

the polaroid

[purescent](#)

Summary:

A polaroid lies face down, stark white against the carpet. Will crouches, breath already unsteady, and turns it over. His breath caught in his throat as the image came into focus, sending a jolt straight through him. Mike's jeans strained visibly against the thick bulge at his crotch, the denim stretched taut over an unmistakable erection.

Dear Will,

If you wanted to see me with a boner, you could've asked instead of drawing it.

Love, Mike

OR

Will accidentally gifts Mike an erotic drawing of him, Mike returns the favor by sending him polaroid evidence of what his boners really look like.

Notes:

hi guys <3

this fic is written post-graduation, where El did not die and Will did not come out.

i'm going to add in more tags specifically about the smut as the story goes on, so it will be getting more explicit as i upload more, chapter 3 onwards is where the smut gets really intense, last warning! i hope you enjoy!

[Chapter 1](#): casual

Chapter Text

It's the first real summer after graduation, and Will is staying at the Wheelers' house.

Karen and Ted are away on holiday, which they felt they deserved after their second child finished high school amidst the horrors of alternate dimensions. This somehow turned into Jonathan and Nancy coming back from the city, Mike staying home to help with Holly, and Will being invited along with a gentle, *you're responsible enough, please stay* from Karen that he couldn't quite refuse.

Will doesn't mind being here.

Actually, he likes it.

The house feels familiar in a way that doesn't ask anything of him. Holly still sits at the breakfast table with her pencils spread everywhere, asking Will to draw with her. Nancy

is always around, checking in with a smile, making sure he feels included without making a fuss. And Mike... Mike is still Mike. Comfortable. Constant. Too important.

Will sleeps in the basement.

Karen had insisted on making it feel less like a basement and more like a room before she left, fresh sheets on the couch, a mattress tucked against the wall, a lamp with a warm bulb instead of the harsh overhead light. Jonathan took one look at the mattress that was *supposed* to be his bed and laughed, immediately claiming Nancy's room instead. Will didn't mind. He's used to the quiet.

He likes the privacy. The way the basement lets him exist without being watched.

Most nights, he stays up late with his sketchbook open on the desk, the rest of the house settling into sleep above him. He doesn't have to worry about someone asking him to turn the lights off or accidentally glancing at what he's drawing. He can take his time. He can let his thoughts wander.

Since graduation, his art has changed.

He still draws the party sometimes, familiar silhouettes... But lately, his hand keeps returning to Mike. Not all at once. Never all at once. Just pieces. A curl of dark hair. The slope of his collarbone. The soft line of his mouth when he's concentrating.

Will only ever draws fragments.

He has one sketchbook. One. And the thought of Jonathan, or worse, *Mike*, flipping through it makes his stomach twist. So, he's careful. He clips pages together. He hides the obvious things. He tells himself it's just practice.

Because wanting more than that, wanting Mike like *that*, is something he's learned to live with quietly. And the basement is very good at keeping secrets.

Will hears the basement door open.

"Hey, you ready for breakfast?" Mike asks, walking down the stairs heading towards Will who is sitting at the desk, now shifting in his seat.

Will startles, his chair scraping softly as he shifts closer to the desk. "Yeah- one second."

He lunges to cover his sketchbook with his arm, far too late. The page crinkles under his elbow.

Mike comes up behind him.

Shit.

“What you drawing?” Mike asks, voice low and easy.

Will freezes. Mike’s hands land on either side of the desk, palms flat, caging him in. The space between them disappears all at once, like the room has folded inward. Will’s shoulders go tight, breath catching halfway in.

Will’s breath hitches. “It’s nothing- It’s just um, it’s just practice...”

He leans closer, peering over Will’s shoulder. Will can feel the heat of him now, his chest at Will’s back, his face so close it’s almost touching. If Will turned his head even a little, their noses would brush. Their mouths would-

Don’t look.

Don’t look.

Don’t look.

“Oh,” Mike says. “Are those lips?”

“Yes- well,” Will stammers, staring very hard at the desk, “it’s a work in progress. I just started it this morning. I’m feeling anxious waiting to hear whether I got into that art school or not, so I thought I’d... get some practice in.”

Practice drawing *you*, apparently.

“Cool.”

Mike tilts his head, studying the page. Will feels it like a weight, the attention, gentle but unbearable. His face burns. He hopes Mike can’t tell what those lips are supposed to be. He hopes the outline is vague enough to pass as anyone.

Then Mike straightens and steps back.

The sudden lack of him is almost worse.

Will exhales slowly through his nose, quiet, like the sound might give him away. He tells himself he’s relieved. He tells himself he doesn’t miss the closeness.

He tells himself a lot of things that aren’t true.

Mike’s gaze drifts to the neatly made mattress on the floor.

“So,” he says lightly, “Jonathan hasn’t spent a night here, has he?”

Will follows his eyes. The mattress looks untouched, just like it did when Karen made it.

“Yeah,” he says, smiling. “Are we surprised, though?”

Mike laughs.

Will relaxes a little. This, he can do. This is safe.

Mike steps closer, lowering his voice to a whisper. "I hear them every single night. It's torture."

Will chokes on a breath. That was... unexpected.

"Seriously, Mike?" he laughs, a little too sharp. "Gross."

Mike laughs too, louder now, back in his normal voice. "Will, it's a nightmare. My room's right next to Nancy's. I have to shove my pillow over my ears just to fall asleep!"

Will shakes his head, grinning despite himself. "Even though I'm sleeping on a couch, I'd still rather be here than up there."

Mike's smile lingers, then falters. He shifts his weight, suddenly unsure of where to put his hands.

"Speaking of..." He hesitates. "Do you think I could, uh- invade your space down here and sleep on Jonathan's mattress tonight?"

Will's stomach drops.

"I mean," Mike adds quickly, "you can totally say no. It's just... having an actual good night's sleep would be nice."

Will nods, heart thudding too hard, too fast. This shouldn't matter. They've had sleepovers forever. It's normal. It's fine.

Except it isn't.

"And, uh," Mike says, rubbing the back of his neck now, eyes flicking anywhere but Will's, "since we're on the topic of practice... maybe I could help you. With your art. Like- a reference or something."

Oh.

A hollow opens in Will's chest, sharp and aching all at once. He tells himself Mike means nothing by it. He tells himself Mike is just being Mike. He tells himself this is exactly what best friends do.

"I mean, it's a stupid idea," Mike rushes on. "If you don't want to, that's-"

"No!" Will blurts, louder than he means to. He swallows. "I mean, of course. It's your house. You don't have to ask. And, um... yeah. You can help me with my art later."

He smiles, hoping it looks normal. Hoping his cheeks aren't as red as they feel.

Mike's shoulders loosen. "Cool."

"Cool," Will echoes.

And he tells himself, again, that this doesn't mean anything at all.

"Boys! Come on breakfast is ready!" Nancy shouts from the kitchen.

"Coming!" Mike shouts back. Then, quieter, almost just for Will, "Come on."

Will follows Mike upstairs, the warmth and noise of the Wheeler kitchen settling over him like something he's known forever. Everyone is already there, Nancy humming as she flips pancakes, Jonathan leaning against the counter teasing Holly as she fusses with her syrup. Two empty chairs are waiting.

"Will!" Holly calls brightly, waving him over. "Come sit next to me, I wanna show you my drawing." She pats the seat insistently.

Will smiles and slides in. He never says no to Holly. "Let's see it," he says.

Holly digs through her meticulously organized bag, papers sliding everywhere as Jonathan pours syrup onto his pancakes. Will reaches for Holly's plate automatically, scooping pancakes and eggs onto it while she digs for the right sheet.

He glances across the table and catches Mike's eye. Mike's already watching him, a small, subtle smile tugging at his mouth. A quick nod as a silent *thank you* and Will ducks his head, smiling back before sliding the full plate in front of Holly.

"Mike," Holly says sharply, finally retrieving her drawing, "you're not allowed to see this one. It's just for me and Will."

Mike's gaze lingers on Will a moment longer than necessary, then he rolls his eyes. "I don't want to see it anyway," he mutters.

Will settles back in his chair as Holly passes him the drawing. It's careful, soft lines of herself standing next to a boy, smiling. It reminds him uncomfortably of his own sketchbook.

"This is amazing, Holly," he whispers. "Who's this standing next to you?"

She leans in close, now whispering. "My boyfriend."

Will lets out a quiet giggle. "I'll keep your secret. Promise."

Then Holly straightens.

"So, Will, you've never had a girlfriend before."

The words land too loudly, like a dropped plate. Will feels everyone at the table suddenly present, the space around him thinning.

"Holly!" Nancy calls, sharper than usual, "Eat your food and let Will eat his."

Will's chest tightens. He lifts his eyes and immediately finds Mike's. Mike's looking at him openly now, something dark and unreadable in his expression. A beat passes before Mike looks down, stabbing at his food a little too hard.

Well. That's great.

"It's fine, Nancy," Will says quickly, forcing a laugh. "She's not wrong."

The fork in his hand feels heavier.

Holly tilts her head. "When you get a girlfriend one day... would you want her to be blonde or brunette?"

Will's appetite disappears completely. He pokes at his eggs, buying himself a second. He can't refuse to answer. That would be weird. Suspicious, even.

"Hmm..." he hums. "Probably... brunette?"

He doesn't mean to look at Mike. It just happens.

Mike's eyes snap up instantly, jaw tight, brows drawn together like Will's said something wrong. Something he was supposed to know better than to say. The look is gone almost as soon as Will registers it. Did he register it? Or did he imagine it?

Will drops his gaze and keeps eating, even though his throat has closed around the food.

It's one thing to invent a hypothetical 'dream' girl. It's another to do it while the person you actually want sits across from you, silent.

"Well," Holly says cheerfully, "I hope you find your brunette, Will."

She goes back to her breakfast, satisfied. No more questions.

Thank God.

Will keeps his eyes on his plate, counting bites, pretending everything is normal.

Breakfast winds down, the plates cleared, the chatter fading into the morning. Will and Mike grab their bikes from the garage, the sun already warm on the street. Today, like every weekday this summer, they're heading in the same direction.

Will pedals toward the coffee shop, tucked into the corner of the main street. He works there part-time as a barista, mostly mornings, but his favorite part of the shift is after noon. By twelve, the rush slows, the customers thin out, and he can pull out his smaller sketchpad, drawing in between refills and orders.

The quiet gives him two full hours to himself before his shift ends at two. He can almost taste the calm, already imagining the worn wood counter and the soft clatter of cups, the way the sunlight spills across the tables.

Mike rides just a few buildings down the same street, toward the old brick building where he's taking his summer writing course. Will still remembers the excitement in Mike's voice when he told him he'd been accepted. Mike had applied before graduation, submitting a short story he'd never let Will read, one of only ten students to get in. Prestigious, competitive, a place so difficult to get into that everyone doubted Mike, but not Will. Never Will.

They fall into the rhythm of the ride, pedals turning, tires humming against the road. And... *silence*.

The kind of silence that feels heavy.

Will's mind spins. *Why did breakfast feel so... weird? Was it something he said? Did Mike notice Holly's questions? Did he say the wrong thing about a hypothetical girlfriend?*

He steals a glance at Mike, but his eyes are glued straight ahead, jaw tight, posture stiff. Will turns back to the road, heart thudding, trying to shake the thought, but the ache in his chest doesn't go away.

They pass the corner where Will's coffee shop peeks out behind a small row of storefronts. *Just a couple blocks left*. His stomach tightens. He imagines parking his bike, running inside to the smell of roasted beans and warm pastries, but then the image of Mike next to him, riding silently, overrides everything.

Finally, they reach the coffee shop. Will slows, glancing over at Mike, who pulls up beside him, one hand on the handlebar. He gives a small, almost forced half-smile, a

tiny nod, before turning sharply onto the street toward his building. Just a few buildings down, but already it feels like miles between them.

Will watches him go, chest tightening, shoulders slumping. Acknowledged, technically, but barely. He's left with the weight of that silence, the memory of Mike's stiff posture and clipped goodbye.

The door jingles as he pushes inside, the familiar smells wrapping around him like a tiny island of calm. But even here, the memory of Mike's half-smile follows him, a small cut through the morning, sharp and lingering.

Will locks the door to the coffee shop behind him, the familiar hum of the espresso machine and clatter of cups fading behind him. Normally, this place is his refuge, orders to make, drinks to pull, quiet moments to sketch, but today it feels like a stage he can't escape from. His chest is tight, hands restless, and every move behind the counter feels too loud.

Max, Lucas, Dustin, and El trickle in for their usual orders. They joke, nudge each other, and laugh, but Will only half-listens. He makes their drinks automatically, heart hammering, mind elsewhere.

Mike asked him to stay in the basement tonight. Asked to be his muse. To let Will draw him. And now, while he's serving latte after latte, that thought presses down harder than any rush hour crowd ever could. Will's stomach knots, his fingers tighten around the steaming cup. What if he's too obvious? What if Mike notices the way he's already thinking about him?

"You're too good at this, Will," Dustin laughs, grinning. "You've turned me into a serious coffee addict."

Will chuckles softly, nodding, but his mind isn't in the room. He's listening, technically, but he's not *hearing*. He's thinking about Mike, the way he kept his eyes averted this morning, the tense ride beside him. Every word from his friends slides past him like water over glass.

El nudges him gently. "Will, you okay? You're spacing out."

"Yeah," he mutters quickly, placing her cup on the counter. "I'm fine. Your mocha's ready," Will says, voice a little too sharp, snapping himself back. He watches El take it, chatting briefly, but he's not really present.

He's wondering if he should have said yes, if he'll be awkward, if tonight will be one of those nights where he freezes in front of Mike.

Time drifts forward. Orders come and go. By two, he wipes down the counter one last time, tucks his pen into his bag, and steps outside. Normally, he waits for Mike, hoping for a familiar nod or a shared joke on the ride home. Today, he doesn't. He doesn't even look for him. He swings his leg over his bike, and pedals toward the WSQK, toward Robin, toward anyone who can keep his mind from spinning completely.

The wind stings his cheeks, the wheels hum beneath him, but it does little to soothe the knot in his stomach.

By the time he reaches the WSQK, he's gripping the handlebars like he's holding onto sanity itself. He steps inside, and the familiar smell of old records and paper in Robin's corner of chaos hits him. Relief comes in small waves, but the tight coil in his chest hasn't loosened. He needs someone to remind him that he's not overthinking everything, at least, not completely.

"Byers!" Robin lights up the second she sees him. "What are you doing here?"

She pulls him into a hug before he can answer. Will clings to her for half a second longer than usual.

"Mini Byers," Steve says giving him a nod.

Will hesitates. His chest feels tight, words piling up too fast.

"Hi, Steve. I- uh... I don't want to sound like a jerk, but I really need to speak to Robin... Alone."

"No problem, man," Steve says immediately, like it's nothing. He pats Will's shoulder on the way past, casual and kind, and disappears into the back room.

Will watches him go. He still isn't used to how easy Steve makes it, how safe. After everything Robin told Will about Steve being so accepting of her, it matters more than Steve probably realizes.

Robin turns back to him, concern snapping into place. "Okay. What happened?"

"I'm going to die," Will says, dropping into the chair. "I'm actually going to die."

"Oh, dramatic. So this is bad-bad?" Robin says, crouching in front of him.

“It’s Mike,” Will says, dragging his hands down his face. “He asked me to draw him. And he wants to stay in the basement tonight. And then-” He breaks off, frustration spilling over. “Then he ignored me all morning. Like I wasn’t even there.”

Robin leans back against her desk, lips quirking. “Does he know you already draw him?”

Will groans. “Robin.”

“I’m kidding. Mostly.”

He exhales sharply. “I can’t do this. He’s going to see right through me. I’m trying to get over him, and this is just going to make everything worse. He’s not like me- like *us*. He’s str-”

“Straight,” Robin echoes. “Yes. You’ve mentioned. Repeatedly.”

Will glares at her weakly.

“Look,” she says, softening, “this could be good! You remember what we talked about right? This could be an opportunity for you to try see through *him*.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to observe anything while I’m actively trying not to combust,” Will mutters.

Robin shrugs, “Look, nobody comes out as straight. Vickie had a boyfriend before we started dating. Mike used to be with El. If he has no evidence to suggest otherwise, for all you know he could think *you’re* straight.”

Will rolls his eyes. “Okay, and where is this going?”

“I’m saying,” Robin continues brightly, “You don’t have to back out. You get to paint your crush. That should be fun! Ask him to take his shirt off or something. Be bold! You’re going to be studying advanced arts, right? Very professional stuff that needs very professional, detailed practice.”

Will’s chest tightens painfully. “First of all, it’s not just a crush. And second, absolutely not! If I come on too strong and he doesn’t feel the same, it could ruin everything. I’d rather be miserable quietly than lose him.”

“I understand that, but right now you’re closing the door without locking it. If you want to really get over Mike, you need to commit to it. If you don’t, what’s the point in pining over him and not even *trying* to get a sense of how he might feel? What’s the worst that can come out of you just analyzing his behavior a bit more?” Robin says softening her voice.

Will hates that she's right.

He rubs his tired eyes. "I'll... try. I'll look closer tonight I guess."

"That's all I'm asking," Robin says gently.

He stands and pulls her into a hug. She hugs him back without hesitation, solid and sure. His breathing slows against her shoulder.

For a long time, Will thought he was alone in this. That this part of him had to stay buried and quiet forever. Robin changed that.

He doesn't know how he managed before her.

Will bikes back to the Wheelers just as the sky starts to soften toward evening.

When he steps inside, Nancy and Jonathan are already in the kitchen preparing dinner.

"Can I help you set the table?" Will asks Nancy, already reaching for the cutlery drawer.

Nancy smiles. "Thank you, Will," she says, squeezing his hand as she passes.

He counts carefully, five knives, five forks, placemats straightened, corners aligned. It's something to focus on. Something he can do right.

When he finishes, Will lingers against the kitchen wall. Jonathan drifts in beside him, easy and familiar, and rests a hand on his shoulder like it belongs there.

"Hey," Jonathan says softly. "You okay?"

Will nods, automatically.

"Mike said you didn't wait up after your shift," Jonathan continues. "Where'd you go?"

"Oh. I went to see Robin," Will says.

Jonathan hums, accepting the answer without probing. He never pushes.

There's a lot Jonathan doesn't say. There always has been. But Will feels it anyway, in the way Jonathan looks at him, like he's paying attention to things no one else notices. Like he knows there's something Will hasn't said yet and won't rush him to.

Sometimes Will thinks Jonathan already knows. Sometimes he thinks he's always known.

Dinner is ready soon after. Mike is the last one to sit down. He keeps his shoulders tense, gaze fixed on his plate, fork moving without purpose. He doesn't look at Will. Not once.

The conversation flows around them anyway. Holly asks Jonathan when he'll be dropping her off at her friend's house tomorrow, and Jonathan laughs, teasing her about trying to escape them too early. Will barely hears it.

Every scrape of Mike's fork makes his chest tighten. Every second of silence between them feels deliberate, heavy. Will replays the day over and over, searching for the moment he messed up.

Did I say something wrong?

Is he upset I didn't wait for him?

Did he figure it out?

Mike eats quickly, like he's bracing himself for something. When he stands, he doesn't say a word, just carries his plate to the sink and disappears upstairs.

Will watches him go, stomach hollowing out.

Despite sitting right across from him, it feels like Mike might as well have been in another room all night.

Will helps clear the table, stacking dishes carefully, trying to keep his hands from shaking. Nancy thanks him again and gently shoos him away when he offers to wash up.

"Go get a shower before Holly decides she's next," she says with a smile.

The water is too hot. Will lets it run anyway.

He presses his forehead to the cold tile and lets the day replay itself until his fingers wrinkle and his thoughts tangle into nothing useful.

By the time he goes back down to the basement, his hair is still damp, water dripping cold against his neck.

Now he just has to wait.

Will turns back to the desk and clips the pages he's drawn together, fingers fumbling with the metal clasp. He can't risk Mike flipping through his sketchbook, can't risk him seeing familiar lines staring back from every third page.

He glances at the stairs. *Nothing.*

Will drags a hand through his hair and moves to the mirror instead. It's half-dry, curling in the wrong places. He tries flattening it, then pushing it up, but eventually gives up entirely.

Why isn't Mike here yet?

Time stretches. Will doodles spirals and swirls in the margins of a blank page until the graphite smudges beneath his palm. He paces, sits, then stands again. He bites the skin next to his nails.

He replays the morning. Mike's silent bike ride beside him, the subtle nod goodbye when he reached the coffee shop, that small, almost-forced half-smile. Every glance, every pause, every silence, he searches for the exact moment he might have ruined everything.

This is stupid, he tells himself. Mike doesn't owe him anything. This isn't a date. He shouldn't feel like he's waiting to be chosen, or worse, evaluated.

Another look at the stairs.

Nothing.

The basement feels impossibly quiet. The hum of the soft wind outside, the soft creak of the floorboards that Will's pacing creates echoing in the space where he imagines Mike should appear.

Eventually, exhaustion settles in, heavy and dull. Will swallows and decides, finally, that Mike isn't coming. Maybe he forgot. Maybe he changed his mind. Maybe he's still mad.

Will doesn't have the energy to guess anymore.

He takes off the shirt that he's in and slips into his sleeping shirt.

Will and Robin slightly cropped their favorite band shirts one day at the WSQK. *The Cure* logo is faded, the bottom hem resting just above his bellybutton. It's soft and familiar and safe. It reminds him that no matter what, he has Robin, and tonight he needs it more than ever.

He peels off his sweatpants, left in boxers and the cropped shirt. It's what he wears when it's just him, alone. No one is supposed to see him like this.

Will exhales shakily and pads toward the stairs, hand lifting toward the light switch-

The basement door creaks open.

Will freezes.

“Jonathan?” he starts-

It’s Mike. Standing there with a pillow tucked under his arm, hair damp, eyes already on Will.

Embarrassment hits him like a wave, hot and immediate. His skin prickles everywhere the air touches him. He suddenly becomes painfully aware of his bare legs, his waist, the strip of stomach exposed beneath the hem of his shirt.

“Oh,” Will says nervously. “Hi.”

Mike doesn’t move at first. His eyes stay fixed on Will’s shirt. On the way it rides up when Will breathes.

“I’ve never...” Mike says quietly, stepping down the stairs slowly. “I’ve never seen you wear that before.”

Shit.

“It’s- uh- it’s old,” Will lies. “I just sleep in it.”

He retreats to the desk chair turning it to face the room, perching on the edge and tugging uselessly at the hem, trying, and failing, to make it cover more than it does. Mike settles on the couch instead, still watching him.

“I like it,” Mike blurts. “I mean- I like *The Cure*. So... It’s a cool shirt.”

The words land awkwardly, earnest.

What’s the worst that can come out of you just analyzing his behavior a bit more?

Will thinks back to what Robin said. Will tries. He really does. No. Mike likes *The Cure*, that’s it, that’s not some hidden signal.

“Thanks,” Will says softly, eyes dropping to his knees. He feels exposed, like Mike can see too much just by looking at him.

“I’m sorry,” Mike says suddenly, looking down, breaking the silence that was increasing between them before he spoke.

Will looks up.

“I’m sorry I didn’t talk to you today.”

“It’s fine,” Will says quickly. “Really.”

“No,” Mike insists. He finally meets Will’s eyes. His brows pull together, mouth tight, eyes glossy. “It’s not fine. I was having a bad day, and I shouldn’t have taken it out on you.”

Will’s chest softens despite himself.

“It didn’t seem like you were having a bad day until after breakfast,” Will says carefully. “What happened?”

Mike shifts, shoulders hunching in on himself. His gaze drops to the floor.

The tension from dinner slips back into place, heavy and unresolved.

Will’s heart starts to race. Maybe he shouldn’t have asked. Maybe this is where everything goes wrong.

“Hey,” Will says quickly, reaching for his sketchpad instead. “It’s okay. We don’t have to talk about it.”

He holds the clipped pages down with his thumb, grounding himself.

“Why don’t we start with the drawing,” Will adds gently, forcing a small smile. “Before you get too tired.”

Mike nods, relief flickering across his face.

And the air between them tightens, not easing, just shifting into something quieter. Closer. Dangerous.

“How do you want me?” Mike says, and his smile is small but real as he pushes himself up from the couch. He drifts closer, slow, like he’s not entirely sure where he’s meant to stop.

Will swallows. The room feels suddenly smaller, warmer, like the air has shifted around them. He keeps his eyes on Mike’s face on purpose, anchors himself there.

“Just- like that’s fine,” he says, a little too fast. “You can sit on the armrest, or stand. Whatever’s... comfortable.”

Mike hums softly, like he’s thinking it over, then steps back and perches against the arm of the couch, half-sitting, half-leaning. *Casual*. Except nothing about it feels casual to Will. The way Mike’s shoulders slope, the way his hair curls at the nape of his neck, the way he looks entirely unaware of how much space he’s taking up just by being there.

Will drops his gaze to the page before he can stare too long.

Will's fingers curl tighter around his pencil. Mike looks... impossibly handsome. The low light softens him, shadows settling into the sharpness of his jaw, the curve of his mouth. His curls fall loose around his forehead, and Will has the sudden, overwhelming thought that he could draw him forever and still never get it right.

He lowers his eyes to the page and starts.

He starts with the lines he knows best. The curve of Mike's jaw. The familiar tilt of his nose. His eyes take longer. They always do. Will slows his breathing, lets his hand move the way it wants to, soft graphite strokes building shape and shadow. He's drawn Mike so many times before, but it feels different when Mike is right there, when every glance up confirms the shape under his pencil.

"You always do that thing," Mike says quietly.

Will looks up. "What thing?"

"That face." Mike gestures vaguely toward his own eyes. "Like you're... figuring me out."

Will huffs a soft laugh, shaking his head. "I'm just trying to get it right."

"You always do," Mike says, without thinking.

The words settle between them, heavier than they should be. Will looks back down before his red ears can give him away.

They fall into a rhythm after that. Pencil moving. Occasional glances. The basement hums quietly around them.

"So," Mike says, breaking the silence. "Class today was... actually really cool."

Will's pencil pauses. He glances up. "Oh? What did you do?"

Mike's eyes light up in a way that makes Will's chest ache. "We did a character-building exercise. Everyone had to take a mundane, everyday situation, like waiting for the bus, or making breakfast, and turn it into a short story that revealed something deep about the character. And then we read them out loud in pairs, analyzed tone, voice, pacing... I didn't realize you could learn that much from someone just making toast."

Will smiles faintly, feeling proud of Mike. "You're really good at this, huh?"

Mike shrugs, almost bashful, tucking a curl behind his ear. "I guess. I like it. It's... fun to push myself. See what I can do." He pauses, then tilts his head toward Will. "I wish you could see some of it. Maybe one day."

Will's hand freezes on his sketchpad. "Really?" he asks, hopeful.

Mike bites his lip, shifting his weight, uncomfortable but honest. "Maybe."

Will looks down, he lets his pencil move again, tracing the faint outline of Mike's shoulder, trying to focus, trying not to read too much into the word. *Maybe*

For a moment, neither of them says anything, the quiet of the basement pressing in. But it's not tense, not exactly. It's that soft, hovering space that always seems to stretch between them, heavy with unsaid things.

Will hums, adjusting the page. "I'm glad you're enjoying it," he says softly, almost as if he's afraid his words might shatter the moment.

Mike just smiles, a little crooked, his thumb brushing against the arm of the couch absentmindedly. "Yeah. It's good to have something that's mine. You know?"

Will nods, pencil moving again, feeling the weight of wanting to be close to Mike but not wanting to intrude.

Will's pencil hovers for a heartbeat before it glides over the contours of Mike's chest. He remembers Robin's advice. For the first time tonight, he feels almost confident, almost ready. He decides to act on it before the feeling escapes him.

"Hey... um," Will starts, voice catching, "could you... take your shirt off? Just so I can do your body. Practice, I mean."

Mike shifts, tugging at the hem of his shirt, a faint flush creeping up his neck. "Uh... yeah, okay." His hands fumble with the bottom of the shirt, tugging it over his head and letting it fall in a soft heap at his feet.

Will gulps. The air between them suddenly feels too thick. Mike's skin is warm in the soft basement light, his shoulders taut but relaxed, chest rising and falling at a rhythm that Will can't stop noticing. The faint trail of dark hair from Mike's navel down into the waistband of his low-rise sweatpants makes Will's stomach flip in ways he doesn't want to acknowledge.

Mike notices Will's stiff posture, the way his fingers clutch the pencil like a lifeline, and grins faintly. It's playful, teasing, but restrained. Will doesn't look up. He can't. Not yet. Not while the heat in his ears is spreading like wildfire. He's pretending to concentrate on the paper, focusing on lines and shadows, the gentle curve of Mike's shoulder, the dip beneath his collarbone.

The basement is quiet except for the scratch of pencil against paper and Mike's soft breathing. Will traces the edges of his chest, the subtle slope of his ribs, memorizing every detail, and the world shrinks to the space between pencil and page.

"How's it looking?" Mike asks, voice careful, almost shy.

Will freezes for a fraction of a second before stammering, "Y-you look... great- I mean, the drawing looks great." His voice is tight, ears burning crimson.

Mike shifts his weight, a blush blooming over his cheeks. He isn't used to praise, especially like this, but the warmth of Will's gaze, the way the pencil hovers over him as though worshipping every line, makes him feel exposed and... seen.

Will's hand moves down, careful, hesitant. The happy trail, so obvious, so intimate, is in front of him. He draws it lightly, barely a whisper on the page. Not too much, just enough to capture the form without overstepping invisible lines. His breath catches as he reaches the waistband of Mike's sweatpants. The paper is suddenly heavier, every motion a question, a confession, a promise he doesn't have the words for.

He glances up, drawn by the weight of Mike's eyes. Mike is watching him, silently measuring, analyzing, but not judging. Just... observing. Will swallows, heart hammering, and finally allows his gaze to drift down to his waistband again, just for a moment longer. The boldness shocks him, the way his body reacts, the rapid, shallow breaths that betray him. He knows Mike sees some of it. He can feel the awareness, the pull, like a magnetic force neither of them is ready to name.

For the first time, Will notices the slight curl of Mike's lips, the way his pulse jumps visibly at the hollow of his wrist resting on the couch arm. Mike is tense, yes, but it's the kind of tension that invites attention, that leans into the danger of being seen, being wanted.

Will's pencil moves again, slower now, deliberate, almost reverent. Every line is a brush of memory, a tracing of admiration and desire he can't yet put into words.

Heat pooled low in his stomach. Pressure. His boxers, which had felt comfortable a minute ago, now pinched and tightened in the wrong places.

Shit.

Will shifted in his seat, heart hammering, breath shallow. He could feel exactly what was happening, and the panic came almost immediately. He *knew* it was visible. He knew Mike could notice if he looked.

Instinctively, he dragged the sketchpad closer to his knees, angling it just so, trying to shield the subtle boner in his pants. His thighs pressed together, which only made it worse. His ears burned. Sweat prickled at the back of his neck. *Not now. Please not now.*

He risked a glance at Mike.

Mike wasn't looking at Will's face. His eyes lingered just below Will's cropped shirt, then away, then back again. Curious. Uncertain. Like he was trying to figure something out without fully realizing what it was he was looking for.

Will's stomach twisted violently. Mike didn't look disgusted, or uncomfortable, or even surprised. He looked... interested. Like the curiosity he carried wasn't judgment, it wasn't criticism, it was observation, and that made Will's heart slam painfully in his chest.

He looked back down at the sketchpad. *Focus.* But the pencil trembled in his hand. Will managed to calm himself down, focusing hard enough to get rid of the slight tenting in his boxers.

Mike's voice broke the silence. "Can I see it?"

Will froze. "No-" Too fast. Too loud.

Mike rose from the couch and moved closer, his steps quiet but deliberate. He reached for the sketchpad, and Will reacted instinctively, twisting back, pulling it away. Mike laughs softly, breath warm against Will's shoulder as he tried to pry it from his grip. Will held on tightly, fingers clenched around the metal pin, terrified it would pop loose and reveal everything. Their bodies were closer than they had any right to be. Knees brushing. Mike's arm hooked around Will's wrist.

"Okay, okay," Will said, blurting out, breathless, "I just- I might need to touch it up in the morning."

Slowly, carefully, he tore the page out and handed it over, like it might burn him if he let go too fast.

Mike went quiet, and for a moment, the world shrank to the heat radiating between them. He studied the drawing in silence, eyes softening as they traced every line. His throat bobbed when he swallowed.

"Wow," he finally whispered. "You... always make me look really good."

Will's chest tightened painfully. That sounded too much like *you see me the way I want to be seen*, like Mike might be seeing *him* right back.

“I just draw what’s there,” Will said quickly, packing his sketchpad away, hands shaking.

The tension didn’t leave the room, but it softened, turned warm, familiar. Will climbed into the couch bed, pulling the blanket up to his chest like armor. Mike settled onto the mattress on the floor, lying on his back for a moment before speaking.

“This has been nice,” Mike said quietly. “We should spend more time here. Hanging out.” He paused. “It’s way better than listening to Jonathan and Nancy all night.”

Will huffed a small laugh. “It’s nice not being down here alone with my thoughts.”

Mike turned his head slightly. “Are you still having nightmares? About what happened with Vecna?”

“Not so much,” Will admitted. “But when I overthink, when it’s too cold, it feels like he’s... still here. *Still here.*” Will emphasizes, tapping his head gently.

There was a pause. Then, softer, “You have me here, Will, always. Vecna is gone. If I’m here, I can distract you.”

Will had nightmares for an entire year after they defeated Vecna. All the trauma he went through was trapped in his body. He was able to talk to Mike about it, he was one of the only people who really understood. The nightmares sometimes come back, but Will is able to manage them now, and with Mike sleeping on the floor next to him, he’s certain he won’t have any tonight.

Will swallowed, “Thanks, Mike.”

They shifted slightly, blankets rustling. Exhaustion tugged at them, but neither could sleep right away. The silence wasn’t empty. It hummed, charged, intimate. Heavy and safe all at once.

“Night, Will.”

“Night, Mike.”

And finally, the dark of the basement wrapped them in quiet, holding every unspoken thought, every glance, every line of tension between them.

[Chapter 2](#): the drawing

Chapter Text

The basement was quiet, the soft hum of early morning light filtering through the small windows. Will stirred on the couch bed, noticing immediately that the mattress next to him was empty. Mike had already gone, leaving the space between them cold and still.

Will rubbed at his eyes and sat up. His gaze fell on the desk where his sketchpad waited. The drawing of Mike he had finished last night lay there, he decided not to try tamper with it, it is perfect and maddeningly complete. He reached out, fingertips brushing the graphite, tracing over the sharp lines of Mike's jaw, the curve of his lips, the dark swirls of his hair.

The image made his stomach twist. He loved it, hated it, wanted it, and feared it all at once.

Does Mike even want me to keep this?

The thought prickled at him like electricity, and his hand went to his mouth as he chewed at the inside of his cheek. Keeping it might be... weird. Creepy, even. But it was beautiful. It was *Mike*. And part of him didn't want it to stay hidden in the sketchbook, safe from the world.

His chest tightened. The idea came suddenly, sharp and daring, he could gift it to Mike. Maybe along with a little note, something small, casual, like a "thank you."

His fingers twitched over the sketchpad, and before he could stop himself, Will tore out a fresh sheet and started to draw again.

This time, he was bolder. He traced the outline of Mike's shoulders, the slight curve of his collarbone, the lean lines of his torso. When he reached the hips, his hand trembled. His mind swirled with memories from last night, the way Mike had shifted under his pencil, the subtle heat that had pooled low in Will's stomach when he caught a glimpse of Mike's happy trail, his sweatpants low, just above the hipbone. The memory made his skin tingle.

Should I...

The thought flashed before him, sudden and *wrong*. But the warmth in his chest and the pressure building lower made his hand move almost automatically. He sketched. He drew every detail with careful attention, subtle yet deliberate, the faint shadow of hair at the base of Mike's stomach, the curve of his crotch, the suggestion of what might be underneath the waistband of his sweatpants.

His heart pounded as he pulled back, breathing heavily. The page seemed alive in front of him, hot and dangerous, and yet impossibly perfect. Will groaned, head falling into his hands for a moment. This is *not* what he should be doing. Will is struggling to get over Mike as is, and the fact that he got to see more of him did not make the process any easier.

Carefully, he slid this new sketch, that revealed all Will's sinful, dirty thoughts, under the original drawing from last night.

Then he reached for a blank piece of paper. He had to write the letter. His hand shook slightly as he placed it over the original drawing. *The pen will bleed through.* Will turned both the original and *new* drawing over.

He began to write.

Dear Mike,

Thanks for letting me draw you. It's great practice for the course I really hope to be taking after summer. I thought you might want to keep it.

From, Will

"Will! Breakfast!" Holly shouts from upstairs, bright and unstoppable.

Shit. He had to move fast. Will folded the letter, grabbed the drawing beneath it and carefully tucked it into an envelope. He licked the seal, pressing it closed with trembling fingers.

He bolted up the stairs, heart hammering. "Is Mike here yet?" he said softly to Holly, breathless.

Holly shook her head, eyes wide behind a mess of markers. "Nope! He just started a shower."

Will swallowed hard. "Okay, thanks!" He practically ran upstairs. He slipped into Mike's room, tempted to look around, but stopped himself, leaving the envelope where it would wait for Mike on his pillow, quiet, safe, and just for him.

A few minutes later, Will was in the kitchen with everyone.

Mike appears in the doorway, hair still damp, a T-shirt tugged on in a hurry. Everyone's already seated, plates half-full, conversation overlapping. Mike pauses for half a second, taking it in, then slides into the empty chair beside Will.

Close. Too close.

Will feels the warmth of him immediately, the brush of Mike's knee against his own, the faint clean scent of soap and shampoo. He keeps his eyes on his plate, heart thudding a little too loud in his chest.

"I, um," Will says quietly, then clears his throat. "I left something for you in your room."

Mike turns toward him, brows lifting in curiosity. "You did?"

Will nods, a shy smile pulling at his mouth before he can stop it. He doesn't elaborate. If he opens his mouth again, he might ruin it.

Mike's lips curl into a small, intrigued grin. "I'll check it out later," he says, voice low enough that only Will can hear.

The rest of breakfast passes in fragments. Holly talks animatedly about her plans for the day, Nancy listens with patient focus, Jonathan chimes in when needed. Will eats, but everything tastes faint, like his senses are tuned elsewhere. Mike's thigh stays pressed against his, unmoving, grounding and distracting all at once.

Afterward, the kitchen empties in stages. Will lingers, pretending to rinse his mug longer than necessary, waiting.

Mike doesn't come back down.

Will waits by the bottom of the stairs anyway, heart fluttering as he checks his watch, listening for movement above. Seconds stretch thin.

Then Mike appears at the top of the stairs.

He looks... startled. Pale. Wide-eyed. Like he's just walked into something he wasn't supposed to see.

"Will," Mike says, voice tight. He swallows. "You're- uh... you're gonna be late. I'm still packing my bag. Go on without me."

Will blinks. "What?"

Mike's grip tightens on the stair railing. His eyes don't quite meet Will's. "I'll catch up later," he says quickly.

Will glances down at his watch. He's already cutting it close. "Okay," he says slowly, unease curling in his stomach. "See you later?"

Mike nods. Too fast. "Yeah. Later."

Will doesn't push it. He can't.

He bikes off with a knot in his chest and no idea whether it's dread or something dangerously close to hope.

The café smells like roasted beans and sugar when Will clocks in, familiar and comforting. By noon it quiets down, the lunch rush thinning to a trickle of regulars and passersby. Will wipes down the counter, humming under his breath, trying not to think about Mike's face at the top of the stairs.

The bell above the door jingles.

"Hey, kid," Hopper's voice rumbles.

Will looks up and breaks into a smile. Hopper stands there with Joyce and El tucked in close, El already scanning the pastry case with focused intensity.

"Hey," Will says warmly. "The usuals?"

Joyce nods first, smiling proudly like she always does when she watches him work. Hopper orders his black coffee and a muffin, then digs into his wallet, pulling out way too much than what their order costs.

"You really don't have to tip that much, Hop." Will says automatically as Hopper slides a bills across the counter.

Hopper grins and ruffles Will's hair anyway. "I know," he says. "But I'm going to."

Will swats his hand away, laughing. "Every time," he mutters, but his chest warms at it. Hopper just chuckles.

El leans over the counter, her mocha in hand, "Can you draw me?" she asks suddenly.

Will blinks. "You want me to?"

She nods eagerly. "With color."

"Yeah," he says softly. "Yeah, of course."

Between customers, Will pulls out his smaller sketchpad. El sits perfectly still at a corner table, chin lifted proudly. Today she's wearing purple, eyeshadow dusted carefully over her lids, a soft shirt that looks entirely hers. Not borrowed. Not copied. Chosen.

Will sketches quickly, confidently, adding color with gentle care. Purple blooms on the page, framing El's face, capturing the way she's smiling.

When he shows her, El gasps. "That's me," she says, awed.

Will smiles. "Yeah. It is."

As they leave, Hopper gives him another nod of approval, Joyce squeezes his shoulder, and El waves the drawing like a treasure.

When the door shuts behind them, Will exhales.

His shift ends, he wipes down the counter, clocks out, and slings his bag over his shoulder.

Will waits outside. He leans against his bike and watches people pass, watches the light shift across the street, counts the cracks in the sidewalk. Every sound makes his chest tighten, every door opening, every laugh that sounds too much like Mike's.

Ten minutes stretch thin and then thinner, and eventually the truth settles in with a dull, heavy certainty. Mike is already gone.

He can't even bring himself to get upset. He left Mike yesterday.

Will swallows, pushes off, and bikes home too fast, legs burning, breath shallow like he's chasing something instead of running from it. The ride feels shorter than it should, or maybe he just doesn't remember it. His mind keeps replaying the same fragments on a loop, Mike's voice, the way his eyes lingered, the warmth of something unspoken sitting between them, unbearable and electric.

The house is quiet when he gets there.

Too quiet.

He drops his bike against the side of the house and lets himself in, calling out automatically even though he already knows no one will answer. The air inside feels hollow, like everyone's absence has weight. He moves through the kitchen and notices the note on the fridge.

Mike came early from class today. We're dropping Holly off at her friend. I'm picking up the rest of the party to go for ice cream. Be ready to go when I get back.

– Jonathan.

Will smiles despite himself, this is what he needs. A nice distraction from all the overthinking the last two days. He goes downstairs to change, tugging at his shirt, peeling it off like he can shed the entire day with it. The room smells faintly like paper and graphite and *him*. Safe things. Familiar things.

Then he sees the envelope.

It's sitting on his desk, centered like it was placed carefully, deliberately. His name is written on the front in handwriting he knows too well, slanted just enough, confident in a way Will has never been.

His heart starts to race before he even touches it.

Mike must've left it before he went with Jonathan, Will thinks, warmth blooming in his chest, bright and fragile. A letter. For him. His fingers tremble as he lifts the envelope, the paper softer than he expects.

And then something slips free.

There's a sharp, papery smack as it hits the floor.

Will freezes.

The sound feels too loud, like it echoes, like the house is listening. He looks down slowly, dread pooling in his stomach even before his mind catches up. A polaroid lies face down, stark white against the carpet.

He crouches, breath already unsteady, and turns it over.

His breath caught in his throat as the image came into focus.

It was Mike, captured from the chest downward, the frame cutting off just above his thighs. A thin trail of dark hair peeked from the hem, leading downward to the waistband of his low-slung jeans.

But it was *lower* that seized Will's attention, sending a jolt straight through him. Mike's jeans strained visibly against the massive bulge at his crotch, the denim stretched taut over an unmistakable erection. The outline was impossible to ignore, thick and rigid, the shaft pressing insistently against the fabric, curving slightly to the left and tenting the zipper in a way that left no doubt about its size. The head of his cock seemed to throb even in the still image, the ridge prominent enough to create a shadowed dip in the material.

The Polaroid's edges were slightly curled, as if it had been handled recently, and the colors were vivid—the faded blue of the jeans contrasting with the warm tone of Mike's skin where a sliver of it showed.

Will's hand trembled, the photo nearly slipping from his grip. His mind reeled. This couldn't be real. Heat flooded his face, a dizzying wave of panic crashing over him. He dropped the polaroid like it burned, watching it flutter to the floor.

His heart hammered in his chest, breaths coming in short, ragged bursts. What the *hell* was this? Was it meant for him? The image seared into his brain, the sheer girth of it making his own body react in confusion, a traitorous twitch in his pants that only amplified the horror.

Fingers fumbling, Will snatched up the letter from where it had half-fallen out of the envelope. He tore it open fully, eyes scanning the words in a blur.

Dear Will,

If you wanted to see me with a boner, you could've asked instead of drawing it.

Love, Mike

The words hit like a punch to the gut. Will's stomach twisted, nausea rising sharp and bitter in his throat. *Oh God, no.* He was going to be sick. He lunged toward his desk, hands shaking as he rifled through the scattered papers and sketchpads. There, half-buried under a notebook, was the drawing, face-down. He hesitated, breath hitching in shallow gasps, then forced himself to flip it over.

It was the original one. The one he'd sketched sitting in front of Mike. Will had meant to give him the clean portrait, the innocent version. But somehow, in his rush that morning, he'd grabbed the wrong one. Mike had seen it. Mike knew.

This was so bad. So incredibly, *catastrophically* bad. Will's vision blurred at the edges, his chest tightening like a vice. He couldn't breathe, couldn't think past the roaring in his ears. Images flashed, Mike's face when he opened the gift, the teasing note, that fucking photo with its blatant, throbbing erection staring back at him. *Mike wasn't disgusted? Was he flirting?* Will couldn't process any of it, couldn't let the spark of hope pierce through the terror. All he could focus on was his colossal fuck-up, the secret he'd accidentally spilled, the friendship hanging on the edge of ruin.

A small panic attack gripped him then, his knees buckling as he gripped the desk for support. Tears pricked at his eyes, hot and uninvited, while his mind spiraled. *He's going to hate me. Everyone will find out. Jonathan, oh shit, Jonathan.*

As if summoned by the thought, a sharp honk echoed from outside, the familiar blare of Jonathan's car horn. Will's head snapped up, pulse spiking. *No, no, no.*

In a frenzy, he scooped up the polaroid and the letter, the photo's explicit image burning his palm even through the paper. He shoved them back into the envelope, sealing it with trembling fingers, then jammed it under his sketchpad, burying it deep among the innocent drawings.

The horn honked again, impatient. Will ran upstairs and through the house, feet pounding as he burst out the front door and toward the waiting car, his mind a whirlwind of shock and desperate concealment.

Fuck.

[Chapter 3](#): ice cream

Notes:

last smut warning!

(See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#).)

Chapter Text

The engine rumbled low, exhaust puffing into the afternoon air, and Will could see the silhouettes inside, Nancy in the passenger seat, Jonathan at the wheel, and the back crammed full as always.

His heart still raced from the panic upstairs, but the fresh shirt clung to his skin, a flimsy barrier against the chaos in his head.

“Took you long enough,” Jonathan called through the open window, a smirk tugging at his lips as he drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. “Get in.”

Will yanked open the back door, the hinges creaking in protest, and immediately locked eyes with Mike. Those dark, steady eyes pinned him in place, calm and unreadable, like he hadn't just seen a photo of his cock straining against his jeans.

Will's breath hitched, he couldn't pull air into his lungs, the memory of that bulging outline flashing hot and vivid.

The backseat was a disaster of limbs and laughter. Dustin wedged in the middle, his knees jammed against the front seats, while Max perched on Lucas's lap, her red hair spilling over his shoulder as she twisted to look back.

"Shit," Will muttered under his breath, realizing the math didn't add up for space.

"Well, don't just stand there!" Max exclaimed, her voice bright and impatient, "Sit on Mike's lap and let's go get our ice cream already!"

Mike shifted, leaning back against the seat and stretching his long legs out as much as the cramped space allowed. His eyes never left Will's, a subtle invitation in the way his thighs parted just enough.

Heat crept up Will's neck, but he had no choice, Jonathan's car was tiny, built for efficiency, not comfort. Swallowing hard, Will climbed in, lowering himself carefully onto Mike's lap, trying to lean forward to minimize contact. But it was impossible, the seat forced him back, his ass settling fully against Mike's crotch, the firmness of Mike's body pressing up through his jeans.

The door clicked shut, and Jonathan peeled away from the curb, the car filling with the chatter of friends.

"We're meeting El there," Dustin said, twisting to grin at Will over his shoulder, oblivious to the tension. "She said she'd save us a table outside since it's so nice out."

"Great," Will forced out, his voice cracking awkwardly on the single word. He stared straight ahead, hyper-aware of every point of contact. Mike's chest rising and falling against his back, the heat radiating from Mike's thighs cradling his own.

"How was the coffee shop today?" Lucas piped up from the other side, his arm wrapped around Max's waist to keep her steady. "Any cute girls come in?"

"Lucas!" Max swatted his chest, laughing as the car hit a bump, jolting everyone. "You're such an idiot."

"What?" Lucas defended, feigning innocence. "I'm asking for Will's sake!"

Will barely registered the banter, his focus narrowing to the hands suddenly settling on his hips. Mike's palms pressed there, warm and steady through the fabric of his shirt, practical, sure, since there was nowhere else for them to go. But the squeeze that followed, that felt possessive, like Mike was staking a claim right after Lucas's dumb comment.

Will stopped the thought before it could fully form. *Mike has nowhere else to put his hands.*

“Uh- no,” Will stammered, his response clipped as he tried to play it cool. The car hummed along the streets, trees blurring past the windows.

Mike fidgeted beneath him then, a subtle adjustment in his seat that rocked Will slightly. *Was he uncomfortable?* The thought gnawed at Will, and without thinking, he shifted too, trying to ease the pressure by scooting forward a fraction.

But as soon as he moved, Mike's hand, the one closer to the door, shielded from the others' view, clamped down harder on his hip. Fingers slipped under the hem of Will's shirt, digging into bare skin with a firm grip. It felt like a silent command to freeze, the touch electric and demanding without a word. *Now that was definitely not accidental.*

Will went still, awkward heat flooding his face. *How was he supposed to act normal?* He had just shoved away a polaroid of Mike's dick, and now he was accidentally grinding against him like an idiot. The silence between them stretched, broken only by the group's noise.

“Hey, Jonathan, turn up the radio,” Nancy called from the front, fiddling with the dial.

Some upbeat pop song crackled through the speakers, filling the car with synth beats and laughter as Dustin started humming off-key.

Will tuned it out, hyper-focused on Mike's breathing now, heavy, warm puffs against the side of his neck, each exhale ragged and controlled. And then... he felt it.

A growing firmness pressing up against his ass, insistent and thickening by the second. Mike's cock, hardening right there beneath him, the denim barrier doing nothing to hide the swelling length. It started as a subtle twitch, but quickly firmed into a solid ridge, the head nudging upward along the cleft of Will's ass through their clothes.

Will's mind snapped clear in an instant, the panic from earlier dissolving into a rush of clarity. Maybe Mike *was* flirting. That photo hadn't been a joke or a mistake, it was deliberate, Mike's way of saying he wanted this, wanted Will to see him like that.

A chance? Yes, maybe. But Will figured it was just experimentation, Mike curious or bored, looking to mess around with his best friend. No deeper meaning, just hot, reckless fun.

Bolder now, Will tested it, rolling his hips in a subtle circle, innocent enough to pass as adjusting for comfort, but deliberate, grinding down just enough to feel the full weight of Mike's erection blooming harder against him.

Mike's shaft lengthened, thickening to an impressive girth that strained Mike's fly, the heat of it seeping through, making Will's own dick stir in response, a needy ache building.

There it was, unmistakably harder now, Mike's cock fully erect, a rigid pole slotted perfectly between Will's cheeks, the tip pulsing with each heartbeat, the way it curved slightly, demanding friction.

"Stop," Mike whispered, his voice a low, whiny plea right in Will's ear, breath hot and shaky. It wasn't commanding, just desperate, laced with that pent-up edge, like Mike was barely holding back, his smooth control cracking under the pressure of his throbbing dick trapped beneath Will's weight.

His fingers flexed on Will's skin, not pushing away but clinging tighter. Mike's hips twitched involuntarily upward, seeking more despite himself.

Will bit his lip to stifle a smirk, the teasing thrill mixing with the press of Mike's boner, but the car full of friends kept it all under wraps, *for now*.

Will ignored the whisper, the thrill of Mike's desperation fueling his subtle grind. He shifted again, this time arching his back just a fraction to press his ass down firmer against Mike's rigid cock, feeling the thick shaft throb in response. The denim between them grew warmer, Mike's erection pulsing with need.

Mike's grip tightened, his hidden hand sliding higher under Will's shirt, fingertips tracing slow, deliberate circles over the sensitive skin of his lower back.

The touch was light at first, almost ticklish, but then firmer, nails grazing lightly, dipping toward the waistband of his pants. It sent sparks straight to Will's groin, his own dick hardening in sympathy, pressing uncomfortably against his zipper.

"Please," Mike breathed into Will's ear, his voice a soft, whiny murmur that vibrated against Will's lobe. "You're killing me here. Just... stay still."

His words carried that smooth undertone, not forceful, but laced with raw urgency, his breath hitching as Will rocked once more, a tiny roll that dragged his cleft along the full length of Mike's boner.

From the front, Jonathan swerved around a pothole, the car bouncing and eliciting a chorus of groans. "Roads are shit today," he complained, glancing in the rearview. "Hang tight, we're almost there."

Nancy laughed, twisting to pat Dustin's knee. "At least the AC's working for once. Dustin, you look like you're melting."

"I'm fine," Dustin shot back, fanning himself dramatically. "But if we don't get that ice cream soon, I'm jumping out."

Will tuned them out, focusing on Mike's hidden hand, his fingers slipping along the edge of Will's hipbone, teasing the soft skin just inside his belt line. Mike's touch was exploratory, needy, tracing the V of muscle there, pressing in to feel the heat of Will's body, his cock twitching harder beneath as if the contact amplified his arousal.

"What are you doing?" Will whispered back, facing the window now, his voice barely audible over the radio's hum. He clenched his cheeks experimentally, squeezing around the bulge of Mike's dick, feeling it jump in response.

Mike let out a quiet, frustrated whine, his lips brushing Will's ear again.

"Touching you... your skin's so soft. But if you keep moving like that, I swear, I'm gonna lose it." His fingers dipped lower, one tracing underneath his boxers, hidden completely from view. Will's breath stutters.

Max leaned forward suddenly, "Hurry up, Jonathan!"

"I'm going as fast as I can," Jonathan replied, accelerating through a yellow light.

Lucas chuckled, squeezing Max closer. "Hey, Mike, you been quiet back there. What's up? You finally gonna try that rocky road flavor this time, or stick to your boring vanilla?"

Mike froze, his hands stilling for a split second on Will's skin as the question hit. Will, sensing the distraction, chose that moment to grind down once, harder.

"Uh- yeah, maybe... rocky road," Mike managed, his voice strained and higher than usual, cracking on the last word. He cleared his throat, fingers digging into Will's side in retaliation, tracing urgent lines, nails scraping lightly to urge compliance. "Sounds... good. Whatever."

Lucas raised an eyebrow, smirking. "You okay, man? You sound like you ran a mile. Will giving you a hard time already?"

Will stifled a laugh, the irony burning hot as he felt Mike's cock pulse insistently against him, pre-cum likely soaking into Mike's boxers by now, the shaft so engorged it outlined every inch through the layers.

"He's fine," Will interjected quickly, his tone light to deflect. "Just *excited* for ice cream, right, Mike?"

Mike's response was another whisper, hot and whiny against Will's neck. "Stop. Now." His hand slipped forward bolder, palm flattening over Will's hardening bulge for a brief

second, thumb pressing the tip where it tented the fabric, before pulling back as the car slowed for a turn.

Will chokes at his touch. How did he manage to grope his dick without making it obvious. *Fuck.*

Jonathan pulled into the curb in front of the ice cream place, the little bell over the door chiming every time someone went in or out. The smell of sugar and waffle cones hung thick in the air, mingling with the late-afternoon heat.

El was already there, sitting on the low brick wall with her legs swinging. She lit up when she saw them, waving both hands like she'd been waiting forever instead of five minutes.

Will barely registered it.

The second the car stopped, he was moving.

"I-uh... be right back," he muttered, already pushing the door open before anyone could respond.

His feet hit the pavement and he walked fast, then faster, heading in the opposite direction of the shop like he'd forgotten something important- like his dignity, maybe. His heart hammered, pulse loud in his ears, every nerve still buzzing from the ride.

Get it together.

He shoved a hand into his jeans pocket and pulled out the first thing his fingers found, some crumpled receipt, old and meaningless.

He crossed the street toward a lone trash bin. He dropped it in, then lingered there like he had a reason to be standing around, staring at nothing.

He focused on breathing. On the feel of the sun on his neck. On literally anything that wasn't the memory of Mike's voice, low and strained in his ear, or the way everything had felt too close, too charged, too much.

It didn't mean anything, he told himself, again. Just... a moment. A weird moment.

Still, it took longer than he liked for the heat in his body to settle, but once it did, he turned back and went to the ice cream shop.

Inside, the group had already started ordering. The place was loud, music playing softly overhead, the hum of conversation, the scrape of metal spoons against paper cups.

“Rocky Road,” Lucas said confidently, leaning an elbow on the counter.

“Rocky Road is elite,” Dustin agreed. “But only if you get chocolate sprinkles. They add texture. It’s science.”

Mike scrunched his face. “That’s not science.”

“It absolutely is,” Dustin insisted. “Chocolate on chocolate. You can’t argue with that.”

Lucas thought it over, “Fine. Sprinkles.”

Mike hesitated for half a second, just enough for Will to notice, then nodded. “I’ll have a scoop of vanilla, please.”

“Oh come on Mike!” Lucas groaned.

“You basic bitch,” Dustin laughed.

Mike just shrugged and took the plain ice cream from the server’s hands.

Will stood slightly apart, hands shoved into his pockets, trying not to look at Mike. Trying not to feel the weird hollow in his chest that had nothing to do with ice cream and everything to do with the way Mike hadn’t even glanced at him since they got out of the car.

“Will?” El’s voice cut gently through the noise.

He blinked and turned to her.

“You okay?” she asked, head tilted, eyes sharp in that way that always made him feel like she could see straight through him. “You’re spaced out again.”

“Yeah,” he said quickly. *Too* quickly. “Sorry. Just... having a weird day.”

She studied him for a second longer, then nodded, accepting it the way she always did. “Cookies and cream?” she asked.

He managed a small smile. “Yeah. Please.”

They ordered together. Cookies and cream for both of them. Max, Jonathan, and Nancy all opted for chocolate milkshakes, citing the heat, the mess, and the fact that melted ice cream was a crime against humanity.

While everyone debated cup versus cone, Will's thoughts drifted back to the car. To the silence now sitting between him and Mike like a wall. Mike laughed easily with Lucas and Dustin, shoulders relaxed, like nothing had happened at all.

Like Will had imagined the entire thing.

The realization stung more than he expected.

God, you're so stupid, he thought. *Of course he doesn't care. Of course.*

"Okay," Max said suddenly, clapping her hands together. "Important announcement."

Lucas groaned. "Oh no."

"I was thinking," she continued, ignoring him, "We should have a little get-together tomorrow night. Nothing huge. Just us. Movies, snacks, maybe some... questionable beverage choices."

Jonathan raised an eyebrow. "Nance and I are gonna pretend not to hear this."

"Good idea," Max said sweetly.

Dustin's face lit up. "Sleepover?"

"Yes," Lucas said, already nodding. "At my place. My parents won't be back until Sunday afternoon."

El smiled. "That sounds fun."

"Count me in," Dustin said. "I'll bring movies. And my superior taste."

"Debatable," Mike said, finally speaking again.

They all laughed, and then-

"And you?" Lucas asked, turning to Will. "You good with that?"

Will opened his mouth to answer, and met Mike's eyes.

It wasn't casual. It wasn't distant. It was sharp, focused, and unreadable, like Mike was suddenly aware of him again in a way that made Will's stomach flip.

"Yeah," Will said softly. "That's... yeah. Sounds good."

Mike held his gaze for a beat longer than necessary. Then he looked away.

The ride home was worse.

Lucas and Max ended up walking with El, leaving Dustin wedged between Will and Mike in the backseat, blissfully quiet for once, humming along to whatever was playing on the radio. The car felt too still. Too heavy.

Will stared at his knees, then out the window, then anywhere that wasn't Mike.

Mike didn't look at him once.

He watched the trees outside blur past, jaw set, elbow propped against the door like he was somewhere else entirely. Like Will wasn't there.

They dropped Dustin off at his house, and even more silence pressed in, thick and unbearable, every unsaid thing piling up between them. Will tried to steal one last glance, but Mike kept his eyes fixed on the glass, face reflected faintly in it.

Detached.

Unreachable.

Will swallowed hard and leaned back, wishing, just once, that Mike would look at him and *mean* it.

Jonathan barely had the car in park before Will was yanking the door open.

"We'll be back in five with Holly," Jonathan yelled. Will barely heard it.

Will darted through the front door, heart pounding like he was being chased. He didn't wait for Mike. Didn't look back. He just bolted through the house, shoes skidding on tile, cutting passed the stairs and down the basement stairs like it was the only place left where he could breathe.

He slammed the door shut behind him.

The sound echoed too loud in the quiet room.

Will pressed his forehead against the cool wood of the door, hands braced on either side, chest heaving. His breath came sharp and uneven, like he'd run miles instead of a few steps. Everything inside him felt wrong, too tight, too loud, too fast.

What is wrong with him?

No. what was wrong with *Mike*?

After all these years of swallowing it down, of wanting him silently, carefully, and alone, *this* was how it came out? One drawing. One stupid, honest mistake. One moment where Mike let himself want, and then shut him out like none of it mattered.

One minute he was touching him, too close, too intense. The next he couldn't even look at him.

Will's throat burned.

He ruined everything.

The thought spiraled, quick and merciless. His mouth went dry. His hands started to shake. The room felt too small, like the walls were inching closer with every breath.

He dragged in air through his nose. It didn't help.

His vision blurred at the edges. His heart stuttered, then raced harder, like it was trying to escape his ribs. His fingers tingled, numb and buzzing all at once.

"I need," His voice cracked, barely sound at all.

Water. He needed water. Or air. Or *something* to make this stop.

Will lifted his head from the door, hand trembling as he reached for the knob. He forced himself to breathe in, out, one more time- and pulled it open.

He didn't even get the chance to step out.

Mike was right there.

So close that Will barely registered the movement before Mike's lips were on his, soft, warm, unmistakably real. It wasn't rushed or clumsy. It was careful. Intentional. Like Mike had been standing there, waiting, bracing himself for this exact moment.

Will froze.

Mike kissed him like he meant it. Like he was grounding himself through Will, one hand lifting hesitantly to Will's jaw, thumb tracing it like an anchor. His lips moved slowly, reverently, but there was heat underneath it, something aching and restrained, like he was afraid to take too much and terrified to pull away.

For one fragile second, the world went quiet.

No overthinking. No fear. Just the feeling of being wanted, of being chosen.

And then it hit him all at once.

The silence in the car. The way Mike wouldn't look at him. The laughter like nothing had happened.

Will's chest caved in.

He shoved Mike back, hard enough that Mike stumbled a step, shock flashing across his face.

They stared at each other.

Both of them breathing too fast. Both of them wrecked in different ways.

Mike's eyes were glassy, dark with need he wasn't trying to hide. His shoulders were tense, like he was holding himself together by sheer will. Hungry. Desperate.

Will's reflection in those eyes felt small. Broken. Sad.

"Will-" Mike started, voice raw.

Will didn't let him finish.

He surged forward, fingers fisting in Mike's hair, pulling him back into a kiss that stole the breath right out of him. This one wasn't careful. It was all the things Will had never let himself want, years of longing crashing through him at once.

Mike melted into it immediately.

He kissed Will back like he'd been starving. Like this was something he'd been holding in just as long. His hands came up, framing Will's jaw, thumbs brushing trembling lines into his skin. Their mouths moved together in perfect, devastating sync, slow and deep and full of unspoken things.

For a moment, Will forgot everything else.

Then the weight of it overwhelmed him.

The hands. The closeness. The way his heart felt like it was breaking even as it soared.

He shoved Mike away again, stumbling back like the floor had shifted under him.

"Will, please," Mike said, voice cracking. He reached out instinctively, then stopped himself halfway, hands hovering uselessly in the air.

"No," Will snapped, the word sharp and shaking. "What are you doing? This isn't fair. You're being- you're confusing me."

Mike blinked, hurt flashing across his face. "Confusing? Will, how-?"

Will broke.

Tears spilled over before Will could stop them, hot and humiliating. His chest hurt. His head hurt. Everything hurt.

“I loved you,” Will choked out. “For *years*. And now you do this- touch me, kiss me, and then act like I don’t exist. You won’t even talk to me. You just- use me when it feels good.”

Mike’s face crumpled.

He cupped Will’s cheeks without thinking, hands gentle, desperate. “Hey- hey, look at me.” He crouched slightly so he could meet Will’s eyes, brows pulling together in panic. “Talk to me. Please.”

Will couldn’t. The words tangled up in his throat, thick and sharp. He felt exposed. Dirty. Like he’d finally said the quiet part out loud and it had ruined everything.

Mike’s breath hitched. He swallowed hard. “Please don’t make me say it,” he whispered.

Will looked up, confused and wrecked. “Say what?”

Mike squeezed his eyes shut, tears spilling over now. “I can’t say it, Will. You know I can’t.”

Will’s chest clenched.

“Say it,” he demanded, voice breaking. “Say I ruined our friendship. Say you’re just experimenting. Say you’re using me because you *know* I’ve been in love with you for years.”

Mike went still.

Like he’d been struck.

His breath stuttered, eyes snapping back to Will’s face, searching it desperately. Horror. Shock. And something that looked a lot like heartbreak tore through his expression.

Will saw him falter, and took it as confirmation.

Of course he doesn’t deny it.

“Get off me,” Will said, shoving his hands away.

“No,” Mike said immediately, gripping his wrists, not hard, just refusing to let go. Like he was trying to hold onto something slipping through his fingers.

“We’re back!” Nancy’s voice called from upstairs.

Will ripped free.

Mike looked at him like he wanted to say everything and nothing all at once. Like his chest was caving in too.

Will turned away.

Mike wiped at his wet eyes, jaw clenched, and walked out without another word.

Will shut the basement door behind him.

Will sank onto the couch like his legs gave out, curling in on himself. His throat felt raw, scraped hollow. His chest rose and fell in jagged bursts as the anxiety came roaring back, louder than before.

He cried until it hurt. Until there was nothing left. Until even the sobs went quiet and all that remained was the echo of what he thought he'd lost.

And the terrifying thought that maybe- just maybe... he'd been wrong about everything.

Notes:

the fic is currently set at 6 chapters, but I will probably end up posting more and more as ideas come <3

[Chapter 4](#): confessions

Chapter Text

Will woke up with the uncomfortable awareness that he had been asleep for longer than he meant to be.

His cheek was pressed into the couch cushion, fabric creased against his skin, and when he shifted, the pattern dragged faintly across his face.

His arms felt stiff, like they'd been folded too tightly under his body, and his neck ached in a dull, persistent way that made him wince as he rolled onto his back.

The basement was dark.

Not pitch-black, there was a thin strip of light leaking in from the small window near the ceiling but dim enough that everything looked unfamiliar at first. The air felt thicker than it had earlier, heavier, like the room had been holding its breath while he slept.

Will blinked slowly, eyes burning, lids gritty like they were coated in dust. His head throbbed, not sharp but deep and relentless, the kind of headache that came from crying too hard and swallowing too much back. His throat was raw. His mouth felt like paper.

He swallowed and immediately regretted it.

His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, dry and useless, and when he dragged it free, it felt swollen. He shifted again, the couch springs creaking softly beneath him, and the sound echoed louder than it should have.

For a few seconds, he just lay there, staring at the low ceiling, confused.

Time felt wrong. Stretched thin. His body knew something had passed, but his brain hadn't caught up yet. He tried to piece together where he was, why he was there, why his chest felt tight in that awful, familiar way.

Then memory slammed back into him.

The car.

The silence.

The basement door.

Mike's mouth.

Will sucked in a sharp breath and sat up too fast, the room tilting violently. Black spots bloomed in his vision, and he had to brace a hand against the couch to keep from falling forward. His heart kicked hard against his ribs, a sudden, panicked rhythm that made his fingers tingle.

"No," he whispered, though there was no one there to hear it.

He glanced at the clock on his desk.

6:56 p.m.

Nearly seven.

His stomach clenched, a tight, hollow pull that made him fold slightly in on himself. Dinner. They'd be eating soon.

His head pounded harder, a pulse behind his eyes that made him squeeze them shut. The anxiety came rushing in all at once, fast and merciless, like it had just been waiting for him to wake up so it could resume where it left off.

His chest felt too tight. Like there wasn't enough room in it for his lungs to expand properly.

He breathed in, shallow and quick. Then out. Then in again.

It didn't help.

The feeling in his stomach wasn't hunger. It was the opposite, an emptiness that burned, sharp and nauseating, like his body had shut down the idea of food entirely. Just thinking about eating made bile rise in his throat.

His hands shook faintly when he brought them together, fingers cold and clammy despite the warmth of the room.

I can't stay here.

The thought came unbidden, urgent.

He pushed himself to his feet and paced the length of the basement, bare feet scuffing softly against the carpet. Each step felt restless, unfinished, like his body didn't know where it was supposed to land. He rubbed his palms against his jeans, trying to wipe away the sweat gathering there.

Tomorrow morning, he could leave.

The idea latched onto him immediately, a thin thread of relief cutting through the panic.

He could go back to Hopper's- Back to *his* house. Back to a place where things made sense again, where Mike was just Mike, and love was something he kept locked inside himself where it couldn't ruin everything.

He could tell them he wasn't feeling well. That the trip had been too much. That he missed home.

All of that was true.

He pictured Joyce's kitchen, the familiar clatter of mugs and the smell of coffee. Hopper sitting at the table, pretending not to watch him too closely. The quiet safety of it pressed warmly against his chest, and for a second, he could almost breathe again.

I'll leave in the morning, he promised himself. *Before anyone can talk me out of it.*

The thought made his throat tighten painfully.

Running felt like failure. But staying felt impossible.

He drifted toward the desk without really deciding to, like his body was pulled there by instinct. The sketchpad sat where he'd left it, closed but not hidden. His fingers hovered over it for a moment, then flipped it open.

The drawing stared back at him.

Mike, rendered in careful pencil strokes, every line familiar. The slope of his shoulders. The curl of his hair where it refused to lie flat. The soft concentration in his eyes that Will knew better than anyone else.

Love lived in the details. It always did.

Will's chest ached.

"Stupid," he muttered, the word scraping out of him like it hurt.

He ripped the page up from the desk, hands shaking, and crushed it into a tight ball. The paper crackled loudly in the quiet room. He shoved it aside like he couldn't stand to touch it any longer, like it might expose him if he did.

His fingers closed around the pencil again, desperate for something to do, and he pressed it to the page without thinking.

Spirals. Circles. Lines that went nowhere.

He seems to only be drawing lately when he's falling in love or falling apart.

He pressed harder than he meant to, graphite smearing under his palm, the point dulling with every frantic stroke. His breathing stayed shallow, quick, each inhale catching slightly in his chest like it didn't quite make it all the way in.

Nothing worked.

The memories crept back in anyway, unwelcome and vivid.

The car seat.

The heat.

The unbearable closeness.

His stomach flipped sharply, a flush of warmth pooling low in his abdomen that made him gasp and immediately feel sick with himself. He dropped the pencil like it burned, hands curling into fists in his lap.

Stop, he told himself. *Just stop.*

A knock sounded at the basement door.

Will flinched so hard his chair rattled.

"Hey," Jonathan's voice came through, hesitant. "Dinner's ready."

Will didn't turn around. He stared at the wall in front of the desk, at the faint scuffs and cracks in the paint.

"I'm not hungry," he said, voice flat. "Eat without me."

There was a pause. Footsteps shifting.

"Are you sure?" Jonathan asked gently, concern threading through his voice.

The words scraped against something raw inside Will, and before he could stop himself, they spilled out sharp and loud.

"I just want to be alone!"

The silence afterward felt enormous.

Then, quieter, cracking, "Please."

Jonathan didn't push. He never did.

"Okay," he said softly. "I'll uh- leave a plate for you. In the microwave."

The footsteps retreated. The door clicked shut.

Will's shoulders sagged. His throat burned, tight with unshed tears. For a brief, traitorous moment, he wanted to run upstairs, bury his face in Jonathan's shoulder, and tell him everything. The thought was immediately followed by a rush of shame so strong it made his stomach twist.

He felt dirty. *Wrong*. Like wanting Mike had stained him somehow.

He fumbled for his Walkman with unsteady hands and slid the headphones over his ears. The familiar weight settled there, grounding. He pressed play.

Music flooded in, warm and steady, wrapping around his thoughts like a blanket. The constant noise dulled the edges of his panic, smoothing it down into something manageable. His breathing slowed incrementally, chest rising a little fuller with each inhale.

An hour passes. The anxiety didn't disappear, but it loosened its grip.

His stomach still felt hollow, empty in a way that hurt, but the idea of filling it still made him nauseous. He rested his head back against the chair and closed his eyes, letting the sound carry him somewhere else.

Anywhere but here.

The basement door opens.

Will's shoulders pull inward without him meaning to, spine curving as if he's bracing for impact. He keeps his eyes on the far wall, on the faded poster taped crookedly above the desk. One corner is peeling.

"Will."

Mike's voice is already tight.

Will swallows. His mouth is dry, tongue sticking to the roof of it when he tries to respond. He reaches up slowly, deliberately, and presses pause on the Walkman. The click feels obscene in the quiet that follows.

"Hey," Will says, and hates how small it sounds.

The door closes behind Mike with a soft but final click. Not slammed. Worse than that. Controlled. Intentional.

Will feels it like a trap snapping shut.

He risks a glance over his shoulder. Mike is standing just inside the room, hands clenched into fists at his sides. His hair looks damp, like he's run his hands through it too many times. His chest rises and falls faster than normal, not quite hyperventilating, but close enough that Will notices.

Mike's eyes flick around the room like he's trying to orient himself, like he's stepped somewhere unfamiliar.

"Why won't you talk to me?" Mike blurts.

Will turns back to his desk immediately, shoulders hunching further. He stares at the surface in front of him, at the scattered pencils, the corner of a folded drawing peeking out from under the sketchbook.

"I am talking," he says, because technically that's true.

Mike lets out a sharp, disbelieving laugh. "No, you're not. You're—" He cuts himself off, dragging a hand through his hair again.

His fingers snag, tug. He winces, like the small pain grounds him. "You keep doing this thing where you say two words and then just... shut down."

Will's chest tightens. He shrugs, small and defensive. "I don't know what you want me to say."

“That’s not fair,” Mike snaps, stepping closer. The floor creaks under his foot this time, loud in the quiet room. “You don’t get to decide that and then act like I’m the problem for asking.”

Will flinches despite himself.

He pushes his chair back abruptly, the legs scraping against the floor with a sound that makes his skin crawl. He stands too fast, dizziness washing over him in a brief, nauseating wave. He grips the edge of the desk until it passes.

He turns around now, leaning against the desk, looking at Mike.

“I’m not acting like anything,” he says, but his voice cracks at the edges, thin and brittle. “I just- I’m leaving in the morning.”

That gets Mike’s full attention.

“What?” The word comes out sharp, almost panicked. “What do you mean, *leaving?*”

Will crosses his arms over his chest like he can hold himself together that way.

“I’m going back to Hopper’s and my mom’s,” he says. He forces the words out evenly, carefully. “I think... I think that’s better.”

Mike stares at him. His mouth opens, then closes again. His eyebrows draw together, confusion warring with something darker, more frightened.

“Better for who?” he asks in a loud, frustrated tone.

Will shrugs again, sharper this time. “Everyone.”

Mike exhales hard through his nose. His jaw tightens. He takes another step forward, then stops himself like he’s hit an invisible line.

“No,” he says. “That’s not- You can’t just decide that.”

“I can,” Will says, too quickly. “I already did.”

Silence stretches between them, thick and charged. Will can feel Mike’s gaze on him like heat, like a hand pressed too close to a flame.

“Is this about yesterday? About today? About the polaroid-” Mike asks finally.

Will’s heart stutters.

“No.”

Mike’s eyes narrow. “That’s a lie.”

Will's breath goes shallow. He focuses on keeping it steady, on not letting his chest hitch visibly. He can feel sweat gathering at the base of his neck, cold and slick against his skin.

"It's not," he insists, but the words don't have the strength they should.

Mike's hands clench again. He looks like he's vibrating in place, like there's too much energy under his skin and nowhere for it to go.

"Then tell me what it *is* about," Mike says. "Because I'm losing my mind here, Will."

"Yeah," he says. "Me too."

Before he can think better of it, he turns away again, reaching for his sketchbook like it's a shield. He sits back down in his chair, tears forming in his eyes. He can't control it now, he cracks. He lets out a cry.

"Hey." He closes the distance in two strides. "Don't- don't do that."

Will feels Mike's presence at his back, close enough that he can feel the warmth of him, can smell the faint soap-and-sweat scent that's so unmistakably Mike. His breath catches.

Mike's hand comes down on the back of the chair suddenly, hard enough to make it jolt forward an inch.

He grabs the chair, not rough, but urgent, and spins it around so Will is forced to face him.

The movement is abrupt, disorienting. Will's stomach turns. He grips the armrests reflexively, knuckles white.

Mike is right there.

Too close.

His face is flushed, eyes bright and frantic, breath coming fast. There's a sheen of sweat on his forehead that catches the light. His hands are still on the chair, fingers flexing like he doesn't trust himself to let go.

"Don't," Mike says, voice shaking now. "Don't shut me out. Not like this."

Will's chest tightens painfully. He can't look away. His throat works as he tries to swallow past the lump lodged there.

"I'm not shutting you out," he says. "I'm just... getting out of your way."

The words land like a slap.

Mike recoils slightly, like he's been hit. "What?"

"That's what you want, right?" Will presses on, panic lending him momentum. "For things to go back to normal. For me to stop making it weird. So I'll leave, and then you don't have to—"

"Stop." Mike's voice cracks sharply. "Just- stop."

Will freezes.

Mike's hands leave the chair. He stands back up, no longer crouching in front of Will. He paces once, a tight, restless loop, then drags both hands down his face. When he looks back up, his eyes are glassy, rimmed red.

"Don't put words in my mouth," Mike says. "You don't get to decide what I want without letting me say anything."

"I tried," Will whispers. "You didn't listen."

"I didn't know what you were trying to say," Mike fires back. His chest is heaving now, breaths shallow and fast. "You won't let me finish a sentence. You won't even look at me half the time."

Will's gaze drops immediately to Mike's collarbone, to the rise and fall of his chest. He feels exposed, pinned.

"I'm looking now," he says.

Mike laughs again, sharp and humorless. "Yeah. Because I made you."

Silence crashes down between them again, heavier than before.

Mike's shoulders slump suddenly, like something in him gives. He rubs at the back of his neck, fingers digging in hard enough to leave red marks.

"Please don't leave," he says, and the word *please* is barely audible. "Not like this."

Will's breath stutters. His hands curl tighter into his sleeves, nails biting into his palms.

"I don't know how to stay," he admits softly.

Mike closes his eyes for a second, like the confession physically hurts. When he opens them again, he looks terrified.

"Then let me talk," he says. "Just- just let me talk, okay?"

Will nods, barely perceptible.

The air between them hums, taut as a wire pulled too tight.

And neither of them realizes yet how close it is to snapping.

Mike doesn't speak right away.

He just stands there, a few feet in front of Will, like he's waiting for something to fall on him. His hands hover uselessly at his sides, fingers twitching, then clenching, then relaxing again.

He keeps shifting his weight from one foot to the other, heel lifting and dropping softly against the floor. His knee bounces once, twice, fast and uncontrollable, until he notices and forces it still with obvious effort.

Will watches all of it.

He's frozen in the chair, spine rigid, shoulders drawn up so tight they ache. His breathing is shallow, barely moving his chest.

Mike drags in a breath. It shudders on the way out.

"Okay," he says, too loudly. Then softer, almost to himself, "Okay."

He runs a hand through his hair again. This time it stays there, fingers curling into the curls at the back of his head like he's holding himself in place.

"I'm really bad at this," he starts. He laughs weakly, eyes darting to the door and back, like he's considering bolting. "I mean, you know that. I- I always say the wrong thing, or I say it in the worst possible way, or I don't say it at all and then everything just... explodes."

Will swallows. His throat feels raw already, like he's been crying for hours even though he hasn't. He keeps his gaze fixed on Mike's hands, on the way his fingers dig into his own hair, knuckles pale.

Mike takes another step closer. Then another. He stops when he's right in front of Will, sinking to his feet to crouch in front of him, close enough that Will can see the faint tremor in his jaw.

"When you said you were leaving," Mike says, voice dropping, "it felt like someone punched me in the chest."

Will flinches.

“I know that sounds stupid,” Mike rushes on, panic spiking. “I know you’re allowed to go wherever you want and I don’t get to- to decide things for you, but I just... I couldn’t breathe. I still can’t, actually.” He laughs again, breathless and strained. “So if I sound like I’m losing it, that’s probably why.”

His hand presses briefly against his sternum, fingers splayed like he’s trying to hold his heart still.

Will’s fingers curl tighter into a fist.

“I’ve been trying to say this since California,” Mike blurts. “Or- no. Before that. *Way* before that. I just didn’t know what *this* was back then, so I thought if I ignored it long enough, it would go away.”

Mike looks directly at Will, “It didn’t,” he says.

The room feels unbearably small.

Will’s heart is pounding so hard he’s sure Mike must be able to see it. His vision swims slightly around the edges. He grips the armrests of the chair like they’re the only solid thing left in the world.

Mike’s voice starts to pick up speed now, words tumbling over each other.

“I keep thinking about stupid things,” he says. “Like- like when you went missing. How scared I was when I thought I lost you. Shit, I believed in another dimension to make sense of it.”

Mike tries to laugh it off, but Will just watches him, their faces close. Will can’t tell where he’s going with this, so he looks back down.

“I thought maybe I just needed you,” Mike continues. “Like- like a best friend needs another best friend. And maybe that’s all it was. So I kept telling myself that. Over and over... But then you’d look at me,” he says softly, “and everything in my head would just... stop working.”

Will’s breath catches. He stares at Mike’s face now, unable to look away anymore. Mike’s eyes are shining, lashes clumped slightly like he’s been close to crying for a while.

“I’d forget what I was saying,” Mike admits. “Or I’d start talking too much, or I’d get mad for no reason. And I didn’t understand why it only ever happened with you.”

He gestures helplessly between them.

“I tried so hard to be normal about it,” he says. “I tried to treat you the same as everyone else, but I couldn’t. I can’t.”

Will’s shoulders start to shake. He clamps down on his breathing, terrified that if he lets it go, he won’t be able to stop.

Mike notices anyway.

He stills. His voice softens.

“Hey,” he says, almost instinctively. “Hey, you don’t have to-”

“I’m fine,” Will whispers quickly, even though he’s very much not.

Mike nods, but his eyes never leave Will’s face.

“Okay,” he says. “Okay. I just- tell me if I need to stop.”

Will shakes his head. Barely perceptible.

Mike inhales deeply, like he’s about to dive underwater.

“I think I’ve been in love with you for a really long time,” he says.

The words land in the room and just... sit there.

Will feels like the floor has dropped out from under him. His hands slip from the armrests, falling limply into his lap. His ears are ringing now, a high, piercing sound that makes everything else feel muted.

Mike keeps going, voice trembling but determined.

“And I think I was so scared of that, that I kept trying to push you away,” he says. “Or pretend it wasn’t real. Or tell myself it was something else. *Anything* else.”

His hands curl into fists again, nails digging into his palms.

“Because if it was real,” he says, “then I could lose you. And that scared me more than anything.”

Will’s lips part, but no sound comes out.

Mike leans in even closer, so they’re eye level. His knees scrape the floor with a soft thud. He doesn’t seem to notice.

“I don’t know how to do this right,” he says quietly. “I don’t know what the rules are. I just know that when you said you were leaving, it felt like the worst thing that could possibly happen.”

His voice breaks.

“So please,” Mike whispers. “Please don’t go. Not because you’re in my way. You’re not. You never have been.”

Tears finally spill over, hot and unstoppable. They slide down Will’s cheeks, dripping off his chin. He doesn’t wipe them away.

“I didn’t think you-” Will starts, then chokes on the rest of the sentence.

Mike’s eyes widen, then soften with something like relief and terror all at once.

“I do,” he says immediately. “I do. I know I messed up a lot, but I do. I love you.”

The room feels unbearably quiet after that.

Will’s breath comes in shaky gasps. He presses a hand to his mouth, like he can physically hold himself together that way. His entire body is trembling now, from head to toe.

Mike waits.

For the first time since he walked into the room, he doesn’t rush to fill the silence. He just kneels there, hands resting on Will’s knees now, eyes fixed on him like he’s afraid to blink.

Will finally lowers his hand. “I thought,” he whispers, voice barely audible, “that I made it all up.”

Mike’s face crumples. “No,” he says fiercely. “You didn’t.”

Will closes his eyes.

And for the first time, he lets himself believe it.

Nothing happens at first.

The confession hangs between them, fragile and heavy, like it might shatter if either of them moves too fast. Will’s chest still hurts from how hard his heart has been pounding, but the edge of the panic is dulling now, replaced by something softer and almost worse- the aftermath, the ache that comes when the adrenaline drains and leaves you exposed.

Mike is still kneeling in front of him.

That’s what finally breaks Will.

The sight of Mike down there, eyes red-rimmed, cheeks wet, shoulders slumped like he's finally run out of ways to hold himself upright, it makes something inside Will give in completely.

He exhales, long and shaky, and his body folds forward.

Not all at once. Not dramatically. Just- he tips forward, like he's too tired to stay upright anymore.

Mike reacts instantly.

He catches him clumsily, arms coming up around Will's back, one hand pressing flat between his shoulder blades. Will's forehead bumps against Mike's shoulder, and the contact sends a quiet, broken sound tearing out of him.

It's not a sob yet. It's the beginning of one, that awful hitch in the chest, the sharp inhale that doesn't quite make it all the way in.

Mike tightens his grip.

"I've got you," he whispers, voice rough. "I've got you. You're okay."

Will clutches at the front of Mike's shirt like he's afraid of falling through the floor. His fingers dig in, twisting fabric, grounding himself in the fact that Mike is real and solid and here.

He starts crying for real then.

It's ugly and quiet and relentless. His shoulders shake violently, breath stuttering in uneven bursts. Every suppressed fear, every lonely night, every moment he told himself he was too much or not enough comes spilling out all at once.

Mike doesn't tell him to stop.

He doesn't tell him it's going to be okay.

He just holds him, he pulls him out of the chair and on to the floor with him.

One arm wrapped tight around Will's back, the other sliding up into his hair, fingers threading gently through it. He presses his forehead against the side of Will's head, eyes squeezed shut, breathing Will in like he's afraid to let go.

Will feels Mike start to cry too.

Not loudly. Not all at once. Just... his breathing falters, chest hitching against Will's, and a few hot tears soak into Will's hair.

They stay like that for a long time.

Long enough for Will's crying to ease into something softer. Long enough for the tight knot in his chest to loosen. Long enough for his body to stop shaking quite so hard.

Eventually, he pulls back just enough to look at Mike.

They're close. Closer than they've ever been like this, not kissing, not arguing, just existing in the same fragile space. Mike's eyes are red and glassy, lashes clumped with tears. His nose is pink, lips slightly swollen from how hard he's been biting them.

Will reaches out before he can overthink it.

His thumb brushes gently under Mike's eye, wiping away a tear that's slipped free. The touch is tentative, like he's asking permission without saying it out loud.

Mike stills completely.

Then he leans into it.

Will's chest aches at the trust in that small movement. His hand lingers on Mike's cheek, warm and grounding, feeling the faint tremor still running through him.

"I'm still scared," Will admits quietly.

Mike nods immediately, like he understands that feeling down to his bones.

"Me too," he says. "I think I always will be."

Will huffs a weak, tearful laugh.

Mike's mouth twitches into the smallest smile.

They sit there on the floor, knees touching, foreheads pressed together. Their breaths start to sync up, slow and steady. The storm has passed, but the air still feels charged, like everything is fragile and new.

Mike's hands slide down to Will's wrists, warm and steady, grounding him. He rubs his thumbs over the inside of Will's wrists absentmindedly, a soothing, repetitive motion.

"I don't want to mess this up," Mike says softly. "I don't want to hurt you."

"You already did," Will says gently. Then, before Mike can spiral, he adds, "But you're here now."

Mike swallows. "I'm not going anywhere," he says. "I promise."

Will closes his eyes at that.

He leans forward first this time.

The kiss is nothing like before.

There's no rush, no hunger, no desperation. Just a quiet meeting in the middle. Their lips brush once, barely there, like they're testing the ground. Mike freezes for half a second, then relaxes into it, exhaling softly against Will's mouth.

They kiss again, a little firmer this time.

It's slow. Careful. A kiss full of pauses and breath and uncertainty, but also warmth, like something long broken being handled with care.

Will feels Mike's hands tremble slightly as they settle at his waist.

Will cups Mike's face with both hands, thumbs brushing gently along his jaw. He kisses him once more, lingering just long enough to feel it sink in.

When they pull apart, their foreheads rest together again.

Mike laughs quietly, breathless. "Wow."

Will smiles, small and tired and real.

"Yeah... Wow." he murmurs.

They stay there, wrapped around each other on the basement floor, not rushing to stand up or define anything. Just holding on, letting the quiet stitch them back together piece by piece.

For the first time in a long time, Will doesn't feel like running.

And for the first time ever, he doesn't feel alone.

They stay curled together on the floor for a while after the kiss. The basement hums quietly around them, the house settling above them. It feels strangely safe down here now, like the world has narrowed to something manageable.

Will's breathing has steadied, but his chest still aches in that hollow, post-cry way. His eyes burn. His throat feels raw, scraped clean by everything he's already let out.

There's more.

He knows it the way you know a storm isn't finished just because the thunder has moved farther away.

Mike shifts slightly, careful not to pull away. "You okay?" he asks softly.

Will nods automatically. Then shakes his head.

“No,” he admits. His voice is hoarse, small. “But... I think I want to be.”

Mike’s hand tightens gently at his back. Encouraging. Steady.

“You can talk to me,” Mike says. “If you want to.”

Will swallows.

The words feel heavy in his mouth, like they’ve been waiting years for this moment and don’t quite know how to come out all at once. He stares at a crack in the concrete floor, tracing it with his eyes, grounding himself.

“I’ve loved you for a really long time,” he says finally.

Mike doesn’t react outwardly, doesn’t interrupt, doesn’t gasp, but Will feels the way his body stills, the way his attention sharpens completely.

“Before I even knew what that meant,” Will continues. “Before I knew there was a word for it. Or that it was... *allowed*. I think... I think Lonnie knew before I did.”

Mike’s jaw tightens at the name. Will notices.

“He never said it outright,” Will says. “Not like that. But he’d look at me like there was something wrong with me. Like I was... defective.” His voice wavers. He pushes through. “He’d tell me to stand up straighter. Stop drawing so much. Stop crying. Stop being so...” He gestures helplessly. “Me.”

He laughs quietly, bitter and hollow. “I didn’t even know what queer meant yet, but somehow I already felt gross. Like there was something dirty about me I couldn’t scrub off.”

Mike’s hand slides up Will’s spine, slow and grounding.

“I learned really young how to make myself smaller,” Will says. “How to fold parts of myself away so no one would notice. Especially that part.”

He finally looks up at Mike.

“And then there was you.”

Mike’s eyes shine, his breath shallow.

“You were... everything,” Will says. “You were kind to me when you didn’t have to be. You listened. You made me feel like I wasn’t wrong for liking the things I liked. For being quiet.”

His voice cracks.

“I thought... I really thought it would always be us.”

Mike’s face crumples just slightly, like the words have struck somewhere deep.

“Just- just us,” Will whispers. “D&D, bike rides, and late nights in the basement. I thought that was it. I thought that was forever.”

He laughs weakly, tears welling again. “God, I was so *stupid*.”

“You weren’t,” Mike says immediately, fierce. “Will-”

“Mike,” Will interrupts softly. “Please let me finish.”

Mike nods, swallowing hard.

“When you told me about EI,” Will says, “I smiled. I hugged you. I told you I was happy for you.”

His voice drops. “And then I went home and cried so hard I thought I was going to throw up.”

Mike squeezes his eyes shut.

“I hated her,” Will admits, shame heavy in every syllable. “And I hated myself for hating her. Because she didn’t do anything wrong. She was brave, and strong, and everyone loved her. She was... perfect.”

A tear slips down Will’s cheek. He doesn’t wipe it away.

“I kept thinking, of course it wouldn’t be me. Of course it wouldn’t be the weird kid who cries too much and draws instead of talking. Why would you ever choose me?”

Mike’s breathing turns uneven.

“And then,” Will continues, quieter now, “I learned how to live with it. Or pretend to. I learned how to swallow it down and smile and tell myself I’d get over you.”

He shakes his head slowly. “I didn’t.”

Silence stretches between them, thick and trembling.

“There’s something else,” Will says. His stomach twists. His heart starts racing again, but he forces himself to keep going. “I need to tell you.”

Mike nods. “Okay.”

“The painting,” Will says.

Mike's eyes flicker.

"The one I gave you in Lenora," Will says. "I lied. It wasn't from EI."

He exhales shakily. "It was... it was everything I wanted to say to you and didn't know how. It was a stupid, hopeful, reckless thing to do. A grand love gesture that I panicked about the second I handed it to you."

His voice breaks completely now.

"When you looked so awkward at the airport, I thought I'd ruin everything by giving it to you. I thought you hated me. I thought if you knew it was from me, you'd hate it too." Tears spill freely. "So I lied. And I'm *so* sorry."

Mike stares at him.

For a moment, he doesn't say anything. His face shifts through a dozen emotions, shock, pain, recognition, something painfully tender.

Then he lets out a breath that sounds like it's been trapped in his lungs for years.

"I knew," Mike says quietly.

Will freezes.

"What?" he whispers.

"I mean- not right away," Mike admits. "But deep down? Yeah. I knew it was from you."

Will's breath stutters.

"I told myself I was crazy," Mike continues. "I told myself I was reading into it, that I just *wanted* it to be from you, and that was stupid. So I ran from it. From you."

He reaches out, taking Will's hands in his own, grounding them both.

"But I treasured it," Mike says firmly. "Because it felt like you. Because all your drawings feel like pieces of you. I kept it because I couldn't stand the idea of losing it."

His voice softens. "Just like I keep everything you give me."

Will breaks at that.

He folds forward again, pressing his forehead into Mike's shoulder, sobbing openly now. Mike wraps his arms around him immediately, holding him tight.

"I love EI," Mike says gently, into Will's hair. "I really do. She's important to me. She helped me survive things I didn't think I could."

Will nods faintly, listening.

“But it’s not the same, which is why we broke up years ago in the first place,” Mike says. “What I feel for you... it’s deeper. It always has been. I just didn’t know how to face it.”

He pulls back just enough to look at Will.

“I need you,” Mike says, voice shaking but certain. “I always have.”

Will looks at him through tears, something fragile and hopeful blooming painfully in his chest. Mike smiles through his own tears, he doesn’t need an answer from Will to know how he feels, and pulls Will back into his arms.

They hold each other there on the basement floor, both of them cracked open, both of them finally seen.

And this time, neither of them run away from it.

The room was bathed in the soft glow of a single lamp, casting long shadows across the cluttered bedroom that felt both familiar and charged with new electricity. After a couple of minutes of holding each other, Will sat up to look at Mike.

Their confessions still echoed in the quiet space between them, raw words of love that had stripped away years of unspoken tension, but they simply existed in this bubble, soaking in the warmth of each other's presence.

Will's hand rested lightly on Mike's knee, his eyes followed to watch his fingers tracing idle patterns over the denim of his jeans, a tentative touch that spoke volumes.

Mike could feel the slight tremor in Will's grip, the vulnerability that mirrored his own racing heart. He turned his head slowly, eyes locking onto Will's face, the sharp line of his jaw, the way his dark hair fell messily over his forehead. God, he was beautiful like this.

With a gentleness that surprised even himself, Mike reached out, his fingers curling under Will's chin to turn his face toward him.

Will's eyes widened fractionally, but he didn't pull away. Instead, he leaned in just a bit, as if drawn by the same invisible thread that had pulled them together tonight.

Mike's thumb brushed Will's lower lip for a fleeting second, feeling the soft give of it, before he leaned forward and pressed his lips to Will's forehead. The kiss was tender, lingering, his mouth warm against the cool skin there. He inhaled deeply, committing the moment to memory, the faint salt of sweat, the way Will's breath hitched softly.

“How do you look so pretty even after crying so much?” Mike asks as a whisper directed to his ear.

When Mike pulled away, their gazes met, and smiles bloomed across their faces, sweet and unhurried. Will was shy at first, lips curving up at the corners, crinkling the skin around his eyes in that way that made Mike's chest ache with affection. Mike's smile was broader, laced with relief and something deeper, a quiet joy that they'd finally crossed this line.

“Shut up Mike,” Will laughed, and the sound made Mike's heart flutter.

But then Mike's expression shifted, a mischievous grin tugging at his mouth as he watched the flush creep up Will's neck. The silence had been perfect, but now, with the weight of their admissions settling, Mike couldn't resist lightening the air, or maybe testing the waters of this new intimacy.

"So," he said, voice low and teasing, drawing out the word, "did you like my polaroid?"

Will's eyes went wide, color flooding his cheeks in a rush of crimson. He let out a startled laugh, shoving at Mike's shoulder with enough force to make him rock back slightly, though Mike didn't budge far.

"Mike!" Will sputtered, his voice pitching higher with embarrassment, hands flying up to cover his face for a second before dropping them in defeat.

Will shifted uncomfortably on the floor, knees knocking against Mike's as he tried to play it cool, but the nervous energy radiated off him like heat.

The polaroid... Mike's impulsive, bold move, snapping a polaroid of himself to capture the thick, hard length of his cock straining against his jeans, the outline unmistakable and unapologetic.

"What kind of question is that?" Will managed, his laugh bubbling out again, awkward and genuine, as he rubbed the back of his neck. His fingers fidgeted with the hem of his shirt, twisting the fabric, and Mike could see the way his Adam's apple bobbed with a hard swallow. The room felt smaller now, the air thicker with the memory of that image, the way it had ignited something reckless between them.

Mike chuckled, the sound rumbling deep in his chest, leaning in closer so their faces were inches apart. He loved this, seeing Will flustered, the way his defenses cracked under the weight of their shared secrets.

"Well, I liked your drawing," he countered, his tone playful but edged with heat, eyes darkening as he recalled it.

"Stop!" Will groaned, burying his face in his hands again, but there was a smile peeking through his fingers, his shoulders shaking with suppressed laughter. He peeked out, eyes sparkling with a mix of mortification and amusement. "It was a mistake, okay? I didn't mean to give you that one. I swear, I grabbed the wrong sketch from my folder." His voice was muffled, but the embarrassment was real, cheeks burning hotter as he imagined Mike studying it, tracing those lines with his eyes.

Mike reached out, prying Will's hands away gently, his fingers warm and insistent around Will's wrists. He held them there, thumbs stroking the pulse points, feeling the rapid beat.

"Well, I'm glad you did," he said softly, his grin softening into something sincere, eyes searching Will's. "Because none of this would've happened without it. That drawing? It told me everything I needed to know. You saw me, Will. Really saw me. And I couldn't stop thinking about you after that."

Will's resistance melted, his hands going slack in Mike's grip as he met that steady gaze. A small smile tugged at his lips, reluctant at first, then genuine, warming his entire face.

Mike was right, that mix-up had unraveled the careful walls they'd built, leading to tonight's confessions, the raw admissions of love that still hung in the air like a promise.

"Yeah," Will murmured, squeezing Mike's hands back, "I guess you're right. It was... kinda perfect, in a messed-up way."

Mike's eyes lit up, but he wasn't done teasing yet. He released Will's hands, leaning back on his elbows on the carpet. "You still didn't answer my question, though," he prompted, voice dropping an octave, laced with that flirtatious edge that made Will's stomach flip.

Will bit his lip, the flush returning full force as he glanced away, then back, holding Mike's stare.

The words tumbled out, hesitant but honest, his voice barely above a whisper at first. "Of course I liked it, Mike. How could I not? *God*, it drove me crazy thinking about it."

He paused, emboldened by the way Mike's breath caught, and added with a shy grin, "I also liked sitting on your lap in the car. Feeling you like that, hard against me... it was- *fuck*." Will sighed, maintaining eye contact with Mike.

Mike groaned, the sound raw and involuntary, pulling from deep in his throat as heat surged through him. Praise like that, direct, from Will, hit him like a punch, unfamiliar and intoxicating.

He wasn't used to this, to someone seeing him so clearly and wanting more. His hands moved on instinct, fingers digging into Will's hips, the denim rough under his palms. With a firm tug, he guided Will forward, shifting their positions until Will was straddling his lap.

Now Mike had to tilt his head up to meet Will's eyes, the new angle making his heart pound harder. Will's weight settled against him, warm and solid, their chests nearly brushing with every breath.

Mike's hands stayed on Will's hips, thumbs circling slowly over the belt loops, holding him close. The closeness was electric, the heat of Will's body seeping through their clothes, and Mike could already feel himself stirring, the press of Will's ass against his growing erection sending a jolt straight to his core.

He looked up, lips parted, voice husky. "Will..."

Will's eyes darkened with the same hunger that burned in Mike's chest, the air between them crackling as Mike's hands tightened on Will's hips. The weight of him there, straddling Mike's lap, felt just like heaven.

Mike's gaze dropped to Will's lips, parted slightly, breath coming in shallow bursts. He couldn't wait any longer. Leaning up, Mike captured Will's mouth in a kiss that started soft but ignited instantly, tongues brushing tentatively at first, then delving deeper with a urgency that made Mike's pulse thunder.

Their lips moved together, hot and insistent, Will's mouth yielding under Mike's as he tilted his head to deepen the angle. Mike's tongue slid against Will's.

Will mumbled against Mike's lips, "Mike..."

It vibrated through the kiss, pulling a low groan from Mike in response.

"You taste so good," Mike murmured back, nipping at Will's lower lip before sucking it gently, his hands sliding up Will's back under his shirt, fingers splaying over warm skin.

Will's response was a needy whimper, his own hands fisting in Mike's hair, tugging just enough to send sparks down Mike's spine.

As the kiss grew messier, tongues tangling with wet, sloppy sounds that filled the quiet room, Will felt Mike hardening fully beneath him, his cock thickening in his jeans, pressing up against the cleft of his ass through the layers.

Will shifted, grinding down slowly, deliberately. The pressure was teasing, Will's hips rolling in a lazy circle that dragged his own growing bulge along Mike's stomach.

Mike broke the kiss with a gasp, forehead resting against Will's, "Fuck, Will, you're killing me."

Will grinned, breathless, and pressed harder, the friction making Mike's cock throb, pre-cum already dampening his boxers.

"Good," Will whispered, voice husky, before diving back in, teeth grazing Mike's lip as he teased with another deliberate roll of his hips.

The floor creaked under them, but Mike wanted Will to be comfortable. He pulled back slightly, hands firm on Will's waist.

"Come," Mike said softly, in a tone just for Will. They both stood up and walked the short distance to the couch, hand in hand.

Mike sank into the couch, spreading his legs wide, the invitation clear as he patted his thigh gently, eyes locked on Will's flushed face.

"Sit," he urged, and Will didn't hesitate to straddle Mike's lap again.

As Will settled, their hips aligned perfectly, and he rolled his hips down, the teasing from before turning insistent, his ass pressing against Mike's straining cock. Mike groaned into Will's mouth, as he gave a teasing grin.

Their mouths crashed together again, the makeout fiercer now, lips swollen, breaths mingling in hot pants, tongues thrusting in a rhythm that mimicked what they both craved. Will's hands roamed Mike's chest, fingers digging into shoulders, while Mike's gripped Will's ass, guiding the grind, each roll sending jolts of pleasure through them both.

Heat built rapidly, sweat beading on their skin despite the cool air from the window. Mike's fingers found the hem of Will's shirt, tugging it up and over his head in one fluid motion, tossing it aside. Will's chest was exposed, pale skin flushed pink, nipples hardening in the open air.

Mike's breath hitched at the sight, and he yanked his own shirt off next, the fabric whispering to the floor. Bare torsos met as Will leaned in, skin sliding against skin. The contact sent sparks racing across Will's nerves, every inch of Mike's body against his feeling like fire, their heartbeats syncing in the press of chests.

"God, your skin," Will breathed, hands exploring the dip of Mike's spine, the curve of his ribs, feeling the tremor in Mike's muscles.

Emboldened, Mike's hand drifted lower, fingers brushing the zipper of Will's jeans. He paused, looking up into Will's eyes, heavy-lidded and dark with want.

“Is this okay?” Mike asked, voice low and serious amid the haze.

Will nodded quickly, biting his lip, but Mike shook his head slightly, thumb stroking Will's hipbone.

“I need to hear you say it,”

Will's voice came out ragged, desperate. “Please, Mike, I need this- I need you.”

The words snapped something in Mike, and he yanked the zipper down, popping the button with eager fingers. Will fell to the side, separating their bodies, shimmying the jeans down his thighs, but Mike took over, peeling them off leaving him in just boxers.

Before Will could react, Mike's mouth latched onto his neck, sucking hard on the sensitive skin just below his ear. Will gasped, head falling back as Mike's lips and teeth worked, leaving a blooming red mark, a hickey that would linger as proof of this night.

Mike sucked again, tongue swirling over the spot, tasting the pulse there, while his hands kneaded Will's thighs. Another mark followed lower, on the collarbone, Mike's teeth grazing just enough to draw a moan from Will.

“Mike... yes,” Will panted, fingers threading through Mike's hair, holding him close.

But Mike wanted them closer, equal. Mike pulled away from Will's neck, and Will dived into Mike's neck, to leave his own marks. His lips trailing wet kisses along the column of his throat, sucking lightly in retaliation, making Mike shiver.

“God, this is going to be a problem for me, isn't it? First you couldn't behave in the car and now... Fuck” Mike murmured.

Mike focused on his own jeans, shoving them down his legs, kicking them to the floor in a tangle. Now they were both in boxers, the thin fabric doing little to hide their arousal, cocks outlined clearly, damp spots blooming where pre-cum soaked through.

“Please, get back on my lap,” Mike said, voice a plea wrapped in command, patting his thigh again.

Will hums and climbs on immediately, the couch dipping under their combined weight, his knees bracketing Mike's hips. Will circled his hips, grinding together now, cocks sliding against each other through the cotton, the friction maddeningly good but not enough, the barrier teasing, building the ache.

Pre-cum leaked steadily, slicking the fabric, making each thrust wet and obscene. Will's hips bucked, chasing more, while Mike's hands guided him, groans escaping into their shared breaths.

“Will, I need more,” Mike confessed, voice breaking, his cock twitching painfully against the confines.

“Me too,” Will replied, eyes fierce. “Take these off.”

He tugged at Mike's waistband, and Mike mirrored the motion, shoving the boxers down. They stripped quickly, fabric pooling at their feet, leaving them naked on the couch, exposed, vulnerable, cocks springing free, hard and flushed, tips glistening with pre-cum.

Mike's gaze raked over Will, taking in the lean lines of his body, the way his chest rose and fell, the curve of his erection curving up toward his navel.

“You look incredible,” Mike said, awe threading his words, like he'd imagined this a thousand times but the reality surpassed it all.

Will's heart fluttered, and so did his cock.

“You're perfect, Mike.” Will cooed, kissing his neck once, softly, then sitting up to look into his eyes.

They didn't rush to touch their sensitive parts yet, instead, fingers traced paths over skin, reverent and exploratory.

Mike's hand skimmed Will's collarbone, down his arm, feeling the fine hairs stand on end, then across his abdomen, circling the faint trail leading down.

Will's touch was lighter, fingertips ghosting over Mike's pecs, thumb brushing a nipple that pebbled under the attention, then lower to the V of his hips.

They drank in the sight, breaths syncing, the intimacy of just looking, finally seeing each other like this, hitting harder than any touch.

“I never thought we'd be here,” Will whispered, voice thick, his hand pausing on Mike's thigh.

“How'd I get so lucky,” Mike groaned, his mouth finding Will's neck again, kissing the fresh marks before trailing lower, lips brushing the hollow of his throat, then latching onto a nipple, sucking gently until Will arched with a whine.

“Lay down,” Mike murmured against skin, guiding Will back onto the cushions.

Will complied, stretching out, their legs tangling, calves hooking, thighs pressing, as Mike hovered over him, the couch creaking softly. One hand braced beside Will's head,

Mike's eyes met his. “Can I?”

Will's nod was immediate, fervent. "Please."

Mike's hand wrapped around Will's cock, firm and sure, stroking from base to tip in a slow, twisting pull. Will's length was hot in his palm, velvet over steel, pre-cum smearing under his thumb as he circled the head.

Will moaned, loud and unrestrained, hips bucking up into the touch, the wet sound making Mike's own cock twitch against Will's thigh, leaking steadily.

"Like that?" Mike asked, voice gravelly, pumping again, watching Will's face contort in pleasure.

"Yes, don't stop," Will groaned in pleasure.

Will's hand found Mike's cock in response, fingers closing around the girth, jerking in tandem, up and down, slick with pre-cum, the wet sounds mingling with their gasps. They stroked each other, rhythms syncing, cocks throbbing in unison, pre-cum dribbling over knuckles.

The pace quickened, but Mike wanted them connected fully.

He shoved Will's hand away gently, grasping both cocks together in his larger hand, the heads bumping, tips kissing with each stroke. Skin slid against skin, hot and slick, their lengths pulsing side by side as Mike jerked them in firm, unified pulls.

Mike's grip tightened around both their cocks, the slick heat of pre-cum easing the slide as he pumped them together in long, deliberate strokes, their shafts rubbing side by side with every twist of his wrist.

"F-Fuck Mike, where'd you learn this?" Will gasped, his breath shaky.

"Shhh," Mike whispered, "Let me make you feel good, bunny."

Will groaned at the pet name, then looked down at their cocks moving in unison. Will was in love with the sight of it.

Will's hips jerked instinctively, pushing into Mike's hold, their tips bumping and smearing more pre-cum between them. Mike's eyes locked onto Will's, holding him there in the intensity, breaths syncing in ragged harmony.

"Look at me," Mike commanded, voice rough and edged with desperation.

Will did as he was told, his pupils blew wide, cheeks flushed deep red, his mouth parted slightly as he releases a moan. The vulnerability in that stare amplifying every grind, every pulse of their cocks moving as one, hurtling them toward release.

Top of Form

“Fuck, Will- gonna cum,” Mike warned, breath ragged, the pressure coiling tight. He jerked their cocks together firmer and faster now.

His hips stuttered, and he came first, ropes of cum spilling over his fist, splattering Will's stomach, the sight- Mike's release, face twisted in ecstasy, pushes Will over the edge. Will cried out, cock jerking in Mike's grip, cum erupting to mix with Mike's, warm and sticky between them.

They collapsed together, breathing heavy, chests heaving as aftershocks rippled through. Mike leaned down, capturing Will's lips in a slow, deep kiss, tasting salt and satisfaction.

They basked in it, bodies tangled, cum cooling on skin, the intimacy wrapping around them like a blanket.

“Wow,” Mike said finally, voice soft, pulling back to smile.

“Yeah. Wow,” Will echoed, grinning through the haze.

“That is way better than when I do it myself,” Mike admitted, a laugh bubbling up.

Will laughed too, nodding, pulling Mike closer. “Way better. With you, it's... everything.”

[Chapter 5](#): caught

Notes:

I tried to dabble in some humor for this chapter, smut and humor really are my favorites so let me know what you think!

also, it's about time these two were caught ;)

(See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#).)

Chapter Text

The Saturday sun finds Will first.

It presses warm and insistent against his face, slipping through the basement window in a pale gold stripe that lands right across his eyes. He groans quietly and shifts, skin damp, bangs sticking to his forehead. For half a second, his brain supplies the familiar, automatic thought...

Gross, I'm sweaty

He moves again and everything rearranges.

Mike.

Mike is sprawled across his chest like he belongs there. Like gravity has decided this is where he should rest. His curls are a mess, tickling Will's collarbone, dark with sweat, his face relaxed in a way Will has never seen before. Their legs are tangled together, calves hooked, knees pressed close, skin warm and slick from the heat.

They're both sweating. The basement is stuffy. Will should probably care.

He doesn't.

Instead, a smile spreads across his face so fast it almost hurts. It feels too big for him, like his cheeks don't quite know what to do with it yet.

How is this real?

Last night flickers behind his eyes, not images so much as feelings. The way they'd clung to each other like letting go would mean disappearing. Mike telling Will things he's only ever dreamt of him saying. And... Well... *That*. That was really good too.

And now this.

Will lies still, barely breathing, afraid that if he moves too much the moment will shatter. He studies Mike's face like he's committing it to memory, the soft part in his hair that never quite behaves, the faint crease between his brows even in sleep, the way his mouth is parted just slightly.

He doesn't want to get up. He doesn't want to wake him. He wants to live here, in this exact second, where his body is warm and his chest is full and the future doesn't feel terrifying.

Mike shifts, mumbling something incoherent, and Will freezes again. Then Mike's eyes blink open, slow and unfocused, and he looks up.

It takes a second for recognition to click.

Then he smiles.

"Mm," Mike hums, voice still thick with sleep. "Good morning, Will."

Will laughs softly. "Good morning, Michael."

Mike squints at him. "Wow." Mike groans at the sound of his full name.

"How did my Sorcerer sleep?" Mike says, seeking revenge.

Will groans, rolling his eyes. "Oh my god, Mike."

Mike grins, entirely unrepentant, and dips his head to press a series of lazy kisses to Will's neck. "You love it."

"I don't." Will blushes.

"Liar."

Will laughs despite himself. Their legs shift, skin sticking together uncomfortably now that he's aware of it. Still, there's something about it that feels... right.

"Mike," Will says, trying to sound serious and failing. "It is way too hot for us to be cuddling. I can feel our sweat *everywhere!*"

Mike lifts his head, eyebrow raised. "Oh come on Will, you don't like my juices on you? You seemed to like it last night" Mike bites his neck softly in the same places he was leaving kisses.

"Mike!" Will's face goes red, the memory flashes in his mind quicker than he'd like to admit. He did like it, but he's not going to admit that to Mike now.

"Didn't you?" Mike asks again, looking up at Will with his big brown eyes in a way that is looking for reassurance.

"You know I did, now shut up," Will giggles and pushes his face away gently.

Mike beams, his smile lighting up the whole room in Will's eyes. Mike starts attacking Will with kisses all over his neck, tickling him to the point where Will is laughing so hard he can't breathe.

Mike laughs at this, then gives him a break and collapses back against his chest. Will glances toward the desk and his stomach drops.

11:52.

"Shit," Will says, sitting up abruptly.

Mike yelps as he's unceremoniously dumped onto the couch beside him. "Will- what!"

"We overslept."

Mike squints at the clock. "Oh. Yeah."

Mike doesn't move a muscle while Will's panic spikes immediately. "Do you think anyone came down here? Like... checked on us?"

Mike considers this, entirely too calm. "Would that be... bad?"

Will stares at him. "I don't know, *Michael*, would you want your sister walking in on us cuddling?"

Mike groans and buries his head into their shared pillow on the tiny couch. "Such a stressed bunny this morning."

Will flinches at the pet name, the casual use of it. It makes his face heat up. He realizes just how quickly everything has changed between him and Mike, and how this is all new territory for him.

"Come on," Mike says, standing and stretching. "Let's see if the coast is clear. And then I think a shower is very, very necessary."

Upstairs, the house is quiet. Hotter than the basement, somehow. They creep into the kitchen, shoulders brushing, and find a note taped to the fridge.

Gone grocery shopping. Holly's with us. Will be back noon. – Nancy

Will exhales in relief.

Mike leans over his shoulder. "See? Totally fine."

"I'm showering first" Will announces, his voice a mix of nerves and playfulness. He then bolts out the kitchen to the stairs.

Mike catches up to him and grabs his waist, stopping him on the first step of the staircase. Mike uses his hands to turn Will around, they're now facing each other eye to eye.

"Why cant we just shower together?" he blurted, the words tumbling out nervously, his eyes flicking to Will's marked neck before lifting to meet Will's gaze. "You know... to save water?"

Will feels his stomach flutter, a warm rush spreading through him. How was any of this real? *Mike*, the guy he'd been crushing on forever, suggesting they strip down and share a shower.

His mind raced with images, bare skin, water falling over them, the intimacy of it all. He swallowed hard, a shy smile tugging at his lips.

“Save water, huh? That's your excuse?” Will teased, but his voice held a breathless edge, excitement thrumming in his veins.

Mike grinned, stepping closer, the air between them thickening with anticipation.

“Yeah, and maybe... I just want to be close to you.”

His hand brushed Will's arm, light but intentional, sending a shiver down Will's spine. They both knew this was more than conversation.

With a shared nod and cheeky grin, they snuck upstairs together, the house quiet except for the distant hum of the fridge downstairs. The two boys slipped into the bathroom, locking the door with a soft click.

The shower ran hot, steam filling the space, turning the air misty and warm. Will peeled off his shirt first, heart racing as he exposed his pale skin, nipples pebbling in the humid air. Mike followed, his broader shoulders and chest coming into view, the faint trail of hair leading down to his waistband making Will's mouth go dry.

They stepped under the spray together, water spilling over their bodies, soaking their hair and skin. At first, it was innocent... almost. Will grabbed the body wash, squirting some into his palm and lathering it over his arms, then his chest while the bubbles sliding down his flat stomach.

Mike did the same, his eyes tracing every inch of Will's form, piercing and hungry. Will felt that gaze, roaming from his collarbones to the curve of his hips, lingering on the way the water beaded on his skin.

He kept his own eyes fixed on Mike's face, on those dark, intense eyes that made his pulse quicken.

When Will caught him staring, Mike's cheeks burned, and he looked away, embarrassed heat mixing with the shower's warmth.

Will chuckled softly, the sound low and affectionate over the patter of water.

“I don't mind you checking me out,” he said.

“What about...” Mike started, his voice dropping an octave, laced with a teasing edge that sent a thrill straight to Will's core. He stepped closer, tracing his finger down Will's chest, the steam wrapping around them like a cocoon.

Will's breath hitched, but before he could respond, Mike closed the gap, cupping Will's face with soapy hands and pulling him into a kiss. Their lips met soft at first, then hungry, tongues sliding together.

Water streamed between them, Mike's mouth was warm, insistent, and Will melted into it, hands gripping Mike's wet shoulders. But then Mike pulled back to trail kisses down Will's jaw, to the sensitive skin of his neck, sucking lightly and drawing a gasp from Will.

"Hey," Will murmured, upset at the separation of their lips, his voice whiny even to his own ears.

He tilted his head back, giving Mike more access. Mike's teeth grazed his pulse point, nipping gently, and Will's body arched instinctively.

That's when Will felt it, Mike's hardened cock pressing firm against his thigh, thick and hot despite the water's temperature.

The contact made Will's own erection twitch, swelling harder if that was even possible, straining against his stomach. He shifted, rubbing subtly, the friction sending sparks up his spine.

"Mike..." Will breathed, his hands sliding down Mike's back, fingers digging into his skin.

Mike hummed against Will's neck, the vibration rumbling through him.

"You feel that? That's what you do to me," he whispered, voice rough with desire.

Mike's hips rocked forward once, deliberately grinding his cock along Will's thigh, the head nudging wet skin.

"This isn't the first shower I've had with a boner thinking about you." Mike admitted, still with his mouth pressed to Will's neck.

Will's head spun, arousal pooling low in his belly. He can't process the confession, what it means, how much it means.

"Fuck Mike," Will groaned, voice shaky. "If I had known that sooner--"

Mike's kisses trailed lower, lips brushing Will's collarbone, then down to his chest. He latched onto one nipple, tongue flicking the hardened bud, sucking until Will moaned, the sound echoing off the tiles.

"Fuck, Mike... that feels..." Will trailed off, hips bucking forward.

"Good?" Mike murmured, switching to the other nipple, teeth grazing just enough to sting sweetly.

"Tell me what you want, Will. I wanna hear it."

Will's hands fisted in Mike's wet hair, tugging lightly. "Your mouth... lower. Please."

Mike's eyes darkened with lust as he sank to his knees, the water pounding his back. He kissed across Will's stomach, tongue dipping into his navel, tracing the V of his hips. Will's cock stood rigid, flushed and leaking pre-cum that mixed with the shower spray.

Mike looked up, water dripping from his lashes, holding Will's gaze. "Can I?"

"Please," Will begged, voice breaking, one hand steadying himself against the wall.

Mike didn't hesitate. He wrapped a hand around the base of Will's cock, stroking once, twice, feeling it throb in his grip. Then he leaned in, tongue flat as he licked from root to tip, savoring the salty taste.

Will's knees buckled slightly, a whine escaping him. "Oh god, Mike..."

"You taste so fucking good," Mike growled, swirling his tongue around the head, lapping at the slit. He took Will into his mouth fully, lips stretching around the girth, sucking steadily as he bobbed his head. The heat of his mouth contrasted the cool water, and Will's hips jerked, fucking shallowly into the wet suction.

"Yes- Fuck just like that," Will panted, watching through half-lidded eyes as Mike worked him over. "Your mouth... it's so good, Mike."

Mike relaxes his throat and takes in more, nose brushing Will's pubic hair. He hummed around the length, the vibration pulling a string of curses from Will.

"Shit, Mike... I'm gonna... you're gonna make me-"

Mike pulled off just enough to speak, hand pumping slickly.

"Do it. Cum in my mouth, Will. I want it all." Then he dove back down, sucking harder, tongue pressing along the underside.

It didn't take long. Will's body tensed, balls drawing up, and with a choked cry, he came, spilling hot pulses down Mike's throat. Mike kept sucking softly, milking him through it until Will was trembling, oversensitive.

Standing slowly, Mike wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, a smug grin on his face. Will blinked up at him, still dazed, chest heaving.

"Spit it out," he said, confused, a flush creeping up his neck.

Mike laughed, low and warm, pulling Will close under the spray.

"Don't need to," he murmured, then leaned in to whisper hot against Will's ear, "Fuck... you taste as good as you look."

Will shivered, arousal stirring anew despite his recent release. His eyes dropped to Mike's neglected cock, still rock-hard and curving up against his stomach, the head glistening. It looked thick, veined, begging for attention.

Will bit his lip, nerves twisting in his gut. He'd never done this before, never even thought he'd get the chance with Mike.

"I've never done this before," he confessed, voice small but determined.

Mike's expression softened, thumb brushing Will's cheek. "Neither have I. That was my first time."

Will's eyes widened, pleasantly surprised. It had felt incredible, skilled even. Will felt nervous, he wanted to be good for Mike-

"Hey, you don't have to if you don't want to. We can just-"

But Will was already sinking to his knees, water streaming over his face.

"I want to," he said firmly, looking up at Mike with wide, eager eyes. He wrapped a tentative hand around Mike's cock, feeling it jump in his grasp, hot and heavy. Starting slow, Will licked from the bottom to the tip, tongue tracing the prominent vein along the underside, tasting the clean skin and faint musk.

Mike groaned, head falling back against the tile. "Fuck, Will..."

His hand threaded gently into Will's hair, not pushing, just holding.

Will focused on the tip, swirling his tongue around the sensitive head, dipping into the slit to lap at the pre-cum beading there. It was salty, a little bitter, but the way Mike swore under his breath...

"Shit, yes, right there"

...made it addictive.

"You like that?" Will asked, voice muffled as he kissed the crown.

"Love it," Mike rasped, hips twitching. "Keep going, baby."

Will took a breath and slid his lips over the head, sucking lightly as he took more in, inch by inch. Mike's cock filled his mouth, stretching his jaw, but he relaxed, bobbing shallowly, tongue working the underside.

Mike's breaths came ragged, curses spilling freely.

"Fuck, Will... you're so good for me. Harder- yeah, fuck."

Will hummed around him, the vibration making Mike buck. He wasn't prepared for how quickly it built. Mike's thighs tensed, a warning groan escaping,

"Will, I'm- fuck, gonna cum."

Will didn't pull away. He sucked deeper, hand stroking what he couldn't take, and Mike shattered, flooding his mouth with thick spurts. Will swallowed instinctively, the taste stronger than expected but not bad. A bit dribbled down his chin as he pulled off, gasping.

Mike reached down, thumb wiping the stray cum from Will's face, eyes dark with affection and lust. "You look so pretty like this," he said softly, voice wrecked. "On your knees, lips swollen from my cock. Fuck, you're perfect."

Will stood on shaky legs, Mike pulling him into a deep kiss, tasting himself on Will's tongue.

"That was... intense," Will murmured against his lips, both of them laughing breathlessly.

They finished the shower properly then, soaping each other up with lingering touches, hands gliding over backs, asses, cocks softening but still sensitive. Mike washed Will's hair, fingers massaging his scalp until Will was putty, leaning into him.

"We should do this more often," Mike joked, rinsing the shampoo out.

Will smiled, turning to rinse Mike's chest. "If we get more alone time in the house, deal."

They got out the shower and started drying off with fluffy towels, they stole more kisses, the steam clearing to reveal flushed faces and soft, glossy eyes.

"We didn't bring clean clothes up," Will sighs.

Mike blinks, then shrugs like this is the easiest problem in the world. "It's fine. Just wrap the towel around your waist and we'll sneak into my room. Nobody's home."

He says it so confidently that Will almost believes him.

"You can wear my clothes today," Mike adds, softer now, eyes flicking over Will like he's something precious, something unreal.

Will's chest warms instantly. Wearing Mike's clothes, walking around wrapped in him, sounds like the best idea he's ever heard. Judging by the way Mike's mouth curves into a small, pleased smile, he likes the idea just as much.

They both adjust their towels, take a synchronized breath, and Mike cracks the bathroom door open.

Nancy.

She's standing right there, mid-step toward her bedroom, arms full of folded laundry. She stops dead in her tracks.

Her eyes flick from Mike... to Will... to the towels.

The silence is deafening.

"*Oh,*" Nancy says.

Will feels his soul attempt to leave his body. His ears burn. His face feels like it's on fire. Mike goes just as red, eyes wide, mouth opening and closing uselessly for half a second.

"I-" Mike starts.

"We-" Will adds at the same time.

Mike barrels forward. "We didn't shower *together.*"

Nancy raises an eyebrow.

"We just-" Mike gestures vaguely behind him. "Went one by one."

"Yeah," Will nods way too fast. "One by one."

Nancy doesn't blink.

"And," Mike continues, spiraling now, "Will was just... sitting. On the toilet!"

"Not- not using it," Will blurts. "Just sitting. Like- the lid was down."

"Because," Mike says, hands flying, "it's a small bathroom."

"And I didn't want to leave," Will says, voice cracking. "The- the mirror fogs up really bad."

What the fuck does the mirror have to do with this.

Mike nods vigorously. "Super foggy."

Nancy stares at them, completely unblinking, jaw slowly dropping open.

"Anyway," Mike says weakly, "we're clean now."

Then Nancy exhales sharply, "Okay! Okay. I get it."

They both freeze.

“Jonathan’s waiting for you downstairs,” she continues, like nothing just happened.

“Didn’t you want to go with him to buy drinks for Lucas’ later?”

“Yes,” Mike says immediately, squinting his eyes at the floor.

“Yeah,” Will echoes.

Nancy steps aside, deliberately not looking at either of them anymore. “Great. Have fun.”

They scuttle past her like startled animals and slam Mike’s bedroom door shut behind them.

For a full second, neither of them speaks.

Then Mike lets out a strangled noise and flops backward onto his bed, arms spread wide. “Oh my god. My sister- My *sister* just saw me come out of the shower with my boyfriend. Should we kill ourselves?”

Will blinks. “Boyfriend?”

Mike freezes, then peeks at him through his fingers. “I mean- if you want. I- I just-”

The nerves from the interaction leave Will’s body at the sound. He is Mike’s *boyfriend*. He crosses the room and kisses his forehead gently. “That’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Mike’s face does something soft and wrecked all at once.

Will turns to the cupboard, humming quietly, heart racing in the best way. He opens it and immediately notices a large box tucked inside, stuffed full of envelopes and-

Before he can register it, Mike gently grabs his wrist.

“Um-” Mike says, panicking. He quickly grabs a blue striped shirt, shielding the cupboard with his body, and tosses it at Will. “Here. I love this one. You’d look good in it.”

Will raises his eyebrow for half a second, then shrugs it off and pulls the shirt on. It smells like Mike, like warmth and something comforting. He smiles helplessly.

Mike throws on a yellow striped shirt of his own, collar slightly crooked. They match, sort of.

“I’m gonna grab shorts from the basement,” Will whispers.

Mike leans in and kisses his cheek. “Okay.”

Will slips through the house unnoticed, heart soaring. In the basement, he pulls on his shorts and stands there for a moment, breathing.

He's so happy. It feels unreal. Like something has finally clicked into place after years of waiting.

All that longing, it was worth it.

"Let's go!" Jonathan calls from the stairs.

Will smiles to himself and runs up.

Notes:

This chapter really prepares us for lettergate ;)

[Chapter 6](#): party with the party

Notes:

angsty chapter with a real good payoff in the end :)

(See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#).)

Chapter Text

The car ride is quiet in a way that doesn't feel heavy.

Will sits in the front seat beside Jonathan, the window cracked just enough that warm air drifts in and stirs his hair. He can't help but smile out the window while watching the trees go past. He has Mike, truly has him, and he couldn't be happier. It's hard for Will to even comprehend how he ended up here, after all these years of pushing his feelings down, pushing and pushing and pushing... and now, he has everything he wanted.

The radio hums low, some song Will half-recognizes but doesn't really hear. Behind him, Mike shifts in the backseat, Will doesn't turn around, but he can feel him there, like a gravity he hasn't stopped noticing. Will doesn't know how long he's felt it, but for as long as he can remember he's felt like a magnet drawn to Mike.

Jonathan's driving with one hand on the wheel, relaxed, tapping his fingers along to the music. Every now and then, his eyes flick to the rearview mirror. Not suspicious. Just... aware. Will wonders if Jonathan knows. He will know soon enough, once Nancy tells him about this morning he will connect the dots.

Will can't be bothered to care about that right now. He's too happy, he's too content with this new chapter he's going into.

It's peaceful. Quiet. Like the world has decided, just for this car ride, not to ask them for anything.

When they pull into the parking lot, Jonathan cuts the engine and grabs his wallet. "I'll be quick," he says, already opening the door. "Don't wander off."

Will nods, then realizes Jonathan's already gone.

The heat hits him immediately when he steps out of the car. The pavement smells like sun and oil, the air thick and unmoving. Will stretches slightly, rolling his shoulders, and that's when he notices Mike standing too close, closer than necessary, close enough that Will can feel the warmth radiating off him.

Mike doesn't say anything at first. He just reaches out, fingers brushing Will's jaw, then his neck, then turning his neck sideways.

Will freezes.

Mike's touch is light, careful, like he's handling something fragile. He tugs the fabric down just a little. His eyes flick up, quick and nervous, checking the parking lot. No one's looking.

"What-?" Will starts.

Mike ignores the question, peering at Will's neck with intense focus. His thumb grazes skin, barely there, but Will feels it everywhere.

"They're hidden," Mike murmurs. "Mostly."

Will blinks. "Hidden?"

Mike hums, dissatisfied, and adjusts the shirt again. Will catches a glimpse of concern in his eyes, not panic, just this careful, protective instinct that makes Will's chest ache.

"You can't see the marks unless you pull the shirt day," Mike says quietly, like it's an apology. "Which is... good."

He fumbles with his own shirt then, tugging at it awkwardly, clearly self-conscious. "I, uh- didn't think about the consequences of this."

He tilts his head, just enough for Will to see the mess of red and purple blooming along his neck, disappearing beneath the fabric. The sight sends a rush of heat straight to Will's face.

Oh.

Will swallows. He shouldn't feel proud. He really shouldn't. But something in him sparks anyway, something bright and warm and entirely his.

Mike steps back from Will and leans against the car. Will joins him but at a safe distance apart.

"They look... um," Will starts, then stops, flustered. "They're not obvious..." He lies.

Mike snorts. "They so are."

Will just laughs and Mike looks at him, really looks at him, and something settles between them. Unspoken. Shared.

It's just Will and Mike, standing awkwardly against the car, too far apart.

Will wants to reach for him.

He wants to take Mike's hand, lace their fingers together, press their shoulders close like it's the most natural thing in the world. He wants to lean in and whisper something stupid and affectionate and watch Mike's ears turn red. But he can't. Not here. Not now.

So they just stand there.

Mike shifts his weight, rocking slightly on his heels. His fingers twitch at his sides, like they're itching to move. He meets Will's eyes, and for a second, the longing is so obvious it hurts. Will wishes it didn't have to be this way. Secretive and hidden. Mike looks at him like he's thinking the same thing.

They don't need to say it. They never do.

Will feels it like a pull in his chest, the quiet understanding, the shared ache of wanting more than they're allowed to take.

Across the street, laughter cuts through the moment.

Will turns and spots Robin first, her hair catching the light, and beside her, Vickie, smiling shyly. Without thinking, Will breaks into a jog, heat and happiness buzzing through him.

"Robin!"

She turns just in time for Will to collide with her in a hug. She laughs, arms wrapping around him easily. "Will!"

Mike follows after him, slower, more cautious, and Jonathan emerges from the store a moment later with a paper bag full of bottles tucked under his arm.

Robin pulls back, eyes immediately narrowing as they flick over Will's shirt. A grin spreads across her face. "Okay," she says slowly. "I could've sworn I saw that shirt on Michael a few days ago."

Will's heart leaps into his throat.

"Robin," he says, voice dropping conspiratorially. "I have so much to tell you."

Robin's questioning grin turns knowing the second Will gets close. He doesn't even have to say anything yet, she sees it.

Will smiles, starting to feel overwhelmed he wipes his hands on his shorts in attempt to dry them.

Robin tilts her head, eyes narrowing as she smirks, voice teasing. "You look all flushed. Like someone... really wore you out last night."

Will's stomach flips, pulse jumping, and he swallows hard. "Uh... must be... the heat?" he stammers, trying, and failing, to sound casual, a nervous grin tugging at his lips.

Robin shrugs, it is a hot day today. "That bad, huh?"

Will laughs nervously, brushing a hand down his shirt as if to hide the truth, feeling the warmth in his chest climb. He glances at Mike, letting his eyes linger for a beat so Robin can see it, and then turns back with a cheeky wink. "That good," he whispers, voice cracking just slightly, heat rising through his whole body, heart hammering in a way that makes him feel alive, giddy, and utterly caught.

Robin holds her jaw back from dropping, squeezes his arm and holds in her squeal, practically combusting at the confession from Will.

Will glances back at Mike- and freezes.

Mike's staring at him. Not angry. Not really. Just intense, eyes dark with something unreadable. For half a second, Will panics, wondering if he's said too much. Maybe Mike heard him.

He gently nudges Robin back toward the group. "Come on."

Vickie smiles at them all. "Looks like you guys are up for a big night."

Mike doesn't respond.

"Uh, yeah," Jonathan says quickly, stepping in. "They're going to Lucas'."

Jonathan hoists the bag. "We'll see you guys tonight, right?"

“Definitely,” Robin says.

Nancy invited Steve, Robin, and Vickie over tonight. Holly’s sleeping at a friend’s house, and without Will and Mike around, they finally get the house to themselves.

Will watches them talk, but his focus keeps drifting back to Mike, to the way his gaze never quite leaves him, but something in Mike’s eyes doesn’t seem to be as settled and content as Will feels.

Jonathan’s car rolled to a stop in front of Lucas’s house. “Be careful, pace yourself,” Jonathan called over, his hand lingering on Will’s shoulder as he leaned out the window.

“I’ll look after him,” Mike said from the back seat, voice hard, clipped, like something is prickling at the edges of his mood.

Will forced a smile. “Yeah, don’t worry.”

They climbed out and walked up the driveway together, but Will stopped Mike before they reached the door.

“Hey... is everything okay?” he asked, eyes searching Mike’s face like he expected an answer.

“I’m fine,” Mike said quickly.

Will wasn’t convinced, but he let it go, and Dustin opened the door before it could get any more awkward.

“Will! Mike! Come in!” Dustin’s grin was wide and infectious.

They walked in and Lucas immediately took the bag of alcohol from their hands.

Inside, the room buzzed with noise, Max and El were laughing as they poured drinks, the scent of grilled meat wafted from the stove, and Dustin was intently flipping burgers like his life depended on it.

Mike’s attention shifted sharply to the stove. “Who the fuck put you in charge of making the burger patties?” he asked, frustration rolling off him in waves.

“Hey, I know what I’m doing, okay? Don’t come in here and get all up in my process,” Dustin shot back, waving the spatula at him like a sword.

Mike raised an eyebrow. "And what process is that? Carefully assembling charcoal disasters like last time?" Mike says, never letting Dustin live that one time down. He joins Dustin at the stove, probably for the better.

An hour passes, music is playing from a speaker in the living room, something familiar and rhythmic, low enough that people can still talk over it. The lights are dimmer than usual. The air smells like alcohol and sugar and burnt burgers that Mike and Dustin couldn't save.

Will's already a little tipsy. Not drunk, just loose around the edges, like his body has finally unclenched after holding its breath all day. He drifts from conversation to conversation easily. Mike stays close. Not hovering, but present, always just a step behind or beside him. Will notices the gravity.

They're all spread out across the living room now. Dustin's sitting cross-legged on the floor, gesturing wildly with his drink as he tells Lucas some story that keeps looping back on itself. Lucas obviously isn't listening, his eyes are on Max who is with El near the speaker, dancing badly on purpose, laughing when they bump into each other.

"Will!" El calls, grabbing his wrist. "Come dance."

He laughs and lets himself be pulled in, swaying awkwardly between them. Max spins once and nearly trips on her two left feet, and Lucas lunges forward on instinct before catching himself. Will grins, warmth blooming in his chest.

He feels good. Really good.

When the music shifts, slows just a little, Will looks over without meaning to.

Mike's watching him.

Not casually. Not the way Lucas watches Max, open and obvious and soft. Mike's gaze is sharper than that, unreadable. His shoulders are tense, hands curled around his cup like he's forgotten it's there. When their eyes meet, something flickers across Mike's face, too fast for Will to name.

Will smiles at him. Just a small one.

Mike doesn't smile back right away.

When he does, it's late, crooked, like it's been forced past something stuck in his chest.

The music swells again, and the moment breaks. Will turns back to Max and El, lets himself be pulled into the rhythm again, even as his stomach tightens just a little. He tells himself he's imagining it. Mike gets quiet sometimes. This isn't new.

Still.

Every time Will laughs too loud, Mike stiffens. Every time Will leans close to someone to hear them better, Mike's jaw tightens. He answers questions with short sentences, barely touches his drink. When Dustin elbows him and makes some stupid comment, Mike snaps back sharper than necessary, then immediately looks guilty.

Will pretends not to notice.

He finishes his drink. Lets the alcohol smooth over the unease. Tells himself tonight is supposed to be fun. That whatever this is, it can wait.

But when he looks over again and catches Mike watching him, really watching him, like he's trying to solve a problem that won't sit still, Will knows one thing for sure.

This isn't nothing.

And when they're back at the Wheeler's, he's going to have to ask.

The party had wound down as the night deepened. The alcohol's buzz faded from Will's system, leaving him with a clarity that sharpened the knot of unease twisting in his chest.

What was Mike's deal today? Earlier it felt like a dream, like Will was self sabotaging and imagining Mike being upset, but now, with sobriety settling in, the distance between them stabbed like a betrayal, and Will is certain that Mike is upset.

They migrated to the living room for a movie, the group piling onto the worn furniture under the glow of the TV screen. Dustin, Lucas, Max, and El claimed the main couch, a sprawling sectional that swallowed them up in a tangle of limbs and shared blankets.

Dustin sprawled out with El's head on his lap, her legs draped lazily over Max, who leaned against Lucas. Snores already rumbled from Dustin, a testament to the beers he'd knocked back.

Mike and Will ended up on the smaller couch beside them, the cushions dipping under their weight, forcing their thighs to press together in the confined space.

Will's heart raced at the contact, but Mike's body was rigid, his gaze fixed on the flickering screen where some mindless action flick played out explosions and car chases.

Halfway through, the tension was unbearable. Mike's leg stayed flush against Will's, warm and solid, but he hadn't glanced his way once, his jaw set in a way that screamed unspoken turmoil.

Will shifted, trying to catch his eye, but Mike stared straight ahead, arms crossed over his chest like a barrier.

Without a word, Mike stood abruptly, the movement drawing a sleepy murmur from Max, who barely registered it before her eyelids drooped again.

He rummaged in a nearby basket and returned with a blanket. It wasn't cold in the room, but Mike draped it over both their laps anyway, the fabric settling heavy and concealing.

Will's pulse quickened, he didn't argue, letting Mike arrange it as if it were the most natural thing, though confusion swirled in his mind.

Mike turned his head subtly, scanning the group on the big couch. Dustin's snores grew deeper, his chest rising and falling in rhythmic oblivion. Lucas's eyes were half-lidded, propped on Max's shoulder, his hand idly tracing circles on her arm as sleep tugged at him. Max blinked slowly at the TV, her head nodding forward once before she jerked it back up, fighting the pull of exhaustion. El was out cold.

The room filled with the low noise of the movie's soundtrack and the occasional shuffle of fabric as someone adjusted in their doze.

Will watched Mike's eyes linger on each of their friends, analyzing their states with an intensity that puzzled him. Mike's profile was sharp in the dim light, brows furrowed, and he turned back to the screen, avoiding Will's gaze. The blanket trapped the heat between them, making the air under it feel charged, intimate.

Will sighed, slumping back into the cushions, the tension coiling tighter in his gut. He wanted to ask, to bridge the gap, but the words stuck.

Then, without warning, he felt it- a hand creeping across his thigh under the blanket's cover. His breath hitched sharply, eyes snapping to Mike, but Mike kept his face forward, expression neutral as if absorbed in the on-screen chaos.

The touch was light at first, fingers splaying over the cotton of Will's shorts, tracing the seam with deliberate slowness. Heat bloomed where Mike's palm rested, seeping through the fabric, and Will's body responded instinctively, a shiver racing up his spine.

The hand ventured inward, sliding to his inner thigh, kneading the muscle there with firm pressure. Higher and higher it went, teasing the sensitive skin near his groin, but stopping just short of where Will suddenly craved it most.

Will's cock twitched in his shorts, a faint stir of arousal he tried to ignore, but Mike's proximity, the secrecy of it all, made his skin prickle with anticipation. The movie's dialogue droned on, while Will's world narrowed to that creeping touch.

"Will, are you bisexual?" Mike whispered, his voice barely audible over the TV.

Mike said this leaning in closer so his breath ghosted Will's ear. He still didn't look at him, eyes locked on the screen, but the question hung heavy, laced with something raw and vulnerable.

Will choked on his surprise, his throat tightening.

"What?" He kept his voice to a hushed rasp, glancing nervously at the group, none stirred.

Mike's hand dipped under the fabric of Will's shorts now, fingers brushing bare skin, tracing small, maddening circles that sent sparks skittering across Will's nerves. The direct contact made Will's breath stutter, his thigh tensing under the exploration.

"Breakfast," Mike murmured, his tone low and edged with tension. "Holly, what you said."

Will's mind flashed back to the awkward family breakfast that morning, Holly's innocent question, and his panicked deflection.

Mike's fingers pressed firmer, inching upward, the heat of his skin igniting Will's.

"Mike, did you seriously expect me to come out as gay in front of the whole breakfast table?" Will whispered back, annoyance creeping in despite the growing ache between his legs. "I just made up a type on the spot, okay?"

"And Robin?" Mike pressed, his hand pausing, thumb stroking a lazy pattern that made Will's hips shift involuntarily.

"Robin knows I'm gay," Will admitted, his voice a frustrated hush. "She basically sensed it in me two years ago."

Finally, Mike turned his head, meeting Will's eyes in the low light. Relief flooded his features, softening the hard lines of jealousy that had etched there all day.

His dark gaze held Will's, intense and searching, as if confirming something vital. Will didn't understand the sudden interrogation, the possessiveness simmering beneath it,

but before he could probe, Mike's hand crawled higher, brushing the edge of his underwear. Heat pooled low in Will's stomach, a rush of blood surging south, and he felt his cock hardening fully, straining against the fabric in an insistent throb.

"I'm sorry," Mike breathed, defeated yet hungry, his voice cracking slightly.

"I just- I got a bit jealous." He leaned in closer, lips brushing Will's ear, the warmth of his breath sending shivers down Will's neck. "I want you all to myself."

Then, softer, more insistent, his tongue darted out, licking the shell of Will's ear gently, a wet, teasing glide that made Will bite back a gasp. "I need you all to myself."

As he spoke, Mike's hand cupped Will's fully erect cock through his shorts, palming the length with a firm squeeze that drew a soft, involuntary sigh from Will's throat.

Will leaned back, dropping his head back onto the couch pillow, the blanket hiding the way his body arched into the touch.

"I've only ever been yours to have, Mike," he whispered, the words spilling out like a confession, raw and true. It felt vulnerable, and he probably wouldn't have said it that way if his cock wasn't pulsing under Mike's grip, pre-cum already dampening the cotton.

Mike's entire demeanor shifted in an instant, the relief morphing into something predatory, needy. His eyes darkened, pupils blown wide with lust as he lifted his feet onto the couch, drawing his knees up toward his chest.

The position angled his body, shielding Will from any potential glances from the group, creating a private nook under the blanket. It was possessive, deliberate.

"Mike- please," Will begged weakly, his voice a breathless plea, eyes darting to their friends. He didn't care.

Mike slips his hand past the waistband of Will's underwear with shameless intent. His fingers wrap around his bare cock, the direct contact electric.

Will's length is rock-hard, veined and throbbing, the head already slick with pre-cum that Mike smeared down the shaft with a slow, deliberate stroke. Will let out a soft whimper.

"Shh," Mike murmured, his voice a low command, thumb circling the sensitive tip to collect more fluid.

"You feel this? How hard you are for me already? That's because you're mine." Mike claims possessively.

Will hums, burying his head in Mike's shoulder.

Will has always known that Mike has a jealous side to him, especially when it comes to Will and being taken care of. Mike is the only one allowed to take care of Will besides Joyce and Jonathan, even then Mike has to be present at the very least.

Will's breath came in shallow pants, his hips bucking subtly into Mike's fist as the stroking began in earnest, long, firm pulls from base to tip, twisting slightly at the head.

The blanket muffled the soft, wet sounds of skin on skin, but Will's mind screamed with the intensity of it. Mike's grip was confident, possessive, each upstroke squeezing just enough to make Will's toes curl. Pre-cum leaked steadily now, easing the glide, making every motion slick.

"Tell me how it feels," Mike whispered, gently lifting Will's chin up and leaning in so his lips brushed Will's jaw. He dropped the hand on his chin to Will's hip to steady Will's hip to keep him from thrusting too wildly.

"My hand on your cock like this, how does it feel baby?" He whispered, placing a delicate, soft kiss on his jaw.

"Fuck, Mike," Will whimpered, voice strained, his eyes fluttering shut as pleasure coiled tight in his gut. But Mike's pace faltered, slowing to a torturous drag, barely moving his hand now, just holding Will's pulsing length, denying the friction Will craved. "Please... don't stop."

Mike's breath is hot against Will's neck. "Don't think about that baby, let me take care of you just trust me," He pumped once, hard and fast, making Will's cock jerk, then stopped again, thumb pressing into the slit to block the flow of pre-cum. Will whined, the denial building an ache that bordered on pain, his balls drawing up tight.

To silence the growing sounds, Mike brought his free hand up, two fingers pressing against Will's lips.

"Open," he ordered softly.

Will obeyed without thinking, parting his mouth, and Mike slid them inside, over his tongue. The taste was salty from earlier touches, but Will sucked instinctively, hollowing his cheeks, tongue swirling around the digits as if they were Mike's cock.

He bobbed his head shallowly, eyes locking onto Mike's, the stare intense and unbroken. Mike's gaze burned into him, watching every flick of tongue, every pull, his own arousal evident in the way his shorts tented under the blanket.

“Fuck,” Mike praised, voice rough. “Keep quiet for me, don't want them waking up hearing you moan.” His fingers thrust gently in Will's mouth, mimicking the motion, while his other hand resumed stroking, slower now, building the rhythm back up.

Will's saliva coated Mike's fingers, dripping down his chin, but he didn't care, lost in the dual sensations, the wet slide in his mouth, the firm grip on his cock.

Mike's strokes varied, teasing the full length one moment, focusing on the head the next, rubbing the pad of his thumb over the slit until Will's hips stuttered. Will's cock throbbed visibly, veins standing out, the skin flushed deep red.

“You're so fucking hard,” Mike whispered, eyes never leaving Will's. “All for me. No one else gets this- gets to see you like this.”

Will's whimpers grew despite the fingers in his mouth, muffled but insistent, his body trembling as the edge approached again.

Mike pulled his fingers free with a wet pop, only to clamp his hand over Will's mouth, firm but careful. “Quiet, baby,” he breathed, voice a husky command that sent fresh heat surging through Will. “Cum for me.”

The permission shattered Will's restraint. Mike's hand moved fast and unrelenting now, twisting on every upstroke, squeezing the base on the down. Will's eyes widened, locked on Mike's, the connection raw and vulnerable as pleasure crested.

Mike's stare held him captive, intense and possessive.

“Look at me. Watch me make you cum.” He whispered, holding Will's chin in place with his free hand.

Will's body seized, a choked gasp escaping against Mike's palm as his orgasm hit like a wave. Hot spurts of cum erupted from his cock, painting Mike's fingers.

Mike stroked him through it, milking every pulse, slowing gradually as Will shuddered, oversensitive twitches making him squirm. Cum leaked between Mike's fingers, sticky and warm, the scent mingling with their sweat.

Finally, Mike eased his hand away from Will's cock, but instead of reaching for the blanket, he lifted his cum-coated fingers to his mouth.

His eyes stayed fixed on Will's, dark and hungry, as he extended his tongue and licked a slow stripe along one digit, tasting the salty essence of Will's release.

The sight, Mike's lips wrapping around his own fingers, sucking them clean with deliberate, sent a fresh jolt straight to Will's groin. His cock twitched despite the sensitivity.

Mike hummed low in his throat, the vibration almost audible, as he savored every drop, his tongue swirling to catch the remnants clinging to his skin.

"Mine," Mike murmured, the word laced with jealousy and tenderness, a possessive claim that wrapped around Will like a promise.

He pulled Will close, guiding his head to rest against his shoulder, Will's cheek pressing into the steady rise and fall of Mike's chest.

Will's breaths came soft and ragged at first, slowing as he caught his breath. He slowed his mind to the sound Mike's heartbeat beneath his ear, strong, rhythmic, a soothing anchor in the haze of afterglow.

The movie credits rolled unnoticed, their friends still lost in sleep. Mike kissed the top of Will's head softly and silently, Will looked up at him to give him a soft smile, before they fell asleep in each other's arms.

Notes:

kudos and comments give me so much motivation, thank you so much for your support and I'll be uploading more regularly!

[Chapter 7](#): the truth

Notes:

i have had chapters 5-8 written out already and i've kept going back and forth to try make it perfect, so i hope it is close to that

this chapter is very emotional, fair warning. i felt like this story needed some sibling bonding, and mike and will having an intimate moment of truth. i cried while writing this because it really healed something in me, and i hope it heals something in you too.

(See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#).)

Chapter Text

Will wakes up warm.

It wasn't because of the warmth that comes from a body beside him, or from the blanket tangled around his legs. He was warm in a way that sinks into his chest and stays there. The quiet, comforting kind.

There's sunlight on his face, thin and pale, slipping through the half-open curtains, catching on dust in the air. It presses gently against his eyelids, like it's asking permission.

He doesn't open his eyes right away.

Mike's arm is still around him, loose but sure, a familiar weight across his ribs. Will can feel Mike breathing against the back of his neck, slow and even, the soft rise and fall of his chest grounding him. His fingers are curled into the fabric of Mike's shirt without him remembering when that happened.

For one perfect, suspended second, Will forgets everything else.

Then fingers brush his forehead.

Familiar, but not Mike.

Will's eyes snap open.

Max is standing over him.

Her hand is frozen mid-motion, like she's just realized where she is. Her face flickers through surprise so fast it almost hurts to watch, confusion, recognition, something sharp and knowing.

Will jerks back with a gasp, heart slamming violently against his ribs.

He scrambles out of Mike's arms like he's been burned, feet hitting the floor too fast, balance off, panic immediate and blinding. His first instinct is to run, to put space between himself and Mike, to fix it, to undo it-

Mike doesn't wake up.

Which somehow makes it worse.

The room feels suddenly too bright. Too open. The sunlight that had felt soft a moment ago now feels like it's exposing him, spotlighting everything he's tried so carefully to keep hidden.

Max meets his eyes.

Then, without saying a word, she reaches out, grabs his hand, and pulls.

"Max-" Will whispers, barely loud enough to hear himself. "What are you doing?"

She doesn't answer. Just tugs him along, past the couch, past empty cups and discarded blankets, past the rest of the party slowly waking up. No one's really paying

attention. Everyone's half-asleep, sun-dazed, moving gently like the morning has softened them.

Though, Will's heart is still racing like someone *is* paying attention.

She drags him into the bathroom and closes the door behind them with a quiet, final click.

The room is small and bright. Sunlight spills in through the frosted window, painting pale gold across the tiles, across Will's arms, his face, his throat. There's nowhere to hide in here.

"Max," he whispers again, voice shaking now. "You can't just—"

She turns to face him. *Really* looks at him.

Her eyes go to his face first. Then lower, slow and careful, like she's putting something together. Will becomes too aware of his shirt collar, of how it's shifted in his panic, of the faint marks beneath the fabric.

His breath stutters.

At least they're covered, he thinks wildly. At least—

Max reaches out and gently tugs his shirt down. Not roughly or accusingly.

She does it softly. Like he's fragile. Like she's handling something important.

She sees.

Her eyes widen for half a second, just long enough for Will to feel like the floor is dropping out from under him, then her expression twists, and the shock turns into something else entirely.

A smirk.

"I *knew* it," she whispers.

Will's chest caves in.

His vision blurs instantly, panic surging so hard it feels physical, like pressure behind his eyes, in his throat. His whole world feels like it's tipping, sliding toward something irreversible.

"I knew it," Max repeats, quieter now, satisfied. "Took you two long enough."

She hops up onto the edge of the counter, crossing her arms, shaking her head fondly like this is something she's been waiting for.

“Max...” Will starts, but his voice cracks completely. He presses his lips together, trying not to cry, trying to hold himself together long enough to explain, to apologize, to beg-
She sees it.

Her expression changes *instantly*.

“Oh- hey. No, no.” She jumps down from the counter and takes his hands before he can pull away. “Will. It’s okay. I won’t say anything.”

That’s all it takes for Will folds forward with a broken sound, burying his face against her shoulder. The tears come fast and hot, like they’ve been waiting for permission. His hands twist into her jacket as his body shakes, the fear finally spilling out of him now that there’s somewhere safe for it to land.

“I- I didn’t mean for you to see,” he chokes. “I’m sorry, I just-”

“Hey,” Max murmurs, wrapping her arms around him and holding tight. Guilt flickers through her voice, “I know. I know.”

She pulls back just enough to look at him, cupping his face firmly in her hands so he has to meet her eyes. Sunlight catches in his tears, turning them bright.

“Will,” she says softly. “I love you. This doesn’t change anything. Okay?”

He nods, breath hitching.

“We’ll- we’ll tell the group when we’re ready,” he manages, the words terrifying even as he says them.

“Don’t think about that now,” Max says immediately. “One thing at a time.” She smiles, warm and certain. “I’m so proud of you. And whenever you *are* ready, I know they’ll support you both.”

Something loosens in Will’s chest. The light in the room feels warmer again. Kinder. Like it’s not here to expose him, just to show him he’s still standing.

“And if he hurts you,” Max adds, serious, “I’ll kill him.”

A small laugh slips out of Will before he can stop it.

Max doesn’t smile.

“I’m serious, Will,” she says flatly. “I *will* kill that boy.”

She pulls him back into a hug, fierce and protective, like she’s anchoring him to the ground.

Then she steps back, grins, and gently tugs his shirt back into place, smoothing the fabric over his collar like a secret she's helping him keep.

"Now," she says, scruffing his hair affectionately, "let's go help them clean."

Will takes one last breath in the sunlight, lets it settle into him.

Then he follows her out.

The house settles into a tired, sleepy calm.

Everyone is clearly hungover, but they have a job to do: get this place clean before the Sinclair's get back. Empty cups are stacked. Blankets are folded badly and then folded again. Chairs scrape softly against the floor. The morning light pours in through every uncovered window, too bright for how carefully everyone is moving.

Will keeps his head down.

Mike stays close.

Too close, maybe, hovering at his shoulder, reaching for the same things Will is already holding, stepping in to help with jobs that only need one person. Will is wiping down the counter when Mike wordlessly takes the other side of the cloth, their hands bumping, their movements clumsy and out of sync. It would be easier alone. But Will lets him help anyway.

There's something steadying about it. About Mike's presence like an anchor, even when it's unnecessary, even when it slows everything down. Will pretends not to notice the way Mike keeps glancing at him, like he's checking to make sure he's okay.

When it's time to leave, the goodbyes are brief and scattered. No one lingers. Everyone has a light headache, the sunlight outside is sharp and blinding after the dim mess of the house, washing everything in gold.

The car ride is silent. Nancy and Jonathan don't speak.

Jonathan's shoulders are tense. Nancy's mouth is set in a thin line, like she's holding something back. Will sits in the backseat, knees pulled in slightly, hands folded tight in his lap. Mike is beside him, close enough that their shoulders almost touch, close

enough to feel the heat of him. The quiet stretches, heavy and suffocating. Will can feel the weight of it pressing down on his chest.

Mike's hand moves once. Just once.

He squeezes Will's fingers, quick and grounding, then pulls his hand back like he's afraid of leaving it there too long.

Something in Will loosens, just a little. The knot in his chest eases. He breathes out.

When the car slows and stops, Will looks up, confused. Lover's Lake stretches out in front of them, calm and bright, sunlight glittering across the water like it's been waiting.

Jonathan and Nancy get out of the car without a word.

Will and Mike exchange a wide-eyes, uncertain look, one that says *what the fuck*, before following Jonathan and Nancy.

Nancy reaches for Mike's hand and leads him one way.

Jonathan gently guides Will the other.

For a brief moment, Will looks back.

So does Mike.

Then they turn and walk in opposite directions.

"What the hell, Nance?" Mike snaps, the words coming out sharper than he means them to. "What is this?"

Nancy doesn't flinch.

She stops walking first, like she's been expecting the question, and lowers herself onto a smooth rock near the edge of the lake. The water glitters behind her, sunlight breaking into sharp, fractured pieces across the surface. She looks calm in a way that makes Mike feel worse.

He stays standing.

His arms are crossed tight over his chest, jaw clenched, pulse pounding in his ears. Everything in him is buzzing with confusion, irritation, a low, crawling dread he doesn't want to name. He feels like he's been cornered without being told why.

“Nancy,” he says again, more strained now. “Why are we here?”

She looks up at him, patient. Too patient.

“Sit down, Mike.”

He scoffs, running a hand through his hair, pacing once before stopping. He exhales hard, like he’s trying to push something out of his lungs that won’t leave.

“Fine,” he mutters, and drops down beside her with a sigh, knees bouncing immediately.

There’s a beat of silence.

The lake smells like morning, cool water, wet grass, sunlight heating the rocks beneath them. Birds somewhere in the trees. Everything painfully normal.

“Nancy-”

“Mike,” she says gently, cutting him off before he can spiral. “You know you can talk to me. About anything.”

The words land heavier than they should and his stomach twists.

His head starts to ache, a dull pressure forming behind his eyes like a warning sign. His thoughts go fuzzy, shallow, like he can’t get a full breath no matter how hard he tries. He stares at the water, jaw tight, fingers digging into his palms.

“I- I know that,” he says quickly. *Too* quickly. “I know.”

Nancy doesn’t say anything. She just looks at him.

It’s not accusatory. It’s not expectant. It’s worse than that, soft and steady, like she already knows the answer and she’s giving him space to catch up to it.

Mike swallows.

“Okay,” he mutters. “Okay. I’m-” He trails off, hands starting to fidget uncontrollably. His heart is racing now, loud enough that he swears she must be able to hear it.

Nancy reaches out and gently takes his hands, stilling them. He flinches, just a little.

“I’m gay,” he blurts, breath hitching. “Nancy, I’m gay.”

The words hang there between them, fragile and terrifying and real.

Nancy’s face doesn’t change.

Then she smiles. Her smile is not wide or shocked, her smile is just warm and certain. She squeezes his hands once. She doesn't interrupt. Doesn't rush in with reassurances or anything that might shatter the moment.

So Mike keeps going.

"And I- I'm in love with Will," he says, voice cracking immediately. "I think I have been for years. I just... I didn't know what it was. Or I didn't want to know. I don't know."

His chest caves in all at once. The panic, the fear, the years of holding it in, it all collapses, and suddenly he's leaning into her, shoulders shaking, face buried against her jacket as the sobs tear out of him without permission.

Nancy wraps her arms around him without hesitation.

She strokes his hair slowly, grounding, familiar. She doesn't say anything. She doesn't need to.

The sunlight shifts around them, warming Mike's back, catching in the ripples of the lake. His breathing evens out gradually, the sharp edge of his sobs dulling into shaky inhaleds. He stays curled into her like he's afraid that if he pulls away, everything will fall apart again.

"I love you, Mike," Nancy says quietly.

He swallows hard. "I love you too, Nance."

She hums softly, like she's known that all along.

"I think I knew before you did," she adds.

He pulls back just enough to stare at her. "What? That I was gay?"

She snorts. "No. About *Will*."

Mike blinks. "How?"

"Well," she says lightly, "if that box of unsent letters in your closet wasn't enough, I don't know what was."

His face burns. "You went through my stuff?"

She smiles and cups his cheek, thumb brushing away a tear. "You left it open, Mike. And I didn't read them. I'm not a monster."

He huffs out a wet laugh despite himself.

“I will always support you,” Nancy says, her voice firm now. “You’re my little brother. I’m proud of you, no matter what. I know this isn’t going to be easy for you two. Maybe one day it will be. But right now... it won’t.”

The words sting. His mind spirals instantly, no dates, no hands held in public, no future that looks simple or safe or allowed. No marriage. No normal.

His chest tightens again-

“But Jonathan and I will always be here,” Nancy continues, squeezing his hand. “For both of you. We’ll protect you if we need to. This-” She gestures between them. “*This* is your safe space. Will’s too.”

Relief crashes into him so hard it almost hurts.

“Also,” she adds, narrowing her eyes slightly, “I know I should be biased towards you, but if you hurt that boy Mike I swear to-”

“You know I’d never do that,” Mike says immediately.

She nods. “I know. I know, Mike.”

They laugh softly. Then Mike laughs again, and it turns into another sob, overwhelmed and grateful and exhausted all at once. Nancy pulls him back in, rolling her eyes fondly.

“God,” she mutters. “You’re such a snotty mess.”

“Shut up,” he snuffles.

The bench sits carefully on the grass, facing out towards the lake. The wood is weathered and warped, one leg slightly shorter than the others so it creaks when Jonathan sits down first. The lake stretches out in front of them, sunlight shimmering across the surface, blinding in places where it hits just right. Will squints and looks away, focusing instead on his hands folded tight in his lap.

Jonathan doesn’t say anything.

Neither does Will.

The quiet here is different from the one in the car. It isn’t sharp or suffocating. It feels... deliberate. Like Jonathan is giving him room, not trapping him in it.

Will’s chest aches.

He can feel the words crowding behind his teeth, heavy and fragile and terrifying. He doesn't know how to start. He doesn't know if he even needs to.

"So," Will finally says, voice barely above a whisper. "You know?"

Jonathan turns toward him slowly.

He doesn't look surprised. He doesn't look confused. He just looks at Will the way he always has, like he's checking in, like he's making sure Will is still there.

Jonathan reaches out and takes Will's hand. It's warm and steady. He squeezes once and nods.

Something inside Will cracks open.

"I'm sorry," Will blurts out immediately, panic flaring like it always does. "I'm sorry I couldn't tell you, I just... I didn't know how, and I was scared and—"

"Hey," Jonathan says gently, squeezing his hand again. "Don't apologize."

Will looks up at him, eyes glassy.

"I wanted you to come to me on your own terms," Jonathan continues. "I always have." He pauses, choosing his words carefully. "Nancy told me what she saw. Well—" A small, wry smile. "She didn't exactly *know*. But we assumed."

Will lets out a shaky breath, it's half a panic laughed, half a sigh of embarrassment.

"After that," Jonathan goes on, "we talked. Not about labels or anything like that. Just... about you. About how to make sure you felt safe."

Safe.

The word hits Will so hard his throat closes.

"We just want to be there for you," Jonathan finishes. "For both of you."

Those words were powerful enough to Will for him to let the crack in his throat to take over, and he starts crying.

He doesn't mean to. He doesn't try to. It just happens, quiet at first, tears slipping down his cheeks as his shoulders shake, breath stuttering like his body doesn't know how to process the relief. It feels like something massive has been lifted off his chest, something he's been carrying for so long he forgot what it felt like to stand without it.

Jonathan shifts closer and pulls him into a hug without hesitation.

Will folds into him instantly, gripping the back of his jacket, crying harder now. Jonathan holds him the way he always has, firm and protective, like he's anchoring Will to the world.

"I love you, Will," Jonathan murmurs into his hair.

"I love you so much," Will manages through sobs.

Jonathan pulls back just enough to look at him, hands resting solidly on his shoulders.

"I'm your big brother," he says quietly. "You know I'd never judge you. You'll never lose me. *Ever.*" His voice is steady. "I'm the one person you can trust to never abandon you. No matter what."

Will breaks all over again.

He hugs Jonathan tighter, burying his face against his shoulder, both of them crying now, Jonathan silently, the way he always does, emotion settling deep rather than spilling over.

After a while, when the tears slow and Will's breathing evens out, Jonathan clears his throat softly.

"I'm glad it's Mike," he says.

Will pulls back, startled. "What?"

Jonathan gives a small, almost fond smile. "He knows how to look after you. He always has." He glances out at the lake, sunlight flashing across the water. "Ever since you were little. He watches you. Makes sure you're okay, even when you don't ask."

Will nods slowly. He knows it's true. He's always known.

"I know you're safe with him," Jonathan adds.

Tears slip down Will's face again, quieter this time. Softer. He wipes at them with his hand, smiling through the ache in his chest.

"I am," he says. "I *really* am."

Jonathan squeezes his shoulder.

They sit there together, side by side on the creaking bench, sunlight warming their backs, the lake bright and open in front of them. For the first time, Will doesn't feel like the light is exposing him.

It's just showing him what's already there.

They come back together slowly. With a quiet understanding that whatever needed to be said has been said. The morning has shifted while they were apart. The sun is higher now, warmer, cutting through the cool lake air and settling into their skin like something earned.

Mike and Will are still crying when they reach the car. It's soft, exhausted, the kind that comes when your body finally believes it's safe enough to let go. Their faces are red and blotchy, eyes swollen, breaths still uneven.

For one brief second, they look at each other.

Instinct pulls at Will's chest, *Mike*, but something else moves him first.

He turns and runs straight into Nancy.

She doesn't hesitate. She opens her arms immediately, catching him with a small gasp like she's been bracing for the impact. Will crashes into her, gripping her jacket tightly, a broken sound tearing out of his throat as the last of his composure shatters.

At the same time, Mike turns and goes to Jonathan.

He doesn't stop himself. He doesn't think. He just steps forward and folds, burying his face into Jonathan's shoulder like gravity has finally won. Jonathan wraps his arms around him instantly, one hand coming up to cradle the back of Mike's head, fingers threading through his hair.

Mike cries harder at that.

It's ugly and helpless and completely unguarded. His shoulders shake violently as he clings to Jonathan, fists gripping his jacket like he's afraid Jonathan might disappear if he lets go. Mike is taller, but it doesn't matter, he crumbles into Jonathan's shoulder like a kid who's been holding it together for too long.

Jonathan's breath stutters. He presses his forehead gently against Mike's temple, eyes squeezing shut as tears finally spill over. He holds Mike tighter, anchoring him, rocking slightly without even realizing he's doing it.

"It's okay," he murmurs, voice thick. "I've got you. I've got you."

Mike believes him.

A few feet away, Will and Nancy sink to the ground together.

They don't even notice the damp grass soaking into their clothes. Nancy drops with him, knees hitting the earth as she pulls Will closer, arms wrapped tight around his shoulders. Will curls into her, forehead pressed against her collarbone, sobbing freely now, quiet and wrecked and relieved all at once.

Nancy's breath hitches.

She's crying too now, real tears slipping down her cheeks as she holds him. She pulls back suddenly, cupping Will's face in her hands like she needs to *see* him, thumbs brushing gently under his eyes, wiping away tears as they fall faster than she can catch them.

"Oh, Will," she whispers, voice breaking.

She kisses his forehead softly, once, twice, like a promise, like *protection*. Will melts completely at the gesture, eyes squeezing shut as he leans into her touch, letting himself be small, letting himself be held.

For so long, he's been afraid of being seen. Now he's surrounded by it.

Eventually, the crying slows. It lingers, hiccups fading into shaky breaths, hands loosening their grip inch by inch. Jonathan wipes at his eyes with the back of his sleeve, still holding Mike close. Nancy presses her forehead to Will's, breathing him in, grounding both of them.

They all look wrecked, yet they all look lighter.

Nancy lets out a wet, breathless laugh, scrubbing at her face. "Okay," she says, voice hoarse but fond. "Enough crying."

Mike snuffles loudly from Jonathan's shoulder.

Nancy points at them without looking. "I mean it. You boys are going to dehydrate yourselves."

Will lets out a weak laugh through his tears, shoulders shaking.

"Let's get you home," Nancy adds gently. "All of you."

The drive back is quiet, but it's a different kind of quiet compared to earlier.

Jonathan reaches over and takes Nancy's hand, resting it on her lap. She squeezes his fingers once, and he smiles at her, soft, proud, a little emotional. They look like they've just carried something precious and set it down carefully between them.

In the backseat, Mike slides closer to Will and takes his hand openly this time.

No hesitation.

Will interlaces their fingers and lets himself lean into Mike's shoulder, cheek pressing against the warmth of him. He tilts his head up slightly, meeting Mike's eyes. They're both still teary-eyed, lashes clumped, cheeks flushed, but they smile at each other like they've survived something. Like everything is going to be okay.

And somehow, Will believes it.

They stop to pick up Holly.

Mike hops out of the car and comes back a moment later with her. He helps her climb in, and she settles right between him and Will without question, head tipping immediately onto Will's shoulder.

"Hi Will," She smiles, resting close to him.

Will smiles at her, "Hi Holly, you had a good time?"

"Yup," She answered softly, closing her eyes.

Mike looks at them and smiles. Usually it would be a careful, almost guarded smile. But this time it is something open and peaceful.

He catches Will's eye over Holly's head. Will smiles back.

When they finally get home, the house greets them quietly.

They all shuffle inside, exhaustion settling into their bones now that the adrenaline is gone. Shoes are kicked off. Jackets dropped. It feels like the aftermath of a storm.

Nancy lingers near the door as Mike heads toward it.

She reaches out and gently grabs his arm, pulling him back.

“Hey,” she says softly.

Mike turns to her, eyes tired but attentive.

“Give him the letters,” she says. Not a question. “He needs to know.”

Mike swallows. Then he nods.

“Yeah,” he says quietly. “I know.”

Nancy squeezes his arm once and lets him go.

And for the first time, Mike doesn't feel afraid of what comes next.

The basement is dim and familiar in a way that settles Will's nerves the moment he steps into it.

The small window near the ceiling lets in a slanted bar of sunlight that cuts across the concrete wall, dust floating lazily through it. Everything down here smells faintly like old cardboard and detergent and something warm underneath, *home*, maybe. Will drops into his desk chair and lets it spin once, slow and absentminded, the motion grounding him.

Upstairs, he hears movement.

Drawers opening. Closing. Footsteps pacing. Stopping. Starting again.

Eventually, Mike appears at the top of the stairs.

He's moving carefully, almost comically so, arms wrapped around a box that looks heavier than it should be. The cardboard bows slightly in the middle, corners softened with age. Mike takes each step like it might give out beneath him, eyes locked on the box like if he looks away, everything will spill apart.

Will smiles gently despite the tightness forming in his chest.

“What's that?” he asks, voice soft.

Mike doesn't answer.

He reaches the bottom step and stands there for a second too long, breathing shallowly. His jaw tightens. Then he walks forward and sets the box down on the table with more force than necessary, the sound sharp in the quiet room.

He steps back immediately, hands hovering uselessly at his sides.

“This is-” Mike starts, then stops. He swallows hard and tries again. “This is really hard for me to do.”

Will watches his hands. They’re shaking.

“And it’s... it’s even harder to admit,” Mike continues, words tripping over each other now. “And I feel really guilty, and I know this is-”

Will’s chair scrapes loudly against the floor as he stands.

He crosses the room in three steps and cups Mike’s face gently, thumbs brushing beneath his eyes, grounding him, forcing him to breathe. Mike startles slightly at the touch, eyes flicking up to meet Will’s.

“Hey,” Will says quietly. “It’s okay. You don’t have to rush. What is it?”

Mike’s breath stutters.

“Please don’t be mad at me,” he whispers.

The fear in his voice cracks something open in Will’s chest.

“I could never be mad at you,” Will says immediately. “*Never.*”

Mike’s eyes shine dangerously.

“These are for you,” he says hoarsely.

He turns back to the table, hands fumbling as he lifts the box again. His movements are clumsy now, uncoordinated. He tips it over, and the contents spill out in a soft avalanche. Paper sliding and fluttering across the tabletop, envelopes fanning out in every direction. Hundreds of them.

Will’s stomach drops.

He steps closer without realizing it, fingers brushing one of the envelopes near the edge. His name is written there in familiar, careful handwriting. His full name. His address in Lenora. Over and over again, on envelope after envelope.

His breath hitches painfully.

Mike had written to him.

All that time, every week Will checked the mailbox and came up empty, every night he convinced himself Mike didn't miss him, didn't care enough to try, didn't need him anymore, Mike had been writing to him.

More than he ever wrote to El. And never sent a single one.

Will's vision blurs, tears burning hot behind his eyes. He swallows hard, forcing them back, afraid that if he starts crying now he won't be able to stop.

"I'm so sorry," Mike says, voice breaking. "I lied to you. So much. And I hate that I lied, I hate it, and it wasn't just to you—"

Will lifts his confused gaze slowly.

"I lied to El," Mike continues, words rushing out now like he's afraid of the silence. "I was so unfair to her. I dragged our relationship out because I wanted to be normal. I wanted to pretend I was—" He chokes. "Someone I *wasn't*."

He wipes at his nose roughly, sniffing.

"I lied when I said my life started the day I found her in the woods."

Will flinches.

The memory hits him like a blow, the words replaying in his head, sharp and vivid. That day. *That* day. The worst day of Will's life, reduced to something else's beginning. He'd told himself for years that Mike hadn't meant it like that. That he only said it in the moment to save El.

But it still hurt.

"The truth is," Mike says, voice cracking completely now, "my life didn't start then. That was the *worst* day of my life. I didn't even want to bring her home. I wanted to keep searching for you."

His breath shudders at the confession, Mike knows it's wrong to admit, but he needed to be honest.

"I couldn't accept that you were gone," he sobs. "That I couldn't save you. That I lost you. I *really* lost you."

Mike collapses then.

Will catches him instinctively, guiding him to the couch, sitting them both down as Mike folds into him, face buried against Will's shoulder. Mike is shaking violently now, sobbing in broken gasps that soak into Will's shirt.

Will holds him tightly.

He strokes Mike's hair slowly, anchoring him back to his body. It hurts, seeing Mike like this *hurts* in a deep, aching way, but Will doesn't pull away. He presses his cheek against Mike's head and breathes with him.

"My life started when I saw you on the swings," Mike cries. "It started when we became best friends. And it *ended* when you went missing."

Will's tears spill over then.

"My life started again in the hospital," Mike continues, voice muffled against Will's shoulder. "When I saw you were okay. When I hugged you- *God*, I hugged you so tight Joyce thought I'd hurt you, but I had to. I *had to* feel your heartbeat. I had to know you were real."

Will is crying openly now, fingers threading through Mike's hair, holding him like he's afraid to let go.

"I'm here," Will whispers. "I'm here now. And I'm not going anywhere. Okay?"

Mike nods frantically, clinging to him.

"I'm sorry," Mike sobs. "I'm *so* sorry for all the lies."

Will presses his lips to Mike's hair.

"It's okay," he says softly. "I forgive you."

Mike breaks at that. A sound tears out of him, relief so intense it's almost painful. His body slackens slightly, like something that's been wound too tight for too long has finally been released.

Will holds him until the shaking stops. Until their breathing slows. Until the room feels steady again.

After a while, Mike pulls back just enough to look at him, eyes red and rimmed with tears.

"Please," he says quietly. "Please read them. Even if you only read one tonight. Here. With me."

Mike swallows.

"I can't keep that secret anymore. It's eaten away at me since the first letter I didn't send."

Will nods.

He stands up and reaches out. He picks up one envelope at random, hands trembling slightly. He's careful with it, gentle, reverent. These aren't just letters.

They're pieces of Mike.

Will slides a finger under the flap and opens it slowly.

Mike leans back against the couch, watching him with wide, anxious eyes.

Will unfolds the letter.

And begins to read.

Dear Will,

I just booked my flight to Lenora for next month. I keep checking the confirmation letter from the mail like it's going to disappear if I don't look at it enough. I'm really excited to see you. And El.

I'm also scared.

I'm scared you're going to hate me for not writing more. I'm scared you'll ask why I didn't reach out, and I'll do what I always do and turn it around on you instead. Why didn't you write first? I hate that about myself. I hate that I deflect when I'm afraid. I don't want to hurt you. I just don't know how to explain how hard it is to talk when everything I want to say feels like standing too close to the edge of something.

Hellfire Club had another campaign this week. It was actually really cool. You would love Eddie, he's loud and kind of terrifying at first, but he cares more than he lets on. He reminds me of you in a way, like he feels things deeply and pretends he doesn't so they won't get used against him. I miss you. Everyone here has their person. Dustin has Eddie. Lucas has Max. Max has Lucas, even though right now she doesn't realize it. Even when we're all together, it feels like there's a space beside me that only ever fit you. I don't know how else to say it except that I begin and end with you, and everything in between just feels like waiting.

I feel like I'm drowning without you, Will. It's not dramatic but it's quiet, like holding your breath for too long and realizing too late that you don't remember how to let it out. My heart hums your name all the time, like it's trying to remind me of something I'm not ready to face.

When the sun creeps through my bedroom window in the morning and lands on my bed, all bright and warm, I think of you. When I help my mom in the garden and hand her the pots of yellow flowers, I think of you. When I bike to school and line my bike up next to Dustin's and Lucas', leaving that empty space beside them, I think of you. When it's late and my chest aches in that way that feels like it might crack open if I don't hold it together, I think of you. Every ordinary moment leads back to you, like you're the place my heart goes when it doesn't know where else to rest.

I'm never going to send this. I know that. I can feel this tight, panicked feeling in my chest like I've said too much. But if I'm being honest in a way I don't know how to be out loud, then I know my soul is tangled up in yours. I don't know when that happened. I don't know if it was always this way. I just know it's true, and I hate myself for it because it feels like wanting something I'm not allowed to have.

I hope you're okay. I hope Lenora is treating you gently. I hope you're happy. And I hope, very selfishly, that you haven't found someone else there, someone who fills the space I left behind. I hope you haven't replaced me, even though I know that isn't fair of me to ask.

I don't know how to end this. I don't know how to exist in a world where you're so far away.

*Love,
Mike*

Will started crying somewhere in the middle of reading the letter, before he even realized it was happening.

It was a quiet sob, sneakier. Tears slipped down his face while his eyes were still scanning the page, while his fingers were still gripping the letter like it might disappear if he loosened his hold even a little. Somewhere around the middle, around the part where Mike wrote *I begin and end with you*, something in Will cracked open so suddenly it left him dizzy.

He pressed the paper closer to his chest, like he could hold the words inside him, like they might stitch something together if he just let them sit there long enough.

Mike was crying too. Will could hear it now, the soft, broken sound of his breathing from just a few feet away. Mike had gone very still, like he was bracing himself for something, like he'd handed Will a piece of his heart and was waiting to see whether it would be accepted or shattered.

Will placed the letter down carefully and turned to face Mike, his legs gave out before his resolve did, and he sank down onto the couch. His sobs came harder now, catching painfully in his throat, chest aching with the effort of it.

Every line felt like a revelation and a wound all at once. Every word rewrote years of silence, of misunderstanding, of loneliness he had convinced himself belonged only to him.

I feel like I'm drowning without you.

Will pressed his fist to his mouth, muffling the sound that tore out of him. He had spent so long believing he was the only one gasping for air, the only one waking up every morning with a hollow ache that never quite went away. He had told himself Mike was fine. Happy. Surrounded. Straight and certain and untouched by the quiet misery Will carried like a secret shame.

But here it was. Proof, written in Mike's handwriting. Messy, earnest, unmistakably his, that Mike had been drowning too.

The realization hit Will all at once, violent in its tenderness. Mike had missed him the way Will missed Mike, bone-deep, relentless, inescapable. Mike had thought of him in the quiet, ordinary moments, just like Will did. In the spaces between heartbeats. In the mundane rituals of life that somehow became unbearable without the person you loved there to witness them.

And worse, Mike had been afraid. Ashamed. Trapped inside the same *wrongness* Will had carried like a stain on his skin.

Will broke then, really broke.

He collapsed straight into Mike's arms. Mike caught him instantly, like he'd been waiting for it, like his body already knew exactly what to do. Will buried his face in Mike's shoulder and cried the way he never let himself cry, loud and shaking and unguarded, grief and relief tangled so tightly together they were impossible to separate.

Mike wrapped himself around him, arms strong and desperate, holding on like Will was the only solid thing left in the world. He pressed his face into Will's hair, breath hitching as his own sobs broke free.

"I didn't know," Will choked out. "I didn't know you- God, Mike, I didn't know you felt like *that*."

Mike shook his head against him, fingers threading into the back of Will's sweater like he was afraid Will might disappear if he loosened his grip. "I didn't know how to say it,"

he whispered, voice wrecked. "I didn't even know what it *was* for so long. I just knew it hurt. Missing you hurt. Being away from you felt- so *so* wrong."

Will pulled back just enough to look at him, hands trembling as he cupped Mike's face. His cheeks were streaked with tears, eyes red and shining and so achingly open it made Will's chest ache. This was Mike unarmored. Mike without jokes or deflection. Mike standing bare in front of him, terrified and hopeful all at once.

"I felt wrong too," Will said, the words spilling out now that the dam had broken. "Every day. I thought-" His voice cracked. "I thought there was something *broken* in me. That I was alone in it."

Mike's breath stuttered. He leaned into Will's touch, eyes squeezing shut as fresh tears fell. "You weren't," he said fiercely. "You were never alone. I just... I hated myself for it. For wanting you the way I did. For thinking about you all the time. For feeling like my whole world tilted whenever you weren't there."

Will let out a sound that was half sob, half laugh, utterly undone. He rested his forehead against Mike's, their noses brushing, sharing the same shaky breaths.

"I've been in love with you forever," Will admitted, voice barely more than a whisper. Saying it out loud felt terrifying and holy all at once. "I thought it was a curse."

Mike laughed weakly through his tears, a broken, breathless sound. "Guess we were both wrong."

Will reached up and wiped the tears from Mike's cheeks, his thumbs gentle. "You're such a romantic," he said softly, the words trembling with affection even as he laughed through his sobs.

Mike huffed out a laugh of his own, sniffing. "Shut up," he murmured, and then he leaned in and kissed Will.

It was soft and careful. A kiss full of years of longing and restraint and fear, poured gently into a single moment. Will melted into it, hands clutching Mike's shirt, heart pounding like it was trying to escape his chest. When they pulled back, both of them were still crying, foreheads pressed together, breathing each other in like they were learning how to exist again.

They stayed like that for a long time. Letting the moment be *theirs*.

The midday sun crept through the window, warm and golden, spilling across their faces and hands. Dust motes floated lazily in the light, the world outside continuing on as if something monumental hadn't just shifted inside that small room.

Will felt calm settle into his bones, slow and steady. The ache was still there, but it was different now, lighter and shared. No more secrets weighing him down. No more lies between them.

They had each other.

And for the first time in a long time, that felt like enough.

Notes:

i hope you enjoyed this chapter! there'll be one more for the story.

i hope one of you picked up on my sunlight imagery, i wanted it to feel like they were being exposed and seen at the same time with it :)

please don't be scared to leave comments or kudos, i love the support so much!

[Chapter 8](#): the paladin and the cleric

Notes:

unlike the duffer brothers, I had this entire chapter written before I even posted the first one, this whole experience has been so meaningful to me - writing my first fanfic, and I hope reading it is as meaningful to you <3

I thought about putting this in 2 separate chapters because it's lowkenuinely 12K words (IM SORRY) but it just works as one.

(See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#).)

Chapter Text

Mike woke up first.

The room was still dim, the sun slanting through the blinds, painting streaks across the floor and across Will's face. He lay there, curled up against Mike's chest, breathing slowly but unevenly, traces of tears still clinging to his cheeks.

Mike reached out, fingers brushing through Will's hair.

He pressed a soft kiss to the top of Will's head, lingering there, letting himself absorb the quiet intimacy of the moment. Every rise and fall of Will's chest, every little tremor in his shoulder, every flutter of his eyelashes, it all rooted Mike in a way that made his heart ache.

He didn't want to wake him. He wanted to stay here, suspended in this fragile stillness, memorizing the shape of Will, memorizing this moment like a prayer.

His gaze swept across Will's face, taking in the faint redness staining his cheeks and the slight puff under his eyes.

Mike's chest tightened. He loved him too much, and it terrified him. He didn't want to disturb this perfect, peaceful version of Will, the version that had just let him in, let him see everything.

Mike's eyes glanced at the clock behind the fallen letters, strewn across the table and floor as his scattered confessions.

5:34 p.m.

He swallowed. It felt late- *too* late, and yet not late enough to hold this moment forever.

Careful not to startle him, Mike brushed a hand across Will's cheek, fingers tracing the curve of his jaw.

"Hi, sleepyhead," he whispered.

Will stirred, letting out a soft, drawn-out sigh. He blinked up at Mike, his eyes hazy but glowing in the dim, golden sunlight, and the sight made Mike's chest ache.

Every strand of hair, every freckle, every small detail of him, everything he loved about Will, was right here, real and alive in front of him.

"Hi... Mike," Will said, voice still thick with sleep. A smile tugged at the corner of his lips, fragile but beautiful.

"I didn't want to wake you," Mike said gently, brushing his thumb along Will's cheek.

"But... we should go have dinner now. We haven't eaten all day."

Will's stomach protested, a hollow pit gnawing at him. He hadn't realized how hungry he was until Mike mentioned it. He sat up and rubbed his eyes and tried to push down the lingering fog of earlier's tears.

Mike, already standing, began carefully gathering the letters, stacking them neatly back in the box. He treated them like they were the most precious things in the world, because they were, his love, his past, his heart laid bare for Will to take in, when he was ready.

They paused in the basement for a moment, letting the faint light of the sunset drape over them.

Upstairs, the smell of cooking greeted them. Nancy and Jonathan were bustling around the kitchen, laughter and clinking utensils filling the space.

Holly sat at the table, her hair falling into her eyes as she stirred a bowl to help her sister. The warmth of the room wrapped around Will, a sharp contrast to the storm of emotions from earlier. He let himself relax.

Mike's hand found Will's under the table without him noticing at first, squeezing gently. Will looked down, realizing the contact, and a small, quiet warmth spread through his chest. He didn't have to say anything. The pressure of Mike's hand said everything.

"So," Holly piped up suddenly, eyes bright with curiosity. "Are you two together now?"

Will froze for a fraction of a second. His heart thumped, a nervous flutter that made his stomach twist. He glanced at Mike, who gave a small, confident squeeze of reassurance.

"Yes. We are," Mike said simply, calmly, matter-of-fact, as if it were always meant to be.

Holly's jaw dropped, and she sprang out of her seat before either of them could react. She wriggled herself between them from behind. She wrapped her arms around both of their necks and pulled them in, her cheeks nuzzling into theirs. Will laughed, a sound full of relief and happiness.

"This is the best day ever!" Holly squealed, eyes squeezed shut, holding them both like she was afraid they'd disappear if she didn't.

"Does this mean Will can stay over more? Even when Mom and Dad get back? Oh, Will, please- you have to!"

Will laughed, the nerves left his body at her excitement. But before he could answer, Holly was already speaking again.

"I guess you did get your brunette after all, Will... even if it had to be my *gross* brother," she teased.

"Hey!" Mike said, laughing, nudging Will lightly with his shoulder.

Will chuckled, eyes soft, still holding Mike's hand under the table, fingers entwined.

The rest of dinner passed in a blur of easy conversation, laughter, and the small, comforting chaos of a family meal. Will found himself watching Mike more than anything else, committing every little motion to memory. The way he laughed, the way he passed plates to Holly, the way he leaned back in his chair, thumb brushing against Will's hand every so often. He felt a kind of quiet contentment.

When the dishes were cleared and plates scraped clean, Will and Mike moved seamlessly into taking Jonathan and Nancy's routine of cleaning up. Mike washed, Will dried, their movements almost instinctive as if they did this every night.

Will caught himself smiling quietly, feeling a rare sense of home. He was here, with Mike, with his friends, with his *family*, it felt like nothing could touch the fragile safety of this bubble.

Mike leaned slightly closer than necessary, brushing Will's arm. Will's hand tightened around the towel he held, heart thrumming in his chest, still nervous about all the new-found affection happening so openly. Mike caught the look, smirked faintly, and returned to washing one of the plates, making Will laugh softly.

The room was peaceful. Warm. Quiet except for the small clinks of dishes and the soft hum of conversation from the couch where Nancy and Jonathan had already settled, watching a TV show they didn't really pay attention to.

Will let himself take it all in, the sounds, the light, the feel of Mike's shoulder against his.

After saying goodnight to everyone upstairs, Will and Mike quietly made their way back down to the basement.

Will flopped onto the couch, stretching his legs out lazily, and Mike sank beside him, the cushions soft beneath them. Will rested his head on Mike's shoulder, feeling the solid warmth there.

For a moment, neither of them spoke. The silence was full, full of the words they hadn't needed to say aloud, full of relief, full of trust, full of love. Will traced the pattern of the couch fabric with his fingers, glancing up at Mike every so often. Mike's curls fell lightly over his forehead, the dim basement light casting shadows across his features. He looked impossibly close, impossibly real, and impossibly *his*.

Mike's fingers found Will's hand, lacing their fingers together without thinking. The gesture was intimate and quiet. Will squeezed back, feeling a happiness so complete it made his chest ache.

"I was thinking," Mike said, a hint of hesitation in his voice, "since your art school and my writing school are both close together in New York... maybe we could... share an apartment."

Will's eyes widened a little, and then a smile broke across his face. He threw his arms around Mike without hesitation, pulling him into a tight hug.

The couch shifted beneath them, but neither of them cared. The world outside the basement ceased to exist, all that mattered was the warmth and steady presence of each other.

"We could even stay close to Jonathan and Nancy," Mike added, voice softer now, almost like he was sharing a dream he hadn't dared speak aloud before. "Since they'll be there too. They'd still be close, and we wouldn't lose that family connection."

Will's heart lifted higher than he could have imagined. He hadn't heard a better idea in his life. The thought of a future where he could wake up with Mike beside him, where they could share mornings and late nights, where they could build something new together, away from Hawkins and all its trauma.

"I'd love that, Mike," he whispered, pressing his forehead against Mike's shoulder for a moment before pulling back slightly. "Really. That's the best idea I've ever heard."

He cupped Mike's face gently with both hands, thumbs brushing over his cheekbones as he pressed their foreheads together. Will's eyes searched Mike's, wide and earnest, drinking in every detail.

"This," Will murmured, voice trembling slightly, "this is our future. Every day. Us. Eating dinner together, studying together, cleaning together. All the simple things. Away from Hawkins. Away from... all of it."

Mike's eyes softened, glimmering with emotion that mirrored Will's own. He nodded slowly, pressing his forehead tighter against Will's. Their breaths mingled in the small space between them, shallow and ragged with anticipation and relief.

They simply stared at each other, silent, letting the weight of everything they had survived, everything they had endured, settle into the comforting solidity of the present.

Then, with a small, almost shy movement, Mike closed the distance. His lips met Will's in a soft, tender kiss. Gentle, and full of the love that had been building for years. Will's hands lingered on Mike's shoulders, fingers gripping lightly, savoring the warmth and the solidity, the feeling of being held and holding in return.

The kiss deepened slightly, slow and languid, a physical echo of all the unspoken words, all the letters, all the confessions, all the fear and the longing and the waiting. When they finally broke apart, they stayed close, foreheads pressed together, sharing shallow, uneven breaths.

“You’re my world, Will,” Mike whispered, voice barely audible over the soft hum of the basement.

“And you’re mine, Mike,” Will replied, a quiet certainty in his tone, eyes glistening.
“Always.”

They sank back into the couch, still pressed together, hands entwined, content to simply exist in the same space.

Will let himself relax finally, completely. The pit of anxiety and fear that had lived in him for so long was replaced with a gentle, steady warmth. He had Mike. Mike had him. And whatever else the world could throw at them, they had this quiet love, *hard-won* and unshakable.

In that basement, on that worn couch, their future was no longer a distant dream. It was here, warm and tangible, resting in their hands, in their hearts, in each other.

Mike placed his hand to rest lightly on Will's thigh, thumb tracing idle circles that sent soft sparks through Will's nerves.

Their eyes met, and the air between them thickened, charged with an intensity that made Will's pulse quicken. Mike's dark gaze held Will's, pupils wide and searching.

There was no rush, no urgency beyond the natural pull drawing them closer. Will's hand lifted, fingers threading into Mike's tousled hair. He tugged gently and Mike followed without resistance, their lips meeting again.

This kiss was hungrier, deeper than the first, fueled by years of unspoken tension finally unraveling.

Will poured his longing into it, lips parting slightly to invite Mike closer, and Mike responded with a soft sigh, his tongue slipping past the seam to explore. Their tongues brushed lightly, tasting each other with need. The flavor was uniquely Mike, salty from the morning's emotions, sweet from the underlying care that had always defined him.

Mike's hand slid from Will's shoulder down to his waist, fingers splaying wide to anchor him. The touch was steady and grounding, pulling Will flush against Mike's chest, their bodies aligning in a way that felt like coming home.

The kiss evolved from gentle exploration to something more desperate. Mike's free hand cupped Will's jaw, thumb stroking the curve of his cheekbone, tilting his head for better access.

Their tongues twined fearlessly now, sliding against each other with wet, heated friction that built a slow fire in Will's belly. He tugged at Mike's hair again, bringing a low groan from deep in Mike's throat, the vibration traveling through their joined lips.

Breaths came in shared gasps, chests rising and falling in sync, the room filled only with the soft sounds of their kissing, the faint smack of lips parting and reconnecting and the occasional sigh of contentment.

Mike's hand at Will's waist reached higher, fingers slipping under the hem of Will's shirt to caress the bare skin of his lower back. The touch was electric and soothing, tracing the dip of his spine with feather-light pressure that made Will arch into it.

He felt cherished, every nerve alight with the care Mike took not to overwhelm. Will's own hands roamed, one staying tangled in Mike's hair, the other pressing against the firm plane of his chest, feeling his heart race beneath the thin fabric of his t-shirt. It was a rhythm that matched Will's own.

Mike broke the kiss, "I love this," he murmured, moving his lips across his jaw and down to Will's neck, his breath warm and even, planting a soft kiss there that lingered. "Just being with you like this."

Will smiled, lifting his hand to capture Mike's chin and bring it up, "Me too. Don't stop."

Mike pressed his lips back against Will's. His hand ventured lower, sliding up under Will's shirt to trace the lines of his ribs, thumb brushing a nipple that pebbled under the touch. Will gasped into the kiss, the sensation sharp, his body responding with a shiver.

Mike pulled back just enough to catch his breath, his eyes locking onto Will's with an intensity that made the space between them feel charged.

Without a word, his hands moved to the hem of Will's shirt, gripping the fabric firmly. In a surge of need he couldn't contain, he tugged it upward and over Will's head in one swift motion. Mike yanked his own shirt off, discarding it to the floor with equal haste.

The brief separation of their lips felt unbearable, and Mike surged forward immediately, crashing their mouths back together with a desperation that conveyed how much he ached at just the thought of distance between them.

Will's heart raced, the warmth of Mike's bare chest pressing against his own sending a rush of need through him. He brought his hands up, palms flat against Mike's chest, feeling the quick rise and fall of his breaths.

His fingers trailed lightly, grazing over the small, hardened peaks of Mike's nipples, circling them with soft touches that grew into gentle pinches and rolls. Mike gasped sharply into the kiss, the sound vibrating against Will's lips.

The sensation shot straight through Mike, a tingling warmth spreading from his chest downward, heightening every nerve as Will continued to tease, his thumbs brushing back and forth in slow, deliberate motions that drew out another muffled inhale from Mike.

As they kissed, Will felt the familiar stir in his groin. His cock began to swell, thickening against the confines of his shorts, the fabric growing taut as the length hardened fully, pressing insistently against the seam.

The ache was sweet, a building pressure that made his hips shift involuntarily, seeking more friction, more contact with Mike's body.

Mike sensed the change immediately, his hand sliding down from Will's side to cup the growing bulge through the thin material of his shorts. His touch was tender, palm pressing flat and warm, tracing the outline of Will's erection with slow, loving strokes that followed the curve from base to tip.

He didn't squeeze or demand, but caressed with desire, fingers mapping the shape as if committing it to memory, the gentle pressure bringing soft sighs from Will into the kiss.

The fabric barrier added a layer of teasing friction. Mike's hand moving almost *too* slowly made Will's hips buck slightly, chasing more.

Will mirrored the action, his hand drifting down to palm Mike through his shorts. He felt the solid heat there, Mike's cock firm and straining, and Will wrapped his fingers around the length as best he could over the cloth, stroking upward in a slow pull that matched Mike's pace.

Mike's body responded with a subtle shudder, his kiss deepening as Will's hand worked with the same care, thumb pressing lightly over the head where a damp spot was beginning to form, spreading the warmth of pre-cum through the fabric.

Mike broke the kiss again, a soft sigh escaping him at the loss of Will's lips, his eyes half-lidded and filled with hunger.

As much as Will hated it, the separation was necessary. Mike's hands moved to the waistband of Will's shorts and boxers, pushing them down his thighs in a quick, fumbling motion until they pooled at his ankles. Will kicked them aside, his erection springing free, heavy and flushed against his stomach.

Mike lifted his hips without hesitation to wriggle out of his own, the cool air kissing his newly exposed skin.

Mike reached for Will, guiding him onto his lap with hands that gripped his hips gently but firmly, pulling him to straddle his thighs. Will settled there, their cocks brushing accidentally, sending a jolt through both of them that made their breaths hitch in unison.

Will leaned in for another kiss, but as their lips met, he shifted their positions, twisting his body to guide them both down onto the couch horizontally.

The cushions dipped under their combined weight, Will hovered over Mike, then began to grind against him. He started low, hips rolling in a slow drag that pressed his cock upward along the length of Mike's.

The motion was deliberate, Will's body surging in waves, his erection sliding from base to tip against Mike's. Mike moaned low in his throat, the sound raw and unguarded, his hands clutching Will's waist to steady him as the grinding intensified.

They continued in a rhythm that was both primal and intimate, their cocks trapped between sweat-slicked stomachs, gliding with increasing ease as pre-cum slickened the path.

Mike's moans grew deeper, mixing with Will's soft whimpers between the kiss.

"I need more," Mike whispered, his voice breathless as he pulled back from the kiss, which was only for necessary air. His hands trembled slightly on Will's sides, showing Will his pure, aching want for deeper closeness.

Will nodded, understanding blooming in his eyes, He reached down, wrapping a hand around both lengths, holding them tightly as he began long, careful strokes. The shared grip allowing them to glide against each other, tips bumping with each upward pull.

Pre-cum leaked steadily now, easing the motion into something slick and heated, their veins pulsing in tandem under Will's fingers.

They kissed through it all, lips moving hungrily and tenderly, tongues exploring as their hips rocked into the strokes.

"This feels... so good with you," Will murmured against Mike's mouth. Mike hummed in agreement, his own hand joining Will's to stroke them together, the dual touch amplifying the pleasure.

"You're- everything," Mike replied softly, nipping at Will's lower lip before soothing it with a kiss, their movements syncing into a steady rhythm that built the tension stroke by stroke.

Mike's need shifted again. With a gentle twist of his hips, he maneuvered Will beneath him, rolling them so Will lay on his back along the couch, legs parting instinctively to welcome Mike's weight.

Will let out a light giggle at the sudden playfulness, the sound bubbling up from the joy of the moment, and he settled into place, gazing up at Mike with eyes full of longing and trust.

Mike's gaze softened at the sight, his heart swelling with the love that made every touch feel sincere. He lowered his head, starting at Will's collarbone, pressing delicate kisses along the line of his shoulder, each one lingering as if savoring the taste of his skin.

"I love how you feel under me," Mike whispered between kisses, moving downward to the center of Will's chest, lips brushing the rapid beat of his heart. Will arched slightly, a soft sigh escaping him, his fingers threading into Mike's hair to encourage the path.

Mike continued the trail, kisses feather-light over Will's ribs, dipping into the navel with a swirl of tongue that drew a gasp from Will. Mike turned his head to kiss Will's scar softly, gently, reclaiming the spot as his own to take care of.

He then dipped further, lips ghosted over the faint trail of hair leading downward, until he reached the base of Will's cock. He paused there, looking up to meet Will's eyes, seeking that final affirmation in the nod Will gave, eyes shining with affection.

Leaning in, Mike placed a soft kiss right at the tip, lips surrounding the sensitive head briefly, tasting the salt of pre-cum with a hum of appreciation. Will's hips jerked upward involuntarily, a moan spilling from his lips.

"Fuck... Mike," he whispered, hand tightening in Mike's hair. Encouraged by Will's moans, Mike took him into his mouth fully, lips sealing around the length as he sucked gently, tongue pressing flat against the underside to trace the vein.

He bobbed slowly at first, head moving in measured strokes, hollowing his cheeks to create a warm suction that made Will's toes curl. The wet heat wrapped around Will completely, Mike's mouth working with loving precision, swirling around the head on each upstroke before sinking down further.

Will's breaths came in ragged bursts, pleasure coiling tight in his abdomen as Mike's pace quickened slightly, hand wrapping around the base to stroke what his mouth couldn't reach.

"It feels... incredible," Will managed, voice strained with building ecstasy. Mike responded with a soft moan around him, the vibration sending sparks up Will's spine, pushing him closer to the edge.

But as Will felt the tension rise, his body tensing and a warning throb signaling his impending release, he reached down and gently tugged Mike's shoulder.

"Wait... stop, please," Will said breathlessly, his voice tender despite the urgency. Mike pulled off immediately, lips glistening as he looked up with concern, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Will pulled him up, guiding their bodies to align face to face once more, their foreheads resting together.

"Not yet. I want this to last- longer..." Will explained softly, his hands framing Mike's face, thumbs stroking his cheeks.

Mike's eyes filled with understanding and warmth, and he nodded, sealing the moment with a deep kiss. Will tasted himself faintly on Mike's tongue but finding only deepened intimacy in it. Their bodies pressed close again, cocks trapped between them, still hard and aching as they held each other.

Mike pulled back slightly, eyes searching Will's face. "Tell me what you want," he said softly.

Will's cheeks warmed, but he held Mike's gaze, the trust between them making the words easier.

"Mike..." he started, voice nervous but steady. The vulnerability hung between them, raw and beautiful.

"Tell me baby," Mike's hand cupped Will's cheek, thumb stroking gently, his eyes full of patience and love.

Will swallowed, heart pounding. "Do you think we could..." He paused, nerves fluttering, but the desire won. He wanted more, wanted to feel Mike inside him, to share this first in the most complete way. "Look, I've never done any of this with anyone before, but I really want us to..."

Mike cut him off with a tender kiss, understanding blooming in his eyes before Will even finished. He knew, as he always did, reading the unspoken words in Will's hesitant tone, the way his body leaned closer.

"I've never... before either. But I want to with you," Mike whispered against his lips, the confession sealing their bond. They had always understood each other like this, no need for elaborate explanations, just the quiet certainty of shared hearts.

Mike shifted, reluctantly pulling away to stand, and Will felt the absence like a physical ache, his body cooling without Mike's warmth.

Mike stumbled slightly in his haste, rummaging through a nearby drawer in the side table. He pulled out a small bottle of lube, the label worn but unopened, and Will's breath hitched, a breathless laugh escaping him.

"Someone's prepared," he teased softly, the words light but laced with affection, easing the tension.

Mike grinned, a shy flush creeping up his neck as he returned to the couch, settling between Will's legs. "I hoped... someday. With you. I just don't have condoms..." He set the bottle aside anxiously for a moment.

Will was too desperate to share this moment with Mike to care, "It's fine, Mike. I still- I still want to, if you do too?" Will shyly said.

Mike leaned down to kiss Will deeply, "I want to, I really *really* want to," Mike whispered against his mouth.

Mike hovered over Will, their lips crashing together again, tongues sliding and exploring with urgent need. Mike's body pressed down, pinning Will gently to the couch, his weight a comforting anchor as their breaths mingled hot and fast. He pulled back just enough to gaze into Will's eyes, his own darkened with desire.

"Have you ever... put anything inside yourself before?" Mike asked hesitantly.

Will's cheeks flushed, but he nodded, meeting Mike's stare. "Yeah, just my fingers."

A deep groan rumbled from Mike's chest at the image flashing in his mind, Will alone, touching himself like that. His cock twitched hard against Will's thigh, a fresh trace of pre-cum slicking the tip and smearing between them.

"*God*- that's so hot, Will," Mike moaned, diving back in to capture his lips in a fierce kiss.

Breaking away again, Mike reached for the lube on the nightstand, squirting a generous amount onto his fingers. He warmed it between them, eyes locked on Will's.

"Just one finger first. Tell me if it's too much... I want this to feel good for you." Mike said carefully.

Will nodded, spreading his legs a bit wider, his own arousal evident in the way his cock stood rigid against his stomach.

Mike positioned himself carefully, circling Will's tight entrance with a slick fingertip, teasing the rim before pressing in slowly. The heat wrapped around his finger immediately, Will's hole clenching around the intrusion, so snug it made Mike's breath

hitch. Will let out a low moan, his body tensing then relaxing as the digit slid deeper, the stretch burning just enough to spark pleasure.

"Fuck, you're so tight," Mike whispered, his free hand stroking Will's thigh lovingly.

Will whimpered, rocking his hips experimentally, the fullness sending sparks through his entire body. Mike added a second finger after a moment, scissoring them gently to open him up, the added pressure making Will gasp and moan louder.

The ring of muscle gripped them fiercely, the inner walls velvety and scorching, pulsing with every careful thrust Mike gave.

"That's it, baby," Mike encouraged, voice laced with affection, "*Fuck-* you feel so good."

Will's moans grew breathier, his body chasing the sensation as he thrust back onto Mike's fingers, the slide in and out building a friction that had his toes curling.

Mike crooked his fingers on one deep push, grazing over Will's prostate, a firm nudge that made Will's vision burst with stars, a sharp jolt of ecstasy ripping through him, his cock leaking steadily now.

"Oh shit- Mike!" Will cried out, body arching off the couch for that brief, blinding second.

Mike's eyes widened with awe and hunger, his own cock throbbing untouched. "Right there? Will... you look so pretty like this."

Will locked eyes with him, desperation clear. "I need more. Please, Mike- give me three. I want to feel you stretch me wider."

Mike didn't hesitate, adding a third finger with more lube, pushing in slow and steady. The stretch was intense now, Will's entrance fluttering around the thicker intrusion, the heat inside even more intense as Mike's fingers filled him completely.

Will moaned deeply, a mix of burn and bliss, his walls clamping down hot and tight, every ridge and vein on Mike's knuckles dragging against sensitive nerves. He thrust harder into the invasion, hips bucking rhythmically, the careful pumps from Mike hitting that spot again and again, sending waves of pleasure crashing through him.

"You're doing amazing," Mike praised, his tone dirty yet tender, leaning down to kiss Will's neck. "Tell me how it feels, baby."

"Full... so full and good," Will gasped, emotional warmth blooming in his chest amid the raw heat. "Burns a little, but it's perfect- *you're* perfect."

Will slowed his breathing, he needed more, he wanted to feel the connection of their bodies intertwined.

"I think- I'm ready, Mike." He said softly, looking up to meet Mike's eyes.

Mike moaned at the sound of Will's voice. He gently pulled his fingers out of Will, kissed his forehead and reached for the lube.

Will tried to catch his breath while Mike was busy, aching over how empty he feels.

Mike uncapped the lube, squirting a generous amount into his palm, the cool gel warming quickly as he coated his length. He stroked himself slowly, eyes locked on Will's, the motion deliberate and unhurried, ensuring everything was slick and ready.

Will watched, mesmerized by the care Mike took, the way his hand moved with purpose. Watching Mike stroke himself while looking at him might just get him off alone.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked, voice barely above a whisper, positioning himself carefully, one hand guiding Will's thigh open again.

Will nodded, reaching up to pull Mike down for a kiss. "I'm sure," he breathed.

Mike placed a soft kiss on Will's forehead, then lined himself up at his entrance, the blunt head pressing gently against the prepared ring of muscle.

There was no rush, Mike pushed forward incrementally, the initial breach slow and measured. They both gasped softly at the connection. Will felt the stretch, a burning pressure that bordered on discomfort, but Mike's free hand stroked his hip soothingly.

"Breathe with me, just like this." Mike whispered, keeping his eyes pierced on Will.

Will inhaled deeply, exhaling as Mike inched deeper, the lube easing the way, turning potential pain into a fullness that was intimate and securing.

Mike paused frequently, watching Will's face for any sign of distress, his own brows furrowed in concentration and care. "You're doing so well," he murmured, pressing another kiss to Will's forehead, then his lips.

Inch by inch, he filled him, until his hips met Will's, fully sheathed in the tight heat. The sensation was overwhelming for both, Mike buried to the hilt, wrapped in Will's warmth that pulsed around him, Will feeling utterly claimed, yet safe, the initial burn fading into a deep, satisfying pressure.

Mike stilled completely, bodies locked together, his weight a comforting blanket as he nuzzled Will's neck. "How does it feel?" He whispered.

Will's hands clutched Mike's shoulders, nails digging lightly into skin. "Full... like you're part of me. It hurts a little, but... good. *Really* fucking good."

Mike groaned into Will's neck at the reassurance and Will shifted experimentally, a soft moan escaping as the movement sent sparks of pleasure through them both.

They stayed like that for a moment, breaths syncing, Mike's lips trailing kisses along Will's collarbone, his jaw, anywhere he could reach without moving.

"I could stay here forever," Mike whispered, voice thick with awe. "Just feeling you around me."

Will smiled, eyes misty. "I need more- please- you can move... Slowly."

Mike nodded, withdrawing just a fraction before pressing back in, the motion steady, savoring every slide. The friction built gradually, Will's inner walls adjusting, clinging to Mike's length with each pass.

Mike's hands found Will's on either side, fingers lacing together in a tight hold, grounding them both. He leaned down, capturing Will's mouth in a deep kiss, tongues mirroring the slow rhythm of his hips. Thrust after thrust, unhurried and deep, each one drawing soft moans from them.

"God, Will... you feel incredible," Mike said between kisses, his voice laced with wonder. "I love being this close to you."

Will arched into him, the angle hitting a spot inside that made stars burst behind his eyelids. "Don't stop... it feels so good Mike, *you* feel so good"

Their bodies moved in harmony, skin sliding slick with sweat, the couch creaking faintly under them. Mike's thrusts remained gentle, rolling his hips to grind deep, eliciting gasps and whispers of affection.

"You're everything to me," Will added, squeezing Mike's hands, the connection through their joined fingers as intimate as the one below.

Mike squeezed his hands back breathlessly, the pleasure overcoming him.

As pleasure built as a steady coil in Will's core, he felt the need for more. "Faster... Mike, please. I need you deeper."

Mike's eyes met his, a silent check, then he obliged, pace quickening to a steady rhythm, hips snapping with controlled force. The change intensified everything, the wet sounds of their joining, the slap of skin, the way Mike's cock dragged against Will's prostate with each plunge.

Will's moans grew louder, unrestrained now in the privacy of the night. Mike released one of Will's hands, trailing it down to wrap around Will's leaking cock, stroking in time

with his thrusts. The dual sensation was intense, Mike's fist firm and loving, thumb swiping over the head to spread pre-cum, base to tip in smooth pulls that matched the rock of his hips.

“Look at you,” Mike breathed, though his words were pure adoration. “So pretty like this.”

He pumped Will's length steadily, feeling it throb in his grip, the veins pulsing under his fingers. Will's hips bucked back and forth, chasing the pleasure from both sides, his free hand clutching Mike's back, nails leaving faint trails.

The room filled with their shared sounds, panted breaths, the slick glide of Mike inside him and hand on him.

Tension wound tighter, Will's balls drawing up, the edge approaching fast. Mike sensed it, his own release building, thrusts becoming erratic but still deep and loving. “Will... I'm close.”

“Me too...” Will gasped, eyes locking on Mike's as the world blurred.

“Keep your eyes on me okay?” Mike said as his hand sped up, stroking firmly, his thrusts matching the same quickened speed, urging Will over.

Will nodded. Their gazes held, watching every flicker of Will's eyes widening, lips parting in a silent cry and Mike's brows knitting, jaw clenching in ecstasy.

Their pleasure peaked simultaneously, Will spilling first in hot pulses over Mike's fingers, clenching around him in waves that pulled Mike under. Mike buried himself deep, groaning softly as he came, filling Will with warmth, their bodies trembling in unison.

They rode it out locked together, eyes never breaking contact, faces a mirror of bliss and love, flushed cheeks, parted lips, the raw vulnerability of climax shared. Mike collapsed gently onto Will, still inside, their free hands relacing as breaths slowed. In the afterglow, they kissed lazily, the intimacy deeper than before, two halves made whole.

After a moment of catching their breaths, Mike slowly pulled out of Will, a pool of cum trailing out of his hole.

“Shit- that's so hot.” Mike said, watching it fall out of him.

“You're so hot,” Will teased, breathless.

Mike fell back on to Will's chest gently, “I love you, Will,” he breathed, like it came easily to him, without hesitation, like breathing air was more complicated than those three words.

Will couldn't contain his smile, feeling the heat of Mike on top of him, hearing those words.

"I love you, Mike" Will managed to get out between shaky breaths.

They stayed like that for a while, pressed together, breathing slowly, the world narrowed down to the sound of each other's hearts and the faint creak of the couch beneath them.

Will felt loose in a way he rarely did, like something tight inside his chest had finally unclenched. His limbs were heavy, his head warm where it rested against Mike's shoulder.

After a few moments, Mike shifted gently, careful not to startle him. "Hey," he murmured softly, barely above a whisper. "I'm just gonna- hold on."

He stood and disappeared for a second, and Will watched him go with half-lidded eyes, still dazed. When Mike came back with a tissue in his hand, his movements were slow and deliberate, like he didn't want to rush a single second of this. He knelt in front of Will instead of standing over him, grounding himself there.

"This okay?" Mike asked quietly, eyes flicking up to check Will's face.

Will nodded, trusting him completely.

Mike was so gentle it almost made Will cry. He wiped him clean carefully, attentively, like Will was something fragile and precious. Like he was afraid of doing anything wrong. His hands didn't shake, but there was an admiration of Will to the way he moved, focused, tender, unhurried.

Will watched him with a soft, overwhelmed ache in his chest. To Mike, this wasn't awkward or uncomfortable. It was care. It was devotion. Will felt seen in a way that went deeper than words.

"Hey," Will said quietly when Mike finished, reaching for the tissue. "My turn."

Mike hesitated for half a second, then smiled, small, a little shy, and let Will take it. Will mirrored his gentleness, careful and affectionate, wiping him clean the same way Mike had done for him. It felt grounding, like a quiet promise saying *I've got you too*.

When they were done, they pulled their boxers back on and settled onto the couch again, knees touching, shoulders pressed together. Mike leaned back first, and Will followed, instinctively curling into his side. Mike's arm came around him without thought, hand resting warm and steady at Will's waist.

For a minute, neither of them spoke. They sat in this moment, quiet, taking it all in and appreciating the moment.

After minutes of settling down, catching their breaths and soaking up the moment, Will took a breath. "Max caught me today," he said softly. "She knows."

Mike stiffened instantly, lifting his head. "What?" His voice was tight with worry. "When- are you okay? Did she-"

"It's okay," Will said quickly, turning to look at him. He reached up and cupped Mike's cheek, grounding him. "She was totally cool about it, Mike. She saw the hickeys and just... smiled. Said she wouldn't tell anyone."

Mike let out a shaky breath and slumped back against the couch. "*Jesus*," he muttered, running a hand through his hair. "I thought-"

"I know," Will said gently. "But she was really kind. She hugged me. Said she was proud of us."

Mike swallowed, nodding slowly. "Maybe... maybe we should tell them," He said after a moment. "The party. When you're ready- When *we're* ready."

Will studied him, searching his face. "Do you think you are?"

Mike thought about it. "I mean... I wasn't ready with Nancy... Not really. But I'll always treasure that moment with her and Jonathan. Won't you?"

Will nodded, leaning in to kiss Mike's temple softly. "Yeah. I will."

Mike giggled softly, "I Mike."

"Oh my god, Mike *seriously*?" Will snorted, rolling his eyes, not expecting Mike's silly yet endearing sense of humor to come out in *this* very moment.

Mike laughed and shoved Will sideways against his shoulder with his own.

They settled back into each other, quiet again, limbs tangling naturally. Will felt safe. Like there was nowhere else he needed to be.

Then Mike's voice broke the stillness again, lighter now. "Hey. Uh- what if we slept in my room tonight? There's... more space."

Will laughed softly. "Finally, those gears are turning," he teased.

Mike laughed. "Oh, shut up."

Will let himself fall backwards into the couch dramatically, laughing as Mike grabbed his shoulders and leaned over him, pulling him into a deep, affectionate kiss. It wasn't rushed. It was warm and playful and full of promise.

Will laughed into it, then pulled back just enough to smile at him. Mike's eyes were bright, soft, so full of love it made Will's chest ache all over again.

Mike stood and held out his hand. Will took it without hesitation.

They ran up the stairs together, laughter echoing behind them, carrying with them the quiet certainty that they weren't alone anymore, and never would be again.

Will woke to the Monday morning sunlight spilling across the room, soft and golden, catching on dust in the air and the edge of Mike's curtains. It felt different than other mornings, less sharp, less frightening.

The light didn't expose him, it warmed him. He lay still for a moment, listening to the quiet of the house and the steady, familiar rhythm of Mike's breathing beside him.

Mike was still asleep, curled toward him, one arm slung loosely across Will's waist like it had always belonged there. His hair was a mess, curls flattened on one side, his mouth slightly open in a way that made Will smile despite himself. The shadows under his eyes were faint but still there.

Will studied him quietly, chest tightening with something warm and full.

He's real, he thought. This is real.

Eventually, Mike stirred, shifting closer before blinking awake. His eyes focused slowly, then softened when they landed on Will.

"Oh," he murmured, voice still rough with sleep. "Hi."

Will smiled. "Morning."

Mike smiled back, smaller, sleepier, then leaned in and pressed a brief, lazy kiss to Will's forehead. It was casual. Easy. Like it had always been this way.

They made their way to the bathroom together a little while later, brushing their teeth side by side, bumping elbows, laughing quietly when Mike dropped his toothbrush into the sink and groaned dramatically about it.

Breakfast was simple, toast, cereal, some fruit Jonathan had cut up earlier, but it felt like more than that. It felt like routine. Like something solid.

Holly talked the entire time, swinging her legs under the table and asking Will questions about his classes, his art, whether he liked the coffee shop he worked at. Nancy smiled into her mug, watching the two of them like she was memorizing the moment. Jonathan nudged Mike at one point and stole a piece of bacon off his plate, earning a half-hearted protest and a laugh.

Will sat there, sipping orange juice, feeling lighter than he had in years.

After breakfast, they grabbed their bikes and headed out. The morning air was cool but bright, the sun already high enough to warm their backs as they rode. The sound of tires against pavement filled the spaces between their voices, but this time, there was no silence to fill, only laughter.

Mike talked about a professor who had already assigned three essays for this week. Will complained about a customer at the café who ordered something “off-menu” and then got mad when it didn’t exist. Mike nearly biked into someone’s mailbox while laughing.

They joked about dumb things, Dustin’s latest science-y obsession, Lucas’s over-the-top basketball training schedule that he *pretends* to hate, how terrible the coffee was at Mike’s building compared to Will’s shop.

It was such a sharp contrast to the last time they’d ridden together, which was quiet and tense, everything unsaid hanging heavy between them. This time, the air felt clear.

Will pedaled alongside Mike, stealing glances at him when he wasn’t looking, amazed at how normal it all felt.

They pulled up to the coffee shop a little too soon.

“Have a great day,” he said, smiling, real and bright.

“You too, Mike,” Will replied, smiling back just as warmly.

Mike hopped back onto his bike and rode off toward his building, glancing back once before disappearing down the street.

Will stood there for a moment longer, heart humming softly in his chest. The sun caught on the shop window, bright and welcoming.

He unlocked the door and stepped inside, carrying the warmth with him.

The waiting found Will in the same way it did that day he was anxiously mentally preparing to draw Mike, before he knew all the *good* that was coming.

It surprised Will how easily it slipped back into his bones, familiar as muscle memory. It felt like standing on the edge of something and knowing, with terrifying certainty, that you were about to step forward, not knowing what reactions you will get.

The clock above the espresso machine clicked on anyway, marking time with the same indifference it always had.

Ten twenty-three.

Ten thirty-seven.

Ten fifty.

Will wiped down the counter for the third time even though it was already clean. He lined up cups that didn't need lining. He watched steam curl up from the milk pitcher and vanish before it reached the ceiling. The shop smelled like coffee grounds and sugar and warm bread, grounding and familiar, but it did nothing to settle the restless pull in his chest.

They decided it this morning.

Today, we tell them.

Will kept thinking about what could happen. About the party's faces. He ran through a hundred versions of how it could go wrong and just as many where it went right, and none of them felt real enough to prepare him.

A regular asked for his usual and Will smiled, made it perfectly, slid it across the counter like he'd done a thousand times before. His hands didn't betray him. His voice stayed steady.

It wasn't a good enough distraction though. Inside him something buzzed with anticipation.

Like the world was holding its breath with him.

By the time noon crept close, the shop thinned naturally. The door chimed less. Sunlight stretched across the floor in soft, slanted lines. Will checked the clock again, heart ticking in time with it.

Mike was already there when Will stepped outside, straddling his bike like he'd been waiting longer than he meant to admit. One foot rested on the curb, jacket half-unzipped, curls blown loose by the wind.

He straightened when he saw Will.

"Hey," he said, soft but bright.

Will dropped his bag into the basket and swung onto his bike. For a second, neither of them moved.

"You ready for this?" Mike asked quietly.

Will nodded, firm. "Yeah. I'm ready."

Mike smiled, nervous and proud and steady all at once.

They barely make it up the stairs.

Mike fumbles with the door to his room, Will hovers close, nerves sparking under his skin, hands twisting together until Mike reaches back and grabs one of them without looking.

The walkie is already on Mike's desk.

Mike snatches it up, fingers shaking as he flips the switch and yanks the antenna all the way up until it clicks, metal whispering against metal.

He presses the button.

"Guys," Mike says, voice too loud, too fast. He swallows and tries again. "This is Will and Mike. We- we have a code red. A *code red*. Over."

Static.

Will's heart drops into his stomach. He squeezes Mike's hand harder.

Nothing but the soft hiss of air.

Mike presses the button again, jaw tightening. "Come on," he mutters, then louder, "Lucas. I know *you* can at least hear me. *Code red*. Get the party and meet us at Lover's Lake. Over."

There's a pause. Long enough that Will starts to regret everything. Long enough that his brain starts inventing disasters.

Then-

"This is Dustin," the walkie crackles, cheerful and immediate. "I'll round up the troops. Over and out."

Mike lets out a breath that sounds like it's been trapped in his lungs for years.

He and Will look at each other.

No words. Just a shared nod.

The ride to Lover's Lake is quiet at first, wheels humming against the road. The air is warm, heavy with summer and heat.

"So," Mike says eventually, voice thin with nerves. "We should... figure out how to say it."

Will laughs weakly. "Yeah. Probably."

They slow down, coasting side by side.

"What if we just-" Mike starts, then stops. "No. That sounds dumb."

"What if I say it?" Will offers. "Or maybe you say it and I-"

"Or we say it together?" Mike says quickly. "Like- at the same time."

They try it, murmuring in unison, voices tripping over each other. It comes out wrong. Awkward. Too rehearsed.

Will groans. "That sounded like a bad school presentation."

Mike snorts despite himself. "Yeah. When you forget your note cards."

They keep riding, anxiety tightening in Will's chest the closer they get. Every possible reaction plays in his head, surprise, confusion, silence. He knows their friends love them. He knows that. But knowing something doesn't stop fear from clawing at you anyway.

They round the bend toward the lake.

And then Will brakes so hard his tires skid.

They're all already there.

Lucas and Max are perched on a flat rock near the water, Lucas's arm slung casually around Max's shoulders. Dustin and El sit in the grass, heads bent together, Dustin animatedly talking while El listens, smiling softly.

They all look up at once.

"What took you so long?" Max shouts, grinning. "I thought it was a *code red!*" She teases.

Mike and Will drop their bikes without caring where they land and walk over, suddenly very aware of their bodies, their hands, the space between them.

Lucas raises an eyebrow. "You guys okay?"

Mike and Will sit down on the grass across from them, knees brushing. Will's heart is pounding so hard he's sure everyone can hear it.

"We, um-" Mike starts. He straightens his shoulders, like he's bracing for impact. "We have something to tell you."

The group goes quiet.

Dustin squints. "Is this a *bad* code red or a *good* code red?"

El looks at Will with concern in her eyes, Lucas and Max are scanning his body and Dustin is anxiously waiting for an answer to his question.

Will feels the anxiety spike, sharp and dizzying. All the eyes on them, it feels terrifying, he wants to back out, to forget it all but- he looks over and can tell Mike is barely holding it together, hands clenched, jaw tight, eyes fixed on the ground.

Something in Will snaps into place.

He knows there's no perfect way to do this.

He doesn't think.

He just speaks.

"Mike and I are dating."

Silence.

"What?" Dustin echoes.

"What?" Lucas and El say almost in unison.

Max just smiles proudly at Will.

Mike looks up, eyes wide, then turns to Will- and there it is. Relief. Gratitude. Love so bright it hurts.

“Yeah,” Mike says, voice shaking but sure. “We are.”

Dustin blinks. “Like... *dating* dating?”

Lucas stares at them for half a second longer, then breaks into a grin so wide it looks like it might split his face. He’s on his feet in an instant.

“Dude,” Lucas says, voice cracking. “*Finally.*”

He pulls both of them into a hug so sudden and fierce that Will laughs in surprise, arms coming up automatically, Mike clutching onto Lucas’s jacket like he needs the grounding.

“I’m so happy for you,” Lucas says, muffled against their shoulders. When he pulls back, his eyes are wet. “You idiots.”

Max is crying softly now, like the emotions overtook her usually guarded self, tears streaking down her cheeks as she steps forward and wraps her arms around both of them, smaller but just as tight.

“I love you,” she says, voice thick. “Both of you. So much.”

Mike’s breath hitches. Will feels it like an echo in his own chest.

Dustin leans over and joins the group hug, supportively his hands wrap around Mike’s head, grounding him. “I want to act surprised but...” He laughs mid-sentence, “I’m not.” He admits, ruffling Mike’s hair.

EI leans in last. She reaches for Will’s hand and squeezes it, firm and grounding. Smiling sweetly at him, giving him exactly what he needed, a reassuring look of acceptance. She kisses Will’s hand.

Then looks at Mike, really looked at him, like she was lining him up with a version of him she’d been carrying in her head for a long time. Something in her expression shifted, not hurt or surprised, but she really *saw* him now. Like a puzzle piece clicking into place.

Mike’s shoulders loosened when their eyes met.

EI gave him a small nod. Just one. Steady. Certain.

Then she smiled.

Mike felt it land somewhere deep in his chest. She stepped forward and wrapped her arms around all of them, grounding him in a way that said *I see you* without needing to say anything at all.

“Yeah. This is right.” She laughed softly.

When she pulled back, her gaze moved to Will. Another nod. Another quiet smile.

She squeezed Will’s hand once more before letting go, like a passing of trust.

“You look happy,” she says simply. “That’s all that matters.”

Will nods, throat closing. “I am.”

They separated and Mike and Will sat back down together after that, shoulders touching, surrounded by the people who have always been their world. Questions come gently, how long, how did it happen, are they okay, and every answer feels easier than the last.

Mike lets out a shaky laugh, scrubbing at his face. “We- uh. We already cried about this way too much yesterday.”

El smiles, her eyes glassy, voice gentle but sure. “That’s okay. Crying is good.”

Will swallows, his thumb brushing over Mike’s knuckles as he looks around the circle, at the faces that never left, even when things were messy, even when he was scared. His voice is quiet, but steady.

“Just... thank you,” he says simply. “For being here. For us.”

No one rushes to fill the silence after that. Lucas blinks hard and nods once, like that says everything he needs it to. Dustin wipes at his eyes with the heel of his hand and lets out a watery laugh. Max exhales slowly, her hand still warm where it’s resting against Will’s arm. El steps closer without thinking, close enough that Will can feel her there.

The lake reflects the sky as the sun dips lower, gold bleeding into blue, and Will thinks about how scared his moment was, how impossible it once felt.

Now it feels inevitable. Like the story always meant to end this way.

Later, when the hugs have softened and the conversation drifts, the rest of the group starting their own conversations, Mike and Will sit a little apart, knees still touching, hands loosely linked between them.

Mike watches the water, chest still aching in the best way. He feels lighter. Like he's been carrying something heavy for years and finally set it down.

"They're okay," he says quietly.

Will smiles. "I knew they would be. I just... needed to see it."

Mike turns to him then, really looks at him. At the way Will's eyes shine in the fading light. At the way he's still here. Still choosing him.

"I'm really glad you said it," Mike says. "I don't think I could've."

Will squeezes his hand. "I've got you."

And Mike believes it.

Their heads take a sharp turn to the dock-

The first splash is an accident.

Dustin's the one who does it, *of course*, he doesn't mean to jump, not really, just steps too close to the edge while gesturing wildly about something Lucas said while they were both looking out at the lake, loses his balance, and suddenly he's falling in with a surprised yelp.

There's a split second of stunned silence.

Then a huge splash.

Water erupts up in the air, glittering in the late-afternoon light, soaking Lucas's shoes. Dustin resurfaces a moment later, sputtering and laughing, hair plastered to his forehead.

"Oh my *god*," Max cackles, leaving El to go over. "You absolute idiot."

Dustin shakes his head, dripping. "I *swear* the water has it out for me."

Lucas smirks. "Yeah... the lake clearly didn't like your tone with me."

Before anyone can say anything else, Max shrugs out of her jacket with decisive speed.

"Well," she says, already toeing off her shoes, "now that one of us is wet."

"Max-" Lucas starts.

Too late.

She grabs his hand and yanks.

Lucas yelps, stumbling forward, and the two of them hit the water together in a tangle of limbs and shouting, Max laughing so hard she can barely stay upright in the water.

El gasps, eyes wide, then looks back at Will like she's waiting for permission.

Will grins, the kind that spreads without him trying to stop it.

Will doesn't need to tell her it's okay, and she knows it, she giggles at him and kicks off her sneakers and runs, dress fluttering behind her as she launches herself into the lake with a delighted scream. The splash she makes is smaller than the others, but she comes up laughing, water dripping from her lashes.

Mike watches all of this like he's afraid it might vanish if he looks away.

The lake is alive now, shouts echoing across the water, ripples overlapping, laughter cutting through the evening air. Everything important feels suddenly very small and very far away.

Will nudges Mike gently with his shoulder.

"Well?" Will asks. "You coming, or are you just going to stand there and brood dramatically?"

Mike huffs out a laugh. "I don't brood."

Will raises an eyebrow.

Mike sighs. "Okay, maybe I do. But still."

Will's already tugging off Mike's jacket, movements easy, unguarded.

He then runs toward the lake, hopping and taking off his shoes on the way. He doesn't hesitate. Doesn't overthink. Just steps forward, water soaking his shorts as he launches in.

Mike watches him for a heartbeat longer than necessary.

The way the lake darkens the fabric of Will's clothes. The way his hair curls with the moisture. The way Will looks back over his shoulder, smiling like this is exactly where he's meant to be.

Mike takes off his shoes and follows him in. The cold hits him all at once, sharp enough to steal his breath, and he yelps despite himself.

"Oh come on," Max calls from further out. "It's refreshing!"

"Define refreshing!" Mike shouts back, wiping the water from his eyes.

Will laughs, splashing water toward him. "You'll get used to it!"

Mike retaliates immediately, sending a spray of water toward Will's chest. Will gasps, laughing, and splashes him back harder.

Mike gives Will a cheeky look and they dissolve into chaos.

Water slaps against skin, splashes flying in every direction. Dustin tries to climb onto Lucas's shoulders and nearly takes them both under. El keeps ducking beneath the surface and popping back up somewhere else, like she's learned a new magic trick. Max snorts and yells at Lucas every time he tries to sneak up on her.

At some point, Will shoves Mike hard enough that he stumbles backward, and goes under with a startled yelp.

When he resurfaces, sputtering, Will is already laughing so hard he can barely breathe.

"I'm *so* sorry," Will says, absolutely not sorry at all.

Mike wipes water from his eyes and grins. He lunges forward, grabs Will's wrist. Now with a more serious look on his face. "Trust me," he murmurs.

"What?" Will breathes, surprised.

Mike just shakes his head with a grin, pulling him under the water.

The world disappears. Light refracts through the water, golden and trembling, casting streaks across their skin. Mike's hand cups Will's cheek, and Will feels the familiar press of lips, soft, urgent, trembling just like everything else around them. Will kisses him back, weightless, suspended in this liquid world where no one can see, no one can judge.

They stay submerged, pressed close, arms wrapped around each other, the only sound the bubbles rising from their mouths. The yellow sunlight dances across them, the blue water enclosing them in this moment. Every worry, every fear, every second of waiting and longing is held in that moment.

When they need air, they reluctantly pull apart, surfacing with chests heaving, hair plastered to foreheads, laughing and gasping in the cold lake.

The party keeps splashing, shouting, laughing, the sound of it echoing across the lake like a promise. But Will and Mike share their own private world inside it, a moment they will carry in memory long after the water dries.

Mike lifts a hand, brushing wet curls off Will's forehead, still smiling. "Worth it?" he says softly.

Will nods, forehead resting against Mike's shoulder. "Always worth it."

Gradually, the laughter fades as the sun starts its slow descent toward the horizon. One by one, they climb out of the lake, dripping and shivering, but grins plastered across their faces.

Everyone sinks down onto the warm grass, letting the sun soak into them, drying their wet clothes and their damp hair.

Will leans back on his elbows, chest still tingling from the cold water, and watches Mike sit next to him, knees brushing, hand finding his.

Lucas kicks off his wet shoes and stretches. "Man... perfect day," he mutters.

Max lies back beside him, grinning.

Will breathes it in, the smell of water and grass, the warmth of the sun on his skin, the soft hum of voices and laughter. Everything feels so easy, so right.

"Guess we should head back before it gets too late," Max says.

One by one, everyone gathers their things. The hugs are long and a little firmer than usual, fingers lingering on shoulders, hands brushing arms. Will and Mike get pulled in a few extra times, quick squeezes, tight enough to remind them that they're accepted and safe.

Lucas ruffles Mike's hair. "You two... seriously, it's good to see you both like this. Really good."

El wraps a small, lingering arm around Will's shoulder. "You're both exactly where you're supposed to be," she says softly, and Will catches the pride in her eyes.

The ride home is quieter than earlier, but easy, comfortable. The wind teases at their hair, drying them slowly, brushing across wet skin. The golden light from the setting sun catches Mike's curls, and Will can't resist a soft smile.

"That went... way better than I expected," Will murmurs.

Mike looks at Will, smiling softly back. "Yeah. It was perfect."

By the time they reach the house, the dampness is mostly gone, the evening is soft and calm around them. They line up their bikes, brush off the last traces of lake water, kick off their shoes, and step inside, hearts still fluttering from sun, laughter, and the quiet perfection of a summer day spent together.

Mike held the door open as Will stepped inside the familiar house, the faint scent of late-summer air still clinging to them. Will's now bare feet made soft noises against the floorboards, and his hair was still damp, a few stray curls clinging to his forehead. He started heading toward the basement, planning to change quickly before settling in, but Mike's hand caught his wrist.

"Wait," Mike said softly, the usual warmth in his voice edged with a hint of nervous energy. "Don't... let's go upstairs."

Will stopped and looked back at him, curious. "Upstairs?"

Mike nodded, tugging gently until Will turned. "Yeah. Just... come on," he murmured. His fingers lingered on Will's hand a moment longer than necessary, grounding them both. There was a strange flutter in Mike's chest, excitement, nerves, anticipation, but it wasn't overwhelming. Not enough to stop him.

They walked together through the quiet house, the soft click of their steps on the floorboards echoing faintly in the hallway. Mike's hand remained around Will's, a steadying presence he didn't want to let go of.

Reaching his room, Mike quickly moved to his closet, rifling through the shelves until he found what he was looking for. He pulled out a yellow file, the edges worn from being handled so many times, and held it out toward Will.

Will's eyes widened slightly as he took it in, curious.

"What's this?" he asked, his fingers brushing against the file nervously.

Mike swallowed, a small, almost shy smile on his lips. "It's... just read it," he said, voice low but steady, almost trembling with the weight of what he was about to share.

Will held the file carefully in his hands, the paper warm against his palms, and looked up at Mike, who gave him a small nod, as if giving permission, or maybe silently asking for trust.

Will swallowed and read the neat handwriting centered on the front.

Michael Wheeler

Application to The School of Fiction & Narrative Arts

Will's breath caught.

This, Will realized, heart fluttering wildly, *this is the thing*.

The thing Mike had worked toward. The thing he'd been proud of but terrified to show. The thing that Will was proud of him for and was *not* terrified to say it.

Will opened the file carefully, he looked up at Mike, eyes wide and bright with anticipation.

Mike's lips curved into a soft, tentative smile, his fingers fidgeting nervously with each other as he watched Will, heart hammering with the question of what Will would think. Will caught the look and let it steady him, then returned his gaze to the pages, hands trembling slightly with excitement.

The title sat alone on the first page.

The Paladin and the Cleric

Something in Will's chest softened immediately, melted warm and helpless.

That's us, he thought, stupidly, fondly. *Mike and me. Me and Mike.*

The story opened in the aftermath of a battle. Smoke curling over a ruined field. The Paladin, armor cracked, sword dulled from use, standing stubbornly upright long after he should have fallen. His oath had carried him through the fight when his body no longer could, devotion burning brighter than pain.

The Cleric found him like that.

She knelt beside him without hesitation, hands already glowing faintly with divine light, murmuring prayers not as obligation, rather as instinct. Their bond was immediate and ancient, not romantic at first, but deeper. *Soul-tied*. Chosen by fate and reinforced by trust.

The Paladin tried to apologize for bleeding on her hands. She laughed softly and told him he always did that, always worried about being a burden while carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. Her magic stitched torn flesh, soothed shattered nerves, but it was her presence, unwavering and fierce, that steadied him. Her eyes held faith in him that nothing else could provide. And in that moment, he leaned forward instinctively, pressing a kiss to her hand, not out of gratitude, but because he had never wanted to let her go.

As the story unfolded, it became clear that their bond went far beyond battle. They shared campfires and quiet conversations, words laced with laughter and gentle teasing, unspoken understanding passing between them like air. The Paladin's courage strengthened her. Her care for him gave him permission to rest without shame. When he faltered, her hands were there, not just to heal, but to anchor him, to remind him that someone would always believe in him.

In the final battle, when the Paladin fell, *truly fell*, struck down while shielding her from a killing blow, the Cleric broke, screaming his name, pouring every ounce of love, memory, and devotion into him. Her magic blazed brighter than the sun, but it was her heart, open and relentless, that pulled him back. The gods listened to her, not because she was powerful, but because *her* devotion was absolute.

He rose again.

Not untouched and certainly not unchanged. But *alive*.

At the end, they stood together at dawn, battered and victorious, sunlight breaking over the horizon. The world was still dangerous. The war wasn't over. But they were bound, not by duty alone, but by a love that would not bend, would not break, and would not fade.

Will didn't realize he was crying until a tear blurred the page. Mike's hand rested on his back, tracing small circles, steadying him, grounding him.

He blinked hard, breath hitching, chest tight in a way that hurt and healed all at once. The words felt like hands wrapped gently around his heart, like Mike had found a way to say everything he'd never dared to out loud.

Will turned the last page slowly.

At the back of the file, written smaller, Will found a note stuck to the page.

You heal me, Will.

You keep me standing.

P.S. I'm sorry I had to write you in as a girl. I hope you understand.

Will let out a shaky laugh through his tears.

He didn't care. Not even a little. The shape of the story mattered more than the details. The truth was there, woven into every line.

Even when Will had thought he had no chance with Mike, when he'd been certain his love was one-sided, wrong, unrequited, Mike had been writing about them. Imagining them bound together. Hoping quietly, painfully, the same way Will had.

Will pressed the file to his chest, eyes squeezed shut.

For years, he had ached for Mike in silence. Hated himself for wanting something he thought he could never have. Thought love was something meant only for other people.

And here it was. A love not easily earned, nor perfect. But a love that was real.

The weight of it, the story, Mike's words, the quiet devotion he had longed for, finally broke him.

"I... I thought I was crazy," he choked out, voice cracking, "for loving you all this time. For thinking... for hoping..."

Mike swallowed hard, eyes glistening, chest tight. He reached for Will's shoulder, steadying him. "No," he said, his own voice thick, "I thought the same thing. I thought I'd love you... quietly. From afar. Forever. And I'd live the rest of my life alone, miserable, missing you without ever letting you know."

Will's tears spilled freely now, hot and unrestrained. His chest heaved as the emotions he'd carried for years finally poured out.

"I-" Will started again, words caught in his throat. "I never thought-"

Mike couldn't let him finish. His own tears fell now, blinding, unsteady. "Will... I thought I'd choke on that same silence forever. But here you are. Here *we* are." His voice broke completely, and he pulled Will closer, needing the contact as much as Will did.

Will, trembling, reached up, cupping Mike's face. Their foreheads pressed together. His lips found Mike's softly, a tentative kiss that carried years of longing, years of fear, years of love finally given voice.

"You're not alone," Will whispered against him. "Not ever. You have me. Always. You have me."

Mike clung to him, breathing shuddering. "And you... you have me. Forever."

They stayed like that, wrapped in each other, letting the sobs come, letting the relief and joy and love overwhelm them. The room around them didn't exist. There was no past, no judgment, no fear, just the pulse of two hearts finally in sync, the safety and warmth of being seen and wanted.

Mike's hands returned over Will's back, his grip firm, grounding. "I feel... like my whole world is in my hands," he said, voice muffled, trembling. "Like... nothing else matters. As long as I have you, it's enough. I don't care what comes next, what's waiting for us- we'll figure it out, together."

Will pressed his lips to Mike's temple, breathing in the scent of him, the warmth of his skin, letting himself finally feel it too. "Together," he agreed, voice steady but thick with emotion.

They held each other long after the tears had slowed, long after their hearts had stopped racing. The file sat forgotten on the bed, its words absorbed into their souls. The silence around them was quiet, tender, alive with the knowledge that they had found each other fully.

Will tilted his head into Mike's chest, listening to the steady heartbeat beneath him, and thought *this* is safety. This is love. Real and messy and all-consuming love.

For the first time, Will didn't just feel okay, he felt unshakable in who he was, in who they were together. The world will still be cruel, messy, and unkind, but it didn't touch this. Not here and not now.

Mike and Will had each other, and that was their anchor, their home, their proof that love could be quiet or loud, messy or perfect, but always *theirs*. No matter what storms came, they would come back to this, to laughter, to warmth, to the slow certainty that they belonged.

And in that, Will felt a fierce, steady hope, even in the hardest years, in the quiet moments when the world felt like it wasn't made for them, they would be okay. They would be more than okay.

They would keep going, keep loving in their own way, keep being themselves, even in a world that only *someday* might let them, and they'd do it side by side.

Notes:

let me know what you think!! again, thank you to everyone who has given me support, comments, kudos, artwork, bylers will forever hold a special place in my heart, and there will never be another fandom as special and creative as this one. i love you all so much