

Context: so, robots, but high school

What was the metric for a horrible day? Crouched in the janitors closet, Ennet Teacher had lots of time for contemplation like this. Also; at what point did you just have to accept that the day was horrible? When did it become a lost cause to be optimistic? And what was that point measured in?

In things broken? *Two mugs, a door handle, a pencil, and En's pride.*

In people he humiliated himself in front of? *All fourteen kids in his class, his dad, and whoever else was in the hallway when he tripped over his own feet.*

In lies? *His dad—*

En stopped himself before he could finish that thought. It wasn't fair, he knew. His dad was trying. Besides, En had secrets too!

...well, he *could* have secrets, if he wanted to. But, it was good that he didn't have secrets! He was an open book, with nothing to hide! Wait, no, that wasn't fair, lots of people he loved weren't open books, that didn't mean they were *bad* people. And he didn't want to say that he was better than them, either, because he wasn't, it was just that he didn't lie, and they did, and robo-god this was complicated and—

A clunking sound from above jerked him out of his thoughts. En glanced up, expertly holding out a hand and catching the vent cover as it fell. A drone swung herself through the opening, stumbling over black boots.

"Vee!" En chirped, grabbing her wrists to steady her. But he must have misjudged her speed, because she yelped, and the two went tumbling into a heap on the floor with shrieks that turned into giggles.

"Hey En," Vee giggled, straightening her glasses. "How's it going?"

En shrugged silently, looking at the floor. Vee's smile dropped into a soft frown.

"Hey, you know I don't mean what I said, right?" She set a hand on En's shoulder, gentle, like they were kids again and he had dented his knee. "It's just what I gotta do to fit in with everyone, you know that. I'm still your friend."

En didn't say how much it hurt when he had tripped, and Jade had scoffed and called him a waste of space, and Vee had laughed. He didn't tell her how her laugh turned cold and sharp, like a knife pointed at his core. He didn't remind her that once upon a time, she hadn't needed to fit in. Once, they had been Ennet and Venus against the world. And now they were Ennet the loser and Venus, the girl who couldn't bear to be seen with him, hanging out in a closet during free period so nobody would see.

But he didn't say that.

Instead, he put on a smile. "I know." He reached into his jacket and pulled out a book. Vee beamed, that liquid-sunshine grin that made his core stutter in his chest, and scooted closer as En cleared his throat and started reading. "This breed is known for its friendly, intelligent temperament, and soft golden coat. Golden retrievers are also known for having soft mouths."

“Aww,” Vee cooed, leaning over his shoulder so she could see the illustrations. En was suddenly very aware that she was right next to him, close enough that he could feel the gentle pump of her exhaust vent ruffling the fluffy collar of his jacket.