we might wanna talk to,” you suggest, and Jade’s ears twitch back a moment.

“What?”

“You keep saying ‘we.'”

“You’re going to therapy too,” you say firmly.

“I’m not the one who disappeared for a month.”
“Yeah, well, you’re not really better at talking about your feelings than I am, so if I need one you do too!” You feel irritation building in you, though mostly because she seems irritated with you and it’s putting you on the defensive.

“I don’t have as many feelings that need talking about as you do.”

“Oh, bull shit, Jade. Bull fucking shit!” You put your own laptop down, turning on the couch to face her fully. Her ears are back and she’s frowning too, and you don’t want to fight with Jade but this is such bullshit! “I might not be the most introspective person alive but you’re hardly better!”

“I am fully aware of how fucked up my life has been, thanks,” she snaps.

“Like hell!”

“So I’m not aware that my life sucks? I’m not aware that living alone on an island being raised by a magic dog was fucking weird? I know it’s messed up that my grandpa died when I was a baby, I know it’s weird that I taxidermied his corpse and played pretend that he was still alive, I know I was socially isolated on my island, I know that Vriska knocking me out randomly to the point where we all genuinely thought I had narcolepsy fucked me over, I know watching Skaia’s clouds as often as I did made me scatterbrained and unintelligible sometimes, I know that an explosion killed my good friends and left me alone for three years in the middle of fucking nowhere, I know I’ve been lonely and stunted and raised wrong for most of my life! I’m well a-fucking-ware! I don’t need a therapist to tell me that I have issues or that my dead grandpa and social isolation and weird magic Game bullshit are the cause of it!”

There’s a pause, in which you sit struck by the intensity in Jade’s words.

“I know I’m not okay, John,” she adds, after a couple deep breaths, having gotten really worked up. “I’ve known I’m not okay ever since we were kids. I just lie about it.”

You’re stunned another moment, thoughts not really forming, and then you just reach out and touch your best friend’s hand.

“You don’t have to,” you tell her softly, earnestly. “You don’t have to lie to me, or us, or anyone, we love you Jade you don’t have to pretend to be happy when you’re not.”

Jade’s face runs through a series of emotions, her mouth opening and only just strangled air making it out, before her expression settles on a pained smile. “I… I can’t. Stop it. I just lie compulsively. Sometimes I can’t even-”

She cuts herself off, but you don’t want that, not when it’s just the two of you, not when you’re right here, not when she’s so close to talking about the problems that she’s been avoiding for as long as you’ve been running from yours. You squeeze her hand and prompt “Sometimes you-?”

“…I lie over stuff that- doesn’t need lied about,” she admits falteringly, the confession new and hard for her. “Little stuff. It happens so automatically I- I don’t know why I do it, it doesn’t make any sense, like, once I was talking with Terezi and she asked me what I was doing that evening and I told her I’d made plans with Dave and Karkat even though I hadn’t. I don’t know why! I don’t- I just think sometimes that some things sound better, or make me seem better, than the truth does, even though I know that the truth would be something I’d use as a lie in a different situation as the thing that makes me better! I just- can’t stop it, and when it comes to stuff like being okay I can’t-”

She slumps down against your shoulder, and you are grateful to this stupid body of yours that you are no longer too frail to support her, “I’ve never been under any delusions about how much my life sucks, John, but I have to lie about it. I have to-”
She cuts off again, and you reach up to stroke her hair and give her a minute to parse through her thoughts.

“It’s okay,” you whisper to her when the silence has stretched on too long, “you can keep going, Jade, please, please tell me everything. I want to listen to you.”

“You’ve got enough of your own problems,” Jade tells you, and it’s like a knife, hearing your own words coming out of your sister’s mouth, “you don’t need any more of mine.”

You wrap your arms around her and you squeeze as tight as you can. “Jade, I kept telling myself that and telling myself that and telling myself that until I almost fucking died.” She lurches in your arms, squeezing you back. “I kept- I still feel like my problems are stupid, and that I’m overreacting-”

“John you’re-”

“I do! I do! I feel dumb! I feel like I shouldn’t complain because other people have it worse than me! But- Jade, please, please, let’s not… let’s stop with that okay?” Because “let’s” is better than “I’ll.” Because “we” is easier than “me.” “Let’s stop, let’s just stop with that. Talk to me, please, let me help you, let me listen. I can’t- I couldn’t stand myself if you went down that same road I did just because you felt you couldn’t talk with me, I couldn’t, Jade, I couldn’t. Please, let’s…”

“Both of us,” she supplies into your chest, hugging you so tightly you feel you might never become again, “let’s both promise to stop.”

You nod into her hair and are admittedly unsurprised to find your throat all dry and tight and your eyes near tears. Your Jade, your precious sister, maybe not yours but still yours anyway, is so dear to you and she’s going through the exact same shit you are. Well. Not exact. But so close, so close it tastes like blood in your mouth to even think that she- that Jade- “...I have to...” Jade starts, then stops. “I have to be the happy one. It’s. Another compulsion, I know, but… I just. It’s always been my role, you know? To be the perky one. To be the happy one who cheers others and supports them and if- if I can’t do that, then who am I? That’s, my role, that’s how I’m defined, that’s how I define myself, and if I can’t be happy and if I can’t help the people around me feel better then what can I do? I was- always so lonely, John, and I made myself be happy and charming and fun to be around so people would want to keep talking to me even though I kept falling asleep and said weird shit in my dreams, so you wouldn’t just leave me alone with just me and Bec and Prospit, because I’m not cool or smart or fun I’m just me and even though I’m smart I’m not smart in a way people like, when I get talking about robots or guns or stuff people just think it’s weird so I have to be nice all the time so people won’t tease me or leave me and even though I know, sorta in my brain that that’s not the case anymore, all of you love me right so it’s fine, I can’t stop and-” She takes a deep breath and you rock a little, hard to do but your body can go fuck itself you don’t have time to be tired right now.

“Jade, we love you, we’d never leave you just because you can’t cheer us up or aren’t nice all the time always.”

“It’s awful because I know Callie went through the exact same thing but I can never bring up my own experiences whenever she’s talking about them because it feels like I’d be making it all about myself, and when she’s not the one to bring it up I don’t want to say anything because I feel like I’d ruin the mood.”

You nod again. “I understand.”
“And I just,” her voice is going high, and you pet your sister’s hair as she starts crying. “I just, sort of feel like I did it, I’m friends with everyone around me, but everyone around me loves someone else more than they love me. I’m everyone’s friend but nobody’s favorite and it sucks, because I want to be someone’s favorite, I want to be worth the most to somebody but nobody loves me best and I just feel mediocre and forgettable and like I’m the spare part picked up at the end of the Game.”

“Oh Jade,” you hush as she cries into your shoulder. “Jade, Jade, you’re my best friend, I love you more than anyone, oh Jade it’s okay.”

She laughs bitterly. “Gamzee’s still your favorite though. Ever since he showed up, you haven’t thought about anybody else as much as him.”

“Jade,” you say, heart absolutely breaking for her. “He’s my boyfriend, and I love him lots, but he’s still only just my boyfriend. You’re my sister.”

“I’m not your Jade,” she reminds you, and you wish, not for the first time, that you could eat your words. You wish so desperately that you had never hurt her.

“Jade,” you say, pulling back from the hug so you can hold her crying face in your hands and look her in the eyes. She holds onto your wrists and leans into your palm as you say, “Jade, I’m sorry, I never should have said that to you. But- I did. I had a lot of shit going on in my head and I did a lot of stupid shit, not the least of which was turning into the fucking air and losing most of my sentience. But Jade...”

You kiss her forehead, then look her in the eye again. “When I was just a bunch of wind, it wasn’t Gamzee my soul was called to. It wasn’t other-Jade who brought me home.” You stroke at a tear with your thumb.

“I came back from the dead for you.”
Chapter Summary

And thus, Somewhere Along in the Bitterness Act I comes to its close. I started this exactly one year ago today, and look how far we’ve come since then. I never thought it’d expand into what it is, but I’m so pleased with everything I’ve done and I’m honest to god really proud of myself, and I’d like to thank each and every single one of my readers who has stuck with me this long. Seriously, y’all mean the world to me :) 

Somehow, it isn’t particularly surprising to you that on the first day Jade goes home since your return, you decide to do something reckless. Your impulse control is off checking the plants in her greenhouse, trying to see what magic she and Feferi can work, and it’s just you, Gamzee, a body you’ve finally got back in mostly-working order, and a strong desire to finally get off of this goddamned couch and do something.

“Like what, brother?”

“I dunno,” you say, kicking your legs, “Just, something, anything. Do you have anything you want to do? Anything you want me to use my retcon powers for? Are there any quests you can send me off on?” You’ve been able to float again recently, so you’ve been doing that in fairly spectacular excess, floating absolutely everywhere for no good reason. Jade still makes you walk places so your legs keep on getting better though, which is fair. Also, Karkat has pointed out that if you don’t exercise them regularly, he’s gonna be able to beat you in wrestling, which is unacceptable.

“You and your motherfuckin’ hero quests,” Gamzee says with a laugh. “What, rescuin’ me weren’t enough?”

You blow a gust of wind into his face, and he laughs, his hair flying all over. He pulls you down onto the couch with him, and you allow yourself to be pulled, and he kisses your cheek. “What motherfuckin’ is with this energy of yours though, bro?”

“I don’t know, I just feel better when I have a goal,” you say with an exaggerated shrug. “Like, purpose, or whatever.”

Gamzee touches your face softly with an almost-wistful looking smile. “Got you all mixed up on the inside to be without one?” he asks half-jokingly, and you’re about to respond- protest the sobering of the mood- when his eyes widen sharply. You sit up a little straighter, brought to attention. Does he have something important he needs your help with?

“I… might have a request,” Gamzee says, finger tapping against the side of his thigh with increasing rapidity.

“Yeah?” Dear god you hope it’s something you’re capable of doing. A success would be really nice right about now. You’re not like, shaking with need for it or anything, at the moment, and you’re trying to place less of your worth in what you’re capable of doing (something you and Jade have now discussed at length), but it would still just. Really be nice.

“So… so there’s this sister I met while in service to the Lord, brother. She’s an adult, but she
ain’t…” Gamzee’s eyes skitter away from you. “Okay so she’s motherfuckin’ scary as all hell but she ain’t… bad.”

“Gamzee I’m not going back for the Condesce.”

“Wha-? Wait, what- no. No, brother, fuck that fishbitch. Ain’t who I meant. There’s a different adult as English forced into red shackles. She- Condesce killed her as rite of entry to bein’ English’s newest playing but as I’ve told before,” he gestures to himself, “we toys of Lord English can’t die. Not outside a’ real, real motherfuckin’ specific circumstances.” His eyes go a little distant, sad. “Upset her awful, that. She’d been lookin’ forward to death so much…”

“So, she’s still alive and back with the unfriendly green giant,” you say, also saddened by this. Nobody deserves that.

“Yeah. Didn’t… can’t go back for her myself, if I go back in the Medium he’ll find me and force me back to him, the splinter ain’t gone brother, just dormant. But if you could- convince her it’s real, that this world is safe from him and she’d be safe here too…” Gamzee bites his lip, then looks earnestly at you, grabbing your hands.

“Ga-”

“She is angry, brother, bitter and believing that life is only hurt. She might- listen brother I want for her happiness but she has killed far scarier than you, so don’t be shy none about turning tail if she starts showing fang. She’s dangerous. And I don’t want you getting hurt none over her, even if I wish an end on her misery. Don’t take this goal as something as needs done, just, try? Try for me, and her, but only try?”

You nod. “I’ll back down if I need to,” you promise. You try to genuinely mean it, try not to take this as something you have to do. Success would be nice, but maybe you need to get a little more comfortable with the idea of failure being an option. “What’s her password?”

Gamzee blinks. “Pardon?”

“Uh, what’s the word with the strongest association with her so I can zap to her? If I’ve never seen a time or place or person I need a key word.”

“Oh. Her title’s Handmaid, or Demoness but that’s just what we called her on Alternia. Names work?”

“Yeah. I’ll use Handmaid.” You bonk your head against his, “So, hey, why are you only just bringing her up now?”

Gamzee grins sheepishly and looks away again, his shoulders hunching up. “Well… I mighta still… sorta been afraid all this was fake, or would come abruptly to an end with Lord English showin’ up and wreckin’ everything. No point in goin’ back for a sister if she’s just gonna get here ridin’ English’s coattails anyway, right?”

“Oh, Gamzee…” You hug him, and he hugs back.

“I think you snapping finally convinced me, brother, think it served proof that this place is not all miracles of fantasy and untold perfection.” He strokes your face again with a fond, but melancholy smile. “Think I saw my hero crumble down and hurt and it broke whatever illusion I was under.”

You snort and turn your face to kiss his hand. “Every cloud has a silver lining, I guess. Glad some good came out of that mess.”
Gamzee pulls your face closer and kisses you, soft and adoring. You kiss back, loving the feel of him, loving the smell of him. Loving him sort of just in general.

“I love you,” you tell him quietly, because it deserves to be said. Often. And with feeling. He turns the cutest shade of purple and his ears stick out, a fang poking over the edge of his lip.

”Bro,” he says tightly, voice gone all high-pitched. You laugh at him, then kiss him again.

“I loooooooove you,” you repeat as you nuzzle the side of his face. He tries to cover it with his hands but you just laugh again and pull them away. “I think you’re great,” you chime, singsong, into his ear. “I think you’re fun and sweet and pretty!”

“John!” Gamzee whines, and you are only encouraged by this.

“I think you’re- mmph!” You’re cut off by Gamzee grabbing your face and kissing you recklessly, but you’re pretty okay with that. You kiss back, hugging him around the waist, and try not to giggle too much. Having a boyfriend is really fun, you are very much decided on this.

“John,” Gamzee tells you breathlessly, “John you are a gift sent here from heaven.”

You kiss him again, just a peck. “Well this gift from heaven is gonna go grab your friend. Back in a jiffy!”

“Stay safe, brother beloved! She’s not really a fr-”

**Password: Handmaid**

The Void is so full of rainbow cracks. Your eyes dart around, trying to take them all in. God, there are so many! Some of them look close, too, like when you were a kid how low-hanging clouds seemed touchable, if you just stretch out your arm and-

Ah!!! You yank your arm back in, away from the tear in the fabric of reality that you justfucking touched. God. Okay. The Medium is not a safe place to be, in the time and space your powers zapped you to.

You’re here for a reason. You search around for the Handmaid, looking up, down, and finally spinning around when you hear a crackle of psi behind you. A small distance away (small being relative, in the Void) there’s a broken hunk of planet-probably, and a burst of crimson energy. You fly closer, hiding behind some rubble once you reach the plateau, and find more than just Handmaid.

She’s in a fight with the Condesce. The Condesce that you and your friends killed. She’s got blood on her space suit from where Roxy put a sword through her, but she’s up. Alive. Moving.

“Do you get it yet?” Handmaid spits, psi energy crackling around her and throwing the Condesce into a boulder-like piece of rubble that crumbles into smaller rubble at the blow. “The only reason you ‘won’ last time,” Handmaid gestures to three large bloodstains on her dress, perfectly spaced to match the prongs of the Condesce’s trident, “was because I let you!”

The Condesce coughs up pink blood and staggers to her feet, wiping her mouth with the back of her wrist. “Eat ship, rustblood!”

“You still think you’re important?” Handmaid screams, cutting off whatever the Condesce was about to do by enveloping her in psi, leaving her hanging midair, angry as hell, and wriggling like a fish. “You are a slave and a plaything! You think you’re so special but you-” Handmaid shoots out
A hand and the Condesce’s trident sparks with red energy, “-are-” she lifts her hand and the fork lifts too, suspended high in the air, “nothing!” she flings her hand down and the trident is vaulted straight through the Condesce’s body. Personally, you would’ve called that enough, but Handmaid then proceeds to break literally every bone in the Condesce’s body with her psi, if the nauseating cracking and gyrations coming from the new corpse are anything to go by. The sound is... you kinda wanna vomit, to be wholly honest.

With the Condesce’s breath coming to an abrupt end, you’re now aware of a third person’s breathing. Well, second, now, you guess. You edge to the right a little, floating and avoiding making any noise just yet, so you can peer around the rubble. The breathing feels close.

The body’s close too. It is sprawled limply over a small pile of rocks, limbs bent at awkward angles and head tilted like a discarded doll. The body’s eyes stare vacantly forward, open and unblinking, like the dead, and there is a huge stain of blood surrounding a tear in its shirt.

The body is unmistakably Dave’s Bro. It looks exactly like Dirk, just older and less animated. If you hadn’t been made aware of him specifically because of his breathing, you would have absolutely mistaken him for a corpse. Hell, you still kinda think that he might be a corpse, even with the breathing. Nothing sentient leaves their neck at that angle.

Yeesh. Creepy. Not what you’re here for though. Handmaid seems to have calmed down a little after catching her breath while looming over the Condesce’s body, so you float up from your hiding spot and call out to her with a wave.

“Hello!”

Powerful psi- nothing like you’ve ever felt from Aradia or Sollux or even the Condesce during your fight with her- locks around your body and you are held suspended. The image and sound of the Condesce crumpling like newspaper comes vibrantly back into your brain and you think you maybe could’ve been a little smarter about this.

“The fuck is you?” Handmaid snaps. She twitches one finger inward and your body lurches to her, the speed dizzying.

“Uh, hi, I’m John,” you greet, not bothering to try not to sound nervous.

“Shouldn’t you be on some paradise planet, little victor?” she asks, clawed thumb coming up to push underneath your (neither white nor ghostly) eye. God. She is... she is really tall. (Really thin...)

“I just came from there, as it happens,” you say, heart absolutely palpitating in your chest. You want to Become and get out of her grip but you haven’t Become since your big breakdown and you’re...

You’ll hold out a little while longer with Handmaid.

“Then what-” her face is suddenly very close to yours and you are very aware of her fangs, “-are you doing here?”

“Looking for you, actually!” you try to say brightly. “Gamzee sent me, he’s worried about you.”

The psi around you vanish with a soft pop and you dart back a few feet, floating with a nice, healthy personal space bubble between you and those electric eyes.

“...The Bard?” She sounds quietly incredulous, her eyes squinting half-softly like she’s not quite
sure she’s remembering right.

You nod.

“He’s free?”

“Yeah, I have an assortment of magic powers and when we fraymotifed it broke the demon-curse in his brain- mostly?” She looks like she’s having a time, her eyes moving minutely over your face as you speak. “So… yeah. He was like ‘hey could you go get Handmaid she deser-’”

“They.”

“Huh?”

“Not she,” they spit, “I am not feminine by choice.”

“Oh! Okay. He was like ‘they deserve a happy ending too’ so I’m here to take you home with me. I can teleport so we don’t need to go find the exit gate, or, anything…” you trail off.

They’re shaking their head slowly at you, their massive horns reminding you a little of air traffic signals. Terrifying, terrifying air traffic signals.

“Your kindness is as appreciated as it is unprecedented,” they say darkly, and you feel a shiver crawl up your spine, “but I am a slave to Lord English, and that is all I will ever be.”

Yikes!

“But that’s what I’m saying! You can leave; I’ll help free you! You can come live with us on Earth C and we’ll fraymotif and I can get your curse off too and it’ll be fine!”

“I’m not cursed the same way the Bard was. Your little magic trick might’ve worked on that one,” they gesture to Dave’s Bro with their chin, “if his soul hadn’t already been reduced down to a husk. But I’m not held here by a splinter. I’m here because this is my role, my fate, my only destiny.”

“But it doesn’t have to be!”

“You have very little understanding of the way the Lord works,” they hiss, looking pissed.

“Well… explain to me?” you suggest, feeling timid, yet stubborn. “I want to help.”

They seem momentarily thrown for a loop, then snarl again, nose pointing disdainfully into the air. “You cannot.”

“Why?”

“Because I cannot leave!” they snap, energy crackling from their eyes.

“But why though?”

“Because I am Lord English’s slave!”

You’re pissing them off. This is dangerous. “…Okay, but why?”

“Because he stole me the same night I was hatched!” The air around you cracks, and you are reminded of the sound of the Condescend’s bones, phantom-close to your ears. “Because I was raised each night to submit to him, to be obedient and acquiescent! Because my whole life has been a give
and return of orders and bloodshed and violence!” They spit the last word with fangs bared at you, eyes surging with electric light, and you’re halfway to Becoming when their head suddenly snaps up and they swirl to face away from you. Shakily, you reverse your Becoming, settling back into your bones, and you stare the same way they are. Off in the distance, you can see a small cluster of dream bubbles, one of which is rapidly approaching in your direction.

“The child god,” they say, toneless, and then spin back to the plateau. They glare at you, striding over to Bro and hauling him up, tossing his limp body like a ragdoll over their shoulder. “We’re not allowed to interact with him yet. If you tell him you saw us, I will make you regret the fact that I am letting you live right now, understand?”

“Um, yes, I won’t tell the tiny shitty gremlin about you.”

They snort, the first expression of something tangentially-related to a positive emotion you’ve seen from them. “Aptly named.”

You’re about to try again, try to convince them one last time to come home with you, things can be better, they don’t have to just stay here and suffer, but you stop when they kick the Condesce’s corpse in the side and her breathing kicks back in.

“The child god’s on his way. Get up.”

You can feel the Condesce struggling for breath, how her lungs aren’t working right because there’s a hole in one of them. You can feel liquid inside the organ that is supposed to house only air. You float backwards slowly, wanting to distance yourself from that, wanting to get away from the awful hacking noises she’s making- weaker than anything you thought the Condesce- this giant, terrifying, alien space monster- could ever make.

Another kick, making the Condesce gag and spit up more blood. “Get up.”

She’s coughing, fuchsia spilling out over the dirt and rubble, her arms struggling to get underneath her so she’s not just lying facedown in a puddle of her own blood. She’s coughing, wheezing, trying to get air into her lungs but her body keeps convulsing with coughs before she can get enough air in that she can successfully force the blood out.

Kick. “Get up!”

The blow makes her expel more blood, but it doesn’t actually help anything. She just keeps hacking and wheezing, and the kick sent her back on the ground so now she has to struggle to get back up onto her elbows again.

Kick. “C’mon fishbitch, we don’t have all eternity. Child lord’s on his way.” Another kick to her exposed stomach. ”Get up.”

“So, uh,” you say, “not to try and get between you and literally anything you want to do, but kicking her seems like it’s just making her take longer, since you keep on knocking her down, when you want her to be standing up?”

Handmaid turns enough to sneer at you. “She’ll get it. After all,” they turn back to her, and she used the momentary distraction to get up all the way onto her hands and knees, still hacking up blood but further along the path to standing up than she’d previously gotten, “I did.” Kick. “Get up.”

God this is. Awful. You carry exactly 0 good feelings towards the Condesce, and admittedly you’d kind of been hoping she’d been burning in hell all this time for the shit she did to her planet and
everyone on it and also you and your friends, but being right here, seeing this happen to her...

Cough. Kick. “Get up!”

You want to leave. You turn away, but her breathing is right there in your skull, in your bones, embroidered into your awareness.

You flinch with the next kick, feeling what little wind she has get kicked out of her. “Get up.”

God okay yeah, you cannot stick around for this, no matter how much you’d like to help Handmaid and bring them back to Earth C with you for Gamzee. You don’t like them much. They seem nasty and this is freaking you out. You start to leave, but the edge of the dream bubble pushes against your skin and disorients you momentarily.

“Too late,” Handmaid says darkly, and there’s a sharp, nauseating cracking noise and you don’t turn to see the result of whatever that was, you don’t want to know. Three breathing bodies leave the area in an instant, and you are left wide eyed and oh, look at that, you’re shaking.

You understand why Gamzee called them dangerous. They are… very scary.

You feel him breathing before you hear his words, but you can’t help but twitch just a little when he speaks anyway.

“Well. Well. Well. If it isn’t the incredible blue hulking idiot,” Caliborn quote “greets” unquote.

“God, have you ever said anything-”

“We meet again!”

“-intelligent even once in your life or do you just live to annoy people?” you continue like he never even said anything.

He sneers, “I think you will find. That I am stronger. And also tougher. Since the last time we fought. And am also-”

“God, stop, alright, I just got the shit scared out of me by someone way spookier than you, stop acting like you’re something I could ever even consider intimidating!” you complain, not really wanting to deal with him but sticking around anyway. You don’t know why you’re entertaining him. It’s like responding to one of those screaming trolls on the internet. Except, you did that with Karkat, and now he’s your boyfriend? Maybe there’s merit to entertaining these shitheads after all.

Caliborn opens his mouth to speak again.

Nah. Nah, there is no merit to this. You really should leave.

“What was that, I wasn’t paying attention,” you say, probably not even at the end of one of his many, many, many stilted sentences.

“You disrespect me!” Caliborn shouts.

“Yeah.”

“But you will not for long. For you see. I will kick. Your ass. And then hand it back to you. On a silver feeding plateau. Because that is cool. And a manly thing to do. And you will cry like the little pissing baby that you are!”
You roll your eyes so hard at that.

“And even if I could not send you snivelling. Back to your disgusting monkey maternal figure. You will find. I have you outnumbered. For you see this time…”

You wait, but that was less of a weird pause in the middle of a sentence and more of a trailing off for something hopefully dramatic.

“This time…” he repeats, with more force. A little rusted robot bunny shows up carrying Caliborn’s staff/machine gun. “I have a cool. And useful robot with me. While you are alone. And do not have cool robot underlings. Who are also friends. Because that is all friends are. People who do what you tell them to.”

“God, no wonder they’re so fucked in the head,” you say, thinking on how Handmaid said this guy raised them.

“Ahahaha! Yes! Quiver in fear! Bow before my might!”

“You’re not listening to a goddamned word I’m saying are you?” you ask, taking in the scenery of the bubble, cause why the hell not. It’s a grey planet with a black sky. There’s a radio tower off in the distance, a couple of hills, but mostly it’s just rocks and barren dirt. Sheesh. Depressing place.

“I can see that you are already shaking. Just at the very sight of me. And how powerful. And cool I am. And how outnumbered. And outgunned you are. Beg for mercy. And I might even make your death. Not as long and drawn out. As I intend to right now.”

“Hey little fella,” you say, crouching down and smiling at the bunny robot. It fits in well with the post-apocalyptic scenery. It gives you a little wave, one of its ears cocking to the side (the not-broken one), which makes your nose scrunch up. It’s adorable!

“Yes! Yes! Ahahahaha! Kneel! Kneel before me! I am your god! I hold the destruction of the universe in my palm! Kneel! Kneeeeeeeel! Ahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!”

“Does he ever stop?” you ask the little robot. It shakes it’s head, and you chuckle at it. You’d feel bad for it if it wasn’t, y’know, a robot and not a person. “That sucks,” you say anyway, compulsively polite. It nods.

“I hold dominion! Over the sniveling beta-male! Over everything! All will kneel before me! All will tremble at my might!”

“God, shut up!” you complain loudly, but Caliborn just keeps on laughing that stupid, stupid laugh. Ugh. You like Callie’s laugh so much better, air comes out differently and they hold themselves differently and even though they have the same voice, they do not have the same laugh at all.

The rim of another bubble passes through you on the right, followed shortly by a third bubble passing through your left. From the right, the scenery around you brightens. From the left, it grows no brighter but it does change, the ground turning green with dark red rocks here and there.

“And how exactly. Do you suggest. That you will make me?” Caliborn asks, shitty grin on his face (you’re not even sure how Callie’s face can distort like that) and staff thumping resoundingly down against his palm.

“Ugh,” you groan, “Uuuughhhhh. I’m too tired for this.” You only just started being able to do things again, talking to Handmaid and surviving meeting them definitely counts as your big thing for the day. Time to go home and cuddle your boyfriend. Impressively enough, you’re not too
bummed you couldn’t convince Handmaid to come with you, Gamzee wasn’t lying when he said that they were bitter and angry and dangerous and might not listen to you.

“You are saying that. Because you are a coward. Who is too busy shitting his diaperpants. To fight me. I know this. Because I am excellent at reading ‘character depth.’ And understanding the nuance of personalities. This is entirely in character. As I am your superior. And you are the beta male. That will serve as practice. For my one true rival. Who is Jake. Who I am building. Up to be the ultimate adversary. Hahahahaha!”

“Listening to you talk hurts my everything, I hope you know that.”

“Yes! Yes! Perish in terror and writhe in agony before me!”

“...Anyway. I’m going ho-”

You’re cut off by a sudden rumble of feet and- to your confusion and distress- clattering of bones.

What the-

From the dream bubble on your left, dark green spills forward swiftly across the landscape, accompanied by literally hundreds of animated skeletons of various consorts. The sound is chilling, but you stop paying attention to the horror of a literal skeleton army when you see their leader. Perched atop a fairly large (tortoise?) skeleton is your actual, literal, your-flesh-and-blood, sweet sweet precious child.

“Casey!” you exclaim, astounded she’s even still alive! You haven’t seen her in- and she’s still so small, oh. That is the most adorable- and she’s still wearing Rose’s darling little robes- you have to take her home; you’re not leaving unless Casey is coming with you you absolutely cannot leave without her, no chance in hell.

She glubs excitedly at you while Caliborn screeches, his little bunny robot dancing about on top of the skeledudes while Caliborn gets mercilessly run over, flailing about. You are not concerned with Caliborn’s flailing, however. You are concerned with your outstretched arms and your precious little salamander and reuniting with your loving daughter.

Oh god, oh god you just got the absolute best idea. “Hey, hey little robot dude, little robot, can you c’mere a second?”

The robot honest to god flashsteps to you- which would be weird if you weren’t preoccupied with picking it up with the arm that does not firmly cradle Casey- and you hand it to her. She takes it with a glub, but seems to have anticipated you handing an alien rabbit to her this time. She patters her little webbed feet against you excitedly and you smooch the top of her head.

GT: Rose it’s our daughter!!!!!!! :B :B :B :B <3 <3 <3

You send Rose a snap of yourself and Casey, but you exit out of the app before it sends and the internet is going a little screwy what with this particular iteration of reality literally falling into glowing multicolored pieces around you, so you unfortunately do not notice the little red exclamation point of sending failure until later.

“Oh Casey, I’m so glad you’re okay!” you tell her, lifting her up above your head. The tiny robot bunny remains firmly clutched in her grasp, and she glubs delightedly at you.

The moment is ruined by- of course- none other than Caliborn. The sound of a machine gun reminds you that you are very much still occupying the same space as the miniature hellion, and you quickly clutch your dear sweet precious sweet precious dear daughter to your chest, turning to
shield her from potential stray bullets with your body. You might not have been aware that she made it out alive, but now that you have her back in your sights like hell you’re gonna let this piece of fuck hurt her!

You pull Zillyhoo from your specibus and set Casey down behind you. You’ll teach this shitstain to endanger your daughter! You’ve half a mind to shake a fist at him and tell him to watch what he’s doing!

Before you can do something probably stupid and painful, the dream bubble on your right spills into the space, warping the atmosphere again. It’s brighter- the sky becomes a cheery yellow with greenish clouds, the green on the ground becomes a child’s crayola box lime, and in the distance grey mounds of rock become sky-azure blue mountains. The sound of metal banging and tinny whinnies are heard shortly before a wild, unrestrained laugh that resounds with heady energy.

On the foremost metal steed, you see fucking ARquius. He leads the charge of metal horses, Sawtooth and Squarewave- you’re assuming the 1.0 versions- flanking him on either side. He’s grinning wide, clutching the metallic mane of the horse he rides, and he looks goddamned exhilarated to be charging a tiny demon with full intent of running him and his shitty machine gun over. You understand and relate, on a personal level, but you’re also experiencing a sort of stunned-fury-confusion. Like, he’s right- all this time he’s still been- and here he is just- smiling- robots (so many robots oh god)- and he’s just-

“What?!?!?!”

He vaults off his horse, swooping up over the stampede and laughing as Caliborn’s screeching increases in pitch and volume. He turns to you, and gives you a grin that sings of victory. He shoots you a two finger salute and a “Hey, Sir Dude! John! You look different!”

He does too. His hair looks like a lion’s, long but ridiculously voluminous (you wonder briefly if Dirk’s hair would look like that if he grew it out, or if hair gel would fail in the face of all that mane). His posture is more relaxed, even just from the fleeting moments you saw him last, and he looks somewhat older. Not as much as you probably do, because time, but a little.

“Hey,” you greet back over the din of all those fucking horses. Your emotions are hitting a wall, right now, and you’re pretty sure the part of your brain that processes things like a normal person has been shut down for the time being. Sawtooth and Squarewave have rounded their steeds out of the stampede, back to where you, Casey, and ARquius are, and the three newcomers leave the horses and screeching tiny green demon to their devices, converging on your daughter. Or, more accurately, the bunny your salamander holds.

“Lil’ Seb, finally!” ARquius says, ignoring you in favor of the rusted, damaged rabbit. “Littlest dude we have been scoutin’ high and fuckin’ low in search of you!” The sprite-troll-AI pulls the tiny bunny robot into his arms, and you are once again reminded of the fact that your life is fucking surreal.

“Two heckin’ years lookin’ for your ass,” ARquius continues as the bunny- Seb?- is passed with outstretched limbs to Sawtooth, who kneels down so both he and Squarewave can… okay so they’re robots, they cannot possibly contain the emotions necessary to coo over something, but there’s no way to describe it other than: he kneels so they can both fawn over Seb.

“Chance meetin’, runnin’ into you here,” ARquius says with a smile, turning to face you with his hands on his hips and his muscles bulging underneath his tanktop.

“Uh, yeah, funny seeing you here too,” you say, because the wall your brain has hit is a really
fucking stubborn one. “You’ve… been in here looking for these guys all this time?”

“Naturally. It’d be astonishingly shitty of me to leave them behind,” ARquius says, like searching through the void + dream bubbles for hunks of metal is the most obvious course of action anyone could’ve possibly taken.

“Right. The robots.”

ARquius arches an eyebrow over his pointy red anime shades and the gesture is so “Dirk” you almost laugh.

“You seem to be under the impression that we are not sentient dudes.”

“Well, I mean, you are, but they’re-” you gesture to the other three robots, “quite literally robots.”

“Robots made by a lonely and desperate Prince of Heart,” ARquius says, floating over and sorta-sitting on Sawtooth’s shoulder. The tail makes it kinda hard to really sit on anything but he manages. “We all possess some splinter of His Highness Prince Shitstain, to a greater or lesser degree.”

“You mean Dirk?”

“I fuckin’ hate that nincompoop.”

“I don’t remember you swearing this much,” you note, remembering the weird computer-glitchy noises he used to make instead of swear words.

“I’m not a six sweep thirteen year old anymore.”

“That’s fair. What do you mean you’re all Dirk?” the tiny adorable bunny didn’t really act like Dirk (aside from the flash stepping, which you don’t think is a soul-oriented ability). You also don’t really… like, they’re robots.

“When I was just Hal, and not my beautiful, muscular self, I was a direct and identical copy of Prince Stoneface’s shitty, thirteen year old self. An impression lifted from his psyche and imprisoned within the confines of the internet, torturously ensnared inside wires and circuits and data. Equius-me, for reference, was just a shitty nerd dweeb.”

You’re almost amazed at how stable he seems, given his speech patterns.

“Sawtooth here was Edgelord’s first accidental soul-splinter,” ARquius pats Sawtooth’s shoulder, who seems to be communing with Squarewave and Seb via electronic means. “Dick was a kid and Sawtooth was the only already-made brobot our Bro had left for us- he got left so he could be the gnarly caretaker to our shitty little ass. And Dirt was so desperate for Sawtooth to care about him and actually feel nurturin’ and shit, that the part of his soul that would bloom into somethin’ parental and carin’ splintered and a piece of it shot into Sawtooth. He’s morphed into his own soul since,” ARquius adds with a smug look, which you don’t understand but honestly this is all still kind of hitting you from a distance so whatever, “but that was his base. Squarewave was the same, but instead of seekin’ comfort Irk wanted companionship. Square’s core splinter is that of friendship and playfulness, cause Dirge’s a My Little Pony piece of friendship-lovin’ shit.” Squarewave sends you a two finger salute, then turns back to whatever conversation the literal robots with-souls-you-guess are having. “Lil’ Seb here,” ARquius continues, smiling in exasperation, “was splintered out of Dump’s adoration for Jane, and his all-consumin’ wish he could be there to help protect her and look out for her. Built him just-so so Seb’d be able to fuckin’ tweak Jane’s charm-neurons, which I am just now realizin’ is somethin’ humans don’t actually
have a word for. Fuckin’ wild. He picked up on Jane’s mischief, though, didn’t you you little fuckin’ snot?"

Seb turns to ARquius and sends him a thumbs up, ears twisting out in a way that is- quite frankly- adorable. You can see why Jane would be enamored with Lil’ Seb; he is really cute.

“So yeah, couldn’t just leave my bros behind in the void, god knows that place sucks,” ARquius finishes out with a victorious grin. “Now we’ve finally acquired the whole gang!”

“Tell that to Davepeta.”

The change in ARquius is instant, the hot air of accomplishment vanishing and his whole posture softening, eyes turned searching and his body sloping down, in towards you, his full attention centered on your person.

“How are they?” he asks softly. Even his voice has changed, pitched down and more similar to that low-stomach troll-speech you’re familiar with, compared to the human-throatiness he’d been speaking with more of.

“Bad,” you answer honestly, “they miss you.”

ARquius’s face positively crumples in honest to god sorrow, remorse and what looks like physical pain lining his expression.

“I never meant to be gone this long,” he tells you earnestly. “I just- it took a whole year to find Sawtooth and Squarewave, and another to finally find Lil’ Seb. I couldn’t- I swore I wouldn’t leave without them, but I never meant to be away for a full two years…”

“Four, actually.”

ARquius doesn’t respond a moment, and you can honest to god hear gears whirring. His expression shifts to horror slowly. “What do you mean?”

“Time flows differently in the Game than it does out of it. It’s half-speed. They’ve been waiting for you for four years.”

ARquius’s eyes are wide behind his glasses, and slowly he raises his hands to his mouth, shoulders hunched up to his ears and tail spiraling tightly underneath him. Sawtooth, Squarewave, and Lil’ Seb rise and go to him, Sawtooth placing his hands on ARquius’s shoulders.

“Four-” ARquius chokes, then lurches upright, Sawtooth keeping a firm hold on his shoulders but the other two twitching back. “I need- we have to leave, now, I never meant to- for so fuckin’ long they’ve been waitin’ so long- we have to go we have to go now the whole group is assembled we need to leave-” His voice is getting kinda glitchy. It’d be cool if it wasn’t happening to, like, a person.

“Lucky for all of us, I can teleport! And I can teleport to Davepeta’s location, unlike some people!”

You extend your hand to ARquius, and he hesitantly takes it, like you’re made of glass. “Serious dude, you’ve been impossible to find. Every time I tried to find you my powers just spit me out somewhere random.”

“Ah, yes,” ARquius says distractedly while Sawtooth, still holding one of ARquius’s shoulders with one hand, links hands with Squarewave, who is holding Lil’ Seb. You pick up Casey, and she glubs rapidly in consort to the skeletons. You’ll need to let her have this conversation. “I’ve established some algorithms that allow me to fully Become the Void while maintaining a backdoor
into sentient thought. Didn’t want the tiny green asshole or his larger, deadlier counterpart findin’ me or my kin before we wanted found. Davepeta?”

“Let Casey say goodbye first,” you say, “This is still faster than flying to the exit lilypad, wherever that is.” You’re not sure you could even navigate to the lily pad, with all these tears in the fabric of reality. “Oh, hey, you want your metal stampede?” you offer.

ARquius doesn’t even look at the horses. “No. I built them when I was bored, or frustrated, or idle. They serve no real purpose, aside from making one sick entrance. They can ride eternal in the baller vastness of the Medium. Can we go to Davepeta yet?”

You frown sternly. “Let Casey fini-”

The skeletons all suddenly let out a cacophony of rattling bones and eerie mouth-noises, and Casey gives one final, booming glub, and then she turns to you and blows a bubble against your face. You laugh, charmed, and then glow blue.

You arrive in Jade’s garden. The door to the greenhouse is shut firmly, and you can feel startled breathing inside. ARquius quickly takes his hand from yours, his face searching the area, and he startles a little when the door to the greenhouse opens and Jade comes rushing out, concern plain on her face.

“John, what-” Jade cuts out when she sees ARquius, her brain probably hitting the same wall as yours did. You wave hello with the arm you’re not using as the main support for Casey. You’re pretty fortunate she’s still so small, since your body is just barely strong enough to hold her with both arms, and you feel her slip a little when you wave to Jade. You hike her back up your hip, and Feferi, Jane, Tavros, and finally Davepeta spill out of the greenhouse behind Jade.

“Davepeta I’m so sor-”

There is no pause, with Davepeta. Only a sudden, holy-shit-I-didn’t-know-you-could-move-that-fast bolt of green and orange in your peripheral and the very loud sound of two bodies colliding, Davepeta and ARquius tumbling over the plants of Jade’s slowly dying outdoor garden. They skid, then thwump loudly against the base of a tree, Davepeta perched on top of ARquius and keening.

“I’m sorry,” ARquius gasps with their face in his hands, “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I never meant to be gone that long.”

“John, what happened?” Jade asks you, coming up beside you and staring at the two of them in open confusion and awe.

“ARquius!!!”

“I didn’t know I thought it was only two years I’m sorry I never meant to be gone that long-”

“You’re here- you’re- alive-”

“Where did you find him?” Jade asks you, “Or them?” She gestures to the robots, confusion plain. Jane comes up on your other side- then startles when Lil’ Seb flashsteps directly to her with a pleased-beeping noise, and Feferi and Tavros go over to the robots, curious.

“I’m truly sorry Davepeta I’m sorry I’m sorry-”

Davepeta lets out an even higher keen than they had been, sliding their arms behind ARquius’s neck and pulling him in close.
“I… may have done something reckless the moment you left me unsupervised but it’s okay and we’re all fine,” you tell Jade (and Jane, Feferi, and Tavros). Jade gives you the most bewildered, exasperated look her face can make, then turns back to the scene unfolding before you all while Jane stoops to lift Lil’ Seb and his outstretched robot arms, looking flabbergasted.

“You’re back!” Davepeta is crying.

ARquius chokes, then laughs, and Davepeta joins in through their sobbing and then ARquius is crying too, the both of them laughing and weeping. ARquius pushes Davepeta back just enough that they can knock their foreheads together, their glasses clattering just a little, and you can see their smiles and tears in plain view, both their bodies shaking and you can feel their hiccuping laughter in their breaths. He strokes their face, thumb gentle on their cheekbone, and they cradle his between their hands.

“You finally came home to me!”

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