**all I know**

by *andloveexists*

Summary

day by day and night by night we were together -
all else has long been forgotten by me.

Three love stories, a new girl, a completely unorthodox English teacher, and a secret poetry society. How much more interesting could senior year get?

Notes

Hello!! This is the first full-length fanfic I’ve ever written. Enjoy! I hope you like reading these chapters as much as I loved writing them!

Essentially, this is how I think the movie would have gone in a modern setting. This story p much follows the movie timeline up until a certain point, but of course there's the added romance...

Disclaimer: I do not own Dead Poets Society and all recognizable dialogue, characters, and plot events are credited back to Peter Weir and/or Tom Schulman. Thank u.
Charlie hated summer. Not to say he didn't enjoy the killer opportunity to wear shorts and sunglasses and steal drinks from the lakeside bar, but that was about it. When he wasn't hanging out with Knox at the lake, summer was boring as hell.

"Knoxious! Get your ass down here!"

Typically, he started his days waltzing into Knox Overstreet’s house (although he was never ready on time) sometime in the late morning without knocking, and then waiting an often obnoxiously long time for Knox to come downstairs so they could get on with wasting their time.

"I'm gonna eat your food!"

He grabbed an apple, tossed it in the air and caught it as he slid into a stool by the kitchen island. Linda Overstreet, Knox’s mother, came down the stairs then, looking like she was ready for a day out shopping.

"Goodness, Charlie! We do have a doorbell!" She exclaimed, throwing her hands into the air with all the dramaticism she could muster.

"Sorry, Mrs. Overstreet," Charlie winked at her as he stood and bolted for the staircase.

"Knox! Charlie’s here!" Mrs. Overstreet yelled up at Knox as she fled out the door.

When Charlie reached the bottom of the stairs, he saw Knox at the top. Charlie grinned. Knox glared at him.

"Well there she is!" Charlie proclaimed as his eyes wandered to Knox's clothing choice of bright salmon Bermuda shorts. "Nice."

"Hey, hey. Check yourself out," Knox said, pointing the red bandana Charlie had fastened in his hair to pull his bangs back.

"Whoa." Charlie pulled on the knot of the bandana and tried to look surprised. "I'll have you know, bandanas are all the rage."

"Yeah, okay." Knox brushed past him on the stairs and turned to look up at Charlie. "Come on, will ya, slow poke?" he asked as he jumped the last few steps and ran out the door..

"Hey, ouch!" Charlie said, but he laughed, and followed Knox out the door.

Despite what a pain he could be, Charlie was glad to have Knox to spend the summer with. Their fathers had been best friends when they had gone to Welton, and subsequently Yale, and had both ended up living in Vermont and sending their sons to the same private school.

"Meeks called me the other day," Knox mentioned as they rode their bikes through a small town nearby. "He asked me how you were doing. Since you haven't called him lately. Or talked to him at all."

"Oh." Charlie winced, processing the information. If only he could tell Meeks why he wasn't picking up the phone. “How is he?”

"He's good. Says he's enjoying his vacation in Europe. Lucky asshole keeps sending me pictures of the Eiffel Tower or whatever cool monument he's seeing."

"That's cool."

"You should call him, Charlie." Knox said, throwing a hand up in emphasis and letting his bike wobble.

"I know, I know. I'm still freaked about last year," Charlie said.

"You should've told him about it." Knox shakes his head. “I still think you should've told him."
"Oh lord." Knox shook his head. "Poor Neil."
"He asked me if we wanted to hang out when he gets back, at your house or something." "Yeah, totally, I'll invite Pitts too."

Besides the drag of being at home, the thing Charlie hated the most about summer was not being able to see his best friends every day. With Meeks in Europe, and Neil visiting family in Washington, he and Knox and occasionally Pitts found themselves routinely doing anything that got them out of the house. Not that he didn't enjoy their escapades, but doing the same things over and over again for three months in Welton, Vermont could give you some serious cabin fever.

After loading up on pistachio ice cream and bottles of iced tea at the convenience store, Knox and Charlie headed back towards the lake to cool off and hang out. Charlie was still shaken up from hearing that Meeks was thinking about him.
"You should call him," Knox said again as if he'd read Charlie’s mind while digging into the half gallon of ice cream.
"I don't want to ruin the friend group. That's the last thing I want."
"I'm not saying to tell him," Knox said, and then under his breath, "at least, not over the phone."
"You're right." Charlie sighed, and ran a hand through his now-wet hair. "I hate that you're right." Knox laughed. "You wanna take another dip?" He said, putting the ice cream back in their cooler and tipping his sunglasses on top of his head.
"Yeah, sure." Charlie said, stretching before standing up.
"You're different, talking about him, you know," Knox said, getting up and following Charlie. The music being played over speakers got louder, and Charlie turned around at the edge of the dock.
"What'd ya mean?" He said, raising an eyebrow and smirking, attempting to mask any differences. Knox licked his lips and darted his eyes away in frustration. "That. You don't do THAT talking about him."

Charlie's smile faltered, and he looked at the water. "Shit, Knox, you don't know what it's like."
"Yeah...I'm sorry."

Both then looked at the water, and for a moment, Charlie almost forgot where he was. All he could think of was Meeks, and his ginger-colored hair and honey brown eyes and the spray of dark freckles coating his nose and cheeks and forehead. He thought of all the nights Charlie had spent admiring Meeks when he came over late at night to work on math or essays or just to play video games or lay on the couch or talk. And then there was every time Charlie’s vision wandered to Meeks’ dark red, chapped lips, and thought of what it would feel like to kiss him, to hold their lips together and to put his hands on Meeks’ waist and chest and -
"You never told Neil, either, did you." Knox said, interrupting Charlie’s train of thought. Charlie looked up at Knox for a moment, startled. “Is that a question or an accusation?”
“You know what it is.” Charlie’s heart pounded. Of course, he hadn’t told Neil, and Knox knew it. Knox was the only person who knew about Meeks, and he’d only found out on accident one night when Charlie was a little too upset.
So when Knox asked again, Charlie just shook his head, and though he wasn’t looking at Knox, he could already read his facial expression.
Knox sighed, and a rush of adrenaline came through Charlie as he turned, ran, and dove into the lake.

He heard the splash, and then the muted pounding of the music, and then just the swish of the water as his body floated through it in what felt like slow-motion. Summer had three weeks on the end of it, and just when he thought he might have let go of Meeks, Knox had brought it out of him. Over two months Charlie had spent working to get Meeks out of his mind, and yet now he realized he'd
really been thinking about him the whole time. Charlie's stomach flipped at the thought of seeing him again and getting to spend late nights working though Latin together or poking at each other during lunch.

When his air ran out, Charlie kicked to the surface and out of the water to see Knox take a leap into the lake. The boombox and the chatter of families having picnics and children playing games suddenly became too loud, and Charlie closed his eyes, leaving his heart pounding along to the beat of the music.

Chapter End Notes

So there's the prologue. I used to be a huge Knox/Charlie shipper when I first got in to DPS, but then...my love for Meeks took over.

I don't have a beta or anyone reading over my work, so please do let me know if you have any writing advice for me. I could always use it. ;)

Chapter Summary

Senior year at Welton High School begins.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


Four words plastered all over Welton Academy High School, four words Neil thought he’d forgotten over the long summer. Between spending three weeks in Washington visiting his grandparents, two months of chemistry for summer school, and getting out of the house any second he could to get away from his family, there was no denying that he had quite a busy few months. Especially since, in the last month of it, he hadn’t seen his friends at all. And now back at Welton finally beginning his senior year, things were about to get even busier.

“On this 25th day of August, I welcome you all to Welton Academy!” Principal Nolan says, repeating his yearly speech that Neil is happy to be hearing for the last time. “May the year be prosperous for you all.”

The room erupts in applause, and as obligatory Neil joins in as the assistant principal takes the few steps onto the stage.

“You are now released to find your classes before they start at 8. Have a great year!” She says, smiling, and the room erupts in chaos. Neil joins the crowd in trying to make his way out of the auditorium when his phone buzzes in his pocket.

Charlie 7:35 am
have a tolerable year thanks ms. b

Charlie 7:36 am
let's meet in the caf in 5. meeks and knox are already there

Neil smiles, and texts a quick “ok” before shoving his phone back into his jeans. This year may be filled with physics and trigonometry but at least it will also be filled with Charlie Dalton and the rest of the group.

As Neil finally pushes through the crowd of people and exits the auditorium into the slightly less crowded hallway, he immediately smashes into someone else.

“Sorry!” He exclaims automatically, and is about to dash off before looking at who he ran into.

The boy in front of him is only slightly shorter than Neil, standing with a shy demeanor and a mop of gingery hair brushed across his forehead. He looks not necessarily scared, but out of place, and Neil figures he must be a new student. A very attractive new student, and Neil feels a sudden inclination to be friends with the mysterious boy.

“Uh, hello.” Neil says, nervously running a hand through his hair. He realizes he should probably introduce himself, and consequently sticks out his hand for a handshake. "I'm Neil Perry."

"Todd Anderson." His voice is quiet and nervous, yet Neil still hears him clear.

“A-are you new here?”

Todd shakes his head yes. “I went to Ballincrest last year. Sorry for - uh, sorry for running into you.”

"Don’t worry about it. Why'd you leave Ballincrest?"

"M-my brother went here."
Neil nods. The last name Anderson rings a bell. "Oh, so you're that Anderson."
Todd looks at his feet, and Neil realizes he must have struck a bad chord. "Well, Todd, it's nice to
meet you. Do you need help finding anything?"
Todd looks around the hallway, as if keeping his eyes anywhere but on Neil. "Uh, no," he swallows
dryly. "Things are pretty easy to find."
Neil smiles, knowing Todd is obviously lost. "I'm headed to the cafeteria before class. Come with
me, I'll introduce you to some friends."
Todd blushes, and Neil's heart warms as he smiles back.
"Th-thanks, Neil." He says, looking grateful that Neil offered to help.

Knox had texted him ten minutes ago that he and Meeks were in the cafeteria. Charlie had spent
approximately 7 and a half minutes pacing in front of the cafeteria doors, waiting for Neil to show up
and save him from talking to Meeks. Somehow, this was deemed unavoidable.

"Charlie!"
Charlie freezes, staring at the door to some classroom he's never been into that suddenly seems very
interesting. He knows that Meeks is behind him, and he knows he should probably turn around, but
his eyes are wide and his heart is pounding and it really doesn't seem like the best idea for that very
moment.
But he does it anyway.
"Hey, Meeks...uh, how was Europe?!" Charlie says nervously, spinning around slowly to face
Meeks and a very humored Knox.
"Oh, you know," Meeks said, waving his hand jokingly as if it was no big deal. "Europe."
Charlie was shaking possibly harder than he ever had before. He was never one to lose his
confidence like this, and that fact made him even more nervous.
Charlie's eyes waver to where Knox stands, and Knox gives him a reassuring smile. When Charlie
continues to stare at him, Knox rolls his eyes and sighs.
"Look, there's Neil." Knox says, pointing at Neil talking to another boy a few feet away. Charlie
sighs so loud that he earns looks from both Meeks and Knox, but they make their way over to him
nevertheless.

After showing Todd some classrooms and happily discovering that they have three classes together,
Neil suddenly feels a lot more giddy for the year, though he's not sure why. Together, they go to the
cafeteria to find an evidently very desperate Charlie, judging by the 37 text messages Neil has gotten
from him in the past fifteen minutes.
First, however, he's interrupted by one Richard Cameron.
"Neil! Study group at lunch?" Cameron says, materializing next to Neil and leaning an arm on his
shoulder.
"Yeah, sure." Neil says, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. He makes eye contact with Todd, who
stifles a small laugh.
"Business as usual, huh?" Cameron says, laughing, and then whispering, "Hey, is that the new kid?
Looks like a stiff!"
Todd, who can very obviously hear the conversation, anxiously raises his eyebrows and stares at
Cameron like a deer in headlights.
Cameron shifts his eyebrows up and whispers an "Oops" before dashing down the hall and away
from Neil and Todd.
It takes a lot of energy to keep from laughing, and Neil realizes he's not the only person who isn't
used to having a new kid in their small school and small senior class.
"Listen, don't mind Cameron," Neil starts. "He was born with his foot in his mouth. You know what
I mean?"
He playfully claps Todd on the back in an effort to change the mood, and even though Todd gives
him a slight smile, he pushes his hair back nervously. Neil tries a reassuring smile, and this earns a
grin back from Todd. Neil’s about to say something when they are interrupted again by a smug voice
and a group of footsteps coming from behind.
"Rumor has it, you did summer school."
Neil whips his head up to see Charlie standing behind him, a satisfied expression on his face, with
Knox and Meeks on either side of him, looking almost like they’re a crime trio.
"Yep, Chemistry. My father thought I should get ahead." Neil returns the smirk, feeling at ease with
three of his best friends standing together and seeing them for the first time in months. "How was
your summer, Slick?"
Charlie raises an eyebrow playfully. "Keen."
Charlie glides past him and begins walking to the cafeteria, and Neil falls in step with him.
"Gentlemen, what are the four pillars?" Neil says as they approach the table they’ve occupied for
four years now.
Charlie, opting out of a chair, sits on the table, crosses his legs, and leans forward on his hands.
"Okay, study group." He says, while the boys gather around him. "Meeks aced Trig. I didn't quite
flunk English. So, if you want, we got our study group."
"Sure. Cameron asked me too. Anyone mind including him?" Neil says.
"Hmm, what's his specialty, bootlicking?"
"Come on, he's your neighbor."
"That's not my fault!" Charlie says, scoffing.
The boys snicker, and Meeks notices for possibly the first time that they aren’t alone at the table.
Todd, who hasn’t sat down, stands awkwardly a few feet from Neil at the corner of the table.
"Oh, I'm sorry, my name is Steven Meeks," Meeks says, holding his hand out to Todd.
Neil hurriedly stands up, almost having got so caught up in missing his friends that he’d forgotten to
introduce Todd.
"Oh, this is Todd Anderson." He says, confidently.
"Nice to meet you." Meeks says, always so polite.
"Nice to meet you," says Todd, smileless.
"Charlie Dalton," Charlie calls out. All four of the other boys turn to see him smirking on his spot on
the table. He shrugs when they look.
Knox, however, sticks out his hand for a handshake. "Knox Overstreet." He says with a warming
smile.
Todd nods, and goes back to staring at his hands in front of him. At least this time, he’s chosen to sit
down.
"Todd's brother was Jeffrey Anderson," Neil says, attempting to draw Todd back into conversation.
"Oh yeah, sure." Charlie says with a cocky sheen to his voice. "Valedictorian. National merit
scholar."
"Oh, well, welcome to Hell-ton." Meeks says jokingly.
"It's every bit as tough as they say, unless you're a genius, like Meeks." Charlie says, and he can't
hide the flirty demeanor in his voice as he makes direct eye contact with Meeks for the first time
since arriving at Welton.
"He flatters me. That's why I help him with Chemistry." He responds, and looks back at Charlie,
who’s staring at him with a raised eyebrow and his dumb smirk.
"And English, and trig-"
First interrupted by coughing, and then by Dr. Hagar arriving at their table, the conversation is drawn
to a halt.
"Neil Perry, you’re wanted in the principal’s office." Dr. Hagar says, before nodding to the other
boys and turning to walk way without further acknowledgement.
Immediately, Charlie and Meeks and Knox exchange looks of anger. Charlie has to hold back from
sneering as Neil gets up and follows the teacher.
"I hate him."
"Charlie, not so loud. He might hear you."
"Who gives a damn, the guy's an ass!"
"Yeah, you're not wrong."

“What was that about?” Pitts asks as he finally arrives at the table.

“Aye, Pittsie, how’s it going?” Charlie says. “Neil looks like he’s in trouble. I’m betting his dad wants to change a class or some shit.”

Everyone exchanges looks, and it’s then that Charlie takes notice of Todd, who’s still doing his best to look out of place.

"Why'd you leave your old school?"

Todd moves his head as if checking to make sure Charlie addressed him and not one of the other boys. When he realizes that he’s actually being talked to, he looks at Charlie with a bit of a shocked impression.

"Uhh...my brother went here."

Charlie laughs. "Yeah, but...you’re a senior, like us, right?" he asks. "Why not come here sooner?"

Todd slowly looks down, and Charlie can see him fumbling for an answer. He almost feels bad for asking the question.

"I, uhh...I went to Ballincrest last year. I didn't wanna go there anymore."

"Why?"

Todd’s face becomes red, and his mouth searches for an answer. Charlie raises his eyebrows, but for once in pity, not in spite.

"Guys, Nolan is here.." Knox says, and Todd is saved from further questioning. All of the boys look up to see Nolan walking across the cafeteria to where breakfast is being served. “That means he’s done talking to Neil.”

Charlie stands, and the boys follow. Together, and with Todd coming at Knox’s insistence, they go to the administration office to find their missing group member.

In the hallway outside the principal’s office stands Neil, his head slumped against the doorway, his eyes nervous. The boys stand a while away, watching for a second, as Neil sighs and wipes his eyes. Everyone waits for Charlie to be the first to approach Neil.

“Daddy troubles?”

Neil looks up, and based on the tears brimming his eyes Charlie’s suspicions are confirmed.

"Why doesn't he let you do what you want?" Charlie asks, trying to be playful with a smirk to cheer Neil up.

"Yeah, Neil, tell him off. It couldn't get any worse," Knox adds, aiding Charlie’s encouragement.

"Oh that's rich." Neil says, obviously angered by what just happened. "Like you guys tell your parents off, Mr. Future Lawyer and Mr. Future Banker."

"Okay, so I don't like it any more than you do." Charlie responds, shaking his head.

"Well, just don't tell me how to talk to my father. You guys are the same way."

"All right, all right, Jesus. So what are you going to do?" Knox asks.

"Do what I have to do. Drop the yearbook." Neil says, slumping back against the wall. ‘He thinks I’m taking on too many ‘useless’ extracurriculars.’

"Well, I wouldn't lose too much sleep over it.” Charlie says. "It's just a bunch of jerks trying to impress Nolan."

"I don't care, I don't give a damn about any of it!" Neil says, but his laugh proves that he does, in fact, care. No one responds for a second, the weight of the words hanging heavy above them.

"Well, uh, study group? Library? Free period?" Meeks says, driving the conversation to a new place.

"Yes!" Neil says, and begins walking to his first period, obviously angry.

"Todd, you're welcome to join us!"

"Yeah, come along pal."

Todd looks up from where he was standing, admiring an old photograph on the wall. He nods, still looking a bit fearful.

"Uh, thanks."

Pitts and Meeks leave Charlie and Knox to follow Neil to the Spanish room.

"Fucker, I missed you so much," says Charlie, throwing an arm around Neil’s shoulders.
"I know. My father wouldn't let me see you guys last week," he sighs. "But you know about that."
"Yeah."

Chapter End Notes

I like this chapter much more than the prologue. Things start picking up from here :)

Also, aren't Todd and Neil so cute. Idk how you can't love them

Disclaimer: I do not own Dead poets Society and all recognizable characters, plots, and quotes are credited back to Peter Weir.
Chapter Summary

'Too bad'? It’s worse than ‘too bad’, Pittsie. It’s a tragedy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ahh, yes. Knox thinks to himself as he enters the beloved classroom of Dr. Hager. Math. Equations, schedules, and an uncomfortable amount of homework assignments cover the blackboard, and Knox can already feel a knot in his stomach.

“Welcome, Mr. Overstreet. Take a seat.” Dr. Hager croaks from his spot at his desk. Knox stumbles to a seat near the window and slumps down in it, glaring at the white chalk smeared on the blackboard. Hager shoots him a look, and reluctantly Knox leans over to pull his notebook out of his backpack.

In the seat next to him, a tall, beautiful girl with shoulder-length blonde hair and dazzling silver eyes sits, gently chewing on her pencil and gazing at the board. She looks out of place surrounded by teenagers and schoolwork, as if she should be somewhere else; somewhere better.

Slowly, she directs her eyes his way, and sounds curious rather than rude when she speaks. “Can I help you?”

Knox drops his notebook.

The girl sets her pencil down on the table as a laugh dances out of her mouth. A strip of light coming into the room through the blinds gets caught on her eyes, illuminating them into a silvery blue, and they crinkle at the edges when she smiles.

Knox can feel himself gaping and averts his eyes to the ground, his mouth fumbling for something to say. “Uh, Knox Overstreet,” he says, settling on an introduction, as he smiles and holds his arm out to her.

She returns his smile, but declines the handshake. “Chris Noel,” she says, peering back at the pencil in her hand, as if she had never looked at him or laughed at him for dropping his notebook.

Knox looks at her for a moment more, but falls back in his seat just as Hager rises to begin class. The rest of the period, he keeps glancing at Chris, admiring her blonde bangs brushed against her delicate forehead, her smile when she talks to the girl in front of her, and how flattering her short pink skirt looks tucked over her white v-neck.

When the bell rings at the end of the period, signaling it’s time for lunch to begin, Chris immediately hops up and goes to stand just outside the classroom door. Knox throws his books into his bag, tosses it over his shoulder, and dashes over to where Chris stands in hopes of talking to her again.

But when Knox approaches her, another boy swoops in from the right. He throws an arm around her shoulder, pulling her in and kissing her, and she puts her hands on his chest and kisses him back.

Knox does a double take when he sees the lettering on the back of the boys big, red varsity jacket, which proudly displays the name “Danbury”.

Knox’s feet subconsciously drag him past the couple and towards the library, his heart, stomach, and brain all turning to stew inside his body.

In the library, the boys are all already there, grouped around two tables near the entrance. Pitts and
Meeks are already absorbed in some kind of engineering project, and Charlie is telling a very animated story to Neil and Cameron, the former laughing so hard he’s crying and the latter looking rather angrily into the distance. Next to Neil is Todd, who, surprisingly, is smiling at Charlie’s story. Knox arrives at the tables where his friends are, dramatically leaning against a bookcase with his jacket thrown over his shoulder. He peers into the distance, replaying visions of Chris over and over again.

It’s a moment before anyone notices Knox sulking.

“How was class?”
Knox, who has zoned out, looks up. “Huh?”
“How was class?” Charlie asks again.
“Terrible. Awful.”

Knox gets off the bookcase and plops even more dramatically into a chair at the head of Charlie’s table.

“Why, what happened?”
“Today, I met the most beautiful girl in my entire life.”

“Are you crazy? What’s wrong with that?” Neil asks, and Meeks and Pitts look up from their work.

“She’s practically engaged.” Knox says, with an aggravated face. “To Chet. Danbury.”

“That guy could eat a football.” Charlie says, smirking, both shocked and amused at Knox’s crush.

“Oh.” Pitts says, turning back to his project, “that’s too bad.”

“Too bad?” It’s worse than ‘too bad’, Pittsie. It’s a tragedy.” Knox pleads. “A girl this beautiful in love with such a jerk.”

“All the good ones go for the jerks, you know that.”

“Ahh, forget her.” Cameron says, and despite that everyone else is also tired of Knox’s brooding, they all look annoyed.

“I can’t just forget her, Cameron.” Knox says, shaking his head.

Charlie gives Knox a clap on the back, and Neil tries enthusiastically to draw attention away from the previous conversation. “So...who’s excited for a new English teacher?”

Charlie scoffs. “He’s probably just as bad as every other teacher here. ‘The highly regarded Chester School in London,’” he says, playing a fake prissy English accent.

Neil smirks. “Ha ha, very funny.”

“I don’t know, I think it’s cool,” Meeks says, shrugging. “We never get new teachers.”

“That’s what’s so scary,” Cameron says.

Charlie rolls his eyes. “Why, what’s he gonna do? Stray from tradition?”

“Well, yes.”

Charlie narrows his eyes at Cameron, but lets it go.

The bell rings just then. “Well, I guess it’s time to find out!” Neil says as he stands up to gather his things. “Let’s go.”

“Where is he?”

“You know, if he’s more than 20 minutes late, we can just leave.”

“Knox, it’s barely been one minute.”

“I’m just saying.”

“Shhh, here he is!”

The boys settle in their seats just as the teacher enters the room. A medium-height, brown-haired and fair-skinned man, he carries a black briefcase and walks a full circle around the room while whistling a familiar tune.

Neil turns to look at Meeks, who raises his eyebrows and looks at Pitts. Soon all the boys are looking at each other and back and forth at their books, unsure of what to do next.

“Well, come on.”

The boys all stand and see the man, a small lopsided smile on his face, peeking his head in the doorway. He gestures for them to follow, and disappears without another word.
Soon, everyone stands uncertainly in the main entrance way with Keating, holding a book and a clipboard, smiles at them from in front of the trophy cabinets. “Oh Captain, My Captain.” He says, teetering back and forth on his feet. “Who knows where this comes from?”

Out of the corner of his eye, Neil sees Todd look up and purse his lips as if he knows the answer, but he doesn’t say a word.

“Nobody?” Keating looks around, and everyone is silent. “Not a clue? It’s from a poem by Walt Whitman about Mr. Abraham Lincoln. Now in this class you can call me Mr. Keating. Or, if you’re slightly more daring, Oh Captain, My Captain.”

The students snicker. Charlie turns around and makes a face at Neil, who stifles a laugh.

“Now let me dispel a few rumors so they don’t fester into facts. Yes, I too attended Hell-ton and survived. And no, at the time I was not the mental giant you see before you. I was the intellectual equivalent of a ninety-eight-pound weakling. I would go to the beach and people would kick copies of Byron in my face.”

Everyone laughs again. Maybe he’s not as bad as we thought, Neil thinks to himself.

“Now, Mr…. Pitts. That’s a rather unfortunate name. Mr. Pitts, where are you?”

Todd looks at Neil, a grin creeping onto his face, and Neil smiles. Pitts, towering above everyone else at the front of the group, slowly raises his hand as everyone snickers.

“Mr. Pitts, would you open your hymnal to page 542 and read the first stanza of the poem you find there?”

“To the virgins, to make much of time?” Pitts answers, a shocked expression on his face, and everyone continues to giggle.

Keating nods, and Pitts continues.

“Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, old time is still a-flying. And this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying.”

“Kind of an old doozy, isn’t it? ‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.’ The Latin sentiment for this term is ‘Carpe Diem.’ Who knows what this means?”

Meeks hand shoots up, and Keating points to him.

“Carpe Diem. That’s ‘seize the day’, sir.”

“Very good, Mr-“

“Meeks.”

“Mr. Meeks.” Keating smiles. “Another unusual name.”

Meeks smirks, and the others look around at him and Keating.

“Now – why does the writer use these lines?”

“Because he’s in a hurry!” Charlie shouts, and Neil rolls his eyes.

“No! Ding!” Keating slams his hand down in Charlie’s direction. “Thank you for playing anyway.”

Charlie leans against the wall, still undefeated.

“Because we are food for worms, kids.” Mr. Keating pleads, gesturing around the room. “Because, believe it or not, each and every one of us in this room is one day going to one day stop breathing, turn cold, and die.”

Neil looks down at his feet, feeling the weight of the room settle on his shoulders. Keating continues to speak, and Neil gets the feeling that someone is watching him.

“Now, I would like you to come over here and examine some of the faces of the past. I don’t think you’ve really looked at them.”

When his classmates move to look at the photographs on the walls, Neil can feel eyes on him. He looks up from his feet, everyone else busy following Keating’s instruction, Todd stands a few feet away, admiring Neil. They lock eyes for a second, Neil’s heart pounding. Todd shakes his head quickly, as if remembering where he is again, and follows the rest of the class to the wall.

“They aren’t that different from you, are they?” Keating says from behind the group. “If you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you.”

Some of the class leans in, but most just look on.
“Go on, lean in.”
Neil does as told, as does most of the other class.
“Carpe.”
It’s Keating who says the words, but somehow, Neil can feel the pressure of the photos on his shoulders. Cameron looks up at Keating, annoyed, but Keating doesn’t let up.
“Carpe, Carpe Diem.”
No one says anything, they just continue to stare at the photos in silence. The faces seem to stare back at Neil, black and white eyes and smiling faces over and over again.
“Seize the day, boys.” Keating finishes. “Make your lives extraordinary.”

“Charlie!” Meeks calls, pushing through the crowd of eager scholars ready to leave the school. Being short, he’s smacked in the face by someone’s binder, and it knocks his glasses askew. Charlie turns around then, a few feet ahead of Meeks, and waves nervously.
“Hey, Meeks, what’s up?”
“You up to a study group at Neil’s tonight?” Meeks says, pushing his glasses back up his nose as he approaches the taller, dark-haired boy.
“Yeah, sure.” Charlie says, nodding, and turns on his heel to continue out the door.
“Wait – Charlie,” Meeks says, tugging on his arm. “Is something up?”
Charlie stops just near the door, where there’s a clearing free of students. He takes notice of Pitts and Knox walking outside the window, probably waiting for the rest of the group to arrive for a chat.
“No.” He says quickly, looking at Meeks. “Nothing’s wrong.”
“Are you sure?” Meeks says, almost pleading.
Charlie smiles, and for some reason, he suddenly feels more at ease. “No, Meeks, I promise. I’m okay.”
Charlie drapes an arm over Meeks’ shoulder and leads him out the door.
“Alright,” says Meeks, leaning into him.
“So, study group,” Neil says as they approach him and the rest of the boys, who’ve gathered up in the parking lot. “My house, 5? Someone can pick up pizza?”
“Yes. Sounds perfect,” Charlie says as they walk to the parking lot.
“That was weird,” Pitts says.
“But different,” Neil replies.
“I liked it.” Meeks says, still under Charlie’s arm.
“Yes,” Neil says. “I think I’m ready for something different this year.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm such a sucker for Charlie. He's so good.

Also cue my favorite line in the whole damn movie - 'Too bad'? It’s worse than ‘too bad’, Pittsie. It’s a tragedy.

Once I get the story rolling I'll probably be updating every few days, but rn I have no self control and am basically posting chapter every time I'm done with editing it lol...I hope y'all are enjoying it!
The Dead Poets Society

Chapter Summary

The reconvening of the Dead Poets Society. Featuring Kerouac, Reed, and Sir Uncle Walt.

Chapter Notes

Hola! This chapter took forever to edit, oops. I've been suuuuuuuuuuper bogged down with calc homework lately, so thats nice. Anyway, i really love this chapter, esp. considering all the amazing poetry in it. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Three and a half weeks into the school year, not a single student wasn’t already ready for break. “So after you divide both sides of the equation by 3, you get that x=7.” Meeks says, pointing to a problem in his math textbook. Knox, across the table, stares sickeningly at the book and makes a face at Meeks.
“Come on, Knoxious, it’s not that hard,” says Pitts, a mouthful of salad.
“Explain to me, then,” Knox says, waving his hands wildly in the air, “Why I’m failing trig!”
“Maybe if you didn’t spend so much time staring at Chris, you’d pay more attention to the teacher,” Charlie says, raising an eyebrow.
“Can it, Dalton,” Knox snaps.
“Hey, guys,” Neil says, arriving to their table 20 minutes late.
“Hey, welcome, Neil.” Cameron says. “Where you been?”
“I was in the library,” he says, setting his open laptop on the table. “I found Keating’s teacher page on the website.”
“What’s it say?”
The boys crowd around Neil’s laptop, which displays a fairly recent photograph of Keating and a biography of his time as a Welton student.
Meeks peers at the screen, looking impressed. “Cambridge bound.”
“Captain of the soccer team?” says Pitts.
“The Dead Poets Society.” Neil says, crossing his arms and admiring the laptop’s display.
“What the hell is that?” asks Cameron.
“I have no idea. I think we should find out.”

The boys run out of the cafeteria, searching for Keating in the parking lot. The middle-aged teacher walks outside the campus, holding his old-school briefcase and whistling the same song as he does every day entering class.
“Mr. Keating?” Neil calls.
The teacher continues to walk, as if he hadn’t heard Neil’s call.
“Mr. Keating?” Neil says again, followed by the rest of the group as he approaches the man. “Oh Captain, My Captain?”
A smile appears on Mr. Keating’s face before he even turns around. “Gentlemen.”
Neil laughs. “We were just looking at your teacher page on the website,” he says, gesturing at the boys. “What was the Dead Poets Society?”

Keating smiles, looking at the sky. “I doubt the present administration would look too favorably upon that. Can you keep a secret?”

Neil nods, looking at the other boys, who follow suit.

“Carpe Diem, boys. The Poets were dedicated to sucking the marrow out of life. We’d meet every so often at an old cave in the woods behind the school and take turns reading from all the poetry biggies: Whitman, Byron, Ginsberg. Sometimes even our own verse.”

“You mean it was just a bunch of guys sitting around reading poetry?” says Knox, unamused. Neil looks on in awe.

Keating laughs. “Well, yes. Back then we didn’t have phones or regular television to keep us company. But us, the other initiates and I, we were romantics. Spirits soared, women swooned, and gods were created in that cave. Not a bad way to spend an evening, aye?”

The five-minute bell rings, and Keating salutes the boys. “Good luck,” he says with a wink.

Neil stands up, staring at the field in awe of Keating’s story.

“Dead Poets Society,” he says.

“What?” says Cameron.

“I say we go tonight.”

“Tonight?” asks Charlie.

“Wait a minute.”

“What’s this cave he’s talking about?”

“Charlie and I used to play out there as kids. I think I know where it is,” says Neil.

“Sounds boring enough,” Cameron says, rolling his eyes and strutting away. The rest of the group follows him towards the school.

“So, don’t come,” says Charlie. “Please.”

“I don’t know, Neil,” Pitts says as he passes Neil.

“Come on, Pittsie!” Charlie yells.

“His grades are hurting, Charlie.”

“This could help him, Meeks!”

“What is this, a midnight study group?”

“Forget it, Pitts, you’re in. Meeks, are your grades hurting too?”

“I’ll try anything once.” Meeks says.

“Except sex!” Charlie yells, scoffing.

Neil spins on his heel, stopping the boys from entering the building.

“Listen to this; we go tonight. We all meet up at the school when it’s dark, and sneak out to the cave. It’s Friday night. No school tomorrow.”

Everyone looks at him, pondering the idea.

“Alright, who’s in?” Neil says, grinning.

Charlie stares the other boys up and down, then turns to look at Neil. “I’m in.”

“Me too,” says Cameron.

While some look more reluctant than others, all of the boys nod and smile at Neil. He stands proudly before them, his hands on his hips and a grin on his face.

“Man, on Fridays, even Keating’s class is more of a lull than usual.” Charlie says, rolling his eyes as he and Knox exit the school to meet up with Neil.

“Yeah, tell me about it,” Knox replies, sighing. His eyes dart to the side and he whispers a quick “be right back” before disappearing from Charlie’s vision.

“Hey, where’d Knox go?” Neil says, approaching Charlie as soon as Knox disappears.

“Who knows,” Charlie says, rolling his eyes again. “He said he’d be right back.”

“Yeah, whatever,” says Neil as they reach his dark red Toyota Camry. “Hold this, will you?”

Neil thrusts his backpack into Charlie’s arms and begins digging around in the front pocket for his
keys. Charlie’s almost knocked back by the impact of the heavy blue bag. “Holy shit, Neil, what do you have in here?”
“I’m honestly not sure,” he replies, still fumbling for is keys. “Wait...”
“What?” Charlie says, and Neil wiggles a thick blue book out of the backpack, obviously old and frayed at the edges. He turns it over, admiring it, and Charlie sets the bag on the hood of the car so he can look over Neil’s shoulder.
“Five Centuries of English Verse,” Neil says, observing the title. “I didn’t put this in there?”
“Let me see,” Charlie says, gently taking the book from Neil’s hands.
“Wait a second,” Neil says, pointing to writing on the inside cover of the book. “J.Keating. That’s Keating. I bet he put this in my bag during class, after we asked about the society.”
“What’s this poem written on the front?” Charlie asks, and Neil takes the book back.
“Let’s save it for the meeting,” he says as he places the frayed book carefully back in his bag.
“What’s up?” Knox says behind them, and Neil and Charlie turn to face him.
“Aye, Knoxious, where’d you go?” Charlie asks.
“To disappointment and beyond,” he replies, sliding past Charlie to get in the car.
“Shotgun.” Charlie says, and Knox slumps his shoulders and crawls into the backseat.

Being October, it doesn’t take long for the sun to set and darkness to wash upon Welton. At 5, Todd shows up on Neil’s doorstep, and at 8, Meeks calls and tells them to head out. With his father on a business trip, Neil waves goodbye to his mother, claiming to be heading out to Cameron’s for the night.

“Allright boys, who’s ready to read some poetry?” Meeks says with a smirk as Knox, Charlie, Todd, and Neil approach him, Pitts, and Cameron where they wait on the front steps of the school. Only the girls’ volleyball team is still at the school, finishing running their drills in the gym.
“Okay, so where’s this cave?” asks Pitts, as Neil signals for the boys to follow.
“Walk to the edge of the field, where the woods start,” says Neil, pointing in the direction of the trees that grow behind the high school. “The cave is maybe a mile past that.”

The boys begin the half hour trek to the cave, Charlie leading the way. Neil notices Todd hanging out at the back of the group, and dissipates from where he was walking with Knox to slowly falling step with Todd.
“So,” Neil says, nearly bumping shoulders with Todd. “Will you be reading anything tonight?”
Todd shakes his head, and when Neil doesn’t say anything, he looks up. “Uh, no.”
“Gosh, you really have a problem with that, don’t you?” Neil says, and Todd nods quickly. Neil looks at his feet. “Do you have a problem with this?”
Todd looks at Neil, puzzled, but Neil doesn’t look up. “With what?”
Neil gestures between the two of them. “Talking, I guess. You don’t have to hang out with me if you don’t want to.”
Todd looks ahead. Neil sighs, taking his hands out of his pockets to check the time on his phone.
“I want to.” Todd says, barely audible even among the dead silence of the trees.
Neil looks up, the light from the screen catching on his eyelashes. “What?”
Todd darts his eyes away, saying nothing. Neil sighs again and slides his phone back into his pocket, his heart racing.

“I haven’t talked to you one-on-one in forever.” Meeks says, running to catch up with Charlie as he walks ahead of the group. “Tell me about your summer.”
“Uh,” Charlie whispers, shoving his hands deep into his jacket pockets to conceal their shaking. “I mean, it was okay? It wasn’t Europe or anything.”
Meeks scoffs. “Okay, Europe was great. But I’m asking that your summer was like.”
Charlie sighs. “You were gone. Neil was gone for a lot of it. I spent most days at the lake with Knox. Sometimes Pitts came along, but he’s been busy with a science thing.”
Meeks nods. “Find any cute girls at the lake?”
“Um,” Charlie says, knitting his eyebrows. “Not really.”
Meeks looks at him quizzically, and then he laughs.
“Good,” he says, and Charlie raises an eyebrow at him.

“Hey, I think it’s over here!” Neil shouts to the front of the group.
Neil approaches a small hole in the ground at the base of a small hill covered by trees, and immediately starts to slide in, followed by Pitts and Todd.
“Arrrr, I’m a Dead Poet.” Charlie says, grabbing Meeks by the neck.
“Aww, Charlie,” he says, looking at Charlie with a pout. Charlie grins, sticking his tongue out at the redhead.

One by one, the boys slide into the cave, which is small and crowded but they all fit by sitting on rocks at the outer edges. Meeks is commanded to lay his jacket down by Charlie, and the other boys begin to throw their food on it: a bag of Doritos, chocolate chip cookies, a few apples, a can of soda, and a half-drunk bottle of water.

“Hey, who only brought one can of soda?” Charlie asks, looking around the room.
“Apples?”
“Yuck.”
“What the fuck, why only half a water bottle?”
“Okay, okay, we got Doritos and cookies. We good.”
“Alright, alright,” Neil shouts above the noise. “Let’s get this meeting started!”
Everyone cheers, mouths full of cookies and chips.

“I hereby reconvene the Dead Poets Society. I’ll now read the opening message by society member Henry David Thoreau. ‘I went to the woods because I wanted to live deliberately. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life. To put to rout all that was not life, and not, when I had come to die, discover that I had not lived.’”
Everyone is silent for a moment as Neil looks up from the book. The forest whistles above the opening to the cave and the only other sound is the quiet crinkle of a Doritos bag moved by the wind.

“And Keating’s marked a bunch of other pages.” Neil says, flipping through the large book. “Who’s next?”

“Tonite, thriller was about an old woman, so vain she surrounded herself with many mirrors.”

Knox reads from a thick orange textbook, holding his phone up to his face to illuminate it in the darkness of the cave.

“It got so bad that finally she locked herself indoors and her whole life became the mirrors. One day the villagers broke into her house, but she was too swift for them. She disappeared into a mirror. Each tenant who bought the house after that lost a loved one to the old woman in the mirror: first a little girl…then a young woman…then the young woman’s husband.”

His voice fills the room, ringing against the walls of the cave in the deep silence. Slowly, it gets louder and louder, until it’s as if he’s almost shouting.

“The hunger of this poem is legendary: it has taken in many victims. Back off from this poem - it has drawn in your feet! Back off from this poem - it has drawn in your legs! Back off from this poem - it is a greedy mirror! You are into this poem. From the waist down, nobody can hear you, can they? This poem has had you up to here! Belch! This poem ain’t got no manners. You can’t call out from this poem, relax now & go with this poem. Move & roll on to this poem, do not resist this poem. This poem has your eyes, this poem has his head, this poem has his arms, this poem has his fingers, this poem has his fingertips, this poem is the reader & the reader the poem…”
Knox looks up, the shadow of his eyelashes creating dark circles around his eyes.

“Statistic: the US bureau of missing persons reports that in 1968 over 100,000 people disappeared leaving no solid clues nor trace: only a space in the lives of their friends.”

He stares at the boys for a moment, letting the impact of the poem ring in the room, before smiling and taking a bow. The boys are silent for another moment as he sits down next to Charlie.


“I read it freshman year in English,” Knox says, shrugging. “I guess it stuck with me.”


“Thanks.” Knox says, hiding a blush. “Someone else wanna go next?”

“I’ve got one,” says Charlie, throwing a wrapper on the ground as he climbs to the front of the cave. He raises his eyebrows when he gets there, opting not to read from paper or a book.

“The story of man makes me sick. Inside, outside, I do not know why. Something so conditional, and all talk, should hurt me so. I am hurt. I am scared. I want to live, I want to die. And I see shadows, dancing into doom, in love, holding tight the lovely asses of the little girls in love with sex, showing themselves in white undergarments at elevated windows, hoping for the worst.”

Charlie finishes the poem with a hiss, wiggling his fingers in the air.

“Well then,” says Neil, “Where’d you find that, Charlie?”

“Bowery Blues. Jack Kerouac. Truly an inspiration,” he says, sitting down while Knox claps him on the back. “I had to make up for Knox’s depressor a few minutes ago.”

“Somehow, I liked it.” Neil says, standing at the head of the cave, and cracking his book open to one of the marked pages. “I’ll go next.”

Everyone sits idly as Neil is quiet for a moment, and then he begins to read.

“Come, said my soul, such verses for my Body let us write, (for we are one), that should I after return, or, long, long hence, in other spheres, there to some group of mates the chants resuming, (tallying Earth’s soil, trees, winds, tumultuous waves,) ever with pleas’d smile I may keep on, ever and ever yet the verses owning—as, first, I here and now signing for Soul and Body, set to them my name.” Neil closes the book, looking up at the other group members, and everyone smiles back at him.

“I say that’s good enough for a night,” Cameron says, standing up and eagerly heading for the opening to the cave.

“Wow, Neil, that was something,” says Pitts, smiling. “This was a good idea.”

“I’ll second that,” says Charlie. “Let’s go home, boys.”

One by one, the boys file out of the cave into the chilly night. By now it’s almost 2 A.M., but they still run the whole way back, cheering and letting out “whoops” among the silence of the forest and the town.

Chapter End Notes

Soooooooooooooooooooooo the poem Knox reads is "Beware: Do Not Read This Poem" by Ishmael Reed, Charlie’s is "Bowery Blues" by Jack Kerouac (my dad) and Neil’s ending poem is "Come, said my Soul" by Walt Whitman. I wanted to change up the poems they read because 1. we’ve heard ’em before, 2. I wanted to throw in some contemporary poetry, and 3. I love love love these poems. So much.

New chapters comin’ soon. Hope everyone had a great day today. xoxo
"No"

Chapter Summary

In which Charlie still likes Meeks and Neil finds out Todd’s never been to a school dance.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was five-thirty in the morning. Charlie had always been an early riser, but a brisk 5-minute walk to a school that didn’t start ‘til eight was not cause enough to get up before the sun. Apparently, Neil doesn’t feel the same.

“CHARLIE!” Neil shouts when Charlie finally picks up the phone that’s been ringing for a solid five minutes.

“Jesus Christ,” Charlie says, smashing his face into his pillow with the phone pressed against his ear. “Good morning, sunshine.”

“It’s a sunny day, and I’m ready to seize it, Dalton.” Charlie can hear the bright smile Neil holds on the other end of the line. “What do you want? It’s like, five A.M.”

“And I’ve been up since four A.M. How soon can I come over?”

“Whenever the hell you please, just as long as you let me sleep for the next 60 minutes.”

“YES! My savior. I’ll be there in 10.”

And 10 minutes later, as promised, Neil Perry arrives in Charlie’s room.

"Have I thought so long to see this morning’s face, and doth it give me such a sight as this?” he says, lifting the blanket covering Charlie’s face take a peek at him trying to sleep.

"You’ve been spending too much time reading poetry, Neil,” Charlie rubs his eyes and rolls over. “What’s got you up so early?”

Neil pokes around at Charlie’s bedside table. “My dad woke me up when he was getting ready to leave on his business trip. I’m bored. We’re walking to school together.”

“And you couldn’t go back to sleep?” Charlie says, staring at the ceiling. “Carpe?” Neil says, looking at Charlie questionably.

Charlie sighs, and rolls over again into the pillow. “Fine. Give me 20 minutes. Go make us breakfast or something.”

“Say no more,” Neil says, leaping and hitting the door frame with a whoop as he leaves the room.

First period was not Neil’s favorite. Sure, he had Charlie and Knox in that class, but it was Spanish, and he could hardly talk to them. It was a drag because the next period he had trig with Charlie and Todd, and every morning, Neil couldn’t wait to see Todd.

So every morning when the bell rang to end first period, Charlie had to scramble to keep up with Neil on their way to trig.

“Neil! Slow down, I’ve gotta piss.”

“Sorry, Charlie, it’s time to learn!”

Neil leaves Charlie at the bathroom door and looks around for Todd in the hallway.

“Todd!” He sees the rosy-haired boy walking alone and clutching an open red notebook tight against his chest turn around with wide eyes and look around for whoever is calling his name.
“Good morning!” Neil sings, running up to Todd and slipping an arm around his shoulders.

“Hey, Neil,” Todd says, smiling up at the taller boy and leaning into his warm touch.

“What’d you do this weekend?” Neil asks as they walk to their next class.

“Well, after sleeping in all Saturday morning…” he replies, smirking at Neil, who laughs.

“Oh man, me too. I was wasted.”

They both laugh as they turn the corner of the hallway.

Neil stops in his tracks.

“Neil? What is it?” Todd asks, following Neil’s gaze to the announcement board on the wall outside the cafeteria.

Hanging dead center on the orange paper-covered board is a dark blue flyer with a photo of a beautiful water scene on it. A Midsummer Night’s Dream, it reads. Open auditions October 1st, 10 A.M, in the Auditorium.

“I found it,” Neil says, his arms having dropped to his sides as he stares at the wall.

Todd looks back and forth between Neil and the flyer on the bulletin board. “Y-you found what?” he says, carefully.

“What I wanna do right now. What’s really, really inside of me.”

“A Midsummer Night’s Dream”?

“This is it.”

Todd is puzzled. “What is ‘this’?” he says, throwing air quotes around the word.

Neil breaks eye contact with his new dream to grin at Todd. “It’s a play, dummy.”

“W-well, I know that,” Todd says, wavering his eyes. “I-wh-wh-what does it have to do with you?”

“Right! They’re putting it on here! Open auditions. Open auditions!”

“Yes, so?” Todd says, still not getting it.

“So? I’m gonna act!”

Todd still has a puzzled expression, but when he realizes Neil is serious, a smile creeps onto his lips. They hold eye contact for a moment, both sporting goofy smiles.

“W-what about your dad?” he says when Neil breaks eye contact to take another look at the flyer.

Neil’s smile falters. “Well, first, I have to get the part. Then I can worry about that.”

“Yeah, but won’t he kill you if he finds out you went to an audition?”

“As far as I’m concerned, he won’t have to know about any of this.” Neil’s smile creeps back to his lips. “Carpe Diem,” he says, quietly.

“What?”

“Carpe Diem,” he says louder, taking Todd’s hand and running down the hall. “Carpe Diem!”

“Slow down there, boys,” Keating says, passing them on his way to the English room with a giant smile. “Save some of that enthusiasm for class.”

“Will do, Captain,” Neil says, returning the grin, and Todd nods along with a blush as they finish their trek to second period.

“So, speaking of bulletin board announcements, are you going to homecoming?” Neil says, slowing down pace to walk next to Todd.


“What do you mean you’re not going to homecoming?” Todd! It's the high school experience!” Neil says, stopping outside of the classroom. Even though he’s mostly joking about the importance of homecoming, he really does want Todd to go.

"I-I don’t know." Todd shakes his head. "I've never been. Why go now?"

"It's your senior year! And," Neil says, a huge grin plastered to his face. "I'll be there!"

This makes Todd crack a shy smile.

"Well, listen, Neil. I-I-appreciate this concern but…I’m not like you, alright? I don’t do this whole ‘high school experience’ thing.”

“Why not?”

“Why is this so important to you?”

Neil’s mouth fumbles for an answer. “Because…” he says. “You’re never stirred up by anything, Todd. Not school, not the club, not homecoming.”
“So you want me out?”
“No! I want you in! But being in means you gotta do something. You gotta be stirred up by something.”
“I’m stirred up by you.”
Neil looks at Todd, scanning his face. Todd can’t read his facial expression. He looks away.
“You say things and people listen. I-I’m not like that,” Todd says.
“Don’t you think you could be?”
“No,” Todd says, but he rubs his eye and looks up at Neil. “I-I don’t know, but that’s not the point. The, the point is that there’s nothing you can do about it, so you can just butt out. I can take care of myself just fine. Alright?” He says, holding his breath and glaring at Neil. When Neil doesn’t say anything, Todd just looks across the hall, studying the chipped paint on the lockers.
“No,” Neil says.
Todd’s heart begins to beat faster, and the peeling paint turns blurry. He looks back at Neil. “What do you mean, ‘no’?”
Neil smiles. “No.”
And with that, he spins into the classroom, leaving Todd leaning against the wall. Without reluctance, he follows Neil into class just as the bell rings, unable to wipe the smile off his face.

With the straw of his soy iced caramel macchiato between his fingers (that he totally didn’t sneak off campus to get during second period), Charlie struts into the social studies classroom twenty-five minutes late.
“Late again, Mr. Dalton?” The professor says, peering at Charlie over her thin-rimmed glasses straight out of a teen movie.
“Yep,” Charlie says, plunking into the seat next to Meeks. “Only the fourth time I’ve been more than ten minutes late. Can’t give me detention yet.”
“One more time, and I can,” she says. “We are only three weeks into the school year.”
She continues her lesson, and Charlie rolls his eyes.
“ Didn’t get me anything?” Meeks whispers, his lips turned down in a fake pout.
“Sorry babes,” Charlie says, sipping on his straw in glory. Meeks laughs.
“So, while you were gone, we got our research assignment partners,” Meeks says
“Research assignment?”
Meeks sighs. “You know. What we’ve been talking about all month. The experimental project and presentation.”
“Oh, yeah. I remember now.” Charlie says, leaning back in his seat and taking another sip of the coffee.
“Anyway, you and I are partners. Cool, right?”
Charlie nearly spits out his coffee. An entire semester working with Meeks on a social studies presentation?
“Yeah, cool,” Charlie says, smiling wide. He can’t decide if he wants to go skipping around the campus out of joy or go yell at Knox in the bathroom about what a bad idea this is.

Charlie to The Dead Poets, 2:22 P.M.
hey y’all who wants to get coffee after school

Knoxious to The Dead Poets, 2:24 P.M.
I’m in. pitts says he and meeks are working on something after school so they’re out

Neil to The Dead Poets, 2:25 P.M.
me! Lets meet at 3:30 I gotta go home first

Charlie to The Dead Poets, 2:25 P.M.
cool beans Knox meet me at my car after school

At 3:15, Neil waves goodbye to his mom and walks to the local Brewed Awakenings near the school. Knox and Charlie are already there, sipping on cappuccinos.
"Guys! Guys!" Neil says, running over to them in the corner of the coffee shop.
"Whoa, slow down there," Charlie says, giving Neil a questioning look. "What's up?"
"I'm gonna ask Todd to homecoming." Neil says, grinning from ear to ear and placing his hands on his hips proudly.
Meeks and Charlie give each other a look.
"Uh..." Meeks says, looking back at Neil.
"Not like on a date! As friends," Neil says. "He's never been. I wanna make it special for him."
Charlie looks at Knox again with wide eyes. "Yeah. Okay," he says slowly, and when Neil starts to look nervous, he plants an enthusiastic smile on his face.
The waitress comes over, and Neil orders his coffee. Knox and Charlie take the opportunity to discuss the idea through eyebrow-raising and pursed lips. Neil looks back at them as the waitress leaves, puzzled.
"Neil," Charlie says, setting his coffee down and leaning forward over the table. "Do you like Todd?"
Neil looks at Charlie and Knox with confusion. "What?"
"Oh..." Knox says, looking at Charlie. "We just thought...with all this homecoming stuff..."
"No, no!" Neil says. "No, I just wanted to make his homecoming special. I'm not – not gay."
Charlie nods. "We were just wondering."
"Nah, you don’t gotta worry." Neil says, putting a reassuring grin on his face.
"I wouldn’t be worried if you were."
Neil’s smile falters. Charlie meets his eyes across the table while he says the sentence, bright gold in the light shining in through the window, and they read something Neil can’t quite catch.
"Sorry," Charlie says, leaning back against his chair. "I get it. You want to make it special for him."
"Yeah," Neil says through an obviously fake smile. "I’ll be right back," he says, heading for the bathrooms.
"He likes Todd," Charlie says the second Neil is out of earshot.
"Hell yeah. Gosh, they’re cute." Knox says, grinning.
Noticing the way Charlie puts his hand to his forehead in frustration, Knox becomes concerned.
"Hey. What’s on your mind?"
Charlie sighs, and leans forward on the table. "You’re such a hopeless romantic, Knox."
"Hey, I’m just happy for them."
"I know, I know." Charlie sighs again.
"Why do Neil and Todd bother you so much?"
"They don’t."
"Bullshit, it bothers you." Knox says with as much sympathy as he can muster. "What is it?"
"I don’t really want to talk about it, Knox."
Knox’s eyes go wide. "OH, God, you too?"
"What?" Charlie raises an eyebrow.
"You...like Neil."
"What?! NO, oh."
"He runs a hand through his hair and looks intently at Knox. "No, I - I don’t like Neil."
Knox nods. "Okay, okay. I’m not going to push it. But Charlie?" Knox puts a hand on his shoulder. "Talk to me. If you need."
"It’s about Meeks, isn’t it."
"Knox?"
"Sorry, sorry. I’ll be quiet now."
"It’s okay. Yeah, it is about Meeks. He’s my social studies partner now. I have to work with him all
year on this stupid project.”
“Hey,” Knox says, patting Charlie’s shoulder again. “At least you can spend some alone time with him now.”
“What? And fall for him again?” Charlie says, a quiet hiss as Neil comes out of the bathroom and walks over to them.
“Well,” Knox says quietly, before Neil approaches. “It sounds to me like you already have.”

Chapter End Notes

Cue everyone's favorite scene, "no"

The quote Neil says to Charlie at the beginning is taken from Romeo and Juliet by Willy Shakespeare. I saw once that somebody said Hamlet would be Neil's favorite Shakes play, and I have to agree, but I remembered this quote n had to include it.

I was thinking abt how cute it would be to write a prequel fic for the actual movie, like one about how Neil and Charlie met and why Charlie hates Richard so much and Meeks and Pitts meeting and awww. Would anyone read that? bc i think im gonna try writing it!
“Great lesson today, boys,” says Keating, standing at the head of the classroom after another unusual lecture. “Now, class on Monday will be held outside. Wear gym clothes. I’ll see you all then.”

The bell rings just as he says his final words, and the students begin to gather their books.

“Aye, Neil, wanna come with us to the game tonight?” Knox asks as Neil throws his things into his backpack.

“I’m alright, thanks for asking,” he says, and Knox nods. “Cool, see you later,” he says as he and the rest of the group turn to leave the room. Charlie gives Neil a look when he doesn’t follow, but Neil waves him off.

“Don’t you have somewhere to be, Mr. Perry?” Keating says from where he sits on his desk, his hands together in his lap.

“Actually, I…” Neil begins, but he trails off.

Keating stands. “Is everything alright, Neil?”

Neil sighs, and plunks back into his seat. “Have you ever loved something that you aren’t supposed to? Something that…everyone would hate you for?”

Keating walks over to Neil and takes a seat in the desk in front of him. “Is this about the play? I heard you and Mr. Anderson talking about it.”

“Well, yeah…”

“Or is this about someone else.”

Neil looks at his hands.

“Both, maybe?” Keating says carefully.

“My father,” Neil starts, tears in his eyes but a mile playing on his lips. “He wouldn't like me acting. But it feels so right. And I haven’t even tried out yet.”

“Talk to him, Neil. Go to him. You never know what he might think if you tell him what you just told me.”

“Yeah, you’re right.” Neil says. “But…”

“There is something else, isn’t there?”


“What is it, Neil? It’s alright.”

“It’s-it’s Todd.”

Keating nods carefully, as if he knows exactly what’s on Neil’s mind.

“If I told my friends,” Neil says, the tears increasing, “I don’t know what they’d think. What they’d say.”

“Your friends love you. Neil.” Keating says, putting his hand on Neil’s shoulder. “Trust me, this isn’t something they would judge you for.”

“I don’t even know if I like him, Captain.” Neil wipes away his tears. “That’s the problem, I’ve never felt this before.”

“Tell them, Neil.” Keating says. “Tell him. If you do so, you might gain something wonderful from it. If you don’t, you’ll never know what might have been.”

Neil nods, his tears slowly decreasing. “You’re right. I’m sorry, sir.”
“Don’t be sorry, Neil,” Keating says, as Neil nods. “Talk to me about this whenever you need. I’ve been there.”
The words puzzle Neil, but his problem quickly resurfaces, leaving his other thoughts for later. Neil nods again, standing and grabbing his backpack quickly. He leaves without another word, though he already feels he knows what to do better than he had ten minutes before.

Friday night lights. Nachos. Soda. Cheerleaders. Freshman year, the boys had thought things like football games, homecoming and prom were the epitome of the high school experience.
Boy, were they wrong.
"Football games suck." Meeks says, pushing up his glasses with his knuckles and shoving a nacho chip into his mouth.
Knox sighs, and looks out onto the field where Chris is. Her blonde hair is tied back with a dark ribbon and her cheer skirt’s a deep red, and she looks beautiful shining under the stadium lights.
"We could leave, you know." Pitts suggests, raising and eyebrow as if to hint that he very much wants to leave.
"Not until Knoxious talks to his girl."
Knox jolts into the conversation, just now realizing what they’re talking about.
"No," he says, throwing his napkin onto the empty paper nacho tray. "You guys can leave. Really. I'll be fine."
Meeks pulls a questioning face, and studies Knox for a little too long with narrowed eyes to see if it really is okay. "Alright," he says, concluding it’s true, "let’s go then, G."
The two boys stand up and walk away, leaving Knox with his chin resting on his hand alone at the top of the bleachers. He’s been to all three of the football games now, always dragging along at least one of the other guys, and not once has he gotten the courage to actually talk to Chris. They smile at each other every day in math class, and sometimes she asks how he’s doing, or vice versa. He really thought this would be it—this would be the day.
The scoreboard reads 40-29, with three minutes left in the game, and Knox retreats down the stairs in shame thinking about how the day couldn’t get any worse.
"HEY, watch it, buddy!"
Knox whirls around at the bottom of the stairs to see a dark-haired girl gaping at him in anger. She wears a floral button up shirt under a light pink sweater, all freshly covered in dark red chili sauce and bright yellow cheese.
"Oh my god, I am so sorry." He says, his hand covering his mouth in shock.
"God, don't even worry about it. This night couldn't get much worse." The girl rolls her eyes.
"Hey, I was just thinking that-“ he starts to say, forgetting the situation, but she’s already gone.
Behind him, Knox hears the crowd begin to go wild. As the opposing team's quarterback makes a last-minute dash for the points, the whistle blows and the game is over. The cheerleaders and a group of dedicated and spirited students wearing the Welton colors run onto the field to congratulate the players on their win, just like every game. Just like tradition.
Like he’s witnessing it straight out of a movie, Knox watches Chet Danbury pick Chris up and spin her around in the air, and when he brings her down they begin kissing and don’t stop.
“Shit, shit, shit,” Knox whispers to himself, deciding it’s time to go. He spins around and makes a beeline for the parking lot, keeping his eyes anywhere but on the people around him. He turns slowly, sees the same girl as before.
"Hey," she says, letting go of his shirt sleeve. She’s holding the pink sweater she wore earlier, wearing just an open button down and a tank top, free of nacho stains.
"I'm sorry I spilled nachos on you. You look better, though, so...” He says, running a hand through his hair nervously when she doesn’t walk away.
"Yeah, don't worry about it." She says again, genuinely looking like she no longer cares. "Hey, are you gay?"
"W-what?" Knox says, backing up.
"Oops, maybe not. I'm asking because you spend a lot of time watching my brother."
"W-why..." he starts to say, but then turns around and looks to where the girl is pointing onto the field. Chet and Chris are posing for a picture, his arms wrapped around her shoulders where she stands short on the ground.
Knox turns back around, and the girl looks at him with eyes so dark they're almost black. "No, I'm not watching your brother."
She nods. "So you like Chris."
Knox feels blood rush to his cheeks. "I don't even know your name, and you're questioning me about who I do and don't like?" He says accusingly.
"Hey, you spilled nachos on me, dude." She says, shrugging as if she doesn't care anyway. "I'm Virginia. Virginia Danbury. You can call me Ginny."
"Okay, Ginny Danbury, why's your night so bad?" He says, remembering what she had said earlier when her sweater was covered in beans and cheese.
"Because," Ginny says, pointing again to Chet and Chris, "that bitch is my best friend. But now she's dating my brother, so I've been demoted to number two."
Knox nods. "No offense, your brothers an asshole."
Ginny's widens her eyes. "I know, fucker. I know. Chris can do a million times better."
Knox looks back at Chris again, and imagines how much better he could treat her.
"Do you have a car?" Ginny asks.
"Yeah, why?"
"I don't have a car here. I don't wanna go home with my brother." She sighs reluctantly. "And her."
"I'll take you home." Knox says, knowingly.
Ginny smiles. "Thanks. I owe you one."
"Let's call it even." Knox says, gesturing towards the sweater. "For your shirt."

Chapter End Notes

So, when I originally started writing this, I included Ginny bc lets face it, DPS needs more girls. But then I kept writing, and...I love Ginny.

Also, the next few chapters are some of my favorites, so stay tuned. xxxxx
Okay, I just HAD to add the soccer scene. That's gotta be one of my top five favorite scenes from the film. Ugh.

Also, at the end, it kinda switches between two scenes. I hope it isn't too confusing.

When Saturday finally rolls around, Neil’s up before his alarm with excitement. And so is Charlie - again - because Neil needs someone to be excited with.

“I’d say what’s up, but I figure you’re all pumped up about play tryouts,” Charlie says when he picks up the phone way too early in the morning. His voice is masked with his grogginess, but his cocky demeanor is intact nonetheless.

“You know it!” Neil shouts, leaping onto his bed with the phone pressed against his ear.

Charlie laughs. Neil’s quiet for a minute, knowing that’s not really all of the reason he called Charlie.

“What is it?” Charlie asks, perking up suddenly.

Neil licks his lips. “I…” his voice shakes, and soon he’s regretting this a great deal. “What…what would you say if I told you I liked someone?”


Neil can’t help but laugh.

“We always tell each other this stuff. It’s really no big deal,” Charlie reassures.

“It’s Todd.” Neil blurts out, waiting for the response. Charlie may have said he’d support Neil no matter what, but Neil can’t help but feel this is a different situation.

“Okay,” Charlie says, after a moment of silence.

“Okay?”

“Yeah. I actually kinda figured,” Charlie says. Neil can almost hear his shrug at the other end of the line.

“What if I told you I liked guys too?” Charlie says.

Neil grins as a wave of intense relief washes over him.

“Why’d you wait ‘till 9 A.M. to tell me?” Charlie says, laughing.

“When I told you I liked guys too?”

Neil gets off the phone with Charlie, he’s got a newfound rush of confidence soaring through him. He’s finally about to audition for the play and ask his crush to homecoming, both things he
never would have done a simple few months ago. Of course, his father is still a problem. But he'll work around that.
“Where are you headed to, son?”
Neil stops in the doorframe of the kitchen, unable to make a quick exit like he’d hoped.
Mr. Perry nods. “Alright, son, make sure you get it done.”
Neil smiles and nods, darting to the door the second his father looks away. Just then, his phone buzzes in his pocket.

tdanderson 9:25 am
good luck at play tryouts today! <3

Neil smiles as he stares down at his phone.

neilperry 9:27 am
Thank you love

He debates adding the “love” at the end of the text, but does it anyway. “Carpe Diem,” he whispers to himself. “Let’s get this part.”

Aside from meetings, the only time the entire group got together was during lunchtime, and it made for a hectic hour. After grabbing food, everyone met up at their table in the corner of the cafeteria to discuss whatever they wanted to for the hour.
“Where’s Knox?” Neil asks, shoving a bite of mozzarella sandwich in his mouth.
“Good question. He ran away the second the bell rang.” Cameron says.
Everyone looks at each other, wondering what Knox is up to. Suddenly, he comes up to the table, ad he isn’t alone.
"Hey, guys, this is Ginny."
There is silence for a moment as a short, quiet-looking girl walks up to the table and stands next to Knox, and the boys are startled. It's Neil who breaks the silence.
"Oh, hey." He says, then looks like he can’ remember what he’s supposed to do. "I'm Neil Perry."
"Ginny Danbury." She says, smiling politely.
"Danbury?" Charlie says. "Like, Chet Danbury?"
Ginny nods, and Charlie grimaces.
"Charlie Dalton. You look too nice to be Chet Danbury's sister."
"Don't mind him. I'm Steven Meeks," Meeks says, sticking out a hand.
"Gerard Pitts. You're the junior in my trig class, aren't you?" Pitts says, following suit.
"I am." She replies, smiling.
One by one they introduce themselves, until finally Knox and Ginny take a seat.
"So, Knox, we were talking about homecoming." Neil says. "Who's going?"
"I'm in." Says Pitts.
"Yeah, me too." Says Knox.
"You bringing a date?" Charlie nods towards Ginny.
"No-no. I met Ginny at the football game. We're friends now."
Ginny nods quickly.
Neil raises his eyebrows. "Well, Ginny Danbury, would you like to come with us?" He says, giving her a warm smile.
Ginny returns the favor. "Yeah, actually, that would be nice."
"Cool!" He says, attempting to make Ginny feel at home.
"I say no meeting Friday. We should all go to the game." Knox says, and Meeks and Pitts groan.
"Never." Meeks says, and Pitts shakes his head in agreement.
“No way. If we go to one game, it’s gonna be this one,” says Charlie. “I hate football, but I say we
"I agree." Says Neil. "As leader, I call off the meeting. You’re going."
"Meeting?" Ginny says, and everyone falls quiet.
"It's okay, guys, I think we can trust her." Knox says, after no one speaks for a moment.
"Yeah," Charlie says, and a few of the other boys speak in agreement.
Neil leans in towards Ginny. "It's called the Dead Poets Society. It's a club we created, all of us guys." He says, gesturing to everyone at the table.
"She should come to a meeting," Charlie says. "Get the full experience."
Knox looks at Ginny, happy the group is accepting her so well, and she nods quickly.
"Sure." She says. "I'll try anything once."
"Except sex." Charlie says under his breath, and only Meeks beside him laughs and nearly spits out the bite of salad he was eating.

As they exit the lunchroom, the group splits into pairs or threesomes and Charlie and Meeks break off and drift into the back.
"So...are you going to homecoming?" Meeks asks, with a casual flare to his words.
"I don't know. Neil wants me to," Charlie says. "I don't even have a date."
"Yeah. All the boys are going stag," Meeks replies. "Well, except Neil."
"I know. It's not that I mind being single at homecoming," he says, attempting to mask how much we wants to go with Meeks, "it's just depressing when there's someone you'd like to be with. Plus, I've gone three times already. It's not THAT special."
Meeks laughs, and then turns his head to look at Charlie shyly. "What if we just hung out at my place instead?"
Charlie's heart begins beating fast, but he shrugs and smiles and forces a giant "yes!" down.
"You know, we can get pizza and watch tv and stuff." Meeks says, nodding with regal enthusiasm.
"It'll be SOOOO much better than the real thing."
Both laugh at Meeks' facial expression, and Charlie brushes his arm as they walk. The touch is short, but the heat from Meeks' shoulder remains on Charlie's arm for far too long afterwards.
"Yeah, let's do it." Charlie says, swallowing a mouthful of nerves and voices telling him not to get too close.

“Leave it up to Keating for an unorthodox soccer game.” Charlie says, rolling his eyes as he fumbles with the lock on his gym locker.
“Hey, it’s cool,” Knox yells across the room. “And put a damn shirt on, Dalton.”
“And ruin the show? No way,” Charlie says back with a goofy smirk, earning him a punch in the shoulder from Neil.

“Now, devotees may argue that one sport or game is better than another. For me, sport is actually a chance for us to have other human beings push us to excel.” Keating yells from where he stands on the bottom step of the bleachers, surrounded by students in Welton t-shirts and soccer shorts. “I want you all to come over here and take a slip of paper and line up single file.”
Keating stands in front of the students, ripping pieces of paper off a clipboard and directing the students where to stand.
“What’s this all about?” Knox whispers as he and the boys get in line.
“We’ll see,” Neil says, face full of excitement.
Keating blows his whistle at the talking boys. “Line up here, kids!” He says, placing a soccer ball in front of Pitts at the front of the line. Pitts stares at it with confliction.
Keating gestures at the ball. “You know what to do, Pitts.”
Pitts looks at the slip of paper in hand with slight confusion. “Oh, to struggle against great odds. To meet enemies undaunted,” he says, looking up at Keating for approval.
“Sounds to me like you’re daunted. Say it again like you’re undaunted.”
“Oh, to struggle against great odds, to meet enemies undaunted!” Pitts says, louder.
“Now, go on.” Keating says, pointing at the soccer ball.
Pitts kicks the ball, and the next student moves up.
“To be a sailor of the world, bound for all ports.”
“Next. Louder!”
“Oh, I live to be the ruler of life, not a slave.”
After placing the next ball, Keating walks to the boombox sitting on the bleachers, and hits play.
“To mount the scaffolds. To advance to the muzzle of huns with perfect nonchalance.”
Meeks steps up just as the music begins to fill the atmosphere.
“Come on Meeks, listen to the music!”
Meeks looks at Keating with confusion, but reads anyway. “To dance, clap hands, exalt, shout, skip, roll on, float on.”
“YES!” Keating shouts.
“Oh to have henceforth the poem of new joys,” says the next boy, before throwing his paper on the ground and ignoring the soccer ball completely.
“Oh, boo!” says Keating as Charlie steps up to the plate. “Come on Charlie, let it fill your soul.”
Charlie raises his arms, punching the air. “To indeed be a God!”
“Yes!”

Words Charlie and Knox have said replaying like a broken record in his brain, Neil sits at the curb of the cul-de-sac with the music in his car playing at full blast. He’s been staring at his reflection in the rearview mirror for fifteen minutes, dark hair and brown eyes on pale skin, the collar of a white button-down itching his neck.
Todd’s the only one home; Neil knows not only because Todd’s told him before his parents work late in the city but also because Todd’s faded blue Malibu is the only car sitting in his driveway. The classical music Keating had played during their soccer game is still stuck in his head, and somehow this is enough motivation to finally get out of the car. Neil walks up to the door with the leaves of a lily flower tickling his left wrist.
He hears the doorbell ring through the house, and almost immediately follow the scratching of a dog and the footsteps of the boy inside. Neil considers making a run for it more than once.

“Come on boys!” Keating yells, whistle in hand. “Go Charlie, get on him!”
Charlie confronts Meeks, who has the ball, on the field. Meeks looks around for someone to pass to, but Charlie kicks it away just in time for Neil, his teammate, to snatch it up and make a goal.
“Yes! Good job boys!” Keating shouts.
“Wahoo!” shouts Neil, running up to Charlie and high-fiving him.
“Excellent game, boys,” Keating says. “I hope you enjoyed this as much as I did.”
Neil stands in the center of the field, wiping sweat off his forehead. Todd comes up behind him, grinning.
“Wow, that was - that was amazing,” he says, and Neil wraps an arm around him as they walk back to the locker rooms.

Todd opens the door, pushing his curly-haired dog back into the house. His hair is wet and messy, and he wears an oversized blue sweater with the sleeves pulled down over his hands.
He doesn’t look up for a moment. “Come on, Bear, get back in the house.”
“Todd.”
Todd stops, as if noticing the voice, and looks up slowly through his hair. “Oh my god, Neil.”
“Will you go to homecoming with me?” Neil says, pushing the bouquet of roses and lilies in Todd’s direction.
Todd looks shocked for moment, but then a giant smile breaks out on his face. “Oh my god, Neil,” he says again. “Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

I love Anderperry so much
that's all
stay tuned for more very soon
The days in the week leading up to homecoming pass quickly, as tests are taken and homework is rushed to be completed. When the final bell rings Friday afternoon, not one student doesn't feel a rush of relief in their chests.

“Neil.” Charlie says, looking Neil dead in the eye as he climbs into the passenger seat of Neil’s Camry. “You need to clean your car.”

Empty bottles of water and wrappers from Wendy’s and Taco Bell food dot the floorboard of the passengers seat, and as Meeks and Pitts climb into the back, they’re pushing items onto the floor to make room to sit.

“Drive yourself.” Neil says sarcastically as he inserts the key into the ignition and tosses Charlie the aux cord.

Charlie gives him a look of annoyance, but doesn’t say a word as he plugs his phone in to the speakers and immediately turns on New Americana by Halsey, earning sighs from the duo in the backseat.

When Neil, Charlie, Meeks, and Pitts pull into the parking lot of the home team’s school, Knox, Ginny, Todd, and Cameron are all waiting next to the spirit rock and wave enthusiastically when they see Neil’s car.


The game is already fifteen minutes in when the group shows up, and Knox immediately leads them to his usual spot on the bleachers where he has a perfect view of Chris Noel.

“Ah, yes. The High School Experience. Watching lovesick puppy Knox Overstreet paw after a beautiful and far away girl.” Charlie says, leaning against the wall of the stadium bleachers.

“Trust me, you don’t want her.” Ginny says, rolling her eyes.

“Whoa, whoa.” Neil says, looking surprised. “Did you date her?”

Ginny’s eyes go wide. “No way. She’s been my best friend since we were basically born. And now she’s dating my brother.”

Everyone suddenly remembers that Chet is Ginny’s older brother.


Ginny sighs. “She started using me to get close to Chet. It’s bullshit. She can do better than him. But when I told her that, and that she hurt me by using me, she freaked out and got angry.”


“She’d be better off with Knox, are you kidding?” Ginny says. “I love my brother, but he’s a dick to girls.”

“See?” Knox says, gesturing to Chris and looking at Charlie with wide eyes. “There is hope.”

Despite their lack of enthusiasm earlier in the week, everyone manages to have a good time at the game. Even though he knows nothing about football, Pitts gets very into the sport, and with the help of Ginny, who does know a lot about football, begins cheering or booing at everything that happens. Knox joins in on it, and soon the three of them are throwing popcorn at each other, laughing, and actually enjoying watching the game.

Charlie, Meeks, Todd, and Neil don’t pick up football so quickly, but instead sit at the top of the bleachers talking and laughing and joking around. Meeks and Charlie still don’t know Todd extremely well, but by the end of the night, any past awkwardness is lifted and they talk freely about anything and everything.
“You did what?” Todd says, covering his mouth while laughing to avoid spitting out a mouthful of nacho chips.
“Yeah, I’m serious.” Neil says, tears streaming down his face from laughing. “He dressed up as Hannah Montana and we did the whole fucking dance to like, four of her songs. And we recorded every single one.”
“That’s fucking awesome.” Meeks says, wiping his tears away.
Charlie, although slightly red from embarrassment, snorts from laughing so hard. This causes everyone to erupt into another fit of laughter, and they just keep laughing.
“I’m gonna go get some hot chocolate.” Meeks says in between breaths, a wide smile planted on his face. “Charlie, would you like to join me?”
Todd and Neil both say “me!” and Charlie and Meeks make their way down the stairs and to the concessions stand.
They walk in silence for a second, Charlie afraid to say anything. Every time he’s alone with Meeks, he forgets how bad it is that he’s got a crush.
“So, tomorrow.” Meeks says, bringing up their plans for the first time since he suggested it. “You still up for our anti-homecoming date?”
At the mention of the word ‘date’ Charlie’s heart begins to pound. He knows what Meeks means, of course, but...he can’t help but hope he’s wrong. But he looks at Meeks out of the corner of his eye with a playful expression anyway.
“Oh, shit. Uh, not a date...you know what I meant,” Meeks stammers.
“Do I?”
Meeks sighs, attempting to look angry, but his smile gives him away. “Oh, fuck off, Charlie.”
“Hey, hey. Sorry. Yes, I’m in.”
“Cool.” Meeks says, smiling and nearly blushing, and Charlie can’t help but grin.
“Is anyone else coming?” Charlie asks.
“Nah, everyone else is going to the dance.” Meeks says, looking at Charlie again. “And I thought it might be fun to be just us. We haven’t hung out alone in forever.”
Charlie’s mouth suddenly feels very dry, and the familiar voice telling him not to fall for Meeks is back in his head. But he can’t help what he says next.
“I’d love that.”

“So, how long have you guys known each other?” Ginny asks, wrapping her sweater tighter around herself in the cold. She, Knox, and Pitts ended up abandoning the game, opting to go for a walk around the stadium.
Knox whistles. “Oh wow. I’m not sure.”
“I met Meeks when we were in math club together in elementary school,” Pitts says. “Then Cameron joined and we met him and the three of us met you guys.”
“Yeah,” says Knox. “Charlie’s parents and my parents have been friends for ages, so I’ve known him forever. And then he met Neil sometime in preschool, and then it was the three of us.”
“Wow,” Ginny says, looking surprised. “That’s a long time.”
“Haven’t you known Chris that long?”
She sighs. “Yeah, we were neighbors when we were little. And we were best friends for like, ten years.”
“When did she-” Knox starts, but is cut off. “Oh my god.”
“What?” Ginny asks, but then she sees it.
It is Chris Noel, dressed prim in her Welton cheerleading uniform, crying behind what appears to be the janitor’s shed. The three of them gape at her, but she doesn’t notice. She just holds her head between her legs and cries.
“Chris?” Knox says, approaching her despite Ginny’s whispers to leave her alone.
“Wha-” Chris looks up and sees Knox standing above her, his hands shoved in his pockets. “Knox?
What are you doing here?"

“Well, it is a football game. You know, for my high school.”

“I’ve never seen you at one before,” she says, shaking her head. “I’m sorry. I just want to be left alone right now.”

Knox is immediately angry, but he tries his best not to show it. He’s been to literally every game, mostly just to see her cheer. But she doesn’t even notice.

But before he can get another word out, Ginny steps out from behind Knox.

“He dumped you, didn’t he.”

Chris’ face after that proves she hadn’t noticed Ginny standing by Knox before. “Hi - hey, Gin.”

“Don’t.” Ginny scoffs, biting her tongue. “I warned you. You probably shouldn’t get back together with him when he asks you out again in two days, but you didn’t listen to me the first time, so I won’t say any more.”

“Ginny, he’s your brother!” Chris says, crying harder now and throwing her hands in the air. “And you’re my best friend. Aren’t you supposed to help us?”

“Hell no! I was your best friend, before you stopped talking to me and trying to fuck my brother! We haven’t hung out in months, Chris. Months. Because every time you ask me if you can come over, you end up ditching me for Chet. Until you stopped even asking me.”

Chris look like she’s about to respond, but Ginny cuts her off. “Not to mention, you never even asked me if this was okay! You used me to get with him, my own fucking brother!”

Chris begins bawling, and Knox can see Ginny shaking. He comes up to her, wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her away.

“Sorry, Chris.” Pitts says before scampering after the two of them, and Chris is left on her own.

“I hate her.” Ginny says, wiping her eyes on the sleeves of her sweater.

“Come on, Gin, don’t say that.” Knox says, pulling her in for a hug.

“I’m fine. I’m kind of horrible,” she says, crying into Knox’s chest. “One of you should check on her.”

While Knox desperately wants to, he holds on to Ginny for a while, letting her relax in his arms. This is more important at the moment.

“Thank you, Knox.” Ginny says. He pulls away, and sees that she’s mostly dry-eyed.

“Pittsie, why don’t you guys go back up?” Knox says, looking towards Chris. “I’ll go make sure she’s at least somewhat okay.”

Pitts puts an arm around Ginny and they walk away, and Knox takes a deep gulp. This feels like possibly one of the biggest moments of his life. He’s about to go back behind the building when he hears his name behind him.

“Knox?”

Behind him stands Chris, red-eyed and puffy-faced but mostly done crying. “Is Ginny okay?”

“Yeah,” he says. “Well, no, but she will be.”

She purses her lips and Knox can see tears brimming her eyes again. “I know, I’m horrible,” Chris says, wiping her eyes again. “You must think I’m just horrible. I didn’t think about it while I was dating him, I thought I was happy. Go figure.” She says, gesturing around her, and her voice goes quieter. “Look at where I am now.”

Everything inside of Knox wants to pull her in, hug her, kiss her, and take her home and make sure she’s alright and Chet can’t ever get to her again. “I like - I like you, Chris, but that’s kind of awful,” he says with a stutter, even though knows it won’t matter. He knows Ginny’s right, and that Chet will ask her out again in a few days, maybe even before homecoming, and he won’t matter anymore. “I’m sorry, Chris.”

She looks shocked, as if she can’t believe what he’s said. He doesn’t wait for her next reaction before he turns on his heel and walks away.
Meeks as they walk back from the concession stands.
“Yeah, I’m good.” Meeks says, holding up the drink carrier to showcase his ability, smiling, and turning on his heel to walk away.
The minute Meeks is out of sight, Charlie clenches his fist, turning and leaning against the metal of the bottom of the stadium bleachers. How, after three months, was he still not over Stephen Meeks? The self hate began to seep in and tears brimmed his eyes, and suddenly, Charlie wanted nothing more than to be anywhere but there.
“Charlie?”
The voice behind him was quiet and careful, and Charlie recognized it immediately. He couldn’t decide if it was perfect that she had been the one to find him or not.
He came off the wall, and turned around to see Ginny Danbury standing behind him. She looked concerned, her arms gently at her sides as if she wanted to reach out to him but couldn’t.
“What’s wrong?”
Automatically, Charlie clenches his teeth and looks away. After years of keeping the secret, he searches for a quick excuse and his heart begins to slam against his chest. But why should he care if she knows his secrets? There’s already rumors about him, and it’s not like she could do anything with the information. Maybe telling someone other than Knox couldn’t be the worst thing in the world.
“I’m in love with my best friend.” He says, smiling as if he can’t believe himself. “And you’re only the second person to know. In over a year.”
She nods, as if she knows how he feels. Charlie can’t help wondering if she does. “I don’t know you well enough to guess which one of them it is,” she says, and then looks at her feet. “But if he doesn’t know, you shouldn’t be afraid to tell him.”
Even though he’s heard Knox say it a million times, somehow it sounds different coming off of Ginny’s lips. As if she’s not saying it because it’s the obvious answer, but as if she really thinks he should be doing it.
“I know you’re probably scared.” She says, her voice shaking. “I’ve been there. More than once.”
“Why should I tell him?” Charlie says, almost sneering, though he knows why.
“Because,” Ginny says, almost a whisper, “the friendship between you guys is special. Almost in a creepy way.”
Both of them laugh, and she continues. “But besides that, you’ll regret it if you don’t. And you’ll never get over it if you don’t. It might ruin things for a little while, but it always goes back to the way it was if you really love your friends the way I think you do. And if he doesn’t accept it and love you just the same, what kind of friend is he?”
How he got to crying under the bleachers and hearing Ginny Danbury, of all people, spill exactly his worst fears onto him, Charlie’s not sure. And he doesn’t say anything after this, but he doesn’t need to.
“Which one is it?” Ginny asks, not as shyly as before.
Charlie bites his lip, and looks at her directly for the first time since they began talking. “Meeks.”
“Glasses and red hair?”
Charlie laughs. “Yeah.”
“It wouldn’t surprise me if he liked you too.” She says, sighing. “He looks the gayest out of all of you. Except Todd.”
“Whoa, what? Todd’s gay?” Charlie says, as if he didn’t have the idea himself.
“I have no idea. But you all seem like it.” She shrugs, and Charlie laughs again. Ginny smiles.
“Let’s go back up.” She says, holding out her hand for Charlie to take it. He grins at her, and takes her hand gladly.

“Okay, everyone, picture time!” Ginny says, holding out her phone for a selfie.
Huddled up under a blanket in the corner sit Neil and Todd, both of them giving Ginny’s camera a shy smile. Pitts sits next to them, with his head resting on Meeks underneath, neither of them looking
prepared for the photo. Next to Meeks is Charlie, who gives his signature smirk and eyebrow raise, right in the center, with Cameron to his right, looking slightly annoyed. And in front is Ginny, Knox’s arm around her, giving her a kiss on the cheek as she smiles and snaps the picture. “Perfect!” She exclaims, and uploads the picture to Instagram right as the final buzzer goes off and signals the end of the game.

Despite losing to the opposite team, all eight of them start cheering and whistling and throwing their hands in the air, earning them a fair share of looks from classmates and parents. But they don’t care, they cheer on anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Okay 1. I always imagine Charlie listening to all those electropop/dreampop artists like lana and halsey, or weird artists like natalia kills or melanie martinez, can't you see it ahh
2. My love for Ginny is growing extremely, I can't wait for more of her omg

Next chap is cute homecoming stuffs....

Also, I love thinking abt what kind of music the boys would listen to or what car they would have (like Neil's camry) lmao
“Okay. Pink or black?” Ginny says, holding up a pair of pastel pink heels and another of lacey black flats. Knox and Pitts, positioned leaning against the headboard of Ginny’s bed, gape at her, clueless. Meanwhile, Neil sits at the foot of the bed, staring intently at Ginny. “Pink. Definitely pink.” He says, and Ginny peers at the shoes and nods in agreement. She puts the flats back in her closet, and spins around at Knox and Pitts, who are both looking at Knox’s phone and laughing as they scroll through Instagram. “You guys,” she says, borderline whiny, “It’s four. We have to leave in an hour.” Knox clicks his phone off and stretches. “I’m starting to rethink this whole homecoming thing,” he says. “Hell no.” Neil says, standing before the two boys, “Both of you are going. And you’re gonna enjoy it.” “Easy for you to say, you have a date!” Pitts says. “My date is Todd Anderson,” Neil says, as though the words don’t make his heart flutter. “And Ginny doesn’t have a date either.” “Come on, Knox, show Chris how much fun you can have without a girl,” Ginny says, pulling on Knox’s arm. “I’ll be your dates!” Knox can’t help but laugh as Ginny pulls him off the bed and starts dancing to the music playing on the radio in the corner of her room. Neil sits down next to Pitts, both laughing and cheering Knox on. “Okay, okay,” Knox says, in between laughs. “Let’s get ready.”

---

Meeks 12:39 PM.
Hey, what time you wanna come over?

Charlie 12:41 PM.
Is like 2 ok

Meeks 12:42 PM.
Anytime. I’ve got a gallon of ice cream and a whole box of wii games with your name on it.

Charlie 12:42 PM.
I’ll be over in 10.

Ten minutes later, as promised, Charlie is smoothing down the collar of his dark button-up while staring at the wooden door to Stephen Meeks’ house. And he’s shaking. Charlie Dalton is nervous to spend a day alone with a kid he’s known since middle school. “Shit,” he whispers, with only the door to listen. Before he can do anything, the door opens - and there stands Meeks, looking adorable as ever in a green Christmas sweater with his glasses pushed on top of his head, slightly squinting at Charlie. “How long were you planning to stand out there?” he says, the corner of his mouth lifting into a smirk. Charlie takes a deep breath and steps inside before Meeks can make any further stabs at him.

With Ginny fixing Knox and Pitts up before dinner, Neil leaves to pick up Todd. Todd only lives
five minutes from Neil, but he lives 15 from Ginny, so Neil drives and takes the opportunity to jam out to Madonna on the way.

Neil’s heart is thumping the whole way to Todd’s. He still can’t believe that he managed to score a date with Todd, even if it is platonic. Even if it doesn’t feel platonic. Even if Neil’s starting to wish it wasn’t platonic.

When Neil pulls up, there’s only Todd’s car in the driveway. Neil walks to the door, another bouquet of flowers (this time, tiger lillies) in hand.

Todd opens the door before Neil even knocks, looking incredibly adorable in a classy black-and-white suit, his hair still messy and flopping into his eyes. Neil’s so taken aback, he doesn’t say anything for a minute - the two boys just stand smiling at each other for a moment, neither of them phased by how awkward this would have been just a mere month ago.

Behind Todd appears a tall, blond man only a few years older than Todd, and Neil remembers seeing the face in the hallway graduate photos a few times before.

“So, you guys going on your date, or what?” Jeffrey Anderson says, wrapping his arm around Todd’s shoulders and reaching out for a handshake from Neil. “Hey,” he says, nodding at Neil. “Come on, Jeff, it’s just homecoming,” Todd says, blushing.


“I thought your brother went to Harvard,” Neil questions as he opens the car door for Todd.

“He does. He comes home every few weekends.”

“Even when your parents are out of town?”

“H-he-he comes to see me.”

Neil nods, deciding not to push it any further.

They sit in silence for a moment, Madonna still playing quietly out of the speaker. “N-Neil?” Todd says quietly.

“Yeah?”

“You look really nice.”

A smile breaks out on Neil’s face, and he can feel his pulse in his throat. “Thank you, Todd,” he says, the words sputtering out. Todd stares ahead, smiling slightly, a little red blush breaking out on his face.

“You look great too,” Neil adds quickly.

Todd blushes more and looks down at his lap.

A few minutes later, the boys pull up next to Ginny, Knox, Pitts, and Cameron, who are sitting in their car singing loudly along to the radio in the parking lot of a local diner.

“Fantastic singing!” Neil shouts as they climb out of the car.

“Hey, I had to prove to Gin how good of a singer I am!” Pitts yells back.

They enter the diner, where about 40 other Welton students looking for a cheap pre-homecoming dinner are, and get a booth of two tables pushed together in the back of the room. Everyone orders a couple rounds of pancakes and milkshakes and fries, which quickly turns into a fry-dipping-and-throwing contest, much to the comedic relief of the tired waitress serving them.

“Come on, Meeks, you can do better than that!” Britney Spears blasts from the speakers as Meeks and Charlie follow the cliche moves of the colorful figure on the screen. Charlie’s ripped off his button-down, revealing a plain white v-neck underneath, and Meeks is wiping the sweat off his forehead as he tries to keep up.

The song ends, and both hit the gold move. Meeks tosses his Wii remote on the couch and falls back into it, scooching over for Charlie to sit next to him.

“I really think I got you that round,” Meeks says, as they watch the score on the screen.
“Oh, come on! I beat you by like 200 points!”
“189,” Meeks says, smirking. “I’m getting better.”
From upstairs comes the rumbling of feet bounding down the stairs, and within a matter of seconds a short boy around the age of 10 leaps over the side of the couch and into Meeks’ lap, knocking him over and into Charlie.
“Well, hello, Thomas,” Meeks says, laughing, as he pulls the boy onto his knees and lifts himself off Charlie.
“Whatcha doin?” Thomas asks, brushing a mop of bright red hair out of his eyes.
“Sorry about that,” calls another voice from across the room. Charlie looks up to see an older boy a few years younger than Meeks standing in the doorframe, chewing nervously on his thumbnail.
“Hey, don’t worry about it.” Meeks says, picking Thomas up and setting him down next to the other boy. “Charlie, meet Thomas,” Meeks says, pointing to the younger boy, “and Finn,” he says, pointing to the older boy.
“Charlie Dalton,” he says, staying seated on the couch but smiling at the boys nonetheless.
“Would you mind if I went to a friend’s house, Stevie?” Finn asks, running a hand through his dark hair that is very unlike his brothers’.
“Sure, where?”
Obviously bored of the conversation, Thomas comes running over to Charlie and plops down next to him on the couch.
“Hey,” Charlie says, smiling at the boy.
“Are you Stevie’s boyfriend?” Thomas asks, rocking back and forth on the couch.
Charlie’s ears get hot. Boyfriend? Does that mean Meeks has had a boyfriend before? Does that mean Meeks talks about his family?
“Tommy, you wanna play a couple games with us? Finn’s gonna go over to Savannah’s house,” Meeks says as Finn mouths a ‘thank you’ to him and dashes out the door. Meeks turns to Charlie. “If that’s okay with you, of course.”
Charlie nods, unable to wipe the giant grin off his face from the clues Thomas just gave him. “Not a problem at all.”
“Oh my god, this kid is good,” Charlie says as Thomas beats him at yet another round of Mario Kart.
“Dude, I tell ya, he’s the master.” Meeks says, smiling as Thomas cheers for his first place victory.
“Can I play Pokemon?” Thomas asks from where he sits on the floor.
“Sure,” Meeks says, and then he turns to Charlie. “You hungry?”
“Yes,” he says, getting up and following Meeks to the kitchen.
“I gotta make Tommy food, soo...pizza?” Meeks asks, shrugging.
“Sounds good to me.”
Meeks begins to pull items out of the cupboards and fridge, tossing them onto the counters. Charlie hops onto the island, admiring Meeks.
“How old is Thomas?”
Meeks looks to the sky, thinking. “He’s nine. Finn is going to be 15 in a few days,” he says.
“I didn’t even know you had siblings,” Charlie says. Meeks laughs. “We always go to your house. You just have Sarah, right?” Meeks asks, about Charlie’s older sister.
Charlie nods. “Yeah, but she’s at CalTech. Ya know, doing the sciencey shit.”
Meeks nods, and turns back to the ingredients on the counter. Charlie drifts out of focus, studying Meeks as he works, dusting flour on the counter to knead out the pizza dough. The way he crinkles his nose when he pushes his glasses up, the way he bobs his head softly to the song on the kitchen radio, the way his dark blue joggers gently hug his ass.
“Wanna help me with this?” Meeks says, gesturing to the food in front of him and jolting Charlie out of his daze.
Charlie hops off the island and comes up behind Meeks, leaning on the counter much closer to Meeks than necessary, but Meeks doesn’t move.
“Here,” Meeks says, cutting the dough in half. “Roll this out. There’s another roll in the drawer over there.”

Charlie moves to get the roll from across the room, but trips over Meeks’ foot. Meeks reaches an arm out to steady Charlie, and instead of immediately continuing across the room, Charlie stays leaning on Meeks, their chests inches from each other. Charlie’s a good six inches taller than Meeks, looking down at his golden eyes through his clear-rimmed glasses. Meeks’ lips appear in his line of vision, a soft pink, chewed from too many late nights of homework and chats with parents and tests worth 25% of your grade. What it would be like to gently grip Meeks’ soft bottom lip between his lips or teeth while their noses and eyelashes brush on each other’s cheeks, Charlie can hardly imagine. His eyes flicker back to Meeks’, and they keep eye contact as Charlie leans in, leaving their hips barely touching. Meeks’ coarse hair brushes against Charlie’s nose as a moment that was meant to last six seconds lasts an infinity longer.

“Sorry,” Charlie says, leaning so his face is directly in front of Meeks’. His smile is free of comedic demeanor. Meeks’ lips are barely parted, his eyes searching Charlie’s face for a sign of reason. Charlie moves away, leaving Meeks’ gripping the kitchen counter behind him, looking not so much confused as dazed.

______________________________________________________________________________

“Oh hell yeah!” Ginny shouts over the noise of the gym as her and the group enter. “This is my song!”

She takes Knox by the hand and leads him out onto the dance floor, disappearing into a flood of teenagers and flashing neon lights.

Pitts, Cameron, Neil, and Todd stand much more hesitant near the gym entrance, watching flashes of bright colored dresses and dark hair dart back and forth to the loud, overbearing music. “I’m gonna go grab some punch,” Pitts says, raising his eyebrows at Cameron, who follows.

“Well,” Neil says, “welcome to homecoming, Todd.”

Knox twirls Ginny around for probably the hundredth time since they started dancing, bopping his head along to the music while she shakes her dress skirt. He’s sweating like he never has, and the scent of body odor is high in the air from the people surrounding him, but he doesn’t care. This is the first moment he hasn’t thought of Chris in at least a week.

“Where are the other boys?” Ginny shouts over the music, and Knox shrugs.

Ginny looks over Knox’s shoulder, searching for one of their other group mates along the wall, but instead bites her lip.

“What is it?” Knox says, stopping dancing, and spins around.

Chris, wearing a light pink 50s-style Hepburn dress, smiles up at Chet, who’s still wearing his letterman varsity jacket, even at homecoming. Hardly 24-hours after their fight, they’ve already reconvened.

“I hate him,” Ginny says, barely audible above the music.

“Ginny,” Knox says, lifting her chin. “Don’t look at them. Focus on me.”

Ginny nods, the whites of her eyes changing color with the neon glow of the DJ’s lights. Knox stares over her head for a moment, watching Chris twirl through the room, and somehow, she’s still not the first thing on his mind. The music takes over and he falls back into the dancing daze he was in just a moment ago.

______________________________________________________________________________

Post-pizza dinner, Finn comes home, and Meeks and Charlie escape upstairs to Meeks’ blue, broody, nerdy room.

“Here, I’ll turn on some music,” Meeks says, hitting the play button on his open laptop.

A slow drumbeat starts, and Charlie rolls his eyes. “Come on, Meeks, I thought this was anti-homecoming.”

Meeks skips the song, and an upbeat woman’s voice comes out of the speakers. He hums and bobs
his head along to the song, sliding up in front of Charlie. Charlie doesn’t move an inch as the heat of Meeks’ body strums closer to him.

“This has been interesting,” Meeks says, streetlight catching on his golden eyelashes.

“For sure. Still better than homecoming,” Charlie says, and Meeks laughs. Charlie’s mind runs out of focus, and Meeks’ face becomes a little blurry. Somehow, he’s managing to think of everything and nothing all at the same time, and his stomach and his head and his throat are all pumping with some kind of emotion Charlie never felt before and his feet feel like they’re floating off the ground.

And then Charlie’s kissing Meeks, and every inch of emotion he felt just a moment before is replaced with a burst of energy surging through his body. Meeks’ face is between his hands and his body’s against the wall, and Charlie’s pressed up tight against it as his lips finally discover what it’s like to kiss the mouth he’s been dreaming of.

Charlie pulls away, his hands still gripping Meeks’ soft chin, their noses pressed hard together, and looks into Meeks’ eyes. Meeks’ mouth is open in almost a gasp, and his face reads dire confusion and simultaneous desire. And it’s not Charlie who breaks the kiss barrier the second time. It’s Meeks. And then Meeks is on the bed and Charlie’s on top of him, pinning him down and kissing his neck. Meeks is grabbing Charlie’s v-neck and exploring his body, falling deeper and deeper into a mess of his bedsheets. The kiss is hard and fast and far from perfect, but it still manages to be the best kiss Charlie’s ever had. The boy beneath him as well is far from perfect, but his soft stomach and coarse hair and dark red lips are everything Charlie’s ever wanted.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, but Knox and Ginny are slowly becoming my favorite thing. Like, I know they only interact for like .2 seconds in a deleted scene of the movie, but when I started writing they just sort of,...worked???

Besides that, CHEEKS!!! FINALLY!!! yes.
“Thank you for this, Neil,” Todd says as they sit in the Camry outside of Todd’s house. The sky is dark but lit up navy blue by the full moon and streetlights lining Todd’s road.

“You liked it?” Neil asks.

Todd nods quickly, grinning at Neil. They stare at each other for an amount of time that should feel awkward.

“Well, I’ll...walk you up, if that’s alright,” Neil says, and Todd nods again.

It’s silent in the darkness, save for the whistling of the wind and their footsteps.

“You know,” Neil says as they approach the steps to Todd’s house. “I had almost thought you actually liked me when you said yes.”

Todd stares at Neil like a deer caught in headlights, his blue eyes lit up by a strip of street lamp light.

“W-well,” he says, his eyes falling to his feet. “Who says I don’t?”

Neil smiles, a blush spreading across his cheeks. “Oh” is all he says before Todd rushes inside, grinning like a madman.

Ginny leans over Pitts in the front seat as he opens Instagram to see what all has been posted about homecoming. There’s a picture of Ginny hugging Knox outside of the restaurant, easily a foot shorter than him, Ginny’s eyes closed with a grin on her face and Knox looking proud and happy.

There’s a video of Neil and Todd, Todd laughing as Neil does a dance to what sounds like a Britney Spears song. There’s another picture of Knox, riding on Pitts’ back, both laughing and making Knox look like he’s about to fall. And then there’s one from Meeks, a picture of Charlie with his nose to the camera, grinning like an idiot, with the simple caption “anti-hoco with my favorite boy.”

Pitts nudges Knox in the driver’s seat, and the two of them plus Ginny peer at the photo, grinning.

“Aw.” Ginny says, looking up at a smiling Pitts.

“I wonder if those fuckers finally admitted to liking each other.” Pitts says, almost under his breath.

“You knew about it?” Knox asks, looking up.

“You knew about it?” Knox asks, looking up.

“Yeah, of course,” Pitts says, laughing. “Who didn’t?”

When Charlie wakes up Monday morning, there's a new taste in the air. Despite it being October, the sun is shining through the honey-colored leaves of deciduous trees and casting a warm glow across the neighborhood.

He's even perky when Neil showed up at his doorstep so they can walk to school together, which he almost never is.

“So, sounds like you had fun at your Homecoming,” Neil says immediately when Charlie opens the door.

“Anti-homecoming,” Charlie says, but he still blushes at the thought of the eventful Saturday night.

“But, uh, what are you talking about?”

“Knox told me, Charlie,” Neil says, rushing after him. “I mean, I already knew, but Knox just confirmed it. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Ay, Neil, comeon. You try being in love with your best friend.”

Oh, Neil knows the feeling very well.

“Besides, I know you’ve got secrets of your own. I just...I didn’t want anything to change the friend group. Knox only found out by accident,” Charlie argues.
“B-but you’re together now, right? So you can tell everyone?”
“I dunno, we didn’t really talk about that,” Charlie says, shrugging. “I guess we’ll see.”
Neil nods. “I’m really happy for you, Charlie.”
Charlie blushes and looks at his feet. He still has butterflies at the thought of seeing Meeks at school today, everything having changed.
“The cast list for Midsummer’s comes out today,” Neil said.
“Yes! Of course!” Neil says, running out in front of Charlie and waving his hands wildly in the air. Charlie laughs, tossing his arm around Neil and leading him back towards the school.

When they arrive, Neil immediately leaves to catch Todd before class, leaving Charlie to find Meeks. Charlie spots the redhead walking towards the cafeteria and runs up to him, taking him by surprise and pushing him into a deserted hallway off the main corridor.
“Wha-Charlie?” Meeks says, but he’s cut off by a hard kiss.
“God, I’ve missed you,” Charlie says in between rough and deep kisses.
They stay that way for a minute, Meeks pressed up against the wall and Charlie passionately kissing him, rubbing his hips against Meeks’ pelvis and his hands over Meeks’ chest. Charlie pulls away, looking Meeks in his amber eyes, and smiles. “So, what are we gonna tell the boys?” he asks.
Meeks is still blushing from their intense makeout session. “Um…” he says. “That you’re mine now and I’m very very glad?”
Charlie grins, taking Meeks’ hand in his and leading him back out into the hallway.

“Charlie, I got the part! I’m gonna play Puck!” Neil shouts, entering the library with glee. This earns him a shush from the librarian, but he whispers excitedly again, “I’m gonna play Puck!”
“What did he say?” Meeks whispers to Pitts as Neil comes over to their table.
“Puck?” Pitts asks.
“That’s the main part!” Neil explains.
“Great, Neil,” Knox says with a smile.
“Charlie, I got it!” Neil says again, coming up behind Charlie and clapping his shoulders.
“Congratulations!” He says, smiling through a mouthful of food. “Good for you, Neil. good for you.”
Neil, a giant grin still plastered to his face, plops down next to Todd and pulls his laptop out of his bag.
“Okay, okay, okay.” He says, fingering the keys with excitement.
“Neil, how are you gonna do this?” Todd asks.
“They need a letter of permission from my father.”
“You’re not gonna write it!”
“Oh yes, I am,” Neil says through a laugh.
“Oh Neil, Neil, you’re crazy.”
“Shhh. Oky. I am writing to you on behalf of my son,” Neil says, looking at Todd with a mocking expression. “Neil Perry.” He stomps his feet and laughs, as if he can’t control his excitement. “Oh, this is great.”
Todd grins as Neil furiously types, making typo after typo.
“Hey, what’s that? What are you working on?” Neil asks, gesturing to the paper in front of Todd. Todd blushes and crumples the paper with his arm. “It’s j-just my poem for today.”
“You haven’t finished that yet?” Neil asks in awe.
“N-no. Have you?” Todd asks.
“Well, yeah. It’s du today!”
“I-I guess I’m just having trouble.”
Neil nods knowingly, turning back to his letter.

“To: Chris.”
Knox stands nervously at the head of the classroom, holding a crumpled-up piece of lined notebook paper in his left hand. His classmates snicker, making quiet jokes about Knox’s love interest.
“I see a sweetness in her smile. Bright light shines from her eyes. But life is complete; contentment is mine, just knowing that…”
Everyone begins laughing, cutting Knox off.
“...just knowing that she is alive,” he says, defeated, stumbling back to his seat. “I’m sorry Captain, it’s stupid.”
“No, no!” Keating says, taking over at the front of the classroom. “It’s not stupid; it’s a good effort. It touched on one of the major themes: love! W major theme not only in poetry, but in life.”
Keating approaches Todd’s desk, where he sits in fearfully of what is to come.
“Come on, Mr. Anderson. I see you sitting there in agony. Come on, Todd, step up. Let’s put you out of your misery.”
“I-I didn’t do it,” Todd says, quivering. Keating raises an eyebrow. “I didn’t write a poem.”
Keating raises both eyebrows, looking around the class with surprise. “Mr. Anderson thinks that everything inside of him is worthless,” Keating says. “And embarrassing. Isn’t that right, Todd? Isn’t that your worst fear?”
Todd looks on with shame.
“Well, I think you’re wrong,” Keating says. “I think you have something inside of you that is worth a great deal.”
Todd sighs inaudibly. Neil, from his spot at the center of the classroom, stares at him, feeling the second-hand embarrassment of the situation but also hoping that Todd is simply okay.
Keating begins scribbling on the blackboard. “I sound my barbaric YAWP over the rooftops of the world,” he says with a swish. “W.W. Uncle Walt again! Now, for those of you who don’t know, a YAWP is a loud cry or yell. Now, Todd,” he says, gesturing to the doe-eyed ginger, “I would like you to give us a demonstration of a barbaric ‘yawp’.”
Todd’s eyes fall.
“Come on, you can’t yawp sitting down! Let’s go!” Keating tugs on Todd’s arm, pulling him to the front of the classroom, and Todd follows reluctantly. “Come on, up! You gotta get in yawping stance!”
Everyone in the classroom begins giggling at the situation. Neil laughs too, knowing he should feel bad for Todd but instead feeling like something wonderful may come out of this lesson.
“A yawp?” Todd says quietly, smiling at his fellow students nervously.
“No, not just a yawp! A barbaric yawp!”
“Y-yawp.”
“Come on, louder!”
“Yawp.”
“No, that’s a mouse. Come on, louder!”
Tension fills the room as the two go back and forth, and slowly it feels as if nothing exists outside of the family of students inside that classroom and the words heavy in the air.
“Yawp!”
“Oh, good God, boy, yell it like a man!”
“Yawp!”
Half a second of silent surprise follows after Todd’s shout, but Keating is quick to keep going.
“There it is! You see, you have a barbarian in you after all!” Keating says, pulling Todd back to the front center when he tries to escape. “Now, you don’t get away that easy. Look at the picture of Uncle Walt up there,” Keating says, pointing. “What does he remind you of? Don’t think, answer!
Go on!” Keating begins to walk in circles around Todd, closing off the walls of the classroom further and drawing every eye to the two of them.

“A-a,” Todd says, clearly thinking about it. “A madman.”

“What kind of a madman? Don’t think about it! Just answer again!”

“A c-crazy madman,” Todd says, hoping it’s enough.

“No, you can do better than that! Say the first thing that pops into you head, even if it’s total gibberish. Go on, go on!”

“Uh, uh, a sweaty-toothed madman,” Todd says, the words flowing out of him like jelly. Keating stops in his tracks, throwing his arms into the air around Todd.

“Good God, boy, there’s a poet in you after all! There, now, close your eyes. Close your eyes,” he says, and when Todd doesn’t immediately follow, Keating places his hands over Todd’s eyes.

“Now, describe what you see.”

“Uh, I-I close my eyes,” Todd says as he and Keating begin to spin around.

“Yes?” Keating says.

“A-sweaty toothed madman floats beside me.”

“A sweaty toothed madman,” Keating says, nodding.

“A sweaty-toothed madman with a stare that pounds my brain.”

“Oh, that’s excellent. Now, give him action. Make him do something!”

“H-his hands reach out and choke me.”

“That’s it, that’s wonderful. Wonderful.”

“A-and all the time he’s mumbling,” Todd says. Keating stops spinning and takes his hands off Todd’s eyes. Todd doesn’t open them again.

“What’s he mumbling?” Keating says, stepping back.

“M-mumbling, ‘Truth. Truth is l-like, like a blanket that always leaves your feet cold.”

Slow laughter fills the room, and the walls begin to open again as Todd opens his eyes.

“Forget them, forget them,” Keating quickly gestures for Todd to close his eyes. “The blanket! Tell me more about that blanket.”

“Y-Y-Y-You push it, stretch it, it’ll never be enough. Y-You kick at it, beat it, it’ll never cover any of us,” Todd says, and when he speaks, he pulls everyone back into the room. “From the moment we enter crying to the moment we leave dying, it’ll just cover your face as you wail and cry and scream.”

Todd opens his eyes. Charlie, leaning carelessly against the back of his chair at the back of the classroom, lowers his hand from his forehead and looks at Todd. Knox is leaning over his desk, his mouth half-open, shocked by the feelings settling over the room. And Neil, at the center, stares completely awe-struck at Todd.

Slowly, one unknown student begins clapping. The whole room erupts into a fest of loud cheering and clapping and whistling, and Keating comes up to Todd.

“Don’t you forget this,” he says, looking a blushing Todd right in the eye and smiling.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry I haven't updated lately- however I feel that is a common issue with anyone writing a multi-chapter fic. I hope you like this! This Is such a good scene in the movie ahhhhggg.

Also if you're interested my tumblr is andloveexists.tumblr.com :) give me a follow and pm me if you ever wanna talk about all things DPS!!!
Hello everyone, I am back!
I made a spotify account just for DPS playlists, so y'all should go check it out. My username is andloveexists, just like on here, and the link is: https://open.spotify.com/user/andloveexists

Trigger warning is that they're getting high at the beginning, so skip that if need be. <3

The boys plus Ginny sit in a circle in the cave yet again, this time on a Saturday afternoon, smoking weed out of bowls that Charlie has somehow supplied.
“Attaboy, Pittsie, inhale deeply,” Charlie says, smirking at Pitts’ inability to smoke the pipe properly. Pitts begins coughing, and the cave erupts in laughter.
“Come on, Pittsie!” Charlie says, laughing. Pitts sticks out his tongue in return.
“Come on, Knox, join in,” Meeks says, talking the bowl from Charlie’s mouth. Charlie throws his arms up in fake anger, and Meeks takes a smoke with a smirk on his face.
Knox sits in a hollow of the cave, his arms crossed, pouting.
“Oh, Knox,” Ginny says, poking him and laughing, already very wasted, “she's just a girl. Have some fun with us.”
“Hey, guys,” Neil says, climbing in from the top of the cave. “Oh jeez, it smells like shit in here. Are you trying to smoke us out, Dalton?”
Charlie blows a stream of smoke in Neil’s face in return, and they both just laugh.
“What do you say we start this meeting, then?” Charlie asks, blowing erratic sounds out of the saxophone he’s randomly brought.
“Okay, okay. New business,” Neil says, taking a bowl from one of the boys and standing before then, as per usual, “one, we have a girl here. Welcome, Virginia Danbury.”
All of the boys begin cheering, and Ginny laughs.
“Okay, Two,” Neil says, smirking at Charlie, “our friends Charlie and Meeks have finally decided to do something about their love. Please no making out at meetings.”
Charlie leans over to kiss Meeks, despite Neil’s fake plead, and the cave erupts in cheers and applause.
“Whoa, guys!” Pitts shouts, clapping Meeks on the shoulder.
“I know, I know,” Meeks says, grinning like an idiot.
“Let's get this started.” Charlie stands up, clearing his throat and adjusting the strap of his saxophone.
“Gentlemen, lady, this is “Poetrusic” by Charles Dalton.”
Charlie begins playing eardrum-shattering tunes on his saxophone.
“Oh, no,” Meeks says.
“Laughing, crying, tumbling mumbling. Gotta do more, gotta be more,” Charlie says, followed by more splitting sounds. “Chaos screaming, chaos dreaming. Gotta do more, gotta be more!”
Charlie puts the saxophone to his lips again and begins to play a real song. The slippery soft melodies of the instrument fill the cave, almost dancing with the smoke in the air. Even Knox, at his lonely corner of the cave, looks up.
“Wow!” Meeks says when Charlie sits back down.
“Where’d you learn to play like that, Charlie?” Pitts asks in awe.
“My parents made me take the clarinet for years,” Charlie says.
“I love the clarinet,” Cameron says.
Charlie retorts back almost immediately. “I hated it. The saxophone. The saxophone is more...sonorous.”

“Ooh.”

“Vocabulary!”

“I can’t take it anymore!” Knox shouts, leaping up from his seat. “I gotta have Chris. I just gotta.”

“Knoxious, you’ve gotta calm down,” Charlie says.

“Knox, I thought you were over her,” Ginny says.

“No, no. I thought I was. I could forget about her at homecoming, but since then, I’ve only been seeing her with that jerk Chet and I can’t take it anymore. I’ve been calm all my life. I gotta do something about that,” he says.

“And what’s that?” Neil asks.

Knox sighs. “Honestly, I don’t know.”

“Hey,” Ginny says, perking up. “My parents will be out of town next weekend. Chet’s throwing a party. Come along, Chris will be there. Maybe you can talk to her then.”

“Oh, my God, Ginny, you are my savior!” Knox says, hugging her tightly. “This is amazing!”

“Don’t thank me,” she says, laughing. “Thank my parents for being ignorant fucks.”

At nearly midnight, the only sounds heard in the misty woods behind the school were the eight poets shouting “carpe!” into the darkness.

With his math homework glaring at him from across the room, Neil scrolls through Todd’s Instagram. He knew he had homework to get done, and it was already dark outside, but he couldn’t help himself. And he was starting to get damn sick of this ‘love’ business.

Then his phone buzzed, displaying Charlie’s name on the screen and pulling Neil out of his obsessive state.

“Hey, Charlie, what’s up?” Neil says, trying to mask the tiredness in his voice.

“Are you busy? I’m lowkey bored as fuck,” Charlie says.

“Busy not doing my math. I’ll be over in 10,” Neil says, sighing and clicking his phone off.

It’s finally November, and the air is crisp and cool in Neil’s throat when he steps outside. There’s a dark figure at the end of his street, sitting on the curb with their head in their hands. Neil steps closer, and the streetlight above the person reveals light, gingery hair and a boyish figure staring across the road.

“Todd?” Neil calls out tentatively.

The figure raises his head and reveals himself to be, in fact, Todd. Todd stares up at Neil for a moment, his blue eyes flickering with the streetlight, without saying a word. He looks almost frightened, but as Neil approaches he can see the tears rimming Todd’s eyes.

“Hey,” Todd says, quietly. “What’s going on?”


“Today’s my birthday,” he says quietly.

“Is today your birthday? Happy birthday,” Neil says. How did he not know it was Todd’s birthday?

“Thanks,” Todd says.

“What’d you get?” Neil asks, noticing the beat-up book laying next to Todd’s feet.

Todd looks at the book painfully, then picks it up and waves it in the air. “My parents just gave me this.”

Neil reaches out to steady Todd’s arm. When their skin makes contact, Todd’s eyes flick up, meeting Neil’s for a few seconds. Neil’s heart begins to pound, and he quickly returns to looking at the book title.


Even Todd, whose eyes still ring with hurt, grins. “Yeah,” he says, looking at Neil almost gleefully.
“Maybe-maybe they just-” Neil says, unable to control his laughter for a second. “Maybe they thought you needed some extra confidence.”

“Maybe they weren’t thinking anything at all,” Todd says.

It’s quiet as Neil stares at the book and Todd returns to his slum state.

“Rip,” Neil whispers, handing the book back to Todd. “Rip it up.”

“What?” Todd says, his voice masked with concern but his lips turning up in a smile.

“Rip it up!” Neil shouts, imitating Mr. Keating’s voice from that day in their first week of class. He leaps onto the street, throwing his fists in to the air as he continued to shout “rip it up! I want nothing left of it!”

Todd manages to rip the entire paperback book in half and begins scattering the pages along the street, Neil cheering him on the entire time.

“Ah, this feels amazing!” Todd shouts into the darkness. Papers settle over the boys like snow as Neil takes Todd by the hand and goes running down the street, filling the neighborhood with laughter.
The next morning, Neil texts Charlie nearly the second he wakes up.

Neil 6:45 am
Charlie charlie charlie charlie are you awake

Charlie 6:46 am
Unfortunately, and i'm already on my way to your house so no need to fret

Neil 6:46 am
Luv u

Just a few minutes later, Charlie enters the Perry household, and Neil immediately begins gushing.

“I spent last night at Todd’s. Not like, the whole night, but some of it, and it was amazing.” Neil gushes the second Charlie enters the Perry household.
“I figured as much when you didn’t show last night. Either that or you were dead,” Charlie says, walking past Neil into the kitchen.
“Right, I forgot about that. I am so so sorry.”
“Don’t worry about it. My Meeks showed up just a mere five minutes after our phone call. We had quite a good time without you,” Charlie says, winking.
Neil grimaces. “I don’t want to know.”
“Oh, but I think you do,” Charlie smirks. “Tell me about your boy.”
“Right, okay. So he basically exposed his feelings to me after homecoming, and then last night I found him wandering around on my street when I know he lives two streets over. So I go up to him, like, ‘hey, what are you doing here’, and I found out it was his birthday.”
“Todd has a birthday?”
“Right, I know,” Neil says, then realizes immediately after what Charlie said and gives him a look.
Charlie smirks yet again. “Okay, then what happened?”
“Well, I just hung out with him,” Neil says. “We had an amazing night.”
“Remind me again why you haven’t spilled your feelings?”
Neil sighs. “I don’t - I don’t know.”
“Do you think it’s interesting that at least four of us guys are gay now? There’s only, what -” Charlie counts on his fingers, “Seven of us? That’s more than half!”
“Plus Ginny now, I guess.”
“Still half,” Charlie says, grinning. “Anyway, just go for it. He so obviously likes you.”
“Yeah,” Neil says, as if a light bulb is going off over his head. “I think I will.”
The doorbell rings, and Charlie lights up. “And that would be my Meeks.”
Charlie rushes over to get the door, and then the three of them are off to school. Of course, Neil doesn’t actually mind that Meeks had begun to join he and Charlie on their morning walks to school. It gave him more time to brood about Todd.
“Guys, look. I just really think I have a talent, okay? Even you all agree,” Charlie gushes, his saxophone slung across his back like a new accessory.
“Yes, that’s how it works. You play for us once, Charlie, and suddenly you’re Mozart,” Meeks responds, rolling his eyes but squeezing Charlie’s hand in his anyway.

“Actually, Mozart didn’t play saxophone,” Neil interrupts, walking alongside the handsy couple.

“Whatever. Who was that famous sax guy? Parker something?”

“Charlie Parker, actually,” Neil says, but then tunes back out.

Todd, who had sort of confessed his feelings on the night of homecoming. Todd, whose bed he sat in just last night, who he’d smiled with all night, who made his heart flutter right out of his chest. Todd, who he needed to confess his feelings to asap.

“JAZZ BAND! Meeks, I should join JAZZ BAND!”

“Please. I’d love to see you wear those fancy black-and-whites.”

Charlie and Meeks’ banter drowns out as a small fluff of yellow catches the corner of Neil’s eye, blooming in the cracks of the sidewalk at their feet.

Neil stops at the crack. “Hey guys, wait up,” he says, bending down to pluck the short dandelion from the earth. Even though it’s well into October and the sky is as gray as the sidewalk, it blooms bright and beautiful, not a single piece missing.

“You know, those are actually weeds,” Meeks comments, and Charlie gives him an amused look.

“I know,” Neil responds, without looking up. “But it’s a beautiful weed.”

“I love seeing you all blushy-faced, Meeksie,” Charlie whispers into Meeks’ ear, throwing an arm around his shoulders as the two walk down the hallway, the students surrounding completely unknowing of what just went down in the closet.

Meeks’ cheeks go from rosy to blatantly red. “Hey, come on, Charlie,” he says, brushing Charlie’s arm away but letting it slip back around his shoulders the next second. “We really can’t keep doing that.”

“Right,” Charlie says, flipping and walking backwards in front of the tiny redhead. “Gotta go to math. Meet you in the East wing bathroom for lunch?”

Meeks rolls his eyes, and Charlie winks before turning and running down the hall as the bell rings.

Meeks himself waltzes into German right on time.

“Dude, where have you been? You’re never late like this,” Pitts whispers as Meeks takes the seat next to him. “You’ve been late every day this week.”


Pitts narrows his eyes, but slumps back in his seat anyway.

Whenever Neil and Charlie were late for second period trig, Todd always assumed the worst: they weren’t coming. They were probably dead, or something equally bad, and then Todd would have to suffer through one of the worst classes while worrying about his best friends and how he would find out the news.

Of course, they always showed up (well Neil did, at least).

And on that bleak Monday morning, while Todd worries before class in a room swimming with equations, a bright gold-hued flower is dropped to his desk as a smiling Neil walks past and takes his seat.

Todd picks up the fleur and examines it. “What’s this?”

“I thought of you when I saw it. I know, its a weed, but I think they’re awesome,” Neil says, grinning.

Todd barely gets in a cheeky smile before Charlie plops down in his seat nearby.

“He’s been thumbing that thing all morning. Won’t put it in his pocket; scared he’ll ruin the ‘last of summer’.”


“It’s true. Music is my passion. I clearly have a talent and I must follow my dreams.”
“You play one song and music is your passion?”
“Well, no, my passion is wooing my Meeks. But you all have your thing. Neil acts, Knox hopelessly chases Chris, Pitts is good at being tall and confused. But me? What am I to be in this crazy world?”
“You’re a lot of things, my good friend,” Neil says, exchanging looks with Todd. “But let’s get to work. Problem 14, shall we?”

Under the walkway in the courtyard during fourth period, Keating instructs the boys to stand in a line and watch Cameron, Pitts, and Knox walk in a circle around him.
“No grades at stake, gentlemen. Just take a stroll,” Keating says, and the boys begin to fall in line with each other. “There it is.”
One of the boys in line begins to clap. Then another, and another, and soon the whole line is clapping.
“I don’t know, but I’ve been told,” Keating sings aloud.
“I don’t know, but I’ve been told,” the boys repeat.
“Doing poetry is old.”
“Doing poetry is old!”
Keating falls in line with the three marching boys.
“Left, left, left-right-left! Left, left, left-right-left!”
The boys grin.
“Left, halt!” Keating says, and the boys stop abruptly. “Thank you, gentlemen.”
Keating faces the line as Cameron, Pitts, and Knox blend into it.
“If you noticed, everyone started off with their own stride, their own pace. Mr. Pitts, taking his time. He knew he’ll get there one day. Mr. Cameron, you could see him thinking, ‘is this right? It might be right. It might be right. I know that. Maybe not. I don’t know.’”
The line laughs and Keating continues.
“Mr. Overstreet, driven by a deeper force,” he says, pushing his groin forward, and the laughs continue. “We know that. Alright, now, I didn’t bring them here to ridicule them. I brought them up here to illustrate the point of conformity.: the difficulty in maintaining your own beliefs in the face of others.”
The laughter stops, and the boys look forward, caught on Keating’s words.
“Now, those of you - I see the look in your eyes like, ‘I would have walked differently.’ Then ask yourselves why you were clapping. Now, we all have a great need for acceptance, but you must trust that your beliefs are unique, your own, even though others may think them odd or unpopular, even though the herd may go ‘That’s baaaaaad.’”
Laughter overcomes his audience again, and Keating grins back.
“Robert Frost said, ‘Two roads diverged in a wood and I, I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.’ Now,” he instructs, “I want you to find your own walk right now. Your own way of striding, pacing. Any direction. Anything you want. Whether it’s proud, whether it’s silly, anything. Gentlemen, the courtyard is yours.”
Some of the boys look at eachother hesitantly, and some get right to it. One boy begins knocking his knees together while walking, one trots backwards. Pitts walks slowly with his head down and Meeks pushes him over, running playfully about.
“You don’t have to perform, just make it for yourself,” Keating encourages.
Charlie hasn’t moved from his casual lean against the pillars where formerly the line of boys stood.
“Mr. Dalton, will you be joining us?”
Charlie gives a sly smile. “Exercising the right not to walk.” Charlie and Meeks make eye contact, causing both to grin.
“Thank you, Mr. Dalton. You just illustrated the point.” Keating makes a swishing motion with his arm. Swim against the stream.”
Neil, who’s walking with his head bobbing up and down, catches up with Todd in the frenzy of people. “Hey, wanna do homework together tonight?” He asks, falling in step.
Todd nods excitedly, and Neil grabs his hand and pulls him forward, almost as if they are dancing.
They were “doing homework”. That was always the cover - although Neil swore he’d never actually
done homework in Todd’s presence. He just texted Charlie behind his laptop and queued up songs
from his Todd playlist, hoping the other boy would notice and say something like, wow, I love Iron
and Wine, or something of the sort.
Tonight was not a bit different. Maybe it was time to do something about it.
“Arithmetic, Mr. Perry,” Todd responds, though his face plasters with a goofy grin.
Neil smiles back, and crawls off his bed as he made his way over to the couch. “What are you
working on? That doesn't look like math,” he says, plopping down a little bit too close to Todd.
“Just, on your own?”
Todd took another sharp breath. “Actually, Keating, uh, asked me to participate in a contest.”
“A writing contest? Todd, that's amazing!” Neil says, hopping off the couch in excitement. Todd’s
eyes glimmer. Neil pauses his celebration. “Can I read it?”
Todd’s eyes divert. “Oh, uh…”
‘Come on,” Neil says, ducking his head to meet Todd’s. “Let me see!”
“No.”
“Yes!”
“No!”
“YES!” Neil tugs at the corner of Todd’s notebook.
“Neil!” Todd almost squeals, pulling back the notebook and giggling. Neil crawls forward, pushing
Todd back on the couch and tickling his stomach. Todd uncaps his pen and starts scribbling on
Neil’s face.
“Hey!” Neil says, and goes for Todd’s underarm.
Todd lurches forward, sending Neil falling back onto the couch, and climbs closer so he can keep
writing on Neil’s face. He manages to get Neil’s right arm pinned down with his leg and left arm
with his free hand, and Neil resorts to kicking Todd in the back.
“OW!” Todd squeals, but then freezes. Neil ceases kicking, and looks up, focusing on Todd above
him.
It’s as if a flash of lightning has struck him when he realizes just how close he is to Todd. Touching
Todd’s eyes widen. “Oh God,” he says, jumping off Neil and smacking into the bed behind him.
Neil stands up, running a hand through his hair, prepared to let the awkwardness of the moment
manifest. But Todd’s just staring at him, and he realizes that if any moment is the time to make a
move, it’s now.
“Todd…” he starts, and Todd stiffens. “I...it’s okay.”
“What?”
“It’s-” Neil says, running a hand through his hair again. He’s not sure where to go with this. “It’s
okay.”
Neil interrupts himself, lurching forward to kiss Todd, hard, and sloppily, but he’s doing it. He’s
never kissed anyone before, so it takes him a moment to soften up, and remember what’s going on.
And then, softly, and slowly, his muscles relax, and he takes hold of Todd’s upper lip and buries his
hands in Todd’s hair. He feels Todd do the same, but his hands find Neil’s waist, and then somehow,
they’re kissing, and Neil isn’t thinking about anything but the moment.
Hello! I am so sorry it's been so long since I've updated; this chapter has literally been in the works for months now. I have more written, and hopefully more coming. I appreciate the comments and the love and am so happy as always to be a part of this wonderful fandom xxxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Todd spent the night.
That’s the first thought on Neil’s mind when he wakes up the next morning.
Todd Anderson spent the night.
And now, he's lying face-to-armpit in Neil’s arms, smelling incredibly sweet and Todd-like against Neil’s nose. And Neil's afraid to move and wake him up, but was also dying to stare into his eyes and ask him what the hell they were going to do about what happened last night and also, maybe, kiss him one more time.
The blond stirs just as Neil’s phone rings - apparently not for the first time, judging by the “seven missed calls” notification on his home screen. All from Charlie. Neil catches the time in the upper corner of his screen. Shit. He’s missed his usual wake-up time by nearly 45 minutes.
“Hello?” Neil says into the phone, as quietly as possible. Todd stays cozied up in his free arm. “NEIL PERRY, how dare you ignore my calls? You promised me Starbucks this morning, remember? To pay me back for last week? Also, I’m approaching your house. I will be entering as soon as I arrive. You best be ready.”
“NO - no, Charlie, now’s not really a good time -”
“Too late. Entering,” Charlie continues. “You have approximately one minute before I’m in your room.”
“Shit.” Neil hangs up, thinking about how damn lucky he is that his father’s out of town and his mother works early this morning.
“Neil?” Todd’s soft voice prompts Neil to sit up and look at the beautiful boy sitting next to him in bed.
“Hey, sweetheart, we need to get up. We’ll be late for school.”
“Okay,” Todd croons, still not fully awake yet. Something in Neil turns to complete goo. Of course, Charlie chooses that moment to throw open the door. And subsequently gape at the scene, saying nothing. He surveys Todd, now sitting up in Neil’s bed (looking adorable as hell in the same light blue sweater he’d worn the night before) and makes his eyes over to Neil. Shock resides on Charlie’s face, and Neil almost can’t help but grin at the thought of someone finally seeing Neil and TODD together, in an intimate situation. It made the whole thing all the more real to him.
“Can I use your bathroom?” Todd asks, although mostly to excuse himself. “To...y-you know, get ready.”
“Of course. You don’t have to ask.” Neil smiles. Todd returns the favor, blushing, as he exits the room.
As Todd walks out, Neil resists looking directly at Charlie. He can feel his best friend’s eyes burning into the back of his head, waiting with anticipation for an explanation.
Neil is unable to resist, and Charlie breaks him.
“We kissed,” he blurts out.
“NO.”
“YES!”


“Charlie, we are gay.”

“Was there tongue? How far did you go?”

“Charlie!”

“You’re right. Sorry, sorry. But tell me everything.”

Neil sighs. “Oh, God, it was amazing. We just, we were studying, and then all of a sudden we were kissing. It was magical. We just kissed for like, an hour, and then we held each other for a while, and then I guess we fell asleep until his phone rang and he had to go home. He kissed me goodbye then. It was magical.”

Charlie sucked air in, and smiled. “About damn time, Neil!”

Neil’s smile falters. “I’m praying to God I didn’t ruin anything.”

“Ruin anything? Are you kidding me? He just about floated out of here just a minute ago! Neil!”

Charlie exasperates. “He’s totally in love. And so are you.”

Neil’s grin returns, but he shushes Charlie as Todd’s footsteps make their way back down the hall. “You know, I’ll just go pop a few Keurigs in,” Charlie says. “I’ll just excuse myself for a moment.”

Charlie brushes through the doorway, where Todd remains for a moment. Neil fights making eye contact with Todd too, but for fear that he might throw up if he does.

After a moment, Neil speaks up, “Carpe Diem” seizing in the back of his mind. He tried his best to make his voice low and sultry, like he’d practiced when he’d imagined this moment over and over the night before. “Listen, about last night…” Todd’s face immediately falls to anxiety, but Neil cuts off whatever thoughts Todd is having. “I liked it. Did you?”

A smile breaks out on Todd’s face. He nods yes.

“Listen, I think we should...talk about us, if you know what I mean. Wanna come over after the meeting tonight?”

Todd nods again, this time violently. He still hasn’t moved from his spot by the doorway, but his smile only stretches wider as Neil walks over and pulls him inside.

“Alright loverboys, back to reality.” Charlie arrives with two mugs of sweet-smelling coffee. “I’m makin’ y’all share.”

Neil grins and takes the coffee. His other hand reaches for Todd’s.

“Alright, what’s your game plan?” Ginny says as she and Knox stand at the Danbury’s door.

“Game plan?” Knox says, puzzled. “Am I supposed to have one of those?”

Ginny shakes her head, smiling. “I suppose you’ll just wing it.”

“Is it weird to arrive at your own house party?”

“It’s not really my house party. But yeah, it’s weird to have to knock to enter my own house.” Ginny raises her fist and knocks sharply on the door three times, until it’s opened quickly by Chris Noel.

“Knox!” She says, opening the door further and gesturing the two inside.

“Hi,” Knox says politely.

“You made it! Great! And you brought a friend.”

“Hello, Chris,” Ginny says, as Chris grabs Knox by the jacket and shuts the door.

“Ginny Danbury. Fun. Wait. I have to go find Chet. Why don’t you go downstairs where everybody is. Make yourself at home!” Chris rushes up the nearby stairwell and Knox and Ginny are left staring blankly ahead, already rejected.

“Like she doesn’t even know who I am,” Ginny says, pulling off her coat and scarf.

“Guys, I have an announcement to make,” Charlie says. “In keeping with the spirit of passionate experimentation of the Dead Poets, I’m giving up the name Charlie Dalton. From now on, call me Nuwanda.”
The boys all laugh. Charlie remains unphased, looking about the cave with nonchalance. “Nuwanda?” Pitts asks, shaking from laughter. “Hey, you like it, don’t you, Meeksie?” Charlie asks.
“Sure, if I can call you that in bed,” Meeks replies. The other boys collectively groan. “Most definitely.” Charlie smirks, then whips out a tube of lipstick, and makes three red marks in the shape of a Y on each of his cheeks, as well as actually applies the lipstick to where it’s meant to go. He passes the tube to Neil, who looks at it and laughs, but proceeds to do the same, save for wearing it as intended. “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate,” Charlie says, snaking down to give Meeks a kiss on the cheek. “Cute,” Meeks laughs. He wipes the red kiss mark from his cheek just as Charlie attacks the other side of his face with lipstick. “I made that up, just for you,” Charlie winks.
“She walks in beauty like the night,” Meeks replies sarcastically. “She walks in beauty like the night, of cloudless climes and starry skies. All that’s best, dark and bright, meet her aspect and her eyes.” “Beautiful.” “Plenty more where that came from,” Meeks says, and Charlie leans in for a real kiss. “Okay, okay,” Neil says, and smacks Charlie’s shoulder. “Get a room.” “Whatever, loverboy,” Charlie replies, then leans in to leave a kiss mark on Neil’s neck.

Knox never knew it was possible for someone’s tongue to go that far down someone else’s throat, and yet here he is, watching it happen with his very own eyes. In reality, maybe 45 minutes had passed since he lost Ginny due to his “mopey behavior”, but it feels like hours are dragging on. Chris and Chet dance, both drunk out of their minds, just across the room, but somehow Knox finds it easier to watch a very public display of affection on the couch next to him. Maybe he just needs a drink.

There’s an unbelievable amount of football players in the reasonably sized Danbury house - Knox doesn’t know how many men can be on a football team, but there was no way it’s this many. Two of them, both burly and athletic, guard the beer keg Knox so desperately needs to get to. “Hey, you Mutt Sanders’ brother?” One of the players asks. Knox raises an eyebrow and continues toward the keg, desperately hoping they’re too wasted to keep up the conversation, or care. “Bubba, this guy look like Mutt Sanders to you or what?” ‘Bubba’ spits into the sink nearby. “You’re his brother?” “No relation. Never heard of him. Sorry, guys,” Knox responds. “Where’s your manners, Steve? Mutt Sanders’ brother, we don’t even offer him a drink. Here. Go have some whiskey, pal.” Bubba hands Knox a drink and fills it with a thick, orange liquid with the oddest smell Knox has ever sensed. “Yeah!” Steve shouts. “Whoa, w-what is thi-” Knox starts, but he’s cut off quick. “To Mutt!” The two players say in unison, and Knox figures he no longer cares what came out of the bottle. “To Mutt.” The gold liquid sends a shiver through Knox when he doesn’t swallow it fast enough. He tugs at his tie, fearing the worst for just a moment, and then it passes, and he feels warm. “How the hell is old Mutt, anyway?” Bubba asks, shaking off the kick. “Yeah, what’s ol’ Mutter been up to, huh?” Steve further questions. “Well, I don’t really know Mutt-” “To Mighty Mutt.” Knox shrugs again. “To Mighty Mutt.” The three raise their glasses again for a toast and another round enters Knox’s system.
“I have another announcement.”
“First, the goods.” Neil pulls a bottle of rum from his bag. The boys each take a swig as they pass it around the circle, and Charlie stands at the head of the cave, preparing to make his announcement.
“Listen up, boys. I’d like to announce I published an article in the school paper, in the name of the Dead Poets.”
“What?” Cameron pipes up for the first time that evening.
“Demanding a ban be lifted on the no-PDA rule at school.”
“You didn’t.” Pitts cuts in.
“My Meeks and I can’t even hold hands in the hallway,” Charlie continues. “And fuckers like that Chet Danbury can grope whoever they want in the hallways, all day long. It’s not right.”
“Maybe so,” Neil interrupts, shaking his head as if he’s actually considering the idea. He is, but Charlie’s still stupid. “But you had no right to do that. How did you do that?”
“I’m an editor. I slipped the article right in.”
Everyone looks at him in disbelief.
“What? Nobody knows who we are.”
“Well, don’t you think they’re gonna figure it out?” Cameron says. “They’re gonna come to you and ask to know what the Dead Poets Society is. Charlie, you had no right to do something like that.”
“Nuwanda, Cameron. Are we just playing around out here, or do we mean what we say? For all we do is come together and read a bunch of poems to each other. What the hell are we doing?”
Alright, but you still shouldn’t have done it, Charlie. You don’t speak for the club.” Neil rises to stand at Charlie’s height, which is slightly bent over due to the cave’s size.
“Hey, would you not worry about your precious little neck? If they catch me, I’ll tell them I made it up.”

Knox wishes Charlie was there, because wow, Charlie would be fun right now. Oh, how he loves his friends. Good people, they are.
Knox burps just after downing another glass of whatever the Mutt boys gave him. He sees Chet across the room, barely, without Chris, and Ginny is nowhere to be found. Perhaps she’s one of the girls being kissed on the ground right now. Knox nearly trips over quite a few bodies on his way to a couch that looks perfect to crash on. Who’s Chris, anyways?
Chris is the girl asleep on the couch, all perfectly shaped in her pink attire, obviously loaded on alcohol. Knox slumps next to her on the couch, carefully whispering “God help me” at the sight of her perfect frame.
He can picture it now. Kissing her, leaning down, brushing his hair on her forehead, her returning the favor, something after that? Who knows. He’s gonna do it. That’s what seizing the day is, right? Kiss the girl. Take the OPPORTUNITY.
“Carpe Diem,” he whispers, before taking another swig of his drink. Three, he’s had now. Or maybe four…
He reaches out, running his fingers through Chris’s soft blonde hair. She stirs barely as Knox leans down and slowly plants his lips on her rosy forehead.
“Chet, Chet, look!”
Knox can’t really hear anything. He’s not even completely sure what he’s doing. Kissing Chris? Oh, yeah, he’s kissing Chris.
“What?”
“It’s Mutt Sanders’ brother!”
“Huh?”
Chris can hear, though, and her eyes fly open to see Knox moving away from her slowly.
“Knox, what-”
“And he’s feeling up your girl!”
“What are you doing?”
Chet gets up from his chair. “What the hell are you doing?”
“Chet! Chet, don’t!” Chris pleads, but Chet completely disregards her as he heads directly for a disoriented Knox.
Knox feels his lips moving, but he can’t really be sure of what he’s saying. Suddenly everything is very clear. I’m not drunk, he thinks to himself. I’m not drunk.
He has to say something. “Now, Chet, I know this looks bad, but you’ve gotta -”
And then Chet throws himself at Knox, hurling them both to the ground, and Knox can hear missed punches hitting the floor around him. And then one hits his nose, and Knox is drunk, very drunk again.
“Chet, no! You’ll hurt him! No! No! Stop it! Leave him alone!”
“Goddamn!” Chet exclaims, holding his knuckles in pain and backing away while Chris holds on to him. “Bastard!”
His nose is bloody. Ohhh, crap, his nose is bloody.
“Knox, are you alright?”
“Ginny?”
Knox manages to sit up, and the girl in front of him with a dark shock of hair and soft eyes gently wipes at his nose.
“Chet, you hurt him!” Ginny exclaims, and Knox’s eyes follow her turning head to see Chris and Chet a few feet in front of him.
“Good!” Chet yells, grasping on to Chris.
“I’m sorry,” Knox says, scooting away. “I’m so sorry.”
“It’s okay. It - it’s okay,” Chris says carefully, looking up at Chet.
“Next time I see you, you die,” Chet says, pointing at Knox but making eye contact with Ginny. She shakes her head and grabs Knox by the collar, dragging him away from the scene.

“What the fuck were you thinking, Charlie?” Meeks near-yells in the safety of his own bedroom, away from everyone else where its just the two of them. “You could be ruining the whole damn thing!”
“I had to, Meeks. I had to do something. The Poets need to stand up for what’s right.”
“I don’t give a damn! There are plenty of ways to fight back without jeopardizing the whole club. Does it not mean anything to you?”
“No, no. It means everything to me. Don’t you get it? That’s why I did it!”
“Charlie, I swear to God, you are so frustrating” Meeks takes his glasses off and throws them onto the bed in frustration. “Do not text me this weekend. Just fucking think. By Monday, you better have a damn good plan to fix this mess. I’m done.”
“Meeks, please. Don’t do this.”
“Get out, Charlie, I’ll talk to you later.”
Meeks brushes past Charlie and flees to his bathroom. Charlie stands, alone, in Meeks’ bedroom, as the door down the hallway slams shut.

“Neil, I thought we were going to talk,” Todd says as Neil begins to leave a hickey on his neck.
After the meeting, the two walked back to Neil’s house, and now that they were at the door, Neil was having a hard time keeping his hands off Todd.
Neil pulled away, admiring the fresh bruise on the soft spot of Todd’s neck. “Yeah, you’re right. A few more kisses first?”
“Are your parents not home?”
Neil takes Todd by the hand and opens the door, slipping the two of them inside. What he doesn’t notice is that the light is on in the living room.
“So, where should we go to talk?” He says, and Todd leans in for another kiss.
“Neil!”
Neil looks up, the voice instilling instant fear into his body. Mr. and Mrs. Perry stand in the doorway of the living room, in disbelief over the behavior of their son at the door.
“Whoever this is, tell him to leave. Immediately.”
“Father -”
“I didn’t ask, Neil,” Mr. Perry says, ice dripping from his voice.
Neil doesn’t move. Todd squeezes Neil’s hand, ever so slightly, and slips out the door. Mr. Perry doesn’t look at him once. Mrs. Perry does, though. They make eye contact for just one moment, and the fear in Todd’s eyes is reflected in hers.

“You bloody idiot!” Ginny shouts as she drags Knox outside and lets go, letting him topple to the ground.
“What in hell made you think getting shitfaced and kissing her was a good idea? I brought you here to get over her, not get punched by her wall of a boyfriend.”
“I thought you brought me here to woo her,” Knox says, and tears from the pain form in his eyes as he staggers upright.
Ginny laughs.
“Why does any of this matter? I just want her as mine. She shouldn’t be with that idiot!” Knox insists, trying to walk towards Ginny but failing to even make a step without falling over.
“Because you shouldn’t care about her, not when you have so many other people in your life who would do anything for you. She’s not ever going to let you in. I brought you here so you could see that, not so that you could drink half a keg and drunk kiss her, something you would never have done otherwise.”
“What?” Knox says, as the world spins around him and he can only hear a few of Ginny's words.
“Who should I care about?”
Ginny sighs, looking at his blood-red face and crooked stance with longing. “It doesn’t matter,” she says, taking his hand and pulling him towards the street. “Let’s get you home.”

Knox has heard a lot of stories of what a hangover feels like, but nothing compared to this. It wasn’t so terrible that the light coming through his window nearly blinded him when he opened his eyes, or that even a slight movement of his arm cause a shooting pain through his head, or that the ringing of his cell phone on his bedside table sounded like the liberty bell was ringing right in his ear - but it was so terrible that all of that reminded him of last night, which he so did not want to think about right now.
He had kissed Chris, and he knew that. But for some reason, thinking about it didn’t bother him, or make him feel like as big of an idiot as he probably was. Something else is weighing on him - something he can’t quite put his finger on.
But it doesn’t matter, because the phone is ringing to hell on his bedside table, and he needs to shut it up one way or another.
“Hello?” Knox grumbles, his own voice sounding like a gunshot.
“Hey,” Ginny’s soft voice responds back. “You feeling okay?”
“Like hell.” Knox rolls over and takes a look at his bedside clock. “It’s 2 o’clock?”
“Yeah,” Ginny responds. “Listen, about last night -”
“Don’t even worry about it. I’m over it.”
“Good,” she says, although she doesn’t sound convinced. “Listen, banana smoothie. Best hangover cure ever.”
“Thanks, Gin. I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”
“Take care, Knox,” she says, and then the line goes silent.

Chapter End Notes
An eventful chapter, hopefully to make up for the long wait! As usual, let me know if you enjoyed :) my tumblr is now thingsfallaphart.tumblr.com if you wanna follow and chat about all things dps!

I really, really forgot how much I love Charlie until I rewatched the movie a couple weekends ago...which admittedly inspired me to keep writing this, and jump nearly 10,000 words in two weeks!! Writer's block is a weird thing.
Saturday morning, Charlie awakes to two unpleasant things: a headache from crying, overthinking, and a lack of good sleep the night before, and a text from Ginny warning him to BEWARE OF KNOX.

Meeks told him to think. That’s certainly what Charlie’d done all night after getting kicked out of Meeks’ house, and while trying to sleep, and then again all day Saturday. Around two, Knox rang, and Charlie ignored Ginny’s warning to beware. He needed a break.

“God, Knoxious, you look like hell.” Charlie stands when Knox enters the coffee shop, a shocked look on his face, but Knox ignores it. He slumps into the seat across from Charlie and lazily waves the barista over, but it takes Charlie a moment to sit down.

“What can I get you boys?” The barista says cautiously, and Charlie sits down.

“Banana smoothie.” Knox says, and she scribbles on her notepad as Charlie gives him a look.

“Ginny says it’ll cure...this,” he explains.


“That’ll be right up,” she says, and walks away.


“Some guys gave me alcohol. Like, a lot, I think, but it didn’t feel like a lot. I kissed Chris. I think.”

“You...what?”

“I kissed her. I was drunk. I got punched.”

“That explains the giant bruise on your cheek.”


“Voddy doesn’t suit you, Knoxious.”

“I need to talk to her.”

“No - no, Knox, you’re hungover.” Charlie grabbed Knox’s phone out of his hand. “You’re tired. You need sleep.”

“What about carpe diem, Charlie?”

“This isn’t Carpe Diem. It’s stupid,” Charlie countered. “And it’s Nuwanda now.”

“No,” Knox said, completely ignoring the name change. “I need to talk to Chris first. I need to make things right with her.”

“Knox, you got punched last night for kissing her. I don’t think that’s a good idea,” Charlie said. He was getting desperate.

“What the fuck am I supposed to do? My life is falling apart here!”

“You’re not supposed to do anything, Knox, except go to bed so that you can deal with this properly when the time is right.”

“I don’t like that you’re right.”

“Yeah, but I am. Let’s get your mind off this,” Charlie suggests. The barista comes back with their drinks, and Knox cautiously sips at his smoothie. “Knox, you look like you’re gonna barf.”

“Don’t say barf,” Knox begs. “Let’s talk about something else. Anything else. How was the meeting last night?”

“Maybe that’s not the best subject.”

“What? Why?”

Charlie grimaces. “I...I wrote a letter in the school paper in the name of the Society.”

“What? What did it say?”

“I asked them to revoke the no-PDA rule,” Charlie continued, rubbing his temples as if he was the one hungover. “Everyone’s pissed at me. Meeks especially.”

“Charlie, what the hell? Why would you do that?”
“Nuwanda,” Charlie sneered, but he was beginning to care less. “I don’t know. Carpe Diem.”

Charlie had a horrible feeling in his chest and stomach when school began again. something like he’d never felt before. He wanted to vomit, and had even tried to in the bathroom, but it felt to much like his throat was closing in to actually do it.
Meeks skipped meeting up in their usual cafeteria spot. So did Knox and Ginny, admittedly. Charlie hoped they were reconciling.
Neil, however, was there, and when Todd and Charlie entered the cafeteria, Neil and Todd collided as one. Saturday night, Todd had briefed the society via text about Neil’s father. Charlie’d spent much of Sunday trying to call Neil, but this wasn’t the first time his father had cut Neil off from his friends. It was the first time for Todd, though.
“I missed you,” Todd weeps.
“I know,” Neil replies.
Charlie embraces Neil second before leaving to go search for Meeks elsewhere. He figures Todd and Neil have some catching up to do.
He spots the redhead finally in the crowded hallway seconds before the first period bell rings, and Charlie takes no care in making sure not to hit anyone as he weaves toward Meeks.
“Meeks,” Charlie calls out, but is predictably ignored. “Meeks! You said we could talk on Monday. Please, don’t ignore me.”
Meeks finally spins around. He’s several feet down the hallway from Charlie, but by now the bell’s rung and the crowd fizzled out. “You’re right. But I also said you’d better have a plan. Let's hear it.”
Charlie sighs, and closes the distance between them as much as seems comfortable. His heart pounds so hard he can feel his pulse in his hot ears.
“I’m sorry,” Charlie begins. “I was wrong, and I’m sorry. I’m going to admit that I made it all up, that it was all my own fault, and that the Dead Poets Society is nothing but something I used to piss off the administration.”
Meeks sighs, but his face softens. “You shouldn’t have done it, Charlie.”
“I know, but you have to see where I was coming from. Carpe diem. I’m trying to make a difference.”
Meeks begins to look angry again, but Charlie cuts in. “But it was still wrong, and I’ll figure out another way to do that without dragging you guys into it.”
Meeks smiles.
“I love you,” Charlie says quickly.
The smile faltered from Meeks’ lips, but into something softer and more beautiful.
“I hope that wasn’t too soon to say,” Charlie continues.
Meeks lifts to his tip toes, and holds Charlie’s shoulder for balance. There isn’t much space between the two boys left as they kiss, so much more softly than they ever have before.
“Emergency Newspaper staff meeting will be held in room 707 in ten minutes,” a voice calls over the intercom. “I repeat, Newspaper staff meeting will be held in ten minutes with mandatory attendance.”
“I guess I better go take care of this,” Charlie admits. Meeks waves him away, grinning.

“A profane and unauthorized article has appeared in this week of Welton’s Honor,” Mr. Nolan begins, earning a grimace from every student in the newspaper classroom. “Rather than spend my valuable time ferreting out the guilty persons - and let me assure you that I will find them - I’m asking any and all students who knows anything about this article to make themselves known here and now. Whoever the guilty persons are, this is your only chance to avoid expulsion from this school.”
A phone rings.
“Mr. Nolan, it’s for you!” Charlie exclaims, holding the phone out to the principal. “It’s God! He says we should revoke the no-PDA rule.”
A few newspaper students stifle a laugh. Mr. Nolan rushes over to Charlie and leads him out of the
“Wipe that smirk off your face,” Mr. Nolan sneers into Charlie’s ear as they walk. “If you think, Mr. Dalton, that you’re the first to try to get thrown out of this school, think again. Others have had similar notions and have failed just as surely as you will fail.”

“So what’re you gonna do about your father?” Todd asks. The two cozied up in the cafeteria together as soon as the final bell of the day rang: they both sat on the floor, Neil with his back against a pole and his legs draped over Todd, who sat against the wall and played with Neil’s pant leg.

After Todd hesitantly left that Friday night, when they’d been caught by his father, Neil regretted making him go. He’d wanted to fight back, so badly. So he spoke up.

“Wait a minute. Before you say anything, please let me explain,” He gushed. His father held up one hand.

“Don’t you dare talk back to me! It’s bad enough that you’ve wasted your time with this, this absurd acting business. But you deliberately deceived me! How, how, how did you expect to get away with this? Answer me. Who put you up to it? Was it this new man? This, uh, Mr. Keating?”

Neil stood in shock at the complete lack of mention of Todd. Had his father not seen them together? Or did he simply not care?

“No - nobody put me up to it,” Neil said as he fumbled for an excuse. He never really thought of what he’d do if his father found out about the play. He’d been so much more worried about Todd. “I thought I’d surprise you,” he fibbed finally. “I’ve gotten all A’s in every class.”

“Did you think I wasn’t going to find out?” Mr. Perry demanded, exasperation dripping from his voice. “‘Oh, my niece is in a play with your son,’ says Mrs. Marks. ‘No, no, no,’ I say, ‘you must be mistaken. My son’s not in a play.’ You made a liar of me, Neil! Now, tomorrow you go to them and you tell them that you’re quitting.”

“No, I can’t,” Neil said, as it sets over him how real this situation is. “I have the main part. The performance is Thursday.”

“I don’t care if the world comes to an end because of this! You are through with that play. Is that clear?”

Silence.

“Is that clear?” Mr. Perry sneers.

“Yes, sir,” Neil said finally.

Mr. Perry paused in the entrance of the doorway before turning to leave. Neil’s mother stood her post in the kitchen, as if there, she’d be out of view. Neil caught her eye for a moment, and froze her. For a moment, her eyes betrayed fear, as if she was in the same boat as Neil. Neil grit his teeth in utter frustration at her. She rushed away the moment Mr. Perry spoke again.

“I made a great many sacrifices to get you where you are, Neil, and you will not let me down.” Mr. Perry said.

It took all of Neil’s might to get the next words out. “No, sir.”

There were play rehearsals going on at that very moment, but rather than go and defy his father or go and quit, Neil was simply skipping altogether, unable to make a choice in his dilemma.

“I honestly don’t know,” Neil admits. “I can’t quit the play, but I don’t see any other choice.”

Todd nods, but his eyes betray unsurity.

Suddenly, Neil jumps up. “Keating. I have to talk to Keating,” he insists. Todd gets up a bit more slowly as Neil rushes to gather his things. “Todd, thank you,” he continues, and pulls Todd in for a tight hug. Todd melts into his arms like candy.

“I’ll be back.” Neil pulls away to look Todd directly in the eyes, and brushes back a piece of Todd’s gold-red hair that’s fallen into his eyes. He then picks his bag off the ground and rushes towards the English classroom, leaving Todd frozen, and smiling in the cafeteria with Pitts looking at him with amusement and Cameron with confusion.

Neil marches down the hallway towards the room of his English teacher. Confidently, he stands...
before Keating’s door, preparing a knock, when he hears two recognizable voices drifting from the classroom.

“This was my first classroom, John. Did you know that?” The startling voice of Mr. Nolan asks, drifting through the door to Neil, who feels he should turn away, but can’t.

“Didn’t know you taught, Mr. Nolan,” Keating replies, clearly struggling to keep things light.

“English. Oh, long before your time. It was hard giving it up, I can tell you,” Mr. Nolan continues before changing the subject. “I’m hearing rumors, John, about some unorthodox teaching methods in your classroom. I’m not saying they’ve anything to do with the Dalton boy’s outburst. But I don’t think I have to warn you boys his age are very impressionable.”

“Well, your reprimand made quite an impression, I’m sure.”

“What was going on in the courtyard the other day?”

“Courtyard?”

“Yes. Boys marching, clapping in unison.”

Neil grinned as he remembered the lesson.

“Oh, that. That was an exercise to prove a point. Dangers of conformity.”

“Well, John, the curriculum here is set,” Mr. Nolan cut Keating off. “It’s proven it works. If you question, what's to prevent them from doing the same?”

“I always thought the idea of educating was to learn to think for yourself.”

“At these boys’ ages? Not on your life!” Nolan insisted. “Tradition, John. Discipline. Prepare them for college and the rest will take care of itself.”

Neil heard footsteps, and quickly he ducked around the corner before Mr. Nolan could make his exit and see Neil. He waited a moment before returning to Keating’s door, now open, and he paused just out of view of Keating’s desk.

Slowly, Neil knocks on the open door to Keating’s office.

“Come in,” the voice inside says, and Neil pushes open the door.

“Neil, what’s up?” Keating asks.

“Can I speak to you a minute?”

“Certainly. Sit down.”

Neil takes note of a photo on Keating’s desk. It’s of a beautiful woman, standing in front of an old European-style street car. “She’s pretty,” he says finally.

“She’s also in London. Makes it a little difficult.”

“How can you stand it?” Neil asks in awe.

“Stand what?”

“You can go anywhere. You can do anything. How can you stand being here?”

“Cause I love teaching. I don’t wanna be anywhere else.”

Neil sighs. His eyes drift back to the photo. He realizes he knows so little about Keating’s life, yet he feels that he knows so much about Keating’s mind.

“What’s up?” Keating asks, interrupting Neil’s thoughts.

“My father. He’s making me quit the play,” Neil spits. “Acting’s everything to me. I - but he doesn’t know. He - I can see his point. We’re not a rich family life Charlie’s,” Neil continues, and he knows he’s right. Good grades. Diligence in school. That’s what will pay for college. “But he’s planning the rest of my life for me, and I - H-he’s never asked me what I want.”

Keating pauses. “Have you ever told your father what you just told me? About your passion for acting. You ever show him that?”

“I can’t,” Neil protests, and tears well up in his eyes.

“Why not?”

“I can’t talk to him this way.”

“Then you're acting for him, too. You're playing the part of the dutiful son. I know this sounds impossible, but you have to talk to him. You have to show him who you are, what your heart is.”

The tears begin to flow. Neil knows Keating is right, but frustration wells anyway. He can’t do that.

“I know what he’ll say. He'll tell me that acting's a whim, and I should forget it. That how they’re counting on me. He'll just tell me to put it out of my mind, ‘for my own good.’”
“You are not an indentured servant. If it's not a whim for you, you prove it to him by your conviction and your passion. You show him that And if he still doesn't believe you, well, by then you'll be out of school and you can do anything you want.”

“No. What about the play? The performance is three days away.”

“Well, then you have three days to talk to him.”

“Isn’t there an easier way?” Neil asks as he wipes his tears away. Keating smiles solemnly.

“No.”

“I’m trapped,” Neil laughs through tears.

“No, you’re not.”

When Neil exits Keating’s classroom, the boys are crowded around the door. Neil looks to Todd, wondering if he told that Neil was going to talk to Keating, but Todd’s looking forward with all the other boys. He sees what they’re waiting for. Charlie, who missed every one of his Monday classes due to being stuck in Nolan’s office, walks stiffly and angrily down the hallway towards the small crowd. Neil pushes to the front of the line as Charlie passes,

“You kicked out?” He asks, but Charlie keeps walking.

“No.”

“So what happened?”

“I’m to turn everybody in, apologize to the school, and all will be forgiven.”

“So what are you gonna do? Charlie!”

“Damn it, Neil,” Charlie grins through a grimace. “The name is Nuwanda.”

Later that evening, the boys cozied up in the library for a routine study group. Neil’s father wouldn’t let him leave the house other than to go to school, and apparently wasn’t keen enough to realize that Neil wasn’t actually receiving homework help from teachers like he’d fibbed to his father in order to stay after school. After Keating’s pep talk, Neil had escaped to go to the remainder of rehearsal, refusing to quit but also refusing to tell his father about the matter. Mr. Perry would be gone in Chicago starting Wednesday. Neil could do all three of the play’s Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night performances and simply tell his mother he was out studying. His father would never need to know.

After rehearsal, he joined the boys in their library study session, which had turned into a Charlie’s story-time session. Knox was still curiously not present, but Ginny had made her way back to the group around lunchtime.

“Creak. He started walking around towards my left. Creak. Creak. ‘I want names, Mr. Dalton. Who is responsible for this Dead Poets Society?’”

Charlie paused when Keating entered the building, and scanned the room for the boys he seeked. Charlie and a few other boys waved him over.

“Mr. Keating, what’s up?” Charlie asked, waiting to be reprimanded for his stunt.

“Mr. Dalton. That was a pretty lame stunt you pulled today,” Keating warned.”

“You’re siding with Mr. Nolan?” Charlie asked in disbelief. “What about Carpe Diem and sucking all the marrow out of life and all that?”

“Sucking the marrow out of life doesn’t mean choking on the bone,” Keating retorted. Charlie leaned back. “Sure there’s a time for daring and there’s a time for caution, and a wise man understands which is called for.”

“But I thought you’d like that.”

“No. You being expelled from school is not daring to me. It’s stupid, ‘cause you’d miss some golden opportunities.”

“Yeah, like what?” Charlie sneered, though not rudely.

“Like if nothing else, the opportunity to attend my classes,” Keating continued, receiving laughs and giggles from many of the boys in his audience. “Got it, Ace?”

“Aye aye, Captain.”
“Keep your head about you. That goes for the lot of you.” Keating gestured around the corner of the library where the group was nestled.
“Yes, Captain.”
“Phone call from God. If it had been collect, it wouldn’t been daring.”
Everyone laughs as Keating struts away.

Chapter End Notes

Happy Halloween, folks!

I'm so excited for holiday au season, honestly wanna write a few of my own this time around

Anyway, enjoy this chapter xxx
Level Headed

While the rest of the boys spend their day reeling from what happened between Neil and his father, Neil and Todd, and Charlie and everyone, Knox spends it on Chris. He skips every class Monday to perfect a plan to woo Chris. Tuesday morning, in trig, will be his moment to shine.

The weather is finally starting to get back to classic chilly Vermont, so when Knox arrives at school Tuesday morning, the cool breeze nearly freezes his ungloved fingers off as they thumb the collection of wildflowers he’s grasping by hand.

Lucky for him, Chris is at her locker near Hager’s classroom, chatting with a friend. Knox rushes over to her. She spots him in an instant.

“Excuse me, Chris.”

“Knox, what are you doing?” Chris glances at the redhead girl next to her, who scurries away.

“I came to apologize for the other night. I brought you these, and a poem I wrote for you.” He shoves the flowers in her direction and fumbles in his pocket for the poem with his free hand.

“Knox,” Chris interjects, pulling him into a nook free from the hallway. “Don’t you know that if Chet finds you talking to me, he’ll kill you?”

“I can’t care. I love you Chris.”

She audibly, and dramatically, sighs. “Knox, you’re crazy.”

“Look, I acted like a jerk and I know it. Please, accept these. Please,” he says, once again offering the fleurs.

“No. No - I can’t. Forget it.”

The first morning bell rings. Chris struts down the hall to the trig classroom, hurriedly, leaving Knox behind in the corridor.

Knox debates for a moment. He’s got to go to into trig anyway, but now’s his chance to go after her one more time. To read her the poem and let her know the deep state of his feelings. The flowers in his hand fade into his view. Carpe diem, right?

He follows Chris into Hager’s classroom, where class is seconds from starting. She looks up from her desk (this time she’s moved to the left side of the room, away from Knox), but her expression isn’t horror. It’s shock at Knox’s persistence.

“Knox, I don’t believe this.”

“All I’m asking you to do is listen.”

The whole class is watching him now. Chris looks on with widened eyes.

“The heavens made a girl named Chris, with hair and skin of gold. To touch her would be paradise,” Knox begins.

Chris buries her face in her hands, but Knox finishes reading the poem.

Fourth period in Keating’s class is the first time all the boys are together in a room again since Friday’s meeting.

Knox, for once, is the center of attention, due to his absence from school the prior day. He struts in, doing his best to appear nonchalant, but can’t help grinning when Charlie grabs hold of his jacket as he walks past.

“Hey, how’d it go?” Charlie asks. “Did you read it to her?”

“Yeah,” Knox replies, undaunted.

The boys crowd around. “What’d she say?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing. What do you mean, nothing?”


Knox meanders to his desk. The boys follow.

“What did she say? I know she had to say something.”
“Seize the day!” Knox all but yells as he collapses into his seat. Charlie follows him over, but Keating’s entrance cuts the interrogation of Knox a moment short.

“Alright, everyone, line up and grab a blindfold each!” Keating shouts with his usual luster, and places a stack of blindfolds on Richard Cameron’s desk.

After a long and interesting class period listening to old orchestra records, Neil hangs back as the boys filter out of the room. Beethoven plays softly in the background of his mind. Once the crowd has gone, Keating takes notice of the lone boy left behind.

“Did you talk to your father?”

Neil nods, and turns focus to the notebook in front of him. His heart feels as if it’s shrivelling up.

“Uh, he didn’t like it one bit,” he begins. “But at least he’s letting me stay in the play. He won’t be able to make it. He’s in Chicago. But, uh, I think he’s gonna let me stay with acting.” Neil prays Keating can’t see right through him. Eye contact is out of the question, as the cover of Five Centuries of Verse suddenly becomes very interesting. How’d this thing get so much lint stuck to the cover?

“Really? You told him what you told me?” Keating says, in disbelief, but his tone of voice betrays that he knows the truth.

“Yeah. He wasn’t happy. But he’ll be gone at least four days,” Neil responds, the only truth. “I don’t think he’ll make the show, but I think he’ll let me stay with it, if I ‘keep up the school work.’” Keating’s eyes soften, pleading Neil to tell the truth.


Keating nods, and Neil rushes away.

Meanwhile, Charlie pesters Knox on the way to fifth period. “Knoxious, what’s up? You seem totally unphased by the fact that you just REVEALED YOUR FEELINGS TO YOUR CRUSH.” Knox sighs. The high has worn off. “I don’t know, Charlie,” he says. “It’s like I don’t even care anymore. I feel like I’m just doing it to be reckless. I still have lovesick feelings, though, it’s just...I think I’m in love with the idea of her more than I actually love her.”

“Geez, Knox, it takes chasing your crush down and reading her a weirdly intimate love poem for you to FINALLY see the light?” Charlie retorts. “Level-headedness looks good on you. You should do this more often.”

Ginny walked up to them then, and Knox grinned with relief at the sight of her. They hadn’t talked very much since ‘making up’ over the phone, and Knox feared that she was still angry. Ginny looked radiant, though; she looked happy to see them.

“Hey, boys, what’s goin’ on?”

“Knox revealed his love to Chris, and subsequently may have gotten shot down.” Ginny’s smile faltered, but when she looked to Knox, she eased. “Why aren’t you upset, crying into Charlie’s shoulder right now?” She half-teased and half-sympathized.

Knox looked at her, and then back to Charlie. It felt as if now that his feelings were out, and the ball was in Chris’ court, it didn’t really matter. But his crush on Chris had given him Ginny, something he was still happy about. He still had his friends like Charlie, too. There wasn’t much to be sad about.

“I have you,” Knox says to Ginny. “And you,” he adds quickly, looking to Charlie. Something flashes in Charlie’s eyes - realization. Knox catches in one moment, then flicks his eyes away in fear. “Let’s get to class, shall we?” Knox says quickly, providing his arm for Ginny to take. As they walk away, Knox steals a glance back at Charlie, who’s smirking like a dumbass.

Charlie might know something that even Knox hasn’t caught yet (or maybe he just has). Chris won’t be on Knox’s mind for very much longer.

“Hey,” a familiar voice appears behind Charlie. “Charlie, can I talk to you?”

Charlie whips around to a worried looking Neil.

“Listen, you’re the only person who won’t think I’m completely crazy for doing this,” Neil begins. “My father told me to quit the play, you know.”

“Yeah, I know. What’re you gonna do?”
“Keating told me to talk to him, convince him to let me stay with it. I’m not doing that,” Neil begins to look even more nervous. “I’m doing the play. He’s in Chicago for the weekend. He’ll never know if I’m careful.”


Neil grins, and Charlie snakes an arm around his shoulder, leading him away.
Merry Wanderer, of the Night

Chapter Notes

I couldn't help but post all of these chapters at once, omg
I don't have much to say. I'll just leave this here.

“Are you sure this is gonna work?”
Four hours until opening night. Neil’s holed up in the greenroom, Todd there for emotional support and Charlie there for fashion support. Of course, Todd chooses now to object to the sanctity of Neil and Charlie’s plan.
“Of course it’s going to work.” Charlie swipes shimmery gold powder onto Neil’s cheek.
“It’s gonna work. Now, are you sure I need that much highlight?” Neil asks as he catches sight of himself in the mirror.
“Absolutely. I can’t have my Puck going up on stage without looking like a snack.”
“Whatever you say.”
“Todd, lets go. The boys are waiting.”
“Are you sure you got this?” Todd asks softly as Charlie struts out of earshot. Neil presses his forehead to Todd’s, sending a blush through Todd’s cheeks that’s deeper than before.
“Yes. He’ll never know. We’ve been careful.” Neil reassures Todd. “Now go before Nuwanda has a hernia.”
“Excuse me?”

Play prep for the rest of the boys took place in Pitts’ bathroom, which admittedly was large, but not large enough for the crowd of poets.
“Beautiful baby,” Pitts coos at the mirror, and Meeks follows suit.
“Beautiful baby. Henley Hall, here I come.”
“Excuse me, just a moment,” Cameron gushes. “Yes. You’re so cute.”
Todd leaps up from his seat on the bathtub and musses up Cameron’s stiff hair.
“HEY! Come on, Todd, I’m trying to fix this.”
“Hurry up. Come on, Nuwanda, you’re gonna miss Neil’s entrance.”
“He said something about getting red before we left.”
“Getting red? What does that mean?”
“You know Charlie,” Pitts gufaws.
A hand holding a bottle of red paint violently shoves back the shower curtain, and Charlie emerges, a smirk planted deviously on his lips.
“So, Charlie, what’s this ‘getting red’ bit?”
Eyebrows raised, lips coy, Charlie pulls his button-up open to reveal a crimson lightning bolt drawn onto his chest.
“What is that?” Todd asks, stifling a laugh.
“It’s an Indian warrior symbol for virility. Makes me feel potent, like it can drive Meeks crazy.”
“Oh, I’ll take anything that gets you shirtless,” Meeks responds, and the boys collectively groan.
“Come on, Charlie. The Meek are waiting.”
Knox and Ginny appear in the doorway then, having just arrived to Pitts’. Ginny stifles her laugh at
the sight of Charlie, while Knox does nothing to hide his.
“What is THAT?” He asks, and Cameron sighs loudly.
“Best not to ask,” Todd advises as everyone files out of the bathroom excitedly, complete with
whoops and yawns that fill the house with glee.

The commons of Welton have been completely transformed for opening night. White fairy lights, a
classic, are strung all along the walls, and decorative flowers reminiscent of Puck’s crown cover the
focal-point poster that reads “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. The boys blend in perfectly, dressed
up in suits and ties in colors of red and brown, as they sit before the banner. Todd jokingly pokes at
Charlie, who’s got Meeks in his lap, as Meeks and Pitts discuss heatedly some sciency thing that
neither Charlie nor Todd understand. Cameron tries to give his input, to no avail. Ginny and Knox
sit at the other end of the long bench, Ginny up against the wall and Knox on his back with his head
in her lap.

Snow’s begun to fall outside in the cool Vermont air, and each time the door opens, an oddly
pleasant chilly breeze snakes around the boys’ feet. After a bit of time waiting for the auditorium to
open, the breeze falls over them once more time as a familiar face enters the commons.

Knox stands at the sight of her. “Chris.”
She raises a hand to usher him over.
“Does she ruin everything?” Ginny sighs. Charlie puts an arm around her as Knox rushes over to
Chris.
“What are you doing here?”
“Chet found out about what you did. Your poem. And it took everything I could do to keep him
from coming here and killing you! Knox, you have got to stop this stuff.”
Knox sneaks a look back at the boys. Charlie shake his head violently. Ginny’s eyes plead to him.
Mr. Keating makes an arrival then, and urges the boys to get inside the auditorium.

“Go ahead, guys,” Knox says. “I'll catch up.”
He takes Chris by the hand and leads her outside, where the snow’s stopped falling but it’s left a
heavy white blanket over the ground.
“Knox, what if it just so happens that I could care less about you?” Chris asks earnestly.
“Do you?”
“I’m sorry, what?”
“Do you care about me? Or do you not? I need to know if I’m playing a game that’s already ended
or not,” Knox asks, though it’s more like a plead. Chris just shakes her head. Knox sighs. “Then
Chris, why are you here?”
The doors to Welton opens.
“I’m not going to fight for you anymore, okay? You’re making your choice.”
Footsteps make their way down the path.
“Your boyfriend is an asshole. I know that, you know that, even his own sister knows that. You
need to leave him, but I’m not going to have anything to do with it anymore, okay? I’ll leave you
alone. I do hope that you see, someday, that Chet is bad for you, and I hope one day, someone treats
you with the respect that you deserve. But it can’t be me who does that.”
“I’m not asking you to, Knox,” Chris retorts, and tears fall from her eyes. “I just...I don’t know what
to do.”
“I know. I’m saying it for my own good. And I need to see, as well, that there’s somebody else out
there who loves me and who I love for all of the right reasons. I’ve spent enough time chasing
somebody who’s never going to feel the right way about me. And so have you, on Chet. I think we
both have some changing to do.”
“I don’t know how. We’ve been together for three years, I - I don’t know how to end that.”
A familiar voice pipes up from behind.
“Knox?”
Knox whirls around.
“Hi, Ginny,” Chris says. Her flow of tears steadies.
Knox looks at Chris, looking gorgeous as ever even when crying, her blue eyes illuminated by the white backdrop of snow. His eyes return to the sight of Ginny, and Ginny’s soft brown eyes, and the way her hands reach into her long sleeves for warmth, and the way her hat is falling into her eyes, and the way she’s looking at Knox with a deep anticipation. Ginny, who’s been there for him though everything with Chris. Ginny, who danced with him at homecoming like there wasn’t anybody else in the room. Ginny, who cleaned him up after he drank too much at Chet’s party. Ginny, who’s held his hand every time he needed it. Ginny.

Suddenly, all Knox wants to do is run to her, pull her in, and kiss her, and let her feel the way he has these past few months - like there’s someone out there who loves her. But first, he turns to Chris.

“Are you going with him?”

“Chet? To a play?” Chris laughs, though it feels out of place. “Are you kidding?”

“Then come with me.”

“Knox, you are so infuriating.”

“No, not like that. Come with me. And Ginny.”

Chris looks at him in disbelief, then allows her eyes to focus back on Ginny. Ginny’s expression has softened.

“What would happen if Chet found out?”

“Go inside, we’ll be in a minute.” Knox gives her a little push, and Chris runs inside.

Knox turns to Ginny. “Can we talk?”

Ginny nods, then grins. Knox does a little spin as he links his arm in hers and pulls her along for a walk in the snow.

“So...you’ve given up on Chris?”

“Yes. I’m moving onto better things.”

“Dead Poets Honor.”

“Your word.”

Knox smiles silently, and they walk without destination for another moment before he pipes up again.

“Vee been here for me through everything.” Knox begins. “You’ve spent what probably accounts to days listening to me talk about her. You’ve put up with my weird friends. You’ve been by my side at the drop of a hat when I needed it. All only after a few months of knowing each other. Why?”

Ginny sighs. “That’s love, Knox.”

Knox stops their walk, and draws Ginny in to face him.

“Ginny.” Knox says, and when she doesn’t look at him, he says it again. “Ginny.”

“What?” She says, finally looking up at him. Her scarf delicately covers Ginny’s lower lip, and Knox tugs on it softly to reveal her soft smile.

“You’re incredible.” he says, a soft smile teasing his lips.

Ginny grins, and her eyes betray some mixture of fear and thrilled.

“Is there a word for being scared and excited at the same time?” Knox wonders aloud.

Ginny laughs. “Probably. Is that really what you’re thinking about right now?”

“It’s pretty relevant.”

He’s hesitating. Knox knows this moment won’t last forever, but he wishes it would and that he could be caught up in this shivery feeling for all of eternity. At the same time, he’s pushing himself to place a few fingers under her chin, tilt her head up, lean in, and kiss her.

She beats him to the punch.
“HEY, there he is!” Charlie shouts as the audience erupts in applause. Cameron has to use all his might to pull Charlie back into his seat. “Hey, hey!”

The fairy lights from outside snake into the theater, where they bathe the stage in warm wintery light. The stage has changed from an almost blank stage in the first scene to a dark and magical forest, where Neil, clad in black complete with a twig and lush berry crown, weaves throughout the trees in his entrance. Beside Charlie, Todd, who’s managed to stay in his seat, can’t wipe the tremendous smile from his face.

The theater is packed. Only two seats are empty, at the end of the row containing five Dead Poets, one alum, and Chris, who joined the group after leaving Ginny and Knox in the snow. The two missing society members make their way in just as Neil speaks his first lines and the applause dies down for one moment.

“Thou speak’st aright; I am that merry wanderer of the night. I jest to Oberon and make him smile, when I, a fat and bean-fed horse beguile - ” Puck pauses to make a few neighing sounds, “-neighing in likeness of a filly foa: and sometimes lurk I in a gossip’s bowl, in very likeness of a roasted crab, and when she drinks, against her lips I bob. And on her wither’d dewlap pour the ale. The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale.”

Charlie practically climbs over Meeks, sitting beside him, to whisper in Keating’s ear: “He’s good. He’s really good.”

“But room, Fairy! Here comes Oberon.”

Puck and his fairy friend conceal themselves into the trees. The audience erupts in cheers.

Now Neil’s the one who can’t wipe the smile from his face. As the play continues without him on stage, he sneaks a look at the audience from the theater wings: Near the front, taking up one entire row, he sees his friends and teacher mimicking his grin as they watch the play.

The door to the theater opens, but the actors and audience are too enraptured by Shakespeare to notice. Neil almost is. Neil wishes he was.

Mr. Perry enters the theater, and takes refuge directly in the center of the back wall, no seats being available. Neil’s heart drops.

“Amen, amen, to that fair prayer, say I - “ Lysander belts out to the audience.

“Neil! That’s your cue. You’ve got to get out on stage.”

The last lines of his first play ever are rapidly approaching. Neil’s praying he can draw it out. This is his moment - possibly now, his only moment.

“If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended.”

Todd seems to make direct eye contact with Neil, a beam still plastered to his face. Neil fights the heart-wrenching feeling washing over his chest.

“That you have but slumber’d here, while these visions did appear.”

Keating’s looking directly at the boy on stage, as well. His hand is clenched into a fist as he seems to mouth the words along with Puck. Neil can’t help but smile, just the slightest amount.”

“And this weak and idle theme, no more yielding but a dream. Gentles, do not reprehend: If you pardon, we will mend.”

Charlie uses Meeks as a human pillow as Puck’s last lines are delivered. A few seats over, Knox takes Ginny’s hand in his.

“And, as I am an honest Puck, if we have unearned luck now to ’scape the serpent’s tongue, we will make amends ere long.”

Neil’s eyes lose focus on his friends in the audience. They fall to his father, standing expressionless, still in the back row.

“Else the Puck a liar call; so, good night unto you all. Give me your hands, if we be friends, and Robin shall restore amends.”

For a moment, Neil forgets about his father, and even the audience, and just takes in the the feeling of his own beating heart. The curtains fall, and the cast crowds the center of the stage. Cheers fill the air like a roar.
“Neil, your father would like to speak with you.”
A weight drops on Neil’s chest. He nods.

“He wasn’t kidding. He’s got talent,” Charlie gushes to a giddy Keating and Todd. Todd can’t seem to stop bopping up and down, and Charlie assumes this is his weird way of showing excitement. He’ll take it.
The boy on everyone’s minds follows his father out of the theater and is immediately pounced on by the entire society and friends.
“Neil, Neil, you were great,” Charlie says first.
“I can’t, guys. I have to go,” Neil nods towards his father. Charlie heart drops.
“What’s he doing here?”
Keating rushes after them as the father and son duo burst outside. He manage to grab hold of Neil’s coat. “Neil,” he says, and finally, Neil turns around. “Neil. You have the gift. What a performance, you even left me speechless! You have to stay with -”
Neil is shoved aside by an enraged Mr. Perry. “Keating, you stay away from my son. Neil, get in the car.”
“Neil! Wait! Mr. Perry, come on!” Charlie chases after the car. Keating holds out an arm to steady him, and Meeks grabs hold of his coat.
“Don’t make it any worse than it is,” Keating advises, but Charlie hardly lets up.
Todd falls into place beside him, and Neil looks up from his seat in the car. Todd’s face is masked with exasperation; Neil’s is just sorrow.

“I hope he’s okay.”
Charlie and Knox relocated to Knox’s house after the play, accompanied by Ginny. The two sat a bit too close on Knox’s bed, while Charlie paced the room ad overthought all the events of the evening.
“God, Charlie, go to bed,” Knox pipes in, desperate to stop Charlie from running a ditch into the floor of his room. “You’re gonna give yourself an aneurysm.”
“Hey, he’s worried, it’s understandable,” Ginny pipes in as she snuggled deeper into Knox’s shoulder. Charlie’s not even had a chance to process that whole situation yet, and he probably won’t until he hears from Neil.
“Shut up, Ginny.”
Ginny rips the pillow from underneath Knox’s head and smacks him with it. The two laugh as he tackles her, and Charlie can’t help but smile. It’s weird, but they’re cute.
On Knox’s dresser, Lana del Rey begins playing as Charlie’s ringtone. Ginny pauses her battle with Knox to check the phone. “Uh, Mrs. Perry?”
Charlie raises an eyebrow, but his heart rate picks up. “W-why would she call me?”
Ginny shrugs, and Knox sits up on the bed, his cheeks flush with heat. The room becomes so silent, it feels as if someone’s screaming in Charlie’s ears.
“Hello?” Charlie asks quietly. Most of him hopes it’ll just be Neil’s chipper voice letting them now that he’s fine, but his father grounded him or something. That he’ll see them Monday, and please let Todd know so he doesn’t worry himself to death.
But Mrs. Perry is crying, and Knox and Ginny are now sitting at the edge of the bed, looking anxiously at Charlie, as the screaming in his ears gets louder and louder and louder -

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