

Chapter 1: Marvin's first day

Today marks the first day at Marvin's new school, his fourth first day actually. His dad and stepmom traveled all over for their jobs, and unfortunately, that meant Marvin got dragged along with them. The thought sat sour in his mind as he sat on the crowded and loud bus, surrounded by other kids. A part of him hoped someone would've sat next to him and tried to start a conversation, and another, much louder part decided it was a good thing he sat alone.

With little else to do, he turned his music up as loud as he could, opened his messenger app, and tapped on his second most recent conversation, his sorta ex, sorta friend, Trina Sinclair.

His relationship with Trina was hard to explain, and even he didn't really understand what exactly went down between them. He met her during his last move; her family lived next door, and it was nice to have a friend close to his age. For a while, he thought that was all there was to their relationship, but when she asked him to be her date to the school's fall dance, he felt obliged to say yes, and within less than a week, they were dating.

Marvin was by no means a good boyfriend and the relationship barely lasted a full semester before a decently messy breakup between the two. After some encouragement from their mutual friend, Mendel Weisenbachfeld, they manage to form a sorta truce and are now decently close friends once again, to the point Marvin felt comfortable enough to complain to her about a lot of his problems, which he had plenty of.

MG: *Trina this bus is about to become my 13th reason :/*

TS: *You say that about everything slightly annoying Marv*

The response, all be it correct, sparked annoyance deep in Marvin, it was not at all the answer he wanted.

MG: *Way to be helpful lol*

TS: *Well do what you usually do when you move ig*

TS: *Make your list of what you hate or whatever*

M: *Well so far this bus and all*

the kids are number one on the Westpoint list

Whenever Marvin moved schools he would make a list of the top ten worst things he hated the most about it, and so far for WestPoint, the sucky buses, and loud students were the top two.

The first thing Marvin noticed about WestPoint upon seeing the building was simply the scale of it. The only thing stopping this from being some fancy private school was a dorm building and horse stable. The uniforms were bad enough, the jacket was too big for him, and his dad didn't even bother to get him the proper size. The tie felt like it was choking him as it sat awkwardly around his neck, and the pants were stiff with starch. The whole outfit was a sensory nightmare, if it was up to him, he'd be wearing his go-to red hoodie and baggy jeans. But god forbid schools let their students be comfortable.

The second thing he noticed were posters scattered across the campus, all of the same person with the words "*vote Whizzer Brown for student body president*" The kid had deep brown hair and eyes to match the name. What kind of name was Whizzer anyway? It sounded like something out of the '80s. The posters lined the walls as he made his way to the front office, with how frequently they were plastered around, it seemed this Whizzer kid was either popular or incredibly self-centered.

The third thing he hated about WestPoint was the fact he'd have to wait a few days to fix his schedule and join clubs. The lady in the front office told him he'd been put in filler classes

for now, which he thought was stupid, but he kept that part to himself, he's not looking to get detention on his first day. He checked the small slip of paper he was giving alongside his schedule for his locker number. 6070. He found his locker at the end of the hall, thankfully the last locker in the row. He sat his bag down as he attempted to open his locker before suddenly there was a hand on his shoulder.

"Hey your bag's in front of my locker, could you be a doll and move it, please?" Turning to meet whoever was speaking, Marvin saw the boy from the posters, Whizzer Brown. The posters really didn't do his appearance justice, he looked a lot better in person, pretty even. Before the thought could get any more out of hand, Marvin internally cursed himself for thinking another boy was pretty. He glared at the boy in front of him, before shrugging the hand on his shoulder off.

"Don't touch me." His voice was quiet and awkward, he cringed at the sound of it as he crouched down to move his bag over. He yanked his own locker open and began to transfer his books into it.

"Oookay then... anyway I'm guessing you're the new kid?" He saw out of the corner of his eye that Whizzer was now leaning against his locker as he stared at him, his gaze made the hair on the back of his neck stand up, and a slight buzz filled his stomach, he decided he didn't like the feeling.

He responded with a quick nod, wanting this conversation to end as quickly as possible. The other boy didn't seem to share the same sentiment.

"Cool, I'm Whizzer. I can--"

"I know your name, it's plastered across the school"

“Oh- right” he laughed between his words, it was light and slightly nasally, and it sparked the buzz in his stomach again. “Well anyway, what’s your name, new kid?”

“Uh.. Marvin Gardens.”

“Nice to meet you, Marv, if you need I can help show you around the school, I’m on the student council and-“

“Look,” he spoke, cutting him off a second time, “I get it, be nice to the new kid, get a vote for student body president or whatever. You don’t have to force yourself to talk to me.” He slung his bag over his shoulder, now significantly lighter. He looked over at Whizzer, not expecting the smirk that rested on his face.

“Trust me, kid, I don’t force myself to talk to anyone. I don’t have to pander for votes, I’m simply talking to you because I wanna. I’m just trying to be nice, Marv.” Marvin stared at him, not trusting himself to form a coherent sentence. He felt his face flush slightly and he mentally screamed.

“So as I was trying to say, if you need someone to show you around, I’m your guy. And if you need somewhere to sit at lunch, come find me.” As he finished his sentence, the first bell rang, and students began filing into their classrooms.

“Uh yeah, whatever.” He slammed his locker shut and made his way to his first period. He heard Whizzer laugh slightly as he walked off, and his face flushed more.

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The first half of his day was uneventful but just as unbearable, every teacher in his morning classes announced his arrival to the entire class, which made him want to crawl into a hole and die. And now he was standing in front of the lunch room, his nails digging into his palms as he tried to compose himself since a panic attack was the last thing he needed right now.

He made his way into the loud and crowded room, it didn't take long for him to spot Whizzers table. It was in the middle of the room and was filled with other kids, all talking and seemingly attempting to get Whizzers attention.

As he made his way over, all his senses were screaming at him to abort this decision and go eat in the library or the courtyard, but against his better judgment, he found himself standing by the table, and gripping the strap of his bag before speaking up.

"Uh, is it ok if I sit here?" His voice was barely loud enough to cut over the noise of the table, but somehow they all seemed to hear it and all eyes were on him now, waiting on him to make a wrong move before they pounced.

Whizzer however didn't seem phased by his question and turned to meet his nervous expression with that same knowing smirk.

"Yeah of course!" He pulled the chair next to him out for Marvin to sit on, moving what he assumed was Whizzer's book bag; it was bright pink and covered in all different kinds of pins. He recognized a few from his own preferred musicals, a Something Rotten pin catching his eye. He awkwardly sat down before shifting his bag into his lap, feeling all the eyes of the table on him.

He pretended to search through his bag for his lunch bag only to come up with nothing.

"What's the matter, Marv?" Whizzer seemed to be far too comfortable using that nickname already.

"I uh, I guess I forgot my lunch" Well that's not entirely true to be fair, he did have his lunch this morning and he did leave the house with it. The only issue with the lunch? His stepmother was the one to have made the lunch. He hated whenever she tried to cook for him,

fussing over every little thing he ate, and how often he ate. He wasn't looking to be known as the kid who ate rabbit food (the best and only to describe the things she made him eat)

"It's fine, I don't usually eat lunch anyway." He tucked all his belongings back neatly into his bag before holding the bag close against his chest, his personal shield against anything, as if it did much use as a shield. The faded boot marks he's unable to wash away were proof enough of that.

"Pfft, no way. You can't just skip a meal man, c'mon." Before Marvin could object, Whizzer grabbed his arm, pulling him up and along with him towards the lunch line. "My treat, believe it or not, this school actually puts budget into the food here, so rest assured it's actually pretty good. I wouldn't eat the pizza though, it sucks." His grip was tight on Marvin's arm as he pulled him down the line, before stopping at a selection of food. He tore his arm away, awkwardly grabbing the strap of his bag, glaring at Whizzer.

"I said don't touch me." his voice was more leveled than this morning, a familiar ice settling into it. Whizzer simply smirked and put his hands up in mock surrender. He turned his attention away from him to stare at the various options before him.

This place certainly has money to spare if there's more than three options, what even are half of these things?

He scanned the selection before his gaze settled on one plate, Alfredo pasta. It's one of the dishes permanently banned from his household because his stepmother claims it has too many calories, it also happens to be one of his favorite foods. He slipped the plate on the tray Whizzer all but shoved at him, along with a soda and bag of chips. He followed the taller boy, *seriously why is he so tall*, to a small table at the end of the line where a computer sat with a lunch lady standing nearby.

He watched as Whizzer paid for his lunch before following him back to the table, he felt more human as he sat back down. He didn't pay much attention to the conversation Whizzer was having with one of the girls at the table, the words simply becoming a comfortable buzz as he ate, rather than the loud obnoxious noise that usually fills his ears. As the warning bell for lunch rang, he gathered his trash, chugging the last of the soda before tossing it with the rest.

"You don't talk a lot huh? Are you a man of few words or something?" Whizzer leaned over his shoulder as he spoke, he couldn't see his face but he could just tell he was smirking again. "You're a weird kid Marv, I mean that as a compliment by the way, before you get all in a tiff." He moved to stand in front of Marvin as he spoke, proving his smirk theory correct.

"Uh... t-thanks, I guess." he felt his face burn red, and his stomach buzz returned.

What are you doing??

He's a boy, stop being such a pansy.

Why can't you just be normal for once?

Whizzer gave a small chuckle, about to say something before being cut off by the final lunch bell and kids began to head off to their afternoon classes. He looked around quickly, slinging his bag over his shoulder before turning to look at Marvin again.

"I gotta dash, but let's continue this convo later, meet me after school behind the gym building."

"uh yea-yeah sure." He had a few guesses on why Whizzer asked him that, either to jump him, humiliate him in front of his friends, or not even show up to make fun of him. As he made his way to his next class he took out his phone and began to text Trina again.

MG: *I think im about to get jumped after school*

TS: *it's your first day what makes you say that?*

MG: *some popular kid told me to meet him
behind the school agter the last bell*

MG: *after**

TS: *it'll probably be fine*

TS: *I doubt even you could piss someone off
so much on the first day to beat you up.*

TS: *have some faith in yourself :)*

Trina's message did little to reassure him, people actually like her after all and she doesn't have to worry about stuff like this. He rolled his eyes and stuffed his phone back into his pocket and made his way to his next class.

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As the last bell rang, Marvin felt the hair on the back of his neck rise as he stood awkwardly between the gym building and a small set of bleachers. He paced back and forth for a minute before sitting down and fidgeting with his hands, as his mind began racing. His thoughts bounced around his head, drowning out outside noise, paired with his heart racing in his ears, he didn't notice when Whizzer came up behind him.

"Hiya Marvin!" his voice cut through the mess of Marvin's mind, causing him to jump slightly, almost falling out of his seat. The action caused Whizzer to laugh at him slightly, which brought back the buzz in his stomach and made his face flush.

*What is wrong with you? Get it together Marvin, you are not gay stop acting like such
a fucking pansy.*

“Talk about jumpy, huh? Did I spook you that much huh?” He sat down next to him, dropping his bag down by his feet. He spoke again, not waiting for Marvin's answer. “I honestly wasn't expecting you to be here, my friends thought I'd scare you off or something.”

“I wasn't really planning on it, but my friend Trina told me too.” the words flooded out of his mouth before he could think to stop them, mentally cursing himself for his words.

“Does she go to this school? I don't think I recognize her name.” he leaned slightly forward in his seat to be able to look at Marvin's face, no doubt able to see the pink that tinted his cheeks.

“Uh no, She's from my old school, she's uh, she's a really close friend and I kinda rant to her about a lot of stuff.” it felt weird to talk to Whizzer about Trina, he couldn't really understand why but it wasn't a topic he wanted to linger on.

“I uh, I like your pins, by the way, the Something Rotten one is pretty cool. It's one of my favorite musicals.” He gestured down at his bag, hoping Whizzer would bite at the topic change.

“Oh! I wouldn't have expected you to be the musical type, Something Rotten isn't super mainstream.” Thankfully he took the bait and began going on about the previously mentioned musical. “Has anyone ever told you you look like a younger Christian Borle by the way?”

“Um no not really, do I really?” he's never heard that comparison before, people usually just say he looks like his father, a comparison he despised.

“Yeah totally, I think it's the nose.” Marvin noticed that Whizzer gestured a lot with his hands as he spoke,

It's kinda cute.

The thought seemly crept into his head against his will, and his system went on overdrive as a result of it. He felt his heart begin to race and blood rush to his face, he quickly averted Whizzers gaze to stare at his own shoes.

“S-So what did you want to ask me? I'm guessing there's a main reason you wanted to talk to me?” he picked at his nail bed until it began to bleed. He heard Whizzer chuckle before he spoke.

“Ah, right. Well, I’ve never been one to beat around the bush, so I’ll get straight to the point.” there was a strange aura of confidence to his voice as he spoke that sparked the buzz once again. “I think you’re pretty cute and I like your vibe, so do you wanna go out? There's this diner on 2nd street that I think you’ll really like-”

“I’m not gay.” Marvin's tone shifted from awkward and uncertain to full of ice. He quickly stood up and took a few steps back. “I don’t know what made you think I am, but you’re clearly not good at reading people.”

“Oh. I mean I just kinda thought-” Whizzer quickly stood up and attempted to take a step closer, only for Marvin to back up more.

“Well, clearly you thought wrong. I'm not gay.” before the other boy could say anything else, Marvin turned on his heels and walked off, blood rushing in his ears as he left.

MG: *he tried to fucking ask me out*

MG: *Jesus Christ I never should have listened to you*

MG: *Oh My God*

TS: *wait what*

TS: *who did?*

MG: *Whizzer, the popular kid.*

MG: *He thought I was gay and tried to ask me out.*

As he waited for Trina's response he realized that the last bus left a while ago, meaning he'd have to walk home. He didn't know anyone well enough to ask for a ride, and he most certainly wasn't going to ask Whizzer for a ride.

TS: *his name is Whizzer?*

Trina's message seemed to tick him off even more, despite how simple it was. He didn't even want to read his name right now. Even so, frustrated by the situation he puts himself in because he can't be normal about anything. He can't be normal and make friends, can't be normal and nicely turn someone down, and can't be normal and stay in one place without moving once every 6 months. His emotions bubbled up until he just stopped walking and stomped his foot, letting out a half scream half groan. He pulled at his hair till it hurt. When it felt like everything evened out, a laugh bubbled out, one after another, till he was crouched on the sidewalk laughing and holding his sides.

After a minute or two of the giddy seizure, he was able to compose himself. He looked around to make sure no say what just happened, sure he enjoyed the attention he gained from the act but not when he was actually frustrated. He began his walk home, wanting this day to just end. He wasn't looking to the rest of the week, still having Thursday and Friday to get through. His list still had half the spots empty but he was sure that Whizzer Brown now held the top spot in what he hated at this godforsaken school.

This is going to be a long semester.

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Chapter 2: Just Another After Effect

As Marvin made his way inside his house, he looked around the empty hall, the quiet easing his worried mind slightly. He made his way down the hall and up the stairs toward his room, he passed a couple of boxes that had yet to be unpacked. He definitely needed to unpack the kitchen stuff before tomorrow night. Upon reaching his room he kicked his shoes off unceremoniously and dumped his blazer over his desk chair before tugging his tie off and throwing it somewhere in his room.

He made his way back downstairs before taking his phone out of his pocket and turning on his Beatles playlist and setting it down on the counter. He pulled one of the boxes marked kitchen over and began putting everything away, humming along to bits of the songs as he worked. He embarrassingly had to use a stool to reach the higher counters to put away the Tupperware and larger bowls. He had the same sorting system no matter the kitchen they ended up with. Larger plates on the left cabinet, and smaller plates to their right. Smaller bowls stacked in groups of three. Tupperware and bigger bowls above the plates and bowls. Mugs and cups across from them, with the pots, pans, and cutting boards in the cabinet below that. The knife block goes next to the sink. Consistency like this was one of the few constants he could control with all the moving around, same with his room. He organized it the same way for as long as he could remember.

After about an hour and a half or so, he had everything tucked into its proper place and put away. He folded up all the empty boxes and stuck them in the hall closet. He collapsed onto the couch letting out a sigh as he grabbed the remote, switching on one of his favorite movies, an old 80's slasher movie he'd watched a bunch of times before. He had the plot basically memorized by now, but he still watched it whenever he needed something to watch. He was halfway done with the movie before he felt his phone buzz with a text notification.

MW: *heyyyyyy*

MW: *u gud? Trina told me you were bitchin to her earlier about something*

Leave it to Mendel to butt into his business, but Marvin has to admit, he's a lot easier to talk to about his problems than Trina was.

MG: *dude you will not believe the day I've had.*

He's grateful for the chance to rant about his day to someone who can give some decent advice, even if sometimes the advice ended up just getting high, which reminded him he needed to find someone to buy from before he ran out of his current supply. He sent Mendel a wall of text before turning his attention back to the movie as he awaited his response. It was his favorite part, it was when the killer gets unmasked. Marvin wasn't really sure why it was his favorite part, he just always felt drawn to the scene of the killer as he taunted the victim.

MW: *jeez sounds like this guy needs to learn how to read a room, i don't think he meant any harm by it. He probably just interrupted your friendliness as romantic intentions.*

As unserious as Mendel sounded over text, you could always tell when he took something seriously, he actually used proper grammar.

MW: *I wouldn't hold it against the guy, you should probably apologize for being so aggressive when he asked you out*

MG: *yeah yeah I know, I will*

He wasn't really sure when or if he'd even apologize, but he figured if he said he would be more likely to actually do it.

MW: *how the new school btw, Trina said it's like some rich kid school*

MG: *it's a private school, not prep academy level*

MG: *but it was the only school district near the new house*

MG: *it's only been one day and I already have five things on the list*

MW: *damn new record, what ya got*

MG: *#1 is Whizzer Brown, #2 is how crowded the buses are*

MW: *his name is whizzer????*

MG: *#3 is how loud everyone is, #4 is my history teacher*

MG: *#5 is the fact I have to wait until Monday to pick my classes and join a club*

MG: *and yeah, it's a weird name right? Like something from the '80s*

Mendel was easily one of his oldest friends. They met back in middle school on an online game and became fast friends, even if they lived in different states at the time. They both struggled with making in-person friends in their own ways, so having a close online friend was like a lifeline to them both. Mendel was able to understand Marvin's strange habits and mannerisms, and Marvin was able to figure out Mendel's strange talking habits and the god-awful way he typed. During his last move, he ended up in the same state as him. It was a nice change of pace to have a friend at a new school for once.

MW: *isn't there a bike called Whizzer? Is he named after a bike?*

As the movie ended Marvin made his way back upstairs into his room, needing to get started on his homework. There wasn't much in his room, furniture-wise. His bed was against the wall under his window with his desk at the foot of the bed. Clothes always ended up shoved between the gap, but since he's barely been in the house for a week, they've yet to do so. His nightstand sat near the head of his bed, his glasses case sat on top of it along with a few pill bottles. One for his seizure medication, his bpd meds, and a bottle of melatonin for when he couldn't sleep, which was most nights. His TV stand stood across the room from his bed, the shelving lined with his collection of movies and games, his switch and play station next to his

TV. He had two small bookshelves that sat on either side of the TV stand, one lined with books, the other with various Star Wars collectibles and memorabilia. He's organized his room the same way since he was 12, and he wasn't looking to change it anytime soon.

He tripped over his shoes as he entered, kicking them further into the room. He shoved aside some of the clothes that already lined the floors, as he sat down at his desk, moving his chess set over slightly so he could begin working on the stupid amount of homework given for his first day. Which, by the way, is how his history teacher made the list. He turned his music back on and attempted to get it all completed. He managed to finish the last paper before putting everything away neatly back into his bag. He spun around in his chair, letting out a sigh as he stared around his room before his eyes caught on his alarm clock. It was already 7:30, too late to really cook anything, so he took out his phone and ordered something before flopping onto his bed.

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TS: *sorry couldn't give super good responses earlier, was in class*

MG: *you're fine Trina, don't worry too much about*

MG: *I bitched about it enough to Mendel earlier*

TS: *wanna have a debriefing, some wild stuff happened since you left*

MG: *yeah sure*

Incoming call

"Hi, Marvin." Trina's calm yet tired voice rang through his phone, he always enjoyed having someone to talk to even if it was just over the phone.

“Hey Trina, how's everything going for you? How are your siblings? Is Jason doing ok?”

He felt a little silly for asking so many questions at once but he just wanted to have a normal conversation and feel like a normal person. Trina gave a small laugh, the sound both comforted him and re-sparked some of his annoyance.

“I'm doing alright, we have a track meet on Friday and I'm really looking forward to it. The coach said I'm pretty close to beating my personal record, so I'm pretty excited about it. Elinore is doing great in her classes, her teachers even think she can skip a grade. Marcus has recently started testosterone and his voice is getting deeper. I just wish he would remember to take his binder off sooner, or at least set an alarm so he remembers to do it.” She rattled on about her siblings and home life for a little bit before bringing up Jason.

Jason was a weird kid. Marvin knew him from a weird babysitting gig he was forced into. Trina would watch him on the weekends and he would see him get dropped off a few times when he was outside. The kid always looked miserable, he heard from Trina his parents were going through a rough patch that eventually ended in a messy divorce. One weekend the Sinclairs were out of town. They forgot to check with the kids' parents before leaving, so they ended up showing up at their house without knowing no one was home. That ended with two people Marvin never met knocking on his door while his dad and stepmom were out of town on a work trip. Apparently, Trina told them that Marvin would be able to watch Jason. And that's how Marvin ended up with a random 12-year-old in his house for the next four hours. They played chess and watched a couple of slasher films (they probably weren't all that age-appropriate) and somehow that led to Marvin getting roped into babysitting with Trina on the weekends.

“Jason's pretty upset you're not around to babysit him anymore, apparently you let him watch some R-rated movies?” her voice was playful, with a small laugh behind it.

“Yeah well I don't exactly have any kid-friendly movies, and you've always been the better babysitter between the two of us.”

They stayed on the phone talking for a while, and eventually, Marvin felt more like a person and was able to sit comfortably on his bed without worry. Now that he was calmer he asked the main question that sat heavy on his mind since school ended.

“Hey Trina why do you think Wh- why do you think he asked me out? I mean I barely talked to the guy, so I have no idea why he would think I'm g... that I'm a homosexual or whatever.” he felt his face flush as he spoke, the image of Whizzer and his stupid pretty smirk flashed into his mind. He shook his head in an attempt to banish the thought.

Stop thinking about him, stop calling him pretty.

“Hard to say, he might have actually been into you, you do have a certain vibe about you.” He couldn't pick up the meaning behind her tone, but it felt a little mocking. “Oh, do you remember Sydney Blum? From our writing class last semester?”

“Yeah, what about her?” Where was Trina going with this?

“So she told me that a couple of guys were trying to ask her as some kind of joke or bet and they stopped talking to her afterward,” she paused in her words, clearly hesitant. “As mean as this might sound, and I don't wanna accuse someone of something, Whizzer might've tried to do the same thing”

The words swam in Marvin's head. A twisted image of Whizzer and his popular buddies laughing at him filled his head. He grimaced at the thought, he shook his head and pulled at his hair, moving his phone away from his head, and hitting the speaker button so he could still hear Trina. As he untangled his fingers from his hair, Whizzer and his stupid smirk popped back into his head.

Why does he have to be so pretty? UGH!

He dropped his head into both of his hands, letting out a loud groan. He flopped back onto his bed, trying to get his thoughts under control.

You are a man, act like it. Stop being such a fucking pansy. What is wrong with you?

He's a boy. He is not pretty. Get a hold of yourself.

You like girls. Not boys. Act normal for once in your pathetic life.

“You ok Marvin?” Trina’s voice cut through his thoughts, reminding him of the fact that he was still on call with someone.

“I really need to make sure I take my bipolar meds more often. My brain feels like a war zone.” As soon as he mentioned his lack of taking his meds regularly, he deeply regretted it.

“Marvin! You’re supposed to take them daily!” She went on an all too familiar rant about the importance of taking his meds on time. He rolled his eyes as he sat up, pulling his legs onto the bed.

“Like how you're supposed to take your sleep medicine nightly?” He threw her own words back at her, knowing her own forgetfulness when it comes to her own medication, despite how tired she ends up with it

“Nigh Trina” he cut off the rest of her argument as he hung up the phone, laughing as he did so.

TS: *goodnight you jerk* 🙄

Marvin messed around on his phone for a little while before the clock ticked to 10 o’clock, he put his phone on to charge before setting it on his nightstand. Before climbing back into bed, he changed into an old band tee and sweatpants. He had a feeling he wouldn’t be

getting any easy sleep that night, so he reached over and grabbed the bottle of melatonin, taking one of the small capsules before lying under the covers and falling asleep.

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Thursday and Friday were honestly pretty uneventful. He walked to and from school to avoid the crowded bus and made sure to bring along his wallet so he could pay for his lunch. As he put his belongings in his locker, he did his best to ignore the boy at the locker next to him. Whizzer was quiet as they took what they needed from their respective lockers, only trying to speak up to apologize before Marvin hastily made his leave (which wasn't all that effective as he sat next to him in their first class) and he did his best to ignore the taller boy the rest of the day. He ate his lunch in the library, much more comfortable there than in the lunchroom. He didn't linger at his locker in between classes, only grabbing what he needed before quickly heading to his next class. His afternoons followed mostly the same pattern. Finish unpacking certain parts of the house, complete his homework, and order something to eat.

The main difference between the two days is that on Thursday he spent his time before bed on call with Mendel as they attempted to pass the boss level of their latest game, High School Zombie Apocalypse, the name was pretty blunt, but it was pretty entertaining. They have an unofficial rule of when you lose a life in the game they have to take a hit. Marvin was able to find a new dealer since he was unable to bum weed off of Mendel now. That rule might be the reason they've yet to beat the level, but they got pretty close this time around.

By the time Saturday rolled around, he didn't have much to do before 4, the meeting time for their dnd campaign. He woke up at 8, his alarm ringing in his ears as he reached over to turn it off. 8 might be early to wake up on a weekend, but on days like this after the weird ass week he had, there was one place he planned to go. He didn't know much about the temple in his new

town, as he didn't have a chance to go last week. He dug through his closet for a simple green button-up and black slacks. He brought the clothes in the bathroom and sat them carefully on the sink counter as he took a shower. The hot water cleared his thoughts away completely as the steam filled the room. He carefully dried his hair, before changing into the clothes he laid out. He brushed his hair out, his ragged curls springing out from his kippah. He left the bathroom, the quiet of the house feeling a bit uneasy as he made his way down the hall and into the kitchen. He made himself his usual breakfast, toast with egg and spinach. It was incredibly simple, but it always got him into a good mood for the day.

He made his way down the street, following the directions from his phone. He saw other families make their way into the tall marble building. He followed in after a random family and filed into one of the pews. As he sat down waiting for the service to begin, he began to leaf through his mini copy of the Torah. The Rabbi's words soothed the stress that lingered under his skin. His favorite part of the service was the Amidah, the prayer grounding him, helping him feel tethered to the earth.

He wouldn't consider himself super religious, he wasn't really sure God even existed, to be honest, but the sense of community being at the synagogue was comforting in a way he couldn't really explain. After the service ended the Rabbi went up to him, a welcoming smile on his face.

"Hello there sir, I didn't recognize your face in the crowd today, are you new?" His voice was warm and friendly.

"Uh yes, Rabbi..."

"Rabbi Alder, my boy."

“Rabbi Alder, yes I'm new, to both the synagogue and the town. My name is Marvin Gardens.”

“Well let me be the first to welcome you to the community. I hope to see you around more often, Marvin. Shalom.”

“Shalom, Rabbi Alder.” Marvin returned his goodbye before making his way out of the temple and heading back to his house.

~***~

As 4 o'clock grew near, Marvin set up his computer at his desk with his character sheets, notes, and dice. He never used to be into DnD, he used to think it sounded pretty boring and the role-playing aspect of it was just never his thing. When they were still long-distance friends, Mendel would bug him all the time about just virtually sitting in on one of their sessions freshman year. So when Marvin started going to his school, Mendel pestered him enough to finally join a one-shot session. He ended up loving the strategy and math part of the game and the one-shot turned into a full session.

That session lasted the rest of the summer and the fall semester that Marvin lived there, and even after he moved. They've been working on preparing for their final battle with the BBG. Their party wasn't super big, consisting of Mendel as the DM, himself, Trina, her friend Hannah, and three other people he wasn't super close with. Levi, Caleb, and Abigail. They were more Mendel's friends than his but he still got along with them pretty well. He always found himself looking forward to the sessions, they were good distractions from whatever was going on in his home and school life. Since he lives in a different city now, he joins the sessions virtually via Discord. The rest of the group all met up at Mendel's house.

They usually spent three hours total for the sessions, two dedicated to the actual campaign and an hour beforehand to simply talk and catch up. The others were mostly asking Marvin questions about his new school and town. There were all pretty normal questions before Caleb asked,

“So what's the deal with this Whizzer kid exactly? Cause Mendel and Trina both mentioned him.” He leaned forward in his seat so he was more visible in the camera frame as he spoke. Marvin let out an admittedly dramatic sigh before he explained what happened on Wednesday for the third time that week. He really hoped he could just ignore the topic but the others all seemed pretty interested in the trainwreck he landed himself in.

“He really thought you were gay?” Hannah was the first person to speak up after he finished his story.

“I don't really see it if I'm honest.” Levi was the one to offer up that helpful comment. Marvin rolled his eyes at him, as if gay people were meant to look a specific way.

“Me looking gay or not aside, I feel kinda bad for how I acted...” he ran his hand through his hair as he spoke, pulling at it slightly. Looking back at his screen, he saw the bewildered look on their faces before Abigail spoke up.

“Wow Marvin feels remorse for something he did, I think hell just froze up.” her tone was playful but it still caused his gut to twist.

“Yeah yeah, whatever. I just don't wanna be known as the homophobic kid, cause like I'm not, I'm just not gay. And we were getting along pretty well until, ya'know.”

The rest of the hour before they started the session was full of the party giving Marvin some questionable advice and everyone getting high, well except Trina and Hannah, they don't smoke. The session that day was some more of what they did last week, they did some quests

and dungeon runs to attempt to level up before their final fight, and for the others to do some more plot-related stuff. Despite Marvin not being big on the role-play part of DnD, he still took pretty detailed notes for all the others.

As the session ended and he said his goodbyes he heard the front door open, he knew it could only be his dad or stepmom, he prayed it was his stepmom, but he was never that lucky.

“Marvin! Are you home?!” his dad’s voice boomed throughout the house, sinking deep into his skin and settling into his stomach. He sounded annoyed, his tone of voice was chilling. Despite his best instincts, he opened his door and made his way towards the stairs.

“Yeah, I’m upstairs Dad,” he called down as he hurried to meet his dad, not wanting to upset him even more. He watched as his father tossed his suit jacket over the back of the couch, anxiously picking at his fingers. His father went on a small rant about his work day before turning to look at him.

“Is your mother home yet? She was supposed to make dinner.” His father turned to look towards the kitchen, his face twisting into a grimace upon seeing the kitchen empty.

“Uh, n-no not yet Sir, I think she said she'd be home around 7:30, but that she'd bring home something for dinner.” he mentally cursed himself for how uncertain he sounded, hating how his voice stuttered.

“You think? Do you think she said around seven??? Do you think or do you know? And knock it the fuck off with that fucking stutter. What are you, stupid?” His voice was harsh as he shoved Marvin aside to make his way to the master bedroom, causing Marvin to stumble slightly, catching himself against the hall table. He heard his father say something about wanting a hot meal after work as the door opened a second time. Looking over he saw his stepmother, Miranda,

enter the house, carrying her own work bag and a takeout container from his father's favorite restaurant.

“Oh Marvin, good for you downstairs. Could you please set the table for dinner.” her voice was uncharacteristically small, something that always followed his father's mood swings. He silently followed her orders, knowing not to stroke the fire that was his father's temper by arguing. Despite his distaste for his stepmother, on days like these, they were each other's only allies.

Dinner passed by quietly and uneasily. Marvin struggled to keep the food down as he ate, the pit in his stomach growing as his father ate quietly. His eyes flicked between his dad and Miranda, trying to piece together how this mess was supposed to translate into normal or a tight-knit family. That's what his father always called them. A tight-knit family. One with a kid with a brain and a nice bright mother. One with a caring father. One who worked the 9 to 5 and came home to his loving wife making dinner in the kitchen while his son sat waiting for his return, happy his father was home. But that's not what they are. Both his father and Miranda worked strange hours at a job that constantly had them traveling all over the place. While he sat at home, wishing neither of them would come home and he could go back to New York with his mother. Maybe there he could have a tight-knit family. He wanted one, wanted normal, but he had no idea nor hope of turning this mess into one.

“Marvin. I scheduled a haircut for you tomorrow, so you can actually look presentable for your first day on Monday, and not like such a slob.” his father's words cut through his thoughts, causing him to drop his fork slightly. He felt his heart involuntarily began racing, he knew his father hated being corrected but he knew he'd be more fucked if his dad found out from someone other than him.

“My uh, my first day was Wednesday, sir.” His words were quiet and he hoped they were too quiet for his father to hear them, but he was never that lucky.

“Are you kidding me? Did you go to school looking like that? Did you even bother to iron your uniform like I told you to?!” His words rose in volume till they were just a buzz in Marvin's ears. His father continued to yell as he rose from his seat, moving to yank Marvin from his own, he practically threw him from the dining room into the living room. He could vaguely hear Miranda yell something as his side made contact with the corner of the wall, falling limp against the floor, not even bothering to fight back.

He heard his dad stomp off back into his room as he gathered himself, slowly standing up and making a beeline for the stairs, hearing Miranda try to call after him, the buzz still strong in his ears, blocking out her voice. He was halfway up the stairs when suddenly he felt someone grab his arm. He turned around, seeing Miranda looking at him with concern in her eyes. He stared at her silently for a minute or two, not hearing what she was saying, before realizing she was handing him an ice pack. He quietly took it, holding it to his side as he made his way back to his room, faintly hearing her walk into the kitchen and the sound of running water. He leaned against his bedroom door, the buzz heavy in his ears. He closed his eyes, focusing on the cold radiating from the ice pack at his side. He locked his door before moving towards his bed, putting his headphones on and turning his music on, letting the music drown out his senses till he felt like nothing and melted into nothing.

~***~

When Marvin woke up on Sunday his alarm read 9:43 and the house was quiet again, he felt his phone vibrate from somewhere under him. Flinging his blankets aside as he attempted to find it, soon hearing the telltale thud of it hitting the floor. He sighed as he shoved his blankets

into a heap against his wall and leaned down to pick his phone up, he wasn't worried about the state of his screen, his floors were carpeted and he had the latest model, it was practically fall-proof, one of the upsides, if not the only one, to his strained relationship with his father.

Father: *the hair appointment is at noon, you're going*

Father: *get that rat nest sorted and actually iron your uniform*

Father: *I'm not trying to raise a slob.*

He rolled his eyes, turning to set his phone on his nightstand, a sharp pain in his side. He held his side, remembering dinner last night. He pulled his shirt up to reveal a fresh bright purple bruise, luckily it was easy to hide with a shirt so he wasn't too fussed about it. He changed out of his night clothes and made his way downstairs.

As Marvin made his way into the kitchen he saw Miranda standing in front of the stove. She turned around as she heard him, and quietly sat a plate down at his usual spot at the table. It was his usual breakfast, toast with egg and spinach. She never complained about him eating the same thing every morning, she even made it for herself some mornings. The only difference in his breakfast when Miranda made it was she always gave him a small plate of fruit. True to form she sat another plate next to his own, it was diced dragon fruit today, one of her superfoods as she called it. He finished his breakfast as he watched Miranda get ready for work.

"I'm out of town until Thursday, and your father will be back next Saturday. Have a good week at school Marvin." She rubbed his back a little, giving him a soft smile. He returned it, enjoying the short moments of peace he had with her, the moments when she stopped trying to force herself into the role of his mother and was simply there.

"Bye, Drive safe." he waved as she went out the door, and finished eating his food.

The rest of the day passed in a blur, he got his haircut and ironed his blazer. His brain finally stopped buzzing and his side was now just a dull pain when his phone chimed with a notification from the school. It was a reminder for all students that the student body election was to be held at the end of the week. It was accompanied by a picture of the two candidates, some random girl from his history class, and Whizzer fucking Brown. Marvin stared at the campaign photo, his stupid smirk, glossy eyes, and styled-back hair looking back at him as if mocking. Looking closer at the image he noticed that he actually had braces, how did he not notice that till now?

He looks cute with braces.

The thought forced its way into his head, catching him off guard.

Stop it.

He shook his head, banishing the thoughts away as he closed his messenger app, and if he saved the photo in the process, well that was just an accident. At least that's what he told himself.

~***~

Monday morning woke Marvin with a start, he went through his morning routine, shower, brush his now shorter and tamed hair, change into his uniform, and make his breakfast. He spotted his skateboard as he stood in the hall, fixing his shoes. He got it during his last move and taught himself how to skate, (with Mendel's less-than-helpful assistance) he hasn't had much of a chance to use it with the move, but at the moment it suddenly seemed like a great alternative to walking to school. It would give him some cool points, hopefully at least.

As he rolled down the road, the early spring breeze ruffled his short curls. As he got closer to the school and the sidewalk became crowded with more students, he couldn't help but show off slightly as he wove in and out of the students. His confidence grew enough that as he

reached the stairs to the sunken courtyard, instead of stopping his board to walk down, he managed to jump up onto the railing and ride it down without totally wiping out. Unbeknownst to him, a certain tall brunette was nearby and caught sight of the display.

When Marvin got to his locker, he was distracted moving his books around slightly to fit his skateboard that he didn't notice when someone leaned up against the locker next to him.

"You do fancy tricks like that all the time?" looking to his left, Marvin felt his stomach buzz as he made eye contact with Whizzer. He stared a beat too long before speaking.

"Only when I'm confident that I won't break my neck." he waved his hand out slightly, unintentionally revealing his hand guards. He fumbled with the straps as he tried to quickly take them off.

"Ah, that makes sense, here I was thinking you were some kind of secret bad boy." that stupid charming smirk was on his face again, and Marvin wasn't sure if he hated it or not. He closed his locker and turned to face him. Whizzer spoke up before Marvin could say anything.

"Hey uh, about last Wednesday, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable or anything. My friends say I tend to come on a bit too strong and all that." he chuckled a bit as he finished his sentence fidgeting with his hand as he spoke. Marvin felt some guilt twinge in the back of his mind, it left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Hey don't worry about it, you shouldn't have to apologize," he moved his hand up the back of his neck, used to pulling the longer hair there, unable to do so now "I shouldn't have reacted the way I did, it was uncalled for. My friends uh, my friends say I tend to be a little over dramatic." he felt his face flush slightly as he stumbled over his words.

The two boys stood there for a moment or two, awkwardly smiling at the other as they tried to think of something to say. Marvin was about to speak up again before the first-period warning bell chimed.

“Saved by the bell huh?” Whizzer’s laugh caused that buzz in his stomach to return, and Marvin did his best to ignore it. “You wanna walk with me? Since we have the first period together and all.”

“Uh, you know what, sure.” he felt a little silly walking alongside the taller boy, and he could feel the other students staring at him, their eyes bearing on him. Guess that was something to get used to if he was gonna be friends with Whizzer.

“Hey, you good? You’re doing that spacy quiet thing again, I was talking to you, man.” Whizzer waved his hand in front of Marvin's face, snapping him back to reality

“Oh uh yeah, sorry about that I, uh, wait do you paint your nails?”

“Hmm? Oh yeah! I bite my nails a lot so I started painting them to stop myself from biting them. I originally just did a clear color, but now I use it as a fun way of expressing myself with the dress code and all that.” he showed Marvin his hand, letting him get a better look at his nails. They were painted a light pink color, with a white tip.

“What do you think? Cute, right?” Whizzer did a quick pose before he continued walking.

“Yeah, I think you’re cute...” It took Marvin a second before he realized what he just said, “IT’S CUTE! I think it’s cute, your nails, that is, uh-” he turned his face away, unable to stop the blush that plagued his face. He heard Whizzer chuckle a little, and the sound buzzed into his ears.

“Sorry, sorry, I'm not trying to laugh at you I swear, I just wasn't expecting that reaction.” as he laughed, Marvin caught sight of his braces, the bands were the same light pink colors as his nails.

“Wait, are your nails matching your braces bands?” he felt a little dumb asking, but by the way Whizzer reacted, it was the right question to ask.

“Finally! Someone noticed, thank you!” he said the last two words with added flare as he sat down. Marvin laughed a little at his dramatics as he took his seat. He went to say something else but was cut off guard by the teacher beginning class. He shot Whizzer one last look before turning his attention towards the teacher. Halfway through the period he got called down to the office to fix his schedule and was able to join the two clubs he wanted to, the chess club and the debate club.

His schedule now includes advanced English, Algebra 2, Study hall, World History, Lunch, Art, Club period, and Science. The chess club met on Tuesdays and the Debate team met on Thursdays, so he had two free periods for the other three days. He wasn't sure how he got away with that but he wasn't gonna complain.

~***~

Marvin stood near the end of the lunch line as he awkwardly held his tray, a plate of lasagna sitting upon it, staring at the sea of lunch tables and kids. Before his brain could keep up with his body, he found himself walking towards Whizzer's lunch table, and to his relief, there was an empty spot next to Whizzer.

“Hey is this seat open?” he felt the eyes of the table all turn to him as Whizzer paused his conversation with a blond girl to turn and stare at Marvin, a look in his eye that he couldn't quite place.

“Nope! Go on ahead and have a seat, Marv.” He grabbed his bag from the chair, pulling it out slightly for Marvin to sit down.

“Hello there! Whizzer says you’re new here?” the blonde girl chimed up as he sat, not giving him time to respond as she continued. “I’m Cordelia, Whizzer’s BFF, and this is Charlotte, my girlfriend!” she gestured to the girl sitting next to him, who gave him a small wave.

“Marvin, it’s nice to meet you.” He felt a little awkward as he introduced himself, unsure of what to do with the amount of energy this girl had.

He was more engaged in the conversation that day, answering Cordelia and Whizzer’s questions. They ranged from where he moved from, to his favorite show, if he had any siblings, and what clubs he joined.

“Uh, well I’ve lived in New York, Florida, California, Rhode Island, and South Dakota before moving here, I don’t really have a favorite show, but I really like Star Wars and slasher films, I have a younger brother, named Emmett, and he lives up in New York with my mom, and I joined the chess and debate club.” He laughed slightly between his answers, hating the awkward giggle that threatened to turn into something bigger, something messier. “Sorry if I missed a question, you both asked so many at once.”

“You’re good, I think that was all of them, you laugh a lot when you’re nervous by the way.” Whizzer’s tone was playful but it felt heavy and mocking against Marvin’s ears. He did his best to ignore it and continue with lunch as normal as he could.

He learned that Whizzer along with being on the student council was also a member of the photography club and the captain of the school’s baseball team. Charlotte was on the

volleyball team and fighting with Whizzer for the spot of top student. Cordelia was in the baking club and both she and Whizzer skipped a grade and were a year younger than the rest of them.

He's a year younger and still taller than you? What does this kid eat?

The rest of lunch passed with the four of them talking about anything they could think of and Marvin found the girls were really easy to talk to, while Whizzer still caused a slight buzz in his stomach every time he spoke. He was surprised that he shared quite a few classes with the two of them, and he still had Whizzer in most of his classes. He didn't usually make friends this fast at a new school if he made any at all. It was nice and he found himself continuing the conversation as they tossed their trash and put their trays up.

Don't get too comfortable, you're just going to move again.

A dark bitter voice rang in his ears, reminding him that no matter how close he got with someone, every relationship he made, it had a time limit.

MW: ***dude i found a cheat code to beat the level we've been stuck on, we gotta play after school today!!!***

Mendel's time limit, on the other hand, seemed to be pretty long.

MG: ***I'll call you after I finish my homework and we can try it out.***

The rest of the day passed by in a comfortable blur, and as he stood in front of his locker, pulling his hand guards back on, and tightening the straps to a comfortable place, he saw out of the corner of his eye Whizzer come up and begun grabbing his stuff from his own locker.

"Hey Marv, if you need a ride home, I can give you a lift. I think it's supposed to rain in a bit." Whizzer spoke up as both boys closed their lockers, turning to look at him.

"Oh, thanks for the offer but I'm good. I got my own ride, plus I don't mind if it rains, I love bad weather." there was an uncommon smoothness to his voice as he spoke and held up his

skateboard. He gave Whizzer a small smile and wave as he started down the hall and out of the building.

He didn't have any fancy tricks to get up the stairs on his board, so he simply walked up them before hopping on it and beginning his trip home.

~***~

Chapter 3: Field Day

Marvin's life fell into a steady rhythm over the next two weeks, go to school, go home, do homework, call one of his friends, and repeat. Some days he would sit with Whizzer and his friends at lunch, and others he would completely ignore him and go eat in the library, he didn't know why. He liked Whizzers company, and he liked talking to Cordelia and Charlotte, he even learned that Charlotte lived next door and he occasionally got a ride from her in the morning, joining her small carpool group with Cordelia. He's gotten pretty close with the two over a short amount of time and learned the hard way to decline any food offered by Cordelia that Charlotte didn't eat.

He didn't mean to be rude to Whizzer, he just didn't know how else to act around him when his emotions rushed to the top, so he simply avoided him. It wasn't most days, just the days he needed air, when his skin felt too tight and if he wasn't careful he'd accidentally trigger a real giddy seizure. The real ones made his chest burn and his sides hurt. They made him laugh till his throat was raw and his eyes stung. The fake ones were easier. He had control over them, and the attention they brought was refreshing, acting as a stand-in for the attention he didn't get at home.

The first time he had a seizure was in the middle of his Advanced English class. There was a test he'd completely forgotten to study for and he knew there was no way he'd be able to

pass it. As the teacher passed the papers around and the students around him began to answer the questions, he weighed his options before making a decision.

It started with a slight giggle as if someone whispered a joke to him. He got a couple of odd looks from the people around him, including Whizzer, who asked him what he was laughing at. It then grew into a loud chuckle as he let his pencil fall to the ground, he heard his teacher tell him to quiet down before his laughter grew uneasy and louder, till he was lying halfway out of his chair holding his sides. He heard kids scramble out of their chairs, in either an attempt to move away from him or to get closer to stare and gawk at him. He expected the teacher to tell them to back up but was instead surprised to hear Whizzer yell at them all to back up as the teacher ran to get the nurse. He was able to spend the rest of the period in the nurse's office and study for the test that night after school.

The best part of it, to Marvin, was the attention the act received. Kids and teachers checked on him the rest of the day. It was nice to be the center of attention for so long when he would usually sink into the background. He wasn't, however, expecting Whizzer to be so concerned. During their third-period study hall, he moved to sit next to him, tapping on his desk to get his attention.

"Hey, are you alright?" he felt strange making eye contact with Whizzer as he asked his question. "What happened in first period?"

"Oh, uh..." he stared at his desk instead of at Whizzers face as he spoke "It was a seizure, it happens sometimes, but it's not super serious." he waved his hand as he spoke, attempting to downplay the act. It wasn't a real seizure so it wasn't anything serious, but for some reason, he felt bad about lying to Whizzer about this. He wasn't lying, not really, but it still felt wrong.

“Are you sure? I can get you some water if you want.” Whizzer's look of concern made his stomach flutter and twist.

“No no, I'm fine, don't worry Whizzer, I'm fine, I promise.” he was quick to answer, not wanting Whizzer to worry so much about him.

“Fine... but you should let the teacher know if you start to feel bad.” he was glad that Whizzer dropped the topic and they continued with class. Apparently, practically there were no kids at Westpoint with a medical condition like Marvins, so he didn't need to fake one very often to get the attention he craved.

He was usually able to make it through the day without having an actual seizure, but sometimes he messes up and forgets to take his seizure medications. He didn't even realize he forgot about it until he was in the library with Whizzer and the girls during study hall. Marvin and Charlotte were attempting to work on their science project while Whizzer and Cordelia were messing around on the school computers. They were playing some dumb Roblox game about a shrimp or whatever. One of the three made a joke, he couldn't remember who, but suddenly his quiet polite laugh bubbled in his chest and grew into something bigger and louder. He tried to cover his mouth as he lost control of his voice. He heard them all say something but he couldn't tell whose voice was whose.

Marvin's laughter filled the library, the giggles and chuckles echoing off the books and bouncing back, ringing in his ears. He laughed and laughed till his eyes stung and his sides ached, till his lungs ached and his throat was raw. He laughed until he turned upside down like a ladle. He heard Charlotte say something and he felt someone turn him onto his side. It was the first time someone stayed with him during one of his seizures. When his waves of laughter died down he was able to sit up, albeit with some assistance, he realized that was Whizzer the one to

hold him still, and he'd later blame it on recovering from a seizure, but he couldn't help but lean against him slightly as he caught his breath.

Normally he would enjoy the attention, but the way they looked at him made his stomach ache with something sour. He turned his face away from the three as they took him to the nurse. He had lunch in the library that day, tucked away into a corner to avoid students and teachers alike, not wanting the attention for once. The looks of concern from his friends(were they his friends?) soured any positive attention he could gain from it.

~***~

A few days after the library incident, all the juniors were gathered in the cafeteria waiting to be assigned busses for a field trip. Apparently, it's a yearly trip the juniors do while the seniors have a career fair thing, and the sophomores and freshmen have ACT testing. The junior class takes a day trip to a science museum with a middle school a town over. Marvin couldn't remember the name of the middle school, but it sounded vaguely familiar in the fog of his mind.

“Are you excited for the field trip, Marv?” Whizzers voice snapped him out of his thoughts, making him realize he was staring at him slightly as he spaced.

He's really pretty

Stop it

“Uh yeah, I guess so, mostly excited to skip Algebra.” he was quick to reply, trying not to seem strange for staring so long.

“You and me both, Marv.” Charlotte agreed, bumping her shoulder against Marvin's.

“I've been looking forward to this trip all semester, the museum we're going to is like, so cool. There's a bunch of fun stuff there and not just boring museum stuff.” Cordelia chimed in, leaning forward in her chair as she showed off photos of the building from online. “The middle

school we're going with, Pinewood Middle School, is supposed to fill out these worksheet-type things as we show them around."

"Wait Pinewood Middle School?" Marvin was suddenly able to place why the school felt so familiar.

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Nothing really, I just know a couple of kids that go there." Whizzer was about to say something else but was cut off by the teacher assigning buses for the trip. Cordelia and Charlotte got put on another bus than him and Whizzer. He planned to sit in the back by himself but as the two boys got onto the bus, he was pulled into one of the front seats by Whizzer. Marvin took a moment to compose himself from being yanked, glaring at Whizzer as he sat up properly.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to pull you that hard, you're lighter than expected." he laughed slightly as he spoke, the slightly nasal sound sparked the buzz in Marvin's stomach again, louder this time and much harder to ignore. He felt his face felt slightly as he quickly turned away, staring at the window.

"Just... give me a warning or a heads up before you touch me next time." His words were quiet, just loud enough for Whizzer to hear. He saw him smile to himself in the window reflection, the slight simply made his stomach buzz more.

As the bus filled with more people, Marvin was reminded of why he didn't take the bus in the morning. He reached up towards his neck for his headphones, only to realize their still in his bag in his locker. He let out what could only be described as a growl of annoyance as he covered his ears with his hands. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw some movement from Whizzer before he was silently offered a small object.

“I dunno it’ll do the same thing as your bulky headphones but you can at least listen to music with them.” he stared at the headphone case before taking them. He fiddled around with his Bluetooth before connecting to them and putting one of the buds in his ear, he was about to put the other one on before he hesitated. He gazed at Whizzer quickly before offering the other earbud to him.

“I uh, feel bad using both when I only need one, and they’re yours after all so…” his words trailed off as Whizzer took the other bud, their hands grazing slightly as he did so.

“What kind of music do you listen to?” he leaned over Marvin's shoulder, staring at his music selection.

“Uh, I really like the Beatles so I have their songs, and a playlist full of random songs from musicals I like, if you’d rather listen to that.” he felt his face flush at the close contact.

“Oh! Yeah, play the musical one.” Thankfully Whizzer moved back against the seat after that and Marvin hit shuffle on the playlist as the bus began to pull out of the school parking lot. He stared out the window, tuning out the noise that filled the bus and focusing on the music. At some point he realized something was touching his hand, looking over he realized that Whizzers hand was right next to him, their pinkies interlocked.

What are you doing?! Knock it off!

For once Marvin chose to ignore the loud mocking voice in his head and spent the rest of the bus ride with his hand right next to Whizzers.

The ride to the museum wasn’t long, only about half an hour. The junior class was now gathered outside the museum, waiting in the chill early spring air, the wind was still crisp from a late winter spell. The four friends quickly found each other as they waited for the middle school buses to arrive.

“These kids better get here fast, it's cold out here and these uniforms can only keep us so warm.” Whizzer was the first to complain about the temperature before Cordelia joined in.

“Yeah, it's stupid chilly out today, I didn't realize we'd be waiting outside for them. How are you two not cold?”

“I dunno, I guess we just handle cold weather better than you two, right Marv?” Charlotte answered her girlfriend's question, turning to Marvin for him to agree. Marvin, however, wasn't paying attention to the conversation, he was instead looking in the distance, staring at the clouds that blanketed the sky.

“Uh hey, earth to Marvin? What are you looking at bud?” Whizzer waved his hand in front of his face in an attempt to get his attention.

“Oh, the clouds.” When that answer simply resulted in blank stares from the other three, Marvin dove into a long-winded rant about the clouds and weather patterns. They stared at him as he spoke, not really understanding anything he said. As he finished speaking he stared at them before realizing he just ranted about the weather for 5 straight minutes. He felt his face flush, with embarrassment this time.

“Uh sorry about that, I kinda tend to ramble sometimes...”

“No no, you're fine Marv, it was actually pretty endearing.” as Whizzer spoke he felt his face flush a deeper shade of red. People usually find his rambling annoying, so it was nice to hear someone say they liked his strange knowledge of the weather. The four spent the rest of the wait time asking Marvin different questions and listening to him explain different weather phenomena.

As the middle school buses pulled up and the kids spilled out of them, Marvin searched the crowd until he spotted a familiar mess of brown curls, and it didn't take long for the owner of said curls to spot him back.

"MARVIN!" the small boy came barrelling towards him.

"Jason! Hey buddy!" Marvin braced himself as Jason threw himself at him for a hug. "It's been a while since I last saw ya." he ruffled his hair as Jason pulled away from the hug, causing Jason to giggle.

"Who's your little friend Marvin?" Cordelia asked

"This is Jason, I used to babysit him with my friend Trina back in the city I lived in before." Marvin patted Jason on the shoulder, laughing a little as the kid squirmed at the sudden attention.

"Don't tell them that, that sounds so lame." Jason groaned, hating the fact he still had a babysitter.

The teachers ordered them into the building, giving the middle schoolers instructions to buddy up with a junior. At that, Jason clung to his arm, choosing him as his buddy for the trip.

"Alright Kid, what do you wanna do first?" before he could get an answer, a girl with dark black hair came running over to them.

"Jason! Do you wanna hang out during the field trip?" she stopped in front of Jason, swinging her arms back and forth, nervous of his answer. Marvin watched as Jason's face flushed a deep red.

"Heather! Uh um, yeah sure! That sounds fun! Uh, is that cool with you Marvin?" he turned to look at Marvin, stuffing his hands into his pocket, something he did when he didn't know what to do with them.

“Yeah, that’s fine Jason, who’s your buddy, Heather? So we don’t leave them wondering where you ran off to.” As soon as he spoke, he heard someone else come running towards them.

“He’s over there.” Heather points at, to Marvin's surprise, Whizzer as he comes running over the the three of them. He stared at him for a moment too long before Whizzer caught him staring and he quickly looked away, not noticing the knowing look the two middle schoolers shared.

“Hi Whizzer, we’re gonna hang out with Jason and his friend ok?” Heather turned to Whizzer, pulling him by the arm closer to their little group.

“Sounds like a plan kid, Marvin’s my friend as well so it all works out. I’m sure the four of us will have a great time, isn’t that right, Marv?” he bumped his shoulder against Marvin’s as he spoke.

“Uh yeah, we’ll make sure you two finish your worksheets,” he paused as the two groaned at the mention of the paper, “And that you two have fun.”

“Can’t we have fun here and do the papers on the bus?” Marvin chuckled at Jason's suggestion.

“Sorry kiddo, that's the rules, wanna have fun, you gotta do a bit of work.”

“Fine, but I get to pick the first exhibit!” Heather exclaimed as she grabbed Jason’s hand and began pulling him toward one of the interactive displays.

“Well, the kid certainly knows what she wants, c’mon Marv, before we lose ‘em.” Before Marvin could object, Whizzer grabbed his hand and pulled him along after Jason and Heather.

~***~

The rest of the day consisted of the two older boys supervising the younger pair as they journeyed about the museum. Marvin made sure the two completed the worksheets while Whizzer made sure they didn't lose the pair in the sea of kids.

Marvin and Jason were currently sitting off to the side as Whizzer and Heather played around with a moving table train model.

"Hey, Marvin?"

"Yeah, kid?" He put his phone back in his pocket as Jason spoke up.

"Do you... like Whizzer?" he wasn't looking at Marvin as he spoke, instead staring at Whizzer.

"Uh.. yeah? I mean he's my friend so..." Marvin wasn't really sure how he felt about Whizzer but he liked him enough to call him his friend, and Whizzer seemed to share the sentiment.

"No, I mean like, do you have a crush on him? Like how I have a crush on Heather."

WHAT.

"No no no, kid, uh, Jason I don't like Whizzer like that, I don't even like boys." he tripped over his words, trying to get his explanation out fast enough. He felt his face flush, which was really not helping his case. Jason gave him a look that said he didn't believe him, causing Marvin to sigh as he ran his hand through his hair and leaned back against the bench.

"I don't know kid... he's really nice, but I dunno every time I talk to him, I feel slightly... nauseous, I guess." he held his head in his hand, letting out another sigh.

"That sounds like how I feel every time I talk to Heather." Jason nodded as he spoke.

"Ha, has anyone ever told you you're too smart for your own good, kid?" Marvin let out a tired chuckle as he spoke.

“My dad says that a lot, yeah.” Jason took the statement as a compliment instead of hearing its actual meaning. “Oh, Trina and Marvin are dating by the way.”

“Their what??” That statement caught him off guard.

“Yeah, she told me about it yesterday, so it's pretty new. I don't think she meant to keep it from you, but I found out when he was at her house while she was watching me.”

“Huh. well damn.” He let out another tired chuckle as Whizzer and Heather walked over to them.

“We're done with the trains now, let's go do something else.” Whizzer laughed as Heather declared she wanted to do something else.

“How about we let Jason pick what we do next alright Heather?” Marvin spoke up, attempting to dispel the redness that stained his face. He saw Whizzer raise an eyebrow as he shook his head, but thankfully he didn't question it. Heather nodded and the three followed Jason as he led them to their next activity.

“Ta-Da!” Jason pointed at the exhibit he picked out, a giant chess set.

“Yeah, I should've expected you to bring us here.”

Marvin and Jason spent the next couple of minutes playing chess while Heather and Whizzer sat off to the side. They were talking but Marvin couldn't hear what they were saying, but he did catch his and Jason's names a few times.

“I like Whizzer.”

“Huh-”

“Like if you two started dating, I'd be cool with it.” Jason's words came out so calmly that they caught Marvin so off guard that he just stared at him, unable to speak.

By the time lunch rolled around all the students were brought into a courtyard area to eat before the trip back to their respective schools. The two schools were separated as they ate, so Marvin and Jason said their goodbyes to each other and went to eat with their friends. Marvin watched as the other three got their packed lunches and chatted about how the day had gone and he completely forgot about his lack of lunch as he sat at the table picking at his fingers.

His stepmom had once again packed him a lunch but upon inspection, he deemed it rabbit food once again(big surprise) and tossed it before making his way to school. He planned on just buying lunch but forgot about the field trip that day and has resigned himself to just wait till he gets home to eat. His friends on the other hand had other opinions about that plan.

“Did you forget to pack a lunch or something, Marv?” Whizzer was the one to point out the obvious as usual, always finding some excuse to talk to him

I like it when he talks to me.

Knock it off, be normal.

“Yeah, I uh... forgot we had the field trip today, I had a big breakfast tho so I should be fine until I get home.” that was a bold-faced lie, he had the same thing for breakfast as he always does. Whizzer simply rolled his eyes at his response, clearly still not willing to let Marvin skip a meal.

“Here, we can share mine. It's turkey so you can eat it.” before he could protest Whizzer shoved the other half of his sandwich at him. Marvin went to say something before all three told him to eat, So he begrudgingly took a bite of the sandwich. Lunch passed without much fuss, until near the end Whizzer asked him a question that shook the mood of the conversation.

“So what’s up with your attitude? Like you have this whole hot and cold act.” the words sounded light and playful, but there was a bite to them. They were mocking and light all at once, they sank into his skin and lodged himself there.

He stared at the table for a moment, before he just stood up and walked off into the bathroom. There was no one else inside it. He stared at himself in the mirror, his hands gripping the porcelain sink, the cold stone burning into his palms.

What is wrong with you?

Why can’t you be normal for one goddamn minute?

Even they notice how fucking weird you are.

The thoughts in his head blurred into one, growing into a loud buzzing noise till it was all he could hear. His breathing became labored as he squeezed his eyes shut. He put his hands over his ears, attempting to block out the noise. Before he knew it he was curled into a ball against the bathroom wall. He stayed there for the final ten minutes of the lunch period, riding out his panic attack.

As he left the bathroom, he followed the rest of the students toward the buses, passing Whizzer, Coredila, and Charlotte. He got onto the bus, staring out the window as he felt someone sit down next to him.

“Hey I’m sorry for what I said, I didn’t mean to make you upset.” Whizzers voice was much softer than it was at the table, and Marvin couldn’t help but melt.

“Are you ok?” he felt Whizzers hand brush against his own as he asked the question.

“Uh... yeah, yeah I’m ok.” he turned to look at Whizzer and had to take a moment to compose himself before continuing. “I just needed a minute, the question caught me off guard.”

Whizzer gave him a small smile as he answered, before moving his hand away to grab his earbuds from his pocket and offering one of them to Marvin. He quietly took it and put it in his ear, it was already paired to Whizzers phone, so he picked the music they listened to on the way back to school. Halfway back, Whizzer moved his hand back to where it sat before, and Marvin was the one to interlock their fingers.

~***~

About two weeks after the field trip, Marvin found himself hanging out with Whizzer, Cordelia, and Charlotte a lot more after school and even on Sundays. He would mainly hang out with the three of them at Charlotte's house and it was nice. He would even just hang out one-on-one with Charlotte and the two quickly became fast friends. When his dad was in town he would avoid the collision and take shelter at her house, the perks of having a friend so close by. He was staying the night at Charlotte's house one night and was scrolling through his camera roll to show her something when he stumbled across the campaign photo of Whizzer. He completely forgot he had the photo saved. He stared at the photo for a moment, completely forgetting about what he was trying to show Charlotte.

The photo was incredibly flattering. His hair was slicked back with a few strands breaking away from the rest to hang in front of his face slightly. His eyes were a deep rich brown color, a color very befitting of his last name. His teeth peeked out from his smile, revealing his braces. He learned that Whizzer was slightly insecure about his teeth, but he honestly thought he looked pretty cute with them.

He looks so cute.

Wait...

Closing his photo app, he quickly opened his messenger app and clicked on Trina's conversation.

MG: *Trina I think I might be gay*

TS: *Oh!*

~***~

Chapter 4: Tight-Knit Reunion

After Marvin's poorly timed revelation, he avoided pretty much all his friends for the rest of the weekend. He quickly left Charlotte's house and hurried back home before locking himself in his room. He barely left his room at all over the two days, only leaving to get food and use the bathroom. His stepmom tried to ask what was wrong but he just ignored both her questions and comments about his food choices. He even skipped their DnD session, unable to quiet the buzzing in his ear to answer Mendel's invite.

It wasn't until Sunday night after he finished his shower that he looked at his phone and answered one of his friend's many messages of concern. He spent the previous day ignoring them completely, unable to stomach talking to anyone at the time, especially not Whizzer or Charlotte.

TS: *Marvin? You alive? You missed the session on Saturday and you were radio-silent all day.*

TS: *do you wanna talk about it?*

MG: *yeah I guess so*

MG: *but not over text, can we call?*

TS: *yeah of course man hold on*

Incoming call

“Hey Trina...”

“Hey man, you sound rough you ok?” Trina’s voice chimed out from his phone speaker, ringing in his ear slightly.

“Not really.” He barked out his answer with a bitter laugh, “I don’t know how people usually act when they make a realization like this, but I don’t think having a mental breakdown at your friend's house is normal.” He grimaced at the memory as it came flooding back into the front of his brain.

Not long after he told Trina he thought he was gay, that turned into a much longer conversation with Trina asking Marvin a bunch of questions in an attempt to help him figure out how he was feeling. It didn’t really help, all it did was stress him out more and leave him spiraling on the floor of Charlotte’s bedroom. He yanked at his hair as she attempted to calm him down before he made some excuse to leave and ran back home.

When he got home that night the first thing he did was make a beeline for the bathroom, locking the door as he filled the sink full of water. His thoughts were spinning around in his head, mocking and laughing at him, growing louder and louder until they became just a deafening buzzing sound in his ears. Once the sink was full enough he dunked his head under the water, letting it fill his senses till there was nothing but the water. ‘Til his ears stung and his lungs burned from the lack of oxygen. Only then did he raise his head out of the water. His knuckles gripped the white porcelain of the sink till they turned a shade to match.

“Yeah... it probably not, but then again what is normal?” Trina's words brought him back into the present, laughing at the phase that practically became him, Trina, and Jason's unofficial mantra.

“Yeah, that's fair.” Trina’s laugh rang out from his phone, soothing his stress slightly.

“How’d the session go on Saturday by the way? I’m sorry for missing it, I just couldn’t really function normally.” He rolled a blunt as he spoke, wanting to get high if he was gonna be having this conversation.

“We just had a game night, since we didn’t wanna get too far into the story without you since we were supposed to start the final fight.”

“Right, shit I forgot the final fight was yesterday, I’m surprised Mendel didn’t blow up my phone about it.” He lit the blunt, taking in a puff of smoke.

“I filled everyone in on the basis of what was bugging you, I didn’t tell them bout the gay thing, that’s your thing to tell them. I just told them you were dealing with something stressful.”

“Thanks, Trina..” they spent the next 20-something minutes talking and helping Marvin process his newfound discovery. The conversation was a lot easier to have over the phone, where he could talk through his problems without making eye contact and he didn’t have to worry about someone’s facial expressions as they talked. Near the end of the call, he asked Trina how she doing.

“Oh well, I’m doing pretty good, Marcus and Elinore are doing good, Marcus hit a growth spurt and is two inches taller than me now, which is so unfair.” Trina huffed as she spoke before continuing. “And my dad got a promotion at work! So that’s fun.”

They talked for a little while before hanging up for the night. Trina mentioned something about having the next few days off from school but he didn’t pay too much attention to it.

On Monday, he was going through his locker when he was suddenly swarmed by Whizzer, Charlotte, and Cordelia. They all began speaking at once, asking what happened Friday and where he was all weekend. Their voices all mixed into one buzzing noise.

“Ok ok ok, one at a time! One at a time, jeez. It's too early for this.” ran his hand through his hair, attempting to remain composed.

“What happened on Friday? We were hanging out and you just started freaking out and left, are you ok?” Charlotte was the first to speak, concern in her eyes.

“Uh yeah about that... I uh, realized something and got pretty stressed out over how my dad would react if he found out.” he quickly looked between the three, not wanting to make eye contact with them as he answered. “I probably overreacted with the whole ignore everyone thing, but I just needed a bit to cool down.”

“What realization did you make that made you freak out so much and spend the entire weekend ignoring us, we were worried man.” Whizzers words were sarcastic, clearly annoyed by the silent treatment act.

Don't tell him

Tell him what's the worst that could happen

He could pull that joke again.

Trina's theory of why Whizzer asked him out flashed back into his mind, and he debated making up a lie, but instead he just signed and turned back toward his locker as he spoke

“I uh... I realized that I'm um...” he struggled to find the words to say it. “That I'm ya know, gay...” he mumbled as he said the last part, feeling his face flush, embarrassed to be saying this in the first place. He glanced at his friend's faces and saw them all just staring at him.

“Please say something and stop staring at me like that.” he felt his face flush deeper.

“We're sorry, it's just... that seems like something small to overreact like that about.” Cordelia chimed up, her words carrying a confused tone to match her face.

“It’s kind of a big deal when it comes to my dad... let’s just say he's not the most open-minded person when it comes to this kind of thing.” His words carried a bit of unintended ice with them, wanting to move on from this topic as fast as possible and go on as normal.

“I get what you mean Marv, it's alright.” Whizzer interrupted what would be Cordelia's response, the softness from the field trip returning, bringing with it the familiar buzz in his stomach. Their conversation was cut off by the first-period bell. The four split off into two as Cordelia and Charlotte went to their class while Whizzer and Marvin went to their own. The two chatted a lot more than what Marvin thought was normal but he wasn’t fussed about it.

~***~

By the time lunch rolled around, instead of eating in the library or the lunchroom, he was sitting outside with some other kids from the chess team at the bleachers. He has spent the last couple of minutes schooling a bunch of kids at the game. He enjoyed watching as they struggled to make a move while he quickly moved his pieces around the board. He was quickly stacking up wins against the other kids while the chess team hyped him up.

As he was setting the pieces up for the next game, he saw the small crowd that gathered around them split as a few other people walked over to them. Looking up he saw Whizzer, Charlotte, and Cordelia make their way over to their group.

“Are you skipping lunch to play chess??” Whizzers tone was accusatory for whatever reason.

“What is your obsession with me eating lunch dude-” Marvin gave him a funny look, laughing at how absurd the situation felt. It felt weird to have someone fuss over whether he ate or not, and the fact that Whizzer was doing it made his stomach buzz again. “And yes, I’m

spending the lunch period playing chess.” he gestured at the board set up before him. “Any of you wanna play?”

“You know what, sure, I’ll play.” Out of any of them, Whizzer was the last person he expected to play.

“Ok then, have you ever played before?” when the only answer he got was a shake of Whizzers head, he rolled his eyes before beginning to explain the rules of the game

“Ok so first of all, you have the pawns, the little guys up front. They can only move forward, except on the first turn where they can move two, and they move diagonally to capture other pieces. Then you got the Rooks,” He picked up one of the pieces as he spoke. “They can move any number of spaces forward or sideways.” He sat the piece before grabbing another one.

“This is a knight, they move in a L shape, like this.” He did a quick example before setting it back into its spot. “These pointier pieces are called Bishops, and they can only move diagonally on the color spot they start on.”

“And these two are your king and queen pieces. The king is-”

“Oh I know this one, he’s the important piece!” Whizzer cut him off as he picked up the white kingpiece.

“Well, yes the king is the piece you need to check to win,” he reached over to take the piece from Whizzer before setting it back on the board. “He can only move one square but in any direction.” He picked up the queen last. “The Queen, on the other hand, is your real heavy hitter, she can go anywhere she wants, as long none of her own color pieces are in her way.” he set the piece back down. “Try to hold on to her for as long as possible, so are you ready to play or what, golden boy?” he didn’t intend for that nickname to slip out, it had always been something he just

called Whizzer in his head. He felt his face flush, even more so when he saw Whizzer's face do the same, especially paired with that stupid smirk.

"I think I got it all, who moves first Marv?"

"That would be you, white always makes the first move. Since it's your first time playing I'll go easy on you." As the game went on, more kids gathered around to watch. While Marvin was able to quickly analyze the board and make a move, he watched as Whizzer hovered between the pieces before moving one. Marvin was able to capture piece after piece till eventually, he had his king in check.

"And that," he paused as he leaned over the board to take the final piece he needed to win "makes checkmate. I win."

"I thought you said you'd go easy on me." Whizzer pouted as he watched Marvin gather up all the pieces back into the velvet bag they came from before he folded the board up and set it in his bag.

"I said I'd go easy on you, not that I'd let you win, There's a big difference between the two, Whiz." Marvin stood up as he spoke, dusting his jeans off and adjusting his bag. "Are you gonna be a sore loser or head to fifth period, 'cause I think lunch is over."

"Yeah, Whizzer c'mon." Cordelia pulled Whizzer up by his arm as Charlotte and Marvin started their way back into the building.

~***~

The rest of the school day passed without much note, only with a strange new air between him and Whizzer. He wasn't sure what caused it, but as they stood at their lockers at the end of the day he turned to look at Whizzer.

“Hey you’re not really upset about losing are you? I mean it’s just a game.” He tried to sound sincere but it came off as slightly sarcastic.

“Ha, please. Me? A sore loser? Don’t Kid yourself, Marv.” Whizzer turned to look at him as he leaned against his locker, matching the mocking tone of Marvin’s voice. He raised his brow at that, not believing that at all.

“Sure, Whizzer Brown isn’t a sore loser at all, totally.” He chuckled as he closed his locker, giving Whizzer a sideways glance.

“Hey, I can be humble from time to time, plus I didn’t really expect to win my first chess game, especially against you.”

“Really? Why specifically against me?” He turned to stare at him and was met with that signature Whizzer smirk.

“I mean you’re on the chess team, and I haven’t played before so, the odds were unfortunately stacked against me.” He waved his hand about as he spoke, as he did so Marvin noticed his nails were now a shiny blue color.

“Hey boys!” Before Marvin could give his rebuttal, Cordelia and Charlotte made their way over to them.

“Hey girls, what’s up?” Whizzer turned to the two, slinging his bag over his shoulder.

“You should probably wear your bag properly, you’re gonna hurt your back wearing it like that.”

“I will wear my bag however I like, thank you very much.” He stuck his tongue out at Marvin, causing him to roll his eyes.

“Real mature Whizzer. Anyway, you two need something?”

“There’s this new ice cream place on 6th street we’ve been dying to try and we wanna know if you two wanna come with us,” Cordelia explained, pulling up the place online as she spoke.

“I’m buying so don’t worry about cash.” Charlotte chimed in.

“Oh I can pay for myself, I’d rather my friends don’t spend their money on me when I can afford it myself.” He always felt bad when someone spent money on him, he always had enough cash to use for himself.

“Are you sure? That feels unfair to make only you pay.” Charlotte raised an eyebrow at him.

“Yeah, I’m sure Lottie, I can buy my own ice cream.”

“So is that a yes for you Marv?” Cordelia asked, waiting for his nod before turning towards Whizzer “What about you Whiz? Are you coming?”

“As if I’d say no to free ice cream, let’s go.” Whizzer pulled Marvin along by the arm as he finished speaking.

~***~

“I can not believe that out of all the choices that place had you picked vanilla, Whiz,” Marvin remarked as they left the shop.

“Hey, it's French vanilla, thank you very much. What did you even get, chocolate?”

“Coffee actually, I don’t like super sweet desserts, I can't stand milk chocolates.” he made a face as he spoke, causing Whizzer to roll his eyes.

“Dramatic much? Anyway, what flavor did you girls get?”

“I got strawberry!” Cordelia hoped slightly as she spoke, showing off her cone before going back to eating it.

“I got cheesecake, it's my all-time favorite flavor- Marvin did you just bite your ice cream?” Charlotte stared at him, a bewildered look on her face.

“What the fuck Marvin.” Whizzer and Cordelia turned to look at him, equally horrified looks on their faces.

“What??? You guys are staring at me like I just shot someone.” He didn’t understand their reactions, it's not like it was illegal to eat ice cream like that. “And you say I'm the dramatic one, geez.”

“And here I was thinking you couldn’t get weirder.” Whizzer let out a breathy laugh after he spoke, the sound causing that damned buzz again. Marvin was really starting to get annoyed by it.

As the four stood around the front of the shop eating their ice cream, Marvin spotted someone familiar across the road. It was a girl with light brown hair pulled into a bun, she was dressed in bright blue running gear, and as she paused her running to catch her breath and take out something from her pocket, he was able to get a glimpse of her face, and when he recognized who it was he was surprised.

“TRINA?” he called out to her, startling the other three as they stared at him. The girl across the street looked over, and it definitely was Trina.

“Marvin!” she returned his greeting as she quickly crossed the road, running over to the small group.

“Girl, what are you doing here?!” his voice was shocked as he hugged her, being careful not to get ice cream in her hair.

“Remember how I mentioned my dad's promotion and that I'll be out of school for a few days? Turns out the promotion meant moving, and I was pretty nervous about that, then I learned

we'd be moving here, so I figured I'd surprise you on my first day, on Thursday." Trina explained as the hug ended, squeezing his shoulders slightly

"How are you handling the move?" Marvin noticed the way she smiled, a telltale sign that she was barely holding it together.

"Uh well... ya know, pretty well. Elinore is pretty excited about the new school, Marcus is happy to move somewhere people don't know his dead name, and I got a new car out of the whole deal! So, I'm ya know... excited." as she spoke she twisted her hands, keeping that same shaky smile.

"You're barely holding it together aren't you?"

"YES! Oh god, I'm so nervous! I don't know how you move around so much! I lived in our old city my whole life, all my friends were there, and Mendel! We've only been dating for three weeks, what if something happens and we break up?"

"Trina, Trina! Breathe girl, calm down. You're gonna have a breakdown." he put one of his hands on her shoulders, steadying her "You sit down and stop freaking out, and I'll go grab you an ice cream ok? Rocky Road?" he helped her sit down before pointing back at the ice cream shop.

"That would be great, thanks, Marv." her voice returned to her normal calm but tried sound as Marvin made his way back into the shop.

When Marvin came back outside, he saw Trina chatting with the other three and heard them laughing at something.

"Here ya go, one rocky road for the girl on the verge of a breakdown." he handed her the cone as he took the empty seat at the table, sitting between Whizzer and Trina.

“Ok so first of all, I doubt you and Mendel will break up, he's like, obsessed with you, girl. And second of all, I don't think you gotta worry about making new friends, you're really easy to like Trin.”

“Thanks, Marv, I'm just anxious, ya know? Especially since it's practically in the middle of the school year.” Trina let out a tired sigh as she spoke, “This is really good, thank you, Marvin.”

“Girl, are you ok? You sound exhausted.” Charlotte chimed in, giving Trina a slightly worried look.

“I'm chronically tired,” she chuckled in between her words, “I have medication for it but I forget to take it sometimes.”

“And she still has the nerve to lecture me about taking my meds on time.” he rolled his eyes as he waved his hand around.

“Marvin! If I don't take my meds, I get a little sleepy. If you don't take your meds, you have a seizure. So I think it's pretty important you take yours.” she let out an exasperated sigh, having already had this conversation hundreds of times before.

“I'm on her side with this Marvin, seizure medications aren't something to take when you feel like it, dude.” Charlotte chimed in, giving him a bewildered look.

“I don't take them when I feel like it! I just forget sometimes, that's when the bad seizures happen.” He rolled his eyes, tired of giving this explanation.

“You need to take your bipolar meds daily as well Marvin.”

“You have BPD?” Whizzer asked as he finished eating his cone, the question causing Marvin to groan.

“Yeah... but it's not... like super serious.” At his answer, he saw Trina roll her eyes.

“Anyway! My medication is not important right now, what's important is preventing Trina from having a breakdown about moving.’

“Well, how do you deal with it whenever you move, Marv?” Cordelia asked in between munching on her own cone.

“Uh...” he hesitated before answering. “I usually chug a slushie from 7-11 and get high while listening to the Beatles.” the other three stared at him while Trina started giggling.

“You smoke weed?” Whizzer’s voice had a mixture of judgment and intrigue.

“Yeah, do you?” he was genuinely curious if someone like Whizzer smoked.

“Sometimes, I, uh, usually just smoke cigarettes.” That answer caught him off guard.

“Cigarettes? Really? The golden boy smokes? What a surprise.” He raised an eyebrow, out of any response he could have gotten, he was not expecting that.

“Golden boy?... oh wait!” Trina quickly turned her head to stare at Marvin “That's Whizzer???” to accompany her words, she pointed at him, causing Marvin's face to flush slightly

“Ye- yes Trina, that's Whizzer- Stop pointing at him.” He dropped his head into his hands, letting out an exasperated sigh.

“You talk about me?” The smug tone of Whizzer’s voice was a dead giveaway that he was once again smirking.

“He mostly complains about you.” Marvin held his head up just in time to see Whizzer’s look of offense. For once he was grateful for Trina's blunt nature, the offended little gasp the other boy made paired with Cordelia and Charlotte's giggles, he couldn’t help but laugh a little.

“So how did you and Marvin meet?” Cordelia asked as Whizzer huffed.

“We lived next to each other in our old town, and babysat together occasionally,” Trina explained. “And we dated for like, 4 months.”

“Wait, you two dated??” Whizzer asked, sounding baffled.

“Yeah, but it wasn’t anything super serious.” She spoke casually, looking over at Marvin for confirmation.

“You can just say I was a bad boyfriend, Trina, we both know it.” Marvin laughed as he spoke, taking note of the look Whizzer and Cordelia shared.

The five sat around for a while, finishing their ice cream and talking about random things. After 15 minutes of talking, Trina said her goodbyes and began her run home. The remaining four said their own goodbyes before they split, Whizzer going in his own car, while Marvin got a ride from Charlotte.

~***~

By the time Thursday rolled around, Marvin spent a lot of his time after school at the Sinclairs helping them unpack and getting settled into their new house. He always enjoyed going to their house. It was nice to have a quiet place to escape too from the chaos and uncomfortable quiet of his house.

Trina’s parents were always nice to him, they let him come over whenever he needed to and never made a fuss about it. It was a good change of pace to be around adults who weren’t annoyed simply by his presence. Trina’s mom, despite being a lawyer, always somehow had dinner on the table by 7, be it by cooking it or ordering food from her office, Trina and her siblings called her a super mom, and Marvin was inclined to agree. Her dad worked the typical 9 to 5, and he was good at it. Marvin wasn’t sure what he did but it definitely paid well. In a way,

he was envious of Trina. She had the perfect family, parents who liked her, and siblings who idolized her.

Thinking about Trina's family made his thoughts turn toward his own family. Not his dad and stepmom, but his real mom, and his little brother Emmett. They lived in New York, where Marvin lived before all the moves started. He didn't always know who his real mom was, he just knew Miranda wasn't her. One day his dad threw an address on a slip of paper at him and told him to go bother her. The address took him to a dingy apartment in the slums, he took the elevator to the third floor and knocked on the door marked 079.

He wasn't sure what he expected when the door opened, but a small kid was definitely nowhere near the top of the list. One very awkward explanation later, he found himself inside sitting on the couch. It was old and worn, much like everything in the apartment. It was pretty much the opposite of his house, where everything was new and shiny. It was nice, back home everything felt too clean for people to live there. Emmett took a while to warm up to him, and he couldn't blame the kid. Marvin just showed up and wedged himself into his and their mother's lives. After a month or two of Marvin coming over randomly, the two became practically inseparable. He enjoyed going to his mom's house, it essentially became his sanctuary, a place where he could escape from his house.

When they started moving, he begged his dad to let him stay with his mom. His dad however disagreed with it and he's been moving around ever since. When he moved to the same town as Trina and Mendel, he suddenly had a safe place to go to. If he wasn't next door at the Sinclairs, he was at Mendel's house, either getting high while playing video games or watching old movies.

Charlotte's house was starting to fill that role in their current town. Her parents were nice, but they both worked long hours at the hospital so the house was almost always empty. The two would hang out after school talking about random things before they both passed out. They had a lot of similar interests and would force each other to watch their favorite movies. Charlotte would let Marvin rant about Star Wars and Marvin would let Charlotte explain the incredibly confusing plot of Doctor Who to him.

On Thursday, Trina gave him a ride to school in her new car, a yellow punch buggy. Marvin knew what it was like to be the new kid at a school, so he showed her the office and helped her find her locker, which was down the hall from his. The two of them stood in front of Marvin's locker before the first bell.

“So you’ll have the filler schedule until Monday, then you’ll get called down to the office to fix your schedule, pick out your electives, and join clubs,” Marvin explained as he went through his locker.

“I have to wait until Monday to join the track team? That's so lame.” Trina rolled her eyes, tugging at the scrunchie that held her hair up.

“Yeah I think it has something to do with the amount of students or something, I dunno,” Marvin replied as he grabbed a book from his locker.

“That’s dumb.” Trina huffed as he fidgeted with her sleeves. “Also I see what you mean by Whizzer having campaign posters everywhere.”

“The more posters, the more people are likely to vote for me.” As if he’d been summoned, Whizzer came bounding the hall towards the two. “Plus, it keeps me in the mind of the people, clearly, I mean it's working for you two.”

“You say the people as if this is something bigger than the student body,” Marvin remarked with a roll of his eye “It's not like you're actually running for a government office.”

“You sound like a lot of fun at parties, Marv.” Whizzer chimed back with.

“I don't get invited to parties.” His response was slightly sarcastic, but not untrue.

“Ya don't say.” Whizzers response, however, was entirely sarcastic. Out of the corner of his eye, Marvin saw Trina give both boys a strange look. Before he could question the look, the first bell chimed, and the other students began making their way to their classes.

“What's your first period, Trina?” Marvin asked as he closed his locker and turned to look at her.

“World History, what floor is that on?” She asked as she glanced over her schedule.

“Second floor, right by the stairs.” Whizzer pointed down the hall as he closed his locker with his foot.

“Me and Whizzer have English first period, we'll see you at lunch though?” he turned around slightly as he started walking.

“Sounds like a plan! See you boys then!” Trina waved as she hurried off to her own class. Marvin turned to face Whizzer as they walked.

“Is it cool that I invited Trina to our lunch table? I probably should have asked you first.” His question spilled out of his mouth, the words stumbling out awkwardly.

“Yeah, that's fine Marv, no need to word vomit at me.” Whizzer chuckled, bumping his shoulder against Marvin, causing him to stumble slightly.

“I was not word vomiting! And don't bump into me, Tall ass.” the insult stumbled out, slightly mumbled. He couldn't see Whizzers full face, but out of the corner of his eye, he saw him smirk again.

“Well, it's not my fault, you're easy to bump into, Short Stack.” Whizzer returned the insult with one of his own. Marvin met his smirk with his own glare, trying his best to ignore the red that no doubt colored his cheeks and neck. The eye contact only lasted for a moment before Whizzer laughed and started walking again, only to glance back and see Marvin rooted to their stopping point.

“C'mon Short Stack, we're gonna be late, and neither of us wants that.” Before Marvin could respond, Whizzer grabbed his arm and began once again pulling him alongside him.

“You don't need to drag me around, Tall ass.” He huffed, as he struggled to keep up with the taller boy “I can walk by myself you know.”

“Well sure but you walk so slow,” he spoke matter-of-factly, the smug tone returning to his voice as if it ever left. Marvin rolled his eyes, resigning himself to his fate, and pretending not to notice when Whizzer's hand slipped down to his wrist.

~***~

As the final bell rang, Marvin stood at his locker, chatting with Whizzer about the test they had in their last period, and how well they did. As they talked Marvin glanced out the window at the end of the hall, noticing the beginning of a rainstorm, his favorite kind of weather. He heard Whizzer grumble something about forgetting his umbrella. Marvin had brought his own, having already checked the forecast before school. He saw Whizzer turn to look at him, about to say something before,

“Marvin!” Trina hurried down the hall in a sorta run towards the two, tucking things into her bag as she went. “I'll give you a ride home, i know you like walking in the rain and all but this is weather you get sick from.” she stopped in front of him, zipping her bag close as she did so.

“Trina I don’t need a ride, I brought my umbrella-” she cut him off before he could finish.

“If you walk home in this weather you’re going to get sick and if you get sick you’re gonna miss school, and I know how much your attendance matters to you.” the look she gave him shut him up before he could give any rebuttal. With how much he moved around his transcript is fucked, so his attendance and GPA were his saving grace if he wanted to get into a good college. So getting sick was at the very bottom of his to-do list.

“Yeah fine, you have a point.” He rolled his eyes at her as he closed his locker, catching a glimpse of Whizzer as he did so. He was giving the two a strange look, a strained sorta smile on his face.

“You ok Whizzer?”

“Hm?” Whizzer quickly changed his expression upon being spoken to, his typical aloof demeanor coming back to the surface “Oh yeah I’m fine, just not looking forward to the run to my car, it’s going to totally wreck my hair.”

“Oh, uh, here.” Marvin handed him his umbrella, a simple green one he has had since he was a kid. “Just make sure to give it back tomorrow.” Whizzer stared at the umbrella for a moment before taking it and Marvin pretended his face didn’t flush when his hand grazed his own.

“Thanks, Short Stack, I appreciate it.” Whizzer flashed him his signature smile before making his way down the hall. With another roll of his eyes, he turned back towards Trina, seeing her giving him a knowing look.

“What?” he questioned.

“Nothing, nothing, c’mon let’s go before the rain gets too bad, we gotta pick up Marcus and Elinore.” The two hurried down the hall toward the parking lot.

As they walked Marvin's brain kept drifting away from whatever Trina was telling him, giving simple answers. He still hasn't come to full terms with his newly discovered sexuality and his brain kept going off to the first day he met Whizzer and the diner date he suggested. He wasn't sure how to describe his feelings for him, but he hoped it wasn't anything more than platonic emotions.

I can't like someone like him.

Right?

~***~

Chapter 5: Spirit Week

Marvin wouldn't describe himself as someone with a lot of school spirit, he's never been at a school long enough to have any. So when he found out WestPoints spirit week was starting on Monday, he wasn't really looking forward to it, especially when he learned the theme. Mostly because he found out about the theme via Whizzer making a group chat and immediately began spamming said chat.

WB has made a group chat.

WB: ***SPIRIT WEEK STARTS MONDAY***

WB: ***HOPE YOU LOSERS ARE READY***

MG: ??

CN: ***Whiz it is 10 am, put the energy drink down.***

CD: ***Whizzer it is too early***

CD: ***please calm down***

TS: ***How did you get my number Whizzer??***

MG: *why are you so hyper about something
stupid like Spirit Week, Whizzer?*

WB: *It is not stupid thank you very much.*

MG has named the chat "Falsettoland"

CD: *Why Falsettoland?*

MG: *I dunno, popped into my head lol*

WB: *anyway spirit week starts Monday
and you all better be hyped for it*

WB: *The student body worked hard on the
theme.*

MG: *And the theme is??*

TS: *Whizzer, how did you get my number?*

WB: *don't worry about it girly*

WB: *anyway, Monday is "Red as Roses", you
can buy roses for people,
Though technically the buy-a-rose thing lasts
all week*

WB: *Tuesday is "Heartbreak Hottie", students
can wear their sports uniform or something
pink*

MG: *who came up with these names*

CN: *Whizzer did.*

WB: *Wednesday is "Foral Sugars", there's a*

bake sale after school

WB: *Thursday is “Dream Date, dress up for your dream date*

TS: *that's so vague*

WB: *Friday is “All Hearts Day”*

WB: *the afternoon classes are shortened for the All Hearts Day dance, which is being held in the gym*

MG: *these themes would've made more sense in February ya know.*

The more Marvin talks to Whizzer, the stranger he seems. He'd never met someone so invested in a school spirit week, but Whizzer's place on the student council probably had something to do with that. Even so, the themes seemed out of place for the middle of March. He wasn't looking forward to it, it's not like he was planning on going to the football game anyway. He wasn't the biggest fan of sports in the first place, he was never able to understand the enjoyment of watching other people chasing various kinds of balls around a court. Needless to say, he was not planning on really joining in on any of the themes, especially not Tuesday's theme.

~***~

The first thing Marvin noticed when Trina and he walked into school on Monday, was how seriously WestPoint took Spirit Week. They went all out with the themes, there were fake rose bouquets all around the school, and there were paper chains hung up over the lockers. It felt

like someone put a pink overlay on top of the normal school colors. He groaned as he walked through the hall.

“I feel like I'm wearing rose-colored glasses, there's so much... pink,” Trina said as she split off to go to her locker, and Marvin was inclined to agree. He stared at his locker, a pink love heart with the words ‘Heart U’ written on it. He rolled his eyes before pulling it off as he opened his locker.

“Oh come on, the art club worked hard on those, you could’ve at least left it up for a little bit.” he turned to his left to see Whizzer staring at him, a look of slight disappointment on his face, probably from Marvin's lack of school spirit.

“Yeah, I'm sure they worked hard on paper hearts with corny messages on them.” He shoved the paper into his locker as he spoke.

“They're supposed to be those candy love hearts, ya know the ones you give people on Valentine's Day,” Whizzer replied, rolling his eyes as if it was the most obvious thing “Ya know, the ones that taste like chalk? C’mon you’ve had a girlfriend, surely you gave Trina some of those.”

Something about Whizzer mentioning his relationship with Trina made his stomach churn, talking about his dating history with him felt wrong.

“Well like I said, I wasn’t a very good boyfriend, and we dated during the fall, so both normal and Jewish Valentines had already passed.” He answered quickly, wanting to move on from the topic.

“Jewish valentines day? What's that” he wasn’t expecting the question and turned to give Whizzer his own questioning look.

“Tu B'Av? Ya know, the Jewish day of love? August 18th? How do you not know this, aren't you Jewish??” he closed his locker, turning to face him as he spoke.

“Half Jewish, but anyway that's beside the point, you never did anything romantic for her?” Whizzer waved his hand as he spoke, shutting his locker as he did so. Marvin thought for a moment before responding.

“I uh, I bought her flowers, that's about it...” he felt his face flush as he answered, “Can we just drop it? This is a really weird conversation to have.”

“Yeah sorry, didn't mean to touch a nerve Marv, just curious.” Whizzer apologized, and Marvin realized he was holding something behind his back. He leaned over slightly trying to see what it was before Whizzer noticed and held the object out. It was a rose. The sight of it caught Marvin off guard, and he felt his face flush a deep red.

“Today is Red as Roses, so here ya go.” he presented the flower to him, holding it out slightly, waiting for him to take it. Whizzers face was now a similar shade of his own.

“Oh uh... thank you.” He reached out to take the rose, holding it carefully despite its lack of thorns. He was about to say something else before the bell chimed.

“We should probably get to class now, Short stack.” Whizzer pointed behind him, as he turned slightly.

“Uh right, right yeah, we should.” As they walked to class, Marvin continued to hold the rose carefully, despite the odd looks the pair gained by him doing so.

He just gave me this as a friend thing right?

Even if the rose was given with a platonic meaning, that didn't stop Marvin from putting it in a small vase with some water when he got home.

~***~

Tuesday, thankfully, had significantly less pink all over the walls. The students, however, made up for the lack of color on the walls by wearing it themselves. Trina even got in on it, replacing her cream undershirt with a light pink one, even wearing a matching neon pink hair ribbon and bow, instead of her usual black. Marvin doubted he even owned something pink.

He stood in front of his locker and grabbed his history textbook while he talked about the upcoming test with Trina. As the two talked he saw someone walking toward them. He did a double-take once he realized it was Whizzer. He wasn't wearing the school uniform, instead, he was dressed in what he assumed was the school baseball uniform, with a soft pink long-sleeve shirt underneath it. He didn't even realize he'd been staring until Trina lightly shoved him and gave him a slightly judgmental look.

"Morning you two!" Whizzer greeted as he stopped in front of the pair.

"Good morning Whizzer," Trina replied as Marvin turned back toward his locker, feeling his face flush again.

"Glad to see someone showing some school spirit, I love the ribbon, Trina." Marvin could tell the comment doubled as a jab toward him.

"Thank you! I haven't gotten my track uniform yet so I made due, I did buy the ribbons last night though." Trina adjusted the ribbons as she spoke.

"At least you wore something pink, c'mon Marvin where's your school spirit." he turned in time to see Whizzer roll his eyes as he waved his hand.

"Back in New York, besides I don't own anything pink, it's a girl's color." as he spoke he saw Trina roll her eyes but she didn't say anything. Whizzer on the other hand,

"Oh please, there's no such thing as a "girl color", that's so dumb." As he spoke, he reached into his and pulled out a pin. Before Marvin could object, Whizzer reached out and stuck

it on his blazer, right below the school's crest. It had a pink love heart on it, with the words “UR SWEET” printed on it.

“I’m guessing this is also supposed to be one of those candy heart things?” he gestured at the pin as he spoke.

“Yes, and since you don’t know what those are, I actually got you some.” He pulled another thing out of his bag, this time a bag filled with small candy hearts. Marvin stared at the bag for a moment before taking it.

“Didn’t you say these tasted like chalk?” Marvin asked as he inspected the bag.

“Oh, they do, but there, like, a staple of holiday candies,” Whizzer said as he slung his bag over his shoulder. The bell rang and Trina split off from the boys. As they walked, Marvin opened the bag of candy and began munching on them.

“I don’t know what you’re on but these are actually really good.” He said in between crewing.

“You are so weird, Marv.” Whizzer responded with a chuckle. They walked in silence the rest of the way to their classes, the only sound between the two was Marvin crunching on the candy hearts.

The candies are just because we’re friends right?

~***~

Wednesday classes came and went without much fuss, besides the constant chatter from the other students about the bake sale. He wasn’t planning on buying anything from it, he just wasn’t big on desserts. His stepmom was mostly to blame for that, always making a snide comment when he ate something with excess sugar until it reached a point where he barely ate

desserts. Even when he did, he gravitated more toward the bittersweetness, anything with dark chocolate was his all-time favorite dessert.

As he walked around the tables with Trina and Whizzer, pausing at every other one so the two could look at the selections. They both tried to talk him into buying something but he turned each option down, each one far too sweet for his liking. He eventually left them to do their own thing while he sat under a tree, waiting for Trina to finish up since she was his ride home. As he waited, he took out his mini copy of the Torah, turning to the book of Deuteronomy. Despite his lack of belief in god, he still enjoyed reading the book, it set out rules for him, even if he didn't always follow them.

After a while, he realized someone was standing over him. Looking up he realized it was Whizzer, he was leaning forward slightly, trying to see what he was reading.

"Are you reading the bible??" Whizzer asked, his voice sounding baffled.

"What? No, I'm Jewish, this is the Torah. I uh, read it from time to time, it um, helps keep me grounded, I guess." He quickly tucked the book back into his bag as he stood up. "Also, do you like, have a personal goal to bug me at least once a day or something?" As he spoke, he noticed Whizzer hiding something behind his back.

"What do you have? And why do you keep hiding stuff behind your back?" he tried to see what he was hiding but Whizzer quickly turned to the side so he couldn't see it.

"Nuh-uh, you gotta close your eyes, it's a surprise," he spoke with a sing-song tone, his signature smirk on his face, and Marvin was about to protest before Whizzer quickly cut him off. "Just close your eyes and hold out your hands Marvin."

With a roll of his eyes, he did as he was told and closed his eyes, and held out his hands. After a moment or two of nothing happening, he felt a small weight get sat on his hand. Once

Marvin felt Whizzers hands move away, he opened his eyes to see a small slice of cake wrapped in a plastic foil decorated with storm clouds.

“You mentioned last week that you don't like milk chocolates so I figured that applied to most super sweet things, so I found a stand that was selling a dark chocolate cake and got you a slice.” as Whizzer spoke, Marvin saw his face flush a deep red color, and he was sure his face was a color to match.

“Oh uh, thank you. I'm, um surprised you remembered that.” he chuckled awkwardly, staring at the cake in his hands. “How much did it cost? I'll pay you back for it.” He turned it around slightly, trying to see if there was a price anywhere.

“It's a gift, Marv, you don't owe me anything.” Whizzer shook his head, chuckling slightly as he did so.

“C'mon you already bought me the candy yesterday, and the rose on Monday, stop buying me shit, and let me pay you back for the cake at least.” he felt bad that Whizzers bought him something three days in a row.

“Nope, gifts are gifts Marv, I'm not telling you how much it cost,” Whizzer replied, laughing as he spoke. Marvin was about to say something else before Trina called for him since she finished her dessert shopping and was ready to leave. He gave Whizzer one last look before hurrying over to follow Trina out to the parking lot.

He's just buying me stuff because he feels bad for me.

Right?

~***~

Thursday passed by similarly to Wednesday, the theme of the day wasn't as obvious as Monday and Tuesday. The students mostly seemed to use it as an excuse to wear other clothes

than the school uniform. He was hoping the day would pass without most note, and for the most part, thankfully, it did. Even Whizzer left him alone for the majority of the day, it was nice, if not a little strange. He was unfortunately getting used to his and Whizzer's small chats in between classes.

After the seventh-period bell rang, Marvin stood by his desk, gathering up all his stuff. He was listening to the Beatles so he didn't hear when someone walked up next to him and tapped him on the shoulder. He jumped slightly before he noticed it was only Whizzer, who upon seeing his reaction began giggling to himself.

"You are so jumpy, man." Whizzer leaned against the desk behind him. "Anyway, I have something to ask you." his tone was carefree, and something about the classroom still having students in it while the two spoke made his stomach twist slightly.

"Uh, what is it?" he felt his face flush as he spoke, uncertain if he wanted to hear the answer.

"So, stop me if this gets too weird or if I'm coming on too strong, but we've been vibing pretty well together, and since you like sorta came out recently, I was thinking if you wanted to maybe go out? That diner I mentioned is still an option." Whizzer stared at him after he finished his sentence, a hopeful expression on his face.

Marvin felt his mouth go dry as he suddenly became incredibly aware of the number of eyes on him at the moment, waiting for his response, waiting for him to mess up.

This is a prank.

People like Whizzer don't like people like you.

He's making fun of you.

No one like him could like someone like you.

You are unlovable.

He stared at Whizzer, struggling to piece together a response amidst the storm of thoughts in his head.

“It's totally cool if you don't-” Whizzer tried to put Marvin at ease before he quickly cut him off.

“What makes you think I'd date someone like you.” His words were coated in a thick layer of ice, catching the taller boy completely off guard. As soon as he spoke the words he regretted them, the look of hurt that painted his face struck deep into his core. Before Whizzer could respond or he could take back what he said, he quickly left the classroom, shoving past the students who gathered around the door.

The drive to Trina's house passed by in a blur, his brain barely processing anything after he left the classroom, so he wasn't sure how he ended up in Trina's room pacing back and forth while she sat on her bed judging him.

“Why did I say that!? Of all the ways I could have handled that, I went in that direction?!? What is wrong with me???” he collapsed backward onto Trina's bed, hiding his face with his hands.

“Well... I mean I'm trying to think of something reassuring to say but yeah no, you really fucked up man.” Trina stared at him, her voice layered with comfort and slight discomfort. Instead of responding with proper words, he let out a disgruntled groan.

“Is he ok?” Marvin moved his hands from his face to see Marcus standing in the doorway, with Elinore peeking out from behind him, concern written on both of their faces.

“Yeah, we're just learning that Marvin is just as bad at talking to boys as he is at talking to girls.”

“HEY!” he sat up with a start, glaring at the three siblings as they laughed at him.

“Well, it sounds like you should apologize to this boy, as soon as possible.” Elinore chimed in as she sat down in Trina’s desk chair.

“And you should definitely do it in person, don’t do it over text, that’s a copout.” Marcus gave his two-sense as he flopped down onto the edge of the bed.

“I know I should, I just don’t know how!” he covered his face with a pillow as he let out another groan. Trina muttered something he couldn’t make out and he moved the pillow from his face to glare at her.

“I have an idea, but you have to promise not to throw a fit over it.”

“I do not throw fits!” he flung the pillow at her, it missed her completely and almost hit Marcus.

“Yeah sure you don’t. Anyway, my idea is that tomorrow at school, you buy Whizzer one of those roses and apologize.” Trina rolled her eyes as she spoke, staring at Marvin as he processed her answer.

“I’m trying to turn him down! Not give him the wrong idea!” he ran his hand through his hair, pulling at it slightly as he did so.

“It doesn’t have to be in a romantic way, you can just use it as a way to start the apology. That or you spend the rest of your time in this town thinking that he hates you and vice versa.”

“I hate it when you’re right.” he rolled his eyes as he pulled his legs up to his chest.

~***~

Marvin wasn’t surprised when Whizzer avoided him in the hallways and during class. He was slightly hoping he’d be able to apologize without Trina’s plan, but he still found himself

standing awkwardly at the stupid flower stand buying a rose. He felt ridiculous doing it, and he was sure the other students knew why he was getting one.

He was able to catch Whizzers attention right before the dance started, stopping him before he entered the gym.

“Whizzer, hey! Just a minute, I promise this’ll be quick.” Whizzer glared at him as he spoke, crossing his arms as he stood near the gym doors. Marvin was relieved that most students were in the gym already, saving him from their prying eyes.

“What do you want Marvin, 'cause I’m still annoyed with you-” his words trailed off as he caught sight of the rose in Marvin's hand. He was quick to offer the flower as he spoke.

“That’s totally fair, but please just hear me out.” Whizzer looked between him and the flower, a conflicted look on his face. He sighed and took the rose, looking at Marvin for him to continue.

“Ok, my reaction yesterday was completely unfair, and you really didn’t deserve that. I know it doesn’t excuse what I did but still...” He stammered through his words, trying his best to make sure they came out properly. “I do like you. I’m pretty sure.” Whizzer raised a brow at that but didn’t say anything. “I’m just not really sure how. I’m still trying to figure out everything with my sexuality, and that’s hard enough to do alone, let alone do it while trying to hide it from my dad.” He let out an exasperated sigh as he choked out the last words.

“What I'm trying to say,” He tugged at the hair at the back of his neck as he spoke “I’m really sorry for yesterday, I still think you’re cool, I just need some more time to figure out my own shit before anything like that.” He stared at Whizzer as he finished speaking, waiting for his response. He stared between Marvin and the rose for a moment, twisting the flower in his fingers before speaking.

“Dance with me.”

“What-” out of anything Whizzer could have said, that was the last thing he expected.

“Dance with me once during the dance, and I'll accept your apology and hold off any more date attempts until you figure your junk out.” Whizzer broke off part of the rose stem before he tucked it into his shirt pocket. He extended his hand, waiting for Marvin to take it. He stared at his hand for a moment.

“Just one dance?”

“Just one. I promise.” The signature smirk was back on his face. Marvin let out a sigh before taking his hand and letting Whizzer lead him into the gym.

~***~

Chapter 6: Reluctant Comfort

The next week passed in a strange new normal. Whizzer was a lot more open about his crush (if you could even call it a crush) and as a result, was much more flirtatious and touchy. Marvin wasn't sure how he felt about it, but he wasn't entirely against it. It definitely didn't help with the now-constant buzz that sat in his stomach whenever Whizzer was around.

Because of how much Whizzer was around him, he's unfortunately gained the attention of a lot of his classmates, guess that's a side effect of hanging out with someone as popular as him. The attention was mostly positive, kids were being nice to him, but not in a sincere way. Marvin was able to tell the difference between when someone was simply being nice to him and when they wanted something from him. It didn't bother him much. He knew he wasn't the most likable person, but it still hurt him slightly to know they didn't actually care for him.

It wasn't all good attention, however. There were a couple of kids who weren't super thrilled about how close he was getting with Whizzer and his friends. He's gotten pretty good at

ignoring the dirty looks they gave him, he's dealt with worse than a couple of glares. It all came to a head on Friday during an afternoon passing period. He was at his locker, switching out his art book for his science textbook. He was minding his business listening to the Beatles when someone walked over to him. Instead of getting his attention in a normal way, he was instead forcibly yanked around by his shoulder and spun around to face someone.

When he was able to maintain his balance and ensure he wouldn't fall on his ass, he stared at the kid. He was slightly taller than him, with scruffy blond hair that fell over his face. The most important fact about the kid was the fact he clearly did some kind of sport. Marvin felt his stomach drop, he'd been in this situation before. Cornered by some jock he accidentally pissed off.

"Do you think you're hot shit or something?" His tone was instantly hostile.

"Not really, kinda the opposite actually." sarcasm was his natural defense against guys like this, even if it mostly landed him in more hot water with them. By now a crowd had started to form around the two.

"Oh, so you're a funny guy? Do you even realize who you're turning down??" the kid pointed a finger hard against Marvin's chest, glaring at him. "Do you know how many guys would jump at a chance to date Whizzer Brown and you turned him down? Twice?!" as he spoke, the kid shoved him hard backward causing Marvin to stumble slightly.

"Dude the hell is your problem?! And who Whizzer wants to date is his own business, the same goes for me." Marvin glared at the kid, not in the mood for whatever he was bent out of shape about.

"You're my problem. You prance on in here, cozy on up to Whizzer, and act like you own the place." from behind the kid, Marvin was able to see Whizzer walking over to the crowd, his

pace speeding up once he realized what was happening. Before Marvin was to say anything else, he was shoved a second time and his mind went blank. There was only so much he could put up with when it came to other people, with his father, he could bear just about anything, but with anyone else, he was quick to snap.

Before the kid could do anything else, Marvin quickly pivoted his body weight and punched him, hard, in the jaw. The next thing he knew, the single punch turned into a full-blown fight. He was on top of the kid, repetitively punching him in the face. He could faintly hear the other kids chanting “fight” over the rush of blood in his ears. He was acutely aware of Whizzers eyes on him, feeling the way his eyes bore into him. At some point, he heard someone call out that a teacher was coming.

As the teacher got closer, he felt something bubble up in his chest until a laugh poured out, then another and another. Marvin fell to his side and was unable to hold off the seizure that quickly overtook him. As he lay on his side, he felt the kid get up and start kicking him. Just as soon as the kid started kicking him, he stopped. He could faintly hear the teacher yelling at the other kid and tell someone to bring him to the nurse. Marvin felt someone try to help him stand up and he could vaguely make out that it was Whizzer, he spoke softly as he led him down the hallway.

Halfway there, Marvin was ebbing in and out of the seizure when the two were stopped by a teacher. He could somewhat hear Whizzer explain to the teacher where they were going, the annoyance thick in his tone as he did so. As he stood there laughing while Whizzer spoke to the teacher, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his mouth, and when he laughed next, he felt something warm and wet sputter down his chin. He heard the teacher exclaim and felt Whizzer cover his mouth with some kind of cloth.

Once they were in the nurse's office, his seizure was pretty much over, and he was just sitting on one of the cots, holding a wad of gauze to his mouth while Whizzer explained to the nurse what happened.

“Marvin started having a seizure and this kid just started literally kicking him while he was down.” He waved his hand around as he spoke, causing Marvin to lean back slightly to avoid getting smacked

“And what did you say the other boy's name was?” The nurse wrote something down as she spoke, most likely for the principal later on.

“Charles Wilson, he's a junior and on the football team.” Whizzer was quick to rat on the kid and it seemed like he had some kind of vendetta against him, though that might have something to do with him beating up Marvin.

“Alright, do you need anything else Marvin? How's your tongue?” the nurse sat her pen down as she spoke, looking from Whizzer to Marvin.

“Yeah, I'm good. My tongue stopped bleeding.” He tossed the wad of gauze into the nearby trash can. He was luckily able to avoid getting any blood on his shirt, he wouldn't even know how to begin washing blood out.

“Alright then, do you want me to call your mom or dad?” she reached for the phone on her desk as she asked the question, waiting for Marvin's answer.

“No! Uh, no, both my dad and stepmom are out of town for work...” he felt his neck flush slightly with how quickly he answered.

“Ok, well you boys should be fine to head to class, try to stay out of trouble please.” she nodded at the two as they left the room. Since it was Friday, neither of the boy's clubs were

meeting so they made their way to the study hall classroom. As they walked Whizzer lightly bumped his shoulder against Marvins.

“Didn’t realize you were some secret tough guy, Marv.” his tone was light but Marvin felt his stomach twist.

“Not really.” He muttered as he sped up, leaving Whizer behind as he walked into the classroom. He sat at a random empty seat in between two other students, ignoring the look of concern Whizzer gave him.

~***~

The last thing Marvin wanted to do was have a mental breakdown at school, yet he found himself huddled under the bleachers outside behind the gym building, doing just that. He held his knees to his chest as he sobbed. A loud buzzing in his ear drowned out any noise around him, so he didn’t notice when someone sat next to him until they reached out and gently patted him on the back.

He jumped at the sudden contact, snapping his head toward whoever the person was. He was surprised to see it was Whizzer, his face was painted with a look of concern.

“Hey, you ok Marv?” he spoke low and softly, his tone soothing away some of Marvin’s stress. Instead of giving a proper response, Marvin let out another sob and covered his face with his hands as he tried to stop crying. He hated crying in front of people and hated how weak it made him feel.

Stop being such a pansy, You are so pathetic.

What is wrong with you? Why can’t you just be normal?

“Hey, hey, it's ok man, just breathe it's ok.” Whizzer’s voice cut through his thoughts, bringing him back to reality. The two sat like that for a while, Marvin attempting to stop crying

while Whizzer comforted him. After a minute or two his cries turned into soft whimpers and he was able to wipe his eyes dry.

“Sorry...” He shifted his legs so he was sitting cross-legged.

“What are you sorry about?” Whizzers voice was still soft, but now it was laced with a hint of confusion.

“For... all this?” he waved his hand as he spoke, gesturing to himself as he did so. “For making you deal with me like this.” he let out a sigh as he spoke, running his hand through his hair.

“You don’t need to apologize, Marv. you’re my friend and I care about you.” Whizzer smiled at him as he spoke, the sight triggering the buzz once again.

“Do you?” the question slipped out unintentionally, meaning to just be an inside thought.

“What do you mean?” he tilted his head to the side as he spoke, looking at Marvin strangely.

“I mean, for god's sake Whiz. Someone like you hanging out with someone like me? C’mon, there's gotta be some kind of ulterior motives.” He turned away from Whizzer as he spoke, staring instead at his shoes. “Lemme guess, one of your baseball buddies made a bet so you’d befriend the weird new kid.”

“What? No, Marv, it's not like that at all. What gave you that idea?” Whizzer leaned forward, a confused and slightly offended look on his face.

“It wouldn’t be the first time a popular kid talked to me because of some bet or joke.” he picked at the cuffs of his jeans, still not wanting to make eye contact.

“Marv, I promise that I hang out with you because I like you, not because someone made some stupid bet.” Whizzer grabbed his hand and Marvin looked at him, unable to read the

emotion on Whizzers face. “Trust me when I say, I’m around you because I want to be around you. I actually really like your company, believe it or not.” Marvin let out an awkward laugh, giving Whizzer a small smile.

“Thanks, Whiz, I really appreciate that.” the two sat in silence for a moment before Marvin realized Whizzer was still holding his hand. He felt his face flush and he quickly pulled his hand away.

“So! Uh, what were you even doing back here? The last bell already rang.” he quickly changed the topic, trying to get rid of the blush that painted his face.

“Oh, I usually come out here to smoke, my mom doesn’t know I smoke so.” He took out a packet of cigarettes as he spoke.

“For a second I forgot you smoked cigarettes, I thought you meant you came back here to get high.” Marvin stared at the small box.

“Getting high on school grounds sounds like a one-way ticket to detention.”

“And smoking cigarettes isn’t?” Marvin raised an eyebrow at the boy next to him. The comment got a laugh out of him, the sound easing away the last bit of stress that clung to him.

“Fair point, but being on the student body gives me some leeway with the teachers, I also tend to wait till the last bell to smoke, and why I do it back here, less likely to be spotted.” he tucked the packet back into his bag, clearly abandoning the idea to smoke.

“Well if you want a good spot to get high, we can go to my house.” He made the offer absentmindedly, not hearing himself till the words left his mouth.

“Really?” The disbelief in Whizzers voice wasn’t hard to notice.

“Yeah, my dad and stepmom travel a lot so they're never home.” he stood up as he spoke, waiting for Whizzer to follow. “My dad doesn’t really care if I smoke inside as long as I don’t do it when he's home.”

“Wow, uh yeah sure.” Whizzer hesitated slightly before getting up to follow after him.

“Do you mind giving me a ride? Trina already left so...” he pointed vaguely toward the parking lot.

“Yeah of course, what's your address?” Marvin answered as they made their way to Whizzers car, it was a red Mercedes-Benz.

“Cool car.” The complement felt a little silly but he wasn’t sure what else to say.

“Thank you! She's a classic.” Whizzer beamed as he walked toward his car.

“She?”

“Yep! Marvin, met Tabatha.” Marvin stared at Whizzer in disbelief.

“You named your car? And you named it Tabatha?”

“Do you want the ride or not? Cause if you’re gonna make fun of Tabatha you can walk.” Whizzer hopped in his car as he spoke, playfully glaring at Marvin slightly as he did so. Marvin rolled his eyes as he got in the car, chuckling slightly.

As the car pulled out of the parking lot, Whizzer turned on the radio, and some loud annoying pop music started playing. He groaned and rolled his eyes.

“Oh come on, how can you not like this song?” Whizzer looked at him exasperated while he turned the music up louder.

“Pop is not my preference- is that Bruno Mars??” he stared at the radio, surprised to see the name pop up.

“Yep!” Whizzer laughed at his shock, leaning back in his seat as he drove. The top was down on the car, the wind blowing in their faces. There was something about how the wind ruffled Whizzers hair that just made Marvin stare at him. He didn’t even realize he’d been staring until Whizzer called him out on it.

“What? Do I have something on my face?” Whizzer raised a brow, the mocking tone of voice easily noticeable. Marvin quickly stared at his lap, not answering as he felt his face flush red. He heard Whizzer laugh, the sound ringing in his ear as they drove.

When they arrived at Marvin's house, he let out a deep groan when he noticed the blue SUV parked in the driveway. Whizzer gave him a look but didn’t say anything, as they walked up the steps, Marvin turned to look at the taller boy.

“Ok this might sound really rude and really weird, but unfortunately my stepmom is home so, uh... you can’t let her know you're gay...” his words trailed off, waiting for Whizzers response.

“That homophobic huh?” Whizzer shifted his weight around as he crossed his arms.

“Yeah... if she knew you were gay, she’d... kick you out... And the same goes for me” He stumbled over his words, trying not to sound like an asshole for asking Whizzer to do this.

“It's cool I understand, believe it or not, I have some experience pretending to be straight.” Whizzer joked as Marvin opened the door. As the two walked inside, Marvin heard Miranda call out from the kitchen.

“Marvin! Is that you?”

“Yeah it's me!” he called back as he led Whizzer into the house. Miranda stepped out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on the apron she was wearing. She looked like your typical housewife. “Who's your friend?”

“Uh, this is Whizzer, my friend from school. Whizzer this is my Stepmom, Miranda.” he quickly introduced the two.

“Hello m’am, nice to meet you.” Whizzer flashed her one of his signature smiles.

“Nice to meet you too dear, what a unique name.” The judgment was noticeable in her voice as she spoke. “It’s nice to know that Marvin making friends at school, are you planning on staying for dinner.”

Marvin tried to warn Whizzer to say no with the look he gave him but he didn’t seem to pick up on it.

“I’d love to, that sounds wonderful.”

“We’re just gonna hang out in my room.” Marvin quickly headed towards the stairs, Whizzer following after him.

“Alright, I’ll call you boys down when dinner is ready.” She called after them as they made it to Marvin’s room, once the two were inside, Marvin quickly closed his door.

“Hellooo ocd...” he heard Whizzer mutter as he looked around the room.

“Hey-” Marvin glared at him as he kicked his shoes near his closet, ditching his tie and tossing his blazer over his desk chair.

“For someone who seems so neat and orderly, you seem pretty careless about wear you toss your clothes.” Whizzer kicked at one of the small piles of clothes that littered his floor.

“Yeah well, I didn’t really plan on having company this morning.” He quickly explained the excuse as he haphazardly shoved the clothes into his laundry basket.

“Do you wear glasses?” he was standing by Marvin’s desk, holding up his glasses case. Marvin felt his face flush as he quickly walked over and grabbed the case from his hand.

“Nosey much?” he sat the case down back where it was, “And yeah but, I prefer to wear contacts.”

“Hey, it was out and the open, it's not like I'm actively going through your stuff.” Whizzer laughed slightly as he spoke. “What’s with the chess on the turn table by the way?” he spun the board around slightly.

“Oh it's on a lazy Susan, I use it so I can play chess by myself. For ya know practice and stuff.”

“Marv, not to be rude, but that seems a little psychopathic buddy.” he spun his finger around as he pointed at the board.

“It is not psychopathic! It's how I practice my chess moves!” his answer was quick and defensive, and brought a laugh out of Whizzer.

“Anyway, I see you’re a fan of Star Wars by the way.” he gestured at the bookshelf next to his TV stand as he spoke, the one filled with different Star Wars-themed memorabilia.

“Oh yeah, it's been my favorite franchise since like forever.” he crouched down in front of his TV to set up his switch, slightly aware of Whizzers gaze on him. “Anyway, since the plan to get high has a wrench in it since Miranda got home earlier than I expected,” He stood up and turned to face Whizzer as he held two switch controllers. “Wanna play Mario cart?”

“Sure.” Whizzer flopped onto the bed as Marvin handed him the controller and sat beside him. The pair played a few rounds till Whizzer rage quit.

“You have got to be cheating! How do you keep winning!?” he threw the controller onto the bed, glaring at Marvin.

“I spend a lot of time playing this when high.” Marvin laughed as Whizzer shoved him slightly. “I thought you said you weren't a sore loser?” Instead of giving a proper answer,

Whizzer stuck his tongue out at him. He turned his attention back to the TV while Whizzer turned his head away, looking at his window sill.

“Hey, isn't that the rose I gave you on Monday?” At the question, Marvin felt his face flush a deep red, “I’m surprised you still have it.” Whizzer turned to look at him.

“Uh yeah well... it was a gift.” The soft look Whizzer was giving him made his face flush more and caused the buzz in his stomach to return. “I uh, I'm probably not caring for it properly, I’m surprised it's not dead.” His words spilled out, mentally cursing himself for how hurried they sounded.

“I still have the one you gave me.” Whizzer leaned back slightly as he spoke, a small smile on his face, his cheeks a similar shade of pink to Marvin's.

“Oh...” He didn’t expect Whizzer to keep it, and he felt his face flush impossibly more, “Uh anyway, if you’re tired of Mario Kart we can watch a movie till dinner if you want.”

“Sure what kind of movies do you have?” Whizzer shifted to sitting cross-legged on the bed as Marvin turned the game system off and started going through his movie selection.

“Uh, I mainly have some old slasher movies and horror movies in general, I also have Netflix and Disney+, so anything on those.” he turned to face Whizzer slightly.

“Hmm, surprise me, pick one of the slasher films.”

“Alrighty, how about a classic, Lost Boys?” He took the DVD off the shelf and turned to show Whizzer.

“What's it about? I’ve never heard about it before.” Marvin gave Whizzer an incredulous look, shocked to hear he'd never seen it before.

“What do you mean you’ve never seen it??” he scoffed and put the movie into the DVD player.

“Forgive me for not seeing a movie from the eighties, 20-something years before I was born.” Whizzer rolled his eyes as he responded.

“That is no excuse, and it came out in 1987, so not 20 years ago thank you very much.” he flicked Whizzer on the side of the head as he sat back down, which got an offended gasp out of him. Whizzer shoved Marvin slightly and he shoved back, which spiraled into the pair shoving each other until Whizzer shoved Marvin off the bed. As Marvin glared up at him from the floor, Whizzer threw his head back and laughed.

“I keep totally underestimating how light you are, man.” Marvin's face flushed slightly as Whizzer laughed between his words. He didn't respond properly, instead choosing to huff as he stood up. He made a point to sit out of shoving distance from the other boy, the act gaining another laugh from Whizzer.

“What? Scared that I'm gonna shove you again?” Whizzer wiggled his eyebrows as he spoke. Marvin huffed again instead of answering, kicking him lightly as he did so. Whizzer laughed and scooted back til he was sitting flush with the wall.

“I believe I might be starting to spend too much time with you, Marv.” Before Marvin could overanalyze what that meant, he continued, “I've picked up and figured out all your tells. When you get upset you go nonverbal and huff and grumble, when you get happy you talk a mile a minute, and when you're sad you, like, shut down.” he counted off his finding on his fingers as he spoke, a smug smile on his face.

“I do not huff!” he huffed out, throwing a pillow at the other boy as he did so, the act only resulting in making Whizzer laugh more, “Whatever, just watch the damn movie.” He grumbled and turned to watch the movie.

The two were able to sit in comfortable silence while the movie played, save from Whizzer's constant comments on the appearance of the characters in the movie, and to ask questions that get answered in the later movies. It was nice, he enjoyed Whizzers company more than he thought he did. Something within him wished the moment would last forever. He felt silly for the thought, somewhat selfish for wanting to hog all of Whizzers attention when he'd turned down his romantic advances twice already. Still, he knew if he did begin a relationship with Whizzer, it would only end with someone getting hurt. The feeling was something to be explored later on, but he was content with just watching the movie with him for now.

“So why'd you make a face when your mom asked me if I was staying for dinner?” Whizzer turned to ask him suddenly and Marvin felt his stomach twist at the question.

“She is not my mom. She's my stepmother,” His words came out harsh and blunt before he continued. “And her cooking is not the best, whenever she's not cooking for my dad, she makes some gross health shit that tastes like nothing.”

“Oh, damn... is that why you buy lunch every day?” Whizzer tucked the pillow he was holding behind him as he spoke.

“Yeah, every time she makes my lunch it's essentially just rabbit food, and she's always bugging me about eating healthy and the number of calories or whatever so I eat a shit ton of junk food at school, and my friend's houses,” he explained, turning to watch the movie again.

“Well if you ever wanna hang out at my house, I got plenty of junk food there,” Whizzer replied, his tone easy and light, and Marvin could tell he was smirking again. “Plus my mom always tells me if she'll be home or not, so we can plan accordingly.”

“What, so we can get high?” he glanced at him quickly before turning back to the TV. Whizzer took a minute to respond before agreeing with Marvin's sentiment.

They watched the last part of the movie in silence, as the credits ended Marvin ejected the DVD from the player, tucking it back into its case.

“You’re pretty old school, huh, Marv?” he felt Whizzer’s eyes on him as he put the case back into its spot on the shelf.

“Oh yeah, I guess...” He felt his face flush slightly at the statement, slightly embarrassed.

“Oh, I meant that as a compliment, by the way. It's cool, like retro. I mean, you got a DVD player and big clunky headphones. It's cool, it's kinda cute.” Marvin turned to face Whizzer, his face flushing more from the compliment.

“You gotta stop saying things like that, Jesus.” He ran his hand through his hair, trying to hide his blush.

“Hey, I said I'd stop it with the dating attempts, not the flirting, you never said I had to stop flirting.” The sass that filled his tone was not lost on Marvin as he spoke, the smirk still plastered on his face.

“At least don’t do it while Miranda’s home. She's gonna get on my case about it and start asking a bunch of questions.” Marvin let out an exasperated sigh as he spoke, leaning slightly against the TV stand.

Before either could continue the conversation, Miranda called them both down for dinner. Marvin stood straight at the sound of her voice before composing himself and turning to face Whizzer as he stood up from the bed. He gave Whizzer a smirk of his own.

“Hope you’re ready for your last meal, Whizzer Brown, because this might kill you.” he laughed at the look on the other boy's face as he walked out of the room, hearing Whizzer sputter something as he followed.

~***~

Dinner, unsurprisingly, ended up being another one of Miranda's weird health recipes, a vegan lasagna that tasted like spinach. She asked Whizzer several questions about himself throughout the meal. He tuned out most of the conversation as Miranda interrogated the taller boy. She somehow managed to spin a lot of the things Whizzer told her into a thinly veiled insult towards Marvin. He could sense Whizzers discomfort with each remark, but he didn't say anything and Marvin knew better than to talk back. After dinner ended, the two stood in the hall as Whizzer pulled his shoes on, not bothering to undo the laces.

"Oh, uh, tomorrow we're starting a new campaign for our dnd group if you are interested in joining." he wasn't sure what possessed him to make him ask, but for some reason he did.

"Oh, are you guys like, down a player?" Marvin laughed a bit at that, feeling his face flush in embarrassment.

"Uh no, not really," He picked at his fingers as he spoke, struggling with the words. "But since it's a new campaign, Mendel was seeing if anyone knew was interested in joining." It wasn't exactly a lie, Mendel was always looking for new people to join the group, he just never told Marvin he could invite someone new. He probably won't care.

"I've never played D&D before, I'm not sure how good I'll be at it, but sure! It sounds like fun." Whizzer replied with a smile as he slung his bag over his shoulder.

"Cool, uh, just swing by again tomorrow around at, like, 3, so we have time to make a character for you. The rest of us made our characters last week. Trina's in the group as well, so it's not just people only I know." the words spilled out of his mouth as he explained, feeling his face flush some more.

“Sounds like a plan. See you tomorrow in that case, Marv.” Whizzer smiled at him before leaving. Marvin looked out the window as he walked to his car. Once he saw him drive off, he leaned against the door, took out his phone, and opened Mendel's chat.

MG: *Hey I invited Whizzer to join the campaign tomorrow*

MW: ???

MW: *ok iq, damn*

MW: *lemme know sooner than the day before next time*

MG: *no*

~***~

Chapter 7: Critical Feelings

For some reason, Marvin was antsy waiting for Whizzer to come over on Saturday. He wasn't sure why, he was literally over at his house the day before. But as he sat in his room with Trina playing Mario Kart, his nerves went haywire. Because of this, Trina was unfortunately winning. They were on the last race of the track when he faintly heard someone approach his room, he didn't recognize the pattern of the footsteps, so he assumed it was Whizzer. Sure enough, when his door swung open he heard Whizzer announce himself to the pair.

Hello!” his voice filled the room and Trina turned to face him to return the greeting, allowing Marvin to overtake her in the game and win.

“Yes! Ha!” he punched the air in victory as Trina turned, glaring at Marvin in turn.

“Hey! No fair that's cheating! You should have paused it!” She shoved him lightly, causing Marvin to roll his eyes.

‘No way, and it's so not cheating. You looked away from the screen first; you should have paused it first.’ The two bickered a little bit more before they heard Whizzer start laughing at them.

“With how often you two argue, you two act so much like siblings, it's weird to think you two dated.” As he spoke, he crossed the room and plopped down in his desk chair, far too comfortable despite this only being the second time in Marvin's room. At the mention of their past relationship, the pair moved slightly away, sharing a strange look.

“Also I didn’t realize Trina was gonna be here as well, like you mentioned she was a part of your group, but not that she’d, like, be at your house.” Whizzer gave Marvin a strange look, glancing between him and Trina.

“Oh, I didn’t?” he put the joy cons back on his TV stand as he spoke, glazing behind him to see the strange look on his face. “I thought I did, sorry.”

“It's fine, if I knew Trina was gonna be here too I probably would have grabbed her something as well.” He pulled something from his bag and tossed it towards Marvin without much warning. Instead of catching it, Marvin held his hands up to cover his face, feeling the bag thump against his side and fall to the ground. He heard Trina sputter out a laugh as he lowered his arms, feeling his face flush.

“Word of advice, Whizzer, don’t throw stuff at Marv.” Trina waved her hand as she spoke, giggling slightly. “He’s shit at catching and he freaks if you don’t give him a heads up about it.”

“Hey! Don’t tell him that, jeez.” He picked the bag up, seeing it was a bag of candy messenger hearts. “Can you not make me sound lamer than I already am.” Whizzer snickered slightly, smirking at Marvin as he sat back down on the bed.

“Anyway, thanks for the candy, Whiz.” Before Whizzer could say anything else, Marvin continued. “Didn’t I tell you to stop buying me shit?”

“You did. Did I listen? Nope, and I’m gonna keep buying you stuff and you can’t stop me.” the smug look that rested on Whizzer’s face made the buzz in his stomach return with a newfound intensity. Marvin stared at the other boy for a moment before catching sight of the look Trina gave the two.

Anyway!” He gave a quick wave of his hand as he spoke, “We should probably get started on making Whizzer’s character, otherwise Mendel’s gonna try to lecture us about procrastinating, even if he waits til the night before to do practically anything.”

“What is Mendel like by the way? You’ve both mentioned him a couple of times but I don’t really know what he’s like.” Whizzer spun back and forth in the chair as he spoke, looking between the two.

“Oh well, I’d say Mendels-”

“He’s a hippy.” Marvin interrupted Trina before she could finish her sentence.

“Stop calling him that!” Trina smacked his arm, glaring at him before she continued. “Anyway, Mendel’s really sweet, he can be a bit of a dork sometimes but it’s really endearing, and he’s really emotionally mature and he always knows the right thing to say.” Trina’s face flushed as she spoke, holding her face. Marvin rolled his eyes as he listened to her gush about him.

“Ok, first off, most of the advice Mendel gives people is to get high, second of all you’re dating him and see him from rose-colored glasses.” Trina scuffed at his words but didn’t interrupt him. “I’ve known Del since middle school and the best way to describe him is as a dork and as a hippy. His entire family is pretty liberal so the majority of the time you talk to him, he’s

probably high. His whole house smells like weed.” He gestured at the bookshelf covered with his Star Wars collection.

“The amount of nerd shit he has puts my collection to shame, he’s a giant nerd, a fucking hippy, and he makes me question your taste in men severely.” Marvin shifted to sit cross-legged on his bed, staring at both of his friends. “I can say all these things because unfortunately, he is my best friend.” Whizzer laughed at his words and Marvin couldn’t help but soak in the sound.

“We should probably get started on the character creation, we gotta explain to him how to play the game as well.” Marvin walked over to his desk and pulled out the notebook designated for DnD, leaning over Whizzer slightly to do so, “You’re going to need to pick a character class, a race, and you’ll need to write a small background for them.” He handed a blank character sheet to the other boy before opening one of the desk draws and took out one of the many dice sets he had. It was one of his older resin dice sets he hadn’t used in a while, it was colored blue and green with white numbers inked on. Whizzer held one of the die up to the light to examine it.

“They kinda look like the gay flag,” Whizzer smirked as he spoke looking at the rest of the dice.

“I thought the gay flag was a rainbow?” Trina asked as she took her own character sheet and dice.

“You’re thinking of the pride flag, that one is a rainbow. The one I’m talking about is the flag just for gay guys, the blue and green one. It’s also called the toothpaste flag because of the colors.” as he spoke, he pulled up a photo of the flag. “Ironically how you had something with the gay colors before you even realized you were gay. Where’d you get ‘em?”

“Uh.. I’m pretty sure my ex-girlfriend gave them to me.” He laid out his character sheet and notes as he spoke, sitting down on the floor.

“Why not just say Trina gave you them?” Whizzer raised an eyebrow as he spoke, causing Trina to give him a look.

“I didn’t give him them.” Trina sounded slightly offended.

“Trina’s not my only ex-girlfriend Whiz, I dated someone else before her.” he gave Whizzer a half smile, tilting his head slightly.

“Really? Who?”

“A girl from one of my past moves, in my freshmen year I stayed at the same school for an entire year, and during that time I started dating a girl named Johanna. She was nice, a real sweetheart, but we split up when I moved.” he finished setting up his area on the floor as he spoke. “We still talk every now and again, and she actually came out as lesbian last year, and when I told her I was gay she said and I quote ‘Bout time you figured it out’ and now she keeps sending me gay memes.”

“She sounds hilarious.” Whizzer laughed as he moved to join Marvin on the floor.

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Marvin and Trina helped walk Whizzer through the character setup and all the different classes and races. Marvin was hoping it wouldn’t take the full hour, but with the number of questions Whizzer asked, the character creation took longer than he wanted it to. How often he was getting frustrated by the questions wasn’t helping either, several times Trina had to chime in to explain. Between the two of them, they managed to explain to Whizzer the important things he needed for the session. By the time four rolled around, Whizzer ended up with an elf druid and a somewhat sensible backstory. All three were sitting on the floor, with Marvin's computer positioned away from them.

It chimed with a notification from Mendel and he leaned forward to accept the invite, bringing the rest of the dnd group into view. They all chimed with their hellos and greetings. Before Marvin could say anything, Abigail interrupted him.

“Holy shit is that Whizzer??” she leaned forward, completely blocking the others from view.

“Yes Abigail, this is Whizzer, please back up from the computer, we can see your pores.” Marvin rolled his eyes as he spoke, feeling his face flush.

“No, you can’t because A, I actually have a skincare routine unlike you, and B, Mendel's computer is shit,” Abigail said with a dramatic sigh as she sat back down. “Besides I'm just surprised someone like him asked you twice, then again Trina dated you so.”

“We’ve already concluded that Trina has terrible taste in men.” Caleb chimed in as Levi nodded.

“Hey!” Both Trina and Mendel spoke at the same time, the latter reaching out to smack Caleb.

“Trust me I’m just as surprised as you guys are, he won’t leave me alone.” Marvin chuckled gesturing at Whizzer as he did so.

“Nope, and I don’t plan on leaving him alone anytime soon.” Whizzer gestured back at him, his signature smirk on his face. He ignored the look Hannah and Trina shared over the screen.

“This obvious flirting aside, what all do you know about DnD Whizzer?” Mendel asked, ignoring the offended huffs Marvin made. Whizzer chuckled lightly before explaining what Trina and Marvin told him, holding up the character sheet.

“Alright looks like they got you filled in on the basics, that's good, the rest will be a trial-by-fire type learning experience. You got dice?” Mendel waited for the taller boy to show him the dice Marvin gave him, “Alright, we should be good when we start, but before that how is everyone?”

They spent the rest of the hour catching up, though most of it was Mendel gushing about how much he missed Trina.

“Oh my god, Del if you don’t shut up I swear to god. I will go to your house and smother you in your sleep, please. You are going to give everyone cavities.” the rest of the group laughed while Mendel sputtered for an answer.

~***~

The session went decently since it was the first session, they didn't do much. They all had their character meet up and head off to the adventure guild. The others did some character interactions to set up how they all knew each other, Marvin was mostly just taking notes on how everyone interacted before Whizzer declared that their characters were traveling partners, forcing him to join in with the roleplay. He chose to ignore the looks the rest of the group shared and went along with the story Whizzer gave their characters.

About halfway through the session, Marvin went downstairs to grab a drink, not without getting heckled by the rest of the group for not getting one beforehand. He ran into Miranda in the kitchen and the pair didn't exchange any words. He stood at the edge of the kitchen as she handed him a cola, despite her tendency to be a health nut, she never made a fuss about his soda preferences. She was cooking something, he wasn’t sure what it was, but by the smell he could tell it wasn’t one of her usual healthy recipes. He was about to ask her what she was making when he felt his phone buzz.

WB: *come back*

WB: *they're threatening me*

WB: *help :(*

He stared at the messages for a moment before heading back upstairs and entering his room.

“Why did I just get a distress text from Whizzer? What are you all saying to him.” he retook his spot on the floor next to the other boy. “I leave for a minute and this is what you guys do.”

“We weren’t saying anything bad, per se.” Levi started to say before Whizzer interrupted.

“They said if I’m mean to you, Trina’s gonna give them my address.”

“Trina!” He turned to look at her, his tone accusatory. She let out an offended gasp.

“I never said I’d give them his address! I don’t even know his address!” Trina shoved him slightly as she spoke. The rest of the campaign went smoothly and ended with the party joining the local adventuring guild.

The three said their goodbyes to the others as Marvin ended the discord call. They chatted about nothing specific before they walked downstairs, drawn to the smell of food coming from the kitchen.

“Ah, hello you three, how’d the DnD session go?” Miranda appeared from the kitchen, startling Marvin slightly. He stood awkwardly as Trina and Whizzer had a polite conversation with her. He was waiting for the opportunity to cut into the conversation so the other two were able to make their leave. But before he got the chance, they heard the door swing open. The sound caused both Marvin and Miranda to freeze as they heard Marvin's father enter.

“Honey, I’m Home!” his mood seemed high, a stark contrast to his usual angry demeanor. He shared a look with his stepmother as she hurried over to him, taking his coat off as he pulled her into a quick kiss.

“Welcome home dear, how was the trip?” she hung his coat up on the rack, revealing two gift bags his father was carrying. Marvin spared a quick towards Whizzer and Trina, the latter holding a concerned look on her face, while the other boy just looked confused.

“It went wonderful, and on my trip back I picked up a little something for you and Marvin.” at the mention of his name he quickly walked over to his father, fidgeting with his hands as he did so. “This one is for you sweetheart, and this one is for you kiddo.” he handed over the bags to both of them. Miranda opened up the bag first, revealing a long silk red dress, paired with a matching silver necklace and earrings.

“Oh, Abe, these are beautiful, thank you, dear.” Miranda gave him a quick kiss on the cheek, “Let me go hang this up in a dress bag so they stay all neat, one moment.” she quickly disappeared into the master bedroom as his father's eyes fell on to him.

“Well what are you waiting for sport, go on and open it.” Marvin reached into the bag and pulled out the contents.

“Holy Shit!” He stared at the boxes, they were limited edition Star Wars dark falcon Lego sets. “These are like 200 dollars, you got me two of them??” He looked between the boxes and his father, excitement filling his voice.

“Language kid, and yes, I got you one to display and one to keep mint in the box. Besides, your mother's dress and jewelry cost around 400 dollars so it evens it all out.” His father clapped his hands together as he spoke, the sound startling Marvin, causing him to almost drop the boxes. His father turned to face his friends and he saw Trina tense up slightly.

“Ah Trina, nice to see you again, I heard your father got a promotion, I suppose that's why you're in town?” she nodded quickly, not giving a verbal response. “And who might this be, a new friend of yours, Marvin?” He turned his gaze to Whizzer before looking at Marvin.

“Uh yeah, this is Whizzer Brown, he goes to WestPoint, he's on the student body.” Whizzer quickly shook his father's hand.

“It's nice to meet you, sir.” his face switched from the look of confusion to his normal confident demeanor.

“Great to meet you as well kiddo, glad to know my sons making friends with the right people, much better than that bum Mendel.” all three tensed up at the comment, Marvin and Trina sharing a look before she spoke up.

“It was nice to see you again Mr. Gardens, but I gotta be getting home for dinner.” she gave Marvin a quick hug before hurriedly making her exit, and Marvin wished he could do the same.

“Well, what about you Whizzer? You plan to stay for dinner?” once again ignoring the look Marvin gave him, Whizzer agreed to stay for dinner.

~***~

To say dinner was awkward is an understatement. His father spent most of the dinner grilling Whizzer about his school activities and how he and Marvin met. The entire time Marvin was waiting for the dinner to end. He felt bad for subjecting his friends to his father, especially with how much his father twisted Whizzer's academic achievements into a dig against himself. A not-so-subtle reminder that no matter what he does, it'll never be good enough for his father. When dinner ended he was quick to see Whizzer to the door and say goodbye, not extending the

parting like he did yesterday. Once he was gone, Marvin hurried to his room, locking himself inside.

He sat on his bed while a random slasher movie played. He wasn't really paying attention to it, it just served as background noise. He tossed his phone somewhere on his bed when he first entered his room, so the sudden buzz under him as he lay down surprised him. When he found his phone, he saw Whizzer messaging him.

WB: *dude I got hella bad vibes from your dad*

WB: *you good?*

MG: *yeah I'm fine*

MG: *hes just in a weird mood sometimes*

WB: *alrighty, stay safe Marv*

MG: *lol, I'll try Whiz*

Whizzers concern made his heart feel like it was gonna beat out of his chest. He felt a bit silly for getting flustered over such a simple text. It's not like it's the first time one of his friends was worried about him after meeting his dad, but the fact that Whizzer was the one to check in on him made his face flush as he stared at the messages.

~***~

Sunday paused in a blur. He barely remembered what happened as he sat in the emergency room with Miranda, holding his wrist. The most he could remember was his father yelling at him and calling him unappreciative. The doctor was asking her what happened as she struggled to find an answer. He spoke up for her and explained to the doctor he just fell and landed on his wrist as he tried to do a kickflip. He didn't break anything, but he did need to wear a brace for a week or so. The car ride back home was quiet, neither of them saying anything as

the radio filled the vehicle. He flipped through the stations for a minute before he landed on a pop station and the song he listened to in Whizzers car began playing. He stared at the radio for a moment before letting it play and leaned back in his seat.

~***~

On Monday, he turned down both Charolette's and Trina's offers for a ride to school and opted for walking instead. The late March air warmed his skin as he walked, ruffling his hair as it went. He was almost late, and the majority of the hallways were empty by the time he made it to his locker, he took what he needed, and went to his first class. He made it to class just before the final bell. Marvin thought he covered his brace well enough, but apparently, the teacher caught sight of it.

"Oh, Marvin, what happened to your arm?" her words brought the entire classes attention onto him, including Whizzers.

"Oh uh, it's pretty stupid really, I was trying to do a kickflip on my skateboard for the first time, and totally wiped out." He laughed awkwardly as he sat down, feeling Whizzers eyes bear into him.

"Alright, well if you need anything feel free to ask." The teacher moved on and began the lesson for the day. Marvin glanced to the side and saw Whizzer staring at him, with concern written all over his face. He quickly avoided his gaze and stared at the board, after a moment of feeling Whizzer stare at him, he felt him finally turn away from him. After another minute or so, Whizzer passed him a note. He unfolded the note, careful to block it from the teacher's view.

Hey, is your arm ok?

Yeah, I'm good, gotta wear the brace for a week tho.

He scribbled out an answer before passing back, giving him a small smile, one that Whizzer returned after reading the note.

After class he stood at his locker, switching out his books for his next class before he was swarmed by both Trina and Whizzer, with Charlotte and Cordelia trailing behind. Whizzer was offering to carry his books for the week before Trina spoke up.

“Marvin... did you actually fall off your skateboard?” the question made Marvin's stomach twist.

“Trina...”

“I’m just saying Marvin, if something else happened you can tell us-” She tried to put her hand on Marvin's shoulder, but he shrugged it off.

“How about you just mind your own business Trina.” he glared at her, the hurt expression on her face as she gripped the hem of her blazer made his stomach twist. “Sorry... I just... I fell, that's all that happened, can we please just drop it.” He stared at his friends for a moment before closing his locker. He walked to his next class with Charlotte and did his best to ignore the look of concern and worry the four of them gave him the rest of the day.

~***~

Chapter 8: Blowing Smoke

About two weeks have passed since the start of their new campaign. They’ve only had three sessions so far, so not much has happened yet, just setting up character relations and meeting the characters from the adventuring guild. He was able to stop wearing the brace a week ago and go back to his normal. He still wasn’t used to Whizzer being so open about his feelings, but he was somewhat returning some of his flirting. The flirting wasn’t the only change in their odd dynamic, the two also found themselves arguing over small things almost daily. Most of the

fight were lighthearted, but a couple of the fights left the two bitter and annoyed the rest of the day.

The first time he flirted back with Whizzer was in the middle of the passing period last Tuesday, he had no idea what possessed him to do so, but before he could stop himself, the compliment slipped out. Whizzer commented on his hair looking nice that day and even though both Charlotte and Cordelia were present, he responded without really thinking.

“Well, I guess everything looks good, as seen through such pretty eyes as yours.” Where did Marvin’s sudden confidence come from? He had no idea, but just as quickly as it came, it left. He quickly felt his face flush as he realized what he said. Whizzer’s face turned a similar shade and he took a moment to recover from the remark. Cordelia whispered something to Charlotte before Whizzer let out a small laugh.

“Aw, thank you, Marv, you flatter me.” he smacked his shoulder lightly as he spoke, closing his locker with his other hand. Marvin sputtered out a barely coherent answer before the warning bell rang, and the four made their way to their next class. The awkward back and forth continued on to the present day. Marvin stood in front of his locker, putting his books away for the day. He wasn’t paying attention to what Whizzer was doing since his headphones were on, and his music was loud. He could see him move around slightly out of the corner of his eye, but he didn’t think much of it. Suddenly, he felt someone grab his headphones, pull one of the speakers away from his ear, and blow air into his ear. He flinched away as fast as he could, feeling his face flush as he did so. His headphones fell awkwardly around his neck as he glared at Whizzer, who was holding his stomach laughing.

“Sorry! Sorry!” His laughter interrupted his apologies, “I was trying to get your attention and it didn’t work.” Marvin glared at him as he spoke, adjusting his headphones as he did so.

“So you blow in my ear???”

“I mean it worked didn’t it?” Whizzer chuckled a little more before stopping. “Anyway, I was trying to ask you a question, Marv.” he rolled his eyes at Whizzer, waiting for him to continue.

“Do you wanna come over to my house? My mom works today so...” His words trailed off as he waited for his answer. Marvin stared at him for a minute before huffing at him.

“Yeah, sure, why not? I’ve got nothing else to do today.” He smirked to himself as he walked toward the parking lot, Whizzer huffing as he hurried to follow him.

“What do you do most days anyway? Sit in your room playing chess by yourself?” his tone was sarcastic and somewhat mocking, causing Marvin to scoff at him.

“No, not all the time,” He paused for Whizzer to chuckle at him before continuing. “I go to 7-11, get a slushie, go home, and get high, and I then play chess.” he paired his words with a wave of his hand as the other boy let out a loud laugh, the sound washing over Marvin.

“Well in that case,” He said the words with dramatics as he got in his car, turning to face Marvin, “then I guess we gotta go and get some slushies then.”

“Well if you insist.” Marvin let out a small laugh as Whizzer started the car. The drive passed in a comfortable silence, the only sound between them was the radio and Whizzer quietly humming along to the songs. As they pulled into the 7-11, Whizzer turned to face him.

“Hey quick question, you mentioned a few weeks ago that you cope with all the moves by drinking slushies and getting high, is that for any specific reason or...?” the question trailed off once again as they entered the store and walked towards the slushie machines.

“Uh, kinda I guess...” he paused as he thought out the answer and grabbed one of the slushie cups. “I don’t have a lot of consistency in my life with how much I move around, so I

find it in other ways I guess, like arranging my room the same way, and constantly going to places like this.”

“In every state and town I've lived in, 7-11 is the same in every single one of them, so I come here. It's easy to pretend I'm back in New York and not being dragged across the country.” They wandered the aisles, as he explained, gathering candies and snacks as they did so. “Back in New York, my mom lived pretty close to one, so whenever I was at her house I would take my little brother and get him a slushie, he hated doing his homework so I would use it as a way to bribe him.” he chuckled slightly as recalled the fact.

“So you got some good memories in this place? Or well I mean, 7-11 in general.” He waved his hand as he spoke, “So, is that why you constantly drink the slushies?”

“Not exactly... uh more because a brain freeze is the best way to stop thinking about a move, and paired with a high... you kinda stop thinking about everything.” he felt a little stupid for explaining that to Whizzer, but he didn't comment on it or make any rude remarks. Their conversation ended as they paid for their snacks and drinks. They walked back out to Whizzers car in comfortable silence. It was only when they were both back in the car that Whizzer spoke up.

“As long as you brush your teeth regularly I don't see anything wrong with your coping methods.” His voice was soft as he spoke, reassuring Marvin and washing away any regret he had about telling Whizzer.

~***~

They spent the rest of the ride in comfortable silence, aside from the two arguing about the music selection. When they reached Whizzer's house, it was a simple two-story blue home with the works. White picket fence, wind chimes hanging from the porch, driveway lined with

flowers, and even windmills stuck in flower boxes on the windows. Marvin felt somewhat jealous as he stared at the house, something about how homely it seemed made his house feel lacking in some way.

It's not your house.

You're just staying there for the time being.

You don't have a home.

“Hey Marv, are are gonna come inside or are you just gonna stand there planning to rob me or?” Whizzer’s voice cut through his thoughts, cutting off the wicked voice in his head, staring at him from the front steps of the house.

“Uh yeah sorry, got lost in thought, and before you ask, no I was not planning to rob you, tall ass.” Marvin smacked his arm as he walked up to him, glaring at him.

“Take your shoes off by the way, we don’t wear shoes inside,” Whizzer said as they walked inside, taking his own shoes off. Marvin rolled his eyes before doing as Whizzer told.

The first thing Marvin noticed about the interior of Whizzer’s house was the plants. There were about a dozen or so plants all across the living room and dining room, they were all planted in multicolored pots. He stared at a Venus flytrap on a side table behind their couch for a moment before following Whizzer up to his room.

Whizzer’s room was covered wall to wall in something. It was cluttered but in a very clean way. His walls were lined with movie and sports posters, as well as printouts from musicals, some he recognized like Wicked and Something Rotten, and some he didn’t like Starlight Express and Ride the Cyclone. He had LED lights along the top of his walls, casting a slight blue glow onto the room. His window was lined with plants and flowers, one vase holding a singular rose. He recognized it as the rose he gave Whizzer weeks ago, it was slightly wilted

and he was surprised it was still alive. The one Whizzer gave him was practically dead so he saved it in a book.

He had a built-in TV stand with bookshelves attached to it. There was a chaotic mixture of books and knickknacks littered among the shelves, the top shelf seemed to be reserved for Lego builds Whizzer had, alongside baseball memorabilia. His floor was hardwood, but he had a giant rug laid out. It had several wavy lines in various shades of blue and green against a white background.

“Is your rug the gay flag?” As he asked the question, Whizzer let out a loud laugh before nodding.

“Yep! Got both the pride flag and the MLM flag, in flag form.” He waved his hand up in the direction of his ceiling, where both flags were pinned.

“The MLM flag? Like multi-level marking?” the two stared at each other for a minute before Whizzer started laughing. Marvin sputtered as he tried to get him to shut up.

“Multii-level what?! Marv, no! MLM is men loving men, it's the more specific term for gay men.” His response was interlaced with laughter as he spoke, causing Marvin to glare at him and throw one of the many pillows on his bed at him. Despite how chaotic his room seemed, his bed seemed to be the only coherent thing. They were a solid blue color with matching blue and silver silk pillowcases.

“Dude, do you seriously have silk bedsheets?” He scoffed slightly as he sat down on the edge of Whizzer’s bed.

“Yes, thank you very much. It's good for my skin.” Whizzer put the pillow back in its place as he sat down against them.

“Oh well forgive me, Your Royal Highness.” Marvin rolled his eyes at Whizzer before reaching down and picking his bag up. He dug around in one of the pockets before taking out a small silver case.

“So anyway, you wanna smoke?” he shook the case as he spoke, the contents rattling about inside. Whizzer stared at him for a moment before speaking.

“Oh right, yeah, uh yeah sure sorry, I almost totally forgot about that.” he let out an awkward laugh as Marvin gave him a strange look.

“Alrighty then, uh, you can pick something to watch, and I'll roll the blunts.” Marvin sat cross-legged as he opened the case, revealing a bag of weed and a couple sheets of rolling paper. “Don’t put anything weird on though, I don’t wanna freak out today”

He rolled out two small blunts for the both of them while Whizzer switched on a random Disney channel show. He was acutely aware of the other's eyes on him as he did the actions of rolling the blunts. Marvin sat the finished blunts in the case as he fished around in his bag for a lighter, grumbling as he came up empty. He turned to Whizzer as he placed one of the joints between his lips, handing the other to him.

“You got a light golden boy?” the stunned look on the taller boy's face made his stomach do a summersault as he watched him fumble in his pockets for a rainbow-printed lighter. He held it up carefully to the joint and watched intently as Marvin breathed in, causing the joint to spark to life. He didn’t take his eyes off him as he released the smoke from his lips, allowing the smoke to fill the room.

“You gonna smoke that or just hold it?” his tone was teasing as he spoke, raising a brow at him. Whizzer stared at him a moment longer before lighting his own joint and breathing in the

smoke. Instead of exhaling the smoke, Marvin watched as he held his breath before coughing and sputtering. He couldn't help but laugh at him.

“What the hell? Whiz, why did you hold your breath? I thought you said you smoked before??” Marvin stared at him bewildered.

“Well, I haven't! I've only smoked cigarettes! I thought I was supposed to hold it in??” He coughed as he spoke, glaring at Marvin as he laughed at him.

“Jesus no Whiz, you smoke weed the same way you smoke cigarettes, and if you haven't gotten high before why would you lie and say you did?”

“I dunno! I just... wanted you to think I was cool, I guess...” he mumbled his words as his sentence trailed off. Marvin chuckled softly as he took another hit of the joint.

“Trust me, golden boy, you don't have to try and act cool. I already think you're cool.” the two stared at each other for a moment before Whizzer took the second hit of his blunt, exhaling the smoke instead of holding it in this time. As the smoke pooled around his head and drifted toward the window, Marvin couldn't help but think he looked ethereal, the slight made his face flush slightly.

Before Whizzer could catch him looking, he turned his attention back to his own joint, taking another hit as he moved back till he was sitting flush against the wall. They sat in silence as the two of them finished the blunts. Whizzer turned out to be pretty chatty while high and started ranting about a Marvel series hes been watching. He paid half attention as he spoke, staring more at his lips than his eyes as he spoke.

~***~

Hanging out at Whizzers house seemed to spark some kind of catalyst because the pair were suddenly hanging out almost every day after school and during the weekends, aside from

the days Whizzer had baseball practice. Even then Marvin found himself loitering around the baseball field waiting for him to finish practice. This strange new normal continued for about a week before Marvin found himself waiting near the track for Trina to give him a ride home when he saw Whizzer running toward him, while Cordelia and Charlotte were standing near his car. As the taller boy came up to him, he paused his music and set his headphones around his neck.

“Marv! Glad I caught you, I couldn’t find you in the halls, so I thought you left.” He took a moment to catch his breath before continuing, taking out the sucker that sat in his mouth. “You got any plans for today?”

“Uh no not really, I was probably just gonna-” Before he could finish his sentence Whizzer interrupted him.

“Great, do you wanna come with me and the girls and get some frozen yogurt? A Pinkberry opened up on Main Street and I’ve been dying to try it.” he exaggerated his words with his hands as he spoke, setting one of his hands on Marvin’s shoulder as he finished his question, and popping the sucker back into his mouth.

“Oh uh, I was actually waiting for Trina, she was gonna give me a ride home.” He awkwardly pointed back to the track as the team ran their last few laps of the day.

“Oh come on Marv, you hung out with Trina all last weekend, let’s go get some fro-yo.” He rolled his eyes at Whizzers answer, lightly knocking his hand off of where it still sat on his shoulder.

“Yeah cause you had baseball practice all weekend.” He couldn’t help but smirk at the way Whizzer huffed and glared at him.

“Not all week, asshole. I had baseball practice on Saturday and I had karate on Sunday. Plus you hung out with her yesterday, c’mon Marv, come to Pinkberry with us.” he took a step

closer, thoroughly invading Marvin's space. Whizzer turned his head down to look him in the eyes, and the sudden awareness he had of their height difference made Marvin's face burn slightly. He looked away, breaking eye contact and taking a step to the side, putting some space between the two. He let out an awkward laugh as Whizzer gave him a strange look.

“You can always hang out with Trina on another day, they doing a special for the opening day so we gotta go, and you gotta come with us.” Whizzer did not seem to be budging on the topic at all, so with a sigh, Marvin gave one last look toward the track field before sending a quick text to Trina that she didn’t need to drive him home.

“Alright, Alright sure I’ll go to Pinkberry with you and the girls, as long as you don’t get something boring like vanilla this time.” He bumped past Whizzer as he headed toward Cordelia and Charlotte. He heard Whizzer huff from behind him and he was suddenly yanked back slightly as he rushed in front of him, turning back and smirking at him as he beat Marvin to his car.

“HA! Beat ya, Marv.” He held his hands on his hips, a lot of triumph on his face as Marvin approached them.

“Since when were we racing?” he glared at the other boy as he climbed into the passenger seat while Cordelia and Charlotte took the two seats in the back. Whizzer met his glare with his signature smug smirk as he climbed into the driver's seat.

“Well, of course, can’t have you getting one over me after all.” he pointed at his chest as he spoke, smugness thick in his voice. Marvin simply rolled his eyes in response and the girls laughed in the back before Charlotte spoke up.

“Can you boys stop flirting and drive so we can get some damn fro-yo already.” Whizzer and Marvin both huffed at her as Whizzer put the car into drive and pulled out of the parking lot.

As they headed down the street Marvin felt his phone buzz in his pocket and he took it out to see the notification from Trina.

TS: *Wow ditching me for your boyfriend again?*

TS: *I can't say I'm surprised*

MG: *hes not my boyfriend.*

~***~

As the group pulled into the Pinkberry parking lot, Marvin groaned internally at the sight of all the other cars that lined the building that seemed to be bursting with people. He felt his stomach twist and squeeze, and he was reminded of why he avoided popular places like this. He grimaced at the loud volume of the store as they entered, pressing closer to Whizzer as they got in line. Whizzer gave him a surprised look at first before seeing the discomfort that covered his face and with little hesitation, reached out and grabbed Marvin's hand, giving it a slight squeeze. He was caught off guard by the action but didn't pull his hand away, instead squeezing Whizzer's hand back.

As they waited in line, Marvin pulled his headphones over his ears to drown out the chaotic noise that filled the busy store. He didn't even realize when they made it to the front of the line or when the others ordered and he was suddenly being led away from the register. He moved one of the speakers away from his ear as he looked at Whizzer. Before he could say anything, Whizzer seemed to read his mind.

"Oh, I figured the noise was overwhelming you so I ordered for you, and Charlotte offered to pay for everyone." he gave Marvin a small smile as he spoke, squeezing his hand again.

“What flavor did you get me?” he felt bad that Whizzer had to order for him in his weird panicked state and that Charlotte paid for his food when he could definitely afford it, but at that moment he was more concerned with what Whizzer had got him.

“I got you a coffee flavor, don’t worry, I know you don’t like sweet stuff.” He smiled at him again and spoke in that stupid soft tone that made Marvin melt slightly. The two were still holding hands, which he was acutely aware of. His stomach felt like it was on fire, and as he squeezed Whizzers hand he felt the fire spread through his entire body til he was left with a comfortable warm feeling, and he decided he enjoyed the sensation.

The moment was interrupted as a new group entered the shop, being overly loud, he recognized the group as the WestPoints cheerleading team. He groaned as their conversation echoed throughout the already loud space, pulled the speaker back over his ears, and let Whizzer pull him to an empty booth near the back.

After a few minutes, Charlotte and Cordelia returned to their table with their fro-yo. They handed the two boys their orders as they sat down. Marvin ate his yogurt in silence as the other three talked. He wasn't sure what they were talking about since his headphones muffled the noise, and it all blended into a comfortable background noise as he ate.

“Whizzer! I didn’t know you were gonna be here!” whoever was talking was loud enough to cut through the volume of the shop and his headphones. He turned to see one of the cheerleaders approach their table.

“Oh... Jade... Hey, how are you doing?” the annoyance that laced Whizzer’s tone wasn’t hard to miss as Marvin turned to look at the girl, Jade, and one quick glance at Charlotte and Cordelia showed they were also not thrilled by her sudden appearance.

“Oh, I'm doing great! So excited that a Pinkberry finally opened up around here, me and the other girls from cheer are thinking about making it our new spot ya know?” she talked at a mile a minute and no one at the table seemed to be really listening to her talk. After another minute or two of her talking about nothing Whizzer cut her off.

“It's nice to see you again and everything Jade, but uh, I'm hanging out with my friends already so...” He gestured to their little group as Charlotte and Cordelia chimed in with their agreements. Marvin still hasn't spoken up, unsure if he should, he was just waiting for this girl to leave. As he leaned forward in his seat to take another bite of his fro-yo, the girl seemed to finally notice him. For some reason, her attitude seemed to shift when she saw him sitting next to Whizzer. With the way they were sitting, he was sitting on the inside of the booth squished against the window, one of Whizzer's arms stretched out over the table while the other rested over the back of the booth behind Marvin.

Marvin finally turned to look at her, he meant to just glance at her but he guessed he glared at her instead because she stammered out an apology and retreated back to her group. The three deflated in their seats when she was out of earshot. Whizzer let out a loud groan, looking at Charlotte and Cordelia.

“God I can not stand that girl.” He pinched the bridge of his nose as he spoke, angrily taking a bite of his fro-yo as he spoke,

“Right? She is so annoying, I always try to avoid her during my volleyball games.” Charlotte mindlessly mixed her fro-yo as she explained the reason for her distaste, a grimace on her face.

“She’s always acting all buddy-buddy with the kids she thinks are popular, and she’s like so fake with it, a major pick me in my opinion,” Cordelia spoke around her spoon, glaring after the girl. “Dunno why she ran off when she saw Marvin though.”

“I’ve been told I have that effect on people.” He spoke with a grimace, the statement bringing back unpleasant memories. He leaned back in his seat, bumping against Whizzers arm.

“Oh, uh sorry-” he shifted in his seat slightly, feeling his face flush. The other boy made a humming noise and moved his arm to rest on the seat between them. With some slight hesitation, Marvin moved his hand down next to Whizzer and intertwined their hands. The girls seemed to ignore the boy's actions as Charlotte continued speaking.

“You do kinda have a weird reputation at school Marv,” She waited for all three of them to look at her before she continued. “On like the first week you started, you made friends with the arguably most popular kid in school, turned him down twice, and still hang out with him in this strange ‘will they won’t deal’ beat the shit out of another kid, awhile also have the rep of the kid with seizures.” He rolled his eyes at the last part, not super thrilled about it.

“You’re kinda unsettling sometimes Marv. Like you're gonna snap at any minute. It’s kinda scary.” she finished the rest of her fro-yo as she spoke, pointing at Marvin with her spoon as she did so. Whizzer and Cordelia both made a noise that implied they didn’t agree with her statement but Marvin spoke up before they could.

“Yeah I mean, at my last school someone started calling me a school shooter so, I'm not surprised about that.” he shrugged as he spoke, finishing his own fro-yo. “This flavor is kinda ass by the way.” he turned to face Whizzer, holding in a laugh at the offended huffs he made.

“If you didn’t like it, why did you eat the entire thing??” he shoved him lightly, glaring at him playfully.

“Because you ordered it for me thinking I’d like it, and Charlotte paid for it, I wasn’t gonna be an asshole and say I didn’t like it.” he paused for a moment as they stared at him, “I’m gonna eat it and then I’m gonna say I don’t like it.” His comment got some laughs from the other three as they stood up and tossed their yogurt cups. He pulled his headphones back over his ears and let Whizzer take his hand again and lead him through the crowded store and out to the parking lot.

Once they were in the car Whizzer turned to look at Marvin, a smile on his face, a sight that made his stomach burn with a new intensity. Something twisted in his chest as he returned his smile with an awkward one.

“So Marv, you wanna come hang out at my house? My mom works a night shift tonight so we’d have the place to ourselves.” he wasn’t sure why the question made the hair on the back of his neck stand up, he’s hung out alone with Whizzer at both his house and his own several times before, why was the idea of it today making him so unsettled. He stared at Whizzer for a moment before letting out a small laugh, attempting to regain his composure.

“No, not today Whiz, I gotta get caught up on some school work, I’ve been procrastinating it all week, and I was supposed to work on it with Trina today but you convinced me to procrastinate some more.” the taller boy huffed but relented and started the car, driving the three home before heading home himself.

Neither his father nor Miranda was home so he made himself something simple to eat for dinner before heading up to his room and began working on his schoolwork. As he did so, his mind drifted to Whizzer. He still wasn’t sure how exactly he felt about him, he enjoyed his company and spending time with him, with the rest of their friends, and alone. Every time he talks to him, he gets a warm feeling deep in his gut. He might be able to describe it as a crush,

but he wasn't sure. Hes never really had a crush on anyone before, both times hes been in a relationship, Trina and Johanna initiated it, and he went along with it. Marvin was pretty sure he wasn't supposed to just go along with a relationship. He didn't want to ruin what he had with Whizzer. He wanted it to last, but he wasn't sure how to make it last.

After he finished his schoolwork, he laid on his back on his bed staring up at the ceiling as he tried to make sense of all his thoughts and feelings around Whizzer. He barely knew how to be in a relationship with a girl, let alone be in one with a boy. Was one of them meant to be the girl in the relationship? He cringed at the thought of him being the girl, he wasn't a girl. He was a guy. The idea of being the girl in a relationship made his skin crawl and the idea of being out of control of anything made him want to pull his hair out.

If either of them were the girl, it would be Whizzer wouldn't it? He was the more feminine of the two, right? Was it right to think of Whizzer as a girl? He didn't want him to be a girl. He liked his long legs and toned arms, the way he smirked whenever he got what he wanted, and even though he'd never admit it, he enjoyed the way Whizzer would drag him down the hallways when they walked to class. He liked all the reminders that Whizzer was a guy, but he still considered him the feminine one between the two.

It might've had something to do with how confident Whizzer was with himself. He never seemed to care how people viewed him no matter what he did. He carried himself with so much confidence, it was kinda intimidating, but that was part of what Marvin liked so much about him.

He let out a loud groan as he tried to make sense of everything, the more he thought about it, the more confused he made himself. As he lay stewing in his thoughts, he heard his

phone buzz with a notification from where it sat on his nightstand. He sat up with another groan as he reached for his phone, seeing the notification was from the Falsettoland group chat.

TS: *does anyone wanna do ice skating with me on Saturday?*

TS: *my siblings made other plans and I dont wanna go by myself*

WB: *ooo sounds fun*

CN: *are we going to the one by the bowling alley?*

TS: *yeah*

CN: *me and Charlotte are down to go*

WB: *same here, I dont have practice this weekend.*

WB: *you coming, Marv?*

He stared at the message chain for a minute, not sure if he should answer. It was late enough that he could act like he was asleep, and because it was a group chat, they wouldn't be able to tell if he had seen the messages yet. Marvin let out a long breath as he ran a hand through his hair.

MG: *ya sure*

MG: *it's been a while since I've been skating.*

~***~

The rest of the week leading up to Saturday passed without much note. Marvin did his best to act normal around Whizzer, but in his process of trying to sort out his emotions involving him, being around him was suddenly a lot more stressful than before. He was acutely aware of everything Whizzer did while he was around him, and a lot of his attention when he was around was spent on trying not to make a fool of himself every time they chatted in the halls and class.

He spent his time after school locked in his room high as he attempted to make sense of his thoughts.

By the time Saturday rolled around, he found himself waiting at the ice rink with Trina. They actually got there at the meeting time and were waiting for the others to show up, as they were now almost 20 minutes late. Marvin was starting to get annoyed as he leaned against Trina's car as she checked her phone for the fifth time to try and see when the others would arrive.

“If they don’t get here within the next five minutes I say we just go in without them.” Marvin huffed as he looked over at Trina as she tucked her phone into her jacket pocket. She was wearing a white woolen jacket over a colorful striped shirt, along with a white skirt with black tights. He was pretty sure she had stolen the shirt from Mendel.

“I mean they probably just ran into traffic, I’m sure they’ll be here soon, Marv.” Trina glanced at the entrance to the parking lot before facing Marvin. He simply rolled his eyes as he crossed his arms.

After a minute or so, they saw Charlotte's car pull into the lot and park next to Trina’s car. Trina shot him a look before turning to the others as they climbed out, Cordelia was quick to apologize for being late, something about how she couldn’t find her shoes or whatever. Whizzer quickly walked over to where Marvin stood, meeting his glare with a smile.

“Hey, Marv.” He looked down at him slightly with his hands on his hips. He was dressed in what he assumed was Whizzer’s casual wear. He was wearing a light blue button-up with only the bottom two buttons buttoned on top of a white turtleneck tucked into a pair of light brown slacks. The colors suited his slightly tanned skin so well that Marvin almost forgot he was annoyed with him. Almost.

“You’re late.” he stuffed his hands into his pockets as he spoke, feeling somewhat underdressed in comparison to Whizzer. He was dressed in a black hoodie with a band displayed on the front, with a baggy jean jacket on top of it. He’d thrown on a random pair of jeans to go with them. He tugged at his collar as Whizzer smirked at him.

“Yeah well blame Cordelia, can’t get her anyway on time. Don’t get so sour, Marv.” he lightly shoved Marvin as he spoke, causing a slight grin to break out from his glare. “I saw that.” Whizzer gloated at Marvin as he quickly turned to follow the girls into the building. The girls were dressed in clothes much more suited for ice skating than Whizzer was. Cordelia was dressed in a light pink sweater with a baggy tee shirt on top of it, the tee shirt had a print of a Hello Kitty character on top of it. She paired it with a simple pair of grey jeans. Charlotte had an orange cardigan with flowers embroidered along the sleeves and bottom half of it. She wore it over what he assumed was a black turtleneck and a pair of overalls, also embroidered with flowers.

Whizzer seemed to be the only one from their group to choose fashion over function, as he was dressed for possibly anything but ice skating. As they entered the building, Marvin was sure he saw the other boy shiver, but he didn’t comment on it. They traded their shoes out for pairs of ice skates. The others simply took their skates and changed into them without any fuss, but as Marvin stared at his pair, he saw several stains across the leather of the shoe and he felt his skin crawl as he thought about wearing them. He turned back to the employee behind the counter, nervous as he did so.

“Uh, can I get a different pair than this one?” he sat the skates on the counter, careful not to touch any of the stains.

“Um, I guess? What's the matter with this pair?” the employee just stared at Marvin as he spoke, not taking the skates back.

“They’re filthy. I’m not wearing them, can I have a different pair?” He repeated his question, feeling his face flush from the nerves. He felt someone walk up next to him and took one glance to see it was Whizzer.

“They look fine to me.” the employee still hasn’t taken the skates back, and Marvin was probably making a bigger deal about this than he needed to, and he was aware of that, but the last thing he wanted to do was wear those skates. The employee was about to say something else before Whizzer spoke up.

“Dude, just give him a different pair. It’s not that big of a deal.” Whizzer placed his hand on the counter and leaned forward slightly, staring the kid down. They studded out an apology and replaced the stained pair with a fresh clean pair. Marvin took the clean pair and changed into them, giving Whizzer a quick smile as he did so.

They met up with the girls at the gate to the rink, and as a group, the five of them stepped onto the ice, each with various levels of success. Trina and Marvin were able to get on without falling, as they’d gone skating several times before at their last town. Cordelia and Charlotte stumbled slightly but held on to each other as they wobbled onto the ice. Whizzer, on the other hand, was latched onto the wall of the rink, trying to keep himself stable on the ice. Marvin turned on his skates and failed to hold in a laugh, only laughing more as Whizzer’s head snapped up to glare at him.

“Wow, I’m surprised, we actually managed to find something that golden boy’s bad at.” Whizzer tried to stand up properly and say something but any words he tried to say turned into startled welp as he slipped.

After about ten minutes of them all skating around, Marvin was enjoying himself as he glided around on the ice. It left him with a feeling of weightlessness as he moved about. Out of their group, he'd say he might be the best of them at skating. Cordelia and Charlotte still stumbled about on the ice, and while Trina was able to stand without falling, she still slipped and stumbled from time to time, and Whizzer-

"Ow! Fuck!" his thought was interrupted by the sound of Whizzer falling flat on his butt, slightly behind Marvin. He skated over to the taller boy as he sat on the ice grumbling, his cheeks, and nose tinted with a rosy glow from the cold.

"You ok there, Whiz?" He leaned down and offered him a hand to help him up.

"No." He huffed as he took his hand, letting Marvin pull him up. Once Whizzer was up, he leaned his weight against him so he wouldn't immediately fall again. "This was a terrible idea." He grumbled as he slung his arm over Marvin as the two made their way back over to the gate of the ice rink.

"Yeah well, you agreed to come so." Marvin chuckled slightly as he spoke, helping Whizzer off of the ice and over to a seating area. "But if it makes you feel any better I'll sit with you for a little while." Whizzer gave him a small smile at that and the pair sat there together for a while till Marvin noticed the other boy shivering.

"Not dressed for the weather huh?" As he spoke, Marvin shrugged off his jean jacket and handed it to Whizzer. The taller boy stared at him for a minute before taking the jacket and draping it over his shoulders.

"Thanks, Marv." he smiled at him as he spoke, and he felt something in his stomach flutter as he stared at Whizzer as he looked out at the other skaters. After a minute of Marvin just

staring at him, Whizzer turned and caught him staring. “What? Do I have something on my face-”

“Do you wanna go on a date?” Before Whizzer could finish his sentence, the words spilled out of his mouth, before he could really process what he said. Once he did realize what he said, he felt his face flush a deep red and Whizzer’s face quickly turned a shade to match.

“Wait really?...” Marvin cringed intentionally at the disbelief in his tone, but it was deserved after he turned Whizzer down twice already.

“Uh yeah, I mean, um I think I’ve worked out most issues I got going on with my shit so uh, I’d really like to go on a date with you.” he tripped over his words as he spoke, pulling at his hoodie collar. “It’s totally fair if you say no, I totally deserve it after turning you down twice.”

“No, no I do wanna go out with you! I really do, like super bad.” Whizzer put his hands on his shoulder, not giving Marvin a chance to look away. “I was just surprised, what, what did you have in mind?” he moved his hands from his shoulders to his arms.

“Uh...” He didn’t think that far ahead. “Uh, we could get bubble tea?” he fidgeted with his hands as he spoke, a bit of relief washing over him as Whizzer smiled at him.

“I should have expected you to be the kind of person to call boba bubble tea.” he chuckled slightly as he released his grip on his arms to set them back on the seat.

“So is that a yes...?” he drew out the last word, an awkward smile on his face. Whizzer returned it with a smile of his own as he answered.

“Absolutely.”

~***~

To say Marvin was nervous was an understatement. He stood in front of his closet as he tried to piece together a good outfit. He eventually settled on a random purple button-up thrown

over a black long-sleeve shirt with a random pair of jeans. He pulled on his red converses as he checked the time. He had about 20 minutes until their meeting time of 2:30, he checked the directions on his phone as he headed downstairs and out of the house. He felt all his nerves stand on end as he made his way down the street. He made it to the bubble tea place before Whizzer and stood near the entry while he waited for the other boy.

At 2:35, Whizzer still hadn't shown up yet, and Marvin was starting to get nervous that he wasn't going to show up. He started pacing back and forth in front of the shop as he waited, checking his phone every now and again.

This was a sick joke.

He only agreed to stand you up.

This is what you deserve.

"Hiya Marv!" Whizzer's voice cut through the fog of his mind, and he quickly turned his head toward the sound. He was dressed in a pink undershirt with a brown leather jacket with matching brown pants. Marvin let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding in as Whizzer walked over to him.

"Hi Whizzer," he sounded slightly breathless as he stared at the other boy, once again feeling underdressed in comparison. "You look great." he looked Whizzer's outfit over again before his gaze settled on his face.

"Thanks, you look great as well." there was a giddy smile on Whizzer's face as the boys stared at each other, and Marvin was sure there was a similar one on his. The two stood there for a while awkwardly before Marvin cleared his throat and gestured to the door.

"Well uh, shall we?" he held the door open for Whizzer as he spoke, feeling his face flush a deep red.

“Right! Yeah, we shall.” he was slightly relieved to see the other boy's face was a similar shade as his own as he entered the shop, and he was quick to follow him in. Once they were inside the shop, Marvin reached out and silently took Whizzers hand as they walked up to the counter to order. Marvin ordered the taro flavor while Whizzer ordered a brown sugar flavor.

“You somehow always manage to get the most basic flavors.” He couldn’t help but poke fun at Whizzer for his order.

“Oh please, taro is way more basic than brown sugar.” He scoffed at Marvin as he spoke, bumping against him slightly, keeping a strong grip on his hand as he did so.

“Hey in my defense, I got the taro flavor for the dumbest reason,” He paused for a minute for Whizzer to look back over at him before he continued. “I got it because it’s purple and I’m hella picky when it comes to trying things for the first time so I just pick a flavor in a color I like.” He chuckled as he spoke, unable to stop fully laughing after Whizzer began laughing.

“That is actually the best reason to pick a flavor.” their conversation ended as they were handed their orders and they walked over to one of the tables. With a smug look on his face, Whizzer pulled out Marvin's chair for him. With a roll of his eyes, he sat down and took a sip of his drink as Whizzer sat down. The pair sat in a comfortable silence for a few minutes before Whizzer spoke up.

“Our drinks match our outfits! Mine’s brown like my jacket and yours purple like your shirt!” he gestured to their clothes as he spoke, a wide smile on his face.

“Oh yeah they do, I didn’t even realize.” Marvin laughed a bit, stirring his drink as he tried to think of something else to say. “What do people even talk about on dates?” he gave Whizzer an awkward smile as he asked the question, trying to ease the tension he found himself in.

“Uh... well I think first dates are usually meant to be used as a way to get to know each other, but we already know a bunch about each other.”

“That’s fair, um, well what don’t we know about each other?” the question felt a little silly but he didn’t know how else to ask it.

“I think the only thing I don’t know much about you is about your family, and the same goes for me. We don’t really talk about them much.” Whizzer stirred his drink as he talked, before taking a sip of it.

“Well, do you wanna talk about our families?” his family didn’t seem like the best topic to talk about on a date, but Whizzer did have a point, it was the only thing he didn’t know about Whizzer. All he knew about his family was that he lived with his mom and that she worked odd hours.

“I can talk about mine first if you want.” he waited for Marvin to nod before he continued speaking, “Alright, uh where to start?” he let out an awkward laugh, leaning back in his chair.

“So it wasn’t always just me and my mom. It used to be my mom, my dad, me, and my brothers.” Marvin raised an eyebrow at the mention of Whizzer having brothers and the past tense made him slightly nervous about where this was going. “My brothers are named Kevin and Jack, Jack is our little brother, and Kevin is my um, twin brother.” he tried to hide the surprise on his face upon learning Whizzer was a twin, but his face quickly gave him away. Whizzer let out an awkward laugh before continuing.

“I don’t really talk to anyone about my brothers 'cause I haven’t seen either of them since I was 13.” he fidgeted with his jacket sleeve as he talked. “My dad totally flipped out when he found out I was gay, threatened to throw me out if I continued with my ‘homoerotic ways’ and it

caused a big fight between my parents because she was on my side with the whole thing, so they split, or at least as split as they could be.” he took another drink as he finished his sentence.

“What do you mean? Are they not divorced?” Marvin leaned back in his seat as he asked the question, tilting his head slightly.

“Uh well, no not really. My uh, dad's side of the family is uh, Mormon. So uh, up until about my freshman year, since I skipped my 9th year, I was Mormon.” he covered his face with his hand as he said the last part. Marvin did his best not to laugh, but he unfortunately failed.

“Hey! You don’t gotta laugh jackass!” Whizzer balled up his straw wrapper and threw it at him, glaring at him as well.

“Sorry! Sorry! I’m not trying to be rude, it’s just, hard to picture you as a Mormon, the religion with the most rules.” He gave him a crooked smile as he spoke, in hopes of easing his annoyance, “You’re the most carefree person I know, and to imagine you as one of those Jesus freaks is pretty impossible. You’re way too cool for that.” Whizzer gave him a small smile at the compliment, and Marvin felt his flush again.

“I’m flattered. But uh, yeah, ever since then it's been me and my mom, she works two jobs to support us so she works odd hours at both. My grandparents are the ones who pay for my tuition at West Point. They hated my dad and the fact my mom married him, so when they learned she left him because of how he handled my coming out, they’ve been super supportive.” he waved his hand as he spoke, revealing the lack of polish on his nails.

“No color today?” Marvin gestured at his hands.

“No, I forgot to paint them before today so.” He glanced at his nails as he spoke, before turning back to Marvin. “Alright, I told you about my family, it’s your turn Marv, spill.” the way Whizzer stared at him made the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

“Uh... geez ok, let's see. So right now I live here with my dad and stepmom Miranda, you've already met them, real fun folks.” the sarcasm was thick in his voice as he spoke of them. “My actual mom lives in New York with my little brother Emmet.” he shifted in his seat as he spoke, looking up at the ceiling of the shop.

“I didn't always know she was my mom, I just knew Miranda wasn't my mom. I would bug my dad about it constantly when I turned 13 because I was tired of listening to Miranda, and one day my dad just threw an address at me and told me to go bother them.” He glanced back at Whizzer quickly before averting his eyes again. “It took me to a random apartment in the New York slums, and 13-year-old me thought I was gonna get murdered or something.”

“I knocked on the door expecting to see my mom and I was instead greeted by an 8-year-old kid, I thought I had the wrong apartment at first. It was an odd first encounter with both of them.” he took another drink as he spoke, still avoiding Whizzers gaze.

“My mom's a really sweet woman, she's everything I imagined a mother should be, kind, and caring, and she always let me stay with her if I needed to. I think the best night's sleep I had was on the couch in her apartment.” Whizzer was listening intently as he spoke, staring at his face even though he didn't make eye contact. “Emment took a while to warm up me, and I don't blame the kid for it, a weird 13-year-old kid showed up in his and his mom's life and wedged himself into it.”

“So you bribed him with slushies?” he smirked as he made his remark, causing Marvin to chuckle slightly.

“Partly yeah, I would help him with his homework and teach him how to defend himself from the bullies in his neighborhood, and eventually we became irrespitable. I did my best to be a good role model for him, ya know? Teach him the stuff I had to figure out myself.” He fidgeted

with his shirt collar as he thought back on it. “He was really upset when I moved the first time, he tried to lock me in his room so I couldn’t leave, but that clearly didn’t work.” he chuckled slightly, finally making eye contact with the boy across from him. The look Whizzer was giving him made him melt in his seat and he returned the look with one that can only be described as lovesick.

“Well, by the sound of it, I think you’re a great big brother, Marv.” the two sat there for a while in a comfortable silence as they finished their drinks and when they were done, they left the shop, once again holding hands.

“So uh, do you wanna come over to my house and hang out for a bit? It’s the weekend so you could stay the night if you wanted to.” Whizzer was still looking at him in that stupidly sweet way, and coupled with the soft tone of his voice, he was unable to say no, so he left Whizzer led him down the sidewalk and toward his house.

Once they made it to the blue house Marvin recognized as Whizzer’s, he saw a Honda parked in the driveway next to Whizzer’s car.

“Who’s car is that?” they were still holding hands as they walked up to the porch. Whizzer gave a quick glance over at the car as he opened the screen door.

“Oh, my mom’s, I totally forgot she was gonna be home,” He turned to look at Marvin. “Are you ok with meeting her?”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” He followed Whizzer inside, taking his shoes off and following him into the living room. As they entered the room, Whizzers mom turned to face them from her spot on the couch.

“Hey sweetie, who’s your friend?” she stood up from the couch to walk over to them, giving him a quick hug before turning towards Marvin.

“Hey Mom, this is Marvin, the boy I told you about.” he held up their hands, which were still intertwined. Marvin felt his face flush slightly as she quickly looked from their hands to their faces.

“Oh, Oh! I see, well I’ll leave you, boys, alone, I’ll just be in here catching up on my shows.” she waved her hand slightly as she spoke, before heading back to the couch.

“Do you work today Mom?”

“Nope, I’m off for the rest of the day today and tomorrow, I’ll call you boys down when dinner’s ready, I’m gonna make your favorite tonight, Whiz.” The smile Whizzer gave his mom as she spoke made Marvin melt some more and stumble slightly as Whizzer pulled him upstairs to his room.

“Your mom seems nice.”

“She’s the best, we don’t get a lot of family dinners so it’s really nice when we get to have them.” Whizzer plopped down on his bed, dragging Marvin over with him.

“So, you talk to your mom about me?” he couldn’t help the smugness that filled his voice as he nudged Whizzer as he spoke.

“Yeah, yeah, I do. Don’t go getting a big head about it.” Whizzer nudged him back, rolling his eyes slightly. The two sat on Whizzer’s bed for a few minutes until Whizzer turned to look at him. “Hey, Marv?”

“Yeah?” Marvin turned to look at him as he sat cross-legged. Instead of answering, Whizzer scooted back on his bed until he was sitting against his pillows and patted the spot next to him.

“Come over here.” With a bit of hesitation, Marvin moved to sit next to him, before he could question what Whizzer was doing, he wrapped his arms around him and pulled him into a

sideways hug as they half laid on Whizzers bed. His face felt like it was on fire, and the warm feeling quickly spread out through his body from where Whizzer was holding him.

“Is... is this ok?” Whizzer’s voice was quick as he spoke and Marvin took a second to answer.

“Uh.. yeah,” He moved his arms, wrapping them around Whizzer. “Yeah, it's ok.” the two lay there, arms wrapped around each other awkwardly, for a while watching a random movie before Marvin spoke up.

“I uh... Usually try not to get too attached to people whenever I move. It kinda just makes moving more difficult so.. But uh,” his sentence trailed off, his words slightly muffled against Whizzer’s jacket.

“A little too late for that huh?” Whizzer finished his sentence for him, treading his fingers through Marvin's hair as he did so. He made a noise of agreement, the feeling of Whizzer’s hand against his scalp was soothing in a way Marvin wasn’t familiar with, and before he knew it, he was drifting off to sleep. As he hovered in and out of conscience, he felt Whizzer press a kiss to the top of his head.

“Night, Marv.”

~***~

Chapter 9: The Prom

When Marvin woke up on Sunday, he was confused about where he was. He was in someone else's room and bed. He tried to sit up to figure out where he was, but something was wrapped around his waist, preventing him from doing so, he was also suddenly aware of a weight behind him. Marvin rolled over as much as he could and glanced behind him to see Whizzer wrapped around him, using his shoulder as a pillow. The sight made his face flush a

deep red, freaking out as quietly as he could as not to wake the other boy. Yesterday's events flooded back into his mind, the boba date, meeting Whizzers mom, and the dinner all rushed into the forefront of his memories, causing his face to burn brighter.

He moved back to his previous position, feeling Whizzer's grip around his waist tighten as he did so. Marvin wasn't sure what to do at this point. The fact that he went on a date with Whizzer, that it went well, and that he then fell asleep while cuddling Whizzer seemed so hard for him to believe, but here he was, laying in Whizzer's bed, basically being used as a human teddy bear. What exactly was he meant to do? Was he just supposed to wait for him to wake up? That option was very quickly a no-go, he needed to use the bathroom. He rolled over as far as he could again, and reached over to nudge Whizzer awake.

"Whiz, hey dude, let go of me. I gotta use the bathroom man." the only response he got from the other boy was a grumble as he buried his face in the side of Marvin's neck. "Whiz, let go, c'mon." after he practically elbowed him in the chest, Whizzer finally let go of him and sat up, stretching as he did so.

"Well good morning to you too, ya jerk. Haven't ya ever heard about sleeping in on the weekends?" he glared at him as Marvin got out of bed and headed toward the door.

"You're more than welcome to go back to sleep, I just need to use the damn bathroom." He heard Whizzer huff as he left and headed down the hall to the bathroom.

Once he was done he peaked into Whizzers room and saw him once again asleep, latched on to one of the many pillows. He didn't want to intrude downstairs before Whizzer was awake, so instead he sat down in front of his bed and began watching the random movie that played while they were asleep. He didn't pay much attention to the movie, he wasn't the biggest fan of Marvel, it partly just served as background noise as he messed around on his phone.

After another hour or so, he saw Whizzer toss and turn out of the corner of his eye before he sat up and looked down at Marvin.

“You could’ve gone downstairs ya know, you didn’t have to wait for me to get up.” As he spoke, Whizzer shifted to sit beside him in front of the bed. Before Marvin answered, he leaned against the taller boy.

“I know, I just didn’t wanna intrude with your mom home and everything, it felt rude.” He let Whizzer intertwine their fingers and pull them both upright. “When I stay at Trina’s or Charlotte’s house, I wait for them to get up before I roam their house.”

“What about when you stayed at Mendel’s house?” Whizzere asked as they made their way downstairs.

“When I stayed at Mendel’s house I did basically whatever I wanted, his parents didn’t care and I’ve known Del long enough to do so.” he followed the other boy from the stairwell into the kitchen, where Whizzers mom stood in front of the stove, glaring at a box of pancake mix while some sat on a plate next the stove, charred beyond recognition.

“Morning Mom!” Whizzer took a seat at the kitchen island, glancing at Marvin as he sat next to him. “You making pancakes?” Marvin wasn’t sure how he felt about skipping his usual breakfast, but he didn’t want to sound rude or ruin the mood.

“Morning boys, and yeah I’m...” She sat the box down on the counter before turning to face the two boys. “I’m gonna level with you boys, I have no idea what I’m doing right now, these instructions are kicking my ass right now.” she pushed away the hair that came loose from the bun she was wearing out of her eyes as she spoke, a tired look set deep within them.

“We might need to order out for breakfast, I’m not sure I can save these hockey pucks.”

She grabbed the plate the burnt pancakes sat on and tossed the attempted breakfast into the trash.

She sat down across from the two as Whizzer pulled his phone out. “Where ya ordering from?”

“The diner down the street, Andrews, I’ll get your usual, what do you want, Marv?”

Whizzer turned to face him, as his mother handed him her card. He felt his face heat up as he stared at him, unsure how to answer.

“Uh... what do they have?” he only half listened as Whizzer listed off the breakfast menu, agreeing to a random item. He knew he wouldn’t be able to have his usual breakfast since he was at someone else’s house, but getting food from a restaurant he’s never tried before always made his stomach turn. He wasn’t going to be rude and refuse it however, he’d just eat whatever Whizzer ordered him and hope he’d like it.

~***~

Luckily, the food from the dinner wasn’t as bad as Marvin was worried it would be, it actually ended up being a nice change of pace from his usual breakfast, which he didn’t think was possible. Lunch was normal, Whizzer’s mom made them turkey sandwiches with chips. Marvin was surprised when she placed the plates in front of them, for a minute he forgot not every parent had strict rules with food as his stepmother does.

The strangest thing about the lunch was that Whizzer took the top layer of his sandwich and added some of his chips onto it before taking a bite of the sandwich. Whizzer glanced over at him and saw the bewildered look that probably sat on his face.

“What? Why are you staring at me like that?”

“Why did you do that?” he gestured at Whizzer’s sandwich as he spoke, giving him another strange look.

“Uh, it makes the sandwich crunchy? I dunno it just tastes better. Have you never had a sandwich like this before? It's like a staple in anyone's childhood.” Whizzer smirked as he answered.

“Not my childhood I guess.” He turned back toward his food, an uneasy feeling settling in his stomach as he continued. “My stepmom, she has always been pretty nitpicky about what I eat, stuff like chips and all that was only for special occasions.” He could feel Whizzer eyes on him as he spoke and the mood shifted.

“Oh.” was all he heard Whizzer say as he started eating. The rest of lunch passed in silence as the two boys ate. As the two set their plates in the dishwasher, Whizzer turned to face him, a small smile on his face.

“Well, you're more than welcome to come here to eat all the junk food you can manage, or if you want anything specific that your stepmom won't let you have, you can let me know and I'll bring it to school for ya.” he bumped his shoulder against his as he spoke.

“What you gonna sneak my contraband or something? Like the candy hearts?” he couldn't help but return the smile as he followed Whizzer toward the living room. He made his way towards the couch before Whizzer stopped and quickly made his way upstairs.

“What are you doing?” He stood in front of the couch as Whizzer paused halfway up the stairs to turn and look at him.

“I'm grabbing something from my room, gimme a minute. You can put on whatever you want while you wait.” With that, he disappeared upstairs leaving Marvin alone in the living room.

After about five minutes he heard the sound of someone hurrying down the stairs, and before he could look over at the stairwell, Whizzer was sitting down next to him and setting a silver case on the coffee table.

“Gimme your hand.” Marvin stared at him as he opened the case and took out a bottle of nail polish, it was a pastel green color.

“Why?...” He felt he could tell where this was going and wasn’t sure how he felt about Whizzer painting his nails. Whizzer rolled his eyes and shook the bottle slightly.

“I need to paint my nails today so I don’t bite them off during classes, and I wanna paint yours so we can match,” he said it so casually like it was the most obvious thing. Marvin stared at him some more before Whizzer just reached out and grabbed his hand, yanking it closer. He shifted so he was sitting cross-legged on the couch, facing Marvin and forcing him to also shift so he faced him.

“Whiz, come on, this is something girls do.” He tried to pull his hand away but Whizzer had a death grip on it.

“It is not, I paint my nails all the time and I’m just as much a guy as you are, plus I picked a green. You’re literally wearing green right now so it’s fine.” He gestured at the green hoodie that he was wearing, one that Whizzer lent him for the weekend as he didn’t originally plan on staying the night. With that Whizzer started to paint his nails, and most of Marvin’s focus was spent on keeping his hand still.

Something about the proximity with Whizzer made his head spin slightly and his face flush. The way Whizzer held his hand still paired with the look of concentration brought back the buzz in his stomach with great intensity. He barely noticed when Whizzer finished his hand and moved on to his other hand.

“Don’t smudge the polish, let it dry,” Whizzer spoke up as he capped the bottle to the polish, setting it back in the case and pulling out a different color.

“I thought you said we were gonna match...” His statement trailed off as the other boy turned to look at him and Marvin quickly looked away, feeling his face flush again, mostly from embarrassment. He heard Whizzer let out a small laugh, the sound breathy and light.

“We still will don’t worry, it’s the same brand, and they’re both pastel so we’ll still match, I’m just gonna use blue instead of green.” his tone was soft as he explained, somehow always knowing the right tone to use to ease Marvin’s worry.

“How do you do that?” He paused for a moment for Whizzer to look at him before he continued, “You always like, change your tone to talk to me when I’m agitated or upset.”

“Oh, uh it’s just something my mom used to do when I was younger, and I figured it would help whenever you got stressed.” he fidgeted with the nail polish bottle as he spoke, his face turning a similar shade to Marvin’s.

“That’s really sweet...” his voice was quiet before he continued, “You’re really sweet, Whizzer.” The complement slipped out before Marvin could catch it, but he couldn’t seem to care.

“Thanks, Marv, you’re really sweet too.” Whizzer leaned against him as he started painting his own nails. The rest of the evening Marvin spent at Whizzers house passed in a pleasant quiet until he eventually had to go back home, unable to stay over a second time because it was a school night.

It wasn’t until he made it home and into his room that he realized he was still wearing the hoodie Whizzer gave him. He was putting his clothes from Saturday in his laundry basket and went to change into pajamas, and realized he had never gave it back before he left. He stared at

the green cotton hoodie, feeling slightly guilty for keeping it, before holding it up to his face, breathing in the scent. It had a soft laundry softener scent to it, along with the scent of cherries and vanilla.

It smells like Whizzer.

The thought snuck into his head, causing his face to flush again. He stared at the clothing item for a moment longer before putting it back on and pulling the hood over his head. With that, he climbed into bed for the night, drifting off to a decently peaceful sleep.

~***~

Over the next week, the pair went on two more dates. Marvin wasn't sure how long people were usually meant to wait in between dates, but to him, two days seemed reasonable. He felt somewhat silly for it, but another part of him wanted to make up for the fact he turned Whizzer down twice. Whizzer didn't seem to care one way or the other and agreed to both dates enthusiastically.

On their second date, they went to a movie. It was a random action movie about a princess fighting a dragon, Whizzer picked it out and Marvin went along with it. He didn't really pay attention during it, but he enjoyed it more than he thought he would. After the movie, the two wandered around the mall, not really looking at any store in particular. Marvin just let Whizzer drag him from store to store. At one of the stores, Whizzer stood in front of a clothing rack, staring at a dark blue leather jacket.

"You gonna get that, Whiz?" he walked over to him, abandoning whatever he was looking at.

“I don’t think so, I don’t have enough to buy and still get other stuff.” He watched as Whizzer let out a sigh as he put the jacket back on the rack. “Hopefully I can get it next week if it’s still in stock.”

“I can get it for you if you want.” Marvin glanced at the tag as he spoke, figuring he could afford it with no problem.

“Wait really?” Whizzer looked at him slightly surprised, “You don’t have to, Marv.”

“No it's fine, my dad doesn’t really care what I buy, as long as it's not illegal, ya know.” he let out a small chuckle as Whizzer stared at him as he grabbed the jacket back off the rack and handed it to him.

“Thanks, Marv, you’re an angel.” he smiled at him as he went to pay for the jacket, and as they left the store, Marvin handed Whizzer the bag it sat in.

“How come you get to buy me stuff but get upset when I buy you something?” Whizzer tilted his head as he spoke, giving him a sideways smirk.

“Uh, I guess it’s because if I want something I can buy it for myself, and it’s nice to be able to give my friends stuff they usually can’t afford.” He felt silly as he explained it, not so how else to phrase his answer.

“So it's like gift-giving is your love language,” Whizzer nodded as he spoke, reaching over to hold Marvin’s hand as they walked. He let out a small chuckle as he looked at him.

“I’m guessing your love language has something to do with you being so touchy?” he gestured at their entwined hands, smirking back at him.

“Probably, that or I'm just clingy.” Marvin couldn’t help but let out a laugh at that and the two finished their shopping date with plenty of items to remember the event.

Their third date took place at the local arcade on Friday after school. They stood in front of the token machine as Marvin got them both 20 tokens.

“Will that be enough?” Whizzer asked as he leaned over Marvin’s shoulder, looking at the screen as the tokens dispensed.

“Probably, but if we need more I can get us some more.” Marvin handed Whizzer his tokens. “Do you wanna split up or should we stick together?”

“Well, this is a date isn’t it?” Whizzer bumped against his shoulder, smirking at him before he continued speaking. “We should stick together, Marv.” with that, Whizzer laced their hands together and pulled him toward the games.

Time quickly passed as the pair made their way around the arcade, going from game to game, growing more competitive with each other as they went. Whenever one of them would win, they would gloat to the other, and the two very quickly learned they were both sore losers. They were currently playing one of the racing games the arcade had, and Marvin was starting to get annoyed with how often Whizzer was winning.

“I feel like you're cheating at this.” he turned to glare at him, only getting more annoyed when Whizzer simply met his glare with a smirk and laughed at him.

“I don’t think I can cheat at something like this, Angel.” As Whizzer spoke the last word, Marvin felt his face turn bright red. The other boy seemed to realize what he said, and his face quickly turned a similar shade. “Uh, is... is it ok if I call you that?” Marvin stared at him for a while before looking back over at the game screen.

“Uh, yeah, sure.” He could see Whizzer smile at him from the corner of his eye as he spoke. “Yeah that's fine, you can call me Angel,” he mumbled the last part, unable to meet Whizzer’s eyes.

“Cool, cool, ok.” He saw Whizzer move out of the corner of his eye and suddenly stood in front of him, grabbing one of his hands and pulling him up from where he sat. “well then, Angel, what game do you wanna play next?”

The rest of the afternoon passed in a blur for Marvin, unable to really focus on anything with Whizzer calling him Angel the rest of the day. He was incredibly grateful for the fact that when Whizzer dropped him off at his house afterward, neither his father nor stepmother was home yet. He cringed at the thought of having to explain to either of them why his face was so red.

~***~

A week later on Monday, Marvin was sitting in his 7th-period class after the bell rang, he was gathering all his belongings into his bag when Whizzer came up to his desk. He was looking down at him from where he stood, an awkward smile on his face. Marvin stared back at him, not sure what he was doing, with an odd sense of *dey ja ve*.

“Hey Whiz, you need something?” he stared at Whizzer as he spoke, unsure of what Whizzer was playing at.

“I wanted to ask you something.” Whizzer’s eyes seemed to bore into him as he spoke, and he was suddenly very aware of the number of people in the classroom still, watching them. Marvin stared at him, waiting for him to continue.

“Prom’s this Saturday, and I was wondering if you wanted to be my date.” His words rang in Marvin's ears, and he wasn’t sure how to react. He was happy that Whizzer asked him, but he wasn’t sure how to answer because so many people were staring at him. His face was definitely as red as his shoes at that point. Whizzers face faltered slightly as he waited for his answer. “Well...?”

“Uhh...” Marvin felt like he was on display as the other students stared at him, feeling his words clog up his throat. “Yeah... Yeah! I- I’d love to be your date.” At his answer, Whizzer's face turned a shade similar to his own.

“Awesome!” as he spoke, Whizzer grabbed his hand, pulling him from his seat like he did at the arcade, leading him from the classroom and Marvin did his best to ignore the stares from his fellow students. Whizzer pulled him down the hall to their lockers, letting go of his hand to open his locker. The pair stood in silence for a minute before Whizzer turned to look at Marvin, and he could see a look of concern on his face.

“Hey, Marv? You said yes because you wanna be my date right? Not because other people were there?” the doubt that laced his voice was obvious and Marvin let out a nervous chuckle.

“Whiz, we literally spent last week hanging out and going on dates, yes I wanna be your date to prom on Saturday.” he couldn’t help but smile at the look Whizzer gave him, feeling the warm feeling return to his chest. “Plus I doubt I’d even go if someone else asked me.” as he finished his sentence he felt his phone buzz. He took out his phone to see a notification from Mendel.

MW: *yo*

MW: *I need you to get Trina out to the parking lot, like now.*

MG: ???

MG: *ok sure ig*

“We need to find Trina, c’mon.” Before the other boy could question what was happening, Marvin grabbed his hand and pulled him down the hall toward Trina’s locker. When the two approached her, she was closing her locker. “Trina! Hey.”

“Oh hey boys, what's up?” she turned to face them, giving Marvin a knowing look when she saw their intertwined hands.

“I think I left something in your car this morning, can I go check?” she rolled her eyes at him as he spoke.

“Yeah yeah, sure, let's go.” she led the two out of the building, Whizzer still following them confused. Marvin pulled his phone out again and pulled up Mendel’s chat log.

MG: *heading your way Del*

MG: *whatever you’re planning better do it*

MW: *thank you, Vin*

Marvin didn’t even think to question what Mendel was doing, he just assumed it was something dumb, but when they approached Trina’s car and saw an old beat-up white pickup truck with a familiar-looking idiot holding a sign with the words “PROM?” written across it, he realized he got tricked into helping Mendel with a stupid promposal.

Trina, on the other hand, seemed overjoyed by the display and ran over to him as he hopped down from the bed of the pickup, to meet her with a hug. Marvin rolled his eyes as the two kissed and turned to look at Whizzer, who seemed to finally realize what happened.

“I can’t believe I seriously just helped Mendel with his lame ass promposal-”

“It was not lame thank you very much!” Mendel yelled over at him, glaring at him as the two boys walked over to them.

“Yeah because this just screams ‘not lame’ Sure Del, sure.” Marvin gestured at the sign as he spoke, smirking at the way Mendel huffed at him. He let go of Whizzers hand to give Mendel a quick hug.

“Hey, I spent two days on this- everyone else gave me crap for it on Saturday, besides at least I have a date for the prom.” The smugness in his voice caused Marvin to roll his eyes, and before he could even think to correct him, Whizzer walked up next to him and draped one of his arms over his shoulders.

“Actually, he does have a date to prom.” as Whizzer spoke, Marvin felt his face flush slightly as Trina gave a small gasp and smiled at them while Mendel looked at the pair, bewildered.

“You actually have a date?” The disbelief in his voice made Marvin scoff and glare at him, but before he could say anything Trina turned to Mendel.

“Oh wait Mendel, are you asking me to your prom or mine?” Mendel’s attention very quickly shifted to Trina as she spoke.

“Your prom, mine’s not until next week so I figured I would just go to yours and skip mine.” Marvin couldn’t help but roll his eyes, something about the way Mendel acted around Trina always ticked him off. The fact that Mendel could have a normal relationship with her when he struggled. He wanted so desperately to be normal, but no matter how hard he tried he just couldn’t.

You’re just a freak.

That’s all you’ll be.

His face twisted into a grimace as the thoughts echoed in his head, not noticing when Whizzer pulled him away from the other two and toward his own car. He quietly got in the passenger side before Whizzer spoke up, his tone cheerful and easing some of his stress.

“When do you wanna go shopping for suits?” the question cut through his sour mood and he turned to look at Whizzer, quick to smile at him.

“Uh, how about tomorrow?” the smile Whizzer gave him made the rest of his nerves melt away as the car started and they left the parking lot.

~***~

The rest of the week passed in a strange sense of anticipation as he waited for Saturday. He’s never been excited about something like this, school dances were never his thing. The last one he went to was with Trina, and there was barely any dancing between the two, they just awkwardly stood around and danced maybe twice. There was the spring dance from two months ago, and he did dance with Whizzer.

The memory brought back the warm feeling in his stomach as he glanced at himself in the mirror. His father was stood in front of him, tying his tie for him. He was in a good mood today, something Marvin was grateful for.

“When will your friends be here?” his father rested his hand on top of his shoulders as he spoke, giving Marvin a proud look as he stared down at him.

“Whizzer said he’d be here to pick me and Charlotte up at 7:30, from her house,” he told his father that he was going with his friends instead of a date.

“Alrighty well then, I’d say you’re all good to go.” he ruffed his hair as he spoke, something he hasn’t done since he was a kid. Moments like this made Marvin wish his father was a nicer man, moments where he was reminded of how his father used to act.

His thoughts were cut off by the sound of a camera flashing. Miranda was standing at the end of the hallway, holding up an old Polaroid camera. She was smiling as the photo printed, she walked over to the two before speaking.

“Oh I still remember my junior prom, it was so fun, me and all my girlfriends spent the whole night dancing and partying.” He cringed at her story, not wanting to listen to her gush

about her past. She handed him the photo once it finished developing, and the sight of him and his father made something in his chest twist.

I look so much like him.

The thought sat heavy in his head as he glanced at the clock, noting the time. Letting out a small awkward chuckle as he stepped away from the two.

“I should probably head over to Charlottes.” He grabbed his bag and headphones as he made his way toward the door, barely returning their goodbyes as he escaped outside to the chilled spring air. He quickly walked across the lawn to Charlotte’s house, before knocking on the door.

Charlotte’s dad opened the door to let him in, smiling at him as he did. He liked Charlotte's parents, they were nice to him whenever he was over, which was becoming more and more often. He made some light small talk with him as he waited for Charlotte. She eventually came downstairs, followed by her mother who was doing a few touch-ups to her hair. She was dressed in a dark orange dress, that went down to her ankles, with flowers embroiled all along it, paired with a pair of black heels. Her hair was braided and twisted together with gold beads interlaced in it. Marvin thought the color suited her.

“Hey, Lottie.” he gave her a quick hug before she pulled him into the kitchen.

“Hey, Marv, your dad suspects anything?” Charlotte was one of the few people that he told about his dad and his temper, and she thankfully didn’t say anything to anyone.

“Nope, no clue that all four of us actually have dates, or that my date’s a guy and yours a girl.” he leaned against the counter as he spoke, about to say something else when he heard a camera flash and a familiar laugh. He and Charlotte turned toward the sound to see Whizzer and Cordelia standing in the kitchen doorway.

Cordelia was wearing a soft pink dress, the sleeves hung off her shoulders, with butterflies printed on the fabric. Her hair was pulled back into a small bun at the base of her head. She quickly walked over to Charlotte, wrapping her arms around her, and kissing her.

Marvin turned his attention toward Whizzer as he fiddled with his camera, and even though he was with Whizzer when they bought the suits, seeing him wearing the outfit made his legs feel like jelly. He was dressed in a white button-up with a blue suit jacket and matching pants. His tie was a deep green to match the pocket square he had. He somehow felt a little underdressed in comparison. Marvin wore a white button-up as well, paired with a forest green vest and pants, instead of a jacket. His tie and pocket square were navy blue, upon Whizzer's instant that they match the colors.

"Um, I uh got you something, Whiz." he reached into his bag and pulled out a small box before handing it to Whizzer. It was a small bundle of roses, a corsage. He bought it on impulse yesterday on his way home from Whizzer's house. Marvin wasn't sure it was a good idea to buy at the time but judging by the look on Whizzer's face, he could tell it was a good decision.

"You got us matching corsages?" he asked as he opened the box, smiling at him as he did so.

"Yeah, you mentioned at some point you liked roses so, yeah." He waved his hand slightly as he spoke, watching as Whizzer slipped one of them over his wrist before stepping in front of him and clipping the matching one onto his vest. As Marvin looked at him, he felt slightly breathless as he saw a pink hue spread across the taller boy's face.

He heard the girls have a similar conversation as Charlotte gave Cordelia her corsage, but he didn't really listen. All his attention was on Whizzer at that moment. He let him pull him into

the living room for photos before the four of them finally piled into Whizzer's car and set off to the high school.

~***~

At some point in the night, Marvin found himself standing by the punch table by himself. It went fine at first, they met up with Trina and Mendel, and the six of them were having a good time, but Trina and Mendel went off on their own to dance and then Cordelia and Charlotte went off somewhere else. He was enjoying just hanging out with Whizzer in their own corner of the room but at some point, one of his baseball buddies came over and started talking to him, and he retreated over to the drink table, a choice he was very quickly regretting.

The loud volume of the room paired with how many people were in the gym was serving as a great reminder of why he didn't go to events like this. Even with his headphones pulled over his ears, the sound still echoed through the space and rang in his ears. He was gripping his drink cup like it was a lifeline when he felt someone walk up next to him. He at first thought it was just someone trying to get to the punch before he felt someone's hand snake around his waist, and he realized it was Whizzer.

"You ok, Angel?" the nickname paired with his soft tone of voice eased away some of his stress, but most of it remained, especially as he pulled his headphones down to properly hear him.

"Yeah it's just, really loud in here." he let out an awkward laugh, not wanting to worry Whizzer too much. Before he could say anything else, Whizzer grabbed his hand and led him out of the gym toward the bathroom. As they went, the loud obnoxious sound of the gym faded away until they were left in the peaceful quiet of the bathroom, and Marvin was finally able to breathe.

"Thanks, Whiz, I was having fun, it just-" Whizzer cut him off before he could finish.

“Too loud? I get it, I'm a social person, but sometimes I'd rather just hang out one-on-one with someone, with you mainly actually.” the smile that accompanied his words made him melt, feeling that familiar buzz return to his stomach.

“Really? Even if I make fun of how you do your hair or call you vain?” he took a step closer to Whizzer as he spoke, returning his smile with one of his own.

“What can I say? I think I'm starting to enjoy our little fights.” Whizzer stepped closer as well, til the two were only inches apart. Marvin's heart was pounding in his ears as Whizzer reached up and draped his arms over his shoulders. The close proximity made his head spin as he reached up and held onto Whizzers forearm. The look he was giving him made him feel like his skin was on fire.

Before Marvin could second-guess himself or step away, he leaned up and kissed him. Whizzer was quick to return the kiss, and he could feel the way he smiled against his lips. It only lasted a few moments before it ended and he pulled back to look at him, seeing the giddy look that overtook his face, and Marvin was sure his face looked the same.

He went to say something else but he quickly forgot it as Whizzer kissed him again, lacing one of his hands into his hair. It was several small heated kisses as Marvin clung to the taller boy, returning each kiss the best he could. His teeth clashed awkwardly against his braces, but he didn't care. Eventually, the two separated. Marvin took a half-step back, in an attempt to catch his breath and process what just happened. He was sure his face was as red as the roses he and Whizzer were wearing, and Whizzers face was a shade to match. A full smile on his face as the two looked at each other.

“Will you be my boyfriend?” the words spilled out of his mouth before he could stop himself, but he didn’t regret them, especially when Whizzer smiled at him again and pulled him into a hug before pressing a kiss to the top of his head.

“Fuck yeah.” with that answer, Whizzer kissed him again, and any worry or stress Marvin had melted away as he returned it. After a while more, the two left the bathroom and returned to the gym, spending the rest of the night attached at the hip, and it didn’t take long for Charlotte and Cordelia to catch on to the shift in their relationship.

The rest of the night passed in a blur, and Marvin doubted if the whole event even happened, but as he found himself lying half asleep in Whizzers bed with the aforementioned boy draped halfway on top of him, he was inclined to believe it. As he drifted off to sleep, he ignored any mocking voices in his head, and whatever worries he had about his dad finding out were far from his mind. The only thing he thought about was the boy lying next to him as he fell asleep.

~***~

Chapter 10: Planting and Pulling Roots

To say Marvin was in disbelief about everything was an understatement. Over the course of the three months he’s been at WestPoint, he made the realization he was gay and somehow ended up with a boyfriend. He fully expected the entire night to be a dream when he woke up the next morning, still in Whizzer’s room, and with him practically on top of him. It was nice and really comforting. He couldn’t remember the last time he slept that well, as dumb as that sounds.

You’re just gonna move eventually.

Why are you getting so attached?

The thoughts sat bitterly in his head as he lay there, wrapping his arms around Whizzer in an attempt to banish the thoughts from his head. He ran one of his hands through the other boy's hair, hearing him hum in content as he did so. He wished he could stay in this moment forever, but he knew he couldn't. Eventually, Whizzer would wake up and he would have to go home at some point. Marvin was eventually just going to move again and most likely never see him again. This was why he didn't get attached to people when he moved, he was just gonna leave.

His thoughts were cut off by Whizzer waking up and burying his face against Marvin's neck. His hold on him tightened slightly before he released him and sat up, stretching out his long limbs.

"You think so loud by the way, I think that's what woke me up." Whizzer smiled at him as Marvin sat up. He rolled his eyes at him, giving him a playful glare before moving to climb out of bed. Before he could do so, Whizzer wrapped his arms around his waist, pulling him back into the bed. "Nuh uh, weekends are for sleeping in, that's the rules of having a boyfriend," he said matter-factly as he rested his head on his shoulder.

"Oh is it now?" he attempted to wiggle out of his hold, but Whizzer simply tightened his hold, and Marvin could feel him smile against his shoulder. "What about breakfast?"

"My mom works today so breakfast is whenever we want it, so we simply must abide by the boyfriend's rules." his tone was as serious as he could make it, with laughter threatening to overtake his words.

"And what, pray tell, are these boyfriend rules?" he finally gave up and let Whizzer pull him back down.

“Well...” he drew the last word, clearly trying to think on the spot, “Rule number one, whenever you stay the night at my house, you gotta sleep in. Number two is we steal each other's clothes, but I got like half a foot on you so my options are probably limited on that front.”

“I mean most of my hoodies are too big for me, my dad never buys my clothes in the right size, so.” he felt Whizzer’s grip around his waist tighten slightly as he placed a kiss on his shoulder. The action sent a shiver down his spine, especially when it was followed by another kiss next to his ear, causing him to squirm again.

“Your dad is an utter asshole, Angel,” he mumbled against Marvin's neck, the heat from his breath making his face flush slightly.

“Yeah well, what can you do about it? As Del puts it, everyone hates their parents.” he heard Whizzer scoff as he shifted how the two were positioned until he was lying right on top of Marvin.

“That’s not true, I like my mom,” Whizzer responded, a matter of factly.

“Yeah, but you hate your dad so-” Marvin was cut off by him rolling his eyes and kissing him, effectively shutting him up. Something about the way Whizzer was lying on top of him as they kissed made his head spin, and not entirely in a good way.

God, you’re pathetic.

He pulled away from the kiss, trying to hide the weird look on his face. He let out an awkward laugh before Whizzer could say anything.

“You’re certainly taking advantage of the whole boyfriend thing huh?” The confused look on Whizzer’s face was quickly replaced with his signature smug expression.

“Well, I mean, I will admit I've been waiting to kiss you since the boba date so, now that I have the boyfriend title, I'm gonna use it to my full advantage.” he finished his sentence with another kiss, spreading his smile to Marvin.

“That long huh?” He shifted around slightly til he was sitting up, preferring that to lying down. Whizzer adjusted the way he was lying to lay on his side next to Marvin.

“Probably longer, to be honest. I also just like kissing you; it's fun.” As he spoke, he started playing with Marvin's hair, running his hand through his loose curls. He was due for a haircut soon.

“You flatter me, I doubt I'm any good though.” he let out an awkward laugh as Whizzer moved his hand to the back of his neck to tug lightly at the shorter curls.

“I mean, compared to some other guys I've kissed, you're pretty good.” Marvin shifted slightly as he spoke. Something about Whizzer mentioning the other boys he's kissed made his stomach turn, and Whizzer seemed to pick up on the tone shift. “Sorry, I probably shouldn't compare you to other guys, that's pretty weird isn't it?”

“A little yeah.” he let out an awkward laugh as Whizzer sat up and gave him a quick kiss.

“Do you wanna hang out up here a bit more or do you wanna go get something to eat?” Marvin stretched as Whizzer spoke, swinging his legs over the bed and standing up, before turning and extending a hand to Whizzer.

“Breakfast sounds good.” He helped Whizzer to his feet and the pair made their way downstairs.

“Do you wanna savage around in the kitchen for something or order from the diner again?”

“The diner, I can pay for it if you want.” he reached for his bag as he spoke, having left it on the couch the night before.

“Alrighty, I’ll get you what we got last time.” Whizzer plopped down on the couch next to him as he ordered the food.

~***~

A week after prom, Marvin would say his relationship with Whizzer was decently close to a normal relationship. He still wasn’t sure how to really act in one, it didn’t really feel like there was a big shift between them, besides them holding hands at school and Whizzer randomly kissing him.

It wasn’t all great though. The pair found themselves fighting over small things almost daily, and it probably wasn’t something normal couples do, but of all the lesser passions, they seemed to enjoy fighting most. The majority of their fights ended with heated kissing between the two, but a few ended with them giving each other the silent treatment for a few hours before one of them apologized.

On Friday he was standing in front of the school, looking around the parking lot for Whizzer and his car, but he couldn’t find either. Normally when he doesn’t see Whizzer or his car, he is at the baseball field, but he didn’t mention anything about having practice today.

MG: *Whiz, hun are you still here?*

No response, which is normal if he was at practice, but even before they started officially dating, Whizzer would let him know if he had practice or not. As Marvin stood in front of the school watching other students leave, he felt stupid waiting around for Whizzer.

Where is he?

Is he still angry at me?

He paced in front of the school for a moment before storming down the path and making his way home. He was hoping to spend the weekend at Whizzer's house since both his father and stepmother were home until Monday. He already told them he was hanging out with a friend over the weekend, so if Whizzer didn't respond he was planning on going to Charlotte's house instead.

He liked Charlotte's house, it had the peaceful quiet of his house but with her company along with it, and her parents didn't seem to mind whenever he just showed up. They treated him like their son rather than their daughter's friend, and it was nice. Her mom fused over how much he ate, and not in a controlling way like his stepmom would, simply because she was worried he wasn't eating enough, whenever he had dinner at their house he left with a full stomach. Charlotte's dad acted as a better role model for him than his own dad did, he even showed him how to fix a few things around the Duboir house.

They were a real tight-knit family.

You'll never have that.

Why can't I have that?!

His thoughts turned bitter as it started raining, the intensity quickly building. It was nice, the rain always comforted him, the water washing away his stress as he stood on the sidewalk, letting it soak him to the bone. He was thankful for Charlotte's dad talking him into leaving some of his clothes at their house for when he decided to stay the night. As he walked he felt his phone vibrate repeatedly in his pocket, he didn't check it, however, not wanting to get it wet.

He was about halfway to Charlotte's house when a familiar red car pulled up next to him, slowing down to ride alongside him. Marvin knew it was Whizzers car, but didn't stop walking until the passenger side window rolled down and Whizzer spoke out of it.

“Marv, babe get in the car, you’re gonna get soaked.” his voice carried an annoyed tone, but there was concern laced into it. He didn’t stop walking and tried to ignore the way he stumbled slightly when Whizzer spoke. “Angel, you’re going to get sick, get in.”

“Shouldn’t you be at Baseball practice?” His voice was bitter as he spoke, and he could see out of the corner of his eye the way it stung the other boy.

“It got canceled because of the rain, I totally forgot to mention I had practice today, it got switched from next Friday to today. I’m sorry, can you please get in the car now?” he finally stopped walking and turned to face Whizzer, seeing a relieved smile break out on his face.

“Won’t your seats get wet?” his tone was playfully mocking, and Whizzer returned it with one of his own.

“Don’t worry I put a towel down, Tabatha’s seats will be fine.” Marvin rolled his eyes as he got in the car, hearing Whizzer let out a small sigh.

“You worry me sometimes, Marv.” the comment caught him off guard, and he turned to look at him, seeing the look of concern on his face. “You just shut people out when you get mad, and as your friend it was worrying, but even more so as your boyfriend.” the tone Whizzer used was a mixture of the soft tone he always used for him and a stricter one, it sent a shiver down his spine.

“I know... I’m sorry, I just don’t really know how to handle it other than to avoid people.” He avoided Whizzer’s eyes as he spoke, unable to make eye contact.

“Just...” he heard him let out a sigh as his words trailed off. “Don’t shut me out please.” he rested his hand on his shoulder, squeezing it lightly.

“I’ll try.” he gave Whizzer an awkward smile as he started driving. “Can we stop at Charlotte’s house for a bit? I need to dry my uniform and don’t wanna go to my house since my dad and Miranda are home. I got some clothes at her house.”

“How come?” Whizzer glanced over at him quickly before returning his attention to the road.

“I hang out at her house a lot whenever my parents are home, so her dad had me leave some clothes at their place in case I ended up staying the night, her parents are really nice to me.” He shrugged his blazer off as he spoke, growing irritated with the wet fabric. Whizzer responded with a hum and the rest of the drive was spent in a comfortable silence.

When they got to Charlotte’s house, her mother was the one to open the door, and she was quick to hurry them both in and send Marvin upstairs to dry himself off and change. Once he was done, he joined Charlotte, Whizzer, and Cordelia in the living room. It felt nice to hang out with all of them, he was able to just relax and be himself around them. When he sat down next to Whizzer, the other boy shrugged off his baseball jacket and draped it over Marvin’s shoulders. It was a size too big for him, but it was a welcoming warmth from the cold the rain left him with. He put it on properly and leaned against the couch, watching whatever the others were.

Stop getting attached, you’re just gonna move.

Far too late for that.

~***~

He was able to avoid his father and stepmother over the weekend, but a week later on Friday as he entered his house after hanging out with his friends, he was surprised to see both of them in the living room, taking boxes out of the hall closet. He felt his blood run cold as he watched them, wishing he could disappear into thin air as his father turned to look at him.

“Marvin good you’re home. Take some boxes and start packing, we need to relocate for work so we’re moving.” He barely glanced at Marvin as he spoke, and Marvin just stood there, staring at him in shock as his stepmom brought a few boxes over to him.

“No.” the word fell from his lips before he could stop it, and all he could hear was his blood rushing in his ears as his father paused and slowly turned to look at him.

“What?” his father's voice was cold and cut deep into him.

“I don’t want to move again, I'm sick and tired of constantly moving!” his voice rose with each word, and he balled his hands up, his nails digging into his palms. “You both drag me around from state to state like some kind of accessory!”

“Do not raise your voice at me young man!” his father yelled right back, taking a step closer but Marvin remained where he stood, doing his best to remain composed. “Do you realize who pays for everything you have?! The clothes you wear?”

“I don’t care! I hate moving! I hate leaving somewhere just after I finally make friends and settle down! I hate it! I hate you!” his words rang out in the room as his father's fist made contact with his cheek, knocking him to the ground, and he didn’t stop with that. His father continued to beat on him as Marvin curled in on himself on the floor. He felt something wet roll down his face and he could tell it was blood.

“Abe stop! You’re gonna kill him!” he heard Miranda call out as his father kicked him hard in the side, a sharp pain ringing throughout his body,

“Good! Maybe then he’ll finally learn to stop talking back! And be grateful for one in his fucking life!” Each sentence was emphasized with another hit. He faintly heard his stepmom say something else, but it was quickly followed up by the sound of a slap that echoed throughout the

room. His father was no longer hitting him, and Marvin carefully lowered his arms to see Miranda holding her hand to her cheek and a look of regret on his father's face.

“Baby, I didn’t mean it, I-” he was cut off by her retreating to the master bedroom, his father quickly following after her.

Why does he feel sorry about hitting her?

Why does he care more about her than me?

His thoughts were racing as he stood up, gripping his side as he did so. He made his way upstairs, as quickly as he could, and stuffed some clothes into a bag with some important items before making his way back downstairs and out the door. He was definitely a sight for the neighbors to see as he made his way down the street, with a swollen lip and blood drying on his face.

MG: *hun, can I come over?*

WB❤: *yeah of course <3*

WB❤: *want me to come pick you up?*

MG: *no I'm already on my way*

MG: *just make sure your*

Mom doesn't answer the door.

WB❤: *alrighty ;)*

He let out a small laugh as he saw the message, leave it to Whizzer to read into his message when the most they’ve done is make out. By the time he made it to the picture-perfect blue house, it was already turning dark. Something about seeing the house made his stomach twist as he walked up the path to the door.

MG: *I'm here*

He knocked lightly on the door, mostly out of habit, going fully on autopilot. He pressed a hand to his side as he let out a hiss of pain, the adrenaline finally wearing off. When the door opened, he was expecting to see Whizzer, but when he saw his mom standing in the doorway, his blood ran cold. He didn't know what to do as panic quickly filled her eyes as she looked at him. He saw Whizzer come into view behind her, the slightly embarrassed look on his face quickly replaced with one of worry. Marvin was trying to think of something to say when she ushered him inside. He wasn't really listening as they spoke to him and despite the pain ringing in his ears, he stopped to kick his shoes off before heading deeper into the house.

"What happened? Do you want me to call your dad?" The question made him pause as he leaned against Whizzer, as the two made their way toward the stairs.

"NO!" The sharpness of his voice rang in his ears as he looked at Whizzer's mom, he turned to look at Whizzer with panic. "If she calls my dad, I'm leaving." The stressed look that quickly overtook the taller boy's face made his stomach ache slightly, but he meant it. The last thing he wanted was for his dad to know where he was.

"It's ok, don't worry, hun, she won't." Whizzer gave him a quick kiss on the forehead before turning to look at his mother. "Maybe you should call Charlotte's parents?" he paused for a moment but Marvin didn't interject.

"Alright, I'll call them, you boys head upstairs, there's a first aid kit under the sink in the bathroom." She retreated into the kitchen as the two made their way upstairs and into Whizzer's room. Whizzer helped him sit on the bed before he left to go get the first aid kit. Marvin stared off into space, his brain going a thousand miles a minute as he waited for Whizzer to get back.

“We’re moving.” Was the first thing he said when Whizzer came back in, not looking at him, still staring at a poster on his wall. The other boy paused where he stood before sitting down next to him.

“We can talk about that later Angel, let's get you patched up ok?” he carefully dapped at the blood on his face as he spoke. They sat in silence as Whizzer cleaned up the small cuts on his face and covered them with Sanrio bandages.

“These are so girly...” As soon as the word left his mouth, he started crying, and once the tears started he couldn’t stop them and he curled in on himself as he sobbed. Whizzer was quick to pull him in a tight hug and hold him against him.

“It’s ok, it’s ok, I got you, hun.” he rubbed his back as he clung onto him, as if he let go of him, he’d fall off the earth. He cried until his throat was raw and his lungs burned. He cried until he couldn’t cry anymore.

“Why does he hate me? What did I ever do to him?!” his voice was ragged as he spoke, demanding an answer he knew he couldn’t get from Whizzer. He clung to Whizzer until he eventually stopped crying. He pulled away to wipe his eyes, still keeping one arm around the other boy as he did so.

“Have you had dinner yet?” Whizzer brushed his hair out of his face, leaving his hand on his cheek as he wiped a few tears away with his thumb. Marvin shook his head, feeling silly for crying so much. “Alright, I’ll go get you something to eat and some water, I dunno if you brought pajamas, if not you can steal some of my clothes.” he placed a kiss on his forehead, careful to avoid any of the many bruises and cuts, before leaving the room.

In the time it took for Whizzer to bring him the food and water, Marvin changed into one of the shirts and sweatpants he shoved into his bag along with Whizzer’s baseball jacket. The

worn leather was a strange kind of comfort, he wrapped it tight around him as he sat against the wall on Whizzer's bed, tucked up against the pillows. He didn't even notice when Whizzer came back into the room with a water bottle and a plate of food. They two sat in silence as he ate, Marvin leaning against the taller boy as he did. Once he was done and Whizzer sat the plate on his desk, he turned toward him before speaking again.

"We're moving again Whizzer..." His voice was quiet, barely loud enough for the other to hear, but he did.

"Yeah..." Whizzer sat back down next to him, folding his hands in his lap as he did. "Do you know where?" Marvin shook his head, leaning back against him.

"My mom's talking to Charlotte's parents and Trina's mom, she told them what happened." Marvin stiffened in his seat as Whizzer spoke. "They're trying to figure out a way you don't have to move or go back with your dad."

"Can they do that?" He didn't want to get his hopes up, it was more than likely he'd have to go back home and leave.

"I mean, Trina's mom is a lawyer, so maybe." Whizzer wrapped his arms around him. "Or you could just stay here and not go back." He held him tightly as he spoke, protectively, and Marvin sank into his hold.

"What, you gonna protect me from my dad or something?"

"I mean, I have a metal baseball bat so..." Marvin laughed loudly at that, pulling himself impossibly closer to him. "But yeah, I'll protect you, no matter what, I promise." he tried to believe Whizzer, he wanted to, but reality had let him down one too many times before.

~***~

Marvin spent Saturday and Sunday at Whizzers house, mostly hidden away in Whizzer's room ignoring his phone ringing with calls from his father. On Sunday afternoon, he ventured downstairs to see Charlotte's and Trina's mom sitting in the living room. He stopped like a deer in headlights, glancing into the kitchen where Whizzer sat with Charlotte, Trina, and her siblings. He was about to try to sneak back upstairs before a small kid came running up to him, turning him into the center of attention in the room.

"Marvin!" he stared in slight shock at his brother, Emmett, who threw himself at him for a hug. He returned the hug, not before wincing in pain from the contact.

"Emmett? What are you doing here kid??" as he spoke, he looked up at the adults and saw his mom. She was making her over to him from where she sat on the couch and pulled him in a hug, much more carefully than Emmett did. "Mom!" he latched on to her, all the emotions from the previous few days bubbling to the top again as she held him.

"Oh honey, it's ok, it's ok." she cradled his head in her hands, doing her best not to cry herself. "So help me god, I am going to kill that bastard."

"Ok, maybe calm down a little Rebecca." Trina's mom set her hand on his mom's shoulder, letting out an awkward laugh. She was dressed in her work clothes still, a sight that made him slightly confused.

"Hi, Mrs. Sinclair, what are you guys all doing here?" he wiped away the tears that threatened to spill from his eyes.

"Well, Elizabeth called us on Friday to try and help, so I've been at the office all weekend and I think I got a plan that works for ya kiddo," she explained, going into further detail on what she meant.

“So I don’t have to leave with my dad?...” his voice was quiet, twisting his hands in his lap. His mom shook her head, smiling at him.

“No honey, you can stay here with Charlotte's parents, that’s how they come into play in this, or you can come back to New York with me and Emmett.” he wasn’t expecting that and quickly turned to look at his mom and brother, before glancing into the kitchen, staring at Whizzer. He couldn’t read the emotion in his face, but it wasn’t a good one.

For years all he wanted was to go back to New York and live with his mom, getting as far away from his father and Stepmother, but now as the option was presented to him, it didn’t sound so appealing. The idea of leaving town, leaving WestPoint, and most of all, the idea of leaving Whizzer made his skin crawl. They’d only been dating for two weeks, but even so, he’d gotten far more attached than he planned to. As he turned back to look at his mom, he gripped the hem of Whizzer’s baseball jacket.

“Can... can I stay here?” his voice wavered slightly as he spoke, and he expected her to snap at him, but she didn’t. She simply smiled at him and hugged him again.

“Of course hun, Charlotte and Trina’s dad are at the house packing up your stuff now kid, we’ll let them know to take it to the Duboir’s house.” She ruffed his hair as she spoke and he turned to smile at Whizzer before making a realization that might fuck him over.

“Uh, mom... they’re gonna find my weed stash...” he heard the others burst out laughing from the kitchen as his mom let out a long sigh.

~***~

By Wednesday of the same week, he was fully moved into the Duboir’s guest room, which was now his. He organized it the same way as his old room, still not wanting to change it. His new room was slightly bigger than his old one, so he found himself with a lot of empty wall

space. He mentioned it to Whizzer at school on Thursday and he then proceeded to show up at the Duboir house with Cordelia and a bag of stuff. They both let themselves inside and upstairs to his room.

“Hey Whiz, hey Delia, what do guys have?” Charlotte was the one to greet them since Marvin was crouched down in front of his bookshelf as he organized his books.

“We brought some stuff for Marvin to put on his wall!” Cordelia said with flair as Whizzer sat the bag next to Marvin before giving him a quick forehead kiss.

“When I said I needed stuff for my walls I didn't mean for you guys to go buy stuff.” he glanced in the bag slightly before Whizzer reached in and grabbed something.

“Well too bad, we already bought them, and Cordelia lost the receipt on the drive over here so-” Whizzer ripped the packaging open of the thing he had reliving an MLM pride flag. “And since you no longer live with a homophobic piece of shit, I bought you this.” He unfolded it to the full size to show it to Marvin, before going to hang it above his bed.

“Don’t put it there, “ He paused to glare at him slightly, before standing up and taking the flag from the other boy. “I want to put some posters over there, and I have more space over here.” He moved his TV aside before hanging the flag up in the space between his two bookshelves.

“Ok yeah that does fit better, I’ll admit.” Whizzer huffed slightly before reaching into the bag and taking out the rolled-up posters. “We also got you some Star Wars posters and some from the Scream movies.” he handed them to Marvin as he spoke.

The four spent the rest of the day hanging the posters up around his room and helping Marvin adjust. Neither Whizzer nor Cordelia stayed the night since it was a school night, so he and Charlotte were left alone in the living room as they ate. It was a strange sense of comfort,

one Marvin hadn't felt in years. He was able to just relax around her, in a different way than he did around Whizzer.

"Ya'know, this might sound a little silly, and probably dumb with the way this situation all played out," Charlotte spoke up, breaking the silence. "I always wanted a brother." they both let out a small chuckle, and Marvin smiled at her.

"Well, I always wanted a sister, so it's a win-win, and yeah it is kind of a shit situation, but hey, life happens."

"Yeah, at least you don't have to deal with that jackass anymore." she nudged him, grinning at him as she did.

"True, but now you have to deal with this jackass." that got a laugh out of her as she shoved him slightly. It was nice.

He finally felt like a part of a family.

~***~

Growing pains

The last month of school passed in a new sense of normal. He adjusted to living with the Dubois pretty quickly, it was strange at first. It was odd to have people around consistently who cared about him. Both Mr. and Mrs. Dubois worked long hours at the hospital, but they were always there in the morning to make him and Charlotte breakfast, even going out of their way to make him his usual breakfast of spinach on egg on toast. It was nice, and for the first time in a long while, Marvin was able to relax without worrying about someone yelling at him. It was strange, to say the least. He never expected he would have this kind of peace until college, or probably later if he was being honest with himself.

Since he moved in with the Dubois, Whizzer came over a lot more often. He claimed it was because they didn't need to worry about Marvin's dad or stepmom coming home and catching them making out.

"I feel like you have ulterior motives for being here so often, but I'm not gonna complain." Marvin teased as he sat down on one of the new beanbag chairs he got for his room, giving Whizzer a slight smile as he did.

"What? Can't a guy wanna spend more time with his boyfriend?" Whizzer responded as he sat down, opting to sit in the same chair as Marvin instead of the one next to him, causing Marvin to let out an 'oof' sound as he did so.

"Is it really so hard to believe that I just wanna hang out with you? I like being around you, and it's faster for me to just drive here than for you to walk to my house or for me to pick you up and drive back to my house." as he spoke, he ran his hand through Marvin's hair, twisting some of the curls. "Plus you have more streaming services than I do-" Before Whizzer could finish his sentence, Marvin shoved him off his lap and onto the floor, glaring at him.

"I was joking! C'mon Marv, don't be a ass." Whizzer shifted to sit criss-cross, laying his head on Marvin's lap, looking up at him through his lashes, with a smug grin.

"Fuck you."

"If you wanna." the bluntness of his statement caught him off guard, and he just stared at the other boy, mouth agape.

"What?" he stared at Whizzer as he sat his folded arms over his lap and rested his head on them, "like, actually?" He felt his face flush, quickly turning red.

"We've been dating for almost 9 weeks-"

"Ten weeks," Marvin interjected, causing Whizzer to roll his eyes before he continued.

“and the most we’ve done is made out with a lot of touching, so like I said if you wanna.” the way Whizzer spoke so nonchalantly made his stomach buzz. He’d be lying if he said he didn’t think about doing things like that with him, but it felt wrong to actually act on those thoughts, or even voice them to Whizzer.

He’s come a long way in accepting his sexuality, but he still struggles with it in a lot of areas. The idea of doing something like with Whizzer made his head spin, and he wasn’t sure if it was in a good or bad way. He was still just staring at Whizzer without an answer, not really paying attention until he started gently rubbing the inside of his thigh.

“Or if you’re not comfortable with that yet, we could do something else.” As he spoke, he gently moved Marvin's legs apart, moving in between them. Marvin felt his breath catch in his throat, but he didn’t stop him, instead lacing one of his hands in Whizzer’s stupid perfect hair.

“Like what exactly?” he hated how breathless his voice sounded, and there was a dark bitter voice in the back of his head that hissed mocking words at him, but as Whizzer smiled up at him, it became easy to ignore. Instead of giving a proper response, Whizzer simply hummed at him as his hands traveled up his thighs to his waistband.

“Don’t worry angel, just let me know if you want me to stop,” He placed a small kiss to the inside of his thigh, on top of his jeans. “Marvin must relax.” as Whizzer spoke, Marvin sank back in the chair, staring at a random spot on his wall, focusing on the yellow color of the room. As Whizzer went down, all thoughts in Marvin's head swam away, leaving nothing but his name echoing throughout it.

Whizzer Whizzer Whizzer

~***~

“Jesus Christ Whizzer.” was all Marvin could manage to say as Whizzer sat down next to him, a smug look on his face.

“Aren’t you Jewish?” the smug tone of voice he used, paired with the slight rasp caused by the previous action made Marvin's face flush slightly as he glared at him. “But it was good huh?”

“Yeah, but I mean...” he sputtered out a response, not meeting Whizzer’s eyes. “I don’t really have anything to compare it to.” his face flushed a deeper shade as he heard the other boy let out a small laugh.

“That was kinda obvious, Babe-” Before Whizzer could finish his sentence, Marvin flicked him on the forehead. “Ow- hey! Rude, that’s no way to treat your boyfriend, especially after that.” he pouted as he looked at him.

“What, do you want a kiss or something?” he did his best to compose himself, letting out an awkward laugh as Whizzer wrapped his arms around his neck, pulling himself closer.

“When do I not?” as they kissed, it quickly grew in intensity, with Whizzer lacing his hand in his hair, keeping his face in place, and Marvin couldn’t help but melt into it.

Pathetic.

You’re a man, act like it.

The thoughts leaked into his mind, spitting venom over the moment. He shifted in his seat, tightening his grip on Whizzers shirt as he broke the kiss, pulling back as much as he could with the way Whizzer was holding him. Whizzer must’ve seen the strange look on his face, cause he gave him a strange look.

“You ok? You’re making that face again.” The way he phrased it made Marvin falter.

“What do mean? What face am I making?” his voice was rudier than he meant for it, attitude slipping into it. Whizzer rolled his eyes before answering.

“Half the time we kiss, you pull away and make that face, like you hate the fact we’re doing this.” he shifted as he spoke, moving to sit next to him again.

“I don’t hate it when we kiss, I like it. I just, I dunno...” he avoided Whizzers eyes as he spoke, getting frustrated by it all. “I get like, freaked out or whatever whenever you lay on top of me, it makes me feel kinda trapped I guess...” it wasn’t the full reasoning, but he didn’t feel super comfortable admitting the full reason.

“Oh...” he couldn’t see Whizzers face, but he could tell by his tone that he felt somewhat bad. Before either of them said anything else, Whizzer pulled him into his lap. “There, problem solved.” the smug way he spoke caused Marvin to let out a loud laugh as he adjusted how he was sitting. He leaned his head against Whizzers chest as he laced his hand through his hair again and turned on a random movie.

After a few minutes of watching the movie in comfortable silence, Whizzer tilted his head up and they resumed their previous make-out session. It was easier for Marvin to just sink into the moment and enjoy himself, but there was still a mocking voice in the back of his head.

~***~

Time passed until it was finally the last day of junior year and Westpoint allowed the students to wear casual clothes instead of the uniform, as long as they still abided by the dress code. Marvin was thankful he didn’t have to wear the stupid blazer and tie finally, and pick out clothes he actually wanted to wear. He was getting ready in the morning, dressed in a random pair of jeans and his favorite red hoodie with a white tank top underneath it. He went into the

bathroom and opened the medicine cabinet to grab his contacts, only to realize he was out. With a groan, he walked back into his room and grabbed his glasses case, slipping them on.

He was pulling his red Converse on when he glanced over at his desk chair. Whizzer's baseball jacket was draped over it. He kept accidentally leaving it at his house when he came over, though that might be due to the fact Marvin almost always ends up wearing it whenever Whizzer comes over with it.

He stared at it for a moment before shrugging it on over his hoodie and grabbing his bag before heading downstairs. Charlotte was downstairs already, waiting in the dining room as her mom made breakfast. She was dressed in a white long-sleeve shirt under a yellow and blue striped tank top paired with blue jeans. She gave him a knowing look, noticing he was wearing Whizzer's jacket.

"Don't start-" he rolled his eyes at her as he sat down.

"I wasn't gonna say anything," She scoffed at him as Mrs. Dubior sat their plates in front of them, Charlottes with bacon, toast, and eggs, and his with his usual breakfast. "Pretty much the entire school knows you guys are dating, so..."

"Whatever." he rolled his eyes at her again before the two started eating, giving a quick goodbye as Mrs. Dubior left for work.

~***~

As they entered the school, Whizzer and Cordelia were waiting for them in the hallway. Cordelia wore a plain light blue shirt and shorts with a bow on the front. She paired them with her signature chunky sneakers and Charlotte's volleyball jacket. Whizzer was wearing a white shirt tucked into a pair of green pleated pants and his leather jacket. Marvin had no idea how he managed to look good in anything he wore.

“Is that my jacket?” Marvin rolled his eyes at the smugness that laced Whizzer’s voice as he laced their hands together.

“If you’re gonna make a big deal about it, I will take it off.” He responded as they walked to their lockers. Whizzer let out a small laugh as they went.

“No, you’re fine, angel. It looks good on you, ” he said as they opened their lockers, before turning to look at him. Also, I totally forgot you wear glasses. I've seen your case for ‘em, but this is the first time I’ve seen you wear them.”

“Yeah, I don’t really like wearing them, I look stupid.” He averted Whizzers gaze as he spoke, feeling embarrassed that attention was brought to his glasses.

“No, you look cute with them, you should wear them more often.” he finished his sentence with a quick kiss on his forehead.

“Sap.” Marvin rolled his eyes, lightly shoving Whizzer, feeling his face flush from the PDA.

“Yeah Yeah, what can I say? I think my boyfriend's cute,” he spoke as they made their way to their first class. As they walked, the bitter voice sank back into his head, spitting venom-laced words into his mind. He didn’t want to blame Whizzer for these thoughts and the wicked voice in his head, but who else was he supposed to blame? He had no idea how to act in a normal relationship, let alone a gay one, but he felt like everything he was doing was wrong. It all left him feeling agitated.

Whizzer seemed to pick up on his emotional conflict as they walked, squeezing his hand as he quickly kissed his cheek before they sat down at their desks.

“You ok, Marv?” the soft look Whizzer gave him made some of his random annoyance melt away, and he gave him a small smile.

“Yeah, just a little anxious I guess, with final exams and all.” he let out a small laugh, not wanting Whizzer to worry about him.

“I’m sure you’ll do fine, we spent like all of last week studying, and I, for one, am ready for summer vacation. The beach is calling me.” The mental image that statement gave him shut out the wicked voice for the rest of the period, as well as made it incredibly difficult for him to focus.

~***~

As the day came to an end, Marvin was clearing out his locker when Whizzer, Cordelia, and Charlotte hurried over to him.

“Marv! Do you have any plans for Friday?” Whizzer called out as he stopped in front of him, glancing at the girls as he did.

“Uh... I don’t think so? Why?” he gave the three of them a strange look.

“Good! Because we are taking you to a party on Friday.” Whizzer said it with such confidence it made Marvin falter slightly as he stared at them.

“Ok... what exactly makes you guys think I’d wanna go to a party? I spent most of the prom freaking out. I doubt I’d fare much better at a party.” he stared at them as Whizzer rolled his eyes and the girls scoffed.

“It’s the end of the year party Marvin, we’re all going, you gotta come with us.” Charlotte said, gesturing with her hand as she did.

“Yeah come on hun, it’ll be fun I promise,” Whizzer said as he took a step closer, “plus, it’s a lot easier to show up at a party like this high than prom was, so...” He drew out the last word, his signature smug smile settling on his face.

“I feel like even if I say no, you guys are gonna drag me to the party anyway.” he let out a small laugh as the other three took that as him agreeing.

Looks like he was going to a party on Friday. Great.

~***~

On Friday night, Marvin found himself sitting on his bed as Whizzer dug through his closet as he attempted to find an outfit for him to wear.

“Babe your wardrobe is depressing,” Whizzer said as he shuffled through his clothes, before eventually emerging with a band tee shirt and old red leathermen jacket from one of his old schools. “Where’d you get this jacket?”

“From one of my old schools, they had uniforms but you could get around it if you wore one of the school jackets so I got one, and red was the only color I liked,” he explained as Whizzer handed the items to him.

“Well, you definitely look good in red,” Whizzer responded as he turned back to his clothes, grabbing a pair of blue jeans and a belt. “There, I’ve done the impossible, make a decent outfit with your questionable clothes selection.” he turned to put back the clothes he took out in his search, leaving Marvin holding the clothes and staring at him.

“Uh...” Whizzer glanced back at him, a questioning expression on his face. “Could... could you leave the room? I don’t like taking my shirt off in front of people.” He was acutely aware of how his torso looked, the way his ribs stuck out on his sides, and how weirdly pale his stomach was. He figured Whizzer would eventually see him without his shirt, but today was not the time.

“Oh.” Whizzer closed his closet and glanced between Marvin and the door, before giving him a quick kiss and heading toward the door. “Just so you know Marv, I don’t care what you

look like hun.” with that he exited the room so he could change. Once he was done he knocked on the door, letting Whizzer know he could come back in.

“Do I have time to smoke or?” he glanced back at Whizzer as he made his way over to his desk, opening the drawer where his stash was kept.

“Probably, we’re still waiting for Delia to get here.” He sat down on the bed, watching as Marvin stood in front of his desk, rolling a small blunt, before lighting it and inhaling the smoke. He glanced over at him, seeing the way Whizzer stared at him.

“Why are you staring at me like that?” Marvin asked as he took another hit, turning to face him.

“Sorry, it’s just...” Whizzer let out a small chuckle, the sound airy and light, “Whenever you do that, the smoke fans around your face and you look, really elegant.” the statement caught him off guard, causing him to stutter out a response.

“Is it so unfair when you say stuff like without warning. Jesus Whizzer.” He sat down next to him, glaring at him, one with no malice behind it. After a moment or two of them sitting in silence as he smoked, Marvin turned to Whizzer. “I know you probably shouldn’t drive high, but a slight buzz should probably be fine, and I wanna try something.”

“Try what exactly?”

“Do you know what shotgunning is?” he held up the blunt slightly, waiting as Whizzer shook his head no, “So like, I take a hit of the blunt, and then I breathe it into your mouth.” As he explained, he could tell Whizzer was interested in the idea.

“Ok, yeah sure.” he shifted til he sat facing Whizzer, tilting his head closer to his, keeping his hand on his cheek as he took a hit, holding it in as he pressed his lips to Whizzer, breathing the smoke into his parted lips, he watched as Whizzer moved back slightly to exhale

the smoke. He stared at him for a second, before taking another hit and repeating the action, holding the almost kiss for a moment longer before pulling back to allow Whizzer to exhale the smoke and breathe. He took the last hit by himself, setting the remains in his ashtray.

Marvin turned back to Whizzer, his eyes blown out slightly, before the taller boy pulled him into a full kiss, holding onto his waist as he did. It was slow at first, before building up as he felt Whizzer nip at his lower lip and push deeper into his mouth. He felt Whizzers hands slip under his shirt, not moving but just resting on his hips, and he shivered at the coolness of his hands. Unsure of what to do with his own, he laced one of his hands into Whizzers hair, tugging on it slightly as he felt him bite at his lip again, the action resulting in a low moan from the other boy.

The two broke apart to breathe before Whizzer tilted his head down to kiss and mouth at his neck. Marvin moved his head to the side, allowing him more access until he reached a spot low on his neck, and felt him bite down slightly before he paused and lifted his head up quickly.

“Shit, sorry- I got a bit carried away-” he tried to explain quickly, tripping over his words as he spoke before Marvin stopped him.

“I mean- I’m fine with it.” typically Marvin would rather pull his tongue out than admit something like that, but the weed loosened him up enough to be honest with himself. Whizzer stared at him momentarily before moving his head back down to his neck and continued his previous motions.

When Charlotte knocked on the door to let them know they were getting ready to leave, his neck was splotched with several red marks, some placed too far up on his neck for his jacket collar to cover. She stared at the two for a moment, her eyes flicking between Whizzer’s face and

Marvin's neck. She gave Whizzer a look before heading downstairs, with both of them in tow. The four of them piled into Charlotte's car and headed towards the party.

~***~

To say Marvin was having a bad time was an understatement, the loud noise of half-drunk high schoolers with zero adult supervision was making his skin crawl. His high wore off not long after they arrived, and he was not about to share the bong that half the party used by now. He sat awkwardly on the couch, trying to disappear as the volume of the room grew louder. The only saving grace of the night was that Whizzer hadn't left his side the entire time. He was currently sitting right next to him, one arm wrapped around his waist, anchoring him to reality as he talked to one of his baseball friends. Marvin was starting to feel ridiculous just sitting there as he talked to his friends.

"I'm gonna go grab a drink." He stood up, needing a breather from the obnoxious noise.

"Can you grab me one? Lotte's our designated driver tonight." Whizzer called after him as he escaped into the kitchen, grabbing two random drinks from the cooler on the counter.

"Hey, you're Whizzer's boyfriend, Marvin, right?" He turned to see who was talking to him, seeing a tall tanned-skinned boy with glasses and black hair. Marvin felt a bit annoyed about being referred to as Whizzer's boyfriend before his name, but he nodded in reply, giving the kid a strange look as he spoke again.

"Sick, nice to properly meet you, I'm Micheal, a friend of Whizzer's from middle school." he held his hand for Marvin to shake, but he just stared at it instead before he awkwardly retracted it. "I honestly didn't think he'd ever get a boyfriend."

"What is that supposed to mean?" His voice was hostile, taking Micheal's statement as an insult, getting defensive in Whizzers place.

“I didn’t mean in a bad way I swear-” Micheal quickly backtracked, a panic expression setting on his face, “I just meant that Whizzer never seemed like the kind of person to have a steady relationship. In our freshman and sophomore year he kinda just went after any guy, so I never thought he would actually have a boyfriend.” he leaned against the kitchen counter as he spoke, waving his hands about as he did.

Marvin stared at him for a minute, not saying anything before shoving passed him back into the living room. He did his best to ignore the mocking voice in his head returning with vigor.

You’re just another name on a list.

This will never last.

He did his best to ignore the voice, opening his drink and downing half of it before heading back over to the couch where he left Whizzer, only to see another guy start kissing him. Before he could really process what he was seeing, he sat the drinks down and crossed the room over to where they stood, pulled the guy away from Whizzer, and punched him hard in the jaw knocking him to the ground. He felt the whole party halt to a stop for a moment, feeling multiple eyes bare into him. The feeling made his skin crawl, and he faintly heard people start whispering as they stared at him. In another moment of clouded judgment, he grabbed Whizzer’s arm and pulled him away from the main party, and into the entryway. Before Whizzer could say anything, Marvin turned to him, anger in his voice.

“What the fuck was that?!” his voice was accusatory, spitting venom with his words.

“Excuse me?” Whizzer stared at him, confusion and annoyance written on his face.

“Why the hell did you kiss him?!”

“Why the hell do you think I willingly kissed him?! He grabbed my face!” the confusion on his face melted away into simple annoyance.

“Well, why didn’t you pull away? Or try to stop him?” He stepped closer, getting slightly in Whizzers face.

“I was going to, but you stepped in before I could!”

“I swear to god, Whizzer! It feels like sometimes you don’t take me seriously! Like whatever this is,” he gestured between the two as he spoke “is all just some kind of joke to you!” his words slipped out before he could catch them, and he just stared at the expression on Whizzer’s face, unable to read his expression.

“Marvin... I-” As he spoke, Whizzer tried to reach out and put his hand on his shoulder, but Marvin smacked his hand away before storming out of the house. He faintly heard Whizzer call his name as he left, but he ignored him and stalked down the path and onto the sidewalk. He wiped aggressively at his eyes, trying to stop the tears that threatened to spill, before he stopped at the edge of the block. He pulled at his hair till it hurt and stomped his foot on the ground.

Marvin stood on the sidewalk, throwing a fit over a problem he caused. He can’t be normal, no matter how hard he tries. He can’t be normal in a relationship with Trina, or be normal in one with Whizzer. He was just a freak and that was all he’d ever be. He let out a choked sound before yelling into the night. He wiped his face dry on his sleeve before he started walking again.

He felt his phone buzz from his pocket as he walked, but he didn’t check it. He didn’t want to talk to anyone at the minute. He wasn’t sure where he was walking, just mindlessly heading in a random direction. At some point, he ended up at 7-11. He stared at the bright lights of the rest shop before heading into it and making his way to the slushie machines. He grabbed the largest size and filled it to the max with cherry, paying for wordlessly and leaving. Marvin eventually made his way home, walking upstairs and into his room, locking the door, and sitting

on his bed. He pulled his headphones on over his ears before pulling his hood up. He raised his music volume to max and sank into the sound.

He heard Charlotte come home around midnight as she knocked on his door, calling out to him and asking if he was ok, but he ignored her. After a while, he finished his slushie and finally checked his phone. There were mainly messages from Whizzer.

WD❤️: *Marv, did you leave???*

WD❤️: *Marv*

WD❤️: *don't ignore me.*

WD❤️: *Marvin where are you?*

WD❤️: *fine, whatever, talk to me*

when you're done pouting.

He stared at the chat messages for a while, attempting to type out an apology for a minute or two, before giving up and setting his phone down, only to feel it chime with another notification.

WD❤️: *I saw you typing coward.*

WD❤️: *did you at least get home safe?*

MG: *yeah.*

WD❤️: *good.*

WD❤️: *lemme know when you're done sulking*

He stopped whatever apology he typed and deleted it, tossing his phone on his bed. He begrudgingly kicked his jeans off and changed into a pair of sweatpants, still leaving on the band tee but taking off the jacket and tossing it with his other dirty clothes. Turning back toward his

bed, he spotted Whizzer's baseball jacket draped over his desk chair. He stared at it for a moment before putting it on and climbing back into bed for the night.

~***~

By the time Monday rolled around, Marvin barely left his room for the entire weekend. The last thing he wanted was to be perceived, but the longer he went without talking to Whizzer, the worse he felt. This is the longest one of their fights has lasted, and this one was definitely mostly his fault.

With a sigh, he rose from his bed and changed into fresh clothes. He wore a blue and red plaid shirt and jeans, and once again grabbed the baseball jacket before grabbing his bag and heading downstairs. As he made his way through the living room to the door, he passed by Charlotte and Cordelia on the couch, the latter of the two having stayed over the night before.

"Are you finally going to apologize to Whizzer?" Charlotte's question caught him off guard, and he turned to look at the two like he got caught doing something he wasn't supposed to do.

"Omg, please say you are, he's been complaining to me all weekend, please talk to him," Cordelia said, leaning forward in her seat as she spoke, "Get him flowers, that's how you apologize properly after something like this."

"...is it?" Marvin stared at the two of them, watching as they nodded. He stared at them a moment longer before heading outside and down the sidewalk. He looked up the name of a random flower shop nearby and made his way to it.

As soon as he walked into it, he felt incredibly out of place. There were rows and rows of different kinds of flowers, and the smell made him feel nauseous. It smelled like someone doused

the building in perfume. It was incredibly overstimulating and he debated just leaving and heading straight to Whizzer's house, but before he could, he was approached by an employee.

"Hi there, can I help you find anything?" they had a large smile that Marvin could tell was forced.

"Uh.. I'm just looking for a bouquet of roses." he stared at the employee, embarrassed someone came over to him and knew he came in there.

"Great! You'll find some lovely selections right this way if you follow me this way." they lead him to one of the displays filled with roses of different sizes and colors. The selection overwhelmed him as he looked through all the flower bundles before his eyes settled on a small bouquet of pink and red roses with a small white flower mixed into it, wrapped with blue paper.

He ignored whatever the employee was saying, grabbed the bouquet, and walked over to the checkout. He paid and left, quickly leaving and heading over to Whizzers house. He walked up to the front door, and stared at the door for a minute before reaching out to knock on the door, only for it to open before he could.

Whizzer stood in the doorway, staring at him with an expression Marvin couldn't quite place, but he hoped it wasn't annoyance. He was dressed down, wearing sweatpants and a teal hoodie, it wasn't anything to write home about, but it was the first time Marvin saw him dressed so casually, and for a minute he forgot what he was doing and everything he practiced to say.

"Hey Marv, are those for me?" He crossed his arms as he spoke, looking at him with his signature smile. He felt his face flush as he stuttered out his words, tripping over them.

"Uh, um yeah, yes um..." He awkwardly held out the flowers to him, waiting for him to take them before he continued. "I uh, felt bad about what happened on Friday and I probably shouldn't have overrated like that, I was being an ass."

Whizzer's smirk turned into a smile as he looked between the flowers and him, before letting out a small chuckle.

“Ya know, the last time we had a major ‘fight’ you bought me roses as an apology.”

“I did?” he tried to rack his brain for what Whizzer was referring to, but he came up blank.

“At the all hearts dance during spirit week, you bought me one of the roses and danced with me as an apology,” He paused and chuckled again as Marvins remembered what he was referring to.

“Uh, do you like them? The girls said I was supposed to get you flowers as an apology, but I get it if you’re still angry at me...” He gripped the hem of his shirt, trying to read the look on his face, his nerves fighting against him weren’t helping with identifying it.

“I love them, I think it’s sweet, and the girls were right, flowers are definitely a great way to apologize.” He stepped to the side as he spoke, still smiling at him. “Did you wanna hang for a bit? I will admit I missed you over the weekend.”

“Yeah sure, I missed you too.” He felt relief wash over him as he stepped inside, “How’d you know I was here by the way?”

“Oh, uh...” He heard Whizzer stammer as he walked into the kitchen to grab a vase, “Cordelia texted telling me you were on your way, so I was kinda expecting you, I saw you walk up the path but you were taking forever to knock so.”

“Well glad to see you didn’t suddenly gain patience in the two days we didn’t talk.” He mocked in a light-hearted tone as Whizzer sat the now vased roses on a window sill before sitting next to him.

“Well can’t change too much before you see me again,” he threw himself on top of Marvin as he spoke, quickly making himself comfortable. “Also, you’re wearing my jacket again.” the smug look and tone returned just as quickly as it left.

“Yeah well, you keep leaving it at my house.” He rolled his eyes, trying to hide the blush on his face.

“It’s almost like I do that on purpose so I get to see you wear it more often.” He finished his sentence with a kiss, spreading his smile as he did. The small kisses soon built heat as they went before Whizzer pulled away for a moment. Before Marvin could question what was wrong, he shifted the way the two were lying so Whizzer was below him. He quickly wrapped his arms around his neck and pulled him back into a kiss.

~***~

Two weeks have passed since Marvin’s apology, and things have been good between him and Whizzer, for the most part at least. The two fell back into their old song and dance of arguing, fighting, making up, and acting as if nothing happened. It was the strangest sense of normal Marvin had and for some reason, he hated it. He hated the constant stupid arguments, he hated how stupid Whizzer made him feel. Whizzer was basically everything he wasn’t, and he felt like he went out of his way to rub it in his face.

He did his best to ignore the ugly feelings he had while he was with Whizzer and not kill the mood, but it was harder some days than others and he could tell Whizzer was able to pick up on when he was having a bad day. It pissed him off how easily Whizzer could read him.

He was currently lounging in his room with Whizzer, who stayed the night before and planned to stay the rest of the weekend. He was going on about something or another but Marvin

wasn't listening, his mind kept drifting back to the night before, especially when he caught sight of the faded purple marks on Whizzer's neck.

Whizzer was more touchy than he normally was when he visited, and at first, Marvin just chalked it up to Charlotte's parents not being home, but when the two were up in his room Whizzer said he had other plans than just hanging out over the weekend. That statement led to a semi-awkward conversation about intimacy and what the other was comfortable with. The whole thing felt like a dream as it happened, and it left his head feeling like it was covered in fog as he lay in his bed, staring at the other boy as he slept, but at the same time, it left him feeling more alive than he had in as long as he could remember.

"Marvin, are you paying attention to me?" Whizzer's question brought him back to the present, staring at him with a slightly amused expression.

"Sorry no, I spaced out." He chuckled slightly as Whizzer rolled his eyes at him. He stood up from where he sat and grabbed his chess set before sitting across from Whizzer. "Do you wanna play a game with me? Instead of just watching me play by myself?" chess was something he was good at, it was something he could win. He just needed one win over Whizzer.

"Yeah sure, I doubt I remember how to play tho." he turned to look at the board in front of them as Marvin sat the pieces up, facing the white side toward him.

"The main thing you need to remember is that the king," he pointed at the piece as he spoke, giving Whizzer a slight smirk, "Treat him nice, use some brains, and protect him."

"I know that." Whizzer rolled his eyes, glaring at him before reaching out to one of the pawns, hovering his hand over it.

"Move a pawn," Marvin stated

"Where?" Whizzer asked.

“There.” Marvin replied

“Here?” Whizzer asked again.

“Move a pawn.” Marvin said.

“Who?” Whizzer requested.

Not the queen.” Marvin corrected

“Who?” Whizzer questioned.

“Jesus.” Marvin groaned. This was proving to be more annoying than he first thought it would be. After a while, Whizzer finally moved the pawn and stared at Marvin as he waited for him to make a move.

“Move the pawn.” He parroted Marvin's words to him. “Move the pawn.” He pointed at the piece as he spoke, the tone he used mocking. He eventually grabbed Marvin's hand, guided it to a piece, and moved it forward. The sight and action made his heart flutter as he stared at him.

“God you’re pretty...” He leaned forward in an attempt to kiss Whizzer, only for him to lean farther back.

“More's the pity,” he rolled his eye as he spoke, pulling his hand away, “ since you need a man who’s brainy.” the statement caught him off guard.

“What?” he stared blankly at Whizzer as he spoke.

“How should I behave myself?” he crossed his arms as he leaned back in his seat.

“Maybe we should call it quits.” Marvin stared at the half-finished game on the board in front of him before signing and looking at Whizzer.

“This game shits.” was all he said as he reached for the bag he kept his chess pieces in.

“Let me win?” there was a hopeful tone to Whizzers voice as he spoke, and Marvin couldn’t help but melt at the sound of it, it was the closest thing to the soft tone Whizzer usually used, even if he hadn’t used it in a while.

“Yeah fine.” He reached out to move a piece before Whizzer grabbed his king piece and started hoping it across the board, “wait-”

“Whizzer wins!” he was interrupted as Whizzer exclaimed his statement a few times more before knocking Marvin’s king piece over. Marvin stared at the board for a minute before standing up and walking across the room to his bed, where Whizzer’s overnight bag sat. He grabbed it and started shoving his clothes into it, before turning back around to face Whizzer, holding the bag out in front of him.

“Marvin...” Whizzer stood up as he spoke, knocking the chessboard over as he did, the action only fueling his anger.

“Get out.” His tone was ice, as steady and cold as he could manage at that moment. “This needs to stop.”

“Are you kidding me? What needs to stop?!”

“This! The way you act! The way you treat me!” he shoved the bag at Whizzer's chest, causing him to stumble backward slightly. “It's like you don’t even understand-”

“Don't start explaining, I'm sick of explaining!” Whizzer’s voice rose as he took a step closer, anger building in his face.

“Get out!” he practically yelled at Whizzer as the other boy stormed out of his room and out of the house. He slammed his door shut before Charlotte could ask what happened, having left her room due to the yelling.

He paced back in forth for a minute before seeing the spilled chess pieces and board. With a groan, he crouched down and began picking the pieces up and putting them back in the bag, as he did, he realized he was missing a piece. The white king piece. He looked around the area, trying to find it, and growing more and more stressed the longer he couldn't find it. He did his best not to cry and let his emotions crush him as he sat the chessboard and bag back on his bookshelf, telling himself it would turn up.

As he shoved the beanbag chairs back against the wall, he saw something he forgot to shove in Whizzer's bag. His stupid baseball jacket. The sight of the item hit him like a freight train as he realized what he had just done. He just kicked Whizzer out over a chess game, he more likely than not just ruined his relationship over a stupid game of chess.

I am so dumb.