"Please... come back," you barely whisper and twitch your head towards the door like he could still hear you, "I don't have anyone. I don't ha-," the word stop as you choke on a sob. You hug yourself mindlessly. Your knees buckle.

You've found the name for that poison, that burning, that stinging, throbbing, PAIN. It's loneliness.

You collapse, sobbing and sobbing, all facades and pretenses are now out the window.

Your name is Dave Strider, and you are so, so lonely.
Loneliness

Your name is Dave Strider and it's suddenly really bright. What the hell is going on?

You sit upright quickly and immediately regret it. Your breath hitches and you curse softly. A throbbing, grinding feeling hits you in the head like a freaking bulldozer. The pounding in your head multiplies when you move too quickly and you start feeling dizzy. You raise a hand to your head to steady yourself.

Shit, this isn't good. Through squinted eyes you can just make out that your window shades are wide open. God dammit. You always make sure they're closed. Who the fuck opened them? Sure as hell wasn't you.

With that, you inhale sharply and close your eyes. You slowly use the hand that isn't supporting your head to grope around on your bedside table. When you feel the cool touch of metal and plastic you calm down just a little bit and exhale. You all but slam your glasses on.

After some mental preparation, you open your eyes slowly.

Everything is blurry and bright. The throbbing behind your eyes increases and you try your best to ignore it.

You fail.

You close your eyes again, not risking a seizure or something. You lie back down, press your glasses to your forehead and press the heels of your hands into your eyes, rubbing this pounding away.

Maybe you should just go back to sleep.

"Rise and shine little man," you hear.

The rubbing stops and your blood turns ice cold.

Without hesitation, you jump and stand on your bed instinctively. Grabbing the katana hanging on your wall above your bed, you take the most threatening pose you can muster with your eyes still slammed shut.

You stand there, wobbling on the downy mattress, chest heaving up and down, ready for what was coming.

But it never comes.

After what seems like an eternity, you crack one eye open the slightest bit, still poised for a fight.

Standing at the foot of the bed, leaning on the post, is a man in a white polo and black jeans. His sharp features and prominent jaw are noticeable, even from behind your obscure sunglasses.

He would almost look like an average guy- if he wasn't sporting black, leather, fingerless gloves, an orange baseball hat, and those ironic pointy anime shades. He had a devious smile painted onto his smug face and his body language practically oozed coolness.

"Hey hey, cool it there little guy," he managed through his cocky smile, "I'm not here to fight you."

"God DAMN it Bro!" You clench your teeth and drop your arms to your sides. You realize what a fool you must look like to him right now. You should have known he was there. You should have known it was him. Guilt and shame swell inside your stomach but you keep your expression stoic.
You take in a deep breath and try to ask him what the hell he's doing here of all places, but your head starts spinning and the edges of your vision start fading to black.

"What the fff-" you start, but you can feel yourself slipping, the pounding in your head and ears intensifies. You see flashes of bright, white light right in front of your face. What is wrong with you?

You fall forwards, and you would have hit your bed or one of the posts but the big guy flashsteps forward and catches you before you even have time to realize it.

The last things you hear before you completely give up all consciousness is the sound of your katana hitting the hardwood floor and your brother snickering as he holds you up.

"Not cool, little dude."

Bastard.

---

You wake up on your living room couch to the sound of bacon frying.

Oh, there's that pounding. It has subsided at this point, but jesus- you've never felt anything like it.

Your face is buried in the leather pillow. You peel your forehead off of it. There's probably a mark on your face but you're too out of it to care much. You're all kinds of sore and you can feel a crick forming in your neck. You peel an arm off of the couch to rub at it.

What the hell? You haven't felt this shitty in a long time. You open your aching eyes and turn them towards the kitchen, groggily.

You glare into the kitchen and your gaze lands on your Bro's back which is turned to you. He's busy at the stove, making something. He's got that ironic flower apron on. You roll your eyes in disgust and moan at the shooting pain it sends through your head.

You wonder what the hell he's doing back so soon. He had told you that he wouldn't be back until the end of the month or something like that. It was only the 19th of July.

Bro could leave for long stretches of time. He's the owner of a multimillion dollar puppet-porn business and since the business stretched all across the planet, he was always out and about, taking care of whatever it was porn puppet tycoons do. He tried explaining it to you once when you were younger, but you hate those things too much to care. You know it's what put the bread on the table and what affords your living, but... Man, FUCK those things.

You sigh loudly. Things were always hard when he was gone for a long time. Of course, you'd never admit that to him. Striders are strong, they don't miss other people- they're loners.

You'll never tell him about all of those nights you've spent awake, trying not to think about the empty halls in your apartment. You'll never tell him how sick you get of fast food and TV dinners or just how much you crave a good homemade meal. You'll never tell him about that growing feeling of dread you get in your stomach every time he has to leave...

That would be stupid and weak. Everything a Strider isn't.

"Are you gonna pass out again on me there, kid?" You snap out of your thoughts. Damn. He heard you all the way in there.

"I'm making you this quality breakfast so you better eat it. Do you keep any food in this house or do you just waste away to nothing?"

All you can do is grunt in return.

You're upset, but you don't know about what. So you decide to direct all those negative feelings at
him. You start shivering.

Oh no. Oh god no. Please not now. You lock the door behind you and heave for a good ten minutes.

When the puking has finally subsided, you stumble over in front of the sink. You douse your hands in cold water and pat your face and neck down. You're sweating all over, hot and cold, hot and cold. Your body can't make up its mind.

You look in the mirror. Damn, Strider. What a state you're in. Your bangs are plastered to your forehead in the water/perspiration combo. The damp pieces of hair are darker but the rest of it is blonde enough to be considered white. Your mouth hangs slack, dragging in any breath you can manage. There are freckles sprinkled across your fair, smooth complexion.

You meet the reflection's gaze. The rest of your body is weak but two red eyes gaze back with intensity. They look older than the rest of your 19-year-old body, but have the sharpness of a feline's. And they are red as blood...

You tear your gaze away, not wanting to remind yourself for the millionth time how much you hate them.

When you're sure the nausea has subsided, you exit the bathroom, walking like nothing even happened.

You find your Bro sitting in the armchair across from your couch, scarfing down a plate of eggs, bacon, and hash browns. You notice there's a plate set for you too. Your mouth salivates and your stomach turns. There's no way your stomach can handle that right now.

Plus, 'you're mad at him,' you think as you sit down, 'you can't take that from him'.

He eyes you expectantly as you sit, eyes switching behind his glasses from you to the plate in front of you. He's proud of what he's made, you can tell. He wants you to eat it but that won't be happening.

All you do is lean back into the couch and cross your arms with a stoic face. You can beat this jackass.

He stares you down. After thirty intense seconds he sets his own plate down on the table and mimics your position. His face settles somewhere between grave and amused. You start to rethink and try to swallow the lump forming in your throat.

"So," he finally drawls, "you gonna tell me what happened last night?"

You stare at him blankly. Neither of you move for fifteen seconds. You realize you're not wearing your glasses and thank god the blinds in here are shut. But you're going to have to make a better attempt at hiding your emotions because without your glasses, you can see every emotion in your eyes.

You lean forward the slightest bit. "I have no idea what you're talking about," you snarl. You really don't. In fact, last night is a complete mystery to you. Which, of course, is never good.

You're pretty sure he squints his eyes behind his shades. It's so hard to tell.

"Oh really?"
"Yeah really."

He leans forward to meet your stance. The corner of his mouth twitches. You're starting to feel uncomfortable.

"Look around little bro. Tell me what it is exactly that you see."
You stare him down for a few more seconds before freeing your gaze. You look around your apartment space.

Nothing is different. The walls are the same eggshell white they always are. There are a few pictures hanging around on the walls. They're cheap imitations of famous paintings that you and Bro had bought ironically at the art show that you two ironically bought tickets for.

The entertainment system, comprising of a TV, gaming area, and surround sound speakers, is still completely intact and so is all the furniture. Across the room from it, your turntables are standing high and mighty as ever. It's almost like the sacred throne to yours truly and you could never imagine anything ever happening to them. It's where you create your masterpieces and jam out to your godly tunes. That is, until the neighbors complain. If your sweet setup was ever disturbed, you would probably have a heart attack or some shit.

You can only peer into the kitchen through the doorway and the window in the wall but it's enough to show you that that area is completely normal as well. You can see the pots and plates and other paraphernalia piling up inside your sink and beside it. You promise you'll clean it up eventually.

You don't remember anything being out of place in the bathroom or your bedroom.

You look at the ground. No blood stai-

Shit.

Your gaze coolly slides back up to your Bro to meet his hard stare. He's standing now, arms crossed, one eyebrow up, asking a nonverbal question.

"So what? I had a few drinks," you mumble in his direction, averting your eyes towards the plate in front of you.

Now the other eyebrow rises. He looks around the room.

There must be fifteen bottles lying around on the grey calico carpet. You honestly have no idea how it happened, it's all so unclear and fuzzy...

"Alright," Bro sighs as he walks towards your couch. He raises two fingers to his temples and starts rubbing, "What's up, kid?

Oh no. He's going to get all fatherly on you now. Abscond, abscond!

Before you can even shift in your seat, he's sitting on the couch next to you. If you try to run now, he'll take you down. You might as well get this over with.

"Look," you hiss, stating straight ahead, "what I do in my apartment is my business. I appreciate you stopping by and trying to be a good fatherly figure or whatever the hell it is you're trying to do, but I'm doing. Just. Fucking. Perfect. On my own."

He snorts, "Your apartment?" You nod curtly.

He looks at you, smiling fading. Really looks at you. Then, his gaze goes down to his hands in his lap. His shoulder rise and fall with a large sigh. His hand moves up to his face and he removes his glasses in one swift movement and places them on the table next to your uneaten breakfast.

Before you can do anything he has his hands on your shoulders, turning you and forcing you to look right at him.

His orange gaze is searing right through you, burning right to your core. You were raised under that stern gaze and you still get chills every time he looks at you with those piercing amber eyes.

The longer he stares, the more uncomfortable you start to feel and you start squirming.
You start to wonder if your eyes have the same effect on anyone else. That's why you wear your glasses, you guess. You don't want to scare people. You're ashamed of them. You hide them away, cover them up, lie about why you need them on at all times in public. Anything to not let them know how pathetic you are. What a freak you are. The WEAKLING you are.

You start squirming harder, growing more desperate, trying to get away but he holds you there with a strong hand.

"Dave. Be honest," he asks, "Why do you keep doing this? This is the third time in the past two months that I've had to save you from drinking yourself half to death."

You close your eyes and smirk. Huh, three times, huh? Nice, Strider.

What? No! What the hell is wrong with you? Please go away Bro, you beg in your mind. Leave me alone. I don't want to answer this question right now.

"I swear to God Dave," he sighs, "I can't leave without you getting yourself into some trouble or drinking yourself into a coma." You say nothing, eyes still closed and staying as stiff as a board under his hold. "I know I'm away a lot because of work," he's yelling now, becoming more and more frantic. His grip increases ten-fold, "and whatever else I'm always away being called for but you have to start-"

And, as if your prayers had been answered, you hear Bro's phone ring. You finally open your eyes again when his death-grip releases your shoulders. That'll leave some marks. You roll your shoulders quickly.

He curses quietly and opens his old phone, reading frantically.

"Shit," he breathes, closing his phone. He looks at you solemnly. "There's a problem with the manufacturing plant in Tokyo."

You swallow. Every fucking time. As soon as he gets home...

There is a hole in your chest and it's burning out like a flame on paper. Like a poison, spreading. Bro is talking but you can hardly hear him over the rushing in your ears.

"and they need me there and..." he continues but you still say nothing. You stare at your hands, as if they had all the answers. You can feel your face heating up. You're so angry you just... you don't-

"Dave?"

Your vision snaps up to him, eyes burning, teeth bared. "Then leave," you half-scream, your voice cracking slightly at the end. It was still more chilling and biting than you intended but you don't care. You can feel the tears teetering at the edge, but you don't dare let them out. Not now.

He stares at you, mouth slack. His eyes are wide in shock and, hurt?

Before you can analyze it, he has his glasses back on and he's walking to the door. You don't even turn to face him.

With a hand on the doorknob he turns back to you, face completely straight.

"At least try not to do anything stupid." You say nothing. Your stomach is churning. You need to lie down, escape, hurt something, ANYTHING.

"Again," he finishes his warning. You snort bitterly, hiding the first couple of tears rolling down your face.

He opens his mouth again, falters, and then changes his mind.

"See ya, kid."
With that, he's gone. You're still sitting on the couch, stomach churning, eyes and ears pounding.

You clench your fists. You need to hit something, hard.

Your cold breakfast sits on the table. It makes you sick to even look at it. You stand swiftly and kick the table, sending it and everything on it flying across the room. Dishes clatter, the table breaks apart as you slam down on it again. You turn and punch the wall behind you. Then you just stand there, arm raised to the wall.

A minute later you slide your hand down the wall, leaving some streaks of blood where the skin breaks on your hand.

You stand there shaking, cold, hands clenched into fists, cheeks glistening.

"Please... come back," you barely whisper and twitch your head towards the door like he could still hear you, "I don't have anyone. I don't ha-," the word stop as you choke on a sob. You hug yourself mindlessly. Your knees buckle.

You've found the name for that poison, that burning, that stinging, throbbing, PAIN. It's loneliness.

You collapse, sobbing and sobbing, all facades and pretenses are now out the window.

Your name is Dave Strider, and you are so, so lonely.
Chapter Summary

Ok. So I'm experimenting with this plot. Relationships and everything will come! I just need character development first!!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It's been about an hour and you're still having an argument in your mind.

'Get up.'

'No. The ground is my friend. I'm going to marry the ground. Get on a knee and propose to this shit. Have kids, save money to send them to college.'

'You little shit. Get up'

'No.'

It goes on like this for a while.

You're, obviously, still lying on the ground. The left side of your face is squished up against the carpet and your body is strewn all about behind you.

Looking ahead there's a sea of grey and a dozen or so bottles scattered around.

There's probably some really deep metaphor here for your life.

Idly, you use your right hand to massage the carpet by your stomach at a loss for what to do. Your other arm is trapped under your body. It lost feeling a long time ago when the circulation got cut off.

Eventually you slowly drag the right hand up the scratchy carpet to your face. It's slick with tears but you've long since stopped crying. You rub your right eye slowly. The pain in your head still stings but you've also long since stopped caring or feeling.

The tears have stopped, but there's still a scratching in your chest. You cough a few times, a sob threatening to escape again.

But you won't cry again. You won't allow yourself to.

You feel broken, shattered, defeated, but you promise to never let your guard down again.

You turn to face the ceiling and decide to focus on that. With a shaky sigh you shift your body and turn your focus upwards.

With the little light creeping through the windows you can see there are cracks lining the outer edges of the ceiling. You've grown accustomed to the crappy conditions.

You can't believe how shitty this apartment really is. Your Bro chose this apartment out for you two when you were too young to remember.

Your brother is a multimillionaire. Why does he decide to live in a place like this? The apartment isn't the most broken down place ever but it isn't exactly five stars. Some nights you can't sleep because the people upstairs tread too heavily or the elderly couple next door turn their TV volume up way too loud. You know you're whining about nothing, but still.
The rent was decent but the landlord was greasy as hell and didn't like the Strider family all too well. It could be because of your constant strifing that broke all the furniture. Or the loud music. Whatever, screw him.

You figure you live here of all places because Bro wants you to learn about the simple things and life and doesn't want to spoil you. You actually smirk and laugh at that.

You groan immediately after a wave of pain racks your abdomen and roll over onto your other side. You squeeze your eyes shut... Squeeze the pain away.

---

Two hours later you slide back into consciousness and you only know one thing. Your mouth is dry and you NEED coffee.

After much groaning and protesting your body finally finds the strength to stand. You plant your feet under yourself and hesitate. The ground wobbles and so do you. You take a minute to adjust, throwing your arms out for balance and ironic dramatic effect. You stretch your arms over your head and they pop and groan.

You shuffle over to the kitchen in search of that dark nectar of the Gods which calls to you now. With every throb that racks your head, you hear your body screaming for caffeine.

You enter the doorway and lean against it for support. You do a quick reconnaissance of your kitchen's supplies.

Staring in, you can see nothing lies inside the tiny pantry next to the fridge. There you would only find a box of stale crackers and maybe a box of pancake mix that expired a year ago. You slide your bare feet across the tile floor to the fridge, not bothering to turn on the light.

You open the fridge, hoping something lies in store for you.

There, in the center of the bottom shelf, all by itself, sits half a gallon of expired apple juice. Mother. Fuckin. YES.

You guzzle that shit down like a Hummer guzzles gas. You are the bee and this is your honey.

You don't even care that you're missing your mouth half the time- your arm is too weak to hold it up. Your throat is parched and damn does this quench like nothing you've ever known.

When the bottle is emptied you discard it right on the floor. You turn and head for the cabinet where you usually keep the coffee.

No such luck. Instead of coffee, you open the cabinet door you only find some plastic plates and a few rotten pears.

You stand in the kitchen and do one more turnaround before sighing and deciding you should probably just go out.

You hate going out. Understandably.

---

Once again you find yourself in your room. The neon red clock on your dresser reads 2:45.

You quickly pick your sunglasses and katana off the ground where you, ahem, left them. You slide the glasses back onto you face familiarly with one hand while you place the sword back on the wall gingerly.

You look down at what you're wearing. A pair of red and black checkerboard pajama pants and a
white t-shirt. You're pretty sure you've been wearing this for the past three days. Oh well, the public doesn't need to know that.

With that you reach in the closet and pick out the first jacket you find and slip it over your shoulders.

A quick look in the mirror: yikes. Hair every which direction, blood smeared on your right cheek, glasses glinting off the little light in the room, and a smile that says 'don't mess with me'. You probably smell and you haven't bothered to brush your teeth.

You're fucking beautiful.

---

You step out into the bright Texas sun, a little reluctant now. You know it's about a million and two degrees out, and the city does nothing but amplify the July heat. But the jacket is ironic and makes you look about 130% cooler. Plus, you're used to the heat by now.

It's the brightness you can't stand. The sun is reflecting off of every surface, as if everything was made of ice.

You actually panic a little.

'Your door is right behind you, Strider. Just turn and go back inside - it's pointless. You can't stand anyone. Why are you doing this?'

You hang your head low, squint, and make your way down the street anyway.

You pass a few people as you walk a the mindless blocks.

Most people are inside where the air conditioning is. A lot of people give you funny looks when you pass by. (That's right, pay attention to the ironic hipster coming your way.) You tell yourself repeatedly that its your devilishly handsome looks. You're too tired and bothered to care what they really think.

You have no idea where you're going until you're about fifteen blocks away from your apartment. You stand at an intersection, staring around. Your heart starts racing. What were you out for again? The light is staring to burn you. You need to get inside...

Right, coffee. Nectar of the Gods and all that shit.

You stop, turn on your heels, and look up and down the street.

About a hundred feet to your right on the other side of the road was a huge neon coffee cup sticking out of the side of the building. The 'OPEN' sign was well lit. Well. Guess that's the place to be.

You cross the road slowly, ignoring the people who blast their horns at you. You shove your hand into your pockets, showing them just how much you really don't care.

When you finally reach the front of this coffee joint you stop and read the name: "Jumpin' Java!" You snort extremely loud, grin spreading dangerously wide for a Strider. What a perfect name for a coffee shop. You open the glass door and a bell rings overhead.

This place is anything but jumping.

The walls are painting 'raincloud-stay-away-depression grey' and the floor is a dark-colored hardwood floor. There are no lights on inside, probably because it's too hot. The only light oozes through the huge glass windows. There are various couches, all grey satin, scattered here and there around the place. There's smooth jazz playing softly somewhere. Fuck that noise.

You look back outside. Everything seems to be moving slower, even the light coming through the
glass. You can see dust motes floating around. This place has the eeriness of a library or something.

You slowly make your way to the back of the room where the counter is.

Sitting at the counter is a very solemn looking girl. She looks almost the same age as you if not younger. Her hair is short bob-cut - a golden, sandy color. You can't see her face because its buried in a textbook. Her hand strums idly on the counter, and you notice her nails are painted black.

As you step up to the counter, she does nothing. After about twenty seconds of awkward standing, you cough.

"I know you're there," her voice is like ice but there's a purr to it, "but if you wouldn't mind I would like to finish this page."

You say nothing, just stare at her.

When she finally looks up, you notice her eyes. They're as large as you please and they have the shape of a feline's. The only other thing you notice is they're a deep, dark violet.

Her other features are slight. She's so pale she could be a ghost. Her paleness is accented by the black lipstick she's sporting. However she's neither as slight or pale as you are. You look sickly compared to her- and she's almost glowing.

"Can I help you?" Her smile is genuine but has the hint of a smirk.

"Uhhh.." So incredibly uncool, Strider. You forgot to look at the menu. You break eye-contact with her to look up at the menu above her head. She scoffs and looks back down at her book.

Jesus if there aren't a million options on here. How do they even remember how to make anything?

A minute later: "Large chocolate chip mocha," you mumble, "and a slice of apple pie... Please."

You barely get that last word out it's so rushed.

"What was that?" Her smirk widens.

You can't believe this chick.

"I said please."

She grabs a notepad, writes down your order in a quick cursive flick, sets it on the kitchen window, and goes back to her textbook.

"Thanks...," you search for a name.

"Rose," she deadpans. She grins again in your general direction without looking up- too immersed in whatever she's reading to give you a second thought.

All you can do is stand awkwardly. When you realize no conversation will continue, you turn slowly and head for a small table in the corner of the room.

There's another couple across the room and you resolve to watching them while you wait.

"I love you, honeykins!"
"No, I love YOU!"

Forget it.

You turn away in disgust. Why is everyone so happy all the time? They have time to go out, find other people exactly like them, date, have children, and die in each others' arms dramatically. Spare me.
You're not the type to get close with anyone. Ever. To be honest, people freak you out. They're so caught up in fancy cars and grades and degrees and grocery lists. All the little things- they let them run their life. When you look outside you see the normal people on the streets are racing from point A to point B and back again. Like lab rats.

They only care about how they look and how they look to others. Sometimes, sometimes... You wish you could be as ignorant as they are.

But then again, you're the lonely one, remember? Probably doomed to stay that way. What does it matter what you think?

There's that feeling of dread piling in your stomach. This day is becoming too much to handle. You never should have come out here. You should have just stayed back in your dark apartment to wallow in self pity.

Something slams down on the table in front of you and you jump a few inches out of your chair.

A tall, lanky, angry dude stands with his hands on his hips. A frown is eternally stretched across his face. He's staring at you. No, glaring at you. His eyes are the color of the walls, as if they've slowly seeped in over the years he's worked here.

Oh wait. What did you do wrong?

"I hope you like it," he barks sarcastically. God this guy's loud, "this is the last piece, you DICK." He stomps away. He's practically steaming when he bursts back into the kitchen.

Uh. Well.

You look down at your pie and notice your lack of utensils. What are you supposed to eat this with? Your hands? What an ass.

You sigh loudly and roll your head back. What was this guys problem? Honestly, everyones problem? Was everyone out to get you?

Probably.

"Please pardon Karkat, he's a little... rash at times."

The fuck kind of name is Karkat?

You slowly roll your head back forward, eyebrows raised.

Rose is gliding over to your table, cup of coffee and spoon and fork in hands, steam trailing after her. She sets them down carefully.

"And by little I mean really and at times I mean constantly." She straightens up and the corner of her mouth twitches.

"It's cool." You grab the fork and start at the last goddamn slice of pie. Like hell you're gonna let that guy win.

Rose stays. Her eyes remain on you, arms crossed, pondering.

"So what happened to you?"

You continue eating. Damn this pie was good. "What do you mean?" You don't even skip a beat.

She nods towards your hand. You still haven't cleaned it up. There blood all over your knuckles. You don't even respond to her, just continue eating.

She rolls her eyes. "Stubborn, are we?"
"Fine. I'll go retrieve the first aid kit." She turns and glides back to her counter.

Retrieve? Who even is this girl?

You sip your coffee and stare blankly at the wall opposite you. The clock now reads 3:30. You start chewing slower, lost in your own thoughts.

Why have you never been here before? It's eerily quiet, dark, and filled with strange people, but it's interesting. It has character.

Then you remember why you've never been here. You lock yourself away from any human contact. You are a jobless, friendless, sorry sack of nothing and probably were going to stay that way as long as foreseeable.

You slump down in the chair farther. Maybe you should just leave. You're itching to go.

With that you stand and the chair scrapes at the floor.

"Stop right there," Rose calls from across the room.

You freeze in your spot and look to her.

She's sauntering over, first aid kit in hand.
"You're not leaving until that hand is taken care of."

"Excuse me but last time I checked, you can't hold me here against my will," you snap at her.

Her eyebrows raise ever so slightly.

You tense, relax, sigh, and collapse into your chair again, giving up. She grins, knowing she's obviously won this battle. She sits across from you and opens the box.

"Now. Answer me this time: how did this injury come about?"

"I told you--"

"You told me nothing. You said nothing and continued to shove pie into your mouth the last time I asked."

You wince as she applies Neosporin to your cuts. She looks up at you, expecting an answer.

"I punched a guy."

"Oh really?"

"No."

She clicks her tongue. "Now, now...," she pauses for a name.

"...Dave. Strider."

"David. You can be honest with me."

She flips your hand over and traces your palm with her index finger.

"Or, I could read everything I need to know about you right here." She sorta wiggles her eyebrows at you in a really uncharacteristic way.

"What are you, some nut?"
"No, and I insist that you not insult my particular talent." Weirdo.

You scoff and sit back in your chair, however you don't pull your hand away. You're intrigued.

"I see a sibling," she declares, "here on this line."

What?

"Excuse me?"

"I can also see emptiness," her voice grows dark. You can hear your heart rushing. "And they're connected somehow. There's an absence of... happiness. You see? This line represents your happiness and there's a scar running through it."

You stare at your hand, mouth slack.

"Is it true? Are you unhappy with anything at this moment?"

Bro had left that scar years ago, a reminder of a strife you had failed... Your stomach swells at the memory and your hand feels like it's burning from it.

Before you can think of a response she's bandaging your hand. When she finishes you pull it back into your chest.

You can feel your heart cracking at the seams again. How can you be that easily read? You don't need anyone's help. You're not some charity case. This was a mistake.

"That's really none of your business, is it?" you barely whisper. You imagine you must be flushing with embarrassment but you're too broken to do anything about it.

She stares at you. She knows she's struck a chord. She might even be sorry for it. Her smile, for the first time, is genuine.

"Listen, David," she soothes, "we all have our problems, our own demons. I know you don't know me at all and, actually, I'm hardly acquainted with you at all. I'm just that strange girl who sold you a beverage. But I'm going to offer you some advice."

You stare at her blankly, bitterly.

"Don't keep it pent up. The pressure becomes too much and you'll explode." Her eyes burn you.

What the hell kind of advice is that? You're pretty sure your high school teacher said that to you once. Lame.

"In any case," she sighs, "I shall ring you up whenever you see it fit." She stands up.

"Yeah I should probably go," you join her, "important things to do, people to see."

"I see," she hums.

Actually, you can't wait to get the hell out of this place. You just need to get back home and lock yourself in and not look at the stupid sun again for a good week.

At the register, while she brings up your total, you stare back into the kitchen, checking on the grumpy guy. He's back there, throwing (literally) ingredients into a bowl. You'd like to think he has to make another pie because you took the last slice. Poor bastard.

"Your card, Mr. Strider?"

"Just Dave, thanks."

"Your card, David."
"Dave."

"I prefer David."

You scowl, but you don't argue. You're too fucking tired.

You reach into your front pocket and grab your worn leather wallet. You take the first credit card you can find and toss it onto the counter.

She takes it and swipes it through the machine.

"Denied," she holds it out to you, "Another?"

You pull out your next card. Same result.

This goes on for about four different cards before it hits you.

That cheap son of a bitch cancelled all of your cards. That good for nothing...

You take out your only ten dollar bill and slam it on the counter. You're so mad you just don't know how to react.

It's probably some punishment for drinking everything in the house for the third time. That or a prevention from buying more booze. Either way, how are you going to buy REAL food? Bet he didn't think of that.

"Is something wrong?" Rose hands you your change and brings you back down to reality.

"Nah, it's cool. See you around, I guess," you mutter in her direction as you turn.

"Goodbye and good luck."

You ignore that last part. You nod quickly and turn on your heel.

You're about halfway to the door when you stop.

You're just going to let Bro walk all over you like that? Normally you would because you don't have a choice, but this? This is the last straw.

Your whole life he's been beating on you. Telling you what to do, trying to set an example for you and be a good parent. But he was and is never there for you when you really need him. And now he's going to make your life harder?

Some role model he is. You hate him.

You feel a bubbling rise in your chest. You stare at the ground, your eyes tingling and threatening tears.

You're sick of his mind games, sick of him leaving you, sick of HIM.

Well, you're not going to stand for it anymore.

It's time to stop feeling sorry for yourself and start standing up for yourself, like a man.

You turn back to Rose, perched at her counter again. She looks up, eyebrows raised.

She sees you standing in the middle of her empty restaurant...

and you're crying, tears trailing down your face, shoulders shaking.

But you're smiling.
"Hey, Rose?"

"Yes David?" She closes her book.

"You got any job openings?"

Your name is David Strider and, well-

Here's to new beginnings.

Chapter End Notes

I have a tumblr!

It is also skaianskirmish :)

So check it out if you like!
Chapter Summary

Friends show up in the weirdest places.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shit.

Shitshitshitshit.

You're late.

You roll out of bed and into a pair of jeans. You grope around your bedside table, slide your glasses on with one hand and slip your converse on with the other.

Rose told you. She TOLD you, dawg.

You're running towards the kitchen, throwing a random t-shirt on (you hope it's somewhat clean)-walking into a wall for good effect.

You're going to pretend that never happened, ok?

Once you stumble into the messy kitchen area, you throw the cabinet open while your arm struggles through the other sleeve. You grab a poptart and your apartment key and you are out the door and down the stairs in a matter of seconds.

It's been a week since you've visited Jumpin' Java and asked for a job. Today is your first day on the job.

And you're late, goddammit.

You start jogging and then slow to a brisk walking pace. You're already late. No reason to get all sweaty now.

You lift your head and heave a sigh as you continue walking. The sun is beating down relentlessly. Damn, it's hot. Like walking on the surface of the sun up in this bitch. The waves above the pavement stretch as far as you can see.

It's been like this all week as far as you know. You haven't dared to leave the sweet air conditioned paradise that is your apartment. You spent most of that week jamming out on your sweet turntable setup.

You earn a little money on the side now and then, making tracks and selling them online. People seem to like them for some reason. Well- whatever, as long as they're paying you.

Honestly, you can spend hours just standing there and mixing tracks. You get lost in those sick beats and rad rhythms. When you're angry or just plain emotional, it's where you turn to. Its kinda like your inspiration.

But, you need more than a little money on the side now. You need to start at making a living for yourself.

And that's what you're doing now. Trying to make a living, without the help of a certain
You'd spent the week kind of shuffling around the apartment, mixing, watching TV, and sleeping. You don't want to admit it, but you would look to the scratched and battered door every once and a while, half expecting and maybe hoping your bro would burst in and.... Well you don't know. Something. Like it would even happen anyway. It was stupid.

When you finally walk in the door of the establishment the AC hits you like a brick wall. It rustles your shirt and hair, which are already starting to stick to you under the savage heat.

You enter, a little out of breath, letting your eyes adjust to the dim light behind your even dimmer shades.

Its as dark and libraryish as always. Rose is cleaning tables. When she hears the bell she turns to greet her newest customers. When she sees you instead, she smirks.

"Well well!" she clicks her tongue and crosses her arms, grin lighting on her face, "Someone certainly took their time getting here."

You're embarrassed as all hell but you keep the Strider calm about you. You shove your hands in your pockets and shrug, meeting her grin with a smirk of equal force.

"Whatever," you retort. Smoooooth. You're a man of few words, ya know?

She snorts and shakes her head, hands falling back to her sides.

"Alright, David," she turns and heads to the counter, "just try to leave a little earlier next time. Now!" she spins on her heels, eyebrow cocked mischievously, "let your training begin!" What a dork.

"This'll be a cake-walk," you shoot at her, heading to join her behind the granite counter, "how hard can this be, Rose?"

---

Really hard, it turns out.

Really FUCKING hard.

It's coffee, right? NO. Fuck off, man.

First of all, there are so many goddamned things to order you can't keep them straight. What's the difference between a caramel mocha and a caramel macchiato? Fucking everything, that's what.

You're standing in the kitchen. There's chocolate, whipped cream, and milk covering your apron and shirt. Your hair is sticking up every which direction because, if possible, it is hotter back here than it is outside. You're trying your best to make a iced green matcha and obviously failing.

You are about two and a half mistakes away from tearing your hair out and chopping every one of these machines in half with your katana.

To make things worse, Rose had gone on break ten minutes ago- which left you with Karkat.

"WRONG!" he yells and slams a fist on the metal table. The cup jumps and everything spills out.

"Shit!" you yell and jump back. You try to avoid the spillage but fail miserably. Your shoes are gonna smell like green matcha for weeks.

You glare at him.
"Watch your anger, fucktard. I was doing fine." You have no problem insulting and yelling at him, seeing as its all he does. You turn to grab a roll of paper towels and get to work on the counter.

"What?? You call that fine? That was anything but fine. That shit is so far from fine. The polar opposite of fine. Like your creation is south and the real deal is north. Just step back you pile of narwhal shit and let me do it. I have no fucking idea why Rose would hire a moron like you."

You turn and you swear, you're going to clock him square in the jaw if he doesn't shut up. You consider it for a few seconds.

"Children," Rose announces as she enters the kitchen door, all airs and graces. She hasn't spilled a drop of anything this whole shift. You moan audibly and slump against the nearest machine.

"I can't leave you two alone for long, it seems," she stops and continues tying her apron, "otherwise you'll stink this establishment up with your teenage angst and what not."

"And Karkat," she adds, smoothing her hair out, "stop breaking this poor man's spirit." She nods in your direction. "It's merely his first day and I would bet a great part of my paycheck that he already wants to quit because of you and your anger management issues."

Karkat turns and sort of hisses at her. He goes back to making the blend he was working on. He's not going to argue with her.

Rose turns to the faucet, grabs a cup, and fills it with water. "Here," she says, turning and holding it out to you, "you're not a slave. You can take a whatever beverage you need while working here, on the house."

You grab it quickly, but sip. Not trying to look desperate here.

Rose's Mom owns this place- she was telling you before on your first ten minute break. She had obtained it in a, well, unconventional way. Lets just say it involved a poker match, lots of vodka, and a whole lot of weird luck.

But, Rose's Mom, as she put it, is 'incapable of running an establishment such as this'. When you ask why, she grinned and shook her head slowly.

"She's frequently inebriated. Not the best candidate for the job."

"Oh," you had replied, pausing. "So who runs this place, then?"

"I do."

You had scoffed but her gaze never softened. She was serious? How could an eighteen-year-old run this place?

Turns out she isn't half bad. She had explained it to you.

Rose does a great job. She keeps the employees in line, pays the bills, orders the supplies. Everything. Nice. Good for her, doing it every day like that for her Mom.

"Plus, it's a great place to escape and read books," she had mentioned, eyes gleaming.

She really loves this place. It's started to grow on you too, even if you've only been here a few hours now.

"David," she calls you back from your thoughts to the present, "It's about 2 o'clock now. My, it's getting late for lunch but go on and take your lunch break. You've been working... diligently."

She must be mocking the array of stains on your shirt and apron.

She smiles at you kindly, though, and leans against a wall. Sometimes you forget this chick is a
"You have half an hour, don't be late again." She winks.

"Thanks," you straighten up and tighten your apron, "But I think I'll just get myself a slice of pie from here."

"No," Rose replies, "You're not confined to this place for your break. Go out and explore a little." She motions outside the glass windows at the front.

You shrug. Makes no difference to you. You tell her you'll see her soon, throw your apron behind the counter, and head out the door.

The sun is even higher now, and it's even HOTTER now.

You squint up and down the street. Hoagie Haven? About three stores down, across the street. Works for you.

---

You exit said hoagie haven with the biggest sandwich you've ever seen. You dig into that ham, salami, pineapple, nutella masterpiece as you cross the street. It's like your tastebuds are on ecstasy and your brain is singing sweet hallelujah.

You look around. You've got twenty minutes to blow off before you need to face Karkat in that hell of a kitchen again. Might as well take a look around.

There's nothing much. There's your standard RiteAid, pizza place, jewelry store, bank...

What the hell is that?

You stop in front of it and read the sign above:

Prankster's Gambit

You've never heard of it, so it's probably a unique store. You try to look through the windows, but they're all warped. There are lights on and the sign displays 'OPEN'.

You decide to check it out. Ironically, of course.

The first thing you notice when you walk in- its deserted. Void of customers... and staff. Eerie.

Second- this place is tiny, but ancient looking. There are boxes piled high with prank items that look like they haven't been touched in a decade.

Third- you feel like you're about to sneeze. This place was musty as all hell and the dust was almost overbearing.

Fourth- what the hell was that noise?

A pair of hands clamp down on your shoulders.

"GET DOWN!" The voice belongs to a guy, but you barely have time to see them.

Next thing you know you're being flung behind one of the crates.

SPLAT.

Frosting hits your check and smears on the right lens of your shades.

Cake? What the f-
SPLAT. Another one hits the wall above you.
Out of the corner of your eye, you see whoever shoved you out of the way run out of sight, through a doorway in the back of the room, hidden by beads.

"What the hell is going o-" you start to yell after him.

Two more cakes hit the wall, on either side.

Like hell you're staying here.

You bolt out from behind the boxes and try to make it for the front entrance.

Before you get there, a man appears in front of it.

This man. CANNOT. be for real.

He's dressed to the T. White collared shirt, pressed black pants, tie- the whole nine yards. He's sporting a fedora and a pipe. An evil grin stretches across his face.

"Well hello there and welcome," he guffaws, "how can we be of service?"

"You could start by letting me leave!"

He throws another cake and you duck quickly again. You turn and run the other direction.

He's not going to let you leave.

You're going to die here. That's it.

'The illustrious Dave Strider was found dead today in a prank shop, covered in cake'. That's what the headlines'll say.

You struggle through the beaded doorway, seeking help from the stranger who helped you before, hoping he could shed some light on this fucked up situation.

The room is even darker and it stretches far back. There are tall bookshelves as far as you can see.

You choose one and head down the aisle, escaping the maniac.

There are leagues of books and more books back here. You get the smell of dust and mold as you fly through the aisle.

When you reach the end of the row you search, your heart is pounding. You head swivels left and right, looking for a way out.

When you look right, there's a guy barreling towards you. It's not the maniac, but you have no time to react before he-

"OOF!"

He tackles you to the ground.

The air escaped your chest and you almost start panicking.

He's off you in a nanosecond and whispering, "Come on, come on!" He's practically dragging you along behind a bookshelf.

You're dazed and confused, so what can you do other than follow?

When you two finally crawl behind the shelf you're both out of breath.

Next thing you know, after a moment of silence, the kid next to you is laughing. You shoot him a look that's somewhere between exasperated and outraged.
He looks like he's your age. Yeah, about that. He's an inch or two shorter than you, though. His hair is sticking every-which direction. It's black, messy, and has white frosting caked and knotted into it. The frosting has spread to his face. There's some on his cheeks and nose, matching his pale skin. His glasses are crooked and his eyes are tearing with laughter.

When he turns to finally look at you, his laughs are slowly coming to a stop. His eyes are wide and so blue. They're so innocent and mischievous and, well they're pretty, really. Interesting.

He sighs and puts his back on the bookshelf. "That was so close!" Another laugh.

His laugh is so contagious it almost makes you smile...

But you're mad at him, so you snap back to reality with a force.

"You wanna explain to me what the hell is going on here?" you motion outwards to nothing.

He smiles even wider and nudges you with his shoulder, "Come on! Can't you have a little fun?"

You look at him with a straight face.

He kinda hums to himself and finally tells you, "You came in at a bad time. My dad and I are having one of our epic cake fights! He makes a lot of them. So when we have extras, we use them for practical pranks and fights." He smiles at you like that explains just about everything ever.

"You do this often?"

"Wеееell we don't get much business so..."

There's an awkward silence.

"So you helped me duck out of the way I guess. Before, that is..." you admit.

"Yeah! I felt bad cause you had no idea what as going on. He likes to challenge our new customers for some reason. I usually don't help people out but... Yeah. I was feeling generous today. You're lucky!" He kinda shoots a double-pistol thing at you. Then he turns back away, looking around.

You don't know how to respond other than: "Thanks, then? I guess."

You also don't know how this guy could shove anything out of the way- he's just about as skinny and weak-looking as you.

But then again, you consider yourself pretty strong. Maybe he's the same way.

You both sit silently, waiting for the maniac father.

You glance over at him occasionally. He seems to be stuck in his own little world over there. Smiling to himself, despite the situation at hand. He tries cleaning off his glasses for a little bit but it doesn't work.

He starts giggling. Again. He even snorts a few times.

"What is it now?" you say through your teeth.

He looks shocked, but stifles his laughs with a subtle grin.

"Well nothing it's just-"

His question is interrupted when you hear the beads rustle behind you and you both stop breathing.

"Oh god," you exhale. He's coming. HE'S FOUND YOU.
"Hey." The seriousness of the kids voice startles you. You turn.

He's holding a cake out to you. Where did he get that? "Take the weapon. Use it wisely."

His face is 100% serious now.

He's testing you. Alright, then. Lets show them what you got. If you're going down, you're going down in style.

You grab the cake and rise to your feet slowly and quietly. The guy is still sitting on the ground, watching you contently.

You shift to the end of the bookshelf and peek around the corner.

"Hello."

You come face to face with the maniac and-

with the manliest squeal you've ever made-

you nail him in the face with the cake.

Behind you, glasses-boy is erupting with laughing and applauding along with the occasional "Nice! Oh my god...". He is literally rolling on the ground.

You back up, ready to run, but the father takes a towel out of nowhere and starts cleaning himself up.

"Well done! Congratulations! You're the first customer to actually have bested me! I am so proud!"

What a freakshow this place is. You need to leave. Now.

"Uh. Well, thanks. I should go." You head the hell out of there. Behind you you can hear the father and son laughing, making comments about how stupid they look.

When you're back outside in the heat, you're actually grateful for the sun. You never thought you'd have the chance to see it again.


You start wiping the icing off of your face.

Hopefully Rose wouldn't notice. You're not sure you want to explain what just happened.

You look at your phone- 5 minutes before your break ends. You made it out alive AND on time.

Before you melt into a puddle of pure relief, you hear the door open behind you.

"Hey!"

You spin around and jump into a fighting stance, preparing for a cake or god-knows-what to the face.

It's just the crazy-haired, spectacled son. In the light outside, his eyes are even bluer and wilder. He has a small toothy grin on now. You didn't notice before but he's got a slight overbite.

He runs up to you and you relax your stance but not completely. He still can't be trusted.

"I wanted to apologize. Again." He stops in front of you. This time he's serious. "My father is a little crazy and strange. I really hope that whole fiasco didn't make a bad impression."
"Oh, man!" He face-palms suddenly, "I also forgot to introduce myself."

He sticks his whole arm out in an offer of a handshake, shrugs his shoulders and beams at you. "I'm John Egbert."

You stare at his hand and back at the kid.

You internally smirk. Egbert? Weird name. Then again, he's a weird guy. Though, you're not gonna lie, it's pretty endearing and you guess it suits him. Plus, just about every other person in your life is crazy.

You decide you can trust him. He did save your life after all.

What are you doing? Stop rambling. Respond, dammit.

"Dave." You smirk, take his hand and shake it smoothly.

You two stand outside and shoot the breeze for a while- way past when you should have returned from your break. He tells you to come over and visit again when there isn't a major cake battle taking place. You agree you will and part ways.

Yeah, you guess this guys pretty cool.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know your feedback lovelies! ^u^

I hope you liked John! It's possible the next chapter may be HIS POV! ;D
===> Be the John.

Chapter Summary

John's POV :)

Chapter Notes

Skreeeeeee this was hard >.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

===> Be John Egbert

You are now John Egbert and you think you're in love.

You stare at the screen in front of you. You're practically on the edge of your seat, eyes wide with wonder.

There's no denying it.

Nick Cage is the most glorious human to grace anyone with his presence, like, ever. I mean, look at the guy! Those chiseled features, that sculptured face, those acting skills!

You laugh when he does and cry to the same effect. Man, his movies are awesome. "Son!" you father beckons, "Come on son, it's nearly nine o clock!"

Ah, shoot. You were just getting to the good part!

You shut your monitor off and swivel around in your chair to face your room.

The walls are painted an ocean blue that seems to glow whenever the sun comes through the windows- which is all the time in the summer. The blue is there, but hardly noticeable under the vast expanse of movie posters you have collected and displayed over the years.

You get up and walk over to your bed and pick up a shirt. This one looks clean enough, you guess! You switch it for the one you're wearing now. When you finally get your head through the top you shake your dark hair out. You reach your hands up and try to control it somehow.

You shuffle over to the mirror to get a better look.

What greets you there is a buck-toothed, blue-eyed, nineteen-year-old. You grin falters just a bit. You lift your hands up to fuss with your bangs.

After finally giving up on that, you grab your trusty spectacles and exit downstairs.

There, your father is waiting with... pancakes, of course. Though you're sick of them at this point, you have no trouble getting them down.

You always tell your father he cooks way too much food, but he insists that you're always too thin!

Every weekend, you help your dad out at his job. He owns this sweet prank shop down on Main Street. It's your favorite place to be. You could spend hours strolling down the aisles, looking at
the fine wares they have to offer, or talking to the customers who share your affinity for pranking!

Of course, customers don't come along often. But when they do, you're sure to greet them enthusiastically, just like dad taught you!

"Goooooooodmorning everyone!" a chipper voice announces, bounding down the stairs.

"Well good morning to you too, daughter!"

"Hey, Jade!" you speak through a mouth of pancake.

Jade plops on the stool next to you at the kitchen counter. She's wearing a moss-green tank top with jean shorts. Her hair is braided neatly behind her.

Her hair is as dark as yours because, well you're twins! And you wouldn't have it any other way—Jade is a great sister!

She turns to you, smile just as wide as yours, "So! Ready for work today?"

"Sure am. I'm always ready for everything. I'm prepared like that."

"Riiight," she draws out, rolling her green eyes behind her round glasses. Those things are way too big for her face. "Anyway," she leans back, "Dad I'm going swimming with Fef and Eridan today! Can I stop by 'Prankster's' later?"

"Sure, sweetheart!" He heaps two more stacks of pancakes on your two plates and smiles at her.

"Great!" she beams. She grabs two pancakes and shoves one in her mouth as she stands, grabs her bag, and rushes the door. "See youf vere!" she muffles through the food, winks, and she's gone.

"My my, isn't she a busy girl," your Dad chuckles. He turns his sights on you and chews on his pipe thoughtfully. "What about you, son? Any plans?"

You grin solemnly. "Nah, I'd rather go to work with you, Dad." You push the smile on your face. Make it look convincing...

He looks right through your smile.

"Any friends you can spend time with? The summers just started, son. You can't spend it all cooped up inside the house or the shop."

"Yeah Dad, got it," you stand up, third stack unfinished, "I'm gonna go brush my teeth or something."

You race up the steps before he can say anything. Man, you hope that wasn't too obvious.

You knew it was about time he started confronting you about this.

---

You're John Egbert and... you have a hard time fitting in and a bit of a... self-esteem issue, you guess?

It's been a problem for as long as you remember.

It started with the glasses in elementary school and the braces in middle school.

No one wanted to talk to the buck-toothed, four-eyed loser. I mean, come on. You might as well have painted a target on your head.

Don't get it wrong! You were willing to make friends for the longest time, you really did try.
But, as time went on, as you got rejected more and more by your peers, you grew to live with it and became an introvert of sorts.

Sure, you have no problem talking to the people you know like Dad, Jade, and the patrons at the shop. Jade is always putting you in headlocks and telling you what a great brother you are. They're a great family. Really.

But, beyond family, people aren't interested in you, so you don't get interested in them. It's simple.

Though it does hurt from time to time when you watch a group of kids from behind the glass window, walking down the street, laughing and having a good time.

You want something like that. You desperately want someone to talk to that isn't a relative. It's something you've kept to yourself and its been bubbling under your skin for quite some time.

You tell yourself you don't need anyone. When you start to reach out to anyone or get close to them, you stop yourself. You don't know why.

Probably because you know the disappointment of rejection will hurt.

You want to open yourself up to them; you really do want to wear your heart on your sleeve-

But they laugh at how you look, dress, act... What you like, watch, DO. They laugh at you. They all have since day one.

You smile and smile though, and put on this act about how you're the happiest kid alive. You act all happy-go-lucky and bubbly on the outside, just so no one will ask. You think it's better that way.

But the fact still remains:
In your nineteen years on this earth, not a single person has ever wanted you as their friend.

Life has taught you that you're just an embarrassing, strange-looking nerd.

Who would want a friend like you?

---

You stand behind the counter of the abandoned store, drawing invisible patterns on the counter in front of you.

You've been on for about 2 hours now and you've run out of things to do. You've already run down the furthest expanses of aisles, pranked your dad and a few good-humored customers, and organized everything. Twice. You even dusted again.

The clock on the wall ticks loudly as the minutes drag by. 2:10. Your father should be coming back soon. You always wait for him to return from his lunch break before you go on yours. Holding down the fort and whatnot.

You sigh and lean back onto the stool behind you while looking around at the old place. Maybe your dad's right. You can't spend all summer cooped up in here. It'll drive you crazy. You should get out and..

Do what? You turn and search outside the window, looking for answers. The glass is warped, but one way only, so you can see outside, but people can't see in.

It got hotter. You can see the heat rolling in transparent waves off of the pavement. You can see the cars and people rush by. Busy, busy people.

And here you are.

You shake your head and sigh, standing. You need to do some busy work- keep you occupied.
It isn't like you overthink your normal solitude. You've always been fine, managing on your own. Why the sudden impulse to do something? What is bothering you? Where would you even find or make a friend?

You meander over to your favorite shelf, the disguise section, and start organizing. These Beagle-puss masks are your favorite. The most clever disguise!

The door opens up front and you drop what you're doing to greet the customer. When you finally come to the door, there's no one there.

Strange. You could have sworn...

Oh well. You shrug and turn back around, but you hear the cans of silly strings in the back topple over.

Ooohhhh. A devilish grin spreads from ear to ear on your face.

Dad, you're getting sloppy.

You saunter over to the front desk casually. You know he's watching. You smile the whole way over.

You hear a creak and... not yet... not yeeeeeet...

Now.

You duck and spin, throwing some marbles out on the floor. A cake hits the wall square where your head was a moment ago.

You chuckle when you see your father topple over, courtesy of your marbles. The cake he was holding before topples over and nails him square in the chest.

"Ha! Good one son!" he laughs heartily, "but, did you see this one coming?"

You pause. Before you know it, a cake flies at you and barely grazes the side of your face. You leap into action and hide behind the counter.

---

The laughter and cake flies for about five minutes when the bell rings again.

You freeze and turn. Oh no, they'll be caught in the crossfire. You gotta help them!

In the doorway stands a pretty tall, thin guy. He's wearing a black tee, dark jeans, and dark sunglasses.

His clothes are soiled with what looks like food stains. Maybe he works at a restaurant nearby...

Hell, everything about this guy seems pretty dark. Even his mood. He looks like he's pouting, but trying to be cool about it.

The only thing that isn't dark is his complexion. He's as pale as a ghost. Guess he doesn't get out much. His hair is a very very light blonde. It sweeps to the side and looks perfectly sculpted. You are jealous of that mans hair.

Out of the corner of your eye you see your dad slinking towards him behind some boxes. Oh no, Dad! Don't get him involved now...

Watch out mystery stranger- and forgive me!

He hears your dad approaching and turns in the opposite direction. Now is your chance! You are the hero.
It is you.

"GET DOWN!" You jump over the counter, grab his bony shoulders and shove. He lets out a yelp and lands behind a pile of boxes before a cake could nail him square in the face.

Before your father has a chance to reload his ammo, you tear across the room to the beaded doorway, going to hide in your safety spot.

You really hope that guy gets out in time. He really did come at an inconvenient time. Your chest is heaving from running so fast.

Your heart is racing, but also happy. This is so exhilarating! So much fun. You giggle a little.

As soon as you sit in your spot you hear the beads rattle again and your breath stops in your throat. You turn and all the way down the hallway you can see the tall guy standing in the doorway, contemplating an escape. What's he still doing here?

You sympathize with him and decide to help.

Your knees protest as you stand and you can feel the icing start to harden on your skin. Some state you're in, Egbert.

You start briskly walking- then jogging- then sprinting. As you get closer you realize you can't stop. There no other option that to-

"OOF!"

-tackle him.

The guy under you is obviously flipping out. You would be too, considering the situation.

"Come on, come on!" you beckon him. You two need to hide if you're ever going to make it out alive.

As you crawl over behind a closer shelf, he follows. When you sit and catch your breath, he plops down next to you quietly and does the same.

Oh whoa wait what are you doing?

You don't even know this guy. What if he's some kind of gang member? Or a murderer?

This whole ordeal strikes you as hilarious all of a sudden. You don't know if its the adrenaline or the sheer idiocy of the current situation, but you start laughing.

The guy looks at you, obviously startled and confused. You can't see his eyes behind the shades. Why is he still wearing those anyway? It's dark back here.

When your laughs subside, you're thoroughly embarrassed. You look back at him. He looks kinda serious. Maybe you should say something to break the ice.

You lean back against the shelf and say something about that being really close.

His expression falters for a second, like he's contemplating what you just said to him.

Then he's back: "You want to explain to me what the hell is going on here?"

Whoa, his accent is pretty obvious. It's deep, but even though he's angry it stays quiet and smooth. Everything about this guy says 'I'm better than you'.

You try to muster a bigger smile, hoping it will put him at some ease. "Come on! Can't you have a little fun?"
He glares at you, or so his facial features tell you. Shoot, Egbert way to go.

You make some kind of strangled noise and all of your social skills abandon you. You start to blurt about your fathers baking obsession and your fights.

"You do this often?" His arms are crossed and one eyebrow raised.

"Weeeell we don't get much business so..." Why would you tell him that? Stupid stupid stupid-you sit in self-loathing silence.

"So, you helped me duck out of the way I guess. Before, that is..." he interrupts your inner-self-loathing monologue. You look at him and he's staring at you, expression softened a bit.

You panic. "Yeah! I felt bad cause you had no idea what as going on. He likes to challenge our new customers for some reason. I usually don't help people out but... Yeah. I was feeling generous today. You're lucky!"

Oh no, you did not- you repeat- NOT just shoot him the double-finger- pistols your sister does all the time. Oh god, smite you now...

You need to get out of here, fast. Your anxiousness is starting to show. You can't stand to look at this guy anymore or you think you'll explode from embarrassment.

"Thanks, then? I guess," he says and shrugs, then faces the other direction.

You sit there in silence, internally screaming- wishing your dad would come in and nail you in the face with a cake and you could just die.

There is a stranger here, who probably thinks you're some freak, and you're FLIPPING. OUT.

You keep smiling though. Keep up your appearances, John. You even try cleaning off your glasses but it works in vain.

You have the strangest feeling he's watching you and you don't know what to do. You're crumbling under the pressure.

Oh no. Here comes the nervous laughter. Yup, there it is.

He looks over at you like you're some kind of looney.

"What is it now?" Oh shoot he's angry. You blew it again.

You try not to let the hurt show and force a half-hearted smile.

You try to tell him that you think it's weird that you're sitting in the back with some random guy and it's making you freak out and you don't know what to do but all you can get out is:

"Well nothing it's just-"

You question is interrupted when you both hear the beads rustle behind you and stop breathing.

"Oh god," he breathes as his face freezes up. He tenses and puts his guard back up. His head flips around. He looks like he's primed for an attack and it's kinda funny.

That's when you get an idea.

"Hey." You speak with as much authority as you can muster. You need to get his attention.

You pull out the cake you've been saving for the right time. You hold it up to him and try to look calm. Your hand is shaking but you need to still it if he's going to take you seriously.

"Take the weapon. Use it wisely."
He looks from you, to the cake, to you again.

While maintaining eye contact with you, he takes the cake. Then, the corner of his mouth turns up and he gives you this smirk. He knows what's going down.

He stands slowly and silently and you watch him. This is it!

He slowly creeps down to the end of the bookshelf, feeling his way with one arm and holding the cake in the other.

What happens next is a blur. The next thing you know he's yelling, flinging the cake, and backpedaling.

You hear some guffaws.

Wait. Oh my god, wait. He got him. The customer got your dad square in the face.

The horrified look on the guys face combined with the cake all over your dads does it for you. Soon your sides are splitting with laughter and you can't see because tears are in your eyes.

Through said blurry eyes you can make our mystery-guy's face turning a shade of red.

You can't hear what they're talking about but soon the stranger is jogging away.

You stop and look after him. Huh. You should stop calling him stranger- but you didn't even learn his name.

You dad helps you up and hands you a towel.

"Wow, son! That boy is a great competitor. Why don't you go apologize to him? He seemed a bit flustered."

Before you can respond, you dad is out of earshot.

"Oh and go on your lunch break, son!"

You stand there, towel in hand.

Should you go apologize? Why? You're never gonna see him again. Plus, he probably wouldn't accept one, anyway. You creeped the living day-lights outta that guy.

But, this part inside you was telling you maybe you should...

You don't know if its the adrenaline or not, but your feet start jogging towards the front entrance, after the mystery-guy...

Maybe apologizing would be a good idea.

---

No no no it's a bad idea.

You stand behind the safety of your glass door and observe the stranger from there.

He's standing there, looking up at the sky.

His hair is reflecting the sun and he stands cool and poised. One hand is working at his face, wiping away the butterscotch icing.

You reach a hand to your face and realize how ridiculous you must look. Well, then again you always look ridiculous.
No, stop. You're here to apologize.

Sorta.

He takes out his phone and starts walking. Wait! You'll miss your chance. But your feet are glued to the floor.

"Ooooh my gooood John!" a voice complains behind you. You squeak and flip around.

Jade is standing there. Her hair is still wet from swimming. Her green eyes are searing you.

"When did you get here?"

"Go apologize already," she points towards the door, her mouth is set in a pout.

You pause to stare at her.

"But I- he doesn't- I can't.." You start panicking for the umpteenth time today and look anywhere but at her. Her eyes were intimidating. Why is she doing this? What does she care if you apologize or not?

She knows that you crack under this kind of pressure. She relaxes a bit and smiles at you.

"Oh well. Nevermind. You don't have to apologize."

She turns and waves a hand in the air, walking away. You breathe a sigh of relief and turn to watch the stranger walk away.

Wow, what a chicken, Egbert. All you had to do was open the door and say 'Hey!' That's it!

But why is it so hard?

"Oops!" You hear a snicker next to your ear and jump. Two hands land on your shoulders. "I changed my mind."

You put your hands on the door out of sheer terror and next you're being flung through the door.

Curse her for being so strong!

"Hey!" you yell at her. You stumble to your feet and when you look up, you're outside and about twenty feet away, the blonde guy is looking at you, poised for a fight. Oh. He thinks you were yelling at him.

You internally whimper as you jog towards him. You put all the effort you have into a smile and curse your sister.

You stop in front of him and blurt your apology out as quick as you can. "I wanted to apologize. Again." He keeps staring at you, but come out of his stance and shoves his hands in his pockets.

This time, you lose the smile and try to look serious.

"My father is a little crazy and strange. I really hope that whole fiasco didn't make a bad impression."

Of course you made a bad impression! But you just can't stop talking. The way he's staring down at you is intimidating and you just want to run away. But you know Jade is watching.

All of a sudden his eyebrows lower somewhat and his stance relaxes even more. Is... is it working?

You don't know, but of course you keep talking.
"Oh, man!" You physically and internally face-palm. This guy doesn't even know who you are.

You stick your whole arm out, unfamiliar with the formalities. He looks down at it like you're trying to hand him something dangerous.

Ah! Don't intimidate him. You were doing so well. Dammit, John. Really smile this time.
And you do. You give him your most genuine smile and shrug to show you mean it.

"I'm John Egbert."

He stares at your hand, his hands still in his pockets. He looks like he's mulling it over.

Wow this guy doesn't talk much, does he? And he's also taking a really long time. This was a bad idea. Your heart is about to jump out of your chest and you're sweating under the sun and the pressure.

You're about to give up and mark it up as another failure but as soon as you start to move, so does he.

First, he looks up at you. Then, he pulls his hand out of his pocket and places it in yours.

Whaaaaaat did it really work?

His hand is cool and smooth, regardless of the weather. You're sure yours is gross with sweat.

He starts the shake. You look up at him, and he's still looking at you.

"Dave." Again, a man of few words. Even his name is cool. Everything about this guy is cool and it's... cool.

But, you're too busy being exhilarated about someone your age talking to you like an equal to care.

"So," he drawls, "how do I get this fucking icing out of my hair?" He reaches up to move his hand through it, but it gets caught on some dried icing.

You stare and laugh a little. "Well, I usually just take about seven-hundred showers to rinse it out. But then again, my hair is little more-er-unruly." You reach up to show him how tangled it is.

"Yeah," he looks at your hair and sticks his hands back in their pockets, "but it's pretty cool. I wish my hair was darker like that."

"Really?"

"Nah."

You pout, but he smirks at you. Just a subtle smile. Oh, he's joking.

"You work around here?" you ask, trying desperately to keep up a conversation. You don't even know how to. That sounded creepy.

"Well yeah," he turns and nods down the street, "'Jumpin' Java'. That place is the shit, man."

Oh! You know that place. You ask him how Rose is doing.

He seems a surprised that you know her. You tell him you two went to school together. She was a year or two younger but she was smart enough to skip to your classes. He laughs a kind of breathy laugh and says "That sounds like her."

When you run out of thing to talk about, your mind is racing while you stand there awkwardly. You've stuck your hands in your pockets to match his position. He's definitely more relaxed now.

He's even smiling and laughing now. You never knew you could talk to anyone like this.
"Hey," he calls you back to earth, "I gotta get going cause it's already way past my lunch break." He starts to turn. No, don't go! You pout but he can't see.

You're about to open your stupid mouth and protest but he turns his head and says: "Though, it'd be cool if you stopped in every once in a while for a coffee."

Oh. What?

"Really?" You squeak.

He turns around but continues walking backwards. "Yeah. The coffee there is awesome. Like the nectar of the gods or some shit. It could get you away from your maniac father, anyway." He smirks again, "Maybe I could even get you a free slice of pie. Damn, that would drive Karkat crazy. Yeah, I'm stealthy and catlike, like a ninja. I got those skills." He stops and chops and kicks at the air for emphasis.

You laugh and admire his 'skills'.

"Oh really? You'd sneak some pie for me? I did just get you tangled up in a cake fight, you know."

"Yeah, man!" he turns and walks away again. He's almost out of earshot when you hear him say, "What are friends for, anyway?"

Oh. Shit. He walks away.

You stand there way longer than you should have. You can't move.

When you finally do find your legs, you stumble blindly into the shop and find Jade.

She's sitting in the back, sorting a box.

When she looks up and sees you, she smiles.

When she sees your face, she frowns.

"John?" she asks carefully, "What."

You don't even wait for her to finish. You sink to your knees next to her, bury your face into her shoulder-

And cry.

She smiles and hugs you. She always knows exactly what's going on. She rubs your back.

"So it went well?"

You nod against her shoulder and continue crying, not caring how you look.

Your name is John Egbert and after nineteen years of loneliness, someone just called you their friend.

Chapter End Notes

So how did I do guys? :) leave a comment!
You're sitting in your dutiful stool, leaning back against the wall, headphones in. You fix your shades and sigh. This is great.

Business is slow today so you have time to just sit around and chill. It's a first.

The ceiling fan rotates slowly. The music in your ears is throbbing, jumping, and heavy- so unlike the room around you. The sun's going to start setting in an hour or so. Shadows are thrown across the solemn room and splattered onto the wall behind you. The city street outside is quiet, like it always is on Sunday evenings.

You close your eyes and tip back so you're leaning completely against the cool wall for security. You let your mind wander with the music.

It's a mix you made the other night when you couldn't sleep. There are a few things here and there that you don't like so you make a mental note to change them. However, you like how hot and heavy it flows from one part to the next.

You smirk quietly- damn you're good.

You try your best not to fall out of your chair when a hand clamps violently down on your shoulder. You eyes pry open as you straighten up and look at the offender: Karkat.

"What the fuck?" you ask, pulling one headphone out, smoothing your perfect hair back, "I'm busy."

"Busy?" he hisses. He wipes his hands off on his apron and gets right up in your face, "How in the everloving FUCK is that busy? Why don't you make youself useful for something other than a chair warmer and mop the filthy floors?"

"Chair war-?"

He pushes you off the stool with force and you land on your side behind the counter. He plops down on the chair and uses your torso as a footrest.

"Yes, your scrawny ass is the only thing that's actually working right now."

"You know what, Karkat? You can kiss my scrawny, beautiful ass. I've already mopped these goddamn floors twice. I could eat off of this shit it's so clean."

He laughs and presses a foot down harder into your abdomen as you flip around. "You wanna try,
"You festering dumbass?" His lips curl around his teeth demonically.

You struggle around, but he pushes his foot down harder. "Oh what is it?" his voice is mocking, "Someone can't get up? Here let me help." The pressure on his foot digs harder into your ribs and you gasp.

Breathing is coming harder.

"KARKAT... YOU.. DOUCHE!" you hiss between weak breaths. He cackles and reaches a hand down.

"So what's with these cheap-ass shades all the time?" he starts reaching for your face, "Got something to hide, Strider?"

You freeze. His hand is moving closer to your face. He knows that your glasses are an extremely sensitive topic and they should NEVER be touched. A lump forms in your throat and you forget how to breathe completely. Your muscles and face tighten up even more. His hand gets closer and closer and-

-well what the hell-

you bite it.

He jumps off of the chair with a yelp cradling his hand to his chest. At the same time he releases you from his death-crushing foot-grip and you sit up slowly.

You gulp in air and curse him as he's lays on the floor, cursing you.

You two are about to collide in another epic battle when, suddenly, you're both tugged up by the collars of your shirts and turned around abruptly.

Rose is holding you two up and she looks FURIOUS. Her black lips are curled back over her perfectly white teeth and her eyes are almost shining violet sparks.

"CHILDREN," her eyes are spitting fire and the hair on your neck stands straight up, "you two had better start acting like the ADULTS you are, or I PROMISE," she shakes you two on the word 'promise', "I will make this week the most miserable week of your employed lives. Do I make myself ABSOLUTELY CLEAR?"

She switches her bewitching gaze from you to Karkat, silently looking for an answer. You two turn and look at each other. He looks just as frightened as you but he continues:

"Sorry you're such a weak little bi-" Karkat starts and is shaken again until his eyes rattle. You start to smirk, but you get shaken too.

After both shooting a nasty glare at Rose for the unnecessary shake, you turn to each other and shake hands in a temporary truce.

"Little bitch."

"Asswipe."

You both get slapped on the back of the head.

"Now listen," Rose's voice is substantially calmed down now, "its almost six- so the Egberts will be stopping by soon and we're going to be ready as we always are for our guests. Karkat, you get the pie warmed up and David, you boil some water."

You both shuffle your ways dutifully, not wanting to mess with Rose any more today. You get to work at the sink, filling a kettle with hot water.

Secretly, you're always a little nervous about the Egberts' daily visits. Not just because seeing the
Dad makes you want to duck behind the nearest object. (Though that is a thing.)

Mostly, it's because the guy, John, gives you the weirdest vibes.

You shut the tap off and head over to the stove.

Ever since they started coming over after their work day finishes, he's been almost avoiding you. Well, not really avoiding- just not looking at you or acknowledging you all that much. It makes you nervous.

Maybe, he just doesn't like you as much as he thought he would.

Well, he wouldn't be the first, so what do you care.

Yet, the thought makes your stomach twist. He saved your ass in a surprise cake-fight. He saw you in a figurative moment of weakness.

Now that you think about it, even talking to him afterwards outside of the shop, it looked like he was almost uncomfortable or being forced to- like he wanted to get away from you as quick as possible.

Yeah, he's never going to acknowledge you. As you turn the stove on to boil, the bell above the door rings and three figures enter.

First is Dad. He removes his jacket (what the hell it's like a million degrees outside) and his fedora and places them on the coat rack next to the door. You watch him carefully as he approaches Rose.

Next is Jade. Now Jade, she's a pretty swell gal. Nice to talk to, but so full of energy and constantly moving around. Anyway, she never came here to talk to you.

She makes a beeline for the counter and nearly jumps on it.

"Heeeey Dave!" she reaches over the counter and crushes you in an awkward embrace. She realizes what's she's done and backs off.

"Oh, sorry- Mr. Cool Shades," she shifts her weight to her back foot and shoots you some double-finger pistols you've heard about. You can't help yourself when you grin. This chick is alright. Pretty cute, actually.

"Sup," is all you return. She's hardly phased by your brevity.

"Sooo..." she starts, tucking some black strands behind an ear shuffling from one foot to another. You already know where this is going.

You nod your head back to the kitchen, "In there, darlin'."

Her smile glows, "Thank you!" She practically jumps over you and the counter and calls, "Hey, Karkat!"

As a result, you hear several pots and pans drop back in the kitchen, accompanied by several loud curses.

She looks at you, giggles, heads towards the door, and opens it. When Karkat sees her, you hear a yell of disapproval.

You can't help laughing. Revenge is so sweet.

"Oh, don't be so excited to see me again!" Jade walks in, arms wide, "Come on, I need a hug!"

"NO! FUCK. NO. Stay away from me, you witch." You can hear the clamor of the fallen pots and pans as she chases him around the kitchen for the millionth time.
"Be a man and let her hug you, ya fucktard. She doesn't have cooties," you yell back through the window.

You see Jades head pop into view from behind a wall.

"Oh, but I do!" she smiles mischievously and wiggles her eyebrows.

"NO!" you hear his voice from somewhere within the kitchen, "keep your fucking cooties to yourself, you slimy, assaulting, wench!"

She turns to you, cups a hand to her mouth, and mouths 'I think he likes me!'

You rest an arm on the window and wink at her, the effect lost behind your dark shades.

She scampers off to find him and you turn your attention back to the others.

The Dad and Rose are already sitting at a table over in the corner, talking about... well whatever they're talking about. You could really care less. They both look accompanied enough.

Then, you turn your attention to the third figure that had entered and hadn't moved an inch since.

You don't know why he comes along anyway. All he ever does is stand by the doorway and look at his feet, desperate to leave.

You don't know what this guy's problem is. Had you offended him in any way? None that you can remember. What, he just doesn't want to talk to you?

Well yeah, probably.

You can't help but feel a little angry and upset that he would just ignore you like this for this long.

You internally admit a defeated sigh while resuming your stoic demeanor.

Ok then. You're going to go talk to him.

You make a decision and set your plan in motion.

You grab some rags and two spray-bottles and head in his direction.

In the few days they've been coming over, neither of you had approached each other, just sometimes awkwardly made eye contact. Usually he would look away first and mumble apologies.

You always chalk it up to him being disinterested in actually being a friend of any kind. It kinda hurt but you always let it slide.

Not today, though.

Now, you're gonna force him to talk to you.

"Hey," you articulate as you walk towards him.

He looks up and looks you right in the eye. His blue eyes are piercing and they could cut straight to anyone's core.

His expression is mixed somewhere between concern, surprised, and shy.

You toss one of your rags to him and he snaps into action as he barely catches it. He looks at it and back to you, a question on his lips.

"If you're going to just stand there and not talk to anyone," you say, and really smile at him for the first time, "at least make yourself useful."
You had begged your father to just let you go straight home, but he wasn’t hearing any of it.

He and Jade enjoy visiting that place every day before they went home now. And they just love to drag you along.

You protested profoundly at first but Jade would put a comforting arm around your shoulder and walk with you. She would rub your back and talk and talk. She always did know how to put your nerves to rest.

The first time you went, he wasn’t there. Your... friend.

You spent the whole time standing by the front door, smiling weakly as the rest of your family commingled and got acquainted.

You do like watching Jade and Karkat. You just like watching Jade do anything that makes her happy.

Jade recognized Karkat immediately. They had gone to school together. He also recognized her, and booooy was he not happy.

She chased him around the tables, like two five-year-olds. She laughed and jeered and he yelled and cursed.

When she finally caught him she tackled him to the ground, pinning him down and giggling the whole time.

Karkat writhed and swore but to no avail. He was stuck with her, both literally and figuratively.

You could have sworn you saw him stop, rest his head on hers for a moment, and hug back sweetly.

Maybe he did or didn't smile. You don't know. Before you knew it, he was storming back in the kitchen, a stream of profanities following.

The next day, Dave was there.

He looked at you enter. He was wearing his shades then too. Kinda funny. He nodded to you and you panicked and looked at the ground. You refused to move or look up, occasionally squeezing your eyes shut when you thought no one was looking.

You wanted to go home... but you also wanted him to come over and talk to you. This went on for a few days.

This time, today, everything is going differently.

~

You stare at the rag in your hands and back at him. You can't see past the dark shades to get a read on what's going on.

And now he's smiling at you.

He moves towards a group of tables and starts spraying them.

You clench your hand in a nervous fist and follow.
You spray the table next to him and start cleaning it idly. You glance up at him occasionally.

This time, he's wearing red. He seems to cycle between about 4 colors, more than often it's red or black. You think red suits him better.

"So," you jump at his words, "why're you so afraid of me?" He never looks up from his work.

You stop what you're doing but don't look up either. You just barely smile.

"H-huh? What do you mean?"

"I mean you haven't said a word to me since after the cake fight. What is it?" He stops what he's doing and leans a hip against the table, arms crossed, looking at you. "Is it the shades? The awesome, spectacular aura I give off? My dashing good looks?"

You stare at him. Boy, this guy's full of himself.

"Well, I mean, no? It's just-"

He's still staring.

"I dunno, maybe I thought you wouldn't want to talk to meeeeee?" Your voice shoots up a few octaves on the 'me'.

Oh shit. Oh FUCK. God dammit! John! Did you seriously just say that? No, don't you dare cry. No, just run away-

"Why the hell would you think that?"

You look up at him as carefully as possible.

He's giving you a wide smirk, but it's friendly.

You cough awkwardly. "Well I mean, um," You motion to yourself quickly, answering his question.

"What?" he responds, shaking his head and shrugging.

"Uh, well I'm not exactly, er.." how to put it delicately, John, "cool? And I mean you are and..? I don't know. I'm not good at talking to people either- ehm."

The whole time you're talking you look back down and wring your towel.

The silence coming from him is almost unbearable. After a while you decide you've screwed up badly. You start to walk away, back to your lonely spot.

"Wait."

You do. You slowly turn back to him.

All signs of smiling are gone. His arms are uncrossed and he's sitting on the table now. He pats the table next to him.

"C'mere." You stare at him. He tilts his head a few frowns at you. "I'm not gonna bite your head off, dude. Just-" he pats the table again.

You slink over and settle on the table with a creak.

He turns away from you and sighs. Then looks off in the distance, as if gathering his thoughts. You squirm and start running your mouth again: "Hey, uh Dave? Listen, I'm sorry, it's jus-"

"I don't HAVE... that many friends," he slowly turns and looks at you with a sad smile.
"I have," he looks dead-straight at you, "some swords, turntables, a cat that visits my apartment occasionally, and oh!" he snaps sarcastically, "a guardian who doesn't give a shit about me."

You let out a breath you didn't know you were holding in.

"So," he chuckles, looking away solemnly, "you and I are a little more alike than you thought."

Your mind is racing, a fantastic blur of confusion and wonder.

"You mean, we're both.. looking for a friend?" you mumble. You stare at him, wide-eyed and on the edge of crying.

He looks back at you, shocked at first, then his expression softens and he smiles.

"Yeah, as stupid and cheesy-as-all-fuck as it sounds, man. When you talked to me outside, that first time, hell, I knew I wanted us to be friends. I mean, who wouldn't want to be friends with a swell kid like you?" He punches your shoulder lightly for emphasis.

"Honestly," he continues, all defenses down, "I thought you were intimidated by me. That you are afraid of me, somehow. I don't want you to think you can't, ya know, approach me or talk to me or whatever. Honestly, John. I like to think I'm a pretty chill guy, and I know you are too. What else can I say?"

He laughs and swings his legs like a kid while you watch silently. "Man look at us, full grown men, making friends like we're kindergarteners or some shit, pairing up for a project in finger-painting or braiding. All bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and whatever."

You laugh, but it comes out choked. You're so emotional you feel like you could burst.

After a while you speak:

"Hey Dave?" you manage, "Can I ask you a question?"

"Shoot, man." He smirks at you.

You ball your hand into fists and place them in your lap. You concentrate on them as you feel your cheeks become hot with tears.

"Are we... Are we really truly friends? Like, best bros or something? I mean do you really think I'm *hic* cool? Or normal?"

You can't see him but you can feel him look at you.

Then, you feel a comforting hand on your shoulder. You lean into him and cry. You've never felt so comfortable.

He rubs your shoulder and laughs softly,

"You got it, bro. We're the best of bros- the best."

You really wish you weren't such a baby and curse yourself for it constantly. You realize you cry all the time, but he's just so comforting. It's almost like he knows what you're going through.

You can't help it, but you reach out and encompass him in tight hug, his red shirt getting soaked.

He doesn't care. You know it because he hugs back, laughing and talking carefully, rubbing your back the whole time.

Though he doesn't really let it show, you can tell by his trembling voice that he needs the hug as much as you do.
And they continue their feelings jam until John has to reluctantly leave or something. <3

Leave a comment :)
"No... Nonono... Dude! I'm serious. No. NO!"

"Ha! Blue shell Dave! Check your privilege."

You tilt the gamecube controller farther, like it'll do something to help your floundering situation. Your fingers are smashing the buttons furiously and you're elbowing John to delay his attack. He's squirming and laughing maniacally, teasing you.

"Here it cooooomes!" BOOM. "Ha! Yes I win! I win, finally!"

You stare at the screen through your shaded eyes. Defeat. You had been beating him 57-0. Your perfect streak is ruined. Damn it, Waluigi. You've betrayed me.

You turn in mock disgust to face John, laying on the floor next to you. He's laughing so hard at your pouty expression he has tears streaming down his face. He's laying back on the floor, feet kicking, clutching his stomach as they fall in stitches.

"Oh god, ha! Dave, oh my god! You should see your face. Oh man," he punches your shoulder weakly. You grunt and turn the other way, keeping up the ironic tantrum.

"Ohh come on Dave, it's a game! Plus, you've been kicking my ass for the past hour at Mario Kart. I deserve at least one win."

"No John, you simply do not understand," you stick an arm out to him theatrically, placing the back of your other hand on your forehead. He giggles some more. "This game- this game is my lifeline. Oh no. John. I can feel myself slipping. There's the light at the end of the tunnel. I'm going, John. I'm-"

You reach the other hand dramatically past him, reaching toward said light. You faint theatrically and fall on him. He yelps as he's crushed by your thin frame.

"Ack, jeez, Dave. Stoooop. Daaaaave." He waves his arms and kicks his legs dramatically under you, trying to escape.

"No John, I'm dead. You've killed me. Call a hearse, light the beacon, blow the horns, write an epitaph. A Strider has fallen."

John finally pushes you off him and stands quickly, brushing himself off. You fall with a thud next to him and continue to lie face down on the floor- you are dead after all.

"Ok, Mr. Theatrics. Get up." He kicks you lightly a few times.
Now! You grab his foot and pull.  
He hits the ground next to you with a satisfactory thud.  
"Ahhh! Yooooouu-" he grabs the pillow next to his head and beats you over the head with it, savagely.  
"Ok, John, we're even now. Spare me." He throws the pillow back down and sighs.  
After a while he speaks again. "You hungry, Dave?" He pokes you on the head.  
"What time is it?" you ask, turning your head from the floor to look at him. You still haven't gotten up.  
"What does that have to do with anything?" He pushes his glasses up inquisitively.  
"Just answer the question, Egbert."  
He checks his wristwatch. "Uhh, 12:45."  
He had originally invited you over to play some video games for the afternoon. However, when John insisted you sleep over and denied your claims that sleepovers are for girls, you couldn't say no.  
"Our house is your house, David," his father had answered with a smile when John asked if you could sleep over. You two have been almost inseparable for the past two months and he treats you almost like family now.  
John had brought two sleeping bags and pillows to his room so you guys could game through the night without disturbing the rest of his family.  
When he asked if you needed to borrow some pajamas, you scoffed and asked 'who wears pajamas anyway?' He turned about three shades of red in his embarrassment. When you realized he was wearing his favorite ghostbusters pajama pants, you couldn't contain your laughter. He immediately went to change again, looking like he was about to cry.  
"Ahh man John, I don't care. I was kidding- come on, they're cool!" you had jumped up after him, dragging him back in.  
He isn't so conscious about them anymore. He's still smiling down at you, waiting for an answer. "Well? Is it an appropriate time to eat?"  
You squint at him from behind your shades and pretend to ponder.  
"Yeeaaahh I could eat," you grin.  
His face lights up, "Yeah! Midnight fridge raid!" He jumps up and cringes. "Oh. But we can't wake..." he nods to the door.  
You roll over and stretch, "Yes, yes I know the drill."  
---  
You wake up with a start and clumsily find the clock. 2:35.  
The only light in the room is the dim-blue electric light emanating from the television.  
A box of klondikes, seven sodas, two bottles of apple juice, and an empty bag of gummy bears lay littered around you.  
You search around for- oh, there he is.
You had fallen asleep sitting up against the foot of his bed, John is curled up in a ball next to you, controller still in hand.

"Huh," you laugh and remove it from his loose grip carefully. What a dork. He looks so different when he’s asleep. He's not smiling all the time- his facial features are softer, especially in the blue glow.

When you first met him all those weeks ago, he had you fooled. You believed the smiling-and-being-happy-all-the-time thing. You honestly thought he was just that happy. All the time. Always out to please the ones he's close to.

However, the more you two hung out, the more of the real him you saw. You're starting to notice the small things. He doesn't like talking to people he doesn't know, his happy facade slips every time he thinks no one is looking, and he cringes every time you ask about his other friends. In fact, you're starting to doubt he HAS any other friends.

He's really just... man. It makes you way beyond sad to see such a great, awesome kid so... so lonely.

Heh, look at you- talking about what it means to be lonely. Ah, shit.

Your wince and slip the heel of your hand under your shades to get at your eye.


You drag a hand through your hair shakily and exhale, looking back down at John.

You know exactly how his loneliness feels, though. Like you said, you two are more alike than he thought.

He's the best/only goddamn friend you've ever had and--

You cautiously reach a hand down to him. You pause for a second, but finally reach down and rub his back softly. He shifts closer to you in his sleep and sighs contently, the faint trace of a smile on his face.

--you're going to make him happy if it kills you.

You continue watching him and rubbing his back, listening to him breathe easily for a while. He's cuddled up against the side of your leg.

You move your hand up to his head and cautiously touch his hair...

Daaaaaaamn this kid's hair is soft. Bastard.

You play with his hair for while, moving your fingers gently through the unruly, dark locks. You push his bangs back from his face. He'd fallen asleep with his glasses on and they are crushed between his face and the floor. You carefully lift his head and remove them, folding them neatly and placing them on the foot of the bed above your head.

'Don't worry, bro,' you think to yourself, 'I gotcha.'

You continue rubbing his back gently as he sleeps and sighs happily next to you.

You eventually rubbing his back gently as he sleeps and sighs happily next to you.

You do. The first thing you notice is the obvious, painful crick in your neck.
The second thing noticed is the foreign hand laying on your shoulder.

Before you can completely flip the fuck out, you slowly recollect the fact that it must be Dave and you exhale shakily. You then peel your face off of the carpet which it had been molded to and proceed to check out your situation.

You're curled up in a tight ball next to Dave, who's sleeping quietly, leaning against your bed. His mouth is slack and his slender hand is resting gently on your shoulder.

How did that even get there? Dave probably moves in his sleep. What a dork.

You slowly reach up with your other arm to move it. When you grasp it in yours, you slowly move it back to his lap. His hands are much slighter and longer than yours.

When you do finally place his hand back in his lap, he stirs in his sleep, then settles again with a deep sigh.

When you're sure he hasn't woken up, you sit up quietly. You turn so you're facing him while stiffly rub the spot on your neck where you can feel the crick forming.

With a wide yawn, you wonder what time it is. A glance at your super-awesome glow-in-the-dark wristwatch tells you it is 4:52.

Great. Too early to do anything but too late that you probably can't fall back asleep.

Now what?

You could play some video games. You turn to the blue screen thats throwing a soft light across the room. Nah. Too noisy.

With a gentle huff, you turn your attention back to your sleeping guest.

Gee, uh, isn't he cold? At least you slipped a sweatshirt on before you fell asleep. You bet he's freezing.

Almost as if on cue, you see a shiver creep up Dave's spine in his sleep. That's all the reassurance you need.

Your body groans in protest as you stand. You shuffle over to the side of your bed groggily and pull the comforter off of it.

Spreading it out wide, you lean down and sit back on your heels in front of Dave. You throw it over his shoulders gently. You also try your best to tuck it in around him while still letting him sit up against the bed. He doesn't move the whole time. Wow, he's a heavy sleeper.

Once you feel you've done all you can, you lean and sit back with a thud and look at him. You mean really look at him.

What makes you so special? What makes you so special that someone as cool as this guy wants to be friends with you- let alone best bros?

Seriously. Dave could be friends with anyone he wants to. All he has to do was talk to someone and they were instantly friends. You would kill to have this guy's social skills.

Yet, again and again, Dave chooses to spend all of his free time with you. What did you DO? You're the awkward one. You're the nobody. Why would the cool guy hang out with the nobody?

You reach both hands up to your face and rub your eyes in frustration, trying to understa-

Your glasses? Your glasses! Huh. Must have fallen off somewhere.

You snort cynically when you look back at Dave. Of course Dave managed to keep his on.
In fact, it doesn't even surprise you that he sleeps in them. You've never once seen him without them on, actually. When you ask him why he's always wearing them, he scoffs and tells you that 'they're cool, duh, I don't need a reason'.

Somehow, you think that's a buncha bullshit. He's too protective over them for it to be that silly of a reason. But, you're too afraid to confront him about it and risk him getting upset and not talking to you. So you let it go.

You reach a hand forward nervously and touch them. What's so special about them? They're just regular plastic. Maybe if you just-

As soon as you start moving them up, he stirs. You yelp quietly and snap your arm back. Stupid, stupid John.

Once he settles down under the blanket again, your curiosity peaks yet again.

You inhale sharply and reach forward more boldly this time. You hook your fingers under the corner of the frame and push them up until they're resting on top of his head. Once you're sure they'll stay, you pull your arm back to admire your work.

His sleeping has considerably softened his expression, his jaw still slightly slack. Usually he looks kinda serious or joking- his mouth always pressed in a firm line. Now he just looks downright... serene.

His eyes are still closed, but his eyelids are lined with fine blonde-white eyelashes that match his perfect hair and thin eyebrows. Across the bridge of his nose, all the way across his face and under his eyes, is a heavy peppering of freckles. They were noticeable before, but they're more obvious now.

Underneath his eyes is a darker color. A frown twitches on your face. Does he have problems falling asleep like you do? You doubt it. But still...

What you're about to do is so stupid on so many levels, but you can't help yourself.

You reach forward and brush your fingertips against the dark circles under his eyes. Then you move to his freckles. You keep your touch as light as a feather so he won't wake up. You trace his prominent jawline with your knuckles.

A smile lingers on his relaxed face.

After barely sweeping over his closed eyelids with the back of your fingers, you gently brush a strand of light hair that had fallen out of place behind his ear.

You don't know how long you keep this up for, but you figure you've violated his privacy enough. You reluctantly slide his shades back into their place and retract your hand.

You continue to look at him though. Why the dark circles? He claims that you two are more similar than you think... Could it be that he's really as lonely as you? That he loses sleep over it like you?

A shiver runs up your spine and hug yourself loosely. You want to reach out and hug him, but he'd wake up. You want to comfort him, just like he does for you.

No one would pin Dave for being the touchy/hugging type. He likes hiding behind those ironic shades and exhibiting the emotional range of a carrot.

But around you, he's completely different. Whenever you, John Egbert, become even a little bit upset or start to doubt yourself, you find that comforting arm around your shoulder, holding you up.
When you're definitely upset and crying (which is more often than you care to admit), he brings you in for a bone-crushing hug and rubs your back until you can't cry any more.

For that, you are more than grateful.

He doesn't care that you're both nineteen or that you've only known each other for two months or so. He doesn't care that you're a blubbering, antisocial, anxious mess. He only knows that you two are best friends and you always need to be there for each other.

You like the mindless afternoons with him, watching crappy movies and eating everything in sight. You like visiting him at work, even if it means putting up with Karkat. You like how whenever you play a practical prank on him, he laughs along with you. He always stands up for you when you can't stand up for yourself. He knows how to make you HAPPY.

No one has ever treated you as kindly as him.

You sniffle gently as your lip quivers, tears threatening to show again.

Maybe you've been too afraid to step up for him every once in a while. Maybe you should initiate that comforting bro-hug more often. Maybe he needs you as much as you need him - he just doesn't show it as often.

You look at your best friend and make a vow to yourself, right there and then:

If Dave is truly as lonely as he says he is, you're going to make Dave happy - just like he makes you happy.

You reach out again to smooth his hair down and readjust his blanket so he's (sorta) tucked in.

You move yourself back onto the ground next to him, except this time you lay your head down on his outstretched leg. Like you said, he's comfortable.

With a few deep sighs, you drift back to sleep.

It's the best sleep you've gotten in a long, long time.

Chapter End Notes

Don't forget to leave a comment! :)

You're Pathetic

Chapter Summary

John runs into an old 'friend'.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorryyyyy!
For two reasons:

One: This is late
Two: THIS IS SO SAD

It's late because I've had a rough week.
It's sad because I DON'T KNOW

Please enjoy though (or try to if you can bear my writing right now)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jesus, God DAMN, why is it so hot?

You stare up at the ceiling, wasting away in your own perspiration. You glare at the ceiling fan, begging it to go faster with all of your willpower.

Right now, you’re lying on the prank shop’s counter, because you honestly have nothing better to do. Business is slower than the air moving in here. The air is so humid you can feel the water in your lungs.

You’re seriously starting the regret deciding to wear a black t-shirt and green cargo shorts this morning.

You huff slowly and lull your head around. You’re so bored. There’s nothing to do. Nothing.

Normally you’d go over to Jumpin’ Java and see who you can find. However, you remember how hot it is out there and think lying here is just fine too.

Who knows? Maybe Dave will come over to see you- ohhh shoot, no. You close your eyes and thump your head lazily against the counter. He’s away today. He never did tell you why.

Actually, when he had told you he was going away for the day, he seemed a little nervous. You had tried to get more information out of him but he wouldn’t budge. Eventually, you gave up asking, but you’re still pretty curious.

You also regret telling Dad that you could run the shop alone today. You’re so boooored.

You reach above your head for some pamphlets to read out of boredom. You grab one that the local community college had dropped off as an advertisement.

You sigh and stare at it for a while. You probably should go to college. Your father had let you take a break last year after high school. He had said it was alright that you didn’t know what you wanted to do, but sooner or later you’d have to decide what you want to do with your future. You
certainly can’t work in the joke shop for the rest of your life, even though sometimes you want to. Maybe you’ll study something like biology. You don’t know. It’s all hypothetical.

You throw the pamphlet to the side and sit up. You swing you legs over the edge and perch there. You’re considering organizing the whoopee cushion pile again when the bell rings.

Finally, a custom-

Ohhhh shit.

You stare begrudgingly as two tall, graceful figures enter through the door. A guy and a girl. You know them, but you wish you didn’t. You slide back behind the counter a shrink as much as possible. Maybe they won’t see you…

“Weeeell, Egbert!” the guy teases you with a thick British accent, making his way over to you and leaning against the counter, “How goes the dam-building, beaver-boy?”

“…Hi, Eridan.”

“Oh, so you remember me?”

“Yeah. Hard not to.”

“Oh, that’s sweet,” he smiles unkindly and tousles your hair like a child.

Eridan is a tall, muscular guy. He spends almost all of his time at the beach, so he’s pretty tan. His hair is a deep black except for that ‘rebellious, cool’ purple streak he added himself. He looks like the stereotypical lifeguard, save the hipster glasses he’s sporting on his angled face. He smiles a lot, but the smiles are always cold and devious. They never quite reach his eyes.

God, you hate this guy. And you’re absolutely sure he hates you too.

He takes advantage of your silence:

“I must have made some kind of impression on you, Egbert, considering how pleased you seem to see me. How’s life been since high school?”

“Fine.”

“Fine?” he says, raising his eyebrows. He does a 360, looking at the shop.

He scoffs, “I’ll say. Hard to tell in a dump like th-”

“Eridan!” the girl chimes in finally, “Enough is enough, Jeeeeez.”

You briefly look over Eridan’s shoulder to find Feferi, leaning back against one of the bookshelves, crossing her arms.

She’s almost as tall as him now. Her hair falls in thick brown curls all the way down her back. She pretty much always has her hair pushed back with a pair of sunglasses and wears about twenty necklaces and bracelets. She’s also pretty lean, muscular, and tan. She spends most of her time with Eridan, surfing or swimming at the stupid beach. She has pretty blue eyes and bright pink lipstick on.

She waves, “Hi there, John. It’s nice to see you again!”

“Hi, Fef,” you grumble.

Feferi was one of the only people back in school that didn’t incessantly make your life a living hell. You didn’t hate her, but she never exactly made anything BETTER for you…
“Hey!” Eridan barks, and you jump up straight in surprise, “Listen kid-”

“He’s the same age as us Eridan, don’t call him kid,” Feferi chimes in again as she comes and leans against the counter next to him.

“I call him what I want!” he snap at her. She shrugs and turns back away to look at some fake bugs.

He turns back to you and his eyes bore into your skull. “Listen, KID,” he emphasizes, “we didn’t come here to see you.”

“Really?” you mumble sarcastically after a second.

“We came for Jade,” he continues anyway, “So, where is she? She said she could come swimming with us today.”

“…I don’t know where she is.”

“Excuse me?” he leans a little closer.

“I said-”

“I HEARD WHAT YOU SAID,” he growls, practically in your face. He backs up a bit and cools down a little. “Now listen, I’m gonna ask again real nice. Where’s Jade?”

You look up at him above the rim of your glasses in silence. He stares back intently.

Finally, he reaches a hand out and snatches your glasses off of your face. You go to protest, but he cuts you off.

“How can you not know where your sister is?” he laughs at you, “What, are you blind or something?”

“Give them back,” you deadpan, fists curled up on either side of you.

He hums. “I think not, kid.”

“Eridaaaan,” Feferi warns him and comes back. She pushes his shoulder lightly, “Just give ‘em back! You’re being such a dumbass right now.”

He scoffs at her and turns back to you, “Fine,” he huffs. Without breaking eye contact with you, he bends the bridge of the glasses.

SNAP

You feel a lump form in your throat and your mind flashes white with anger.

“God, Eridan!” Feferi face twists into annoyance and she punches him in the arm, “Look what you did!”

“What?” he laughs. He throws the two halves down on the counter, “Look, I gave them back, ok?” You stare down at the two pieces, speechless.

“Well look at him, you’ve upset him!” she continues. She motions one arm out to you. He turns back to see you start picking up the pieces of your glasses. Not once does Feferi actually move to comfort you.

“What, he looks fine to me,” he chuckles. “Well. I mean at least he looks like his usual self.”

They’re bickering now, like you’re not even there. Like you’re a nobody. You can feel the anger bubbling up in your chest and your eyes stinging.
You slam your fist down hard on the desk. They both cease their bickering to look at you.

The room is still sticky and hot, but your heart and demeanor has turned ice-cold. You stare up at Eridan.

“Get out.”

“Uh,” he chuckles, “who do you think-”

You rest your hands against the counter and lean forward. “Get. Out. NOW.”

He stares at you in shock for a few seconds, then his lips curl over his teeth into a snicker as he turns away from Feferi.

He leans forward to meet your gaze. His eyes are a dark, dark brown. Almost black. They’re cold and unfeeling, but you can see the rage he’s feeling towards your defiance in them.

“Or what?” he practically purrs.

As much as you want to run away, you can’t break eye contact. If you do, he’ll beat you into oblivion. There’s no going back now.

“She hates you,” you hiss at him quietly.

He leans back a bit and you can see the rage in his eyes consumed by curiosity and confusion.

“What?” he deadpans, “What are you even talking about?”

“Jade. She hates your rotting, ugly, slimy guts.” Your eyes are starting to sting even more and the fire in your chest builds. You stand up straight. “She thinks you’re a coward and a moron and doesn’t want to have anything to do with you. She, and I, personally hope that you rot forever in hell and-”

That would have been the longest thing you’ve ever uttered to him, but before you can finish, he’s behind the desk and has you pinned to the wall by the front of your shirt.

He reaches out and slaps you, hard, across the face.

You don’t look back at him, you just keep your head to the side like that. If you look back you’ll start crying. Your anger is still raging in your mind and chest.

“You rotten piece of shit,” he leans in close to you, “You know that’s not true. Jade and I are great friends,” he hisses at you. “I think what the REAL problem is,” he tightens his grip on your shirt and leans in close, “is that you’re jealous.”

You don’t say anything. You don’t even know where he’s going with this. You slowly turn to face him. He’s grinning at you.

“That’s right,” he purrs, “Look at you. A lonely, pitiful nothing. The only real friends you have are your family, like Jade. Jade is the only person who really cares about you as a friend, and you hate to see her go. Why would she ever care about you in the first place? I mean seriously, have you SEEN yourself? God.”

You feel a tear run down your cheek but you stay silent and keep looking him in the eye.

Your heart hurts more than anything and it feels like it’s going to shrivel away into nothingness. He’s right. He’s right he’s right he’s right. Oh god.

You barely hear Feferi move to stand beside Eridan.

“Alright, come on Eridan, that’s enough.” Her voice is grave and quiet. She tugs at the back of his shirt.
“Oh, I’m almost done here,” he hisses and pushes her away. His smile grows. He’s still glaring at you intently, “Just gotta make sure he really remembers this.”

He shifts and lifts his arm into a fist. “You ready, freak-show?”

At this point you’re next to sobbing. You can’t look at him anymore. You know this is going to hurt, but the physical pain is only temporary. You finally look away and wince.

When his fist hits you square in the jaw, you see stars. You hear Feferi shout.

The first thing you feel is the deep throbbing pain it leaves in your neck and chin. You taste blood, and you deduce you must have cut your gum or bitten your tongue on impact. You let your head roll to the side and you let yourself slump to the ground when he releases you.

“Oh, John,” he rarely ever calls you by name. He hunches down to gloat over you and nudes your shoulder, “You’re pathetic.”

You feel a twinge in your chest and you release a sob as you realize- he’s right. You are pathetic.

You’re about to start sobbing and apologizing for nothing, when you hear a shout:

“Yo, shit-for-brains!”

It’s soft-spoken but loud enough to carry across the room. It’s icy and full of anger.

Eridan stands quickly and spins around in surprise. You’re just confused because you never heard the bell ring…

Standing in the doorway is Dave. He’s in a white tank top and black jeans. His face is distorted with anger behind a pair of cool shades.

“If you don’t step away from my friend RIGHT NOW, I’ll make you regret ever walking your sorry ass into this place,” he hisses, moving forward slowly.

He looks like he could tear something apart. Oh shit.

~

The douche-bag gloating over John’s body turns and faces you, shock highlighting his features.

“If you don’t step away from my friend RIGHT NOW, I’ll make you regret ever walking your sorry ass into this place,” you hiss, trying (and failing) to maintain your cool.

You’re more than glad that you decided to stop by to check up on John. You had told John you were going away for the day. And you were away… you just didn’t want to tell him why yet…

But, you had finished your task a little earlier than expected and hoped to surprise him by stopping by on the way home.

When you had arrived, you had the full intention of sneaking up on his and scaring him. He hates it when you do that, but it always makes him laugh in the end.

You had slipped in the door and past the annoying bell only to be met with this tragic scene.

You walked in right as he punched John.

When he did, you could see John’s tear-streaked face snap to the side and wince in pain. You felt your heart snap in two as he fell to the ground.

No one, repeat, NO FREAKIN ONE, is going to lay a hand on that kid. He’s been through too much shit for that. Plus, no one lays a hand on Dave Strider’s best friend and gets away with it.
You had instinctively barked out at the offender immediately to get his attention. You couldn’t see John anymore because he had fallen to the ground behind the counter. You really hope that he’s ok. You’re sure he is, but you have to deal with this asshole first.

The son of a bitch is walking out from behind the counter. He’s got a pleased look on his face that you’d be more than happy to remove.

The other chick has moved to tend to John, thank god.

She yells, “Eridan, I swear to GOD if you don’t stop it right now.”

“ERIDAN?” you exaggerate as put your hands on your hips and cock your head. You lift your eyebrows, “What kind of person names their kid ERIDAN? What, that sounds like something you’d name a pet dolphin. Eridan. Erriidan.” You have to try get this guy worked up.

Anger flashes across his face appropriately, “What are you talking about? There’s nothing wrong with my name. Who the hell are you, anyway? What do you want? We’re busy here.”

You snap your gaze back to him and you relax your stance. “Like I said, I’m John’s friend. I’m also the guy that’s gonna kick your ass in three easy moves.” You have actually already calculated it. You know for a fact that you can reduce this guy to tears in just three moves.

He doubles over in laughter but you still maintain your poker face.

“Oh well that’s rich,” he wipes a fake tear away, looking up at you, “Alright, here’s a good question: why would you want to be friends with that waste of space anyway?” He crosses his arms and stares you down. You keep your ground. “The kid’s a loser. He’s a plain, buck-toothed, lonely, loser.”

Your heart wretches when he says lonely.

“You son of a bitch,” you utter quietly, full of venom and clench your fists even tighter. Hell, it’s not like you to lose your temper like this but DAMN is he getting on your last nerve. “I’ll wreck your shit up for calling him that.”

He glances over behind him and sighs heavily.

“Oh well, kid, I didn’t want to have to do this. Seems like you could have been a cool guy, but, you are who you hang out with I guess.”

He charges at you, fist flying for your face.

Big mistake.

You take one step to the side and lash out. You grab his wrist and swing him with his momentum. He stops in shock and looks at your face. You look him right in the face.

“One.”

You snap his wrist. He screams.

“Two.”

You pull him towards you by the broken wrist and knee him in the stomach.

“Three.”

You literally kick him in the ass and he flies headfirst into the counter.

The chick finally lifts her head from behind the counter to look at Eridan, now fallen on the ground.
She clicks her tongue, “S’ what you get, you bully! Told you to leave him alone.”

You glare at her. “Do me a favor, and get this asshole out of here.”

She salutes, smiles, and runs around the counter. She takes the sobbing loser’s arm around her shoulder and leads him out.

As soon as they’re gone, you turn quickly to see John struggling to stand behind the counter. He’s rubbing the injured side of his face with one hand and gripping the counter with the other. His hair is disheveled and his shirt is stretched out from being held up.

His face is splotched and streaked with tears. He’s still hiccuping and sobbing.

You run faster than your feet can carry you, tripping over yourself to help him. He’s too weak and shocked to stand.

Eventually, the two of you just end up on the floor- you sitting with your back against the counter and cradling his head in your lap.

It takes him a while to calm down but eventually he does. You’ve never seen him cry quite like this. You know he’s pretty sensitive, and he does vent to you a lot, but this- this is different.

You rub his back, hum, and smooth his hair. It’s really all you can do, but you know it helps calm him down when you do those things. It’s pretty calming for you too. You have to admit, you did get quite a bit worked up from that whole ordeal.

You occasionally touch his swelling bruise and he winces. You’re gonna have to ice that…

“Hey, dude,” you say quietly after a while, “Do you want to tell me what happened?”

He sighs gently. He would be looking up at the ceiling, but his eyes are closed.

“I don’t know what happened.”

“Oh come on now, it’s me. You can tell me, bro.”

He shrugs lightly. You sigh.

“Listen, John. Obviously whatever happened, I know it’s not your fault. You’re not the kinda rough-n-tough person to get into fights like that.” He smiles softly, eyes still closed. You look out to the distance and rant, “And also, that guy is such an asshole, he was just looking for a fight, ya know? He probably has some serious self-esteem issues or daddy issues or whatever and he likes to take it out on other people. That or he’s just having a bad day-”

“No, he’s always been like that,” he cuts you off.

You look back down at his closed eyes and his lip is trembling again. His voice is shaky.

“Eridan has… he’s always been like that. He and I went to school together and, well, he’s always treated me like that. Said nasty things like that. Even when we were little,” he sniffs and rubs at one eye.

“Oh I don’t know. I tried my best to ignore him but I guess everything he’s said has kind of messed me up. Messed my mind up and my self esteem. To the point where I start believing…”

He stops and sighs.

“…believing what he says is true?” you finish quietly.

He nods solemnly.

“And you know, he has a few points. He calls me pathetic and look, I’m crying see? I practically cry every day, Dave. I shouldn’t let those insults get to me but then they echo around in my head
He gets cut off because you reach down and scoop him up into a crushing, blinding hug.

You bring your arms around his shoulders in a death-grip and squeeze him as hard as possible. You settle your head into the nook between his neck and shoulder and just stay there. Soon, he relaxes and reaches his arms around your torso lightly.

How could anyone ever think of John that way? How dare he. How DARE he do this to him?

You just want him to be happy, dammit. And this isn’t helping.

“John,” you whisper after a minute of silence and loosen your grip a bit so he can breathe, “I want you to listen to me.” No response. “John, are you listening to me?” You can feel him nod against you. He’s shaking again.

“Now,” you start, “you are just about the least pathetic person I have ever met in my life. You are awesome. Dude, you’re just-” you pause to think. “Shit, how can I put this? Dude, I’ve told you how awesome apple juice is right?”

He nods again.

“John, you’re like a mountain of juice-boxes that automatically refill themselves once you finish them. That’s how awesome you are. If awesome were a hairstyle, you’d rock it. If awesome were a song, it’d be the anthem of your life.”

John laughs quietly and nuzzles into your neck. You squeeze him once again.

“Seriously though, dude,” you continue, “All those kids who said anything about you before? You know them?” He nods again. “Stupid. All of them. Dead to me. Dead to you. Dead to the world. You need to know this.”

You lift him off of you and hold him back by the shoulders. He’s opened his eyes and now he’s looking right at you.

He looks so different without his glasses. His eyes are bright and swimming with tears. His lip is quivering and he looks so sad and young and innocent it makes YOU want to cry.

You smile at him, though. A real, genuine one that you don’t dish out often.

“John, I’m pretty grateful for you. I’m happy I found you, man.” You tighten your grip on his shoulders as the tears start to flow from his eyes. He stays silent though, watching you.

“Before I was friends with you, things were pretty dark, ok? You know that. I’ve told you. Remember? And now, I have a kick-ass friend who’s changed everything. You pretty much brighten up my days.” You see the edge of his mouth kick up into a grin. “You and no one else, alright dude? Don’t believe for a minute what that douche-tsunami said is true.”

He’s sniffing and shaking harder now. You hate to believe that this might be the nicest thing anyone has said to him in a while, but it probably is. This life must be so hard on him.

“But, if you ever doubt yourself, if you believe what he says again, even for a minute-”

You pull him back into the comforting hug and smooth his hair while he cries silently,

“Remember that you’re one of the best things that has ever happened to me.”
Much later, when you’re 100% sure that John’s going to be alright on his own, you head home. You told him to call you if he needs anything and he assured you that he would.

It’s dark by the time you leave the shop, but you don’t care- you like the dark.

You run over what happened again and again in your head as you amble home.

Eventually, you get sick just thinking about that Eridan guy and what he said. You decide to think about other things.

Your feet hit the pavement lightly, but the echo against the empty streets. The streetlights are shining bright- those that aren’t burnt out.

You think back to today and what your task was:

Apartment searching.

Yeah, you’re getting pretty sick of living in your old place; the one that you technically still share with that good-for-nothing ‘brother’ of yours. Plus, Rose has got you working enough hours now that you could probably start paying for your own rent and everything.

Honestly, you just need a change.

You had found this pretty cool place. It’s a lot closer to work too. The rent was decent and so was the apartment. You had decided to put an offer down on it and to be honest- you feel pretty proud of yourself.

Well, you’re proud, but you’re not completely sure of it yet. That’s why you haven’t told anyone. Not even John. It’s a pretty big decision to make, and god knows you’re terrible at making big decisions. It’s better to keep it on the down-low for now.

It’s still extremely hot out, you notice, as you approach your building. As you enter the building the air-conditioning hits you and you sigh in relief.

The elevator, of course, is still ‘out-of-order’, so you make your way up the stairs.

Now that you think about it, your life is taking a pretty decent turn for once. You’ve got a great friend who’s got your back, a brother who quite possibly won’t be back for months, a great job with some pretty chill people (save Karkat), and a possible new abode.

Damn, you think, maybe I’ll help myself to a celebratory drink tonight.

Fat chance, you laugh to yourself. You haven’t been able to LOOK at a drink, let alone touch one since your incident a few months ago. Plus, it’s probably better if you don’t.

You don’t need it anymore. You don’t depend on it like you used to.

You take your keys out of your pocket as you approach your door. You decide you’re just gonna crash and slip into a deep coma. You gotta get up early for work anyways.

The crappy, scratched wooden door clunks and creaks open eventually once you jiggle the keys a bit. God you can’t wait to be rid of it.

You walk in and slam the door behind you, throwing your keys onto the small table next to the door.

You flip the switch on-

and shout in horror as back up into the door immediately in disgust and disdain.

“Whoa, whoooa, little man,” your Bro holds out his arms and grins at you devilishly, “Is that any
way to greet your bro? Where’s my hug?”

You feel like you’re going to be sick.

Chapter End Notes

BUH BUH BUUUUHHHH

Hang in there, kiddies ;)

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You stand with your back pressed against the door, silently glaring across the room. You can feel the acrid bile rise in your throat as you stare him down across the room. You can feel the hair standing up on your neck.

The room is filled with static, electricity, and tension. You’re wound up with so tight, you feel like you might break any second or snap like a rubber band. You can practically feel everything crumbling apart at the seams, all in that split second.

He’s not supposed to be here. This ruins everything. Everything was going so WELL, dammit. You clench your fists slightly at the thought of all your hard work since then going to waste.

He chuckles lightly, shakes his head, and settles back into the armchair. He has a snide look sketched across his face.

“…Why?” you barely manage to ask, voice laden with rage.

He gives you an exasperated look and leans his head forward to peer over the edge of his shades.

“You’re going to have to use your big words, kid,” he teases, “Why don’t you sit down right over there,” he lazily points to the couch across from him, “and we can talk like grown-up, real adults, huh?”

You don’t obey. You stay where you are.

His face falls into mock hurt, “Oh, ouch! If looks could hurt, dude. What is it? Aint you happy to see me, lil’ man?”
You feel your head start to throb. “Don’t call me that,” you snap at him quietly.

He straightens up and smiles. “What? Don’t call you ‘Lil’ man’?”

He jumps to his feet suddenly and flashes to where you’re standing. He looms over you and jabs you in the chest with his pointer finger.

He laughs at you, “I’ll call you whatever I want, got it?”

You stubbornly try to push him away but he doesn’t move an inch, keeping you pinned against the door with his finger.

Frustrated, you finally give and move around him to sit down. You’re so furious you could repunch the hole in the wall. You can feel your pulse increasing.

You settle rigidly on the couch just as he turns back to watch you. He’s grinning cunningly. Like your anger is what's fueling him.

You know he’s acting like this to get on your nerves and you know where this is going.

You don’t want to strife because you’re not in the fucking mood right now. The best you can do is to try to keep a cool head and not let anything he says get to you.

Maybe he’ll go away again.

Or maybe not.

He sighs deeply and saunters back slowly to his armchair. He shoves his hands in his pockets.

“Sooo? How’ve you been, man? I got kind of worried ‘bout how you’d handle this whole ‘being alone’ thing,” he nods to you, “after your little temper tantrum.”

You don’t dignify that with a response. Yet, you glance to the spot where you had laid for hours afterward and then back at him from behind your tinted shades.

He ignores the silence and continues. He finally arrives back at his chair and sits down slowly.

He changes the topic. “I also heard you got a job. Good for you, champ. How’s employment? Finally making your own living and bringing in the big bucks?”

“Yeah, no thanks to you,” you hiss at him, leaning back into the couch, arms crossed “How else was I going to survive after you cancelled all the damn credit cards?”

He shrugs and pouts his lip.

You continue: “And why the hell did I deserve that kind of punishment, anyway? Sure, I did something wrong, but I could have starved or died or whatever. Did that cross your mind at any point?”

His face goes from amused to stoic in the blink of an eye. You can see him twitch slightly in annoyance.

“You wouldn’t have died. Stop being such a drama queen,” he deadpans.

This makes you furious. “I’m not being a fucking drama queen, I could have gotten into some serious trouble. Thank god I had enough sense to go and make some money so I could get along, while you were over there touring Japan or some shit.”

He doesn’t say anything; only crosses his arms and stares you down. He's giving you a warning.

“I mean,” you’re practically shouting now, “what was going through your mind when you just left
me here with nothing? No money, no food, no warning. Do you just not CARE about my well being?"

At the last remark he sits forward sharply. You flinch and your words freeze in your throat.

“What did you just say to me, you little shit?” he whispers, teeth clenched.

He’s gripping the arms of the chair. His knuckles are slowly turning white.

You swallow the lump in your throat (no going back now) and continue slowly: “You don’t give a flying FUCK about my well-being and-”

He stamps his feet and stands abruptly as your speech falters. His face is so contorted with rage and hurt that it makes you cringe.

He points directly at you. You’ve never felt so intimidated by him in your whole life.

“Don’t you EVER,” he shakes his head, “EVER say I don’t care about your well being.”

He quickly crosses around the coffee table that’s separating you two. He towers over you and you begin to feel extremely insignificant and regretful. You can see him grit his teeth as he leans in closer to you.

“Why do you think I cancelled those cards in the first place?”

You don’t answer, just watch and wait for it.

He grabs your shoulders briefly and shakes.

“Because I do care for your well-being. So, yes, I made a mistake, Dave. I didn't realize that by cancelling your money flow, you wouldn't have food to survive. But, look, I had to teach you a lesson.”

He finally lets go of your shoulders and stands back up, defeated.

“That filthy drinking spree you had going was tearing me apart and I couldn't stand to watch it anymore.”

This is the first time Bro has ever shared his feelings with you, let alone open up to you. His face is laced with emotion and its looks so foreign to you.

He sits back on the coffee table, looking weary.

“I had to do something to get your attention. Nothing was working. Plus, I wasn’t always there to stop you, like the past few months. I’m always away and you’re always on your own, making your own stupid decisions. I figured cutting off your cards would stop you from buying anymore freakin’ booze and get you to wake the fuck up,” he sighs, “but I never-”

He stops, removes his glasses, and rests his face in his hands.

And you are awestruck, to say the least.

He’s sitting still now, rubbing his face. You reach a hand out and place it on his shoulder lightly. Your hand is shaking, and you hope he doesn’t notice. You’re so scared right now.

“…Bro?”

He looks up a bit from his hands. “Hmm?”

You pause and retract your hand.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry I said those harsh things, but…I mean dude, come on. You have a kid to
take care of— me. What if something had— you struggle to explain your distress to him once more.

Apparently, that was taking it a step too far.

He stands, completely rigid again. He looks down on you and you can see the fire in his eyes. His mouth is molded into its usual frown.

“You just never learn from your mistakes, do you?” He throws his glasses to the side.

“Bro— listen—” you start backpedaling.

“Fight me,” he keeps his voice even.

You stand to confront him, arms up in defense. “Bro.. come on, listen—”

He pushes you back down with such force you feel your breath leave you and the couch nearly tips backwards.

“I said FIGHT ME, you little BITCH.”

He draws his sword from his sylladex, yells, and slashes at you, the fire never fading from his eyes. You barely dodge it before he’s coming at you again.

This isn’t what you wanted.

_______________

Pain and a dark deep red is all you can feel, burning inside your chest. Everything is a swirl of confusion and pain and anger.

You stumble across the dark street blindly. You keep your right hand on the left side of your abdomen, keeping the blood in. Have to keep it in, but the cut is too deep…

You collide with a stranger. You fall to the ground when your shoulder hits theirs.

“Hey, you fruit-loop!” the woman chides, “Watch where you—”

She stops talking as soon as you look up at her.

The right lens of your shades is missing and the other is shattered. The shades themselves are just barely hanging on your face.

A large gash cuts far across your right cheek. The blood oozing from it is getting into your eyes, staining your irises even bloodier.

Upon impact, you bring your knees tight into a fetal position, bear your teeth, and cry out in pain.

You immediately bring your other hand to your injured left side and desperately clutch and claw at the deepening wound, trying to keep the blood in. The red has already soaked most of the shirt, though, and contrasts sharply with the white.

You’re pretty sure your clothes are tattered from all of the smaller cuts, but you don’t care because your mind is bursting and your nerve endings are all screaming.

You’re shaking and whimpering pitifully when the lady approaches you, like a lost animal. You wish she would just leave you here to bleed to death.

She cautiously rests a hand on your shoulder.

“Oh my god,” she whispers, “kid, are you ok?” She tsks, “Oh well, fucks sake, look at you. ‘Course you’re not. Jeez.”
You shrink away from her touch. You reach your hands up and try to pull yourself across the pavement and away from her.

“Whoa, whoa hey there!” she shifts and stops you by your shoulders, “Take it easy, kid.”

You stop and slump over again and moan loudly as more pain settles in. You can see the blood starting to stain the pale pavement below you, a trail following where you try to drag yourself.

“Shhhhhhit,” she draws out, “you got it bad, huh? Bar fight or something? Damn, I’ve been in plenty of those.”

You say nothing.

“How’s the other guy look? Worse than you?”

You shake your head.

“Did you even lay a scratch on him?” she whispers.

You hadn’t. You shake your head again.

She’s got this subtle Brooklyn accent and her voice is really soft and melodic. You wince up at her through the uneven, fragmented shades hanging on your cut-up face.

She looks like she’s about middle-aged. Her hair is blonde, short, and curly. It looks really soft to the touch. Her skin is a light, cream color and her eyes are the color of blue china, and look just as fragile. Her pink lipstick, lining her thin smile, matches her elegant dress and scarf.

There’s something about this woman that seems odd to you, but you can’t put your finger on it…

"Awww," she coos and pushes your bangs out of the way, "Well, don’t you just have the prettiest eyes?"

You cringe away from her and choke out a sob as your heart sinks. Not now. Not now, please...

She sighs. “Come on,” she pulls your shoulders, “I’ll get you some help.”

Suddenly, you’re being hoisted in the air and-

Holy shit, this woman has you draped over her shoulder like some faux fox fur.

“I know it hurts kid, I know,” she whispers as she walks down the street, heels clicking on the pavement, “We’re almost there, ok? Hang in there.”

You gasp out, “No… hos...plll…” Your tongue feels thick in your mouth.

She scoffs, “No kid, don’t worry. No hospital.”

You’re still wondering how such an elegant and gentle-looking woman can lift you up like this when you arrive at a large, wooden doorway. You don’t talk the whole walk because you feel like if you open your mouth again, you’re going to puke all over her nice dress.

The door swings open into a quiet, small hallway when you realize- you don’t know this woman.
What the actual fuck.

You panic; try to raise a fight and resist but your limbs just sway as she walks. You’re too weak to fight. You guess you’re just going to have to go with the flow.

She opens another door and you enter into what looks like a cozy living room. It looks classical, with a large, dusty chandelier hanging from the ceiling and expensive rugs lining the floor. The light fragments into the colors of the prism and it hurts your sensitive eyes.
“Sweetie?” the woman yells, “Come here! I found this kid all bloodied up on the street and I think he might be really hurt. Come on, I need your help… Oh! Grab some towels while you’re at it.”

She carefully maneuvers you so your feet are now touching the floor again, but she’s completely holding your weight up.

You’re in so much pain, but the only thing you can seem to focus on is the blood stains now crossing her shoulder and neck from carrying you. You feel so bad about it, for some reason. She doesn’t seem to mind, though. She busies herself with keeping you awake.

You can feel the blood at your side and face crusting into your clothes and hair. Yet, the cuts are still wide open and continuing to bleed. You’re starting to feel light headed with all of the bright, reflecting colors that seem to echo around the room.

You try to think back to how it came to this.

There had been a fight. Between you and Bro. It all happened to fast and heatedly.

All you remember is he had you cornered on the roof. You had already earned the slash on your cheek from trying to run the first time.

Then, a slick, wet, wrenching pain tore into your side as you took a stupid swipe at your crazed brother…

You remember a scream. Not sure if it’s yours or his. It was probably a combination of both.

He had looked at you in shock as your raised a bloodied hand from your side.

The next thing you knew you were stumbling blindly out the door, every part of your body stinging with exhaustion, cuts, and shame.

You had run for at least a few blocks before you ran into this woman.

Did he even try to follow you?

“Mother,” a familiar voice calls from above, “You can’t bring a new person in from the streets every week like this. It’s dangerous. And it’s getting old,” she adds bitterly, “Do you even have a clue as to whom-”

She enters the room.

“… it might…… be?”

You stare at her and she stares back for a solid five seconds.

“D-David?!” Rose gasps, bringing her hands up to her mouth in horror at the sight of you. Her eyes travel to your side and grow wider in shock.

You manage a weak head-nod, leaning into your support and still clutching your side. “Sup, Lalonde.” Another nod towards the support. “This your mom? Should have guessed.” That’s why the face seemed familiar.

“Well. I-” she stammers, finally lowering her hands to her sides.

She’s wearing a night-gown. No doubt she was heading to bed. You totally pinned her for the type of person to wear a night-gown and go to sleep relatively early.

“Well- yes. But- you… what HAPPENED?” She turns her head to her mother, “Where did you find him?”

“Babe,” her mom rolls her eyes and squeezes you, “relaaaax- calm down. Details will come later. It’s all going to be a-ok!”
The woman hooks her arm under your knees gently and picks you up, bridal-style. “Now be a good girl and spread those towels out on the couch, dear.”

She glares at her mom. “Mother, he could be seriously injured. He needs to go—”

“Now sweetie,” she pouts at her daughter, still holding you, “Your young friend here…”

“David,” she announces matter-of-factly.

“Dave,” you mumble harshly.

“…Dave-,” she nods to you, “has requested we don’t bring him to the hospital. And we can’t just force him to go! He obviously has his reasons, so, we’re gonna fix him up right here!”

You can see the doubt and rage surfacing in Rose’s eyes. She looks to you and you try your best to give her a reassuring look, telling her that her mom is right.

Rose really isn’t happy about this. Regardless, she knows you’re in distress and does as she’s told.

Once the towels are spread out they get to work, cleaning your smaller cuts and bandaging them.

You can’t lift your arm up to get to the gash in your side, so they have to cut the shirt off. The throw the now-soaked article into a nearby trashcan.

They rinse the cut out with damp towels and you have to bite down on an extra towel they have to keep from screaming. Any form of contact with the cut sends searing pains all throughout your abdomen and down your side.

They go through a few towels, cleaning and stopping the blood.

Rose’s mom whistles. “Damn, kid, you got cut pretty badly,” she continues dabbing the gash with a wet hand-towel, “It’s pretty deep too. S’gonna need some stitches, Rosie,” she directs towards your friend. Rose nods and exits the room.

Once the excess blood is all cleaned away, she regretfully informs you that she has to apply some Neosporin to the cut before they stitch it up. You let out a whine. You’re already in so much pain, you feel like you’re going to faint, but she convinces you that it’s necessary.

She pours some out on a towel and dabs the top of the cut lightly.

As soon as the sting hits you, your back arches violently and a scream rips from your throat.

“Oh, don’t be such a sissy,” you can hear her mutter. You whimper again, loudly.

She laughs and pets your hair for a while, waiting and shushing gently until you calm down again.

The sanitizing process continues for about half-an-hour before Rose returns with the supplies needed to stitch it up.

While they stitch it up, all you can do is whimper at the pain, because you’re too exhausted to comprehend or feel much.

At some point, the mom puts her hand reassuringly in yours and you squeeze it as Rose stitches you up with expertise.

When they finish, they wrap it up in gauze and wind a bandage around your torso so it will stay put.

Rose gathers up the bloodied towels and other supplies and walks out with them. She’s surprisingly composed for how much blood there is. You bet she would make a great doctor.
In the meantime, Mom Lalonde takes your temperature and asks about any allergies you might have. You try to reply the best you can.

Rose comes back shortly with a blanket and some water and pills. She gives them to you, assuring you they will ease the pain.

She waits until you can get all the water down. You can feel it slosh around in your empty stomach and you feel sick again.

Once Rose has been assured that you are alright and will survive, her mom shoo’s her away, telling her to get some sleep. Rose bids you a ‘goodnight’ and tells you she will check on you early tomorrow morning.

Once she’s gone, Rose’s mom carefully covers you with the thick, wool blanket and tucks you in.

“I’m sorry we had to put you through all that,” she smiles at you sweetly, with a hint of sadness, “but I just had to help you. I couldn’t leave you out there like that. It’s not how I roll.”

She sits next to you on the couch once she finishes.

“And now that I know you’re one of my girl’s friends, you deserve the VIP treatment.” She boop’s your nose and laughs brightly.

You smile weakly. “Thanks Ms.-”

“Oh Lord. Dave,” her mannerism changes as she holds a hand up, “I’m Roxy to you.”

You laugh lightly again and wince at the pain it sends to your side, “Thanks, Roxy.”

She winks at you. “Anytime, kiddo. Anytime. You get some rest, ok? I’m sure you’d like nothing more than that, huh?”

You nod solemnly as she continues to smooth your hair down. There’s something so soothing about it. This woman is heaven-sent. Is she an angel or something?

After a while you clear your throat awkwardly. “Hey, Roxy?”

She looks up at you.

“I’m really sorrr-”

“I know what you’re going to say and I’m just gonna stop you right there,” she points at you, "Never apologize for needing help. Ever. You should never be ashamed about asking for it either.”

She thinks for a second.

“You got a home to go to, Dave? Anyone I can call?”

You sigh heavily and you can feel your blood run cold.

“No. Not anymore.”

She nods sadly and places a cool hand on your forehead. “I understand.”

You rest your head back on the pillow. Her hand feels great on your burning head.

Suddenly, it’s gone and she’s up at the doorway. She flicks the light off and looks to you one last time.

“Dave,” she says softly, “You’re going to be staying with us for a while. Alright?”
You mumble a reply, but you’re already half asleep. She laughs quietly.

"I’ll take that as an, ‘Alright, Roxy,” she chuckles and closes the door with a click.

It is more than alright.

Chapter End Notes

*violent sobbing because Roxy

Please leave a comment! It makes my day, even the smallest ones!

Also, when you comment, let me know what you think is going to happen next. I'm curious to see what you guys think and what your opinions are!

<3 I LOVE YOU GUYS

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Your name isn’t important, and neither is your age. All you can bear to do right now is rinse all this blood out of your mouth, off your arm, and down the sink. You would yelp out in pain from the stitches you’re sewing in your arm, but you feel completely numb. It’s like all of your nerve endings are tingling but you can’t feel it at all. You mind is racing and spinning.

Dave…

You’re amazed for a second when you realize this wound is his work. Usually he never lands a hit on you. You would never let that happen. You always make him work harder- you want him to be stronger, faster, and more agile. That’s the reason you fight with him like this.

But this time was different. It was your fault. You and your stupid anger.

You tie the end of the thread into a knot and bite it off. You throw the thread and needle back in the first aid kit and shove it under the sink. You stoically remove your shades and splash your face with water.

You gotta calm down. You need to get a hold of yourself, dammit.

But you can’t. You can’t believe you did that- HURT him like that. Not just with your words but….

Oh god you hope he’s alright.

You glance at your watch. It’s been twenty minutes. Twenty minutes since he went tearing out that door.

You glance at your reflection and turn away in disgust, throwing your shades back on.

You’ll give him an hour. He needs to cool down, just like you. If he doesn’t come back in an hour, you’ll look for him.
You shouldn’t have snapped at him like that. But God you were so angry. Doesn’t he realize what you’re doing for him? Doesn’t he realize that you care?

You pull a bottle of vodka out of your bag and open it with your bare hands. You grab a towel and douse it with some, dabbing your cut. It stings, but it’s nothing compared to anguish you’re feeling in your chest. You take a swig from the bottle when you finish.

His words flash through your mind as you lean against the counter, towel pressed against your arm.

'Do you just not CARE about my well being?'

That little shit.

You yell and turn around to punch the wall. You can feel some of the stitches break open. Shit.

You bring both hands up to rub at your eyes. This kid is going to be the death of you.

Everything you’ve ever done in your life has been for him. You work day in and day out for him.

You remember finding him that cold, October night. You had been walking home from the bar through the park when you saw his basket abandoned by the playground. He was tiny, his hair a light feathery blond. He couldn’t have been more than a year old. He grabbed your finger when you held it out, and boy, you were hooked. Plus, you couldn’t just leave him out in the cold like this. You had waited there for half an hour to see if anyone came for him. When no one did, you took him home in the basket.

You had reported the abandoned child the next day. A month later, the feds had found his parents, but they had died- a double suicide. You had requested adoption papers on the spot.

The day the adoption papers were finalized, you gave him a cute pair of shades, just like yours. You held him that night and promised him you would be the best dad there ever was. You named him Dave, after your own father.

You remember his first word: ‘Daddy!’ His first sentence: ‘I love you Daddy!”.

You remember staying up until 3 AM, humming to him when he had nightmares.

You remember his first day of school, how he had cried and cried and wouldn’t let go of your hand.

You remember getting him his first bike on his eighth birthday, and then him wrecking it the same day. He was such an adorable little shit, pedaling for his life.

Everything with Dave was great. He was the best-behaved kid around. You even started teaching him how to fight with a sword and he loved it.

You remember the first time you had to go away.

It was only for two weeks. You told him it wasn’t a big deal, but he clung to your leg anyway. You told him to be strong, like a Strider always is and kissed him on the head like you always did. You had left him with a friend, knowing she would take good care of him.

When you returned, Dave was cross with you. He wouldn’t look at you. But, after offering him a hug, he gave in and nearly tackled you. He had buried his face in your shoulder, and told you he had missed you and loved you anyway. You told him the same.

You remember the first time he told you he hated you.
He was only 13. You had called him to the kitchen and explained to him that you were leaving for a month, to start spreading your business to Japan.

You couldn’t see behind his glasses, but you could tell he was hurt. “Ok,” he had said, and left.

You went on the trip with a sense of dread and regret clawing at your stomach.

When you returned after that hard month, you were so happy to see him. You went to give him a hug like you always did. You had missed him—plus he had grown taller.

He just stood across the room and stared at you.

He was wearing a different pair of shades now.


You looked at him. You were hurt.

“Yeah, lil’ man,” you had knit your eyebrows together, "I know. I tried calling but-”

“I hate you.”

With that he left to his room. He rarely ever came out.

You found his old shades, broken, lying on your bedroom floor.

The more popular your business became, the more you had to go away. The more you went away, the more cold and distant Dave grew. Your attempts to reconnect with him grew more and more futile.

Eventually, you just gave up trying to find that adorable little kid you knew and loved.

He was gone.

Dave was seventeen when he started drinking.


Apparently, cancelling his cards doesn’t work either.

You’ve spent nights lying awake, thinking about how much you miss the Dave you used to know. You wonder about whether or not the puppet business is really worth losing your kid—your son.

You’ve come close to quitting the business, again and again.

Yet, you go back across the Pacific Ocean to Japan time and time again. And he hates you for it.

You’re a horrible father.

You guess you failed.

-

Now, here you are, sitting alone in the place you both once called a ‘home’.

You stare at the clock. The hour is up.

You stand from your chair, grab your keys, and walk out the door.

You can fix this.

You hope.
Be the sleeping John.

Ok. You guess so.

You’re standing in a field. It’s dark and there’s a slight breeze rustling your hair.

You look around, but you don’t know what you’re looking for.

There’s a tree in the middle of the field. It’s old, black, and gnarled. You decide to go check it out.

Upon further inspection, you find a crow in the tree. He’s staring down at you with his black, beady, cold eyes. His wings flap and he caws three times at you.

Then it speaks:

‘Help.’

Just one word. ‘Help’. Over and over again.

The sky is brewing with dark clouds now, covering the stars and moon.

Then, the crow attacks you. It lands on your shoulder and pecks at your head. You run and try to bat it away, your cries for help mixing with the crows’.

You're scared it might be mocking you.

You jolt awake. Your torso is covered in a sheen of sweat and your legs are tangled in the sheets.

You head and heart are pounding. You can still feel the pecks the crow left behind.

When you had come home earlier today, you father had made a big deal out of your state. You told him about Eridan and that Dave had saved you. You smiled and assured him that Eridan looked much worse.

Your dad had given you an older pair of glasses and sent you to bed early, saying you needed rest. You agreed with him- you were glad to be in bed at last.

You rub your head and realize:

The pounding isn’t in your head. There are pebbles hitting your window.

You turn your bedside lamp on and place your old glasses on your face. You’re carefully not to touch your swelling jaw.

You tiptoe over to the window and pull the shades back. It’s dark on the lawn below and you can’t see past the glass. You shimmy the window up and stick your head out. It’s still warm, but a chilly breeze is moving through the city.

Standing on your back lawn is Rose. She’s in a nightgown and wrapped in her jacket.

She whispers up to you, cupping her hands around her mouth. “I hope this isn’t a bad time?”

You snort. It’s only 2AM.

“Well I was sleeping, but I was having a nightmare anyway,” you whisper back down to her.

You can see her eyebrows rise from here. “A nightmare? Oh, I would love to hear more about that later, but there is something I need you to do.”
“Oh?” you whisper, smiling. This whole situation is amusing to you. Straight out of a high school fairy-tale. “And what would that be?”

“I need you to come with me.”

“Now?”

“Right now.”

“Rose.”

“John,” she glares at you, "It’s important.”

You roll your eyes. “Rose, what could be so important that you had to come to my house in the middle of the night in your pajamas?”

“I snuck out of my house, mind you. My mother wouldn’t let me leave.”

“My dad wouldn’t be all that happy about me leaving either.”

“The matter at hand is a little graver than you getting in trouble for sneaking out.”

This concerns you a little bit. Rose would never lie to you. She’s not one to over-exaggerate either. There must really be something wrong. Otherwise, she wouldn’t sneak out of her house against her mothers will and be standing here in her pajamas.

“Err..” you start anxiously, “Alright. Just, give me a minute?”

“I’ll be here,” she calls up and steps back.

You turn quickly back to your room, completely awake now.

You’re almost tempted to believe you’re still dreaming. You can feel your stomach twisting in knots when you begin to realize that your dream must have been some kind of warning about the danger Rose is talking about?

You walk over to your closet and grab a thin jacket. No time to change. Since she’s in her pajamas, you guess it’s alright if you wear yours.

Plus, who doesn’t love Ghostbuster pajama pants?

You poke your head out of your bedroom door. Jade’s and Dad’s doors are closed. You tiptoe down the stairs to the kitchen. Under the kitchen sink are seven flashlights. You grab the strongest one and make your way to the back door.

The glass door slides open and closes easily and quietly. Your heart and your mind are racing. You’ve never snuck out before. You’re all giddy just thinking about it.

When you walk out to where Rose was standing before, you realize she’s disappeared.

“Rose?” you call out quietly, clutching the flashlight in your hands, “Rose?”

You turn the flashlight on and Rose appears right in front of you, like something out of a horror movie.

She brings a hand up to your face as your scream in surprise.

After you finish, you tug her hand off your face and whisper angrily, “Don’t do that!!”

She smiles, “What? I’m the one being stealthy. You’re the one screaming.”
You grimace at her and her smile fades.

“Alright now I need you to promise me something,” she utters in a hushed tone.

You nod and stare at her intently.

“Don’t freak out.” She crosses her arms to keep the chill of the night away.

After a pause, you realize: that’s it.

“What? That’s it?” you state.

“Yes. Follow me.” Suddenly she’s moving very fast and you have to jog to keep up with her. You’re still a little sore from today but your nerves are pumping adrenaline through your body.

“Where are we going?” you call after her nervously, once you reach the outside of your neighborhood.

“My house,” She replies curtly, never looking back.

“Oh,” you respond and fall in next to her, holding your light out so you can both see. “Why?”

She grimaces and her eyebrows lace together in worry. “Just stop asking. You’ll see soon enough.” She finally looks at you. Her eyes are alert and deep with concern. “We need your help.”

Neither of your paces falters as you continue on through the dark streets.

“Ok.”

~

== > Be the boy in agony.

It’s hot. It’s so incredibly hot. You’re swimming in heat and you’re burning up.

You can’t feel anything other than pain. You can’t remember your name, you can’t remember who you are. All you know is that it needs to stop.

Your tongue is sticking to the roof of your mouth and your throat is itching. You can’t open your eyes or mouth because if you do, you’ll scream.

You can feel something seeping down your throat but it feels wrong and you want to retch it up.

You do.

You hear something curse in the distance. It’s a woman’s voice. It echoes in your head and makes it hurt more. You let out a whimper and try to move your limbs. They stay put.

“I’m sorry,” the voice calls in the distance, “I’m so, so sorry, kid. I’m doing everything I can, but you’re not even taking the water. How the fuck am I supposed to cool your fever down if you won’t drink any water?”

You let out more whimpers and feel yourself slipping in and out of blackness for what seems like forever. As you slip further back into unconsciousness, the voice gets farther and so does the pain.

The only thing that yanks you back is a sudden cry of shock and anguish.

Was it yours?

No. You recognize it.
It’s John’s.

Oh, shit! John!

~

== > Yeah, you freak out.

When you finally arrive at Rose’s house, you both enter through the front door.

A woman (you guess is her mother) appears in the hallway quickly, and she chastises her daughter for leaving the house without her permission.

“And who’s this?” she looks up at you. Her voice is velvety sweet and she’s very pretty. She walks over to you and lightly places a hand on your head.

“This is John,” Rose turns and told her, “He is David’s best friend.”

“Hello, John,” she smiles at you. She ruffles your hair around, then moves to give you a tight hug.

“How are you feeling?”

She smells like lilacs and appletinis. She has a aura emanating from her that makes you relax under her vice-grip hug.

“Um, I’m just fine, Ms. La-”

“I swear to Jesus,” she lets you go and holds you by the shoulders, “If one more person calls me that again, I’m going to have a fucking cow.” She smiles at you, “Call me Roxy, kid. Please.”

“Oh. Uh. Ok, Roxy.” You look around and confess awkwardly, “Look I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be rude, but why the hell was I dragged here at two in the morning?” You’re wound up too tight to shoot the breeze with anyone.

Roxy looks from you to Rose. “Yeah that’s a good question, sweetie.”

Rose crosses her arms and stares her down. “He’s getting worse Mother. He needs help. And right now, the only person I know that can help stabilize him is John.”

Roxy continues to stare at her. Her grip tightens on your shoulders.

“You’re right,” she admits, “You’re right.” She turns back to you, her dark purple eyes searching your face. “Ok, kiddo, you ready?”

“Ready for what?” You’re a little more than frustrated now, and your voice shows it. They won’t tell you what’s going on. This whole situation is scary and you just want to run home. Why do they need YOUR help? Couldn’t they find someone else?

Roxy squeezes your arm, walking for the nearest door. From behind the solid oak, you can hear some whimpering.

Is there an injured animal in there?

Roxy squeezes your arm reassuringly and tells you to relax. You relax your body but stay alert—there could be anything behind that door.

She turns the knob and lets the door swing open. You enter the room and look around—

You let out a shout and the flashlight you’d been gripping so hard drops to the floor.

The couch over to the side of the room has been pulled out into a bed.

Writhing on top of the sheets is your best friend, and he’s covered in blood.
His hair is matted down on his forehead with sweat and dried blood. He’s not wearing a shirt and his jeans are all torn up and bloody. Up his side is a long, jagged cut. It’s been loosely sewn up and the gauze is starting to slip off. From Dave’s moving around, the stitches are starting to break and the wound is starting to ooze again. His body is completely flushed and his face is twisted with pain and agony. His broken glasses are on the table next to him and his eyes are skewed shut. There’s more blood trailing down his face from the deep gash on his cheek.

He’s whimpering and arching his back, trying to get away from something. It’s more than obvious that he’s in a lot of pain. He must be suffering. Oh god, Dave…

You sprint to the side of the bed and kneel. You call to him through his fit,

“Dave! DAVE! Can you hear me?”

He says nothing, just squirms and whimpers loudly.

“Nothing is working!” Roxy yells over Dave’s screams, “I’ve tried everything. Plus, he just throws up any water I try to get him to drink.”

You reach out cautiously. You place a hand on his forehead. He is burning up. “Dave, listen to me! Listen!” You move your other hand to his cheek and hold his head there, trying to get through to him. “It’s John. Come on, Dave, you’re scaring me. Please stop.”

You can feel the tears welling up in your eyes. It’s scary to see him like this. Oh god, what happened to him? Was he jumped? Maybe it was Eridan’s pals?

You continue rubbing his face, forehead, and hair, talking to him, trying to get him to calm down. Nothing is working. If anything, he’s getting worse.

His whimpers have grown to shouts now. You don’t know what to do.

You turn around and snap at the girls in the doorway, “Get some ice, something!” They both turn and scurry away.

You don’t know where that power came from, but it’s gone now. You’re trembling, holding Dave down.

You bring your voice down an octave and lean over him.

“Dave. Please, shh. I know you can hear me. I don’t know what’s wrong. You have to tell me. I know this is hard but I want to help you more than anything… Dave, please don’t be in pain. You’re going to be OK just… just tell me what to do?”

You are so scared. You are scared that something’s wrong with him- that this is more than just a fever.

Suddenly, Dave sits straight up and you hear a rip as more stitches come undone at his side. His hands fly up to his head and he starts screaming,

“No! Get away! Get away! Don’t touch me! Get that sword away from me!” his voice is cracking. He shakes his head and clenches his jaw and eyes tight, pulling at his hair.

You yell and panic, scrambling back, “Roxy! Rose! Help! Oh my god, he’s hallucinating or something!”

Neither of them comes to your aid. Dave continues yelling, making absolutely no sense. You’re hyperventilating and in shock. You feel like you could faint.

Suddenly, you know exactly what to do. You need to take action.

You jump up on the bed and sit, one knee on either side of his legs. You take each of his
shoulders in your hands and shake him. “Dave! Snap out of it! DAVE!”

His eyes shoot open.

You gasp and are taken aback by the sheer intensity of the color. They burn a deep red, like coals do- but they’re brighter and more powerful. Right now, they’re crazed and disillusioned.

After faltering, you get back to bringing your friend out of his frenzy. You move both hands up to his face and shake. “Dave it’s me! Look at me!”

He finally does look at you. After five seconds, his yells and cries falter in volume. Soon he’s back to whimpering and his eyes lose their intensity and start watering. Your ears are still ringing from his screams.

“John?” he whimpers. His arms ease off his head, his fingers untangling from his hair. He lets them fall to the bed underneath him. The cut on his cheek is now dripping onto the sheets, and so is the one on his side. He must be in some sort of pain right now.

“Yeah, Dave, it’s me,” you move a hand to his forehead and he sort of leans into it, eyes lidded, “I’m here, ok? Oh god, Dave, why didn’t they tell me about this sooner? You have a fever, err, obviously. You’ve been yelling and hallucinating. You’re pretty sick and the Lalondes are getting you ice...”

You know he isn’t paying attention. His eyes are drooping and his actions are weak. But, you can’t stop your mouth. You’re a bundle of nerves and you’re wound up so tight you think you’re going to break.

You don’t care about the blood for once. It’s already all over your shirt, pants, and hands. You fling your arms around his neck and pull him to you. You bury you face in his shoulder and hold him there. After a second, he brings his arms up around your back and hugs you.

How could you let this happen to him? It was just today that he saved your ass. You’re supposed to have each other’s backs.

You’re suddenly filled with rage. Who could do this to him?

You tighten your grip protectively and hear Dave gasp. Oops. Too tight.

But seriously, how did this happen? You would ask Dave, but he’s not in the condition for talking. He’s practically leaning on you for support now, breathing shallowly.

“Oh, John,” you hear him mumble weakly, “John- I have to-”

You release him and push him back by the shoulders to hear him better.

“What?”

His eyes are drooping. He’s going to lose consciousness again. You can feel the heat of his fever coursing through his body.

“John, I need to-” he’s stumbling over his words. He shivers and his head lulls. He’s out cold.

You shake him, “Stay with me Dave! Don’t pass out again!” It’s no use. He’s slipped under.

You curse loudly.

Roxy decides to appear again.

“John? Oh shit, is he out again? His cut must be infected. I knew we should have cleaned it more. This damn fever is getting worse and worse.”

You pull his limp head to your shoulder and call over your shoulder, “Can’t we bring him to a
hospital?"

“He said, ‘no hospital’. Sorry, kiddo. Thems the breaks.”

You rub his back lightly, hoping it will help him take in deeper breaths.

“Mother, John,” Rose enters the room, “I have filled the bathtub upstairs almost all the way with ice-cubes. We need to get him in there to bring his temperature down.”

Rose and Roxy approach the bed. You’re reluctant to let go of Dave, but you do. You aid them in carrying him out of the room and up the stairs.

When you get to the bathroom, you find that Rose was true to her word. The king-sized bathtub is filled to the brim with ice. You all, with much effort, manage to get Dave, jeans and all, into the tub.

After a minute, you settle on the edge of the tub and rub his head and neck to soothe him. The whimpering has stopped now.

“His fever should lower soon enough,” Rose points out, leaning against the sink.

All of you feel the exhaustion and worry kick in. You all spend about half an hour in the bathroom, constantly taking his temperature and trying to get him to drink some water.

“It’s 105 now,” Roxy exclaims, holding the thermometer up in the dim bathroom light, “Much better than it was before. It’s goin’ down, alright.”

You breathe a sigh of relief, but you’re still apprehensive. “That’s still pretty high,” you mumble.

Roxy comes over and hugs you tight. “I know you’re scared and worried. We all are,” she lets go and cups your face reassuringly, “But I know Dave’s gonna pull through. He seems like a pretty tough kid.”

You nod, “He is.”

She gives you a reassuring nod.

“I’m going to go get you something to drink too,” she says, walking towards the bathroom door, “You look like you’re about to pass out.”

You feel like it too. This whole situation is just too crazy. You need to be near Dave. You arms and legs are shaking and feel like jelly.

The doorbell rings.

Rose and Roxy look at each other in confusion.

“Did you call someone, sweetie?” Roxy hisses at her.

“I did not. Perhaps it is a concerned neighbor? We were making quite a bit of noise.”

A beat of silence. You all watch Dave breathe slowly.

“What do I tell them then, Rosie?” Roxy’s voice is laced with worry again.

“Tell them that I was having a nightmare. Something, anything.” Rose rubs her cheek, a nervous tick. “We can’t let anyone know about him.”

You’re wide awake again, standing defensively in front of the tub. Why else would someone be ringing the bell at 3AM? Something is wrong.

The bell rings again, twice this time.
“I’ll go,” Roxy warns them, “You two stay here.” With that, she’s out the door.

You and Rose look at each other, a silent agreement made. You follow.

You both sneak halfway down the steps and sit in the shadows, watching Roxy open the door. If they were gonna come in and see Dave, they’d have to get through you and Rose first.

The porch is dark, but you can see a man standing in the doorway. He’s tall and muscular. He’s got a white t-shirt on, but it’s speckled with… blood? There are stitches lining his right forearm, the fresh cut still bleeding. He’s got dark glasses like Dave’s, except they’re much pointier. They hide his eyes, masking his little to no expression. His blond hair is tucked in under an orange hat and sticks out in the back.

His and Roxy’s gazes meet.

You feel the hair on your neck rise when you hear Rose gasp in recognition. The guy freezes.

“YOU,” Roxy practically growls as she winds up.

She punches him right across the face.

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Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment! <3

www.skaianskirmish.tumblr.com
This Can't Be Real

Chapter Summary

Roxy and Bro talk for the first time in years.
Dave freaks out about Bro finding him.
John saves the day!

Chapter Notes

Hello there, friends!
I can't believe how many likes and bookmarks and comments this thing is getting!
you're all so wonderful oh my goodness <3
I have AP tests coming up tomorrow and all through next week *greatest sigh of all*
So, I'm going to try my best to crank out another chapter for you guys within the next week!
So, without further ado, I hope you like this next chapter and also that you will leave me a comment! (Yay for coherent sentences.)
See the end of the chapter for more notes

What the hell is going on?
You grip the bars on the stairs in shock as Roxy’s fist comes in contact with the guy’s face a second time. Wow, she’s strong.

His head snaps to the side and he doesn’t turn back for a second. He heaves a sigh and brings a gloved hand back up to his face.

He finally does turn back. He has some blood dribbling off of his chin and he’s got one hand holding a crooked nose.

Then, of all things, he laughs.

“Well. Guess I should have seen this coming.”
Roxy bears her teeth and slaps him. Hard. His head snaps to the other side and you can see some blood fall off of his chin from the momentum.

“Ow. Shit, Rox. That’s enough, ok?” He turns back to look at her with a frown lined with blood, holding up one hand in defense.

“You dirty, dense, fucking ASS-HAT!” she yells at him. She pushes him by the shoulders, but he doesn’t budge. He’s got at least a foot on her.

“What do you think you’re doing? You have the NERVE to actually come here and talk to me?”
He wipes his nose along his forearm, leaving a long streak of red. He sighs heavily and leans against the door frame, sniffing.
“Listen, if I had known this was your house, I certainly wouldn’t be here. I didn’t come to talk to you anyway.”

“Then why are you here?” she snaps.

“You know why I’m here,” he deadpans. You can’t tell if anything this guy says is true or not - his weird shades block his eyes.

That’s when it clicks. Weird shades.

You can feel your heart accelerating.

Dave’s ‘guardian’.

Dave doesn’t talk about him much. He hasn’t even told you what he looks like. All you know is that he treats Dave pretty awfully.

The hair on your neck stands up straight.

Did he do this to Dave?

You clench your jaw and glare.

“How do you even know if he’s here?” Roxy hisses. You can tell she’s close to hitting him again.

“It’s not hard to miss,” he claims, wiping more blood away. It’s dribbling onto his crisp white shirt now. “I saw some blood on the sidewalk and followed the trail.”

Roxy’s fist flies, but the guy catches it this time, barely flinching.

“I told you to stop that, Roxy,” he growls, still holding her fist.

“How could you do this to him?” Roxy yells, small fist still caught in the guardian’s big hand, “How do you even stand yourself, you horrible, stupid CHILD?”

You tear your eyes away from the horrifying scene to look to Rose.

She’s kneeling on the stairs next to you, just as enveloped in what’s happening as you are. She’s unbelievably tense. You nudge her gently and she jumps.

You send her a desperate look and she shakes her head back at you, eyes wide. You shift closer to her and whisper,

“Rose. What’s going on?”

She solemnly watches the two of them continue to fight and turns back to you.

“I may be wrong, but from the way she’s reacting, I’d say that that man is Dirk. They used to be friends, way before I was born. Best friends, actually. They went to college together - I’ve seen some pictures of them together. They had some kind of fight - Mother never likes to talk about it. They haven’t spoken since.”

You pause. “And he’s Dave’s guardian?”

She nods slowly, looking back to the argument. “I guess he must be. This whole time… I never knew… Why else would he show up now?”

You stare at her. “How come your mom didn’t recognize Dave, then?”

She shrugs, just as confused as you are.

“I don’t know, John. Like I said, this was long before I was born. Maybe she did recognize him,
but even if she did, the last time she probably saw Dave was when he was a baby.”

This is so confusing.

When you look back to him, you realize he’s now entered the household. He standing with his arms crossed, taking a berating from Roxy. His face is still cool and collective.

“I knew one day you would be a shitty father,” she growls at him, hands on her hips, “Didn’t I tell you? Now look what you’ve done!”

“I’m not a father,” he retaliates, voice even and calm, “Dave is adopted.”

Well. Shit.

She glares at him. “Why would you adopt a kid?”

He sighs and reaches up to rub his temple.

“Look, Rox, I would love to stand around and chat about the last twenty or so years but I don’t exactly care. Where is he?”

Roxy looks like she’s about to kill someone. “Over my dead body you’ll be seeing him anytime soon. Get the fuck out of my house.”

“Roxy, I’m warning you-”

“You still here, dumbfuck?” she snarls, “I thought you were leaving! Because -”

“Shut the hell up and tell me where Dave is!”

The room goes silent when he raises his voice. You could hear a pin drop.

He’s starting to crack. His poker face is turning sour as he grinds his teeth together. His fists are clenched up tight.

Roxy remains stoic.

“No.”

Dirk pulls a sword out of nowhere.

“I don’t want to have to fight you for him.”

“How childish,” she bites at him, “I’ve gathered you’re still solving all of your problems with meaningless fights.”

This seems to get him going.

He lunges at her and shouts. Both you and Rose scream and close your eyes as you clamber back from the edge of the stairs.

You hear a loud BANG! and open your eyes.

There’s a bullet-hole in the door and Dirk is crouched on the floor with his katana.

Roxy is standing across the room, long rifle in position. The barrel is still smoking.

She lowers the gun and smirks evilly at Dirk on the floor.

“You want the kid?” she purrs with note of vengeance, “You have to go through me first, pretty boy.”

Dirk somewhat grins and leaps at her again.
You and Rose gape at the battle unfolding in front of you. You shake your head: This must be a dream. It’s all too surreal.

You can barely tear your eyes away from it: Dirk’s strong, quick moves and Roxy’s calculated, graceful ones. They’re equally matched.

The only thing that disturbs you from your trace is the sound of ice cubes shuffling upstairs.

Your head snaps up the stairs and you listen carefully.

And, there’s a thump and a cry of pain.

You hear the fight stop below and your breath catches. When you look back, Dirk’s staring right at you.

There’s a pained expression on his face. You barely have a chance to observe it before Roxy is coming to slam the butt of her rifle into his face, which he quickly avoids.

You quickly scramble away up the stairs and dash to the bathroom, heart racing.

The bathroom door is slightly open, a crack of light spilling into the dark hallway. You place a hand gently on the heavy wooden door and push.

It’s silent inside. You look around and there is no trace of Dave. You look over into the enormous tub. No Dave. You stick your arm in the ice and feel around. The intense cold is nothing compared to the horror ripping through your chest. He hadn’t fallen in.

Dave is gone.

You retract your hand from the ice and lean on the side of the tub. Where could he have gone? What if he’s still bleeding or has a fever? He was here a minute ago…

Your mind is circling and bursting with questions and oh my god you have to sit down.

Why were you dragged into this? Was the man downstairs going to hurt Roxy like he hurt Dave? Why would he do that to his own son? Is he going to hurt you?

You feel a shiver run up your spine and you stand up from the side of the tub.

You have to find him. You’ve gotta find Dave before-

You slip and hit the floor.

You groan as you squirm on the floor, jaw and injuries from earlier throbbing. You really should be more careful.

You rub your head and look around.

There’s a small trail of water, leading out of the room. Why didn’t you notice that before?

You quickly, carefully scramble to your feet and follow it out of the bathroom.

It takes a sharp turn to the left and into a room behind a closed door.

Frantic, you approach and open the door quickly. You scan the room and two things catch your eye.

One: this is Rose’s room. You know because of all of the Lovecraft posters, hanging in prefect symmetry on the walls. The walls and sheets on her perfectly made bed are violet. The lights are turned off, so the only thing that lights the room is the moonlight, cascading through the open window.
The second thing you notice is Dave trying to escape through said window.

"D-Dave!" you whisper.

He stops struggling in the window. He’s holding his side tightly and breathing heavily.

He turns back to you. He’s still not wearing his shades, shirt, or shoes. His crimson glare is caught in the moonlight and they almost glow. He has the expression and aura of a madman.

His face and chest are still flushed with a high fever and his features are twisted in pain.

"Bro, I swear to God, get the fuck away from me. You filthy-" his voice is cracking and he’s cringing away from you.

When he sees you, he relaxes, but only a little.

"Oh god, John." He’s still weak. You can hear it in his voice. “I’m sorry, oh man, I’m sorry…”

All of a sudden, everything becomes so much clearer. All confusion and fear leaves your mind and chest, like a light-switched being flipped off.

You walk over to the window and hold out your arms to coax him down. He’s shaking like a leaf when he grabs onto you.

“John,” he weakly grabs your shoulders once he’s down, “He’s here. I heard him, I know he’s here. He’s going to take me away from here and I don’t want-”

“Dave,” you hold him steady and upright. You look him in the eyes, “You need to calm down.”

“I can’t,” he chokes out. God, he must be so terrified. He’s having a panic attack. Your heart throbs.

You sigh heavily and bring him in for another hug while he’s panicking. He’s still wet and cold from the ice, but you don’t care.

“Shhh,” you rub his back, surprised by your own maturity, “He’s not coming up here, ok? Roxy’s… err… fighting him. Downstairs. And winning,” you add, “Plus, he’s going to have to go through me if he wants to get to you.”

You continue to rub his back as his breathing slows, unsure of what to do.

He starts leaning on you more and more for support, growing more and more tired.

“You’ve lost a lot of blood, Dave,” you point out stupidly. You hold him out again and look to his side. Still bleeding.

“Huh,” he confirms, bringing a hand back to it.

“Here. Come on.”

You carefully take his free arm and sit him down on the bed. He looks up at you, eyes drooping, but still as intense.

“I’m going to go get you another towel,” you tell him softly. You remember seeing some in the bathroom, “I’ll be right back, alright?”

You slide out of the door and close it quietly behind you. Downstairs you can hear metal hitting metal as Roxy and Dirk continue fighting. You can hear them shouting.

You sure hope Rose found somewhere to hide.

You run to the bathroom and grab some towels as quickly and quietly as possible. Soon, you’re
racing back to the room with an armful of them.

You open the door and spin, closing it and locking it.

When you turn back into the room, you find Dave, lying very still on the bed. The violet bed-sheets are stained darker-brown with his blood.

“What? Dave?” you squeak, and run over to the bed kneeling.

You sigh in relief as Dave slowly rolls over to look at you. He still looks afraid, but you can tell he’s thankful that you’ve come back.

“Alright,” you nudge him softly, “Come on, sit up.”

You help him sit up and lay a towel under him. Once it’s in place, you let him lie back on a big pillow.

You take another, damper towel and walk to the other side of the bed.

You sit down on the edge and wipe the blood away from his cut as he watches intently and in silence.

You start to wonder what’s come over you. In any other circumstance, you would have run from this house, screaming in horror. The sight of blood would have made you faint.

Could it have something to do with the fact that it’s… Dave?

You shoo the thought from your mind and focus on cleaning the blood away.

When you finish, Dave has closed his eyes and his breathing has steadied. You silently stand and throw the towel into the corner. You rest a hand on his forehead.

His forehead is hot, but not burning like before. He sighs when your cool hand touches his head. He must be asleep.

You sigh and brush his hair back a few times. You want to hug him again- just to let him know that everything is ok. But, he’s probably asleep and he needs to rest.

You remove your hand and move the blankets up around him, carefully tucking them in so he’s more comfortable. Once that’s done, you stand back and watching his breathing, just to be sure.

You head for the door when you hear Dave sit up quickly behind you.

“John?”

You stop and turn your head to meet his gaze.

“Where are you going?” he deadpans, staring you down intensely. You can see him shivering and shaking, still.

“Um,” you turn the rest of your body to face him, “I was going to go check on what’s happening down there.” You could still hear the commotion downstairs. “And I was thinking of maybe standing guard or something? Keep you safe.”

He lets his gaze fall to his lap. “Oh.” He lies back down on his good side and curls up into a tight ball.

He sounds afraid and disappointed. And you seriously don’t like it.

You bite the inside of your cheek and look at the door, then back to him, conflicted.

“Would you rather I stay here?” you ask, walking back to the side of the bed.
He doesn’t move but his eyes flash to your face and back to the sheets.

“Yeah,” he says quietly, “I don’t want you to get hurt out there too.”

You sigh again for what seems like the umpteenth time.

“Alright,” you whisper.

You sit down on the edge of the bed and he scoots closer to you. You resolve to rubbing his back and pushing his bangs back again. It calms him down significantly.

He’s still shaking, even though at this point he’d fallen asleep again. You don’t know whether it’s from the cold, the fever, or fear.

You’re still comforting him five minutes later, when he wakes up and shouts. His shaking increases two-fold.

You stop rubbing his back. He had been dreaming.

“You ok?” you ask him quietly.

His eyes are shut tight and he’s gripping the sheets. “Mhm,” he confirms shakily.

He’s not.

“You’re obviously not.”

He grumbles and sputters something that sounds like “Bite me.”

You can’t help it, but you giggle a little. He WOULD still try to act all tough, even though all of this is going on.

He glares at you and knees you in the back, then grunts at the pain it sends to his side.

With your mood lightened a little, you have an idea.

“Here, scoot over,” you tell him, pushing him slightly.

He scowls. “No.”

“Oh come on Dave, you’re freezing. Just-” you nudge him some more.

With a dramatic sigh, he finally forfeits and scoots over some. You lift the blankets up and get in under them too.

You weren’t kidding- he’s freezing.

“Well, come here,” you tell him, holding up one arm, “Don’t be all tough or manly about it, either. You need to warm up.”

He rolls his eyes and eventually shimmies closer to you. Soon, he’s cuddled up against your chest and you throw your arm over him.

It should phase you that you’re cuddling with your wounded best friend who’s currently not wearing any shirt-

But it doesn’t.

He does warm up after a while. He’s got his arms settled between the two of you as he curls up into you and he’s breathing normally.

Yet- the shaking still won’t stop.
“Hey,” you ask him after a while, “You doing ok?"

“I’m fine,” he whispers back.

“Um,” you pause, “are you, like, still scared?”

You know he probably is. With all of the silence in the room, you can hear the fight downstairs.

After a minute he responds. “I dunno,” you can feel him shrug, “I guess?”

You wrap your other arm around under him in a hug and squeeze lightly, placing your chin on top of his head. He moves his arms out from between the two of you and wraps his arms around your middle so you’re pressed pretty close against each other.

Once you two get settled, his shaking stops. You still squeeze him every once in a while, just to let him know you’re there.

You don’t know what else to do to comfort him, so you start humming.

It’s a song that your dad used to sing to you when you had nightmares. It’s one of your favorite haunting songs you taught yourself on the piano. You called it “Showtime”.

You guess Dave likes it, because he snuggles in closer to you and buries his head in your shoulder. Your heart continues to throb, but you ignore it.

After you finish your third song, he speaks.

“John?” He sounds pretty tired.

“Yeah, Dave?”

“… Thank you.”

You look down at him. You find him staring back up at you.

“For what?” you ask, confused.

“Not… freaking out.”

“Why would I-”

He slowly reaches up and taps below his eye.

It’s then you finally remember how unnatural his eyes are. Up close, you can see them much better. They’re a bright, flashy red around the edges with flecks of orange thrown in. In the center, they’re a deep crimson color. They almost fade to brown before it reaches his pupil.

He lets you look at them for little, waiting for a response.

“Dave.”

“Yeah?”

“I think… Dave, I think your eyes are wonderful, to say the least.”

His face goes blank.

You’re worried you might have said something wrong, but then Dave buries his head in your shoulder again and moves his arm back to give you the tightest hug he’s ever given you.

“Thank you, John,” you can hear his voice break through his muffled voice in your shirt.
“Whoa, dude, it’s ok,” you tell him as you rest your chin on his head again and squeeze back. “It’s alright. Everything’s alright now.”

You’re pretty sure he’s crying silently, but you can’t see because he’s still got his face buried in your shoulder.

At a loss of what to do, you start humming again.

You keep doing that, hugging him closely.

The two of you finally drift off to sleep, just before the sun comes up.

Chapter End Notes

Wooooo for cuddling finally!! <3 There shall be more later :o

So, leave me a comment with an opinion, suggestion, observation, prediction, anything :) <3
Miracles, Man

Chapter Summary

Haha I think the fangirls will be pleased with this one.

Chapter Notes

Hi yes! Very quick before I have to run to work! I didn't want to keep ya'll waiting so I thought I'd just post it now.

I know for a fact that there are probably a few typos in this, but if you could look past them, I will edit it when I get home tonight. I promise.

I think you all will be very happy then upset then crying then crying some more by the end of this chapter (if that makes any sense).

So! As always, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is Dave Strider, and you don’t believe in miracles.

----

Soreness creeps up your spine and splits your side. You wince sharply as soon as you gain consciousness.

You can feel the blood crusted on your side and chest crunch with your breaths and movements. So, you decide to stay still, concentrating on the blackness behind your eyelids.

You’re still afraid. You try to listen downstairs, but you don’t hear any signs of struggle. Is the fight over? Who won? Did Bro leave or is he still here, waiting for you?

You take a shaky breath and move your head.

It bumps into something and you stop breathing.

You slowly open your eyes and come face to face with John.

Your face is only inches away from his, but you can tell he’s sleeping soundly. His jaw is slack and his eyes are moving behind his eyelids.

You can’t help the breathy laugh that escapes you. His glasses are all crushed up against his face again. He’s really gotta stop doing that.

You remember that he had only come into the bed to warm you up, which you happily agreed to.

Yet…

You sigh and move closer to him, resting your forehead on his.

You… you actually don’t mind being this close to him.
John shifts in his sleep and moves his arms back around you, pulling you closer into him. Your heart flutters a little but you manage to stay still.

You close your eyes again and relax into him.

John is so kind to you. He’s been the best friend you can ask for. The best.

As long as you’ve known him, he’s always been there when you needed him. Like last night. And he’s your best bro, right? Yeah. And that’s what friends do—they’re there for each other.

That’s really all that you two have considered acted towards each other. You love hanging out with him—just being around him.

You’re simply the best of friends.

But. If you’re just best friends…

then why is your heart racing like this now?

You mentally shake off the idea forming in your mind. No. You can’t…

This is just… bro cuddling. You are cold and you need comfort. That’s all.

…right?

Its comfort… but… you only like comfort… if it’s from him.

Then, you remember how much relief flooded you when he told you he likes you eyes. You remember how it made you feel… the way he was looking at you…

Oh, god.

Almost on cue, John moves in his sleep and squeezes you into an unconscious hug.

You open your eyes again, your face growing a little red due to your inner-conflict.

John has that stupid grin spread on his face. You notice his hair has gotten longer, the way it falls in front of his eyes and almost covers them.

Your foreheads are still touching but now the squeeze John is giving you has your noses touching too.

So, you get a stupid idea. Something to… test what you’ve been thinking about.

You abandon all hope and all sanity in your being, close your eyes, and kiss him on the nose.

Nothing else. Just one soft kiss on the nose.

As soon as you pull away a good amount, eyes wide in shock because of what you’ve just done, you watch him for any reaction.

It’s kind of light and slow, but he definitely giggles.

For a moment of complete and utter horror, you think he might be awake.

But then, he shifts and brings you in so he can rest his forehead on yours again. You can see he’s still deeply asleep, but his smile stays on his face and he sighs contently.

You think you can feel your heart swelling.

You resolve to cuddling up against him and watching him sleep. You feel the time pass by as you listen to him breathe slowly.
God. Why did you just kiss his nose? That was a stupid thing to do. What if he had woken up?

It was a stupid, stupid move to make.

But… God. Well.

You’d do it again in a heartbeat if you got the chance.

You close your eyes and smile.

You think you’re falling for your best bro.

How ironic.

--

About two hours later, you’re being lightly pushed.

Your eyes drift open again. You must have fallen asleep at some point again.

The pain had subdued a bit so you move around a bit to test it. Not bad.

When you fully open your eyes, you notice the blinds had been pulled closed, blocking the sunlight on the outside. The room was dark, but illuminated enough that you could see John kneeling next to you on the bed and leaning over you, face close to yours. His eyes still manage to glow in the low light.

You suddenly remember what you had done and freeze in place.

“I closed the blinds so it wouldn’t bother your eyes,” he whispers, “I figured since your shades are broken now, you won’t be able to protect them from the sun.”

You don’t respond, just stare up at him with wide eyes.

He continues anyway. “I called my Dad before. I explained everything.”

You open your mouth but he cuts you off. “Dave, don’t worry. My Dad is cool with everything,” he smiles lightly, “he understands why I had to sneak out. He’s actually coming to pick us up soon. In about half an hour, he said.”

You finally close your eyes and swallow. All you can manage is a nod.

You can hear the worry thick in his voice. “Dave, are you alright?”

When you don’t move or respond, you feel his cool hand on your forehead again. You exhale and let him card his fingers through your hair worriedly.

“You’re still hot,” he sighs. You feel him settle down and sit next to you. He continues rubbing your forehead, for which you’re extremely grateful. “Don’t worry,” he assures you, “You’re going to be ok.”

You hope so.

“I’m not going to leave your side until you are.”

You REALLY hope so.

After a minute you clear your throat and ask in a quiet, raspy voice: “How are we going to get outside?” You could kill for some water right now.

John’s quiet for a second. “I don’t know. I guess we’ll either have to find a way to get out that window, or,” he pauses again, “we’ll have to sneak away downstairs.”
“Is Bro still here?”

“…He might be.”

“Window it is.”

“Dave,” John warns, “It’s been quiet downstairs for hours. I don’t know what’s going on. He might have left already, but I’ve been up here with you. I only know as much as you do.”

You try to sigh dramatically but you just go into a fit of coughing. John panics and runs to the door.

“I’ll be right back,” he whispers above your coughs and shoots out the door.

He’s back within seconds with a glass of water.

“Where did you get that?” you manage between wheezes.

He walks towards you and sets the glass down on the table. “In the bathroom.” He holds his arms out to you. “Now come on, I’ll help you sit up.”

He places one hand on your good side and the other on your shoulder to help you sit up against the bed-rest. You can feel the cuts and bruises on every inch of your body. Wherever John’s cool hands rest on you, you feel like you’ve been shocked.

He frowns and looks you in the eye. “You’re still feverish. Take it easy.” He hands you the glass, sitting on the edge of the bed next to you.

You gulp from the glass in your shaky hand. Of course, it’s too much and you cough and sputter it up. John has to rub your back again until you stop coughing.

“I said take it easy…”

“Can I lie down again?” you manage.

“You can’t drink water lying down, Dave.”

“Touche.”

You finish the water, but you can feel it sloshing around in your stomach.

John gets a text from his dad.

“He’s here,” he says gravely as he shoves his phone in his pocket, “Come on, we gotta do this.”

He slowly helps you stand up and throws one of your arms over his shoulder so he can help you walk.

When you get to the door, you feel like your heart is going to beat right out of your chest. You don’t know what lies on the other side. You don’t know if Bro could be waiting for you downstairs.

Simultaneously, you look at each other. You meet John’s gaze and realize how calming it is to look into his eyes.

“Ready?” he asks.

“I guess,” you mutter, facing forwards again.

He carefully swings the door open and you enter the hallway.

You eventually make your way to the top of the steps and stop.
“Alright,” John tells you, “get on my back.”

“Dude, do I have to?” you squeak.

“Don’t you dare argue with me right now,” John whispers and glares at you, “are we really going to do this right now?”

You sigh, “Sorry.”

“That’s what I thought. Now come on, I can carry you down.”

He helps you so that he’s carrying you on his back as he slowly makes his way down the stairs.

When you get to the bottom, he doesn’t put you down. He starts walking to the door…

“Hey!” you both hear.

Your blood turns ice cold and you both whip your head around to the open door.

Inside the open door is the family room.

Sitting on one side of the room is Roxy. She doesn’t look too bad. She’s got a small cut above her eyebrow, and she looks completely ticked off. But that’s it.

On the other side of the room, standing by the fireplace is… Bro. He had lost his hat and his blonde hair had been pushed back and out of the way of his face. He didn’t have any cuts on him, but he had bruises all over his arms, supposedly from Roxy butting her gun into him. His expression is still blank, but you can tell he’s tense.

You don’t have to see his eyes to know he’s staring right at you. You feel a shiver run up your spine and your heartbeat accelerate.

Sitting on the coffee table in the middle of the room, still in her pajamas, is a very angry looking Rose. She’s glaring right at the both of you.

“Where do you think you’re going?” she asks plainly, arms crossed.

“Well,” John sputters, “I-"

“In here,” he hisses. “NOW.”

You snap your head back to him and whisper, “John, don’t do it, go for the door, please don’t bring me in there, Bro’s-"

“JOHN,” Rose shouts.

“Oh god never mind John, SHE’S going to kill us. Do what she says for the love of god.”

He swallows and enters the room with you still on his back.

Once you’re inside, he stands still. He keeps you behind him, as if protecting you from everyone in the room.

“Dave. You and your guardian need to talk,” Rose speaks.

“Then go ahead and let him talk,” John snaps. Apparently John’s speaking for you.

Bro takes a step forward from the fireplace. You flinch with his step and John backs up, tensing as you do. You have you chin resting on John’s shoulder for support.

Bro looks to Rose and she glares at him.
He finally turns and speaks to you.

“Dave.” He pauses for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts, “I’m sorry.”

Silence falls over the room.

You don’t know what to think right now. Your mind is a white slate. Static noise. This whole scenario is crazy and it’s making you sick.

You stare at him, expecting to say more.

But he doesn’t. He just shrugs.

“There. That’s it. I’m sorry.”

“Bullshit.”

....That wasn’t you. It came from-

“How dare you?” ...John?

You can feel Bro’s gaze leave you and land on the guy carrying you.

“What did you just say to me?” Bro leans in closer.

“You’re full of shit,” John hisses at him.

Whoa whoa what the hell back up here for a second. Who is this guy? What happened to the shy, awkward-

“You’re full of shit and you’re just about the most despicable person to ever crawl this planet. Do you just, like, not have any emotions? You just hide behind your shades and think everything can be solved with a simple ‘I’m sorry’? You could have killed Dave. You could have KILLED him.”

John is shaking now. He’s starting to scare you a little bit.

“John,” you whisper, “John calm down-”

“LIKE HELL I’LL CALM DOWN,” he turns his head and shouts.

You just stare at him, unsure of how to feel.

He turns back to Bro, a blue fire burning in his eyes.

“I’m taking Dave. I refuse to let you see him, touch him, ANYTHING. I forbid you from having any form of contact with him. I fucking FORBID IT.”

You can’t tear your eyes away from him. He’s furious. He’s gripping you extremely tight, as if to hide you away from him.

After what seems like an eternity of silence, you glance back at Bro.

Nothing about him had changed. He’s still standing indifferently, face unreadable.

“Whatever.” He shrugs again.

You feel your heart crack down the middle. “What?” you croak.

He looks back to you again and saunters up, hands in his pockets.

“I honestly don’t even care anymore,” he drawls. He looks and sounds tired.

When he’s standing right in front of you and Dave, he stops and smirks.
“You can take him. He’s not my kid anymore-”

He leans right in and gets in your face.

“I lost my kid a looooonng time ago.”

And he drives a metaphorical stake right into your heart.

He stands back up and strolls right past the two of you, pausing in the doorway.

“Well,” he sighs and smirks, “Try to have a nice life, Dave.”

And with that, he leaves.

After you hear the front door close, you feel… Well, you feel…

Actually, you can’t feel a goddamn thing. You entire body has gone numb.

John turns to look at you, eyes soft again.

“Dave?.... Dave.”

You don’t respond. You can’t. You’re not going to react to what Bro said.

“Dave you’re shaking.”


“Roxy, Rose,” you hear him say, “My dad is waiting outside. I have to bring him home so we can help him. Thank you for everything you’ve done, but I really have to go.”

John rushes you both out into the hallway before either of them can say anything. You just curl up onto his back and hold on tight.

When he gets to the door, he pauses with a hand on the doorknob.

“Close your eyes, it’s going to be bright for a little while, ok?”

You do what he says.

Suddenly, you’re blinded and your whole head hurts.

There’s another man’s voice, probably Dad.

You’re being placed gently in the car, on a pile of blankets and there is the sound of a door slamming, followed by two more. You still don’t open your eyes.

When the car lurches forward, so do you. You feel like you’re going to be sick again.

But then, there’s a pair of familiar hands on your shoulders.

“Dave,” John whispers, “I’m going to need you to calm down. Plus, you can open your eyes now.”

“Don’t want to,” you mutter. It’s childish and stupid of you, but you don’t care.

You feel one hand cup your cheek and the other smooth your hair back.

“That’s ok. Don’t worry about it,” he comforts you. “We’ll be home soon.” He pauses. “Do you want to lie down? You’re practically green.”

You nod quickly. He helps you lie down and puts your head in his lap. The leather of the car is
uncomfortable on your bare torso and it rubs at your stitches. But the way John rubs your arms and shoulders gently distracts you.

When you arrive at his house, his father helps John carry you upstairs to John’s room.

John’s dad had made some preparations. He had set a cot up next to John’s bed and a table next to it. On it is some pain medication, water, and other first aid supplies.

They both set to bandage you back up while you stared blankly at the ceiling, thinking. They fixed up the cut on your side and the cut under your eye. They even gave you a loose, baggy shirt to wear so it wouldn’t bother the wound.

After they were finished and had laid you back down again, Dad sits down on the edge of the cot.

“Dave. I’ve heard everything that has happened.” He places a firm hand on your shoulder.
““You’re going to be staying with us for the foreseeable future. You’ll find everything you need here. Is that alright with you?”

You can only bring yourself to nod. “Thanks, Mr. Egbert. I appreciate it.”

“Dad.” He smiles kindly.

You smile back.

He leaves, but not before telling you and John to get some rest.

Once he does leave, John comes and lies down on the cot next to you, without having to be asked. He hugs you close to him so you can bury your face in chest. He lays his chin on your head and rubs your back.

“John,” you mutter after a while.

“Hmm?” He’s almost asleep.

“He doesn’t want me anymore.”

Silence. He continues rubbing.

“He never wanted me,” you finish.

He shifts a little so he can look at you. He’s frowning.

“I’m so sorry Dave. I’m sorry he said that. You don’t deserve what he said.”

You move back to hide your face again. “Maybe I do.”

He pushes you back, holding your wrists tight. Now he looks angry.

“Dave don’t you dare-”


He’s staring at you now, still holding your wrists tight. His face falls.

“Face it, John,” you whisper, “he doesn’t want me anymore because I’m a failure. Ok? What kind of person gets turned down by their own family? By the person who RAISED them? Only a seriously fucked up person does. Me. I failed him, and that’s all there is to it. He dropped me while he still had the chance.”

He looks and you and he just looks so… sad.
“I don’t blame him for giving up on me, John,” you mumble, looking up from the sheets and into his deep blue eyes. “I wouldn’t blame you if you did the same.”

At that, his grip tightens again and his mouth purses into a line.

Then, his eyes water and his lip trembles.

“Don’t say that, Dave.”

“John-”

“Dave, you’re amazing.”

You stop and your heart throbs again, but in a different way.

“John, I’m telling you…”

Your voice tapers off because of the way he’s looking at you. His eyes are crinkled at the sides, like he’s ready to start sobbing but he’s stopping himself.

He tugs on your wrists and pull your face closer to his. You can feel your pulse rise.

“J-John, y-” you stammer.

“Dave,” he stops you, placing his forehead against yours, “Are you listening to me?”

You swallow and nod your head slowly.

“Dave, you’re amazing,” he repeats, “and I would never, EVER give up on you. Do you understand?”

You frantically try to look anywhere but his eyes …

“Look at me,” he whispers.

You slowly look up again into his eyes.

Once you look into his eyes you know exactly what’s going to happen. You relax all at once and lean into him.

You understand now.

John smiles through his first few tears. “Not giving up. Got it?”

“Yeah,” you swallow thickly, “I got it.” You cautiously lean in.

“Good,” he just barely whispers, doing the same.

His lips just barely brush yours, lingering slightly as both of you close your eyes.

He slowly lets go of your wrists. You keep them there at a loss of what to do. He places his hands gently on either side of your face and slowly brings it forward to his.

He brings your lips to his, placing a light, chaste kiss on them. His lips fit perfectly on yours. Your heart is racing even faster. You want to burst because this is exactly what you needed.

You slowly move your hands and place them on the small of his back. Taking this as an ‘ok’, he pulls your face in closer and deepens the kiss.

You both lie there for a long while, kissing slowly and sweetly.
Your name is Dave Strider, and you’re pretty sure this is what passes for a miracle.

Chapter End Notes

PLEASE LEAVE A COMMENT DONT LEAVE ME HANGING.
MY BBYS <3 FINALLY.
THERE WILL BE MORE.
And All That Jazz

Chapter Summary

What's going to happen to Dirk now? How is he feeling?
What are John and Dave going to do after kissing?
This is all very peculiar indeed.

Chapter Notes

Hi there lovelies!
I absolutely adore every single one of you and the comments you're leaving. They are what keep me going through the week.

THERE IS A LOT OF DIRKJAKE IN THIS CHAPTER IM TELLING YOU NOW (I'm a big shipper of this ship, sorry!)
The beginning is Dirk's POV, the next is a quick John POV, and the last is Dave.
I hope you all enjoy it and don't hate me too much! <3 There's a method to my madness, I promise.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

== >Dirk, you have some explaining to do
No, fuck no. Don’t even. You have nothing to explain.
You’re… Shit.
You slam the door of the apartment open and tear across the living room, towards your hardly-used bedroom. Furniture and other objects in your way be damned.
Your fingers fumble with the suitcase zipper and you simultaneously slide your phone out of your pocket.
You dial the number from memory and hold it up to your ear, grinding your teeth.
“Come on, come on you piece of-”
“Hello?” a man with a slight British accent calls through the phone.
“Jake,” you hiss through your teeth, walking across the room to your dresser and pulling it open.
“Oh well how do you do, sunshine?” he answers, “I was wondering when you were going to call back. See, there’s this-”
“Jake, I need you to do me a favor and shut up for two seconds and let me do the talking for once,” you manage, shoving an armful of t-shirts into the bag.
There’s silence on the other line for a minute and you slap your forehead.
“Jake, sorry I’m just- I’m just so angry I-”

“It’s alright,” his voice is significantly softer and more worried, “But… are you alright?”

You stand in the middle of your room, rubbing the bridge of your nose.

“No, Jake. No I’m not.”

“Do you want to talk about-”

“Not right now. What I need you to do is start packing.”

“Why? What does that-”

“Also, call up the jet and tell them to be at the airport in an hour,” you start loading up on jeans, “Can you be packed and there by then?”

“Yes,” you can hear him answer quietly, “Um… I’m almost nervous to ask but… how long am I packing for exactly? And where are we going?”

You sigh into the phone in one hand while the other shoves some boxers and socks into the engorged suitcase.

“Japan. I don’t know how long.”

“I see,” he sighs in response, “I’ll do it. But you have to tell me what’s going on.”

“Oh Jake, for the love of-” you bite your tongue to prevent any further damage, “I just… I need to get away for a little bit. I’ll tell you everything on the jet, ok?”

“Alright, ok Dirk, I’m packing as we speak,” he tells you, “I’ll be there soon.”

“Alright, thanks man,” you go to hang up.

“Dirk wait!” you hear him call.

“What, what?” you answer feverishly, throwing one arm up in defeat.

“… Just, hang in there. Everything is going to be alright… I think. I’ll see you soon. Be careful.”

You pull the phone away from your ear and stare at it for a while. You then resign to looking up and around your small, barren room. There are hardly any decorations in here- you were never around often enough to have time to decorate or give the effort to care. It’s just the solid oak floors, the off-white, empty walls, a plain dresser with five drawers, and a large bed with way too many pillows.

The only thing that piques your interest is a framed picture on the opposite wall. You walk over to it and gently remove it from its hook.

It’s a stupid fucking picture Dave drew you when he was only three. The scribbles hardly resemble the humans he told you they were. He claimed it was a picture of his family- you, him, and Cal. You were so proud of it that you decided frame it. He had whined about you hanging it up in his room instead of the living room where everyone could see it, but you assured him you would treasure it and admire it every day. He cautiously continued to pout, but you had just tickled him until he was squealing with laughter…

You easily slip the back off of the frame and ease the paper out. It still smells like the crayons that he drew it with. You fold the paper in half twice and shove it in your back pocket.

Without so much as a sweeping glance across the empty apartment, you grab your overstuffed
suitcase, passport, and Cal.

The door slams behind you with finality. You don’t look back.

You need to get away. You need to get as far away from this place as humanly possible.

--

You watch the crew scurrying around the jet, getting it ready for flight. Your arms are crossed and you face is etched in its perpetual scowl. You had bought this thing on a whim seven years ago and it’s hardly been used.

“Where’s Jake?” you ask your advisor.

“Already on the jet, sir. He’s waiting for you.” Your advisor is a stocky, middle-aged man who is very much afraid of you. He calls you sir, even though you’ve told him a million times not to.

You don’t answer him, but hand him your suitcases and walk towards the steps up to the door. He looks at Cal uneasily.

“Make sure those cases get on there. I also don’t want anyone hovering over us in the cabin, you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

You bound up the steps, two at a time, until you come to the entrance. You stop and turn back, waving at your pilot to let him know it’s time to go. Then, you step inside and the door is closed behind you.

Inside, you can barely hear the engines running. The air hangs in suspension. The sky is overcast and the lights are off, so the cabin is extremely dark. You tense up and take a few tentative steps forward. There are armchairs and couches and tables in various places around the cabin, but no sign of Jake.

“Jake?” No answer. “Jake, I know you’re in here. Come on. I’m not in the mood for this right now.”

The armchair a little to your right swivels around.

Sitting lazily across the chair, with one leg propped up on the arm, and smiling devilishly is Jake English.

Jake is almost one year older than you. You two were roommates back in college and best friends even before that. When your company finally took off, you obviously made him your second in command. He is efficient, sincere, and you can’t think of anyone that would make a better business partner than him. But, you always think of him as a friend before a coworker.

And you guess he’s also a pretty spectacular boyfriend.

Jake raises an eyebrow at you standing there, staring at him. He cheerily lifts his arms up and motions you forward.

“Well come on, then! Where’s my hug and kiss ‘hello’?”

You scowl from behind your shades and walk past him.

“Oooohhh,” he mutters, swinging around in his chair to face you, “Someone’s a little touchy this morning.”

You sit in the chair opposite him.

Jake’s always been a pretty simple guy. He doesn’t like wearing suits or fancy outfits. He’s happy
to wear his simple black v-neck, those way-too-short-and-tight-for-his-own-good cargo shorts, and heavy combat boots. The only thing remarkably fashionable about him is his thick, dark-rimmed designer spectacles.

His skin is slightly tanned from all the time he spends outside. He’s into rock-climbing and paragliding, so he’s pretty well-built. His dark hair is short in the back and moves into a swooping cow-lick at the front.

The thing you like the most about him is how his jade-green eyes crinkle up at the edges behind those glasses from laughing so much. His laugh was so charming and endearing to you. That and his quirky, yet smooth, grin.

No wonder it took you so many years to build up the courage to tell him how you felt. You’d been harboring quite the crush on him throughout your college days, but you never had the guts to tell him about how you felt until you proposed he help you run the company.

You were honestly surprised to learn he felt the same way.

You have stayed together all these years. You don’t know why you kept it a secret from Dave. You had just assumed that Dave would hate you for it- that he wouldn’t like Jake. Then again, Dave hates everything about you, doesn’t he?

You’re hunched over in your chair now, rubbing your forehead. Jake sighs deeply, a smile still lingering in his features.

“Listen, pal,” he says softly, “I can’t help you out if you don’t tell me what the hell is going on.”

You finally remove your glasses, place them on the table in front of you, and rub your eyes silently.

“I’m guessing it’s Dave, huh?” he straightens up in his chair, and then leans forward on his knees to look at your face. “Now what has that boy gotten himself into?”

The plane jerks and starts moving backwards.

“Dave hasn’t done anything,” you utter, eyes still closed.

“Then… what’s the problem, eh?” He sounds confused.

“It’s something I did.”

“Well what did you do then?”

“I…” You lie back on the couch, defeated, and look out the window.

You can’t tell him. If you tell him what you did he would look at you like some kind of monster- and you don’t think you can bear that.

“Dirk,” there’s a hint of warning in his voice, “What happened? Is it serious?”

You still don’t look back. You can’t do it.

“Dirk-” he warns again but you snap.

“I hurt him, alright Jake? I got so fucking upset with the kid I took out my shitty sword and took a few swings at him. It just so happens that one of those blows actually landed and I almost killed my kid.”

Jake’s sitting straight now, face completely void of all emotion and eyes wide with horror.

You realize that your glaring at him and that your eyes are watering but you honestly can’t bring yourself to give much of a shit at the moment.
“Jake, I could have killed him,” you continue slowly, easing up a bit, “I don’t know what happened. It’s like a snapped. He doesn’t realize how much I’ve done for him, how much I’ve missed him, how much I fucking care about him…”

Jake hangs his head and sighs heavily.

“And I guess hurting him is a really fucking stupid way of showing him how much I care…” you finish.

The silence carries on for a few minutes, even after the jet has taken off. Neither of you move or speak until you’re cruising at the regulated altitude.

“How badly is he hurt, Dirk?” Jake barely whispers, never looking up from his lap.

Your gaze is concentrated on a window on the other side of the plane. “Um.. there’s a gash. On his side.”

Jake slowly shakes his head. “God dammit, Dirk.”

“Yeah.”

“Where is he now?”

“A friend of his took him. From what I know, he’s an alright kid. His name’s Egbert I think.”

After a minute, Jake sits back up, relaxing into the back of the chair.

“Are you sorry?”

You look at him, face cradled in one hand. You’re just so tired of everything now.

“About hurting him?” he inquires.

Without hesitation, you answer.

“I’m more sorry than I’ve ever been in my entire existence.” You pause. “About everything. Everything I’ve done or said to him. He doesn’t deserve it… I don’t…” You trail off, not knowing how to express the feeling of your chest being torn apart from the inside out.

You anxiously watch Jake rake a hand through his hair and close his eyes, thinking.

After what seems like another eternity of silence, Jake slaps both armrests with his hands and stands up suddenly. Before you can say anything, he’s headed towards the cockpit.

Five minutes later, you feel the jet shift slightly to the left. Jake returns- that gentle smile etched across his face again as he approaches you.

“Come on then,” he motions for you to stand up.

You do.

Once you’re up, he sits in your place and pats his lap, telling you to sit again.

“Jake,” you whine and practically roll your eyes, “What? Are we eighteen again?”

He laughs, “Oh come now, Dirk we’re only thirty-nine, not a hundred. Plus, you’re always young to me!”

You produce what little smile you can and finally settle down. Once you’re both comfortable, he lays back and pulls you close so he can kiss your forehead and rub right in-between your shoulder blades.
You turn absolutely red, thinking of what might happen if a crewman comes back here and sees the CEO of the company and his second-in-command cuddling on the couch.

Yet, you have to admit, it’s nice being this close to Jake again and you like the way he rubs your back. You need the comfort after all that’s happened.

“So what was all that about?” you ask quietly, nodding your head towards the cockpit.

“Hmm?” he asks, opening his eyes and looking at you, “Oh! There’s been a change in plans. We’re not going to Tokyo again.”

You shift back a little bit to look at him, confusion flooding your features.

He laughs quietly, “Oh relax, would you? We’re taking a vacation.”


“Mhm,” he hums, “A long one.” He starts rubbing your shoulder again. That makes you give in and move back against him.

“We’re going somewhere secluded,” he continues, “I figure that you’ve been through quite a lot these past few months. You need to get away for a while. Just you,” he pokes you in the back, “and me,” he smiles at you, “Just to take your mind off some things for a while, huh?”

You sulk into his shoulder, “But-”

He moves forward and presses a quick kiss against your lips, and you shut up. “No! I won’t hear any of it. I’ll see to it that the company doesn’t burn to the ground while we’re away for a while.”

You sigh and thump your head against his arm in defeat. “Whatever. I guess.”

“That’s what I thought,” he mutters smugly and continues massaging your back.

“Where are we going anyway?”

With that he moves his nose next to yours and whispers, “Guess!”

Your mouth shifts into a lopsided frown. “It’s that stupid island of yours, isn’t it?”

He feigns hurt, bringing a hand up to his heart, “You wound me, Strider!” He butts foreheads with you, “But yes. It will be quite the adventure, just you and me!”

You bring a hand up and flick him on the forehead, “You’re such a dumbass, you know that? You and your shitty adventures.”

He gives you a squeeze, “Yeah, but I’m YOUR dumbass and now you’re stuck with me.”

“Shit.”

“Dirk!”

“Kidding.”

He smiles again, which you can never get tired of. All thoughts of Dave and other troubles fade into the background and out of your chest, only to be replaced with warmth and all that fuzzy shit.

“Allright,” you resign, “It’ll be good for me, I guess. Get away for a while…”

“That’s it, old chap,” he pats you on the face and kisses you lightly, “Everything is going to be great.”

Maybe it is a good idea to get away for a while…
Freak out again.

Your name is John Egbert and you are currently flipping the biggest shit you’ve ever flipped.

You’re lying on your sleeping best friend’s cot, silently screaming in your head.

Did that really happen? Or were you dreaming?

Did you… kiss Dave?

You blink feverishly and worry your bottom lip.

That wasn’t supposed to happen. THAT WASN’T SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN.

Oh god, you just remember feeling so bad for him. You remember feeling awful and he looked so vulnerable and his lips were right there and you just…

No, no, NO. This is not happening. He knows now. HE KNOWS.

He’s not supposed to know how you feel about him. You’re not even sure of it yet. You’re not ready for that.

Oh god, what are you doing to do when he wakes up?

Be the already awake Dave

Well.

Shit.

You’re lying still next to John, who you assume is still sleeping. You’ve made sure there’s about three inches between you two.

Last night was. Interesting. In a word.

If you remember correctly, there was some sort of sob-fest going on and the next thing you knew, John and you got to macking on each other.

Not that you didn’t like it.

Actually, he’s a pretty good kisser. But, that’s not the point.

You probably fell asleep at some point. And so did John.

You would kill to know what’s going on in his mind right now.

But, you should probably sort out your own thoughts first. Let’s make a list, yeah?

1. Why the hell are you so nervous?
2. Is John gay too? You never got around to telling John you were gay. You guess that just slipped your mind.
3. Focus, we’re making a list here.
4. What is this going to do to our friendship?

Oh no.

You can feel a pang of something surge through your chest.

What does this mean for your friendship? You don’t want to ruin the friendship that you’ve been accumulating. Could you be boyfriends and still be best friends like before? Or would it be
awkward?
Maybe you two could just be best friends who just kiss a lot? Occasionally?
You mentally shake your head. Listen to yourself.
It’s too soon to know what’s going to happen. This can’t happen between him and you yet. You need more time.
You wish you could just make this situation disappear…
…and maybe you can.
Slowly, you stretch yourself out, moving your legs around and making some noise. Then, you feel John start moving next to you.
He’s awake too.
You both lie there for a while, obviously aware that the other is awake.
You guess you’re going to have to make the first move.
You open your eyes and go to turn your head and face him-
-just as John does the same thing.
Your foreheads collide and you both shrink back, cursing and rubbing at the impact.
John’s mouth opens and closes a few times before he manages a weak, “Morning.”
“Mornin’,” you reply with a dry throat.
“Umm… so how did you sleep, then?”
“Fine. No problems.”
“Oh, good.”
“Yeah.”
Silence.
You both lie there, looking at each other. You zero in on his eyes and try to see what he’s feeling. As the deep blue eyes searches your blood red ones, you both find the answer you’re looking for.
You’re both equally as panicked about what happened.
Neither of you are ready.
It’s then that you both make an unspoken agreement.
Both of you silently tell each other: “Let’s just not talk about it.”
“Breakfast?” John asks quickly as he stands up from the cot. You roll over onto your back and your stomach answers for you, growling loudly.
“Yeah, that sounds great.”
“Dad’s still asleep so I’ll be back in a few. Just… uh…stay there. You’re going to have to rest today, alright?”
“Cool,” you respond.
As soon as he closes the door behind him you, you let out a breath you didn’t even know you were holding.

Unbeknownst to you, John is leaning against the door outside, breathing heavily.

In both of your minds, there’s a chorus of:

“Oh god, that was close.”

“He can’t know. He can’t know.”

--

John does eventually return with breakfast. He helps you sit up and eat your bowl of Lucky Charms (that shit’s magically delicious), and sits next to you as you eat.

“So, how’s the side?”

“It’s alright,” you manage through a mouthful of marsh-mellows. You turn to your right and left. You wince a little and hold your side, “Though I don’t think I should get up soon.”

John laughs quietly, “No, you shouldn’t.” He shoves another spoonful of cereal in his mouth.

Dad Egbert comes in and checks your bandages before heading off to work for the day. He reassures you that should you need anything, don’t hesitate to ask or call.

Once he leaves, John sets up a movie across the room and you both settle down to watch it.

Half-way through some ironic, shitty action movie, you find yourself thinking about Bro. You wonder what he’s doing, where he’s gone, and mostly if he’s alright….

Then you remember what a fucking asshole he is and realize that you don’t give a shit. Even the thought of his sneering grin makes your heart hurt and your side ache.

He’s not your guardian anymore. Why should you care? And why DO you care?

Not once the whole day does John mention Bro. He know you’re thinking about it, and tries to get your mind off of it. He keeps suggesting that you guys get up and play some video games or go raid the fridge.

Instead, you just tell him that you’re fine, it’s just that your side hurts, and ‘besides, you’re happy enough just chilling up here, watching shitty movies’.

Much, much later, after the sun had set, after about a thousand snacks, ordering two whole pizza pies, losing a game of chess, and watching the entire first season of Supernatural, John falls asleep.

Well, he falls asleep on your shoulder, to be specific.

You crane your neck to look at him and snort. He’s still got chocolate ice cream on the corner of his mouth.

You contemplate licking it off for .03 seconds and then mentally slap yourself across the face.

This is nice, ok? Just being with him is nice. You don’t need any of that shit. Not right now, at least.

Your heart pounds as you lay your head on his and watch the scenes on the TV screen blur away and out of focus.

Just being this close is enough to make you happy for now.
Later that night, when Dad comes home, he finds you two in the same position. There are tubs of chocolate ice cream all over the cot and pizza boxes sprawled out across the bed. The disarray of the room is bathed in the blue light of John’s idle television.

He clicks his tongue and smiles gently. He makes his way over to the cot and removes all the trash. He makes his way over to John side of the bed and gently shakes him.

“Son,” he whispers, “Son, come on now. Let Dave sleep in peace.”

John shrugs his hand off of his shoulder and cuddles in tighter to you.

With that he chuckles lightly and pulls the comforter up over the two of you. He leans in and kisses John on the head, and ruffles your hair gently. You wake up for a second and gaze weakly at him through lidded eyes.

“I’m glad you kids are safe,” he whispers to you, “Sleep tight then.”

He makes his way over to the TV and shuts it off, submerging the room in darkness except for the light trickling in from the hallway.

But, even that is cut off when Dad leaves and closes the door quietly behind him.

As soon as he’s gone, you pull you arms around the sleeping John and kiss him quickly over the head too. He won't remember it.

You like to think that things will eventually work out for the both of you.

But for now, you aren’t ready to admit your feelings.

And that’s ok.

Now’s just not the right time.

Good things come to those who wait…and all that jazz.

Chapter End Notes

I really really really want to know what you're all thinking right now! Leave me a comment/suggestion/critique/anything! <3

See you next weekend, beautiful people!
A Little Spying Never Hurt Anyone

Chapter Summary

John and Dave spy on Jade and Karkats date... but they both learn something new about each other.

Chapter Notes

Well. Guess I have some explaining to do!

Welp. I wasn't able to update last week because it was prom for my high school... I probably should have told you last time! I was going to write a chapter, but I didn't want it to be all slap-dashed and rushed. (Plus I didn't want my friends to make fun of me for writing fics... they don't know about it!)

Anyway, this chapter makes the fic take a whole new turn. Prepare for fluff and plot development!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

== > Respond to Dave’s Idea

You shoot a gaze across the room at Dave, splayed out across his cot. “You’re serious?”

He rolls his head towards you, blonde hair covering his eyes. He needs a haircut. “One hundred percent, dude. We gotta do it.”

“But Dave, that’s wrong.”

“Wrong?” He rolls over to face you. “Wrong is that fact that Jade actually accepted the offer of a date from that class-A-douche-nozzle.”

“Karkat isn’t a douche-nozzle… he’s just… sensitive.”

“You’re fucking with me, John. That guy is the most angsty guy I’ve ever met. The guy could burn a thousand suns up with that angst.”

“Dave-”

“What? Don’t you want to make sure he won’t make any sketchy moves on poor, innocent Jade?”

“Dave!!” you moan, “She’s more than capable of protecting herself. That is IF she even needs to protect herself. Its fine- I’m not worried at all.”

“You sure, Johnny boy? Picture it,” he leans up on his elbows and motions with his arms to paint the scene. “They’re in the movies, right? He’s just bought her one of those totally sweet combo buckets of sugar, buttery goodness, pepsicola, and god-knows-what-else-what. It’s dark and Jade is completely involved in whatever shitty rom-com they’re there to see. Maybe she’s getting a little snuffy…”

At this point, Dave sits up on the edge of the bed. He winces as the cut on his side twists but he continues.
“She turns to him- ‘Oh, Karkat-’,” he fakes a falsetto and rests the back of his hand on his forehead, “‘This movie is so sad oh dear, oh my.’”

You roll your eyes dramatically and huff.

At this point Dave stands up and walks over to you. He continues talking to you as he sits down in your lap. You jump and throw your hands in the air.

“Dave, what the-”

“Then,” he cuts you off, “He’ll throw his arm around her, like so-” he throws one arm around your shoulder. You try to suppress the laugh forming in your throat.

“Then he’ll look deep into her eyes and say, ‘Oh Jade,’” at this point, Dave’s face is getting closer to yours and you make a squeaking noise, “‘I’m here to comfort you, Jade…’” He leans in closer and closer…

and licks your glasses in the most disgusting manner possible.

“aaaaAAAARRRGHH!!!”

You throw him off in a large display and pull your sleeve up to rub your lenses furiously. Maybe it will hide the huge blush you’re sporting.

Dave’s on the floor, cracking up. (“Oh shit, John, you should see your face!”)

You kick him lightly and he winces.

“Watch it, Egbertian- that was close.”

“Well maybe if you put a shirt on…”

He isn’t wearing a shirt and it shows off his scar. It’s scabbing over and it runs jaggedly up from his hip to almost his armpit.

You tilt your head and your scowl softens. “…Does it hurt at all?”

Dave looks from the ceiling to you, a grin still etched on his face. You don’t think you’ll ever get used to those eyes. It’s not like Dave has much of a choice… his shades are broken… but there’s something so endearing to you about how comfortable he is around you now. It’s like he doesn’t even notice they’re not there anymore.

Sometimes his eyes dangerously red and piercing- like when he’s mad or upset. But most of the time they’re a soft, delicate red and full of expression- like now. You don’t know why he hid them- they’re actually amazing.

He lifts his arm up to look at the scar. He runs his other hand up and down it idly.

“Only a little…” he mumbles quietly.

“Here!” You jump up and kneel next to him, pushing him over so he’s lying on his stomach.

“Whoa man, what are you-” he looks back at you desperately.

Then, you lay a hand on his side, above the cut, and start rubbing.

Dave tenses up at first, but then all but melts into the floor.

“Ohmygodthankyou,” he breathes out.

“Hehehe, that’s what friends are for, huh?” Gulp.
“OhsweetlordjesusIneedthis.”

You knead his back and let him breathe. His back is smooth, except for a few moles and freckles that you can feel as your hand grazes across his skin, light as a feather.

After a while, his back rises and falls slower and slower as he drifts off. The side of his face is muffled in the carpet, facing away from you, his hands raised above his head.

Your fingers rub up and down along the scar and he sighs. Your heart flutters a little as you knead his shoulders.

God damn him and this effect he has on you…

“Dave?... Dave, wake up.”

“Hmm?” He was already asleep.

“Come on, get dressed.” You slap his shoulder and he yelps.

“Why? I’m getting a kick-ass massage over here. Don’t leave me hangin’.” He rolls over and shifts his crimson gaze to you with sleep-heavy lids.

“We’ve got a date to spy on, dumbass. I’m pretty sure if we leave in the next ten minutes we can still catch them at dinner.”

The smile that spreads across his face twists and churns something deep in your chest.

--

One shirt, some shoes, and two sweatshirts later, the two of you are headed for the door.

This is the first time in a while that Dave has left the house and you’re a little apprehensive. You don’t want anything to happen to him. Sure, he can probably handle it- he’s been healing for a little more than a week after all. But, you can’t help but be a little concerned.

Before he walks out the door you grab his sleeve, “Wait! There’s something I want to give you.”

He waits patiently in front of the door while you run into the kitchen. You come back with a pair of old aviators.

“They’re really dusty so you blow on them quickly and wipe it off with your sleeve.

“These are, ah, pretty old,” you say without looking up from them. Dave is silent. “They were… my Mom’s.” Your reflection gleams in the lenses in the dimming daylight. “I never wear them because… Well I mean I’m sure you don’t mind if…” Just breathe, Egbert.

You look up at him and the shock on his face is obvious. His mouth is wired in a tight line and his eyebrows are lightly knit together in sympathy.

You step forward carefully, reach up, and lay the shades on his forehead. Then, you lean back and watch him cautiously.

His eyes are soft and he’s smiling gently. Suddenly, you’re being scooped up into a light hug.

“I know this was hard for you to do,” you hear him breathe near your ear, “but, thank you. So much. They’re… awesome.”

You squeeze him back gently. “You’re welcome, ya dork. Just be careful with them, ok? They mean a lot to me.”

Dave pulls back and nods. He goes to pull them down in front of his eyes.

Before you can bite your tongue, your cool betrays you: “Dave!”
He stops and looks at you, fingers still on the arms of the shades. They’re not quite down yet.
“Yeah?”

“One more thing…” you shuffle and look at your feet, “There’s a deal that comes with those shades. I need you to promise me something.”

“…Well, sure… I guess. What is it?”

“You… you can’t wear them all the time. I mean… uh… sometimes you should just take them off? Wait no, that’s a weird way of phrasing it, uh… I think it’s good if you don’t wear them? Shit, no that’s not…”

You take a deep breath and look him in the eye.

“Dave, you don’t have to wear those around me. In fact, I prefer it when you don’t.”

His eyes search your face for a few seconds. He slowly lets go of them and places his hands gently at his sides.

“…Really?” It’s a whisper.

“Well yeah, I mean,” you worry your lip and look around the hallway, searching for the right words, “I like to think that you can feel comfortable around me and not have to worry about me judging you. Because I don’t- and I think you know that by now. In fact, I actually think your eyes are the coolest thing ever. I mean, wow I’m jealous.” You’re rambling. “Ugh. I mean, I just want you to do whatever makes you feel alright.”

He’s staring you down with that uncomfortable intensity again. You stand your ground, though.

“…You mean that, Egbert?”

“Yeah? Why wouldn’t I?”

After a few moments of silence, Dave makes a move and shifts the shades into place. You’re sad to see that vulnerability of his disappear, but soon you’re distracted by the upturning of his lips.

“It’s a deal,” he nods to you. You feel lightheaded with excitement and joy, so you give him the biggest, most genuine smile you can muster.

“Now,” he continues as he opens the door, “Let’s crash this bitch.”

~

== > He… gave you a present?

No one’s ever really given you a present. Bro never really celebrated anything, so presents were foreign to you.

While you and John walk down the street, you can’t help but raise a hand to touch silver frames of the aviators every once in a while. It’s like you want to make sure they’re really there.

You can’t imagine what John was going through when he decided to give these to you. It must have brought up some old memories. The look on his face made you just want to scoop him up and squeeze him and never let him go… It makes your chest swell to think you’re that important to him.

You’re going to repay him somehow. You not sure how, but you will. The most you can do is protect them and treat them gently.
You both finally walk up in front of the restaurant Jade was talking about.

“There’s no fucking way he brought her here,” you deadpan. The both of you look inside the ‘Fondue for Two’ restaurant through the enormous glass windows.

Everyone is dressed to the nines inside. Ladies are wearing elegant dresses and men are wearing sharp tuxes. The lights are dim and everyone is seated at satin tablecloths, discussing how much money they’ve made over fruity drinks.

“There’s no way we’re getting in there, Dave.”

“You’re positive this is where they went?”

“Yeah! Look, they’re right over there, in the corner!” John points blatantly. You slap his wrist down so it isn’t obvious.

Sure enough, sitting in the corner booth is the couple you two were here to see.

Jade is wearing her favorite dress. It’s a black satin cocktail dress. When it moves it ripples and shimmers in the dim light. Her hair is in some kind of twisty-up-do, and… is she wearing contacts?

Karkat is wearing probably the lamest tie you’ve ever seen. It’s black and it’s got GODDAMN SQUIDDLES all over it. “That’s a present from Jade,” John points out, “He initially said he hated it. I don’t know why he’s wearing it…” Other than that, Karkat’s dark hair is still as messy as all get-up and the sleeves of his button up, black shirt are rolled up to the elbow.

He looks extremely uncomfortable. Either that or he’s really nervous. You’re going to go with the later. He’s sitting there, wringing his napkin while Jade talks his ear off from across the table. Every once in a while he’ll look up at her and respond in short phrases.

“Dave,” John gets your attention, “We’re not dressed up enough. Maybe we should just-”

“Alright,” you stop him abruptly, “then we’ll go somewhere else where we can still see them. Like…” you spin around and face the street behind you, looking for close restaurants.

Across the street and a little to the left is a small diner with some broken neon lights that spell “OPEN 24/7”.

“There.” You shove your hands in you pockets and jog across the street. John follows you silently.

The door rings as you both step inside. The diner is considerably warmer than outside. The air outside is a little crisper than it had been all summer. That means fall is approaching…and fast.

The interior of this place is nothing special. It looks like a stereotypical diner from the 50’s-all bright colors and jukeboxes and linoleum seating.

A red-headed, middle-aged waitress takes you two over to a booth near the back and hands you some beat-up menus. You order a Cola, John orders a Pepsi. She scratches it down and shuffles away.

“See,” you beam, “perfect seating.”

John turns in his seat to glance out the window. You can still see where Jade and Karkat are seated inside their restaurant. He laughs and turns back to you, smiling.

“And at a much more reasonable price,” you add, holding up the menu to demonstrate what you mean.
You both look over the menu and decide what you want. The whole time, you keep stealing glances over the top of your menu before you realize-

Wait a minute. Wait just a goddamn, fucking minute.

You’re on a date with Egbert.

A smile creeps across your face.

Well yes, under extremely weird circumstances. A date where you spy on another date, but a date none-the-less.

You doubt that’s what John thinks it is. He probably thinks it just you guys hanging out and spying on his sister.

But hey, a guy can dream.

You clear your excited expression, set your menu down, and click your tongue sarcastically.

“Can’t decide what you want over there?”

John has his face buried behind the menu. “Give me a minute!”

~

== > This isn’t a date, John. Calm down.

OF COURSE THIS IS A DATE.

How stupid are you? He’s going to figure you out. It’s extremely obvious isn’t it? You suggesting that you both go out to eat and have a conversation and… STUFF?

You’re never going to come out from behind this menu. You’re going to die of embarrassment right here. Your grave is the linoleum seating and your tombstone is this menu.

“Ready to order?” the waitress asks as she sets your drinks down. You jump in surprise.

“Yeah, I’m feeling breakfast for dinner. I’ll have the French Toast with a big side of Orange Juice,” Dave tells her smoothly. “You, John?”

“Oh, me too. Well, not the French Toast. The breakfast-for-dinner thing… I mean… chocolate chip pancakes… please.” You hand her your tombstone and settle back into your seat as she walks away. Hopefully the flush on your face isn’t too obvious…

“You hot, John?” Dave asks from across the table.

DAMN IT.

“No! No…” you respond too quickly, “I’m fine. Actually, it’s just right in here. It’s outside that’s the problem.”

Dave quirks an eyebrow and leans his chin on his palm. “Oh, really?”

“Yeah, it’s freezing!”

“It’s seventy-five degrees, John.”

“See? Bitter-cold.”

“Whatever you say,” Dave chuckles at you and takes a sip from his drink.

You take a breath. It’s obvious that you’re freaking out. He’s probably caught on by now. You just gotta breathe in and out- everything will be alright and it’ll go smoothly.
After you’ve calmed down substantially, you continue the conversation coolly.

“It’s probably because summer’s almost over and fall’s coming.”

“Makes sense,” Dave responds.

“… That means school is starting up again.”

You can’t see behind his new shades, but you can feel Dave’s gaze shift to you.

“Damn, that’s right. All the little kiddies with their new backpacks and notebooks, loading up on those yellow busses and making their way to the mind-numbing awesomeness that is SCHOOL.”

You laugh a little at the hint of sarcasm in his voice. “Yeah. I wouldn’t mind it.”

“I thought you hated school.”

“High school, yes. Middle school too.” You grimace. You can feel your anxiety increasing. “But that’s not what I’m talking about.” You play with your napkin idly, still not looking at Dave.

“What? You mean college?”

“I guess so.”

There’s a silence as that idea swims around the air in front of you two.

Dave gets really quiet. “You mean… like going away?... to college?”

Your eyes shift to him. His expression is completely unreadable, but he’s considerably tenser.

“…W-… No! I wouldn’t go away. I couldn’t, actually,” you tell him quickly, “I don’t want to.”

You see the corner of his mouth twitch but he shifts again in his seat, more comfortable.

“Then how do you mean go to college?”

“There’s that one downtown,” you offer, “Mercer County College. It’s kinda like this community college. Maybe I’d take some courses down there.”

Dave crosses his arms and starts to nod slowly.

“Downtown, huh?”

“Yeah, I know. I wouldn’t walk, obviously. I’d have to get a bus-pass or something.”

“That’s a 45 minute trip, one way,” Dave tells you.

“I can do it!” you tell him, too enthusiastically.

“Huh,” Dave shifts and twists his mouth like he’s thinking.

“What?”

“What nothing.”

“Dave you’re obviously thinking of something.”

“Am not.”

“I know you better than that.”

“Shut up, no you don’t.”
“Dave!”

Dave leans his head back on the booth and sighs deeply, uncrossing his arms and letting them fall to the side.

“It’s just… coincidental,” he shrugs.

“What is??”

“Promise you won’t tell anyone?” he tells you, still not looking forward. “This shit is secret man. National Security can’t get a hold of this, it’s so secret. Its right up there with the Area 51 secrets, except MORE secret.”

“Tell me!” You lean over and poke him in his stomach impatiently. He starts and goes to guard himself.

“Ok, alright, Jeez.” He rests his arms on the table and sighs again. “Before, this whole thing happened,” he motions to his injured side, “and you guys offered for me to stay with you, I had been looking into some new places to live.”

“You mean, live somewhere other than your Bro’s apartment?”

“Yeah,” he shifts uncomfortably, “That. Anyway, I had found this apartment closer to work that’s reasonably priced. I put a down-payment on it, actually.”

“So… does that mean you’ll be moving out soon?” You can feel your heart sinking. You never wanted to think about him leaving. You guess he had to at some point, but…

“The apartment is about five minutes walking-distance from downtown, John.”

“Oh. So you’re going to be really far away…”

“Oh my god. Do I have to spell this out for you?”

He stares you down, but you feel like a fish flopping out of water.

“Guess so,” he chuckles, “John, I’m saying that if you decide you want to go to college downtown, we could share the apartment.”

What.

What?

WHAT??

“I mean,” he continues, waving his hand, “it’d be a little cramped maybe? We’d have to share a bedroom, but we already do that. And the living room is pretty tiny, the kitchen sink leaks… shit like that. But, you know- it gets the job done.”

You stare down at your hands in your lap. You don’t know what to say.

“Dave-”

“Here ya go, darlin’,” the waitress interrupts cheerily, setting Dave’s OJ down. You almost fall out of your chair she scared you so much.

Once she walks away, you can see Dave looking over at you, smirking. You’re completely flustered- like a deer in headlights- and he knows it.

“You don’t have to answer me right now, John. Just think about it, alright?”

“…Ok. Thanks, Dave.”
“Don’t mention i-OH GODDAMNIT WHERE DID THEY GO?” he rises to his feet suddenly, glaring out the window.

You gape for a second and then move to look out the window too.

The booth that your sister and her date had previously occupied was now taken by another couple.

“We lost them!” you face-palm immediately. “Dave, they probably left for the movie!”

“Shit, lets go!” he mumbles as he pulls a twenty out of his wallet. He turns to the counter where the waitress is. “Can we get that breakfast to go?”

~

= = > Be the French Toast King.

God damn do you love French Toast. Call me the king of French Toast.

The only problem is, your breakfast is cold now.

“John. It’s cold. It’s ruined.”

“Oh pipe down,” he rolls his eyes at you; “It’s not my fault they wouldn’t let you bring it in to the movie. You can heat it in the microwave.”

“Yeah, well it won’t be the same,” you utter viciously, “And it’s Karkat’s damn fault.”

“Don’t blame it on him!” John punches your shoulder lightly, “It’s not his fault.”

“Yes. It is,” you tell him bitterly.


John pushes on the front door and it swings in.

You’re immediately met with a very livid Jade.

“You didn’t think I didn’t see you two there,” she hisses at the both of you. She still has her dress on, which makes her anger about seven times more hilarious. “If I catch either of you spying on my dates again,” she points a finger at John, then you, “I’ll skin you alive. Got it?”

You both raise your hands up in defense. She gives you one final glare, then storms up the stairs.

As soon as she leaves, you both collapse into fits of laughter.

“Oh my god, I can’t believe it worked!” John wheezes.

“Yeah, that was priceless!” you snigger, catching your breath. “Now come on! I’m starving here.”

You both make your way to the kitchen.

“Dad!” John yells into the living room, “We’re back!”

“You boys back already?” you hear him respond. He’s in there, watching some infomercial on tie-stain-cleaner. “How was the movie?”

“Awesome,” you call in, “lots of action and explosions and whatnot.”

“Glad to hear it!” he exclaims before going back to his show.

You empty your styrofoam-packed dinner onto a plate, along with John’s, and shove it into the microwave.
You start to enter the time when John taps you on the shoulder.

“’Sup, John?” you ask, tapping in the numbers.

“I’ll… I’ll be back in a minute, cool?”

“Cool,” you respond, hitting start.

John exits the kitchen and you go to the fridge to find the syrup. You close the door in time to see John making a bee-line for the living room.

Curious, you jog over to the doorway and hide next to it.

“Hey, Dad,” you hear John greet his father.

“Hi son,” you hear him reply happily, “What’s on your mind?”

You can practically picture John standing there in front of his Dad’s armchair, shifting from one foot to another and scratching the back of his head- a nervous tick of his.

“Well, Dad… I’m going to be straightforward with you…”

“What’s wrong?” You can hear Dad shift in his chair. “You can tell me anything, John.”

“….. Dad, I’ve thought about it and… Dad, I want to go to college.”

The microwave behind you beeps through the silence, loud as a gunshot. You’re frozen in place.

You hear his Dad stand up from his chair and approach John. You want to see what’s going on, but you can’t let them know you’re there.

“John,” you hear Dad say cautiously. You hold your breath.

“Yeah, Dad?” You can hear John’s voice quivering.

“John…” more silence. “I’ve never been more proud of you than I am right now.”

You gasp and finally slide into the doorway.

Dad has John in a vice-hug. John is facing the doorway. As soon as he sees you, his smile grows ever wider. He lifts up one hand and gives you a thumbs up.

“Of course you can go, son,” you hear him exclaim.

“Thanks, Dad!”

You fistpump the air.

This is going to be fucking awesome.

Chapter End Notes

Leave me a comment, you lovely people! <3
Broken Pictures, Broken Homes

Chapter Summary

Dave shows John where he used to live.

Chapter Notes

I AM SO SORRY.

I KNOW THIS IS SO LATE BUT YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT MY MONTH WAS LIKE. Crazy. Graduation, finals, the whole thing.

Anyway, it's here now! I'm going to update more regularly, I promise!! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"If we're not back by eight, Dad's gonna kill us. You know what happened last time we were late for dinner."

"Don't you worry your pretty little head, John, we'll be back by then."

"Well you know, it would help put me at ease if you actually told me where we're going."

"Can't do that."

"Dave, c'mon!"

"Dave nothing. It's a surprise, I told you that."

"The last time you told me it was a surprise, I got egged in the face."

"An egging for the Egbert."

"I smelled like egg for days!"

"I thought you liked pranks."

"Well, yeah but only when they're played on others."

"That hardly seems fair. Gotta be able to take what you dish there, John."

You huff and shove your hands back in your jacket pockets, turning your head away from him. Your footsteps fall in rhythm with Dave's on the pavement. The air is a little crisper than before, seeing as it was fall-

and fall is time for school.

You kept your promise- you had signed up for some classes at the community college a week ago. You're surprised they let you sign up this late. Actually, you start your first class a week from today.

Dave, your father, and you had just gone out last week, shopping for things for the new apartment you two were going to be sharing. Your father was so proud that you would be taking this next
step in your life. He admitted he's a little upset that you are going to be leaving him, but he was more than happy to offer buying anything you two would need. You thanked him profusely.

Dave didn't ask for much on the other hand. He would point out a few things he might need, but nothing too important. In fact, he had seemed a little distant during that shopping spree. You had asked him if his side or anything was bothering him, but he just dismissed it with a wave of his hand and some witty comment.

You knew something was up. Regardless, you were taken a bit off guard when he confronted you today and told you that you both needed to take a trip. You felt a bit uneasy about the way he said it. He sounded a little too serious and grave for your liking. You asked where you would be going- to which he responded, "Well I can't ruin the surprise can I?" with a snide smile.

And that's why you're walking out in the middle of the city now- a little closer to dinner-time than comfortable.

For someone who had been seriously injured four weeks ago, he walks pretty fast. Your breath comes out in puffs of white air as you have to work a little more than usual to keep up with his pace. You know his legs are longer than yours, but- this is a little faster than normal. He must be nervous or anxious or something.

"You wanna slow down there, bucko?" you ask him.

He turns to look at you. "You wanna speed up there, squirt?"

You glare at him and brush the hair out of your eyes. "Doesn't your side hurt or anything? I'm not too sure about how soon you've recovered from this whole thing."

He smirks and turns forward again. "You said you wanted to get home before eight, right?"

"Well yes, but-"

"Then can it and hup-two, squirt."

"Stop calling me squirt!"

"Ok, squirt!"

"UGGHH."

You continue at his pace for another five minutes. You think you're never going to get there. That is, before Dave comes to a complete and sudden stop in front of a high-rise apartment building. He stops so quickly, you almost trip trying to stop yourself.

You glance up at the building, unzipping your jacket. (All that walking is making you start to sweat.)

"So. Is this it then? The surprise?"

"Yup." Dave looks down and pats his jean pockets. Finding what he's searching for, he fishes a pair of keys out of his pocket and walks towards the door. You follow silently, still confused.

Inside the dingy lobby is an empty reception desk and some cheesy decorations lining the cheap tables and wallpaper-lined walls. It smells like mold and air-wick freshener in here. The dim, fluorescent glow emitted from the dirty lightbulbs does no justice to hiding the dust that lines every piece of furniture in the room.

"Is this where you live Dave?" you ask as you walk in, trying not to sound terrified "Or… used to live?" You crinkle your nose, taking in the surroundings.

"Yup." He slinks in the doorway after you. "And by the way, I wouldn't take that elevator," he
adds as he sees you start towards the elevator.

"What? Why not?"

He raises his eyebrows over the rims of the shades. "Do you trust that elevator, man?"

You look to the dingy, dented doors and back to him again. On second thought…

"Yeah, no. I guess not. I don't feel like dying today or anything."

"Stairs it is." He turns on his heel and heads towards a door on the other side of the room. You follow.

"What floor do you live on?"

"Ninth floor- best seat in the house."

"Aw, man."

"Hey, suck it up, cupcake. I had to do this almost every day."

---

"Dave, carry me. I can't go on."

"Oh my god, John, they're stairs."

"DAAAAVE."

"STAIRS, JOHN, THEY'RE STAIRS."

You dramatically faint back onto him and he curses loudly. Dave pushes you up the last flight of stairs before you collapse on the top. You're not really tired, you're just throwing in the dramatics for fun. You know it annoys him.

He kicks you when you're down. - "Ow, jeez Dave. I was kidding," you laugh.

"Yeah, yeah whatever. Now get up, ya big baby."

You roll over and get up to follow him down the narrow hallway. The doors are all kinds of different colors and some of them have the numbers falling off. You honestly can't believe Dave would live in a place like this. It makes you sad just seeing the condition of these doors. God knows what it's like behind any of these…

It's honestly a shit-hole. You've never felt happier about taking him in. You almost feel like you saved him in more than one way…

You zone out so hard that you bump into Dave again. You hadn't noticed he'd stopped. He just kinda laughs at you and takes the keys out again, leaving you to drown in your own embarrassment.

The door in front of you is painted a deep, burnt orange with the number '413B' scratched into it. It actually looks a little intimidating- that is, if door could look intimidating.

The door swings open slowly once it's unlocked and Dave slides in.

"Come on, John, I need your help in here," he calls behind him.

You hesitate before entering, but you swing the door open fully in front of you anyway.

It's dark inside when you walk in, but the first thing that hits you is the musty smell. If things could smell quiet and creepy, this apartment would smell silent.
There's something unsettling about this place. Granted, it might be the fact that the lights are still off, but you get the picture.

"Dave!" you call, "Dave, how do I turn the lights on in here?"

"Next to you. On the left," he calls from somewhere within the hallways of the apartment.

You turn and grope along the wall until you find it. The light-switch clicks and the lights burst to life above you.

Once your eyes adjust, you cautiously step a little further into the room. You squint at the white walls- they've been broken and patched up so many places, it looks like a wallpaper pattern. Dents and cracks line them, from the floor to the ceiling. The carpet looks old and has a few stains scattered around.

You walk over by the dusty green couch and line a dent in the wall with your fingers gently. There's blood here. There was a half-assed attempt at washing it away, but it still stands out.

You get the strangest feeling you know who it belongs to. You shiver and turn away.

On a small table, next to the couch is an old picture frame. You pick it up gently and look at the picture behind the dirty glass. The picture itself is black and white and the edges are starting to yellow. It's a picture of a handsome guy, somewhere in his twenties. It's Bro- you know because he has those stupid pointy shades and the baseball cap. The only difference is- he looks genuinely happy. He has less scars and less worry-lines. He's holding a kid. Bro is sitting on the couch holding a toddler with feathery-blonde hair. The kid is beaming up at the camera, waving his bottle full of AJ for the world to see.

You can't help but smirk. That's Dave. It's gotta be. He's wearing overall-jeans and a t-shirt with dinosaurs on it. He's got an identical pair of shades lying on his forehead. He's staring right at the camera with his huge, playful ruby eyes.

They were… so happy- or at least this picture suggests they were at one point. What the hell happened?

Feeling your stomach churn, you put the picture down and turn to face the other side of the room.

Dave's got a sweet entertainment station set up here. TV with surround sound speakers, game systems, media players…

Are those turntables?

You walk briskly over and lay a hand on them, mouth agape. These are the finest you can buy! So expensive… Dave never told you-

"Hands off the property!"

Your hand shoots up to your hair and smooths it back. "I wasn't touching anything!" It comes out a little rushed and panicked.

"Yeah right," Dave comes and stands next to you, "I saw you there, with your dirty, dainty little fingers all over these revolutionary mesas of art." He frowns, turning his attention from you to the tables. "God, I haven't cleaned these off in a while." He runs a finger along the edge of the table to examine the dust. He holds his finger up to his shades and clicks his tongue. "Follow me."

He waltzes over to the kitchen and flips the light on. You do follow him.

A ceiling fan turns on and rotates lazily, dust falling from it as it spins. Dave opens the cabinet under the leaky sink. You can see the rusty pipes along with an array of unlabeled bottles. He pulls one out and holds the liquid up to the light. Satisfied, he closes the door and grabs the paper towels off the counter.
As he walks past you, he asks you to look around and see what food is there while he attends to 'some important business' with his 'baby'.

You boots clack coldly against the tile floor as you meander from cabinet to cabinet, searching for any signs of food. The more and more you look, the greater the frown grows across your face. How long have these cabinets been empty?

Another empty cabinet.

Was there ever any food in this household?

"John!" you hear Dave call, "Come look at this!"

You hurry back out to find him beaming. He's standing up behind the tables now, shades pushed up in his hair and tangling his bangs. He's too involved in setting the levers and switches to their correct positions to care about how he looks. You love the way his eyes are sparking with excitement.

"Wanna hear something totally sick?" He wiggles his eyebrows at you while he plugs his phone into the machine.

You nod solemnly, at a loss for what to say. This place is kinda dampening your mood, but you don't want to risk seeing that smile fleet from his face.

Dave shrugs off his green denim jacket and throws it to the side on the floor. He cracks his knuckles and picks up his headphones. "Have a seat," he tells you as he points to the couch without looking.

You shuffle over and perch on the side of the couch, wringing your hands.

"Dave, we should probably-"

"This'll take five minutes- tops. Just chill out there, ok? And listen to-" he flips up some switches dramatically with a smirk "-THIS."

Bass pours out of the surround sound and you jump, landing back on the couch. You can feel the vibrations in your chest and the drums shake the walls.

You can see Dave laughing behind the booth, holding his headphones on his ears. You've never seen him so happy. He's grinning, laughing, flipping switches, pulling leavers- but his line of sight never seems to leave you. It's like he's watching you for a reaction. You have to admit, this music is pretty great. Well done and well made.

"It's good!" You shoot him a smile and a thumbs up. You sit up and lean on your knees. "But a little loud!"

"What?"

"IT'S A LITTLE LOUD!"

Dave's eyebrows shoot up and he mouths an 'oh'. He turns to the side a hits a red button that stops the music abruptly. The sudden loss of sound and vibrating is almost painful. You adjust to the absence of noise as Dave comes around and leans on the front, crossing his arms.

"You didn't like it."

"What? No, of course I like it. I told you I do."

"Yeah, you did. But you don't like it."

"That's ridiculous."
Neither of you move—just look at each other for a few seconds.

Dave has an epiphany and snaps his fingers. He walks back around to his station. "I got it!"

"What?"

"Something you'll enjoy a little better. More accustomed to your taste."

"My taste?" You wait patiently as he scrolls through his phone, looking for the song he wants.

He smiles and looks up at you expectantly as the song starts.

An upbeat twenties ragtime begins to play and you roll your eyes.

"Oh my god, DAVE. I'm not that big of dork."

"Well newsflash, Egbert! It turns out, you are!" You throw him a glare. He tsks, "Tell me THIS isn't good enough for you either."

You sigh and lean you head on a fist, giving him the most exaggerated look you can muster.

Dave gets tired of waiting and runs out from behind the tables.

"Alright, that's it!" he grabs you by the shoulders, "Come on!"

"Come on, what?" You swat at his hands as he forces you to stand and move to the middle of the room.

"We're dancing. Your mood is absolutely killer right now and I can't stand it. You gotta loosen up."

You gasp, offended. "I am so loose!"

"Are not."

"I swear to God…"

That's when Dave takes your hands in his and swings you around. You yelp and lose your footing, almost tumbling over. Dave keeps you on your feet and begins swaying from side to side, encouraging you to do the same.

With a few grumbles and mumbles about how stupid this is, and a couple 'get your hands off me's, you manage to start dancing along. You can feel your heart racing and your temperature increasing at the thought of dancing with Dave. Your face is blushing madly, but you choose to ignore it and focus on the footwork.

You don't know how long it takes, but you eventually start to enjoy yourself and you really do loosen up. Soon, you're both doing twirls, the Macarena, ballet, and Riverdance. Your favorite was the waltzing, but you'd never admit how nice it felt to put your arms around his shoulders and just dance with him. It was like your arms fit there perfectly or some poetic shit. Being this close to his face again made your stomach do some weird flip-flops.

Dave starts making faces at you, sticking his tongue out and crossing his eyes—so you make a few of your own. Before you know it, the two of you are on the ground in fits of laughter.

You're lying next to Dave, parallel to him. You sigh as your laughter dies down and place a hand on your stomach.

"So why are we here anyway?"

You hear him exhale and throw his hands up.
"Ahhh I dunno," he sighs, "I needed some things. Little things- they're in the box there." He points to the one near the door. "Like my katana. Alarm clock. Some bugs from my collection. I also guess I just wanted to see the old place, y'know?"

"Really?" you ask, a little too skeptical. "Not to bash your childhood memories or anything Dave, but… dude this must have sucked living here."

"Yeah. It did." You can hear him sit up. He looks around. "It sure did. God, I have so many memories in this place though. Good and bad. But mostly bad."

"Hmm." You don't really know what else to say to that. You sit up too and pull your knees to your chest, looking at him. His shades are still up- so the forlorn look on his face is obvious. He's looking from wall to wall, like they're talking to him. Then, he points to the wall behind you.

"See that?"

"What?" You turn to look at the battered wall.

"That. The scratch there."

"Dave there's gotta be a bizillion scratches on that wall."

He ignores you and continues. "That was from the first time I learned how to hold a sword. I was so fuckin clumsy, holy shit. You don't even know."

"How old were you?"

"Four?"

"Four?!"

He laughs. "Yeeaaahh well you know. Bro…" He trails off- his face and expression fell immediately. It was almost like you could see something click behind his eyes. Like he just remembered that his Bro existed again and his world is crashing down around him.

"Uh," you lean forward to place a hand on his shoulder, "Dave?"

"We gotta go." Suddenly, he's up and headed for the door, bending over to pick up the box. "Don't want to be late for dinner."

"Well, hold on there Dave." You scramble to stand and make your way over to him, "Just… hold up a sec."

He stops with his hand on the doorknob, box tucked under the other arm. His head swivels around to face you. His eyes are crinkled, just like they always are when he's trying to hide how upset he is.

Looking at him and how vulnerable he is, you're suddenly confronted with the idea of how difficult it was for him to just be here. This shabby, crappy apartment means nothing to the normal guy. But, to him- it probably means the world. It's where he's lived his entire life. It's practically all he knows. It's just a bunch of rooms, but it's a bunch of rooms filled with scars, echoes of bad times, and loneliness.

He wanted to come to say goodbye. To leave it all behind him.

"I'm waiting, John," Dave calls you back to reality.

Your head snaps up to meet his gaze. His eyes tell you that if you don't leave soon he's going to burst. You can feel your chest throb, but you try to keep your cool.

"I think you might have missed something," you almost whisper. Without giving him a chance to respond, you move back over to that small table with the small frame. You pick it up and walk
over to him slowly.

The look on Dave's face is painful to watch. He watches you approach him like you're on fire. When you finally reach him, you hold the picture up to look again.

Comparing Dave to himself all that time ago is strange. It's like he never changed, physically. He's still got that beautiful, blonde head and the stunning eyes. Yet, everything inside him has changed. All that happiness has become twisted and lost, all that joy has turned into suspicion and mistrust.

You sigh and hold the picture out to him weakly.

You're actually a little surprised when he takes it and looks at it.

But you jump when he flings it across the room.

It hits the wall across from you two and leaves another dent. You can hear the glass shatter as it hits the floor. You turn from the projectile back to your friend. And GOD is he furious- all his rage is concentrated on that picture across the room.

"Oh jeez Dave I'm sorry," you barely get out, shrinking away, "I didn't know! I thought you might want it! That was really stupid of me. Don't be upset, I just-"

His vision snaps once more, back to you. Eyes flaming, fists shaking.

The look he gives you is too much and you can't handle it anymore-

You burst into tears.

～

And just like that, your anger vanishes.

The complete and utter HATE you have for that picture, along with your Bro, is so indescribable at this moment in time that it can't be put into words correctly.

It's like you're drowning, being stung by bees, caught in rush hour traffic, and rolled over by a steam-roller all at the same time. Then- someone slaps you across the face for no reason.

Yet, the thing that really snaps you out of it is John.

Yeah, you're angry- but you take one look at that face… One look at the horrified look on that face as you fling that abomination across the room and lose all your cool, one look from those desperate blue eyes as he cringes away from you- and he cries.

Everything just melts away.

You place the box at your feet quickly and take a step towards him. He tries to shrink away and stutters more apologies as you make your way to him, but you won't stop at anything.

You take his shoulders and pull him into you so you can rest your chin on his head.

"John, oh my god, John, no. It's not you, shhh, it's not you. Please. I'm calm now, ok? I'm ok. You're ok."

He continues to sob, but presses closer to you. You forget from time to time how emotional this guy can be. He's pretty fragile- you always gotta remind yourself of that.

"You.", he can barely talk through all the crying, "This place… you grew up here… horrible… don't be mad… just wanted to help… I'm sorry…"
"Why are you sorry?" you ask as you rub his back, "There's nothing to be sorry for."

You stay there, breathing in the scent of his shampoo until he calms down. You find it a little soothing.

"I'm sorry," you hear him whisper again after a minute or two.

"Dude, I already told you-"

"No, listen to me. I'm sorry you had to go through this, Dave. I don't know what it must have been like living here. I can't even imagine it. I'm…"

"… You're what?"

"I'm so glad I found you."

Your heart does a flip right inside your chest-cavity. You know what he means- he's glad he found you and rescued you from this dump.

Yet, you still kinda hope he means it in the way YOU want it.

"And I'm glad I found you," you retort with a smile, "Saved me from living in this dump." You can feel him nod against your chest, sniffling. "You alright down there?" Another nod. "Good."

You stay like that, but after another minute, John awkwardly unattached himself from you and wipes the tears away with his sleeve.

You lean down to pick up the box again. "Come on, John. Let's get back. Dinner was served twenty minutes ago."

"Shit," you hear him grumble lightly as he opens the door for you.

John walks ahead towards the stairs and you turn around to flick the lights off and close the door.

You don't even look back inside.

---

Later, after a sound berating from Dad and a lesson on punctuality, you two retire to your room to finish packing up John's stuff.

The room is littered with cardboard boxes of all sizes. John's working on sorting some old papers, you're packing books.

"Adventures of Tom Sawyer?" you ask.

"Leave," he tells you.

"Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy?"

"Bring."

"Lord of the Rings?"

"Uh, bring obviously."

"Judy Bloom? Aw shit, man, this is coming."

"Hey, Dave?"

"Yo."

"Come here, I want you to see something."
You sigh and make your way over to his side of the room.

"This better be good, John. Making me walk my fat ass over here. (Hey, John. It's ironic because my ass isn't fat at all)."

"Shut up and look at this."

He shoves a small photograph into your hands and turns away, blushing.

Dad is younger in this picture. His hat and clothes are the same, but he has a different pipe. He's holding a bowl of some yellow-colored Betty Crocker concoction, mixing it. Next to him- god bless his little soul- is little Egbert. He's standing there, dutifully holding the box and reading the direction out loud. His little buck-teeth are more prominent and his hair was much neater. His face was a little chubbier, but still a very skinny kid. He didn't look like the happiest kid in the universe, but he looked content- a small smile etched across his face, as though he had no idea the picture was being taken.

"Well look at you," you draw out, smiling, "A regular casanova right here." John blushes an even deeper hue of red.

"You ever consider modeling, Jonathan?"

"Shut up, Dave," he mutters, still smiling.

"You're just a sucker for the camera, aren't you?"

He swats at you. "Oh my god, STOP."

"You have such chubby little cheeks!"

"Ok, you know what??" he snatches the photo from your hands, "You've officially lost my trust! Back over there in your corner. Back to sorting books now."

You grumble and make your way back over.

A minute of rustling papers passes before you speak again.

"Hey, John."

He sighs impatiently. "Yeah?"

"You should hang that up in the new place. I like it."

After a few seconds he responds. "Ok," he submits as he looks over at you and smiles gently. "Thanks."

You smile back.

God, it needs to be next week. Now.

Chapter End Notes

Leave me a comment please! And let me know if I'm headed in the right direction. <3

LOVE YO FACES.
Who Ya Gonna Call?

Chapter Summary

Wowowowowwwwowow I did the thing.

Chapter Notes

Hello friend! <3
FIRST- I CHANGED MY NAME FROM SKAIANSKIRMISH TO CAPTCHABLOG. The same goes for my tumblr:

www.captcha-blog.tumblr.com

And now, welcome to the part where I try to explain why I haven't been updating so frequently.
I've just recently started a internship with a biotech company near where I live to prepare myself for working in labs in college. So, with all the work I've been doing there on top of enjoying my summer vacation, it's been a little difficult to find the time to update. That's why I just spent the last 3 hours writing this.

In no ways, shape or form am I going to stop updating this fic. It's just that I don't know how frequently it will be. I'm not saying months, but it may not be every week anymore. This fic is getting pretty long and I'm trying to tie up all the loose ends and such.

I really am very thankful for all the support you guys have been giving me and how popular this fic has seemed to be getting.

Anyway, I won't delay any further, please enjoy and don't die too much ok?

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The feel of your lips on his is unlike any other. They're softer than you remember and even smoother than that. You can't help yourself when you bite down gently on the bottom one, coaxing a moan from his throat.

The feel of his warm, freckled shoulders under your hands feels great. More than great. But you have to admit- it's not as great as the shiver that runs up your spine every time his hands move across the small of your back.

You can feel the heat of his skin flush against yours and every twitch in his abdomen or chest as he arches his back. You can feel every hum and moan that he makes. You can feel him kiss you back feverishly and lick your lips. He moves closer to you. Of course- you can never get close enough.

His mouth pressed against yours, his voice deep in his chest, his eyes half lidded- they're all so perfect. You want to sit back and admire them and soak the moment up. But, that would require tearing yourself away from his lips.

"John," you hear him whisper through your lips and onto your tongue, "John-

"John!"
You wake with a start, sit up straight, and scan your bedroom. Boxes. Boxes everywhere. Dave is sound asleep on the cot next to you, you in your bed. He shows no signs of ever having been that close.

You fall back on your pillow, defeated. You knead the heels of your hands into your eyes. You're covered in a cold sweat, your heart is racing.

Your name is John Egbert- and you think you might have a problem.

---

You glare at the ceiling intently. It's still dark, so it's hard to make out. You mean- see it! Observe it? GAH. You're not making out with the ceiling. How do you even- UGH.

You need some time to think and calm down.

Primarily, the question that bounces around inside your skull is: "What the FUCK did I just dream about?" The close runner up was: "Is it possible to have that dream again? 'Cause DAMN."

You're not sure which one worries you more, honestly: the fact that you had that dream, or the fact that you really enjoyed it. ('Cause. You mean… DAMN.)

Should you be feeling guilty about this dream? Should you tell someone? God, no. What would telling someone accomplish? Who would you even tell? Dave? Hell no.

All this secrecy and secret crushing and silent suffering really isn't doing it for you. You wish you had someone to talk to- someone to tell how you… feel… about Dave and what you're going through. You feel like somehow, it might take a load off your shoulders. Maybe they could even give you some advice.

You start considering some people to tell.

There's Jade. But she might get too over-excited and spoil the whole thing by telling a friend or breaking under pressure. (She would punch you in the arm for thinking that, but it's true. Sorry, Jade!)

There's your Dad. But you're not sure if now would be a great time to tell your father that you're moving into an apartment with a boy that you have feelings for. And the whole "telling-him-you-think-you're-gay" part is completely different.

You sigh and roll over on your side, facing Dave. He's facing away from you, so you assume he's sound asleep. You pull the sheets snugly up to your chin.

You're suddenly overwrought by the coldness of your room. You give a fleeting glance to him, part of you wishing you could just go and cuddle up next to him for warmth.

Hell- why not?

You mentally prep yourself for fifteen whole minutes before finally shifting the sheets down and padding silently over to Dave's cot.

"Dave," you whisper. He doesn't move. Maybe you should just leave him alone?

Nope. You promised yourself you'd do this- so you're doin' this. You cross your arms over your bare torso. "Dave." … "Daaaaave." You reach out briefly and poke his head.

Dave jumps suddenly and slowly turns to face you. You can feel your heart pounding in your chest. He leans on an elbow so he's kind of sitting upright.

"What? Huh?" he asks, giving a big yawn, "Who died?" He looks at you with sleep-heavy eyes. "Was it me? Is this heaven?" He wiggles his eyebrows. "Are you an angel?"
"No, shut up," you push him lightly, heart racing at that last comment. You heard your voice waver and cringe inwardly. "I'm cold."

He just stares at you. "Then why did you get out of bed, dumbass?"

You inwardly panic for a second. Maybe this wasn't such a great idea.

"Cause I was cold over there and I wanted to come over here. Duh."

He stares at you again, but doesn't say anything. Even without his shades, he emotes nothing. The longer he stays silent, the more anxious you become and begin to regret this decision.

Finally, Dave sighs and smirks. "Alright then, come on."

You try to keep back a smile as he lifts up the sheets for you to get in. You do get in- and it's just as warm as you hoped it was. You shift right over next to him so you're kind of snuggling right into his side.

This feels so great and so right in so many ways. You're comfortable here.

You look up at him when you settle in and give him a genuine smile.

He smiles back.

"Now don't get too comfy there, Egbert. I'm doing you a huge favor. Do you know how many ladies would kill to be in your position? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Take a picture- but I won't sign anything. No autographs."

He reaches over you for his shades on the bedside table. You stop his arm.

"No shades."

Confused look. "Why not?"

"Because I said so! Plus you have to hold up your end of the deal- remember?"

Dave sighs a tsks at you. You reward him by attacking him with your cold feet. He yelps and you laugh.

"You're such a pain." He's smiling anyway.

"I know."

It's then that Dave throws an arm over you and huffs contently, subconsciously burying his face in your hair. Maybe it was consciously- you don't know. You're left to drown in the sound of your own heartbeats mixed with his as Dave quickly falls asleep again. Dave's like a human furnace. He keeps you nice and warm and it's… nice.

You find yourself drifting off again, just before the room gets light.

---

"John?"

Rose is perched on her favorite stool behind the counter, as always. Her hair is smoothed back into a deep red hairband that matches her blouse and lips. There's a mix of genuine surprise and question mixed in her expression upon seeing you enter her store.

She places the book on the counter and leans onto it with one arm. "Well come in, don't be a stranger."

You enter from the doorway and make your way over to her. Just act cool. Nothing's changed.
"Hey, Rose," you smile to her, shrugging out of your jacket, "Haven't been here in a while, I guess."

"Hm," she hums in agreement, a small smirk on her lips, "That you haven't. I suppose your time is consumed caring for David."

"Hehe, yeah," you laugh, "He can be quite the drama queen. So demanding."

"Oh, I completely understand," she rolls her eyes. She straightens up and grabs a notepad. "Coffee?"

"Please," you tell her as you bring the closest chair up to the counter to sit next to her.

She scribbles something down and turns to the window to place it on the rack. She comes back and sits down, facing you.

"How are things? Haven't heard much from either of you- other than the occasional text."

"Yeah," you agree, "and I guess since you guys gave Dave the month off, you haven't seen much of him either."

She nods solemnly. "I do miss having some people to talk with. Sociable coworkers."

"Hey!" you hear someone shout from the back.

"I said sociable, dear!" Rose yells to Karkat over her shoulder. "That excludes you. Don't eavesdrop or I'll dropkick you so hard you'll be seeing the future."

"Fuck you," he replies.

She shakes her head and returns to you. "Yes, I do get some texts from David once in a while, asking if we need help. But honestly, we never do and I don't want him exerting and harming himself at all. I'm sure he's going to milk this vacation for all it's worth." She smirks lightly.

You scratch your arm absent-mindedly. "He's doing a lot better, honestly! He's up and around the house, so I guess he's able to walk and run. Plus he helps cook sometimes and does some laundry. I'm sure he'll be back working here within the next week." You look up to the ceiling. "Rose, he may bitch and moan that he doesn't want to come back, but the truth is- he misses you guys and I can tell."

She actually smiles back at you. "Well, that's great to hear. I look forward to torturing him about it."

You laugh as Karkat comes around the corner with some coffee for you and Rose.

"When Strider comes back," he pipes up, "I will personally kick his scrawny can for dumping all this shitty work on me. I've had to work countless double shifts because of that little shit." He sets the coffees down in front of you two and turns to you. "Speaking of this upcoming week, aren't you guys moving soon? To that new apartment?"

Rose coughs politely. "Hey Karkat, is it going to rain on Friday?"

"What the fuck? How am I supposed to-"

Rose stands and poses to kick him. "Ready to tell me?"

"Alright, shit, I'm going." He scurries back behind the door.

She sits back down as you laugh at his priceless expression. She then prompts you to tell you about the move.
"Well! Tomorrow's the day!" you tell her confidently while adding sugar to your cup. "Everything is packed and ready to go."

"Got everything you need? All of your papers are sorted out?"

"Yes, Rose. Sheesh. You know you're kind of like a brooding mother."

"I've been told that," she tells you after sipping her coffee. "Can't ever be too sure, you know?"

"Right," you roll your eyes and take a sip of your own.

"And how is Dave taking all of this?"

You take a second to word your answer. "He's alright. Nothing's changed about him. I'm sure he's a bit nervous, right? I mean, anyone would be nervous moving from one place to another. The thought of actually paying my own bills and rent now scares the shit outta me! But you know Dave- covering up his feelings with word-vomit and shitty raps."

"Don't I," she tsks as she drinks again.

A kind of awkward silence falls over the two of you. You fill it with slow sips and glances around the room.

"So what do you REALLY want to talk to me about?" Rose asks suddenly, making you jump.

You tug at the hem of your shirt nervously, "Well I-"

"Without the bullshit excuses, John." She doesn't even look at you. She's reaching over to grab some biscuits from a jar across the counter. "Why are you here?"

Damn, she's good. You came to the right place.

"Rose, I think I might be gay," you blurt out suddenly.

"Forward," she chuckles. She breaks one of her biscuits in half. "Yes, I think you are too."

You stare at her, mouth agape. She finally looks back at you and rolls her eyes.

"There's nothing WRONG with that John. I never said there was anything wrong with you being gay. I just," she dips one half of the biscuit into her coffee and shrugs, "had a feeling."

"Well I know there's nothing WRONG with it Rose, but… A feeling?" She nods and bites into the dripping cookie. "And you didn't tell me because…?"

She almost chokes on the biscuit and places a hand in front of her mouth. "You wanted me to TELL you that I believe you're gay?" You nod feverishly. "John, that's the most preposterous thing I've ever heard." She clears her throat and moves her hand away. "What if I had been wrong?"

"You're never wrong," you whine.

"Yes, that is true," she smiles devilishly, "Honestly? The real reason is that I wanted you to figure it out on your own."

You take a stubborn sip from your coffee and knit your eyebrows together, focusing on the floor in front of you.

"Well, ok then," you sigh, "So I've figured out I'm gay."

"How?"

"How what?"
"What made you realize that you are?"

You hear a quiet sob. You take a shaky sip and swallow thickly- staring into the cup.

"John?"

With a deep breath, you turn back to her. "That's the reason I'm here today." She raises her eyebrows. "I like someone."

"Oh stop shitting me already. It's obviously Dave."

"You don't-" you start, blushing wildly.

"Oh my go- oh my god, sweet lord," Rose rubs at her temples, "grant me the patience- who the fuck ELSE could it be?"

You exhale and slump forward on the counter, throwing your arms in front of you. "Rose, does this make me a bad person?" you squeak, muffled by the counter.

You hear a sigh and jump when you feel her pet your head. "Of course it doesn't."

You roll your head over so you can face her. "How?"

"John, you're allowed to love whoever you want."

You go back to muffling yourself in the counter. "But. God, he's my best friend, Rose."

"I know," she soothes, "I know. And that makes it harder for you to accept, correct?"

You nod curtly. "Yeah. I must be putting him through hell. How can I do that to my best friend?"

"What do you mean? You haven't done anything."

"… That's not entirely true, Rose."

Her hand falters. "What happened?"

"We may or may not have… kissed."

"When?"

"It was only once." You turn your head again. "The day we brought him home after the incident." Rose is watching you intently now, and it's making you a little uncomfortable, but you continue anyway. "He was crying. I felt so bad for him and on top of that… I don't know, Rose. I felt something else too. I can't exactly describe it. But all I know is that I wanted to kiss him, real bad. So, I did." You shrug lightly. "We haven't talked about it since."

Rose sits back against the wall and just watches you.

"What was the kiss like?"

"Fuckin' great." She nods for you to continue. "Well I don't know. It wasn't just, like, one? We kissed for a while. It was kinda slow and careful and we only stopped when we started to fall asleep and Rose I don't really see how this matters?"

"Hmm." You wait patiently for an answer. "John, I have some good news and bad news for you."

"Alright, hit me with the good news first." You sit back up and face her.

"The good news is: congratulations, John. He likes you back."

"What? How the ever-loving fuck could you know that?" You can feel your heart beating out of
your chest- Rose is never wrong.

She smirks and crosses her arms. "If he didn't want to kiss you, he would have stopped you or confronted you about it. Dave is far too awkward to tell anyone how he feels unless it's telling someone off."

Oh, fuck that actually makes sense.

"And now for the bad news." She reaches out and slaps you hard across the head. "The bad news is you're a fucking moron."

"OOOOW," you spring back, immediately rubbing the spot, "Rose!"

"Why haven't you talked to him about it? Are you stupid? Did your brain get gnawed out by insects?" She's practically shouting above you, assaulting you.

"I'm sorry," you yell above her attacks, "I was too nervous! I lost my nerves, I couldn't do it!"


You throw an arm up and back off the chair. "I'm going to I'm going to I'm going to! Just-"

WHAM "Oh, shit! Stop that!"

She defiantly throws the book back down on the counter and crosses her arms again. She glares at you as you sit down.

"Now, I don't want you barging back into your house and confessing your love for him up and down the hallways," she scowls, "You need to find the perfect time to tell him."

You wince at her. "When is that?"

She sighs and softens up. "You'll know. Trust me."

It's at that exact moment your phone goes off. You shimmy it out of your back pocket and look at the text:

FROM: Dad

Son, please come home for dinner promptly. Also, I have a surprise for both you and Dave.

"Rose, I'm sorry but my Dad wants me home," you tell her as you shove your phone back in your pocket.

"I understand." She stands and straightens her blouse. You go to pay her and she refuses. She motions towards the door and walks you to it.

Once you reach it, you turn and scoop Rose up into a hug. It may be the first time you've genuinely surprised her.

"Thank you, Rose," you grin, "I really needed that."

"Anytime, John," she pats you on the back, "My door is always open."

You put her down and push the door out, waving to her as you leave.
You find your Dad and Dave sitting in the kitchen. When you enter, they both cease talking and look up at you.

"Son!" your Dad smiles, pipe in his mouth, "Come join us!"

You gladly do, pulling a chair out next to Dave and sitting down. Dave is still in his pajamas, but he's wearing the shades. He gives you a punch to the shoulder in acknowledgement and you both face forward.

"You two are growing up fast," your Dad starts, and it takes everything in your willpower not to roll your eyes, "and I'm proud of both of you. I know you're both going to grow to be a pair of intelligent, young men." His grin spreads wider and he leans one elbow on the table. "I got you each a present to show you just how happy I am to be your father." You turn and grin at Dave, who smirks back at you.

He stands and exits the room. You both sit there, totally confused. Should you follow him? Stay here?

Before you can do anything, he returns with a small package. "John first!" He places it in front of you and settles back into his chair.

You carefully pick up the light present and tear the paper until you're left with a small box. When you open it, inside are a pair of keys. You look up at him, completely confused.

"With you two going off and living on your own in the city and you, John, going to college, I thought you might want an easier way to travel around the city."

Your brain is short-circuiting. "You... you're giving me your car?"

Your dad grins even wider and blows a puff of smoke. "Exactly. I don't need it as much as you do anymore. I've even taken the liberty of paying for your parking space for the first year. I know you've earned i-"

He can't even finish his sentence before you're practically tackling him into a hug across the table. He hugs you back and he smells like tobacco and shaving cream.

"Thank you, Dad," you whisper. You're going to miss living with him. He pats your back and he knows.

"You're welcome, son."

You settle back in your chair and gingerly place the keys back in the box.

All attention turns to Dave.

And he's squirming.

You know he's uncomfortable with presents. He never knows how to repay the debt, even though he doesn't have to. Growing up with his Bro, he's probably never received presents and never had to give any. This is new for him. You reach over and squeeze his shoulder securely and he stops moving in his chair.

"Dave," your Dad starts, "You are quite the talented young musician."

"Yeah," he replies.

You can't help but snort- that cocky son of a bitch. He knows his music is good.

Your Dad just looks at him across the table, smiling. "Follow me."

This time, when he rises, so do you two. He walks over to the garage door. All of your boxes are stored in there, ready to be loaded up tomorrow.
Your Dad places one hand idly on his pipe. "They weren't easy to get, but here you go." He reaches out and opens the door.

Sitting in the corner of the garage, amongst the boxes, is Dave's turntables and mixing gear.

The noise that Dave makes is absolutely unreal. It's like a squeal and a shout were caught and died in his throat. You can see his hands clench up and face skewer into a half-emotion.


He lifts his shades up off his face and back into his hair. He stumbles over to the tables and practically lies on top of them, face still stuck in his half-emotion limbo.

"You can bring those with you to your new apartment now," your Dad tells him. "It's all taken care of." Dad chuckles and pats you on the back. "I'll be in the kitchen finishing dinner. Twenty minutes."

"OHMYGODTHANKYOU," Dave blurts across the garage. You can hear your Dad guffaw as he moves back into the kitchen.

When he's gone, you quickly move over to Dave. "Dude, you ok?"

He jumps down and brings you into a bone-crushing hug.

"John, I've never been so happy." You can feel him smiling into your shoulder. "This is going to be so great."

You rub his back and smile. "I know."

~~~~~

"And that's it, John!"

Your name is Dave Strider, and you just dropped the last box off in your new living area.

You take a good look around the room. The walls are actually a nice white color. Boxes line every inch of the walls in here, the bedroom, the bathroom, and the kitchen. It'll take you a good week to unload everything.

John pokes his head out from the bedroom, hair disheveled and glasses askew.

"The elevator seriously had to break TODAY," he mumbles for the hundredth time, "and you had to get the apartment on the top floor."

"Hey. It's all part of the Strider way of life," you point to yourself. "Plus, it's good exercise. Gets those hamstrings looking healthy."

John rolls his eyes. "Well, Mr. Hamstrings, the bed fits, but it's a tight squeeze. The dresser will have to go next to the closet."

"Fine, whatever," you wave it off, opening a box, "just as long as you don't start putting your shitty posters up."

"Too bad I already did."

"You're shitting me. Let me see."

You muscle your way past John into the bedroom, ignoring his protests. The large bed is placed below the windows on the farthest wall, already set with sheets and a comforter and pillows. The curtains mask much of the dim, evening light coming through the glass. The room is smaller now,
with the bed put in place, but it's good enough. The dresser will fit just fine next to the closet and-

Oh hell no.

"John," you ask calmly.

"What?" he asks.

"What is Matthew McConaughey doing on the ceiling?" A poster with his face sits directly above the bed, on the ceiling.

John pouts at you. "I like him there!" he points out dejectedly, "I think he belongs there."

"Oh, fuck no. That's coming down right now." You start for the bed.

"No," John pulls at the back of your shirt, "He's staying."

"Like hell he is," you start climbing onto the bed, sneakers be damned. "There is no way I'm falling asleep at night with that monster's unbearable mug staring at me like some kind of creeper."

"He's not creepy," John whines, climbing after you, "Leave him alone!"

"Nope. Down he comes, toppling like Jack down the fucking hill." You reach out for the poster, only to have John grab your arm.

"Over my dead body!" he yells.

Soon enough he's tackling you, doing anything he can to stop you from reaching that poster. He's like a kicking and screaming child who just won't give up.

"John, let go of me! Don't make me-"

"Make you what? Tear down my beloved poster? Never!"

He jumps you at the same time you jump him and you both collapse into a heap on the bed. The poster catches on your hand at the same time and comes tumbling down after you.

You both hear a riiiiip and stop still.

You're kneeling on the bed, John trapped on his back under you. Your fists, balled up with each half of the poster, is on either side of John's head, so you're leaning over him.

You start panicking.

"Oh… shit. John. John. I'm sorry I- Look, I'm sorry I didn't know it would tear like that."

John looks up at you with his huge eyes. You stutter your apologies to a stop.

"John, I'll buy you a new poster. I promise. Shit, I'll just-"

You start shifting off him, but John brings his hands up and holds your arms there. You look back at him. You don't know whether he's about to start crying or throwing punches. His face- he's not emoting. You brace yourself for whatever's about to come your way.

"John, I-"

"Dave, I think I'm falling in love with you."

Chapter End Notes
Ok though seriously, I already have this next part sorta written so I KNOW WHERE IM GOING WITH THIS ONE.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE leave me a comment or anything! I really appreciate your feedback and opinions- it's what helps me improve.

My tumblr! www.captcha-blog.tumblr.com

Have a lovely day, and I'll update soon!
Wow is it Chapter 16 already? Time for Make-Outs!

Chapter Summary

I stayed up all night writing this
You better like it.

Chapter Notes

Well jeez just look at the title. That should be enough of a dead giveaway :P

As always, I'm so happy to see how much popularity this fic has been gaining! It's truly lovely and I don't know what I would do without all of your support and comments and general HAPPINESS UGH IM SORRY JUST READ ABOUT MY BBYS OK

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dave hasn't moved for a good minute. He's still kneeling over you on the bed, a hand on either side of your head, torn poster now tossed to one side of it.

Honestly, you think you broke him. He's just leaning over you. You haven't moved an inch, your heart is pounding like crazy, and your head is spinning.

You inhale when he moves his shades to his forehead slowly. His eyes are wide and he's practically shaking. So are you, for the record.

Maybe now wasn't the most ideal time to have-

Dave swallows audibly and leans closer.

"John," his voice is raspy and thick. His eyes are searching your face. "I'm going to need to you say that to me one more time."

Your head is reeling and you feel faint, but you clear your throat anyway.

"Dave," your voice cracks but you continue anyway, "I think I'm falling in love w-

"Just so we're clear: if you're fucking with me right now John- if this is one of your pranks, I swear to JESUS I will-"

"Dave!" You reach up suddenly and place your right hand on his chest. This stops him short and causes him to freeze up again. You look him in the eye- and there's noticeable tinge of red shading his face now.

You take another deep breath. "I'm not kidding you." You give him a half-nervous, half-terrified smile.

He shifts his weight to his left arm next to your head and uses his right hand to cover yours on his chest. He takes your fingers in his own and starts rubbing them anxiously.

"You're serious," he deadpans.
“S-serious,” you stutter as your voice wavers. You swallow thickly and stare up at him. You think you're paralyzed.

You can practically feel your friendship dangling on a string this very moment. He's staring at you and you're staring at him. Without his shades, you can see a million emotions come and go, come and go. He flickers from suspicion to shock and everywhere in-between.

After what seems like an hour, but was most likely a minute, Dave buries his face in his own shoulder, squeezes your hand, and gives a kind of mix between a cough and a laugh that shakes his entire body.

"John, I…” he mumbles into his shoulder. He laughs again.

Your heart drops.

"Yeah?” you respond. He's still clutching your hand to his chest, so you wiggle your fingers a little to get his attention.

He looks up and he's giving you a big smile. "Well shit, John. I just don't know how to respond to that- give me a minute, will ya?"

"Oh.” You look up at him smiling down at you. You feel so ashamed and embarrassed. He doesn't know what to say…

He doesn't say anything, just looks at you. He continues rubbing and smoothing your hand with his own, like he's repeatedly making sure its there.

About another minute passes- just like that. Him looking over your face and smiling- not saying a damn word. You feel so uncomfortable and so unsure of yourself- so sure that you'd done something wrong or crossed some kind of line. All the tension builds and builds in your chest and the pressure threatens to spill over into something unwanted. The suspension is killing you.

You open your mouth to say something, but it comes out as a choked sob. Before you know it, there are tears rolling down your cheeks.

Dave gives a surprised noise. He places your hand back on your chest and moves his to the side of your face and swipes the tears away with his thumb, rubbing your cheek softly.

"Hey,” he whispers down, smiling a little kinder, "You should stop doing that."

You give him a mixture of a laugh and a sob, trying to cover your face, "God, I'm sorry-"

He bats your hands away and shushes you. "I said stop that."

You take quivering breath and let it out slowly. You tears are staring to fog up your glasses and it's annoying. You reach up to take your them off.

He stops your with his hand and you give him a questioning look.

"I'm just taking off my glasses," you mumble to him.

"I know," he tells you, smirking, "but I wanna do it." With a shy, incoherent thanks, you slowly put your hand back and let him do it.

He finally bends the left arm he had been supporting himself with it and rests on his elbows on either side of your head. His face is considerably, considerably closer to yours now. His chest is almost touching yours now and it's suddenly harder to breath.

He just reaches up and slides the frames off your face silently. Once they're off, he throws them to the side with the destroyed poster, never once looking away from you. He goes back to rubbing your cheek again, and it feels nice. It helps you calm down. You close your eyes and just let him.
"Well, John." He's quiet-spoken and calculated. Like he's rehearsed this. "Listen up- 'cause I'm only gonna tell you this once. Got it? Right. Well, that thing you said earlier? Yeah, like two minutes ago. That thing."

You open your eyes and search his. Your eyes must be all swollen and splotchy after the random waterworks, but you don't care. You want to see his face.

"Yeah, Dave?"

He looks taken aback by your sudden searching gaze. "Oh. Well- I just wanted to… say… um…"

You can see something click in his eyes as he tapers off. His smile grows more determined and he moves a hand to your back.

"Ah, fuck it," he mumbles quickly as he pull you up and brings his mouth to yours.

You jump, but mold your mouth to his and you both sigh audibly.

He tilts his head and tightens the grip on your back. He tangles his other hand in your hair, bringing you closer. You grab his hair likewise and throw an arm around his back, bringing him down so his chest is to yours.

This feels absolutely right.

After a minute of just holding each other and moving your lips together, Dave hesitantly licks at your lips and you can't help the gasp that escapes, muffled and stolen by his own lips. Taking that as encouragement, he gently nips and sucks at your bottom lip. He even starts tracing even circles with his hand on your back.

You make a noise half between a giggle and moan and tighten your grip on him. You move so you can tangle you legs with his. Soon you're both breathing heavily, bruising each other's lips with deep kisses and gentle licks and touches.

When you both finally pull away, you're both gasping for breath. You lean against each other for support, your faces squished up against each others' in a comical manner. You're both still clinging tight to each other.

You slowly move back and look up at him-

~

And oh, you are so done for. Those eyes will be the death of you. He looks at you like you're the greatest prize in the world- and it makes your heart swell. That little shit.

You shift so you can pull him to your chest and cradle him there. You smile down at him and kiss the bridge of his nose, his forehead, his eyes- and he lets you. He LETS you.

You're both smiling like idiots. Obviously. You mean… look at this! Look at… oh jesus dicks there are no words for this. You're shocked and surprised but so happy and relieved and glad to know that these feelings… these feelings for John are mutual. You don't have to hide it or doubt it anymore. You would flip your shit and do some pirouettes or something, but you've got more important things to attend to.

John lazily nuzzles your neck and your heart skips a beat. You lean in to kiss the top of his head again when you feel him start kissing your collarbone. You shiver and pull him closer.

You can feel the puff of breath against your skin as he laughs. "You ticklish there, huh?" He asks between small kisses. He's obviously not worried about being nervous anymore…
You flush brightly and bury your face in his wiry hair. "Shut up."

He squirms and gives you a devilish look before nuzzling back and licking a stripe from your neck to your ear. You just about lose your shit.

"Whoa there, Egbert," you tell him shakily, "Baby steps, there, buddy."

He buries his face once again and laughs. No doubt his face is about as flushed as yours. He grips you shirt tight and snuggles in tight. You smile contentedly and hug him even closer.

"Well. Look at us." You play absently with a strand of his hair. "Huh?"

"Hmmphh," he mumbles into you. He pulls his face up to look at you with those blue puppy-dog-resemblant eyes. "Not to be, er, forward or anything but… what is us exactly?"

Oh. Shit.

You bring your arms from around you and cup his face gently. With that, he smiles, and leans up to kiss you gently. When he does, you feel like your heart is going to fill up your chest cavity and explode and spill out.

Instead, you kiss him with a force that takes him by surprise. He squeaks when you roll onto your back and pull him on top of you. He turns a bright red that makes you grin immensely against the kiss. You comb his hair back with your hands and lick his lips again, to which you feel his entire body shiver.

When you pull away, he's watching you intently. You bring your forehead to his. "Does that answer your question?"

He pretends to ponder it, snaking his arms around your neck carefully.

"Hmmmmm," he rolls his eyes, "I'm not sure I get the message yet." He grins and tilts his head. "What was it again?"

"You little shit," you crush him in a hug. He squeaks and laughs his stupid little laugh until you kiss him again and again.

---

An hour later, you're both still clinging to each other- legs tangled and hands brushing hair and faces and necks.

John's almost asleep now. You're peppering light kisses across his face- a light smile lighting his sleepy features.

He opens his eyes slowly and you stop.

"Dave. I don't think-"

You give him a puzzled look. "You don't think what?"

"To what I said earlier," he pulls back to look at you.

You start to panic, you want to grab him back. "I don't understand, John."

He gives you a sleepy, sarcastic look. He leans up and kisses your forehead. "Don't panic, numb nuts. I had said 'I think I'm falling in love with you'. I don't THINK, Dave. I am."

You look at him increduulously. He grabs your hand and brings it to his face. He leans into it. "I am falling in love with you, Dave." He looks up at you. "Hell, I AM in love with you. Everything about you, really. Like how you never seem to shut up- you even talk in your sleep, you brush your teeth after every meal…" He brings a hand to your face now. "You take care of me. You
care about me more than anyone else has. You-

He doesn't have time to finish because you needed to kiss the fuck out of him.

When you two are finally out of breath again, hair and shirts disheveled, lips swollen, do you say what's on your mind.

"John, I-

He looks at you with those wide eyes and you get that rush you need to say:

"I-," you hover right over his lips, "I love you, John," you tell him as you kiss him softly. John sighs happily into it and puts his arms around your waist.

~

Your name is Rose Lalonde and you're just opening for business when you get a text.

*From: David*

*hey so there's very big chance that i'm not coming in today*

You grimace at the screen. Why would he need the day off after a whole month off? You type away at the keyboard quickly, walking over to the counter.

*To: David*

*And may I ask why you need this day off after so many?*

After cleaning the counters and tables, sorting the cookies in the display and sorting out the cash register, you receive a picture message. You're a little confused, but you hit 'accept' anyway.

You behold the picture on the screen and, you must say, it's difficult to contain yourself. You're just about in fits of laughter when Karkat arrives for his shift.

"What the fuck are you laughing at?" he grimaces, "It's too goddamn early to be laughing."

You compose yourself and motion for him to come over. "Come see for yourself!"

Karkat rolls his eyes, shrugs his jacket off, and meanders over to where you're seated on the counter. He sits next to you and grabs the phone from your hands. He takes one look at the screen and his nose scrunches up.

"Why the everloving FUCK would I laugh at that shit?" he yells as he shoves the phone back in your hands and storms into the kitchen. "Jesus dicks! Can that guy keep his personal life personal, or does he just share every goddamn aspect of his life?

You grin and shout behind you, "Oh, let him be happy." You smile at the screen again. "I knew everything would work out between those two."

The screen displays a small picture of Dave with John, asleep, cuddled up to his chest and clinging tightly to Dave's shirt. The shot was taken from above, Dave giving a hearty 'thumbs-up' to the camera. He looks like he's won a million dollars and then some.

"So does this mean they're, like, a THING now?" you hear Karkat yell from back in the kitchen.

You close your phone and shove it back in your skirt pocket. "I assume so. I guess we'll get the full story on Monday."

"Monday? I thought he was coming in today?"

"There's absolutely no chance he's showing up today, Karkat. You're going to have to stay a little
"WHAT?? WHAT THE SHIT?! I'M TIRED OF COVERING HIS ASS!"

You grab a prepackaged cinnamon bun and hurl it in his direction. You hear a successful 'thump' followed by a cry of anger.

"That's enough!" you yell back, "Don't test me, you whiny bitch, and let the man be happy!"

You go about your business cleaning the floors, coming up with a list of detailed questions to ask David later.

~

Your name is Dirk Strider and you're wondering how Dave is.

You're running through the jungle at top speed, trying to keep up with Jake. But, you know what you're doing- katana trailing after you like second nature- so you allow your mind to wander.

How is he doing?

Has he healed completely yet?

Where is he staying?

Is there even a remote chance he'll ever forgive you?

"Watch out!"

You narrowly flash step to the right, avoiding a large tree trunk that would have sent you sprawling. You skid to a complete stop and impale your sword in the ground. By the time Jake runs back to you, you're shimmying your gloves off.

"Dirk, for gods sake! Watch where you're running! You nearly took a great big spill back there," he eyes you worriedly. "Everything alright?"

"Yeah, yeah," you tell him, shrugging your shoulder and stretching your neck. It's hot out. Hotter than hot. You're already sweating pretty considerably and you've only been at it for an hour. Jake, on the other hand, is still dry and energetic- ready for more 'adventure'. You're just not used to these condition.

"Something weighing on your mind?" he asks, "Is it Dave again?"

He reaches out to cup your face, and you let him. He guides your head so you're looking at him.

You had ditched your shades and shirt a while ago- they were only making the task more difficult. He could see right into your freakishly orange-glowing eyes and, therefore, your mind.

He searched until he found what he wanted. He sighed and smiled at you lightly.

"Do you want to go home?"

You hang your head and consider.

You've been gone at least a month now. Is that enough time for him to cool down? Is that enough time for you to have cooled down? You don't want to explode again. You don't want to risk-

"I'm going to go with 'Yes, Jake. I would very much like to go home and see my son," he fills in for you, smiling like a goofball.

You grin in his general direction. "Took the words right outta my mouth, English."
Jake kind of laughs and moves forward to peck you on the mouth.

"Well. We just need more time. More time here. If not for your own benefit, for mine. Huh? Two more weeks? Three?"

You look at him quietly. You can’t say no to him.

"Three weeks."

"Splendid!" He punches you lightly on the shoulder. "Well, we're finished here. Time to head back I suppose. Come on!"

You jog to catch up with him. When you do, he throws an arm around your shoulder and you both stroll back to Jake's enormous mansion in the middle of nowhere.

Jake is rambling about what they’re going to be eating for dinner and what the plans for the afternoon are. He talks about the clouds in the sky and what shape they are and what that must signify for upcoming weather.

The whole time, you're thinking about the impending confrontation between you and Dave. And feeling nervous about it.

God, you hope he's ok.

Chapter End Notes

as always PLEASE LEAVE ME A COMMENT ILL LOVE YOU FOREVER <3
(feel free to inbox me on tumblr though!)

www.captcha-blog.tumblr.com
A Warning

Chapter Summary

I have too much free time over here.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry for the delay. Let me explain.

For those of you who don't know yet, I am in Ireland, without consistent wifi, for two weeks. I do have plenty of time to write, but when I do find wifi, it's unexpected and I never have my laptop with me! BUT NOW I DO.

This chapter is so big... I don't even...

Just enjoy, my friends. And prepare yourselves.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The early, Sunday morning sun shines down and reflects off the dark pavement, but the air is crisp. There isn't a cloud in the sky and the breeze rustles the strands of hair over your shades.

You look down at the paper in your hands. This seriously can't be it. It has to be a joke.

You glance back up at the run-down building in front of you once more. The glass panes in the windows are barely hanging on, roof tiles line the gutters, and the paint is chipping. It looks like one of those run-down, abandoned liquor stores- forgotten off the side of the busy interstate.

You heave a sigh and fold the paper up and place it in your back pocket. You lock the car behind you and shove the keys into your pocket along with your fists.

The dirty glass door displays the crooked, broken sign: 'Sorry, We're Closed!' You disregard it and shoulder your way past the door as it opens with reluctance.

The lights are humming quietly. The AC is blasting. There's really no need for it anymore, seeing as it's sweatshirt season now. The leaves had started turning about a week ago, along with the warm weather. You had bundled up in your own loose red sweatshirt with the chewed-up drawstrings before you left the apartment.

The ceiling is lined with cheap-y looking decorations you'd find at the dollar store. There's a few strings of Christmas lights and, what you guess, are Valentines Day decorations still floating around. Neon lights advertising several brands of beer are hung on the poorly-painted, yellow walls.

Mirrors are sprinkled here and there, covering the walls from ceiling to floor. They're all clouded over with a grime that seems to coat the place. It's like moving through the air covers you with this soot or filth that you can't quite shake off. It gives you a bitter taste. There's a jukebox over in the corner, pushing out some crackly Elvis hits.

To your left is something you could classify as a dance floor. The floorboards are nailed together tightly, some overlapping. It takes up about half of the spacious room. There are dents and spills lining the floor, but with the amount of people that must traipse it over the night, it isn't that
noticeable. Up at the front of the floor is a raised platform with a fold-out table sitting on top. It's small and flimsy looking, but you could probably work with it if you had to.

"Hey, kid!" The call is dull drone that almost doesn't catch your attention.

You turn your head slightly to find an overweight, middle-age, regular douche-bag standing behind the oak counter. That must be the bar. Glasses are hanging above his head and old, dusty bottles sit behind him in a cabinet. There are bottles scattered all over the counter from the previous night, caps lining the floor beneath it. The guy's taking a drag from a cigarette, nursing a gin and tonic, and ignoring the mess around him. The smoke from his cigarette swirls around the tip and evaporates into the dingy air above- absorbed by the grease lining the walls. He himself seems to be a part of this place. He's got the white collared shirt, complete with mysterious stains and yellowed armpits, greasy mustache, and enormous eyebrows to seal the deal.

You nod your head once over to him, indicating your acknowledgement.

"We're closed," he growls, a puff of smoke falling from his jaw, "Get out."

You bring one hand from your pocket to push your shades further up your nose before quickly shoving it back in.

"Rude," you scoff at him, "You didn't even let me explain why I'm here, pops."


You squint, though he can't see that. The thought of drinking again makes you cringe. "I don't wan any of your cheap-ass liquor."

"Then what?"

"I'm here about the job."

He chuckles again before taking another gulp of his drink, finishing it off. He slams it down on the counter.

"Which one?"

"Night music."

He leans forward against the counter with one arm and holding the cigarette up with the other.

"Experience?"

"Some."

"Any other jobs I should know about?"

"A day job, but it wouldn't clash with this one. I checked."

He crinkles his nose and scours towards the ceiling.

"I dunno, kid. You're a little young."

"So are half the people comin' in here for drinks every night."

His eyes flick back down to you. He doesn't even laugh once, never moving or taking his eyes off you.

"What's your name, kid?"

You shift from one foot to the other. "Strider."
He coughs and puts his cigarette out right on the counter.

"I like you, kid."

You relax a bit, but not entirely. You've said all the right things so far, but you're not in yet.

He makes his way to the end of the counter, stepping around it. He settles back, leaning against the counter. He starts picking at his fingernails.

"You brought anything for me to evaluate or somethin'?"

"Sure, my stuff's back in the car."

He nods towards the door, continuing his picking.

You waste no time getting out the door and unlocking the car. You pop the trunk open and behold all of your equipment. You silently thank John for the millionth time, letting you borrow the car for the day.

"Alright," you mutter, picking your first mix-table up and smoothing your fingers over the edge, "Don't let me down, baby."

You pull it out completely and make your first trip back.

---

Five minutes later, everything is set to go.

Your hands are shaking as you bring up the first track on your playlist. Your mind is racing, but you keep a calm about yourself- you can't tip this guy off. He's sitting back behind the bar again, wiping some dirty glasses down and glancing up at you every once in a while.

"Alright," you shout back at him, "I'm all set."

"That was quick," he muses out loud, setting the glass down, "Go 'head then."

You take a deep breath, shimmy the headphones up to your ears and hit play.

/ If you wanna get with me, there's some things you gotta know, /
/ I like my beats fast and my bass down low. /

The table starts jumping with the bass. You curse internally and bring a hand down to steady it. You use your free hand to adjust the sliders to stabilize the noise pouring from the speakers. You increase the bass and mess with the treble, locking it when it's just right. You add your own tune over it. You nod your head in time with the rhythm, but never once look up at the guy.

The room shakes uneasily from the low bass tones and some dust is even falling from the ceiling above and covering your setup. You try your best to ignore it and just go with it.

You breathe a little easier when the first song finishes and transitions smoothly into the next bass-drop.

/ Ladies and gentlemen, /
/ Fasten your seat-belts. /

You close your eyes and try your best to imagine the place dark and crowded- people covering the dance floor, singing and swaying in time. You spin one of your records and the tempo picks up to just the right pace.

Before you know it, it's over and you're lifting the headphones off and shutting the system down.
When you look up, the guy's right there below the stand. He doesn't look elated, but he doesn't exactly look disappointed either.

"You start Friday, eleven to two." He turns and makes his way back across the room. "Saturdays and tuesdays are nine to one. Can you do that?"

"Sure, yeah," you tell him, hand lingering idly at your headphones. You're ecstatic, but you won't show it. You tell yourself to save the victories for when you're safe back in the car.

The guy finally makes it back to the bar and lights another cigarette before continuing his glass-polishing.

"I expect you to be here 'bout an hour before start time," he tells you slowly, "While you're working, drinks are on me, but don't get too cocky, alright?"

"Yeah, I got it," you tell him as you quickly dissemble your equipment, "Don't get cocky."

"And," he leans forward a little, "The more people you bring in, the better I like you." He places the glass down. "The better I like you, the better you get paid."

You look up at him as you pick up the first mix-table. "And how much am I getting paid now?"

He chuckles. "We'll see how you do on Friday, kid. Then we'll talk."

You shrug. "Fair enough."

---

"So, how'd it go?" John inquires as he leans over the counter. He nearly knocks several jars over in the process and mumbles an apology.

You wipe your hands on your apron and smirk over the register. "I don't know. How do you think it went?"

He smiles back at you and pouts mockingly. He paps your face lightly. "It's ok, Dave. The world just isn't ready for your level of brilliance yet."

You smack him quickly with your towel. "Funny. Very hilarious, John. I'm glad you have such confidence in me."

"Wha-hey!" He rubs at his arm. He gives you that hurt-puppy look that you can't resist.

You roll your eyes and fold the towel back up. "Yes, you incredible dork, I got the job."

"Really? And it's not gonna conflict with you working here?"

"Yes. And nope."

"I knew you could do it," he quips, "Good job, Mr. DJ." He leans over the counter to give you a quick peck on the lips. You smile and return the gesture.

Over in the corner, you both hear an elderly man scoff audibly at the two of you. He mumbles something under his breath at his newspaper and takes a sip from his latte.

Your head snaps up and you lock eyes with John. His eyes are growing wider by the second.

You look over to the guy and step around the counter and stand next to John, slinging an arm around his waist.

"Excuse me, guy, you're gonna have to speak up," you yell over to him, "I couldn't quite hear you."
John's turning absolutely red next to you. He's mortified at what you might say, but doesn't stop you in the end.

The guy peers over at you again, eyes squinted and mouth set in a firm line. "Some people are trying to relax," he tells you defiantly, "Don't need two pansies like yourselves ruining the atmosphere."

The other customers in the place are looking now, intrigued by the scene folding out in front of them.

Ohhhh, shit. This is happening.

Your first step of action is turning your back on this guy and facing John. He his hands up to his face, covering it, but behind it you can see his face is red.

"Dave," he tells you, "let's just go home." His voice is quivering and he's starting to shake. "I don't want to do this right now."

You heave a sigh and place your hands on his shoulders, rubbing them up and down. "Hey, hey. Look at me."

He lowers his hands down slightly and turns his eyes to you. They're watery and frightened.

God, it makes you so angry.

This isn't the first time it's happened either.

Ever since you two started holding hands and kissing in public, give or take about a month and a half ago, you've had this problem from time to time. Usually it's just people staring. You can ignore it easily, and with a little help, so can John. However, from time to time, someone will make a remark or make a gesture or say something under their breath. You're quick to lash out at them, and John lets you. Sometimes he has to hold you back. He'll give you a light tug or squeeze your hand and bring you back to reality. But, secretly, you know that he gets just as much satisfaction from watching you bitch them out.

This time is no different from any of the others. Why does he look so terrified?

You lean forward and kiss him on the forehead. "I got this, ok?"

He nods once and sighs. "Ok. Don't overdo it."

"No promises." You turn and face the guy, ready to rip him a new one.

You take a step forward and open your mouth to say something, but the kitchen door next to you opens and Rose slides out. She's looks over at you and raises a hand for you to stop. She's got that smile on her face-

Shit's about to hit the proverbial fan.

You take an easy step back to the counter, trying to keep quiet. You wrap your arms around John, drawing him close.

John gives you a confused look, but you don't take your eyes off Rose. "Dave, I thought you-"

"Shh."

He looks taken aback. "But Dave, what's going on?"

"Don't get too close, John. Just stay back here." You smile and squeeze him tighter. "Everything's gonna be great." You kiss his head again and he relaxes a little, watching Rose now too.

Rose finally reaches the man's table and smiles sweetly. "Is there anything I can help you with?"
The man lowers his newspaper and eyes her carefully.

"Actually, yes, if you don't mind."

Rose's eyebrow subtly quirks.

To anyone else, it's nothing.

To you, it's a sign to run for the fucking hills.

Karkat's saddled up to the window now, leaning on the edge with both arms and smirking evilly.

"That guy's gonna wish he never fucking stepped foot in this place."

"Shh!" You motion back at him to shut up.

Rose calmly smooths her immaculate apron over her skirt and sits down in the chair opposite him. The sun from the window glints off her hair perfectly.

"So, what is it that I can help you with today?"

The guy scoffs and straightens out his paper again. "Those two goddamned pansies over there need to stop all that PDA. It's unsettling. They can go in the back kitchen to do that if they want, but not where there's customers."

John twitches with just about every emphasis he makes. You idly rub his arm again and again, murmuring, "It's ok, it's alright, John, don't worry, I'm here."

Rose tilts her head slightly and sighs. "Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that, sir. What is your name?"

"George Findlay."

She smiles again. "Mr. Findlay, I apologize from the depth of my heart. It truly bleeds for you."

He gives her a weird look. "Well, it's alright. Just be sure that it's taken care of."

"Oh, I assure you, it will be!" she exclaims, placing a hand on the table, "I really am sorry. And for a moment, she does look sorry.

But you know better.

"Its… it's alright just-"

"Sorry, that is, that you're a homophobic abomination." She smiles sweetly. "You cowering, inconsiderate dickwad."

The man looks up from his paper. "Come again, young lady?"

"Mr. Findlay," you can see her demeanor shifting gradually, "You are truly the most disgusting kind of person. And I really am sorry for that. I cannot ask you to stay here. Please be on your way."

(("Little fucker better do as she says," Karkat quips quietly.))

The man lowers his paper again and gives her the most shocked look he can muster. "Now listen here, girl, I would like to speak to whoever is in char-"

"I'M in charge," she barks at him, "And if you've got a problem with THAT too, then fuck you, sir. Leave. Now."

The place is actually dead quiet now. Everyone's watching.
"Now, please." She crosses her arms and glares at him. "Don't make me ask twice."

("She never asks twice," Karkat and you mutter together.)

The man sputters and looks around for some kind of backup. Nothing happens.

Rose stands abruptly and snatches his newspaper from his hands with finesse. She folds it up quickly and slams it down on the table. His latte shakes and nearly topples over. She leans over the table and gets right in his face.

"I said NOW." Her face is dark and her eyes are sparking.

The man quickly stands, grabs all of his belongings, and shuffles out the door without a word.

Rose slowly turns and faces the rest of the restaurant, cool demeanor returned to her features.

"Does anyone else have an issue with my friends exchanging kisses?" She eyes everyone individually. When no one responds or moves, she straightens up. "Good. Please don't let me disturb your afternoon. Let it be a pleasant one."

She breezes back over to you and John, peaceful smile intact. Karkat jumps and resumes whatever he was doing before, getting way out of her way.

"John," she lays a hand on his head, "I'm going to make you some tea. Sit down for a while and try to breathe."

He looks up at her and nods uneasily, settling down on the stool next to you. As Rose walks away, you move to stand in front of him.

"John? Hey, John come on." You reach up and brush some of his hair from his eyes. "Come on, he's gone. You're alright."

"Fuck that guy," he says shakily, never looking up from the ground. "God, just. Fuck him."

You laugh uneasily. "Yeah, man. Fuck that guy."

John laughs too, but it's bitter and doesn't quite reach his eyes.

"Hey. What's wrong? You usually don't get this worked up about this kind of thing," you ask him, sitting down next to him.

He huffs. "I'm not worked up."

You reach around and tap him on the other shoulder. He jumps off the stool and stands protectively, glancing around nervously. You laugh and pull him to you again, kissing the top of his head.

"Yeah, and I'm Nic Cage. Try again. What's up?"

He grumbles and sits back on his stool again. "It's stupid."

"It's not stupid."

"It is though."

"Try me."

He sighs and kicks at the bottom of his stool while worrying his bottom lip. "I dunno. It's like, every time someone does that," he motions towards where the jackass was sitting, "or makes some kind of comment, I feel like-" he purses his lips and kicks especially hard.

"Like what?" you egg him on.
"Like you might not want to hold hands or kiss or anything outside of the apartment anymore. I dunno."

You glare right at him.

"John, that's incredibly stupid."

He looks at you incredulously. "See?! I am being stupid."

You roll your eyes and grab his arm, dragging him off the stool, despite his protests.

You bring him over to the kitchen doors and drag him through. Once you're safely inside, you turn and push your shades up onto your head, turning and regarding him with a serious expression.

"I'm sorry. You're not stupid, John," you tell him. He stands there, shuffling and searching your eyes. "They are." You point back out past the doors. "They're the stupid ones- the ones that make fun of us or are too ignorant to let us be happy or do our own thing."

"Yeah," he counters, reaching his hands up to his face and rubbing his eyes with worry, "but still, the stuff they say-"

You huff unhappily. You've had enough of this nonsense.

You grab his hands out of the way and press your lips to his. He jumps in surprise, but calms down after a second. When he collects himself, he throws his arms around your shoulders, draws closer to you, and makes a satisfied noise against your lips. Your grin slightly, rubbing circles into his back soothingly. He's going to be alright.

You break the kiss and look him in the eye, brushing a out-of-place hair back. He smiles a little, pressing his forehead to yours, but never breaking eye-contact.

"Um…"

John all but jumps out of his skin at the sudden intrusion. You both turn your heads at the same time, never moving from your position.

Karkat and Rose are standing there, a plate of cupcakes in Karkat's hands and a teapot in Rose's. Karkat looks a little out-of-place, Rose is smiling. Karkat's gaze switches back and forth between the both of you, awkwardly, and finally settles on you. He grunts.

"Strider."

You clear your throat. "Yeah?"

"Your eyes are red."

You exhale sharply. You remember Karkat's the only one who hasn't seen it yet. "Yeah."

"…They're fucking red."

"Yeah, thanks for the update there, Chuckles."

He looks back and forth between you both again, dazed. Rose just shakes her head and huffs a contented sigh, placing the teapot down on a nearby table.

You still haven't moved your arms from around John and he hasn't removed his arms from your neck.

Actually, you think he stopped breathing a while ago. You give John a protective squeeze, reminding him to start breathing again.
This is rather awkward.

"Come on, Karkat," Rose grabs his arm with her free hand, "We need to do something over in the other room."

Neither of them say another word as she drags him out.

John removes his arms and tries to untangle himself, spurring apologies. You hold him to you steadfast.

"Yeah, no, I wasn't finished, Jonathan," you mutter into his hairline as his head is turned.

He groans something about that not being his name, lets his arms find their way back around your neck, and lets his head fall onto your shoulder. That must be uncomfortable with his glasses crushed up against his face like that.

"God, why does today suck so much?" you hear him grumble unhappily into your neck.

"John, I don't want you beating yourself up about this. It's taken care of. Done and over with," you tell him, "You saw it. Rose kicked his ass. You don't need to worry about it anymore."

He doesn't respond, so you pull him off of you completely and hold him at arms length. He looks up at you with those melancholy eyes and you try your best to give him a genuine smile. "Ok? Can you do that for me? Stop worrying about it so much?"

He sniffs a little, letting his arms just dangle at his sides. "I guess." He still looks broken up, and that won't do.

You drop your grip from his shoulders to take his hands and hold them up in-between you.

"You see this?" you ask him, smiling softly. He nods. "What am I doing, John?"

He lets his gaze fall on the hands in front of him. "You're holding my hands," he responds plainly.

"That's right," you tell him, "And I'm not gonna stop anytime soon. No son of a bitch is going to talk me out of it. Hell, take a crowbar to it. Get some of that sick-nasty ACME stuff you see that Wiley-guy running around with all the time. You're gonna need all you can get because this," you shake the hands for emphasis, "ain't stopping anytime soon. You're stuck in this Strider's vice-grip. Five-ever."

John laughs a little at that. And this time, it reaches those wonderful eyes of his.

"Got it?" You shake the hands again. "Did it get into that little pea-brain of yours? Cause I can never tell. Sometimes I think there's just this white static that runs non-stop in your-"

"Yeah, Dave, yeah, I got it," he rolls his eyes and blushes moderately. "Not lettin' go."

"Good." You pull him closer and kiss him on the nose. "Now let go of my hands so I can get back to work."

He bumps his forehead against yours. "Loser."

"Don't even hate," you scold him.

~

Your name is John Egbert and your hands are still shaking a little.

You try and shake the feeling, walking briskly down the paved street. Other people pass you, but you don't look up from the ground to notice them. You shift the paper bag in your arm to the other and zip your sweatshirt up. It's getting a little darker out, so you pick up the pace again.
After the incident at the coffee shop, Rose had forced you to sit down and finish at least two cups of tea. You really appreciate how well they treated you, even Karkat. He might have even gone a whole two minutes without insulting you once. That's saying something.

You really hope you weren't overreacting in any way to what the guy said. Judging from how brashly Dave and the others reacted to it, you don't think you were. But then again, you always second guess yourself too.

It's just that what he said… God, it really got your blood pumping, you know? It made you angry that someone would take how you feel about him and twist it like that, but it also made you afraid that Dave might see reason in what they say. Then, he wouldn't want to be with you anymore and all of this would be taken from you in an instant.

You shake your head and pull yourself from the daze. No- Dave told you to stop thinking about it. He probably knew that this was what you were going to do- think about it incessantly and find a way to blame yourself for it somehow. And really, it isn't your fault. How could it be? That guy was just a stubborn, prejudiced, pig-headed jerk.

Plus, there's no way whatever he or anyone says could pull Dave away from you. Dave's just as stubborn as that guy. You smile absently at the sidewalk, thinking about what Dave had said. He was never going to let go of your hands. You clench your free hand slightly, remembering how tightly he had held it while the whole thing went down. Your face flushed just the tiniest bit, warming you a little bit as you walked the chilly distance back to the apartment.

You had let Dave borrow the car for the day, and that's why you're walking the several blocks home from the grocery store. You didn't mind much, even if it was a little windy. You enjoyed the way it pushed your hair out of the way and played with the leaves at your feet. It was distracting and calming.

You wonder what-

"Well! You're right near impossible to find, old chap!"

Suddenly, there's a muscular arm thrown around you and their feet fall into rhythm with your own. Your heart is about to burst out of your chest from pure shock. You flinch, almost dropping the bag, and open your mouth in surprise.

"Please do everyone a favor and don't yell," the stranger asks you, "I don't think that would end very well, now would it?"

You gulp impossibly, continuing walking with a stutter in your step. It's just some drunk guy or something. Maybe if you don't say anything he'll leave you alone or-

"John Egbert, yes?" he asks turning and flashing a brilliant smile at you. He's got to be over thirty-five. His glasses are strangely similar to yours and his smile is too white against his tan skin and dark hair.

His british accent makes your name sound strange. You hesitantly nod, heart-rate still accelerating.

He utters a triumphant 'Ah!' and faces forward, never retracting his arm. "We need to have a good, long chat. Any good restaurants around here? Hm?"

"---"

You sit, in a daze, across from the stranger in a cafe you both stumbled upon a few minutes ago.

You have no idea what the fuck is happening, who the fuck this guy is, what the fuck he wants with you, and why the fuck you're still here. Your head is a swimming mess of questions, none of which have been answered, but certainly should be!
You clutch your bag of groceries closer to you as the waiter pours some water out for the both of you. He gives you a weird look before handing you both menus and walking off. Yours sits untouched in front of you as you stare down the man across you.

You're not sure why he's wearing those pants. They're way too small for him, and it's intimidating. He's busying himself with looking over the small menu, an idle smile on his face. He needs to stop being so goddamned happy and let you leave already.

After a minute, he puts the menu down and you jump, not noticing you had been staring at him. He looks back up at you. His eyes are like Jade's, big and green, but his are darker and a little more worn around the edges. Yet, they still maintain a youthfulness about them.

"I'm not going to harm you in any way. I just want to talk, old chap. No funny business." He smiles, like it solves everything.

You don't dignify that with a response, just clutch the bag tighter.

His lips quirk downward a bit. "I assume you want to know why I've sort of kidnapped you, in a way."

"No shit, Sherlock." Your voice cracks a little, and you flinch internally, but remain stoic.

He smirks and offers you a hand. "I'm Jake English. Pleasure to finally meet you."

You look at the hand apprehensively. You may be a little shell-shocked, but you're a gentleman, so you shift the bag and offer your own.

"You already know who I am then," you tell him, retracting your hand after a strong shake.

"Oh, yes!" He sort of chuckles, going for his drink again. That makes the hair on your neck stand up straight.

"Really?"

"Yes!" He never stops smiling through the sip. You give him a look.

He snaps the fingers of his free hand, gulping whatever was left in his mouth. When he finishes, he leans forward.

"Oh, bollocks! I forgot. I'm a friend of Dirk Strider's!"

Ok, you've heard enough.

You bolt to stand up and run, but there's a hand keeping you where you sit.

"I thought you might have that reaction." He tsks, frowning like you've disappointed him. "At least hear what I have to say before you storm out on me."

"No."

"You haven't even let me-"

"I said no, Mr. English," you glare at him, hoping he finally gets the message.

He quirk an eyebrow. "It's about Dave, if that sweetens the pot at all for you."

You can feel the bile rising in your throat. Of course it is.

He smirks as you finally settle back down, putting the bag on the floor next to you. "Atta lad, there we are!"

You grimace, crossing your arms. "What about Dave?"
He leans back again. "Let me explain first." He motions forward, "May I?" You shrug- you guess you're stuck here anyway. Might as well play his game.

He clears his throat. "I am business partners with the aforementioned Dirk Strider, or as you probably know him better, 'Bro'. I've taken the liberty of sending him away for a while. No thanks needed, my boy. I have it covered! He and Dave both needed to cool down in light of some recent events, from what I've heard, that you were involved in." You nod curtly, so he continues. "I've been keeping him there and postponing his return to the best of my abilities. Gosh, he thinks I'm back here on a business trip right now." He smirks a little. "He just can't stop thinking about that company. Anyway, as you can tell, I'm not here on business. I've come in search of you."

"Why?"

"Well to warn you, of course."

You freeze up. "That sounds like a threat."

"What? Heavens, no, it's not a threat at all!" He laughs a little, but it doesn't put you at ease.

"Then what are you warning me about."

He places his water down and leans against the table. "You care deeply for Dave, right? You want what's best for him?"

You stare at the table, trying your hardest not to blush. "I don't really have the right to decide what's best for-"

"Oh, please John, don't try and fool me," he shakes his head, "I know the tell-tale signs of one engaged with a Strider in a romantic way."

"Oh yeah?" you respond skeptically, "Why's that?"

"Well I am one of those people!" he responds way too cheerfully.

You deadpan. "You're joking. You seriously expect me to believe that you and Di-"

He raises a finger. "Ah! Let's not get sidetracked here. You care about Dave? Yes or no?"

"Well, yes," you tell him reluctantly, "but you and Di-"

"Then I need you to do something for me," he interrupts you, "It's very important."

You finally uncross your arms and lean them on the table. "What?"

He points at you. "I need you to have a talk with Dirk."

"No."

"But-"

"No."

"John, you're being-"

"Fuck, no."

"LISTEN."

You laugh half-heartedly. Bitterly. "There's no chance in hell that's happening. I won't let him near me."

Jake leans back and runs a hand through his hair. "Boy, howdy. You're not making this easy." He
leans his head back. "Why can't everyone just stop being so block-headed and get along for once?" He looks back at you. "Why can't things be simple for once, hm?"

"It's not simple," you practically hiss at him, "Dirk loses his temper. He's reckless and can't be trusted. He obviously doesn't give a shit about Dave. He said so himself! And then abandoning him like tha-"

Jake slams his fist on the table and you jump, all boldness scared out of you. His kind face is stone-hard now. His eyes gleam behind his spectacles.

"You better watch your tongue, Egbert," he leans in close. "Have you any idea how fucking difficult Dirk has it? Has it ever occurred to you what this story is like from the father's perspective? Has it gotten through your thick skull yet that maybe, just maybe, this isn't a black and white case? That there may be more than one guilty party here?"

You don't move, just watch him and listen.

"Maybe if you heard his side of the story, things would be a little different."

The words ring in your ears.

He stands abruptly and you shift in your seat. "But," he shrugs, "It's not like you had a say in this anyway. You'll talk to him. Soon. That's why I came to warn you. I can't stop it. I know how he thinks. He's probably itching to get to know you."

He turns and starts to walk away.

You stand, pushing the chair back in the process. "Why me? Why me of all people?"

He stops again, turns around and walks back to you. He's smiling again.

"Honestly, John. It's pretty obvious. Think- you're dating a Strider now too. You've got to learn to know how they think. See, here's how it works-"

He paints a picture for you with his hands as he talks.

"I can't promise Dirk won't sneak away on a business trip of his own. But I can promise you when it does happen, and it will happen, he won't be ready to talk to Dave yet. Not a snowball's chance in hell, he won't! He won't even so much as tip Dave off to the fact that he's back. It's probably for the best… Plus, Dirk's too smart for that! He knows that if he goes after Dave, or if Dave knows he's back, it'll only end in a catastrophe to beat all others. So, where does he turn next? Who knows his little Dave almost as much as he does?" He looks away, pretending to be pensive. He looks back to you and gives you a sarcastic surprised look. "Oh, would you look at that! It's you!"

He grins again. "The minute that jet hits land here, he's going to track you down!"

No.

"Yes, I can humbly guarantee that that's what's going to happen." He winks at you. "If I had to guess, I'd say."

No.

"You have one month."

No.

He turns back around and starts walking away again, waving an enthusiastic 'Goodbye!'

No.

You grab your bag and run.
"You have one month," echoes behind you as you run down the street, terrified.

Nonononononono.

---

You sit in the elevator of your apartment complex. You try to breathe in and out. In and out.

*The minute that jet hits land here, he's going to track you down!*

In, out. You step off of the elevator.

*Oh, would you look at that! It's you!*

In, out. The keys are in the doorknob. You push the door open and flick the light on.

You throw the bag on the counter. Your head feels like it could burst and you don't feel too great. You run to the bathroom, forgetting to close the door behind you.

You heave up whatever was in your stomach. Your eyes swim and you grasp onto the porcelain in front of you. It's cool in contrast to your heated skin.

You barely hear the front door open and close again.


His voice gets closer and closer. You see him step into the doorway out of the corner of your eye.

"Oh, shit, John!" He carefully walks up, lightly placing a hand on your back. "Dude, what happened?"

You groan, reaching out and grabbing the front of his shirt. You gotta tell him. You have to.

"Dave- ughh- bluuhh-" You feel another wave of nausea. "I have to- You have to-" You shiver and fall into him as he crouches beside you.

"John, you're scaring the fuck outta me right now. What do you need? Should I call someone?"

He's trying his best to hold you up. You can't see his face straight, but his shades are pushed back and you can see his eyes are wide in terror. They're gentle and concerned.

You close your eyes and remember what Jake said.

*He won't even so much as tip Dave off to the fact that he's back. It's probably for the best. It'll only end in a catastrophe to beat all others."

"Come on John, at least give me a sign you aren't dying, here. What is it?" He presses a kiss to your forehead after smoothing your hair back. You open your eyes again.

You can't do this to him.

"Sample food at the store," you tell him weakly.

He searches your face and you hope desperately that he buys it.

He groans and sags his head back. "John, I told you about that shit! What did I say?"

You laugh weakly. "I couldn't resist."

"Well now look at you, you stupid ass," he scolds you. "Come on, let's get you to bed. There's only one thing that can solve this, and that would be a healthy dose of snuggling it up with yours truly. And maybe some Tums. Come on, I'll bring the waste basket for you."
He helps you up steadily with one arm and grabs the waste basket, as promised, with the other. You both shuffle over to the bedroom and he pulls the covers back before plopping you down.

"Feet up, John," he tells you as he pulls the covers back over and up to your chin. You comply, at a loss for what else to do. You're just settling in when he jogs over to the other side and jumps in. He shifts over to your side and practically scoops you up into him. You curl into him immediately and let all your muscles uncoil.

You inhale his scent and all but melt into the warmness around you. You're so glad to be near him again, where you're safe. You feel him slip his own and your glasses off and throw them over to the nightstand. He soothes your hair back and over again and again, picking up a steady rhythm.

"Hey," he whispers into your hair, "Remember that time I was sick and you hummed some stuff to me 'till I felt better?"

You nod, ruffling the fabric of his shirt. You're not capable of words at the moment.

"Well get ready, John, cause I'm about to blow your socks off with these sick beats. Prepare yourself."

You sort of shake with a half-hearted laugh, but you can't bring yourself to laugh for real. You feel sick, completely and utterly worn out. In a sad, sorry state, you decide to throw everything that just happened out the fucking window and melt into Dave. He's really the only thing you care about right now.

He starts humming. It's a tune you recognize.

"Hey," you smile up weakly at him, "I know this one."

He smiles down at you and continues humming. It's 'Showtime'. It plucks at some of your heartstrings to know he remembered it.

It's nice hearing his humming with your head against his chest.

Soon enough, you're feeling a little better and drifting off, putting all thoughts of tonight's events in the back of your mind. You listen to the sound of Dave's humming, accompanied by his heartbeat. You don't have to look to tell he's smiling.

Everything's going to be fine. You don't need to worry about Jake English. You don't have to worry about Dirk.

Jake English can take his one month and shove it.

~

Your name is Jake English, and it has been three days since your visit back in Texas and your confrontation with John Egbert.

You are currently walking back into your house after a much-needed hike over to the old ruins. You had received some mixed up signals from over there, indicating either something big had been discovered, or something was tapering with the wiring over there.

It was the wiring.

You sigh as you push the large wooden doors inwards. You had to fight off an ungodly amount of small, ferocious white fairy-bulls, or "tinker-bulls", just to fix the bloody thing. You were exhausted and in need of a shower.

You climb the many steps up to the main room, where you're surprised to find Dirk. He's over by the fireplace, a book opened in his lap- forgotten. He's staring at the fire in the old, stone fireplace.
You make your way over to him and he hardly moves. You clasp one hand down on his shoulder and he still doesn't budge.

"You alright, there?" you ask.

He doesn't respond, only moves his hand thoughtfully to his lips, worrying them a bit. He does that when he's deep in thought or worried about something. The orange flames reflect off of his shades, pushed back in his hair. The fire bounces and rolls in his eyes, adding to the color already there.

You sigh. "There's something off about you today, and I can't seem to pin it, Dirk. Tell me what's up, huh? I'm here to help."

He does look up at you, now. He moves both of his arms to the armrests and settles back into the chair comfortably.

"Jake."

"Yes, Dirk?"

"The boy that Dave's staying with…" He tilts his head slightly, "John Egbert." His mouth quirks downwards at the side. "What do you know about him?"

You shrug. "Not much," you lie, "other than the fact that he was taking care of him when we left."

At that, Dirk tsks and slumps a little more in the chair. He's such a child…

"You worry too much," you chide him, a small smirk on your face. "I'm sure he's fine with him."

Dirk hums in agreement, but doesn't sound convinced. You shake your head and sigh.

"I'm going up for a quick shower," you tell him, "Two ticks." You lean forward and kiss him lightly. He returns the kiss, lifting one hand to touch your shoulder.

You eventually pull back and smile. When he returns it, you turn and head up the stairs.

You don't have to look back as you climb the stairs to know he's looking back in that fire.

"One month," you mutter under your breath, "And your month starts now, John Egbert."

Chapter End Notes

MWYYESHHH I HOPE IVE DONE RIGHT.

Please leave me a comment, telling me your thoughts. <3 I love yall, and thank you for your patience!
You rouse from your light sleep and can’t help the shiver that wracks your body.

You pull the covers up closer to your chin, blocking the cold draft echoing across your room. It’s so fucking cold in here. You wouldn’t have bought this place if the guy had told you it was like the motherfucking ice-tundra when it wasn’t summer.

Squirming uncomfortably, you shimmy closer to the warm body next to you and- shit, wait, it’s empty.

You groan and sit up slowly, rubbing at the side of your face. You throw the warm covers off of yourself and immediately start to regret it. The cold of the room hits you full force, seeing as you were dumb enough to sleep in your boxers. You can’t help but mutter a curse as you slowly rise and place your bare feet on the unforgiving floor.

You shuffle over to the door, rubbing your bare arms with your hands, trying to warm yourself up some. You open the door, turning your drowsy attention across the room. You sigh and stumble over to the desk where John’s sitting.

“John,” you mumble, “John what are you doing up? It’s three in the fucking-”

You pause when he doesn’t respond. You shift around to look at him.

He’s passed out, books open in front of him. He’s got his chin cradled in one hand, the other still
holding a pen. He’s drooling a little onto his hand and snoring lightly. He even left the desk light on.

You can help but smirk as you lean over and turn the light off. This is the third time this week that he’s done this.

You lean in closer to him and rub soothingly at the back of his neck.

“Hey,” you whisper carefully, “wake up.”

John snorts as his head rolls off his hand and-

WHAM

-it hits the desk. He doesn’t move from that position for a second, and it takes everything in you not to laugh. You can hear him groan as he rolls his head to the side and peers up at you.

You laugh anyway as you lean down, face level with his. His eyes are cloudy with sleep behind his skewed glasses and he’s got a blush forming, embarrassed from slipping up in front of you.

“I fell asleep,” he points out dumbly.

“Yes, you did,” you snicker. “Now come on,” you rub at the back of his head, “The desk probably isn’t the greatest place to sleep.”

He groans and turns his face into his open textbook.

“I have a test though,” he moans, “and I gotta-”

“Egbert,” you warn, “you’ve been studying all day. Give it a rest already.”

“But-”

You’re having none of that. You wrap your arms around his torso and lift. You can’t exactly carry him, but you drag him back towards the bedroom.

“Is this kidnapping? This is kidnapping,” he grumbles into your shoulder as he squirms, “You’re making me leave against my will. I should call the police.”

“Fine,” you tell him, “You asked for it.”

Before he can register what’s going on, you let go and he crumbles into a heap on the floor.

“Shit, ow!” he complains as he rolls over and glares up at you. “What the fuck, Dave? That was unnecessary.”

“So’s your bitching,” you cross your arms and look back down at him. “Now you gonna cooperate this time or are you just gonna stay down there tonight?”

He huffs and rolls over on his side so he can’t look at you.

You scoff. “That’s mature. You know, you’ve been in the shittiest mood lately. What’s up with that?”

He doesn’t say anything. Just sits there.

“Alright, fine. Stay there.” You turn on your heel and walk back into the bedroom, closing the door behind you. You even contemplate locking it, but you don’t.

Once you’re behind the closed door you huff angrily and slink back over to the bed. You throw the now-cold covers back over yourself and shiver lightly again. You turn onto your side to look at the empty spot next to you and curl up in a tight ball. No matter how hard you try, you find it
hard to believe that you’ll be able to fall back asleep now.

About ten minutes later, you hear the door open quietly. You don’t bother looking up, just rolling away from John’s side of the bed and looking at the wall. You figure a good silent treatment will do the trick.

You listen to John get out of his clothes, set his glasses on the side table, and shimmy into the bed, the mattress dipping when he does so. You close your eyes and slow your breathing, hoping he’ll buy that you’re asleep.

You almost jump out of your skin when you feel his hand press against your back. He places it there lightly, right in the middle, and doesn’t move it. You take one deep breath, and he notices.

He starts moving the hand in small circles, and it’s kind of sweet in a way.

“I’m sorry,” he breathes a minute or two later, “I was being rude.”

You don’t say anything, just feel him rub your back as he shimmies closer to you.

“So, yeah,” he continues, “Sorry. I’ve just been…”

The rubbing stops as he pauses.

“Never mind. I’ll just leave you alone then.”

You feel the mattress move as he turns back around. You cautiously move your head around to see him turned the other way, facing his wall.

Your chest twinges. Maybe you shouldn’t have been so rough on him? He has been studying a lot. He’s been kind of-

Your thoughts are cut short when you see him shake. You don’t think it was the cold.

“John?” you ask as you turn around completely. He doesn’t respond. “John. What’s going on?”

He continues to shake, so you move yourself closer and loop an arm around him.

“Tell me what’s wrong,” you demand. He shakes his head slowly.

You slip your other arm under him and pull. Soon, you have him maneuvered so that he’s lying on top of you. He squeaks in surprise and covers his face with his hands quickly.

“Are you crying?” you ask softly, linking your hands behind his back. He shakes his head again. “Then say something.” More head-shaking. “You’re being hella difficult right now. All I want to do is help.”

When he doesn’t respond yet again, you lean up and kiss the hands covering his face. “Take your time, then.”

He does. He stays there on top of you for a while, breathing in and out. You brush his hair out of his face a few times, letting him calm down a little.

Eventually he does take his hands away. At first he just looks at your chest, but his gaze moves up to your face. You’ve never seen blue eyes so sad. They’re a little wet around the edges, as well as his dark eyelashes.

“You really are just fucking adorable,” you tell him, smiling a little. The flush returns to his face as he bites the inside of his cheek in embarrassment. You slide one hand up and down his back, feeling him breathe slowly.

“You’re not so bad, either,” he mumbles himself, shifting his eyes down and smirking a little.
A grin all out splits your face. “That was cute,” you tell him.

“Oh my god, shut up,” he moans as he buries his face in your chest. “We were having a moment.”

“No, we still are,” you assure him, “And I tend to drag it out as long as agonizingly possible.”

“Don’t you dare,” he mumbles into your chest again.

“Here, I can even come up with some lyrics. Or poetry.”

“Don’t you d-“

“John, shall I compare thy fine ass to a summer’s day?”

He takes the opportunity to blow a raspberry into your chest and you just about shriek in surprise. He laughs, looking up again.

After another minute of laughing about how ridiculous that whole scenario was, John settles back into your chest. He ghosts his fingers lightly over your skin as you watch.

“Sorry I’ve been kind of on edge, though,” he speaks up, never looking away from what he’s doing.

You keep your sight on his face. “It’s alright, bro. I just want to know what’s been bugging you so much these past few weeks.”

He sighs and his hand stops on your shoulder. Then, he shifts so that he’s got an elbow on either side of your torso, leaning over you. He looks at you and he’s… worried.

“I’ve had… oh god how do I put this… an assignment. Yeah. Think of it as an assignment. I haven’t been able to stop thinking about.”

You look at him skeptically. “An assignment.”

“Yes, an assignment!” he defends, and then continues. “It was given to me by a… professor. That I really hate. He’s British. He gave it to me about a month ago. It was kind of sprung on me too and I’m really scared about it. It’s due in a few days and I can’t stop it and if I fail it could have really awful consequences and—”

“Whoa, slow down there,” you tell him as your feel his heart accelerating. “John, it’s just an assignment. If you fail, you fail.”

“You don’t understand though!” he says wildly, “I can’t fail it! I can’t.”

You give him a searching look. “What’s the assignment on?”

He bites his lip. “It’s about something really important to me.”

“Like for your major?”

He’s really quiet for a moment. He looks at you intensely.

“Yeah. My major.”

“So it’s really important?”

“You have no idea.”

You reach out and push his hair back. “I’m sorry, man. I wish I could do something to help.”

He sighs unevenly and settles back down again, still looking at you.
“You are helping. In a way.” He kind of nuzzles into your neck more. You bring your arms around his back as he starts pressing soft kisses to your jaw and behind your ear.

You can’t help the warm smile that spreads on your face. It feels great.

“I’m glad I could do something then.” You kiss his messy black hair lightly and tighten your hug.

You stay like that for a while, but soon John makes his way up your jawline and to your mouth, straining to reach it directly.

You smirk and kiss him back lightly. You pull him up against you for easier access to his lips, but as you do, he gasps lightly into your mouth.

You both stop, mouths centimeters away from each other.

It’s then that you notice John’s very… pressing matter.

“Uh… um,” you stutter.

From this close, you can see the bright color John turns all the way down to his chest. He’s frozen in place. He stares right at you, eyes wide with alarm as he starts to realize his current situation.

“Oh my god, I’m so fucking sorry,” he starts panicking, trying to roll off of you, “I’ll just… oh, shit, god dammit-”

You hold him so he can’t get away. He’s struggling and moving against you, which you think may not be improving his situation.

And it certainly isn’t improving yours.

“John, stop,” you tell him, “Just hold on a second.”

He stops moving, but hangs his head so you can’t see his face. You release your grip from him and he still doesn’t move, so you prop yourself up on your elbows to get a better look at him.

“Stop being so embarrassed,” you tell him quietly. “Seriously, there’s nothing to get so upset about.” You lean forward and kiss his forehead for good measure.

“I’m am so, so sorry,” he repeats again.

You huff and roll your eyes, the effect lost due to John’s averting eyes. So, you use a hand to lift his chin up again.

You lean forward slowly and press one light kiss to his lips. You can never believe how soft his lips are. Yours are always so chapped and his are always so smooth and delicate. He stays very still and doesn’t say anything. Not even when you pull back.

You make eye contact just long enough to watch his pupils dilate again. All signs of embarrassment fade quickly.

This time, it’s him that leans forward gently and kisses you. It’s hesitant, like he might break you. His hand even comes up to touch your cheek lightly.

He breaks the kiss and backs up the slightest bit, eyes fluttering. For a second you think you’ve blown it— that the moment has passed.

But then, he closes the gap once more and crushes his lips against yours. He reaches around to tangle his hands in your hair for better leverage as you part your lips quickly for him. Then, he all-out moans into your mouth, sending shivers right down your spine.

You almost jump at the forcefulness of John’s advance. He’s never been one for getting past petty kissing and cuddling. Anytime something got too heated, he would back down, face flushed and
blustered. It was pretty frustrating for you from time to time, but you never said anything. You would wait for him. You didn’t want to rush him or force him to do anything he wanted to do.

But now, he seems pretty eager to get things going.

And, boy, you’re not one to disappoint.

You sit up abruptly and pull at him so that he's sitting in your lap. He squeaks in surprise but adjusts quickly. You reach up and slowly run both hands down his sides. The grip in your hair tightens just a bit as your fingers trail down his ribcage.

He continues to devour your lips and you can’t help the raspy moan that escapes your lips.

When your hands reach his hips, you pause for a moment.

Realizing this, John pulls back to look at you.

“Did I… uh, do something wrong?” he asks- his flushed chest heaving up and down. He looks concerned, but his eyes are lidded and hazy, yet still as stunning as ever. His hair is more disheveled than ever.

You don’t think you’ve ever wanted something as much as him right now.

You shake your head quietly and smile at him. “No. Just wondering…”

He leans in closer. “Wondering what?” There’s a hint of worry in his voice as he stares right into your eyes.

You grab his hips a little firmer and push your own up into them. John gasps and lets his head fall onto your shoulder with a small ‘ahh!’.

“I’m just wondering what we’re going to do about this?” you whisper right in his ear as you grin devilishly. You move to kiss right behind his earlobe and down his neck.

He doesn’t respond, just pants lightly on your neck. You roll your hips up again and his breath stutters once more.

“Well? Any ideas?” you ask cunningly.

“Well, shit, Dave! Just… do that again,” he breathes, bringing his face and yours back together, silencing you with his lips again.

You rock your hips up against him at a slow-but-steady rhythm as he presses closer to you. Your effort earns you some light, little sighs from John. His hands are all over your neck, back, and hair. You can’t help the groans and curses that stumble off your breath every time you come into contact with him. Your hands roam up and down his back, feeling the muscles contract and relax periodically.

Soon, sitting upright becomes tiresome. You roll and flip yourselves so you’re kneeling directly above him, breaking the kiss suddenly.

You look down at him, lips pink and swollen, eyes lidded and hazy with lust. You imagine, from his view, he must see something similar.

~

Definitely a good idea.

This was a GREAT idea.

Dave leans over you, hair hanging off of his forehead. The muscles in his chest, stomach, and arms are defined as he towers over you, kneeling between your legs with one arm on either side of
your shoulders.

The way he’s looking at you right now would turn any sensible human into putty. His eyes are heated, but just the right way so that you can’t bring yourself to look away.

They lower and move closer as he leans forward again to press a chaste kiss to your lips.

“You alright?” he mumbles, lips centimeters from yours.

You manage to swallow and nod slightly.

“You sure?” he asks as he moves and ghosts his lips over your temple.

When you nod again, he smirks and presses a soft kiss there too.

“Good.”

You can’t help but pull him back to you by the shoulders. You can’t stand not kissing him right now- not having him as close as possible. He moans in a pleased way at the feeling of having your lips on his again. As you drag him back, he lowers back onto you, thrusting at the pleasing rhythm he had picked up before.

You’re not really sure what you expected when it came to stuff like this. You thought it would be a little more… awkward- to be honest! You always thought that if you tried to initiate anything whatsoever, it would surely end in your embarrassment. At first, you were mortified at even the thought of doing anything with Dave. It took a while for you to even consider the idea of moving beyond kissing.

But now, you can’t seem to think of why you were so nervous in the first place. Hell, you can’t really think of much of anything right now. Your mind is a blank slate of white static- exploding with pleasure as he rubs deep circles into your lower back with his hands.

You practically yelp when Dave’s teeth latch onto your collarbone. He nips and sucks and bites at it, creating a display of wonderful red marks. Your mouth hangs slack as your push yourself up faster into him.

“Oh, God, Dave…”

“Shit, John…”

You reach down to the curve of his ass to squeeze and pull him infinitely closer…

And in a shorter time than you were hoping for, it’s all over for both you and him.

You both lay there for a while, regaining your senses and coming down from your perspective highs.

You move to lift Dave’s head from your shoulder and back to your face, kissing softly once again. This time, it’s different. There’s no sense of urgency or necessity. It’s just… kissing. Sweet, meaningless kissing that can’t help but mean the world to both of you.

You don’t have to look to know that he’s smiling. You can feel it against your own grin.

Before you know it, the two of you are drifting off to sleep, peacefully wrapped up in each other and keeping each other warm.

You almost forget about life for a while.

Almost.

~
You adjust your dark jacket, loosen your tie, and curse the heat of this island. It’s bad enough that the sun is hot enough to make a Texan sweat, but now you have to wear this uncomfortable, godforsaken suit. You don’t even need the damn suit. It’s for appearances.

“Alright then,” Jake interrupts your thoughts, “Jet is ready for takeoff. Your briefcase is stowed onboard, under that one red chair. Oh! And I’ve taken the liberty of packing you something to eat.” He grins, lowering his clipboard and sticking the pencil behind his ear. “Everything seems to be ready, Dirk.”

“Great,” you tell him, flipping your shades down into place, “Let’s go.”

You both exit through the grand front doors and the heat hits you like a stampede. You huff ungratefully and keep up with Jake’s brisk pace.

“Now don’t forget, Mr. Barnes will be staying in the same hotel as you. Might be nice of you to buy him a drink or two, eh?” He bumps you with his elbow. “But don’t get too carried away! I’m the jealous type.” He throws an arm over your shoulder and laughs.

You grimace. “It’s a business meeting, Jake. Not a date.”

“Well I’d say, taking a gander at that suit you’re sporting there.”

Mr. Barnes does not exist. The business meeting isn’t real. It’s a decoy you set up to get you off this island and take care of some… things you’ve been thinking about for too long. Jake’s been keeping you here, coming up with excuse after excuse to put off leaving. You need off for a while. You need some space to think.

But god, you do feel awful about lying to him.

You can’t help but glance to the side, watching him ramble on. It’s pretty hilarious, actually. He’s still got his arm around you. He’s smiling and chatting away to nothing.

You appreciate everything he’s done for you. You’ve enjoyed every minute you’ve spent with him here because you really have missed him. He genuinely cares about you and really knows you better than anyone else. You couldn’t ask for a better guy…

“Well, there you go! Ready and waiting!” He motions out to the jet with his free arm as you approach it. You can’t help but smirk at his sincere smile.

“Hey,” you stop in your tracks, “Jake.”

He stops next to you, dropping his arm and looking at you inquisitively.

Before he can start rambling again, you lean forward and press a quick kiss to his cheek.

“Thank for everything.”

He stares for a moment, his face a mix of slight shock and flattery. Then, it shifts into one of those warm smiles that you can’t help but adore.

“You’re quite welcome,” he assures you as he pulls you into a tight hug. You carefully loop your arms around him as he squeezes you tightly to him.

“I’ll see you in a few days, ok?” you reassure him.

“Yes, you will. Have a safe trip, Strider.”

“I will.”

You part with one last small kiss. Soon, you’re bounding up the steps, and turning at the doorway to wave one last time.
As you turn and see him standing there in the distance now, you can’t help but feel surrounded by even more guilt about lying to him. It’s just another burden to throw on your shoulders.

He smiles and waves back, a small gesture.

You can’t shake the feeling as you walk onto the jet that the smile was a little too smug and knowing.

As you sit down in your seat and the crew prepares to take off, you rub one hand over your eyes and sigh. You can’t get distracted.

You have some shit to take care of.

~

“John if you take any longer getting ready, the carriage is going to turn back into a pumpkin before we even step foot out of here.”

You grimace in front of the mirror, fumbling with the tie around your neck. These things are way too difficult. Who even came up with the idea of tying a piece of cloth around your neck? Who thought that would be fashionable?

Dave peers around the corner of the doorway into the room.

“That’s what you’re wearing?”

You turn and give him the most displeased look you can muster. “What’s wrong with it?”

He scoffs and steps into the room. He’s dressed in plain black jeans and his old red hoodie.

“I don’t know, nothing’s wrong. But that’s not typically what you would wear to a club. A country club, yeah. This club, no.”

“But it’s a special occasion!” you urge as you turn back to the mirror, adjusting the knot again, “And my Dad always taught me to look my best at special occasions.”

You can hear him lean up against the doorway.

“It’s not that special,” he sighs.

“Dave, you’re headlining tonight. That’s a pretty big deal.”

“Yeah, so? It’s the same as every other gig.”

“Yeah, well…” you taper off, not wanting to argue with his weird logic.

After a minute of silence and watching you suffer with the tie, he makes his way over to the mirror.

“Come here, let me do it.”

“I can do it myself, thanks very much!”

“If by ‘it’ you mean ‘massacre an innocent piece of apparel’, then yes. Yes, you can it.”

“Oh my god, shut up and just, I don’t know, fix it!”

You drop your hands and let him work at untying the impossible knot you’ve created. Your pout steadily disappears as his deft fingers work at the silk material.

He looks so calm right now. You don’t know how he can maintain a façade like that. He’s gotta be playing for hundreds of people tonight and he acts like it’s nothing.
“You know you look pretty nice in a suit and tie,” he tells you, and you can see him wink at you from behind the shades.

You scoff, rolling your head to the side. “I’m flattered.”

“You should be,” he chides as he tightens the knot into place. He pulls on it and brings you in for the most stereotypical kiss yet.

You can’t bring yourself to complain, though.

“There,” he tells you, breaking the kiss, backing away, and walking towards the door again, “You can stop being such a baby and let’s go.”

“Wait, Dave, I have to iron these pants!”

“Holy. SHIT. Dude. No. There is no way.” He turns back and points at you. “You’re going to get my ass fired. I’m supposed to be there in five minutes!”

You walk towards him calmly. “Then take the car and go. I’ll walk. It’s only a few blocks.”

He watches as you fish the keys out of your pockets. “You sure?”

“No Dave, I offered it as a joke. Ha ha, funny.”

You hold them out to him and he snatches them, giving you an exasperated look.

“Don’t be late,” he warns you as he turns for the door.

“I won’t!” you call as the door closes behind him.

You wait exactly two minutes, just in case he forgot something and came back. As soon as you’re sure the coast is clear, you dart from the bedroom and into the bathroom.

You jump up on the counter- a difficult feat in your dress pants- and lift the corner panel up in the ceiling. You reach around inside the ceiling until your fingers come in contact with what you’re looking for.

You pull down a long box, wrapped in red paper. It’s about as long as your arm, and a little heavy. You wobble a little trying to get down off the counter with it still in your arms. Once safely on the ground, you dart back into the bedroom and attach the big red bow you were hiding behind your pillow.

A stupid grin spreads across your face. You can’t wait for him to open it tonight after the gig. The look on his face is going to be priceless.

You got it for him as a “congratulations” for finally making a name for himself as a DJ. You know he’s wanted it for some time now. You had to put in some excruciatingly boring, extra time at the prank shop to pay for it, but it was definitely worth it.

You gather everything up into your arms and make like you’re headed to leave.

Then the door opens.

“Shit!” you mutter under your breath as you jump in surprise. You knew he would forget something. You should have waited just five minutes longer. “Just a sec, Dave! I’m, uh, not decent!”

You mentally slap yourself. That’s the dumbest excuse you could have thought of.

You scramble around the bedroom, trying to find a place to shove the present, but there’s no room! You can’t run to the bathroom because you hear Dave approaching the bedroom.
“Dave, just wait, hold on!”

You trip over the side leg of the bed and come tumbling down. Loud curses ensue as you land on your stomach and the gift comes tumbling down on top of you.

You hear him step up to the doorway and you flounder.

“Dave, oh shit, I’m sorry! It was supposed to be a surprise but then I tried to get it out without you seeing and now you’re here and-“

You stand to recover the present, rambling off on some tangent. You fumble with it and stand abruptly.

“- it was really nothing and before you say anything about me getting you s-“

You look up and your blood runs ice-cold.

Shit.

SHIT.

---

Your name is John Egbert

and your one month is up.

Chapter End Notes

I’m.
Yeah.
So yeah.

AHHH so you’re probably wondering when this next chapter is coming out.
Follow my tumblr www.captcha-blog.tumblr.com because I frequently post about how frustrated this fic makes me.

ALSO I WOULD REALLY APPRECIATE SOME FANART.

One wonderful girl has already drawn me something!

http://25.media.tumblr.com/b47a997bc1a684817ffe22228ac567a2/tumblr_mrlwsyy78Q1s6a51so1_400.png

ISN’T IT BEAUTIFUL!!?! <3

Ugh. Just let me know if you draw something because I want to die over it, please?

ALSO LEAVE A COMMENT.

ILL GO NOW

THANK YOU <3
If Looks Could Kill

Chapter Summary

John talks to Bro, John talks to Dave, and stuff goes down

Chapter Notes

College sucks and prevents me from writing stuff. But I'm not at college right now because its christmas break so that = me writing some stuff.

I CHANGED MY TUMBLR URL TO GIRLOFSPACE

www.girlofspace.tumblr.com

I love all of you guys so much <33 thanks for the continued support and readership!!

You clutch the wrapped present to your accelerating heart.

That British guy- Jake. He was right.

He’s here.

“Get out.”

“John-“

“I said get out!” You can’t help the rise in your voice as fear spreads through your chest and rushes to your head.

He’s here and you don’t know what to do.

“I just want to talk,” Bro says as he takes a few steps forward.

You abandon the present and shuffle backwards.

“Don’t touch me!” you yell, bumping against the wall.

Suddenly, a flash of anger betrays his placid features.

“I’m not gonna fucking-!” he begins to shout, and you cringe, curling into a ball.

He sees you, stops, lowers his hands, and sighs- visibly disappointed in himself.

“I’m not going to hurt you, John.”

You can barely blink. You can barely breathe. You’re frozen in fright- back against the wall and curled up into a ball.

“Look,” he tells you sternly.
You watch him carefully as he moves and sits on the bed. He raises both of his hands in the air in surrender.

“I’m not armed, I’m not anything.”

You glare, not budging an inch.

“What do you want?” your voice is shaky.

“I want…” he shakes his head and looks at his hands in his lap. “Jesus, kid, I flew all the way out here and…” He laughs weakly.

“What do you want!?” you reiterate, uncurling and leaning forward aggressively.

You watch as he slowly removes his shades, folds them neatly, and places them next to him on the bed.

He looks over at you and you’re taken aback for a moment.

They’re an unnatural golden-honey color-

but they’re the most broken, tired eyes you’ve ever seen. They’re filled with sadness and desolation.

It twinges something deep in your chest.

The remind you of what Dave’s might look like, worn down by years and years of stress and grief.

The face contorts into something defeated.

“I just want…” he closes his eyes and buries his face in his hands, “I need to talk. That’s all.”

All of a sudden, you find yourself doubting everything you thought you knew about this man in the lingering silence.

Here he is, the most dangerous man you know, practically breaking down in front of you.

Against every fiber of your being, you stand, take the chair from the corner, pull it over, set it down in front of him-

And you talk to Dirk Strider for a little while.

~

Your name is Dave Strider-

And where the fuck is John Egbert?


“Get off my back,” you mumble, pulling out your phone.

TO: John

dude where the fuck are you?

You slide the phone back in your pocket while simultaneously smoothing your hair back with the other hand.

You’re a little shakier than usual. Then again, this crowd is larger than it usually is. What if your set isn’t long enough? What if it’s too long? What if this mix isn’t right for the people that showed
up tonight?

Where the ever-loving fuck is John?

The DJ up there now is working the table and calling out to the crowd every chance he got. He’s certainly getting them worked up. They started dancing as soon as the music hit the speakers.

Damn, you could use a drink.

You wipe your palms off on you sweatshirt before approaching Greg again.

“Pops, I need you to hook me up.”

He raises an eyebrow. “With what?”

“A cold one. I don’t care. Anything.”

He stares at you a few moments longer, shrugs, and makes his way through the crowd to the bar.

You lean against the wall again and take your phone out. No new messages. Shit.

Three minutes later, Greg comes back with an opened beer, telling you “not to drink it all at once because it’s comin’ out of your paycheck and you still gotta perform in five minutes”.

You take a sip and wince.

“Well it’s certainly been a while,” you mumble to yourself, taking another swig of it.

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“Alright, alright, folks,” the DJ’s voice plays over the music, “My time is the spotlight is over. Yeah I know, I know. Stop your crying. However, they did manage to find someone just as bodacious and sick-nasty as myself to take over. Ladies and gentlemen- Mister Strider.”

There’s a bout of applause and a few catcalls from the audience as you step into the light. You can barely make out any faces in the white light that floods the stage, even with the shades on.

There’s a buzz through the audience as you step up to the mic and start plugging your equipment in.

“How’re ya’ll feeling tonight?” you ask as you plug in the last of it.

A few rowdy responses from the darkness.

“That’s what I like to hear,” you smirk a little as you down the rest of your beer and place the bottle on the table. “Now let’s get down to business.” You flip three switches up and music pours into the room.

People start dancing immediately and you can’t help but feel some sort of relief that you’ve gotten off to an ok start. So far so good.

As you switch the lights off, you catch a glimpse John’s face. Right there in the middle of the crowd.

The last thing you see before the lights go out is the terrified look on his face as he stares right at you.

-----

“Okay I’m gonna take a quick break, ya’ll,” you tell the audience.

There are some disappointed shouts.
“Don’t get your floral, lacy panties in a twist, gang,” you reassure them, “I’m gonna keep some tunes going.”

A few more cheers and you’re bolting off the stage. You’ve been itching to get out of that light since you got up there- and not because of the fear of performing. God damn, do you love being a DJ.

You need to find John.

You squeeze into the tight crowd on the dance floor. As you stretch through the masses, people pat you on the shoulder and try to stop you to talk to you or offer you a drink. However, right now you’re a force to be reckoned with- you stop for no one.

You glance from side to side, hoping to catch a glance of him. Why was he so upset before? He was fine when you left.

Over to your right, by the bar, a familiar tie catches your eye.

“Egbert!” you shout above your own music, shouldering your way through some more dancers.

You finally make it though and slap a hand on his shoulder.

“John, where have you been? I’ve texted you, like, a mil-“

He almost falls out of the chair in fright. He turns to face you and you immediately know something is wrong. His tie is askew and his hair is messier- like he’s been running his hands though it like he does when he gets worked up or nervous.

On top of that, his eyes are blown wide in blue horror.

“… John?” you ask quietly, getting in close to his face. He has that thousand-yard-stare going on. He’s visibly shaking and twitchy.

“Jesus, John? You alright?” you ask, shaking him firmly.

He snaps out of it and turns to look at you. He opens his mouth.

“Dave-“ he barely manages.

“Dave!” another voice chimes in. It’s Greg, coming up all smiles and beer in hand. “I could kiss you buddy, I really could. Look at all these people! I don’t think I’ve had this many customers in ages. Here you go, bud. You’ve earned it- on the house.”

He holds the beer out to you.

Suddenly, John yelps and snaps out of whatever trance he’s been stuck in. He swats the beer out of Greg’s hand, like it’s diseased, and it falls to the floor with a loud ‘clank’. Beer spills out everywhere.

Greg slowly looks up from the beer to John, severely confused and pretty angry.

“Greg, Pops, it was an accident,” you say, moving in front of John. “Don’t worry about the beer. I’m good anyways. Thanks.”

He looks between the two of you and sighs. “Whatever.” He walks away, shaking his head and glaring at John.

You turn around to face John, who’s looking at the grounded beer like it’s poison.

“Dude. What the hell.”

Nothing. He keeps looking down.
“John, I want to know what the fuck is going on.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about the drinking problem?” he mumbles without looking up.

You can feel your heart start to sink. You couldn’t have heard that right.

“The WHAT?”

“You heard me,” he says a little clearer, finally lifting his head up. He looks hurt and upset. “Why didn’t you tell me about the drinking problem?”

“…What, you mean MY drinking problem?” you point to yourself. “Before?”

He nods. It’s hard to hear anything over the music you set.

You give him a blank stare. To be honest, you had completely forgotten about it until you had a drink earlier. But now this had to come around and kick you in the ass.

“I’m not mad,” he adds in as you think, taking a step closer. “I just… didn’t know…” He motions quickly to the spilled beer on the floor.

“That was a long time ago, John,” you tell him calmly, reaching out to touch his shoulders gently. You look into his eyes. “That was way before I met you. You know how much everything sucked before then. I got really low from time to time but I’ve learned to deal with it and put it behind me and-“

Wait a second.

You pull your hands back.

“John, that was way before I met you.”

He freezes up. “I, uh, I don’t-“

You grab him by the shoulder and start walking.

Once outside, you let go of his shoulder and spin to face him. The cold doesn’t phase you. Your mind is spinning a million miles an hour.

He stares at you like a deer in headlights. You can see how uneasily he’s breathing as his breath escapes his nose and evaporates into the night air.

You both stand in silence for a few seconds longer, neither of you moving. You decide to break the silence again.

“What the fuck is going on?” you yell, face beginning to heat up. “Ever since about a month ago, you’ve been freaking me out!”

He cringes. “I never…” He looks down at his feet again. He’s wringing his hands and breathing uneasily again.

You pause to watch him and recollect your breath. Puffs of smoke escape your mouth as you feel your heart decelerate. You push your shades up into your hair and rub your face vigorously.

You hear a hiccup and pull your hands from your face. You can see John’s glasses have started
fogging up and his shoulders are shaking.

You are a complete piece of shit.


He slowly looks up at you, and you can tell he’s trying his best not to start crying.

“I didn’t mean to-“ you start.

“I know. It’s not your fault,” he blurts out. “I’m just on edge.” He brings a sleeve up to his face and wipes at his eyes.

“Why are you on edge in the first place?”

You stop and wait patiently as he takes a deep breath. God, he looks so small and alone.

“Ok, baby steps,” you tell him, stepping closer and bring him into a hug. You can feel him relax as he wraps his arms around you. “Why did you look so terrified before?”

He rests his chin on your shoulder. “I was running.”

“To what?”

“Not to what.”

“Then what?”

He pauses.

“...From whom.”

“Running from whom? That does make any-“

Oh.

OH.

It clicks. Him figuring out about your drinking. The terror. Everything.

You slowly pull him away until he’s at arms length.

“Where is he, John?”

He looks terrified again. “Dave, don’t.”

“What did he do? What did he say to you?!“

You feel like you’re having heart palpitations. He’s back. He’s somewhere close by.

“Dave, please, calm down.”

“Calm down?!“ You’re practically yelling at this point. You don’t know if it’s the panic or the shock that’s getting to you, but it’s starting to scare even you.

“Dave!” This time, he takes you by the shoulders and shakes. “Listen to me!”

“We have to go there. Now.” You turn and start walking for the car, motioning for John to follow.

“Wait!” He grabs your shoulder and spins you around. You almost fall over in surprise.

“What!?”
“There’s one more thing…”

~

You know, you guess he did do pretty well for himself.

There’s a decent amount of furniture in this apartment. A desk over to the right has papers thrown all over it. Biology. Obviously John’s.

It’s pretty good for two kids barely in their twenties, but you can’t help but feel a twinge of regret that you weren’t able to help them out with this.

You’ve been stuck here for about an hour. You’re itching to do something.

But if the little guy said to wait, you guess you should wait.

You jump up and head to the kitchen to grab yourself a soda.

You open the fridge door and mutter in disappointment. It’s not too well stocked. You find nothing to drink other than TAB.

You grab the first one you see and open it coolly.

As you close the door, you step to the right- avoiding the first punch.

The second one catches you by surprise.

When it connects with your nose, you jerk back from the impact- which results in TAB all over your suit.

You don’t have to feel it to know your nose has been broken.

“Ahhh fuckin’ perfect,” you mutter.

You regain your balance, assessing the damage done to your suit while placing the half-empty can on the counter. You try to wipe the soda off, but blood starts dripping from your nose, ruining the jacket for good.

After pushing your shades back into you hair, you sigh and look up.

Dave’s standing there, of course, one hand holding a katana, the other curled in a fist. John’s there, almost completely in the doorway but still hiding behind the frame for measure. He’s eyeing Dave carefully, like he might do something irresponsible.

Dave is GLARING at you- like you expected.

“Well if looks could kill!” you exclaim. You look around Dave to address John. “A warning would have been nice.”

“Don’t fucking talk to him,” Dave hisses, drawing your attention back.

You look back to Dave and blink.

“And if I do?”

He lunges forward with outstanding form-

But you just happen to be quicker. You dodge the swing easily. He jumps back to his original position, recoiling.

You hear John shout from his post. He runs out in the open.
You watch quietly as he jumps between the two of you.

“John, what the fuck?!” Dave yells, “You’re going to get hurt.”

“No I’m not,” John tells him firmly.

“Stay out of this, John. I don’t want anything to happen to you. This is between me and him-“

John turns to face Dave. “I’m not going to get hurt! Dave you need to listen-“

Dave motions angrily at you. “Listen to what? He’s fucking-“

They continue to bicker, like a pair of old women.

This isn’t what you came here for.

“Both of you shut the hell up,” you say sternly.

With that, they both turn to look at you. Dave, furious and John, terrified.

You lean back against the counter and cross your arms.

“Lil’ man, you and I need to talk. Alone. Think you can manage that?”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think? uwu
Back at Square One

Chapter Summary

You will cry

Chapter Notes

BLANKET APOLOGY

I don't think anything can excuse how long I've left this fanfic abandoned for. I was so swamped with my freshman year of college, a new job, and everything else. I didn't know what to do. I felt so bad. I sat down time and time again but could never write what I felt was appropriate. However, now I have something that pleases me and I hope pleases you.

I think I know how this fic is going to end. And it's soon. Only a few more chapters. Actually maybe, like, two more. But I'm rambling now.

But I'm in the workings of something BIG. Something that will branch off of this story. But more on that later.

For now: please enjoy this chapter and try not to cry!

((IT STARTS IN JOHNS POV BTW))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Your name is John Egbert and you are nervous.

Dave lowers his katana.

“You expect me to just agree to that?”

Dirk lifts his shoulders nonchalantly and lets them fall again.

The room is quiet for a moment as the two of them glare across the kitchen.

“I'll give you two some space,” you say quietly as you turn to leave.

Dave does a complete one-eighty, running up to you.

“No, John. We're leaving. Now.”

He has his shades over his eyes again, but now that his back is turned to Dirk, you can see the panic and hurt in his eyes. You know how much this is probably hurting him. You know it probably pains him to see his guardian that practically disowned him. And it hurts you just as much if not more to do this to him.

But it's for his own good. He has to do this. This has to happen.

You reach up and cup his face in your hands.

“Dave,” you look as brave as you can muster, “You need to talk to him.”
“John,” he hisses, “I can’t-“

“Please. I need you to do this. If not for you, for me.”

He stands there, weight of his head in your hands. When you pull them back, his head bobs a little.

“I’ll be waiting just outside the door,” you tell him. “First sign of anything, I’ll come in.”

You kiss him lightly on the lips and turn for the door.

As you close the door behind you, you lean back against it and hope to whatever deities exist that this goes well.

~

“He’s a cute kid,” Bro tells you.

You don’t answer him. You just slowly make your way over to the table and sit down.

“When I met him, I had no idea,” Bro moves to sit across the table from you with his soda half-empty.

You glare at him still.

“As in no idea you two were, you know,” he lifts his can up to motion and smiles, “‘a thing’.”

You can feel your heart pounding in your chest, but keep your composure. Why is he here? What does he need?

He stands up again and you flinch in the slightest. Anyone wouldn’t notice it, but Bro does.

He sighs and places the can on the table, crossing his arms. “I’m not going to hurt you, Dave.”

You snort and turn your head towards the left wall.

“Dave, it was an accident I didn’t mean…” His words slowly taper off at the end.

You can feel your side start to itch. You resist reaching for it.

You finally speak: “Just get to the point, Bro. Why are you here?”

He makes his way over and jumps up to sit on the counter.

“I wanted to see how things are going.”

You lean back into your chair.

“… Really?” You ask him skeptically.

He shrugs his shoulders, making an innocent face.

“Everything is fine,” you tell him curtly.

He finally pushes his glasses up into his hair. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“How’s it living with Egbert?”

“Fine.”
“Any financial problems?”

“No, we’re fine.”

“Still got a job?”

“Yes.”

“Anything you want to tell me?”

“No.”

He claps his hands together and jumps down. “Well then, my work here is done.”

You squint. “What?”

“My work here,” he flips his shades back down, “is done.” He walks towards the entrance of the kitchen, but you jump up and put yourself in the way.

“What do you mean you’re ‘done’? What the hell does that mean?”

He smirks and motions towards you. “Listen, lil’ man, I can take a hint. I’m not wanted. You don’t want me here, Egbert’s probably shitting himself in the hallway, and it’s late anyway. I’ve got places to be and so do you. Message received.”

He walks around you and heads for the door.

You can’t stand him. You can’t stand this entire situation. You're done. You’re so consumed with hate. You see nothing but red and white.

You grab the kitchen table and throw it as hard as you can. It clatters against the wall and comes crashing down, breaking three of it’s legs in the process. Pots fall off the wall and clatter to the floor.

You can hear Bro huff behind you in the living room, “Really, kid? Whole lot of good that does everyo-”

“SHUT UP!” you spin and point at him, “YOU SHUT THE HELL UP RIGHT GODDAMN NOW!”

Bro slowly arches his eyebrows, incredulous. “Come again?”

“Don’t act so high and mighty! Who the hell do you think you are?!?” Your volume only increases as your fury boils over.

You can hear John open the door and burst inside behind Bro.

“Dave!” he yells “Dave, calm down!”

“Go outside, John!” you point, “Just go away!”

John’s brow furrows and his mouth sets. He starts walking towards the kitchen. “No, Dave. I’m here to help.”

You let out a frustrated yell and throw your katana across the kitchen. It clatters somewhere near the sink. You kick a few pots and pans around the floor in anger. John stands to the side of the kitchen, out of your way.

“Calm it with the theatrics, Shakespeare, we get it!” Bro yells from the living room, above the clangor.

“I thought I told you to shut the hell up!” you yell. You turn and the momentum sends your
glasses flying from your face. You leap forward to storm into the living room, but something slides from under your foot as you step down. You can hear a slight crack, followed by John’s gasp. You stop dead in your tracks.

You look to the ground before John, where the shades slid. The frame is twisted and a lens is missing.

John slowly bends over and picks them up slowly and carefully, like a shard of glass. He looks up at you, face completely blank.

“Dave,” he says gently, eyebrows pushed together. “Dave, these were my mothers.”

The air is caught in your throat. You don’t know what to say. Your muscles tense and your nerves feel like they’re on fire. You remember what he had said to you:

“These are, ah, pretty old,” he had said, “They were… my Mom’s.”

“I know this was hard for you to do,” you had told him, “but, thank you. So much. They’re… awesome.”

“You’re welcome, ya dork. Just be careful with them, ok? …

… They mean a lot to me.”

John’s face turns sour. He folds them up as gently as he can.

“John, I’m so-” you start.

“Save it,” he says, as bitter as you’ve ever heard him. He shoves the pair of shades in his pocket and walks for the door.

He walks right past Bro as he watches. He has the door half open when Bro finally speaks.

“Where are you going, kid?” He sounds concerned.

John stands in the open door and turns. You’ve never seen him this angry or bitter. He looks at you for a moment, then back to Bro.

“I said save it.”

He turns and slams the door shut.

The air hangs in an unpleasant way, but in a completely different way now.

You can feel your insides deteriorating. Your knees are weak. What the hell did you just do? It was an acc-

“It was an accident,” Bro says calmly from across the room.

You head snaps back over to him. He’s standing there, hands in his pockets now. He doesn’t look as condescending as he did before. Now he just looks… sorry for you.

“People make mistakes sometimes,” he continues, “They lose sight of what’s important and hurt those that they love in the process.”

He walks towards you carefully and you don’t move.

“I came to say goodbye, Dave,” he says solemnly as he stops in front of you. You’re still too weak to move.

“You don’t need me anymore, lil’ man. I’m out of here.”
It’s getting more difficult to keep your cool.

“Hah, well, you’re not such a lil’ man anymore. I should have realized that a long time ago. You’ve got a great life here.”

He sighs and removes his shades once more, hooking them on his shirt.

He’s gotten old. Well, not old, but older. When did that happen?

He smiles sadly. “I came by one last time to say goodbye.”

You look up at him, not sure what to do. He reaches into his back pocket and takes out a square piece of folded-up paper.

“Do you remember this?” he asks, shaking the paper.

You shake your head ‘no’.

He unfolds it.

“You drew it when you were three,” he tells you. You look at the paper.

It’s a horrible drawing of what you can only guess is you, he, and Cal. The people don’t even look like people, but the colors give it away. The paper is old and torn around the edges, but kept in good condition.

You choke out, “Why the hell do you still have that?”

He scoffs, still looking down at it in his hands. “Why wouldn’t I? Its my most prized fucking possession.”

You close your eyes and some tears stream down you face, hot and ugly.

“You drew it at a day-care. You came racing up to me, flaunting it and telling me how proud you were of it. You wouldn’t put the damn drawing down. You were so, so disappointed when I didn’t hang it up in the living room. But, I hung it up in my room so it was the first thing I saw waking up and the last thing I saw before I slept. Something my lil’ man had made just for me.”

He folds the paper back up and shoves it back in his pocket.

Next thing you know, you’re brought in for a tight hug and you don’t fight it. You had forgotten what it felt like to be hugged by him.

You just sit there, remembering what it felt like.

Eventually, he pulls away and puts his hands on your shoulders.

“I’ll miss ya, lil’ man.”

You move your arms to hug him back, but he moves away before you get the chance.

“But,” he says as he Backs towards the door, “If you ever do need me, you’ll know how to find me.”

The tears are free flowing, now. You’re even making the most disgusting hiccupping noises as you watch him go.

He reaches the door and opens it. You can’t think of anything to say that could possibly help right now. You place your head in your hands, waiting for the slam of the door.

“One more thing,” he says. You look up and see him about to leave.
“I didn’t mean it when I said that I had lost my son all those years ago.”

You remember him telling you that at Rose’s house and your world breaking down.

He gives you one last sad smile. “It turns out that my son had lost his father instead. I’m sorry, Dave.”

You allow one loud sob as he closes the door behind him.

“See ya, lil’ man.”

And once again, you were back where you started. Way back at Chapter One of everything…

You’ve found the name for that poison, that burning, that stinging, throbbing, PAIN. It’s loneliness.

You collapse, sobbing and sobbing, all facades and pretenses are now out the window. Your name is Dave Strider, and you are so, so lonely.

~

Your name is John Egbert-

…and boy, are you bitter.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave me the comments~ I LOVE THEM.

My tumblr is girlofspace.tumblr.com

SEND ME MESSAGES I WILL LOVE YOU FOREVER AND I ALWAYS RESPOND
Chapter Summary

Second to last chapter!

Chapter Notes

NOTE: I WILL BE MAKING A BIG ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT A NEW PROJECT IN THE NOTES OF THE LAST CHAPTER. STAY TUNED.

This is the second to last chapter!

And yes, I do know how the fic is going to end, so it wont be long before the next (and last) chapter is out!

Thank you for sticking around with me this long- it wont be much longer...

I hope you enjoy it! Time to learn about John's mother...

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

You cradle the shades in you jacket pocket, running your thumb gently against a broken edge. The wind bites your face a little as you make your way down the early-morning street.

You’re not entirely sure whether the small tears in your eyes are from the stirring emotion in your chest or the wind. It could be both, but you’re too bothered to acknowledge what it really is.

You slow down as you approach an old bus stop. There’s graffiti on the plastics panes, covering an old advert for foot-cream. You take shelter inside of it, sighing shakily when you sit on the cold, metal bench.

You continue fondling the glasses in your pocket. You can feel the headache of a century start to kick in.

Before long, the bus pulls up and you stand, grabbing your wallet out of you back pocket. You pull out the change as the bus pulls up and step on as the doors open. The gruff driver hardly acknowledges you as you drop the change in the box. It whirs behind you as you move back and take a seat.

At the bus pulls away from the station, you walk to the back and take a seat. There aren’t many other people on this bus- just you, a younger couple a few seats ahead, and the bus driver. The couple is talking quietly as the bus whirs on down the street.

You lay your head softly against the window, crushing your glasses against your face in the process. They’ll get all smudged, but you don’t think that matters. What does matter is getting the peace and quiet you need right now.

You don’t remember much about your mother. Just a warm smile, ruby-red lipstick, and the scent of flour. You were too young to remember anything about her. Your Dad doesn’t like to talk about it much- but he did indulge you in some answers when you felt brave enough to ask the questions.
“Why don’t I have a mommy?” You had asked, age four, in the car with your Dad one day.

He had looked over at you, pipe in his mouth. “Son?”

“All of the other boys and girls have mommies. I see them on the telen-visor-“

“Television, son.”

“- television and at the food store and all over everywhere. Why don’t I got one?”

He had apprehended you for a moment more, before turning back to the road ahead.

“Well, champ,” he started, sighing, “You do have a mommy.”

“I do?” You had asked, eyes wide with wonder. “Where is she? I want to say hi!” You emphasized it with a wave and a smile.

He had smiled softly. “She’s not here with us. But she’s always watching.”

That had puzzled you. “Watching what?”

“Me, you. Especially you, son.”

“Well how does she do that? Where does she go to watch us?”

“Let’s just say,” he had looked back at you briefly and smiled, “you have an angel watching over you.”

You let out a soft gasp. “Is mommy an angel?”

“Yes, John,” he sighed,

“Yes she was.”

The bus pulls over a speed-bump too fast and your head bangs against the window. Your questionable headache rears it’s head and assumes the title of “full-on-head-buster”. You pull back and rub at it viciously.

Of course, as you grew up, the real questions started coming. Where is mommy, really? Like really really?

Lung cancer is a nasty business.

And a real bitch too.

She passed when you were only one.

You look around at your surroundings outside, trying to orient yourself. When you recognize where you are, you pull the rope above to indicate that you’ll be getting off at the next available stop.

It wasn’t until you were much older that you got the real information, after all. Your Dad gave you the shades when you were about twelve.

“Dad, I’m going to the pool, I’ll see you ‘round-“

“Are you wearing sunscreen?” He peaked from behind his newspaper, pipe overflowing with
You had rolled your eyes, slinging your towel over your shoulder. “Yes.”

“Eye protection?”

“Wha- eye protection?”

“Yes, son, I read an article the other day. Your eyes can be just as badly damaged by UV rays as the rest of y-“

“I got glasses, Dad, I can’t see without them.”

He squinted his eyes briefly behind his own reading glasses. An idea lighted upon his face and he snapped his fingers. “Wait right there!” Then, he was off into the other room.

He had returned with the shades. “Try these on.”

You took them carefully. They were so sleek and new. You removed your own glasses and tried them on.

“They work,” you told him, “I can see.”

“Good,” he smiled, “They were your mother’s. I got them for her birthday.”

The words made your stomach jump to your mouth.

“She hardly ever wore them. She said they were too nice to use…” He pat you on the shoulder. “They’re yours now. Take care of them.”

He walked back to the table, grabbed his newspaper, and retired to the living room.

You lightly touched the frames on your face. You slowly removed them and walked over to the bathroom. You lightly wrapped them in tissues. You went back to the kitchen and placed them softly in a drawer that no one used.

You spent a while thinking about them. They were too precious to wear. You did take them out every once in a while to look at them. They made you feel a little closer to her.

You had almost completely forgotten about them.

Until…

- 

The bus pulls to a halt. You thank the driver and jump off onto the sidewalk. The streetlights are the only thing lighting the street- all of the storefronts are dark and empty. You shiver and walk the right direction.

While meandering down the street, you pat your pockets down for your cell phone. You curse as the screen lights up, indicating the battery is almost dead. You open your contacts and make the call anyway.

It rings.

“Hello?” the voice on the other end asks.

“Rose.”

“Hello, John. I hope you realize it’s nearly two o’clock in the morning.”

You stop and stare up at the sign above you. Jumpin’ Java.
“Rose, would you care for a cup of coffee? I need to talk.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t think you heard me before. It’s two in the-“

“Rose, it’s important. You can pick at my brain all you want. No strings attached.”

You can hear her smile.

“You’re going to be the literal death of me, John Egbert.”

“I know.”

“I’ll be there in fifteen.”

~(Meanwhile)~

You kick the door and dust scatters. It does budge the door however. You try the handle again and it moves, but doesn’t unlock. Son of a bitch.

You lean back against the door and wait. Soon enough, a girl starts walking down the hallway. Well, more like stumbles, she probably had a few too many. Her hair is up though, perfect.

As she approaches you, you wave her down, “Uh excuse me?”

She stops and apprehends you with glassy eyes. “Who’re you?” she slurs.

“Uh, I locked myself out and I don’t have a spare key. Could I use one of your hair-pins to pick the lock?”

You can see the gears turning in her head slowly. She squints. “Didn’ those people get evicted or or or somethin’?” She waves her hand in the hair.

You huff. “You’re thinking of the floor below us.”

She thinks for a moment and then buys it, nodding exaggeratedly. “Ohhh right, yeah, huhuh duhhhh Susan. Yeah, shit, here!” She reaches up and grabs one out of her hair, handing it to you.

“Thanks, I’ll give it right back,” you tell her, turning to unlock the door.

“Nawww naw don’t even worry about it,” she coos, “I don’ even need it THAT much.”

You turn to smile at her weakly. Before you can turn back to the door, she grabs your shoulder quickly and turns you around. You nearly jump straight out of your skin.

She glares right into your eyes. “Dude your eyes are so fuckin’ bloodshot right now.”

You swallow uncomfortably. “Yeah. Long day.”

“No, no,” she emphasizes, “Not like that. Your fuckin’ pupils are red, dude. Fuckin’ rad.”

“Ahhhh, thanks,” you mutter anxiously, turning back around again and unlocking the door in one fell swoop. You hand her the pin back. “Here.”

She grasps it clumsily. “Thanks bro!” With that, she smiles, takes off her heels, and keeps walking.

You open the door and close it behind you. Besides the light leaking in under the door and through the windows, it’s pitch dark. But you don’t need lights. You grew up here after all. You can feel the carpet under your feet. And of course all of the furniture has been removed, so you don’t have to worry about tripping on that.

You move through the rooms, your eyes adjusting to the dark.
You don’t know why you’re here. You just felt like this was the best place to be. For the moment at least.

You find your way back to the front door and lean against it. You slide down it and face the darkness ahead of you.

Damn, that’s a deep metaphor.

You can’t bring yourself to laugh at it though.

John. You need to call John. See if he’s alright.

You take out your phone and dial the number.

It rings, and rings, and rings,
And he picks up.

“Dave?”

“John.”

“Dave-”
His line goes dead.

~

“Shit!” you yell, slamming the phone on the counter. Dead battery.

“Everything alright?” Rose yells from the kitchen, through the window.

You take your glasses off and rub at your eyes. “No.”

“No?” she muses, “Well that’s no good.”

“Obviously,” you grumble, putting the glasses back on and straightening them.

She appears through the door with two cups of coffee. She smiles at you kindly as she sets on down in front of you. She adds cream and sugar.

You pick up a spoon and stir the black liquid gently, watching the steam evaporate.

“Thanks,” you smile back at her. Weakly.

She leans at the counter, arms crossed, watching you stir your coffee.

“You’re a terrible pouter.”

You rolls your eyes and your head in one fell swoop, raising your hands in the air.

“Well what do you want me to do, Rose? I’m angry!”

“Oh, well now we’re getting somewhere!” she walks around the counter. “Now tell me,” she jumps up and sits on the counter next to where you’re sitting, “Why are you angry?”
You scowl at her and reach into your pocket, retrieving the broken aviators. You lay them out on the counter next to her.

She picks up one of the shards of the lens, and turns it around again and again.

She looks at you sideways.

“You broke your sunglasses?”

“Rose.”

“Did you sit on them?”

“Rose! They belonged to my mother…”

She looks right at you, confused. Her hair is getting longer. It swishes around when she turns her head quickly.

“Did they? Why did you break them?”

“I didn’t.”

Her eyebrows stitched together. Her eyes searched yours very sternly. You could see the realization in her eyes.

She motions to the shades without looking away from you. “These are Dave’s.”

“I gave them to him. A gift.”

“Oh,” she looks back down at them, “I see.”

Silence for a while. The only sound is that of the teaspoon hitting the sides of your coffee cup. Rose swings her legs and they hit the edge of the counter. She looks back at you for a while, probably evaluating your facial expressions. You try to keep a blank face.

“What are you feeling?”

“I’m feeling angry. I’m feeling upset. I’m feeling tired and broken and I don’t know what to do.”

You drop the spoon with a long ‘clang’ on the counter and settle back in your chair.

Rose finally jumps down from the counter. She slides her own coffee to herself, sitting in the seat next to you. She starts adding the cream and sugar.

“What happened?”

You sigh.

You tell her.

You tell her about Bro coming back, about Jake telling you how he would come back, about the fight, about everything.

At the end, she just finishes her coffee with one last sip. She turns her violet eyes to you as she sets the cup down.

“Well,” she sort of chuckles, “You are in a pickle.” She laughs and shakes her head, crossing her arms.

“I am?” you ask.

“No,” she replies with a smile, “You’re not.”
You look down at your own empty cup and scowl. “That’s not funny, Rose.”

“You’re not being funny.” She stands. “More coffee, John?”

“What? Rose.”

She turns and looks at you, hand on the door to the kitchen.

“Yes, John?”

“I’m serious, I need some advice here.”

She shakes her head and moves back into the kitchen again.

“My advice is to move on.”

You scoff. “Move on?”

“I do believe that’s what I just said, isn’t it?”

You get up and move to the window to look into the kitchen.

“Rose I’m going to need more than that. That’s terrible advice.”

She sighs, leaving the coffee to cook. She turns to you.

“I want you to give me a brief rundown of the events you just told me of.”

You lean down on the frame of the window.

“Jake came to warn me about Dirk. Dirk shows up. I go to get Dave so they can talk. Dave—” you sigh, “Dave freaks out. He breaks my glasses. And I ran.”

“So now what, John?”

“That’s what I came here, asking you for!” You feel like throwing a tantrum. Like a child.

She frowns.

“John, what am I supposed to tell you? Run away from your problems?”

“What? I’m not running away.”

“What do you call this then?” She motions out to the shop.

“I needed to get…”

She raises her eyebrows.

“…away.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I’m just so frustrated with everything!” you whine. “I needed to get away and think. It’s so much pressure, Rose, it’s too much.”

“Then break up with him.”

Your world stops turning.

“What?”

“My are you hard of hearing tonight. I said if he’s that much trouble, dump him and move on,
“John.”

“… Dump Dave?”

“That’s what I SAID, yes.”

She silently continues making coffee. You leave the window and sit back down in your chair.

You mind spins.

Break up with Dave? Break up. With Dave. Dave.

She comes back out with two more cups of coffee.

“No,” you tell her quietly.

“What, no more coffee? You want tea instead?”

“No, you know what I mean, Rose,” you say.

She smiles and prepares the coffee. “Elaborate for me.”

“I can’t break up with him. I would never do that. Not only would it kill him…”

You pause. She makes eye contact with you.

“It would kill me.”

“Good,” she coos. “Now. Tell me this. What means more to you?”

She picks up the broken shards.

“A broken pair of shades? Or Dave?”

“But they were special.”

“UUGHH.” Rose loses her cool. “I’m sorry, John, but you’re being ridiculous right now. Yes, he broke the damn glasses. Now, did he intentionally break the glasses?”

“…No.”

“Was it or wasn’t it an accident?”

“It was.”

“Did he try to apologize before you ran out on him?”

“…”

“DID HE?”

“He did! He did.”

She nods her head slowly. “Now tell me what I’m thinking, John.”

You look down at your lap.

“Well. Move on, I guess.”

“Yes, John. Move on.”

You look up. She’s smiling at you.
You slowly, slowly smile back.

She picks the fragments of the glasses up and drops them into your open hands. You curl your fingers around them.

“You know, John?”

You look up as you shove the pieces in your pocket.

“I think your Mom would have liked Dave.”

“Huh,” you say, smiling. The smile then turns into a giggle. The giggle then turns into a laugh. Soon, both you and Rose are laughing.

You walk around to hug her.

“Thank you, Rose.”

“You’re welcome, John.”

You take one more sip of coffee and head for the door.

“Where are you going now?” Rose asks, sitting with her own coffee in hand behind the counter.

“Gotta go see Dave!” you yell, opening the door.

“But your phone died-“

“I know where he is,” you assure her, “I just gotta grab something from home first.”

You run out down the street, quick as you can.

Rose sits behind calmly. She grabs her book from under the counter and opens the page to her bookmark. She tries to read, but smiles and closes the book again. She shoves it off to the side and brings her coffee closer to her face.

“Those two are going places.”

She takes a sip.

~

You hear footsteps approaching in the hallway behind you. Another drunkard on his way you bet.

You stare at your phone in the darkness. You still haven’t moved. You’ve been doing a lot of thinking.

It’s been an hour since you called John and he hung up on you.

You knew he was going to do that, but it still sickened you anyway. It’s not like you didn’t deserve it. You deserve this.

But it still tore at your chest.

You figure you might as well just go to sleep here. Sleep among the other trash here. Where you belong.

There’s a knock at the door above your head.

Uh.

“Dave?”
Is that John?
Is that really John?
“Dave, I know you’re in there.”
You scowl into the darkness.
He knocks again.
“Who’s there?” you say, sarcastically.
There’s a pause behind the door.
“Little old lady,” he responds.
You smirk.
“Is that the best one you know?”
“You haven’t responded,” John sings.
You sigh. “Little-old-lady-who?”
“No need to yodel!” You can hear his grin from this side.
He starts again after a few seconds of silence. “Dave, will you let me in?”
You don’t respond, just keep looking into the dark.
“Dave, come on.” You hear him knock his head against the door.
“Dave isn’t here,” you say plainly.
“Then who am I talking to?”
“The mice.”
“Well the mice need to stop being jackasses and let me in.”
You jump up walk towards the empty room.
“The door is open, John.”
“Oh,” he says, “I didn’t even…”
You hear the door open and turn around.
He’s holding a box. A big box. And it’s wrapped like a present.
You squint until the door is closed again. It only takes a moment to adjust again.
He walks towards you, placing the box on the ground once he’s a comfortable distance inside. He flashes a toothy smile.
“Why are all the lights off in here, Dave?”
“They don’t work,” you tell him softly.
“Ah,” he says.
An awkward silence ensues.
He motions to the box suddenly. “I brought you some-”

“I’m sorry,” you say quickly. A little too loudly.

He leans down and places the box completely on the ground. He takes some more steps towards you and starts to open his arms. He’s looking for a hug.

You take a step back. “Don’t.”

He stops. “Will you open the present at least?”

“Present?”

He picks it up again and brings it to you. You take it into your hands. It’s heavy.

You tear off the paper slowly and open the box.

You stare at it.

“Well,” he sighs, “What do you think?”

A yellow and orange skateboard sits in the box. You had raved about it for weeks on end. About how much you wanted it.

“John,” you whisper. “John, I can’t take it.”

“I got flames painted on it, too.” He shuffles his feet.

You sit on the ground with the box. Staring at it.

“John,” you tell him as he sits next to you, “I don’t deserve this.”

“Sure you do,” he leans into you and nudges you. “It was supposed to be a present for your success with DJing.”

You look at him.

He smiles at you. He leans in and kisses your forehead lightly.

You can’t help but lean into it. When he pulls away you bury your face in his shoulder.

He throws an arm around you and sighs.

“I’m sorry,” you mumble.

“I know,” he kisses the top of your head.

“I broke your mother’s glasses,” you say dumbly, tears threatening your vision.

He’s quiet and sighs, a smile still on his face. “Dave?”

You look at him finally.

“It was an accident. It’s forgotten.”

“… Really?”

“Really. I love YOU Dave. Not a pair of sunglasses.”

“But your Mom-”

“The sunglasses are sunglasses, Dave. You’re you. You’re more valuable than a million pairs of sunglasses.”
You two sit in silence for a few minutes. Thinking.

"Bro left," you tell him finally.

"I figured," he responds, rubbing your shoulder softly. "You alright?"

You shrug. You don’t know if you’re alright.

"Well," he turns and faces you, “there’s only one thing left to do, I guess.”

You turn to him. “What?”

He leans in and captures your lips with his own. A sort of tension melts in your head and chest. He pulls back and smiles.

“We move on, Dave.”

You let that sink in. Maybe it was time to move on.

“Yes, we move on.”

“Yes,” he kisses your lips quickly one more time. “Let’s go home, okay? We have to buy a new table tomorrow.”

You laugh quickly and agree.

---

Once you two are outside, your tension disappears.

You can make it through this. You can do it.

You have John after all of this. After everything, he's stayed by your side.

You turn and look at him. The streetlamps glare off of his glasses as he looks ahead down the street.

"Hey, John?" you say.

He turns and look at you. That smile has found it's way into your heart over time. You don't think you'll ever get tired of it- of him.

You take his hand. His fingers tighten around yours as his smile grows.

"I love you."

"I love you too, Dave."

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment! <3 One more!!

Tumblr: www.captcha-blog.tumblr.com

BIG ANNOUNCEMENT ALONG WITH THE NEXT CHAPTER- STAY TUNED >:D
Three Years Later

Chapter Summary

Three Years have passed

Chapter Notes

So here we are! The final chapter! Who knew that parting would be such sweet sorrow!
On one hand, I'm seriously glad that this is over with because godDAMN FINALLY
But on the other hand, I love writing for you guys and believing that I've entertained you somehow.
So, I have a new project coming up. It's a new JohnDave fic!

Do you see these two losers? (http://captcha-blog.tumblr.com/post/93564508380/i-need-to-post-this-here-for-reasons-dont-ask)
These are my two best friends, Alex and Andrew. (Green shirt = Alex) (Tie dye = Andrew) I go to college with Alex and Andrew is a long time friend.
I introduced these two losers this year. They are very much now, well, an item!
They've been happily dating for a good while now. They're very interesting characters with very interesting stories and experiences. Lots of hardships but also good times.
The two of them have expressed interest in me writing a fic about them, except as JohnDave. So I agreed.
I will be writing the story of how they met and came to fall in love, but as John and Dave!

On another note, I've been playing with the idea of writing a prequel to this story, except with how Dirk and Jake met in this timeline. I'm not sure. Let me know!

I hope you guys like the idea! Let me know what you think, alright?

And now, for my bittersweet ending! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Dave, I gotta go, seriously! The rehearsal…”

“Wait, John, no your tie is all messed up. I thought you had finally learned to tie the damn thing…”

“It doesn’t matter! There’ll be plenty of people there that can help me!”

“No, it’s gotta be me.”

“Jesus just- just tie it!”

You step around to the other side of the bed, your own dress shirt half-buttoned. You get to him and start tying his green tie around his neck.

“You missed a button,” he tells you, poking at your stomach.
You take a moment to look down at your white, button-up shirt and ‘umph’. You finish with his tie and step back to admire the perfect knot. He puts his hands out in a dramatic manner.

“Is it alright now, can I go?”

“Yes,” you tell him, looking down to fix your own shirt, “Go on.”

He steps to the side of you and pecks you on the cheek. “Don’t be late, alright?” You smile, leaning into the kiss but not looking up from your hands at work. “Got it.”

You ask him quickly as he’s leaving if he wants to take a snack with him or something. He groans and slams the door behind him.

You pull your black slacks on and finish tucking in the shirt. You throw your favorite black jacket over it. You were going to go with a tie, but decide to just unbutton the top button of the shirt. Plain and simple.

You saunter out to the kitchen and get the rice out. You’ve got some time for a quick snack. Just as the rice is finishing, you hear the door swing open.

“Dave! Dave?”

“In here, Ms. L,” you shout over your shoulder, stirring the rice in the pot.

You hear her come in the kitchen and drop some bags down on the table. You turn to greet her.

“Davey!” she gushes, “Look at you, huh? Oh, c’mere!” She shimmies over to you as well as she can in her pencil skirt and high heels to give you an enormous hug. She smells like perfume and hairspray. It’s a lot more comforting than you thought it would be.

She pulls back and gives you a light smack to the head, “And enough with the Ms. L shit, ’kay? I’m not gonna tell you again.”

“Fine. Roxy.” She flashes a brilliant smile.

“And why can’t I call you Roxy?” you hear Rose enter the kitchen, carrying many more bags.

Roxy ‘tsks’ and points at her. “Cause you’re a different story, hun. You’re my daughter and I deserve some respect, y’hear?”

Rose rolls her eyes. She drops most of the bags on the ground near the table. You snort and start eating rice straight from the pot.

“Careful with those!” Roxy chastises her, “There’s a shit tonna bottles in there!”

“What’s in the bottles?” Rose asks, raising an eyebrow.

“Ohhhh, this is exciting ain’t it?” Roxy clasps his hands in front of her, “I always love a party.”

“Yeah, well let’s start setting some stuff up or there won’t be a party. We head out in about an hour,” Rose says, rooting through some bags.

“Who died and made you the queenie?” Roxy shakes her head, “We got time!” She moves to grab your fork but you swipe it out of the way in time.

Rose shakes her own head and starts pulling out decorations.

You relinquish your snack to Roxy and move to help her set up.
An hour later and you’re out the door. You all board the bus and settle in some seats in the back.

“I never quite got the point of graduations,” you tell Rose.

She looks up from the knitting she had stashed in her purse. “What do you mean?”

“Well,” you sigh, “you’re handed a piece of paper and it’s like here, this piece of paper means the difference between a $20,000 job and $100,000 job.”

Rose scoffs and returns to her knitting. “I’m not sure that’s exactly what happens. There’s a bit more work put into it.”

“I get that,” you tell her, “You have no idea how many times I had to put Egbert to bed because he fell asleep at the desk, pulling one of his shitty, caffeine-induced all-nighters. But seriously, we gotta sit through at least a million other names and shitty speeches.”

She raises an eyebrow. “Have you even been to a graduation?”

“No.”

“You then kindly pipe it.”

You scoff and watch the city pass by for a while.

“Oh, look, there’s Jade! C’mom!” Roxy pats your shoulder. You and Rose follow her off the bus.

You’re greeted by an enthusiastic Jade and a not-so-enthusiastic Karkat. He was 100% dragged along to this. But he had the decency to wear a button down shirt and a sloppy blue tie to match Jade’s summer dress.

“I already found our seats, let’s go! Dad’s waiting. It’s gonna be pretty crowded soon,” she tells you, already walking.

As you all walk through the courtyard to the front door, you look around at all the cherry-blossom trees lining the way. You think about how many times you’ve had to wait out in this courtyard for John to finish up with lab or class or whatever. Then you two would go out for dinner somewhere. He would fall asleep on the bus-ride back and you’d have to practically carry him up the stairs.

There was that one time when you had gotten into a fight with him. He had come to the college and used his card to swipe in. You couldn’t get in after him so you waited outside all night. You still can’t believe that idiot slept in a lab.

The door is wide open now though. There are other families walking in. You all navigate your way to the gym. The floor is flooded with rows of chairs and so is the stage. A podium sits in the middle of the stage, decorated with ribbons. In fact, the whole damn place is decked out. Figures, seeing that Jade offered to help decorate. She had started at the college two years ago.

You see Mr. Egbert turn and wave to you. You all go and settle down in your seats near him.

“Thank you all so much for coming,” he says, “This is one of the proudest moments of my life and I’m glad I could share it with you all.”

“Aww not a problem,” Roxy waves her hand, “We would have come even if you didn’t want us to!”

You and Rose nod agreeably.

A few minutes later, men and women dressed in caps and gowns start entered the stage in
rehearsed lines. Pomp and Circumstance plays and the crowd starts clapping. You push your shades onto your head, looking for that familiar face in the crowd.

He’s right up in the front row. You see him looking out for you guys. When he spots you, you all start waving. You see him blush and wave back timidly.

You can’t help but smirk as you fold the shades and place them in your jacket pocket.

“Good evening!” says a short, bald man, who you can only guess is the President of the College. “And welcome to the graduation of the Class of 2017 at our lovely Community College here in the city!”

More applause.

“We’re pleased to have our Valedictorian step forward and say a few words to open this ceremony.”

A young woman stands and steps forward to the podium. There are whoops and cries of joy from the back of the room. She is absolutely stunning. She’s tall and dark, black hair perfectly curled. She made the graduation gown look like the designer dress she was probably wearing under it.

Rose leans over to you. “That’s Kanaya Maryam. John was telling me about her. She’s my age. Already graduating. Smart girl- got hired by a big name designer in New York City.”

You lean over slightly. “Maybe John will introduce her to us?”

Rose smirks and shrugs. You both watch as the President places the medal around her neck.

“Hello,” she starts, “And thank you very much for the honor of speaking to this graduating class.” She smiles a clean, white smile and clears her throat.

“We’re all here up on this stage today for different reasons. Some of us are here because we wanted to pursue a higher education. Others to get the experience they needed for a job they want. Some are here because their parents didn’t give them an option.” That merited some laughter. “But I’ll tell you one reason we’re all here today. Love.”

Your eyebrows tweak a little upward as you see John look out to the group.

“The love and support of my family is what has kept me going all of these years,” Kanaya continues. “There were nights when I told myself I couldn’t do it. There was no way I could finish college. I was going to drop out and never come back.” She smiles lightly. “But then I had them on my side, showing me and telling me to never give up. So, I didn’t. But, the love of a family isn’t where it ends. It could be the love of education, the love of friends…”

You nudge Rose and she snorts.

“or the love of your life.”

Rose nudges back and you blush. Just like you expected, you look up at the stage and John’s looking right at you. He’s smiling his most brilliant smile- the one that he’s usually pretty conscious about. You smile right on back, as big as you can.

He mouths something to you. You didn’t get it, so you knit your eyebrows together and lift the shades up.

What? You mouth to him silently.

He rolls his eyes. I Love. You.

Oh. You smile. I love you too.

When Kanaya finishes her speech, she receives a roaring applause and sits back with her
classmates. She receives a few pats on the back she smiles shyly. She’s pretty much glowing.

A few more people make brief speeches. Finally, they start handing out diplomas.

“John Egbert,” the President says as John walks up to shake his hand and receive his diploma. You stand and whoop, along with Roxy and Jade as Mr. Egbert snaps pictures. You can see him blushing from here- you were the loudest group there.

With some closing words, the ceremony concludes. A few hats are thrown, and you had told John to do the same, for ironic purposes, but you guess he was smart enough to hang onto it.

You all shuffle out to the crowded hallway to make your way to the courtyard. You text John and tell him to meet you all out there.

Twenty minutes later, Rose spots him coming out the doors. He makes his way over to the group of you, smile spread across his flushed face. His tassel swings as he jogs over.

The first one he greets is his father. He catches him in a big hug, patting his back.

“Thanks for coming, Dad,” you hear him say.

“I’m so proud of you, son”, Mr. Egbert beams, “Proudest day of my life.”

He picks Jade up and spins her around briefly. He even shakes Karkat’s hand.

Roxy catches him in a bone-crushing hug, nearly knocking the breath out of him.

Rose on the other hand is more delicate with her hug.

Finally, he gets to you. You grab him and pull him into a tight hug. Before you can say anything he kisses you hard and fast. You see one or two people turn to look at you but you can’t bring yourself to give much of a shit or two.

“You’re welcome,” he says quietly, bumping foreheads with you.

And you know, you just know that it’s more than just a thank you for coming to the graduation. It’s a thank you for staying with him and helping him through it. For making sure he ate and got enough sleep. For helping him stay on track with his homework, on top of your own working schedule. For loving him.

“You’re welcome,” you tell him sincerely, “You really are.”

He smiles sweetly and kisses you one more time. The tassel gets in the way and you both laugh.

“Let’s go!” Roxy pulled at your jacket, “We gotta get back before all the buses are packed!”

---

When you get back to the apartment, John is taken aback by the small party you had all set up. You had about twenty cakes, courtesy of Mr. Egbert, and lots of food, courtesy of Roxy.

You each give him a present later in the night.

Jade and Karkat give him a new journal to record his biological observations in.

Rose gives him a book on magic tricks.

Roxy gives him a book on introduction to computer programming.

His father gives him a brand-new-fucking computer.

You tell him that your present is coming later. Rose waggles her eyebrows and you whack her in the shoulder. “Shut the hell up, it’s special.”

“It sure is,” she counters.
Much, much later, Roxy and Rose are finally leave last. You close the door and turn to lean on it, facing John.

He walks up and kisses you softly, letting his hands graze your shoulders. “God, Roxy can talk forever.”

“I know, geez, I thought she’d never fucking leave,” you agree.

“So what, we clean up now?” he sighs.

“Nah, we’ll do that tomorrow,” you tell him, “The first part of the present starts now. First, let’s get out of these suits, I’m dying.”

You both change into more comfortable boxers and t-shirts and return to the kitchen.

“Now,” you tell him, “The first present.”

You reach into the fridge in the kitchen and John groans.

“It’s not more food is it? I don’t think I can-”

He stops when he sees what you’re holding.

“You made the mac-n-cheese?”

You nod, smiling deviously.

“You made the FUCKING MAC-N-CHEESE HOLY SHIT.”

You had found John’s favorite mac-n-cheese recipe. He would go on and on about making mac-n-cheese with bread crumbs on top with several different kinds of cheeses, just like his Dad does. But, he always complained about never having enough time or money to make it.

“Heat it up, heat it UP,” he tells you excitedly.

“It’s two in the morning,” you tell him, “You really wanna-”

He glares and holds up a hand. “Heat. It. UP.”

You shrug and turn the oven on and stick it in. “There. That’ll take twenty. Next present,” you motion for him to follow.

You walk into the living room and pull a smaller present out from under the sofa. It’s wrapped with a neat little red bow. (Jade helped).

You hand it to him and he slowly unwraps it.

He looks up at you in amazement.

“Are these plane tickets?”

You smile. “Yeah.”

“Where? What? I don’t…” He’s beyond words.

You take him by the shoulders. “It’s a week vacation out to California. Beaches, L.A., the whole experience, Egbert. I even signed us up for one of those super ironic bus tours.”

“Dave!”
“I heard the bus goes by Nic Cage’s house.”

“You’re fucking serious right now? Holy shit!”

He hugs you and you rub his back. You never get tired of the feeling of just holding him.

There’s a knock at the door. You both freeze up.

“Was that a fucking knock?”

“Yeah, I heard it,” you say, slowly moving towards the door. You look through the peep-hole, but don’t see anything.

“There’s no one there,” you tell John, but you hear a knock again.

“What the fuck,” you mutter as you open the door.

You look up and down the hallway. No one.

You’re about to close the door, but you look down and a large orange envelope is sitting there.

You hesitantly bend over and grab it before closing and double-locking the door.

You walk over and hand it to John.

“What is this,” he asks, receiving it hesitantly, “Why are you giving it to me?”

He takes it into his own two hands. “Hey, it has my name on it!”

His name is, in fact, typed onto the front of the envelope. No address. Just “John Egbert”. Plain letters.

He looks at you, eyes squinted. “Do I open it?”

You shrug. “Sure. It’s obviously for you.”

He shrugs too, and opens the envelope carefully. He holds out one hand as he shakes out whatever’s in there.

Who knows HOW many hundred dollar bills scatter all over the ground.

“What THE FUCK?” John yells incredulously, dropping the envelope like it’s hot. “WHAT THE EVER LOVING SHIT IS THIS?”

You curse loudly and bend down to start picking bills up.

Wait a minute. Wait a MINUTE.

You can’t fucking believe it.

You can’t FUCKing beLIEVE it.

John’s still collecting the bills.

“Dave, help me pick these up, holy SHIT.”

“Hold on, I’m going go down to the front desk and get a new envelope to stash it in.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he tells you, “Hurry!”

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One pair of pants later, you’re in the lobby of the building. You ask the tired man at the desk for a
After you get it, you step outside. There are no cars out at this hour. At least not many. You look up and down the street. You sigh.

“Bro,” you say quietly, “I know you can hear me. I know you’re here.”

Nothing.

“I don’t know what you’re getting at. I don’t know why you fucking did that. That’s a lot of fucking money.”

The street remains quiet.

“Jesus,” you sigh as you run a hand through your hair. “Fuck. Thanks, I guess. Just… Thanks.”

You turn to walk back into the building.

There’s a note taped to the door.

_You’re welcome, lil’ man._

You shake your head in amazement.

“You have to stop doing this, man. You’re gonna have to give it up eventually.”

You take the note down.

There’s another fucking note.

_No fucking chance in hell, Dave. Take care of yourself and Egbert_

Fuck. Typical.

You smile regardless.

You stick them both in your pocket and go inside.

By the time you get back upstairs, John is pacing around the room.

“Dave!” he bombards you as soon as you walk in, “Dave, there’s at least $20,000 in here.”

“Damn,” you say, shaking your head.

“I know!” he says incredulously, “That’s, like, just over the price of my student loans!”

You let out a sharp breath. That’s why Bro did it.

“Well then put it in here and we’ll see about how to pay it off,” you say.

John takes a deep breath and shoves the money in the envelope.

“What if this isn’t for me?” He asks quickly.

“It’s for you,” you reassure him, “It had your name on it.”


He goes into the bedroom to shove it between the mattresses. “Just in case.”

You both return to the kitchen, remembering your mac-n-cheese. You serve yourselves some in heaping bowls. You both decide to take them back to bed with you.
Once you’re cuddled in, you start eating and put on a random movie.

“Oh my god,” John says, pulling the covers in even closer, “It’s even better than I imagined!”

You agree, putting another fork-full in your mouth.

You continue eating until you can’t possibly eat another damn thing.

Finally, you both have to lie down to accommodate for the food-babies and finish the movie.

You’re absent-mindedly holding hands as the credits roll. But you’re not paying attention anymore. You’re both looking at one another, not saying anything. Just looking.

“You know,” John says softly, “I could see myself being with you and just holding your hand for a very long time.”

“Yeah?” you respond.

“Yeah.”

“How long is a very long time?”

He shrugs against you. “I dunno. The rest of my life?”

You feel your heart swell.

“That sounds good to me.”

He moves even closer against you. You move to accommodate space for him and settle in comfortably.

“That mac-n-cheese was great,” he tells you as he drifts off to sleep.

“Yeah,” you tell him, closing your eyes and thinking about holding John Egbert’s hand for the rest of your lives, “It really fills the void, doesn’t it?”

THE END

Chapter End Notes

ALL I ASK IS THAT YOU LEAVE ME ONE LAST COMMENT

Again, thank you so much for the continued support and endearing messages!

Look out for this next fic coming out soon! I've already started working on it, so I'll let you know!

Don't forget to follow me at captcha-blog.tumblr.com

I love you all! <333

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