"Mista’s pretty sure that the entire cafe has concluded either one of two things. One, Giorno Giovanna is incredibly charming in an absolutely unflattering way — he looks like he has no fucking clue how dancing even works, and though he probably doesn’t think he can’t dance, Mista can certainly conclude that this guy cannot dance. Two — Giorno is excellent at making an ass of himself."

((A coffee shop AU that started off as a joke, and now it's a serious mess of drama and comedy. Welcome to Hell.))

Notes

So this started as an inside joke with my GF. I said something like, “dude I want a cafe AU where the gang runs this cafe and like giorno walks in one day and mista sees him and is like FUCK THAT’S A BEAUTIFUL MAN and spills hot coffee on himself”. Which further evolved into “Abbacchio is a bitchy police man who hangs around the cafe all the time just for Buccellati because he’s in love” and “okay but on wednesday narancia holds rap battles and dance-offs and everyone gets super into it and giorno can’t dance” and well here we are.

I work at a fucking cafe and I hate it so much but I love it in this setting.
and I haven’t written a fanfiction in like 2 years, and I wasn’t going to upload this because I was embarrassed by it, but I re-read VA and I’m PRETTY SURE i got everything down as much as it’s gonna be

I’m a sucker for flustered little gay-ass Abbacchio tho.
Chapter 1

The warmly inviting, jazz-laden atmosphere of the out-of-the-way café is shattered that morning, by a stumble, splat, and screech. What would've been an otherwise typical morning is now filled with caterwauling, and in the midst of the quiet café, among one other patron in an officer's uniform, stands a very confused and unintentionally accident-causing Giorno.

The story was this: He woke up maybe an hour too early, and couldn't get back to sleep. After spending a good half hour tossing and turning the blond merely chose to give up, and with a half-assed groan ran a brush through his tangled curls, threw on a blue winter sweater with a heart-shaped cutout over the breast area and some slacks with torn-up old winter boots, and proceeded out into the frost-laden morning in the pursuit of coffee.

Giorno never drinks coffee unless he feels like he's suffering, which on this morning he doesn't, but a distant schoolmate named Trish had told him earlier in the month of how great Passione Café was and that if he came in she'd give him a free mocha... And it had been quite a morning, and now Giorno is here, waiting at the register, while some idiot who stumbled and spilled coffee on himself is jumping around like he's on hot coals. There’s a bout of shouting, phrases like, “Oh my God, Mista!” and “Dude, are you okay?!” and even one calmly-stated though still worried, “You’re going to the doctor, right now.”

This Mista guy, with tufts of black hair sticking out from underneath a plain blue knit cap with the rim rolled up, and bits of black stubble on his chin, only responds with a disgruntled snort and purses his lips, ducking into the kitchen and ripping his apron off all the while, and then from what Giorno can see through the window, his coffee-soaked shirt. The swinging doors push back again and Trish, with her ever-pink coiffure and candy-pink lipstick, pops out carrying a tray of sweets in both arms with the grace of a swan; as soon as she ducks to put said treats into the bake case, giving Giorno a, “Be right with you!”, Gio’s eyes immediately track towards where the door is swinging again, getting a better view of Mista’s bare back.

Nice.

Admittedly, Giorno shouldn’t be staring, but his attention is snapped back to Trish almost immediately as the other employees begin to disperse — most to check on that poor Mista guy, who Giorno feels a pang of sympathy for, because one time he tried cooking and burned his finger. Well, it’s certainly not the same feeling, but still!

“So, like,” begins Trish, waving her arms around in dramatic gestures as she speaks, “I promised you a free mocha. Whipped cream?”

“No, thank you.”

With a casual shrug of her thin little shoulders, the distantly pastry-scented young woman turns towards her task, gesturing again, one hand around a paper cup. “I feel bad,” she holds an
outstretched palm behind her, apparently at the swinging kitchen doors, and the raucous chattering
from behind them, “for poor Mista. Like, if you become friends, don’t breathe around him. He
smells —” she pinches her nose, “horrible.”

Actually, Giorno imagines he smells like burned flesh and coffee right now.

“This hasn’t happened to him in a while.”

“A while?”

Capping the drink and passing it over the countertop, the sleeve of her blouse stained with an
almost-invisible drop of chocolate and coffee splatters, Trish continues, “He’s hopeless!” She
wails, rolling her eyes, elbow propped against the marble countertop and head in her palm. “Can’t
keep his head out of his pants for five minutes, and every time someone reasonably attractive
walks in here, he gets caught up staring, and then has to go to the doctor.”

Oh. Ohh. Oh!

Giorno goes to take a sip of his coffee rather awkwardly, as if to shove aside the oddness of the
situation, and burns his tongue doing so. With a small, renounced huff at Trish’s action of
wiggling the tip jar in his face, Giorno slips five euros into the glass, and takes a window seat.
From a simple shoulder-bag, the blond pulls out a semi-thick hardcover novel, and reclines
casually against the creaking wooden chair as the saxophones from the cafe speakers blare like
foghorns in his ears.

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There are two things Guido Mista actively seeks in life. One is good food, which he’s perfectly
capable of making on his own, without all this pre-cooked, frozen, heat-it-up-and-you’re-done
bullshit — his blueberry muffins are five thousand times better than the frozen ones that they have
to let thaw for an hour before popping them in the oven. Two, attractive people and general
romance, because one time he bought some cheesy-ass romance novel in a bookstore, and when
the lady had asked if he was into “that kinda stuff” all Mista did was give a noncommittal shrug.
Yeah, maybe, he’d said, which was an absolute lie if there ever was one.

He’s into it. He doesn’t quite understand why he’s into it, nor is he on the dating scene enough to
understand how any of it works quite as well as some casanova, but he’s well aware that
sometimes the absolute prettiest people step foot into the café. And, much like an idiot, each and
every time it happens Mista goes home with burns from hot coffee or from sticking his hands into
the oven without any oven mitts on. This isn’t the first time, nor the last time, this kind of
unreciprocated, “Hey, you’re attractive, and my flesh is burning” bullshit is going to happen.

It never gets old.

Mista’s pressing himself against the window of the swinging cafe doors and their various food
stains and coffee splashes that are probably older than he is, face squished against the dirty
plexiglass. Damn it, damn it, damn it! If things were going to go his way at all, he’d be the one
giving Trish’s Cute Friend a free mocha, and planning their first date! Mista would present him
with a bouquet of gardenias, because Cute Friend looks like a gardenia type of guy, and buy him
dinner, and they’d have a storybook slow dance under a gazebo, and —

— ugh! Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here, Mista.

Cliches are Mista’s niche. He’s the best at them, at yanking out some ridiculous pickup line on any
unsuspecting patron, and usually promptly gets rejected afterwards. Trish says it’s his scent, but
Mista thinks he smells just fine. Right now, especially. The medium roast he just doused himself with always has this amazing, rich scent to it.

In his earlier panic about his burns, Mista had charged into the back room and ripped off his apron and shirt, grabbed the sprayer hose, and splashed himself with cold water. So not only is the floor soaked with dishwater, Mista is sopping wet, and everyone's incessantly bugging him about hurrying to the doctor.

"It's both a health concern and sanitation issue," begins the ever-expressionless assistant manager Buccellati, "for you to be standing back here shirtless, with your skin peeling off."

"I ain't gonna just," Mista waves his hands in the air, cheek still pressed to the glass, as a very blurry image of Cute Friend shifting to cross his legs enters his vision, "walk out there — I made an ass of myself."

"You do that daily." Fugo retorts, a thin, joking smile pulling at his lips as he mops up.

"Plus — Abbacchio's out there —"

"Like always." Interjects Fugo.

" — always out there, always watching me fuck up, and giving me shit for it."

It takes a while of back-and-forth, and a while of Mista almost never taking his gaze off of the blond boy in the cafe corner, with his loosely-curled hair free and cascading in waves over his shoulders, until he finally has to suck it up and head out for the day wearing a coffee-splattered knit sweater.

The awkwardness of just giving this kid a passing glance is almost too much. There was one time he gave himself a third-degree burn from the oven, because a lovely lady in a corset had walked in (he has a scar from that, on the back of his olive-skinned hand); another time he managed to not get injured but nearly did by narrowly avoiding smashing his head against the inside of a waist-level cabinet; once, nearly slicing his finger open on a knife he wasn't even using, and then the many coffee incidents. It was probably because they always had four pots out on the counter at once, and filled or not, this was some fucked-up cafe.

He'd voice his concern to the owners, but Trish's father is somewhat of a nightmare to talk to. Mista's met the guy once, and fuck doing it again. When he tried grouching to Buccellati about it, he was met with a semi-concerned but mostly-dismissive, "Boss has told us before that we're required to have four different types of coffee brewed at any time."

Which is bullshit! Because no one comes in here for the brewed stuff except for grouchy old men! The most people come in on Wednesday, when Narancia breaks the calm atmosphere to host rap battles and dance-offs, and every other time the entire world wants Trish's drinks. Which, frankly, aren't any better than what everyone else can make, but Trish has the perfect image to do whatever she wants in life flawlessly. She's fit every scene she's walked into, and Mista is, frankly, angry about the way she manages to get all the numbers at the cafe. He wants romance too, dammit!

...though, Trish did say that her cafe-based romances never work out.

But that's just her! Mista knows how to get love, kind of. He's just really bad at it.

Anyway, on the way out, Cute Friend glances up from his book right at him with these stupidly gorgeous eyes and inquires as to if Mista is okay — admittedly, he should've gone to the doctor right after it happened, but there were important people to look at and gush about — to which the cap-donning individual can only manage a, "This happens all the time."
"Trish said it did."

TRISH UNA IS NO LONGER TO BE TRUSTED.

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It’s a little over a week until Giorno goes back to the cafe, and that’s not because he wants to avoid anyone in there — in fact, he doesn’t know a single person there besides Trish, and sort-of that Mista kid — but is, indeed, because Giorno doesn’t drink a lot of coffee, nor is he a fan of caffeinated beverages. In general, he’s always drinking water or decaf tea, and he would say he has a relatively healthy sleep schedule. No need to poison himself with stimulants.

Though that isn’t to say he’s a healthy eater. Giorno once ate a school lunch consisting of pudding and apple juice, because the dessert looked better than the main course.

No, no. The exact reason for going back is because of Trish’s eager announcement in maths that it’s Wednesday, and that means Narancia is hosting rap battles and dance-offs until close, and that Gio absolutely has to be there to see, and plus he can meet everyone, and this and that and a plethora of reasons Giorno forgot. So here he is, sitting at another side-table at the cafe, because today all of the tables have been pushed against the wall to make room in the left-centre of the large venue for whichever participants wish to play.

The cafe itself has been severely darkened, with spotlights hung terrifyingly poorly above the impromptu show area, illuminating the alternating white and brown tiles on the floor and making each participant seem to glow as they move around. Most of the guests are seated on the tables, and Trish had mentioned that this is the only time they allow “butts on the tables” since it’s a sanitation concern; with that being said, Giorno at least tries to have a smidge of respect for the establishment, and sits in a chair placed cock-eyed in front of a square-shaped, green-topped table.

Service at the cafe has slowed severely, but those that wander over to the counter don’t seem the least bit perturbed by the lackluster assistance, instead mostly-focused on the riveting performances. A majority of the sweet-filled plates dotting the cafe’s tables and the laps of patrons have been all but remembered, abandoned in the excitement of the weekly entertainment.

Though the speakers on the cafe ceiling blasts a bouncy hip-hop tune, only paused whenever someone’s next challenge is a rap battle — thus far, Narancia has won all ten of the events he’s participated in, most of those being dance-offs.

Without Trish’s help, Giorno is easily able to pinpoint Narancia, even though the youth isn’t wearing a nametag as the rest of the employees are. In part, that’s due to the fact that he’s the one hosting, shouting excitedly for the next participant to step up, and promptly kicking their asses; additionally, multiple employees are screaming and cheering him on, with Trish occasionally shrieking out-of-place comments like, “Show them why you’re the rap God, Narancia! Woo!” The atmosphere, in contrast to last time Giorno stopped by, is riled and excitable, more akin to a club than an out-of-the-way cafe. Narancia, with his black hair held back loosely by a headband, wearing only a loosely-fitting black tank top and sweatpants with high-topped sneakers, is sweating just slightly under the hot lights. He gasps for air a few times between challenges, coming down when the vocal battles begin, and dancing with full force when the time rolls around again — wearily, but still excellently.

This kid can dance.

Giorno can kind-of dance to such upbeat music. When he was younger, he was enrolled in dance classes, and in his free time he’d dance alone in his room. Other than that, he has zero skill, and
while he may not have two left feet, he’s certainly not on par with any of the participants. The cheering and caterwauling is tempting him, almost, to just get up there and go — certainly would be an interesting way to make some friends here, though Trish might poke fun at him in class tomorrow.

Like a child, he’s grinning ear-to-ear when Narancia drops a quick-witted line, and the whole venue bursts into raucous cackling.

Next to him, the table shakes with the weight of someone hopping up onto it, and the paper cup filled with water nearly topples over. Giorno lashes an arm out to catch it, a few little drops splattering on the surface’s corner, and catches a glimpse of the man who’d previously dunked himself with coffee the week prior. Here he is, sitting on the table next to Giorno, more or less focused on Narancia’s aggressive vocal prose.

“You didn’t spill anything on yourself today?” Questions the golden-haired boy with a joking half-smile, eyes shifting from Mista, to the water cup in his hands, to the improvised stage, and to Mista again. He gives a simple snort, glancing away for a sole second and dipping his hand underneath his cap to scratch at his head awkwardly, while Giorno only exchanges a quiet chuckle to himself. “You’re alright, I take it?”

“Like I said,” begins Mista, gesturing idly towards the coffee pots on the countertop, “it happens — doctor jus’ shook his head at me, and told me what to do, even if I already know.” Pause. “I’m fine now, thanks.”

A bout of silence ensues.

"So, uh — how’d you meet Trish?"

If only they both weren’t so socially inept; sure, Giorno is quite easily able to make friends, but he doesn’t have anyone he quite considers himself too close to, and Trish is merely a sociable person that Giorno often speaks to. He’d consider them friends by now, but they’re more likely sociable acquaintances — people who, once they’re no longer in the same class, will forget about former inklings feelings of similarity and trust. To add to the awkwardness, Giorno’s chatting with the man who spilled coffee all over himself just because he thought Giorno was attractive. Outlook so far: not good.

"We’re classmates." Giorno responds simply, voice risen to compensate for the now-blaring dance music. "I don’t drink coffee usually, but she kept bringing the cafe up," he toys with the braid over his shoulder, nimble fingers running over the twisted strands, "so I dropped by."

"Ah. Cool."

More silence amidst the resounding music and tapping of sneakers on tile.

"So, uh — your name?"

"Giorno."

"I’m Mista."

"I know."

Dammit. They might actually have something to talk about, if the both of them weren’t giving a half-assed attempt at chattering. But here they are.

From behind the darkened counter, Trish is waving her hands eagerly at the two, a gesture that has
say something scrawled all over it. Giorno has no idea what he could say, and remains silent, but Mista's sudden sputtering tells him that he's definitely paying attention to whatever gestures Trish makes.

"So — dancing." What about it? "Would you believe me if I said I'm good at it?"

Giorno could believe just about anything this hat-donning dork chokes out. "I'm no good at it, so sure."

"I'm nothing like Narancia," continues Mista, now leaning forward with his head in his palm and his elbow on his knee, "but I can do it, and I think I will, just 'cause no one's giving him a challenge."

Giorno nods encouragingly, though he doesn't comment, as Mista gives a tiny shrug and hops off of the table. He's thereafter replaced by Trish, who instead of jumping to the table merely leans against it, and only speaks during the interlude when no one's dancing.

"What do you think?"

"Narancia sure has a lot of skill."

"And?"

"He's a great freestyle rapper?"

"And?"

"I should put money in the tip jar?"

"Yes! But wrong — I was talking about Mista." Giorno shrugs. "Like, okay, granted he stinks and every part of him is just hair and he never takes off his dumb hat, but he's good at cooking, and he's fun!"

"I'm not interested in set-ups, Trish." He's met with rolled eyes and a squeaky reply about how, yeah, okay, she didn't ask them to go on a date, just be friends, and something about Mista needing friends. Or something.

Silence yet again ensues, as both are occupied this time by devoting their full attention to the dancing. Mista is, surely, a lot lighter on his feet than half the other participants were, though everyone still deems Narancia the winner. Giorno realizes that there's some kind of bias from all sides to the short teen, but despite that everyone's having the time of their lives.

"So. You're going next, right?"

No? No, Giorno is absolutely not — hey, Trish! Stop dragging the poor kid from his chair, he really doesn't want to —

While his hands are raised in protest and he’s unwillingly pushed towards the stage area, Mista walks past and slaps him a cheery high-five, which is met with an exasperated groan as the cherry-scented Trish throws her elbow around his neck and proclaims that the "cafe newcomer" is going to face off against the champion. What, are all of these people regulars, or something? By the looks of it, they all seem to know everything that's going on, what's going to happen, blah blah blah… Giorno concludes that he’s officially fucked in the dance-off.

But, hey, he can’t be as bad as some of the participants, can he? By studying Narancia’s movements in contrast with the others, he seems to give a fair contest by toning down his skill
only slightly, and while he still outweighs the competition, at the very least he’s kind about it; Giorno’s sharp observational skills tell him that Narancia didn’t need to tone much down for Mista, which thus means that Giorno is, as stated, fucked.

What do cafe workers even do all day to hone freestyle rapping and hip-hop skills? Is there some secret Rappers Anonymous group Giorno needs to sign up for?

As if talking into a microphone, Narancia cups his hand in front of his mouth and dramatically raises his right arm, shouting out the words, “Alllllllright, so you’re gonna face the master, huh? Huh?” Not by choice! “What’s your name again? Trish said it was — Gio-something?”

“Giorno. Giorno Giovanna.”

“GioGio?”

Absolutely not.

“Okay — okay, GioGio!” GIORNO. “Let’s throw down!”

Fuck.

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Mista’s pretty sure that the entire cafe has concluded either one of two things. One, Giorno Giovanna is incredibly charming in an absolutely unflattering way — he looks like he has no fucking clue how dancing even works, and though he probably doesn’t think he can’t dance, Mista can certainly conclude that this guy cannot dance. Two — Giorno is excellent at making an ass of himself.

Granted, the entirety of the venue witnessed Trish forcibly yanking his short blond self into the show area, and Giorno was clearly not chickenshit enough to say no to the idea. But still.

If he weren’t a cute person, Mista probably would’ve been booing and hissing mentally (because, y’know, when people actually try their hardest at something, it’s rude to do that — last time they did, they lost customers, and Trish’s parents were not having that again). But unfortunately for Mista, Giorno’s cute, and distracting enough to the point where the dark-haired man can’t even focus long enough to eat the apple tart sitting in his hand. It’s embarrassing, and Mista’s sure that Giorno feels the same way, but his ineffective attempts are just… just…

Ugh!

Cute!

The life of a hopeless romantic is a rough one, but the good news is that he’s not handling food right now, lest he lose a limb or something.

There’s something in the blond’s face, something that says he’s having fun out there despite getting totally owned. Which, just to add to Mista’s stupid affectionate thoughts, he laughs when Narancia is deemed the winner and admits that he thought he could do better than that. Trish hops over the countertop and claps Giorno on the back so hard that he stumbles forward, beaming from ear to ear, and then drops a landmine.

No. No no nononono. She doesn’t know what she’s doing with that proposal.

“Well, Giorno — I’m sure you’re better at dancing than me!” She’s lying. Trish is pretty good, if Mista does say so himself. Which, he does. “But, I’d bet you’re even better than Buccellati is!”
Jesus Christ, NO.

Even from the darkest corner of the restaurant, Mista can see the casually-dressed Abbacchio pop his head up from his reading, and immediately narrow his eyes into a glare, black-painted lips pursed into a thin line.

Trish really, really, has no idea what she’s just done. Similarly, Buccellati has no clue, either, for he’s sort-of oblivious to the situation as he steps back from behind the counter and politely gives Giorno a shake of the hand, an Archaic smile wrought on his features. Mista can swear in the next ensuing few minutes, as both of these left-footed, unbalanced buffoons try dancing, that smoke’s coming out of Abbacchio’s ears.

There’s one thing most of the cafe workers know by heart, and that’s the fact that the asshole, lipstick-wearing police officer who always sits in the cafe whenever he’s got down time, absolutely despises newbies treading on his turf. “His turf” being exclusive to Buccellati, whom gossip girl Trish effortlessly guessed that Abbacchio was head-over-heels for. The last time someone showed up Buccellati in a dance-off — which is admittedly not that hard — Abbacchio had gotten up and promptly wiped the floor with them, with a glare intimidating enough to make the customer not come back. It’d been six months since then, and Mista really doesn’t want to watch the ensuing drama, nor does he want that cute little Giorno to flee in terror from the abominable beast that is Leone Abbacchio.

In their free time, Buccellati and Abbacchio are drinking buddies; Mista’s heard that Abbacchio despises coffee, and only hangs around the cafe as often as he does because it gives him opportunity to speak to the assistant manager. He usually doesn’t eat anything when he comes in either, instead just sitting in the corner with either headphones on and a quixotic expression, or buried in some book. Every time Buccellati goes on his lunch break and Abbacchio’s there, they’ll sit down together and converse quietly amongst themselves, and a bright light will flicker behind the officer’s eyes. Mista’s inner romantic can’t help but notice that, and consider that they’d be a perfect fit.

And, hey. Abbacchio may be an asshole, and may have his share of making fun of everyone (especially when Mista takes a nice hot coffee bath), but he’s good company.

But the one thing — the one thing that no visitor should ever do, is to fuck around with Buccellati. Whether it’s joking or not, or involves beating him in a dance battle, it’s a zone where no person should enter into unless they want to die a slow and painful death.

The both of them have clearly no idea what they’re doing, just swaying back and forth and stomping sometimes, and it’s even more humiliating to watch than Giorno getting his ass whooped by Narancia just because neither of them can actually seem to move to the blaring beat of the music. Mista almost wants to bury his eyes in his hands and shake his head and groan into his palms. Customers are merely watching, not as riled up as they were, but remaining positive and smiling in either case. Narancia, from in front of the bake case, is cheering and throwing his arms about despite the awful display, and Trish is eagerly clapping her hands together, while Fugo merely wipes down the countertops.

It takes a bit until the viewers unsurprisingly note Giorno as the winner, and then they all know what’s next if they’ve been around for longer than six months, because a ripple of ooo’s resonates in a wave around the cafe. The two participants shake hands again, both looking like they had a good time, and Buccellati gives the now-standing Abbacchio a clap on the shoulder and retreats back behind the counter. A ripple of murmurs, comments like, “That kid’s not coming back,” reach Mista’s ears.
The officer loosens his tie and tosses it onto the table, undoing the top two buttons of his shirt and untucking it from his trousers, and throws his head cockily to the side with a taunting, “Beginner’s luck.”

Even Trish looks a little guilty, having realized what she’s done, and as soon as Fugo starts the music track, the cafe buzzes into an intense, watchful silence. All Mista can think about is how anyone’s supposed to save this poor 11th-year from the wrath.

At Abbacchio’s scowl, Giorno only gives a sly little smirk, which clearly serves to piss the taller off even more than he was.

Oh, God. Oh, fucking Christ.

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WHO THE FUCK DID THIS KID THINK HE WAS, ANYWAY?

He should be the one dancing, rather poorly, with Buccellati, and he should be the one smiling at the cafe’s assistant manager, and he should be doing this and that and kicking this damn blondie to the curb where he fuckin’ belongs, and urgh, Abbacchio isn’t jealous! Abbacchio doesn’t get jealous. He just gets mad, and gets competitive, but not for any jealous reasons. It’s not as if Buccellati’s probably the most gorgeous man on the planet, the man that deserves to be showered with rose petals and get everything he’s wanted in life, rather than working at a damn cafe and occasionally coming to dinner with little burns dotting the backs of his hand from coffee splashes.

The last person that fucked with the object of Abbacchio’s affections was terrified by his scowling, but this Giorno kid — this damn Giorno Giovanna kid — only smirks at him, as if accepting the challenge. And when they get into it, he’s a better dancer than he was against Narancia, actually able to keep up with the beat and maintain jeering eye contact. Under pressure, he almost seems more confident — and here, his pride’s on the line, if he ever wants to step foot into the venue. At least, that’s the feeling Abbacchio wants to insinuate, because he’s far too passive-aggressive to physically remove a technically-innocent civilian from a public place.

Abbacchio attempts to trip Giorno mid-dance, and Giorno dodges with a swanlike grace and minimal effort. Abbacchio’s brow furrows; spectators seem not to have realized, or if they have, assume it’s all part of the dance. Has this midget actually been in fights before? Real fights? Did some bully attempt to trip little Giorno at the flagpole and string him up by his underwear on a tree branch? Either way, he’s actually moving now, not making a complete dumbass of himself, and definitely trying to make one of Abbacchio.

The dancing gets more aggressive, akin to that of a fight set to upbeat dance tunes; Abbacchio juts his elbow into Giorno’s face, and the latter responds in kind with an aggressive tap of his foot and a staged knee-kick. Abbacchio parries left, Giorno turns into a fuckin’ show-off by kicking his leg over his head and doing a backflip with a perfect landing, and so Abbacchio copies that — throws himself forward and lands with one foot squarely in-between Giorno’s. The music comes to a halt, and they’re breathing heavily, with a freaky perfect timing to their finale. The cafe is whooping and hollering, and in the background Mista can be heard shouting out, “Damn, Giorno!”

As if it weren’t completely obvious, Abbacchio’s deemed the winner, and the tired cafe guests disperse as the house lights are brought back up. He hadn’t realized it’d been so late, and quickly scrambles to check his phone for any messages, but he’s missed nothing, and no one’s getting mugged outside, so Abbacchio reasons it’s safe to officially go off-duty for the night.

He overhears Giorno mention something about taking musical theatre once, and all kinds of theatre classes, and now it’s no wonder that their dance battle almost became a literal battle.
“My favourite musical is Les Misérables.”

This kid has no taste!

Judgement aside, it’s ten o’clock, a bit past closing — they’ve all gotten too caught up in the show, but no one seems to mind. The employees scramble to get everything cleaned up and locked as soon as possible, and Giorno mentions that he’ll be going home since he has school in the morning, which entails Buccellati sending Trish home earlier for the same reason. Narancia and Fugo, of school-age but not attending school at the moment, stay behind to help close. Abbacchio offers help, but is met with a, “Technically, no one is supposed to be in the restaurant after-hours,” from the ever-responsible and rule-abiding Buccellati, thereafter adding, “I’ll meet you outside.”

A shrug of the shoulders and a pivot, and Abbacchio is outside on a shoddy wooden bench lined on either side by a bed of daffodils, thinking to himself that he could really use some wine as a pick-me-up. Turning his head, he catches the golden hairline of Giorno disappear below the horizon, and he glowers yet again with arms crossed. It’s another half hour until everyone leaves, exchanging goodnights and see-you-tomorrows and the like, and Buccellati comes to stand in his raven-haired glory before Abbacchio like an angel sent from heaven.

“You left practically everything you own on the table.” Says Buccellati, leaning forward to place Abbacchio’s coat over his shoulders and passing the folded tie over; Abbacchio takes it, stringing his arms through the sleeves, and only then does he realize he was shivering in the chilly air. He pats around in his pockets for a moment, realizing that Buccellati must’ve shoved everything else in there, and when he’s sure he has everything he gets to his feet, smacking his cold lips together once as if to warm them up.

He’s blushing, and he’s not sure that it’s entirely the shitty weather’s fault. God, he is weak.

In his defense, this — this gorgeous piece of ass… exists! He exists, dammit, in all his beauty. With a heart of gold and all of that lame shit. He’s here, he’s got a white scarf pulled just underneath his lower lip, and speaking of his lips they look incredibly soft. And even in the dim light of the crescent moon, his eyes are somehow one of the most stunning features. His posture is straight and perfect, his hands tucked into the pockets of a thick coat, and his eyes are gazing right into Abbacchio’s; his breath fogs around his lips, and the first snowflake begins to fall from the sky and brushes over his nose, and with a childlike wonder he gazes at the sky as more fall down around them.

A half-smile pulls at the corners of his lips. It’s rare that he smiles, rare that he shows anything besides an empty expression and a calm demeanor, but whenever that golden grin appears, it’s like everything is right with the world. The planets are aligned and heaven is shining down on the two of them. They’re the only two left in the world, and they’re happy. Abbacchio’s mind whirls with thoughts of the two of them, of all the things they could be and would be, if only he could just be less of a weenie and actually go to the store and get the flowers and actually give them to Buccellati. Last month, that was the plan, and he had a bundle of a dozen roses, but Abbacchio couldn’t bring himself to reason that Buccellati might feel the same — out of humiliation for rejection he never experienced, he merely allowed the flowers to wilt and rot, and bitterly threw them out.

Next time, though.

He’d say just having the opportunity to look at and talk with Buccellati is enough, but it’s not — it’s never enough, because unlike those shitty-ass romance novels, Abbacchio actually wants more than just to look at the object of his affections and sigh. He’s been pining for too long, thinking of
all these ways he could possibly get it off his chest, and the one person who knows about it is his partner. But that’s only because Abbacchio had a little too much wine one night and slipped up and admitted it, and since then said partner’s only been giving him advice. The man’s married, already went through the doting shit that Abbacchio is now, and his advice is good if lackluster and corny. Not like Abbacchio himself could think up anything better.

And here they are — here they are, the perfect opportunity. No one is around, and Abbacchio could just grab Buccellati’s shoulders and plant one on him now, or drop some kind of line like you look beautiful or something stupid like that. He could intertwine their hands as they walk to their cars down the road, kiss each knuckle and place their foreheads against each other, swinging their held hands at their sides and humming. He could embrace Buccellati here and now, bury his head in the crook of the manager’s neck, run his hands through the sleek hair and whisper amorous phrases into his ear.

If he weren’t thinking so hard about this, he wouldn’t be as red as he is, but luckily Buccellati blames the cold and insists that they start walking. Abbacchio saunters slowly, savouring the moments they can talk before the night’s over, occasionally glancing at the frost in Buccellati’s dark hair and smiling to himself. How does one just go about telling someone how beautiful they truly are?

He’s not as eloquent, and he’s far more aggressive. What is a romantic confession in his head is bound to turn into a disastrous slew of curses and tripping over his words, and he’s in no mood to make an ass out of himself before the man of his dreams. Abbacchio knows he’s an asshole, and Buccellati knows it too, and why Buccellati would bother to stick around someone of his tier — aggressive, competitive, distrusting — when he’s so perfect himself is absolutely baffling. That aside, the officer is grateful for it, and loves it, but that wistful side of him wants more. He’d give up the world to have Buccellati curled up next to him in his bed every night and wake up to that captivating gaze, to have a ring on both of their fingers and fall asleep warmly intwined. They’d be the best thing that ever happened to one another — Buccellati would be his prince and Abbacchio would be the pauper, and the world wouldn’t suck as bad as it does.

Because they’d be in love.

They stop at Abbacchio’s car, and oh, what the man would give to have the two lying bare in the backseat in a loving embrace without a care in the world until dawn breaks over the horizon.

The goodbyes are quick. Buccellati places his hand on Abbacchio’s shoulder as if to do something, but retreats back, patting it and waving a small goodbye. Abbacchio can see the fresh burns dotting his fingers as he goes, and it’d be an understatement to say that Abbacchio wants to book it across the frost-strewn street and grab those wounded hands and hold them until they heal.
Giorno visits Passione Cafe again on Friday, and he’s not sure why he’s gone back — Narancia isn’t holding any rap battles, Trish hasn’t offered to give him any freebies, and he doesn’t drink coffee, and to top it off that ever-present cop guy for some reason absolutely loathes him — but the point is, he’s gone back. When he goes in, he doesn’t order anything, instead sitting down in the corner by the window again and reading. Trish has today off, and by the looks of it, it’s been a slow day. The employees are all slumped around the serving area chattering idly, grumping about how they’ve finished all of their weekly chores and there’s nothing to do until someone wants something.

If Giorno hadn’t actually eaten lunch today at school, he would’ve ordered some unhealthy pastry just to give them something to do.

Narancia steps out from the kitchen, hanging his apron up on a nearby hook and swabbing his hands off with a rag; Goodbye, he says, he’s out of here for the day, shift’s over — and he heads out at a speedy walk, waving to Giorno on the way. The bell at the top of the door jangles as it opens and closes, and the small rapper disappears down the sidewalk.

Half an hour later, Giorno is absorbed in his book, head slumped against his fist and legs crossed underneath the little square-shaped table. He adjusts, slick pants whispering against the fabric on the chair’s seat, table shaking only slightly when he accidentally kicks it in the process, and then it’s silent in the cafe again save for the employees talking. They’re about half-capacity now, with that Fugo person popping in and out of the kitchen and obsessively cleaning things he’s cleaned countless times before in an effort to find something to do; with Trish and Narancia out, the cafe seems just a bit more relaxed than usual. Buccellati and Mista talk quietly amongst themselves, though each and every time Mista hops up on the counter, Buccellati immediately chides him to get down.

It’s around four o’clock when Abbacchio steps into the cafe, practically ripping the door off of its hinges as he does so. He shoots Giorno a glare — uh, why, again? — and proceeds to the counter. As he passes by in a flurry of bitter expressions and silver hair, Giorno catches a scratch on his cheek, a bruise forming at the corner of his mouth, and a split lip hiding between all that dark makeup.

“Done for the day, Abbacchio?” Inquires the manager, occupied with polishing a glass that he’s been polishing for at least the last ten minutes out of sheer boredom.

“No.”

“You look like shit.” Mista comments wryly, and Giorno only covers his grin behind his book. Abbacchio doesn’t catch it, since his back is turned to the blond, and all his attention seems to be focused on slumping over the counter and whining to Buccellati about how his job sucked today. Abbacchio does shoot Mista a scowl, by the look on the other’s face, which only seems to drive Mista to step over and sit in front of Giorno with his legs apart and his chin in his palm.
“No burns today?”

“No burns today!”

Giorno places the torn piece of paper that is his bookmark in between the pages of his novel and shuts it, pages coming together with a *whap* sound. Placing the book upon the table, he shifts it to the side, and gazes out the window at the freshly-fallen snow from a few hours ago. He’d shucked his jacket off as soon as he was inside the cafe, having plodded through unshoveled sidewalks in poor footwear to get here. His socks are still soaked, but it’s more tolerable than it was before. Behind him, the occasional drip of melted snow from his coat splashing over the tile sounds out, but it’s hardly noticeable over the cafe’s typical jazz tunes.

Abbacchio’s yelling something about getting decked today by some teenager who he caught selling drugs, and Buccellati only nods along and casts a sympathetic gaze towards the taller. Giorno blocks it out, turning his gaze from the two onto Mista, but much to his surprise the latter is watching the two of them with a curiously-raised eyebrow and his lips twisted into a sideways frown.

“Mista?”

At hearing his name, Mista jumps a bit in his seat, as if coming out of a trance. He shifts towards Giorno and waves a hand at the two, then announces that they’re going outside to chat. Before Giorno can protest that it’s bloody freezing outside, Mista’s already out the door pulling his cap down over his ears, and Giorno feels that he has no choice but to follow.

As soon as the door shuts behind them, Mista starts gesturing wildly, raising his arms over his head and stomping his foot and sending flurries of fallen powder in storms around their legs. “Do you see this shit?”

No?

At Giorno’s dead expression, Mista heaves a sigh and plops down on the bench after swiping some of the snow off. “They’d… they’d —” he pushes his fingertips together, draws them apart again, and repeats as he searches for the words, “— they’d click. Do you get what I’m saying?”

No?

“Look at them!” Okay, sure. Giorno peers through the window, trying to get a good look, but all he can see is two friends having a conversation. Buccellati laughs at something Abbacchio says, which is met with a smile from the latter officer, and they immediately go back to chattering as if they’re completely unaware that both boys are watching them through the shutters. “Did you see that?!”

What is Mista getting so riled up about?

“They’re talking.” Giorno says, flatly, uninterested in whatever game Mista is trying to play. He may be good at reading people, but he’s hardly good at reading people he’s only ever met once or twice and never talked to beyond a *dance competition*. But, as soon as Buccellati gives Abbacchio a clap on the shoulder, and Abbacchio’s face turns the same colour as Trish’s hair, Giorno’s figured it out. So that’s what Mista’s getting on about.

“Look at the way they look at each other…” Mista begins, squishing his face up against the polished glass. “It’s disgusting.” Something about his tone says “*I want them to date*” rather than “*They disgust me*.”
Giorno never really saw Mista as an overly-romantic type, however. Sure, he’d taken a nice hot coffee bath the split second Giorno walked into the cafe on that first day, and sure whenever Giorno hangs around Mista always tries to make conversation — but that doesn’t necessarily mean that someone could be a hopeless romantic. Just that they’re interested, or getting to know a person before they attempt to date some attractive stranger. It’s not like Giorno’s ever really been on a date, and he doesn’t like the idea of a blind date. He’d much rather take the path Mista’s attempting to take, one where he’d know the person well first, instead of just demanding that a stranger hop into the car and come eat spaghetti with them.

That’s… that’s how blind dates worked, right?

Mista slouches away from the cafe window and sits properly on the bench, shivering slightly from a freezing breeze that courses over the two of them. Giorno pulls the sleeves of his turtleneck over his hands and squirms to warm himself up. Mista is the first to speak.

“Trish an’ I noticed it — well, she got it first. She ran in one day raving about Abbacchio having a big crush on Buccellati, and so we stood there in the kitchen watching them talk. They’re both really into it — but Buccellati isn’t great at, y’know, saying what’s on his mind or anything like that, so Abbacchio hasn’t figured it out. If you worked with us, you’d see Buccellati come back into the kitchen after they talk, and he’d just kinda sigh.” Mista is a very gestural person when he speaks, Giorno notices. “They’re makin’ us mad.”

“Because they’re not together?”

“Exactly!” Mista shouts, yanking at his apron and gazing off drearily into the distance.

Giorno proceeds to swipe off the lump of frost next to Mista and sit down near him, though the icy cold on the surface of the wood only serves to make his backside colder than it already was. How Mista could just sit out here without squirming around like a child was beyond him. “You’re the romantic type, then?”

“I read, uh, a book once.”

“‘A book’?” Repeats the blond with a sly smirk resting on pink lips, gaze drawing over to where Mista sits with cold-reddened cheeks and eyes trained on a hare jumping on the other side of the street. “Just one?”

“And Mista begins to recount a tale, thumbs twiddling in his lap, of how an absolute beauty of a brunette sauntered into the venue one day and Mista practically sliced his own hand off because she was “just that distracting”. She was friendly, he said, and fun to talk to. Trish had, as she usually would, encouraged Mista to ask for her number. He did, and it looked real, but he called after work and ended up ordering a pizza instead. Specifically, Mista mentions the way he murmured a humiliating, “Hello, do you know karate? Because your body is kickin’.” Which he was then met with giggles, and a question as to if he got rejected by a girl.

“Then, every wrong number I got after that, most of ‘em went to that pizza place. I guess it’s a default for girls around Naples to write that one down. So every time I get rejected, if I get a number or not, I order pizza. The guys there know me and usually they throw in pity breadsticks.”
Pity breadsticks. Wow.

“So I s’pose something good came out of not going on a date. I mean, I went on one —”

Mista certainly can talk. This story features a tale from when he was fourteen, and he “dated” a girl for a week. He purportedly told her he loved her, and then she left, and they never spoke again. He finishes it with a nonchalant, “Granted, we were fourteen, and it was dumb. I’ve never been on a date after her, but I’ve read a lot about them. Speaking of dates —”

*Please do not ask what I believe you’re about to.*

“ — how do you propose we get those two in there to finally get over themselves?”

While that’s a lot better than what Giorno was prepared for, he’s still got no idea. Giorno really hasn’t considered the prospect of being in love, nor getting married, or anything like that. He really, really, just wants to focus on his goals. Which, he doesn’t quite know what they are, but musical theatre is a lot of fun. Why is Mista asking his opinion, anyway?

His answer is neither grudging nor optimistic, simply a thoughtless little blurb. “They could… take a walk together.” Yeah, Giorno! That’s awesome. Walks always get people to confess their feelings for each other, totally. Because taking a leisurely stroll through the town induces confidence.

Yeah.

Mista practically slams the back of his head into the window. Sheesh, was the proposition *that* terrible? “Well, I’ve got nothing, either. We’ve all tried leaving them alone for a few hours, or forcing Buccellati to go home early whenever Abbacchio has the day off, or somethin’. He doesn’t realize that the entire world knows about his big gay crush,” Mista places his hands in front of him with a clap, then spreading both palms towards the sky, hands mimicking a rainbow shape, “and we’re not gonna tell him we know because we don’t want to die. So he’s just fucked unless one of th’ two of ‘em gets it together.”

Honestly, Mista gets so heated over romantic events that it’s kind-of charming in a weird way. Neither of them have experience in anything, though if novels count as experience then Mista’s got a few legs up on Giorno. Either way, it’s… it’s… cute. It’s cute how passionate Mista gets about a little abstract noun called love, and the way he gets dangerously flustered when he’s working. Though, maybe losing a limb or something to that effect isn’t as adorable as Mista’s reaction when Giorno mentions that he enjoys Mista’s passion on the subject, to which Mista responds by yanking his hat down over his eyes and dropping his head in between his knees. His olive knuckles redden with the force with which he holds the knitted material.

When Mista sits back up again, he incessantly attempts to fix his cap, eventually yanking it off. The messy, black hair from underneath springs up in tiny curls as Mista re-folds the hat’s rim up. For some reason, Giorno has good reason to believe that Mista’s face now isn’t only red because it’s *fucking freezing* out here. That thought alone creates sparks in the back of his mind — did the romantically-inept Giorno Giovanna really just make someone blush? Really?

Success!

“Tomorrow,” begins Mista, dipping his head as he places his beloved hat back atop his skull, “I’m free all day, don’t work or anything. What’d you say that musical was that you liked?”

“*Les Misérables.*”

“Yeah, that!” What about it? “Do you got it on DVD?”
“Of course. Interested?”

“Yeah. At first I was like, shit, this kid can’t dance at all,” which is still true, “but I saw you doin’ that… fighting thing…” We’re excellent with words here. “I figure that Leh Miser… Luh… uh. That.” Exceptional French. “I figure that it’s nothing like what you were doing, but I noticed that the spine of the book you were reading had the same title,” he thinks, anyway, because he’s not sure how French really works, but it looked something like how he’d imagine the title to be spelt, “and — I swear I’m not just babbling about this because I think you’re kinda cute. But I like reading, too, but obviously I’m horrible with French. I figured I’d watch the musical first and figure out how things were said, and then go on to read.”

Giorno cannot help but produce a tiny, breathy laugh. “You turned out far more interesting than I thought you’d be. I’d be happy to have you as a guest.”

“Great!” Mista practically blasts off into space with the amount of force he puts into standing up. “I’ll, uh — here’s my phone,” fishing around in his back pocket yields to pulling out a gray, dated phone with an antenna, in the age of smartphones, even!, “so you can put your number in here. We’ll meet up somewhere. I’ll give you a call.”

“Wouldn’t you rather have pizza?” Jokes the golden-haired boy as he punches in his information on the ancient device slowly and unskillfully, to which he’s met with rolled eyes and a snort.

“By the way, you said you did musical theatre?” Giorno nods. “…can you sing?”

“Quite well, but I can’t rap.” Giorno cocks a brow, eyes peering up to his companion from the soft glow of the phone’s backlit screen.

“…show me.”

“Not right now.”

“When?”

“Some other time.”

“But when?”

“No idea.”

“Tomorrow?”

“No.”

“Damn.”

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The story behind Abbacchio’s messed-up face is this: He was on-duty, driving, when he saw teenagers acting suspiciously. Having pulled the car over and stepping closer, he overheard the word heroin, and he wasn’t really sure how these kids got their hands on it, nor did he care. The officer made his way towards the group, informing them that what they were doing was illegal and that he’d let them walk if they handed over the drug and never did it again. (Which was a lie, because they were going to get their asses arrested no matter what they did. Abbacchio’s partner was around the corner ready to make the arrest of the dealer.)
They didn’t, and apparently the teenage boy he was dealing with was absolutely fucking asinine, because he proceeded to deck Abbacchio with a hit that was poorly-made but hurt like an absolute bitch. With the corner of his mouth bruising and beginning to swell up, Abbacchio had ran his tongue over his lipstick-blackened lips and tasted copper amidst the indescribably disgusting flavour of minerals, realized that the kid split his lip, and therein had the right to punch the kid back. It was aggressive, hard enough to send the teenager reeling backwards, and buying time for his partner to cuff the kid. After that, he considered it a job well-done, despite not catching those who were trying to purchase the illegal substance, but they mattered significantly less than the one that actually possessed it.

A turn of events led to one of the teenagers running back with a pocket knife, and though his intent clearly was to stab Abbacchio’s fucking eyeball out, he’d chickened out at the very last second and merely cut the officer’s cheek. It was just a scratch, and Abbacchio didn’t see it coming and thusly had no time to think about dodging, but the young man’s guilt shone in his eyes as he folded the knife and handed it over, willingly sticking his wrists out to be cuffed and locked up for a bit.

And, well, Abbacchio has a smidgen of respect for people who mean well and give in when they know they’ve done wrong, so he made sure to tell the chief about it as soon as they were back at the main building with the two convicts. Abbacchio found the scratch on his cheekbone less taxing than the bruise at the corner of his mouth.

Here we are.

When he steps into the cafe and Giorno’s there, he almost wants to attempt to elbow the damn brat in the face again, only this time in a setting that’s not a dance battle. He restrains himself — again, too passive-aggressive and law-abiding — and makes his way to the counter, where he proceeds to moan and groan to Buccellati about everything wrong with the afternoon. Giorno and Mista head outside because Mista’s making an uproar about something, and that gets them out of earshot.

He doesn’t notice when the two start watching their interactions through the blinds, attention focused entirely on Buccellati’s sympathetic gaze and the way the teeniest, most adorable laugh on the face of the earth comes spilling from the raven-haired manager’s gorgeous lips. All Abbacchio said was, “I hope someone pisses in that damn brat’s tea,” but if that’s enough to even make Buccellati show the least bit of emotion, he’ll take it.

It really wasn’t that funny, and it was kind-of serious, though Abbacchio supposes that Buccellati’s only chuckling because he took it as a joke. Which it wasn’t.

Buccellati claps his hand against Abbacchio’s jacketed shoulder, which prompts an almost-unnoticeable widening of his eyes and a teeny bit of red to dot his cheeks. Everything’s right with the world whenever Buccellati does that ridiculous, affectionate gesture. Totally feels like no one tried to beat him up today.

Teenagers are stupid.

His hand drops, and on instinct Abbacchio’s own hand rises to where Buccellati’s had been, as if he can somehow feel inklings of remaining warmth from the delicate touch. He, too, drops it back to his side moments later, shrugging slightly. “Has the day been alright?”

“It’s been painfully slow.” Buccellati tells with an affirmative nod, picking up the glass he abandoned moments earlier to shelve it with everything else. “The morning was slightly busy with elderly gentlemen stopping on their way to get black coffee, but that’s nothing special.”
That’s incredibly typical. The elders of the local area always stop in before they head to their nine-to-fives and grab the brewed stuff, or cappuccino, or caffe misto — from Abbacchio’s knowledge, people are incredibly picky about their cappuccinos, and Buccellati has stated once or twice that ninety percent of the time one will make it wrong and have to redo it. But he always adds that it’s far better to have a pleased patron than an angry one, because apparently Trish Una’s father is a terrifying man when he’s perturbed. Abbacchio hasn’t met the man, and doesn’t want to.

“Are you free later, Abbacchio?”

“Not tonight or tomorrow. Sunday.”

Please be what he thinks it is, please be a date, please be some kind of getaway from all of the bullshit that he’s forced to endure on a daily basis, please —

“We’ll have to head out to dinner, then. I’m off at five. We haven’t had time to ourselves in a while.”

No kidding! And they haven’t kissed since never in the history of the fucking universe. Which, frankly, is utter fucking bullshit, and Abbacchio will not stand for that any longer! ...or so he tells himself, because when he thinks about saying anything about his scrambled-up feelings, all he can do is retreat inside of his safe little shell and smack himself again and again. Get over it, dipshit! This is the man of your dreams and he wants to be alone with you! Get it together!

“We’ll carpool,” Buccellati’s brow furrows, “since I’m fully aware you’ll be drinking.”

Hell yeah, he’ll be drinking.

“Sure.”

“Additionally, I’ll pick you up, since you…” he throws a half-amused smirk to the side, eyes shifting to the cash register and back to the taller man on the other side of the counter, “...drive a Subaru.”

What the fuck’s wrong with his fucking Subaru?

“You drive a Ford Fiesta. A bright-ass yellow Ford Fiesta.” Abbacchio points out scathingly, though a sparkle of bemusement glows behind his eyes as he accusingly waves a finger at Buccellati. “You can’t trash-talk my Subaru —”

“It’s what the Americans would call a ‘soccer mom’ vehicle.”

“Who cares about the fucking Americans?”

“My point was,” Buccellati continues to joke, and there’s that rare little smile of his, pulling at the corner of his lips and somehow making his face ten times more beautiful than it already is, “that Subarus are incredibly lackluster.”

Abbacchio’s Subaru is fucking cool, dammit.

Not offended by the teasing, he grins and just shakes his head, stuffing his hands into the pockets of his coat and giving a half-satirical, throaty chuckle, that for a second drowns out the jazzy background noise. “I don’t know a fucking thing about cars,” Abbacchio starts — both of them drive a pre-owned vehicle, and both of their cars aren’t exactly the prime of the time, “but I don’t have the money to get something better.”

“Like?”
Fuck, he doesn’t know! Didn’t he just say that he doesn’t know anything about cars? He knows which ones look cool, sure. Lambos are cool. Cadillacs are cool. Ferraris? A Ferrari would be nice, too.

“A cadillac.”

“You’d be giving Trish complementary rides for months.” He says, and Abbacchio knows that isn’t a joke, because if any half-decent rich-folk cars come near Trish Una, she’s certain to sit on the hood and demand a ride and not move until she gets one. Abbacchio could see Narancia being the same way, if Narancia gave a damn about cars. The kid can’t drive, and he’d blast rap music out of the car like a douche and disrupt the entire neighborhood. Really, Narancia should just stick to taking the bus and bringing his iPod wherever he goes.

In his back pocket, his phone buzzes, and a long cry of nooooo immediately floats through the back of his mind. Heaving a long, drawn-out, and highly-exaggerated sigh, Abbacchio answers, hanging up almost immediately with a short, “Uh-huh. Bye.” Back to duty he goes. Granted, he shouldn’t have been chilling out in the cafe for this long. He’d told his partner before he stomped in to complain to stay in the car and park it a bit up the street, and said he’d be five minutes… but he took way longer than that, and he’s amazed how fast time flies by when you’re gushing over your love interest.

The officer crams his phone into his back pocket, settling his hand on the countertop and saying goodbye, that he’d see Buccellati on Sunday, since he doubts he’ll be able to stop in for the next two days until after the manager is off for the day. He’s about to turn and go, when a soft, delicate hand overlaps the back of his, and a sweet voice merely recites,

“I’ll pick you up Sunday evening, Abbacchio.”

“See you.” Replies the other, giving Buccellati’s hand a fleeting squeeze before he goes, practically running out the door and past the two idiots outside who look like they were about to walk in before Abbacchio practically ran them over.

Someone just kill him and end his suffering.
Chapter 3

Mudad makes a guest appearance and he’s still a piece of shit (I <3 Dio)
I was writing the latter half of the chapter at 1 in the morning and let me tell you I went to bed squealing over my own writing because I love these dorks so much.

Saturday.

Mista doesn’t have a car, never really cared to have one, since he lives within relatively close proximity to the cafe. Even during the winter, he’s always buried within sweaters, and even if it’s cold he can’t get enough of being outside. Outside is nice. During the summers, he reads outside on the lawn of his apartment complex, with the book poised above his face in such a manner that it blocks the harsh light from his eyes. The grass will tickle his back, and his loosely-fitting cropped shirt keeps him from getting too hot. He’ll wear capri shorts and sneakers, except for when he’s working, but always don the knit cap that he’s grown so fond of.

But it’s not summer. It’s winter, and it’s cold.

The previous night, when Mista called Giorno to set up their socialization day, he’d expected them to talk for five minutes, maybe ten. But to his disappointment, it’d taken about two minutes for them to agree to meet at Giorno’s house — “My father will be out of the house until around six, he said. This is the address.” — and that was that, they decided just like that. Mista doubted he’d hear Giorno’s soft voice until tomorrow in the later hours of the morning, but as if they were long-time acquaintances, he just… continued to talk.

And talk.

And talk.

They’d spoken of a plethora of things. Giorno asked what Mista was planning to do for a career, and Mista explained awkwardly that he’s only in university part-time and that he’s working full-time instead, and that he’s really got no idea what he’ll be doing. Giorno had agreed, but in Giorno’s defense he’s only fifteen — Mista’s eighteen bordering nineteen, and he really should get off his ass and figure something else out.

Then they talked about the cafe. Giorno mentioned he doesn’t have a job, didn’t want one until he finished schooling unlike Trish. Mista stated he rather liked it, despite all the burns, and told Giorno another hopeless story of his rejected affections, the one that gave him the scar on the back of his hand from the oven. Giorno had laughed, then corrected himself, stating that he didn’t mean to laugh at Mista’s burn, but the comedic way Mista had phrased the story. Mista said it was okay, it didn’t bother him, he was the stupid one anyway.

Next it was about music, and Mista mentioned that he loved The Carpenters, that Close To You was probably their best song. Giorno said he’d give it a listen, and the two of them fell into silence as Giorno purportedly pulled up YouTube on his phone and the song hummed through the speakers. (Damn these kids with their smartphones and stuff. Mista can’t afford an upgrade to this piece of shit flip phone.) Giorno commented that he thought the song was sweet, that it fit Mista’s tastes to a tee.
There were conversations about animals — Giorno wants a dog, but his dad hates them; Mista wants a kitten, but can’t afford one — and about food and this and that and really, Mista felt as though he’d gotten to know Giorno. That it was more than just a passing glance at the cafe, something that wasn’t just leading into a dead-end. They could become friends easily at this rate, and if Mista was lucky, lovers, even. There’s the dream.

It didn’t snow at all last night, so the snow’s partially-melted as Mista steps along the slick path and nearly falls on his ass at least four separate times. Giorno and his father live in a flat that’s quite the distance from Mista’s place, on the first floor. There’s nothing appealing about the front of the building, nothing that particularly draws his eyes to the plainly-bricked walls and black-painted, numbered doors. Nothing stands out, no decorations in the windows of any of the homes. Everyone here must live a simple and sub-par life, because Mista — well, Mista’s got all kinds of decorations in his windows, including a blown-up image of the Sex Pistol’s *Agents of Anarchy* album sitting in front of his blinds. There’s some other things, like a teddy bear wearing a Christmas hat that he leaves out there year-round because one year he forgot to take it down and promptly decided it’d just stay there forever, some fuzzy dice that he thought he’d hang from the mirror in his car (but then he didn’t get the car), and a smiley face in red window paint that he made a few years back when he was trying to cheer himself up after a really bad night.

But this — this is just boring.

He skips lightly up to the doorstep, nearly sliding back on the ice as he does so and breaking his neck, but manages to ring the buzzer and survive until Giorno allows him into the house.

The inside is plain, just a boring old white couch in the main room in front of a television set, though the shelves below are littered with many films that Mista recognizes as musicals. Behind an ajar door down a short hall is the kitchen, with a few closed doors on the opposite side; behind the couch is a room with a closed door, labelled with a carved wooden sign that says “DIO” in large, gothic calligraphy lettering and surrounded by roses and thorny vines; the room just next to it has a similar sign, this one labelled “GIO” with ladybugs instead of roses.

Dio and Gio. Aw.

...who the fuck was Dio?

“Yes, my dad is a vain person.” Giorno makes subtle motions towards the rather ornately-created sign on the door, shrugs his shoulders, and immediately begins thumbing through the movie cases until he pulls out the aforementioned French… one. Luh… Le… Les? That one!

It’s a good thing Mista actually showered today, because he might have a shot!

He flops down on the couch, and god is it a comfortable couch — probably never used, by the way it feels — but one glance over at the matching armchair hints that it’s used by a pretty big guy. Giorno starts up the television and DVD player, incessantly and irritatedly spamming the buttons on the remote until all of those annoying adverts are over, and he’s able to hit play.

About halfway through the movie, Mista’s entirely clueless as to what is going on. Maybe it’s due to the fact that everyone is French, and he can’t remember names too easily — he only pinned Jean Valjean so far, and everyone else is just a blurb. Whenever trying to discuss the film, he gives a poorly-created description of the person, and Giorno recites the name in near-perfect French.

When the film finishes, Mista’s not sure that he gets it entirely. It was cool and all — he cannot seem to fathom why Giorno loves it so much, but maybe the book will make more sense to his poor, poor mind. Maybe. Or he’ll just get bored of it and switch to some horribly cliche romance
novel and squeal about it for the next few days like always. Probably the latter.

“I liked it — the parts I could understand, y’know.” Mista tells honestly, but Giorno doesn’t seem the least bit perturbed by his companion’s lack of similar tastes, instead politely taking the review with a grain of salt and nodding along with it. “Do you speak French or somethin’?”

“Comment allez-vous?”

“What?”

“Vous êtes plutôt mignon.”

“I don’t speak French.”

“Je sais.”

“Giorno!”

The two exchange a bout of laughter, only after Giorno starts snickering like a child behind his hand. After a moment or two, he informs, “I only speak a bit of French. I’m not proficient yet.” Sounded pretty proficient to Mista! But Mista’s no language expert, not by a long shot. Foreign languages were one of the admittedly many things Mista got low marks on in school, because he just could not get a handle on them. But he supposes that’s also in part due to him never studying a day in his life.

Giorno offers for Mista to dig through the variety of movies that the family has stashed, but no titles in particular catch his attention — Mista’s not quite as big on musicals — so he merely shrugs and tells Giorno to pick something else. Giorno states he has an idea, disappears into his bedroom, and reappears moments later with a board game tucked under his arm, and a larger box under the other one.

“Monopoly or Uno Attack?”

Is now a bad time to admit that Mista’s never played either of those games for longer than five minutes? Because last time the cafe employees tried to play Monopoly, Fugo attempted to shank Narancia with a plastic fork, and then Mista had gotten angry and flipped the board over, and — well, that was great. And Uno, he tried playing Uno with Trish, and she whipped his ass.

"I've never finished a game of Monopoly in my life.” Admits Mista, because it's completely true, though for a different reason than Giorno probably expects. "Nor Uno."

"No one on the face of the earth has finished Monopoly before."

That’s probably true.

They start with Uno Attack — Mista's brain had blotted out the word "attack", and he'd been expecting a regular card game until Giorno slapped that red demon card-shooting machine down on the coffee table. A card game! A card game, for fucks sake! That demon machine is going to shoot four cards at him, and eventually he’ll have to take from four, and — this was a horrible, awful, shitty idea. Why didn't he think ahead? But he’ll attempt it, he’ll attempt to play —

— Giorno ends up with four cards in his hand, and he folds. The world is against him!

After having to painfully explain and gripe about the number four and how horrible it is, Giorno just gives a little nod, and at first Mista thinks it’s just him trying to be polite and ignore the very odd paranoia that Mista has, but it turns out that Giorno’s actually somewhat sympathetic. When
they start their game of Monopoly (Mista’s the hat, and Giorno’s the shoe), Giorno informs Mista that if he rolls the accursed number, that Mista can re-roll; but Mista argues that if he rolls that number then his life is officially over and he might as well just climb to the roof and wait for lightning to strike him dead.

Giorno offers to roll for him, and have Mista cover his eyes, if that’d help at all — he promises he won’t cheat, and apologizes for the bad idea, which Mista counters with a, “Listen — I was the one not thinkin’, and I didn’t tell you.” The blond offers a tiny, reassuring smile, and starts the game. Mista tells Giorno to never roll a four for himself, either, lest Giorno incur the wrath. With that kindly agreed upon, they start off with Giorno going first, and Mista averts his gaze.

Eventually, it becomes less of a paranoid problem — Mista knows that when the dice clatter more than once against the game board’s centre that Giorno’s re-rolling to avoid a horrible fate, but it bothers him less when he can’t exactly see it. And maybe Giorno’s cheating, he tells himself, even though Mista’s winning the drawn-out game. Now, however, the game’s actually fun, and they’re exchanging teasing banter back and forth.

“Pass ‘Go’, collect two hundred Euros.”

“You can’t have that two hundred.” Mista shoots back.

“Why not?”

“Because I’m going to win.”

“Do you have a clue how to win this game?”

“I think you’re supposed ta… buy everything and rule the world.”

... 

“Why the fuck is there just a random jail card? Why do I have to go to jail?”

“Class-A felonies, probably.”

Mista throws his hands dramatically in front of him. “Oh, sorry officer,” he begins, rolling his eyes, “the shoe guy was pissing me off.” He then begins mimicking the would-be voice of the imaginary officer, picturing Abbacchio the entire time, and by the glint in Giorno’s eyes he reasons that the latter boy is as well. “Well gee fuckin’ whiz,” the worst southern-American accent on the planet, and yet he’s still got an image of Abbacchio, “don’t that just suck, ‘cause now you don’t pass ‘Go’ and get money this time!”

Giorno’s chuckling again, face alight with a childish glee, and Mista’s half-tempted to lean over the table and kiss his cheeks and tell him how much cuter he is when he smiles.

... 

“Sir,” begins Mista, mimicking the stroking of a beard, “I’d really like to purchase this property.”

“I’m afraid, dear sir,” Giorno mocks with a bemused smile, “that you really don’t have the funding for this property.”

“But sir,” protests Mista, “I need it so that I can win against the shoe.”

“You are but a mere hat.”
“And you smell of feet.”

... 

Mista’s not sure how far they get through the game, but the board’s a mess of little plastic houses and cards and fake bills, and Giorno’s about to move his piece six places when the door bursts open with a *whump* and sends them both jumping out of their skin.

That guy’s gotta be Giorno’s dad.

Hi, dad! No one’s thinking of planting one on your cute son, especially not Mista, who wouldn’t dare try to hold his hand or anything. That would just be wrong and inappropriate, haha… ha…

This man is intimidating. Without even needing to stand, Mista can tell that he’ll tower over the cafe worker easily, and to top it all off he’s ripped and looks like he could tear Mista’s poor head from his body with a single lash of the wrist. He doesn’t quite look nice, lips pursed and eyes darting between his son and Mista. That had to be Dio. Dio, Giorno’s terrifying father.

“You weren’t supposed to be home until six.” Giorno mutters in a dejected irritation, beginning to sweep up the mess from their board game — Mista takes it that he’s to leave now, but sits awkwardly on the floor because the big guy’s towering in the doorway and almost blocking out the afternoon sun completely with his gargantuan form.

“Yes.”

“Dad, it’s three.”

“Indeed.”

Giorno purses his lips and places the cap on the game’s box, stacking the demonic box of the Uno card game on top of it, and rising to his feet. How this Dio person spawned a son that was so thin, short, and lanky, when he towered over probably the entire earth, is beyond Mista’s comprehension. They sort-of share the same likelihood, although not really. Giorno’s eyes are softer, kinder-looking, and his hair isn’t quite as wild. It’s tame, and looks smoother, and his entire build is far gentler and —

“Who the hell is this?” That’s not rude or anything! Perfectly polite.

“My friend, Mista.” At least Giorno’s able to keep his cool. Turning to Mista, he invites, “My room?” To which Mista nods and gets to his feet, and Dio simply responds with a scathing,

“Did you get permission before bringing him over here?”

“From his parents? No, he’s eighteen —”

“I don’t have any *fuckin’* parents, dude.” Mista intercepts, uncomfortably yanking at the end of his sweater, curling his fingers into the fabric and tugging it down just a little bit out of sheer frustration.

It’s then that Giorno shouts out a vehement, “Dad!” With eyes narrowed into a glare, he practically shoves Mista along down the hall, calling out behind him that they’d talk about this at a better time. While Mista has this uncomfortable feeling that Giorno’s going to be in trouble for this, he’s also too pissed off to really consider anyone else’s feelings. Disregarding common courtesy, he throws himself down at the side of Giorno’s bed, arms stretched on either side of him as he flops.
Notably, Giorno has a few things in a window that faces away from those seen outside — the shutters are open, and there’s a ladybug gel sticky on the window, as well as a few ladybug sculptures and the like on the sill itself. Other than that, Giorno’s room is fairly plain, with a few books on a shelf above the desk and a powered-off laptop computer plugged into the wall. His backpack and some straggling school supplies are tucked against a corner created by the light oak desk meeting the wall; the white doors of the double-doored closet are shut, and the room is pristine, nothing like Mista’s own.

The blond removes his phone from his pocket and plugs it into the wall to charge, tossing it half-gently atop the desk, and taking a seat next to Mista on the very edge of the mattress. “He picks now to make a scene.”

“This happens often?”

Giorno shakes his head, one leg perched up on the metal bed frame, and the other outstretched before him. “I never bring others over.”

“I see why.” Mista grumps, rolling onto his side with a distressed exhale.

“He’s an asshole, Mista. A controlling man with a god-complex.”

“What happened to your mom?”

“Would you believe me if I said she was almost worse than he is?”

Mista sits up, eyes flashing with concern.

“Things get difficult, and you power through them. ...how about you?”

“Been alone since I was at the beginning of my teenage years. Don’t wanna talk about it.”

“I’m sorry that he said that.” Giorno places his hand over Mista’s lying on the mattress next to him, and oh GOD they’re touching hands this is the most important event in Mista’s sad excuse of an existence and Giorno’s looking at him and fuck fuck fuck fuck FUCK.

It’s just a gesture of comfort, Mista repeatedly tells himself as his brain reels and whirls around with these pathetic, gushy-mushy thoughts. Just to make him feel better. His dad’s an asshole and he feels bad. Nothing wrong with that!

He manages to choke out a barely-audible, “Both our parents sucked. What a coincidence.” Oh, that was so awkward, you blubbering hat-wearing dork. You can do better than that, Mista. Think! Think of something positive! Cheer him up! That sad, guilty little expression doesn’t look good on someone so wondrous. “The sign on your door said ‘Gio’. Is that like a nickname?”

“I don’t use it like I did when I was a kid.”

“What’d Narancia call you the other night?”

“No —”

“GioGio?”

“My name is Giorno.”

“GioGio it is, then.”

The 11th-year uses his free hand to grasp the front of Mista’s hat and jerk it down over his face,
and though he’s now blinded by the thick, wooly fabric, Giorno’s vibrant laugh paints the most extraordinary picture in his brain. He moves his hat out of the way, peering out from below the rim and into the most magnificent set of blue eyes belonging to an absolutely exquisite boy, at laugh-reddened cheeks and a genuine expression, and Mista chuckles along with his cheeks burning like fire and his heart thudding in his chest, and —

— oh fuck, it’s begun.

The feelings are here to ruin his life.

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Sunday.

Reservations are at six, and it’s snowing like a motherfucker outside. Buccellati’s got his phone pressed between his cheek and his shoulder, ringing up the restaurant’s number as his car struggles its way through the harsh weather. “Yes, I called about reservations,” he begins, huffing into the speaker, “but I’m afraid we’ll be a few minutes late. Oh, terribly sorry. Six o’clock tonight for Buccellati. Yes. Yes, yes, the weather is quite awful tonight.” Should’ve checked the damn forecast. “Yes. Yes, I will see you as soon as I can get through this.” This awful, terrible snow.

At the red light just before Abbacchio’s home, Buccellati slips his phone into the cup holder, and watches in awe as a Subaru in likelihood to Abbacchio’s skids over the ice and nearly crashes into a railing, tyres screeching in agony as the driver attempts to correct the vehicle’s course.

It’s dark, street illuminated by yellow-orange lamps that cause the frost to turn to warm hues despite being an element capable of ruining his entire evening.

So, we’re a little mad.

The entire world knows — hell, even newcomer Giorno must have figured it out by now — that both Buccellati and Abbacchio have a painstakingly obvious crush on one another. Unfortunately for both of them, they’re awkward, unable to express feelings. Abbacchio’s never quite himself when feelings are made to be put on the line, and he’s always aggressive; around Buccellati, his demeanor shifts into calm and controlled, somewhat loose and free. They relax one another; Buccellati, who struggles with showing emotion, can actually manage a smile that isn’t forced, and Abbacchio has someone to complain to that isn’t his partner. It’s nice, and it’s functional. They’ve known each other for several years, but only recently have shared feelings come to fruition.

And it sucks.

It sucks that they’re both socially inept, both unable to just shove a bouquet in the other’s face and spew comments. Sucks that they’re not able to hold hands or stand closer to one another without one of the two backing up because he feels strange, like he’s invading the space of someone who’s uninterested in him. And while Abbacchio has an excuse for that, since Buccellati shows about as much emotion as a rock most of the time, Buccellati has none, and if he wasn’t so chickenshit he’d stop backing down and just grab Abbacchio’s hands and tell him.

But the setting — the setting for it, every time they have an opportunity, is just wrong. Trish has it hammered into his head that he must find the absolute perfect environment for the ultimate experience, and Mista’s agreed with that. A sub-par romantic such as Buccellati has no room to
argue, no reason to consider that maybe it could be perfect no matter where and no matter what scene. So here he is, always trying to find the right setting.

Wednesday night under the falling snow would’ve been completely wonderful, had Buccellati not gotten eagerly distracted by the snow during a mental process that went something like, “Show some emotion you dipshit” and ended with his fascination of snow. (It’s no secret that Buccellati likes winter best, but it’s just right now as he’s trying to parallel park the damn car next to this snow bank in front of Abbacchio’s house that he really, really loathes the entire night.) He’d completely missed the chance, and all he’s been able to do is clap his hand against Abbacchio’s strong shoulders and offer a half-smile, one that’s almost painful to put on at this point. It’s not as if he’s pretending to have no feelings at all — it’s just that he feels as though he can’t bring himself to do a thing about it, and it completely… it just sucks.

Attempting to open the driver-side door proves absolutely pointless because of the way Buccellati parked the car not a minute earlier. It collides with the nearby snow drift, and Buccellati heaves another exasperated sigh and merely calls his dinner partner up and explains that he cannot get out of the car.

“Are we going to be able to pull out of here, Buccellati?”

“Of course not.” Ideally, they’d just cuddle in Abbacchio’s house if that were the case. But that’s not the case, and neither of them can get too close without running away.

Buccellati has dressed nice for the occasion. He never informed Abbacchio of where he made the reservations, just that he did, and if Abbacchio wants to fight him about picking up the tab, then the officer will surely lose. He’s half-expecting Abbacchio to come out wearing something nice but not over-the-top, because he shouldn’t be anticipating that they’d visit a five-star restaurant in the middle of the city for what’s supposed to be a casual dinner.

White suits are rather pricey, and while he’s watching the door for Abbacchio to step outside, he straightens his golden necktie just a bit more until he’s sure that he looks absolutely perfect. Yes, yes, the night should go swimmingly, and he’ll pay for dinner and spare Abbacchio the fee — And holy shit does he look stunning.

Buccellati can’t say that he’s seen his love interest dressed in anything besides a uniform or a button-down with slacks, even on his day off, but tonight he dashingly struts down the pathway in a black suit and light purple tie. Practically glowing in the hazy street lamps, he carefully walks around to the other side of the car, a long black coat trailing in his wake. This is a man who — no lie — could easily be a model.

The car door closes with a click, and they eye one another up and down as the windshield wipers sway aggressively back and forth.

“Why’re you dressed nice?”

“I could say the same to you.” Returns Buccellati as he pulls away from the curb and the car scoots off into the storm.

“Shit, are we going somewhere fancy? You didn’t fucking tell me where we were going —”

“I’ll be paying.”

“Like hell you will.”

“My treat.”
Are they married yet? Because they’re acting like it.

The argument continues for only a few short minutes before the two fall into a long bout of silence. The only sound piercing the veil of silence is the frequent honking of horns, and Abbacchio shifting restlessly in his seat.

They arrive at around six-thirty.

The split second after Buccellati steps out of the car, Abbacchio makes a snide comment on how his necktie matches his vehicle, but the former doesn’t bother to share the tale of the other Subaru driver nearly killing themselves earlier. The car park is mostly empty save for a few straggling vehicles that must belong to employees who haven’t been sent home to cope with the storm in the comfort of their own abodes.

Abbacchio practically barrels into the door in an attempt to reach the decorative glass first and hold it open for Buccellati, who thanks him with a small bob of his head and thusly escapes the cold before he starts shivering. He didn’t really consider bringing a jacket for whatever ingenious reason that his lovestruck mind could’ve come up with. They’re seated quickly — reservations for two, yes, thank you — and left in the almost-empty venue on what otherwise would’ve been a star-filled night. Instead, the house lights are low and atmospheric; a young couple a few booths down from them engage in quiet chatter, hands entwined over the tabletop.

Oh, what Buccellati would do to have that for himself. Sigh.

“Never been here.” Comments the officer, shucking his coat off while Buccellati flicks his eyes between a handsome companion and that couple who needs to tell him their secret.

“Nor have I. It’s not fun to go alone,” he begins, glancing over the menu for something to drink, “though I did read several reviews when I was deciding upon a location, and most of them pointed me here.”

“We could’ve just gone to a regular three-star restaurant and I would’ve been perfectly fine.”

“This is far better.”

“How? It’s overpriced —”

“It’ll feel more special.”

Special. Yeah.

Just like every moment they’ve shared up to this point, every fleeting moment when they found themselves unencumbered by the presences of others, every time they’ve stood by their cars for way too long past the cafe’s closing just talking or looking at one another with resonant affection. It’s every moment they exchange a message, each rare little text message — something completely irrelevant, small talk. It’s every single damn moment they spend thinking about each other, an action so obvious and yet so secretive. It’s everything. Everything about Abbacchio, everything about the way Buccellati feels so passionately about him, like the way his chest grows tight and his lungs feel like they’ve filled with smoke because he just cannot breathe in the presence of someone who practically shrieks the word special with every movement he makes.

The world could end — God could strike him dead right here — but life would still feel exhilaratingly wondrous just because Leone Abbacchio is a real, living, breathing person.

Buccellati only snaps out of his entrancement when the waitress steps over and asks if they’d like
drinks and appetizers to start. Had Buccellati glanced over the menu? No! No, not at all!

“Sauvignon Blanc.” White wine, to no surprise. This is the exact reason Buccellati is the designated driver.

“Water, please.”

Abbacchio casts him a look that says something like, “Can’t be asested to order any fancy drinks at a five-star restaurant?”

“Appetizers?” Questions the waitress in a feigned polite and patient tone. The boys exchange a glance and both shake their heads; it’s quite obvious that they haven’t been looking over the menu, as Abbacchio’s had his face buried in the alcohol list, and Buccellati’s had his head in his ass. The woman leaves with a tiny nod, practically stomping away. Honestly, Buccellati can’t be mad at her attitude, as she probably only seeks to go home.

“Order whatever you find suits your tastes, regardless of price.”

“Or,” suggests Abbacchio with a cocked brow, “I could save you money.”

“I want to treat you, Le — Abbacchio.” He corrects at the last second, shaking his head side to side, black hair flying around his lips as he tries to push away the embarrassment.

They don’t call one another by their first names. Haven’t before. The only time Buccellati’s thought about it is, well, when he knows he won’t open his mouth and slip up. It’d show a level of intimacy, one he’s not quite ready to admit he harbours. But now, that plan’s utterly backfired, because he couldn’t keep the loving words from leaking into what he imagined was a solid tone.

Abbacchio’s formerly-unamused expression twists; his lips curve into a shrewd little lipstick-dabbed grin, and he arches a single brow, rudely leaning his elbow on the table and placing his chin atop a closed fist. “Leone?” He purrs, drumming his fingernails against the cloth-covered table, a tone which sets fire to Buccellati’s blood.

Is he blushing? Is he actually — is the hot feeling on his cheeks not from the heater that’s locking out the icy storm?

Averting his eyes, Buccellati stares at the folded cloth napkin at his side and clenches his fists in his lap. “I apologize. Slip of the tongue.”

Abbacchio’s posture relaxes; he draws away from the table and leans against the cushy booth seat, though he confidently crosses his arms over his chest and continues to give his dinner companion that same wily expression. “No need to apologize, Bruno.”

Someone save him.

The awkwardness retreats as the waitress sets their drinks down, takes their orders (Buccellati didn’t check the price on whatever Abbacchio got, so he’s not sure if the latter really took him up on the offer to get whatever the hell he wants), and steps away yet again. Abbacchio takes a sip of his wine, and Buccellati chugs about half of his water in a single gulp, a desperate action to cool his cheeks down a little bit. Lord, crushes were difficult — and he had to go and pick someone as hard to deal with as Abbacchio, too.

“Thirsty?”

“Yes.”
Oh, yes. Yes we are.

So, the entire world remembers how Buccellati gave Abbacchio shit about his admittedly terrible Subaru, right? Right?

Well, dinner goes great! Dinner is perfect, Abbacchio is tipsy, and Buccellati got to pay the entire bill without much protest because someone probably attempted to drink away their very obvious romantic attraction. Which, of course, only worked so well at the time, because Abbacchio has a very high tolerance. Everything was delicious, and they don’t leave until the wait staff kicks them out so that they can close.

They go to the car and unlock it, and lo and behold, the fucking thing won’t turn the fuck on. It merely sputters and coughs, sounding exactly akin to a dying man with lung cancer, and Abbacchio only manages a joking, “Whose car is shit now?”

Both cars, actually.

Buccellati calls for maintenance, but it’ll be at least an hour before someone can pull up in this weather, and both decide that since the heat isn’t working that they’ll scramble in the back of the car where the snow doesn’t press up against the windows as badly and chill them like water in an ice tray. It’s at least, y’know, two degrees warmer in the backseat, but two degrees is better than nothing.

And damn, is it cold. It’s got to be zero outside, there’s no way it could possibly be above that, because it’s fucking cold. It’s abhorrently freezing. Ninety-nine percent of the time, Buccellati is prepared for anything, but the one time he’s distracted by these disgusting, fluffy thoughts, is the one time he doesn’t count on his car deciding that it hates existing and doesn’t bring a damn jacket.

He’s shivering like a chihuahua, trying to control the spasms in his muscles as best he can, but it’s just too ridiculously cold outside, and the fact that the car won’t start up makes it so that they have no heat. It wouldn’t be so bad if the car would at least turn on but just be unable to go, because they’d have heat until the gasoline ran dry. But, no. After the first splutter, the car decided it was done for today. Goodnight, everyone! See you all in hell.

Long and strong arms wrap around his shoulders, pulling him to the other side of the vehicle, and the sharp stench of wine fills his senses. Then, a heavy coat is dropped over his shoulders, and he slumps into Abbacchio’s chest as if by instinct.

“You’re going to get sick, and I’m not a doctor.” He begins in a slightly-intoxicated tone, one arm thrown all-too casually over the shorter’s shoulder. “Just — just shut up, and let’s stay warm in your piece-of-ass car.”

Aaaaaaaaahhhhh.

Yep, this is perfectly platonic.

That’s, indeed, why Buccellati’s beginning to doze off against the other’s body, listening to a slow and steady and strong heartbeat. He closes his eyes and nestles in further, comfortably, and neither of them shudder from the horrid weather anymore. Instead, they’re curled up together — maybe his car deciding that it hated itself was a good thing — in every way Buccellati could’ve wanted. Now would be a wonderful opportunity, while they’re curled up and alone with one another, to mention something. Abbacchio isn’t too shitfaced to forget any of this ever happened, and it’s
perfect — it’s snowing, they’re pressed together, Buccellati’s got a single hand placed on Abbacchio’s chest and the other is squished between the officer and the leather seats, and their faces are getting closer, so close that their foggy breath mingles in front of their lips, and —

And there’s a knock on the window!

There’s no fucking way it’s already been a fucking hour. This is completely unfair.

But when they’re both keenly aware of what almost transpired, they practically shoot to opposite ends of the universe.


While Buccellati’s car is set to be towed, they’re taking a taxi home. Buccellati mentions that Abbacchio’s house is closer, that they should stop there first and get this wine-influenced man home and safe, but the driver is almost raving when he realizes that he has to take two people to two different houses in this disastrous condition. Buccellati wants to argue, but also wishes that luck would work in his favour and at least grant him the opportunity to make his grouchy love-interest breakfast in the morning, but Abbacchio cuts in with a snide,

“He’s paying, so you’d better fucking drive.”

That fixes it.

While they’re driving, a certain white wine-addict ends up dozing off on his shoulder, and Buccellati finds himself playing with the silken strands of Abbacchio’s hair while they’re being driven home. He hums softly, almost inaudibly, caught up in the gentle way his companion’s chest rises and falls and not at all noticing the glares the driver throws at them from the rear-view mirror. He kisses the top of Abbacchio’s head, and for a moment his heart skips a beat and his face heats to a fiery red, before a dull ache constricts his chest.

When they arrive, he unwillingly wakes Abbacchio, wishing that the ride could’ve possibly lasted the least bit longer, even a few minutes or seconds. The groggy man stretches, takes a second to blink the sleep from his eyes, and begins to shuffle out of the car while throwing comments over his shoulder.

Abbacchio does absolutely swear to the high heavens that if Buccellati leaves the taxi to help him inside, that the driver will simply drive off; and a grudging driver affirms that it’s correct, and that he just wants to go home, blah blah blah — so they say their goodbyes with Buccellati still in the back seat, and before he’s even completely sure Abbacchio made it inside without breaking his neck, the driver takes off.

The words I love you resonate powerfully in the back of his mind, and he sighs into his palm.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Working chapter title: "Trish ships it"

Guest appearance from Doppio and Diavolo B)

Chapter Notes

I'll have trouble uploading chapter five within the next few days because I work about 12 hours each day, Friday through Sunday. I'll be too tired to work most of the time. After Sunday, though, everything will get back into the usual daily-ish updates pattern. (: 

Trish immediately notices something is awry the moment she steps into the cafe after school.

She’d gone ahead and asked Giorno as soon as she saw him in maths, having darted over to his desk and slamming her palms down on the wood and demanding to know how it went. She’s about as eager a romantic as Mista is, though with different ideas, more straightforward in fact. None of that beating around the bush bullshit.

Giorno had responded with an, “Other than my asshole father, it went well.” Trish had a feeling that it went better than expected by the little glint in his eyes, but couldn’t get Giorno to mention anything else.

So, after school. They’re in the cafe — Giorno takes his usual seat by the window, curling up with a book and a paper cup filled halfway with water. Trish deposits her bag in the breakroom and heads back into the kitchen, where, as on the first day the two met, Mista’s pressing his face to the plexiglass and sighing. The young woman cocks a brow at him, hands on her hips, prepared to ask him how he thought the night went on Saturday since she didn’t get a chance yet, when Buccellati stumbles into the kitchen and nearly sends cheesecake flying into her face.

Yep. Something happened.

It’s well-known that Buccellati is calm, composed, never clumsy — he’s got his whole life together it seems, and he’s a great manager, kind and helpful, always on time and dutiful. He enters the cafe everyday with a relaxed demeanor, ready to work, and his mere presence just adds to the atmosphere. He’s here, and the cafe feels like it should. But, most importantly, he never trips. He’s light on his feet, easily able to dodge around the other workers with his arms cradling boxes three times his weight. So, whatever happened yesterday clearly threw him off completely.

It’s a love emergency.

It’s a damn good thing Trish is here to fix these damn boys and their horrible crushes!

First things first — snatching the cake out of her manager’s hands and setting it down in the most
random location possible.

She half-dances over to the clearly-exhausted man, noting the bags under his eyes and that he genuinely looks like he hasn’t slept in three days despite the fact that he’s been perfectly alright any other time she’s seen him — she’s met with exactly zero resistance when she snatches the plate and sets it on the edge of the sink, dangerously close to the running water where Fugo is spraying off dishes, but luckily he grumpily stops and puts the cake where it goes. That’s one minor disaster averted.

“Okay,” Trish begins with a shake of her head, pressing her palm against the edge of the countertop, “what’s up?”

“I didn’t sleep well. That’s all. I’m honestly fi —”

“Fugo, Mista, can you go hang outside for a second?”

“Wh —”

“Fugo, please, it’s a love emergency.”

Both cooperate, and Buccellati attempts to leave as well, until Trish darts in front of him with her arms spread out and shoves him further back into the kitchen. She may be overall smaller, but he has no room to resist. She’s going to fix this. He just looks so… so… broken. Like something almost went right but then went completely wrong in the end.

“What happened?”

“Honestly, Trish, you needn’t worry —”

“How was dinner?” She presses, hands yet again on her hips, leaning forward and staring up into his face as if she can detect a lie by the slightest twitch of his lips. “You took him to a five-star restaurant, right?” She knows, because he made reservations eagerly over the phone while on his lunch break, and Trish had stepped into the break room during. “Did you have fun?”

“Yes, to all of the above.”

“Alright,” Trish claps her hands in front of her chest, “so I take it neither of you confessed?”

“No.”

“Did you almost confess?”

Caught.

A young lady such as Trish is adept at studying the facial expressions of those in love, and she has many reasons for knowing as much as she does. How many of her girl friends had she set up on dates? About all of them. She’s exactly like a loving big sister in that regard, always looking out for those she feels kinship with, and ensuring that their love lives go as planned. Once, one of her close friend’s boyfriend cheated on her, and Trish made sure to deck him. She wouldn’t say she gets in fights often, and actually prefers to be passive, but there are some things that Trish Una absolutely will not stand for.

Anyway — as soon as she inquired about that, the tiniest little flush appeared over Buccellati’s cheeks, and his eyes widened just barely. How did she know? How did she know? Trish is just good at this stuff, far from a naive little girl. It must be embarrassing to turn to a fifteen year-old for advice, but if it gets the job done, there’s nothing wrong with it.
Buccellati is thusly forced to explain what nearly transpired in the back seat of his ugly-ass car (could’ve picked a better colour, in Trish’s opinion — pink, anyone?), and Trish crosses her arms and nods along with interest, and... geez. This would’ve been an easy fix if they’d both just cooperate with their emotions, but no. No, we can’t do that, because that would just be... that would just make everything easy! We have to struggle, and pour our sweat and tears into it, and not sleep well, and hide our feelings! Because that’s how this works!

“Is Abbacchio coming in today?”

“I don’t have a car currently, so he’s driving me home at around two —”

“I’m going to talk to him.”

“Trish, really —”

“No, no! It’s fine, it’s fine — you don’t have to thank me or anything. You’re going to confess, dammit! I have experience in these sorts of things, okay? Leave it to the love expert.”

Mista thinks he shares that title with her, but he doesn’t. Mista isn’t good at setting his friends up with the loves of their lives, after all.

Now, while Mista’s issue isn’t quite as pressing as the current one, Trish sends the manager on his way and drags Mista’s stinky ass into the kitchen. Neither of them might have feelings yet, but it’s important to her to figure out what happened on Saturday, because Giorno’s too stubborn to share anything, much to her annoyance.

“What?”

“Same deal as with Buccellati — I want to know what happened Saturday, because Giorno won’t tell me.”

“It’s not like it’s a secret or nothin’.”

“He’s stubborn.” Trish replies in exasperation — why were boys so difficult?

“We watched that French thing he really likes, then played Monopoly, then his dad walked in and made me fuckin’ mad — made both of us fuckin’ mad. We hung out in his room and stuff.”

Trish raises both eyebrows, waiting for Mista to tell her the rest. When he ends it with a concise “that’s all”, Trish casts him a disbelieving and toothy smile, and the taller heaves a sigh and dips his hand underneath his hat. While rubbing the back of his head, he tells her,

“I realized that he’s perfect.”

There it is! There it is! There it fucking is!

They discuss it for a few more minutes, Trish telling him to keep pining, that she’s sure Giorno will get over the way he smells and want to be closer to him some day, to which Mista shoots a humiliated “I’ll have you know I took a shower today, too!” It’s a miracle, in Trish’s honest and totally-humble opinion. She then brings up that unfortunately, he’s not the most pressing concern in the world of romance right now, and explains Buccellati’s situation, to which her partner in crime almost instantly blurts out a,

“Well, we gotta do something!”

“I’ll yell at Abbacchio when he drops by, and then we’ll scheme to get them together. Cafe’s
closed tomorrow. I’ll call my dads right now. Then, we’ll start planning, and we’re going to — they’re going to admit it.”

Trish whips out a berry pink iPhone, which she’s technically supposed to leave in the breakroom, and scrolls through her numerous contacts before starting a dual-call with the two contacts labeled “Conceiver” and “Adopter”. She finds it humourous to give each contact a little nickname (as an example, Mista’s is “Stinky”). Speaking of Mista, he looks thoroughly confused by Trish’s words, and she gives a brief explanation of, “My biological dad is named Diavolo, and my adoptive dad is Doppio, but if you ever hear me say dad I’m really talking about the first one, ‘cause I call Doppio by his name since they’ve only been together for — Hey! Dads!”

Mista still looks a little dumbstruck.

“We’re having a love emergency, and we need to close the cafe tomorrow.” Resistance. “No, you don’t understand!” She whines, pouting though she’s keenly aware that neither one of them can see her. “It’s an emergency, and it’s just one day, and I swear that’s all! Please?”

Diavolo heaves an irritated sigh into the speaker, and Trish envisions him holding his fingers to his temple and biting his lip. “Are you the one having the emergency?”

“No, it’s Buccellati!”

“He can’t speak to me himself?”

“No, dad, it’s a love emergency! It’ll be on a Tuesday, and we get no one on Tuesdays — please? Please, please, please?” If she keeps pleading, it’s sure to work, because eventually one of them will cave and the other will merely follow.

“It sounds important.” Doppio is a godsend.

And that’s all it takes, just a little comment from the freckled dad, and then Trish bursts from the kitchen and hollers that the cafe is closed tomorrow, and that also she and Giorno are taking the day off of school. In the corner, Giorno attempts to protest, but she storms over to his table and pleads with him to help as well. And, well, that’s that. No one is really able to argue with her, though they ask what it’s about, when she openly announces the pressing emergency and gestures dramatically.

A gaggle of customers walk in, look at her, assess the weird atmosphere, and proceed to the counter to order. Fugo takes over the register while Trish continues the discussion without a care in the world.

“Where would be a good place to send these two on a date, then?”

“A park?” Suggests Narancia with a shrug of his shoulders, helping Fugo out by making drinks all the while. “I always thought that yeah, a park is somewhere I’d want to be if someone wanted to confess to me.”

The customers are silent, waiting at the “pickup” section of the countertop with their eyes darting around the cafe. Clearly, this was a bad time for them to want some food and drink to-go, but what’s to do? Just let bygones be bygones.

“It’s a frozen wasteland outside,” Fugo argues, dramatically lashing an arm at the window. “How about just their houses?”

No! No, that can’t be done! No way, no how! Trish almost shakes her head so fast that it gives her plan away — her plan to gather all the boys up and slap disguises on all of them and have them
follow the couple in public to make sure things go the way they need to. It's mediocre, it's cliche, but it just might work if Trish sends Giorno barreling into one of the little lovers and pushes them together. It just might work. Admittedly, Trish hasn’t ever had to do such a thing before; whenever she’d set up a friend, they knew they were being followed, and she’d shoot them a text message at them to look at for hints. One of her most-used is just the phrase “KISS” and a little heart emoji. That one always came with perfect timing, in her honest opinion.

But Buccellati is a more private person, not quite willing to be followed — and Trish can respect that most of the time, but it’s killing everyone around the two of them, just watching their friends slip into misery just because they’re not sure how to go about confessing and it’s eating them alive.

She’ll inform everyone else of what they’re to do after Buccellati leaves for the day. For now, though, the venue is the most important part. Somewhere atmospheric, somewhere public… somewhere beautiful.

“This’d be easier if it were summer.” Mista states. “Could make ‘em watch a movie, though.”

“I’m right here.” Buccellati snaps.

“Well, don’t mean to talk about ya like you’re not.”

The customers leave with brief and awkward little goodbyes, and the rest of the employees wave in response.

Trish snaps her fingers — okay, people, focus! “Movies won’t work. I don’t see how greasy fingers and popcorn breath could in any way be romantic — like, sharing a soda, sure, but neither of you drink soda.” That’d be dumb anyway, since they can’t be assed to get close to each other, unless one of them is inebriated and the other is freezing half to death. She’d send them to a park again, as Narancia suggested, but Trish doesn’t particularly like following someone for hours when it’s two degrees outside. That’s not her idea of a good time.

Even in a love emergency.

“I got it! A club!”

“Narancia, how is that in any way romantic?”

“Well — what d’you know, Fugo?”

Fugo’s face flushes, but Trish can’t tell if it’s from embarrassment or anger or a mix of the two, especially after they start bickering and shoving one another. Okay, so, ignoring those two...

“Listen, we got permission to close the cafe down tomorrow, just for tomorrow — so it’s ex-treme-ly important that we find the perfect place for those two lovebirds.”

“Why, exactly, did we need to close the entire cafe just for me?”

Shit. Fuck. Caught.

“Cause, uh, I don’t want to work tomorrow — I got school to do.” Trish lies, which is met with raised eyebrows and crossed arms.

“You have ‘school to do’, yet you’re planning on skipping the day with Giorno? You were scheduled to come in after school, like always.”
“We’re going to rehearse for musical theatre.” Trish isn’t even in the theatre program. “We’re really behind, I swear.”

“You’re not planning on following us, are you?”

Why is this dude so suspicious of everything? Of course they are, but that’s not supposed to be known, God dammit! Just play it cool, Trish. He won’t find out, because she’s the master of disguise. The master.

The MASTER.

“No, because I just said Giorno and I were going to rehearse.”

“For what musical?”

Shit. What musical was the school planning to put on? Uh… uh…

“Legally Blonde.” Giorno tells with a tone so solid and confident that it should be impossible to tell that he’s lying. “I’m one of the leads — Warner Huntington III.”

Buccellati somehow manages look both unimpressed and impressed at the same damn moment. “I can tell when someone lies by their sweat, you know.”

“But, am I sweating?” Giorno states with such confidence, and in such a charismatic tone, that the argument practically ends there despite the fact that the manager doesn’t seem to believe their lie. It’s plausible, because Giorno actually is playing one of the leads — and Trish really owes him another free mocha for helping her out! She should work on honing her lying, too. Giorno’s skill obviously stems from his experience with acting, and maybe his dad, who Trish has heard is a very charismatic man. He is a lawyer, after all, but for whatever reason they don’t live in a mansion. Trish thinks that’s complete and utter bullshit, because if she had a lawyer for a parent she’d surely love to have a gigantic house, but it looks like Giorno’s family disagrees. For whatever reason.

Weirdos.

Speculation aside, Mista’s now asking if that’s an American musical, which Giorno says that it is but he still thinks it’s hilarious either way. Off topic! Off the fucking topic, boys! Get your heads in the game!

“We were discussing a place for them to go.” Giorno then says, index finger pressed against his book where he last left off. Clearly, he knows that they’ll be following the happy almost-couple around, and he’s in on the plan now. Maybe. That, or he’s just helping Trish out and planning to flake. She, naturally, won’t allow that to happen. “There is a botanical garden that’s mostly indoors, I believe.”

Mista makes a face that says something like, “Damn, kid, I didn’t even think of that.”

Hmm, an indoor garden. It’s quiet, there won’t be too many people but there will be enough to hide amongst, it’s atmospheric, couples go there all the time… “It’s perfect!”

“No,” Buccellati begins, “I’m not sure he enjoys staring at plant life for an hour —”

“He’s supposed to be staring at you for an hour! It’ll be nice and quiet and pretty, a great location for you two to finally do something.” Trish is set. Trish is set, and she’s not the one that’s supposed to be going on the date.
It’s then that the whole cafe bursts into a chant of *do it, do it, do it*, as if they were some kids playing a rousing game of truth-or-dare (speaking of, if this utterly backfires somehow, Trish will force them all to play spin the bottle with her, and everyone will kiss everyone until they’re all seething with jealousy. That’s healthy, isn’t it?).

Buccellati caves and goes to make plans, warning that Abbacchio might be on-duty tomorrow… which everyone seemed to have forgotten, he is an officer, but… Trish is pretty sure that if it’s meant to be, it’ll work out. Trish has great intuition with these types of things.

And, as it turns out, Abbacchio was free anyway! Lucky!

Now it’s just a matter of waiting until Abbacchio pulls up to go yell at him to get his life together, and waiting until they’re both gone to inform the boys that they will be tagging along to make sure this goes according to plan. They don’t call Trish a love expert for nothing.

When Abbacchio pulls up at around two, Trish practically annihilates two children that were playing right outside the cafe. She apologises for nearly crushing their faces into the pavement, and immediately proceeds towards the police car (look who’s shirking his duties for a bit to drive his soon-to-be-boyfriend home, aww) and slams her hands down on the hood. Abbacchio glowers at her, but she persists, then stepping over to the window and tapping on it until he rolls it down.

“*What?*” He practically spits, painted lips drawn into a callous frown.

“When are you gonna tell him you love him?” Abbacchio makes a face like, “*how could she have known about that?*” “The whole world knows! You’re so obvious that we’re all suffering just watching you — like, come on. Kiss his hand or his cheek or embrace him or *something*!”

It’s an understatement to say she’s fed up with the way these two are acting. Trish’d been watching them act like idiots around one another for the past few months, and she’s done with it. They need to get together. They need to kiss.

Abbacchio doesn’t even give her the time of day, rolling up the car window instead of responding; with eyes closed and teeth grit, he stays in place despite Trish banging on the window, until she eventually goes back inside. It’s cold out, and if it were summer, she’d have been out there for way longer.

She sends Buccellati on with a thumbs-up (which doesn’t mean anything other than “*You’re good to go, so leave*”, because Abbacchio is super uncooperative), and as soon as the car pulls away, she practically leaps over the countertop and slams her hands atop the marble.

“Alright, so we’re all going to follow them, okay?”

“Did you even bother to ask what time they were going?” Inquires Mista.

Shit. No. Trish shakes her head. “It’s fine, it’s fine! We’ll get there at opening, so meet at my house for disguises. We’re going to get them *together.*” For emphasis, she pushes her palms together and grins behind her fingertips. Admittedly, she’s excited, and Trish always becomes this way whenever love is involved. It’s wonderful! ...She should really find herself a date some time, but that’s for later.

No one is as excited as her.

“We’ll speak in different voices if we can manage, and dress differently. I can supply costumes, so don’t even worry. Giorno, you have plenty, right?”
“From theatre?” He asks with a raised brow. “I’m... sure I could put together something relatively normal-looking.”

“So, we’re all in?”

Everyone looks grudging, but they nod along with it. Sure, yeah, whatever Trish. Whatever gets you through the day, sweetie. She jots down her address several times on several different sticky notes, and passes those around.

“Who’s driving?” Mista then questions, and that’s when they realize. Fugo’s the only one with a car, and it’s illegal for him to be driving with that many people in his vehicle, but... yeah, it’ll all be fine! He’s responsible, if hot-headed, and Trish is about ninety percent sure they’ll get there in one piece.

Fugo immediately realizes, heaves a sigh, and says he’ll see everyone in the morning before retreating into the back of the kitchen to continue washing the dishes he never finished. Slow days were wonderful for doing absolutely jack and discussing how to set up friends.

Trish is ready to go before her friends even get there. Luckily, both dads are out, so the situation’s made a hell of a lot easier.

She answers the door wearing a long blue wig that’s surprisingly well-kept, considering it’d been in the back of her disaster of a closet for the last three years, but to hide the fact that it’s a wig she’s wearing a baseball cap backwards. Her hands are shoved into a gray pullover hoodie, and it’s probably the first time in years she’s worn jeans and sneakers.

Mista’s the first to arrive, and Trish forces him to take off the hat for the day, much to his obvious remorse, and sticks him into a Spice Girls T-shirt that she purposely got about six sizes too big so she could wear it like a nightgown, and even though Mista’ll probably stink it up by the end of the day, laundry detergent exists for a reason. Luckily, he decided to wear ripped jeans and high-top sneakers. This “skater squad” act was going surprisingly well! Not that it was planned in the first place.

Narancia manages to look like Narancia in whatever he wears, so Trish leaves him be with his tight jeans and baggy tank-top, but pops a blue beanie cap on his head to top it off. Still looking like a bunch of street punks, eh? She decides his face is too recognizable, though, and makes him wear her sunglasses.

Fugo is the hardest to dress up, because he looks like he’s uncomfortable in anything she manages to fit on him, and like he should be dressed in a fancy rich kid’s outfit rather than a T-shirt that says “I DONUT GIVE A DAMN” with a picture of a donut on it. Trish really likes that shirt, too. Disappointing. She does have a pretty cute black vest that she makes him put on, and even though it looks horrible, he... kind-of matches the impromptu theme... The donut shirt is the best part, though.

Giorno stumbles in last, stating that he had to walk the farthest to get here. His usually-braided hair is down, golden curls bouncing around his shoulders, and he’s just wearing blue jeans and a plaid shirt that’s a little too big on him; the sleeves are rolled up and even though the buttons are done all the way, it’s still sagging and showing off his collarbone. Trish honestly expected him to show up dressed like a royal from the French Revolution, but this is far better. He looks almost perfect, if it weren’t for those dumb golden spirals atop his head that completely give him away. She says it flatly — the spirals have to go for today — and Giorno unwillingly reaches up and removes the
bobby pins that hold the twisted hair into their silly spiral shapes, and all at once his long bangs cascade over the front of his face.

What she wouldn’t give to have hair that luscious and shiny.

Giorno takes a few minutes to pull his ridiculous bangs back over the top of his head and clip them in place, and Trish proceeds to slap Mista’s hat on him. Mista probably doesn’t have head lice, so it should be fine.

If Mista wasn’t gushing over Giorno the first time he walked in, looking small and squishy in his too-big button-down, he certainly turns bright red when Giorno’s wearing his hat. In Trish’s most humble opinion, everyone looks cute and silly, and this’ll be way more fun now that they’re in costume.

It’s early in the morning, and Fugo is the only one who doesn’t fall asleep on the way to the gardens. Trish falls asleep draped across Giorno and Mista in the backseat, and Narancia’s curled himself into a little ball in the front. Fugo wakes them the moment they park, and it’s only a few minutes into opening. They decide to hang around in the car and chatter for a bit until more people show up, waiting until their targets come into view and go inside.

They’re there for four hours before that even happens, and had Mista not gotten volunteered to run to the fast food joint across the street and get them all something to eat, they’d be starving. With trash now littering Fugo’s car, the teens spill out of the vehicle and follow to purchase their admissions into the gardens. Trish can’t hear what Buccellati or Abbacchio are saying, but both look rather pleased to be within one another’s company.

The plan sets into motion as soon as they’re past the ticket desk and into the humid indoor exhibit.

Behind glass doors, some butterflies and other gentle creatures are allowed to fly around freely between the plants. Trish is, at first, entranced by a few brightly-coloured beauties, but focuses again on the couple. When she’s within earshot, with her back turned to them, she overhears,

“If you sit down and hold still, they might land on you.”

“What would I want them to?”

“I’ve heard it’s good luck, Abbacchio.”

When she looks over her shoulder, they’re sitting on a nearby stone bench making small talk. She walks to the other side of a wall of plant life, plants she doesn’t care to look at the tag to figure out what they’re called, and watches through the thick foliage for any changes.

They’re there for a surprising thirty minutes.

A butterfly of a bright yellow hue lands on Abbacchio’s knee, and he goes to swat it away until Buccellati catches his hand and chides him for it. They gaze at each other for a moment and draw back, but Trish counts this easily as a success. As soon as the little yellow butterfly carries on with its short lifespan, the two stand and continue their rounds, and she pretends she hasn’t been watching them the whole time.

When Trish turns to the others, they’re entranced with Giorno, and she’s not sure why until she catches him attempting not to sneeze while a Golden Anglewing rests on the tip of his nose. He’s going cross-eyed trying to look at it, a bright smile plastered on his face. Giorno remains unmoving until the creature flies off. In their distraction, Trish almost forgets to tail the couple, but they didn’t end up going too far anyway.
In an area structured to be akin to a tropical rainforest, Trish attempts to coax the boys into backing up into Abbacchio, but none of them will do it. She gives in, whipping out her phone and snapping pictures of the environment while walking backwards, until her back collides with the taller officer’s. He grunts, and in a squeaky, high voice, Trish apologizes and darts off.

“Nice, dude,” Mista whispers as soon as she’s back to their circle, “Buccellati caught ‘im — look.”

Sure enough, their hands are now on each other, and they’re both red-faced and silent, looking super nervous. Abbacchio’s fingertips drum over Buccellati’s shoulders, and the latter’s hands are on Abbacchio’s chest from where he attempted to stop the other from falling over himself. They break apart eventually, though it’s not as sudden as usual from Trish’s memory, and immediately turn towards one of the displays.

She goes to slap a high-five with Mista, who she thought was standing next to her, but Narancia eagerly steals it. When Trish turns to look for him, he’s standing by Giorno, who looks utterly enthralled with a display of passion flowers.

“These are the most beautiful flowers I think I’ve ever seen.” He conveys, eyes trained on the bright red plants.

Mista, jutting his hands into his pockets, mutters a flirtatious and shy, “You’re th’ most beautiful boy I’ve ever seen.”

Giorno’s face reddens, and he produces a soft, flustered laugh from his parted lips, looking even away from the flowers for a split second.

Damn, did they just… start having their own date during Trish’s Super Awesome Ultimate Love Plan? Stomping her foot and making wild motions at the two eventually causes them to split up for a second and rejoin the group. While getting Mista and Giorno together isn’t a priority right now, getting two couples together in one day would be great. Well, it’s obvious that Giorno’s not quite to that stage of feeling yet, but — they’re getting somewhere.

Though, if they diverge off into their own little world again, she’s going to throw her phone at them. Hello? Focus!

Halfway through the gardens, Trish has stopped trying to pin the theme on the area. So far, she’s bumped into Abbacchio, Narancia’s “accidentally” tripped Buccellati (resulting in Abbacchio grasping onto his hand to save him, and instead of either of them requesting an apology, they’d kept their hands entwined for the next few minutes), which Fugo followed up later by flicking a stone from one of the open exhibits underneath an unsuspecting Buccellati’s foot and causing him to fall over into Abbacchio’s chest; Giorno and Mista hadn’t helped much, because the both of them kept on getting distracted by the plants (well, Mista was more so distracted by a certain golden blond boy), but that did inadvertantly bring up a strange topic between them.

See, as far as everyone in the gardens was concerned, Giorno and Mista were on a date. Buccellati, not recognizing either of them (Mista mostly kept his back turned, and Giorno was nearly unrecognizable without his hair spirals), commented on it shyly — look who was taking Trish’s advice, in a way! — and questioned as to if Abbacchio had ever been on a date before. The latter answered no, he hadn’t, obliviously stating that he would if the object of his desires would just ask already. That ended that conversation, but at least they got somewhere!
In a desert-related environment, in front of several tall cacti, Giorno makes a snide comment that cacti remind him of his father. Mista questions what he means by that, and Giorno gives a clever, “You know, the pricks.”

Everyone’s laughing in their little group, having a genuinely good time despite the fact that those two idiots haven’t kissed or done anything besides hold hands for five minutes and break apart thereafter. Mista attempts to practically stand on top of the two, driving them closer together until they walk away, commenting on how “this person cannot respect personal space”, and then it’s only Giorno left.

Giorno states he’s not sure what he’s going to do, but Mista mentions that he should use some of his acting skills, and Narancia dares him to “make a scene”. Suddenly, he looks as though he has an idea, and confidently struts over to the two lovebirds after stealing Narancia’s sunglasses and putting them on. He musters all of his strength, it seems, and full-on shoves Abbacchio aside, yelling in perfect English with a thick accent,

“**Move, queers! Bloody gays, always ruining my day.**”

Trish understands enough English to know the gist of what Giorno said, and has to translate it back to Narancia and Mista. As Giorno stomps off, Abbacchio calls back (again, in English),

“*Dick is great, you should really try it some time!*”

That, Trish can’t translate back without laughing in the middle, and suddenly the entire group is caterwauling.

Back to Italian. Trish catches wind of Buccellati’s comment, “Are you insinuating you have, Leone?” Leone? Leone? They’re on a first-name basis now? Spoken so warmly and intimately, too!

“N-no, I just — I felt the need to defend us. Myself. Myself, I mean.” The man can’t talk when he’s flustered, clearly.

“Oooooooh.” Mista starts. “They’re fuckin’.”

“They will be.” Fugo agrees, and Trish is again back to laughing behind her manicured nails. Giorno just upped the sexual tension instead of the romantic, she feels, but it still works in their favour.

Though, by the end of the three-hour tour, they haven’t truly gotten together. Trish deems it both a success and a failure, but mostly a success, because they seem a lot closer and more comfortable with one another than they did before. Reasoning that it’ll be far easier to get them to confess now, Trish suggests going back to her house and watching movies for the rest of the day, before her dads get home and intimidate everyone into never talking to her again. She’s technically not supposed to have boys over when no one is home.

On the way back, Mista suddenly remembers Giorno’s excellent English, and inquiries, “You speak English?”

“Half of my family is English. My father actually grew up in London.” Pause. “By the way, I never meant what I said earlier. I hope I didn’t offend anyone.”

“You didn’t,” Mista assures, and Trish nods in agreement, still mentally chuckling at the reactions. “But, by the way,” oh no, “do you like dick?”
“I haven’t… tried.”

“Okay, but, do you want to?”

Fugo interjects with a disdainful, “Can you two keep this conversation out of my car? Thanks.”
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

love is stupid and I'm a mess over my own writing after this chapter. amen.

Also! The English grading system is different than the American grade system -- in short, a 75% and above is considered an outstanding grade, as opposed to 90% and up being an A in America.

Giorno’s failing biology.

Okay, well, he’s not really failing it. He has a seventy-four, an A, but because his grade isn’t an outstanding seventy-five or higher, in his father’s eyes he’s failing biology. He’s right on the fence, too, and if he can get it up now he should be perfectly fine until the end of the semester, when he slams his face into his textbook until midnight every night and wants to die because studying sucks.

The reason he’s “falling behind” is because of theatre. Every Friday they have a meeting until eight to rehearse, and with the musical coming up in the next month, the practices are upped to every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and within the week before the musical he’ll be expected to sacrifice his weekend just to finalize everything. As much as Giorno likes musical theatre, Dio’s pretty much promised to kick his ass out of the program if he doesn’t meet expectations — damn high-standard dads — so it’s become rather stress-inducing to try to keep up with everything.

While confident, Giorno really needs to make it this semester, and so every day over lunch he’s had Trish quiz him. He gets everything right, about ninety-five percent of the time, and Trish insists that he’s fine and he’ll absolutely ace the next exam, but Giorno isn’t so sure. He’s got pages and pages and infinite pages of written, re-written, and double-re-written notes in variously-coloured pens; flash cards dot the inside of his backpack because the rubber band holding them snapped, and his highlighters have ran dry.

He doesn’t show up at the cafe Wednesday, much to Mista’s obvious disappointment. He chooses to study instead until he falls asleep with his face against a drawing of the human brain, and wakes up the next morning lying stomach-down with a pen in his hand and a textbook stuck to his face. His phone, on about thirty percent battery life due to him neglecting to plug it in, has a single text message from Mista.

“Missed u tonite. Everyone says hi. Trish said ur studying for ur classes probably, GL.”

Sigh.

Ever since the botanical gardens and trying to get those two dorks together, Giorno’s been having a rough time. In between theatre and class, and trying to make the grade, and trying not to think of the way he and Mista have been kind-of flirting back and forth, it’s been quite a time. He can still hear the words in the back of his mind, the ones uttered while he was entranced with the passion flowers — “You’re th’ most beautiful boy I’ve ever seen.” At first, he was taken aback by the way his heart thudded in his chest, and the way his face grew red, but then a warm feeling took over and all he could manage was a tiny chuckle. Not even a thank you or back at ya or anything relevant; merely a tiny, embarrassed laugh.
Initially, when Trish practically forced him to ditch school for the day yesterday, Giorno was concerned about it. He wasn’t able to call in, had no one to do it for him, and promptly got hollered at by a half-awake father for not going to class and coming home late, too. Dio had demanded an explanation, and Giorno repeated Trish’s lie to Buccellati, that Trish was helping him rehearse for theatre. Giorno believed that only enraged his father more, and he then asked if Trish’s parents were home, and Giorno yet again lied and said yes they were and no they didn’t do anything besides watch movies.

Giorno’s concern with missing school, however, had stopped as soon as they got to the gardens, and Mista started shooting off his mouth, and a butterfly landed on him — and it was fun, even pushing Abbacchio aside though he said some regrettable things. Giorno was and feels he always will be a social outcast, but for some reason, the cafe workers really appreciate him — and he’s grateful for that, even if it did get him in major trouble at the end of the day.

Giorno only wishes the school hadn’t called his father, but that was to be expected.

He did get detention for ditching the entire day, but used the hour and a half of doing nothing to mentally review everything he’d studied.

But, back to his morning, Giorno is a mess; some of the words from his textbook had rubbed off on his face because he’d been in a cold sweat all night, apparently, and there’s dried saliva pooled at the corner of his mouth. His rather crass appearance is furthered by the fact that there are bags beginning to gather under his eyes. It’s the first night in a while that Giorno hasn’t slept right, for he wakes up feeling like a grumpy old man.

This day is going to go perfectly.

Washing up takes longer than usual, and because of that Dio leaves without giving him a ride to school, announcing that he’ll “be late if he takes Giorno to school”. Grudgingly, Giorno throws on a coat and treks out the door about ten minutes after, making it to class just before the first bell rings to start the day. And, well, from there, everything is just a cesspool of utter bullshit.

Biology goes swimmingly. It’s a review day for the upcoming exam, and the class votes to study via playing a game. Giorno wins by a landslide, earning himself extra credit in the class. So, he decides, since the exam is next week, he won’t work himself half to death by reviewing until he falls asleep and gets spit all over a diagram of the brain.

History and maths utterly blow, because in both classes there was a quiz he wasn’t quite ready for; while he holds belief that he did alright, he still believes it may cause his grade to drop a percentage point or two, which just fucks him over for the end of the year. Just to add to the exam in biology, he’s now fretting over the final at the semester’s end for all of his classes, and, well, that’s just making his brain gush out of his ears. He’s still got a month, but he’s also got a month until the musical, and there’s no way in hell he’ll be blowing his chances at auditioning for the next theatre performance.

Language classes and electives go alright. In gym, Giorno runs laps around the track field despite the conditions outside, and by the time school’s over for the day, he’s sneezing his cranium out. So, maybe that was a bad idea.

Tired, dejected, and feeling low, he slumps down into his usual spot at the cafe and bangs the back of his head against the window a few times with his eyes closed. Ugh. Ugh. Ugh. Why.

The cafe is unusually busy for a Thursday evening, and the raucous chatter of customers only serves to give him a bigger headache than he already has. His shoulders convulse as he sneezes
into his sleeve, sniffs, and yet again goes back to leaning against the window with his legs splayed sloppily out in front of him.

To his surprise, it’s not Mista that first approaches to talk, but Buccellati. Giorno casts him a sidelong glance with half-opened eyes; the manager sits down across from him, gesturing to a cup he left on the table, and warmly states, “Hot chocolate. Are you ill?”

Giorno thanks Buccellati with a small bob of his head, fixes his horrible posture, and takes a drink. Setting the paper cup back on the table, he soberly shakes his head, answering, “I ran laps around the track field today. I may have caught something from being out in the cold.” *May have.*

Buccellati places his elbows against the cafe table, mouth behind intertwined and flattened hands, and then inquires, “Did you enjoy the gardens on Tuesday?”

Shit. *Shit,* when did he find out?

“It was very relaxing, yes. You?”

Buccellati draws back, leaning against the back of the chair with an introspective expression, eyes cast to the side and an almost-unnoticeable smile drawing at the corners of his mouth. He doesn’t even need to say anything for everyone who knows him to realize that he’s fairly happy with the outcome, even if his idiotic employees and Giorno decided to f**k with them. He’s not mad, which must’ve come to everyone’s surprise when he brought it up to them. Their rag-tag group had deemed it a success anyhow, and had a good evening in Trish’s living room, watching comedy movies and stuffing their faces with popcorn that she cooked for too long in the microwave. While burnt popcorn isn’t the best, it sufficed at the time, especially when the teens all started hurling it at one another and abandoned the film completely.

“How did you know we tailed you, though?” Giorno then questions curiously, with eyebrows raised up into his hairline.

“Believe it or not,” begins Buccellati knowingly, “your voice when you speak English. It doesn’t sound very different. That, and Trish’s laughter from the other side of the room.”

Oh.

The cafe’s manager announces that he’s going back to work, though there’s no one at the counter and the other employees are standing around and chattering; Giorno takes another sip of hot chocolate, warming his hands against the cup and heaving a sigh before said sigh is interrupted by a loud sneeze. It’s rare that the blond even gets sick, and the last time he even had so much as allergies was a year ago.

It’s then that Mista finally comes over and sits down where Buccellati was only a minute earlier, and softly murmurs, “Missed you last night.”

“I received your message,” Giorno begins, “but lost the chance to respond to it in my rush to get to class. I failed to sleep well last night because I’ve been studying too hard.” Lost the chance to respond, he says. Yeah. He didn’t totally forget or anything like that.

“Yeah?”

“Textbooks are good pillows.”

They exchange tiny laughs, and Giorno stares down at the hot chocolate cup resting between his hands. Steam rises out of the small spout on occasion, along with the rich scent of chocolate, and he watches it until his head snaps back up at Mista’s next comment.
“Missed holding your hand, too.”

Fuck. Giorno had forgotten about that.

When they were at Trish’s, the two sat next to each other on the couch; Giorno was sandwiched between Fugo and Mista, and Narancia and Trish sat on the floor together. They were all basically just cuddled up together like kittens, with Narancia leaning against the couch between Fugo’s parted legs and Trish using Giorno’s as her own personal backrest. This was, of course, before the popcorn war began. Anyway, Mista’d had his hand on the small space between his and Giorno’s legs, and Giorno unknowingly put his hand in almost the same spot. As soon as they’d touched, both stiffened their shoulders, and as Giorno languidly shifted his hand aside, Mista grasped it and intertwined their fingers. Everyone else, too focused on the movie, completely missed Giorno’s head snap around to gaze at Mista, who merely offered a smile and throaty chuckle; their hands yet again fell into the space between them, and Giorno didn’t mind — didn’t mind a single moment their nervously-sweating palms were pressed together, or the way Mista intermittently traced his fingertips over the curves of Giorno’s knuckles, or how befuddled his mind became the longer this went on.

In reality, he liked it, and he’s willing to do it again.

So maybe a little tiny bit of interest is there. Giorno wouldn’t call it a full-on crush, wouldn’t really be ready to kiss or cuddle or anything, but he doesn’t mind the subtle flirting or that single time they held hands.

“GioGio, are you free tonight?”

“Giorno.” He corrects, though the nickname rolling off of Mista’s lips makes his stomach flutter.

Maybe he doesn’t mind that, either.

Technically, Giorno should be studying.

Giorno should be studying, and he should be working on rehearsing for the musical, and he should be doing his homework, and he should’ve called his father to say he’d be home late. Giorno should not be walking around town late at night, shopping around with Mista, who practically insists on buying Giorno everything he glances at. Giorno argues every time, but it’s too late, because the second he looks away Mista’s booked it towards the counter and has swiped his card before the blond can stop him.

In a way, it’s charming. Mista takes good care of him, stopping in front of every restaurant on the strip mall and asking if Giorno is hungry, and though he darted into a shoe store to find shoes for himself earlier, he almost had to beg to buy Giorno some better winter wear.

“Fine,” Giorno had said at the counter, “but only because I’m in dire need of boots.” His previous pair stopped fitting at the beginning of the year, but Giorno hadn’t bothered to mention it to his father, because he reasoned he’d be getting driven around most of the time. Giorno never expected to walk into the cafe and… get so much attention from this guy, who kind-of smells bad but has a really handsome face.

His phone’s off in his backpack, been off for hours now, and he’s sure he’s missed calls from Dio. He’s also extremely positive that Dio hasn’t called the police to search for him, because his father’s never expressed that type of worry before, especially last time Giorno came home late. Granted, it’s far later into the evening now, and if the light pollution weren’t so strong it’d be a
perfect night to gaze up at the stars with his companion.

But it’s not.

It’s cold.

It’s cold outside, and Mista’s stopped him on the side of the road to clasp a ladybug charm bracelet around his wrist, because despite Giorno’s protesting, the former absolutely could not wait until they were in the next store to pull him aside.

“It’s snowing.”

“Yeah.”

Mista’s fingers are frozen, and he can’t seem to get the clasp done properly.

“We should probably head home.” Giorno sneezes; Mista’s only response is a dejected frown. He argues that it’s only five past nine, that they’re fine, but Giorno says it’ll take them both an hour to get home and that he has school tomorrow, and that Mista’s bought him too much anyway. That’s met with protest, a complaint that he hasn’t done enough yet, and Giorno reminds him that he said he was broke a few hours before they started shopping.

“Mista, believe me,” begins the blond as he pivots and leads Mista along, “I thoroughly enjoy spending my time with you. I still have school, and I’m catching a cold.”

“Well, but. It’s — yeah, okay. By th’ way, I’m not broke yet.”

He’s totally broke.

“If you need money, we can get most of this refunded —”

“No! No, ‘cause the bracelet suits you an’ all. You need better shoes, too.”

“The scarf?”

“You never wear one.”

“I have several. How about the sweaters?” The sweaters which Giorno had picked up while they were in a clothing store, simply because they were soft and warm-looking and had the boob-window design that he’s so in love with.

“Nah. They make me think of, y’know, the first day I saw you, and you came in wearing this,” he makes an oval shape with his hands in front of his chest, “sweater with th’ cutout here. You look good in ‘em.”

Giorno can’t resist rolling his eyes.

The two fall into a steady silence for the rest of their walk home, but eventually their hands find one another and their fingers interlock, and the blond finds that his mind’s racing with warm and fluffy thoughts and that he can’t seem to focus on the walk home, almost making several wrong turns on the way back. They pass Mista’s apartment complex, which he points out with his free hand, and Giorno begins making his way across the street until he’s yanked back.

“I’m taking you home first.”

No time to argue, because he’s being half-dragged down the sidewalk again.
It’s when they approach the flat that Giorno realizes that the lights are on, and dad’s looking out the window, and…

“Okay,” he begins loudly in rising panic, “I’m dead when I get inside, but I’ll see you again later. I’ll message you.”

Mista raises their intertwined hands and switches his grip so that the back of Giorno’s hand faces towards the sky, and brushes an ephemeral kiss over the latter’s knuckles. The two slowly, unwillingly step away from one another, until their fingertips brush and their hands fall to their sides. A pensive expression falls upon the blond’s face as he stares at Mista’s back retreating into the falling frost.

The moment is absolutely annihilated as soon as Giorno steps into the house, because the first damn thing Dio says is,

“Boyfriend?”

“Friend.”

A wicked grin stretches ear-to-ear over his father’s face. “Boyfriend?”

“A friend.” Giorno repeats, firmer this time.


“Whatever.”

Despite his dismissive, irate tone of voice, Giorno goes upstairs feeling light and fluffy like down feathers. Everything’s aflutter, and he can’t stop chuckling to himself as he sends Mista an update.

“Grounded. See you next week.”

“<3”

…

“Wait shit sorry”

Giorno’s beaming brightly, pretending his face isn’t bright red as his nervous and shaky fingers message back.

“<33”

Not falling in love. Not falling in love. Giorno throws off his boots and coat and crawls underneath the blankets without bothering with pajamas, eyes ceaselessly glancing over the tiny conversation over and over, smile plastered onto his face.

“ur cute”

“Goodnight, Mista.”

“Night giogio”

Definitely. Not. Falling in love.
Abbacchio has this all figured out. See, he’s an expert at this sort of thing. This time, he’s the one who made dinner plans, and he’s the one who will be paying and driving (mostly because Buccellati doesn’t have a car…), and he won’t get drunk. He hates to admit it, but Trish is correct in the fact that he needs to get his head out of his ass and just say something.

The first thing he really, really, really wants to do, is punch Giorno in the fucking face. Buccellati told Abbacchio that yes, his idiot cafe workers and that little blond twink idiot followed them and were purposely fucking with them during their time together. He never did disclose why, but Abbacchio knows. Abbacchio knows because it’s Trish and she’ll do anything to make couples work out, including scheming and having the idiot boob-window-sweater kid shove him. Abbacchio would say he owes Giorno one, and owes everyone, because recently they’ve been able to at least hug goodbye at the end of the day, but that… fucking golden blond asshole of a mediocre existence doesn’t deserve praise.

And, did Abbacchio need the other workers’ help? No! No, he sure fucking didn’t! He had everything under control, thanks. (He had nothing under control.)

So, tonight’s plan. First, they’ll go eat at a nice restaurant, nothing too high-end, but something romantic. Then, they’ll go to a snow-strewn park right across the street, where Abbacchio will present him with a single red rose, and drop the best line in the history of lines — “You’re under arrest for stealing my heart.” — and then they’ll be together and from there it doesn’t matter what he does because he’s won.

He’s gloating about his stellar plan in the front seat of his Subaru while he’s waiting for Buccellati to come outside. As always, when the raven-haired man appears, he looks dashing and charming and a slew of synonyms that Abbacchio has no time to name. He feels like his tongue’s twisted into a knot, like he can’t think long enough to tell Buccellati how absolutely breathtaking he looks. The day’s supposed to be absolutely spectacular — the diner he picked contains a small area where couples often slow-dance to soft and gentle music, with their heads nestled together and murmuring quietly.

And how, might you ask, does Abbacchio know how to slow dance? YouTube videos. (The style of dance he rehearsed with himself, alone in his room, is much more similar to a ballroom waltz than a sway-side-to-side club-type dance.)

Abbacchio doesn’t know if Buccellati knows how to slow dance. The man definitely can’t move like his employees can, and he’s obviously never taken Giorno’s musical theatre bullshit before. If the officer’s lucky, Buccellati will have to learn, which means Abbacchio will teach him, and then they’ll be nestled together and stepping all over one another’s feet and laughing and smiling — he’ll see that rare and heart-stopping smile and the world will end right then and there because a certain someone is too fucking marvelous.

And then they’ll go to the park, where they will then become lovers.

If maniacal cackling was socially acceptable, he’d be doing it.

The love of his life hops into his car, and then they’re off. Neither one of them bother saying a thing on the drive there; instead their hands meet over the Subaru’s console, and while Buccellati looks out the window into the chilly afternoon, Abbacchio gazes longingly at him at every red light.
They stop holding hands at the restaurant as soon as the food arrives, requiring two hands to eat like civilised people. Abbacchio keeps his eyes constantly moving between the food, the couples out snuggling on the dance floor, Buccellati, and then back to the food, rinse and repeat. They’d joked back and forth about how if Abbacchio was going to be driving that he couldn’t get completely plastered by drinking wine, but the little diner didn’t even have a license to serve alcohol anyway, and so (quite unfortunately), Abbacchio is not currently inebriated. He might be later, if this doesn’t go too well (he’s only seventy percent sure that he’s reading the air between them correctly, after all — maybe they’re just really good friends). For now, though, he’s sober. Painfully sober.

Buccellati’s about to ask for the cheque from the waitress when Abbacchio practically shrieks for them not to do that yet, instead slumping his cheek into his palm and his elbow on the table and waiting until the incredibly confused waitress steps away. He then motions towards the mostly-empty dance area, throws a half-nervous and half-doting grin, stands up, and holds out his hand palm-up towards Buccellati until the latter takes it and follows him out.

Though the plan was to dance skillfully, with twirls and loving embraces and the like, a sudden explosion of disquietness hits him square in the face, as if someone threw a cinder block at him from across the restaurant. Instead of doing what he learned off of the internet, he merely holds Buccellati close and sways side to side, hands resting languidly around his waist while the other’s are strung up around his neck. Elbows unbent, Buccellati’s hands dangle uncaringly behind Abbacchio’s shoulders.

They’re almost nose-to-nose, foreheads dipped together, both of their faces lit up in shades of deep crimson, reticent smiles forever stuck on their faces. Buccellati smells good, his breath riddled with the sweet scent of pancakes, a light cologne drifting mesmerizingly off of his skin. The moment is perfect; spotlights on them, together, so close that they could almost taste each other’s lips if they so much as dared to. But instead of that, instead of taking things at too quick a pace, they’re here now just enjoying one another’s company, swept up in the moment so terribly that neither can utter a word.

All that matters now is that they’re together, clinging on as if to never let go.

It’s warm. Everything is warm; there’s a resonant heat spreading like a tangled web all over Abbacchio’s chest, until it threatens to stop his heart then and there. His grip tightens as he tugs his companion in closer, craning his neck as if to swoop in for a kiss, but his mouth hovers there instead as a tiny and almost-inaudible, breathy giggle cascades off of Buccellati’s lips.

“What are you doing, Leone?” He inquires lowly, met only with a shrug of the shoulders.

“Falling.”

That’s far from the truth. Abbacchio’s already fallen, in so deep that he cannot escape the pit he’s dug himself into. Everything in his mind for the past few months has shouted out nothing but loving words about none other than Bruno Buccellati; at work, he’s distracted, and even sitting on the sofa at home and sipping wine cannot save his lovesick self from these horrid affectionate phrases filtering through his brain. He’d go as far as to say he loves it, loves holding onto these powerful feelings that knock him around like a hurricane, loves the way his heart throbs with every passing moment they glance at each other. But more than that, he loves it here, now, holding Buccellati while the latter tugs him in closer, arms wrapped fully around his neck and fingers now twisted through the long hair. He loves it, the way Buccellati rests his forehead in the crook of Abbacchio’s neck, producing a miniscule and shy chuckle.
Abbacchio rests his cheek against the side of Buccellati’s head, closing his eyes only for a few moments but feeling like it’s been two lifetimes since he’s opened them up again. The way their eyes lock as soon as his head pops back up is slow and gentle, with mixes of infatuation and respect and yearning shining through even in the dimly-lit dance floor. Both stop dead suddenly; Buccellati is slightly slack-jawed, apparently trying to grip onto the words he wants to say, and though his eyes shift a bit he’s unable to draw them away completely.

“Falling?” He finally repeats, index finger idly curling a tendril of Abbacchio’s long hair.

“Falling.” Affirms Abbacchio.

“For what?”

 Pretending to think for a second, he confesses finally, “You, perhaps.”

Sparks start flying; in an instant Buccellati goes from a half-lidded stare to wide-eyed and bright red, and practically throws himself forward into Abbacchio’s grip, as if they could somehow get closer than they already are. Such a strong display of emotion from Buccellati — the stoic, the emotionless, the one who isn’t able to show any emotion ninety-nine percent of the time — practically sends Abbacchio on a loop himself. His throat tightens, and he feels as though he’s about to cry, but he doesn’t, instead stumbling a bit and moving one hand to pat Buccellati’s back.

“I still had something else to give you, Bruno.”

Buccellati doesn’t move for a solid minute, refusing to let go it seems, until he utterly murders the moment with, “Oh, right, the bill for dinner.”

He’s still cute as ever, though.

Buccellati’s not looking at him as they cross the street and head towards the snow-coated park. The fountain there isn’t running, never does during the winter time; instead, piles of snow are built up on top of the marble, and the various tracks of winter-loving animals surround the general area. Abbacchio has the rose hidden in his coat, and though it’s no longer required that he drop some sort of line — the dancing worked out absolutely perfectly — he’s still going to do it. He’s going to do it, and the whole day will be made more wonderful than it already is.

Each and every time his love brings his head around to gaze at Abbacchio, he immediately puts it back down again, biting down on the corner of his lip. Abbacchio finds it enamoring, the way he’s suddenly growing shy after their little moment back in the diner, and gives Buccellati’s hand the smallest of affectionate squeezes before pulling him by the fountain.

From his coat he draws the rose forth, handing it over to a rather shell-shocked cafe manager, and then stumbles over his words. A sudden bout of troublesome feelings takes over, and then he’s forgotten what he’s about to say; Buccellati gingerly takes the rose between his fingertips, and all Abbacchio manages is a completely uncouth,


Buccellati’s laughing.

“Why,” demands the officer, “are you fucking laughing?”

“Because,” begins the human embodiment of heaven itself, “that was the most graceless thing I’ve ever seen you do.”
“Wh — fuck off, honestly.”

“I love you, too, Leone.”
It’s been a week. A week! A whole, entire, god-forsaken, awful, horrendous, despicable, fucking week, since Mista’s been able to see that perfect angel that is Giorno Giovanna, or tell him how cute he looks — because, while he can imagine it, an impromptu message of “you look good today” makes him seem like he’s watching Giorno from a high-tech telescope. He’s not! He would never! Mista realizes the difference between having a big-ass crush and an obsession. Still, the days are dragging on and on.

And it blows that all he’s gotten are infrequent text messages.

Giorno always responds to Mista’s doting with nothing but a heart emoji, and then the conversation drops for a few hours, picking up on a completely different topic. It goes from a slew of hearts to a conversation about maths or books or theatre. Mista likes the small talk, sure — the updates that Giorno is “studying :/” or “just watched someone nearly break their leg in theatre today” are warmly welcomed and accepted. But... damn! What he wouldn’t give to have Giorno talk about something else, other than the little updates and the “how are you doing” messages.

Ugh. He’s got it so, so, so bad. He can practically hear Trish squealing with delight.

The morning before Giorno is finally freed of being grounded, finally allowed to do something other than school and be at home and probably bored out of his (adorable) little mind, an early-dawn text buzzes the phone that Mista fell asleep holding.

“Last day. See you tomorrow.”

Mista shoots back a lazy, “gr8!” because he’s far too exhausted to respond any further. He’s lying facedown on his bed with his boxers yanked halfway off and the blankets pooled at the corner of the mattress. He dozes off again in between messages, before long waking to another message and stopping mid-snore with saliva dribbling out his mouth over the pillowcase.
“I’ve missed you a lot.”

Well guess who’s fuckin’ awake now!

“SAME”

“oops sry caps” Mista would now like to pretend his heart isn’t racing, that he is most certainly not overjoyed to hear the good news, and that in his excitement he totally didn’t hit the caps lock button and text so fast that his thumb’s about to fall off. This is great! Excellent! Giorno missed him! Giorno missed him a lot! Mista misses that cute little pizza roll, too!

“It’s alright.”

“ok but how much did u miss me?”

“I told you already.”

“ok but how much?”

“A lot.”

“ok but how much is a lot”

Persistent there, bud.

It takes a bit until he receives a reply. By then, Mista’s convinced himself that Giorno either has nothing to say on the matter, or had taken off for school a few minutes earlier. The ecstatic man drags himself out of bed, fixes his clothing despite living alone and having no guests, and stumbles down the hall to the shower with his phone in-hand. It buzzes, and Mista practically flies out of his skin and into another dimension.

...It’s Trish. God dammit, it’s Trish. Why couldn’t someone relevant message him? Like Giorno? Why’s it gotta be Trish? (Mista’s working himself into a pit of despair, wrought with fear that he questioned Giorno too much, and now he’s never going to get a response because Giorno just isn’t as interested as Mista thought.)

“Hey stinky :3 <3 just thought Id tell u that gio’s been telling me everyday how much he misses hanging w/ u. ill be at ur wedding tbh”

Yes! Yes yes yes yesyesyes!

Mista can definitely imagine what it’s like to be a raging, hormone-filled fifteen year-old, as he recalls those days in vivid detail (and really, he’s still not over them). Stopping dead in the hall, images of a grounded Giorno complaining about his father fill up his mind. Whenever Mista’s upset, he continually grumbles on and on about the topic until he’s gotten over it — Giorno must be the same way, if what Trish says is true! Trish wouldn’t be mean enough to lie to him about that, after all. They’re bros.

Which… which means… Giorno and Mista…

Can! Flirt! Mutually!

He doesn’t message Trish back. Mista’s not much of a texter anyway, since his phone is a piece of fucking shit. The only reason he hasn’t been calling Giorno is because one night he tried, and Giorno hung up on the second ring — it was then explained to him that Giorno wasn’t technically supposed to have his phone, but he kept on stealing it from Dio’s room to keep in touch and
would put it back at the end of the night. Now that Mista thinks about it, that’s got to mean something, right? But, then again, Giorno might have other friends. But, GioGio once told Mista that he felt like a social outcast and that he had difficulties retaining his companions, and even that he rarely spoke to Trish unless it was in person… That means something, then! Right? Right?!

Trekking the rest of the way to the bathroom, Mista throws off his boxer shorts and hops underneath the water, abandoning his phone on the corner of the countertop. A few minutes after, his phone buzzes, and he practically breaks his neck trying to scramble and see who it is.

Finally, finally, it’s Giorno.

“‘A lot’ means more than words can describe.”

Mista’s soaked fingers slip over the numbered buttons as he responds, “we both read books so we both know words are there 2 describe things so u gotta tell me how much cuz i miss u a metric fuckton”

If Giorno asks how much a metric fuckton is, Mista will probably explain in the most graceless way that it’s “basically like 907 kilograms of the word ‘fuck’ shoved into a big-ass bottle”. Because fuckton is a mode of measurement, obviously. They definitely used that when he was in school. Like, how hot is the sun? A fuckton of degrees celsius, of course.

“It took me this long to respond because I was grappling for those words.”

“i can wait tho”

“I have class now. I’ll tell you later.”

“tonite?”

“I’ll find the words for you tomorrow.”

“can u tell me in person cuz i want to hear it from ur beautiful lips instead”

Ohhh! Was he smooth, or what? He’s smooth! Mista’s the absolute master of flirting, obviously, and right about now Giorno should be blushing or his heart should be thudding in his chest or he should feel all warm and fuzzy inside —

“<33”

HELL YEAH HELL YEAH HELL YEAH.

As soon as Mista pops back into the shower, the shitty apartment complex hot water shuts off, and he’s left there to freeze to death as he attempts to get clean for once in his damn life. Despite that, he gets ready for his workday feeling absolutely elated, pumped up and ready to go, until he remembers that he was supposed to work the opening shift today… He didn’t set an alarm, and woke up about an hour too late, on top of the half an hour spent both showering and obsessing over the state of his relationship with Giorno.

Mista manages to finish getting ready in under five minutes, and shoots out the door with his phone pressed to his ear, the screen reading, “CALLING: BUCCELLATI”, until he trips down the stretch of stairs to the ground floor and his phone goes flying out of his hand, over the railing, where it practically shatters into ten million pieces.

So, the day’s shitter than he thought it’d be. Buccellati’s gonna have a fucking cow.
He was right! He was right, Mista was right-o about that — Buccellati is pissed because he managed the cafe for a good hour by himself, dealing with the rush of grouchy old men who just wanted their coffee and scones, having to make the mocha syrup and get everything brewed by himself and do the morning bake and *blah blah blah blah*. Mista feels bad, of course he feels bad, but getting lectured for ten minutes straight while your cafe mom has his arms crossed over his chest and a sour expression tends to make one feel less bad after some time. All he’s gotten since he arrived has been nothing but *nag nag mom-voice nag get-here-on-time-Mista nag*.

“You do realize how irresponsible it is,” yes, mom, “to get here this late, and still expect to keep your job,” yes, mom, “especially with our bosses being who they are?” *Yes, mom, got it.*

“Yeup.” Mista slurs, fidgeting with his hat — can’t this just be over already? Mista knows all about how pissy Trish’s dads are about their cafe. The last guy that showed up an hour late was never late once in his life, but he was fired the second Diavolo found out about it. Like, shit, okay, he was an hour late, but that’s a little too strict.

“You’re never late, Mista.” *Yep*. “I was worried. I clocked you in so that it appeared as though you were only five minutes late as opposed to an entire hour.”

“I tried calling, but my phone broke after I dropped — wait, you did?”

Buccellati’s gaze goes from steely and irritated to soft and understanding, yet the rest of his face somehow manages to stay completely devoid of any emotion. “I have sympathy for you. You’re in a tight situation, what with your parents —”

A flame kindles in the back of his brain. *Really don’t wanna fuckin’ talk about it, boss.*

“All I’m trying to say, is that I don’t want to see you lose your job. You’re a good kid and a hard worker, and I know you desired to go back to school.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

“I feel for you, Mista. My own parents —”

Mista slams his hand down on the countertop, the sting resounding throughout his entire palm and up his arm, cold from the marble seeping through the warm sensation of gathering blood. Face twisted in a combination of vexation and poignancy, and with a tight throat and nearly-cracking voice, he shrieks out, “I *get* that you’re trying to be nice, but can you fucking knock it off for five seconds?! I really, really, really don’t wanna fucking talk about it!”

Buccellati’s expression changes momentarily to slight shock, and then he’s back to stoicism and his arms fall down to his sides. “I apologise. If you need, you’re welcome to take a break.”

“I’m fine.”

Yeah, Mista — you’re about as fine as a guy who got shot in the face with a bazooka, but that’s not the point.

His posture relaxes, hand slipping off of the counter, where it then ducks into his pocket. Taking a few deep breaths, Mista pivots and heads off into the kitchen, where he immediately proceeds to check the expiration dates on everything in the freezer until his mind settles again.
Half an hour later, Mista finds himself busy making drinks for the mid-morning rush, and though a rather pretty looking redhead makes her way over and chats to him, he’s no longer hopeless enough to spill her drink all over himself. She may be pretty, but Mista’s got someone far more beautiful — someone he actually knows this time, and really wants to shoot a message to, if he hadn’t broken his fucking phone earlier.

But life sucks, and Mista will have to deal with it.

“How long’ve you worked here?” She’s saying, leaning over the counter as Mista hands her drink over and begins cleaning off the steaming wand.

“Six months, I think. I guess. I used to work bussing tables at a restaurant, but the hours sucked. No one works here except for a few of us, y’know? So we’re all real close. But it’s bigger than like, a Starbucks, so on weekends almost everyone’s here. And Wednesdays, too.

“And,” she points to the dark scar over his olive-skinned hand, “that?”

“I burned myself on the oven, real bad.” Somehow it doesn’t beat the way he gave himself 2nd-degree burns over Giorno.

“Yeah?”

Jesus, what did this girl want from him?

“I gotta go.” She then says, slipping out the door, but when Mista looks at the counter her number is scrawled hastily on the back of a business card. Wow, the first time in his life someone offers their number first, and clearly it’s not for the pizza place, and his heart’s been stolen by another. Why couldn’t this have happened earlier, before Giorno, when he was desperate?

(He’s still desperate. But desperate for GioGio.)

Without regrets, that business card goes straight into the trashcan. Mista continues swabbing down the counter until Buccellati insists that next time he do something stupid (well, not phrased like that — Buccellati’s exact words are, “Next time you get injured on the job,”) he file for worker’s compensation. But Mista refuses to do that, says it’ll be too much effort, when he could just continue working without bugging anyone. His injuries are too copious, anyway, too frequent.

As soon as ten o’clock hits, Fugo comes in for his shift, and Buccellati goes on lunch. Fugo doesn’t have much to say today, besides grumbling about the way people drive, before setting to work on bringing washed and dried dishes out to be put away. Fifteen minutes after, Abbacchio walks in, and Mista’s prepared for him to sigh and do this and that and generally make an ass of himself while he deals with his terrible beast of a crush… but today, he’s holding flowers, and…

Buccellati comes out of the break room in a flash, a warm aura about him, and nuzzles up against the officer.

Wait. Wait, wait, whoa whoa whoa wait a fucking second there. Since when did Captain Awkward and Cafe Mom get together? How in God’s name did Abbacchio beat Mista to getting the love of his life wrapped around his finger? Abbacchio is… Abbacchio! He’s worse off than Mista when it comes to love! He’s a grump, an asshole, a prissy wine-addicted bitchbaby, and somehow he managed to beat Mista to the draw? Is the world ending? The botanical gardens thing must’ve worked really well!

Mista’s question as to how and when doesn’t come out properly, as he leans over the counter and ogles the two lovebirds and immediately hollers so that the entire cafe can hear him, “Wait, when did you two start fucking?!”
Eloquently stated.

Several of the patrons look up, others snickering, and a multitude of them leaving. Well, whoops. His bad.

Those that stay then have to deal with the unpleasantly immature conversation that ensues.

An eruption of two, “Mista!”’s come from Fugo and Buccellati, with the latter’s face turning to a deep shade of crimson. That’s met with an equally-childish, “At least I actually get ass, dickshit.”

“No one is having intercourse with anyone!” Buccellati shouts out, putting his hands up between the two as if to keep Abbacchio from advancing like a wild tiger and slaying Mista’s poor ass.


“Especially not Mista.”

“Leone!”

“And surely not Abbacchio.”

“Mista!”

“I’m leaving.” Good idea, Fugo.

“Go burn your dick in the oven.”

“I hope you get shot.”

“Boys! Behave!”

There’s a long, drawn-out silence, and the rest of the cafe guests had left in-between the words *intercourse* and *dick in the oven.* That’s… the most *mom* any of them had heard Buccellati be before. Are the mom jokes getting old yet? Not in Mista’s opinion, they sure fucking aren’t!

Mista’s not really mad, though — just some playful banter between friends, right? It’s not like he actually wants Abbacchio to get injured, and he’s sure Abbacchio wouldn’t want Mista to burn his genitalia off. Just boys being boys.

The lovers go outside to talk, where Mista can see Buccellati stuffing his face into the bouquet Abbacchio gifted him. He sighs, a bit jealous that the most hilariously awkward people on the planet could confess to one another before he even managed to do something with Giorno other than call him cute twenty-four-seven. Like, damn.

What’s it gonna take for Giorno to feel something? Mista very clearly remembers that one night, where they were up in his room joking around, and he very vividly recalls how he felt the exact moment after Giorno nearly strangled Mista with his own hat. He remembers a few nights ago, when he called Giorno *GioGio* over a text message and wasn’t met with a snarky correction; how adorable Giorno’s face looked after Mista looped that ladybug bracelet around his wrist, and how Giorno messaged him the day after and stated that he was extremely grateful that Mista bothered to spend so much on him.

He misses the way they were holding hands a week ago, secretly, on Trish’s couch, and she never found out so she couldn’t give them shit about it. He misses kissing Giorno’s knuckles and walking off into a bleak snowstorm, getting home late and collapsing onto the bed and just sighing
because his bank account was empty but his heart was full of love and his brain of thoughts. Thoughts of Giorno just existing, being him, smiling like he sometimes does. It’s gross — disgusting, even — the way the feelings turn him into this mushy mess. Not even when he’s engrossed in Jane Austen novels, does Mista ever outwardly blab about romance, and how cute someone is, and this and that and ugh.

Love sucks. Mista might be a hopeless romantic, but he’s never had a real crush until just now. It might not even be a crush anymore — he may just go so far as to say that he’s in love with Giorno Giovanna.

…

UGH.

Trish steps into the cafe after school for the closing shift; Buccellati had gone home around one-ish, still getting driven around by Abbacchio (Mista’s not really sure if his car’s fixed or not, but now that those two are dating, it really doesn’t matter, does it?), where Narancia took over for the afternoon shift. Mista’s supposed to be out at around one-thirty, but it doesn’t matter now, because he totally broke his phone and doesn’t see Giorno until tomorrow. What’s the point of even going home? Just to… lay there? And read like always? The world sucks!

And poor, poor, Trish Una, is bombarded by Mista shouting out inquires as to how Giorno’s been all day, and explaining hastily that his phone exploded when he dropped it and now he has to get a new one but he can’t afford one and how his life sucks and how is Giorno doing again?

“You’re talking a mile a minute. You’re at a ten, and I need you to take it down to a two.”

Mista slumps into one of the chairs by the window and holds his forehead in his palm.

“Okay, listen — I’ll tell him that you busted your phone.” She says, standing in front of him with her deft fingers gliding over her fancy-shmancy touch screen. “He’s been fine. We had our science exam today. I think I failed. Whoops!”

“That sucks. Did y’know that Buccellati and Abbacchio got together finally?”

“Oh, yeah, I found out the day after because I had work. He was walking around like, so ecstatic — there were cartoon hearts popping out of his head and all,” Trish makes motions above her coiffure, iPhone clutched in one hand, “and I asked about it.”

“Yeah.” Mista responds idly, merely for the sake of keeping the conversation going.

“I haven’t gotten the full story, but apparently Abbacchio accidentally cussed him out, which — I mean, that’s not really how you’re supposed to tell someone you want to kiss them, but it worked I guess.”

“Yeah.” Mista’s zoned out.

“So, Giorno.”

“Yeah.”

“He really is miserable, cramped up in that flat and only able to talk to you sometimes.”

“Yeah.”
“Today, he seemed really down at lunch.”

“Yeah.”

“He kept playing with this ladybug charm bracelet. I said it was cute, ‘cause it really was — could’ve used more pink, but who am I to judge? He said you got it for him, and that he hadn’t taken it off.”

“Yeah?” Now he’s paying attention.

“I asked if it was because he couldn’t undo the clasp with one hand. He said he could, and he showed me, before I had to help him get it back on. I know what you’re thinking.”

“It means something.” Mista insists, inklings of hope spawning in the deep cavities of his chest. “It’s gotta mean something!”

“I think it’s starting to mean something.” Trish corrects, index finger raised pragmatically, manicured nail aimed at the ceiling. “I don’t think he’s moved beyond the ‘really close best-buds’ phase. Like, I don’t think he understands yet. I’ve been in love before, or at least had a crush, so I get it! But he’s not… he’s Giorno, do you know what I mean?” Mista shakes his head. “He’s got a dad who he’s never seen cuddle up with his mom, and a mom who was never around and didn’t cuddle up to him.” Mista didn’t know that — all Giorno said was that his mother was worse than his father, but he left it at that. “He doesn’t even know what love looks like half the time! Sure, he realized about our boss and Abbacchio, but that’s because we were there. There’s a multitude of girls who have a crush on him and I keep telling him every time that that’s why they’re being strange and flighty. He just — he doesn’t get it, because he hasn’t even had maternal or paternal love. He’s… I dunno.” She trails off, sitting down in the seat across from Mista with her phone still clutched in her hand.

“New to this?” Mista finishes a bit forlornly.

“That, and he’s inexperienced. Maybe I read too much into this, but he’s not like us at all. I’d almost say he was completely aromantic-asexual, if he wasn’t always sighing out the window these days and checking his phone for messages. He doesn’t get it himself.”

“You’re suggesting it’s just a passing phase, then? He’ll realize that he’s just got a best friend —”

“No, no! Not at all, Mista!” Trish assures without a flicker of doubt. “He knows best friend, he’s got me! We’ve become really close after I first brought him here. He refers to you as his best friend, too, but when he says it he sounds like he doesn’t really mean it. I know I’m contradicting myself —”

“Majorly.”

“ — but he sounds a little lost. And again, he doesn’t realize it yet. Give him some time!”

So much for Giorno finding the words tomorrow for him. Mista’s prepared for those words to either never come forth, or to end with the word friend. Even if Giorno always responds to Mista’s flirting with hearts, it could just be that he has no other response, that that’s what he’s seen done in movies or in books or something of the sort — Trish sends platonic hearts all the time, in fact! He heaves a sigh, to which Trish responds lowly with,

“You really do like him, huh?”

Mista really does.
In the morning, all Mista can think when he wakes up is *Giorno Giorno Giorno*; in the afternoon while he’s at work, from the corner of his eye, every blond that walks in looks like Giorno; and after work, while he’s waiting outside of the cafe without a jacket because he was dumb and *forgot one*, his mind races with thoughts of — you guessed it! — Giorno.

Trish and Giorno appear over the horizon, trekking through the snow in their boots. Trish has her hands shoved into the pockets of a long, muted-pink coat, the collar upturned against the wind, and Giorno’s only wearing a fleece jacket over what appears to be a turtleneck sweater, earmuffs over his ears, looking eagerly to Trish as they near the cafe. When they’re both within ten metres, Mista shoots to his feet, begins jogging towards them, slips, probably breaks his ass on the sidewalk, gets up, and manages to meet them halfway.

Trish is laughing at him. That… that witch!

Mista feels a little bad for calling her a witch, though.

“I’m done with work for today,” Mista starts, dusting the snow off of his behind in an absolutely loutish fashion, “so I’m outta here. Unless y’wanted anything from the cafe, GioGio.”

“I’m fine. It’s nice to see you again, Mista.”

Trish gives them both goodbyes, throwing a wink over her shoulder at Mista as she proceeds inside.

“My house?” Suggests the capped man, as… well, Dio’s a pretty scary guy, he admits, and he doesn’t want to get Giorno re-grounded because Dio totally saw last week’s hand-smooch and probably has many questions. Oh, God. What if Dio gave Giorno *The Talk*? Did Mista honestly, really, subject poor Giorno to that bullshit? Did… did his dad think they were…

Ohhh *nooo*.

“Yes.” Giorno states simply, flatly even, as they head across the street and down the slick sidewalk.

“Did you pass your uh… your science thing?” Mista so good at speak word! Good Mista!

“I won’t know until next week.” Well, that’s bullshit, honestly. “Trish mentioned that you broke your phone?”

“Yeah, okay, so,” begins Mista, gesturing in front of him, “I was runnin’ late for work because I didn’t set an alarm and I forgot I had to open in the morning with Buccellati. So here I am, scrambling to get ready, an’ then I go to call the cafe and apologise when I nearly fall down the stairs, and my phone goes over the railing and just explodes on the ground. Kinda like the way iPhones explode when you drop ’em, except last time I saw that happen Trish only dropped it like thirty centimetres. The difference is, she’s got parents to buy her a new one, and… I don’t, and I can’t afford one.” Way to make yourself sad there, bud.

“Next paycheck?”

“I gotta pay rent, dude. And eat, but I guess I can jus’ live offa McDonald’s for the next six weeks.”

“Don’t do that.” Giorno suggests with a shake of his head. “The phone shouldn’t be your first priority.”
“It is, though.” Argues Mista.

“Why? It’s only a phone — you live right next to the cafe, and everyone knows you broke it, right? It’s no emergency.”

“It is, though!” He repeats, jamming his hands into his pockets. “I can’t text you until one of us falls asleep if I don’t have one.”

Giorno’s face is probably just red because it’s bloody freezing out. That’s also why Mista’s face feels hot, too. Obviously. Yeah.

Yeaah.

“Do you have a landline?”

“Well… yeah, but it sucks. Damn thing always cuts out. It was a bundle plan with the cable company my complex uses, y’know? And that can’t text.”

“Call me on that, then.” Offers the blond, glancing up at Mista and offering the tiniest of smiles. “I’m allowed to have my phone now, after all.”

That was… that was an offer to call him. That… that can’t be a platonic call me, right? Carly Rae Jepsen, give him a sign! Anything! He’ll take anything he can get at this point! And God, if you’re listening, could you possibly help Giorno realize the feelings Trish proposes he might be harbouring? Amen.

“Okay, uh —” So awkward. “ — What time works for you?”

“As long as I’m not in school, any time, mostly. If I don’t answer, I might be doing something. I have musical theatre practice more now.”

“Y’sure I won’t bother you?”

“Positive.”

“Positive?”

“Absolutely.”

Mista might actually just believe it, if he can get his head out of the crush that’s wringing his heart like a washcloth and leaving it out to dry underneath an arid summer sun. (Which is ironic, because it’s winter. Ha, ha. Irony.) That aside, Mista has a lot of stories to tell.

“So, you missed Wednesday, but Narancia…”

They arrive at Mista’s apartment just before the snow picks up, and boy oh boy could he not be assed to clean up the disgraceful mess that is his living quarters. Even in the living room, there are dirty clothes everywhere, from nights when he was too exhausted to drag his tired behind into his bedroom and decided to strip and sleep on the couch. Clothes that are, frankly, weeks old and need to be washed badly. Mista’s only been doing laundry for the same three outfits.

“Sorry, sorry,” Mista manages as his cold muscles kick into gear and he begins to tidy up, carrying bundles of shirts and pants and underwear and socks down the hall and into his room, where it can all safely be strewn over that floor instead. “I’m a mess — did anyone tell ya I’m a mess? I’m not
good at, uh, cleaning.” Clearly, dude.

“It doesn’t bother me.” Giorno assures, but obviously it does, because someone as clean as Giorno probably wants to jump out a window when he sees a mess this horrendous! God!

At least there’s no cockroaches or anything. Yet.

“Go ahead and uh, put your coat wherever you want — I don’t have a coat rack or anything fancy like that. I usually just throw shit around.” You don’t say?

Giorno slips his coat off and strings it up on the doorknob to let it dry, taking off his earmuffs and boots thereafter, and leaving them on the tiled entryway just before the carpeting starts. When Mista pops back from reorganizing the entire living room, save for the open bags of chips on the counter and a tipped-over, empty glass on the coffee table, he realizes that Giorno’s wearing one of those adorable keyhole sweaters again, but this one…

...this one’s cutout is distinctly the shape of a heart.

Oh God, does he look cute in everything.

Why would the world do this to Mista’s fragile emotions? Why?

“Are you alright, Mista?”

Was he staring? Oh, God, he was staring. He didn’t mean to stare, it’s just… “Yeup, I’m great.”

The question now is, when is Giorno going to give him those words that he said he’d have? Mista would like to have them now, please and thank you very much. Instead of the words he wants, those that he’s expecting but simultaneously not at all anticipating, Giorno reaches into his bag and pulls out a familiar-looking, Italian-translated novel. A Jane Austen novel, more specifically *Emma*. Which Mista absolutely loves!

“I got this at the school’s library,” Giorno makes his way over to the sofa, fingers idly toying with the corners of the pages, “since I knew you enjoyed the genre. I realize you’ve probably read Jane Austen before,” Mista owns that fucking book, and it’s well-worn, “but my thoughts were that we could read it together.”

Ooooooooh.

“Sure, but, believe it or not, I’m a slow reader.”

“I’ll read to you.”

Oooooooohhh.

Mista plops down on the couch, back against one arm and feet against the other, one leg dangling off the side. He pats the space between his thighs and holds his arms out to Giorno, an affectionate yet coy grin lighting up his features; after a moment’s hesitation, Giorno sits down, leaning against Mista’s chest, where Mista then proceeds to wrap his arms loosely around Giorno’s waist.

“Chapter one,” Giorno reads, as if he were reading aloud to an audience instead of just Mista, who can very clearly see the words at the top of the page. “*Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.*”
“Harriet Smith’s intimacy at Hartfield was soon a settled thing. Quick and decided in her ways, Emma lost no time in inviting, encouraging, and telling her to come very often; and as their acquaintance increased, so did their satisfaction in each other.”

Giorno’s voice is soft and low, just the right mood for reading a romantic novel. His thin fingers turn the pages every so often, the fluttering of paper breaking the second-long silence until Giorno’s voice picks up again. Mista holds onto him tightly, as if to never let go, head nestled against Giorno’s shoulder.

“The Picture, elegantly framed, came safely to hand soon after Mr. Elton's return, and being hung over the mantelpiece of the common sitting-room, he got up to look at it, and sighed out his half sentences of admiration just as he ought; and as for Harriet's feelings, they were visibly forming themselves into as strong and steady an attachment as her youth and sort of mind admitted.”

It’s getting late, around nine o’clock. Mista stops their reading and suggests that Giorno tell his father that he’s over at Mista’s so that he’s not grounded yet again, but Giorno counters by informing that he’s already established that he’ll be over “at a friend’s house”, and will probably get home late. He then adds that it’s a Friday night, anyhow, and that this is the last one he’ll have free for the next while.

“As long as you’re not gonna get in trouble again.”

“I’m not,” Giorno promises. “Her views of improving her little friend's mind, by a great deal of useful reading and conversation, had never yet led to more than a few first chapters...”

Ten o’clock. Giorno’s yawning in-between paragraphs. Thirty minutes ago, Mista broke their warm cuddle-puddle by getting up to get a blanket for the two of them, where their legs are currently tucked under.

The blond smells of hours-old soap and shampoo from earlier in the day, presumably, but Mista still finds the slight vanilla scent to be rather enrapturing. He playfully undoes the braid at the back of Giorno’s head, sifting his fingers through the golden locks as the latter willingly lies back so that his head rests in the crook of Mista’s neck. With the book now at an odd, sideways angle, Mista can’t exactly read along anymore, but listening does him well enough.

Besides, he’s read this before.

“Mrs. John Knightley was a pretty, elegant little woman, of gentle, quiet manners, and a disposition remarkably amiable and affectionate...”

Giorno yawns right where the semicolon is.

“Tired?”

“No.” Yes, he is.

“You’re tired.”

Giorno grumbles inaudibly, one hand yanking the blanket over his shoulder.
“Oh, before you fall asleep,” no, Mista, don’t ask, “you texted me like… you had words for me. Y’know what I’m talking about? I don’t remember everythin’ you sent.” Mista, don’t press the boy, he’s half-asleep.

“I remember,” Giorno’s voice is quiet, drowsy — he’s about to doze off any moment. “I know what I wanted,” he yawns, “to say, it’s jus’… It’s strange.”

He babbles when he’s tired, aw.

“Like how?”

“It’s weird.”

“Like how?” Mista presses.

“I miss’d you a lot, Mista — I feel like you’re my closes’ friend, but when I say friend it feels wrong somehow. Like I’m missin’ something…” Small yawn. The book closes over Giorno’s fingertips, and Mista pulls it away and sets it atop the back of the sofa. “Do you… get what I’m trying to say? It feels wrong, Mista. Know why?”

Mista knows exactly what he means.

Giorno’s eyes close; his breathing slows, and one of his hands shifts to rest against Mista’s chest. “Mista?”

“I have no idea.” Mista states, kissing his forehead. “Goodnight, GioGio.”

Mista knows exactly what Giorno meant, but Mista doesn’t have the heart to tell him yet.

Chapter End Notes

I broke my own soul into pieces with that ending, by the way.
Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Was it ever canonically established what happened to Mista's parents? They were never around in VA... I improvised.
We actually learned about the "beads of time" thing today in my psychology class! (I'm a psych major, if anyone cared to know.) Who knew it'd fuel part of this chapter? Also... "Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter" is amazing.

Still searching for ideas! My contact information is in the last chapter's beginning notes. <3 <3 <3 Please suggest things!

It's a damn good thing Mista doesn't have work today.

He wakes himself up by snoring, looking rather churlish because his hat’d fallen off during the night and his hair’s more of a mess than usual, not to mention the fact that he’s drooling with his head tipped back in such a way that when he lifts it, his neck instantly begins to throb painfully. He doesn’t remember falling asleep, only remembers Giorno falling asleep; Giorno is, in fact, still out cold, breathing softly with his lips parted and his face buried into Mista’s chest. Trish would comment something like, “are you sure your scent didn’t knock him out?” But Mista’s been showering a lot lately, and Giorno’s to blame for that. Can’t impress someone when you smell like ass all the time.

Giorno is cute. Giorno is cute when he’s awake, and cute when he’s reading Jane Austen, and cute when he’s trying to stay conscious while reading, and cute when he babbles just before he totally crashes. Giorno is cute when he sleeps, an endearing expression on his features, blond hair lying tousled around his head and his fingers limply clutching Mista’s shirt.

Mista noticed it last night, but Giorno is a thin little thing. The sweaters he’s worn every time Mista’s seen him serve to make him appear bulkier than he is, akin to that of his father, but holding him close like this reveals that it’s just a ruse. Giorno is absolutely tiny in contrast to Dio, and to Mista especially. He harbors larger-than-average hips for a boy, but that’s about it; other than that, he’s basically a twig. Mista himself is more like a thin tree. With fine musculature. Yeah. That’s accurate.

Like, okay, if we’re comparing people to plants, Giorno is a twig, Mista is a tree branch, and Dio is a fucking redwood oak. In Mista’s very honest opinion.

Urgh, he’s hungry. Mista doesn’t quite want to wake Giorno up, if only to sustain the moment for a bit longer, but there’s the temptation to make breakfast — there’s bacon in the fridge, the shitty pre-cooked stuff that you’re supposed to just heat up in the microwave and call good, and Mista makes the best omelets, not to mention the blueberry muffins he made the other day that should still be good, if a little firmer than they were when they were fresh. A few minutes longer, however. He strokes Giorno’s baby-soft hair, wrapping the loose curls around his fingers and sighing.

He’s not sure why he couldn’t explain it to Giorno last night. Perhaps it was a combination of
several things — the part of him that wasn’t ready to admit his own feelings, the part of him that didn’t want to blow Giorno out of the water, and an overall sense of nervousness. They may be cuddling now, but that doesn’t mean they will be later on in the day, and that doesn’t necessarily entail that this’ll happen so perfectly again. GioGio was tired last night, unable to really think clearly — he may have babbled about how his feelings of kinship felt strange, but maybe that was just a heat-of-the-moment thing, and maybe Mista’s not that important to him, and maybe the words Giorno really wants to say are *best friend in the whole entire universe* and not *I might have a little tiny crush on you.*

It hurts to think about. The paranoid part of Mista’s psyche is making him extremely disappointed and sad, even though there’s a load of evidence to support the fact that his feelings are requited somehow; Trish said it herself, that Giorno probably doesn’t really understand any affectionate feelings, because he’s never had them directed at him as a kid. Mista almost feels like he’s holding a broken doll.

But the broken one isn’t Giorno here. Even if his life sucked, he still has a wealthy father and a good life, and maintains high grades and could easily go to any university he wanted to. He’s great, and Mista’s sub-par. Mista’s parents left. Mista’s parents didn’t care! They couldn’t be assed to give a shit about him, and the split second after he got out of school they kicked his ass to the curb and told him to find somewhere else to go, because they didn’t want to see him. All Mista did was sneak into the house late at night and grab everything he needed, and take off with a little bit of cash, and live homeless on the street until he could get a shitty job and a shitty apartment. Mista knew affection, because until his teenage years he could’ve sworn his mother and father really did give a damn about his well-being.

In this way, Giorno, who has everything, seems to have nothing; and Mista, who once had everything he could’ve ever desired and now has nothing, seems to have everything.

The world is cruel and awful and a cesspool of fuming *bullshit.*

Those tears that prickle at the back of his eyes whenever he thinks about it only drive him to become angrier, and after some time of useless thoughts and self-loathing and wondering how someone as perfect as Giorno ended up in his arms while Mista himself is only the unwanted family disgrace, the phone rings. The phone rings, and it’s not Mista’s landline.

Giorno’s smartphone’s screen reads “DAD”, with no contact image.

Mista should probably wake Giorno up, he realizes, as he bravely leans towards the coffee table and answers it.

“Hullo?”

“...*who is this*?”

“Uh — it’s… Mista. You met me a while ago. GioGio — uh, er, Giorno… Giorno is here still, he’s safe an’ all. Just sleeping.” This was a horrendous idea. He should never have answered the phone. “Do you, uh, want me to like… send ‘im home?” Be respectful, Mista. Be respectful. Don’t be intimidated, Mista.

“He stated he’d be out late.” Okay cool please hang up the phone please please *please.*

“Tell him to be home by five.”

“Will do, captain.” Oh *God* do we sound stupid over here.

Dio grunts into the speaker, which only serves to make Mista’s heart drop into his stomach. “*I*
“don’t think we’ve formally met, Mista,” oh God, why does he sound threatening? Is he trying to sound threatening? “My name is Dio Brando, the father of your boyfriend.”

“W-well, we’re not dating, sir.”

Another grunt. Mista opens his mouth to say something, then closes it, opens it again, and that’s when Giorno lifts his sleepy head up; his eyes go wide, and he snatches the phone from Mista’s hand.

Mista really should apologize, but right now he’s a chihuahua with his tail between his legs.

“What the hell, dad. ...I was sleeping, you two woke me up. ...Okay. Home by five. ...Well, I fell asleep, that’s why I’m not home.” Giorno’s face suddenly goes bright cherry red. “We didn’t do anything. ...Seriously! ...Why are you laugh — not my boyfriend, dad!”

Mista mouths I’m so sorry to Giorno before proceeding to cover his face with his hands and groan loudly into them. The one thing that could make this worse is Dio suddenly pulling both of them aside for The Talk… Mista hopes he didn’t just jinx that one. Please, God, be nice to him today. Be nice, be nice, please be nice…

The phone’s hung up finally, thank fuck, and Giorno proceeds to practically hurl his phone across the room (it skids over the carpet and hits the leg of the couch, perfectly fine), lie face-down against Mista’s chest, and exhale an irritated little “wryyy…”

“So it rang, right,” says the elder, immediately jumping to his own defense, “an’ you were so calm and asleep an’ I just didn’t wanna wake you up so I answered it,” breathe, Mista, “and I don’t think I made a good impression again. Like, you know how on my first one, I pissed him off? The second one wasn’t as bad, y’know, but. Bad.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Giorno says, lifting his head back up and readjusting. “Dad just… it gets him off to harass everyone he comes into contact with.”

Ew.

There’s a bout of silence, in which Mista goes back to stroking Giorno’s hair whilst the latter lies against him as they were previously, fingers worrying the fabric of Mista’s shirt. He appears as though he’s about to go back to sleep, but while Mista has the chance he offers, “Breakfast? I make th’ best omelets ever.”

Giorno replies with a groggy sure, and they separate, with the blond falling right onto the couch and curling up under the thin little blanket again. Mista finds that he’s entranced for a few short seconds, before he paces off into the kitchen. Just like the rest of the house, the kitchen is an equal disaster. Why put a cap on the milk in the fridge? Why finish the six sodas on the top shelf when we could just bust open a new one and not finish that? Why close anything?

“Are you allergic to anything?” Mista calls over the counter, met with a tiny shake of the head and Giorno throwing the blanket over his face to block out the sunlight streaming through the window to the porch. “Cheese, bacon, tomato, parsley?”

“Okay.” Mutters Giorno. Eesh, the kid doesn’t wake up easily, does he?

Mista even wonders if Giorno is paying attention. “Poisonous mushrooms?”

“Cool.”

Definitely not.
In the ten minutes it takes Mista to make them both omelets (part of that is consumed by him doing the dishes suddenly, as he sort-of needs pans to make food, and plates to eat the food on, and glasses to serve drinks), Giorno’s already out like a light, lying with one arm crossed over his torso and the other tucked underneath his head. Mista steps out into the living room to serve the food, complete with a glass of water and a plastic fork because he lacks any real silverware. Setting everything down, he picks Giorno’s discarded phone up off of the floor, puts it by his plate, and shakes the thin blond awake.

“Mmpf.”

“Breakfast, GioGio.”

“Mmm…”

“Giorno.”

“Nnno.”

Does this… happen every morning?

“Giorno.”

“Nnn!”

“Giorno, dude. I’m gonna dump this water all over you.”

Now he’s up! Giorno practically hurls the blanket into the next dimension with the force with which he shoots awake, casts Mista a sour glare, and takes the plate that he correctly assumes is his.

They eat in silence, and only when Mista’s finished scarfing like a starving dog, does he inquire as to Giorno’s sleeping habits.

“I sleep fine,” begins the other, taking a momentary sip of water, “and wake up fine, when it’s actually required I be awake. Weekends are… lazy days.” Yeah, no shit. “I don’t usually wake up this early,” sheesh, it’s only nine, “but I never sleep until noon like most of my generation does.”

Is he lying? Mista can’t tell if he’s lying. If Mista didn’t have work, Mista would sleep until noon every damn day. That is the life.

...The life Mista can only dream about having, because he can never seem to sleep past seven or eight in the morning, and it completely blows. Even if he’s getting only four hours of sleep, his body just refuses to let him sleep longer than eight in the fucking morning.

As soon as they’re both finished eating, Mista offers to take Giorno’s dishes and wash them off — have to set a good example and make it look like he’s not a total disaster of an existence — but Giorno mentions that he wants to talk about something with Mista, and if that’s not anxiety-inducing, nothing else could possibly be.

But whatever. Mista’s eager to talk about their feelings, eager for Giorno to confess his undying love and whatnot, when —

“You looked perturbed by something when I woke up. Did my father say something to you?”
— that’s not the conversation he wanted to have.

“Nothing out of the ordinary, I think.”

“Something else?”

Mista doesn’t want to admit it. Mista doesn’t feel like he should, doesn’t want to talk about it still — just like the other day with Buccellati, Mista just doesn’t want to talk about his shitty life, how he’s led to feel inadequate just because his parents decided they didn’t want him around any longer for whatever convoluted reason they could come up with. Was it because he was stupid? Because he struggled with foreign languages? Because school wasn’t his strong point? Because his hygiene was awful? Did he say or do something wrong one night?

Giorno catches the way his face contorts in misery, and proceeds to wave Mista back over to the living room.

“Do you want to talk about what’s bothering you?”

“No, not really.” Mista sits down.

“That’s fine, then. Do you need anything?”

“It’s just,” begins the black-haired man, leaning forward with his elbows against his thighs and his hands apart, fingers spread as he gestures feebly alongside his story’s narration, “my parents. I know y’know that I don’t have parents, because I told your dad that one night, and I didn’t wanna talk about it. Still don’t wanna talk about it,” but he’s going to, “but… I dunno, dude. My folks were cool and all, until I hit sixteen or seventeen-ish, I think. Then they started hating me, and I don’t know what I did — I still don’t know, and I can’t jus’ ask ‘em ‘cause I don’t have their numbers or anything. Not like they’d talk to me now.” His voice grows strained. Mista dips his hand back behind his head, rubbing it a few times, eyes shifting side to side to avoid looking at anything for too long.

“But I finished school, and I did a shit job at it. I got through what I had to do, and then they told me one night, y’know… ‘Get out, we don’t want you around, you’re a disgrace.’ I left, came back through the window in the middle of the night and took my stuff and some money and left. I was homeless for a long time, living back behind a movie theatre, and got a shit job eventually. I saved up enough for this piece of shit apartment, where the heating breaks all the fuckin’ time and then the AC breaks and then if you stand right in the middle of the porch out there you’ll fuckin’ die because it’ll shatter beneath your feet. And I’m still livin’ here because I don’t have anything else.”

Giorno’s blue eyes are filled both with solemn and sympathy; his hand comes to rest between Mista’s shoulderblades, and he asks in a concerned and gentle voice, “You’ve been miserable for this long?”

“No! No, not really — life may have sucked, y’know? But I was real happy even when I was homeless, and even after I got this place, because life is still good. I was happier without my folks around after a time, and I lived out underneath the stars and in the alleyways with the raccoons and shit. You wouldn’t believe it, but I had this awesome gathering of animals that I’d feed food scraps to and they were totally used to me, y’know? Wouldn’t let me pet them, but still would come up kinda close and sniff around.”

Giorno nods.

“But earlier, I was just thinking about it — I don’t know what brought it on,” yes, he does, “but I
was watching you and I realized how perfect you are an’ all, and that I’m a nobody. I don’t have nothing good to my name.” He sniffles, turning away to rub his eyes before the tears actually fall down. “Sorry, it’s — stupid, ain’t it?”

“It’s not. Look at me for a second?”

“Nah, you don’t wanna see this shit.”

“I need you to look at me for a second.” Giorno repeats, firmer this time.

“Dude, I look like ass right now.”

“Mista.”

“GioGio.” Despite the arguing, he turns anyway, cheeks red and eyes swollen.

“I’m no good with advice.” Giorno prefaces. “Listen. In my psychology course, we learned about this. Every twenty seconds of your memory is called a bead of time. So, imagine this — this necklace of beads strung up. Some of them are vivid yellow for when you’re happy, others are red for the times you’re pissed off, some of them are black because you’ve had a terrible time. Every twenty seconds, you have the ability to tell yourself that you’ll be happier, or better off.” Mista nods, not really getting it thus far. What does a psychology necklace have to do with his shitty life, again? “What I’m saying is, if you go down this string of beads to a few years back, there are these black beads sitting there that you can’t let go of. Even though we’re millions of beads into the future by now, we still dwell on the negative and hold grudges. I’m not saying that you need to stop holding grudges,” Giorno pauses, taking a deep breath, “but you can always choose to stop dwelling.”

“How?”

“Up to you. But, Mista, are you really going to let a few black beads ruin your life? Your self-image suffered badly, but if it’s any consolation, I think you’re wonderful the way you are. You can move on from this.”

Giorno places his hand over Mista’s, squeezing it. Throughout that spiel Mista’s found he’s stopped sobbing, that he finally understands Giorno’s smart-person psychology stuff, and now he’s trying to visualize this string that’s covered with variously-coloured beads that keeps growing every twenty seconds.

“So, question.” Mista begins. “What colour would you think to be associated with love and stuff?”

“Pink, perhaps?”

Mista’s string is filling up more and more with pink beads as they speak.

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Monday afternoon.

Buccellati doesn’t have work today, much to Abbacchio’s satisfaction, and though Abbacchio is technically on-call he’s not too worried about the crime rates suddenly rocketing upwards. It’s been a peaceful few weeks, everything’s been fine and good, no drug trades or robberies or
anything of the sort.

He’s lying on the couch with his head in Buccellati’s lap, a bottle of white wine resting on the table, boyfriend flicking through the pay-per-view films and occasionally suggesting titles that Abbacchio has zero interest in. Comedies? Nah. Romance? Hell no. That’s Mista and Trish’s thing. Family? No kids, no desire for them. Action? There we fucking go.

“What the hell is ‘Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter?’”

“Some American movie about one of their presidents,” Abbacchio says, shrugging his shoulders, “but he kills vampires.”

“Have you ever read Dracula?”

“I don’t have time for your old-world bullshit.” Gee, Abbacchio.

Buccellati blows air out of his nose, shaking his head as he hits the play button on the remote. Abbacchio rolls over so that he’s now laying on his side and facing the television screen, and Buccellati’s long fingers twirl through his silver hair.

They spend the next few hours in silence, focused on the movie mostly, though sometimes one of the two will divert their attention to their lover. Buccellati sometimes stops to bend down and plant a delicate kiss over Abbacchio’s forehead before his eyes immediately take to the flickering screen again. Halfway through the movie, they’re holding hands, and just before the finale hits Abbacchio sits up and puts the cork back in the wine bottle.

They don’t finish the movie, because Abbacchio wraps his arms around Buccellati’s waist, and jabs his fingers into the latter’s side. The tickle war begins.

Unfortunately for the café’s manager, Abbacchio isn’t all that ticklish, so the war is a one-sided mess of Buccellati trying to squirm away and Abbacchio pulling him back in, planting a loud kiss on the former’s temple, and continuing to wriggle his fingers until Buccellati’s red in the face and can’t breathe.

Both collapse back onto Buccellati’s couch, tangled up in a sloppy embrace, grinning ear to ear as if they were the only two people on the planet and absolutely nothing could possibly shatter the good mood. And honestly, Abbacchio’s never been happier in his life than right now, living in the moment where his black lipstick is smeared over both of their faces and they’re laughing as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. Abbacchio is always grumpy — there’s no end in sight to that, but whenever he’s around Buccellati and they’re existing within one another’s presence and smiling and doing stupid things that they’d otherwise never do… life feels like a feather. Light. There’s no burden of negative thoughts or displeasure weighing on either of their shoulders, no pain contorting their voices.

They can sit and just be, in silence even, and everything feels like it should.

Buccellati is Abbacchio’s entire world, the one thing that keeps him going throughout the worst of days, the one man he can stand next to and feel completely comfortable with and at peace around. Life is going to work out for the two of them; they’re going to continue their relationship and dote on each other, and smile and joke around, and get married, and at their wedding Abbacchio will punch Giorno in the face and get plastered before the honeymoon.

What would make the moment better is if he could sing. Abbacchio has a singing voice that sounds somewhat akin to a dying cat, and he’s well aware of it, unlike those people that go onto those talent television shows and claim they sing like an angel before blowing everyone’s
eardrums out their assholes. He’s not sure if Buccellati can sing at all, but somehow Abbacchio has his doubts.

Both of them look sloppy, but that’s hardly a distraction as they shift positions, and their lips meet with a bit of a stumble and awkward glances thereafter. Is Abbacchio blushing again? Mother fucker. Mother fucking Buccellati and his perfect face and his perfect hair and his perfect existence. It’s his fucking fault!

“First kiss?”

“No?” Abbacchio squeaks, voice rising in pitch and betraying his petty lie.

“Mine, too.”

Both of them were even more strange and unpleasantly perplexing when they were actually in school — neither one had dated before, and no one really wanted to invite them to parties. They were both losers (they still are losers). Inexperienced losers.

It’s decided then that they should probably get Abbacchio’s lipstick off of their faces. Buccellati may look good in everything, but makeup is an exception to that, especially when it’s smeared everywhere. Cleaning up takes a bit longer than it should, as Abbacchio isn’t any low-class bitch; his makeup is waterproof, and it’s the kind of stuff that’s impossible to get completely off without makeup wipes and perseverance, followed by six showers. Abbacchio remembers the time Fugo called him prissy, and it’s undeniably true — he gets the expensive lipstick, and the expensive hair products, and takes his long-ass showers and makes sure he looks absolutely stunning before he walks out of the house.

He may be a cop, but people stop dead in the street when they realize that he’s a fucking beast.

Gloating aside, the biggest talent Abbacchio has is blowing hundreds of dollars on cosmetics a month. One has to look excellent before they deal with society. (Yeah, okay, whatever floats your boat there.)

“What do you want for lunch?” Abbacchio then inquires, setting a blackened washcloth on the corner of the bathroom sink.

“Pasta?”

“No.”

“Pizza?”

“Something I can cook, Bruno.” He still loves the way Buccellati turns all pink when his first name is used.

“If you want something to be cooked, allow me to do it.”

“All you do at the cafe is take out frozen lumps of shit and put it in the oven while Mista sets himself on fire.”

“Are you insinuating I can’t cook?”

“I’m insinuating that you don’t know how to work a frying pan.”

Are they married? No? Not yet?
...how about now?

“I’m not daft.”

“I didn’t say you were daft. I said you couldn’t work the fucking frying pan.”

Lunch goes off with minor issues.

It turns out, neither of them can work the frying pan, because they’re both still in the honeymoon phase of their newfound relationship — Abbacchio’d started out by making some type of skillet meal that he found in Buccellati’s freezer, while the latter insisted they have some side dish to go with it. That turned into fruit salad, which Abbacchio didn’t really see as a good side dish to that weird beef and potato skillet thing. He didn’t argue, however, because once they got that done…

Well, lunch was left to burn.

Lunch was left to burn, because they got distracted by one another, complete with cartoon hearts bubbling up around them and Cupid’s arrow shooting both of them in the ass, and though Abbacchio said he’d check on dinner after he sat on the couch, it never happened. They ended up cuddling, and cuddling ended in more tickling, and then kisses, and the split second after Abbacchio attempted a French kiss, the fucking smoke alarm went off. Then, they realized. Then, they separated.

So fuck that idea.

“Who can’t work a frying pan?” Buccellati teases over the pizza that they did end up ordering.

“Your car is still a piece of shit.”

“It’s fixed now, Subaru.”

“Yellow Ford Fiesta.”

If it weren’t for that yellow Ford Fiesta, Abbacchio, y’all wouldn’t have cuddled in the back of the car that night.

The leftover pizza is saved for dinner, but they manage to scarf all of the fruit salad. Though, halfway through their bowls, they start feeding each other, and… it’s gross. They’re so disgustingly in love, that if someone were to see them in public, they’d gag. Who knew either of them could come up with romantic ideas, like feeding one another fruit? Abbacchio should stake claim on the idea, so that Mista can’t say he came up with it. Ever. In his life.

Abbacchio has the oddest friendships with people.

He didn’t really want Mista to hurt himself yet again, as he stated a while back. They were just teasing each other. Just like how Mista definitely wouldn’t want Abbacchio to get shot while on-duty. Everyone knows that Abbacchio doesn’t really want his companions to get badly injured (Giorno is not a companion. Giorno is a gnat).

They discuss simple things, which eventually leads into a conversation about when each realized he was in love with the other. That’s a question Abbacchio doesn’t want to answer, out of sheer embarrassment. He recalls the exact day — it was the first damn time Buccellati smiled in front of him. They weren’t even talking much at the time. Abbacchio’s cafe visits were infrequent, but he’d come by on Wednesdays because his partner always wanted to see Narancia rap. Eventually,
Abbacchio was taken with it — the event in its entirety was hilarious — and his partner grew bored of their weekly visitations and went on to his own life with his own family. Anyway, it was a Wednesday night, and Abbacchio had been standing at the counter, watching Narancia from the darkened section of the cafe and speaking idly with Buccellati. He doesn’t recall what they were discussing, just that someone must’ve said something hilarious, and there it was. Buccellati smiled, and he looked like a radiant angel. One second after, Abbacchio returned the grin. Two seconds after, his heart began to thump faster and faster. Ten seconds after, he realized, and went home and slammed his face into the wall.

He explains all of that, eyes shifting from Buccellati to the television’s screensaver to the empty bowls where the fruit salad was. It’s cliche, and Abbacchio hates it because of how cliche it is. It couldn’t have been something better, like one day I just sat down and thought you looked good and there it was or we had similar interests and it just happened. No. It had to be the exact moment that Buccellati smiled. It had to be the exact moment when Abbacchio’s life was simultaneously ruined and saved.

Buccellati seems enthralled with the story, and recites his own tale — it was a long while after the two became friends. Buccellati mentions that he always thought Abbacchio was too brash and a little more sailor-mouthed than he preferred at first, but got over that the longer they spent time together. It was when they were walking down a strip mall together and passed a pet store, and there were puppies in the window playing. Abbacchio had mentioned at the time that he hoped to work on the K9 unit one day, just because the dogs were so well behaved and most were undyingly loyal to their masters, and additionally were very smart. He was then mesmerized by a German Shepherd that noticed him and padded up to the glass, where it attempted to smell him through the transparent barrier.

“Your eyes were lit up like Christmas lights.” Buccellati concludes with an affirmative nod. “You went from being crass to being a fascinated child, and something about that softer side of you drew me in.”

Abbacchio’s not soft! Abbacchio is the fucking devil, dammit!

“I inquired as to if you wanted to go into the store, and you said you didn’t have the money for the puppy and didn’t want to get attached, so we walked on. You looked rather perturbed by that.”

“It was cute. And I’m not soft.” Abbacchio defends, folding his arms rigidly against his chest.

“What you still want a dog?”

“Don’t get me a dog.” He’ll probably cry. Because he’s soft.

“I didn’t say I was getting you a dog.”

“Okay, good. Don’t get me a fucking dog.”

There’s a glint in Buccellati’s eye, but Abbacchio is cut off from questioning it by lips being pushed against his. “I love you, Leone.” He tells.

“I love you, too, Bruno.”

It’s eight o’seven when Abbacchio’s called to duty. A disappointed groan leaves his throat, and he practically rolls off of the sofa and onto the floor. Why. Why now? Why did someone have to rob a gas station now? Why did he have to be dispatched? Where the fuck was everyone else?
“What’s wrong?”

“Some assdick is robbing a gas station convenience store.” Abbacchio mutters, slinging his coat on and stuffing his feet into his shoes as fast as possible. “I just have to go in there and knock the gun out of his hands, that’s all.”

“He’s armed?”

“Most of the guys I deal with are.” Abbacchio shakes his head. “Partner’s on his way down there now. I have to go assist.”

“...be careful.”

“I’m always careful.”

He earns a single fleeting kiss, and he’s out the door and into the breezy night. From the window, he notices Buccellati watching him drive off into the nighttime.

Arriving on the scene takes three minutes. By that time, his partner’s waiting outside, crouched behind his car with his gun at the ready. Abbacchio copies his position, looking to the other man for an update on the situation.

“Guy knows we’re here. Took the cashier hostage — I really don’t want a fuckin’ shootout in the middle of the station.”

“We’re not going to have a fucking shootout.” A quick assessment of the situation proves there’s no one inside. There are people watching from corners of alleyways, some of which have glass shards stuck into their arms from when the man purportedly shot the glass. The alarms are still blaring, and he’s shrieking about how if the officers move, that she’ll be shot and killed. But, from Abbacchio’s experience, most people who do something petty like rob a gas station won’t fire their guns. A misfire could set off an explosion, killing everyone within the vicinity. The perp doesn’t look like he wants to die, and doesn’t have the face of a murderer.

For whatever reason, he’s seeking money and attention. Mentally ill? Psychology isn’t Abbacchio’s area of expertise.

The inside of the place is clear, save for glass littering the floors and tipped-over shelves and spilled items. The only two inside of the store are the cashier, who’s sweating so badly that the white of her blouse is turning grey and sobbing hysterically, lips twisted and eyeliner streaking her cheeks. Perp himself has an equal amount of sweat on his brow, with the woman in a weak headlock and the revolver quivering in his hand. He’s terrified, biting his lip, knows where he’s going next.

“We don’t even need our fuckin’ guns.” Abbacchio concludes, getting to his feet and walking around the vehicle.

“H-h-hands i-in the air! I’ll — I’ll sh-sh-shoot her d-dead! I swear I’ll sh-shoot! D-don’t come closer!”

Ugh, this is pathetic.

Abbacchio complies while his partner shouts out that he’s being stupid from behind the car, hands raised in the air, but his own gun still clasped in his right hand. He continually steps closer, until he’s standing in a pile of shattered glass just before the entrance.
“I—I’ll shoot her!”

The woman makes a distorted wail of agony, clawing at her captor’s arm with red-painted nails until it begins to bleed from the force. He never releases her, however, grip adjusting but not tightening. The silver revolver still shivers like leaves underneath a fall breeze.

“You won’t shoot her,” Abbacchio begins with an icy calm, “because your sentence will be lengthened. If you release her and come with us, your sentence will be shorter, and you can live without feeling like a murderous bastard for the rest of your life.”

To everyone’s comfort, the man drops her to the ground, and on her hands and knees the woman scrambles through the glass until she’s outside. Out of the corner of his eye, Abbacchio sees his partner shoot up and stop the woman, holding onto her like a father would cling to his scared offspring. “You’re an important witness,” he’s telling her, gripping her shoulders with fierce resolve. “We promise we’ll protect you.”

Abbacchio goes to take a single step forward as a loud crack splits the air. A spasm of agony shakes his entire form, spreading throughout his abdomen with its fiery fingers. He doesn’t realize what happened, doesn’t have a concept of it, until he falls onto his knees and his hand draws away from the hole in his flesh soaked with a copper-scented rouge.

It’s when he catches a blurry glimpse of the smoke rising from the barrel of the gun, that his brain finally catches up to the situation, and he’s left to lie in a pile of broken glass while the blood pools out around his crumpled form.
Chapter Notes

This chapter ended up SUPER dialogue-heavy and SUPER LONG. Very sorry. Usually my word count for each chapter lands between 4k and 6.5k words, but this one... hit a whopping 8,072 words.

The ideas for the cards came from here:
http://www.someecards.com/usercards/viewcard/7da9c958c10a57b74cb834e6e2c352a9a3
And here: http://www.live-inspired.com/Great-and-beautiful-is-the-world-P830

I'm so sorry, I have so many headcanons about Mista -- I love him so much... help...

Thank yous:
To tumblr user Abbaecchio for some super awesome fanart!
To tumblr user CCvienna for some ideas, many of which overlapped with mine... but one of which I definitely used! (I'll tell you all about it when the chapter ends, no spoilers.)
To archive commenter by the name of "K", for more ideas! Their suggestions, I used in this chapter and will put to use in a future chapter.
To my plethora of readers and commenters -- you guys motivate me to keep going with what I thought was going to be a cafe AU but turned into a mishmash of hurt/comfort and squishy romance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

So fuck what Abbacchio said about his life being awesome.

He wakes up a few hours after the incident, lying in an uncomfortable hospital bed, hooked up to this absolute fuckton of wailing machines. Every few seconds, there’s a clamorous beep, which only serves to make Abbacchio more pissed off.

He got shot. He got shot! He can’t believe he just got fucking shot because that chickenshit guy couldn’t stand the thought of being arrested! So much for a shorter sentence, asswagon!

Abbacchio loathes humanity.

He’s confused as to why he doesn’t feel any pain yet, wondering what kind of drugs they’ve crammed into his system, staring up at the bright ceiling lights and then groggily to his hand, and then he shoots up to check on the wound and practically tears his abdomen right in two.

Okay, mother fucker, now it hurts. Glad to know we’re still alive!

His partner walks in soon after Abbacchio’s conscious, immediately darting to his side and explaining. Perp hasn’t been caught, got away in the panic caused by the injured officer. Abbacchio mentions that he doesn’t remember much other than falling over onto the bed of glass and staring with blurring vision until the EMTs arrived, at which point his memory blanks out until the current moment.

“You were barely conscious throughout the trip here. They knocked you out for surgery — said
that this wouldn’t be fatal, but that you sustained minor organ damage to the pancreas.” Great. He needs that. “They’ve drugged you up with something called fentanyl.”

“I’m not a fuckin’ doctor.” Abbacchio slurs, closing his eyes to block out the harsh hospital light. “I don’t have a single fucking idea what that’s supposed to mean.”

Shrug.

“When am I going home?”

“When they’re sure you’re stable. You sustained organ damage, Abbacchio.”

“Technically, I think you can live without a pancreas.”

“Miserably.”

Well fuck that. Abbacchio’s already miserable! There’s nothing that could possibly make his life any better at this point — wait.

“Where’s my phone?”

“I already told him what happened. Visiting hours are over in five minutes. You’ll see him tomorrow, I’m positive.”

But Abbacchio wants to see Buccellati now.

Life proves to be more and more shitty as the days go on. First it’s Giorno, and then it’s suffering through the turmoil of having a monster crush, and then his life finally gets better, and just when he thinks he’s about to go home to the man he’s practically already married to, some douchebag shoots him and sends him to the fucking hospital. He’s in pain, the lights are making his head hurt, and tomorrow he’s absolutely positive he’ll have to struggle through Buccellati lecturing him about being careful and then breaking down at his bedside.

The mere thought itself kills him.

Abbacchio doesn’t sleep well that night. It’s not the thoughts of getting shot that plague him, or the pain that keeps him up (though that does contribute to a portion of it). No, what keeps him from getting a wink of sleep is the worry he has not for himself but for his lover. He can’t imagine the state of disarray that Buccellati’s in, and it’s certain that Buccellati will have slept less than Abbacchio.

He shouldn’t have been irresponsible and cocky with the way he handled that guy.

That’s the whole reason he’s in here — because he was dumb enough to believe that a bit of talking could convince an armed man to surrender without a fight. That’s why the guy pulled the trigger, that’s why Abbacchio’s in pain, and that’s why Buccellati’s heart is probably breaking as he thinks about it. And really, he should apologize, and should say a plethora of things — but an apology won’t save either of them, won’t heal Abbacchio and won’t cure Buccellati of his fretting.

It’s just a matter of time until the latter enters his room.

An attempt to rest more before Buccellati comes storming in proves absolutely futile, because not only can Abbacchio not rest, but he can hear Buccellati talking to the nurses outside his room after
a while, and that only serves to agitate him more. What is he supposed to say when Buccellati enters the room? “Yeah, hi, I’m alive! Look! Not dead!” There’s no fucking way.

“Abbacchio,” here it goes, “I told you to be careful! He was — he was armed!”

“I was careful.”

“You were not careful! That was idiotic!”

Abbacchio’s never seen Buccellati mad before. Granted, there’ve been moments of irritation, where his face would get a little red and his gaze would betray what his lips would not, but he never shrieks like this. He may raise his voice in a loud room, or squeal in protest whenever Abbacchio grabs him and starts tickling him, but whenever he’s perturbed by something he merely activates his mom voice and goes off. But this — this is far from a mom voice. This is the tone of someone who’s reached their breaking point.

“You weren’t careful and now you’re here, missing part of a vital organ from what I’ve heard. Have you seen yourself?!” Nope. “You look awful. Do you realize how worried I was about you, even before this hit the news? I watched you drive away and prayed for your safety, and that you wouldn’t do this crass bullshit you always pull! I don’t understand why you have to be so aggressive with everything you do, or why you’re so cocky when there’s a man with a gun aimed at you, but this is the exact reason I always fret over you whenever you’re on duty! I know you’re trained, and you’re intelligent, but you do the most idiotic things.”

His face is deep red, eyes puffy, hands clenched into fists. By the bags under his eyes and the cut on one side of his lower lip, Abbacchio can easily tell that he’s been biting his lip while wrought with enough anxiety to prevent him from sleeping. A dull coldness stops his heart for a split second, and he attempts to defend himself with a feeble, “This shit happens in the line of duty.”

“Yes, especially to people who stand up and walk toward the gunman! When someone pulls out a gun, Abbacchio, most people run away or flee. I get that you’re an officer and that the lives of the people matter, but did you ever consider the fact that your life is important, too?!”

Silence.

“Important to me, especially?”

More silence. Abbacchio’s fists claw at the crisp white sheet of the hospital bed.

“I was so worried about you. I couldn’t sleep at all — I considered the fact that you might be dead by the time I got here, and that I wouldn’t be able to say goodbye. That I wouldn’t have the chance, because you were a fucking idiot and decided to get a little cocky.”

Buccellati practically throws himself into Abbacchio’s grip then, his arms lacing around the injured man’s neck and holding him with the intent to never let him go, especially not after he nearly lost Abbacchio in the first place; his chest quivers and convulses with the force of his sobbing, and it’s a few minutes until his hold loosens and he weakly murmurs,

“I love you far too much to let you slip through my fingers like that. If you do anything like that again, Leone, I’ll deck you.”

Abbacchio scoots over on the tiny hospital bed, making room for Buccellati to sit down; the other only buries his face back into the crook of Abbacchio’s neck, silent tears soaking his silver hair, until he eventually cries himself into a deep sleep.
Doctors are annoying.

Buccellati is woken up from his anguished nap by the nurses coming in to check on him, to make sure he hasn’t ripped his stitches or anything ridiculous that he would do, to take his vitals, this and that and a whole bunch of things. His heart rate’s fine, the monitor is still annoying, he’s still in pain — everything’s as it should be, doctors, thanks a bunch! Get the fuck out now!

Abbacchio inquires as to what happened with the cafe, and Buccellati explains that he had to take an emergency day off, again letting Abbacchio know that he’s a dumbass. Abbacchio gets it — he feels terrible, and he’s made to feel worse by Buccellati’s constant babbling about it. All he wants to do is go back and time and not do that, and wait until backup arrived, because then he could’ve gone home without terrible injuries and embrace Buccellati and kiss his cheeks until they fell asleep within one another’s arms.

But he can’t do that now, can’t do that because he fucked up big-time. Every time the doctors enter the room, Buccellati’s gaze goes from affectionate yet concerned to downright terrified, as he waits for something to go horribly awry, for some tidbit of information to completely ruin everything that they’ve built up.

“I’ll be out of here by tomorrow night or the morning after, they say.” Abbacchio tries to reassure, though his skills on reassuring are sub-par, “and I feel fine,” he feels like shit, “so stop worrying.”

“That’s like asking Mista to stop wearing his hat.” Buccellati retorts with equal parts sarcasm and grief. “I’m not going to stop worrying until you’re home safe with me.”

They don’t even live together.

“Can I take you on a date when we get out of here?”

“You’re injured.”

“I can still drive.”

“You’re not driving! They’re going to give you medication — you’ll end up on narcotics to help deal with the pain from the surgery, and you cannot dive while on vicodin.”

“...can you take me on a date?”

Buccellati buries his face in his palms.

“Bruno, come here.”

No response.

“I’m sorry for being fucking stupid,” Abbacchio begins, leaning to put his hand on Buccellati’s thin shoulder. “And I’m sorry for freaking you out like that. I know that I’m an aggressive piece of shit, and that I need to tone it down. Right now, I’m worried about you, and I know it’s my own damn fault that you’re like this, but you look ten thousand times better when you fucking smile. And before you say anything, I know that I look ten thousand times better when there’s not a hole in my side.”

Buccellati chokes out a weak, half-forced chuckle.

“Life fucks you up the ass without any lube,” vulgar, “and no warning sometimes. But I’m still here.”
“You’re an asshole.”

“I love you, Bruno.”

“No amount of ‘I love yous’ is going to make this situation any better.”

“I love you.”

“Leone.”

“I love you, I said.”

“Abbacchio, please, knock it off.”

“I fucking love you, Bruno Buccellati.”

“You’re acting loopy. Are the opiates they gave you kicking in, finally?”

They are.

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Giorno, frankly, has no idea what he’s missed. Not a single, fucking clue — none at all, until Mista messages him early Tuesday morning (from Fugo’s phone) and delivers the message.

Giorno doesn’t watch the news. Giorno, generally, doesn’t even watch television — there isn’t one in his room, and he never wants to hang out with his dad for longer than five minutes to even bother with usage of the television in the first place. He only ever uses it for movies when Dio isn’t around to bother him, and that’s about all. So, when Mista slams him with news of Abbacchio getting shot in an armed robbery, and that he’s currently in the hospital, Giorno’s first response is to leap over his desk and book it down the hall and dial up Fugo’s number, shouting behind him that his friend is in the hospital and it’ll be a bit until he’s back.

The teacher can’t have any qualms about Giorno leaving for five minutes if someone he knows just got fucking shot, can she?

He’s out in the hall pacing out of sheer worry — he wouldn’t consider Abbacchio a friend, as they haven’t quite talked, and done nothing but antagonize one another; but Abbacchio is important to people important to Giorno, so worry gathers in his stomach despite their brash relationship. Mista picks up Fugo’s phone on the third ring, where the background is filled with voices shrieking.

The whole cafe must be in an uproar over this.

Trish bolts from her classroom moments after, immediately locating Giorno and coming to stand at his side. Giorno puts his phone on speaker mode and waits until the caterwauling dies down.

“Trish and I are both here,” he starts. “What happened?”

“Abbacchio got fuckin’ shot, that’s what happened!” Mista hollers, prompting Giorno to turn down the volume a little bit. “He just — I don’t know, Buccellati called us this mornin’, practically bawling y’know? Said Abbacchio got shot, he couldn’t come in ‘cause he was going to visit. Fugo’s in charge, and we gotta visit after work, but…”
“But?” Trish presses, waving her hands in front of her as if to coax the disembodied voice into talking.

“I dunno, guys, it’s — the other day, we were yellin’ at each other, jus’ joking around, y’know? An’ I told him, y’know… that I hope he gets shot.” There’s a pause; Giorno and Trish exchange a concerned glance before both their gazes shoot back to the phone. “I didn’t mean it, though! I didn’t want that to happen, but I feel like shit.”

“It’s not your fault.” Giorno attempts, but before he can continue he’s cut off.

“It feels like my fault! I gotta go back to work — we’re all gonna visit after work, so can you guys get… I dunno, flowers and cards and shit? Make sure mine says ‘sorry for being a jackass’ on it.”

“Mista, it’s not —”

Click.

He’s guilty. Giorno understands why he feels that way, feels as though it’s his fault, as Mista’s a superstitious man with a multitude of paranoid beliefs — and neither one of the two teenagers have any idea of how to reassure Mista, that it’s not his fault and that sometimes shit gets said and things happen and that it’s best to just move on instead of linger. They exchange another short glance again, to which Trish only meets his eyes with solemn and explains that they’ll go after school to grab gifts.

Back in class, people ask Giorno if he needs to go home, to which he responds that he can make it through the day. Only ten percent of him can focus, he finds, because the other ninety percent is fully consumed by a lingering sense of unease. Giorno knows that despite getting injured, Abbacchio will be alright in the end — Abbacchio is a strong figure, from what little Giorno’s gathered about him; a man who won’t let just anything stop him, especially now that he’s got a strong will to survive due to Buccellati.

It feels wrong to be more concerned over Mista’s guilt.

After school.

Giorno doesn’t have a penny to his name, doesn’t get allowance — he typically saves his birthday money, but didn’t quite have the opportunity to stop home and get it after school. Trish, luckily, is as spoiled as ever, and whips out a pink debit card out of her pink bag with her pink manicured nails alongside her pink hair and her pink outfit and pink pink pink.

It’s… probably a terrible idea to let two fifteen year-olds who know practically nothing about Abbacchio shop for get-well gifts for him.

“This card seems appropriate.” Giorno tells, shopping basket looped around his left arm as he waves a card depicting some medieval knights around, the text reading, “SORRY ABOUT YOUR INJURY AND THAT YOU HAVEN’T THOUGHT OF A MORE BADASS BACKSTORY FOR IT.”

“You have a death wish!” Trish protests, scooting down the aisle. She’s deep within what Giorno would call the grandma cards, the ones that are always set on a white or cream background with various flowers and cursive text, written in a poetic style that brings tears to your eyes before you even read what it says. Giorno remembers getting one of those as a birthday card once from his grandfather. Aside from the stanzas of poetry, there was another paragraph written in perfect
calligraphy inside the card, crammed under the rest of the text. Giorno could hardly read it, and all he remembers about it now was that it was more a spiel about how great Giorno would grow to be rather than an actual birthday wish.

But, hey.

“This?”

“Way too serious,” Giorno protests, shoving his wondrous find of a get-well card back on the shelf. “He’s not dying.”

“Yeah, he’s not dying, he just got shot, Gio.”

“Giorno.”

Trish steps over to him and waves the poetry-card in his face. The glitter on the very tips of the purple petals fall off over her fingernails, and the little tied bow bounces with the force of the movement. “We have to get something that comes from everyone.”

Giorno shrugs his shoulders. “Do you honestly see Narancia getting someone a card with poetry and flowers all over it?”

“...you’re right.”

Finding something from all of them is a mess. Giorno insists on something a little more comical, since most of the café’s workers are rather comical people; but Trish insists on something in-between serious and sentimental, as just because Abbacchio is going to be alright, doesn’t mean that they shouldn’t show that they care. For once, Trish is being more mature than Giorno; and maybe it’s just because they don’t get along too well, but Giorno doesn’t think something totally serious and sad-sounding fits the mood.

Their argument is cut short when Giorno finally picks up a card that says, “Great and beautiful is the world…” Inside, “...and so are you. Get well soon.”

The illustration is simple, merely a yellow background with white and red silhouettes of bears on it, surrounded by intersecting, thin red lines that Giorno believes to be string. It’s a little more eloquent than he considered, but they both agree on it, and decide to flee the aisle before they get into another stupid disagreement about a damn get-well card.

Okay, that’s done.

“Balloons and flowers to go with it?” Trish suggests.

Giorno nods. “What kind?”

“I don’t know what he likes.”

“Then, we should skip the flowers —”

“We can’t just skip the flowers.” Argues the pink-decked woman. “There’s a method to these things. You either show up to someone’s hospital room with cards, flowers, balloons, and a stuffed animal, or you don’t show up at all.”

“...roses?”

“That’s a Buccellati thing. We can’t tread on his territory. Besides, Giorno, if you admit that you
thought of roses first, Abbacchio will probably have a cow.”

Roses are a go-to plant, Trish. But alright.

“Lilacs? Carnations?”

“I don’t remember what flowers go with what meaning,” says Trish, whipping her phone out, “so I’m gonna call the cafe and ask for Mista.”

“Put it on speaker.” Giorno suggests, coming to look over her shoulder.

“Passione Cafe, Fugo speaking.”

“Is Mista there?” Trish inquires while the woman behind the flower counter stares at the two kids with a concerned expression. “Can you ask him what kind of flowers you’d get for a person when you’re wanting them to get better? Roses are too romantic, I think.”

Giorno wonders if it really matters.

“He’s on lunch, and he... really doesn’t want to talk about Abbacchio right now. I don’t know if Abbacchio likes flowers, but if you insist on some, get daisies.”

“No, no!” Comes Narancia’s squeaky voice in the background; Giorno imagines that he’s clawing for the phone at the moment. “You gotta get something prickly, to go with his prickly personality!”

Giorno fucking agrees, though rather spitefully. Over the line, there’s an oof and screaming, and Trish immediately slams her thumb on the end call button, crams her phone in her purse, and proceeds to pick up a bundle of white daisies from the refrigerated display. Noting that the flower-lady looks even more concerned after hearing the rambunctious duo over the phone, Giorno swiftly pivots and walks away.

“Wait, wait, balloons!” Trish hollers after him, jogging to catch up, crinkly transparent flower wrapping crunching in her arms.

“We’ll blow up our own.” Giorno dismisses. There’s something about having concerned, judging eyes watching your every move that throws a person on a loop.

Stuffed animals up next.

The toy aisle is a mess of children and knocked-over items that were never set back up properly. Giorno knows — Trish has to realize — that Abbacchio isn’t a man who appears as though he’s keen on teddy bears and fuzzy blankets. Abbacchio is rough around the edges, the kind of man that Giorno can more easily imagine ripping the heads off of teddy bears over cuddling them. But, trying to convince Trish of that doesn’t go over too well, because she has her plan set in stone.

Giorno’s not a stuffed animal type of person, either, so he allows Trish to choose something, stating that he has no knowledge on the subject. She picks out an average, everyday bear that’s probably littered with the bacteria and snot from various four year-olds begging their parents to get it for them, and then adds that they should get some ribbon so that she can “give him a bowtie”.

“Should we get him a giftcard, too?” Trish asks; how much money did this girl have? Granted, she has a job, but... if Giorno had a job, he’d spend most of his paycheck the moment he got it. He wouldn’t ever have extra funds for things like this.

“I don’t have a single idea what he likes.”
“Well, he’s an adult,” Trish begins when they’re back to the party aisle, pulling pink ribbon (it just has to be pink with her, doesn’t it?) from the shelf and leading Giorno onwards to where the store keeps the giftcards, “and adults like buying gasoline, and paying their bills, and grocery shopping. Probably.” Yeah, Trish. That’s exactly what adults want in life. “Oh! I have an idea!”

“What?”

“Abbacchio likes wine!”

“We’re going to look awful if we buy a card to a brewery or liquor store. Especially for a man that’s laid-up in the hospital and probably won’t be allowed to drink for some time.”

Trish frowns. “McDonald’s?”

“How about we just go to an ATM and give him cash?”

“Oh, I didn’t think of that.”

Clearly.

The cafe is, per usual, empty on a Tuesday afternoon. Trish doesn’t have work, but uses her employee discount to get herself what she notes is a “feel-better cheesecake”, and sits down to devour it. Giorno occupies himself by blowing up balloons and tying them onto strings, which Narancia joins in on after he gets done putting things away.

The cafe is quiet.

“I can’t get Mista out of the break room.” Fugo informs, struggling to clean some sticky substance off of the countertop. “…it looks like you’re throwing a party for him.”

Fugo is right; the way the two balloon-blowers are allowing the balloons to rise to the ceiling and float around with even the slightest gust of wind makes it appear as though the cafe is throwing some sort of special event; the flowers, teddy bear, and card are all crammed into one corner next to Trish, who appears preoccupied by her phone, a funereal expression trapped on her face now that she’s no longer speaking.

“Trish?” Giorno calls to her as he knots one of the balloons.

No response. Trish gnaws on the plastic fork she’s eating with, half a cheesecake slice still sitting next to her.

“Trish?”

“Wha —” The fork gracelessly falls from her mouth and clatters against the table. “Yeah?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Just — nothing. Nothing, just a bit worried, y’know what I mean? Abbacchio’s still our friend, and he’s probably miserable right now.”

Giorno’s worried as well, but the spiteful part of him — the side that doesn’t get along with Abbacchio — doesn’t want to admit that. He wonders why, for a second; sure, they’ve caused each other grief, but that hasn’t happened since the gardens, and Giorno doesn’t hate him per say. Abbacchio might not feel the same way about it, and Giorno can’t help but wonder what the state
of their relationship is. Enemies? Neutral? Do they hate one another? It’s not like they’ve ever talked, aside from the time they got into a dance battle, and Giorno now has an understanding as to why he was attacked by passive-aggressive dancing. Still, in his defense, he didn’t know a thing about Abbacchio’s feelings or anything like that, didn’t even know his name until after it happened.

It might be too late to apologise, anyway. Neither one of them made an attempt with each other to become friends or reconcile. In a way, Giorno does take after his father, for he’s a little more aggressive and ornery than he’d prefer to admit. Those two personalities couldn’t possibly mix, where both of them harbour an ill-natured side.

Giorno lets the discussion go. Trish has gone back to playing some kind of game, the weak glow from her screen illuminating her face, and Narancia’s blowing up the last of the balloons. Fugo’s still cleaning, and Mista’s nowhere to be found.

The miserable atmosphere is making him too introspective, so as soon as Giorno’s done with the balloons, he leans back in his usual spot and buries himself in a book.

Fugo yet again has to cram everyone, plus gifts, into his car and drive off into the frosty night. This time, they’re not in disguises, but this trip is for a completely different and not-fun reason. To add to that, it’s dark, and even though the roads are mostly-clear of ice, Giorno imagines that it must be a pain to drive boisterous teenagers around in the dead of night.

“Buccellati said that visiting’s over at ten, and it’s past eight,” Narancia starts from the front seat, waving his phone around just in case no one believes him, apparently, “so you gotta drive faster!”

For the love of God, Giorno prays from the backseat, where he’s yet again squished between Trish and Mista, do not attack each other right now.

Luckily, Fugo only protests once, and the conversation drops.

Mista is the only one who remains completely silent throughout the ride there. Giorno places his hand atop Mista’s, which is resting against his knee, but unlike usual he gets zero response.

“Mista?” He whispers, to no avail; Mista’s gaze is bleak and broken, set outside at the sparkling city lights. He’s gnawing at his bottom lip, sometimes dipping his hand underneath his hat to fidget, but nothing is said between them.

Giorno tries again, pulling out his phone and going into the notepad, writing the words talk to me and handing it over. All Mista does is stare at it, before lightly pushing the phone and Giorno’s hand back, shaking his head, and continuing his empty-eyed gawking.

“It’s not your fault.” Giorno types, trying to get Mista’s attention again.

Failure.

“I need you to talk to me.”

Nothing.

“Mista, I’m worried about you.”

Vacant gaze.
He’s a mess. The whole damn group is a mess, in fact — but Trish and Narancia and Fugo are better at hiding it than Mista is.

Awkwardly enough, the bouncy visitors step into Abbacchio’s hospital room right when he and Buccellati are lip-locked, which elicits several giggles complete with a round of applause from everyone. No one told Giorno about the news, though... when the hell did this happen? Why is he out of the loop?

One tends to miss a lot when they’re grounded.

Red-faced, the couple tear apart, and Buccellati takes his seat on a nearby chair. Abbacchio doesn’t look as terrible as Giorno imagined he would, instead appearing rather lively, though when he attempts to sit up more to glower at his guests, he flinches in pain.

Everyone had signed the card at the cafe besides Mista, who they couldn’t coax out of the break room. Trish wrote something along the lines of, “Giorno and I bought you stuff <3 I hope you feel better soon!” So, basically, if Abbacchio hates everything he got, it’ll all be pinned on Giorno instead of Trish. Yay. Great. That’s what he wanted.

“Be free.” Narancia whispers at the balloons clutched in his grip, releasing them all over the hospital room.

Anyway, Fugo and Narancia had nice things to say, that they both were sorry to hear the bad news and hoped Abbacchio recovered (Narancia’s was written in almost-illegible writing). But Giorno… Giorno didn’t have a single idea what to write at the time, has no idea what to say still, now that he’s standing at the foot of the bed and needs to say something like everyone else. He wrote simply, “Sorry to hear about what happened. Wishing you a fast recovery.” Because everything else he thought of — “sorry you got shot” and “hopefully you recover” — sounded a little too cynical and blunt.

He really, really, really struggles with this sentimentality thing.

Trish is left to set the flowers and the bear on the table in the room’s corner, making sure they look nice and neat; she seems a lot more cheerful now that she’s seen Abbacchio looking alright and breathing and not dead, and smiles when she turns around and hands over the card.

Abbacchio’s eyes wander around the room, and there’s an uncomfortable silence as he scans the card, and chokes out a weirdly-stated and misplaced-sounding, “...thanks.”

Giorno wonders if he’s ever used the words thank you in his life before.

“How’s hospital food treating you?” Fugo jokes, pulling up a chair that was previously resting against the wall underneath a hanging television set that looks unnervingly like it’ll fall over at any moment.

“Horribly.”

“Oh, damn it, Giorno! We should’ve gotten chocolate or something for him.” Trish snaps her fingers. “We got you money, though — like, we were both gonna get you a giftcard to spend on alcohol, because you drink wine, but… Giorno said we’d look bad if we got it, because we’re teenagers.”

“So, make sure you spend it on wine.” Giorno tries joking.
“I’ll spend it on whatever the fuck I feel like.”
Okay, jeez, sorry dude.
Through the joking around that then ensues, and Narancia trying his best to make everyone laugh,
and Trish sharing stories, and Buccellati offering to get Abbacchio whatever he needs whenever
he needs it, Giorno notices that both he and Mista are feeling off. Not only does Mista fidget
where he stands, hands repeatedly diving in and out of his pockets, but Giorno also feels out of
place standing in this group. He realizes he doesn’t belong, that Abbacchio doesn’t like him and
probably doesn’t want him around; but the important thing now is Mista’s feelings, and he
announces that he has to have a short discussion with Mista before pushing him out of the room.
“What?” Mista practically spits as the door shuts behind them.
“You’re finally going to talk to me?” Giorno responds with equal gall. “Finally?”
“Preferably? No.”
“It’s not about what you prefer, Mista. I’m trying to help you. I want you to know that it’s not
your fault, and that everyone knows you didn’t mean what you said that day.”
"Well — that sucks, because it is my fault."
"It's not."
"You don't know that!"
"You weren't there, Mista! You weren't holding the gun! When it happened, we were on the
phone talking!"
"Yeah, well — y'know, Giorno, I'm the one who wished it upon him. An' I really should've
thought about it, because when I said it, there were four people in the cafe. Four is a shitty,
unlucky number. Bad shit happens whenever there's four of something."
"Okay, let's back up." Giorno suggests rationality, shaking his head and trying to put himself in
Mista's shoes. "What were you guys talking about when you said that?"
"I was tryin' to find out when they started dating..." Mista recounts every event of that day; Giorno
takes a seat in the chairs outside of the room, and when Mista's done telling his admittedly
humourous banter with Abbacchio to Giorno, he, too sits down.
"You were kidding around."
"Well, I totally — I fucking jinxed it. An' now he's in here suffering and it's my fault."
"So, if you injure yourself in the oven, it's therefore his fault? Because he wished it on you?"
"He was kidding."
Giorno throws both arms out in front of him, palms facing the ceiling, and stamps one foot on the
white-tiled ground. "That's my point, Mista! Granted, neither of you should've said what you did,
but you were both joking. It's not your —"
"It is!" Mista shrieks out, shooting to his feet and glaring down at the seated blond. "It is my fault!
There were four people in the cafe — four people! The number four follows me like a plague, and
I... Fuckin' messed up!"


"Mista!"

"My stupidity with these things is probably the exact reason my parents kicked me out, too!"

"Mista!"

Giorno is on his feet next, hands grabbing Mista's shoulders and shaking him, as if to snap him out of a trance. As soon as they connect, Mista's expression changes from pure, unadulterated rage, to a look of despair and self-loathing. Giorno's hands slide from the tops of his shoulders to the sides of his forearms, down his wrists and to Mista's hands, where he slowly holds them in his own and calmly murmurs,

"You have a terrible habit of self-deprecation."

"Self-deprecation?"

"It's basically when you belittle or reprimand yourself for no good reason. Mista, you place blame on yourself for situations you really weren't a part of to begin with. If I told you I failed my exam, what would you say?"

"I'd say that it sucks."

"What would you think?"

"Dunno. Probably that I distracted you and contributed — oh. I see what you mean."

Giorno nods, squeezing Mista's hands. "Do you mind if I ask one last question? ...your family didn't place you at the centre of the blame for any problems they had, did they?"

Mista's face contorts, and his eyes flicker to a nearby whitewashed wall. The halls are empty, save for them, and now silent; the taller bites down on his lip for a second, exhaling sharply through his nose, and Giorno knows it — he knows that somehow, Mista's family contributed to the present-day issue, to his psychological condition. The beginnings of tears form at the corners of his eyes, and his cheeks turn red, and immediately Mista frees himself from Giorno's grip and plops down in the chair again only to shy away moments after.

"Well," he starts, continually turning his face away when Giorno moves to get a good look at him, "anyone would feel guilty in my situation."

"That's true, but you have an underlying reason for feeling like you're a burden to all of us."

He sniffs. Giorno falls onto his knees in front of Mista, pulls his hands away from his face, and offers a reassuring yet equally disquieted gaze. Using the sleeve of the coat he hasn't yet removed, he dabs tenderly at the tears gathered on the other's cheeks, susurrating,

"You're not a burden to any of us. Alright? Not to Buccellati and your co-workers, not to Abbacchio, and especially not to myself."

He'd given Mista a bit to gather himself, before insisting that if Mista really felt like he needed to make ends meet and get it off his chest, that he needed to go in there and apologise for what he said. Mista's reluctant; concerned that he'll make an ass of himself in front of everyone, he attempts an argument, but Giorno insists (despite hardly knowing if it'll turn out true or not) that Abbacchio's harbouring no negative feelings towards Mista about a joking statement. Even if that statement did come out hostile.
When they appear back in the room, roughly forty-five minutes later, everyone’s watching the shitty hospital cable. It’s some Disney movie, Giorno believes; Trish and Narancia appear absolutely enthralled by it, Trish singing softly along with one of the songs (she has a surprisingly good singing voice, in Giorno’s opinion). Abbacchio, of course, remains ever the more bitchy out of their rag-tag group.

“She’s falling in love with this beast,” he begins, making upset and confused gestures at the glowing screen, “but does she fucking realize she’s human and that bestiality is frowned upon? Does she have a fetish for monster cock?”

“He’s a human!” Trish protests mid-song.

“Not right now he fucking isn’t.”

“Why is the candle guy French?” Inquires Fugo.

“That’s a French accent?” Narancia follows up, earning himself an elbow to the ribcage. “Why’ve you always gotta hit me when I say something wrong? I’ll kick your ass! I’ll kill you! Just watch!”

“Because you’re a dolt!”

So, this is the worst possible time to try to spring an apology on Abbacchio.

They’re about to enter a skirmish when Giorno coughs into his fist, and they break apart, and all eyes land on the two of them. Giorno pushes Mista centre-stage, as if that’s going to help his comfort levels somehow.

“Okay.” Mista starts, and then the babble-fest begins. “Okay, look, Abbacchio — when we were arguing in the cafe that one day, and I said I hoped you got shot, I didn’t mean that really, ‘cause we were joking. Or I was jokin’, and now I feel shitty — really shitty, okay. I didn’t want you to get shot, an’ I ain’t gonna jus’ accept the fact that I said that and then this happened. So, I guess, I’m trying to apologise. Y’know, for being an asswipe.”

“Well, it isn’t your fault some dickass decided to pull a gun on me.”

“...are we bros still?”

“...bros?” Abbacchio echoes, eyes darting around for context clues as to what the hell Mista just asked him.

“Y’know, like — friends. Friends. Are we cool still?”

Abbacchio looks almost moved. “...yes, uh. We’re… bros.”

It must’ve been hard to use Mista-lingo just then.

Fugo takes everyone home before visiting hours end, giving Buccellati and Abbacchio some time to themselves. Mista’s a lot cheerier, Giorno notices, like a boulder’s been lifted off of his shoulders and broken into pieces. He leans against Mista’s shoulder, the other’s arm slung around his neck. Trish is, yet again, on her phone; Narancia’s fallen asleep in the front seat, feet up on the dashboard.

Trish is dropped off first, and with a dreary goodnight she hops out of the car and heads up to her apartment. Giorno can see the blurry outlines of figures watching them from the window, and
reason that those people must be her parents, but can’t see their faces for the lighting behind them is too strong.

Mista’s dropped off next, and though he climbs out of the car and proceeds to the door, just before Fugo takes off he suddenly whirls back around, whipping the car door open and pressing the largest, sloppiest kiss imaginable to Giorno’s temple. The latter blond takes up an immediate shade of crimson, and Mista shrieks out a thank you and dashes off.

...what an asshole.

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Unknown to Mista and Giorno, the entire hospital could hear their screaming at one another, and Mista spilling his guts all over the floor about the Abbacchio situation. No one had the heart to tell them about it, but if Fugo was reading the air right, Abbacchio looked the least bit concerned with his capped probably-friend.

But that was yesterday.

Abbacchio’s supposed to be released from the hospital before work even gets over for anyone today, but Buccellati took another day off, much to the chagrin of the impromptu-manager. Fugo is well aware of the fact that it makes sense, that that’s the way it’s going to be, but he still. Can’t believe. That managing a cafe. Is this much. Of a pain. In the ass.

He doesn’t work opening shifts. Never has, never wanted to — being up early was never his thing. It was always Narancia who was up before him.

The two live together, have for quite a while, as Narancia’s parents were complete and utter shiteheads — Fugo’s parents took the rapper boy in without batting an eyelash. Neither of them are currently in school, instead working full-time, and in their down time Fugo really does attempt to help Narancia learn something.

But if Narancia wasn’t so fucking stupid, Fugo wouldn’t be punching him all the time. Would he? Eesh.

Anyway. Today’s a weird day, because not only is Fugo in-charge again, but it’s a Wednesday, and that means they don’t close until around ten. Mista has the day off, though Fugo imagines he’ll pop in for the ensuing rap and dance battles; same with Abbacchio and Buccellati. It’s just him, Trish, and Narancia today… and Trish doesn’t come in until after school. (Giorno established that he wouldn’t be in for a while, because musical theatre practice was kicking up more frequently.)

“Okay, so,” Narancia begins as they start to prepare the cafe for the day — most days, every coffee is already brewed by the time Fugo comes in, and most everything is baking, and while he knows how to do most things there are opening procedures he’s not sure how to handle (like making the mocha syrup), “you gotta do this when you’re making the chocolate sauce.” The mocha, Narancia.

How did Fugo, the teacher, end up being the taught today? Fugo doesn’t want to be taught. Last time that happened, well…

Let’s just say, Fugo isn’t in school for a good reason.
It’s an hour of Narancia giving Fugo his opening-the-cafe tasks, most of which go off without a hitch, and they open up, and. Well. Okay, so Buccellati always spoke of the way the grouchy elders always stormed the cafe in the morning seeking their pastries and coffees, but unlike Buccellati, Fugo never upsells — if one of the elders gets snappy with him over offering something additional, he’s bound to deck the fellow. It could easily be said that Fugo’s not supposed to be handling the cash transactions due to his nature, but Buccellati isn’t here to help, and Narancia is to stay away from the cash register at all times.

“Where’s that other fella at today?” One of the kinder men inquires as he throws his change into the tip jar, like a good person should.

“Visiting an injured companion in the hospital.” Fugo explains simply. “Would you like your receipt?”

“No, thanks.”

With a shrug of his shoulders, Fugo tears the thin paper into pieces and hurls it into the trash can underneath the counter. “Hello, what can I get started for you?”

“Blueberry scone and a large coffee, please and thank you, young man.”

Fugo leans over and gazes into the bake case, frowning when he doesn’t spot the aforementioned item. “Narancia, are we out of scones?”

“Yeah — Buccellati says we’re not getting more until tomorrow, ‘cause they’ve been really popular. How about a blueberry muffin or a cinnamon scone instead, sir?”

“Why are you out of scones? The one day I want a damn scone,” Fugo’s eye twitches, “and you don’t have any damn scones.”

“They’ve been really popular.” Fugo echoes with a twinge of irritation lacing his voice. “We don’t have anymore right now, because other people ate them.” Be polite, Fugo. Don’t punch the guy. Please, don’t punch the guy.

“Well, I just want my damn large coffee.”

Fugo forcefully kicks the trashcan as if to restrain himself from getting arrested today. “Of course, sir. Would you like room for any creamers?”

“Do I look like a pansy to you, boy?”

Fugo kicks the trash can so hard that the plastic breaks. “No, sir.”

Narancia has to take over the register for the rest of the morning. Fugo’s pretty sure they lost at least fifty dollars within the hour.

While busier than average, the cafe still remains pretty calm until after Trish arrives, which it then kicks into an uproar — Fugo practically demands that Trish handle customer service, as his customer service face is an utter failure. Trish asks why the trash can is broken. Fugo tells her that he had to kick it to maintain his sanity today, no big deal.

Then, it’s hours and hours of drinks, drinks, food and drinks, cleaning tables and dishes and Trish waggling a tip jar around like an instrument. Why did Fugo get left in charge, again? Everyone
knows that he’s totally willing to pummel someone into the ground if they so much as take up a
tone with him.

And then, it’s more drinks and food and the sort, until the battling begins and Narancia ditches
work clothes for a backwards cap and gaudy, fake gold chains, complete with a Tupac T-shirt.
He’s off to impress, and he never fails to do so.

This is the one thing Fugo wouldn’t hit him for. Fugo can’t rap, he can sort-of dance, but never on
par with Narancia. Fugo has respect for the latter; he went through a shitty life, and didn’t get a
good education at all. And sometimes, that kinder part of him regrets the way he handles
everything, the way he gets so angry when the slightest thing goes wrong, the way he retreats into
his shell to play it safe whenever a sense of unease prickers at his spine.

He has a lot of respect for Narancia. Narancia is, in a certain light, stronger than Fugo is. Narancia
can control himself half of the time, when Fugo’s not attempting to shank him or elbow him or
anything of the sort. Though they argue, and they certainly bicker often, there’s a sense of kinship
between the two of them, an irreplaceable friend lingering. Fugo, indeed, has no idea what he’d
do without Narancia; similarly, he bets Narancia wouldn’t know what to do without him.

If only, just for a second, he could stop wanting to punch everything.

Fugo remains mostly calm throughout his days, with a remnant sense of satire in most of the things
he does. It’s only when someone acts stupid, or when working in retail gets too rough, or when
some idiot driver nearly kills him, that he really gets going. (There’s a plethora of other things that
enrage him, too, but he can’t name them all. It’d be easier to name the things that don’t irritate
him.)

But, at the end of the day, he and Narancia usually go home in a good mood. They’ll apologise
for trying to kill each other for whatever convoluted reason, and play a board game until Narancia
pisses Fugo off again and Fugo tries to commit murder; they’ll apologise again, and put the game
away, and go to bed. In the morning, they’ll wake up contented, and go right back to being best
friends. It’s an endless cycle of love and hate and wanting to stab one another and then
immediately turning stabbing into hugging and apologising.

Neither of them have told the others that they live together. Not even Buccellati knows, and
though trustworthy in all aspects, Fugo doesn’t feel like it’s his manager’s business. It’s a secret
they share, one that they’ll keep on sharing until someone inadvertently finds out. Fugo’s not sure
how he really feels about Narancia, and reasons that he’ll figure that out when the time comes.

Narancia wins all of his battles as per usual, and they close down the cafe and head out, where
Narancia falls asleep in the car and Fugo therefore struggles to wake him up to get him inside of
their house.

“Mario Kart before bed?” Narancia offers.

“Yeah.”

“...are you gonna kick me in the face with your stinky feet like last time we played? I’ll kill you if
you do it, Fugo! I’ll kill you, I swear!”

Fugo shrugs. “Probably.”

“I’ll kill you! ...hand me the orange controller, would ya?”

“You’re always player one.”
“Yeah, ‘cause I’m number one.”

Fugo doesn’t understand the nature of their relationship, nor how he feels about it completely — but it’s moments like this that he lives for, when they’re huddled together in front of the tiny television set smashing the buttons on game controllers and laughing as if they’ve never fought in their lives.

Chapter End Notes

Ideas credit:
CCVienna: Fugo trying to manage the cafe -- I've never written Fugo before, and he wasn't in VA enough for me to analyse... I hope I did a good job :o
K: The gang walking in on a smooching BruAbba <3 That was cute.

The cheesy flowers and balloons idea definitely was on my mind, but y'all wanted that to happen, so I figured why TF not? Let's put it in! Thanks so much for your suggestions, and if you have more, I'll take them!

I've got a plan so far... soon, Uncle Diego (because I love the whole Brando family, okay?) will visit. But I'm also wondering if a grudging Dio should allow uncle Jonathan and aunt Erina to visit? (And he proceeds to bitch about the family of them - - they probably show up for Giorno's birthday or something.) ((I'm a slave for domestic family AUs.)) Anyway, let me know what you guys think. <3
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Working title:
Doppio nails Abbacchio in the FUCKING FACE.

Chapter Notes

I ???? Love ???? Doppio ???????

Anyway...I don't think I have much to say on this one, besides the fact that the inspiration for Giorno playing acoustic guitar came from me listening to way too many acoustic covers by Boyce Avenue. As I am a slave to domestic AUs and big dorks, I am also a slave to squishy romantic music and acoustic guitars.

You'll see where this is going.

Ideas are still being accepted for submissions! <3 (Also, I type this up on google docs before editing and formatting it [again] in here, on an 11pt font and single spaced... it's hit over 100 pages.)

It is, yet again, the weekend -- and that means I have a lack of time to work on this because I have an actual job *gulps* Updates will yet again lag a little bit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Puberty fucking sucks.

Giorno’s now to the point in his teenage career when every four seconds, his voice starts to crack; he could control it before and keep it out of his speech for the most part, but now it’s becoming so bad that he’s squeaking every four seconds. Now rendered unable to keep his voice from sounding like he’s not a little kid, Giorno’s response is to keep silent unless he’s called upon.

Which fails when it comes to Trish and maths.

Trish is boisterous. Everyone who knows that pink-splattered girl, knows that she’s extroverted and talkative, most often spotted chit-chatting in a gossip circle with her close friends. Giorno is opposite of that — he’ll talk, but he won’t share too much, not even with those he deems close, unless it’s inquired upon and he feels comfortable answering. And, on the one day that Giorno’s struggling to keep the squealing out of his voice… Trish wants to talk.

And Trish wants to talk a fucking lot.

Maths usually goes like this: The teacher explains the problems on the homework, they review things, and then they’re free to work on homework. Usually, Giorno falls into a focused silence and manages to get his maths done in class, despite Trish constantly pestering him. On a good day, he can get her to focus on what’s in front of her, and they’ll do the work together.
However…

On an awful day like today, Trish has too many questions, almost none about the work they’re supposed to be doing. The rest of their table group is absent, leaving only the two of them to sit, and making their conversation a little more personal than they’d otherwise be holding.

“…and I can’t wait until the new iPhone comes out — are you going to get it?”

“My phone works perfectly fine.”

“Well, if you get it, give Mista your old phone. He needs a new one ‘cause he hucked his down the stairs.”

“I remember that.” Fuck. There it is. Trish begins giggling behind her hand for at least the fifteenth time in the past half hour. “Trish…” Giorno whines, eyes darting down to his hardly-started homework.

“Okay, I’m sorry — I’m really sorry!”

“Are you?” God fucking dammit.

“Well — no. Don’t feel bad! You sound so cute and small, Giorno! I can’t wait until Mista hears this.”

Oh, God. Mista. Mista absolutely cannot hear Giorno’s squealing. No way, no how. He’ll avoid the call tonight, the call he knows will inevitably happen, and do something else. Like… maybe he’ll finish his homework that Trish’s distracting him from, or take a nap, or hang out with his dad, or anything but let Mista laugh at him for what puberty is doing to his poor soul.

“He’s not going to hear this. I’m not answering the call tonight.” It’s a damn good thing he has theatre after school today, or he’d be in for it.

“Oh my gosh,” Trish breathes, head rising from where it previously rested in her palm. “Oh my gosh, Giorno. Are you embarrassed?”

“No.”

“Giorno! You’re embarrassed!”

“I’m not!”

“Your face is all red!”

“It is not!” Where’d his maturity go? Giorno scrambles to find it and screw his head back on, instead of shouting over the desk at Trish like a four year old who didn’t get a cookie with his dinner.

“Yeah, it is! Giorno — you’re embarrassed because your voice keeps cracking! You don’t want Mista to make fun of you!”

Because he sounds like an idiot. Mista’s sure to tease him over the way his voice keeps cracking, give him hell and prod at his sides and crack all these stupid jokes, and then he’ll tell Giorno that he sounds adorable or something horrid like that. Giorno doesn’t fucking sound adorable! He sounds like he shaved three years off of his age!

“You’re making a grumpy face,” Trish leans over the desk, half-standing from her chair, and
squishes Giorno’s cheeks together with her manicured demon nails until he pulls back from the unbearable sting. “You don’t want your best friend to think that you sound dumb.”

*Best friend.*

There it is.

Giorno’s been wondering about that for a while now; why it feels so odd, so out-of-place, whenever he or someone else refers to their relationship as *friendship.* Why it hurts to hear Mista say it, and why he feels empty whenever he says it. What’s wrong with him? They’re definitely friends — they do things friends would do, like go out to lunch and tell stupid jokes, and visit their other friend in the hospital. They care for one another, value what they have; they’re both grateful that they met and became close. Giorno places Mista’s feelings above his own, and found he was thoroughly perturbed by the fact that Mista couldn’t text him, but that it was almost more enjoyable to hear Mista’s voice over the line at midnight when he should be going to bed, both of them whispering into the speaker so that Giorno’s dad doesn’t burst into his room and scream that it’s past his curfew.

He likes it, all of it, the way Mista secretly holds his hand when no one’s looking, the way they fell asleep on his couch intertwined over a romance novel. The way that they’re complete when they’re together, and even the hollow yet longing feeling that possesses Giorno’s mind when they’re apart. The way that the butterflies gather in his stomach when Mista calls him GioGio, and how he feels that’s a nickname only Mista has the right to use. The way Mista kisses his cheek or his temple.

The way that, recently, they’ve been snuggling up together.

And especially that day at the botanical gardens, where Mista called him beautiful — and he wasn’t joking, his tone filled with affection and genuineness.

But the one thing that Giorno Giovanna hates more than anything in the world, right now, is the way the word *friend* feels to him when used in the context of their connection. It rolls off of his tongue like a curse, bitter and caustic.

And the worst part is that he still has no idea why.

“Gi-or-no.”

Oh, look, reality’s calling. Right now, reality is a pink-haired girl named Trish Una, and Reality is also waving her manicured nails around in Giorno’s face and trying to get his attention.

“Trish.”

“Giorno, class is almost over — I was trying to tell you my story about the time last year when, on my fifteenth birthday, we had a food fight at the cafe. You weren’t listening, but anyway. My dad was really mad about it, but it was still fun — the customers actually paid money to get involved in it, so really, we didn’t do anything wrong.” Yeah, Trish. That sounds like fun. It’s better than the existential crisis Giorno’s dealing with. “I was pulling cheesecake out of my hair and shirt for the rest of the day.”

“That’s great, Trish.”

“We have lunch next, and you’re being weird. Shouldn’t you be more excited? It’s pizza day!” Giorno shrugs and begins packing his backpack up, the ladybug keychain attached to the zipper jangling with every movement he makes. “...okay, I’ll bite. What’s up?”
“Noth —”

“Okay, fine, we’ll talk about it in the hallway! We’ll grab our food and go out to the hallway.” Where they will manage to be for five minutes before a disgruntled teacher reminds them that they can’t eat in the hall and kicks them back to the cafeteria. “You’re going to tell me, Giorno!”

He really doesn’t want to, Trish.

In a poor attempt to prevent Trish from bringing up his earlier distraction, his introspective thoughts on why, why, why, Giorno books it off to the hallway first and pulls out his maths textbook with the intent to work on the homework he didn’t get done. That ultimately fails, for Trish plops down at his side and nearly slams the book closed on his fingers, steals it, and puts it on the opposite side of her.

They’re leaning against the wall when Trish calmly whispers, “Talk to me about what’s on your mind, squeaky.”

Oh, so he’s got a new nickname to go with his shitty puberty problems, does he?

Giorno tries to refuse, but finds that the issue is bothering him more than he’d like to admit. He spills his guts — spills how calling Mista his friend feels erroneous and how he doesn’t understand why that is, that it’s bothering him; he asks then if it could be because Mista’s not really his friend, that they were never meant to be friends.

“Yeah, you weren’t ever meant to be friends.” Trish concludes, which admittedly causes poor Giorno’s heart to drop into his stomach and a dejected look to cross his expression.

“What am I going to tell him?”

“That you love him.”

Wait. What?

His blank, dumbfounded look clues Trish in. “Giorno — I realize that no one really showed you love before, and you’ve probably only seen it in movies and stuff. But movies aren’t real life, so you probably didn’t have a way of knowing.” Of knowing what? “You have a crush on him, Giorno.”

Giorno has a… what?

A… a what…?

“Look at you — you’re a mess! I saw you guys cuddling in the car on the way back from the hospital. You were flirting with each other when we were trying to get Abbacchio and Buccellati together! You probably still don’t get it,” rude, Trish, “so let’s go over some stuff. So that you get it. What have you guys been doing lately?”

“Nothing particularly,” Trish gives him a look reminiscent of a disappointed mother. “Besides those times when we’re embracing on his couch. The… the other night, I fell asleep on top of him.”

“How did you feel?”

“Comfortable. Warm, I suppose. Safe. He had his fingers in my hair, and before I knew it I was
out cold.”

“Mmhmm…”

“He kissed my cheek the other night,” alright, voice, knock that annoying shit off, “and… I don’t know what to say, Trish.”

“Other than the fact that you’re falling for him?”

“You don’t know that.” Giorno defends, looking down at the notebook sitting squarely in his lap and drawing half-assed little lines on the page as if to somehow rid himself of a nervous tingling in his chest.

“If the word friend feels wrong, have you tried using the word lover?”

Giorno thinks on that. Lover. Boyfriend? Affectionate terms like that. Love-interest. Yeah, that fits a lot better — wait shit fuck what the hell. Trish starts giggling at his pink-flushed cheeks, and with his voice cracking yet again just as a teacher walks around the corner to holler at them for eating in the hall, Giorno ever so politely asks her to fuck off.

In musical theatre, Giorno’s voice only ever cracks sometimes during dialogue, to which the director asks him if he’s sick. No, sir, he’s not sick, he’s just dealing with fifteen year-old bullshit, no big deal. When he’s singing, however, belting his notes without a care in the world and dancing alongside the ensemble, nothing goes awry with his voice. Everything is as it should be; he’s great, a star, orchestra cheering him on. He’s light on his feet, travelling from one end of the stage to the other, heels tapping against the wood. Giorno is the pinnacle of magnificence, the most important person in the world at the current moment, glory flowing through his veins.

What would Mista think if he could hear Giorno now?

After, he’s backstage on a set break, chugging water out of a jug to maintain his strong and vociferous voice, glancing at an acoustic guitar resting by the chair at his side. His mic is off, and he should be able to get away with playing…

Giorno actually owns an acoustic guitar — it was a birthday gift a few years ago, when he first expressed his interest in musical theatre and singing. His uncle Jonathan (whom Dio loathed) left a note in the case saying that any good star should have a guitar, and that he hoped Giorno liked it, that he was sorry he and his aunt Erina couldn’t come visit this year. That’s when Giorno practically had to force Dio to enroll him in guitar classes, which he’s since dropped out of…

It may have been a few months since he’s played, but he should be able to remember fine, he reasons, as he inquires to the guitar’s owner (a rather tiny girl in the ensemble) if he could play for a few. She’s a kindly, trusting figure — rather likes Giorno, from what he gathers — and so she allows him to, asking if he’s played before.

Giorno says yes, he has, that it’s just been a while — and immediately delves into recalling all of the chords before the girl digs sheet music out of her backpack and holds it in front of him as if she were a music stand.

“How long have you been playing?”

“A few years.” Giorno strums a sour note and makes a face. “It’s been a few months since I’ve touched my guitar, clearly.”
“Your fingers are too high up on the strings for that chord.” She corrects, moving his hand a mere centimetre, but the chord he then strums sounds ten thousand times better. “You said you hadn’t touched your guitar in a few months, right?”

“Correct.” Giorno practically glowers at one of the pages she holds, trying to remember where his fingers are supposed to be located for the chord displayed. It takes a few seconds, but the young lady doesn’t remind him, and he eventually gets it.

“...why’s that? You’re so good at singing, Giorno, so I’m amazed you don’t write songs. I write my own songs. You should write songs.”

“I’m not entirely creative enough for that.”

“What inspired you to ask to play my guitar, then?”

Mista.

“I reasoned I should get back into practicing.”

“Oh, yeah? Good idea.”

Giorno clearly remembers every little detail. The first time he ever told Mista he was an active participant of musical theatre, Mista’d asked Giorno to sing for him. That hadn’t stopped, in fact; just the other day, Mista inquired about the musical during one of their reticent phone calls, and Giorno gave him the date of the show and invited him to come see it, even. He noted that he’d buy the ticket for Mista, because unfortunately the show wasn’t free, but that Mista was more than welcome to show up.

Mista stated that he’d love to hear Giorno’s singing voice, that he’d surely be there, though Giorno had a feeling that it wouldn’t just be Mista showing up judging by his love interest’s friendly personality.

He’s irresponsible when he gets home from school. Instead of doing his maths, which he should’ve done in class — could he focus on it at all, that was — he fishes the tan guitar out of the back of his closet, where it’s still lying within its hard case. Severely out of tune, it requires almost an hour for Giorno to remember how to tune a guitar and get it back to where it should be (this also ended with him consulting videos on the internet), sound-wise. And finally, finally, when that’s done…

He just delves in.

Giorno just dives right into it, re-working through the practice books that uncle Jonathan had got him alongside the guitar, and does that until Dio storms into his room and demands that Giorno shut up so that Dio can sleep through the night. Out of a spiteful respect for his father’s wishes, Giorno practices the chords and moving his fingers, air-strumming a few centimetres above the strings but never actually making a sound. He does that, even through his phone ringing, until he’s finally tired enough to put it down and go to bed.

Mista left him a voicemail. Other times when Giorno was too busy to pick up the phone, he never got a voicemail — instead it was left at that. His paranoid side kicks into gear, wondering if Mista’s alright, if his emotions are acting up or he feels like shit again, but the sustained fretting dissolves when he actually listens to Mista’s voice over the scratchy line.

“Guess since you’re not answering you fell asleep.” No, he was playing his guitar… because he’s
having gross, disgusting, squishy thoughts about you, Mista. “Sleep well, then. If you want to, this weekend, I was thinkin’ we could finish Emma. I… miss holding you, y’know? Night.”

Giorno doesn’t have a crush. Giorno totally, seriously, completely, does not have a crush. He just… has teenage boy hormones. And a cracking voice, which thankfully, Mista didn’t hear. Though he’s positive Trish’s gone ahead to the cafe and told the whole world about it.

And he knows when he wakes up tomorrow, that his voice is going to pull the same shit it did today, and that he’ll just have to suck it up.

~~~

Insert a riveting, moving quote about maturity here.

That’s exactly Abbacchio’s current mood, because not only is he freed from the absolutely Satanic grasp of the hospital and the earsplitting heart monitor letting everyone know that he’s fucking alive, thanks, but the whole cafe has delved into a late-night snowball fight.

Minus Mista.

Technically, minus Abbacchio, because he’s having to use a crutch to walk around, and it’s impossible to hobble through the snow that they’re playing in. Buccellati insisted that he sit down earlier, and each team took fifteen minutes to make a snow fort. Abbacchio’s job is to stay behind their wall and rebuild it whenever there’s an opening, but sometimes he takes to hurling very hard snowballs at people’s heads.

It’s him and Buccellati versus Fugo and Narancia versus Trish and Doppio.

Trish was rather perturbed by the fact that the teams wouldn’t be even, and that Mista wouldn’t come back to play with them because he was “probably flirting with Giorno” (which caused Abbacchio to curl his lip and make a disgusted sound, because Giorno was just. So. Annoying). So, she called her dads, and managed to get “the less grumpy one” to come down and hang out with them.

Which was awkward.

Because Doppio looked younger than him. Not only that, but the cafe’s workers felt horrible about nailing their boss and his daughter with snowballs, so it was mostly a one-sided war, where Trish and Doppio were whipping their asses.

The park had people in it, teenagers and the like, before this group of working-class assholes stepped in and started assaulting everyone with snowballs. Granted, most of Narancia’s mis-launched snowballs weren’t on purpose when they hit one of the kids, but Abbacchio’s? Were all on purpose. Because, unfortunately for everyone, Abbacchio is an immature brat.

Anyway, the teenagers not part of their clique are gone now.

Buccellati’s black hair is nearly white with all of the snow that’s in it, his scarf pulled up to his nose to block out the cold air from entering his lungs. Though Abbacchio has difficulties moving, and thusly everyone goes easy on him, he can throw still and he can do it quite well. He decides he’s not chickenshit enough to hide from the Una family to the west, and while pretending to fix their base (which is getting destroyed, horribly), he makes a few snowballs. Buccellati casts him a glance that says be careful, but Buccellati has no idea who Abbacchio’s about to nail in the
Trish is a speedy little thing, and dodges the snowball with a duck that’s so swift he’s pretty sure her winter cap suddenly defies gravity for a second, as if she were some misplaced cartoon character. But…

THAT’S ALL ACCORDING TO HIS PLAN, MOTHER FUCKER.

The residents of the war fall into a still silence as the freckled, sweater-donning man, who Abbacchio swears is younger than him despite what Trish insisted when he asked, swipes snow off of the side of his cheek. Then, he looks to Abbacchio, lips puffed out in a half-pout, but suddenly smirks. He’s in for it now, isn’t he?

“Oh,” begins Doppio, “the phone’s ringing!”

The phone? Abbacchio doesn’t hear a phone —

“Ring ring, ring ring!” Instead of a terrified silence, the park is now consumed by an awkward, confused silence, as Doppio holds a melting snowball up to the side of his head. “Ring ring! Hello, it’s Doppio! …oh?”

Trish starts laughing behind her gloved fingers, but none of the boys are sure why, until Doppio announces that he’ll transfer the call and a snowball comes hurtling towards Abbacchio’s face at light-speed.

There’s the sound of a father-daughter high-five, and Abbacchio’s now trying to bat snow out of his eyeballs.

“Bad idea.” Buccellati tells him, smiling delicately.

“I thought we were fucking avoiding him because he’s everyone’s boss.”

“Nah!” Shouts Trish, hucking another snowball that knocks Narancia over. “It’s ‘cause he’ll kill all of you!”

Yeah, no shit. That was a hard-ass throw from the tiniest freckled creature that Abbacchio’s ever seen in his entire life. He’s still seeing stars when he returns to fixing the fort. Damn, the one time he thinks he’s being the most badass man alive, and a fucking twink nails him in the face.

…alright, you. Mind out of the gutter. That’s not what anyone meant.

Their snowball fight ends with everyone soaked to the bone. Abbacchio’s hair is no longer sticking up at the ends as it always is, instead tangled and clinging to the leather of his coat; Buccellati looks like a drowned cat, and Trish’s hair has fallen from its puffy shape and down around her cheeks. (How long does it take her to style that?)

Fugo and Narancia begin walking back to their car parked on the side of the street, when Narancia starts trying to make up a rap about their snowball fight, and Abbacchio can’t help but roll his eyes. After their goodbyes, those two drive off, and Trish occupies the walk back to Doppio’s smart car by plucking debris out of his ponytail.

Ha, a smart car. A tiny car for a tiny being. Haha.

Abbacchio’s funny.
He and Buccellati head home, Buccellati helping him maneuver through the snow on the crutch he was given so that he doesn’t rip his stitches open, and then he’s in the passenger-side seat.

“We have to change your bandages,” no, “and assure that you haven’t damaged anything. Per the doctor’s instructions. I suppose we were a little rough with that game.”

A little? Trish’s fucking adoptive father is an aggressive son of a bitch!

“I haven’t damaged anything.”

“We’ll see.”

Can the world just trust his word for once? Please?

It’s decided that they’ll go to Abbacchio’s house, since he’s the one that often has a first aid kit for various reasons, including the scratches he gets from working and the bruises and the everything else that Buccellati gives him shit over. Come on — working as an officer is a dangerous job!

He still appreciates the concern, however.

Abbacchio’s house is simple and refined-looking; a rather cheap though still pretty chandelier hangs over the dining room table, composed of brass and small glass panels. The damn thing hangs too low, and it’s almost a daily occurrence where Abbacchio will walk out in the dead of night for something to eat and bang his head against the stupid ornament as he sits down. His kitchen is nothing overly-fancy, with simple plastic countertops that he absolutely loathes, and a makeshift wine cabinet built into the wall. He doesn’t live a high-class life, but he certainly likes to pretend he does, what with his pricy leather coats and clothing and makeup. (Maybe if Abbacchio spent less money on fashion, he’d have more money to make his house look the way he wants.)

In the tiny-ass bathroom behind the kitchen wall, is a mirrored medicine cabinet which contains the first-aid kit and several unopened packs of gauze and bandages, and that cursed alcohol scrub that’s supposed to help clean wounds but makes him want to die because it stings. That aside.

Abbacchio grasps one of the little rolls of white gauze and goes to rather painfully remove his soaked shirt, flinching with mostly every movement of his muscles now that the adrenaline from the snowball fight has died down and he’s left to realize that that was a shitty idea.

Buccellati walks around the corner moments later, towel looped around his neck, slacks darkened around his knees from where he was crouched in a snow bank. The serene smile he casts Abbacchio’s direction as he pads over causes those stupid, fluttery butterflies to completely overtake his stomach. He offers help, placing the tiniest yet sweetest of kisses against Abbacchio’s temple as he sits his soaked ass on the edge of the bathtub. Buccellati bends over, running another towel that he had previously tucked under his arm through Abbacchio’s hair, and placing yet another peck on his forehead. All the while, Abbacchio is red from both the cold and the fact that this son of a bitch — this beautiful bastard — is kissing him, and…

…and Buccellati is his, and Abbacchio is Buccellati’s, and they’re together after totally getting their asses whipped in a snowball fight, caring for one another (though it’s mostly a one-sided event tonight).

Abbacchio’s yes to the offer of help earns him help which he was not expecting, where Buccellati’s deft fingers begin working their way over the buttons on his shirt and undoing them, and —

— okay no that’s not the help he needed right now thanks Buccellati.
It’s a half-innocent gesture that Abbacchio completely blows out of the water; he attempts to jump away but that only leads him to nearly slipping off of the edge of the tub and probably breaking his neck, had Buccellati’s cat-like reflexes not kicked in and caught him.

“What’s wrong, Leone?”

Abbacchio’s reply comes out as some kind of gargled strangled-cat noise, before he manages to shake it off and speak actual English instead of gargoyl. “I can undress myself.”

Buccellati raises a brow, a teasing glint in his eye, and Abbacchio knows that he’s now in for hell. For hell, because if this son of a bitch does something, Abbacchio isn’t going to be able to move well enough to… to…

...that!

“You’ll still need help with the bandages.”

Yeah, okay, but for the love of god, don’t undress the man — there might be a surprise. It’s a sterile safety precaution type of thing — though the wound is stitched up, and quite well, infection is definitely still possible, so Abbacchio’s doctor informed him that he must keep it bandaged for at least the first week. He’s also not allowed back on the force until this heals up, and while that’s a nice break, what’s he supposed to do all day? Just… read? Sit at the cafe and stare at Buccellati? Drink grape juice and pretend it’s the wine he’s not allowed to have?

...yeah, this won’t be so bad. Granted, he can’t get plastered, but… boyfriend.

Boyfriend boyfriend boyfriend. Sigh.

Speaking of boyfriend…

Buccellati is doing the shit he’s doing on purpose.

This is all part of some sick, twisted plan to drive Abbacchio up a wall while he’s limited in what he can do. An important tidbit that Abbacchio’s noticed about his lover, is that his fingertips are soft and gentle, and that his hands are far from a man’s hands in appearance — they’re lovely to look at, with neatly-cut and even nails just a titch longer than an average man would have. For future reference, Abbacchio will now refer to Buccellati’s nails as his demon claws, because that’s what they are.

They’re demon claws. Demon claws that belong to a fucking incubus.

Those demon claws trail over his bare sides slowly and tantalizingly, causing the slightest of goosebumps to dot his shoulders and upper arms; suffice to say, that enthuses his partner, lips cracking into a smirk of temptation. It sets Abbacchio’s blood on fire, the look he’s getting as the gauze is peeled away from his sides. As the new wrapping is set into place, the fingers trace the curves of his lower back absolutely alluringly, and he stiffens up his posture and shoots Buccellati a glare. A glare that means something to the effect of “I hope you know what you’re about to be fixing.”

Of course he does. Because, their game continues, until they’re lip-locked with their fingers snagged in one another’s hair and balancing on the thin edge of the bathtub becomes impossible; Abbacchio stands, temporarily separating the two, before he backs Buccellati up against the wall and holds him there, knee resting between the latter’s thigh and their hips enticingly close, too close for the temptation not to arise — too close for Abbacchio to resist the thoughts bubbling up in his mind, to resist dreaming up ambrosial sins. They’re exactly where they want one another,
vulnerable and willing, nipping at lower lips and collar bones and finally breaking apart for a few seconds to stare…

“If you don’t mind, I’m going to take a shower before bed.”

*You mother fucker.*

What a fucking cockblock. Okay, granted, Abbacchio shouldn’t be doing… what he was about to do, but it’s still… it’s. Unfair! Bullshit! Blah blah blah. Oh, he swears to God, when he heals, Bruno Buccellati is in for it. In for a sore ass and hickeys! Mother fucker…

Abbacchio goes to change into pajamas, leaving an oversized shirt and sweatpants in the bathroom for his boyfriend to wear to bed, since they’re apparently having an impromptu sleepover. He lays in bed, and sleep doesn’t come to him at all, for his mind is totally in his pants right now.

Buccellati shows up for bed after twenty minutes, looking adorable in his loaned clothing, though the second he turns to get into bed Abbacchio playfully slaps his rear and mutters, “You’re a fucking fuckwagon.” Whatever the hell that means.

“When you’re healed. Assuming you have the self-control, Leone.”

“I have a fuckload of self-control.”

“Yes, absolutely.”

Abbacchio throws an arm around Buccellati’s shoulders, nuzzling up to him like a kitten and pulling him in closer. The scent of soap and Abbacchio’s hair conditioner rolls off of his form. “You’re just lucky I love you.”

Buccellati half rolls-over, craning his neck to get a good view of his lover, which is probably only his ear and some of his silvery hair. “How much?”

“Oh, you know,” Abbacchio props himself up on one elbow, a sarcastic grin on his lips as he leans down to give Buccellati a tiny little *smek*, “only a little bit.”

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Chapter End Notes

Buccellati is fucking thirsty
Abbacchio is fucking THIRSTY

This got naughty really fast I'm very sorry
If there’s one thing that Giorno Giovanna has concluded, it’s that he’s entirely fucked.

Not in the sense that his grades are failing, for he’s passed his science exam and when he received the study guide for his finals, he realized that he knew everything and that a few quick rundowns would prove the most effective for getting it in his head. Not in the sense that the musical’s going badly, because it’s going fantastically, and he’s only got a few weeks until the end of the semester when finals punch him in the face and then the performance goes off hopefully without a hitch.

No. It’s the sense that somehow, Giorno has to figure out when the hell to confess. Because, he’s told Trish to not interfere with this one, explaining to her that he’s going to do this himself, that he has the perfect plan. And he does! It’s perfect! Mista will think it’s cheesy and cliche and he’ll love it! But. The issue.

Is when.

...today? Yeah, today. That'll surely work.

The holiday season is upon them, and though it’s not quite as bad as it is on the other side of the world, there is still a very pressing issue that will become a reality really, really soon.

Dio had gone ahead and woken him up Sunday morning in a half-panic, shaking his shoulders with the phone clasped to his ear and yelling Giorno, Giorno, over and over again until the groggy fifteen year-old opened his eyes. And then, they were both in a fit, because of one announcement.

“Your uncles Jonathan and Diego, and aunt Erina, are coming to visit for the holidays.”
“Wait,” Giorno had said, sitting up with his hair falling in loose waves around his neck, “for how long?”

Dio covered the speaker with his hand. “Damn bastards want to see your musical performance.”

Oh. No.

Giorno likes his extended family. He really, really does — everyone is nice and kindly, except when they’re all together. They rarely, if ever, get along, because (from what Giorno’s heard) Dio once macked on uncle Jonathan’s now-wife and killed his dog. And uncle Diego in general is just eccentric, far too into dinosaurs to hold an actual conversation about anything decent. Giorno usually finds himself caught up in the middle of the bickering, though it always appears Jonathan tries to make amends and whatnot… It never works, and last time they visited like this he was only twelve and was emotionally traumatized by their caterwauling and went to bed crying.

 Granted, he was twelve.

But — oh, God. Family time means either a lack of Mista-time, or that… the family will meet… oh no.

Well, that was last weekend. Giorno’s still incredibly worried about it, especially because the visitors don’t speak Italian, at least not last time he checked. If that’s the case, at the very least, Mista won’t understand much of what’s said just in case Dio says something completely out-of-hand that prompts an argument, like he usually does. But. Urgh.

Urgh!

Anyway, so an almost month-long impromptu visit from his family is to be expected, and he’s supposed to be able to focus on finals and the musical. And it’s inevitable that Mista meets everyone when he’s at the damn performance, because Giorno knows that Dio won’t keep his damn trap shut as soon as he sees the hat-donning cafe worker. He’ll make more boyfriend jokes, though hopefully by then they won’t have to deny it, but — wait, it’ll be easier to deny it! Way easier!

That aside. Giorno had gone to the cafe per usual, and as soon as Mista got off of work around two in the afternoon, they’d decided to go to Giorno’s house. Giorno argued at the time that it was a mistake, because Dio was sure to harass the both of them as he always does to Giorno. Mista countered with the fact that his apartment complex was currently dealing with a rat infestation problem, and that he wouldn’t dare subject Giorno to that, nor could he handle being in that shitty place at the current time. Reluctantly, Giorno obliged to let Mista come over, where literal hell then ensued.

Today’s plan was to go over to Mista’s with his acoustic guitar and confess then and there, but he can’t do it now that they’re going to his house, where his father is home. But now, there’s no avoiding Mista’s questioning as to when Giorno got a guitar and why he’s never heard of this before and when Giorno’s going to sing to him — and Giorno would’ve told him today, if the rats hadn’t cursed their fate.

“I didn’t even know you played guitar,” Mista says for the umpteenth time as Giorno unlocks the door to the flat and steps inside, where Dio then looks up from his book and cocks a brow at the two of them. “Hi.”

“Hello, Mista. Hello, spawn.”

Spawn.
“My room.” Giorno kicks his shoes off, then proceeds to pace down towards the hall, when Dio leans back in his chair and exclaims,

“Wait, Giorno. I have to have a talk with your boyfriend.”

“Not my — I’m leaving.” If it doesn’t work the first ten thousand times, Giorno, just walk away.

Mista inquires, “Am I also free t’go?”

“Yes.”

“No.”

“Dad.” Giorno waves Mista on, and proceeds into his bedroom, where he realizes then that Mista hasn’t followed him. He doesn’t hear talking in the other room, and glances down at the bed, where —

IT’S A FUCKING GOOD THING MURDER IS FROWNED UPON.

He was gone for a fucking hour, and there’s a box of condoms on the bed, a sticky note stuck to the box with a smiley face on it. Giorno immediately whips open his bedside drawer, tossing the box in there to hide the evidence, slams it shut, and stomps out into the living room again. In English, so that Mista does not ever learn of what has happened, Giorno shrieks,

“Dad, what the fuck!”

“Safe sex is important,” Dio responds, also in English, “my spawn.”

“You planned that! I was gone for an hour, maybe an hour and a half —”

“Indeed.”

Is it safe to say that he hates his life? Because Giorno Giovanna absolutely hates his life. Trying not to scream at Mista, too, he tells the other to hurry up down the hall and storms off, red-faced and glowering, into his room. Contrasting with his aggression upon entering the room, Giorno gently puts his guitar case down, and then flings himself into his mattress, where he dramatically screams into a pillow. The laughter from the other room signals that Dio heard.

“Uh…”

“It’s nothing, Mista.” Comes the muffled response. “He’s being antagonistic.”

The mattress sinks slightly under Mista’s weight as he sits down; Giorno turns his head slightly, just enough to cast his love interest a dry smile, and practically flies off of the other end of the bed when Mista plunges his fingers into Giorno’s sides.

“No no no no no nononono stop stop stop Mista —!” Raucous laughter consumes the small room as Giorno attempts to squirm away, even once yanking Mista’s hat down over his face as if to blind him while he runs. It fails; Mista’s got a stronger grip than Giorno imagined he would’ve, and now he’s a puddle on the mattress and trying to beat Mista away with one of his pillows.

“Wryyyyyyy?”

Mista’s laughing so hard that Giorno’s ninety percent sure he’ll pass out.

“Didn’t know y’were ticklish, GioGio.”
Yeah, neither did he!

Mista’s wiping tears from his eyes as Giorno sits up, smacks him over the head with one of his pillows, and then rather delicately sets it back down against the headboard. The next few (rather slow) jabs are blocked by Giorno, and their game ends just as quickly as it began, with Mista flopping back against the headboard and tucking a single arm behind his head. Giorno is both brave and stupid enough to snuggle up to him, head on Mista’s chest as they were the night they read *Emma* together. The latter throws his arm around Giorno’s shoulders, tugging the two closer; one of the blond’s arms is uncomfortably squished between him, Mista, and the bed, but he doesn’t mind it as much as he normally would.

He’s warm, soft; a strong and steady heartbeat nearly lulls Giorno into a small nap, but instead of that he tosses his free arm over Mista’s stomach where the temptation arises to squish him like a giant teddy bear. But he doesn’t, just to save his sanity, to somehow look as inconspicuous as possible about his shitty crush and the way his damn confession didn’t go according to plan. Giorno refuses to say anything unless it’s the way he had it in his head, because he’s got this figured out, dammit, and stubbornly refuses to change those plans. Now, maybe, if Dio had been out of the house or something, the confession would’ve happened — or maybe if it was summer and they could sit out in the grass instead of on an ice block.

It’s a casual setting which he has planned. Not the cafe, not some restaurant where everyone can hear them — a house, someone’s room or on the couch, alone, where it’s just them, where they’re the last two existences on the planet. Somewhere peaceful, somewhere natural and comfortable. Mista’s house may be a pigsty, but it’s comfortable. Plausibly, only because Giorno has a massive-ass crush on the apartment’s owner, but. Y’know. Comfortable.

Well, at the very least, they’re here now within one another’s warm embrace, in a perfectly still silence — and Giorno has more time to practice later!

“Do y’ever look at someone,” begins Mista, “and just their face tells you that heaven is real?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Like, I dunno — when you look at someone so beautiful, that they gotta be an angel. Or like, the reincarnation of Adonis. It’s Adonis, right?”

“Yes, Adonis.”

“Yeah. Like that.”

“What makes you mention that?” At least his voice hasn’t broken so far. He should be safe for the rest of the day.

“Well, it’s just — I’m superstitious, yeah?” Yeah. “I knew I always believed in somethin’, that there was heaven, but you confirmed that. For me. Uh.” Smooth. “No one’s ever told y’how perfect you are before?”

“No one is perfect.” Argues Giorno with a small shake of his head, a warm blush seeping onto his cheeks and the tips of his ears and shoulders; the feeling spreads over his chest, encompassing and passionate, until his entire being is full of nothing but love, love, love.

“Yeah, besides you.”

“I’m far from it.” GOD FUCKING DAMMIT, IT’S BACK. THE VOICE CRACKING IS BACK. CALL THE FUCKING POLICE, BECAUSE THIS IS ILLEGAL.
Immediately the moment is shattered in its entirety, because a low, rumbly little snort shakes Mista’s entire torso; Giorno sits up in a flash, crossing his arms over his chest and thus going from loving and cuddly to jokingly upset, half a pout wrought on his lips. Mista’s laughing behind his hand, eventually flopping over into the pillows and trying to suppress his humiliating chuckling by suffocating himself (or something to that effect).

“I’m fifteen.” Shoots out a dejected blond, arms still crossed in a grumpy fashion underneath the cutout on his sweater.

“And cute.” Emphasises Mista as he climbs back to a sitting position, legs criss-crossed underneath him now as he wipes tears from the corners of his eyes. Come on, it wasn’t that funny, Mista! Puberty sucks! It’s not Giorno’s fault — he wasn’t trying to be humourous!

Boys are embarrassing as all hell.

“There wasn’t a single thing cute about —”

“I’ll tickle you again.”

“Threatening me?” No, Giorno. Flirting. This is flirting at its finest.

“Yeup.” Mista waggles his fingertips around tauntingly, sliding closer at a snail’s pace; Giorno shoots off of the bed, lips cracking into a wide smile as he attempts to run to the other side of the room, where he’s idiotically cornered himself between the wall and the desk. This leaves room for Mista to attack from behind, one arm looped around Giorno’s waist to keep him in place and the other constantly shifting to tickle him. Despite copious amounts of flailing and shouting, Mista doesn’t cease, not until Giorno’s back to being unable to breathe and using Mista as a pillar to keep himself from falling over.

Mista presses a gentle kiss to the side of Giorno’s temple, and from there it’s all over. His previous stubborn need to uphold the plans he’d had set in stone completely dissolve, because the split second he wriggles in Mista’s grip to face him, the latter dips his head down. The gentle brushing of soft lips is enough to have Giorno seeing stars for a good minute, eyes open as if paralysed, shoulders stiff and breathing hitched.

“Shit —” Mista starts, immediately turning at least six different shades of red, “I’m sorry, I just — you were, it —”

Giorno shuts him up with another tiny peck on the lips.

And…

Fuck it. He’s doing this now. Even if dad’s going to hear the guitar and his singing and give him shit about it later, he’s doing this now, because waiting is only going to ruin the utter miracle that just fucking happened.

~~~

Mista’s told to sit on the bed and wait for a moment. Sure, he complies, but he’s not entirely sure what the hell’s going on. Other than the fact that they just fucking kissed, of course, and apparently it’s reciprocated, because Giorno shut up his useless babbling with another timid little kiss. Mista’s kissed people before, sure, but most of that was just a useless dare or a game of spin-
the-bottle when he was a kid. They were pointless little smooches, nothing like a first kiss with someone one loves deeply.

He takes his seat back against the headboard, cross-legged, while Giorno rifles around in his guitar case. Wait a second. Guitar case… guitar…

Oh no.

Please lord, don’t do this to Mista’s poor, hopeless-romantic heart! He’s not quite ready to admit that he cries at the cheesiest, most cliche things, like every time a couple gets together in one of his stupid books or in a movie or when he hears a really ridiculously romantic song… He’s a mess, dammit, always been a mess since the day he was born. He almost kind-of wants to cry now because feelings are absolutely awful!

“The plan was to do this when my father wasn’t around, but happenstance is happenstance. I know you said you liked The Carpenters,” no he fucking doesn’t, “and that Close To You was your favourite,” no, it isn’t!, “and additionally that you wanted me to sing for you,” he never said that at all!, ”so I’d been practicing in my down time.”

Giorno sits down on the corner of the bed, acoustic guitar positioned on his lap and a guitar pick between his fingers, and he offers a sort-of shy and flustered half-smile.

And then, Mista realizes that his life is fucking over.

This kid has the voice of a fucking angel. Maybe even six, or maybe even all of the archangels themselves. The point is, Giorno harbours this incredibly stunning and beautiful tenor-baritone voice, that resounds around the entirety of his small room and bounces off of the walls and straight into Mista’s ears. It’s thundering and vociferous, potentially the most gorgeous sound he’s ever heard. When he sings, he looks like he’s at home in a way, like the world isn’t quite as bad as both of their lives often make it out to be; he’s not looking directly at Mista, instead with his eyes trained on the closet doors and never down at the guitar in his hands. He’s confident, in an otherworldly way, and the quality and richness of his voice and the way his eyelids flutter sometimes as he sings spells all of that out.

God. How did Mista end up with the most magnificent boy on the entire earth? And why could this magnificent boy sing, and what the hell did he see in a dumbass like Mista?

He’s bawling by the end of the song — not in a bad way, just in an extremely gushy-mushy happy way, one that completely reveals to the world that Guido Mista really is a big fucking baby when it comes to things like this. A half-chuckle rolls off of Giorno’s delicate, pink lips as he sets the guitar back into its case whilst Mista tries to dry his eyes on the sleeves of his work shirt. His sniffling causes his whole torso to convulse and shiver, and it only becomes worse when Giorno practically throws himself into Mista’s grip and gives him a tight and affectionate squeeze.

Giorno is cute and Mista is a mess and life sucks but is simultaneously fucking amazing.

“I hate y-you, y’know,” he blubbers, “for doing that t’me, ‘cause you knew I would — I’d do this shit.”

“I didn’t account for it in my planning. I just realized it’d be a good way to confess.”

Damn right, it was the best way to confess! And now he’s a fucking mess, way to go Giorno. Dammit, Mista’s cool as hell — he doesn’t cry! He’s too cool to cry! It’s impossible to make Mista cry! Clearly! He’s… cool!

Yeah!
“I hate you.” Mista repeats after a moment, finally managing to chill out after a time and stop the waterworks for long enough to return Giorno’s adorable little hug and kiss his forehead.

“That’s why you’re hugging me.”


“I love you t—”

The bedroom door opens, and around the corner peeks in Dio, wearing a knowing smirk and an I-heard-all-of-that gaze. Mista realizes then that he’s totally screwed whenever he comes over, and that one day they’ll eventually get The Talk, which he fears almost as much as the number four…

“I knew it.” He whispers, and Mista must be going crazy, because he could’ve sworn that was a threatening tone…

“Dad!”

Dio closes the door, and down the hall resounds raucous laughter whilst Giorno groans vehemently with his head squished up into one of his pillows.

Mista’s working Tuesday afternoon at the cafe, brewing up more of their medium roast coffee. He hadn’t seen Giorno on Monday due to the poor (adorable) teen having musical practice, but they’d talked on the phone until Giorno fell asleep before he could manage to hang it up. Mista had wished him a goodnight and emulated kissing sounds into the phone despite the fact that the blond was unconscious and couldn’t hear a thing, then hung up and went to bed himself. When he woke up in the morning, he took a shower — thank God — and waited until his shift was about to start to proceed down the icy path to the cafe.

The coffee pots they keep their roast in are all ridiculously large, about the size of Narancia’s torso if Mista had to estimate it. That makes them sort-of heavy, especially because they’re encased in metal, but it’s nothing that any of them can’t lift. Mista’s walking to set one of them down in the empty spot, where those cursed four pots sit, when Giorno steps into the cafe in all his perfect glory, and Mista stumbles and coffee goes fucking everywhere.

Just like the first day they met.

Life’s a bitch like that.

“Mother fucking —” Back to his skin being on fire just like last month!

“I thought you’d gotten over that?” Fugo queries as he steps back from behind the swinging kitchen doors holding a tray of frozen muffins to be defrosted and baked, muffins which Mista really wants to shove on his stomach to eliminate the coffee burns as he retreats into the kitchen and pulls his sweater off.

“It’s his fault!” Comes the accusatory holler, which Fugo quickly attributes to Giorno.

From the plexiglass windows, Mista can see Giorno step up to the counter, and hear their conversation over the water he’s spraying himself down with.

“What’d you do?”
“Sang to him.” Giorno answers with a noncommittal, casual shrug — that asshole’s playing it cool out there! “Told him I loved him.”

Trish’s squeal can be heard from halfway across the universe, alongside a disgruntled Abbacchio’s “ugh, disgusting” comment, which is then met with Buccellati calling over the counter, “Are you forgetting something?”

“Yeah, forgetting to go vomit in the bathroom. Be right back.”

“Leone.”

Mista stops running the water just long enough to laugh into his palm.

Chapter End Notes

New AU idea:
Harpies.
I was divvying up each character from the various parts (besides 8 b/c I haven’t... read 8... oops) into clans, where a plethora of important characters from each part are harpies and such. It's a massive cast list (and excludes Kira and Valentine because Kira just makes me :/// and Valentine makes me REALLY FUCKING ANGRY so they do not get to be part of this :u).
I don't know what's happening but Rohan is probably a fabulous harpy birb. (And Giorno's feathers look like spun gold and everyone's like "fuck this kid tbh".) though, we'll see if this actually goes through, because I have this shitty tendency to plan things too much and then quit while I'm ahead.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

This is the most dysfunctional, hilarious family ever -- I had too much fun with this chaos.

Working title: Dio punches a mother fucker, Giorno wants to die, and Diego is an asshole.
Working title for the latter half of the chapter: Author dies of cardiac arrest due to squishyness.

I will now proceed to translate British slang, because whenever I write Diego, I use a plethora of it. (Because my Diego headcanons say that he uses WAY TOO MUCH of it.)

Arseholed: Drunk
Nick: Steal/rob
Pissed: Drunk
Off your trolley: Gone mad, gone crazy, etc.
Prat: An insult that you shouldn't be saying in front of your elders.
Slag: "slagging someone off" basically means bad-mouthing that person.
Old sod: "bastard"

((I also like to type out accents phonetically if I can, but I haven't figured out how to do that for Italian accents, because I haven't heard them very much. So apologies for that.))
(((I ALSO HAVE 6 THOUSAND VOCAL HEADCANONS FOR THIS FAMILY. THEY PROBABLY MAKE ZERO SENSE. I AM ECCENTRIC IN THOUGHT AND I APOLOGISE.)))

This is full of Giorno's disdain and Mista's romantical thoughts. BruAbba to come. B)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Giorno’s been busy. Way too busy for his own good, in fact, way too busy to even drop by the cafe or anything. The end of the semester crunch has him slammed with homework that he’s got zero time to do, and even on nights when he’s calling Mista he’s usually at his desk with a pen in-hand or trying to plan out an essay. Multiple times, he’s had to hang up, simply because focusing on an essay or maths proved too difficult with Mista blabbing in his ear. He’s promised a date, promised Mista to give him his birthday gift today and that they’d go to dinner or something like that, but at six in the morning Dio storms into his room and hollers for Giorno to hurry and get ready because they have to go to the airport and pick up the family. Despite the fact that they’ve flown in on different flights, they’ll be here on the same day… just with a few hours leeway in between.

Which means, not only is the drive to the airport going to take a good hour or so depending on traffic, but that Giorno gets to hang out there while his family bitterly bickers with each other until someone else arrives. With his luck, it’ll be late in the afternoon when they arrive home, and then he’ll have to awkwardly explain that he was planning to spend Mista’s birthday with him… poor planning on his part. He’s totally fucked in that case, too, because lord knows he won’t get out
without telling the world that yes, he and Mista are boyfriends, blah blah… Dio’s known that for the past week, and hasn’t stopped giving him shit. Every single damn time Giorno goes to shoot Mista a call, dad always runs down the hall and obnoxiously shouts something to the effect of, “Get an STD check done!” or “Don’t fornicate while I’m in the house!” or kissing noises or something else fucking annoying.

It’s December third, a Saturday, and Giorno’s spending it in Dio’s truck as they head down to the airport. He’s shotgun, and he’s made to stay shotgun, because of Dio’s exasperated, “If you don’t fucking stay there, and I have to sit next to JoJo, I will crash this fucking car.” What about Diego? Would he drive the car into a museum and drop Diego off to be with the raptor fossils?

The fact that Dio drives a yellow-orange Toyota Tacoma with a green heart decal on the hood only makes this worse. Not just because the car is ugly (the car is fucking hideous, but he wants to survive, so he won’t tell his dad that), but because the entirety of his family is ripped as all shit, and no one is going to fit into the car. He and Erina are relatively small, and Diego isn’t too buff, but Jonathan and Dio… eesh. Giorno can only imagine how many screaming and punching matches those two are going to get into.

On the road, they hit the morning airport traffic, which leads Dio to mutter an indignant, “I’m going to drive on the fucking sidewalk.” Giorno almost believes it, by the way his father suddenly spins the wheel and makes obscene gestures out the window.

The second they’re at the airport, Giorno dials Mista’s number despite it being early in the morning. Mista must’ve been on the opening shift, either that or he’s out cold, because he doesn’t pick up the phone. Giorno leaves an apologetic, brief voicemail, explaining the situation, and then hangs up after an “I love you” and a laugh from Dio caught over the line. What an… what an absolute ass.

Dio scathingly notes that it’ll be a bit before Diego manages to arrive, as he’s flying in from the States from “some annual horseback race”. Which means that Giorno now has to deal with the ensuing hollering and bickering and fists flying and ugh. Why can’t they just get along for five seconds? Why did he have to come with? Why couldn’t Mista be home or awake or something to liberate him of the oncoming torment?!

The damn first thing that uncle Jonathan does, as soon as they meet up in the airport lobby, is to throw his big, meaty arms around Giorno until the latter boy can’t seem to gather enough oxygen and nearly suffocates to death under his grip. Kicking his feet only seems to make the current situation far worse, even as aunt Erina presses a kiss to his temple and then instructs her husband to drop poor Giorno before he dies.

Why was he born shorter-than-average? What did he do to deserve this?

“Giorno! You’ve gotten taller!”

Yeah! Barely!

When he’s finally on his feet, he immediately has to go and sit down, and though he may be exaggerating this he firmly feels as though Jonathan’s bear-hug drained him of all oxygen and that’s the reason he’s dizzy. From here on out, it’s awkward as all hell sitting here in the airport, people bustling and chattering around them, listening to,

“It’s nice to see you again, Dio.”

Dio, arms folded over his torso and stance nothing less than unfriendly, produces a small grunt and puffs his chest out bitterly. Aunt Erina remains silent, obviously finding no need to make
amends of any kind to repair what still remains and always will remain a broken family; Giorno looks on with a combination of terror, antipathy, and interest, slouched in his seat with his legs crossed and his chin in his palm.

“It really is — a pleasure if you ask me. Though we’ve certainly had our difficulties —”

“Difficulties’ is a sugar-coated way of describing it.”

“ — that doesn’t mean that we cannot come to some kind of consensus —”

“On the underlying reason as to why I hate you?”

“ — on how to better our relationship.” Jonathan concludes, face falling into a half-frown, a forlorn gaze signalling that he’s trying his absolute best to understand his adopted brother, but that he hasn’t a single idea what to say now.

There’s two obvious reasons for the family visit. One, uncle Jonathan wants to close the massive abyss that separates their family by any means possible. Two, it’s all for Giorno’s sake — he’s more well-received than Dio is, and can actually get along with the rest of the family, not to mention the fact that he’s got a big musical performance coming up. He’s not on social media much, doesn’t really use Facebook or Twitter or anything like that, but his school’s Facebook page tends to tag him in photos from the musical as advertisement (along with the other cast members), and his family can see it… there’s no way Dio could possibly be bragging about his son over social media, right? It doesn’t seem like there is, so the only logical conclusion is that his aunt and uncles stumbled over the posts and decided to show up early.

Though, Giorno’s not sure what Diego has to do with any of this — uncle Diego’s always been more of a neutral figure between uncle Jonathan, aunt Erina, and dad, tends to keep his nose out of the family business until he’s actually present. Where, Diego then requires being the centre of attention, and will throw himself into the middle of fights between Dio and Jonathan just for shits and giggles. (Giorno reasons that the family visit was all Jonathan’s idea, in that case, and that the man roped everyone into it, including a grudging Dio. Giorno would give almost anything to be that convincing.)

“There’s nothing to be done about the way I wish our family cook would’ve gutted you and strung your carcass over the mantle.”

“Dio —”

“I’m only grateful your impromptu, unwelcome visit, doesn’t entail you staying at my home.”

“Dio,” replies a sullen Jonathan, “I’ve done nothing to antagonize you as a child! You were the one —”

“Accusations will get you nowhere.”

“It’s not an accusation! It’s the truth! You killed Danny, you —”

“Giorno,” why does he have to be a part of this? Giorno just wants to go home and give Mista a complaintive speech about why his family sucks, “why don’t you show your uncle and aunt around the airport?”

...how about no?

“We’ve been here countless times.”
Giorno shoots to his feet anyway, if only to get away from the incessant quarrelling, and almost shouts out that he’d love to take the two guests to the gift shops and restaurants. If only they could stop fucking fighting for five minutes. Arguments were never Giorno’s favourite thing, and he’s always preferred to avoid drama (another reason for his keen avoidance of Abbacchio).

Silence falls over the entire group as Jonathan and Erina fall into step behind their nephew. The air lingering between them is filled with feelings of bitter resentment and hollowness, but the further they get from Dio, the more it clears up and turns into flowering happiness. They catch up while they have a moment — Erina inquires about school, Giorno says that it’s going well, finals in a few weeks and all. He mentions idly that he’s made friends with a gaggle of cafe workers, friends he’ll believe he’ll actually keep around unlike those that he brought up last time he saw these folks. He’s met with congratulations; Jonathan goes off on a tale about his misadventures with two close pals named Speedwagon and William, to which Erina recounts that the three of them were nothing short of eccentric when they spent their days together. There’s lighthearted, reminiscent laughter, and then the conversation cuts short when the three wander lazily into one of the many airport shops.

Aunt Erina finds herself entranced with some of the books, to which Giorno wryly comments that she doesn’t want any of the ones they’re selling here, as they’re either poorly-written, overpriced, or both — adding that there’s a book store not far from his school prompts her to set one of the paperback novels back on the shelf, and after a quick glance through the rest of the useless trinkets, they head back out into the crowd. He really should look for a physical gift for Mista, he realizes — but because he doesn’t even earn allowance, Giorno doesn’t have much to get him something worthwhile, so what he did was attempt to write a song. He’s not confident that it’s anything super incredible, but knows Mista will enjoy being serenaded (again) nonetheless.

He knows that he’ll record the moment anyway, just to have something tangible for Mista to hold, something to grasp onto the memory for the both of them.

But that isn’t a physical gift that’s good enough! Mista likes romance novels, would probably appreciate flowers and chocolates... he likes The Carpenters and Sex Pistols, and wearing cashmere sweaters (Giorno can’t afford to buy the latter for him at all, and there’s no convincing the family to loan him money for that)... he likes Giorno, even, but Giorno doesn’t think he’ll fit into a box all too well.

“You seem awfully perturbed, Giorno.” Says aunt Erina in her usual serene, honey-sweet voice. Curse her ability to read through people, because he certainly wasn’t making any notable facial expressions that could’ve possibly given his mood away.

“I’m concerned with my lack of pocket money and my friend’s birthday present, is all.” There’s the word friend again, just like before they kissed in his room and sent each other on a loop — Giorno’s not too fond of using it, even when lying to his family about the nature of their relationship, because the thought of he and Mista being only friends still stings. With the realization that nothing lasts forever, the negative side of Giorno’s mind reminds him that one day they may be nothing more than distant companions, and the thought irks him enough to clench his fists in his pockets. He’s never paranoid — why did love have to do this to him?

“What were you considering getting your friend?” She inquires.

“A book. He loves the romance genre,” Giorno probably should’ve taken a gander at Mista’s collection before deciding upon that, “but his birthday is today — I promised I’d use my pocket money to take him to dinner.”

“It’s today,” Jonathan exclaims, “and you haven’t gotten him a gift? What are you doing here? Friends are of equal importance as family, I feel.”
“N-no…” Giorno manages, pink flushing his cheeks. “I wrote a song for him. It doesn’t feel like enough, is all.”

A collective *ohhhhh* floats into the air around them, and Giorno wishes that his family could be daft and blind to the world at that exact moment. The good news is, Dio didn’t get a chance to say anything, and he might be able to get away for just long enough to spend time with Mista —

“What do we get to meet him?!” When Giorno turns to give a sidelong glance to his uncle, he finds that the gigantic man’s eyes are wide and sparkling, an enthusiastic, childlike smile carved into his face.

“Well —”

“JoJo, that isn’t the conundrum!” Erina chides, her hand on her husband’s shoulder. “How about we loan you some money, Gi —”

“I *really* don’t need it, aunt Erina, thanks.”

Jonathan mutters a, “I simply find it unfair that Dio doesn’t give you allowance, especially with all of the wealth in the family.”

Giorno agrees wholeheartedly, but that’s still not the point here!

“Nevermind that proposition,” Erina shakes her head, platinum blonde locks shifting gently around her narrow shoulders. “Where are you taking him for dinner?”

“What’s his name?” Interjects Jonathan.

“Mista and I are going to a small diner —”

“That’s no place to take your date, Giorno!” *IT IS WHEN YOU’RE FUCKING BROKE, JONATHAN.* “There must be some fancy venue out here!”

Giorno huffs an agitated repeat of, “I don’t have *enough money.*” He really does despise every moment of his life when he has to repeat himself. People should open their damn ears up!

“We’ll loan you some money, then! No worries!” Yes, worries! Lots of worries! Before Giorno can protest, Jonathan dips his hand into his back pocket and pulls out a wad of cash, sifting through the bills and handing a few to Giorno; when the blond doesn’t immediately reach for them, Jonathan wiggles his wrist around a bit, until the shorter is forced to take the bills to save his sanity.

More often than not, this family is a little *too* difficult.

Giorno was right in that they leave the airport rather late, at roughly three o’clock. Diego’s flight came in around one (he also made them stay for a bit for expensive airport food), and afternoon traffic proves irritating yet again, though the most obnoxious thing has to be Dio incessantly slamming the Toyota’s horn and screaming profanities out the window. Profanities which the rest of the family doesn’t understand, but are smart enough to figure out the connotations of.

He’d forgotten how much uncle Diego could talk and talk and talk, too.

The split second after they’d met up, with Jonathan trying to offer hugs and getting rejected, Diego immediately went into a spiel about how “some completely arseholed bloke troied to nick
him” and then how “the man was so pissed, ’e was off ’is trolley!” Giorno tries his hardest to remember British slang, but Diego typically uses so much of it that it’s impossible to keep up with him.

In the car on the way home, Giorno’s sitting in the front seat playing a game on a half-dead smartphone, when Diego goes off on another tale.

“You know, Giorno, when Oi was litt’l, Oi used to ‘ave ’air like yours.”

“With the braid and all!” Jonathan muses, a tiny chuckle escaping his thick chest. “Dio, do you remember that?” He’s trying so hard to make everyone have a good time, but unfortunately for Jonathan, Dio positively loathes good people for some reason.

“No, JoJo,” Dio huffs, rolling his eyes into the back of his skull before slamming the breaks and lurching the car forward with a shriek of, “Watch where you’re fucking going, you meaningless waste of matter!” Pause. Huff. “No, JoJo,” he repeats with an equal irritated twinge, sarcasm lacing his voice like knives, “I forgot completely.”

When Giorno speaks English, he only has a slight mixed accent — it’s a gross combination of mostly-Italian and a twinge of British, which makes his accent a pain to understand. That’s mostly due to the fact that Dio’s accent has grown slight over the years he’s lived in Italy, and the bi-cultural influence on him has given him a smooth and even mix of the two. It sounds very odd to the ear, Giorno thinks, but these days Dio takes to speaking mostly Italian, as that was Giorno’s first language though it wasn’t long after when he started to pick up English from the British half of his family.

Both uncle Jonathan and aunt Erina have a relatively softer British accent, one that Giorno’s sure can be compared to those heard on television in the States — you know, the accent that all of the women consider “sexy” and swoon over, but is still easy to understand for the yanks. But Diego… eurgh, Diego. Diego’s accent is so thick that it’s almost tangible, enough to cut into cubes and build himself a house with. From what Giorno knows about the family, Diego lived much of his earlier life in a completely different location in England, having moved out before Jonathan or Dio did. Every voice is different, he reasons, but still can’t help but wonder what happened to make Diego’s accent so much more obnoxiously difficult to understand.

Diego and Jonathan take to a conversation about dinosaurs next — this seems to be the only thing they can get along about, as famous jockey Diego and archaeologist Jonathan share an equivocal fascination with the extinct reptiles. Aunt Erina falls into a silence, having nothing to contribute to the conversation, and Dio ends up slamming his head into the steering wheel a good ten times while Giorno tries to block everything out. Then, from dinosaurs it goes to Diego’s horrible service on the plane.

A few comments leak into his consciousness, most all of them from Diego.

“...’e was a total prat…”

Trish sends a text message, “Hey Gio!! <3 what did u get stinky for his birthday?”

“Don’t ruin the surprise if I tell you.” It’s not that he doesn’t trust Trish, it’s that sometimes she has a big mouth. Only sometimes.

“...told me ’e was feeling roight knackered and couldn’t be arsed to bring out the food I ordered…”

“I’m not gonna ruin ur surprise stupid!!! tell me”
“I wrote him a song. I’m going to sing it to him, but I have to escape my family first.”

“O yeah u said that they were coming in for a visit soon. r they here now?”

“...the absolute worst service Oi’ve ever gotten.”

“I’ll say!” Jonathan shouts, the sound of him clapping Diego on his green-sweatered shoulder resounding throughout the car. Jonathan’s currently squished up between Erina and Diego, right in the middle, and practically forcing both of them out the window. “What was his problem, again?”

“They’re here now, yes. Yelling. Are you at the cafe?”

“Like Oi said, I ‘aven’t a clue.”

“yeah Mista says hi. he says he loves u”

“Dio mentioned that you were participating in a race! Did you win?”

“No — some Italian arsehole named Gyro just barely scraped by. Oi’m sorry, Giorno, but you Italians can be a litt’l irritating. ‘e slagged me off, too!”

“Tell Mista I love him, too, and that I’ll see him later.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Diego — but I think I have something that’ll surely lift your spirits!”

Giorno looks up just in time to see Dio flip someone off with the driver’s side window rolled down, and then the person immediately proceeds to get out of their car in the stopped traffic and start raising an uproar. He slumps down into his seat as if to go unnoticed, while Jonathan rummages through his satchel for something and tries hard to ignore the situation. Dio’s eyebrows are knit together as he shrieks obscenities that can be heard for miles.

“Go practice safe sex,” begins the angry guy banging on the side of the hideous Tacoma, “and go fuck yourself, dude.”

“Is that your crybaby, whiny-assed opinion? When I want your opinion, plebian, I’ll beat it out of you.”

“ok! have fun with your family”

“I AM NOT HAVING FUN.”

“Step out of the fucking car, shithead.”

“I don’t particularly feel like sending someone to the hospital right now.” Wow, Dio, that’s honestly surprising.

“Oi, Dio, Oi’m not sure what you’re saying, but tell the old sod to fuck off!”

“y gio whats wrong!”?

“I’ll tell you all at the cafe.”

“Step out of the fucking car before I pound your fucking windshield in!”

“You hit my car and I make it so that reproduction for your pathetic family is no longer possible.”
Both Giorno and Erina bury their faces in their hands as the guy kicks the side of the truck; as the thud resounds throughout the door, Dio coolly cocks his arm back and decks the guy so hard that he’s sent reeling back into the car behind him. Traffic is still stopped, and it’s not going to move any time soon, because Dio gets out of the car and hooks the guy by the collar. Giorno’s not sure that this family visit was a good idea, because Dio’s acting like a twelve year-old now, and Diego’s cheering on the fight from the back seat. Both Erina and Jonathan hop out of the truck to go break up the fight, which luckily doesn’t end in any broken noses, but does end in Jonathan dragging an enraged Dio back into the driver’s seat and reprimanding him. Which inevitably leads to another screaming match, and Erina burying her face in her hands again.

Eventually, aunt Erina herself snaps, and on the ride home once traffic kicks back up again, shrieks out, “Will you two knock this behaviour off?! This is family time that you’re ruining!”

No one messes with Erina when she’s pissed off. The whole car falls into silence, and Dio bites his lip as if he wants to make some scathing remark, but manages to hold himself back for just this moment.

The rest of the ride home is as peaceful as it’ll get, and Giorno books it to the cafe as soon as he can run in and grab his guitar. Hopefully no one’s dead by the time he gets back, but there’s no promise of that.

The cafe is busy when Giorno storms inside and practically throws himself into a seat nearby his usual one (which is taken by some couple, boo). Trish almost demands that he recount the tale behind his mysterious text messages, which prompts all of the workers to gather around the counter and listen to Giorno’s lamentations. Abbacchio’s present again, looking far better than he did a while ago in the hospital but still carrying that same disgruntled, world-abhorring gaze, and dryly mutters, “There are more of you? We’re all fucked.”

Buccellati chastises him briefly, while Narancia cheerily says, “Gee, I wish I could’ve seen that fight!”

“You don’t.” Fugo corrects with a shake of his head. “I, personally, am amazed no one got arrested.”

“I, personally, would’ve loved to make the arrest.”

“Leone.” Repeats Buccellati, firmer this time.

“Y’don’t sound too keen on your folks, dude.” Observes Mista, whose uniform-lacking figure signifies that he’s done with his shift for the day, and probably been done for quite a while.

“I like my family,” Giorno assures, but with a lugubrious shake of the head, continues, “but they don’t like each other, thus chaos ensues whenever they’re all together. Oh, yes, Mista — before I forget, my uncle Jonathan and aunt Erina would like to meet you.”

Mista’s posture goes from casual and relaxed to tense and terrified. “Am I gonna die?”

“No, they’re very kindly people.”

“You sure?”

“Yes, Mista.”

“Really sure?”
“I am sure, Mista.”

“Super really sure?”

Giorno’s brow twitches, and he attempts to patiently state, “I really resent repeating myself, Mista. Please don’t make me say it a fourth time.” He really tries not to have those moments where he bears semblance to his father, but his tone obviously sends the whole cafe into shock, and the only one that’s met Dio is Mista himself. Clearly, the kid’s having a rough day.

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Giorno initially told Mista that their birthday date would happen at a nearby diner, so when Giorno plods past it through the falling snow, Mista is nothing short of shocked. He attempts to tug on Giorno’s coat and pull him back, but his lover only meets his eyes with a twinge of sneakiness shining behind the sky-blue hues, and offers a flippant smile.

“You have your guitar again.” Mista observes, already on the verge of tears, because God fucking dammit, Giorno and his perfect self and his perfect singing and perfect guitar-playing is the best gift he could ever ask for. Even better would’ve been if his folks weren’t in town and Mista could take him back to his now not-infested apartment and snuggle him all night again. But that’s merely wistful thinking.

Silence.

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.” Giorno tells, and clasps onto Mista’s hand to tug him along the slippery pavement.

To Mista’s absolute astonishment, it’s a four-star restaurant. No wonder the walk was over an hour long, and no wonder they’re both freezing half to death. He choking on his own tongue after glancing over a menu posted on the wall, briefly explaining with a twinge of disappointment, “I can’t afford to pay for this.”

“That’s good,” says Giorno with a confident smirk and raised brow, “because I’m paying for it.”

“Where’d you get th’ money for —”

“My aunt and uncle are kindly people, remember?”

Mista remembers, but if he remembers correctly, Giorno has two uncles that are visiting, not just one. Which one was the nice one? Jonah? Jo… John… Uh…

Well, fuck it. He’s not going to ask now, not as the waitress seats them at a little two-person booth. The restaurant is well-lit but moody; the yellow and white hues of the chandeliers at every table wash the tablecloths and black cushion of the seats in soft shades of gold and ivory. Everyone in the place is dressed nicely, in suits and ties and expensive dresses, and both of them look as though they’ve just came from some late-night classes and wandered in to sample things with their parent’s stolen credit cards. By the looks they’re getting from the staff, they’re not well received, and several patrons whisper lowly comments under their breath.

Giorno isn’t the least bit bothered by it, reclining against the comfortable seats and taking a sip of water. Mista continually eyes the bar at the other side of the building, filled with champagne and
fancy wines and bourbons and whiskeys of all types, strongly wishing that Giorno was only a bit older so that they could both get shitfaced and go home in a drunken stupor. But Mista knows what he’s like when he’s intoxicated, too — he’s loud, screams too much, hardly a fun person to be around if those around him aren’t under the influence as well. He doesn’t want to scare Giorno off with his idiotic antics, and so Giorno’s offer to pay for whatever fancy martini Mista’s thinking about getting is rejected with a dismissive flick of the wrist.

Eyeing the guitar case jutting out from underneath the table, Mista inquires, “You’re not… gonna play that here, are ya?”

“I would disturb the other patrons if I did it now.” Giorno concludes with a tiny bob of his head. “There is a stage area where they do open mics, and I managed to schedule myself last second, on my run from home to the cafe to meet with you.”

Oh, fuck.

Mista gulps, and he gulps hard.

“Okay, but, y’know — I was already gonna cry an’ all because you’re doing this again. And — what’re you singing this time? When’re you singing?”

Giorno’s face flushes with embarrassment; his eyelids flutter, eyes darting to a lit candle in the centre of the table, gaze trained on the melting wax just below the flame. The fire serves to illuminate the stunning blue, the flickering orange and yellow reflected in front of his pupils. “I… wrote a song for you.” He looks up suddenly, expression set in a stony seriousness, lips formed into the tiniest of pouts. “You might say this is moving too fast, but —”

“No! Uh — didn’t mean to shout. It’s not! What’s it called?”

“I forgot to title it.” A shrug of the shoulders and a swap of the subject. “What’re you ordering?”

Well fuck if he knows, because Giorno just dropped a fucking nuke on his fucking heart.

He points to something completely random on the menu, something with a picture and text underneath it — and lo and behold, the damn dish has a French name! Curse these mixed-cultural food places, honestly. Mista can’t pronounce French for shit.

“Coquilles Saint-Jacques?” Giorno reads in his perfect French with his perfect voice and ugh ugh ugh. “You like scallops?”

Maybe? He might? Uh…

“It looks good to me.” He reasons with a nod.

“That’s a holiday dish. If I remember correctly, you could get a bûche as dessert with it, to top it off. That’s a French Christmas-time dessert.”

“Why do you know so much about food?”

Giorno gives a noncommittal gesticulation.

Oh, yeah, it’s because his family has more money than they know what to do with. He must’ve learned something from like, a private chef, or some bullshit like that. Mista’s honestly jealous.

They order as soon as the waitress makes her rounds, and Mista realizes sadly that this has got to be expensive. It’s not that he owes Giorno money, but he now owes his family cash, and that
won’t go over too well — he’s gotta pay his dues, so he’ll talk to them about it Sunday, when he
has the day off. After all, Giorno did mention that his relatives wanted to meet Mista. If that went
down badly, that was… well. To be expected, he supposes, considering the tales he’s heard today.

They’re holding hands underneath the table, Giorno’s fingers tracing the curves of his knuckles
and the scar over the back of his hand. The tenderness of the gesture tickles his skin, sometimes
causing an inadvertent shudder and a flustered half-smile, which Giorno returns in kind and
resumes the movement of his delicate fingertips.

“I dunno what you see in me.” Mista starts, free hand yanking his hat down over the reddening
tips of his ears. “I’m just some guy who needs to go back to school and get his shit together, and
I’m sure Trish’s told ya that my hygiene is kinda shitty, ‘cause she’s always givin’ me shit about
that. I’ve gotten better.”

“Are you looking for specifics?” Giorno inquires, chin resting in his palm and elbow on the edge
of the table like a boy with refined manners should not be doing in a restaurant that sells water for
seven euros. “I’m not entirely sure how to name them. It’s just you. There’s something about you,
Mista, that I cannot put my finger on or fathom entirely. You’ve got a huge, shining heart, and
you’re a wonderful person. You cause everyone around you to breathe a little and have fun.
You’re funny, and a strong man for going through what you did with your family.”

“Okay, but — boost my ego for a sec, GioGio. What about my face?”

“Handsome.”

“Cool.”

“Like I was saying. It’s just you. You drew me in the first day we met, when you clumsily took a
coffee bath —”

“You were distracting!”

“ — and suddenly, before I knew it, we were friends, and I struggled with the realization that I
was falling in love with you. I’ll admit, I didn’t understand at first,” Trish called that one, Mista
recalls, “but Trish helped me figure it out. I suppose I owe her one.”

“She’s always gettin’ everyone together.” Mista grumbles.

“Singing to you is still my idea.”

There’s wetness prickling at the back of his eyes. He can’t be sobbing already — dinner hasn’t
even arrived, and Giorno hasn’t even picked up his guitar and… scratch that, dinner’s here now;
the waitress is still giving them looks as she sets the food out before them. Mista supposes that
they both could’ve dressed better if Giorno told him about this, and maybe they wouldn’t be
getting these weird looks from everyone, but… whatever.

The important thing is they’re here now, it’s his nineteenth birthday, and Giorno’s gift is
serenading him. Mista doubts he’ll ever get tired of that. Giorno’s voice is beautiful and rich
enough when he’s merely talking — singing is another story.

Hands releasing one another from underneath the table, they eat in silence, occasionally casting
each other smiles from behind cloth napkins and glasses of water.

As a side note, Mista finds that the scallops were really good.

Just as they both manage to finish eating everything, including the dessert — which they shared,
by the way — Giorno’s name breaks over the intercom, and he eagerly shoots to his feet and
snags his guitar case after a swift peck on Mista’s lips.

It begins.

From where they’re sitting, Mista can’t see the stage area, and he’s forced to follow Giorno to an
empty table just in front of the little wooden platform. It’s got a few spotlights on it, nothing too
expensive compared to the rest of the decor, and a plain stool in the middle in front of a
microphone. After a few seconds, Mista realizes that he’s setting up a camera to record himself,
and at first Mista’s mind defaults to “wow, how vain” until he realizes that this has gotta be part of
it. Giorno’s recording it so that it can be saved forever, so that Mista can watch the video over and
over and over until his tear ducts shrivel and dry up.

After finally taking his guitar out and getting ready, Giorno briefly introduces himself, explains
that he wrote this song for someone he’s in love with, and goes for it.

This time, he’s looking right at Mista, and Mista’s too far gone to even look away. Feelings
bubble up inside of his chest, erupting like a volcano about midway through Giorno’s
wonderfully-composed masterpiece, until his tears completely blind him and the blond is merely a
blurry blob amidst the water in front of his corneas. Giorno’s previous words during his
introduction, “someone I’m in love with,” stick at the back of his mind like a plague, replaying
like a broken record, over and over and over again until the sickly sweet feeling completely
overrides his senses.

Giorno’s still watching even near the end of the song, cheeks growing redder by the second —
he’s getting choked up, too, by the looks of it, though not to the extreme that Mista is as he dabs
his eyes on the cashmere of his blue sweater and sniffles. He’s the most splendid, graceful thing in
the whole world up there, only a few feet ahead with the song rolling off of his fingertips and lips
like the blessings of angels.

Applause roars in Mista’s ears, and that’s when he snaps out of his trance just long enough to
watch Giorno put away his guitar and hold back his own blubbering up there. The split second
before he arrives at Mista’s side, he puts away the camera he’d mounted on a foldable tripod,
crams it into the shoulder bag at his hip, and then as soon as he’s in the darkness away from the
spotlights the first glimmers of tears begin rolling down those flawless cheeks.

“H-how dare,” Mista begins as Giorno pushes their foreheads together, tips of their noses
touching, “you d-d-do that t-to me, ’ca-cause you knew I-I’d…”

“Happy birthday, Mista.”

Mista throws his arms around Giorno’s neck, and they’re lip-locked powerfully, passionately —
they’re in public, and he knows people are staring, but for a split second in his life he doesn’t
fucking care. They’re here, together, entangled now, and when the kiss breaks Mista immediately
suggests,


“Alright. Let me message my father — we should pay for dinner, no?”


Mista’s house is still a disaster, but it’s a little tidier than last time. The good news is that there’s
not clothing strewn over every inch of the house. The bad news is that the clothing is strewn over
every inch of his bedroom, and he doesn’t want to make Giorno sleep on the couch again. Granted, that last time was a sheer accident, but his sofa isn’t the most luxurious thing in the world. Put lightly, it fucking sucks.

That’s being generous.

He makes Giorno stand in the hall while he attempts a quick sweep of his room, and manages to hide all of his clothing against the wall. Explaining the mess (and spraying the room with a suffocating amount of air freshner, just in case), Mista then allows Giorno into his bedroom and throws himself back onto the mattress. There’s never a day in his life when he actually makes the bed, so the blankets are strewn everywhere as if a tornado tore through the room, but mess has never bothered Mista. He considers the fact that he should probably keep the place clean, but. Well.

Giorno isn’t complaining and doesn’t look upset when he lies down beside Mista and offers the absolute sweetest smile Mista’s ever fucking seen. The lights aren’t on, the only thing illuminating the room being the moon and a half-working nightlight that Mista has solely so that he can see his way around this pigsty when he wakes up late at night in need of a snack. Outside, the snow gently flutters to the ground, some flakes sticking to the window before evaporating and dribbling down to the windowpane.

Both of them yawn within seconds of one another, prompting a bout of laughter. Mista reasons that it’s bedtime, especially because it’s almost midnight now.

“So, this’s awkward,” he slurs, sitting up a bit, “but I don’t ever sleep with a shirt on, or at least not a sweater — I can wear a T-shirt if you feel uncomfortable or somethin’.”

Giorno’s eyes glint briefly in the darkness, and he responds with a simple murmur of, “It doesn’t bother me. Do you mind if I borrow a shirt, however?”

Mista manages to find a clean one in a drawer in under five minutes, and pitches it Giorno’s direction. They change together, Mista shrugging off the warmth of his sweater and setting his hat aside on a rather cluttered nightstand. He turns around at a completely inopportune time; Giorno’s got his arms raised above his head, peeling away his sweater, thin frame and peach skin illuminated by the soft orange glow of the nightlight nearby and this is GETTING OUT OF HAND MISTA.

He pretends he’s not completely drawn to that thin figure in more ways than one as Giorno slides a loose gray top over his shoulders, and then it hits him that he grabbed one of his summer cropped shirts and oh God fucking dammit Mista get your head out of your britches.

“I didn’t know you wore crop tops.” Giorno comments, lying down after kicking the blanket over himself, thank fuck for that.


The tingly feelings disappear as soon as he crawls into bed and Giorno snuggles up close, giving Mista one last kiss on the lips before he quickly dozes off. Mista’s final action before he, too, completely crashes, is to squeeze the blond tight and whisper into the darkness that he’s in love with Giorno, too.
"why's this another chapter with a serenading scene" fuck the shit off okay... I really just like the idea. (Also by the time I finished this chapter I forgot that I JUST GOT DONE with a guitar sing-song chapter and I wasn't going to hold off on the moment.) This was partially inspired by the fact that my girlfriend pulled the same stunt on me at HER open mic -- we weren't at a restaurant, but I was still sobbing. Everyone thought we were really cute. This is us. I'm the one with Buccellati hair. http://wolfchan.tumblr.com/post/116992301062/my-gf-and-i-are-really-photogenic-on-date-night
Fugonara hell.

This update is really late, partially because it's REALLY LONG (over 11k words) and partially because I have a job and god dammit jobs are :uuu
I also had an anniversary date with the bae, we went to museums and the aquarium, where I figured out by feeding the manta rays that they have teeth.

To emphasize language barriers, I italicized text that is in English when someone who doesn't speak English is around, notably Mista. It's hard to explain, so hopefully it makes sense when you guys get to that point. I have a very non-sequitur way of doing things.

Notice on inconsistencies:
I actually DO live in the States, and I try very hard for accuracy in different settings (so hard that the other day I shouted "IS THIS BLOKE GOING TO LET ME INTO THE LANE" while driving) -- but there are some things which are inaccurate. If you see anything, like the word "dollars" where it should be "euros" or something, go ahead and let me know and I'll fix that up! I research almost everything, and I did find out that Italians do celebrate Christmas (which I'm a sucker for these stupid holiday AUs -- it's October now, though :) and some do put up Christmas trees and the like.

@All my commenters and readers: Y'all have been super nice! It's very refreshing to see such nice comments and stuff in my inbox, and the fanart is <3 <3 <3 <3 <3 One time I recall doing research on a fic and had someone try to leave "criticism" by insulting me and calling me stupid, so I always get a tad bit nervous when the AO3 inbox displays that I have something in there -- that shouldn't deter you from leaving me nice comments, because they're always uplifting! <3
(That sounded really vain, I didn't mean to do that.)

Yet again, everything in here is fucking inside jokes, but thank you to tumblr user 2spookynipples for the "truth or dare" section, because... I needed that in my life. The only ideas that were NOT theirs were: Trish getting water dumped on her head, Giorno telling an embarrassing story, and prank calls.

He wakes up like a cat, with a stretch and a yawn and his back popping, arms high over his head and a little morning groan warbling in his chest. Beside him is Mista, lightly snoring and somehow lying halfway off of the bed. The blanket they were using is pooled up around their legs, but somehow Giorno didn't wake up in the middle of the night freezing to death and hogging the covers.

Mista's bigger than he imagined. Not in the sense that he's chunky or overweight, but in that he's muscular and toned; Giorno's noticed that he's broad-shouldered and wide-chested during their copious cuddle sessions, but seeing it in person is a different story. He may always don form-fitting sweaters that definitely serve to accent the muscles of his chest, but it's incomparable to having him here now, completely shirtless, with one of his arms behind Giorno's head.
He’s a hairy guy — Trish’d told Giorno that he was “the human version of Bigfoot” before, so he’s not completely shocked by it. There’s a trail of black hair starting at his chest, straight and coarse, that travels down his midsection to his navel in a thin line before spreading back out and disappearing beyond the hem of his jeans. Giorno slings his arm over Mista’s torso to give him a hug and a good morning kiss, and the temptation arises to run his fingertips through the ruff as he does so.

...Giorno’s not thirsty! He’s just fifteen! Hormones are bullshit!

Et cetera.

Mista is quite easy to wake up, instantly conscious as soon as Giorno presses a chaste little kiss to his lips. A wide smile yanks the corners of his lips up, strong arms capturing Giorno around the neck and pulling him in for a suffocating hug. He practically covers every visible part of Giorno’s face and neck with tiny smooches, humming to himself before releasing the blond and sitting up with a yawn, stretching his arms out in front of him.

“Is it alright if I borrow your shower?”

Mista replies with a groggy, “Mm? Mm… oh, yeah, sure.” Rubbing his eyes, the tired man slides off of the side of the mattress, stretches yet again, and proceeds towards his cluttered mess of a dresser, yanking out a few articles of clothing and tossing them carelessly atop the oak furnishing before asking, “I don’t have any of those sweaters y’like, and I’m bigger th’n you, but you can borrow whatever.”

“I have clothing from yesterday, still.” Even though he wore the jeans to bed.

“Yeah, but y’look cute in my clothes.”

Fair enough.

Giorno goes with an older-looking pink sweater, one that doesn’t seem to be in use anymore, because it doesn’t carry a single bit of Mista’s scent on it. The latter can’t locate a pair of jeans that’ll fit Giorno properly, explains that he doesn’t own a belt at all, but Giorno shrugs it off. Hiking up his jeans constantly on the walk home will be a pain in the ass, but he reasons that as soon as he’s home he can change out and do some laundry to save Mista the effort (also because he knows Mista won’t do the laundry).

“I should start bringing clothing along whenever we go somewhere.” He concludes jokingly, padding down the hall to the bathroom.

“If it weren’t fucking freezing out, I’d tell ya to wear the crop top out.”

Giorno turns to throw a smile at Mista over his shoulder before the bathroom door clicks shut behind him.

Admittedly, he kind-of wishes that the sweater he’s borrowing carries some of Mista’s scent on it, because pressing it against his face and gushing with a blushing face just isn’t the same as it is in films without the scent attached. Indulgently, Giorno performs the action anyway, wiggling a bit side to side before stepping out of the bathroom with his hair still half-soaked and curls bouncing around his shoulders.

Inquiring as to where to set Mista’s borrowed shirt from the prior night only gets him a response of, “Just throw it somewhere, that’s what I do.” Giorno, being far more tidy, doesn’t feel right
throwing someone else’s things around, and instead takes to setting it gently on the bed. The two proceed out into the kitchen for breakfast, Mista already donning his signature cap this early in the morning.

Over the kitchen counter as Giorno takes a seat on the couch, amidst the clattering of pots and pans and Mista dropping a spoon, Mista calls out a, “I gotta thank your folks for dinner money, ‘cause that was the best night of my life. But I ain’t gonna tell ‘em that.”

“When you meet them,” Giorno begins, turning on his phone which he’d left on the coffee table before bed, “uncle Jonathan might hug you. He’s a bit larger than my dad is, so it might hurt.” A fair warning. Mista looks like he just saw a ghost, but shakes the feeling off.

“I gotta repay ‘em, too.”

Giorno glances up from the phone buzzing in his hand as the machine attempts to catch up on all of his missed notifications, cocking a brow at Mista and merely stating, “They’re rich, Mista. There’s no point. I could’ve asked them to buy you a new cell phone and they would’ve hopped right on it.”

“How’d they get so wealthy?” Inquires the other with jealousy lacing his voice.

He shrugs, unlocking his phone with the set pattern and checking everything out. “Grandfather was wealthy. Inheritance. I really don’t know much of the history, because dad hates everyone in the family.”

“Eesh. What’s up with the family visit?”

“Uncle Jonathan is convincing.”

Mista grumbles out a low "apparently " and continues cooking, metal spatula at the ready. Smoke flies up into the air, and for a moment Giorno’s worried that something’s about to catch fire over there, especially when he goes to open up the kitchen window and yank back the curtains.

But, it’s a false alarm — breakfast is fine and goes off without a single problem. The smoke was merely caused by a stray piece of scrambled egg falling out of the pan and onto the burner. The two eat in silence, hardly looking at one another; Giorno finds watching someone eat to be awkward, and talking with his mouth full absolutely abhorring. His phone, forgotten, has long since stopped buzzing, and only after Mista retreats into the kitchen again to wash dishes does Giorno check his messages.

He’s missed a bit.

“TRISH, 7:41PM: ok so when the dates over youre gonna tell me all about it rite? RITE?”

“UNCLE JONATHAN, 7:52PM: I hope you have fun on your rendezvous! Your aunt Erina and I still would like to meet the lad.”

“UNCLE DIEGO, 9:20PM: heard you’re arse over elbow for whoever’s shagging you. dio said so. good luck i suppose”

What a fucking asswipe.

“NARANCIA, 9:29PM: guess wat”

“NARANCIA, 9:30PM: i whooped fugos ass in mario kart”
“DAD, 10:34PM: K, have fun with your boyfriend, use condoms, etc.”

Asshole.

On top of all that, there’s a mass thread that his number was included in — he has a few of the numbers in the thread, the recognizable names being Trish, Narancia, Fugo, and Mista, alongside two other phone numbers he doesn’t have entered into his contacts.

“FUGO, 9:35PM: Just wanted to let everyone know that my family is throwing an annual Christmas party very soon. You’re invited to it. I’ll update everyone with dates and times.

NARANCIA, 9:35PM: fugo i am sitting right next to u i kno im invited

TRISH, 9:35PM: i’m pumped! Id love to go! what’s everyone want for christmas?

UNKNOWN, 9:40PM: It’s not necessary that any of you get me anything.

FUGO, 9:41PM: I just remembered that Mista broke his damn phone.

FUGO, 9:41PM: I’ll take a day off, Buccellati :)

UNKNOWN, 9:42PM: I recommend putting in a request, then.

NARANCIA, 9:43PM: how abt we all pitch in and get mista a new phone and itll be from all of us

TRISH, 9:46PM: yeah! omg look my fav clothing store has gift cards u guys HAVE to get me gift cards there okay?

UNKNOWN, 9:50PM: We have a few weeks until the holidays.

UNKNOWN, 9:51PM: More importantly, whose number is in this thread that I don’t have?

FUGO, 9:51PM: That was… really vague.

UNKNOWN, 9:53PM: @Trish — I’ll get you a gift card. It’ll have five euros on it.

UNKNOWN, 9:54PM: I mean the 081-555 number.

TRISH, 9:55PM: r00d, also thats gio!

UNKNOWN, 9:55PM: Oh my god.

UNKNOWN, 9:55PM: You’re fucking shitting me right now, Fugo.

FUGO, 10:00PM: I will assault both of you with a butter knife at the party if you two don’t get along. Forewarning.

NARANCIA, 10:01PM: yeah he asalted me w/a butter knife once

UNKNOWN, 10:03PM: I abhor my existence in this meaningless realm of injustice.

UNKNOWN, 10:10PM: Leone, please be nice.

TRISH, 10:11PM: ok WELL can u two save the marital spat for l8r b/c giorno can see all of this and also we really dont want to see you two bickering over text when ur probs sitting on the
couch right next to each other and can fight there like. spare us plz and thank u.

NARANCIA, 10:13PM: also guys i beat fugo in mario kart!!!

FUGO, 10:15PM: He pushed me off of Rainbow Road.

NARANCIA, 10:16PM: i didnt push u off, u cant work the wiimote and u fucked up

NARANCIA, 10:16PM: by falling off in the smae spot

NARANCIA, 10:16PM: like seventeen times in a row.

NARANCIA, 10:17PM: dskjfs

NARANCIA, 10:18PM: fugo just hit me!!!!!!!

UNKNOWN, 10:21PM: Can you two SAVE the marital spat for LATER because we can SEE ALL OF THIS and we DON’T GIVE A SHIT, thank you.

UNKNOWN, 10:25PM: Well, the two of us are off to sleep for the night — forgive Leone, he’s just grumpy because he’s been in pain all day. Goodnight, everyone.

TRISH, 10:27PM: night mom, night grouchy dad <3 <3 <3”

Well. Talk about impolite.

Mista’s glancing over his shoulder at the messages, though luckily for Giorno, Mista’s unable to read Diego’s disgusting British slang and be humiliated by it in turn. After his eyes scan over Abbacchio’s crudeness, which Giorno isn’t shocked or upset about — it’s to be expected, after all, seeing as the man always has a stick up his ass — Mista attempts to choke out an apology for the officer.

“He’s — he takes a while to warm up to someone. You’re not doin’ nothing wrong! He’s been a grump since he was born I think.” Giorno shrugs it off with a dismissive wave of his hand. “He didn’t like me much at first either.”

“I’m just grateful that Fugo bothered to invite me to his family’s party.”

“It was a lotta fun — last year, we were all plastered by the end of it. We shouldn’t a’been, ‘cause Fugo and Trish were underage, but Fugo’s folks nodded off and it was just downhill from there. Y’ever played Wii Sports while totally shitfaced?” Giorno shakes his head, because he doesn’t even own any video game systems. “It’s a fuckin’ blast.”

To top off the text message hell that Giorno’s enduring, Dio sends a simple,

“Giorno. Home. Now. I need you to liberate me from the torment that is talking to these buffoons. They’ve been over for TWO HOURS and I wish murder was not FROWNED UPON.”

Okay. Home it is.

Ah, home.

Home is, more often than not, where the fight is. (The other version of the term, “where the heart
Mista’s reluctance to enter the house shines through the moment Giorno begins to unlock the door, and while Giorno is admittedly a bit nervous about showing Mista off — especially because Dio knows that Giorno doesn’t own any cashmere sweaters, and he’ll then know that Giorno borrowed this and assume that they did… Well, that aside, Giorno’s nervous.

Dio’s bound to be in a bad mood when he enters the house. Lo and behold, he’s absolutely correct; uncle Jonathan is sweeping glass off of the rug, presumably in a location where someone got really pissed off and had a tantrum (Giorno’s bias automatically brings him to believe that it’s Dio). Dad’s brooding in the kitchen. Erina is talking to Diego against the wall, both of them ignoring the bickering brothers, and their conversation seems to be casual up until the word *shag* comes out of Diego’s mouth and Erina reprimands him for it.

The world stops dead, time completely frozen, as Giorno and Mista find themselves standing isolated in the doorway. Everyone looks up and around, and before anyone can move Jonathan’s eyes light up like candle fire and he shoots off of the floor, dustpan abandoned, practically leaping over the coffee table to get to the two of them. Giorno hardly has time for a half-decent introduction, instead managing a barely-audible, “This is Mista, my —”

Jonathan instantly lurches out a hand towards Mista, and the second the latter takes it, Giorno swears that the handshake tears Mista’s entire arm off.

“It’s nice to meet you, Mista!”

“They don’t speak Italian at all? Heard m’name… that’s it.”

“I forgot to mention that. He says that it’s nice to meet you. *Mista doesn’t speak English, everyone.*”

“So, Oi can make comments, Erina!”

“Diego —”

“If the bloke doesn’t speak a lick of English, Oi c’n say whatever Oi want to!”

“I won’t be translating it.” Says Giorno in absolute rancor.

“I’ll translate.” Fuck you, Dio. Fuck you.

“Mista,” Giorno begins, trying not to visibly flinch in response to every comment that his boyfriend luckily cannot understand, “this is my uncle Jonathan — uncle Diego is over by the wall, next to aunt Erina.”

“It’s… it’s, uh — great to meet… you guys.”

“He says it’s nice to meet you.”

“Of course it’s noise to meet me!” Diego, please…

“Diego says it’s nice to meet you, too.”

Jonathan immediately diverges into a spiel about how excited he is to meet Giorno’s boyfriend, that he wanted a grandnephew or grandniece one day, but that it doesn’t matter so long as Giorno is happy; Erina comes to stand by her husband, a delicate hand on his shoulder and an approving smile. She murmurs that Mista seems like a lovely young man, politely going to shake his hand
with far less eager strength, while Mista looks on with a dumbfounded gaze. Giorno immediately kicks into translation mode.

“Uncle’s very excited to meet you. He says he wanted grandnephews and grandnieces one day, but… I don’t really want to adopt any children.” Dio cackles to himself from in the kitchen, and Giorno senses a sly comment coming up. “He’s additionally very pleased that we’re happy together, right now. Aunt Erina says that you seem like a lovely person.”

“Well — uh, tell ‘em thanks a bunch, and that I owe ‘em dinner money or somethin’.”

“He says thank you. I told him that you two helped pay for dinner for the two of us, and he wants to repay you.”

The married couple swiftly shake their heads, Jonathan’s shake in particular being more vigorous. “We won’t accept that, Mista. We merely wanted to help Giorno out with the surprise.”

Giorno translates that back, before Diego starts waggling a finger at him. With a concise excuse me in both languages, he follows after Diego, Dio now in tow, until they’re in the master bedroom and the door is shut behind them. What could this talk possibly be about —

“You don’t own any nice clothing.” Thanks, Dio. That probably (possibly?) didn’t come out the way he meant it to, but either way, there’s humour shining in his irises. Humour which serves to piss Giorno off severely.

“I borrowed the shirt —”

Diego and Dio exchange a devious glance, eyebrows raised, smirks tugging at the corners of their mouths.

“Is ‘e any good?”

“What do you mean?”

“Was he a good fuck?” Dio translates, and instantly Giorno wants to be ejected into space and just die there. Just… someone, please, kick him from existence. Move him to another universe. Do something.

“We didn’t…” Giorno trails off, shaking his head. “Can you two keep your noses out of my love life?”

“Love life?” Dio echoes in awe, eyes going wide with phony shock. “Oh, how I, Dio, was looking forward to the day my son would use the words ‘love life’.”

“Your biting sarcasm isn’t funny.”

“Alright, kiddo, listen,” no, Diego, he doesn’t want to listen, “it’s going to ‘urt the first toime y’doo it.”

Giorno cocks a brow, eyes darting between dad and uncle, and automatically inquires before his brain has a chance to catch up with his mouth, “How would you know that?” Wait! Shit, he doesn’t want to know, please don’t answer, please don’t say a thing —

Both Dio and Diego slap one hand onto either of his shoulders, before Diego says, “Listen ‘ere, runt — we’ve all fooled around before. Your ‘ole family is bisexual.”

He really didn’t need to know that!
“I remember a time, long, long ago —”

Giorno books it from the room before Dio can finish, and behind him, hears the two idiots slap a high five before laughter breaks out amongst them. As soon as he makes it to the decent half of his relatives, Mista comments that he looks shaken up, to which Giorno can only manage a feeble, “I want to move out. Right now.”

The next week and a half flies by.

In fact, it flies by so quickly that Giorno can hardly remember what happened, or what he ate or what the homework for maths was whenever a lazy schoolmate inquires about it. Even Trish seems to be bogged down by finals approaching, for the colour has practically left her eyes and vacated out of her wardrobe as well. No more pink. Giorno’s never seen Trish in sweatpants and a T-shirt, save for that time at the gardens a while back. She does that for about a week, coming into school in her pajamas and vehemently claiming that she’s lost all motivation in her life, sometimes dramatically shouting that there’s nothing she can do about her subpar grades besides lie there and accept the eventual consequence.

The last day of finals is the day right before the musical. Giorno’s given Mista a forewarning that they won’t be able to talk every night until one of the two falls asleep this week, because he absolutely must study and do his homework and keep up with the musical’s practices that run late into the evening hours. He must absolutely stay on schedule, and he doesn’t have time for playing around. The only time he really sees Mista is whenever the family’s meeting up, and either aunt Erina or uncle Jonathan will suggest bringing Mista along. Those two rather like Mista, which Giorno’s grateful for, but he has no idea about the other two members of his family.

That matter aside, finals absolutely slam him. He’s positive that he’ll be able to make the grade so that he can stay in the theatre program, but by the time the second day is over he’s entirely exhausted and just wants to lie down for a nap and maybe eat some pudding… Which doesn’t happen, because on the day before the musical, everyone’s rushing to get ready and cram in the final practice session. There’s tripping and nervously-cracking voices and forgetting lines from almost the entire cast, props getting thrown about, stage makeup gone horribly awry… it’s as if everything they’ve built up is about to come crashing down.

Similarly, the same series of misfortune happened last year, but the day of the performance went dazzlingly. Giorno isn’t too worried about it due to the fact that ninety percent of the cast makeup is composed of experienced theatre kids, and he knows it’ll go off without a hitch, and that everyone will succeed and look stunning while doing so — but there’s still a tiny inkling of paranoia at the back of his mind.

The backstage area is filled with dejected utterances of, “I need a nap” and “there isn’t enough caffeine in the world to keep me awake through this” and “I’m pretty damn sure I failed one of my finals”. Giorno takes a seat during a set break, trying extremely hard to take it easy for a bit, but with the negative air surrounding him like a box he finds it nearly impossible. A few students inquire as to how Giorno thinks he fared on the exams, and he only responds with a simple, “I’m sure I did fine.” Everyone is suddenly jealous of him, and many comments fly into the space around them, comments such as lucky and damn and other one-word complaints such as that.

He studies harder just because of his father’s idle threats. Always has, probably always will, until his father stops breathing down his neck like a starving wolf.
Friday’s showing is sold out. Saturday’s showing is also sold out. About two hundred people purchased tickets for Sunday. Giorno likes to believe that the entirety of the school has decided to come see the show, as he goes to a school with a fairly large student body population — in the audience Saturday night, while he’s adjusting the mic strapped to his shirt and peering out from backstage, the overhead lights cast a glow on many classmates that he recognizes. In the mid-centre of the auditorium sits his family — Dio with arms crossed, Diego chattering about something that’s most likely about raptors to everyone, Jonathan looking excited, and Erina calmly speaking to a woman sitting next to her in her usual friendly fashion. Mista’s crammed right in between Dio and Jonathan, looking highly uncomfortable and confused.

(Giorno realizes that his relatives won’t understand the lines, as this is the Italian translation of the American musical, but they might think his singing voice is nice and laugh absent-mindedly along with the crowd.)

(It’s also a really good thing that many of the adults in the audience speak English, because Erina is making friends out there.)

“Five minutes until the first act! Five minutes! Get your shit together and let’s go!” The school’s director has always been a foul-mouthed person. Most of the students find it comical and laugh at everything the elderly gentleman says, but Giorno’s grown immune to the comedy of cursing simply because of Dio.

Giorno’s eyes continue to wander throughout the crowd. In the far back of the theatre, he’s pretty sure he sees Trish’s puffy pink hair sticking out like a sore thumb, and maybe Narancia and Fugo, too. What, did she tell the whole cafe about it? Shouldn’t they be working right now? He doesn’t spot Buccellati nor Abbacchio, though the latter’s absence comes as zero surprise to him, and slinks back to make sure he’s all ready. Costume on? Check. Mic working? Should be. Stage makeup looks good? Yes, indeed, his face feels five times heavier! Hair neat? Hair is neat.

“One minute! One minute — Giorno, get into your position!”

Oh. Right. That.

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Wow. Giorno’s, like, really cool.

Narancia wasn’t expecting that — the first time they really, officially met, Giorno couldn’t dance for crap, but maybe it was just the music. It’s waaaaay different from anything Narancia would listen to, and he can’t say he really likes the songs all too much, but he’s also not the type to go to musicals. Trish’d said that Giorno was one of the stars of her school’s musical, though! So he and Fugo absolutely had to see, because Mista kept saying things like damn that kid can sing and blah blah blah, romantic things like that. But, anyway, Giorno’s cool, and he looks like he’s having a lot of fun even when he’s in character! That’s cool!

He finds it ironic that the “Gay or European” song isn’t about Giorno’s character, because Narancia is pretty sure Giorno is both of those things. Or, maybe like… bisexual and European. Either way.

It was Trish’s idea to go to the musical, and she’d wanted the whole cafe to go along, but Buccellati decided he’d rather manage the cafe alone. Fugo had volunteered to stay behind, but
Narancia was absolutely insistent that Fugo had to come and see! Especially because part of Narancia, the part of him that danced against Giorno and his two left feet, couldn’t believe that the boy’d gotten one of the lead roles in the musical. The other bit of it is, Narancia wanted Fugo to come along, his argument at the time being that he’d get lost on the way there and never get home, that Fugo would be really sad without him, and a plethora of other bullshit reasons that Narancia can currently no longer remember.

They’re cuddled up together near Trish, Narancia almost falling asleep with his head on Fugo’s shoulder, trying to pay attention but failing horribly. This sort of closeness happens often; they share a room in Fugo’s house, two small beds crammed against adjacent walls, and though two people can’t often fit in one bed sometimes Narancia will take to curling up against Fugo in the middle of the night. Most often, this is met with a grudging and groggy, “There’s not enough room for this, Narancia — how many times have we gone over this?” But, it’s one of those few times where Fugo isn’t violent, isn’t taking out his hotheadedness on Narancia’s face, when they’re not screaming that they’ll kill each other. They’ll curl up; sometimes Narancia’s forehead is against Fugo’s back, and other times it’s opposite, and still other instances have them facing one another and entangled like lovers.

Narancia doesn’t quite understand it.

Fugo is kind, and all the same brash and aggressive; warm and generous, but haughty and prone to instinct. He’s driven by his Id, while Narancia’s head’s up in the clouds. Fugo is knowledgeable, Narancia is ignorant. They’re polar opposites, black and white, yin and yang — sometimes their relationship shakes the earth like Ragnarok, and other times it feels as though flowers are blooming underneath their footsteps. Narancia isn’t often worked up unless Fugo reaches that point first, and suddenly they’re shouting death threats and punching and scratching and kicking; but within a few minutes all of that melts away, and they apologise and move on and do dumb things that teenagers often do. Mario Kart and throwing Cheetos and gorging on all of the food in the house before Fugo’s parents get home. They do that, and it’s wonderful, and it feels right.

Their relationship is a cycle of cruel altercation and affectious gestations.

He doesn’t appreciate the way they’re always at one another’s throats. All Narancia wants is for them to remain like this, warmhearted and snuggly, and eliminate the violence. Until then, he doesn’t feel like they’re going to get anywhere, unless they stop raising their hands at one another and screaming. When they play video games, they tease one another, and on especially fantastic nights Narancia will find himself lying across Fugo’s lap and failing to steer his character around because of the angle he’s at. And he doesn’t care that he’s not winning, for once.

A month ago, he’d asked Fugo why Fugo wouldn’t (and why Narancia wasn’t allowed) to tell people that they lived together. It was purely innocent! It was only because Narancia’s home life sucked so bad, that Fugo decided he’d had enough of it, and his parents took Narancia in. It wasn’t like they were like Abbacchio and Buccellati or anything like that! It wasn’t that kind of relationship at all!

But Fugo only responded that it was nobody’s business, that it was their secret to uphold, theirs and theirs alone, that they didn’t need anyone impeding on their lives. Narancia feels now that it’s due to Fugo being scared of being teased about it, as if there were some romantic insinuations between them. Their friends are benevolent people, though! Trish, especially, might say something — but she only means well, and she’s nice! She’d stop if any of them expressed hurt feelings…

Narancia concludes as soon as Fugo squeezes his hand, the one Narancia had left lying on the younger’s knee, that Fugo is hiding something from the whole world. Narancia’s going to figure
out what the heck it is.

Gee, Giorno’s family is weird.

It’s after the musical, and the hallways of the school are absolutely bustling. The sheer amount of bodies makes it difficult to even get within ten feet of the restroom; in the cafeteria area, the cast members throw their arms eagerly around one another, cheering and clapping and slapping friends on the back with sparkling smiles. Parents gift their children with flowers over the riveting performances.

Narancia first spots Giorno, and then Mista, and with a raucous holler drags Fugo and Trish over to see the two. It’s then that he spots two very large and tall men bearing semblance to Giorno; then, a well-dressed lady in a fashionable diamond ring, and another blond man who smells distinctly of horses and tea.

"Great job, Giorno!" Shouts Trish as she nears the boy and those real tall companions of his, Fugo and Narancia in-step behind her lithe form. "Oh, hey! Are these the relatives you were talking about?"

Relatives? Those dudes Giorno was being all grumpy-butt about? Which one’s the one that beat up a guy in traffic?

As he introduces everyone, he motions in turn to the mentioned family member. “This is my father, Dio; my uncles, Jonathan and Diego; and my aunt, Erina.”

The super-tall guy by the name of Jonathan beams brightly, opening his mouth and cheerfully shouting over the discordant caterwauling of the crowd. “It’s a pleasure to meet all of your friends, Giorno!”

Holy shit, wait a sec! Was that — was that English?! They didn’t speak Italian…? At all…?

“Nice to meet you. My name is Fugo. This is Narancia, but he doesn’t speak a lick of English.” Fugo remains cordial as always, but Narancia’s pretty sure that Fugo probably just insulted him, that asshole! Always whispering shit behind his back — Narancia can’t believe that he actually cuddles up to this shithead!

“My name’s Trish! I’m the whole reason Giorno and Mista are dating, ‘cause without me, Giorno would not have realised his feelings.”

“That’s not true!” Why’s Giorno looking so embarrassed?

“Oi firmly believe tha’ they wouldn’t be snogging if it weren’t for you, Miss Trish. You look loike one of my pals from the ‘orse race back in the States — she ‘ad pink ‘air loike yours, but she looked sorta loike a man.”

“That’s nothing to say about a lady, Diego!” Why was Jonathan yelling? Why does he look offended? What did the horse-scented one say?

“It’s true!”

WHAT THE FUCK IS HAPPENING?

“My English, uh — it isn’t that good. What does ‘snogging’ mean?”
“It’s like ‘making out’ in laymen’s terms, Trish. Can you all slow down so that I can translate?”

In Italian, thank fuck, Giorno manages to make clear what the others had said with swift paraphrasing, and concludes that with, “Sorry, all. Did you enjoy the show?”

Finally, something he can understand! “I thought the music kinda sucked — not you, Giorno, but just the peppy stuff. Y’know, I like rap! I don’t got a clue what Tupac says, but it sounds cool.” Fugo’s nimble hand materializes at the back of his head to deliver a smack. “What the hell?!”

“You don’t compliment someone’s performance by insulting it.”

“I said the music sucks, not he sucks! He’s good!”

By the sudden flurry of English and bouts of laughter, Narancia only assumes that all of that was translated. Giorno doesn’t appear at all upset, instead smiling serenely to himself. “I wasn’t expecting everyone to show up. What happened to the cafe?”

“Tried to get the whole cafe to close for the night.” Trish begins, gesturing with flat palms facing the ceiling, fingers outstretched. “Dad said ‘no’ because it’s Friday. I said that he has to give me the day to see the musical, then, ‘cause I got my ticket for tonight. He agreed! After an argument. I got Fugo and Narancia to call in sick, but Buccellati refused.”

It, quite frankly, was not difficult to get Narancia to escape work and come watch Giorno flaunt his ass on stage. Narancia enjoys the cafe, sure, but when it comes down to it, a day off is always appreciated.

“I honestly feel awful for leaving him to fare by himself.” Fugo tells with a huff. “He’ll probably be furious with us.”

“We’re s’possed to get doctor’s notes for this stuff, right?” Asks Narancia, met then with some nods. “But whatever. Hey, Giorno’s dad?” It’s not socially acceptable to call your friend’s dad that you just met by his first name, is it? Well, Narancia’s already forgotten it, anyhow.

“Yes?” Oh, good! He speaks Italian, too! ...hey, why’s Giorno wearing that ‘oh no’ face?

“How come your family is ripped but Giorno’s not? Why’s he so thin and stick-ish?” Ow, Fugo, stop smacking him!

With lips pulling up into the widest, most sharp-toothed grin Narancia’s ever seen — this dude had to be like, a vampire or something! — Dio purportedly tells his relatives what was said while Fugo explains in utter exasperation that Narancia shouldn’t just ask someone that.

“It’s genetics.” Says a glowering Giorno, arms crossed. For a moment Narancia believes that he’s pissed Giorno off with that question the elder made, but it’s truly the ensuing remarks from his family that he predicted before the answer even came forth. (Giorno was expecting this! He’s so smart.)

“It’s all ‘cause ‘e shagged a midget, Oi believe.” Eesh, Diego — how tall are you, again?

Dio translates that, Narancia feels bad for about half a second, and then Fugo ushers him out while announcing that they’re going home and goodnight.

Sheesh! No need to be so hasty, Fugo! They can visit for a tad bit longer, right? Right? Well, not anymore, because Fugo’s shoving him toward the car park, and Fugo’s pretty damn strong. When they’re both inside of his mother’s Volkswagen (Fugo always says that it’s his car quite a lot, but technically it isn’t, ‘cause he isn’t paying the insurance), he kicks the engine into gear and shockingly enough murmurs,
“Sorry — for hitting you, I mean.”

Whoa whoa whoa there! They haven’t tried to slaughter each other yet! It’s too soon for apologies!

“Y’always smack me.” Grumbles Narancia, arms crossing over his chest, feet kicking up to the dashboard and resting there with ankles crossed.

“I realise.”

“Why’re ya always beatin’ me up?” He’s genuinely expecting a scathing insult to his intelligence, like always, and maybe another slap, too, but to his astonishment he gets a susurration of,

“Because I have the worst temper, and can’t control myself.”

“No kiddin’.”

“Narancia — I try, but it never works.” Fugo pulls away from the parking lot, Volkswagen rolling over the asphalt and away into the darkened street. The headlights illuminate a small cat darting swiftly across the road, and Fugo instinctively slows until the little guy makes it to the safety of someone’s backyard. They’re not looking at one another; it’s quiet, partially due to Narancia contemplating making a snide remark. Oh, all the things he could say.

“I don’t actually want to hurt you.”

“Y’ain’t tryin’ hard enough, then,” Narancia starts vehemently, eyes locked on the street behind them from the rearview mirror, “‘cause you’re always hurting me!”

“I want to get better. I care about you, far too much in fact, to —”

“I know y’do because y’say it every time we fight. An’ I care about you, Fugo, but yer always kicking and scratching and pullin’ my hair and stuff. I know I’m dumb, but I wanna go to school or somethin’ one day, an’ hittin’ me ain’t helpin’ me learn.”

Fugo grows aphonic. The vehicle takes a sharp left turn, scraping against the curb. Contrasting with his usual reactions, Fugo doesn’t shout out or curse, but with a disconcerted expression grasps the steering wheel until his knuckles turn white. He bites down on his lower lip once, a tiny shake of his head thereafter, eyes darting everywhere but to Narancia himself.

Why, of all times, must they have such a painful discussion now? Wasn’t everything all joyous and fine not moments before? How come their relationship is so broken?

“I haven’t a clue why you stick around — why you’ve never told my family how much I hurt you, or tried to move out.”

“I don’t wanna.” Says Narancia, certainly dismayed by the fact that Fugo could even suggest such a farfetched thing. He gauges the change in Fugo’s expression from perturbed frustration to stunned bewilderment. “You saved me from all the shit I went through.”

“You don’t owe it to me to stay.”

“Well — yeah, but I wanna! I know you’re still a good person! ‘Sides, I like it best when we’re doin’ things like joking and playin’ games. You’re not really hittin’ me ‘cause you wanna kill me, jus’ like how I’m not really gonna kill ya when I say that I will! You’re still my best bud. It just hurts my feelings when we fight li’ that.”
When the Volkswagen pulls up to the house, Fugo parks and gently murmurs, “I’ll try to get better, Narancia.”

“And I’ll try to say that I’ll kill ya less.” Narancia offers the smallest of playful grins. “I think I owe ya a swat on the shoulder just to make us even.”

Fugo permissively sticks his arm out, earning a gentle bop on the shoulder, and both proceed to hop out of the car after exchanging affectionate smiles. They can fix this. Narancia knows that they can fix this, that they can heal the broken aspects of their relationship. Because, other than that, it’s great and warm and nice, and maybe if the two of them weren’t so vicious they wouldn’t have this problem. But, Narancia’s confident — Fugo’s surely gonna try, and then they’ll fix everything!

“FUUUGO, 10:00AM: Christmas party is on the 21st, thought I’d let everyone know.
YOU, 10:01AM: i kno im rite next to u!!!

CAFE MOM, 10:15AM: Thank you, Fugo. I’ll be there. What time?
FUUUGO, 10:18AM: Sorry — it’s at six in the evening. My mother and father are going on a date that night, so we’ll be alone. They’ll provide food for us, they said.
YOU, 10:20AM: so basicly we can all play video games really loud i hope u guys like mario kart and mario party and mario everything

CAFE MOM, 10:24AM: I can’t say I’ve ever played video games before. Should I bring food over?
FUUUGO, 10:25AM: If you want to, go ahead.

ABBITCHIO, 10:30AM: Great. I’ll bring wine.

PINKIE, 10:32AM: And then not share it with the rest of us?

ABBITCHIO, 10:34AM: Exactly.

CAFE MOM, 10:37AM: Leone, you can’t be inebriated during the event. We’re supposed to be spending time together.
YOU, 10:40AM: yea dad. thx mom

ABBITCHIO, 10:41AM: If you think I’m going to be sober for this, you don’t know me at all.

GIOGIOGIOGIOGIO, 10:43AM: I’ll let Mista know, Fugo. Thanks again for inviting me.
FUUUGO, 10:44AM: No problem.

YOU, 10:44AM: can some1 bring cheesecake i <3 cheesecake

PINKIE, 10:45AM: YES ILL GET IT

FUUUGO, 10:47AM: Get the kind with the strawberries on top.

PINKIE, 10:48AM: I’ll get a buncha different kinds of cheesecake Im sure dad wont mind.
GIOGIOGIOGIO, 10:50AM: Chocolate preferred.

ABBITCHIO, 10:54AM: You could just get some chocolate cake, but you have to be prissy about it.

FUUUGO, 10:56AM: I distantly remember you spending 100 euros on a single bottle of wine once. Not to take sides here.

GIOGIOGIOGIO, 10:57AM: this is from mista, he cant even eat cake without u being rude about it, cn u chill out for five secs thx

GIOGIOGIOGIO, 10:57AM: He snatched my phone out of my hand before I could respond. Sorry.

ABBITCHIO, 10:58AM: // i have no words, only spite.

CAFE MOM, 11:00AM: Don’t ruin the occasion for us. That goes out to all of you.

YOU, 11:02AM: ok but how is chocolate cheesecake prissy i just want 2 kno bc i think its fuckin amazing

YOU, 11:03AM: like not to drag this out

YOU, 11:03AM: but i just wanna kno abt it”

For future reference, Mista’s name in Narancia’s cell is “HATMAN”.

Narancia never gets a response from Abbacchio about how chocolate cheesecake is prissy — Fugo told him simply the night of the conversation that it was merely a shot at antagonizing Giorno and that’s all, that he most likely didn’t think chocolate cheesecake was at all “prissy”, and wouldn’t respond because he had no response. Narancia believes it, knowing Abbacchio.

The day of the party results in the two of them scrambling to get decorations hung up. Fugo’s mother and father found the American custom of putting up Christmas trees to be rather interesting, and had started doing it when he was a child; in the corner by their fireplace, which doesn’t work at all, is a very tall fake fir tree covered in garland and sparkly lights that are too thickly placed on. Narancia enjoys all of the lights, and though Fugo protested initially when they were setting up the tree together with his mother and father, everyone seemed to come to a consensus. There’s not even a star or angel or anything atop the tree, merely a scrap of paper tucked into the top branches with a cartoon star drawn on it in red sharpie (Narancia might have broken the original star they had).

Nonetheless, it looks kind of cute, if silly.

Their guardians had created what Narancia considers a rather lavish feast for all of the party attendants, complete with an entire honey-glazed ham that everyone knows Abbacchio will eat three-fourths of before anyone else can have a slice; there’s deviled eggs and salad and this and that and a whole plethora of things Narancia can’t name because there’s just so much of it. He’s honestly tempted to eat everything here, right now, before anyone else gets here — especially when Fugo tells him to plate everything and make the dining room table look nice.

It all. Looks. So. Good.

“Narancia!” Dammit! Caught.
“It’s just — it looks good! I’m so hungry, Fugo, you don’t understand!”

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Trish really isn’t expecting many gifts to show up at Fugo’s house, because they’re all broke as hell — Trish has been saving her money for the holiday season since, oh, about January she thinks. Everyone else? There’s no way. Buccellati will probably surprise everyone with something, but the rest of her pals are all completely bankrupt in one way or another.

She enters Fugo’s house with six different cakes balanced strategically on top of one another, holding the door open with her foot until Narancia spins back around and actually holds it open like a polite man should for her; the table is already filled with so much food, she’s not sure where to put any of the desserts, and opts to stick them on the fake-marble countertops instead. When she was in the grocery store picking these up, she didn’t consider the fact that it may be overkill to purchase this many variants of holiday cakes. But, fuck it.

They’re teenagers, dammit! They can gorge on cake all they want!

Trish is the first to show up, and that’s because Trish left the house eagerly a little too early, thinking it’d take her a long time to get through grocery lines and to pick out cakes in general. But when she’d gotten there, the store had an entire section just dedicated to the bakery’s fresh holiday cakes, and Trish can’t exactly say she was careful with her wallet when selecting them. They all just looked… so… yummy…

It was absolutely terrible trying to convince her father to close down the cafe a few hours early, just because the party started two hours before they technically closed — she assumed no one wanted to work, because after her shift, she certainly didn’t want to go back. The argument about it lasted an hour, and finally ended when Trish began fake-crying. Diavolo never liked it when she cried at all, fake or real, and that was usually the only way to get the stubborn man to listen. Case in point, if Doppio were to cry, Diavolo would probably have a conniption.

See, because Trish is an absolute genius when it comes to planning, when she got off of work at around three, she immediately headed home to remind her fathers that, oh yeah, there’s this party, see? And we need to close down the cafe a few hours earlier. Couldn’t have done it a few days before or anything.

At least the more aggressive customers wouldn’t be showing up to bother anyone on the closing staff for a last-minute muffin or something.

The split second everyone arrives, with Abbacchio limping in last because he’s still in pain from his injuries, is the second that Narancia races everyone into the dining room, and a bunch of omnivorous, starving teenagers and two twenty year-olds start tearing into the food like cavemen. In retrospect, Fugo’s parents leaving them alone to do whatever the hell they wanted all night and destroy the house was an awful idea.

Food and a movie comes first. A Disney movie, specifically, one that Trish had brought over from her DVD case of holiday films that she’d never get tired of. The Nightmare Before Christmas. No one objected at the time, though Abbacchio’s sitting there with a grumpy-grouch expression, arms crossed, while Trish and Giorno have their own little sing-along session with Narancia beatboxing in the background. Beatboxing doesn’t quite fit the tone of the music, but nonetheless, it’s fun.
After that, it’s gifts, and Trish merely starts handing out cheesy “Best Friends” keychains to everyone. She’d never grown out of friendship charms, always purchases and gives them out whenever she sees them in the jewelry stores she frequents. Her gestures are never reciprocated, but her purse and keyrings are utterly filled with charms that say “best” on them, for those certain charms that come in packs of two or three. The ones she’s giving out now merely have “Best Friends 4Ever” engraved into a flat metal heart, and the idea of seeing Abbacchio or Buccellati using them doesn’t fit…but it’s the thought that counts, and she doesn’t have the money nor the age to buy Abbacchio his damn chardonnay.

They’d all chipped in some money to get Mista a new phone, since he’d been lamenting over and over about it at work — on top of being a gesture of kindness, knowing that he wouldn’t be able to afford one for a long while as replacement flip-phones are all but existing nowadays, it was also a way of making him shut the fuck up about it. Yes, Mista, everyone knows what happened. Yes, it sucks not being able to talk to Giorno all the time. We know. The world knows. The other side of the world can fucking hear your complaints, Mista.

“I arranged with the boss,” begins Buccellati; they’re sitting on the floor now, in a happy circle strewn with reddish wrapping paper from Mista’s present, “for everyone to have paid time off the next day off each of you have.”

“How the… the fuck…” Trish begins, groping for words. “Did you convince my dad… You know, it took me an hour to get him to close the cafe down two hours early! I don’t want to know how you pulled that off!”

“It was simple,” Buccellati begins, though something in his expression says that the conversation hurt. “I mentioned that since I was the only one running the cafe on Friday, that I should get a bonus,” that was awfully bold of him, Trish thinks, “and that I wanted it to be that. Even though all of you abandoned responsibility.”

“Sorry.” Says Giorno, as if by instinct.

Everyone else had already gotten the spiel from Buccellati, about how Friday night was awful and that he was left to fare alone, that at one point Abbacchio had to hop on the cash register and learn the ropes while Buccellati burned himself constantly and made the biggest mess in the history of messes trying to deal with everyone. Apparently, the tip jar was overflowing because some regulars felt bad and gave pity-tips, and Buccellati took all fifty euros for himself — which is ridiculous, because that jar’s only had about a max of twenty euros in it at once before. Narancia had bemoaned that it was unfair that he got all of that cash, but Buccellati bluntly responded that they should’ve shown up for work if they wanted to get paid.

“I’ve also arranged that, should you want the job, Giorno, you’re hired the second you ask.”

Giorno looks pleasantly surprised, and murmurs out a small thanks, looking now as though he’s contemplating how to bring that up to his father.

“Hopefully you’re more responsible than the rest of us.” Comments Fugo.

“What’d you get Abbacchio, though?” Narancia leans forward, elbows on his knees and chin in his palms. “Is the wedding all ready and all?”

“He gets his gift on Christmas. I couldn’t bring it in here.”

Trish concludes that it’s either a dildo or a machine gun. What else would Abbacchio want that Buccellati can’t bring into the house?
Next up is Mario Kart on the Wii. Trish doesn’t own any video game systems, and by the exchanged looks by the rest of their rag-tag little Christmas group, no one else seems to, either. Fugo tells Narancia to “get the Wii out of the bedroom”, which ignites a spark of suspicion in the back of her mind. Those two always go home together, always are around one another… Whenever they hang out, Fugo always drops Narancia off last…

Wait, those two aren’t…

“The bedroom?” Trish echoes, wondering why no one else is suspicious. Like, hello, guys? Guys? They always come into work together, even if they’re scheduled differently! There’s something up with that! …guys?

“Narancia is over here all the time.” Fugo tells, and though Trish can’t exactly tell that he’s lying or twisting the truth… her instincts just say that something is up. Something… very weird. Some big-ass secret is being kept. Ooh…

Trish doesn’t desire to inquire about it in front of all of their friends, instead taking to watching the boys set up the Wii system. She has minimal understanding of how this thing works, like… you’re supposed to move the controller around and then the character on the game responds to that, right? Uh…

“We only got two controllers, ‘cause it’s always just us playin’ the game.” Narancia tells, passing one of the white stick-shaped controller-thingies to Trish first, then another to Fugo. “Winner of each round switches out with someone who isn’t playin’, is that fair?”

“What’s the objective of the game?” Trish inquires.

“It’s like a racing game! I’m the absolute master of Mario Kart, though, so Fugo’s gonna show y’how to play! Y’gotta… hold the controller like this.”

Right. Yeah, that makes sense. She thinks.

The first lesson goes absolutely wonderfully, all sarcasm positively fucking intended. It’s the easiest course in the game, says Fugo, but Trish finds that she’s hit about every wall. She can’t turn! She can’t do anything, can’t remember how to back the go-cart up or make decent turns without slamming into someone. Power-ups are a no-go, because she always forgets how to use certain ones, what all of those weird symbols mean. The mushroom doesn’t make her character (Princess Peach) grow bigger at all, or shrink all the other racers down. The bullet doesn’t let her shoot everyone. The turtle shells don’t increase her defense! None of this makes any sense whatsoever!

Ugh!

It takes the entire group a while to get used to the mechanics, and then they find themselves sitting back and watching Fugo and Narancia face off. These two are too good — that’s all they probably do, Trish reasons. They just… they sit back and play this stupid racing game, on this really long course called “Rainbow Road” which looks like an acid trip gone horribly awry. For some reason, the two are cursing at each other and bumping into one another’s shoulders, and then Trish figures out that they’re trying to sabotage each other’s control of their specific character.

Something about this induces adrenaline just from watching. They’re neck and neck, about to complete the third lap, and the whole time they’re shooting swift commentary back and forth.

“Don’t you dare use that, Narancia —”
“I’m gonna use it.”

“You can’t use it.”

“Begging, Fugo?”

“I’m not pleading for a thing.”

“You’re aware that I can overtake yer ass at literally any time, right?”

“Only because I’m letting you.”

“I’m gonna use it—”

“Do not put your finger on that button—”

A last-second invincibility power-up sends Narancia flying through the finish line, and Fugo’s vehicle spinning out. He shoots Narancia a glower, one that’s all but enraged, and then elbows the other boy before raising the controller at the rest of the group and asking who wants to play next.

Trish, meanwhile, is caught up in their previous banter. If there was no context, she’d have assumed something pretty nasty was happening, especially because of the shouting that resounded from the both of them after Narancia’s victory. There’s some blatant sexual tension in the air, over a game of Mario Kart no less. There’s totally something going on between those two.

Mario Kart ends at around ten, which leads into Mario Party — an even worse variant of the friendship-destroying series. Trish finds she’s far better at that, despite the fact that the star she got was stolen from her by Abbacchio, resulting in her smacking him on the shoulder; had she been anyone else, he would’ve surely hit back with ten times the force. From there, Giorno steals the next star, and for the rest of the game it feels as though it’s Giorno versus Abbacchio with a side-serving of Trish and Buccellati. Eventually Abbacchio pulls off a victory, and literal hell ensues.

Narancia suggests teams. Sure, that’s fine and all, but the teams consist of Abbacchio and Buccellati versus Giorno and Mista. That would otherwise be a cute couple’s challenge type thing, if it wasn’t another round of Ass-cop versus Blond Twink.

Technically, Mario Party isn’t meant for team-play, at least not generally. It’s decided that whichever member of whichever team pulls off a victory gets their team the overall title of “champion”. Immediately, to avoid Abbacchio screaming in her ear — since she’s wedged between him and Mista on the couch — she sinks down to the floor and scoots closer to the television.

That round almost ends in bloodshed. Trish tries to forget the details, but the number of times someone got bitch-slapped or shoved or something is high within the hundreds. The sheer volume of their cursing prompted Fugo’s neighbors to come over and ask if everything was alright, to which Fugo awkwardly had to answer that yes, it’s fine, that their Christmas party got a little bit too rowdy. The neighbors looked as though they were the type of people who never missed a day at church, preferred a quiet lifestyle, spent all of their money on classical music and went to operas… Long story short, those folks were quite serious-looking, seeming very concerned when they peered into the house to discover a gaggle of teens supervised by Buccellati and Abbacchio.

Buccellati and Abbacchio, who thought it was funny to glance at the neighbors and plant one on one another. (When Trish asked about why their maturity had dropped to that level, Abbacchio
stated it was his idea — but Trish has this deep-seated feeling that Buccellati was in on it.)

They’re forced to move on to a different game.

“Spin th’ bottle?” Narancia suggests.

“That’d work, if not everyone was already dating. It’d get dull with the three of us, sitting in a circle, in our little world of being single.” Counters Trish.

“Board games?” Offers Giorno.

“Those involve the number four.” Mista emphasizes, shaking the smaller blond’s shoulders in pure agony. “Do you wanna know why we lost Mario Party, GioGio?”

“Because we suck?”

“Because of the number four. I played th’ game — I’m gonna be cursed forever.”

“Drinking game.”

“Leone, no.”

“Karaoke?”

“Giorno, you’re the only one that can sing.” Trish folds her arms over her chest.

“Someone should Google ‘party games’.” Says Mista.

“I’m sure there’s another movie we could watch.” Buccellati attempts. “Has anyone seen Il Postino?”

“The Notebook!”

In exasperation, Trish says, “Mista — The Notebook is one of the worst romance movies of any generation. I don’t care what language it’s in — it’s terrible! Nicholas Sparks isn’t a real author, he’s just a guy with bad ideas.”

“You’re a girly-girl, you’re s’possed to like that stuff, y’know.”

“I’m a girly-girl with good taste.”

“I’m gonna Google ‘party games’ like Mista said.” Thank you, Narancia.

“Les Mis.” Giorno tries, met with several shaking heads. “Alright… I think all of us would enjoy any of the James Bond films.”

“Look at that,” begins Abbacchio, scathingly, “the kid has actual taste.”

“Yeah, but if we get those on the pay-per-view,” Mista reminds, “they’ll be the English versions, and Narancia an’ I can’t read th’ subtitles that fast.”

“No one here has a Netflix subscription?” Asks Trish — she used to have one, but her father cancelled theirs because Trish wouldn’t get her homework done. Too busy watching good shows to care. Hope flares in her chest, dying as soon as the whole group tells her no.

Fugo takes a breath as if to make a suggestion, when Narancia starts eagerly bouncing around and waving his phone around. “I got it! I got it, guys — I ain’t played this since I was little an’ all the
kids bullied me.” Ouch. “Truth or Dare!”

That’s going to end horribly.

The game lasts until one in the morning. Admittedly, none of them were supposed to be out this long, and everyone’s half-asleep. Most of the game was utter bullshit, stupid things like dumping water on someone’s head (Trish’s coiffure has lost all of its beautiful volume by the end of the game because of that), telling “the most embarrassing story” (Giorno’s is about Diego’s copious usage of the word “shag” to describe the nature of his current relationship), prank calls, et cetera. Stupid teenager shit. But there are some things, some diamonds in the rough, that Trish will never forget.

First — Buccellati tried taking selfies once. It’s not an understatement to say that Trish herself has a metric fuckton of pictures of herself littering her phone’s SD card. She’s photogenic and cute, however, and there’s the difference. The split second Mista dared Buccellati to show “an embarrassing picture of himself”, he immediately dug into his plain white HTC phone and flicked his thumb over the screen until he found something.

Trish wasn’t expecting the gem that she got to lay eyes upon. The poor, socially-confused bastard is standing in his bathroom, phone poised in front of the mirror, attempting one of the most shitty peace signs Trish’d ever seen. He explains that he was going to delete the image, for he took it over a year ago, but never did. That was the first, and last, selfie attempt of Bruno Buccellati’s career.

(She wants it framed.)

Second — Trish dares Narancia to give someone a piggyback ride around the room. Narancia glances from person to person, can’t decide, and eventually she suggests it be Buccellati. He looks a lot lighter than others, at least to Trish, and she’s in a skirt — doesn’t exactly want to be flashing people. With their combined heights, Buccellati’s head nearly hits the ceiling, and Narancia proves strong enough to sprint around the entire house and its horribly short height, until he’s winded and has to set Buccellati back down. Both Trish and Giorno get that on video.

Third — Abbacchio and Giorno seek to go at each other’s throats. The first dare Giorno got was, in fact, from Abbacchio (the “embarrassing story” one). Abbacchio wasn’t really happy with the result, having nothing to hold over Giorno’s head like he most likely intended. When it comes time for Giorno to ask someone, he chooses Abbacchio, and Abbacchio fearlessly picks “dare”. This prompts Giorno to dare Abbacchio to let Trish give him a new hairstyle, and suffice to say Abbacchio is about ready to explode. There’s smoke coming out of his ears and all, especially when Trish smirks from ear-to-ear and inquires as to if Fugo’s mother owns a curling iron.

No one is chickenshit enough to wimp out of the dares, and most of the game thus far has been nothing but dare dare dare. Even Abbacchio, with his long platinum hair, now has to deal with Trish giving him large curls and a ponytail to top it off. But, he looks sorta cute in her honest opinion, and she’s proud of her work.

He’s not proud of her work. But Trish is. And that’s what matters.

Fourth — Trish picks truth once, just to play it safe (this was after the point where Narancia dumped water on her head). Fugo asks her if she’s ever dated anyone, who she’s in love with and all that cliche stuff. And that… prompts a lot of introspection from her. Trish sets up all of her friends, knows all about dating and healthy relationships and yadda yadda yadda, but she’s never gone on a date. Never even had a crush before, she thinks. Doesn’t even know her own sexuality.
for certain. “You’ll probably think it’s childish, but I’ve never had a crush on anyone — I don’t even know who I’m into. I mean, right now, I could swing any way that I want to. I don’t know.”

“You’re only fifteen.” Buccellati assures. “There’s time.”

Aww. Thanks, mom.

Fifth — Abbacchio, still upset about his hair, picks Truth when Trish prompts him. “Okay, great,” she begins, a devious smirk playing on pink-painted lips, “Abbacchio — out of everyone here besides Buccellati, who would you date?”

Abbacchio’s expression goes immediately from curious to a twisted, nasty scowl, and he spits, “I wouldn’t date any of you fucktards,” before planting a kiss on Buccellati’s cheek. That wasn’t the answer to the question, at all, but everyone comes to a silent consensus and lets the question drop. Antagonising the man further will only lead to death, and maybe a nuke going off.

Sixth — When Giorno’s turn for torture comes about, Buccellati doesn’t have a single clue what to dare him to do, looking more as though he had a question in mind. Trish silently thinks, “Well, why not dare him to answer your question?” but keeps silent. Buccellati’s eyes dart around for a second before Narancia leans and gives a suggestion, and though seemingly unsure, Giorno and Mista are dared to switch shirts for the rest of the night.

Trish discovers that Giorno is super thin and tiny, and that Mista is more built than she thought, because those two are utterly unafraid of stripping in front of their companions. Giorno’s keyhole sweater doesn’t even fit on Mista, at least not well, and he’s stretched it out quite a bit. Mista’s cashmere sweater, of course, makes Giorno look even smaller than he is. The sleeves go over his hands, but he looks so warm and snuggly in that — Trish should invest her money in an oversized sweater, she thinks momentarily, before catching the glance that Giorno continually gives his partner. It’s a stare of carnality, sensual and curious, and just a little bit coy.

Giorno Giovanna is fucking thirsty.

Suddenly, the whole group finds that they’re picking on a thirsty fifteen year old in an oversized sweater.

Seventh is, of course, Trish deciding that Giorno’s thirst is too obvious to not give him shit over, and dares Mista to eat peanut butter off of his stomach. Giorno manages to keep his tone apathetic as he asks where the jar is, but both he and Mista are sixty-five different shades of crimson. The whole group bursts into raucous laughter, Trish leaning over and eventually lying on the floor struggling to breathe, tears leaking down her face and smearing her makeup. She manages to spit out that she was just kidding, that she doesn’t want to watch that happen, but it comes out breathy and unintelligible. Trish goes to pick someone else, which brings her to the eighth and greatest highlight of the night.

Mother fucking Narancia Ghirga.

She does this in part because she’s curious, and in part because she thinks it’ll turn out innocently hilarious.

It doesn’t.

The dare is to give someone a lap dance, and Narancia has to think about that — “A lap dance? One of those sexy things girls always do in th’ clubs? I dunno how t’do that, but I’ll give it a shot! On who?” Trish shrugs. She’s willing to be the one that sits there and gets ass if that’s what it takes to get the dare done, but Narancia’s not looking at her. Narancia glances at Giorno and
Mista, shakes his head; repeats that with Abbacchio and Buccellati, the former giving Narancia a death-glare; and then finally rests his gaze on Fugo.

Everyone is expecting this to be comedic or satirical or something of the sort, anything but what it turns out to be. Trish brings up “strip club music” on YouTube using her phone and cranks the volume all the way up, and Fugo pulls out a chair from the kitchen and sits in it. And that’s when Narancia goes to work, and consequently when the whole group agrees that Narancia and the cafe just aren’t a good fit. This kid should be working in the clubs. The way he tosses his head and sprawls out over Fugo is exactly like a well-choreographed stripping scene from a movie; Fugo’s eyes are the size of saucers, and all he can do is sit there slack-jawed.

Narancia gets a little too in-character, starts trying to undo his own shirt, and that’s when Fugo has to request that this stop. And that’s, coincidentally, when Trish realises that Fugo is now going to be having a sexual crisis for the next few days.

Truth or Dare is no longer fun, and it’s super early in the morning, so the party breaks up and everyone goes home. Trish opts to walk, since there’s no way in hell anyone will drive her home at one in the fucking morning. Not five minutes into it, she gets a text message from Fugo.

“Trish, I cannot believe I’m about to ask you this. I need help.”

“With the sexual crisis nara gave u?”

“Yeah.”

Oh, boy. The Love Expert is on it.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Firsty-timey smutty shit.

Chapter Notes

This fucking sucks for multiple reasons.
I haven't written smut in two years lmao. ALSO this is kind of... just Mista playing with Giorno's dick because I couldn't be assed to finish this for reasons I'll get into in the end notes. In short I've just had fucking bombs dropped on me and I just don't WANT to finish this chapter. So here's a shitty, unsexy draft, since I reasoned at least someone would like it. (Somehow it hit 4,599 words. :/)

This is in a separate chapter where literally nothing is important to the plot, so if you're very uncomfortable with sex, you can go ahead and skip this -- I'll be uploading the 14th gay-ass fluffy chapter right after this, so tonight's update will be a dual one. The comfort of my readers is super important. All I'll do is elude to this sometimes, but the details are all right here, so it won't be more than a passing mention.

If you're worried that you're missing plot points if you skip this, you've only missed the fact that Dio mentions he offended the family and that they skipped a day of the visit b/c Dio is an ass (I will elude to this part in the wonderful Christmas chapter). That line was super brief, so no worries. There's no details as to how he managed that. (It's Dio, so there's a plethora of ways.)

If you want to read the sexy stuff... there aren't any weird kinks or anything, in fact this is pretty vanilla. Just boys being bros and stuff. And again. It kind of sucks ass, and not in the literal and wonderful sense.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What the hell is he doing?

Two in the morning. After the party. Technically, it’s December 22nd now, though Giorno sometimes likes to kid himself by saying that it’s “not tomorrow” until he finally goes to bed. And he tries when he gets home, tries for a good thirty minutes, rolling around with his hair undone and his bangs clipped back over his head. He’s comfortable, warm underneath the blankets and in pajamas. Dio’s out like a light in the other room, snoring inelegantly; the rest of the family is back at the hotel. His phone is off, charging, and no one is bothering him.

The problem is, he knows the exact reason as to why he can’t sleep. He can’t sleep because of Mista. Because of that stupid game of Truth or Dare, where he ended up sitting there for the entire night in Mista’s soft and Mista-scented sweater, where Mista ended up in a top that was more revealing than intended because it was two sizes too small. This is just like the last night they spent
together, where Mista wasn’t wearing a shirt at all — but there’s something worse, something more provocative, about the way his skin showed through the cutout in the sweater, how it was riding up just a bit and exposed his lower body. And… fuck. Fuck, fuck, fuck.

Hormones are the most awful, deplorable, dumbest things on the planet. Giorno can’t come up with better words for it. They’re stupid! They suck! They… they’re… bad! Argh!

He shouldn’t be getting so hot and bothered over something like that. Definitely not. He can’t be, told himself when they were switching shirts again and when they were walking home together that he wouldn’t be. The staring was just self-indulgent, that’s all. There was nothing wrong. There wasn’t any inklings of heat gathering in the pit of his stomach, no enduring images in the back of his mind. When he peeled his sweater off before changing into pajamas consisting of a baggy T-shirt and sweatpants, Mista’s essence didn’t at all roll over his nose and elicit any sort of licentious thoughts.

This is wildly inappropriate.

He should not be doing this.

He’s got his face half-stuffed into his pillow, eyes squinted shut, one hand curled into a fist with his folded fingertips holding down his lips as if to muffle his intoxicated little whines, high-pitched and needy. Having never done something like this before, Giorno’s too humiliated to do anything besides run his fingertips over and squeeze himself through his clothing — he can’t imagine how this would feel if it were Mista doing it instead, how much better it might be, if more embarrassing. What would he say? How would he feel, bare and revealed and firm, breath and muscles shaky, sweat glistening over olive skin —

— that’s as far as his thoughts go, halting as his breath and a muffled wail break over his fingers. He’s louder than he should be, and he knows it, praying to any lord out there that Dio doesn’t wake up and catch him red-handed with these terrible, horrible thoughts plaguing the back of his mind.

Giorno requires a few moments to breathe heavily, chest heaving, now lying with a half-lidded gaze locked at the ceiling, before he eventually climbs out of bed and goes to get the stickiness off of himself and change clothes.

Again.

Guess who didn’t get any fucking sleep?

Luckily for Giorno, he doesn’t head back to school until after December ends, and thank God for that — he doesn’t believe he could handle going back today, especially with the state he’s still in, what with his mind in the gutter and all that.

Groggy and with blurry, unfocused vision, he pats at the space next to him until his hand lands squarely on the cold plastic of his phone, and flicks the machine back on. It’s seven in the morning, and several times that night he woke up for one reason or another — either he was hungry, or had to use the restroom, or was cold, or he was sleeping at an awkward angle. The crick in his neck signals that this is one of those mornings, one where he could really use some coffee because he feels like the world is ending.

“dude giogio!!” Ah. Yes, good morning, Mista. “oh man i activated my phone this morning like as soon as i could and i dont kno what candy crush saga is but everyl says its fun”
There he is, in all of his cute glory, probably lounging around on his couch or in the breakroom at work, playing with his phone in utter fascination. Mista is just... so cute, so indescribably cute, and Giorno has no words. Nothing. He can’t say a thing — if someone were to ask why Mista, he’d only have a shrug as a response, because he doesn’t quite know himself. Maybe it’s the way Mista’s eyes light up whenever something wonderful happens, or the way he gets so impassioned about a vehement dislike for the number four — it might be one of the oddest phobias Giorno has ever heard of, but it’s charming in a way. Passion is an excellent thing to have, and Giorno loves bringing up the topic of books to Mista just to hear the taller go off on a rant about how the characters in his newest find are having romantic trouble for whatever reasons.

Aside from being positively adorable, he’s also good-looking, and looks quite wonderful with his shirt off —

— alright, Giorno, Jesus Christ. Time to go to church and stop sinning there, bud.

The day goes as planned. The family meets up — Jonathan has recently taken to wearing those little red Santa hats everywhere — and goes out to breakfast, participating in conversation that starts off gentle but eventually turns into an aggressive battle of wit and bickering over events long past. Diego chatters about dinosaurs with Jonathan until Giorno glances at his phone, and then earns himself a comment about Mista and their not-at-all sexual encounters (Giorno’s mind flashes back to earlier in the morning); Erina reprimands the boys for not behaving, and they all straighten up but within ten minutes go back to their bullshit brawling. It’s the family usual this morning.

In the afternoon, everyone gathers around the television and watches a movie that none of them could agree on and had to flip a coin over; Giorno appreciates Rent in all of its glory, and is grateful to be able to watch it in English and not have to translate Italian for once, but it becomes increasingly more difficult to sit by and enjoy himself when every four seconds, someone comments snidely on the music. The rest of his family doesn’t quite enjoy musicals as much as he, though Jonathan and Erina can actually be respectful of his tastes unlike a certain two others — Erina mentions that she more prefers the operas, however, but that’s not bothersome. Especially because she says it only once and drops the topic, opposing Diego and Dio with their, “Oh look, they’re singing. Again.” commentary.

Jonathan makes lunch; Dio accuses him of lacing it with poison. Jonathan inquires as to where, exactly, he’d get poison from, as he didn’t find any when he was searching for ingredients; Dio suggests that Jonathan “had the gall” to sneak it into the house. A battle ensues, a wine glass breaks over the countertop, the neighbors knock on the door for the fifth time that week to inquire as to what the hell the bloody problem is. Until dinner, the family spends time in complete, solemn quiet.

Because of the earlier argument, Dio orders pizza for dinner, and as soon as dinner ends the other relatives immediately head back to their hotel rooms. The disheartening atmosphere doesn’t serve to distract Giorno from earlier ideas for very long, for as soon as the family is out, he immediately treks off to his room to lie in bed and have a crisis.

Now, he’s curious. Perhaps a little too curious for his own good, but curious nonetheless.

The lights are off, and he hasn’t bothered to turn them on; the door is shut, alongside the window, and the only source of any glow in the room comes from the laptop screen in front of his face. The computer rests against his stomach, for he’s slouched down with his head up against the headboard in horrible and uncomfortable-looking posture, wrists bent almost ninety-degrees as he types. He cannot believe himself right now, thinks that maybe these thoughts are all going a little bit too fast, that he certainly shouldn’t be asking all of these questions. But... how did it work? Like, uh... how did... two men... do the do?
This wasn’t anything he learned in his biology class! There wasn’t any way they’d be teaching that sort of material — as it is, the class only covered the basics of how reproduction worked, not really how to go about it. Nothing really about pain nor pleasure, only facts that were useless to Giorno, because here he is giving into his most wanton desires. He’d never considered anything like this before, so then, why did Mista prompt such… horrible, secretive, ruttish intentions to collect in his head? What about Mista opened his eyes to a carnal world full of delectable, lecherous pleasures?

Giorno’s blue eyes scan restlessly over the flashing images over the luminous screen, and the first moan that breaks over the speakers causes him to slam the laptop shut and pitch it to the other side of the bed. Burying his face in his hands and rolling onto his stomach, he grumbles inaudibly into his palms, a flustered little sigh leaving his lungs seconds after. It takes him another fifteen minutes of tossing and turning side to side and staring at the ceiling and sometimes attempting to suffocate himself in his pillow, before he opens up the cover again and plugs his earbuds back in.

Finishing the video takes all of the effort remaining in his soul, and promptly thereafter his browser history is cleared entirely despite the fact no one uses the computer but him.

He’s having a hard time coping with several things. One of those things is the fact that he just spent time staring at dicks on the computer. Another is how he got turned on by those dicks on the computer, by the actions mere actors who were most likely faking everything performed. The third is the way he cannot unsee what he just saw, but the way he instead sees Mista and himself in the actors’ steads — only it’s real in his mind, not faked, completely unchaste and dirty, fingers curling into and worrying fabric on shirts and sheets, reddened bite marks and lovingly-placed bruises dotting supple skin.

This is the second time he’s masturbated in his entire life, and unlike last night, he’s not being so subtle about it. No more shyness with his own body, in fact, though it takes him some time to finally decide to shuck his bottoms off and crumple them up at the bottom of the mattress, underneath the sheets where he currently lie.

Ideas grow salacious; he fantasises the two together, intertwined and bare, Mista’s olive-skinned hands trailing over Giorno’s pale stomach. He’d trace deft fingertips over the shaft and head, stopping at the head and thumbing over the slit; Giorno would utter the tiniest of pleased little whines, hands wrapping around Mista’s strong back, nails digging into the soft flesh. Giorno’s voice would rise in heat, but he’d soon be silenced by a rough and sloppy kiss; they’d bite one another’s lips playfully and passionately, hips bucking together. Hoarse cries and curses would shoot up into the air around them, a sticky white covering their fingertips and stomachs —

— Giorno’s whimpering isn’t as loud as it was the first time he came, but it’s enough to elicit him slamming his palm over his lips as if to muffle the sound.

Next to him, his phone buzzes, and that’s the only thing that manages to break his enraptured trance. Not the dog howling outside, not the car horns blaring — nothing but his damn phone going off, with a text from none other than the fantasised himself.

“u’ll never guess what i just did”

Yeah? Mista, you’ll never guess what Giorno just did.

By Christmas Eve, Giorno still hasn’t gotten better. He thinks that he’ll be able to, that his family’s presence in the household for the pre-Christmas celebration will take his mind off of things, but
Dio announces that he “sort-of might have accidentally on purpose offended Jonathan and that they’ll come over tomorrow instead”, so fuck that idea. Now, Giorno’s screwed. Completely, and utterly, fucking screwed, especially when Mista shoots a message.

“cn i come over bc i wanna cuddle u”

“also bc im too broke to get u a good christmas gift yknow so i just wanna spend my time off with u and make up for it”

“You don’t have to get me an actual gift. Dad offended my family, so it’s just us tonight. He’s in his room. See you in a while?”

“yeah omg we should read 2gether again”

Yeah! Yeah, reading! That’ll surely keep his mind occupied, and away from Mista’s dick! That’ll certainly help! If they read some cheesy-ass book or something, or watch a dumb movie in his room on his laptop, then Giorno might be able to get his mind somewhere else.

How is he just supposed to tell Mista what he’s been doing? Isn’t the relationship going a bit fast? How does one suggest that they’d like to run their hands through someone’s hair and kiss them as if they were the only important thing on the planet, that they’d like to touch and be touched, that they’ve reverted to animalistic desires when alone in the dark in the confines of their room? How the fuck is Giorno supposed to outright tell Mista that he looked really good in that damn keyhole sweater, a sweater that happened to reveal a bit much, and now that’s all he can think about, and that all he wants to see at this exact moment is Mista stripped bare and fooling around with his body?

Maybe he just… doesn’t. That might save him some sanity.

They spend the whole day together. At first, everything goes well. They’re sitting in Giorno’s room with a book, Giorno reading to him, and after the beginning chapters they get up to snack a bit. By late afternoon, they’ve switched to Rent, which Giorno explains he tried watching the other day and that it was less enjoyable because his family wasn’t keen on musicals. Giorno states that he doesn’t like the Italian version as much as the original English translation, but sticks with watching a bootleg-quality production of it in their native tongue so that Mista will understand and not have to worry about subtitles and all.

Another few snacks and movies takes them into the ten o’clock area. On certain nights, Dio snores when he falls asleep, and the snoring is loud and boorish, easily heard through the walls and the closed door of his room. They make jokes about it at first, and then cuddle up under the sheets. Giorno’s only had a few residual images flash through his mind, images from last night’s session, but other than that he’s been fine.

Until Mista kisses him.

It’s a light kiss, fleeting and delicate, nothing that should’ve ignited the flame it did.

And Mista? Mista is not helping.

“Y’know a few days ago at th’ party?” Yes. Yes, he remembers very vividly, in fact. “S’it bad that I never washed th’ sweater y’wore yet? ‘Cause it still barely smells like ya.”

MISTA, THIS IS NOT HELPING.

“It’s kinda self-indulgent, but I did that with all th’ clothes you borrowed. Your scent’s gone from everythin’ else, though.”
“It’s not… bad.” Giorno rummages in the recesses of his mind for the right words to describe his current feelings. “Admittedly, I wanted to do the same thing. My clothing smelled like you, too.”

“It drove me nuts,” Mista continues, arms around Giorno’s waist, “cause I wanted to do a bunch of stuff with ya, but y’weren’t there.”

*mista. Stop talking. You’re making his situation way worse.*

“Like?” Giorno inquires, though he’s hardly expecting a response that he actually wants to hear. Mista’ll probably just beat around the bush, avoid the topic all together, get Giorno’s hopes up for absolutely no reason and drive him up the wall with his delicately-articulated words —

“I got a feeling y’can guess, ‘cause I saw you starin’ at me at th’ party.”

Shit! Fuck! What the fuck! Fuck this!

“Well — how should I convey this? You looked good in… that shirt. I couldn’t control myself.”

“What about it was so good?” Mista challenges, voice low, a half-lidded stare flickering idly over Giorno’s features in the dusky room.

“I’m not sure.” Oh, yes he is.

Mista shifts a bit so that the two are no longer lying on their sides; instead, Mista’s propped up on his elbows, partially-thrown over Giorno’s chest and looking him in the eye, while the latter boy finds he’s lightly pinned against the mattress. This only furthers the heat in his belly, stomach knotting and heart thudding dully against his ribcage. His mouth falls open, closes, and opens again as he searches for the words he wants to say. “Really, GioGio?”

“It’s —” chokes out a mesmerised blond, blushing harder every time he even attempts to look Mista in the eye while explaining. “Something to do with the skin you were showing.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Mista slips a hand underneath his hat and pulls it off, flinging it aside, where the yarn clings to a few splinters sticking out of the chipped and aged corner of his nightstand. “So, what yer sayin’ is, you’d really like it if I weren’t wearin’ a shirt right now.”

Giorno gulps. “Perhaps.”

Sitting up, the elder shifts to stand on his knees between Giorno’s parted legs, hands clutching at the bottom of his cashmere sweater, which he slowly starts peeling off, stopping about midway. “Do you wanna help, or watch?”

“I’ve never —” Giorno starts, red colouring the majority of his face as he shoots to a sitting position, “ — done something like this before!”

“What about me makes you think that I have?”

“This does.” Giorno affirms, ravenously tracing his eyes over Mista’s figure once the cloth is discarded carelessly to the floor with a dull little thud. “I haven’t a clue what to do in this
Giorno complies, placing a tame kiss against Mista’s lips, one that within seconds grows firm and impassioned. As if by instinct, both of his hands run along the curvature of Mista’s sides, over his abdomen and stopping at his chest just below the collarbone; a pleased little grunt rolls from his lover’s lips, and he finds that the two are gravitating back to lying down. Giorno’s head thumps against the pillow, and moments after Mista murmurs lasciviously against his lips, “Take your hair down.”

“Why?”

“I want to run my hands through it.”

Giorno complies, reaching a hand back and loosening his hair, though before he can fully pull apart the twisted strands Mista’s already cupping the nape of his neck and pulling them together, lips hot against Giorno’s own, fingers lacing through the unwoven gold. The tiniest of tugs sends the hormone-driven teen reeling, craning his neck up into the kiss with parted lips. Their tongues meet and Giorno pulls away, a flush spreading over his cheeks and ears.

"You alright?"

"It just caught me off guard."

"We don't have to —"

"I want to."

"Alright, jus’ — tell me if I go too far."

"I'm not worried about it."

Mista chuckles awkwardly in the darkness, eyes glowing vividly despite the lack of illumination. They stare into one another’s eyes for a time, cracking into shy and nervous little grins, before their lips meet again. It’s softer this time, less firm and aggressive than the first, but equally passionate and filled with nothing but a deep and sonorous affection. Untangling his fingers from the curls of Giorno’s hair, Mista delicately caresses the side of the former’s cheek, brushing the ball of his thumb over the boy’s high cheekbones and smiling into their lip-locked embrace.

His lips part acquiescently, eyes closed but eyelids fluttering at the sensation. Their jaws move independently of one another at first before mingling in a sort of harmony, through shaky gasps and dreamlike exhales. Gently-brushing tongues and Mista’s pleased, yearning sigh against his mouth is enough to send the smaller over the edge; just that, a simple susurration, and the heat in his abdomen flowers and spreads. The kiss breaks abruptly, leaving Giorno with a dreary sort of forlornness, filled then by the way his boyfriend ducks his head down and trails tiny kisses from jaw to collar. His thoughts melt together under the heat, and with a permissive head-turn all Giorno finds that he can do is merely lie there and absorb every little action. Every kiss and touch and sweep of the hands — every pleased murmured speech leaking from both of their throats. Every slip-up, when Mista accidentally clocks their heads together or when Giorno blindly attempts to reciprocate the neck-kissing and winds up hitting his forehead on Mista’s shoulder.

It’s sweet and beautiful, yet somehow dazzling and arousing all the same.

“It’s sweet and beautiful, yet somehow dazzling and arousing all the same.

“I’ve got no idea what I’m doing.” Muses the blond as he rests his chin in the crook of Mista’s neck, sitting up now with his hands gripping muscular forearms and their laps overlain.
“Y-yeah, I don’t really, either. Try somethin’ for me?”

Giorno hums inquisitively.

“...bite. Not too hard, just like — a li’l nibble.”

He raises a brow, drawing his head back only to look at Mista for affirmation that the latter is serious. Mista offers a thin smile in response, an inviting little pull of the lips, said expression melting into slack-jawed little gasps once Giorno resumes placing sugar-sweet kisses over the bumpy skin. A nip placed at his jugular sends Mista’s hips bucking against Giorno’s, and a squeal of shock and momentary pleasure leaps into the air.

“Did it — did it hurt?”

“No, I liked — wait, don’t do it again!”

“What?”

“Cause I’m th’ only one without a shirt on here! Y’can’t just sit there, turnin’ me on,” the words send chills crawling down his spine, “and not take off nothin’.”

“I could.” Replies a jocose Giorno, brightly beaming from ear to ear.

“That’d be not cool.” Icy fingertips duck under the thick fabric of Giorno’s wool sweater and begin hoisting it upwards, fabric curling and scrunching while he willingly lifts his arms over his head. Restrictive, unrevealing clothing now tossed aside, they’re back to a sloppy display of making out, a sudden bout of ardor taking over both of their minds. Uncouthly, teeth clunk together, hands begin clumsily feeling around; Giorno’s fingers trail through the dark and coarse hair over Mista’s torso, evoking a low and satisfied grumble from the elder. One of Mista’s hands rests at the small of his back, the other dipping dangerously close to the hem of his jeans.

Giorno arches his hips upwards as if to coax Mista, and the latter responds with an airy grunt, brow knitting together. “Move your hips again.”

“Huh?”

“Jus’ —” Mista moves his hands so that they now rest on either side of his hips, holding him in place for a time. “Just move ‘em.”

Giorno complies, rocking his pelvis forward. The denim of their jeans whisper together faintly, barely audible over heaving chests and stifled exclamations. Heat yet again twists in his gut, especially as they fall back against the mattress yet again. With a libidinous glimmer shining behind dark eyes, Mista’s gaze falls upon him unwaveringly; over his face and the pale, exposed skin of his torso, and over the too-obvious tent beyond the light blue fabric making up his trousers. He cocks a single brow at the sight, one side of his mouth pulling into a half-smirk. Giorno turns his gaze away but it inevitably snaps right back into position once their hips grind together yet again.

“We need to be quieter,” he emphasises in the teeniest of breathless voices. “Dad’s gonna hear this and wake up.”

“I’m tryin’. I ain’t usually this loud when I’m jackin’ off.”

Mental images. Mentaaaal iiiimages.
He can see it vividly, in full colour in the back of his mind; the way Mista must look when he’s lying in the darkness alone, bottoms stripped away, the lewd expressions on his face as he runs his hand over his length and whispers concupiscent ideas into his palm. The way he must appear as he throws his head back over his pillows, toes curling, slurs spilling from his mouth on repeat like a broken record. Over and over and over again, until he comes down from his high, sweat dotting his brow in little droplets.

“What’re you imaginin’?”

Giorno doesn’t even try to negate that. He’s so deep in thought that he doesn’t think he’ll be able to, countering the question with another question instead. “How did you know I was imagining anything?”

“You — y’have this thinkin’ face. ‘Cept this one looked more like y’were fantasising.”

“You’re the one that mentioned… that.”

“That?”

“The — you know what I mean.” The words are stuck permanently in his throat, never able to get past his vocal cords and out into the open.

“Does imagining me jerking it get you off?”

“Little bit.” Lotta bit, actually. “Listen, Mista, I wasn’t wanting to rush this along, but —”

“Yer horny?”

“That’s one way of putting it.”

“Well, I’m gonna be honest here — I didn’t… uh, wasn’t expecting none of this to happen, so I don’t have anythin’ on me. And I ain’t ever touched another dick besides my own.” Pause. “You don’t mind if I, uh…”

Giorno shakes his head, a reassuring smile curling on his lips. His gaze remains locked on Mista until the boy starts to fiddle with his zipper, and immediately his eyes trail away to rest lazily on the hazy outline of his desk lamp. A cold draft blows over him once exposed, followed by those cold-laden fingertips trailing languidly over his length. Whimpering, Giorno rolls his head to the side, eyes squinted shut, feeling Mista ogling him. Lowly, he moans, mouth agape and breath coming out in short little spurts.

He throws his forearm over his mouth as if to somehow stifle the ever-amplifying whines breaking out of his throat; his stomach knots and muscles tense, and though they’ve just begun he’s already dangerously close to finishing. Choked gasps and suppressed wails and obscene curses come spilling forth from pink lips; Giorno shifts his other arm to cover his eyes the same way as he does his mouth, hips bucking and toes curling. Mista’s sitting back on his feet when Giorno looks at him seconds before climax, bemused and enraptured, face suddenly going full red when a shower of white gushes out over his hand.

Giorno sits up groggily afterwards, an embarrassed look crossing his features. He shakes his head when Mista asks if he perhaps took it a bit too far, and then eagerly shoots out an accidentally-demanding, "Okay, your turn. Take off your pants."

Chapter End Notes
OKAY so the reason I'm super upset is due to the fact that my mom drops this bomb on me tonight -- actually it's more like she dropped a fuckin' nuke -- and announces that she's 3 months pregnant (at the time I had a cut on my arm that was bleeding so bad that I felt dizzy, too, great timing!). I shouldn't be this upset about it, and when I started crying I said I was happy. But I am not fucking happy. Far from it, in fact. No one really knows this at all besides a few people, but I come from a shitty abusive family, and my mom and I only escaped my father just about a year ago. She got a fiancee now, and I love the guy, but god damn. I don't know what the deal is, maybe it's just because last time my mom got pregnant with my younger brother the abuse started there. Anyway, I'm eighteen, so I still currently live with my mother because I don't go to one of those fancy-ass colleges with student housing. An additional fact about me is the fact that I vehemently dislike small children, and maybe I'm acting harsh about this, but I just don't want anything to fucking change at all. I just want to graduate and move out, but whatever. Have a fuckin' kid! Yay! Fuck. (I also can't say anything because then I destroy what little of a functional family with good memories we have left. So fuck it.)

Expect a brief hiatus soon, probably the same length as the last one that I unintentionally took, because I'm not going to be home for the next few nights.
The thing that Buccellati couldn’t bring into Fugo’s house that night at the Christmas party was not anything phallic, nor violent, nor a bottle of wine that costs more than he’ll ever make in his life managing a bunch of rambunctious teenagers at a cafe. No, the thing that he’s currently walking down the street to Abbacchio’s house (damn thing wouldn’t get into the car), the thing that’s sniffing everything and wagging a tawny little tail and charging through the snow, is a puppy. Specifically, a German Shepherd, that one breed that Abbacchio saw in the pet store’s window a long while ago and instantly fell in love with whilst Buccellati fell in love with the officer himself.

He’s still laid up, spending his days lounging around the house, and though he’s not supposed to (and though Buccellati has reminded and reprimanded him several times for it), he’s definitely drinking wine in there whenever he knows Bruno’s not coming over. Purportedly, he’s supposed to be put back into action soon, but with his very slight limp still hindering his ability to run, not to mention the fact that he’s fallen a bit behind on his workouts due to the potential of stitches ripping… it’ll be a bit. The stitches have fallen out by now, and from what Buccellati’s seen when tending to the man, a nice and pink little scar is forming just underneath his ribcage.

It’s almost fitting, in a weird sort of way. It’s nice. It suits his rugged personality, the way he always rushes headfirst into a fight and usually comes out victorious in the end.

And so does this dog.

Stereotypically, they’re police dogs, strong and all that jazz. But Buccellati’s positive that this puppy can’t quite do anything besides roll in the snow with his tongue lolling out, and sometimes sniff at the man’s ankles, or bark whenever a car passes them by. How people train these sweet, precious animals, to be service or police dogs, Buccellati doesn’t have a single fucking idea.

Abbacchio is softer than he likes to admit. Buccellati knows that, of course — sees the way he treats kids on the street, or how he flinches away from animals that die in movies. Everyone does the latter, but that’s not the damn point. Someone like Abbacchio, someone so rough around the
edges and crass with not a lick of social skills nor a filter on that sailor-mouth of his, doesn’t seem like the type of man to be so gentle inside.

The way he treats Buccellati like a king, too, is just another example of how wondrously soft the guy really is, and all of that is absolutely enrapturing. Buccellati loves it, loves how he’s the only person able to get through the nettle-strewn woods and hop over cinder-block walls to access the real Leone Abbacchio. The side that’s not all doom and gloom and awful and abhorring everything just because he can. The side of him that only Buccellati can see and love. That’s the best part, perhaps — that only Buccellati knows that side of him. It’s dazzling. Their secret.

The aforementioned puppy’s been at the shelter waiting for Buccellati to pick it up for about a week, the latter awkwardly explaining to the folks there that the dog was a gift and he only wanted to get it early. He visited the little thing once in between purchase and now, just to see how it was doing. It’d licked his nose when he stuck his face too close to the bars of the kennel, and the damn thing was just so cute that Buccellati was half-tempted to take it home a couple of days early and just house it.

But he knew that the puppy wouldn’t take kindly to being swapped around so much, might get attached to Buccellati instead of Abbacchio, and patted the little guy on his head before leaving.

Now, they’re at Abbacchio’s doorstep, and Buccellati’s trying very hard to hide the eager creature from Abbacchio’s view before he rings the bell. The puppy sits and stays behind his legs on the step behind Buccellati, and with a sigh of relief he rings the bell and holds his hands behind his back so that the leash doesn’t give away the gift… but the split second Abbacchio opens the door, the tiny German Shepherd leaps out and nearly tears Buccellati’s arm off as it does so, barking and sniffing at the officer’s ankles.

Switching his grip on the leash to his other arm, he meets Abbacchio’s stunned gaze and chokes out, “This didn’t go quite as planned. Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christm — wait. Wait.”

“Is there a problem?”

“Yeah, there’s a fucking problem.” Shut up, Abbacchio, you love it. “You — somehow, you fucking thought of the best gift on this fucking god-forsaken planet, that’s the problem.”

“I’m glad you like him. I knew from the instant we confessed to one another that I’d inevitably one day end up getting you a puppy, and it just happened to work out perfectly. Merry Christmas.” He repeats, a gentle smile forming on delicate lips. “I love you.”

“I — fuck, all I got you was a fuckin’ new coat because you were lamenting that yours wasn’t keeping you warm.”

“I wasn’t the one lamenting, Leone.” In truth, Abbacchio had grumbled several times when he saw Buccellati shivering for one reason or another that he needed to either wear thicker shirts or get a better coat or both. Buccellati found that his plain, boring, old white jacket was perfectly acceptable — he’s always cold, somehow. “May I come inside?”

Abbacchio makes an oh yeah, I’m blocking the doorway face, and steps aside with a wide sweep of his arm to invite his beloved inside of the house. It smells like wine, more wine than usual, but by appearance Buccellati can honestly say that Abbacchio’s not inebriated right now and this must’ve been a last-ditch attempt to get last night’s wine bottles out of the way or something. Buccellati pretends he doesn’t notice the scent despite the fact it’s so terrible his eyes start to water, leaning over to unclasp the leash from the puppy’s blue collar. The creature sniffs everything,
“Running ramped around the family room while Abbacchio closes and locks the door back up.

“He’s almost as adorable as you.” Says the platinum-haired man, coming to stand at Buccellati’s side and encircling his waist with a single arm, a lipstick-laden kiss then pressed gently to his temple.

“When did you get suave?”

“I — fuck off.”

Buccellati inclines his head just slightly, pressing a kiss to Abbacchio’s face that doesn’t quite land on-mark, instead halfway on his lips and cheek. That’s met with Abbacchio shifting only slightly so that the kiss is proper, and then they break apart, faces alight with glee and smiles and a gentle pink tinge. “What’re you going to name him?”

“‘Moody Blues’. ‘Blues’ for short.”

That was an awfully fast answer. “You’ve had that name saved for years, haven’t you?”

“I’ve always wanted a fuckin’ dog. I knew I was going to name one that when I was five.”

Moody Blues trots joyously over to his master, prompting Abbacchio to break their embrace only to give his new best friend a little pap on the head. With tail wagging, Blues gives a throaty, high-pitched little bark in response, tongue lolling out the side of his small muzzle and eyes brightly filled with life.

“Did you buy any toys for him or anything?”

“I imagined we’d go together. He’s your dog, but my gift to you,” explains Buccellati as he crouches down, hands lazily dangling off of his knees, “so I’ll buy whatever toys and food you want to get him.” Hand dipping into the pocket of his old winter coat, Buccellati pulls out his phone, bringing up the camera and facing it in front of them.

“What’re you doing?”

“Family photo.”

“I thought your selfie-taking days were over, after that last one.”

Buccellati eyes him sharply, but that eventually melts into a teasing affection. “Get Moody Blues in here, would you?”

It takes about zero effort for Abbacchio to hoist the fluffy baby up, and the obedient and curious dog sniffs at the glossy screen of the phone before bringing his head back to lick Abbacchio’s cheek. The latter cringes away from it, though his expression betrays that he’s pleased with the gesture and not as grossed-out as his posture would suggest; Buccellati snaps the picture right then, half-smiling while Abbacchio’s expression is slightly twisted away from the loving kisses of Moody Blues.

“Retake it.”

“No.”

“Bruno, I looked… fucking awful.”

“You look beautiful as always, Leone.”
Abbacchio blows air out of his nose with a small huff, eyes glancing casually down at the phone as Buccellati’s thumb presses the send button. “What the fuck are you doing?” Comes the loud, curious, and wary exclamation.

“It’s Christmas, Abbacchio.”

“YOU, 9:03AM: [Image]

YOU, 9:04AM: Merry Christmas!”

“You can’t send out our shitty family photos to people.”

“I can.”

“TRISH, 9:04AM: OMG DID U GET HIM A DOG??// IS THAT WHAT U COULDN’T BRING INTO THE HOUSE AT THE PARTY BC I THOUGHT IT WAS GONNA BE A MACHINE GUN OR A VIBRATOR OR SOMETHIN JUST SAYIN TBH”

Wow, Trish.

In response, she shoots a picture back to them, captioned with the same holiday blessing. The image depicts Trish herself in a sequined Santa hat square in the photo’s centre, Doppio at her side smiling broadly with part of him cut off beyond the border of the screen. Opposite Doppio is a man with his hand outstretched as if to cover the camera; it fully blocks his face, his hand a bit blurry probably due to movement, but Buccellati can clearly make out pink and black-spotted hair. That one must be Diavolo. (Doppio’s the one who interviews everyone for the cafe, and Diavolo selects candidates based on Doppio’s reports. It seems no one will ever see the man’s face besides his daughter.)

“MISTA, 9:06AM: holy shit is that ur dad trish? the one with the pink har not the one with the freckles

TRISH, 9:06AM: yeah thats him omg he hates being seen by ppl?? idk

MISTA, 9:07AM: well anyway merry christmas i think were tryin to take a photo too right now brb

FUGO, 9:08AM: Merry Christmas, all.

FUGO, 9:10AM: [Image]”

Buccellati is expecting an image of Fugo and his mother and father, but included in that is Narancia. It’s a well-taken photo, the camera catching Fugo’s outstretched arm at the corner of the image. In the background stand a mother and father looking very much like him, serenely smiling,
and Narancia (surprisingly) at his side. The latter boy pulls at his cheeks, tongue sticking out and teeth showing, cross-eyed as he stares at the camera.

Why the hell was Narancia there? Buccellati realises that they’re very close friends, but it’s not like Fugo’s parents to allow friends over on Christmas Time — in fact, Mista reports one year that they tried to set something up together, but Fugo’s mother had a conniption over the proposition. ...hmm.

“FUGO, 9:11AM: Sorry, I can’t get Narancia to take a proper goddamn picture.

NARANCIA, 9:12AM: thats very r00d fugo i take gr8 pictures seeeee

GIORNO, 9:12AM: [Image]”

If Fugo’s family photo can be considered a mess, Giorno’s is definitely the epitome of hectic.

Giorno is at the side of the image smiling, Mista’s head on his shoulder, but their chins are cut off due to the extremely tall people standing in the background. Buccellati’s never seen them before, but by Trish and Narancia’s retelling of the musical story a few days earlier, they’re all quite tall people in comparison to literally everyone else on the damn planet. One look at Giorno’s face at least, tells Buccellati that there are no bad pictures of this boy in existence, for he’s practically sparkling.

Behind him stand people who Buccellati assumes are his family members, though he’s not sure which one is the one that loves dinosaurs and which one is the one that tried to kill a man in stopped traffic and which one is “the decent uncle”. The two tallest, one blond and one with dark hair, stand in the background next to one another; the blond looks disgusted, arms folded over his chest and purple-painted lips pursed. In the middle row stands a slightly-shorter blond man in a turtleneck sweater, and a well-dressed blonde woman (the only identifiable member of the family that Giorno bemoans about).

“There’s too many of that devil-spawn.” Abbacchio says, and it takes Buccellati point-two of a second to figure out which one is the “devil-spawn”.

“GIORNO, 9:13AM: We tried very hard to get a good picture. This is the only nice one.

YOU, 9:14AM: This is Abbacchio — send the shitty ones.”

“Leone! Give me my phone!”

“GIORNO, 9:14AM: Sure.”

Abbacchio casts him a victorious smirk, absolutely thrilled with his so-called achievement in the matter. The “shitty image” that comes in is blurry, depicting Giorno turned around with his mouth
agape as if he’s screeching at the people behind him. The aunt has her hands on her hips while the two tall men in the background seem to be bickering about something, the green-sweater one throwing his fist up into the air and looking rather eager as if he were about to watch a battle ensue.

“YOU, 9:15AM: This is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.”

Abbacchio passes his phone back, pointing at the screen and saying, “Save that image and frame it.”

“No.”

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It’s Erina that suggests calling Mista over on Christmas day; whenever she and Jonathan are around, they always bring the most lavish gifts over. She’d found that not inviting “the poor boy” over for the holidays was quite rude, especially because she’d made him a new knit cap and was busily showing it off when Giorno stepped out into the kitchen for a glass of water.

Gift-giving starts as soon as Mista walks through the door, and the first thing that happens is Erina making a dash towards him, tearing the hat from his head, and plopping the new one in its place. She passes it back to him in gentle contrast with her earlier vigor, gives him a small hug, and proceeds to lead him back to the couches where everyone is sitting. Giorno and his dad haven’t ever set up a Christmas tree before, which seems to upset Jonathan and Erina (Diego seems not to care one way or the other).

“Thanks for th’ hat.” Mista manages once the debacle over the tree is finished.

Giorno translates, asking then if Mista likes it, and he gives an eager little bob of the head before Jonathan heaves a massive box and slaps it into Giorno’s lap.

“Open it.”

“That’s the plan.” Giorno responds, tearing off foil wrapping that’s been taped so much it’s nearly impossible to remove.

It seems that every time he gets a gift from one of those two, it’s always an instrument. This year, it’s a keyboard piano (Giorno doesn’t know how to play the piano, at all — guess it’s time to learn). Giorno thanks the lovers, rather awkwardly at that, fingernails scratching at that, fingernails scratching at the colourful cardboard casing around the instrument. He may not know how to play it, but he wants to mash the keys. Right now.

Mista chokes out that he didn’t have the money to get anyone anything, even Giorno himself, and his gift was actually spending the previous night with Giorno and going home around midnightish.

Speaking of that.
Since Dio had managed to offend everyone on the morning of the 24th, causing his family to give up on coming over for the day — Giorno has no idea what the hell he could’ve said, but he doesn’t have any desire to fucking know, either — Mista was able to visit without invitation. Dio had fallen asleep, and then they started fooling around. Giorno was pretty sure upon Mista’s departure that they hadn’t woken Dio up, but that proved entirely incorrect.

“Did you have fun?” Dio’s behind him in the darkness of the house, eyeing him with raised brows.

Giorno doesn’t have a clue what he really means, though his father’s sudden presence causes him to flinch in shock. “Yes. Sorry that I didn’t tell you he was coming over.”

“Not what I meant, my spawn.” Giorno really wishes that Dio wouldn’t refer to him as a spawn sometimes as he turns around to face his father. “I was sleeping soundly,” an oh no resounds in the back of his mind, ringing out over and over like church bells, “when I heard a very, very loud sound. A few, actually.”

“I —”

“It’s alright to fornicate in my house,” thanks? “but next time, do it when I’m not home. You’re loud.”

That was the moment Giorno determined that Mista’s never going to come over again, until Erina insisted this morning. But after this! After this day, Mista will never be visiting the house, ever. Ever. Never ever never. Uh-uh.

The good news is, Mista doesn’t know that Dio knows, and they can still deny Diego’s jokes about shagging for… until the Brit leaves.

Gifts are given out in the most boring, unenthusiastic way Giorno’s ever seen. Dio’s never really eager to hand out free things no matter what day it is, in fact preferring to receive them instead. His so-called “gift” to everyone is merely a sack of defaced currency with vulgarities scrawled all over them; Giorno thinks it was kind enough as it is, for the man to give them money in general, but to put his truest thoughts about the family on them? Damn… he’s being really, really generous for once.

“Oi really love th’ coin ‘ere that says ‘fuckass’ on it.”

“You’re welcome, Diego.”

Giorno rolls his eyes, reclining against the couch. If only he had enough money to buy his family something decent. Maybe he’ll bake cookies or something…

His phone buzzes mid-thought, and he glances down at it with raised brows. The group text thread is yet again going crazy.

“BUCCELLATI, 9:03AM: [Image]

BUCCELLATI, 9:04AM: Merry Christmas!

TRISH, 9:04AM: OMG DID U GET HIM A DOG??// IS THAT WHAT U COULDN'T BRING INTO THE HOUSE AT THE PARTY BC I THOUGHT IT WAS GONNA BE A MACHINE GUN OR A VIBRATOR OR SOMETHIN JUST SAYIN TBH
First of all, Giorno wants a puppy.

Second of all, are those guys Trish’s parents? Which one was the one that she always called “dad” and the other “Doppio”? Why was one of them shying away from the camera?

Mista’s burying himself in his phone texting back, and Giorno explains stiffly that they should reciprocate the family photo gesture. He brings up his camera despite Dio’s protesting and everyone gathers in the kitchen to get together. The split second Giorno snaps the first picture, yelling ensues, with Dio shoving Jonathan aside for “getting too close” or something to that effect; Giorno turns around to shout at them, Erina with her hands on her hips, and Diego shouting out the words foight foight foight in his ever-thick accent and punching the air.

Why could no one control themselves in this family?

The next few pictures turn into rather violent blurs, and finally everyone straightens up long enough for a half-decent image before another fight breaks out. Erina flees the room, Giorno and Mista in pursuit.

“MISTA, 9:06AM: holy shit is that ur dad trish? the one with the pink har not the one with the freckles

TRISH, 9:06AM: yeah thats him omg he hates being seen by ppl?? idk

MISTA, 9:07AM: well anyway merry christmas i think were tryin to take a photo too right now brb

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YOU, 9:12AM: [Image]

YOU, 9:13AM: We tried very hard to get a good picture. This is the only nice one.

BUCCELLATI, 9:14AM: This is Abbacchio — send the shitty ones.

YOU, 9:14AM: Sure.

YOU, 915AM: [Image]

BUCCELLATI, 9:15AM: This is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

Yes, Abbacchio. Frame it. It’ll be there for you to gawk at forever and realise how dysfunctional this family truly is.
Fugo realises a split second too late that he’s just sent that family photo out to everyone, and that none of them really know he and Narancia are living together. None of them should know, and that’s sure to prompt questions.

Well, scratch that. Trish knows. Trish knows, because after the party got over and they messaged back and forth about Fugo’s latent sexual crisis, he explained to her that they live together as friends, that his mother and father didn’t take a lick of convincing other than “Narancia’s asshole dad” to take the kid in. (Sure, technically, if the man decided to file a missing person’s report for his son, they could get in major trouble for this — but it’s been a long time, and he hasn’t done that.)

And then, from there, it’s horrible. Because Trish has this thing about her, this special talent that no one else he spends time around possesses. It’s called “getting people to talk without them wanting to talk”. As if he were hypnotised, he spilled that he’d been feeling a bit odd about Narancia lately, that his violent tendencies weren’t just a problem because they were violent tendencies but that he felt they were gradually destroying what he and Narancia had. Trish’d asked what he felt they had, and Fugo couldn’t do a thing but give a noncommittal shrug before responding with, “We’re closer than most people, I suppose.”

A few more minutes of analysis from the self-proclaimed Love Expert, and the two figured out that Fugo was experiencing the beginning inklings of a hidden crush, and had been for a while — and the second Narancia completed that dare, it awakened the feelings, caused them to cross the psychological threshold and make Fugo aware of it.

Now that he is aware of it, something has changed.

Fugo’s a lot more patient when they’re studying. After gift-exchanging and eating, Fugo’s mom and dad take to watching a movie while Narancia dashes to their shared room to listen to some dated rap music that his mother got the boy as a gift. Fugo follows after, thinking that maybe he’ll read or something, when Narancia shockingly requests that they do a bit of studying.

Per expectation, Narancia blows a lot of the basic arithmetic, and instinctively cringes away when Fugo’s hand shifts over the notebook. It breaks his heart a little bit, realising what he’s done to this poor boy and how screwed up he made Narancia. It’s the same kind of bullshit that was happening before Fugo dragged him into his house for safety; and the realisation that nothing’s really changed in his heart — besides the fact that he likes Fugo somehow — terrifies him. God. Oh, God, he’s doing an absolutely wonderful fucking job here.

“I wasn’t going to hit you.” Murmurs Fugo, lips curling into a dejected frown.

“Y’always do, usually.”

“I told you that I wouldn’t anymore.”

“You’re not gonna yell, either?”

“No. I was going about this wrong.” All wrong. Completely, deplorably, wrong. He’s no better than the past that Narancia escaped, Fugo thinks to himself, posture slipping.
They’re spread out over the floor, Narancia’s notebook in front of his face. He’s balancing his chin on his palm, pencil in his hand and scrawling idly in the margin on the lined pages; Fugo mimics his posture unconsciously, ankles crossed and feet hovering over his head.

“Y’changed so suddenly.” Narancia observes, tapping the end of his pencil over his lower lip.

“You changed me.” Fugo emphasises with a paper-thin smile. “Like I told you in the car, or at least tried to, since you interrupted,” still sassy, though, “you’re very important to me, Narancia. I don’t want to drive you away. I came to the realisation that I wasn’t making your life better.”

“Really? ‘Cause I think you were makin’ it better. Sure, you hit me all the time, and you yelled a lot, but you were always real kind anyway. I know y’were just tryin’ to help me learn.”

“Like I said,” Fugo places his hand in exasperation against his forehead, rubbing his temples with his fingertips, “I went about it wrong.”

“Yeah, but like you always used ta say — I’m just really dumb.”

“There’s a big difference between being an idiot and being under-educated.” Fugo corrects matter-of-factly, index finger now positioned in front of Narancia’s face. “You’re incredibly street-smart, and as I recall, picked up the recipes for the cafe’s drinks rather quickly.”

“They’re easy,” Narancia muses. “They follow a pattern, y’know? A small gets one shot of espresso, a medium and large get two, unless it’s a macchiato, and then a large gets three.”

Fugo raises his brows and grins as if to say told you so. “You know more common sense than most people, too.”

“Like how you never walk into a shady alleyway even during the day in those big cities, because something could go wrong?”

“And?”

“Uhm… y’don’t cross the road even when ya don’t see any cars coming, because there’s always someone who’s gonna speed and they might hit ya when y’think you’re safe. Mista does that lots.”

“Mista’s lucky he’s still alive.”

“Mm.” Narancia bobs his head in agreement, eyes rolling to the side as he attempts to think of another example. “When ya go to a bar, never drink a drink that ya didn’t watch someone make.”

“I don’t see either of us ever going to a bar.” Fugo tells.

“‘Cause we’re not Abbacchio?”

“Additionally, we don’t want liver poisoning.”

“Or ta get creeped on by weirdos!”

Little things like this are the best. The thing Fugo enjoys most in life, perhaps — just the two of them together, joking around about the dumbest things. They’re laughing, heads pressed together over the horribly-written numbers on the notebook page, horrible rap music blaring in the background. The window to the bedroom is open; the neighbor’s chihuahua howls loudly at whatever could possibly be ruining its little day. A car drives by, tyres rolling over rocks on the pavement, sound echoing throughout the room before disappearing into the distance. Time stops,
it seems; they’re still chuckling over their conversation, faces alight with glee. When they finally come down, Fugo taps his finger against the notebook and tells Narancia to try the same problem again, explaining where he went wrong in his previous attempt.

“I got this, Fugo. Just watch me!”

Dammit, fuck, he’s cute.

“Awright,” Narancia slurs, pointing down at the problem after two minutes of hard thought and another minute of scribbling the answer down, “check this out.”

“You… you got it.”

“Seriously?!”

“I’m serious. How about we try this next one?”

“What do I get if I get this one?”

“What do you want?”

Narancia taps his pencil against his cheek as Fugo slides the notebook back over, another multiplication problem drawn lightly on the lined page. “Ice cream.”

“It’s on me, then.”

This one seems to be a little harder, but somehow — as if by miracle, or maybe the ice cream worked as motivation — he gets it right again. Fugo’s confidence in the boy’s ability shoots up tenfold then, and Narancia immediately bounces to his feet and screams that they have to go now.

Fugo follows after a second’s hesitation, scrambling to catch up with Narancia before he slips his shoes on and treks out without him. “I don’t know where you think we’re going to get ice cream,” begins the younger, “because it’s Christmas, and most everything is closed.”

“There’s gotta be somewhere.”

“Nowhere decent.”

“Whatever, Fugo,” Narancia grins from ear to ear, leaning forward with his hands on his hips, “we’re going anyway! You promised!”

It wasn’t that he was going to break his promise, but he’d thought they’d go when everything was open again. But, he’s willing to try, and follows Narancia’s lead of putting on shoes.

The way he got so pumped up a minute earlier about getting those problems correct was probably one of the more adorable things Fugo’s seen in his admittedly short life span. How the hell didn’t he realise he had a crush sooner than this? Why does Trish facilitate everyone’s love-lives?

“By the way,” Narancia begins when they’re out the door, turning to look at Fugo and fluttering his eyelids a bit, “what’d you think of my dance? You never told me if I was good.”

...why the fuck does Fugo have a fucking crush on this guy, of all people?
They’ve played this game for years. It’s a simple game, a game known as “take pictures of Diavolo and fail because you suck”. Maybe it’s not so much that Trish sucks, but that the man is so keen on avoiding having his photo taken that he’ll instantly wake up or put his hair over his face or hide or something to that effect.

In the wedding photos, Diavolo is wearing a thick veil over his face, or a bird accidentally flew through the shot, or something ridiculous like that — it’s as if the world itself refuses to let anyone see Diavolo’s fucking face. That, of course, makes it extremely difficult for comme il faut family photos to exist. Unlike a lot of teenagers her age, Trish finds that family photos are of incredible importance to a family setting. Plus, she loves taking pictures anyway, and having her picture taken. There’s no bad selfies of her — no such thing. Bad Selfies of Trish Una is a new mythical creature.

Similarly to how A Decent Picture of Diavolo is another one. It’s like a unicorn. You don’t see it, ever, but if you do see it, you either get stabbed with the horn and die or you get your wish granted. Trish doesn’t imagine that Diavolo would grant any mystical wishes should his face be seen by someone. The man doesn’t even go outside, manages the cafe from the comfort of the house, putting Doppio in his stead most of the time when he should really get off of his ass and do some work himself. He knows everything that happens in there somehow, despite never being present and Doppio only setting foot in the cafe once a week to make sure everything’s soundly.

In Trish’s most honest, totally-humble opinion, those two are the worst managers ever.

When her phone buzzes with that ridiculous family photo featuring the two boyfriends and their new dog, she’s the first one of the entire group to try to shoot one of those back. And she thinks she’s got a distracted Diavolo in the camera’s range, that finally the man’s face may see the light of day (he’s whiter than all shit, y’see), but then his hand comes up and though he pretends he didn’t notice the camera… he did. But Trish accepts this as yet another defeat and goes ahead, sending the picture anyway.

Dad and Adopter bought her the clothes she wanted from her favourite store, and she couldn’t be more happy with it. There’s all kinds of cute pink skirts and shirts and corseted tops and the like, necklaces that dangle loosely around her neck, earrings, bracelets that make noise when she flicks her wrist around; a new purse with bells on one of the zippers, adorable high-heels, makeup kits… everything a “girly-girl” like her would enjoy, and that Mista would give her shit about (especially since she doesn’t like Nicholas Sparks — sorry Mista, but he fucking sucks). It’s perfect. She, for the third year in a row, ended up getting Diavolo a new picture frame for family photos, but an hour later he’d filled it with pictures of Doppio instead.

“That was supposed to be for, you know, family photos with all of us.” She argues, motioning to the new silver collage frame sitting on the mantle.

“We have none.”

“Dad — we need to take some.”

Diavolo cocks a brow at her, and yet again, another defeat. The dispute ends there.

Next year, she’s going to ask for decent pictures of them as a damn family for the holidays, instead of playing this idiotic game where she loses. All. The fucking. Time.

Today’s game: Getting images of the bastard who conceived her.
Guest star: Doppio, who agrees that their wedding photos were absolute shit (not his words, just Trish’s stance on, “Well, they could’ve been better, but it’s just my luck — I’m always so unlucky, Trish.”).

Every time she tried to sneak into his room to get a picture, he’d wake up. (The bathroom was obviously off-limits for this game.) Cooking dinner? Onion over the face. Watching a movie? DVD case over his cheek. Combing his hair? The Grudge Girl is really her father. Hell, he probably won’t even have a face when he fucking dies. His ghost will fucking descend and just tear it off. Goodbye, face. No pictures. Thanks.

First, he’s in the living room.

These two are absolute children, crawling on their hands and knees around the house with a digital camera at the ready. Diavolo is lounging on the couch in front of the window (they live on the upper stories of the flats, so no one can see him if they look up, in part due to being high-up and in part due to his careful avoidance of the windows), book in-hand, idly turning the pages every so often. Trish is pretty sure that they’re completely silent, no rustling fabric or anything, they don’t knock over chairs or run into anything, but —

“I know you two are behind the couch.”

God. Fucking. Fuck.

Doppio is the first to pop his head up and apologise. Trish is not going to apologise. That’s not the plan. Another defeat. How many defeats is that?

“Sorry.” Doppio utters, earning himself a kiss on the cheek so swift that Trish can’t even get the camera at the ready before it’s too late.

“I forgive you, my cute Doppio.”


Second, he’s in the bathroom.

Now, normally, Trish wouldn’t try to catch him off guard while he’s showering, but Doppio is playing along today! Which means that Doppio can go in, get a picture, and leave before he incurs the inevitable wrath. Or, at least, that’s the plan.

“I’m not going to go in there!” Squeals the freckled one, with a swift shake of the head. “That’d be invading privacy!”

Trish wants to scathingly reply I hear you two having sex at night and you can’t give me that bullshit, but she doesn’t. Luckily for her, she has a filter, unlike a certain police officer that she clocked on the shoulder a few days ago over a video game.

“I’m not going in!” Trish hisses in a low whisper, jabbing a finger into Doppio’s sweater-covered shoulder. “This one has to work! There’s no way he’ll have time to cover up his face!”

The water shuts off soon after, anyway, and the two disperse to separate corners of the hall, Trish ducking into her room and Doppio into theirs. Sounds of dripping-wet footsteps and the door creaking open resound down the hall, and that’s when a very loud father (probably standing in the
hall with a towel around his waist) calls out, “I could’ve sworn that I heard talking out here.”

The door slams shut, and Trish stops holding her breath. Another fucking failure. Infinity is real, kids, if there were ever any doubts.

Third, he’s taking a nap.

Or, they think he’s taking a nap. Trish is pretty convinced that he’s asleep until she wanders over to the bedside and thinks she has it, a second from clicking the button right as Diavolo shoots out of bed like a fucking horror-movie monster and causes her to scream in panic. Doppio, at the time, was in the kitchen making them lunch — he dashed over to the room when he heard Trish shout, but really had no reason to do such a thing, as there wasn’t any danger. Just Trish leaning against the wall, breathing hard, wishing she could slap her damn father across the face for doing that to her.

“You dirty faker.” Trish mutters, hand resting over her fast-beating heart.

“This would be made much simpler if you quit.”

“I’m not quitting!”

Doppio heaves a sigh and treks out of the room, announcing that if anyone’s hungry, sandwiches are almost ready.

The fourth time, he’s eating.

This takes place not minutes after they assemble in the kitchen for lunch. Diavolo is on-edge still because of the camera’s presence, but Trish doesn’t know how to hide cameras very well to get secret photos or videos. She has a feeling that it’d take the fun out of the game, anyway — after all, it is kind of a goofy little family thing they do. Even if it is irritating as all fuck.

She gets a picture, but it’s basically a blur of pink hair, because the split second her finger hit the button and the flash went off (she makes a note to turn that off, because it’s not subtle at all) Diavolo spun around and headed towards the refrigerator. She’d chalk that one up to an accident if it weren’t for the way he returns from the fridge empty-handed, reminding Doppio to go buy some more lemonade when he was out next.

The fifth and final time, he’s watching a movie. Doppio had pretty much left the game after they fought over going into the bathroom to get a picture, so he’s currently on the sofa with her father. They’re snuggling, some really old movie that she’s never seen (nor wants to) playing on the screen, low voices buzzing from the speakers.

She goes about getting the picture on her hands and knees again, only she crawls through the open kitchen this time instead of going from the hall to directly behind the sofa, and feels victorious when she ends up with a profile view of Diavolo on the camera’s screen…

…but a second later, she hits the button, and he’s turned around and planting one on Doppio. Well, the lighting in the room sucks anyway because it’s dusk out, and no one’s bothered to turn on the lights, but… but still!
“This is bullshit!” She calls in frustration, getting to her feet and stomping over to the side of their sofa.

“Oh, Trish.” Says Diavolo idly, turning to look at her. “I didn’t see you there.”

“Are you fu — serious? You turned around right when I managed to get you in the shot!”

“Coincidence favours me.” Pause. “God favours me.”

Trish rolls her eyes, galumphing off behind the couch and shouting, “I’m going to bed.”

“You don’t want to watch the movie?” Doppio calls after her, craning his neck to see her over the back of the couch in the darkness.

“No!” Trish calls, but she wheels around to watch them from behind the corner, just because she feels this sudden urge to do so. There’s no real reason for it, just some pressing sense that she absolutely has to.

Doppio pulls a purple-cased smartphone from his pocket and holds it up, snapping a picture of the two of them, the flash illuminating the entire room. Trish’s jaw falls open right as Doppio inquires,

“Hey, how long are we going to keep this a secret from her?”

“Until she stops trying to reveal my identity to her friends.”

What a bunch of fucking assholes.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

This more inside jokes. Abbacchio’s outfit? Inside joke. Everything he does?? Ridiculous. (Like him.)

This chapter will give you secondhand embarrassment, probably. It did to me. I kept it anyway. It’s silly.

The last time I went to a rave was a few years ago, and it sucked -- the guy yelled at me to put a shirt on the moment some other chick walked between us not wearing one, but did he yell at her? No. (That’s only part of the reason why it sucked.)

It took me a bit to get this chapter out because I could only work on it in short bursts, especially because I got a new kitten recently. She likes to walk on the keyboard when I’m working and type for me. ALSO because I’ve gotten addicted to this pixel game called The Escapists -- I named all the characters after Vento Aureo characters, and Giorno’s almost escaped prison. B)

Hiatus over, expect more frequent updates as long as I can manage to get them out and not be slow.

Also, I WILL be starting a Josuwan fic soon, so stay tuned! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Not this shit again.

Trish, matchmaker extraordinaire, love expert, the queen of blossoming love, princess of courtship, blah blah, finds herself in another one of these stupid situations. In particular, this “stupid situation” involves Fugo.

Fugo and Narancia, to be exact.

It’s all Fugo, because Narancia hasn’t been sharing. It’s always been Fugo for the past week, especially now that the holiday rush has died off. Welcome to January — there’s only a few days left until Trish suffers through school again, and she’s already been grounded for totally blowing a few of her classes last semester. It’s only going to be worse from here, she imagines, and though she likes to maintain a positive demeanor, she knows that her laziness will eventually catch up when it comes to schoolwork. If only standardised tests weren’t a thing.

Anyway, yeah, so — Fugo. Fugo’s what she was thinking about.

Fugo’s been texting her all week, on and off, and though the man’s not overly-fond of spamming people or spending too much time with his eyes glued to his phone (especially, Trish reasons, because he’s got Narancia living in his house), he’s certainly been active.

“I still have no clue what to do, here.” Comes Friday morning’s message.

“ok listen just gimme a bit i told u i would ask narancia his opinions and stuff b/c i cant read that
kid for shit”

“No, no. Trish, you’re misunderstanding.”

Trish can almost hear Fugo’s panicked voice rising through the words written in the gray bubble on her screen. She’s not entirely sure why she gets the premonition that something’s gone horribly awry, or at least has in Fugo’s mind — but her instincts have always been good when it comes to matters of the heart, and she trusts them unwaveringly.

“what did u guys do??”

“I gave into impulse again.”

“fuck call me”

“He’s sleeping. I don’t want to wake him up.”

“go outside then! i’m calling you and you BETTER pick up”

Of course. Of fucking course, it was merely a matter of time until Fugo started smacking Narancia around again — Fugo lamented to Trish that he helped screw Narancia up, that he realised he did after his hand moved while they were studying and Narancia flinched away. He told her that he had to reassure Narancia that the violent days were over… but it looks like that’s not the case. As much as Trish loves the both of them, she knew from the damn start it’d only be so long before Fugo raised his hand against the boy he so coveted again.

The phone rings dully in her ear, a somber and annoying drone, and just as Trish believes that Fugo’s not going to pick up his stupid cell he answers with a quiet utterance of, “Hello?”

“Are we gonna have to put you in anger management classes?” Trish hollers into the speaker, shooting straight up in bed and throwing the covers aside as she hurriedly goes to get dressed. “I love you to death, Fugo — ‘cause you’re a great guy and all, but I knew it wasn’t going to be long until —”

“That’s not what I meant.”

Oh. So… she doesn’t have to hurry up and throw on some damn pants to save this relationship before it spirals further into disaster?

“I haven’t a clue why you keep on insinuating that I’m treating him poorly now.”

“Because that’s what we’re all used to?” Exasperates a flabbergasted Trish as she plops back down onto the edge of the mattress and throws the blankets over her now-freezing thighs.

Fugo grunts lowly into the speaker, though the expressed sound comes off as more guilt-ridden than satirical to Trish’s ears. “When I told you that I gave into impulse, I meant….” Pause, deep breath. Sigh. “I should give you background.” Give her the background afterwards! Come on, Fugo! This is, yet again, a Love Emergency. Love Emergencies cannot be preceded by cliffhangers like that!

The way it’s explained to her is this: Narancia’s had this habit for a while, one where he’ll just crawl into Fugo’s bed in the midst of the night and they’ll curl up together in an affectionate embrace. (Going off of that, Trish hasn’t a clue as to how Fugo just figured out that this is a crush, and how Fugo hasn’t figured out that Narancia clearly feels something.) So, apparently, Narancia performed said deed again last night, and they wound up facing one another with limbs haphazardly tangled. The two spent the night like that, half of their sleeping time wasted by the
way they lowly whispered jokes and shared chuckles in the murky light. Finally, Narancia mused something to the effect of, “You’ve got a great smile, Fugo,” and that was that. That was the fateful moment when Fugo lost all of his impulse control, not that he ever had any to begin with, hooked his roommate by the collar, and kissed him.

“I said something horribly embarrassing after that.”

Ooh! Oh man, she’s just gotta know. “Which was?”

Another shaky sigh breaks over the speaker. Fugo quotes, “‘Your lips look better when they’re on mine.’ It was the worst thing I could’ve said, and I’m still not entirely sure what’s gotten into me.”

It’s called a fucking crush, Fugo. That’s what’s gotten into you, and that’s why you’re acting like a complete dumbass.

“Your dumb line aside,” Trish is feeling sarcastic today!, “how did Narancia respond?”

“If it counts for anything, he’s still in my bed. He didn’t do anything besides look baffled afterwards. I apologised and faced the other direction.”

“He didn’t hug you or anything? No hand holding?”

“We were still tangled up together.”

If only Fugo could see her expression. Boys are just so dumb, all the time — there’s nothing to be done about the way they act it seems. She’s rolled her eyes at least six thousand times in the last five minutes, wishing that some telepathic force, or even Jesus himself, would put the words into Fugo’s brain for him. Narancia clearly loves him, too.

Why does Trish always deal with everyone’s love problems? Sure, she’s good at it, and enjoys it, but she should probably figure out some things about herself soon… Ah, well.

Another fun fact about miss Trish Una is that she’s the entire reason her dad and Doppio finally stopped calling one another and holding voice-only chat sessions over Skype. They’d met online, and while Trish has a plethora of online buddies, she always has video chats with them when she can. Diavolo, of course, was different — he hadn’t wanted anyone to see his face, and his online profile pictures were always of something completely irrelevant. A skull. A black cat. Things such as that. Doppio was, of course, very respectful of Diavolo’s wishes.

It took months for Trish to finally get them to meet, and that was only after sneaking onto her father’s computer and typing the words “this is trish (his daughter) and u should meet my dad in person bc he rly likes u i think”. Not that she can ever read Diavolo at all, but by the sheer volume of their chats and how long they’d lasted… Well, anyway, Doppio brought it up, and Trish had been standing nearby at the time (purposely), shouting that they should do it and acting ten times more excited than she was. (She was quite ecstatic for her father having a love-life, but portrayed it as if she were a five year-old on their birthday.) Because Diavolo was such a weenie about it, in Trish’s opinion, Doppio had to drive his little smart car all the way across Italy to reach their home.

Though, the exact moment they rested eyes on each other, sparks flew between them, and the affection was so suffocating that she had to leave.

...that’s not the point. Part of the point, but not the full point. The point itself is that Trish should honestly get paid for doing this to everyone she’s ever known, ever, that she does it way too much for it to remain a free service for long.
Ahem.

“You’re — you’re not going to be as oblivious as Abbacchio was, are you?” Low blow to Officer Asshat, Trish. “Narancia loves you as much as you love him, you know.”

“I don’t want to do anything until I’m sure I’ve got control over my temperament.”

“As sweet as that is, you already kissed him. It’s a little too late to lounge around and be all like, ‘oh yeah, time to pull a complete one-eighty.’” Jeez, Trish, did you sleep alright last night?

“It’s imperative that he’s happy. ...you’re awfully astringent this morning. Are you alright?”

“I’m what?”

“Astringent.”

“What?”

“Harsh. Blunt. I’m asking if you’re feeling alright.”

“Maybe it’s ‘cause I’m hungry?” Muses Trish, twirling a strand of pink hair around her index finger, phone squished up between her cheek and shoulder as she stands and rummages for pajama bottoms. “I’ll eat in a sec. You’re gonna tell him, right?”

“Eventually.” Dammit, Fugo. “He wants to go to something called a ‘rave’ tomorrow night. It starts late in the evening, after the cafe closes.”

“You’ve never been to a rave, Fugo?” Not that Trish has, either.

“No.”

“Oh. Well, it’s like,” Trish bounces around as she attempts to stuff her legs into fuzzy pink bottoms, “a dance, only with a lot of techno and electronic music, where you get glow sticks and dance under strobe lights and stuff. It’s hard to explain. I’ve heard they’re cool, but ones that serve contraband like alcohol and all won’t let anyone not of legal age in without an adult… well, I suppose that’s not a problem for you guys. I wanna come, though. I’ve never been to one.”

“My mom’s not going to let us go to it if she finds out that they serve alcohol. She doesn’t like the thought of us being out alone at one in the morning, completely plastered.”

“Oh, but you know who will take us all to it? You don’t have to drive, either!”

“Who?”

Isn’t it obvious? “Buccellati! Maybe Abbacchio.”

“I doubt —”

“None of our friends can say ‘no’ to me if I beg hard enough. I’ll talk to ya later, Fugo! It’s gonna take me the rest of the day to convince Abbacchio to help port us around, ’cause Buccellati’s car isn’t big enough for everyone.”

“Wait, I thought —”

“Well, I don’t wanna leave the whole group out! ‘Sides, it’d be fun for everyone to go!”

“I can’t afford to pay for —”
“I’ll pay for anyone who can’t pay for themselves!”

“Stop interrupting.”

Trish flinches away from the device, plodding out into the kitchen and offering a teeny sorry as she goes. “Seriously, though. I’m gonna go eat.”

“Alright. Do you work today?”

“On closing, yeah.”

“See you at work, then. Goodbye.”

“Bye, nerd.”

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Narancia knows the exact hour, minute, second, that he first fell in love with Fugo. Well, back then, Narancia wouldn’t go as far as calling it love — he knows the difference between fleeting attraction and full-on love, and what he felt back then wasn’t anything close to love. More like appreciation, some remnant affection shared between the two.

It was right after Fugo’s parents took him in.

It didn’t take long after that for Narancia to get hit in the face with those giant rocks known as feelings. Before, they were nothing more than casual friends, though as soon as the elder admitted to being in a terrible situation offhandedly at the cafe (where, at the time, Narancia didn’t have a job — it was only Fugo, and he’d been behind the counter listening to the spun tales of calamity and woe), Fugo’s response was to use the cafe’s phone in front of every patron and beg his mother to take Narancia in. It hardly took a lick of imploring, and not minutes after Fugo stepped out from behind the counter and told Narancia that if he had anything he wanted to grab from home, to go then, because Narancia would now be moving in.

He’d then asked why Narancia never called the police, and the latter’s exact words were, “Well, ’cause once I had this friend who framed me for stealin’ somethin’ from a store — he’s the one who stole it — and I got thrown into juvenile detention for a while. The police officers kinda know me still, so I don’t feel comfortable callin’ them.”

As soon as Narancia took what he needed from his home, he realised that it was too late to call the police anyway, that it wouldn’t matter as he’d be safer with Fugo. That, right there, was the exact moment some sort of devotion blossomed in his chest, entangling him as if they were vines.

A few months after they started living together, Narancia would sometimes crawl into Fugo’s bed. He’d felt a kinship towards Fugo, an indescribable warmth, despite the fact that their study sessions always ended in screaming matches and death threats and fists flying. He’d come to accept that Fugo was just hot-headed, that his apologies were genuine even though he pulled the same stunt over and over time and time again. That he didn’t mean it per say, whenever he smacked Narancia around, whereas others always did. Fugo was different, a radiant light in the darkness, the healing glimmer in Narancia’s eyes. A saviour, of sorts. So, whenever they slept next to one another, he felt that they were growing closer without really trying. It was a pleasant feeling.
Narancia knows the moment he fell in love with Fugo — not developed somewhat of a tiny crush, a resonant tenderness — was when they were in the car after the musical and had that difficult talk. That super impossible-to-hold conversation about how Fugo never means the stupid shit he does. It’d been then. It always hurt to be smacked around, and now Fugo’s stopped doing it to him, and maybe because of that life’s been way easier. Whatever realisation slammed Fugo square in the nose changed the outcome of their whole relationship, and now Narancia feels safer around him; Fugo’s fingers twitching over their study guides still unnerves him, but Narancia’s keenly aware that those days are long gone.

It’s just a reflex.

Though, Fugo is still hilariously impulsive. He makes himself just about as obvious as Abbacchio was, and since he’s no longer taking out his rage on Narancia, he’s taken to doing it to other people. Circa a few days ago:

“What the fuck, Fugo?!”

_**Fugo’s standing behind the counter near Mista, hand poised behind the taller’s head, an ectopic expression wrought onto his features. He’s been acting weird, Narancia notices — too weird, in fact. There’s something wrong with him. Is he sick? He’s gotta be sick, ’cause his next words are,**_

“Sorry, Mista. I’ve got too much on my mind.”

“Well, go smack around Narancia like y’always do, not me!”

“That’s over, now,” Fugo isn’t cognizant of the fact that Narancia’s right behind the kitchen door, able to hear their every word, “since I’m trying to better myself for him.”

If that wasn’t a dead giveaway to the crush, then what is? Narancia’s just more perceptive than Trish is with these things, probably because he’s _older_ than she is. That’s clearly why Trish’s just found out — and Narancia has a feeling that Fugo told her, because he’s been looking awful worried every time he checks his phone for a new message. On an average day, he leaves the thing either in his back pocket or in their bedroom, but lately the device’s been practically glued to his palm.

Trish is, admittedly, still an expert with these things.

Oh! And lest we forget, circa yesterday, when Fugo got so mad over something he was thinking about, that he totally wheeled around and decked Abbacchio. Which was met with an equally-hard hit from the officer himself. It took three people to separate the two, Narancia dragging Fugo back as he hurled out an apology with a bleeding nose, and Mista and Buccellati on Abbacchio as he attempted to advance forward and deliver another hit.

Well, they’re on better terms now.

Fugo still thinks Narancia’s asleep when he gets out of bed that morning, since Narancia is an adroit pretender. Fugo also thinks that because Narancia’s asleep, he doesn’t have to be too super quiet when he’s out in the hall on the phone with Trish, which is another misguided assumption.

He’s on the phone with Trish because he’s an impetuous bastard. A cute, charming one, but a bastard nonetheless.

Narancia hadn’t predicted the fact that Fugo would full-on kiss him, especially that hard, at two in the goddamn morning. One second they’re lying together in perfect harmony, all smiles and giggles and joyful eyes, and then Narancia tries flirting, and then it’s over. In Fugo’s mind, it’s
over, anyway. They were lip-locked for an entire thirty seconds by Narancia’s count, and those thirty seconds had to be the best of his life. Better than the time he bought his first Tupac T-shirt! Better than his first taste of ice cream as a child! Better than when he answered all those problems right and Fugo bought him ice cream! Better than *ice cream* in general!

Fugo was embarrassed by it, naturally — Narancia was, too, but not enough to face the other direction. They fell asleep entangled soon after, and now Fugo’s out in the hallway freaking out.

The words “*I don’t want to do anything until I’m sure I’ve got control over my temperament*” filter through the closed door and to Narancia’s ears, and his face instantly falls.

That’s what he’s been brooding over? Was that what he was thinking about those times when he smacked Mista and Abbacchio?

“That’s what he’s been brooding over? Was that what he was thinking about those times when he smacked Mista and Abbacchio?”

“It’s imperative that he’s happy.”

Narancia is happy! Narancia is absolutely overjoyed, Fugo! Especially after those hostilities ended! Everything’s changing for the better, and the world is shining and beautiful and more wondrous than it was before. What a worrywart… he’s worried that he messed up Narancia’s life, but all he’s done is make it far better than Narancia could ever ask for. He’s trying so hard to fix himself, and it’s the sweetest damn thing… Narancia almost wants to rap about it.

Oh! There’s an idea! Maybe Narancia will confess by rapping to Fugo after the rave’s done? Okay, okay — there’s no time to waste. Gotta write this one down to make sure it's absolutely perfect.

“Oh, Narancia,” Fugo exclaims a few minutes after the boy’s already started jotting down words in his notebook, “you’re up.”

“Jus’ got a wicked cool idea s’all.” As he’s using his phone to search for rhyming words, because for some reason this rap is the hardest one he’s ever written before, the thing vibrates in his hand.

“PINKIE, 8:06AM: ok theres a rave tomorrow night we’re all going and abbacchio and buccellati are driving us. i wont be taking no for an answer.

GIOGIOGIOGIOGIO, 8:11AM: My family flies out of here Sunday morning. I can’t be up all night.

ABBITCHIO, 8:12AM: I agree with Giorno. He can’t come to something fun.

CAFE MOM, 8:15AM: Wait a moment, Trish. We didn’t agree to this.”

Narancia silences his phone and decides to let them work it out, delving back into his work. When Fugo attempts to glance over his shoulder, Narancia hugs the notebook to his chest, pages crinkling against his arms; whipping his head around, he manages to snag Fugo’s lips in a delicate, fearless kiss, which sends the other out of the room with a flustered,

“I’m… going to make breakfast.”

Great job, Narancia. You broke Fugo.
Narancia’s only ever heard of raves on television or something of the sort. They’re those dances at big events, where everyone wears neon clothing and fishnets and ridiculous leather boots, and they do tricks with glow sticks and lights. He’s always wanted to go to one, because if there’s one thing he loves as much as Fugo and rap music, it’s electronic beats and dancing like the badass he knows he is.

The drive there is impossibly long, however.

They’re in Buccellati’s car, because Fugo and Abbacchio still aren’t on the best terms — they’re on half-decent terms, but nothing too overwhelmingly positive — sitting in the back with Giorno riding shotgun. There’s no way that Abbacchio will be pleased with Giorno's presence either way. Had Giorno been in Abbacchio’s car, he would’ve crashed it; and now he’s shotgun next to Buccellati, and their car is leading, and Narancia’s pretty sure he can feel Abbacchio’s glare starting to bore holes into Giorno’s head from here.

Narancia would’ve sat shotgun, because Narancia always sits shotgun, but tonight’s a different story. He wanted badly to sit next to Fugo, and didn’t that work out absolutely perfectly? They’re holding hands in the darkness, Fugo’s head on his shoulder; it’s awful warm in this car, warmer still on his shoulder, where he can effortlessly sense the blush spread wide across the kindly man’s cheeks. Fugo sighs once, twice, before sitting back up and turning to gaze out the window, free hand coming to brush over the reddened skin and hovering there as if to hide it.

Maybe if their friends weren’t around, Narancia would say something. He doesn’t, though, holds his tongue as if it’s a sin for him to point out his observation; the street lights flashing by the windows illuminate Fugo’s handsome face in short bursts, and Narancia finds himself enraptured by it. As soon as the former realises that Narancia’s gaze is trained on him like a hawk’s on a mouse, the crimson shade grows three tones darker.

From the front seat, Giorno spins around, nearly catching Narancia throwing sun-kissed arms around Fugo’s waist; he plays it off as stretching since he’s cognizant of the fact that Fugo wouldn’t want to be found like that, not yet, probably not ever. (Since Buccellati’s the one that picked them up, he seems to have figured out their living situation. He’s been suspicious since Christmas, and Narancia’s known that for a long time. The way he eyes them at the cafe says something like I want to ask, but I’m not going to until I’m sure.)

(He’s bound to ask by the end of the night.)

“You two are weirdly silent for once.” Giorno observes whilst Buccellati’s gaze shifts to the rearview mirror and ogles the two.

“I agree.” Thanks, mother.

“Is something wrong?”

Narancia has zero time to reply, mouth hanging agape and breath caught in his lungs as Buccellati insinuates, “I’m sure we’ll learn about it shortly, Giorno.”

If this were some comic, there’d be question marks popping out of Giorno’s skull, and exclamation marks erupting from Fugo’s. Narancia feels pretty neutral about it; it was only a matter of time until they got found out, anyway — right? Secrets can’t always be kept forever, and as days went on they were making it more and more obvious. Driving home together always, the Christmas photo, being in the same house when Buccellati got them…

Their relationship used to be subtle, but it’s evolved from that. Trish knows, and while Trish isn’t quite a secret-blabber, after you tell one person something so close to your heart, it’s going to
spread around to your other friends. That’s the truth in the matter.

There’s nothing subtle about the way Narancia loops his arms around Fugo’s waist in the murky darkness in the back seat of the Fiesta and pulls the two of them closer. He never imagined he’d be making all of the first moves, but here we are! ‘Sides, messing with Fugo like this, making him have this existential crisis that all started because of a lap dance… it’s fun. Hilariously so!

(Fugo never told Narancia if his dance was good or not — but Narancia knows it sparked something because of the muffled sounds from the shower afterwards. Fugo didn’t usually take showers before bed, especially when it was so early in the morning. He’s so obvious.)

Giorno casts the two an inquisitive stare before turning back around in his seat.

"I feel as though Abbacchio is glowering at us." Speculates Buccellati after a few minutes, car rolling into the nearest parking spot, quite the distance from the entrance to the building.

"It’s ’cause Giorno’s in the front seat next to ya." Narancia suggests, finally releasing a very flustered Fugo and watching with a sense of pride as the boy scrambles hurriedly out of the back seat as if Narancia just tried to steal his soul. "We need to do that thing where we sit them two down and have them talk about their problems while someone else sits there and guides them. What’s that called?”

“Peer mediation?”

“Yeah! You two need to have peer mediation.”

That’d probably end in death.

Narancia’s feeling pretty fashionable. It’s not like he nor Fugo own any rave clothing, nothing neon yellow or pink or traffic-cone orange, but in his honest opinion, they do look like they fit the scene. He’s in a tanktop and shorts, glow sticks looped all the way up both arms and another around his head like a halo; Fugo doesn’t own much, but there was this old costume he had in the back of the closet cut up with holes like swiss cheese, so he’s wearing that. He looks like a goofball, decked-out in this ridiculous red and hole-strewn outfit, but Narancia finds it almost charming — no one’s given him shit for looking like those Croc sandals quite yet.

But, damn. There’s one matter that’s killing him: Fugo’s choice of underwear.

When they were leaving the house dressed like this, Narancia glistening like a little angel and Fugo being holey (haha, holey — holy, angel… Get it? Ah, puns), he’d realised that Fugo’s outfit didn’t leave much to the imagination. Should he not have underwear sticking out visibly from those holes? It was all a lie, you see! Because Fugo apparently doesn’t wear boxer shorts or briefs or anything like that. Narancia only figured out that he wears thongs through seeing the little strap peeking out from beyond the hem of the elder’s trousers.

Plus, it was a great opportunity for a gratuitous stare-session at Fugo’s ass.

Buccellati didn’t wear much, probably doesn’t really know what to wear to raves, so he’s just in a T-shirt and jeans — nothing fancy, but nothing that stands out either. Everyone knows for a fact that the man can’t dance for shit, so he’ll probably spend his time staring at Abbacchio.

Speaking of Abbacchio…

The officer hops out of his stupid little Subaru with Trish and Mista in-tow. Abbacchio, being able
to dance — and looking as though he’s got experience with parties such as this one — comes out all too flashy. The guy’s already ostentatious as it is, but this just takes the cake; he’s not wearing a shirt, and on top of not wearing a shirt he looks like he just stepped right out of a punk band. Rule one of going to clubs and stuff is to not show up shirtless and wear a leather coat, because even if you aren’t wearing a shirt, leather trenchcoats like that get fucking hot. Rule two is not to wear tight jeans. Rule three is to not wear fucking goth boots.

What a fucking emo kid.

An emo kid who, more importantly, now probably has obtained Buccellati’s full sexual attraction, if he hadn’t already.

Mista’s just in a crop top and jeans as if it were summer again, hands shoved into his pocket and cap in-place as it always is. It’s different than his usual, a soft shade of baby blue that he’d explained to everyone was a gift from Giorno’s aunt when he first started wearing it around. Baby blue doesn’t fit the scene, either! These people have! No! Fashion! Sense!

Trish strips off a thin coat to reveal that she’s in some bright pink corset, clearly something she isn’t allowed to wear outside of the house nor have to begin with; the outfit is complemented well by an ankle-length skirt that’s split on the left side and a gorgeous pair of high heels that look like they’re worth more money than Narancia’s ever going to make.

Then, there’s Giorno, and because of Giorno, a certain hat-donning individual looks like he’s about to die.

Narancia had assumed that, because of Giorno’s choice of trousers and footwear, that he was dressed kind-of akin to Buccellati. But, he didn’t take into account the fact that the coat was hiding something. In a black fishnet top, nothing underneath, the younger immediately chokes out to all of his staring companions, “I told my father I was going to a rave, and he proceeded to dig in the closet for twenty minutes trying to find ‘something from when he was my age’ for clubbing. I tried to refuse, and he wouldn’t let me go without.”

“Dude,” begins Mista, clearly going into cardiac arrest, “you could’ve just brought a different shirt and changed when we got here.”

“I considered it.”

Trish eyes the group up and down, gawking at each member, though more specifically Giorno and Abbacchio, and with a resolute nod concludes, “You guys are fucking thirsty.”

Brandishing a large pack of glow sticks from her bag, the pink-haired girl immediately proceeds to crack several of them and pass them out like candies, stopping when she gets to Giorno and proclaiming that they must braid said luminescent objects into his hair. That’s met with little protest; the girl sets to work, and Narancia sets to work in his own way, by clinging onto Fugo whenever everyone else is distracted.

“What has gotten into you recently?” Hisses Mister Swiss Cheese.


“I don’t — I don’t think anything, that’s why I’m asking about it.”

Jeez, Fugo, and you always called him dumb?

Trish whirls around at just the right moment to catch them mid-embrace, and as Fugo squirms from their shared grip he announces that they should probably go inside because he’s cold. He’s
not chilly at all, though! Narancia was just against him, and he was warm and soft and nice, like a personal space heater! Liar!

This sort of event operates under different rules than Narancia had expected. After paying to get in, a rather pricy fee that they all grudgingly fork over the money for, they’re asked to present an I.D., and after checking the birthdate of Giorno and Trish the two wind up with X’s on their hands. Everyone else can drink, not like Narancia believes he or Fugo will partake in it — Abbacchio’s certain to tackle something, which means Fugo’s the one driving the shitty Subaru home, seeing as he’s the only other one out of this gaggle that can drive.

Unless Abbacchio’s smart for once and not trying to kill himself.

The interior of the building itself is carpeted, plain walls illuminated by strobe lights and laser beams of varying colours; the place has a DJ, though Narancia sees no need for one, as all the man is doing is pretending to scratch records and using his laptop to play upbeat dance tracks. In the mid-centre of the room in front of the so-called DJ’s podium is a fairly large throng of people grinding on one another as if this were a strip club… Come on! That’s not real dancing — people are dumb.

(Narancia reasons that they probably can’t actually dance for shit, kinda like Buccellati, so they’re resorting to what the rest of the mob does.)

“If y’guys go wash the marks off of yer hands,” Mista hollers over the booming stereo, “then y’can join me at the bar!”

Trish and Giorno swap dumbfounded, doubtful glances before Giorno articulates, “We’re not drinking.”

“I think my dads would stab me if I came home smelling like alcohol, so don’t even hug me after you’re done, alright?”

Mista’s shoulders rise in a judicious shrug before he pivots and heads off towards the bar at the far side of the room, Giorno tugging his hand and pulling them into a swift little peck and reminding Mista not to take it too far. It’s then that Trish drags him off onto the floor, and with glow sticks sticking out of Giorno’s golden hair and Trish’s bust (gross gross gross groooooss), the two proceed to give everyone in the room secondhand embarrassment by dancing together. They’re completely off-beat, though grinning ear to ear and enjoying themselves it seems.

Narancia’s not enjoying watching, and he turns to drag Fugo off somewhere else — somewhere they can be alone but not, out of sight and earshot of their companions. They pass by the bar just in time to see Mista throw back a shot, slam the glass down, and leave to join his lover and Trish in their goofy antics. At the very least, he knows how to move to the beat, and it’s less humiliating to view. There are other people, of course, that really cause Narancia to wonder if they’ve got any culture under their belt with this type of thing… How hard is it to at least sway to the rhythm of the music? Sheesh.

He’s beaming broadly as he drags Fugo by their intertwined hands towards a less-populated area of the floor, where the volume doesn’t quite reach as well and they don’t have to shriek to get their points across. They’re alone, exactly what he’s sought all night — it’s not a good time to confess or anything like that, but Narancia has ideas. Several, in fact. Not quite up to par with that lap dance he gave, though he’d totally give another one should Fugo permit it. Nothing romantic, either.

A dance-off.
They may be in their own little bubble, but Narancia’s never going to pass up this opportunity. A secret that no one at the cafe knows besides the workers is that Fugo can dance like hell — he’s always behind the counter on Wednesday night serving people, though on few occasions Narancia’s caught him tapping his foot and drumming his palm over the marble countertops. Fugo’s skill might as well be tantamount to Narancia’s own. It’s rare that he dances, hasn’t done it in quite a long while now — but the split second Narancia’s smile cracks into a toothy smirk as he suggests it, it’s on.

...boy, do they draw in a crowd.

Narancia’s stamina can easily be described as “higher than a kite”, and Fugo’s is similar. Fifteen minutes in, they’re still going, styles adapting effortlessly to the new song that plays every three to four minutes. Twenty minutes in, and Fugo looks a little tired; they’re both sweaty now, and Narancia thinks the glow sticks around his arms are permanently fused with his skin by this point. Thirty minutes in, and no one pays a lick of attention to the DJ pretending that he’s cool over yonder. Fugo’s breathing is laboured, as is Narancia’s — for once, an actual challenge appears before him! Looking out into the sea of onlookers, the younger can easily spot their friends within the circle gathered around the two, some clapping and Trish cheering them on as she always does.

Forty minutes in, and they’re both enervated. Narancia, barely breathing at this point and with a hand clasped over his chest as he balances his upper body on the weight of an arm pressed against bent knees, proclaims Fugo as the victor “this round”. The crowd disperses after whoops and hollers, sans Trish who takes to offering the two water bottles before clapping both of their sweat-soaked bodies on the back, looking horrified by the moisture, and whirling to go back to dancing with Giorno and Mista in-tow.

Narancia practically inhales the plastic as he sucks down all of the liquid within the bottle, a drawn-out aaah rolling off of his lips.

“My chest,” Fugo pants, adjusting his collar, “is on fire.”

“Happens.” Replies the former, sliding down to a sitting position against the nearest wall. “I haven’t been… beaten in… a dance-off in… years.”


“I wish,” fantasises Narancia, “I could… do those cool rave tricks. With the… you know, the gloves… and the lights?”

“Like Abbacchio is?”

“Huh?” What about Abbacchio being cool? Since when was he —

Ohhh God, he is cool.

From where they’re resting, the two have the perfect vantage point through a gap in the various hordes of people who absolutely, positively, cannot fucking dance. There’s Abbacchio, dead centre, still in his ridiculous outfit, deftly and swiftly moving to the beat with luminescent lights and glow sticks twirling about in his hands.

Damn bastard! Narancia’s the cool one in this friend-group!

Well, in other news, Buccellati’s standing by stiffly, looking dumbstruck by the display. Narancia’s just glad he’s smart enough to realise he’s got zero skill when it comes to these things. It saves everyone the ignominity gained from viewing.
By the time everyone’s ready to go home, it’s early in the morning — the rave itself goes until sunrise, and Narancia’s not sure how these people are lasting that long. They file out with very few others, over half of the patrons having left far sooner in exhaustion. The carpooling is exactly the same; yet again Narancia finds himself in Buccellati’s stupid Ford Fiesta, but if he had to choose, he’d probably take the Fiesta over that fucking Subaru. There’s something unnerving about driving with Abbacchio, anyway, even though the man somehow managed to exert enough self-control to avoid getting shitfaced tonight.

Giorno’s out like a light in the front seat, jacket thrown carelessly over himself like a blanket. Narancia, too, feels as though he’s about to doze off right on Fugo’s shoulder. The split second their little group party ended, he’d removed and tossed out the copious amounts of glow sticks he’d had on him, and now that the car’s no longer glimmering brightly with the sheer force of the colours strewn over his skin the darkness threatens to knock him unconscious sooner than he seeks. He and Fugo share an embrace in the backseat, Fugo’s left arm looped gently and tenderly around his neck, Narancia’s head lying strangely against the boy’s collarbone. It’s a bit uncomfortable, what with the way his neck is strained as he tries to stay close, but he doesn’t want to move at all. The moment is too good, too loving and pure, for him to just squirm away merely because of a slight discomfort.

After all, they’ll get home at two in the damn morning anyway and fall asleep together like kittens, per usual.

Buccellati drops the two of them off first, and a weary Fugo languidly slips from the car before padding to the door. Narancia throws a thank you over his shoulder as he goes, bouncing with an eager energy to the front entrance first and unlocking the door. The two manage to slip inside without waking Fugo’s parents up, the latter boy immediately proceeding to their room. After diverging to the kitchen for more water and chugging back a whole glass in under fifteen seconds, Narancia makes his way there as well.

Fugo’s already curling up under the covers of his bed, a bed that should be two small for the both of them but somehow they both manage to squeeze into it almost every evening. “Not gonna change into pajamas?”

“Too tired.”

Narancia rolls his eyes. “You gotta wake up, then,” he announces, digging into his dresser drawers for some baggy T-shirt and the sweatpants he normally sleeps in, “’cause I got something super important to tell ya.”

Trish and Mista have always proclaimed that moments like these have to be absolutely perfect — that the mood has to be just right, both of the lovers have to be starry-eyed and falling harder and harder with each passing second, that they have to be somewhere considered atmospheric — but what could be more perfect than the two of them alone, in their shared room, in the household Fugo brought Narancia into and bettered his entire life? Narancia places a lot of sentiment into it, into the house, in Fugo’s mother and father, into the family’s actions; more than that, Narancia places the most love into Fugo himself, willing to go the distance to ensure that they’re both happy should it ever come to such an extreme.

It may be two in the morning, and they may look awful and drained from their earlier fun, and both of them might not be fully awake — but now’s a good time, dammit. Narancia thought he could at least make it another day, but his patience in the matter is wearing thin. It takes at least five minutes for him to yank Fugo back to a sitting position, and the grumpy teenager only groans in protest before sitting back up with his pillow over his lap and hair disheveled.
“This is the best time for this, okay?” Narancia prefaces, digging out his notebook from under the bed where he’d written the rap down earlier in the day — it’s finished, took him all day in fact, but he’s a genius when it comes to these things after all. This, right here, is top-tier material. “Are you ready? I wrote ya a rap.”

Fugo looks intrigued at first, and soon after intrigue turns into a state of shock, and from there discomfiture. Even in the darkness of their room, the only light coming from the nightlight Narancia turned on so that he could see while he changed clothing, Fugo’s blush is clearer than the night sky in rural areas.

When the rap finally meets its end, Fugo can only manage a tiny groan and a roll of his eyes before he lies back down and in a callow tone, informs, “This was not the best time.”

“’Cause you’re tired?” Muses Narancia as he hucks the notebook to his bed, letting it glance off of the wall and to the mattress with a thud.

“No. Because I was making plans to confess to you. Idiot.”

Narancia gleefully hops into bed, throwing the covers over the two of them and giving Fugo probably the tightest hug of the century, resulting in partial suffocation for those few brief seconds. “Then after work tomorrow, we go on the date or whatevs!”

“Imbecile.”

Huh. Something about that tone right there is a whole lot less scathing than usual. “Is that an affectionate insult?”

“Absolutely.”

“Ha! Fugo, you’re gay.”

“Thanks, Narancia.”

“Yep.”

Chapter End Notes

Have you guys ever danced for twenty straight minutes at a rave or something before? I don't think I'd be able to do it. I used to be good at it, but I'm so lazy now.

I hope everyone knows that one time in an interview, Araki said that Fugo canonically wears a thong. That's not just one of my headcanons coming to fruition here -- this is real, from the mouth of our beloved mangaka himself.
They’re dropping off the family at the airport, everyone exchanging bittersweet goodbyes and hugs, when an irritated Dio claps Jonathan on the shoulder and leans to whisper something into his ear. They’d had a rough night while Giorno spent time at the rave with friends, much to the latter’s chagrin; he’s at the perfect vantage point to hear what Dio’s saying, what childish susurrations he’s spewing into Jonathan’s ear —

“You’re not welcome here, JoJo. I should’ve tried to poison you instead of father.”

Both Jonathan and Giorno flush white, eyes going wide, stuck open and unblinking as if someone taped up their eyelids. Wait… wait, what? P…poison…?

“He died in the fire, Dio. When you visited last year.”

The… fire wasn’t… arsony, was it?

Their visit to his grandfather’s was cut short by a kitchen fire that spiraled out of control and overtook the entire mansion late at night. Giorno wasn’t entirely sure what caused it, why the chefs were up late, but reasoned it to be because someone was hungry and called upon one of the servants for a meal. He only woke up in the comfort of the guest bedroom when smoke started to fill his nostrils; upon opening the room’s door, the fire licked at his legs, and his only escape was falling into the rose bushes from the third-story window. With several broken bones, it was uncle Jonathan that dragged him to safety before the windows exploded with the force of the heat. Giorno noticed, naturally, that Dio was sitting by the fountain with Erina — Diego wasn’t present, off somewhere else for some horse race as always — but thought Dio hadn’t the time to save them, nor grandfather.

Now that he thinks about it, and now that he hears this… Could his father be assed to save him? Did Dio intend to, or was he about to let the whole family burn up? Jonathan, at the time, lamented over and over again that he hadn’t the time to save his father before the fire consumed him, that the remaining maids and butlers swept him out of the house with all of the force in their bodies.

The police said the fire was an accident, didn’t they?

Feeling ill, as if he’s about to vomit everything he didn’t eat this morning before they left — Dio promised they’d stop by a drive-thru on their way back — he ambles his way towards Erina and Diego, chattering delightfully back and forth between one another. Erina observes that Giorno looks ill today, and Giorno merely lies that it’s because he hasn’t eaten breakfast and he’s just a titch dizzy, that it’s nothing to worry about.


His father trying to poison his grandfather, threatening to do it to Jonathan, and burning down the
Joestar mansion in his next assassination attempt? Terrifying. The thought that he’s currently living with a murderer, and that there’s no longer any evidence to incriminate him with — that Giorno might be next should he ever get on his father’s bad side? Absolutely horrifying.

What was the psychology behind murderers? Should Giorno be concerned? Did Dio care about him? Giorno always felt like there was some level of father-son love between them, like Dio’s teasing was meant in a light way, like their trips to amusement parks and fancy restaurants sometimes wasn’t just because Dio needed something to do. It was… because they were family, right? No matter how grudging or bitter they were towards one another, they were… definitely close, definitely…

God, he needs to get out. Not for too long, maybe just — maybe he’ll just tell Dio that he’s going to spend a couple days at a friend’s house, or something like that. Abbacchio might know something; a smidgen of hope flares in his chest. Abbacchio may be bitchy and curt as all hell, a graceless bastard, but his sense of justice is right where it should be — there might be some ideas he can offer! But, then again, if Dio’s arrested, Giorno won’t have a place to go. They’ll kick him off to a foster home or something of the sort, or make him live in England with his uncle and aunt, away from everything he knows and loves…

Ugh! Why did this have to be so complicated? He would’ve been far better off never hearing that — if Dio decided to rid himself of Giorno, it’d be a surprise. Hey, surprise! You’re fucking dead, kid. Welcome to Hell.

Goodbyes are short-lived from there, and as Giorno shakily climbs into the truck, the only thing he knows he can do is shoot a message to someone. Anyone, at this point. There are things he needs to get off of his chest, friends he needs protection from. A police officer that needs to tell him how he’s supposed to live his life with the knowledge that someone dangerous sleeps in the room next to him.

“Mista.”

“yes i am mista”

“Do you know who’s working today?”

“im not. im hanging around tho. its Buccellati and fugo right now, narancia’s comin in at like noon. y?”

“Is Abbacchio there?”

“y the fuck r u lookin for him”

“I’ll tell you later. Buccellati’s there, so I just assumed Abbacchio was hanging around.”

“nah he actually went back to his damn job today after gettin shot and all. i dunno why but if u need him u can txt him not that hes gonna say anythign to u no offense”

“We just dropped my family off at the airport. I’ll be at the cafe in a while.”

“ok but what the hell is wrong babe”

“I’ll tell you in person.”

~~
Abbacchio’s trying to goddamn do things, people. Why he’s suddenly got his phone blazing with messages from everyone is beyond him — for God’s sake, he just pulled a tailgater over, can’t this wait? No! No, it fucking can’t wait, apparently, so he has to cut his obnoxiously long lecture short and just give the guy his damn ticket before sitting in his car and answering Buccellati’s call —

“There you are!”

“No offense, but I’m fucking working.”

“I understand that. How soon can you head to the cafe?”

“I suppose I can now.”

Alright. See you in a few.” Click. Love you too, honey? What’s the fucking deal today? If someone’s holding them hostage in the cafe, Abbacchio’s going to go in with guns blazing, he swears to fucking God. His partner’s not in the car today, off doing patrol — which is exactly what Abbacchio was and should be doing, still, but the whole world just fucking needs him today, for better or for worse he supposes.

...twenty fucking missed text messages? No wonder it felt like a grenade was going off in his back pocket!

“ANNOYING, 10:02AM: I wouldn’t ask you for help normally, since I realise we’re not on good terms — but I really do need your help with something.”

Well. Too bad, he’s not going to help that reprehensible little Giorno Giovanna.

“MISTA, 10:05AM: ok so i kno u and giogio aren't friends and that u hate him but seriously u can help out with this we need ur cop expertise”

The word is expertise.

“NARANCIA, 10:05AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:05AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:05AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:05AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:05AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:06AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:06AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:06AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:06AM: abbacchio answer ur phone

NARANCIA, 10:06AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:06AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 10:07AM: officer sir

NARANCIA, 10:07AM: abbacchio
Jesus Christ, child, fucking breathe for two goddamn seconds!

“FUGO, 10:10AM: I’m sorry about Narancia, I took his phone away — when can you be at the cafe? We’re working on clearing out the crowd now.”

What’s the fucking problem today?

“<3 <3 <3, 10:12AM: Whenever you can, pay us a visit. This is an emergency.”

What the ever-loving fuck?

“TRISH, 10:15AM: DO U HAVE ANY IDEA WHATS GOING ON ALL I WAS TOLD WAS TO GET TO THE CAFE AND IM RUNNING ARE U THERE?? CAN I GET A RIDE

TRISH, 10:20AM: NEVERMIND I GOT THERE THANX THO <3”

He hasn’t gotten a call yet, so it’s definitely not a hostage situation or anything — seems like everyone’s safe, because his phone keeps going off even as he tries to catch up on messages. Looks like Narancia’s got his phone back from Fugo’s ever-so-diligent watch.

“<3 <3 <3, 10:20AM: I’m going to call you.”

Yep, taken care of, Buccellati. He said he’d be on the way shortly — can everyone else shut up?!

“TO NARANCIA, 10:24AM,: SHUT THE FUCK UP FOR FOUR SECONDS I’M ON MY FUC**ING WAY”

The cafe is ten minutes away from here, and he swears to Christ himself that if that phone goes off another damn time, he’ll throw it at Narancia’s fucking head and give him permanent brain damage. Pulling a U-turn (illegally, oh well), he speeds off in the direction of Passione Cafe, cursing the fact that Giorno’s problem is so big that it literally requires the entire world’s attention. World doesn’t revolve around you, Goldilocks.

The split second he parallel-parks outside of the cafe, for the run-of-the-mill venue doesn’t have its own car park despite its obvious popularity — the land is just too pathetically small — Trish comes bursting outside and practically attempts to drag his lipstick-laden self through the fucking window in an attempt to hurl him inside as quickly as possible. Confused, and still in uniform, he manages a sidelong glance at the CLOSED sign and the way the shutters are drawn over the windows and glass as the thin pink-clad woman uses strength that should belong to a giant to yank him inside.

With a raucous jangle, the bell atop the door slams into the blinds as Trish whaps the handprint-peppered glass door shut.

First comes deducing the situation. The cafe is empty save for the workers themselves, and everyone is here — only two of them don aprons, the rest reclining in chairs and on tabletops, concerned and perturbed expressions wrought on all faces. Giorno’s nowhere to be found, probably in the break room crying his eyes out or something to that effect.

“Does someone, anyone in this fuckin’ place, want to tell me what the deal is?”
“I’ll fuckin’ tell ya,” begins Mista, fuming so badly that smoke’s coming out of his ears, “man — Giorno’s dad’s a fuckin’ murderer, that’s the problem.”

“There’s no need to shout.” Chides Buccellati.

Oh ho ho. So that’s the problem? Kid comes from a shitty family? That’s hilari —

No. No, that’s absolutely not hilarious. There’s something severely wrong with that picture.

All the golden-haired child is, is simply a nuisance. He’s definitely not like his father, a man whom Abbacchio’s only heard tales of — apparently a scary guy just by appearance alone, with an attitude to boot. Giorno’s no law-breaker, probably wracked with terror in the back room. That’s the only reason he’s asked Abbacchio, because Abbacchio’s an officer and he should be trusted with this kind of shit. The mocking smile falls from black-stained lips immediately once that realisation kicks him square in the gut, and with a shake of his head, he proceeds into the break room.

As most break rooms are, this one comes complete with a few lockers for employee’s things, not that any of them are in-use since the group is rather close-knit and trusting of one another. There’s a checkered tablecloth lying across the table, made of a shiny and cheap plastic that Giorno’s fingertips are worrying and puncturing. He’s facing away from the door, gaze locked elsewhere, and doesn’t shift despite the hinges squealing when Abbacchio opens it up.

It’s probably better that they discuss this alone, without boisterous idiots like Mista and Narancia giving their input on the subject. Abbacchio presumes he’s already told the full story to them, anyhow.

“Kid.”

Giorno practically jumps out of his skin, the force of the jolt kicking his chair back several centimetres and causing it to squeak across the tiled floor like nails on a chalkboard.

“Oh.” He’s so out of it that it almost strikes a chord of sympathy with the officer. Almost. “Did everyone give you the rundown?”

Tossing his hat carelessly onto the table, Abbacchio slumps into the seat nearest to Giorno, head resting in his palm and elbow on the tabletop. “All I got was ‘Giorno’s dad kills people’ or something from Mista.” Eesh, dude, don’t be so blunt — you’re dealing with emotional trauma, here! “I need the full fucking story.”

“Right.” Shaky inhale. Exhale. “I found out today…”

Mhmhm.

“…they’d never gotten along, and they still don’t. For good reasoning, too…”

Continue.

“…the fire burned the whole manor down. They said it was an accident.”

“I recall that being on news stations across the globe.” Muses Abbacchio, eyebrows knit.

“Right. Now, I have reason to believe it to be arsony…”

Arsony?
“...he’d whispered in uncle Jonathan’s ear that…”

Poison? Poison… there was a case involving poisoning a long while ago, when Abbacchio was still in training, wasn’t there? Maybe it was even earlier than that, but he certainly remembers hearing about it from elder officers.

“...what I really need your help with is how I’m supposed to get out of this situation, without dying, and without having to move from Naples.”

“Back up a minute there. What’s your father’s last name? Is it different from yours?”

“Brando.”

Familiar! Very, very familiar, in fact! Abbacchio scrawls that down in a sticky note and slaps it onto the brim of his cap as a reminder to look that up later. He can’t quite pin where he’s heard the name, but it definitely wasn’t from any of their friends’ lips or Giorno’s own.

“Right.” Abbacchio has to think about this. The simplest solution to getting rid of your murderous dad from a crime he committed last year, that the idiot police officers chalked up to an accident despite the fact that the… Jonathan fellow seemed to know otherwise, according to Giorno’s tale. The simplest…

Other than finding evidence to get his ass arrested, Abbacchio reasons that the only thing Giorno can do if he wants to get out fast would be to get his father to relinquish custody to someone else. What that’ll entail, and how long it’ll take, is questionable. He can’t say for certain if this Dio Brando guy even gives a damn about his son, if he’d give up custody to someone he hardly knows — it’d just be easier at this point to catch Dio saying something incriminating and launching an investigation, but then comes the issue of Giorno having to move.

At the very least, Abbacchio can sympathise with that — this happened in the past, with parents getting arrested and children not willing to be taken into foster care or under the wing of a relative living halfway across the globe.

He explains the situation, that this won’t be simple no matter which route Giorno takes, that if he wants to live quietly until he’s old enough to move out on his own without legal repercussions that it’ll be the most simple path. The other two, the two he’s seeking, are a little too complex. Unfortunately, Abbacchio isn’t a lawyer, and doesn’t often work with them — he finds them to be somewhat of a gadfly, drab and lifeless, a slave to the courts and making more money than they damn well should. “But, if you want to go through with it, make a good impression on Trish’s parents. They’d probably do it.” Maybe?

Whenever Abbacchio thinks of Trish’s parents, he recalls that time Doppio nailed him in the face with a fucking snowball like a fucking asshole.

Like, okay, it was a game — but that guy throws hard!

“I’ll look into it. I suppose I’d better lie low for a while.”

“Pretend you didn’t hear anything and don’t act out of the norm.”

“I can do that.”

Abbacchio climbs to his feet and claps Giorno on the shoulder, a gesture he hardly uses and surprises the both of them by doing it. Tearing the sticky note from his hat and placing it back on his head, he announces, “We’re behind you, kid,” before stepping out of the room.
Now, if that’s not a bonding moment, what is?

He feels just the slightest twinge of sympathy for the poor kid, after all. Giorno hadn’t done anything wrong per say, just — he’s just an irritant, but certainly nowhere near the louse his father is. Why was he an irritant? Because… he, uh…

Okay, so after their first meeting, they hadn’t talked much. Giorno visited Abbacchio in the hospital, even, despite being keenly aware that Abbacchio wasn’t fond of him. He tried joking, which Abbacchio took the wrong way; he never tried going after Buccellati like Abbacchio initially believed after that little dance-off, just wanted to be friends and all. Hell, he was kind enough to apologise for not being able to afford Christmas gifts for everyone, but noted that he’d make everyone cake “or something” some time; and he pulled through on that, bringing a poorly-frosted chocolate cake to the group’s New Years party. Despite looking like something from an easy-bake oven, the thing was damn good.

...so, there’s no reason for him to be so spiteful, and he’s the asshole here? He could’ve afforded to learn of this sooner!

All this time lamenting over Giorno’s mere existence, the fact that he’d worked his way into their friend group simply because one day he met Mista and went all gay for him — it was pretty useless, right?

It’s always a thing with Abbacchio to push others away until some godly figure descends from the heavens, or something, and beats sense into him. Like, hey, jackass? You need friends to survive.

That’s not to say he quite enjoys Giorno’s presence. Not at all! It’s just that he’s come to understand the blond a bit more, especially knowing now that the dude’s suffering with knowledge that his father might wheel around and quite literally stab him in the back.

“Did you talk to him?” Inquires Buccellati as the officer steps back into the service area.

“Yes. We’re working on solutions.”

Awe ripples through the gazes of the cafe’s employees. “We’re?” Echoes Mista in disbelief. “Yer workin’ with him?”

“I’m an officer. I work with victims often, if not weekly —”

“Did you hit your head in there?” Utters Fugo, arms folded over his chest.

“I did not.”

“He struck a chord with you in there, didn’t he?”

“No, Bruno.”

Yes, Bruno. He did.

Brando. Brando, Brando… Brando…

Some super-secret files are locked down in the system, and fuck if Abbacchio knows how to get into them — there’s a crapton of people with the last name Brando in the world, too. The minor files he can open up have basic felonies on them — this Brando stole something. That Brando kicked a dog once and held an animal-fighting ring illegally in the basement of a bar.
Unfortunately, in this day and age, simply having Giorno testify against his father won’t do anything — they need more evidence, which is only a major fucking inconvenience, considering the fact that the damn kid just found out about this shit a few hours ago. Besides, what he’s stated about the fire in the Joestar manor is just speculation — not that Abbacchio doubts the kid at this point, but in the law, facts have to be hard and witnesses can’t be flimsy or flaky. He can’t call the family, either, as the goal now is to pretend that Giorno doesn’t know anything about that.

Digging up this file is pointless, too, but there’s a pressing curiosity plaguing his brain. He knows he’s heard the name Brando before, specifically dealing with a case of poisoning. The forensics team in another building — a place he visited once before — made jokes about it often. “Check for poison, dude. Might’ve poisoned himself like that sick old man all those years ago.”

If his hunch is correct — and Abbacchio’s instincts are anything but subpar — the poisoning wasn’t the old guy’s fault and was, in fact, because of a certain Dio Brando…

After three hours — literally, three wasted hours — of digging through pointless files and statements and everything else in the database, he finally stumbles upon a file labeled BRANDO, DARIO.

“Witnesses proclaim the elderly gentleman was growing ill and weary after the death of his wife. Sons Diego and Dio Brando, aged twelve, state that he was growing somber and suicidal in his final days. Dio reports hearing Dario utter several times in the night that he ‘wished God would take him now’. Diego’s report is different, as he’s never heard such, but he claims he personally is away from home a lot because he ‘likes to sneak out’.”

Uh-huh. Blah blah, blah… boring, frivolous details —

“The investigative teams and forensics department rule out foul play, as Dario Brando’s body was discovered clutching a vial of poison in his hand. Officers searched for the sons and discovered them to be at the well-known Joestar family manor with a friend of the same age, Jonathan Joestar, stating that their father had given them permission to spend the night.”

Hoo boy.

So, a twelve year-old Dio was smart enough to wear gloves to hide his fingerprints on the bottle when he passed it over to his father, eh? Abbacchio’s not sure whether that Diego fellow has anything to do with this — Giorno didn’t mention it — but this is certainly something.

(Is Dio that good at getting rid of evidence, or are the police in England just fucking daft?)

Abbacchio sees two scenarios.

One, Dio removed the label on the poison bottle and eliminated the actual medication, probably chucking it into the river or something of the sort. That leads to his father getting up to take the medication, taking the bottle of poison from the cabinet, and sitting back in bed to ingest that only to die minutes after. But, that’s only if the poison is potent enough.

Two, Dio removed the label as before, but had previously placed the label for the medication over it before the night of Dario’s death — the pictures display no paper wrapped around the bottle, which should’ve been enough to cause concern, but apparently people are idiots — and placed the mostly-empty bottle into his father’s hands while wearing gloves. The illness could’ve easily been caused by a simple poison (upon glancing at the file, Abbacchio finds the word arsenic scrawled down — how typical). If he recalls correctly, arsenic given in small doses is a slow killer… Why the dumbass didn’t realise he was being poisoned sooner, or at least that his so-called medication wasn’t working after a while, is beyond Abbacchio’s comprehension.
The second one seems far more likely. The children, in their interview, only mentioned that their father was vomiting often — nothing incriminating, nothing to say that Dio knew exactly what the hell that arsenic was doing and what he was doing with it.

Little shit’s cunning. Abbacchio’s gotta give Giorno’s dad some props for that, even if it feels completely wrong.

“I found something that you’d like to see.”

He’s changed Giorno’s contact name from “ANNOYING” to “GIORNO” now, out of some act of grudging respect and understanding for the current scenario.

“I’m still at the cafe. Are we meeting here?”

“Give me some time to print the fucking thing out first.” No need to be so brash.

“What is it?”

“I looked up the last name ‘Brando’. I’ll explain the whole story later, but the basic rundown is that your father probably poisoned his biological dad, too.”

“Oh.”

“Anything to add?”

“He never talked about his dad much. One time, he said that his father was an ‘abusive asshole’, but that’s all.”

“More reason to kill the fellow off.” There’s no message after a few minutes, and as Abbacchio gathers up the papers from the printer — he probably shouldn’t be reviving old cases, but what else is there to do? — he shoots Giorno a, “Not helping?”

“Definitely not helping.”

If he didn’t start giving a shit about the damn kid a couple hours ago, he’d keep going. He’d antagonise Giorno until the world’s end over this issue. But now… now, he’s grown a fucking heart, no matter how unfortunate that is.

“I asked Trish if her dads would take me in, but she said immediately that they’re pretty against her having boys in the house, even if I get adopted as her brother. I’m not sure where to go from here.”

“Ask Fugo.”

“He’s already got Narancia. I don’t want to impede.”

Great, it’s either foster care, or…

“Hey, Buccellati,” he ruminates into the receiver, files tucked under his arm and phone pressed between palm and ear, “how do you feel about children?”

Fuck it.
"Where are the beginning notes, Wolfie, the ones you always put in?"
I excluded them for dramatic effect, since everything went to shit. Surprise!
I feel like in this AU, where no one really has a Stand or any magical powers...
Giorno would be pretty fucking scared. I mean, I would. They're all just big babies here, normal people living normal lives... my poor tortellini son.

Thanks to archive commenter "K" for suggesting this (verbatim from my inbox):
"how about Dio being into some dirty business and Abbacchio finding out and like, hating Gio but a bit less be his dad is rly not that much of a good person?" I saved that message for the last month, sitting on my ass and trying to think of when and what. Thanks for the inspiration, my friend! <3

Remember when this was JUST a cafe AU? haha.

ALSO check out my Josuahan AU, "A Painting of One Thousand Voices": http://goo.gl/LCRkUn
I just started it -- some of you said you were excited to read, so I was eager to get this out.

I was going to do national novel writing month this month, but I figured SLMV is already the length of a full-length novel (officially beating out my original novel, Wave of Ashes, by over 10 pages as of this update). 🤷‍♂️
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Working title: #boyfriends

You guys are really reading a bad soap opera at this point. I'm very sorry.

Whenever I'm putting characters into a scenario that they weren't canonically a part of, I always go into this super-psychoanalysis mode. Like, "How would this character act, given their traits, in this scenario?" Sometimes it feels a little odd.

I base a lot of things that happen to me in real life off of things that I write. I had a coworker obtain legal custody of one of my other coworkers after his family kicked him out of the house before he turned eighteen.

As a side note, my entire family works in law in some way or another.

Gosh, half of y'all were like, "I hope Dio's ass gets arrested" and the other half was like "WAIT don't arrest Dio". I went with what I felt inside, but I feel like I'm now running one of those "Team Peeta versus Team Gale" scenarios. I still love y'all, though <3 <3 <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

It takes convincing to get Buccellati to agree to taking care of Giorno.

When he told Abbacchio over the phone that he was “willing to adopt”, he hadn’t quite meant a fifteen year-old boy whom he considers a friend despite harbouring a somewhat-motherly protectiveness toward him; he was thinking more along the lines of a younger child from an adoption centre, and through a complicated process they might be allowed to adopt said orphan after marriage.

Which, he doesn’t say. At least, not that last part.

He’d just barely gotten off of work the split second Abbacchio called, and now he’s sitting in his car, fingers drumming over the steering wheel and keys squarely in his lap, threatening at any moment to slip between his thighs as he shifts positions in the uncomfortably small space.

He likes children! Children are very cute, to him, and he’s never minded the thought of raising one. Having a family is not something he’s opposed to, especially because he never really had one in the first place — not in the proper sense of the word, anyway. He never returned home to a place that felt like a real home, never stepped into the house and breathed a sigh of relaxation. His exact thoughts on the matter of adoption are simply put, that a child should be able to come home feeling like everything is right with the world.

It’s not that he’s unwilling to help a friend out, it’s just that he’s unwilling to take custody. There’s only a five-year age gap between the two; Buccellati isn't quite ready to be a parent in any sense, especially being unmarried and having managing a damn cafe as his career choice. He’s not paid much more than his friends are, can’t afford a high-end home; his house is stuffy and small, and though it looks nice from outside the inside isn’t anything extravagant in his mind. The guest bedroom that’s never in-use is merely a tiny, square-shaped room sitting at some secluded corner of the home, isolated amongst closets, as if it weren’t meant to be a bedroom in the first place.
despite what the real estate agent said.

The master bedroom? Small. Hardly a “master bedroom”. It’s easily described as “the room you give your eldest child because it’s the biggest” instead of private quarters for the head of the household. He resides in a quaint little house, a house made for one that he got solely because he never brings others over and never expected to even find a lover so soon.

That changed so suddenly. A year after getting it, Abbacchio would sometimes be too wasted to even get to his own damn house, and would lie on Buccellati’s bathroom floor completely plastered until he threw up everything he’d consumed that night and collapsed. Nights like that put the guest bedroom to use — at the time, he’d only stuck a little sofa in there and some shelves and called it the “reading room”. The restroom was just a few feet closer to the secluded room than the living room itself, and though the sofa was significantly smaller Abbacchio always took to resting in there on those nights.

With this sort of event happening more frequently, Buccellati eventually put an air mattress in there, but only after Abbacchio stopped coming over because he was too shitfaced to go home and started appearing “just because” did a twin-sized mattress get purchased. Two of the bookshelves were moved to the living room as best they could fit; the more Abbacchio appeared, the more he furnished the room, and to this day the guest bedroom still has some of Abbacchio’s books resting on the only bookshelf that wouldn’t fit in the living room. At the time, Buccellati joked in his mind that Abbacchio acted like he owned the place, what with leaving his stuff everywhere.

After he fell in love, he’d curl up in the lonely master bedroom in a queen-sized bed that took up too much space, wondering when he’d get the guts to move Abbacchio’s ass into Buccellati’s own room and curl up at the man’s side.

And now, that guest bedroom’s back to being a room that simply takes up space, untouched and with the door constantly shut, because when he has someone over it’s Abbacchio and they’re always within one another’s arms.

He’d planned to keep it that way, planned not to have children or anything of the sort until his budget wasn’t as tight as it is now, until he could go to school and get an actual degree and get a job that wasn’t putting him in financial ruin. He’d planned to keep that bedroom door locked up tight and let the spiders make their cobwebby little homes in there, not suddenly have a… teenager living with him.

“I meant a younger child that doesn’t have a parent.” He emphasises into the speaker, eyes following every little car that passes by him and disappears beyond the horizon. “I understand the situation — I must say that I’m honestly surprised by your wanting to take care of him.”

“I’m an offi —”

“Most officers don’t just pluck children who may potentially be in danger out of their homes and offer to take care of them.” Abbacchio is silent over the phone, though he huffs into the speaker. “I’m saying no for several reasons, Abbacchio. First and foremost, I don’t have the funds to take care of two people. Secondly, we’re both only in our early twenties — the brain doesn’t fully develop until after age twenty-one, and I —”

“I’m twenty-one. So —”

“— feel as though I’m not fit to take care of him, that perhaps we’re rushing into a drastic conclusion.”

“Do you have another idea?”
“He could always ask his extended family to move out here.”

Again, Abbacchio huffs into the receiver, probably drumming his fingers across the back of the phone or on a nearby desk. The crinkling of paper sounds dully over the other end.

“The safety of the general public is important.”

“I realise you’re having a difficult time with this,” replies an exasperated Buccellati, “and that you insist upon doing your job as an officer, but doing your job as an officer would mean collecting hard evidence and removing the victim from the home.”

“That’s what I’m —”

“… Asking me to take care of him, to sign paperwork and take custody, implies that you care about Giorno more than you’d like to admit even to yourself.”

“That’s not the point.”

“As I said. It’s a no for now. I can’t take care of two people.”

“There doesn’t have to be a you. It could be we.”

It takes Buccellati a second to figure out what the hell that’s even supposed to mean, before he spits acidically into the phone jammed against his cheek, “We’re not married.”

“I never implied —”

“… Because we’re not married,” the words stick in his throat, “I’m the one financially responsible. I’d be the legal guardian. You could walk away at any time.” All of his insecurities about the relationship begin to surface at that exact moment, spilling forth from his lips before he has a chance to catch them.

They’re polar opposites. People imply that opposites attract, that yin and yang in a relationship is a good thing. Perhaps that works for some, but it may not work for them. Abbacchio’s aggressive while Buccellati’s a little more mellow; one of them’s a drunk and the other hasn’t gotten shitfaced a day in his life. Abbacchio fires off his mouth like no one in the world cares, and Buccellati prefers to gather his thoughts before he attempts to articulate. They’re nothing like one another, even listening to completely different styles of music — they can’t even watch the same movie without one of the two growing bored. They’re different, too different, and one of these days their differing opinions will move from something small like television shows, to something larger that’ll shake the foundation of their relationship.

All and all, Buccellati’s just afraid that something like this won’t last. He’s come to grips with that, convinced himself that a first relationship with someone of a different caliber won’t ever make it past the first few months. Friendship’s probably all they’ve got between them, and maybe they’re mistaking a strong sense of kinship for love. Does Buccellati love Abbacchio? Yes, he thinks, undyingly perhaps. Is it reciprocated? Yes, endlessly. Are they better off as lovers or friends? Is there someone better out there for both of them?

At what point will Abbacchio grow bored of Buccellati’s unlively and mild nature? Sure, Buccellati has his moments when he steps up to the plate, easily able to lead — easily able to scold someone for doing something wrong, or prove a moral point when it comes to that. Sure, he harbours some rather interesting mechanics in his psychological state. But when it comes down to it? This is bound to end almost as soon as it began.

There’s silence over the phone, long and drawn-out; time ticks by as if slowed, coming to a stop.
when Abbacchio murmurs dejectedly into the phone, “Do you honestly believe I’d fucking walk away from you?”

“Well —” It’s not that he believes it, but that he’s come to realise that could damn well happen one day. Despite the contradictory thoughts tearing his mind in two, the dominant side of the inward argument says that all good things come to an end. “ — Giorno.” He concludes with a resolute nod.

“You just psychoanalysed me and said that I cared.”

“I —”

“Put the damn kid aside for one minute. I’m coming down to the cafe right now to give Giorno these files I found, and then I’ll get rid of your stupid insecurities.”

“I’m not inse —”

“I’m in love with you, fuckass. That’s not going to change.”

Whatever “files” Abbacchio gave Giorno, he wasn’t there to see, and took to going home and texting Abbacchio to meet him there. He’s still not entirely sure how he feels on the whole “legal custody” thing that’s going on right now, but he feels positive that Giorno will be well taken care of even if he’s not the one doing it per say.

That conversation is, of course, pushed aside for later when a still-uniformed Abbacchio stops patrolling around like he should be and shows up to Buccellati’s house. He’d left the door unlocked, messaged Abbacchio that he had and that the man should just let himself in whenever he saw fit; Buccellati’s lying down in bed, brooding and contemplating the little differences they have, throwing his mind into a diffident fit as he pulls the sheets up to his chin and huffs. Maybe he should just take a nap?

In a puerile attempt to lift an obviously-moody Buccellati’s spirits, Abbacchio steps into the room and tosses his cap so that it lands right over his lover’s nose. Alarmed, the former squirms around underneath the sheets before sitting up, hat plopping onto his lap; he offers a teeny, forced smile, though it evolves from forced to natural as soon as Abbacchio scoots next to him and throws a single arm around his shoulder.

“What’s the fuckin’ issue, now?” Inquires Abbacchio, and after a short sigh and a falling grin Buccellati spills his inner lamentations, only to be met with a half-curt, “You’re a dumbass.”

“Thank you. How reassuring.”

“I mean it in the best way.” Someone should honestly tell Abbacchio how to speak to people properly. “...still worried?”

“Considering the fact you did nothing to erase said —”

“I’d marry you if you’d let me.”

Buccellati’s face goes from pale to cherry red within four milliseconds. He hasn’t a clue what to say, hasn’t been suave a day in his life, in fact; he doesn’t read enough romance novels, doesn’t spend enough time with Trish and Mista to know what the fuck to express. Sputtering, “I’d say yes if you asked,” he flops further into Abbacchio’s grip, head lying in the crook of the officer’s neck.
“Still worried now?”

Buccellati elbows him in the ribcage, eyes shut and brow knitted in teasing annoyance.

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“I’d rather live with you.” Says Giorno idly over the steaming mug of apple cider that Mista shoves into his hands practically the moment he sits down on the couch.

“Yeah, but,” starts Mista, one arm stretched clichely over the back of the couch behind Giorno’s head, as if he were some smooth-ass playboy from an 80’s movie, “I can’t even take care of m’self. At least our cafe mother’s got more money and responsibility. Just sayin’.”

Half an hour ago, on their walk to Mista’s apartment (for Giorno wasn’t going home, at least not tonight), he’d gotten confirmation from Abbacchio that Buccellati had agreed to let Giorno live with him, on the terms it wouldn’t turn their relationship into something strained. There’s just papers that Dio needs to sign, and he’s good to move in — according to Abbacchio, Buccellati’s “verbatim quote” was, “He’ll be a friend on an extended stay. Legal custody doesn’t mean I’m going to completely rule his life or make his decisions for him. We’ll be like roommates.”

(Addacchio made a note thereafter that if Giorno “couldn’t control his hormone-driven, fifteen year-old ass”, that he’d “drag Giorno out by his hair”. Some things won’t ever change.)

Giorno has the brainpower to acknowledge the fact that he’s going to be expected to stay in school, however, and show all of the responsibilities he has while he’s currently under Dio’s so-called “care”. That’s not going to change, and he’s willing to keep everything the same, besides the fact that his living arrangements will shift should Dio somehow agree to this.

Would Dio care that Giorno wants to leave in the first place? Should Giorno say something, something like, “I know you tried to kill people in the past, and that concerns me”? He doesn’t really want to go through the process of getting Dio arrested; there’s still some familial love there, he realises, even if their relationship was everything but functional in all regards. He’s only concerned with his own safety at this point, made paranoid as all hell with a need to get out and find somewhere else. Somewhere safer.

They’ll rekindle a father-son relationship later. Maybe. Potentially? Giorno’s not entirely sure where to go from here.

“‘Sides, wouldn’t y’get tired of waking up every day and seein’ my ass?”

“What would make you think that?”

Mista shrugs. “I smell bad.”

“You smell fine.” Sure, Mista has his moments, but his habits are evolving.

“Alright, caught me. I jus’ think it’s a bit too early for us t’think about livin’ together. Even if your dad’s an ass. I still barely make rent on this shitty place every month, anyway.”

“I could get a job and help.”

“Jobs ain’t fun. I have horror stories about angry people and their nonfat chai lattes.”
“You wouldn’t want me to work at the cafe?”

“Not for my sake. Do it for yerself.”

Giorno shrugs his shoulders, lying back against the couch and taking a brief sip of the dark brown drink situated in what looks to be an old custom mug with Mista’s name on it. “If I get a job there,” he offers with a thin smile, gleefully looking up at Mista with a glint in his eyes, “I’ll be the one paying for dates.”

“No.”

“We’ll see.”

“GioGio!”

“We’ll see.”

They’re watching a movie around ten o’clock, moonlight seeping through the closed shutters over the glass balcony door, curled up pleasantly within one another’s company, when Mista’s fingers wiggle their way over his sides. He stiffens reflexively, squirming aside before a tiny giggle breaks over his lips and he shoves Mista’s hand back.

“Don’t tickle me.”

“Why?” Inquires a playful Mista, fingers twiddling in Giorno’s easy grip.

“Because I said.”

Mista continues to wiggle around, hand ducking away from Giorno’s; his fingertips charge forward, and Giorno’s poor attempt to dodge sends him rolling off of the couch and to the floor with a dull thud that shakes the entire apartment. Ignoring it, Mista pushes the table aside with a single bare foot and plops precisely on Giorno’s stomach, fingers waggling over the exposed skin on Giorno’s neck. He writhes, bringing his shoulders up as a shield of sorts, his attempts to escape made feeble by Mista’s weight pressing down on his gut like a boulder.

Placing his hands up to Mista’s chest in trial to push him back, Giorno shouts, “Get off of me, you’re heavy!”

“Did you just call me fat?” Retorts Mista, mischievous glint never leaving his dark eyes for even a second as he threateningly raises both hands up to his cheeks, smile spread wide across sun-kissed features. “You know what that earns ya?”

“No —”

“Death by tickle.”

Giorno manages to catch Mista off-guard long enough with a forceful shove that it leaves him an opening to escape. He flips onto his stomach and crawls away; Mista lets him, and as soon as Giorno’s on the opposite end of the couch their game of cat and mouse begins. They taunt one another for a while; Mista moves left, Giorno moves left, they make a full lap around the couch. Mista throws the television remote as a distraction, but Giorno doesn’t look away long enough for Mista to complete the half-lap around the sofa.

“Babe,” begs Mista, “can’t you look th’ other direction for five seconds?”
“Never.”

“I really need ya to look at somethin’.”

Giorno cocks a brow. “Look at what?”

“Jus’ — I dunno, turn around!”

Giorno decides to humour him, nonchalantly and submissively raising both hands and turning, only to bolt off into the bedroom seconds after; Mista gives chase seconds after, a dejected “Hey!” resounding through the night-darkened house.

As expected, Mista’s bedroom is ever the more messy part of the house, but Giorno ignores his nitpicking about his boyfriend’s habits in lieu of throwing himself onto the bed and making a shield of pillows. Mista bursts into the room seconds after, catching Giorno in the act of poorly defending himself, tearing away the two pillows and catching Giorno in an embrace before the latter has a chance to hop off again.

Mista tickles him until he can’t breathe, and they settle down; the dull static drawl of the television set in the living room hums through thin walls, barely audible over Giorno’s strained breathing. He clocks Mista on the head with the back of his palm, a gentle tap that lands against the folded-up brim of the cap that aunt Erina knitted for him. Mista shifts, craning his neck to kiss the back of Giorno’s hand.

“Remember that time,” muses Mista as he sits up, untangling their snuggle, “when we went t’ th’ gardens?”


“Y’looked cute in my hat.”

Giorno’s glad for that little reverie, but he’s not entirely sure what Mista’s getting at until the other pops back at his side and plops his old hat atop Giorno’s head.

“Hats aren’t really my —”

Mista kissing his cheek shuts him up. “‘S’probably real hard to wear that with yer hair donuts.”

“Hair donuts?” Echoes Giorno, involuntarily sweeping a hand across his circle-curled bangs.

“Would y’prefer hair cinnamon rolls?”

“N —”

“Tortellini?”

“Mista.”

“I got it. Y’know those little tiny circle-shaped pizzas?”

“Mista.”

“They’re —”

Giorno kissing his cheek shuts Mista right up.
It’s a week until Giorno officially moves out. He’d been slowly moving stuff over to Buccellati’s house, small things like trinkets and the unopened keyboard piano that was his Christmas gift. Some clothing goes along, too, and things he deems important and necessary but won’t need immediately.

Buccellati cleared up a guest bedroom for him, explaining the reason for the atrocious state of the room was because it’d been locked up for a long time and the spiders decided that it was their home. The staggering amount of dead spiders and other such insects lying among cobweb-strewn floors and walls made his skin crawl.

When he popped over the next day, that’d been cleaned up nicely, didn’t look at all as if it’d been previously infested with a plethora of creepy-crawlies. Now, Giorno has nothing against spiders or anything, but when they’re lying dead en masse and eating moths in front of him? That’s where he draws the line.

Over that week, Giorno spends time passive-aggressively trying to hint at his father that he knows and wants to leave.

He’d gotten books on poisonous animals at the school library and purposely left them out on the dining room table; mentioned detective cases or some incident of poisoning from Sherlock Holmes. He’s shown murder mystery movies to Dio during “family time” (which is really Dio reading and Giorno sitting on the couch), which he constantly comments that he bets the cause of death is poison even if it’s completely irrelevant.

It’s the night before he leaves, when they’re sitting at the table over dinner, when Dio idly and shockingly mentions, “It was arsenic.”

“What was arsenic?”

Looking up from his book, a red-backed novel missing its dust jacket, Dio ruminates, “The poison I used on my biological waste of life of a father, and that I attempted to use on my adoptive father, before that damn JoJo stopped me.”

Giorno’s known that the man isn’t at all daft for years and endless years, but the fact that his asshole father’s been leading him along all this time is ridiculous. Giorno knows more about poison dart frogs than he ever needed to know, in his entire fucking life, because this jackass couldn’t be assed to bring the topic up sooner.

“He stopped you for a good reason.”

Dio gives a lackadaisical shrug. “You’re allowed to leave whenever you want, Giorno.”

The way Dio’s just giving him permission to up and leave drives him absolutely nuts. “You’re letting me go, just like that?”

“Suspicious?”

Giorno rolls his eyes.

“Our family’s never had anything but strained relations before. This doesn’t surprise me in the least.”

“You don’t care?” Does part of Giorno wish his father would care? Perhaps, maybe, in some strange way, that he’d actually give a shit about his son — his flesh and blood — giving up hope?
“I know the lock code on your phone,” ugh, “and you left it here three days ago. I checked while you were at school.” Pause. Dio lifts a brow. “If it’s any consolation at all, I’m not signing custody over, but permit you to go live with what’s-his-ass. You’re still my son.”

“Answer the damn question!” Shouts Giorno, rising to his feet and slamming his palms on the table; Dio hardly looks alarmed, instead meeting his eyes with a steely mien. “Do you care — did you ever care — about my well-being?”

Eyes darting back to the yellowed pages of his novel, Dio merely replies, “As your father, your happiness is important. Your living under my care is not.” What the fuck does that mean? “Again, this family is built on nothing but spite.”

Giorno falls silent, turning to trek to his room and pack up the rest of his items. He stops dead when Dio presupposes, “You’ll get away with whatever criminal acts you take part in.”

“What are you implying?”

With a bemused, toothy smirk, Dio replies, “You’re part of the Brando bloodline — cunning, charismatic, and astute. It’s merely a matter of time before the antipathy running through you causes severe harm to someone. What’ll you do then?”

“Nothing, because it won’t happen.”

“Wrong.”

“It won’t —”

“It’ll happen, and you’ll erase the evidence.”

“It will never —”

“Getting away with murder is what our family does.”

“I’d never —”

“Something will transpire. After all, you’re my son.”

Chapter End Notes

I think Dio would care about Giorno, but not quite in a way people would see as "caring". It's awkward and strained and rough.

Some notes on slower updates: Since I am working on two fanfictions at once now, alongside college and work, updates will be on a weekly-ish basis for both. I'm trying to shoot for every 5 to 7 days, and hoping I won't take longer.

I work at a movie theatre, and unfortunately we're expecting a fucking fuckton of people to come in for the new Star Wars movie -- our theatre alone has sold about four thousand tickets for it -- so my weekends are unfortunately booked. :( The damn movie comes out in December, but everyone keeps coming in because of the new James Bond movie.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

This is the dorkiest chapter in the whole thing, probably.

There is mild reminiscence of sex in this part. It's not explicit, nothing like last time. HOWEVER if that does make you uncomfortable, when Giorno's part starts up (because he's very thirsty lmao), feel free to skip to the paragraph that starts with, "Giorno's hair is a fucking mess" and go from there.

"We broke rule number one" joke is an inside joke with my girlfriend, because her mom said the exact same thing to her before I came over. And then we broke rule number one. (Don't be like me, kids.)

Also, my aquarium where I live has a part where you can pet the manta rays! They're very friendly and squishy-feeling.

Personal musings aside, I read all these fics where people put in really short chapter notes and I wonder how they do it. I love talking and sharing my thoughts with you guys! More importantly, if you're wondering how long Sei La Mia Vita is going to be, I, erm... don't have a fucking clue when I'll conclude it. I really want this to be the longest JJBA fic on archive, but to do that I need to top 173,935 words :o So maybe not. I'll take third place or something.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Giorno’s mood shoots up drastically during the first week he’s living with Buccellati. All around, the kid’s polite — he’d expected it, but found he was pleasantly shocked as well. He’s tidy and neat unlike most teenagers, more fun to talk to than Buccellati had initially imagined. Their relationship doesn’t grow strained nor awkward with the new living arrangements, and on mornings where Buccellati doesn’t have to work so early he’s able to drive Giorno to school.

They’d discussed it, the two of them plus Abbacchio — discussed Dio’s odd permission to just let his son live with someone else, discussed this farfetched prophecy that Dio came up with before Giorno left about how Giorno was absolutely bound to harm someone one day. When they were discussing it, he’d been nervous, and only about that; his fingers twitched and he never once met either of the adults’ eyes.

“I’m still his son,” Giorno stated, fidgeting in his seat, “he said, and based on that he won’t sign custody over. He’s fine with me living here.”

Abbacchio and Buccellati had exchanged a concerned glance, but that was all. Abbacchio inquired about making an arrest, gathering evidence for it, but Giorno argued that he still feels familial love there — that despite all the shit that went down, he still cares about Dio, as Dio’s all he’s had for his whole life. That despite his father being all but a good one, they’re still family, and he can’t stand the thought of going against that.

It’s a sweet thought. Buccellati has some qualms against it — what if Dio tries this shit again? — and Abbacchio’s completely against it. The officer did everything in his power to convince Giorno otherwise, screaming and shouting as he normally did, and in his frustration reverting back to his
semi-old ways of insulting Giorno himself. Giorno didn’t have any response to it, merely sitting there with slumping shoulders and continually crossing and uncrossing his legs.

That happened on the second night of their newfound living arrangements.

Taking Giorno in, without having custody of him as per the original plan, still earns him his share of mom jokes. He’s gotten used to them, been dealing with them for years, but somehow they’ve gotten worse. When the chaos dies down, he reasons that the jokes will flicker out as well.

He’s with Abbacchio on the couch, and they’re not watching a movie — merely talking while Buccellati’s eyes glance over a pitch-dark television screen. Usually, there’s something on, whether it’s one of Abbacchio’s action-mystery flicks or Buccellati’s rather obscure tastes. Tonight is different, however, in multiple regards.

They’re talking when Giorno pops out of the guest bedroom, treks down the hall with his socks sliding over the carpet. He maneuvers his way into the kitchen, jars clinking as he gets into the refrigerator, and then appears in the living room again with a glass of water. He casts the two lovers a swift little glance before padding back to his room.

He comes back not five minutes later to put away the empty glass. That’s fine, Buccellati thinks, until Giorno stares at them again for a split second from the kitchen entrance before he takes off again.

Another five minutes and he’s back, buried in his phone, presumably texting someone by the way his fingers move. That someone is probably Mista. Since Abbacchio always brings the new puppy over to Buccellati’s house, Giorno takes to playing with the rascal (Giorno had stated that Dio never liked dogs, that he’d never had a pet, and this was kind of exciting to him), occasionally snapping pictures on his phone and appearing as though he’s sending them out. This doesn’t hinder their conversation, and Buccellati and Abbacchio keep on chattering as if the kid isn’t there. The occasional cheek-kiss or peck on the lips goes out, and at one point Buccellati’s lying over Abbacchio’s lap with the latter’s fingertips running through his hair.

He’s quite honestly about to doze off when Abbacchio murmurs, “I’m staying over tonight.”

“Alright,” says Buccellati groggily, and Giorno sighs. “What’s wrong?”

“Sorry. I was searching for an opening to inquire as to the rules of having Mista over, if that’s allowed in the first place.” Straight to the point. None of that beating around the bush shit that Mista always does when he’s trying to ask for the day off.

“I’m not here to control you. We’re roommates,” offers Buccellati, sitting up and leaning to glance at Giorno over Abbacchio’s shoulder, “and thusly you don’t have to ask before you bring a friend in here. All I ask is that you don’t destroy the house.”

“Absolutely.” Agrees a suddenly-eager Giorno as he immediately hops onto his phone, the pup in his lap licking impatiently at his fingers.

“Is that what you’re being so damn passive-aggressive about?” Snidely remarks the king of passive-aggression himself. “Just ask your goddamn question.”

Giorno proves, yet again, that he’s completely immune to Abbacchio’s temperament.

“I need to tell you the rules of having boyfriends over, however.” Begins Buccellati.

“Alright.”
“Rule number one — no sex.”

Pause.

“...is that all?” Inquires Giorno.

“That’s all. Abbacchio and I won’t, either.” Affirms Buccellati, lying back against Abbacchio’s shoulder as he whistles for Moody Blues to come and play, though the officer looks rather disappointed with these events.

~~

They broke rule number one.

In Giorno’s defense, he told Mista that Buccellati said no, probably out of a need for privacy in the house and the fact that no one wants to hear their friends moaning in pleasure from the other room. Knowing, too, that both of them are rather loud from their previous session, Giorno tells Mista outright that that’s the rule. Hell, Giorno doesn’t want to hear Buccellati and Abbacchio going at it while he’s living with the former, either! He’d told himself to respect that, and then…

Mista came over. And that was the end of it.

At first they were playing with the pup, until “mom and dad” as Mista called them at the time went to bed and took Moody Blues with them. The two watched one of the many romance movies that Mista brought over that night, curled up on the couch underneath a blanket thrown haphazardly over their forms. Giorno doesn’t recall much of the movie, because halfway through Mista’s lips were on his neck — and yet again, in his defense, not only did he tell Mista about the rule, but Mista also knows that he’s a teenager subject to the whim of his hormones.

Rule number one was forgotten after the movie finished. Giorno kept telling himself no no no in his head so not to anger the sleeping couple in the next room, but they laid down together in the small little bed and curled up and that was the fucking end. And, unlike last time, Mista had brought things so they could have actual sex instead of just a rousing game of jacking one another off.

It started with simple relaxing, and then they were kissing, and then they were making out, and suddenly there was a hand on his ass and then next thing Giorno knew he wasn’t wearing clothes! Funny how that works, right? Even funnier is how much louder one’s moans get when they’ve got a dick in them.

Those musings aside.

Giorno’s hair is a fucking mess in the morning (wonder why that is?), golden curls all tangled together and his normally-swirled bangs pushed upward like a strange cowlick that flows over the back of his head. When he looks at his reflection on his phone’s screen briefly before he checks the time, he thinks he may resemble one of those dinosaurs that has the fin on its head. What’re those called, again? Dilophosaurus? Diego would know.

Whatever. So, the point is, Giorno looks like a Dilophosaurus because of awesome se —

“Mornin’.”
Giorno rolls over toward the sound of Mista’s voice, nuzzling their foreheads together and discarding his phone to the shelf he’s using as a makeshift bedside table. “Morning.”

“GioGio?”

“Yes?”

“We broke rule number one.”

Giorno chuckles dryly and plants a kiss on Mista’s lips. They weren’t… that loud, right? Buccellati’s room is all the way down the hall! They couldn’t have possibly heard a thing, right? …right?

Fucking wrong.

Giorno pads out into the kitchen with the intent to grab cereal, a capless Mista in-tow and with his short, black hair in an equal mess though not quite as prominently noticed as Giorno’s brand new hairstyle. Neither of them bother to get dressed too much, merely wandering into the kitchen in pajamas — Mista wryly jokes that at least they bothered to wear something.

It’s when they’re getting cereal, that Abbacchio comes bolting around the corner with Moody Blues tucked into one arm, the puppy’s tail wagging and tongue lolling out as his master shouts, “Did you fucking forget about rule number one?”

“Yes.” Says Giorno, shrugging his shoulders as he slides the carton of milk over to Mista, though he shoots out an apology afterwards.

“Revenge will be had.” Threatens Abbacchio as he snags a coiled-up leash off of the counter and hooks it into his puppy’s collar before stomping in sweatpants. And, Giorno’s not really sure what he means, until —

Okay. He gets the point! He gets the damn point, don’t fuck in the house, alright! Shut the fuck up in there!

Giorno shoves his fingers into his ears and buries his head under his pillow, only to inevitably hear those vile noises yet again from the other room. When they die down probably an hour later, he dies a little inside. All the while he’s been shooting texts to Mista seeking consolation for his midnight lamentations.

“They’re getting revenge.” Followed by, “I’m beginning to believe we didn’t apologise hard enough.” Which is then followed by another, “End my suffering.”

Mista, apparently asleep before the third message came in, apologises for being “out like a light” before sending back, “are they done yet u’ve been txting me for 1 hr”

“Finally, yes.”

“are u gonna have ptsd from this”

“I don’t think it was that bad.”

Giorno tunes in to footsteps making their way down the hall, practically leaping with alarm out of
bed when the door opens. Buccellati leans against the doorway, hair disheveled, plain white shirt half-unbuttoned and slipping off of his shoulders as if he never even took it off. They stare at one another, long and drawn-out and completely awkward, until Giorno’s new housemate manages a huff and a,

“I hope you’ve learned your lesson.”

Giorno ignores that. “Have fun?”

“Mm.”

“...rule number one?”

“Repealed.”

“Is ‘no sex while the other housemate is home’ acceptable?”

“That can work.”

~ ~

The next time Mista comes over, no one gets laid, and that’s an all-around good thing. That means Abbacchio doesn’t have to skin a bitch!

He’s over at Buccellati’s more often than he was before, because there’s still a pressing paranoia at the back of his mind — could his lover still be paranoid over their relationship and the eventual state it’ll be in? He wants to be there, needs to be there, if only to reassure Buccellati that he’s not going anywhere anytime soon. With the Giorno and Dio drama over and done with, at least for now, everything’s gone back to relaxing and fun. Moody Blues is growing well, still as hyper as the day Buccellati brought him home; the little puppy likes to sleep on the pillows above their heads, and more often than not during the course of the night he slides down and lands over one of their faces, waking the entire room up.

Abbacchio can’t stay mad at the little guy. However, when he’s bigger than he is now? He’s not sleeping on the pillows. He’ll be at the foot of the bed.

(Moody Blues wasn’t allowed in the room when they were taking revenge on Giorno. The dog doesn’t need the trauma that comes with watching his master nail someone.)

(He would’ve got back at Mista, too, because he’s equally at fault — but Mista had gone home after dinner.)

The dog is almost housebroken, and probably would’ve been much faster, if Abbacchio wasn’t so careful with the little creature. He doesn’t want to scold his new best friend too hard. When he expressed that to Buccellati, Buccellati called him soft and cute and a whole slew of things that Abbacchio is not. Abbacchio is the devil in disguise, he swears it! Ruler of Hell! A sinner! Goddamn!

Animals aren’t like humans! Humans suck! Animals are cute! (Unless it’s a cockroach, because those aren’t in any sense of the word adorable and should just die out.)

His absolute love for his puppy aside…
Mista won't stop making puns.

He’s in the kitchen eating breakfast, wearing simply a t-shirt and some old sweatpants that he yanked from the back of his closet before coming over. As far as he’s aware, Buccellati’s currently doing laundry in the small closet that the agency called a laundry room. It’s a peaceful morning, so far; no car horns are blaring, no idiot kids tripping outside, no nuisances… until Mista walks into the kitchen, face buried in his phone, and shows Giorno a picture of the Earth. Giorno manages a confused utterance before Mista cheerily says, “You’re my world.”

“That was lame.”

“That was good! I spent two secs comin’ up with —”

“That’s why it was lame.” Jokes Giorno, dodging around Mista and ducking into the refrigerator, while the other — lord, curse Abbacchio’s fate, for having to listen to this bullshit — gets into the cabinet and pulls out the salt shaker.

“Why are you in-salting me?”

“Because your puns are awful.” Thank you, Giorno! Thank you for being the voice of reason!

“You’re so salty this morning.”

“You can’t use the same object twice in a row to make a pun.”

Mista reaches over Giorno and opens the freezer, nearly clocking the blond in the head as he does so; showing off the tray of ice as if it were a trophy, he mutters, “Yer bein’ ice cold.”

Abbacchio honestly thinks this shit is going to stop, that Giorno’s going to tell Mista to shut the fuck up, because he heaves a sigh and looks utterly disappointed. But then, lightning strike him dead, Giorno brandishes the tub of butter and with a wide grin muses, “You’re my butter half.”

Shut! The fuck! Up!

Giorno slides out of the way as Mista digs in the fridge next — Abbacchio wants to die right now, for God to come down from heaven and punch him in the face so hard that his brain explodes — and, holding up the cheddar cheese, snaps his fingers and says, “Y’look sharp.”

Of all the fucking puns they had to make, all of them had to be centred around the items in the kitchen! And of all times — Abbacchio just wants to eat his bland cereal without killing a bitch!

The blond taps his fingers against the coffee machine. “Words cannot espresso how much you mean to me.”

“Aww.”

Not aww! Not cute! Shut the fucking hell up! That’s not even a fucking espresso machine!

Someone stab him, because the next thing they do is start cuddling — Mista wraps his arms around Giorno’s waist and kisses his cheeks with such an obnoxiously loud smek sound that it boils Abbacchio’s blood. He turns away from them, hurriedly attempting to gulp down the rest of his cereal and leave, but the flirting continues endlessly.

“GioGio, I love ya.”

“I love you, too.”
“Y’see these otters on my phone?”

“Yes?”

“I’m *otterly* in love with ya.”

That’s the final fucking straw. Abbacchio wheels around in his seat, slamming his slippered feet on the tiles and shouting out a riled, “I’m right *fucking* here. Shut the fuck up.”

“Yeah,” starts Mista, placing another kiss on Giorno’s cheek and never releasing his grip on the other’s waist, “we’ve been ignorin’ you.”

Abbacchio makes a gestation of pretending to shoot himself in the temple with finger guns before grabbing his bowl and trekking out into the living room, where he throws his grumpy self down on the couch and continues eating. Moody Blues scoots along the floor toward his master, eyes begging for food and a small whimper leaking from his muzzle. Abbacchio chides the dog, a gentle *no* in stark contrast to his earlier tone.

Buccellati steps around the corner with a laundry basket, casts Abbacchio a vaguely confused glance, and inquires, “Why do you look so perturbed?”

“They’re making fucking puns.” He bobs his head towards the kitchen, placing the bowl up to his lips and gulping back the last of the milk.

“What?” Inquires Buccellati, a glint in his eye — Abbacchio only knows that little sparkle means fucking trouble.

“Horrible puns.” Not that there are many good puns out there, and not that those two could possibly come up with something.

“Puns so terrible,” no, Buccellati, please spare him, “that they deserve *punishment*?”

Abbacchio slams his head into his hand, groaning vehemently into his palm, while laughter erupts from both the kitchen and Buccellati himself. He didn’t fucking *ask* for this repulsive treatment.

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“YOU, 11:17AM: guys

YOU, 11:17AM: guys u kno what we should do

YOU, 11:17AM: we should all go to the aquarium!!!!

PINKIE, 11:18AM: Out with a bunch of girlfriends today — sorry!!!

CAFE MOM, 11:20AM: At work.

YOU, 11:21AM: then close work!

CAFE MOM, 11:23AM: It’s unrealistic to attempt to close down the venue every single time we want to do something. We lose money.

YOU, 11:24AM: :( :( :(
“Narancia,” begins Fugo, “this isn’t going to work out for any of our schedules.”

Angrily waving the brightly-lit screen of his phone in Fugo’s face, from where he’s sitting on the couch with his knees pulled to his chest and his bare toes curled, Narancia argues, “It’s Saturday! They’re open later!”

“We close tonight.”

“YOU, 11:28AM: FUGOS BEING A LOSER

HATMAN, 11:31AM: im off work on tuesday and u guys open right? u and fugo

YOU, 11:32AM: yeah!! can we all go on tuesday then

ABBITCHIO, 11:34AM: No. SOME of us still have JOBS.

HATMAN, 11:31AM: :/ well i was gonna say that giornos free after school too i think but w/e u say

PINKIE, 11:32AM: Im not free tuesday either, becuz my dads are upset that i havent been doing my homework :( on weekdays im supposed to be home, ‘working’, yknow? He even made me cut my hours until my grades go up cos im already blowing this semester!!! grrrrrr. dads suck.

GIOGIOGIOGIO, 11:35AM: ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

HATMAN, 11:36AM: this ^ ^ ^

YOU, 11:36AM: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! ^ ^ ^”

Fugo flops down next to Narancia, lying his head atop the other’s shoulder. Since they’ve gotten together, they’ve told everyone about their living arrangements — the whole story, the whole shebang — and per Narancia’s expectations no one’s given them shit about it besides the occasional teasing remark. Fugo? Fugo was just paranoid all these years that something would go horribly awry!

He’s not giving up quite yet, despite Fugo attempting to take his phone away and telling him that it’ll never work out with all seven of them going at once. Retail is awful in that regard, and it’s not like anyone could possibly convince their bosses to work for a day while they all leave and have fun. According to Trish, it’s hard enough for her to convince one of them to give someone the day off when they hadn’t previously put in a request.

The plans may not work out with all seven of them, Narancia thinks as he starts a new group thread including only Mista, Giorno, himself, and Fugo — even though Fugo’s right there and Narancia’s prone to chastising the other for texting him whenever Fugo needs to say something — but it might just work for the four. Besides, by the looks of it, he might have to convince Fugo to tag along on their rendezvous as well, and what better way to do that than to bug the ever-living shit out of him? They may be together, but certain things will never change.

Plus, neither of them have been on a double date — hell, they haven’t really gone on a real date
yet, just the two of them, but Narancia’s gonna fucking fix that up in a jiffy. It’ll be a fucking blast, the way Narancia sees it, and fish sure are cool to look at. Some of them are just so strange! Like, hey, mother nature, what’s this abomination here? What’s the fucking point?

“You, 11:40AM: don’t tell buccellati or abbacchio or trish bc were gonna go on a double date. u, giorno, me, fugo. ill be fun.

Hatman, 11:41AM: im up for it tbh, i hvaent been to the aquarium here

GioGioGioGioGio, 11:45AM: I went once when I was a child. They had this part at the end where you could pet the manta rays. I don’t know if it’s still there, but I’m hoping.

YOU, 11:46AM: !!!!!!!! DID THEY STING U”

“Fugo!”

Fugo’s not paying attention; despite the fact that his head’s lying idle on Narancia’s shoulder, his eyes are closed, and he seems to be dozing off. Narancia shows little surprise at that as he shakes Fugo awake — he might have sort-of accidentally on purpose kept Fugo up all night, because he was bored and couldn’t fall asleep. “Fugo! Giorno says that we can pet the manta ray things!” Narancia’s not sure of the difference between a stingray and a manta ray. Aren’t they the same damn thing?

Fugo responds with merely a groggy grunt, sitting back up and rubbing his eyes. “That’s nice.” He responds dismissively, standing up. “I’m going to go take a nap before we have work.”

“Wait a sec!”

“What?”

“That’s not how y’nap when y’got me around!” Fugo’s only response is an inquisitive stare, a tilt of the head. Narancia pats one thigh with his right hand, left holding the phone as he waits for Giorno to answer the damn question. “An’ second of all, y’didn’t kiss me.”

The younger’s face reddens just slightly, a tinge of pink blossoming over his cheekbones. He huffs in mock-annoyance, coming over to Narancia and with a hand on the latter’s shoulder, kisses him gently on the lips, a fleeting gesture. When Fugo stands again, Narancia again drums his palm over his leg, a wide smile cracking over his lips. Fugo cooperates, lying down over the small red sofa with his head resting over Narancia’s lap. Narancia hums, drawing his fingers through Fugo’s hair as he toys with his phone using only his left hand.

Fugo falls asleep far too easily when Narancia runs his fingertips through the other’s hair, voice falling to a quiet hum as he coaxes his lover into soundful rest. They do this nightly, almost — on nights when Narancia actually lets Fugo get to sleep, they’ll curl up beside one another, warm and nestled up under one huge and puffy comforter sheet. With his head nestled into Fugo’s chest, Narancia would reach around and trail his fingers through Fugo’s soft and sleek hair and hum some song. On some nights he makes up the tune as he goes, and other times he’s humming a song that shouldn’t be hummed, something like Tupac or Snoop Dogg. Fugo would laugh, then, tiny and breathy, and they’d kiss goodnight and he’d be unconscious within a few minutes. Narancia’d top it off with a kiss to the forehead and a tight squeeze, beaming with affection. God, he just loves Fugo so much. God damn.
Within a few minutes, Fugo’s out like a light, and Narancia can only grin down at the sleepy boy in his lap and take great pride in the fact that he’s a comfortable pillow. He attempts to bend over and place a kiss to Fugo’s temple, but the angle is too difficult, and with a strained grunt Narancia sits back up and huffs.

“GIOGIOGIOGIO, 11:53AM: I don’t recall being stung, no. You’re not supposed to touch the stingers, anyhow.”

Fucking nice! Narancia’s totally gonna touch all of the squishy little sea flap flaps!

Tuesday rolls around all-too slowly for Narancia. He’s hyped to go, too hyped to think of anything else; when Buccellati inquires as to his distraction at work, Narancia lets it slip that they’re going on a double-date to the aquarium — whoops — but Buccellati doesn’t seem to mind, merely telling them to have fun. Narancia apologises briefly, reassured thereafter by the assistant manager that he doesn’t need to worry about it.

“I’m sure we’ll all get to go together one day. We’ll find time.”

Buccellati’s always so kind and encouraging!

They set off after Giorno gets out of school; Fugo’s giving everyone rides, and he’d picked up Mista by the time they caught Giorno walking to his new home. Pulling over, the blond crawls into the back seat, and they’re off through the city.

Idle talk takes over on the way, Fugo remaining mostly silent, though there are times when someone pisses him off and he slams the car’s horn.

“How was school?” Asks Mista.

“Fine. Nothing out of the ordinary happened. Trish lamented to me over being grounded,” Giorno rifles through his backpack, paper crinkling; Narancia spins in his seat to see what he could possibly be pulling out, “and I got the audition script for the next play we’re doing.”

“Are you singin’ in this one, too?”

“No. Hamlet doesn’t have musical numbers.”

“Yer doing Hamlet?”

“Auditions are in a week. I’m auditioning for Hamlet himself.”

“I ain’t even seen the movie of it or whatever.”

Hamlet? Wasn’t that the play written by that one really famous old guy? What was his name, again? Shake Sphere?

“I haven’t read the play, so I picked up a copy at the library.” Giorno plops a rather huge-looking, yellowed book on Mista’s lap.
“Dude, that thing’s fuckin’ thick.”

Narancia asks, “What was that other play thing that Shake Sphere wrote?”

“Shakespeare. One word.” Corrects Fugo, raising his index finger over the ring of the steering wheel for emphasis. “He wrote many plays.”

“The romance one where everyone died.”

There’s a long, long pause.

“He didn’t write romances. He wrote tragedies.” Fugo shakes his head — excuuuuuse Narancia for not knowing! There was that one that all of the teenage girls were obsessed with, right? “Everyone dies in about everything he ever wrote.”

“It’s the — the one with the boy and the girl!” No? Too vague, again? “Th’... th’ one with the girl named Juliana?”

“Are you talking about Romeo and Juliet?”

“Yeah! That!”

“What about it?” Fugo drums his fingers over the steering wheel.

“I jus’ wanted to confirm it was by the same old dude.”

Fugo diverges from the conversation, back into their previous one about whatever the hell Hamlet is. Narancia’s heard the name, and he’s not really sure of the plot, only knows its by that old-ass playwright by the name of Shakespeare. Although, apparently, going off of what Fugo said moments earlier? Everyone fucking dies. “Do you know which girl is auditioning for Ophelia?”

Giorno shakes his head.

“Wait, wait — wait a sec there!” Mista glances back and forth, between Fugo and Giorno. “Who the hell’s Ophelia?”

Narancia, very maturely, hollers, “Is that the girl Giorno’s gonna be macking on?!”

Giorno shrugs, repeating that he has yet to read the play and that he’s not entirely sure what to expect yet, whilst Mista speaks over him in a red-faced shout. “No! No, he’s not — GioGio!”

“You can’t get jealous over the potential for a stage-kiss.”

Mista dips his hand underneath his hat, clearly embarrassed. “I can’t believe yer leavin’ me for a fictional chick.”

Giorno kisses his cheek in one swift gesture. “I’ll take you on a date afterwards. Alright?”

Narancia blows a raspberry at the two of them, repeating the word gross until Fugo chides him to turn around and buckle up.

Admission to the aquarium is by no stretch of the imagination cheap. Mista pays for Giorno, met with some protest, but when asked if Giorno has the money to pay for himself the youngest of their group only shakes his head and heaves a reluctant sigh. Giorno swears he’ll get a job at the cafe and pay Mista back, and that makes Narancia a little excited — working with Giorno would
be a lot of fun!

Narancia shoves Fugo aside with a bump to the hip as soon as they’re at the ticket window, practically shrieking into the mic that he’ll be paying for the both of them. Gleefully turning to Fugo afterwards, he states very loudly and clearly that he’s the man in the relationship and that he’ll be paying for everything. Fugo goes red then, eyes darting away before he closes them and huffs.

“I loooove you.”

Fugo kisses his temple. Giorno and Mista maturely make faces of mock disgust at the two of them as they ride the escalator up.

Boy oh boy, Narancia’s never seen so many fish in his damn life.

There are some that are as big as his head, plain and dark in colour and looking fairly average. Narancia doesn’t know how old they are, wonders if fish can live for a very long time — the informational sign isn’t very helpful in telling him how old the biggest fish in the fish squad is. The tanks in this part are low to the ground and topless, with little ducks swimming atop the water (Fugo explains that they’ve probably gotten their wings clipped, or they’d be flying out the front door). They’re holding hands as they trek from tank to tank, with Fugo lagging somewhat due to the need to read every goddamn sign in the vicinity.

“This one’s called a Barracuda.” Fugo points to a very long, silvery fish, with some badass fucking teeth.

“Imagine gettin’ bit by that.” Muses Mista.

A little down the way is a larger tank, and try as he might Narancia can’t find any fish — until an otter swims up to where he is and places its little otter paws against the glass. It’s then that Narancia’s heart explodes with joy, for the little brown creature does a backflip in the water and swims away. It returns moments later, staring with big eyes at a crouching Giorno, kicking back off of the wall of glass and doing a few laps around its enclosure.

Narancia wants to take the otter home. Fugo says no.

A bit further through the building is a tube-shaped glass walkway, connected to the tanks on either side of it. The tanks are so large that Narancia can’t see the end of them. Fish leisurely swim by, including a large sea turtle that almost looks as though it’s waving at their ragtag little group. There are a few of those green eels that poke their heads out of holes, another few spotted ones; colourful fish dart by in schools, and a very small little shark maneuvers around the sandy tank floor.

“I dunno the difference between stingrays and manta rays.” Admits Narancia as one of the two species — the rounder one — swims up and rests atop the glass tube.

“Stingrays are round,” says Mista, “an’ the mantas are shaped like — like that.” He points, and Narancia’s eye follows the tip of his finger to where a light brown, triangle-finned creature floats on by. Huh! So that’s the difference, then? One of ‘em’s roundish like a pancake, and one of ‘em has like, ocean wings!

One of the green moray eels tries battling for territory near the stones at the bottom of the tank, and Narancia watches in awe for a split second before Mista suggests they take a group photo. Some stranger takes it, and giggles halfway through; when she hands Mista’s phone back to him and they review the photo, the four of them follow suit with her laughter.
Narancia turns to wave goodbye at the stingray that just photobombed them with its stupid cat-mouth as the large creature swims off into the blue depths.

An hour later, they’re in front of a bunch of smaller, closed tanks — much unlike the first, which Narancia could’ve effortlessly climbed into had he so desired — with a bunch of littler fish. There are seahorses, gripping onto plants with their little yellow tails; pipefish that can’t swim like a proper fish and have their noses turned to the ground float alongside snails climbing the tank walls. A gaggle of orange little clownfish — “Nemos” as Narancia calls them — wiggle through their little tiny tank, looking happy despite the fact that he’s sure fish can’t show emotion. In fact, one of the tanks is themed to be sort-of like something out of Finding Nemo, with a couple clownfish and one Dory and one Gill and all those other fish from the movie that Narancia can’t name.

They pass by one exhibit with a few lionfish, and Fugo reads the sign — apparently, they’re venomous. “*Their venom causes the following*,” Fugo recites, “*Pain, nausea, vomiting, fever, breathing problems, convulsions, dizziness, headache, numbness, heartburn, diarrhea, and sweating. In rare cases, the venom can cause temporary paralysis, heart failure, and death.*’ Ouch.”

“For some reason,” begins Mista, “th’ fish makes me think of Abbacchio.”

“Why?” Inquires Giorno.

“Dunno. Fish sounds bitchy. He’s bitchy. He gives me a headache.”

No one argues with that.

Near the end of the aquarium is the shark exhibit. It’s huge, and so are the sharks — they have a smaller Great White in there, apparently, and by the pictures on the sign Narancia’s easily able to pin it. They swim lazily around the tank, hammerheads and the Great White and some tiger sharks and some of those needlenose ones. Some littler fish accompany them, and they remain untouched by the sharks, who swim past them as if the fish don’t really exist.

The sharks suddenly go from lazy to ferocious as, from above the tank where they can’t see, food begins falling. Suddenly, it’s a carnivorous mess, with the vicious creatures practically mauling anything in their path to get to the chunks of meat. The smaller fish eat leftover scraps that rain down, and that’s the only time Narancia sees their teeth before their jaws shut and they go back to… whatever the hell fish do all day. The sharks, however, have their mouths agape, white teeth riddled with meat scrap.

“Sharks are still kinda cute, though.” Idly remarks Narancia as the tank yet again goes to calm, as if nothing happened. He’s lost in a trance, staring at them, when he realises that everyone’s gone on without him, towards a bunch of moon jellies in the next tank — wait a second there, guys! At the very end, lo and behold, that area where you can pet the manta rays is still there. Narancia’s the first to bolt off towards the tank — “You put two fingers in the water and they swim up to you, but don’t grab them, and don’t use more than two fingers to pet them,” says the attendant lady — and shove his hand in the water.

One of the lighter-coloured ones brushes over his fingertips, and he yanks his hand back in alarm. They’re fucking slimy! They’re — eugh! Why are they fucking slimy?!

Fugo appears at his side moments later with four small, dead fish in paper trays, passing them out to everyone. “We can feed them.”
Narancia isn't going to touch a cold, dead fish, and feed it to the slimy, alive fish!

"You’re supposed to hold the fish between your knuckles," explains Fugo as the other two bravely try it, "and hold your hand in the water. Their mouths are on their undersides, so they’ll swim over your hand."

Narancia shudders. This would be a lot more fun if the damn things weren’t all… slippery.

"Is something wrong?"

"They’re fuckin’ slimy, Fugo!"

"Gross." Says Mista, despite the fact that he lets the sea creature eat from his hand nonetheless and swim over him. He’s the first one with his hand in the water, and as a result the entire tank swims over to him, expecting more food. “Dudes,” Mista speaks to the fish, “I don’t have anymore dead stuff for ya."

Giorno goes next, and the crowd’s over at his hand. He snickers through his teeth, drawing his hand back a few seconds later and muttering, “It tickles.”

“Y’know what else tickles?”

“Wha — Mista! No, we’re not having a tickle war in publi — Mista!”

There they go again. Narancia rolls his eyes, watching as the group flaps their little ocean wings toward the dead fish poised between Fugo’s knuckles. “They’re probably so friendly because they’re conditioned to expect food whenever someone’s hand goes into the water.” Reasons Fugo.

“They’re slimy! It’s nasty!”

Despite his words, Narancia decides to suck it up and try, positioning the fish in his hand the way he was shown and dunking his hand into the crystal-clear and freezing-cold water. One of the littler ones swims up over his hand and eats, and Narancia gives a shout of, “They have fuckin’ teeth! Blunt-ass lil’ teeth!”

“Did you get bitten?” Fugo inquires as Narancia shakes the water droplets from his hand.

“Nah, the teeth just brushed my hand! It was weird!”

On the opposite end of the shallow pool, Giorno lets out a tiny shout as one of the mantas swims up and splashes him, hands hovering in front of him in a feeble attempt to block the water. He winces away, Mista cackling all the while.

“We should get an early dinner.” Suggests Narancia, swiping his over his jeans despite the paper towel dispensers behind his back.

“Sure,” says Fugo, before turning back to the manta rays, where everyone but him spends the next twenty minutes just petting the damn animals until their fingers prune. Sure, they’re cute and all, but Narancia’s never touching a sea creature again.

They drop Giorno and Mista off one by one — Fugo almost drives to the wrong house, not quite used to the fact that Buccellati became mom — and then speed off to home. Narancia’s wallet is quite a few euros lighter now, because not only did he pay for admissions, but also went to the gift shop and bought all of the otter plushies he could find, as well as got gifts for those who couldn’t
go. Based on Mista’s earlier comment, Abbacchio gets a lionfish; Trish gets a pink penguin, even though the aquarium didn’t have any penguins there much to Narancia’s chagrin, and Buccellati gets a whale. Narancia knows that no one besides Trish is as big on stuffed animals, but it’s the thought that counts, right?

“I can’t believe how slimy those thingies were!” Still going on about that, Narancia?

“They’re fish. Are you shocked?”

“I was.”

Fugo snorts and rolls his eyes. The vehicle coasts over the street, lights and buildings zooming past and disappearing into the distance behind them. There’s silence, long and drawn-out yet peaceful, unbroken for a time until Narancia murmurs,

“When are we gonna go on a date with just us two?”

“I’d been planning one,” admits Fugo with a pink tint to his cheeks, “but never…” He shakes his head. “Never implemented it.”

“Yeah, I getcha.” Says Narancia. “I totally wanted to ask ya to come with me to somewhere nice, but I dunno where ya even wanna go.”

“Anywhere’s fine.” Pause. “As long as I’m with you.”

“Fugo,” Narancia shakes his head, folding his arms over his chest, “y’hang out with Mista too much.”

“I don’t hang out with Mista at all.”

“You’re a big loser.” Announces Narancia, leaning to give Fugo a kiss on the lips at the stoplight, broad smile plastered permanently to his face as a flustered Fugo trips over his own words while the light changes.

Chapter End Notes

Lionfish factiods: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pterois

You: "What is this bullshit, Wolfie?"
Me: my mind is an enigma
Something’s \textit{wrong} with Abbacchio.

Buccellati notices it first, being the closest to him at any given moment; he seems just a bit drunker than usual, more out of it, as if in a constant trance. Previously going from drinking, to slowing down on drinking once Buccellati intervened, he’s now back into his old alcohol addiction — and this time, it’s ten times worse. Even on days he swears he hasn’t had a drop — and laments that he needs it — he still smells heavily of wine. It’s as if the alcohol is embedded into him, part of his cellular makeup.

Mista jokes that Abbacchio has blood in his alcohol stream. Buccellati doesn’t find it funny.

When everyone else begins catching on, it’s no longer something to poke fun at.

There are days when he doesn’t show up to the cafe while on his usual patrol; days where, despite Buccellati constantly messaging him, he’ll get at-most a three-word response, or some garbled mash of buttons indicating he’s too inebriated for auto-correct to save him. Days where he doesn’t speak at all if he comes in, merely sitting and staring out the window, taking several seconds to respond to anything said to him. Times when he looks like he’s too ill to be outside, holding his temples as if his brain’s about to explode out the side of his ears. Once or twice within the past week and a half, Buccellati’s caught tears brimming in his eyes, and further inspection from anyone only caused outburst at the time.

Buccellati becomes keenly aware that whatever’s messing him up happened exactly that long ago, a week and a half. They were at Buccellati’s house, curled up on the couch; Giorno had been practicing for his Hamlet audition in the other room, the occasional sigh breaking through his closed door and down the hall. They’d been about to get dinner when Abbacchio was called to deal with some breakout of gang violence — and yes, they were armed. Abbacchio promised not to make any “stupid mistakes” this time before he set off, leaving Buccellati in charge of his puppy.

Giorno came out fifteen minutes later, kept telling Buccellati to watch the news if he was concerned, because they may cover what’s happening; Buccellati refused, and Giorno spent the rest of the night consoling him. Abbacchio didn’t come back, stating that he “just decided to go home”.

And from there, everything went downhill.

Buccellati doesn’t keep up with the news reports. Never wanted to, after meeting Abbacchio, for he holds an inner paranoia that one day Abbacchio’s death will be announced over the news.
before anyone else can tell him. He’s paranoid, shaken up, goes home after work on Wednesday knowing that the fact Abbacchio didn’t show up is due to being too drunk to move.

Abbacchio’s emotions always lie on the extreme. It’s his characteristic trait, something Buccellati finds charming but hellishly obnoxious all the same. Buccellati loves his passion, but loathes the way his passion often gets him into horrible situations. Loves the man, but hates his habitual drinking.

He’s driving home with Giorno, debating showing up unannounced to Abbacchio’s home and kicking the door until a half-conscious Abbacchio lets him in, but he doesn’t; he doesn’t, because a majority of him doesn’t wish to see his lover in such a horrible state. It’d happened before, back when Abbacchio was always drunk and showed up at Buccellati’s house needing to curl up on the bathroom floor and use the guest bedroom; but at the time, they’d been nothing more than close friends, and worried as he was Buccellati also showed slight indifference.

Now, it’s a different story.

In his distraction, he nearly runs a red light, slamming the breaks of the Fiesta and practically throwing the both of them against the windshield. Giorno’s hands snap out in front of him, arms stopping a full-on impact with the dashboard, seat belt tightening and probably choking him as much as it strangled Buccellati. He apologises shortly, drumming his nails over the leather of the steering wheel.

He’s perturbed, and Giorno reads that with minimal effort.

“Abbacchio?”

Buccellati can only nod, grip tightening, nerves wracked and fried.

“Have you tried asking what happened? Why he’s…” Giorno trails away, the unsung words getting drunk floating unwaveringly within the air between the two of them.

“He won’t tell me. Won’t message back.”

“We should pay him a visit.”

“I won’t drag you into this.”

“Well,” starts Giorno, turning to look at Buccellati as — in another bout of distraction — he curb-checks and the vehicle shakes. “He’s going to get liver poisoning if we don’t do something.”

“I’m quite aware.”

Giorno must’ve realised how blunt that comment was, because he immediately chokes out an apology, shifting to look out the window at the darkened nightlife.

Yes, Buccellati knows that Abbacchio’s practically killing himself, probably collapsed on the couch because he couldn’t be assed to drag his ass to bed. Either that, or he’s on the bathroom floor, unconscious with the cold and hard tile pressing against his head. Whatever’s plaguing him is also killing him, because Abbacchio is prone to give into his emotions — a slave to them, in fact, and more than that he’s a slave to the wine he sucks down as if it were the only thing sustaining him anymore. He’s addicted, he’s always been, and Buccellati’s interference only slightly patched up his need to be in a drunken stupor every five seconds.

Abbacchio’s always thought life to be rotten, thought humanity a waste of matter, and whatever happened to amplify that is only going to pluck away at him until he’s but a mere shell.
“NARANCIA, 12:00AM: abbacchio

NARANCIA, 12:01AM: aBBacCHIo

GIORNO, 12:01AM: We know that you’re plastered right now. Answer the phone, we’re all worried.

MISTA, 12:03AM: yeah at least give us signs ur alive u kno

NARANCIA, 12:03AM: and cn u share w/us wht the fuck happened

TRISH, 12:04AM: If you come into the cafe tomorrow I’ll give you something free, okay? We’re all freaking out over here.”

Buccellati also can’t sleep.

He wasn’t expecting an attempted midnight intervention, but what Giorno stated in the car struck a chord with him — he came to realise that if he didn’t do something now, Abbacchio probably wouldn’t be waking up soon. He was getting careless enough to not admit himself to the hospital if he got too ill, and Buccellati’s well aware of that, of the way Abbacchio won’t take care of himself when he feels it doesn’t matter.

He knows — that damn officer fucking knows — that drinking only gets rid of any torment for a short time before amplifying it, and that’s where the dependence comes from. And, if reminding Abbacchio of science is what it takes to get him to stop, he’ll do it.

He might even throw Giorno’s biology textbook at Abbacchio’s face for doing this to not only Buccellati, but everyone.

It’s past midnight, and he’s in Abbacchio’s driveway, checking all of the missed group text messages before he enters. He’s waiting for Abbacchio to answer, reasoning that eventually, Narancia’s constant statements of Abbacchio’s name will wake him up, and that he’ll start yelling over a damn text message for everyone to leave him alone. That’s when Buccellati will show up at the door and knock and kick and yell until Abbacchio gets his ass up and actually lets him in.

“NARANCIA, 12:06AM: abbacchio plz

NARANCIA, 12:06AM: abbbaaacccchhiooooooo

NARANCIA, 12:07AM: abbaaacccchio u need to wake up?? plz respond thank u

FUGO, 12:10AM: We’re going to set fire to your entire wine store.

TRISH, 12:11AM: We’re all worried about you! You’re killing all of us here, being so down — we just want u to feel better!! OK??

MISTA, 12:12AM: we care abt u man.
GIORNO, 12:14AM: *I hope he has his message notifications turned up.*

NARANCIA, 12:15AM: *I HOEP HE JUST ANSWERS THE PHONE*

It takes half an hour. Before he even reads Abbacchio’s disgruntled message, Buccellati’s out of the car and dashing hurriedly up the driveway. While reading the text — “CN U LAL LEA VE M E THFUC KGNIALON E” — his hand’s continually beating on the hard wood of the door, and when Abbacchio doesn’t respond after a minute he begins kicking it while ringing the doorbell repeatedly.

That message probably translates to, “*Can you all leave me the fuck alone?*”

A groan sounds from the house, through the walls and closed windows, erupting like a volcano. Buccellati turns his phone off the second Narancia’s first *excited-that-you’re-alive-bud* message pops in, jamming it into his pocket as a very disheveled Abbacchio whips the door open and glowers with all of the fires of Hell.

He nearly falls over just from standing still. He doesn’t say anything, as if he can’t, and without a single invitation Buccellati barges in. Poised between the fingers of his left hand is a greenish-tinted wine bottle, only a few drops remaining. Abbacchio swirls the liquor around, tilting his head back to take a drink, before Buccellati snatches the bottle away and kicks the door shut behind him as he paces into the kitchen.

“The fuck?”

Buccellati dumps what little is left down the sink before tossing the bottle in the trash. Abbacchio doesn’t yell, only stumbles his way into the brightly-lit kitchen. The rest of the house is pitch-dark; the officer shades and squints his eyes, falling stupidly over himself as he attempts to sit down.

“Leone,” starts Buccellati with a faux sense of calm, voice rising slightly despite how he tries to control it, “I haven’t the slightest fucking clue why you’ve reverted back to this bullshit. Do you plan on sharing anytime soon?”

Abbacchio only shakes his head, slumping over to lie his head on the table.

“*Before you kill yourself?*”

“I know m’limits.” He slurs in a low grumble.

“No, Leone! You don’t! You don’t have a clue!”

“I do!”

“You don’t!” Stomping over to the table, Buccellati slams his hands down on the wood, prompting his lover to jump and raise his head with a frown plastered on his lips. “You know better than anyone that drinking yourself stupid only causes you to feel worse.”

“Mm.”

“Are you listening?!”

“Y’keep yellin’. Hurts my head.”

Buccellati pads over to the cupboard, grabbing a large glass and filling it practically to the brim
with tap water. He returns, sitting down and sliding the glass over the table. “Drink. We’ll talk when you’re sober.”

Abbacchio tries knocking the glass away. Buccellati catches his hand in one swift motion, shaking the table and causing water to splash over the surface. The rest of the liquid shifts within the glass until it goes still.

“Drink.”

He complies grudgingly.

He’s in a state of utter disrepair, black lipstick smudged at the corners of his mouth. His breath as he speaks remains riddled with the sharp stench of liquor; he’s jittery, hands shaking, holding his head every so often and letting out a groan. Waiting with extreme impatience, Buccellati powers his phone back on only to let the group know that he’s with Abbacchio, and that everyone should go to sleep. It’s early, they’re all tired, and though he understands their worry he wants to handle this personally.

They make idle chat. Buccellati attempts to calm himself down with this tactic, and Abbacchio only replies on occasion, drinking his water with a look of disgust plastered on his face.

The air between them is tense. Endlessly, insufferably tense and horrible. Buccellati wants to help, thinking for a split second that he went about it too angrily, telling himself that he’ll chill out before they talk it over. He’s worried, wracked with it, suffocated by it; not only is Abbacchio in absolute emotional turmoil, but he’s beginning to look sicker and sicker by the second.

Buccellati holds his hand as he directs Abbacchio to the bathroom; the latter collapses on the floor, and all Buccellati can do is hold his hair back and wait in total silence.

Another thirty minutes tick by. It’s past one in the morning now, and Buccellati is both tired and emotionally worn, but not so much as his lover is; Abbacchio spends five minutes in the bathroom cleaning up, brushing his teeth and gargling mouthwash while Buccellati waits on the couch. The latter finds that his paranoia causes him to wonder if Abbacchio’s drinking again, if somehow he’s hidden liquor in the bathroom, but when the officer arrives and plops down on the couch he doesn’t smell as strongly of fermented grapes.

“Let’s talk.” Insists Buccellati, a gentle hand coming to rest on the drunkard’s shoulder.

“I don’t really want to.”

“All of us are worried about you.” Abbacchio doesn’t meet his eyes. “I’m worried about you.”

The silence still presses at them like crushing walls. It lasts for what feels like hours, but really is thirty seconds. Buccellati’s looking at him, and he’s not looking back, fists clenching over his pyjama bottoms and lips drawing into a thin line.

It’s painstakingly explained that, while he and his partner were sent to deal with the small outburst of violence alongside a few other officers, Abbacchio nearly got shot again; however, by sheer coincidence, his partner had stepped in front of him a few seconds prior and taken the hit himself. Abbacchio lamented that he blamed himself for it, that somehow it had to have been his fault, that somehow his partner foresaw the event. Buccellati muses that the man’s still alive, and a sullen Abbacchio murmurs that he died this morning.

Survivor guilt. He’s experiencing survivor guilt.

“I’m sorry.” Solemnly states Buccellati. “I didn’t mean to be presumptuous.” Abbacchio merely
shakes his head side to side, face buried in his palms. Buccellati pulls him in close, pushing the former’s head to his chest and stroking his hair. He hums for a second or two, Abbacchio’s shoulders convulsing with the force of his bitter sobs; Buccellati, too, has to resist bursting into tears if only because seeing Abbacchio so broken up is killing him inside.

“I know you believe the liquor is helping,” Buccellati begins after a few minutes of poignant silence, “but all it does is worsen the situation. You’re going to get liver cirrhosis, or your heart will stop — I’m not going to stand by and watch that happen to you.”

“I always drink —”

“I know.” Knowingly tells Buccellati. “Even after you said you’d stop.” No response. “You’d moderated it before, and yet again it’s gotten out of hand.”

“I —”

“Need to quit?”

“Well —”

“Cold-turkey.”

“No.” Comes the brief whine, miserable and pathetic.

“Yes. I’m not going to leave you be. We’ll fix it, together, alright? You’re not alone, Leone. You don’t have to be.” Abbacchio grunts. “None of us would leave you alone. Not Mista, not Fugo, not Giorno, especially not I. I love you, alright?”

Abbacchio squirms out of Buccellati’s grip only to place a wine and toothpaste-scented kiss to his boyfriend’s forehead, pushing Buccellati’s bangs aside as he does so. “I love you, too. And, you’re fucking right — I can’t be shitfaced at our wedding, right?”

Buccellati elbows him. “Alright, Casanova. It’s bedtime.”

Mista’s busy dealing with his own problems.

Abbacchio drinking himself to death? Is a problem, a major one. Buccellati says he’s got a handle on it, that they’re working it out (and unfortunately, they don’t get to set all the super-flammable alcohol on fire, which is a total bummer). They both seem in better spirits later in the week, and that’s fine and all — they’ve got Abbacchio on some system where, whenever he feels like getting plastered, he just has to drink tea or coffee. Mista supposes that getting him addicted to caffeine is healthier in some ways than liquor, but still.

That aside.

Giorno mentioned over dinner around a month ago that his teachers had repeatedly pressured him into putting together an audition video, into gathering recommendations from the creative arts teachers at his school and submitting it to an agency that sought “young talents”. He’d done it, and told Mista over pasta that he was pretty thrilled with how it turned out. He even had it saved to his computer, showing Mista with an eager enthusiasm — Mista thought, and still thinks, that it’s five times better than any of the actors in any movie he’s seen. Though he may be biased, that’s how
he feels and how he felt, and he was super pumped when Giorno came over after school to talk about it.

And, well. The guy’s depressed. Not just depressed, but dead inside, struggling through self-doubt suddenly because the fucking agency bluntly let him know that he wasn’t good enough. Ever heard of “letting someone down gently”, assholes?!

Giorno’s now on his sofa, sprawled out with his legs over Mista’s lap. At first, Giorno doesn’t say much, other than letting Mista read the e-mail he got in return. He’s quiet, eyes looking everywhere but at Mista holding onto the phone as he scans over the curtly-written response. What kind of shitty agency tells someone that they ain’t “good enough” and “aren’t needed” so brusquely? Mista’s angry — no, furious — and half-tempted to walk all the way down to… wherever this place was, confront the guy who wrote the email, and deck him. But he doesn’t, mostly because he doesn’t want to get arrested, and also because Giorno needs him more than that guy needs to get kicked in the nuts.

“The tape was really good!” Mista swears, placing the phone on the table and reaching over to clasp Giorno’s hand for a split second before the latter boy shifts positions to lean against him. “I swear t’God, I wasn’t just bullshittin’ ya.”

“They didn’t seem to think so.” Muses a perturbed Giorno.

“Fuck ‘em!”

Giorno rolls his eyes, a poor attempt at trying to maintain humour, to make light of the situation.

“Seriously! Like, not literally — don’t literally fuck ‘em, just…” The humour isn’t working. Giorno’s not smiling, looking more distressed than anything. Introspective. Brooding. He’s probably in the middle of self-loathing all due to these guys rejecting him so harshly. “C’mon, smile! Yer real good!”

“Again, they didn’t think —”

“Dude, they fuckin’ suck ass. Okay? Not even in the good way!” Giorno’s cheeks colour red, out of some combination of embarrassment and frustration. “They’re probably so jealous over yer skill that they were all, ‘This guy’s gonna be the next…’ uh… someone real popular that the whole world knows.”

“Johnny Depp?”

“Yeah! Yer cute enough.”

Giorno pauses, a wry little chuckle rolling off of his lips. “Did you just admit that you find Johnny Depp attractive?”

“That’s a guy I’d gladly let nail me.”

“Oh my God, Mista.”

“I’m kiddin’.” Mista places a chaste kiss to Giorno’s cheek, throwing his arm around the boy’s shoulder; the comedy is short-lived, as the blond immediately slips back into distress. “Listen, okay? Not everyone succeeds at first, like — there’s a saying about it, y’know? Look at some famous folks, like — Jane Austen. She didn’t get real famous until after she croaked!”

Giorno sighs.
“That was a shitty example.” No shit, bud. “Yer gonna be a star, GioGio, I swear! Y’just gotta… like, go through this shit and learn. Y’failed this, sure, but yer only fifteen!”

**Sigh.**

“Y’gotta stop sighin’ so much.”

Giorno’s blue eyes gaze at him, flick away, and he sighs yet again with a dramatic wave of the hand.

“Now yer just doin’ it to bug me. C’mon.”

“I still feel upset by this.”

“You write all these great songs, an’ y’can sing, and you’re… the best thing in my life, prob’ly.”

Giorno manages a dry little smile. Mista reaches his fingers around, pulling at the corners of his lips as soon as the grin slips away again. “Smiiiiile.”

“Mithta.” Slurs the blond, batting Mista’s hands away. “Stop.”

“If y’don’t cheer up soon —”

“Do not.”

“I’ll fuckin’ tickle ya.”

Giorno’s protests are cut short by squeals of laughter. Yet again, their game of chase around Mista’s small living room begins, eventually ending in Mista jumping over the couch and victoriously catching the younger around the waist. Instead of tickling Giorno this time, however, he merely places kisses all over the blond’s face, murmuring, “Y’still feel upset? I can sing ya a song.”

“Can you sing?”

“Not at fuckin’ all. Y’should cheer up.”

“Mista, it’ll take longer than a ten-minute discussion. I need time, alright?”

“...wanna make lunch with me?”

“I can’t cook.”

“I’ll teach ya.”

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Making food together is simultaneously the best and worst idea they’ve ever had.

Mista starts with simple things — he’s an excellent cook, having lived alone for so long that the skill comes second-nature to him. He’s learned how to make some semi-complex dishes, none quite on par with chefs in five-star venues, but good enough to where he could work at some nice pasta shop. Anyway, point is, Giorno isn’t quite ready to cook something like seared duck.
especially not with the way he clutzes around the kitchen as if in completely foreign territory. He somehow manages to trip over everything, drop spoons and measuring cups… he’s a mess. Probably shouldn’t be a chef.

“The most I can make is cereal.” He jokes after, what, the third time spilling flour all over himself?

“I’ll make y’somethin’, then. You an’ Buccellati both, ‘cause he can’t fuckin’ cook either.”

“You’d be an excellent housewife.”

Mista can’t tell if Giorno is serious or if he’s just playing around. The blond’s expression remains flat and focused, as he’s completely caught up in trying to mix the dough.

Why order pizza when you can make your own? That’s Mista’s philosophy!

“Do you always do this?”

“Make pizza? Yeup.” He totally could wind up in an actual restaurant one day, but he loves the cafe too much to go anywhere else. Besides, a normal restaurant doesn’t have Wednesday-night rap-battles and dance-offs, does it? No! It fucking doesn’t!

Giorno’s face falls after a few moments; he’s growing restless yet again, it seems, and in an impromptu attempt to cheer him up, Mista pitches flour at his face. It lands in a white flurry over the other’s cheek, prompting a flinch and an alarmed holler of, “Mista!”

“Yer not cheerin’ up.”

“I told you it’d take a while.” Before Giorno can state that he hates repeating himself, like he usually has to do — Mista tends to forget certain elements — he rolls his eyes and attempts to make a lame pun (“You stole a pizza my heart”) which falls completely flat.

Come on! Mista’s fucking hilarious, right?

They get into kneading the dough afterwards, which is a lot less taxing for Giorno — apparently. Mista dryly jokes that when they’re married, he’ll be the one cooking everything. And Giorno doesn’t argue about that, merely shrugs and goes along with it, stating that he’d appreciate it if Mista could. He’s blushing all the while, and it’s cute; Mista presses a tiny kiss to Giorno’s flour-coated cheeks, leaving lip-marks in his wake.

Mista’s the one who tosses the dough up, catches it, repeats. He’s what Giorno refers to as a classic Italian chef, prompting the former to laugh and nearly spill the dough over the floor.

GioGio inquires about the oven, and Mista notes that it’s fine — they don’t really need one of those stone furnaces, but having one would be pretty fucking neato.

Okay,” starts the cap-donning chef, who needs an actual chef hat, “now that th’ sauce is on — we need a fuckton of cheese.”

“A fuckton?” Echoes the younger.

“A metric fuckin’ fuckton.” As Mista always says, that’s a unit of measurement. He took chemistry once, so he’s pretty sure that’s correct. (Did he pass? No.)

With everything ready to go, they pop the pizza in, and Mista immediately starts a food fight. See? Awful idea to cook together. With two minutes, the kitchen’s a mess of flour and sauce and eggshells and everything else. First, Mista dips his thumb into the extra sauce and smears it over Giorno’s forehead, whispering Simba under his breath. GioGio throws flour, a handful that
explodes over Mista’s plain black apron; the gesture is returned in kind, much of the fluffy powder spilling over Giorno’s golden hair.

Giorno bops him with a wooden spoon. Mista whips him with the dishtowel.

They’re running around the kitchen moments after with ingredient-coated hands, Mista yet again trying to tickle Giorno — his personal favourite past time — and the younger making a feeble attempt to escape.

The game lasts fifteen entire minutes. They wash up what they can and lounge around on the sofa until the timer dings, gorge over a movie, and then Mista suggests that they take a shower together. “T’get the powder outta yer hair, y’know?” He concludes with a nod.

And though the idea starts off innocent, it only remains chaste for the first few minutes. Let it be known that having sex in the shower works better in theory.

Abbacchio caves again on Wednesday.

Buccellati effortlessly figures that one out when he doesn’t receive a message back for some time. He is in no way clingy, never finds the need to be messaged a constant feeling, but with the way Abbacchio’s slipping into a depressed state it is certainly alarming. First, it starts as a mere paranoia; Buccellati thinks that maybe the officer is out on duty, that something came up, and he waits it out. Then, the clock strikes ten, and he hasn’t heard a word for four hours.

The message he gets around 10:04 says exactly, “Sorry. Just woke up from a nap.”

Abbacchio doesn’t take naps. Everyone knows that. He’s never napped a day in his life, probably — he’s never tired enough, sleeps well most nights, doesn’t have the generational caffeine addiction that everyone else is plagued by. He even prefers his tea decaf, simply because he knows it’ll interfere with a carefully worked-out sleep schedule…

“You weren’t napping. You passed out.”

“‘Passed out’ in the sense that I was so exhausted, that I collapsed.”

“Please, don’t lie to me. I’m coming over.”

“I thought you opened the cafe in the morning? You should go to sleep. I love you.”

“Love you too. I’m coming over.”

Buccellati can practically hear Abbacchio’s vehement sighs as he gets out of bed and starts toward the driveway.

It turns out that the reason he relapsed was because the funeral date was announced. He’d been writing his eulogy for it, got pissed off, decided one glass wouldn’t hurt so long as he got through
it — and from there, one glass turned to a bottle, one bottle to two, to three, to throwing his guts up and passing out in utter stupor. It’d been stressful, he laments to his raven-haired lover, wracked him with guilt that he’d considered already gone away. He muses that he’s aware that it isn’t his fault, that he knows his deceased partner — and best friend — wouldn’t ever want him to think like that. But alas, the feelings of remorse and regret won’t leave him alone for even a mere moment. All he can do is flash back to that scene, to hearing of his friend’s death, and turn right to the one thing that distracts him long enough to feel like a fix.

“You’re probably upset at my lying, right?”

“I’m more than a little peeved, yes, but more than that, I’m concerned about you. I love you, and can’t stand seeing you like this.”

They’re lying in bed together, blankets strewn haphazardly over intertwined limbs. Buccellati continually runs his fingers through the silver-spun locks of Abbacchio’s hair, a silent attempt to console the latter as he talks. He’s sharing his memories now, all the good things that the two went together, as if that sentimental part of Abbacchio cannot stop speaking for even a few moments. He’s half-awake, too, words rolling lazily off of his lips. The taint of wine lingers unwaveringly on his breath, flowing out into the air between them — a pungent scent, a reminder that Abbacchio’s hurting terribly.

When he first joined the force, he tells, he had an older gentleman for his partner. Until the man retired, he didn’t have many companions with him. He was a rookie, passionate as ever, but graduating early gave him a big head. He found he didn’t quite like anyone, that he didn’t get along with a soul in the department — and to this day he and the chief are met with frequent disagreements. It was after the first man’s retirement that he’d made friends, with the fellow who Abbacchio refers to as his current partner before correcting himself in bitter penance. The man was a rookie, almost completely like Abbacchio in some regards but entirely different in others.

There were times when they’d go drinking, he says. Times when they were both so shitfaced that his partner’s wife had to drive them both home. Their tastes in liquor differed — Abbacchio enjoyed and still enjoys his wine, and the other, hard cinnamon whiskey. They’d bonded over a shared, keen dislike of the chief and his policies, poked fun at the elder until they couldn’t breathe due to laughing so hard. No matter what, no matter how much older his partner was, Abbacchio always referred to him as a rookie, and this continued daily for all the years they were friends.

Abbacchio told his partner everything, all he felt and may feel; the man knew of Abbacchio’s love for Buccellati long before anyone else caught on, long before it became love and was merely a fleeting crush. They harboured similar philosophies on law and justice, on life itself — and though their views on humanity as a whole differed, both found the ability to confide in one another. He told Abbacchio about every date with his wife, how much he loved her, about the daughter that was to be born in March. About how he’d first fallen in love with her and everything she was, about her smile. Those stories made him happy in some way, he tells — somehow, they made him think that life wasn’t as bad as he’d always felt, and that there’d be something out there for him, too. He’d visited his partner’s wife after the fact, and they consoled one another; she held the baby within her belly closely, sobbing into her hands with him, and that destroyed him almost as much as the news of his friend’s passing.

“Their daughter won’t ever know how fucking great he was. He was the best friend I ever had.” He concludes his tales with a yawn.

The glow of the digital clock on the dresser brightens the room just slightly, a dull crimson, displaying the time 11:09 in a retina-burning red. Abbacchio dozes off moments later, eyes closed, a solemn expression glued to his features as he lay soundly in Buccellati’s arms. Buccellati gives
him the tiniest of squeezes, reassuring his unconscious lover with all his might that they will get through this; and with his vow, kisses Abbacchio’s forehead and closes his eyes to stop the tears gathering in his own eyes from rolling down his cheeks.

Chapter End Notes

Haha, you thought this chapter would be happy? Never.

I didn't know about any Fugonara angst -- I'm sure I'll figure something out. (:: This is just light angst, of course, because no one (no main, anyway) dies... you should see the angst I write when I'm murdering characters, guys. It's awful. I make myself cry.

Still taking suggestions for what you guys wanna see!

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Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Somehow I managed to get this stupid update done on time. Still recovering from writer’s block.

I had a request from K for a beach episode, and from damnedanbo to see more Trish, so I slapped the two together. Half of y’all wanted aro/ace Trish and another half wanted Trish/Shelia E to be a thing, but unfortunately I’ve no idea how to write Shelia E... Plus, it's a little too late into the story to stick in another couple.

I don't like the term "inner tube", because it doesn't sound cute. "Floaty tube" is much better.

The next Vento Aureo fic will be absolutely painful, so I hope you guys like angst. :))) I'm in the planning stages right now, cracking my knuckles at the thought of writing it and all.

The school year wraps up with a bang.

Trish manages to get herself some passing marks on second-semester midterms, and finally gets herself un-grounded; dad was stubborn, see, and wouldn’t let her do fucking anything until she brought those marks of hers up. Unfortunately, the only way she did it was by midterms... but she’s free by then, freer by the end of the year, because she managed to pass finals as well.

And now they have the summer to dick around.

Abbacchio’s drinking had descalated, escalated, and then got snuffed out completely with copious intervention from everyone. She hadn’t gone to his partner’s funeral, but Buccellati had, and from what she’d heard it was the opposite of a good time. Not to say that funerals are ever fun, but straight afterwards Abbacchio had escaped Buccellati’s watchful eyes to get shitfaced again. Eventually, he landed his ass in the hospital, and the doctors said that had he waited another day they’d have to replace his liver in its entirety. After detoxing and everything, getting ragged on by the whole group while he was laid up, he’d finally managed to quit. It took near-cirrhosis to stop him, but still.

Giorno also got over his issue with the agency that rejected him. Now, while Trish truly and honestly wanted to go bitch them out with Mista, she didn’t, but held the camera while Mista and Giorno — like the immature children they both are — flipped it off. They sent that to the agency thereafter, and while they weren’t met with a reply, both of the boys felt pretty good about it. He’s back and better than ever, especially at Hamlet — Trish saw it, and she was very confused by everything.

Fugo and Narancia seem to be doing well, too. She hadn’t been able to talk to them too much in private, as Fugo answering his phone after his panic over his gay-ass crush died down is a slim to none chance. Narancia won’t share anything super-duper secret that they’ve done, out of respect for Fugo’s need to keep literally everything personal and private. But, well, from what she’s gathered, they’re getting on wonderfully. And she’s definitely... going to be single forever.
That’s not something that completely bothers her, at least, not anymore. Not being invited to group dates because she’s single sucks, and every time the gang wanted to do something together, she always watched them all hold hands and cuddle and be disgusting. At first, this led to brooding and wondering — she’s been surrounded by romance all her life, knows how to get it, knows how to make the perfect couples. Alas, Trish hasn’t been able to find anyone, and after her moments of contemplation over the period of a week, it occurs to her that she, personally, isn’t interested in romance for herself. Isn’t interested in any aspect of it, really. She’d thought about men, women, nonbinary folk, and nothing stuck, nothing prevalent.

Giorno curiously asks her one night if she’s interested in anyone. Trish replies that she’s interested in herself only, and that’s that.

People can be pretty, she’d told him, but I’m never going to kiss anyone. Ever.

While she’s on the topic of Giorno, he’d gotten a job as soon as he could, and it took him a bit to learn the workings of the cafe. Granted, it took Trish a bit, too, but she’d gotten extra help from the owner himself when they were home. Giorno was no chef, and Mista made it clear that he probably shouldn’t be working with food, but a stubborn blond refused to leave once he’d gotten the job… since it literally required no effort, thanks to Buccellati’s Christmas gift.

“How many shots does a medium latte get?” Trish asks him, drumming manicured nails over the countertop in the jazz-laden cafe, recipe cards hidden behind her back so that Giorno cannot cheat.

“We’re supposed to be putting alcohol in this?”

“N...no. Espresso shots.” They don’t have a license to serve liquor. If they did, Abbacchio might be drinking more lattes. Well, might have been.

“Two?”

“Good job!” Trish claps her hands; the customers dotting the tables snicker idly at Giorno’s honest yet idiotic question. Everyone else is out today, for it’s a Monday afternoon — save for Fugo in the breakroom. The cafe is never as popular as other locations, and usually customers float in and chill for a few hours in the tiny little building. They’ll float out, other visitors will flow inside, sit. The cycle repeats indefinitely until closing, unless it’s a Wednesday. Then, it’s dead, until everyone rushes in at once as if they were at a cinema just to watch Narancia throw down his… sick beats, as he calls them.

“Next question,” the young woman begins, finger raised to the ceiling as if she were a professor, “what is a cafe au lait?”

“French.”

Trish holds her head in her palms, groaning softly.

Well, he got it eventually, but he’ll never be as good at making mochas as Trish is. Most people, in fact, come into the cafe and request that Trish (“the little pink girl” to those who haven’t learned her name) make their mochas if she’s available. Her protege, Giorno, is close to her mastery of the chocolatey drink, but unfortunately will never reach her level. Nor will he ever make more than three in his entire life, for if Trish isn’t there to make them, people don’t want them. Long story short, Trish Una is good at her job.

(She doesn’t do anything weird to the recipe, so she’s not really sure why people prefer her version. They’re all the same, really.)
Before school let out, there was the issue of birthdays. Trish always has money to spend, but she never knows quite what to get people like Abbacchio — mostly because, without wanting to drink constantly, what does he have? She gives everyone gift cards, and hears about all of their date plans and things after (more so from Mista than anyone else).

Buccellati and Abbacchio spend their time inside. Turns out that Buccellati knows how to play the piano, and had borrowed Giorno’s keyboard (and the general idea of serenading) and played Abbacchio’s favourite classical piece. The entire time, Buccellati told her, Moody Blues wouldn’t stop howling from where they’d trapped the dog in the bedroom because he’d attempted to hop up on the table during dinner.

Mista had taken Giorno out for a midnight picnic, as he’d called it, and they stargazed “and cuddled and kissed a whole fuckton, man — it was awesome”. Mista swears to god afterwards over text that he’s going to stay with Giorno for the rest of his life, that they’ll take a vacation in France or something and get married. Trish calls him gay.

She’d been absolutely positive that Narancia and Fugo had gone to some ridiculous dance party type of thing for Narancia’s birthday, and that turned out to be true — she let them know that she totally called that one, gloating inwardly with her arms crossed whilst Narancia blabbered away about how the DJ apparently didn’t suck.

Her own birthday? Nothing too special. The dads got her all the clothing she could’ve possibly needed in her life, and somehow she still hasn’t been able to wear all of the new stuff. That’s mostly due to forgetting she has new outfits, and defaulting to her older favourites. Sometimes she mixes it up.

Sometimes.

But that was on her birthday itself. Today, she’s trying extremely hard to get Diavolo to agree to closing the cafe just for tomorrow, just so that she and everyone else can go to the beach like she’s been babbling about all summer. Her standing argument is that she passed school, doesn’t have to get held back a year or two because she’s made up all of her missed credits and did damn good, dammit, so he should just let it happen. Her other argument is that she hasn’t been allowed to go anywhere for a long time, and that the boys never have any free time (Diavolo says that they need to pay bills, and that’s why). Trish remains complainitive all day, until finally both fathers cave and agree to it.

Trish conspired with her friends all day and live-blogged all of her attempts at convincing. When it finally succeeds, she’s immediately on her phone, caps-lock shouting for everyone to get ready to go.

"YOU, 7:00PM: OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOK WE’RE GOOD TO GO WE’RE ALL GONNA HAVE FUN. IF U HAD PLANS AND U HAVEN’T CANCELLED THEM YET, PLZ CANCEL THEM.

GIO, 7:05PM: I don’t have a swimsuit.

YOU, 7:05PM: god dammit Giorno go buy one... don’t you ever go swimming???

GIO, 7:06PM: I haven’t since I was a kid.

YOU, 7:07PM: god dammit Giorno
Doppio asks Trish why she’s laughing so hard, why she’s wiping tears from the corners of her eyes and clutching her sides as she gasps for air. She can’t bring herself to share the conversation, but tells him that her friends are a bunch of idiots. Trish loves those boys to death.

“ABBA, 7:23PM: We should do these stupid group chats on Facebook so I can remove myself whenever one of you assholes says something like that.

GIO, 7:24PM: You blocked me on Facebook.

ABBA, 7:24PM: Ya.

GIO, 7:25PM: :/

ABBA, 7:25PM: :)”

She, personally, finds it hilarious that Abbacchio spent so much time trying to help Giorno out of the Dio situation and caring about him, only to go back to his odd loathing. Things won’t ever
change.

Not that Trish really wants them to.

The beach is a good while away from where everyone lives. They carpool as per usual; Fugo’s driving, with everyone in the car sans Buccellati and Abbacchio, who took the time to bicker over whose car was better before deciding on the Fiesta and taking off on their own. Giorno stated that he would’ve carpooled with Buccellati, but that Abbacchio’s upset with him for eating the last piece of cake in the fridge — he told Fugo that he’d rather not deal with the passive-aggression the whole way there.

Diavolo and Doppio tried to teach Trish to drive, but wouldn’t let her drive herself down there, since they didn’t want to tag along like the big losers they are. Anyway, point is, Trish is really good at driving in a straight line. She’s sharing her stories, bragging slightly because she can drive straight and Giorno can’t for the life of him, the boy says; Mista muses that it’s because Giorno’s about as straight as a rainbow. Fugo comments on the unoriginality of the statement, correcting with, “straight as a parabola”, which goes right over everyone’s heads.

When Trish told her dads that she passed maths, she didn’t mean with flying colours.

“Buccellati’s been teaching y’ta drive?”

“It was my idea, actually —”

“God, he is a mom.” Yes, Mista, he is!

“— and he agreed after some thought,” continues Giorno, completely unphased, “so we drove around the block a few times. I ran over a squirrel.” Jesus.

“Aww!” Hollers Narancia, whipping around in the passenger’s seat and looking back at Giorno with a half-glower. “You squirrel murderer!”

“It was accidental.” Tries the blond earnestly.

“Eat the last slice of cake, run over a squirrel… you’re just asking to go to hell.” Trish elbows him. Giorno sighs. “Not to mention, it doesn’t look like you’re wearing that speedo that Mista suggested —”

“Why are we back on that?!” Vehemently shouts the aforementioned, throwing his hands into the air.

“Yeah, and Fugo’s not wearing a thong right now, either!”

“Narancia!”

It’s probably a good thing Buccellati and Abbacchio don’t have to deal with them right now. The latter man might just strangle everyone.
They pull up to the beach, and everyone’s stripping at the car. Buccellati’s stupid Ford Fiesta got there first, and Fugo managed to find an open spot next to it, squeezing just barely into place thanks to the shitty parking job of some other asshole. Everyone was smart enough to wear swimsuits under their clothing; Trish receives comments from the boys that her pink bikini-and-skirt set looks really cute, and she knows. She knows, because she bought it last night, even though she’d ragged on Giorno for not owning a bathing suit.

(The boys are all wearing trunks, thank God. No one needs to rip their own eyeballs out.)

And, well, from there, hell ensues.

See, Trish hasn’t exactly told anyone besides Giorno — and that was an offhanded message, too — that she’s just not interested in anyone or anything, never will be, doesn’t like the idea of herself being macked on. She didn’t tell them, because she didn’t expect she’d ever need to, that they’d eventually figure it out years down the road and leave her alone.

But now, the men are all conspiring against her.

She’d played matchmaker with them, and they seek to play it with her, in an equally unsubtle way. At the very least, they’re not stalking her on what’s supposed to be a date — not like that’ll ever happen.

Giorno and Abbacchio keep their noses out of it, Giorno because he already knows — or has a fleeting idea, but won’t just tell anyone like he damn well should be — and Abbacchio because he doesn’t give a single fuck what happens so long as he and Buccellati can get married. Or something. Trish theorises that the exact reason for Abbacchio’s existential anger is because he hasn’t proposed.

He will. She’s counting down the days until someone runs up to her asking for advice on how to profess their undying love. She’s the whole reason her dads got together, after all.

...it occurs to her suddenly that she’s spent her whole life around gay men. Well, besides Mista — he’s the only one she knows for a fact likes women.

That aside. The split second after they set up their spot, underneath a beach umbrella of a blue shade rocking gently side to side by a gentle sea breeze, a teenager roughly their age passes by alone; Mista’s the first to jump on the situation and ask Trish if she thinks he’s cute. At first, Trish doesn’t really understand quite what she’s getting herself into. She answers yes — the stranger is rather good looking, with fluffy brown hair and a toned body and light stubble on his chin. Sure, he’s easily cute!

Then, Mista throws a (very hairy) arm around her thin shoulders, pulls her against him, and whispers into her ear, “Y’should talk to ’im, then!”

“Oh, no,” dismissively replies the smaller, running her hairbrush through her coiffure one last time before breaking out of Mista’s grasp and making her way toward the water, “when I said that he was good-looking, I didn’t mean that I’d go out with him.”

That hint isn’t strong enough. Mista shrugs, and she reasons that she’ll be left alone now. Throwing an inflatable plastic floaty tube around her waist, Trish pads across soft and sun-warmed sand to the water. (For the record, she can’t swim for shit, but really does like floating and drifting around. That’s the best.) Giorno follows suit, unbuttoning and removing a short-sleeved shirt and following her into the salt-scented ocean with a silver ladybug necklace clacking against
his chest. They don’t wander out too deep — Giorno hardly has an idea of how to swim, too, but they splash one another back and forth. His hair’s tied up into a bun today, and Trish’s pink puffball of a hairstyle is now down around her chin and bouncing in little wavy curls whenever she moves her head.

Mista swims lazily over to them, sneaking up behind Giorno and scaring the life right out of the both of them with a monstrous splash that manages to hit another group a metre away.

People at least another three or so metres away begin screaming that there are sharks in the water. Before Trish can even think about leaving, panic rising in her chest, Abbacchio shouts from the shoreline, “Sharks don’t swim up to water this shallow, you fucking idiots!”

Turns out it’s Narancia.

Narancia owns these stupid swim-goggles that have a shark fin resting atop the head. He pulls off the mask and smiles at the panicked family before leisurely making his way toward the group. Trish hadn’t even seen him get into the water, and as soon as he’s within range, she flicks his forehead and reprimands him for scaring her and everyone else like that.

A few minutes go by, and Trish makes friends with a group of random strangers. She doesn’t get a lot of girl time anymore, what with hanging out with all men constantly — her school friends sort-of suck in that they don’t invite her anywhere, and she’s the one inviting them out all the damn time. They’ll hang with her if she makes the first move. Luckily, the boys aren’t like that, and are always inviting her places!

The point is, she needs her girl time. There’s a whole gaggle of them, and while she was floating in her bright pink floaty tube, one of them clocked her in the head with a beach ball. She’d turned around expecting it to be from Narancia or Mista, but it was in fact fault to one of the girls failing to hit the ball back… they get out of the water after a few minutes of talking and go to play volleyball. Which, let it be known, that Trish isn’t really good at sports.

After the game stops (Trish’s team won, no thanks to her), they say bye to their temporary friendship, and she rejoins the boys only to receive toothy grins from Mista and Narancia both.

“What?”

“They were kinda cute, y’know?”

“Yes, Mista,” comes the snarky reply as Trish’s wandering eyes land on Giorno a few metres away, wandering up with ice cream cones for everyone. “They were very pretty. Kinda like me.” Trish offers a smile, a thankful nod thrown in Giorno’s direction when he hands her the dessert.

“Y’know what’s even cooler than this ice cream?” Narancia continues, practically bouncing where he stands — and she’s pretty sure he’s about to say Fugo, or Tupac, but he doesn’t. “You getting their numbers!”

“I don’t think we’d be good friends. They were really good at sports,” babbles Trish, “and like, they kept teasing me because I’m bad at that stuff. Like, I laughed it off, and I think they were kidding, but it still kinda stung. It was a fun game, though.”

“You just gotta get to know each other better!”

“No,” Trish shakes her head, taking a bite out of the ice cream that makes the boys cringe, “I’m okay. I have you guys.”

“Dude,” Mista points, “y’can’t just bite ice cream!”
“Watch me, stinky,” she teases, repeating the action until Mista complains that merely looking at her is making his teeth feel like ice cubes.

By late afternoon, Trish could swear she’s just a bit tanner than she was yesterday. Luckily for her, she tans and doesn’t burn; it must’ve been her mother’s genetics, because Diavolo will disintegrate if he goes outside. Like, hey, what happened to Diavolo? Oh, he got sunburnt to death. It really isn’t as funny as it is in her head.

Mista looks exactly the same, having a darker skin tone and all that — boy, does he look strange without his stupid cap on, though. Fugo’s only slightly sunburnt, having spent most of his time collecting seashells instead of swimming like everyone else. Narancia practically became one with the sharks by the time they’re gathering to eat a picnic lunch, that stupid shark goggle-mask thing still managing to scare the everliving shit out of everyone. Giorno, apparently, put on an adequate amount of sunscreen and hasn’t suffered the consequences yet, reapplying before they sit down to eat and then grumbling when he licks chip dust off of his fingertips that sunscreen is far from a delicious snack.

Buccellati? Burns. Half of his back, over his neck and on his cheeks over the bridge of his nose, down to his arms and on his chest just before his ribcage ends — all of that’s tinted red, but he’s not complaining of pain every time Abbacchio happens to lean over and kiss his cheek.

Abbacchio? On fucking fire.

Abbacchio’s pale as all fuck, melanin count so low that he’s just going to be a red-hued statue for the rest of the week. When she points out that maybe he’s too pale to be using such a low-grade sunscreen, Abbacchio dismissively tosses his head to the side and says he’ll cover it up with foundation.

“We both know makeup, Abbacchio,” Trish tells, taking a sip of water, “and you’re gonna need so much to not look like a strawberry.”

Abbacchio glowers at her, but she’s completely unaffected.

“It’s gonna suck to try gettin’ laid with all that.” Jokes Mista; Buccellati gags on his water, leaning over the table and coughing into his elbow.

“Mista,” starts the officer, drawing a finger along his neck and scowling, “I will mount your head on my mantle.”

“Jus’ keep my hat on, ‘kay?”

Fugo rolls his eyes at their banter.

The conversation ends right there, very abruptly, and everyone finishes eating in silence. Trish and Fugo are the last ones to finish, staying at the picnic tables while everyone else goes back to swimming in lazy circles out in the salty sea. They make idle chatter; Fugo still keeps to himself, same as ever. Trish compliments his strawberry earrings, and he reminds her that she gave those to him years ago.

Oh, yeah!
“Now, what is Narancia bothering you about?”

“Narancia and Mista.” She corrects, finger raised matter-of-factly. “I’m not sure, entirely. They’re trying to play matchmaker with me, but they’re not doing a good job.” She should really stop dropping idle hints, or dismissively waving her hand at them when they try something.

“Mm.” Fugo responds, nodding his head as he chugs the remaining water in the bottle, plastic crinkling as he sucks all of the air out along with it. “Sorry to hear.”

Trish shrugs her shoulders. “You know, I should’ve expected it. I played matchmaker with you guys, and they’re just returning the favour.” Annoyingly as possible, but still. She’s grateful for the unwanted attempts.

“Do you want advice?”

“Sure.”

“Ignore what they’re saying,” thanks, Fugo, real helpful. “You should try dating someone with whom you’ve been close with for a time. Like Narancia and I.”

He’s in on it! He’s fucking in on it! Fuck you, Fugo!

“That’s not going to work, either.”

“You’re right — sorry. Not everyone is capable of risking a close friendship like that.”

“That’s not what I mean!”

Fugo inquisitively raises an eyebrow. “Alright, let’s back up for a minute.” Thank you! “What are you into?” No! Fugo! Jesus Christ!

“Clothing.”

“No, I mean — who?”

“Makeup.”

Fugo, growing irritated, speaks slowly with wide gestations. “Do you like men or women or everyone?”

“I like me.”

They stare for a moment before Fugo puts his hands down on the table. The gears turn in his head for a minute before he finally replies with a low, “Oh. That’s what you meant. I’m sorry for misunderstanding. I can get Narancia to leave you alone, but I’m not entirely sure about Mista.”

“It’s okay, Fugo — I’m pretty sure by the time the sun sets, I will have screamed ‘I’m fucking asexual’ at least ten times.”

“Yeah?”

“They’ve been playing a rousing game of ‘Guess Trish Una’s Sexuality’ all day.”

“They’re doing terribly.”

“Agreed.”
The third time Mista attempts to set Trish up, or get her to go flirt with someone, or whatever he was doing at the time, Giorno finally steps in for her. He doesn’t say anything besides, “She’s not interested in anyone at the moment, Mista,” but it’s enough for her to break into her next statement of,

“I’ll never be interested in anyone, Mista. I like when other people date, but I don’t like the thought of myself doing any of that.” Mista stares blankly back to her, comment going over his head. Breaking out of subtlety, Trish emphasises, “I’m asexual, Mista.”

“Oh! Oh, I get it. Man, I’m sorry — you shoulda said somethin’ sooner.” He reaches his arms out as if to give her a hug, taking a step closer. “Apology hug?”

“You’re taller than me — your chest hair’s going to get into my eyes, stinky!”

Mista feigns a dejected pout.

Word of that, however, doesn’t get to Buccellati’s ears. As stated, Abbacchio doesn’t care, wasn’t having part of the whole set-Trish-up-with-random-beachgoers event. Buccellati, mostly, had kept his nose out of it, until the last damn second. It’s getting dark, and they’re packing everything up; everyone smells sharply of salt and sand, and at the final moment as they’re loading the car, everyone besides her and Buccellati and Abbacchio take off to scour the shoreline for more seashells. That leaves those three to put everyone’s things in the respective cars that they’d visited in.

See, Narancia had overheard the conversation between Trish, Mista, and Giorno; and he’d understood, and also gave an apology for his antics. Buccellati hadn’t been near at all, halfway across the beach, probably snogging with Abbacchio or something of the sort.

So, just as she sets her bag in Fugo’s mother’s car, Buccellati just randomly decides to ask her if she ever gets tired of being around couples constantly.

“No, not really,” it dawns on her where this is going almost immediately, “since I like being a matchmaker and all.”

“I’m glad it doesn’t bother you.” Thanks, mom.

“Why would it?”

“I reasoned that eventually, it’d be incommodious being surrounded by couples when you, yourself, are single.”

“Buccellati.”

“Yes?”

“I’m asexual, dude.”

“...ah, no wonder. Alright. Sorry to bother you.”

Boys are just… really, really fucking stupid sometimes. Hell, Mista will probably forget in the morning what she literally just told him and this’ll all start again…
“STINKY, 8:45AM: hey trish i got this girls number for u

STINKY, 8:46AM: wait

STINKY, 8:47AM: im so sorry”

Chapter End Notes

Why are you guys still reading this thing, again?

The crack's over now. The crack is done. Now we will wrap this up. B)
Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

Flashback bullfuckery time. Welcome to this modern AU.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[21 JULY, 1989]

Diavolo didn’t spend his entire life in Italy.

There was a time when he lived in England, and curious as he was as a boy he’d wandered his way to the slums where Dio happened to live; and though Dio’s brother Diego was there, the two never bonded. He’s a child, they’re all children, but more so Diego at times. He’s never liked Diego much.

He’s seen Dio’s father countless times, watching beer bottles crack over the blond’s head from the windows when he isn’t allowed in or he’s too frightened by the shouting to knock on the door; watches Dio leave to some rich boy’s house under the guise that they’re friends, but in secret Dio professes his undying hatred for that JoJo child constantly. Diavolo never meets Jonathan, never cares to, for he’s too paranoid; paranoid that the young JoJo will realise that Diavolo’s mother and father are affluent, that he’d tell Dio, that Dio would hate him all the same — so on the proposal that they “terrorise JoJo together”, Diavolo always comes up with some excuse.

When he goes home, his mother complains of his low-class clothing, the clothing that he’d nabbed off of some other family so that he’d look equally as poor as he wished Dio to believe; and she tries to take it, tears apart his bedroom to find those ratty threads, but he always finds a new hiding spot for them. Eventually, she’d stopped searching, throwing her hands in the air and giving up and announcing that if Diavolo wanted to look like a street-rat then he could do whatever he wanted.

He does. He always does whatever he wants nonetheless, so her words mean nothing to him, nothing more than a simple chime of you don’t have to hide anymore.

On nights when he knew — he could practically sense it in the air, taste it in the molecules like a snake — that Dio wouldn’t be fed, that he’d have to resort to stealing, Diavolo is the one bringing him what scraps he can salvage in secret from dinner. Eventually this secret gets let out, and his mother watches him dump everything into a sack and announce that he’s going to the slums to feed his “best friend”. Despite protesting from both parents that the slums are terribly dangerous, he cannot be assed to care, and so he waves his little hands outside the window behind Dario’s head until Dio makes up some excuse and joins him outside.

“Where is all of this coming from?” Dio asks him as they’re sitting among the flickering street lights outside of the slums, on the sidewalk where countless people have to dart around these idiotic kids to get by. His brows are raised, suspicion glinting in ambergris eyes, spoon poised in front of thin lips.

“I’m stealing it.” Answers the other, stopping mid-bite to answer with his mouth full, an action
that clearly disgusts Dio. Swallowing, Diavolo continues, “Why are you asking now?”

“It’s well-cooked.” Responds the blond, tapping his knee idly. “Better than all of the stupid shit in the restaurants, I’d say.”

Diavolo manages, somehow, to keep the look of guilt off of his face. “I’ve been stealing it from the rich. Like that JoJo kid you always spend time with.”

Dio grunts. “I loathe the well-to-do.”

“So do I,” Diavolo murmurs, turning sullenly back to the food on his lap. “So do I.”

“You have a strange sixth sense,” muses Dio without hesitation, “of knowing when exactly that bastard won’t allow me to eat.”

“Yeah,” begins Diavolo, “I can sorta predict the future.”

“You cannot. That’s impossible!”

“I can!”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah! I gave it a name, too.” Diavolo pauses, coming up with the name on the fly. “‘Epitaph’.”

“You don’t even know what an epitaph is.”

“I do, too!”

“Prove it!”

Diavolo pauses, expression flattening, a previously-poised index finger sinking to show his loss for words. “An epitaph is…”

“What’s that?” Taunts Dio, hand cupping around his ear, smirk pulling at the corners of his lips. “I can’t understand your Italian accent.”

“It’s…”

“An inscription on a tombstone.” Finishes Dio for him, a swift and satisfied nod of the head.

He’s too intelligent for a nine year-old, concludes Diavolo as he shoves the Brit’s shoulder and turns his attention back to eating.

[13 AUGUST, 1992]

“I’m going to kill that rat of a father.” Dio suggests on another instance of Diavolo having to bring him food. This time, they’re sitting next to an apothecary shop, Dio jerking a thumb at whatever could possibly be inside. He leans all-too casually against the wall.
Diavolo doesn’t believe him, thinks Dio’s just kidding around. Offhandedly, the young boy tells, “You should, Dio. Bash his skull in.”

“I’d be more subtle.”

“Subtle?”

“I’d like to hear your idea.”

Dio’s all too good at reading people. Diavolo has ideas, of course he does, but it’s unlikely that he’d carry them out. They’re twelve now, having gone through years and years of Diavolo lying about where the food is coming from and Dio never figuring it out. Diego’s never around, for when Diavolo comes over to play, the brother chooses to stay indoors. Dio doesn’t seem to have any qualms about that.

“I have a few.” Muses the pink-haired boy, fingers running through the mud-gnarled ends of a French braid that his mother forced upon him before the boys decided that pitching mud at Dario’s house was an excellent pastime. “You could mix glass into his food.”

“The forensic team would find that and realise that he was murdered.”

“Alcohol poisoning?”

“He’s well on his way to that.”

“Hire assassins.”

“With what money?” Diavolo shrugs his shoulders, frowning. “I have an idea. Use your Epitaph to see into the future.”

Diavolo half-pouts, half-glowers, a curt, “I came up with that idea when I was nine,” rolling off of pursed lips. You’ll never live it down, Dio tells him, before asking Diavolo to try again, as if they’re playing some sort of guessing game. “Poison him? That’s as subtle as it gets.”

With a wide, sharp-toothed smirk, Dio jerks his thumb at the apothecary building yet again. Diavolo reasons he’s kidding around for the second time, until Dio hucks a bag of coin to his companion, where it bounces off of his chest and into his lap. “Bingo.” He quipps.

A bout of fear grips Diavolo’s stomach, writhing like snakes in his guts, uncomfortable and cumbersome; but his expression doesn’t give him away, doesn’t give away the small inklings of worry rising in his chest. Dio’s planning on killing someone. If he gets caught, it’s over, their friendship is over — and what of Diavolo? He conspired, he gave a perfunctory comment that Dio should do it, and he’s equally at fault here. Dio could rat him out, claim Diavolo gave him the idea, and then they’d both be imprisoned — can they give children the death penalty? People would harm them, harm Diavolo, and…

...and what if Dio decided that Diavolo knew too much and decided to rid the world of his existence, too?

He’s paranoid, so paranoid, delusions pressing at his mind closer and closer with each and every passing second. He doesn’t want to die.

He chooses ignorance, forces himself to forget the day they’re spending time together and Dio ducks into the apothecary and appears with arsenic; forces himself to forget the final evening when Dario dies as he should’ve, fault of Dio; forces himself to forget when Dio fakes tears to the police with Diego and JoJo’s father takes the two boys in. Diavolo had been there for all of that,
the latter two subtly, as he’d hidden as best he could.

As Dio and Diego are leaving the slums with the police, Dio turns around and glances at the bush Diavolo’s residing in, and *smirks* as if to say you’re *next* if you let the cat out of the bag, Diavolo.

[30 MARCH, 1997]

They still talk.

Diavolo utterly refuses to go to the Joestar manor, for he’s still convinced that Jonathan will realise somehow that he’s wealthy; during the day, he hides out in the slums, occupying the old house that the Brando family used to reside in and decorating it to fit his whim. It looks slightly nicer with his presence, but for both he and Dio, the residence has rather negative associations attached to it. Diavolo only does this to appear as though he’s still flat-broke, tells Dio that he wishes he didn’t have to live in this house but that he has no parents and the tarp he was living under previously did nothing to keep out the cold at night.

He’s great at fabricating stories, but he’s not sure if Dio believes them, or if he knows the truth, or if he’s completely buying into all of these little tales.

Dio insists for the next five years that he move into the Joestar manor, that George wouldn’t mind in the slightest to have another young son to raise, but each and every time Diavolo refuses. He tells that he’d be a burden, and Dio refutes that — “We’re wealthy now, and as much as I absolutely *loathe* that family, I have everything I’ve *ever wanted*. My father is rotting in hell as we speak, and my monthly allowance is more than I know what to do with.” He tells that he hates the rich, that he wouldn’t be as subtle about the murder of the family, would get the both of them arrested, but Dio offers countless times to help him out.

“Heart of God,” Dio starts one day, on his umpteenth time trying to convince his one companion to move into the mansion with him, as Diavolo continually concocts reasons why he cannot whilst living a lie in its entirety. “How are you planning to go to university?”

They’re both homeschooled because they’re both wealthy, but Diavolo’s pretending he has a lackluster education. He’s got books on the shelves of Dario’s old house, all from Dio, as the two frequently study together. Diavolo knows half of the shit Dio spits out, but he feigns that he doesn’t, that he’s a fast learner. Dio always seems rather impressed with his friend’s intellect.

“I’ll find a job.”

Dio tosses his head back and laughs, leaning against the wall with his hands resting on his knees. “You haven’t the slightest idea how much university costs, do you?”

Diavolo knows, and knows well. “I suppose not.”

“I might be able to arrange for you to get into the one I’m attending soon,” he suggests with a flick of the wrist, “but I’ll get back to you on that.”
[4 APRIL, 1997]

He does get back to Diavolo on that.

Dio, the favourite son as he refers to himself, manages to get George Joestar to agree to paying for Diavolo’s university fees if he works as a housekeeper full-time. Now that he turns up every day between ages seventeen and eighteen, there’s no need for him to continually occupy Dario’s home, and so he moves everything he’d brought in and been given out. He’ll live on-campus, he decides, and Dio won’t know a single tidbit of what makes up his identity. His mother and father, under the pretense that Diavolo received a full-ride scholarship, have no qualms about his sudden wish to move out.

The two Joestar men in the manor are sickeningly kind.

When he tries to go home, they offer him dinner as if he were a part of the family; he shows up in the morning to get right to work, and for some reason there’s always leftover coffee and tea and a scone or two. Jonathan talks his and Dio’s ears off, Diavolo more so because Diavolo has yet to be blatantly aggressive with the heir; and it’s annoying, the endless drivel, for Diavolo has always been slightly reclusive and non-social, yet this utter manchild is here to chatter to him.

[10 NOVEMBER, 2000]

Halfway through university, Dio gets utterly tired of dealing with Jonathan’s blabbering — admits to Diavolo time and time again that he’s fucked up several moments in JoJo’s life and that Jonathan keeps trying to forgive him and make friends — and suggests they transfer. They’re both hellbent on getting into the same university, for Dio’s obviously aware that Diavolo’s not going to leave his side so soon, and Diavolo’s forcing down his paranoia because he trusts Dio — has since they were children, and how could a murder possibly ruin that? Dio hadn’t ratted him out for the suggestions years ago. Probably wouldn’t, as long as they stayed companions.

And stay, they do. They’re both accepted to a university in Sardinia.

“I decided on a whim to study the Italian language,” muses Dio as they’re packing up their things together, “and I must’ve had access to Epitaph when I did. This worked out perfectly.”

“I was nine.” Diavolo emphasises for what must be the millionth time in his life.

“You’ll never live it down, I said.”

[6 JANUARY, 2001]
They’ve got baby Trish and Giorno in the playpen together while they’re both slouched over their textbooks. Diavolo’s running his hands through his hair, pulling at the pink locks; on occasion, Dio may look over and ask something, but that’s as far as their conversations go. The repartee ends after the question is answered or the task is carried out, and more often than not it’s Diavolo getting up to check on the kids. At several points, they’re sleeping, and others crying — he practically has to force Dio to get his head out of his ass and take care of Giorno on multiple occasions.

After finals end, they’re able to catch up on what they missed over the week. No longer living in dormitories, the two have their own apartments, the selected residences rather close to one another.

“How’s the wife?”

“Moving out.” Diavolo informs, raising his hand to show that the ring that was once there has been pawned away. “She has half-custody of Trish.” As if on cue, the chubby child sitting between his knees raises her arms to the air and clutches at her father’s long hair. He flinches, head being tugged down, eventually managing to free himself though not after several utterances of ouch.

“What’d you do to the poor woman?” Teases Dio, earning himself a glare. The latter eventually flops back in the armchair, baby Giorno asleep in his arms. “His mother and I cut everything off.”

“Sorry to hear.”

“I don’t want to marry a wench like that, Diavolo — I find I am perfectly content with the situation.”

“...custody?”

“She relinquished it, damn party-going brat.”

[25 FEBRUARY, 2001]

There were nights before all of this relationship bullfuckery happened, where they’d both go home so plastered that they weren’t able to walk the next morning. Both often passed out on the bar countertops, had to be escorted home for they were too inebriated to drive or even walk without falling over themselves like buffoons. Both, now single fathers, opted to study together every weekend; on Saturday it was Diavolo’s turn to take care of both children, and Sunday was Dio’s. The one not in charge of child-watching studied until he couldn’t take it anymore, until his brain felt as though it’d explode, and they stopped and sat around and talked.

Diavolo’s not quite over everything. There are certain things he’s quite able to get over, like Dio killing Jonathan’s dog — he never liked dogs much, himself — but other things he’s unable to come to terms with. Dio murdered his father, granted the man deserved a slow and painful death. If and when they do quarrel, there’s always that pressing paranoia that says Diavolo will get thrown under the bus for something Dio does, that he will receive the death penalty or that Dio
will kill him should he betray Dio; and it’s awful, unhealthy, a so-called friendship that relies purely on mistrust and abuse to fuel the fires. Diavolo only recently came to realise that.

He doesn’t want to die. The worst fear he has is dying, is someone from the slums in England moving out to Sardinia and recognizing him somehow as Dio’s little murder helper. They’d have seen the two, they’d know Diavolo’s face, his iconic hair colour, and he’d be — oh, God.

They can’t see his face.

Someone might know. Someone might realise.

As soon as he graduates with a degree in business, he drops right off of the face of the earth.

[16 SEPTEMBER, 2002]

When he reappears, Dio’s grateful to see him, or looks that way; he claps Diavolo on the back and invites him to go for a walk. The kids are with their nannies, for Diavolo’s just gotten done checking up on the cafe he recently opened, and just when he thought he was safe venturing outside to check on everything Dio happened to round the corner and run smack into him. They go for a walk, they decide on a whim, though Diavolo feels more as though he’s been pressured into it.

It’s evening. Dio’s off work, he tells, had an important case today that just got done. However a murderer managed to become a fucking lawyer is beyond him.

“I have to meet with someone.” He tells as they duck into a dark alleyway, the flickering city lights never reaching them, headlights from cars on the road only illuminating the sides of the buildings for a few split seconds before rolling off into the distance. “I hope you don’t mind.”

“No,” says Diavolo, though the paranoia claws at him like the talons of a demon. “I have no qualms about it.”

They’re halfway through the alleyway — which Diavolo views as a shortcut to the next street — when they’re both attacked. Both of them at the same time, by a group of four; in the pouring late-night rain, a flash of silver glints from inside of Dio’s coat, and crimson sprays over the two of them like a fountain. A swift flick of the wrist, and Dio’s freed from the grip of the second, while the third and fourth cease their grip on Diavolo and run toward the blond.

Dio takes them all on, incapacitating them; another with his throat slit, another in a headlock whilst Dio kicks the third between the legs and snaps his neck with a kick to the chin as the man hunches over in agony. The one being strangled is released suddenly, and he charges toward the alley’s exit, only for Dio to wheel around and grasp the man by a tangle of curled hair. Pivoting, he forces the last man’s face into the wall, slamming it over and over again until his skull shatters and gray matter leaks out of a crater in his forehead.

The body falls limply to the ground, Dio gasping for breath, black coat drawn over a bloodstained white dress shirt.

There’s a fifth that neither knew about, a fifth man that causes the garbage cans in the alleyway to
clatter as he rises from hiding with his hand stifling a scream. He takes off around the corner, and Diavolo thinks to himself that it’s over, that there’s nothing to do now, that they’re both going to have their heads put on a damn pike or get beaten senseless in prison.

He doesn’t want to die. He can’t die.

He’s dumbstruck by fear and shock at the events, a sticky crimson running with the rainwater down pale cheeks.

“What’re you going to do about that?”

“I—”

“He saw your face, Diavolo. Our faces.”

Nothing else needs to be said between the two of them before Diavolo yanks the blade from Dio’s hand and charges after the lone survivor, pursuing him into a neighboring alleyway and plunging the knife into the back of his neck with the fury of a merciless killer. Dio, a few paces behind, swiftly steps his way into the alleyway to watch Diavolo gasp for breath, adrenaline rushing, heart pounding ceaselessly and blood rushing in his ears. He’s collapsed to his knees by the time the blond murderer arrives in all his blood-spattered glory, and turns his head ninety degrees to gaze at the silhouette of the man who drove him to this.

“It’s a good thing Sardinia is so empty tonight.” Muses Dio, a hand placed on Diavolo’s shoulder. “We might’ve massacred the town.”

We. Thinks Diavolo, looking down to the crumpled form of the man he’d stabbed not minutes earlier. We.

“You’re helping me get rid of the evidence, right?” Dio’s tone drips acid.

“Why should I?”

“Because,” says the other, a wicked smirk playing on pink lips, “I’m the one witness you can’t kill.”

[10 JANUARY, 2016]

When Trish wanders into Diavolo’s room and insinuates that they need to take Giorno Giovanna in, because Giorno found out about Dio’s murder streak through Dio fully admitting it (yet he never threw Diavolo under the bus, and so maybe inklings of their former friendship remain?), he’s nothing short of appalled by the idea. He tells Trish no, that they don’t have room in their apartment for another member, that the boy could try putting the moves on his daughter and he wouldn’t stand for that, and though she tries her hardest to convince him it doesn’t work for once.

The two kids don’t know — will never know — that their fathers were friends, that they’ve known each other since they were little babies that did nothing more than crawl around while their fathers studied. They’ll never know, because they cannot know, because the second that happens everything will go to shit.
When he’d moved to Naples in an attempt to escape Dio’s hold on his life, on his paranoid mindset, Dio followed. Dio followed him, moved about a fifteen minute’s drive away. Diavolo stays inside constantly for a single reason, a reason he’ll never tell his daughter: Dio. Dio Brando, the one witness to everything, the one person he couldn’t kill because if he tried Dio would usurp him. Diavolo doesn’t want to die. He can’t die. He can’t die. He can’t let people outside see his face, because of Dio, because Dio Brando happened to fuck Diavolo up beyond repair.

They’re still in contact, albeit rarely. He never changed his phone number though he knows he should.

“I told Giorno.” Is the text that comes in the day after, and Diavolo doesn’t have to ask for context; even without Trish telling him all he needed to know, he’d still be keenly aware of what the message means.

“I’m surprised you didn’t tell him about me.”

“Friends don’t throw one another under the bus, Diavolo.”

He wants to reply with something scathing — “I’m not your friend. Pucci and Vanilla are your friends. I’m a pawn, a plaything, to you.” — but he doesn’t.

“You’re right.” He responds, hurling his phone across the room, where it thuds dully into a pile of clothing in the open closet.

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[CURRENT DAY, 11 JUNE, 2016]

“That’s why?” Doppio murmurs in the dusk of their shared bedroom, lying on his stomach with his arms folded up underneath his chin. All Diavolo can do is nod once, looking sullen, phone vibrating incessantly on the bedside table. “Because of him?”

“Indeed.”

Pause.

“How do you feel, my Doppio?”

Doppio raises his head up, making quick gestations in the air as he searches for the words to say. “No different,” he remarks after a minute, flopping back down and gazing at Diavolo with all the love in the world, “cause I trust you. I’m always so unlucky, you know, but not since I met you. I don’t think any of this was your fault, really.” Diavolo raises a brow at the forgiving susurrations. “I think it was Dio’s fault completely, since he used you. If I was strong, I’d… I’d… punch him! In the nose.”

They share a kiss in the darkness, laced with complete affection and trust, Doppio running his hand through Diavolo’s hair. The phone yet again vibrates on the bedside table, and he opts to ignore it until Doppio ruminates, “Do you wanna get that?”

“No,” says Diavolo, though he rolls over and answers it without glancing at the caller I.D.

“Hello.”
“Would you believe me,” Dio’s voice crackles over the line, and Diavolo imagines that he’s sneering with utter delight, “if I told you that Giorno made his first kill?”

Chapter End Notes

HAHAHA YOU GUYS THOUGHT THIS WAS GONNA BE HAPPY.

To be honest, I loved the fuck out of writing the interactions between Dio and Diavolo.

Thanks to user Damedanbo for putting this comment in my inbox: "I've practically made myself believe that Diavolo being reclusive is actually connected to Dio, that he has some evidence or knowledge about Dio's murderous activity(ies?) and that he went into hiding to protect himself from Dio and that's why he never goes out anymore."
I played with it. It was fun.
“I didn’t come back here to make you feel so high-and-mighty.”

Giorno’s glowering at him, lips pursed into the most tight-lipped frown that Dio’s ever seen, perhaps worse than that of anything Jonathan had ever given him over their years and years of bitter quarrels. He’s on the couch, the very edge of it, as if he feels he still doesn’t quite belong in this house, with his murderer of a father; but he does, and both of them know it — at least, Dio does, and Giorno might not be aware of that fact quite yet.

With raised brows, the corners of his own lips pulling into a wicked grin, Dio reclines in his chair, book open on his lap but pages turning themselves in the gentle summer breeze blowing in through the window behind his head. “Oh? Then, what?”

“Because you called.”

Dio’s face falls momentarily. Giorno continues.

“It was on the News, dad.”

Which is why he called.

He called for two reasons. One, no son of his should be getting caught committing a felony, be it petty theft or a full-blown massacre. Two, for some convoluted reason, this whole event was chocked up to an accident — Giorno committed an accidental killing in an act of self-defense, using deadly force because the guy he was facing used it against him. Giorno’s first kill was merely an accident, so he hadn’t disposed of evidence, and more importantly had gotten his name smeared all over the News broadcast that evening. The police had to file a report, had to set a court date just to prove Giorno’s innocence, and as the still-legal guardian of the latter Dio was forced to show up for the endless drawl.

The first thing Dio did was message Diavolo about it, absolutely enthralled with the turn of events. Giorno’s court date happened weeks upon weeks after. It wasn’t a major case, apparently. Major to him, major to Dio, but not to the government.

He wasn’t allowed to defend his own son, be his son’s lawyer in the case, not that Giorno needed one as he’d gotten off scot-free anyway. He wasn’t allowed, because it showed bias, and more than that some bitchy-ass cop wearing black lipstick instantly went into a fit as soon as Dio walked into the courtroom. Dio knows — had known at the time — that Giorno told all of his little lackeys about Dio’s problems with… heh, humanity, and letting the scum of the earth live. The lipstick-wearing fellow was only one of them; there were others, like that Mista guy that Giorno’s so enamoured with, and some other man with black hair that Giorno seemed rather close
to (his new housemate?). Trish Una hadn’t shown up, no pink puffball ambling around the courtroom. Dio vaguely remembers the rest of Giorno’s friends, and hadn’t seen them either.

After the case let out, Giorno didn’t so much as say hello to him, instead hiding amidst the crowd of two close friends and boyfriend and leaving. Knew Dio was there, for he’d looked back several times toward his father before the hearing began. Didn’t say hi, though, much to Dio’s honest (hidden) chagrin.

So, as soon as the case was over, Dio waited an entire twenty-four hours and called. Called for once, instead of shot a half-assed text message Giorno’s way, asking — not demanding — for him to come home and talk to his father. Giorno was compliant, showed up, but knew this was far from an act of caring on Dio’s part and more along that of curiosity and wonder.

It’s hard for him to express, to feel, compassion, as during his lifetime he received none of that, not from his own father. And while he’d vowed to be better, something stupid that Jonathan had made him do when he found out his brother had knocked a girl up and was to be taking custody of Giorno later on, he’s keenly aware that Giorno hasn’t — probably won’t ever — see him as a proper father. Dio feels no guilt over it. Cares, subconsciously he thinks, but in no way is he capable of expressing it.

Tried. Tried doing father-son things with him, like taking young Giorno to the beach or the zoo or whatever his little mind wanted to do. Didn’t try to force the violent nature of the Brando family onto him, for he knew Giorno’s time would come in one way or another — it had, just not in the way Dio presumed. Tried teasing Giorno about his little boyfriend, because isn’t that what a father should do? Left Giorno’s birthday present (a flute) in his bedroom, on the furniture he hadn’t moved out and hasn’t touched since Giorno sought to leave. Let Giorno leave because he is a father, a better one than Dario, and actually wants his son to be happy. Goes about it the wrong way.

Doesn’t express himself well.

That’s not something he spends time mulling over, however. He’s fantastic at showing his apathy for everything, and when not being apathetic he’s boundlessly furious toward JoJo and humanity itself, toward those who fucked with and will fuck with him. There are few people on this drab realm of existence that he might save should he one day obtain the ability to end the entire world — Giorno, naturally, is top of the list. Giorno’s boyfriend if he sought it. Maybe Giorno’s friends, if he was in a really good mood. Possibly Diego. Vanilla and Pucci, for sure. Diavolo, definitely.

Out of all the shitty people in the slums, Diavolo was the only kid that’d turn up to his and Diego’s house from time to time offering food that he’d presumably stolen from the rich. After he and Diego stopped getting along, it was only Dio he focused on, and from that their friendship blossomed. Dio appreciates it, appreciates the only person on the God-forsaken planet that would give him the time of day and the compassion he damn-well deserved.

He knew from the start of Diavolo’s fabrications that the latter was affluent. He was sneakier than he let on as a nine-year-old, saw Diavolo stopping a few shacks before Dario’s to change out of fine clothing and into shoddy rags once. The next few days he’d gone back to that location to see, Diavolo had already changed — at home, Dio thought — but was rubbing dirt over the crisp white of his clothing because his mother had washed it. And he knew, too, that Diavolo was scared Dio would resent him if Dio came to find out about the former’s cushy lifestyle, and while he didn’t appreciate being lied to he did have respect for Diavolo’s undying loyalty.

He knew, too, that a boy “without parents” couldn’t possibly give himself a French braid that was so well-crafted at the age of twelve. Knew that Diavolo’s naievety on the troubles of the world was because he’d been comfortable for his whole life, that when they were eating in front of the
apothecary and Diavolo kept staring at it, he hadn’t the slightest clue that apothecaries weren’t just medicinal.

He liked Diavolo. Still does, so he keeps the man around despite the fact that the cafe owner won’t go outside. Knows all about him now, him and his daughter Trish, of his husband, and that’s only due to thorough investigation. Creepy, yes, and Dio admits to that. Much-needed, however, to ensure that Diavolo won’t ever work against him.

Diavolo never liked to stand out much. Dio enjoyed all eyes on him, whether for better or for worse, enjoyed the euphoria received when an audience’s attention was all directed at his superior self. Diavolo didn’t. Didn’t want to do much with his life. Majored in business, called it good, but once told Dio during a college study-date that he’d prefer to run a smaller corporation than be a master CEO. Didn’t want people to know him, even before Dio turned him reclusive and fearful of the world around him. The only thing the man had and still has going for him is that ridiculous bright pink hair, a trait Trish had picked up as soon as she’d popped out if Dio recalls correctly.

Dio’s the one that drove Diavolo fully into seclusion, and he’s well-aware of that. Diavolo was paranoid even as a kid, more so after Dario died and he knew Dio did it. Came up with excuse after excuse over the years to avoid Dio, finally started spending time around him again as if his life depended on it. Fell off of the face of the earth only to return after both of them had a steady career. Dio’s the one that drove Diavolo to murder, even if he could’ve diffused the situation with the extra witness himself. He’d known, always had, that Diavolo feared death above everything else. Didn’t want to die, probably has convinced himself by this stage that it’s impossible for death to take him even by heart attack or accident. He doesn’t regret playing on that torment to drive Diavolo to murder another human, because that signified that if one of them betrayed the other, the other would go down as well — and Dio would never betray Diavolo and throw him under the bus, because he places value on their former friendship and the way Diavolo cared even in the worst situation. Diavolo would and could never betray Dio, because the second he tried Dio would put him out of his misery and get off without so much as a blemish on the permanent record of life.

Their relationship works in complex ways. Dio has no regrets about it, never will. Doesn’t regret killing those assholes in the alleyway that thought it was funny to throw a rock through his son’s window one night. He’s sure that Giorno could distantly recall that day, should he try hard enough. Dio doesn’t regret anything he did. Not the murder, not the manipulation. Nothing.

“Good job on your first kill.” Says Dio finally, now finished with introspection on his past. “Although, mine was when I was twelve, but I won’t hold it against you.”

Giorno doesn’t find that funny. Folds his hands together in front of his mouth, closes his eyes. Sighs.

“Guilty?”

Surprisingly, Giorno shakes his head. Dio had expected Giorno to nod, to say yes he did and run off to Father Pucci and ask God for forgiveness, because that’s how the damn kid acted when Dio said that he’d killed people before. “I do, and don’t.” He informs after a long, long moment. “I do feel deplorable for taking the life of a civilian. I don’t feel guilt over taking the life of someone who was bound to take mine.” Pause. “Does this make any sense?”

Dio gets it. Giorno’s still half-good! Half-pure! How sweet.

“I need the full story.” Other than what his son so carefully avoided narrating for the courts. He needs the gritty details, to hear the way the dead man’s blood splattered over the ground, Giorno’s fear and how he didn’t regret yet regretted everything all the same. There are certain aspects of
killing that court trials just don’t get to hear.

Fortunately for Dio, and rather unfortunately for Giorno’s sanity, the latter weaves his tale.

[11 JUNE, 2016]

He’s coming home from a late shift, ambling his way through the summer dusk with the intent to grab Mista a gift now that he’s got the extra cash. He’d refused to carpool home with Buccellati solely because of this, because he didn’t want to burden the older man by having him follow Giorno into every fucking store in the entire strip mall. Told Buccellati he’d be fine walking around by himself, said he didn’t need the ideas (which he really, truly does). But that, of course, was an hour ago, and now he’s in the dead-centre of the strip mall with zero shopping bags around his wrist unlike literally every teenager he passes by. He’s glanced over countless items by now, darted into practically every store with hopes that one of them — even something as simple as a shoe store, or a tourist gift shop — would have some hidden gem that Mista will love.

Mista likes a lot of things. Mista likes Giorno, but Giorno’s not about to put a bow on his head and act like a Christmas present in the midst of June. (Or ever. He has a little more pride than that.) Mista likes hats, but he has two — his old one, which he plops onto Giorno’s head every damn time the latter comes over, “’cause he’s so cute”, and the one from aunt Erina that he’s been wearing since she gave it to him. Which, by the way, Giorno finds really charming, and aunt Erina was enthralled to hear that Mista loved it that much. (“A family man.” She’d called him. “You’re very lucky.”)

Mista likes guns, but Giorno’s not going down that road. Mista likes cashmere sweaters, but that’s far out of Giorno’s limited price range. Mista likes reading, but Giorno doesn’t know how many books out of the bookstore Mista already owns from the romance section, and he’s not entirely sure if Mista likes other genres.

As far as Giorno’s aware, Mista doesn’t wear necklaces or bracelets or anything, doesn’t have as much of a fascination with ladybugs; Giorno doesn’t know his clothing size anyway, so snagging Mista yet another high-riding shirt isn’t going to work too well. He’s lost for ideas, bumbling around like a confused little bee searching for flowers but coming upon all the dead ones. (The thought of being a bee doesn’t sit right with him, so Giorno mentally changes his simile. He’s a ladybug, Goddammit.)

With a glance down at his watch, it comes to his attention that he’s spent way too long on his maladroit wandering — way too long bumping into every shelf in tightly-packed stores — and so he pivots and heads back home. It’s past ten, the crowd’s dwindling, and he reasons that tomorrow’s the perfect opportunity to stop back at the strip mall and try again. He mulls over it in his head, over what to get Mista, a perturbed look of introspection carved into his features. Eyes locked at the ground, he ducks into the alleyway he always uses as a shortcut to get back home whenever he’s out.

It’s always normal through here. Always, every day, a normal path with normal emptiness and normal dumpsters and the normal smell of garbage and the normal squealing of rat families from inside cracks in the walls. It’s normal, and sometimes he’ll walk by a homeless man or family and give them anything he has on them, or a group playing a card game that pays him no mind as he
treks past. It’s always normal, except for today.

There are five of them.

Five of them, all bigger than he is, that circle around him before Giorno’s even aware what he’s gotten himself into. He finally removes his gaze from the ground, a sharp and poignant realisation of _oh_ snapping into his mind the split second his eyes lock with the first one. He doesn’t have anything on him besides his wallet, tucked safely into his back pocket, and with a smidgen of hope flaring in his chest he realises that playing dumb might let him get away.

One of them demands he fork over his wallet. Raising his hands in passive submission, Giorno tells them shortly that he doesn’t have anything on him, that he’s trying to get home _because it’s late at night and his mother will kill him if he’s not home on time._

“This is merely a case of high-school bullying,” thinks Giorno shortly as, with a shake of his head, he maneuvers his way through the poorly-constructed circle of wannabe gangsters and carries on with his introspective pace.

One of them whips his arm out and snags Giorno by the shoulder, harshly yanking him back into the circle, where the force sends him tumbling back into another boy who quickly gets Giorno into a headlock. Two others rush at him, pinning his arms whilst the blond squirms around fruitlessly in an attempt to free himself. He’s not entirely sure what to do at first, mind racing yet all the same frozen, screaming over and over for him to _do something_ but not entirely sure _what_. The arm around his neck tightens, an uncomfortable press against his trachea, and with air crowing constricted as the other two close and attempt to grab his legs, Giorno’s brain finally catches up to the situation and he bites down — wriggles until his teeth connect with the squishy flesh and muscle and forces his jaw closed until it hurts, until the copper tinge of blood leaks over his tongue and drips down his chin.

Within those few seconds, the first guy releases him, hollering in pain as one of his lackeys releases Giorno’s left arm and punches him in the side of the head so hard that stars fill his vision. He stumbles aimlessly around, now fully released to bumble through the alleyway like an idiot. The others laugh at him, though their laughs are far from entertained — more poisonous, toxic, a throaty noise that signals a sadistic want to harm. Their voices hit his ears endlessly, like the beat of a drum or the steady sound of rain splattering over pavement, and it’s disorienting — his head hurts so bad that it’s impossible to tell right from left, up from down, impossible for him to immediately realise that he’s been grabbed yet again.

He kicks again, feet flailing in empty space, and it’s weaker now; the fist that connected with his skull must’ve jarred his motor cortex, too. After several minutes snail by, his vision clears up, the blurry world swimming slowly into focus. He’s only held down by two of them, arms behind his back, kicking but not screaming. The others seem to be discussing what to do with him — beat him senseless or leave him for dead — but it’s late at night, and hardly a person’s around. Shortly, he prays to whatever God is out there to send him some help before the kicking ceases.

“A flash of silver in the dusk sends shivers of dread down his spine. The others aren’t armed, it seems, or if they are haven’t tried to pull anything on him yet; the tallest, the one with the knife and purportedly the leader, with a bleeding and nasty-looking bite mark red and raw on his arm, approaches with a short stride. With his hands behind his back, drawn to stand on the tips of his toes by the force and height of the other two lackeys, the leader holds the knife close to his face,
so close that his vision blurs as he goes cross-eyed to look at it.

With an indignant huff, Giorno squirms once more in an attempt to free himself, inevitably causing sharpened metal to scrape against his skin. It’s cold, the knife, the way the air billows softly into the fresh scratch, and all he can do is wince and stop wiggling around.

“Fine.” He murmurs acquiescently, eyes squinted shut as the stinging travels like the tendrils of a spider web over his entire cheek and into his brain, spiralling and spiralling until all he can feel is fierce burning. “I’ll get my wallet out. Take it.”

The split second they let him go with a shove, he rights himself, dusts off and pretends to reach into his pocket; seconds later he’s taking off down the alleyway, sneakered feet slapping against the pavement in rapid bursts of sound. He breaks free from the alleyway, feeling safer the second he hits the minuscule crowd and bolts off into the street. The road is mostly-clear, a few cars honking at him as he makes a break for the other side.

A force hits his back and they tumble together, cold pavement scraping up his arms and face where the clothing doesn’t cover, ripping jeans open at the knee. It’s the leader he’s tussling with, blindly so, the others standing on the sidewalk with hollers. Despite the few stragglers on the streets, a few on the phone with what’s presumably the police, the other boys chant excitedly, “Kill him! Kill him!”

Giorno’s below the leader, hands clamped around the bigger guy’s wrists to hold him back. He’s stronger, more muscular, overpowers Giorno without so much as a lick of effort when he straddles over Giorno’s chest and sits down. The breath ejects out of him with an oomph; knees pin his upper arms, and eventually the guy breaks free of Giorno’s feeble grip. With one hand holding the knife — the left — the right hand balls into a fist and decks him right in the nose. There’s a crack and the taste of blood again, his own this time around, and the very tip of the knife punctures his shoulder.

He moves out of the way on instinct, but that instinct only saves him from a full ten centimetres of metal entering his shoulder. The plain blue fabric of his T-shirt rips open, a deep gash running from the centre of his shoulder all the way to the outer side. Click of the knife with the ground. Blood oozing from the wound, pounding in his ears. Chants of friends on the sidelines. People gathering in droves to watch. Car horns honking. Police sirens.

In the distraction caused by the sirens and the sound of friends booking it, the guy’s hold on his arms loosens. Giorno’s able to get his left arm out from under the guy — not his main arm, but it’ll do. Wannabe gangster doesn’t let up in any other aspect, cold steel swinging down at him again. Giorno manages to divert it, just barely, by using his free hand to punch the big guy in the jaw.

Knife clatters to the ground next to his ear.

In a single, fluid motion, Giorno’s got it in his hand; lashes his wrist out in a way meant to intimidate, to scare the guy off and make him realise that the tables have turned. But perhaps he’d stuck his arm out too far, too hard, or perhaps the man leaned forward into it with the intent to hit Giorno again — but in any case, no matter whose fault it was, the silver is lodged in his throat, blood gushing out from the carotid artery despite the inserted weapon. The guy’s eyes show nothing but shock, alarm, and eventually — as if in some horrific movie — the body slides off of him, hits the ground with a dull and resounding thud.

And Giorno’s lying there, on his back, sirens blaring in his ears and blood that’s both his and not covering his face and shirt and his hand where he was previously holding the knife.
It takes him a few seconds. Three seconds to sit up. Three more to glance at the body; another to
realise that the guy’s fucking dead and that it’s his fault. Five seconds to rub at his face, sticky red
smearred over fingertips and cheek, drying blood from his nose stuck to his top lip. Another second
to look at the body. Double-take.

Abbacchio’s yelling.

Giorno has to wriggle out from underneath the frozen leg of the dead man, scramble to his feet.
This takes a few more seconds. He’s waiting, waiting impatiently, for something to click — for his
mind to replay what happened, for emotions to catch up to him. To cry, to scream, whatever the
hell he’s supposed to do. But his own emotions are stuck, frozen, exactly like the gang leader
lying on the road before him, exactly like the faces of the crowd.

He glances around, shaking, anxiously crossing and uncrossing his arms and turning to meet the
eyes of aghast civilians. Some whisper.

Clink of handcuffs. Abbacchio’s still yelling, but none of that has anything to do with him. They
must’ve found the guy’s friends.

God, god, god, fuck.

Where’s the guilt? Where’s the fucking guilt? He just killed a man instantly, stuck a fucking knife
into his fucking throat — where is the fucking guilt? He’s nothing like his father, can’t possibly
kill and feel nothing, even if it was an accident. This whole thing was an accident, everything,
wandering into the alleyway — he should’ve given up his wallet, dammit, just let them take it and
ran home and called the police, but he didn’t, thought he could be the big damn hero and get off
scot-free and —

“Giorno!”

He’s clasping onto a bleeding shoulder when Abbacchio comes running at him, silver hair flying
out behind him in the wind, pushing through the crowd as if they were insignificant insects. A
thin, pretty young woman follows behind him (his new partner?) in matching uniform,
inquisitively glancing at Abbacchio. A questioning stare that asks him how he knows the guilty
party.

Still no guilt.

“The fuck, kid? What the fuck happened? What —”

White sheet placed in the road by other officers. Giorno’s not sure how many cops rushed to the
scene, but Abbacchio’s attention shifts from him to the lump of a dead man beneath crisp white,
back to Giorno. He grasps the blond’s shoulders and shakes him, bolts of pain slamming his spine.

“ — the fuck happened to you?!”

Giorno’s mouth opens, closes. He looks down, tightens his grip over the wound. This unclots it, a
teeny amount of scarlet dripping between closed fingers. He doesn’t say anything, still searching
for any smidgen of emotion he might feel at the situation. He’s gone numb. Maybe it’s just
because of what’s happened, or maybe because he’s more like Dio than he thinks. Than he wants
to be.

The others are collecting witness reports. Abbacchio messes with his hat, looks over Giorno.
Sighs. A worried, fatherly hand on an uninjured shoulder.
“I’m taking your ass to the hospital.”

Under his breath, Giorno mutters that it was an accident, that he didn’t mean it.

“I believe you,” says the officer, walking Giorno to his car. “You can’t hurt a fucking fly, kid.”

But he can. And he did.

Getting stitches hurts worse than he imagined it would.

The nurses tend to him like they’re tending to a baby, gentle and kind and completely unaware of what happened. Maybe they’re a little suspicious of the uniformed officer standing at the corner of the room, arms folded over his chest, but other than that they’re kind and unbiased. Giorno’s mind is still racing endlessly, little racecars labelled with Guilt and Pain and countless other words coursing over a racetrack in his mind. Pain reaches the pit stop to be fixed up. Guilt continues past and gets lost somewhere and Giorno’s unable to find the little red car again.

Pain starts racing again when the stinging antibiotic is applied right over the scratch on his cheek, spiraling out of control when the antibiotic makes it to the cuts on his knees and arms. They have him rinse his mouth out to get rid of the blood, blood which half-belongs to the dead man from when he’d bitten down. Have him do blood tests to make sure that swallowing someone else’s blood didn’t put him into contact with bloodborne pathogens. Pain finally slows to a stop when they leave. Guilt is nowhere to be found. Sadness and Fear finally join in for the race, neck and neck.

“Both out of concern, and because it’s my fucking job,” says Abbacchio, pulling a little pad of paper and pen from his shirt pocket, “I need you to tell me what happened.”

Giorno recites the story. Midway through, he feels like crying, but doesn’t only because someone’s here now and he’s never cried in front of another person before. Hasn’t cried in years, he thinks. He’d grown out of that after age thirteen.

Guilt finally pops out of its hidey-hole, but Guilt drives slowly around the racetrack. Sadness and Fear pass Guilt by several times in a single minute.

“Listen, kid.” Begins Abbacchio, flipping the notebook closed and tucking it away thereafter. “There’s no way you’re avoiding a case built around this. We caught the other perps, however, and I will get them to comply on telling what happened.” Giorno looks up. Looks away seconds after. “You have all the evidence needed to make your case and get out of trouble. Accidental killings through use of deadly force happen all the time, but you’re only able to get out of trouble if you can prove that he tried to use deadly force against you first.”

Giorno nods.

“You can, obviously. Stop fucking worrying.”

“That’s a terrible attempt at calming me down.” Retorts Giorno with a thin, feeble little chuckle and smile so forced that it makes his face feel as though it’ll crack.

“I’m not a fucking therapist, kid.”
Giorno blows air out of his nose. It hurts briefly. Pain’s motors rev again, but the car doesn’t rejoin the race. Fear stays in the pit for a while, Sadness lapping around Guilt still. Regret joins in seconds later, beating out every single emotion in the competition.

Dio’s arms were crossed over his chest for that entire sermon. Damn story lasted half an hour, and while he wants to complain that Giorno could’ve left out the fluff and got straight to the nitty-gritty I-just-fucking-killed-a-man part, he doesn’t because it’s too late for that anyway. No point in wasting his breath.

He’s glad to know that Giorno’s thoughts work in racecars, though. Sarcastically.

“My father offhandedly killed my mother. I killed him.” Reflects Dio, rage boiling in the pit of his gut. “When I said that you’d one day kill a man, I was hardly expecting it to be a mere accident.”

Giorno grunts, still not finding his father’s commentary funny at all.

“I still care about you. I am your father,” and a better one than Dario ever was, “so until you decide to kill on purpose, I won’t hold this over your head.”

“...thanks?”

“You’re welcome.”

Giorno rolls his eyes, standing up from where he was sitting on the couch, stretching his arms over his head. He’s wearing a tanktop today, as it’s mid-July and incredibly fucking hot despite the fact that Dio has the air conditioner cranked all the way up. The latter eyes the scar on Giorno’s shoulder from where the knife got him, eyes the very faint scar on his cheek, paper-thin and nearly invisible. Eyes the spot where, very subtly, the break in his nose healed and left the tiniest of deformities on the skin, only visible if he squints.

“I’m going to Mista’s.”

His son’s halfway to the door when Dio stops him, a call of his name and a glance thrown casually over his shoulder.

“What?”

“I left your birthday gift on your bed.”

“...you got me a birthday gift?”

Idly, Dio picks up the book he’d left on his lap, leafing through it until he finds the page he left off on. He nods, once, hearing Giorno’s footsteps pad down the hall and the door open. The sign that says Giorno’s name clacks against the wood, and seconds later Giorno reappears with the instrument case in his hands. Predominantly, he’s shocked, staring down at the hard black box with an inquisitively-raised eyebrow. He looks up at Dio, and Dio’s attention never leaves the book.

“...I don’t know how to play the flute, dad.”

“I thought you’d want to learn.”
Giorno smiles, distant and resonant, and paces out the door with a careful little *thank you* thrown over his shoulder.

Chapter End Notes


Can you believe I had to Google this stuff with my parents being paralegals and my aunt being a lawyer? Pff... Have to make sure, though.

I'm always torn between "shitty Mudad" and "good Mudad". :/
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

Wow guys, we're almost done with this fucking mess...
Thanks for sticking with me through all of this bullshit and liking this and laughing with me and dealing with all my fucking mistakes. It means a lot. <3 I love you guys. I will continue to write AUs for as long as my JJBA-obsessed mind allows me to. (I got All-Star Battle for Christmas and it's amazing btw. I'm addicted. Help. SOS.)

I'm sorry this was so late, too. Let me tell you, work is kicking my ass, and then depression cuts like a knife. My family started fighting when I was working on the update, and it kind of killed my mojo. Happy holidays, though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Things, for the most part, calm down.

The worst part of his life has to be over now — nothing could possibly compare to nearly getting mugged in a dark alleyway and accidentally killing a man, although Giorno can’t rid himself of the nightmares and flashbacks. Other than that, life has dulled to a meager trot instead of a rocket ship shooting off at lightspeed. It’s calm, he’s calm. Everyone’s fine.

He’d learnt after everything calmed down that playing the piano is harder than it looks, that there are too many fucking keys to memorise — and while he’s in no way slow at memorisation, learning several different instruments at once majorly fucks with his head. He’d learnt that woodwind instruments were not of his tier, but still tries to teach himself how to play the flute using various YouTube videos when no one else is around to hear him fuck up. He’d learnt that you can take your guitar to the park and sit there in the late-summer sun, legs crossed, and play your heart out, and that people will throw cash into the open case.

Through sheer accident, he found out that Buccellati knows how to play the piano — he’d walked in on it, came home from Mista’s house to the delightful sound of music. And through tutoring, he’s become somewhat adept, though there are times when he’ll march his way over to Buccellati on the couch and demand to know what something means.

He’d learnt, too, that people don’t exactly like murderers, whether accidental and in self-defense or not. So maybe the worst part of life isn’t quite over, and maybe it’s dwindling down from what it was. Maybe life’s just out to get him right now because he was an idiot and could’ve avoided everything if he hadn’t thought that taking an alleyway home in the dead of night was a good idea. Maybe life’s stopped trying to get at Dio, because Dio seems immune to everything thrown his way, and it’s instead trying to get at Giorno because he’s more impressionable and additionally younger, and life is easier to screw up when you’re young.

Maybe the entire world’s mad at him, and Giorno wants to pretend he doesn’t care, but he damn well does.

People recognize him because they released his identity on the News. Not by face, but by name,
like when he slides his bank card across the table at a restaurant, or when he’s working at the cafe. Business had dulled because of rumours that the accidental murderer works there, and though some people had come in saying they didn’t care because shit happens and it was self-defense, most people stopped coming in. Out of fear, perhaps, or disdain. Either way, he’d gotten tired of it within the first week, noticed the way the cafe died down significantly on Wednesday, and quit.

They didn’t want him to quit. Trish told him over and over that people would get over it, that they’d get over their shitty ideas and realise that he wasn’t in the wrong because shit fucking happens and that they’d come back with handfuls of cash and apologise profusely. Buccellati insisted that the drop in business wasn’t his fault, but both of them were keenly aware that it was. Fugo and Narancia both promised together that they’d “kick the shit” out of anyone who tried to mess with Giorno in any way, but the latter didn’t quite want to go to that extreme, for the situation wouldn’t be made the least bit better. Mista only pleaded, because everyone else stole everything he wanted to say in the breakroom the day he decided to leave, clung onto him as if Giorno were leaving the country instead of a minimum-wage job.

Abbacchio clapped him on the back as he stepped out, brooding, and told him that people would get the fuck over themselves because they always did when things like this happened.

Giorno only feels like they get over it when he’s in the park, where hardly a face knows him and his history, playing his guitar and belting out the notes to songs he’s written. They’ll walk up, tip him, maybe stand and watch for a bit. He’s had little kids dance together, cheerful and bright, to more upbeat tunes; had one girl who’d heard him sing before try to mimic the lyrics with him, though she’d only heard the song twice. On occasion, Mista joins him with a book; he’ll sit against the park bench or the tree or whatever’s there and pretend to be reading, though Giorno knows he’s not because ninety percent of the time his boyfriend’s just watching him, smiling and humming along.

Life gets better. Gradually, ever so gradually, things change and people change and he can finally hand someone his debit card without them gasping at the name and refusing his business or making a scene and pointing at him with whispers hidden behind hands.

It takes until the dead of winter again, but it happens. People move on. People stop glaring at him from within alleyways, just challenging him to go in — though he’s learnt to stay away from them, and even when no one’s there that he can see he cannot stand to walk past one anymore. The nightmares lessen, though on a rare occasion they spring up again and leave him in a cold sweat and when he finally rouses from sleep the blankets and pillows are piled on the floor and he’s near-tears and breathing heavily; Buccellati had to explain to him that these are called night terrors and not nightmares, and on a week where they were particularly bad suggested therapy because neither of them knew what to do. Abbacchio interjected with “all therapists are bullshit liars”, and so that debate ended there.

Months and months after he and Trish turn sixteen, everyone sits around in Buccellati’s house and collectively decide it’s a good idea to let the both of them try liquor for the first time. Abbacchio’s lying back against the sofa whilst everyone else sits on the floor, arms crossed, a sideways smirk playing on black-painted lips. Narancia hands both of them a can of beer each, giggling to himself as he does so and stating that this is probably illegal, but who cares?

Both Giorno and Trish stare at the freezing-cold cans placed in their hands before they pop the tab, shrug, and toast to bad ideas.

Both of them begin gagging and coughing after the first drink hits the back of their throats, and that ends there. Apparently — according to everyone else — wine is a bit stronger and more pungent, and however Abbacchio managed to practically live on the stuff daily is a fucking mystery.
The rest of the alcohol gets flushed down the sink, and they collectively head out for a late-night dinner instead.

The day prior to his and Mista’s one-year anniversary, Giorno decides to stay the night so that they can wake up together on the day of and kiss and do whatever their hearts decide to do. He’d brought his guitar and flute, and though countless times he told Mista that he can’t sing when he’s playing the flute the other absolutely insisted that he bring it over. The blond says that he can’t play it well. Mista says that he’s looking forward to hearing it.

They wake up entangled together under a single comforter, thin and of a reddish-orange tone that looks distinctly like rust. It’s plain, unpatterned, old; over the course of the night he’d woken up and fidgeted with some of the loose stitching, or found that one of his necklaces had gotten caught on it. It’s halfway off of their shoulders, Giorno pressed against Mista’s side warmly with his hair down and the spirals in his hair a fucked-up little mess because he hadn’t taken them out before he crashed. Mista’s got one arm around him, comforting and protective and loving all the same, and when they’re both consciously aware of the fact that it’s the morning, Giorno nuzzles his nose against Mista’s and hums softly against his lips in their briefly-shared kiss.

Mista grins ear-to-ear and chuckles in a heavenly, low tone out of some combination of embarrassment and humour — with one hand tangling affectionately through the golden waves of Giorno’s hair, they share yet another kiss, one with an equal fleeting lightness to it but one that lasts just a second or so longer. He slurs tiredly into the morning wind blowing in through the hardly-open bedroom window, “I love you”, and finally they disentangle themselves and sit up.

Sliding off the bed, wearing nothing but a pair of low-cut socks and dark blue boxer shorts, Giorno announces shortly that he’s going to shower — doesn’t really ask to use it, just kind of invites himself to use it, just kind of invites himself to use it, and Mista lies back down and nuzzles up underneath the blankets with an affirmation that he heard. When Giorno comes back, running a fluffy towel through his hair and with another towel tied around his waist, Mista’s out like a light again.

Giorno rouses him again with sweet little kisses dotting his temple, affectatious susurrations against his ear that the blond loves him and that he’s glad they’re together and have been for so long — it wakes him in no time at all, a gentle reminder that they’re together and will be for the longest time.

He laughs gleefully whilst Giorno tries and fails to play a song on his flute. The younger confesses for at least the thirteenth time that day that he doesn’t have a single clue as to what he’s doing — that he’d gotten it as a very late birthday gift from Dio and that he hadn’t quite learnt to play it as lessons are fairly expensive.

Giorno challenges him to try, and Mista can’t exactly say he knows what he’s doing. The split second the instrument lands in his hands, he stares down at it as if it were some foreign object and
sets it back in the case, saying with equal parts exasperation and humour that he doesn’t have a 
shred of talent to his name and that Giorno’s incredibly, incredibly lucky. The latter merely 
chuckles, falling down against the couch on the seat right next to him.

However they get on this next topic is far beyond him — maybe it had something to do with 
Giorno mentioning his father, or maybe it’s because Giorno had sighed and said he can’t believe 
Dio cares in the way he does, with fickle irresponsibility and negligence. Maybe it’s that Giorno 
had said he cared in a way, too, was glad that Dio cared and couldn’t turn his back to his father 
even if he was a cold-blooded murderer. Either way, no matter what sparked it, Mista offhandedly 
remarks, “Wish my family cared at all,” prompting both of them to heave long, drawn-out sighs.

The mood dulls like the flickering of a dying lightbulb.

“Mine sucked,” continues Mista with a gestation of throwing his hands in the air, one of his arms 
eventually landing around Giorno’s thin shoulders and pulling him closer, “but y’already know 
th’t.”

Giorno nods solemnly, head leaning against Mista’s shoulder, brushing over the fabric of an 
expensive blue cashmere sweater — his winter usual. He says he understands, very shortly, left 
hand coming up to the one draped over his shoulder and giving it an awkward squeeze before it 
eventually falls back down to his thigh with a dull thump. “I can’t entirely fathom the feeling.” He 
admits with one final sigh. “For the most part, I come from a good background.”

“Y’said a long time ago, like last year,” Mista recollects, thinking of the last time they shared 
about their family dysfunctionality at the very beginning of lovey-dovey feelings, “that yer mom 
sucked.”

The blond sits up suddenly, braid brushing over the back of Mista’s hand, softly as though it were 
silk instead of hair. He leans forward, elbows poised on his knees, hands falling in between spread 
legs. “Not as terrible as yours, but that’s correct.” He looks up suddenly, blue eyes remorseful yet 
concerned all the same. “I never told you that story.”

Mista shakes his head.

Giorno’s mother was nothing short of irresponsible, he says. She wouldn’t take care of her son at 
all, not that Giorno recalls much of it as he was very young. Dio had tried to take custody of him, 
according to what he’d heard, but when he thought she was relinquishing it her other at-the-time 
boyfriend refused. He wanted kids, apparently, though she didn’t. That was the story he heard, the 
one he’d learnt from Dio. Giorno says that Dio had told a friend (some guys named Pucci or 
Vanilla, he thinks) that also was a father (but GioGio’s not entirely sure if either of those two have 
their own families, as he’s seen them very rarely, though Pucci used to babysit him when he was 
only five or six) about the incident, but didn’t disclose any details. Not that Giorno truly cared. 
He recalls his biological mother’s boyfriend, the one she obtained after Dio, being nothing short of 
what Giorno calls an “abusive asshole”. Recalls that even though his mother didn’t want him, he 
stayed weekends at the house when he was two or three, up alone at night and terrified because if 
he cried the boyfriend that swore he wanted a child would come in and beat him, but also terrified 
that the monsters would get him. Tells Mista that his mother wasn’t a caregiver, came home 
shitfaced all the time and had wicked hangovers in the morning that’d make her even more 
resentful about having a child. She and that boyfriend got married, he says, but by that time they 
were in the midst of a custody battle and Dio finally obtained full custody and took Giorno away.

“Dad’s not the worst, nor the best.” He affirms with some kind of resolute nod.

“Still freaks m’ out that he’s a crazy-ass murderer, y’know?”
“For a while after I found out about him setting fire to uncle Jonathan’s family manor,” Giorno confesses, hands squeezing together before Mista worriedly sets his own atop the whitened knuckles, “I thought that the action of leaving me inside was meant to kill me, too.” Mista glances up at his face. Giorno’s not looking at him, remaining quiet, so the former stares back at their hands. Brushes his thumb over Giorno’s. Offers an unseen, consoling smile. “I suppose it wasn’t.”

“That’s notta good excuse.”

Giorno offers the tiniest of shrugs. “I never asked.”

“Well — try?”

With a sidelong glance thrown his way, Giorno tells, “I figure, by the way he’s acted my entire life — something like trying, though most of the time he’s terrible at it — he didn’t mean it. Perhaps he had confidence that I’d get out, and I did.”

Mista still looks concerned, and he knows that Giorno knows it, but lets the topic drop. In his honest opinion, Dio doesn’t deserve any forgiveness. Mista supposes that he doesn’t understand the situation, as he’s not Giorno and can’t sympathise completely with all of this. But that, of course, doesn’t matter — right now, that’s because it’s their anniversary, and they’re having a goddamn depressing conversation for no fucking reason.

And yet it continues. It continues because Mista has some things to get off of his chest, too — things he’s said before, countless times, things he’s lamented over endlessly to Giorno because it goddamn still fucking hurts in the absolute worst ways. He recites what he’s recited before, reflects, thinks for too long and has to stand up and stretch because that’s the only thing taking his mind off of it. Mista concludes with the thought that he’ll have no proper family for the rest of his life, as even his extended family dislikes him. Flops back on the couch, folds his arms around Giorno. Hugs him close for comfort. Sniffles just a bit, throat tightening. Part of him wants to cry, but he doesn’t. Not fully.

The blond wriggles around in his grip until he’s freed, and for a second Mista considers the fact that maybe he did something wrong. Maybe he smells bad and shouldn’t be hugging Giorno, or maybe he suffocated the smaller boy with the force of his embrace which was admittedly pretty tight.

The latter grasps Mista’s hands in his own, lacing their fingers together, a serene smile on gentle features. “Mista, what’s the definition of a proper family?”

“Well, I — I guess, y’know, havin’ people who love me an’ stuff.” He’s not too sure, honestly. Not sure how to describe the feeling.

“In that case, would you let me be your family?”

Mista pauses. Mulls over that for a time, slack-jawed and wide-eyed before hot tears gather. Giorno, caught off guard, chokes out an, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean —”

Mista shuts him up with a kiss. Long and slow and drawn-out and loving, filled with a slow and longing passion, a tender caress of the cheek as they release their held hands. GioGio carefully places his hands against Mista’s shoulders, grasping at the fabric as though he never wants the moment to end.

When it does, it’s Mista spitting out apologies, wiping his eyes on his sleeves and snivelling that he didn’t mean to cry but that it was so cute and a whole slew of half thought-out comments including a spiel about romance and how he wholeheartedly accepts the offer.
Giorno’s smile appears again, an ear-to-ear grin that lights up his entire world — and for a sole moment, Mista considers that maybe a family of the two of them won’t be so bad. And, mayhaps, the world doesn’t suck as much as he always thought.

Like the eloquent asshole that Giorno Giovanna is and always proves to be, in case the world had any doubts about that, the guy’s got his damn guitar on his lap and is yet again serenading Mista. This one’s not in public, for they didn’t make dinner reservations, preferred time at home without the raucous chatter of other people. They’re hanging out in Mista’s room, and he hasn’t heard this song before — it’s another love-song, dedicated entirely to and about Mista without Giorno ever needing to state his name.

It’s sweet.

It makes him reflect on everything they’d done over the past year. Like the moment they met in the cafe, when Mista dumped coffee all over himself because that goddamn blond boy that Trish just happened to know was fucking beautiful. How Giorno tried, that first Wednesday, to dance against Abbacchio and it almost became a fist-fight. That first time he came over and they played board games, and Dio freaked him the fuck out. The time they went to the botanical gardens to stalk Buccellati and Abbacchio because Trish thought that was a good idea, and he and Giorno acted almost like it was a fucking date between them even though it wasn’t. Their little late-night text messages before they got together, or every time Giorno would message him with a little heart emoji and Mista would utterly die inside right then and there. When they went shopping together late at night, held hands on the walk home before getting together, and Giorno got grounded (whoops).

Like when he broke his phone, and so he and Giorno stayed up all night to talk over the line until he knew by the sleepy way the blond blabbered that he was soon to conk out. How Giorno would fall asleep in the midst of their conversations, softly breathing over the line with his phone probably lying on his face. When they read together, and Giorno fell asleep in the middle of that, too, curled up against him and becoming a perfectly acceptable blanket. That week or so when Giorno’s voice cracked more than usual, and Goddamn does Mista miss those moments, because the voice-cracking made his list of Top Ten Cute Things That Giorno Does.

The first time they got together. Giorno’s singing. Their first kiss. Every sweet susurration, every murmured comment. Christmastime with his family, where they all hugged him half to death. The rave. That one time they broke Rule Number One. The aquarium with Fugo and Narancia. The group beach trip. Every little thing they did in-between.

Every. Fucking. Kiss. Meant and still means the world to him.

As he did the first time Giorno fucking serenaded him, Mista’s brought to tears by the end — can’t see for shit, merely wiping tears off on his sleeve and sniffling with his lips drawn into the widest of happy-smiles.

“I-I’m gonna… k-k-kill ya if y-ya do th’ again.”

“I had another song for you.”

“Gimme a second t’ calm down !”
“That takes the fun out of it.”

“GioGio!”

“I’m doing it,” he tells with a broad smile, beautiful and captivating and wondrously stunning all the same, “because you are my life, Mista.”

Chapter End Notes

I had to Google this, but according to Wikipedia, the legal drinking age in Italy is 18. --> https://goo.gl/zgRgrh
I thought it was sixteen, because when you first Google the terms "Legal drinking age in Italy" the number 16 pops up in big, bold letters. I'm not really sure what the internet's trying to tell me anymore.

I don't know about you guys, but I think wines are a lot stronger than beers. I guess it depends on the type -- I don't really like either of them.

Also this is the last of the GioMis chapters -- this is their "final story" from their perspectives, although the final chapters will go over a little bit more of the shenanigans they're about to embark in. Also, if you haven't looked up what Sei La Mia Vita means, I'd do it right now, because it's going to be a big phrase in the next two chapters. ;)

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