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This chapter includes:

- descriptions of blood, death, and some emotional/verbal abuse**
- a small instance of postpartum depression and discussing medication**
- heterosexuals**

You have been informed.

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Date: Unknown

Time: Unknown

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Sid opened their eyes. A series of blinks came afterwards as they tried to get their vision used to the brightness. They squinted and glanced around, trying to figure out where they were.

They were in a field?

No, they weren't, they concluded after taking a second look. It was just a small plot of grass. They turned and saw a playground by a building. The building, which was behind Sid, had brick walls that were a beige-brown color.

Across from the building was a big oak tree, and between the two was pavement. The sun was at its peak in the sky, beating down a warmth that Sid couldn't feel. They shifted their feet in the grass but its spiky texture wasn't there. They heard the wind blowing but it didn't make them shiver.

Sid: Where am I?

They asked and spun around to search for Petey. All they could see were kids running around and playing with each other. How did they all not notice them?

They tried calling out to some of the students but didn't get an answer. They glanced down at their paws and froze. The burn mark from earlier wasn't there. In fact, their paws looked brand new, like a plush toy fresh out of the factory. Their claws' glittery pink nail polish sparkled in the faux daylight.



Sid looked at their colorful clothes and soft fur. They quickly tried to rub their glasses on their shirt to see better- but they weren't wearing any glasses in the first place.

They were Li'l Sydney.

It didn't feel right. While, yes, they lived her life, and their bodies are the same, it still felt wrong.

They were not Li'l Sydney. Li'l Sydney was not them. Sid viewed them as two completely different people. She was too childish. They couldn't go back to being her, even if they wanted to. They've changed so much. They matured.

Sid: Where am I- why do I look like this?

***Petey: [voice]* It's easier to transport you when you appear smaller- so I picked this version of you. It's not even a real body, I just like her more. She's more reasonable.**

Okay, well, that's stupid.

Sid: And *where* did you “transport” me to?

Petey: The past. But if I show you this, you're going to do something for me, right? You shook my paw. That's a promise.

Sid huffed and rolled their eyes, too irritated to even realize that he said that they were in the past.

Sid: *Fine.*

That feeling suddenly drained away. Sid, somehow, hadn't even registered that it was there. It felt like they could finally breathe again.

Sid's ear fluttered as it picked up a sound from behind them. They turned to the school building and noticed it was coming from the side, out of sight from any of the teachers. Walking closer, they saw that its origin was a hole being dug. There looked to be someone inside of it, throwing dirt up onto the grass above. What?

Sid couldn't see who it was. They tried to call out, but again, there was no answer. They rolled their eyes, peaked over the hole (which was about 2 feet deep, mind you), and saw that it was another calico. She had much brighter fur than them, and her left ear was ginger while her right ear was black.

Sid: That's my mom,

They said blankly. They took a step sideways and noticed another kitten walking anxiously towards them. He was orange with stripes, big ears, and a lime green polo shirt.

Sid: And that's..

Sid's words trailed off. It felt like watching an old home video but perfectly clear.

"HI!" a small voice shouted, startling Sid. The kitten's top half flew up from the hole and she waved her paw. The other kitten jumped back, just as surprised as Sid.

"My name's []!! What's yours?"

The smaller kitten fidgeted with his tail and gathered enough courage to mutter his name. "I-um, I'm []," he said, shaking the other's paw. "I think we're in the same class, here, so I wanted to- to come and say hi, I guess.." She smiled at him and continued on with her task.

Sid tried to focus on the words. They didn't hear either of them say their names. They knew the two did, of course, but it felt like it had been blacked out with a sharpie, or an explicit song with some of the words cut out.

"What.. are you doing?"

"Diggin' a hole"

"W- why?"

"I dunno, it's fun,"

"Aren't you getting all dirty?"

"Yyyep!" The kitten popped the p on the "yep." She looked back at him and smiled even wider.

"There are bugs in there,"

"I know,"

"Aren't you *afraid of them!*?"

"They're just bugs, they won't *kill me* or anything,"

She continued to dig and fling piles of dirt onto the grass. He watched for a moment before looking around at the other kids. One of the times it felt like he looked straight at Sid.

"a-HA!" She exclaimed like a mad scientist, causing him to jolt back. His fur poofed up again, making him appear almost like a ball of fuzzy yarn. "This is the biggest one yet!" She yelled and he looked down to see what she meant. His face lit up in horror as she held a giant worm in her paw.

"AAAH! It's- it's a worm! Why are you just *holding* it!?"

"Yeah, it's a worm. It's not going to hurt you!"

"But- but- it's a worm!"

He kept yelling while she not-so-gracefully crawled onto the grass while holding her paw with the worm up high. Her clothes- a yellow shirt and some blue denim shorts- were completely filthy with dirt and mud.

She presented the worm right in front of the other's face. He jumped away and landed on the ground with a thump. She giggled and took his paw, helping him up.

"C'mon, we should gather leaves and make her a home,"

"How do you know the worm is a girl?"

"Because I just know things." She grabbed his orange paw and ran off to the oak tree across the pavement "Now c'mon! We want her to be nice and happy in her new home! Her new life is gonna be AWESOME. We can come back and get some more worms so she's not so lonely!"

Sid watched as they two ran off.

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They gasped as if their head had been dunked in water. Sid turned around in a circle- They were just at one place a second ago. How could they have gotten this far in that little time?

The transfer felt like a blur. It was like they were a drop of water color that was clumsily smeared around a canvas. They really hoped they wouldn't have to go through that again. Why couldn't they just be *told* everything that happened?

Their surroundings looked to be a school cafeteria. It was almost empty, and the school day seemed to finally be over. There were only a few kids left sitting around and waiting for their parents to pick them up.

Two backpacks laid on the ground next to Sid's feet. Behind them were the kittens again, happily talking to each other while under a table. Sid stared at them. They both looked happy.

They didn't even register that one of their names had been called until he had started to stand up. "Hey! I should meet your mom!" She told him excitedly. "Then we can have a lot of playdates and I can show you the best way to run up the stairs and also how to jump on your bed without your parents noticing from downstairs."

"Okay!" He answered as he adjusted his backpack straps. They walked straight over to Sid, and before they could move, the two passed right through them. The feeling made Sid's skin crawl and they almost became nauseated.

Sid turned around and followed the kittens. They seemed to be heading to a separate entrance that led out to a parking lot. Peeking over the two, Sid could see the back of a cat's head. Her fur was a light brown color with darker stripes running through. She turned around when one of them tugged on her coat. She looked down at her son and gave his head a few pats, careful not to tangle his head fluff.

"This is my friend," he said as he pointed to the other. "She wants to know if we can have a play date soon. Or even maybe today. It would be pretty cool, I think,"

The calico waved excitedly and threw out her paw to greet his mom.

"Oh, hello!" She said, bending down to gently shake her paw. The kitten did the opposite, however, shaking too excitedly to be calm.

"Hi! My name's is [] and my favorite color is yellow,"

"It's very nice to meet you, []! I'm []'s mom. And, well, I suppose my favorite color is.. peach!"

The door behind them opened, and one of the teachers mindlessly called out for the calico, stating that her mom arrived. She smiled and ran to get her backpack, leaving the three.

The brown cat turned around to face the other parent. "Hello! I'm one of [] friends' moms, and the two kiddos were wondering if they could have a hang out one of these days-"

She froze when the two came face to face. Sid stood there and watched, recognizing the other. They almost forgot what she had looked like.

"I... Catheraine, it's so good to see you again,"

The white cat simply stared. She didn't move until her daughter happily skipped up to her. She turned around and grabbed the kitten's arm.

"Ow! That hurt-"

"Come on. We're leaving."

The calico turned around to try and say goodbye. "But-"

Her mother yanked her arm again and walked out the door. "I said we're *leaving*. I'm already upset about you missing the bus- you're lucky I even came to pick you up."

"Oh- ..Okay,"

She tried to turn around and waved for a last time but was roughly pulled forward again. Both Sid and the other mom watched them leave with a strange feeling in their chests.

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Sid gasped again. Everything had blipped once more, and now they were somewhere different. They turned around and saw a swing set with the two cats on the seats.

They were slowly swaying back and forth. There was a sense of calm in the sight. "Are you okay, and stuff?"

"What kinda question is that?"

"I dunno... It just came to mind. Sorry."

"Nah, it's fine. And yeah, I am. Why'd you ask?"

"Your mom's scary..." he said in a hushed voice. She snorted.

"Yeah. She's mean sometimes. But my dad helps with everything!"

She pushed her feet up, making the swing move back and forth quickly. It steadily slowed down again, like a boat lapping the waves in a harbor.

"Do you.. think she'll let you go to my birthday party next week?"

"Oh, definitely not,"

He sighed and sniffled, slumping his shoulders.

"But my dad will! He really likes you and your family, and he likes to help out. But I already said that, so,"

"Okay! Yay. That's good. I didn't want to be alone, my mom invited all my cousins over,"

"Oh, c'mon, it's just a birthday party. It's not like you'll *die* without me,"

The two giggled amongst each other.

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They were in a bathroom? Sid looked around. They knew this bathroom; it was in his mom's house. In front of the sink were the two, now a little older. He was holding a towel while she was spraying something into a bowl.

"Uh, [], I don't think this is a good idea," The cat said to his friend. The calico brushed off his words and rolled her eyes.

"Cmon, its fine. It's bleach, isn't it?" She said, setting the bottle down and putting a paint brush in the filled bowl.

"I guess- but, this one is for cleaning and the other, the one we don't have, is *actually* for dying fur-"

"See, point proven- it's all just bleach at the end of the day. Now- you sit here," He sat down on the chair she pulled in front of the bathroom sink. "And I will put this towel here- even though you don't even need it," She took the towel from his paws and put it around him, covering his back.

"Yeah, but-" he started, looking away from the other and into the mirror across from him. "-I still don't think this is a good idea,"

Sydney shook her head while smiling. She started swaying the plastic bowl back and forth and looking at the cleaner. "You worry too much, [] [] [],"

After she light-heartedly said his full name, she started to put some latex gloves over her paws. She got a small paint brush and dipped it into the liquid. He looked up at her nervously. He tensed when she started to lightly dab it onto his head fluff, careful not to get any on his face.

"See, []? Everything's fineeee. Nothing bad is happening, so you don't have to be all tense-" the moment she said that, everything went wrong. His fur immediately started to fizzle from the chemicals. It very quickly soaked through his fur and made its way to the skin, causing him to yelp.

The two started to freak out. He yelled "ow" dozens of times in a row while flapping his paws. "Shit!" She exclaimed, to where he quickly and nervously ushered her to be quiet because his mom was in the other room. She then- surprisingly, due to the stress of the situation- snagged a wash cloth and rinsed it under the sink. She grabbed him by the shoulder and started rubbing the cloth on his forehead where the burn was. He pushed her away, surprised and overwhelmed at the sudden motion.

"Sorry, oh gosh, we need to get your mom- sorry- oh, no, she'll be upset. Oh, she might yell, shit- I mean- crap! I'm sorry, [], I just thought- oh gosh!" She paced around the bathroom and started clawing on her ears. All he did was stare down at his paws that now held his fur, stunned.

There was a knock on the closed door, and the two froze and looked up at it. It slowly opened and the brown cat's head popped through the doorway.

"Is- is everything okay in here?" She asked, and her eyes soon landed on the tabby, who had a single disappointing tear run down his face. Her eyes widened and she quickly rushed up to him. "Wh- what happened??"

The calico sniffled and held her face in her paws. She then looked up at the cat with a guilty expression.

"Mrs. [], I'm- I'm sorry, and I didn't mean to do it, and I'm r-really suh- sorry, I just thought that clea- cleaning bleach and fur bleach was the same thing, and, I'm sorry I put it on []'s

forehead, and, and I th- thought it would make it look r-really cool, I'm suh- sorry, you can yell at m-me now." She somehow made it through the sentences without bawling her eyes out. She put her face back into her paws and sniffled.

The cat stared at the two kittens and sighed. "Hey, it's okay. Accidents happen, []. You're.. You're not in trouble, just.. Well, I would tell you not to do this again, but I think you already know that ..." she muttered.

The younger one looked at her surprisingly. She had expected a long and serious lecture, so this was quite a pleasant surprise. It only took a small portion of stress away from the situation, though.

His mom quickly started to get another small towel- as the one the kitten used was now dirty on the ground- and soaked it in cool water. She gently patted the towel on her son's scalp and inspected the burnt area.

"I don't think any big tufts of fur will ever grow back here again," She thought out loud. He let out a sob and the other kitten covered her face with her paws in shame once more.

"*But,*" She continued, trying to calm them both. "That's only what I think. We have to ask a doctor for a real answer,"

After saying that, she immediately regretted it. The two kittens gasped and let out a shout of, "We have to go to the *HOSPITAL!?*"

She sighed again. Good thing her husband was at work right now, otherwise he would be getting overwhelmed by just the yelling alone.

"I'm gonna be BALD!" he sobbed and hugged the other kitten.

"No, no. Kids, it's okay. Do you guys want me to make you something to eat while I put some lotion on [] head?"

The two weakly nodded. She slowly led them out into the hallway and down the stairs to the living room couch. She turned on the TV, thankful that it was a Saturday. They flicked through the cartoon channels while she walked off to find the lotion.

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They were now on a bridge above a road. It was overgrown and covered in dirt and moss, with big cracks in the stone that held it together. There were two bikes pressed up against one of the short brick walls covering the sides. It was open enough to see the road, but closed off enough to still stay hidden.

It was close to sunset. The sky was painted with yellows and reds, and soon faded into a soft, dusty lilac on the other end. Aside from the occasional car, it was quiet. Peaceful. Sid could see the wind brush the trees and flower petals.

The two were leaning on the wall and looking down at the road. Well, she was looking down; He was looking right at her. "Do you know what time it is? Mom'll get mad if I'm not back by dinner,"

"Oh, uh-" he checked his wrist for a watch despite never having worn one in his life. "No, sorry,"

"Damn. Meh, it's fine," She shrugged. "Dad'll help me out,"

He nodded. "Is he alright? You said he hasn't been feeling well lately,"

"Yeah, he'll be fine. It's just a common cold, probably. Nothing worth going to the doctors over,"

"Oh, well that's good! Well, I mean, obviously not that- that he's sick, of course, but- y'know. I dunno. Um."

She giggled. "Are you alright? You keep doing that rambling and stuttering. Not that I don't mind,"

"No! I mean, like, no, as in I'm okay. Not like- like anything is wrong. Yeah." He coughed awkwardly.

She shrugged and looked over the wall again. He went back to staring at her, not realizing he was even doing it in the first place. "I should probably get going now,"

"Oh! Um. Yeah. Probably. Yeah," he scratched the back of his head. "It sucks that we can't really hang out for real anymore,"

"Yeah.." she sighed. She started to zip up her jacket and walked over to her bike. "I don't know why mom hates you so much. You haven't even done anything,"

"I should probably get goin' too, actually, um. My mom doesn't like me staying out this late, and I don't wanna, like, make her upset or anything. I feel real bad when I do that,"

She smiled at the mention of his mom. "Tell her I say 'hi,' okay? I miss her,"

He nodded. He fidgeted with his paws while she picked up her bike. She jabbed the kickstand up with her shoe and sat down on the seat.

"Well. See ya at school tomorrow!"

“Oh, uh, bye! See ya!” He waved as she peddled off. When she was out of sight, he sighed and slumped his shoulders, heading to his own bike.

He was about to sit down when he spotted a small bug on the seat. He jumped, almost tripping and falling to the ground. “Oh *god!*” He muttered, not having any way to get it off without touching it.

He groaned and leaned his elbow on the brick ledge. His tail slowly brushed the grass. “I don’t know why I just can’t *talk* to her anymore,” he spoke to himself, but was acting as if he was discussing with the bug. “It’s all of a sudden, too. I just can’t think anymore! I hate it! I hate it so much!”

He looked ahead at the sunset. It was finally fading to a deep red, the lilac turning to a deep purple. He should be getting home now. He glared over to the bug on his bike seat and rolled his eyes. “Can you get off there? Please? This is upsetting.”

As if on cue, the wind softly blew against the trees, causing a leaf to fall onto his bike. The motion knocked the bug off onto the grass.

“Hm. That’ll do it.” He nodded and held onto the handle bars. He sat down and peddled off in the opposite direction she went.

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The kitchen was relatively clean, with very few pots and pans scattered around. She was at the sink doing dishes while her dad was cleaning up in the living room. She hummed to herself and tapped her foot on the ground repeatedly. She looked out the window at the trees in the backyard.

There was an abrupt **THUMPAM!** from the other room. Her ears perked up and she spun around.

“Dad? Is everything okay?” she called out. When she didn’t get a response she started walking to the where the sound came from.

She walked into the living room. He was laying down on the floor, having just fallen down.

“*Dad!*”

She frantically rushed over to his side. She shook him and tried to feel for his pulse. Thankfully, he still had one, but she shook him more violently to try and wake him up. She held his paw, trying to keep him there with her. He squeezed her paw back to try and respond.

“It’s okay, dad, I’m going to get help, okay? I’m still- I’m still here, you’re still here,”

She gave his paw one more squeeze before rushing off to the phone.

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It was raining hard. The thunder sounded like an unintelligible speaker amped up to the highest volume setting. The loud pounding on the door was almost drowned out by it- *almost*.

A brown tabby trotted down the stairs, the back of her yellow robe flying up a bit as she did so. Upon opening the door, any tiredness she was feeling vanished as she saw the calico on her front porch. She was visibly shaken up and soaking wet from the rain, wearing an equally soaked jacket and carrying two bags- one on her back and one in her hand.

"[]!? Are you alright? What are you doing here!?"

"I-I- um-.." she tried to get out any words she could, but a big gust of wind cut her off, making her teeth clatter and sending shivers up her body. The other stopped her from continuing.

"No, no- come inside- Goodness, you're freezing cold! Come along, you can sit on the couch and I'll get you some nice blankets,"

Before she could protest, the tabby pulled her inside as she shut the door behind her. She hurried her to the living room, setting her bags on the radiator on the way. She flicked on the lights, guiding them through the hallway.

She was sat down on the couch and the other rushed to get blankets. Once gathered, she bundled them around the younger one and settled down next to her. She rubbed her back slowly to calm her down.

"What's wrong, dear?" She finally asked. "Why're you here this late?"

"I-" she tried to get the words out, but she choked on a sob. The older shushed her, soothing her with a hug.

"I- I can't be there anymore, I-" she continued. "I'm so scared, I- I'm so- sorry, I did-dn't know where else to go, this was the first place I thought of, I'm s, sorry-"

"You're always welcome here." She stated sternly. "Don't ever think otherwise, sweetheart,"

She sniffled and nodded and looked down at the floor. Her fur was still damp from the storm she hoped she wouldn't have to go back in.

"Mom has been- has been, I don- I don't know how to put it," she started. "She's been scaring me. I wanted to leave a while ago, but- I was scared. I was scared of staying and I was scared

of leaving, and I just- I always feel safe here. I don't- I don't wanna go back," she sniffled and turned her face towards the other, her words getting quieter. *"I don't want to go back,"*

The tabby's gaze was fixed on her, but she didn't seem to be focused on *her*. The calico's own anxieties acted up, unsure if she did the wrong thing. She then blinked and looked back at her with her usual kindness.

"I'll go wake [], dear," Before she could protest, she stood up and headed out of the living room. "You can stay in the basement for as long as you need. We can get the spare mattress and [] can help you," she shouted back.

She nodded, even though the other was already gone. She unwrapped herself from the dozens of blankets suffocating her. She wearily made her way to the basement doorway and headed downstairs. She sat down on the couch and waited.

Sid, although knowing this wasn't real, followed her. Their body passed through the door and they carefully walked down, feeling as if the steps could crumble around them at any moment.

Her body shook, not from the cold, but now with fear. Sid hadn't seen her act like this for a long while.

They looked up the stairs to see the orange cat walking down with a second pile of blankets. Sid swiftly stepped out of the way. The last thing they wanted was to feel sick from someone fazing through them again.

He made it down to the bottom step and looked over to see her back facing him. She was sitting with her arms crossed around her chest.

"[]?" He asked confusingly, some tiredness still left in his voice. She turned around surprisingly, too unfocused to hear him walk down. He quickly walked over and sat next to her, putting the bedding next to him. Their shoulders touched, and he noticed her fur was still damp and frozen from the storm.

"What happened? My mom said that you ran away," he started hesitantly. She nodded, and he pulled her into a hug.

Eventually, his mom called him upstairs again, and he slowly got up and said he'd come back. She nodded again and watched him leave.

She didn't know when her paws began to shake or when she had sat on the floor against the couch. Her claws were on her ears and she started to bounce her leg to calm down.

Sid, on instinct, ran up to her. They settled in front of her and tried placing a paw on her knee. Their paw, as expected, fazed through her. They moved back, angry at themselves for forgetting.

They glanced up at her. She was so young.

The cat heard the basement door open and soon close again. Footsteps down the steps soon followed.

"My mom wanted some help with finding the airmattress, but my dad said he'd help her and sent me back downstairs," He spoke and sat beside her. Sid backed up and looked at the two.

"Hey, are you okay? I know.. a lot.. just happened. But could you talk to me? Or, at least give me a sign that you can hear me.."

She kept staring forward, but held onto his paw, just to let him know she was listening. She didn't want him to worry.

It was quiet and still for a moment, but oddly peaceful.

"I'm scared," she finally said, her voice noticeably starting to tremble again. "I don't know what to do. Not only that, but I just.. I don't want to bother you guys here. I don't want.. I don't.."

"Hey, look at me," he gently held her shoulders, making her face him.

"It's okay, it's gonna be okay. You did the right thing, your mom was a terrible cat. You will be safe here."

She wiped her eyes and nodded.

"Yeah. Yeah. Th- Thank you,"

The two kissed and Sid had to look away.

They hugged and then huddled together, leaning on the couch. Her chin leaned on his head as he nuzzled into her. They drifted off to sleep- her from stress and him from being woken up mid-sleep.

After a few minutes, the door opened for a fourth time. "Okay, I think I found the air mattress, so I need someone to help me. I don't know if it's still good, so just in case, I need [] to help get more pillows-"

The brown tabby walked down the stairs and over to the two teenagers. She stopped when she noticed them sleeping.

She smiled warmly. She silently grabbed a blanket and went to place it on the two, careful to not wake them up.

"Well, I guess those projects can wait until morning," She whispered as she gazed down at them fondly. She quietly went back to the stairs and turned off the light, making it darker for the two to sleep calmly.

It was still the basement, but this time it felt much more lived in. Sid remembers the basement being this way- lively and peaceful, shut off from the world upstairs. They used to spend hours down here.

The air mattress on the ground was set up next to the couch with pillows and blankets. He was laying on the couch while she folded her clean clothes next to the stacked washing machine and dryer. She hummed a small tune while doing so.

"I lost my job," he said defeatedly. She stopped what she was doing and looked at him sympathetically.

"Your boss was mean, anyway," she tried to comfort him.

"That's not the point, []. I'm never going to get a career if I can't maintain a job- and If I can't save money, I can't go to college, and I can't get us a house, and I can't support you, and- and it's just-"

"Hey! [], it's okay," she got up and crawled next to him on the couch. "Everything will be okay. That's in the future, you have time,"

"There's not much time left, []. After this summer break's over, it's our last year of school. If I don't have money I'm not gonna be able to go to college-"

"What? [], your parents have a college fund for you, and it's a *lot*. They've been saving it since you were two," she started. "Please, don't worry, darling. You're more stressed than me, and I'm not even going to graduate," she brought his paw up to her face and kissed it.

He smiled giddily, but his demeanor soon changed back. "But who will take care of us?" He asked.

"*Both* of us. I'm not *incapable* of working. In like, a month and a half, I'll be 18. And I can finally stop this hiding and being scared that my mom will find me. Even if I don't go to school, I can still work. You don't have to have all the responsibility, []. It's okay,"

He nodded and held her paw. She squeezed it back and walked back to the laundry.

“Hey, are you okay?”

It was the basement for a third time. He stood by the bathroom door and knocked. He eventually sat down with his back pressed against the door.

“Could you answer me? Or give me a sign that you're okay?”

No response.

“Could you at least knock?”

There were two quiet knocks on the door. He sighed in relief.

“How about.. two knocks for yes, one for no?”

Two knocks.

“Okay, that's good,” he thought for a moment. “Are you.. okay?”

Knock

“Can I come in??”

Knock.. Knock knock

“Is that ‘I don't know’?”

Knock knock

“Do you want me to leave you alone?”

Knock

“Okay,” he sighed. “I don't know how to help if I don't know what's wrong,” he muttered to himself.

There was the sound of shuffling and then something was slipped under the bathroom door beside him. He picked it up and stared.

“Oh,” he whispered eventually. He tried to steady his breathing to calm himself down.

There was a click on the doorknob. He stood up and opened it. She was sitting against the bottom cabinet of the sink with her legs pressed up against herself. She hugged her arms tightly while tears prickled at her eyes.

He sat down next to her and hugged her tightly. "We'll be okay," he said, not only to reassure her, but himself. She clung to his back like it was her lifeline.

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He was staring up at the ceiling. Dozens of fans were pointed at his bed while he laid with his blankets on the floor.

A loud, screechy noise came from his bedside table. He jerked up, startled, before calming down and realizing what it was. Though, upon realizing, he groaned. He turned and lowered the volume on the baby monitor.

He silently opened his bedroom door and tiptoed down the stairs. Sid followed him, taking their time. They looked up at the different photos and memories on the wall, going all the way back to a photo of his parents as teenagers.

He sneaked past the living room and kitchen to get to the basement door. He opened it with ease, now that he was out of range to wake up his parents. The tabby walked down the steps and past the small nightlight at the bottom.

He sighed, ignoring the couch and going to the small crib near the corner of the room. The cool, soft carpet was a pleasant change from the humidity of his bedroom. Sid wished they could feel it.

They watched the two- well, three, they supposed- cats. He reached his arms down and picked up the tiny kitten from the crib. He rocked back and forth, trying to stop its crying as it went back to sleep. Just to be safe, he held onto it instead of putting it back on its bed.

Subconsciously, he started meandering to the couch, soon sitting down next to the other. She was staring at the wall in front of her. She did that a lot these days. It'd only been a few months, maybe less- but they had been long. Very, very long, and very tiring. He was worried.

He tried to greet her, but she gave no response. She only hugged her arms tighter. "Did you take any of the medication the doctor gave you?" He asked in a whisper. "She said it would help with the sleep,"

She shrugged.

"You need to be taking your medication,"

"It'll be gone soon, anyways," she whispered under her breath.

"Not for him, for *you*. You need to take care of yourself for *you*."

Her breathing started to get shallow, causing him to worry a little because, well, he didn't have a way to help her anxiety attack without putting a two month baby on an air mattress and waking it up.

He leaned onto her side, helping her calm down with the weight of his shoulder. One of her paws let go of her arm to squeeze his. The bundle in his arms started to stir, and he went back to swaying it.

"Would you.. like to hold him?" He asked cautiously. The only response was a long pause and the shifting of her arms. She held them out and he carefully handed it to her. She glared down at it longingly.

It nuzzled into her chest fur and snored. She inhaled deeply before giving it back to him, shaking her head while she did so. He nodded and stood up to place it back in the crib.

After succeeding in putting the kitten to sleep, he made his way to the stairwell and stopped.

"You should come upstairs with me, []. You know that air mattress isn't good for you,"

She got up and followed him and they successfully made it to his room. After she walked in, he closed the door to keep the cool air inside.

"That's a lot of fans,"

"It's the middle of July, they're needed."

"Still. That's a lot of fa- you have one on your *pillow*?"

He rolled his eyes but smiled when he heard her giggle from behind. Once he got the blankets ready, he climbed in and patted the side for her to lay next to him.

She crawled under the blankets with him, humming softly when he turned and hugged her side. She did the same, and the two were soon wrapped together like a soft, indistinguishable kitty cat blob. She laid her chin on top of his head, the rough bleached-fur making her whiskers tickle.

She sighed when she heard him start to purr. She nestled further into his fur, trying to stop thinking about downstairs and to start thinking about where she was in this moment.

Sid could sense what she was feeling. One comes to understand their mother over the years, and they wished they knew how to help.

Or maybe they just wanted to seem like they were helping so they looked better.

She heard snoring from beneath her. She kissed the top of his head and turned on her back, staring up at the ceiling.

—

It was dark out. It was almost pitch black except for a few house windows, the stars covered from the clouds. He checked to make sure she was asleep and carefully got out of the bed.

He swiftly grabbed a bag and shoved a pile of clothes into it. Before walking out of the bedroom, he spotted a jar of money on the bedside table. Instead of grabbing some, he put a few extra dollars in it.

She was laying on the bed sleeping. He stood and looked at her. He gently kissed the top of her head and tip-toed out to the hallway before he could rethink anything. He ignored one of the rooms out of sadness.

He frantically slipped his jacket and shoes on. He was about to open the front door when a noise from behind him made him freeze.

“Dad? Where’r’ya goin’?”

He slowly turned around and looked to the side. He sighed, set his bag down, and walked up to the kitten.

He kneeled down in front of him while thinking of what to say. It took a few moments.

“I.. there’s an emergency, and..” he pondered. “And I need to go. I promise I will be back.. I hope,” he said that last part in a whisper.

“You be good, okay? You be good to your grandma and your grandpa and most definitely to your mom, okay?”

He nodded.

“I...” he wiped his face to try to calm down. “I love you, okay?” He whispered.

“I love you, too,” the kitten replied sleepily. He hugged his dad tightly, wanting him to stay with him forever and ever and never leave.

The older one sniffled and gently pushed him away. He got up to open the door, but the kitten latched onto his back leg. "Don't go," he mumbled into his pant leg. "If there's an emergency, I can help," he said, messing up one of the words.

He pushed him off again and quickly left through the door before the kitten could follow. It closed rather loudly, so he rushed away to the nearest bus stop. Sid ghosted through the door and watched him leave.

—

The house they were in was different. It was *much* more smaller and cramped. They looked out the window to see that they were up high- this was an apartment building. It was night, but very few stars could be seen from the view, just like the previous memory. The other apartments' lights blocked them out.

Sid walked around. They didn't like that last memory very much. Surely whatever's next can't be much worse.

They paused and stared at the ground. There was blood.

God damnit.

They carefully followed the trail, trying not to stumble. The amount of blips have been catching up to them, the transferring making them ill. There was crying coming from the room in front of them. They peaked through the door frame to see.

The kitten from before was hunched over on the bathroom floor. He was shaking with blood dripping from his mouth and onto his paw. He wiped it on his stained shirt and tried to breathe, but all that came out was another agonizing cough, covering his paw again.

The front door opened and the sound covered his wheeze. Sid turned their head to the kitchen.

"Petey, I'm home," she called out and set the groceries on the counter. The name was said as clear as day; there was no strange interference whatsoever.

She hung her jacket on a hanger. "Petey?" she shouted again. He would always answer her, and he could never fall asleep alone. He should be awake. She turned on the light switch and froze.

"P-.. Petey??" she said with more fear. She glanced at the ground and frantically followed the trail. She slid onto the bathroom floor and held him. "P- Petey, o-oh my god, *Petey*,"

He looked up at her, frightened, before passing out in her arms. She frantically checked his pulse. It was still there, he was still breathing- but he lost so much blood. So much blood. It was already dripping onto her shirt.

She clung to him. She didn't let go of him when she stood up and raced to the kitchen. She didn't let go of him even when she frantically knocked on her neighbors door to use their phone. She didn't let go of him until the ambulance came and they laid him on the stretcher.

—

Sid blinked. They were in their moms house. It looked very, very different than what it looked like currently, but Sid could remember every inch of this room.

“S-So,”

Sid turned around to the kitchen. The orange cat was hunched over anxiously, his back facing Sid. They looked past him and saw her standing over the sink. They had a guess of when this was.

Her ears went flat against her head. Her shoulders tensed and her fur started to bunch up. “Uh-um. ...How has everything been..?”

She turned her head around and glared at him. She scrunched up her nose in annoyance.

“ ‘How has everything been’!? You leave for 5 years, magically come back because of a robot I built, and the first thing you say is ‘How have you been’?? Good *lord*.”

He stepped back cautiously. “I- I’m sorry, I didn’t-”

She scoffed and rolled her eyes. She turned around and stared back down at the sink. There was a clock on the wall that filled the room. Sid remembered that clock very well. It eventually broke and Sid had gotten permission to use its parts for a project.

He spoke up again, this time with more wariness. “Where.. where is he? I want to say happy birthday,”

Sid cringed to himself the same time her body tensed. Well, Sid *did* know where he was at the moment. They were both upstairs.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“I..- You- you should know who I’m talking about, [],”

Her whisker twitched. “[]-” he tried speaking again, but she didn’t respond.

"[], please. I want to at least be a good father for this moment, []- I- I want to know where he is,"

"No, []. I don't think you want to."

"Y- yes I do, I want to tell him I'm sorry-"

"You can't, []."

"Why not, []?" His voice was shaky now, and her claws dug into the glass. There was a thick tension in the air.

She stayed silent.

"[], please, it-it's the least I can do- Please, I want to know where Petey is!"

A sharp **SHATTER!** filled the area. Pieces of the glass cup dug into her paw. Small slashes of blood trickled from the skin under her white fur. She spun around without a care for her wound. Both he and Sid stepped back.

"You wanna know what happened, []? You wanna know what happened when you abandoned the sole reason I had enjoyed this world!?"

"Well I want to know why you weren't there! Why you weren't there when he started complaining about his stomach hurting, when he started to throw up constantly, when he started coughing up blood!

"I want to know where you were when I had to rush him to the ER, when they strapped him up with all these needles and tubes, when the doctors said that he was dying!

"I want to know where you were 5 years ago when he was on that hospital bed, and when he took his last breath!

"He's dead, []! Petey Duckhat Lawson is dead, and he died on his seventh birthday, wishing to know where the hell his father was and why he left him!"

It was dead silent except her rapid breathing and the ticking of the clock. The ticks were like the markings of a bomb. He stared and Sid tried to study both of them like a science book.

Tick

Tick

Tick

Sid always hated that goddamn clock.

“W-Wh- ..what?”

“You know EXACTLY what I said, []!”

Her voice was filled with anger and her words were filled with pain. She screamed and screamed and screamed at him, but all Sid could pay attention to was the kitten scrambling up in front of her. She was so small and afraid.

“Mama, please- what are you doing!?”

Sydndy froze, her eyes emptied any hate, and her face dropped. The entire world was hushed. She looked down at her own paws.

“Y. You need to leave.”

“Wh-what- Sydney-”

“You need to get off my property before I call the cops again.”

He stared at her. She stared back. The kitten looked between the two, scared that they both might start yelling again.

“I-. I'm. I'm so sorry,”

“And tell me why I should believe that.”

Peter rubbed off the tears that started to form and weakly nodded. “O-okay. I- Uhm. Okay.”

He scratched the side of his arm and shakily walked away and out the front entrance. The door closed with a gentle thump and things were quiet once more.

“I- I'm sorry,” Li'l Sydney started. “I didn't- mean for any of this to happen, I- I wanted- I wanted you to be happy. I shouldn't- I shouldn't have- I should have listened to you last night, I-I-”

Sydney looked down and her gaze softened. She leaned down and hugged the kitten.

“Sh, shh, it's okay. I'm always- I'm always happy with you. It's okay. *Please don't cry,*”

She clung to her mother and sniffled into her shirt. Sid wanted to feel that again. They wanted to feel safe when they were hugged. But that was in the past, and they were an adult now. They should never wish for that again. It was childish.

“Can.. Can we go upstairs and color? Please?”

“Of course,”

Sydney stood up, but her vision spotted the small trail of blood from her paw. She tensed, but shook away the remaining thoughts or memories she had. The smaller didn't notice, but Sid did.

Sydney sighed “I gotta clean this up first, you can go upstairs, kiddo. I'll be up there in a bit,”

She nodded and hopped towards the staircase. Sid stayed still. They already knew what happened upstairs.

She stood completely still for a moment. She took a shaky breath and walked towards the sink. She leaned down to open the cabinet and grabbed a container of cleaning wipes, taking a few out.

Sydney spent the next minute cleaning up the blood drops. She threw away the dirty wipes and glared at her paw. Sid could tell she was thinking of it scarring. They wished that they could call out to her.

She grabbed some tweezers from the downstairs bathroom cabinet and carefully picked out the glass. She carelessly threw it all away in a trash can and thoroughly wrapped some bandages around the cuts.

Sydney stared at herself in the bathroom mirror. Sid watched her from outside the door frame.

She gripped the sink and tried to calm down by breathing, but it didn't work. She angrily punched the bathroom wall and recoiled immediately after, the pain ricocheted through her arm and into her shoulder which made her yelp.

She stood with her other paw clutching her arm. Sydney eventually made her way to the kitchen, fazing through Sid in the process.

The scene melted around them and into black, staying like this instead of dissolving into another memory. Petey was nowhere to be found, but they could feel his presence. Sid could feel him taunting them.

Sid: Well. Okay. Some breaks between that would have been nice.

They said in a sarcastic manner. In reality, they felt like they were about to throw up.

Petey: I gave you what you wanted, didn't I??

Sid: I mean, I guess-

Petey: Okay. Good. Now YOU have to do something for ME.

Sid: ..That depends on what it is.

Petey: I- you promised. You can't go back on a promise. You have to do what I say now.

Sid: ..Do I?

Petey: YES! YOU DO! SCROLL UP IF YOU DON'T THINK SO!

Sid: ..What??

Petey: ..Tch. It doesn't matter. YOU wouldn't understand.

Sid turned around to try and figure out what he meant. They scratched the back of their head and wondered what this weirdo was talking about.

Petey: Don't call me a weirdo.

Sid: I.. didn't? You're not making any sense.

Petey scoffed.

Petey: I know how to read.

Sid: Congratulations, I do too. Now tell me what I have to do, I guess, so I can leave. I want to get back to my family.

Petey: [muttering] They're my family, too,

Sid: Okay, well, sure.

Petey: We're not so different.

Sid: I'm not *dead*.

Petey: None of this had to happen. If you help me it can all stop.

Sid: What? You dying? Me being created? Should I thank you for this?

Petey: Well, yeah. You exist because of me, y'know,

Petey: I made sure she didn't read that last instruction. I didn't want her to be lonely anymore. But that took a lot of my power, so I wasn't able to say hi until that day.

Sid: Stop.

Petey: I'm the reason you exist. Well- the canonical reason. That's why I-

Sid: Stop it!

Petey: Why? What!?

Sid: It's weird! You're being weird and everything here is hurting my head and making me sick! I don't like it- now take me back home. Now.

Petey: You promised to-

Sid: Take me back home! Now!

Sid tried to block out what Petey was saying but it was no use. His voice sounded like it crawled into their ear and nestled into their brain. They lashed their tail and stomped. Everything was finally catching up to them. Every small thing, not just from this, but today, this past week, *everything*, was too overwhelming. They flapped their paws around.

Sid accidentally hit something. It toppled over onto the ground, finally making itself visible. Petey was hunched on the ground with his back facing them. His wings were tethered around him, the feathers puffed up.

There was a white piece of paper on the ground. Somehow it looked to be darker where he was facing- which was surprising considering how it was pitch black all around. He shakily grabbed for the mask beside him. Sid's spine started to get chills.

Petey sighed angrily after putting his paper mask back on.

Petey: I wanted to do this the easy way. The other way is such a hassle..

He muttered. He quickly poofed away, leaving Sid confused and stepping backwards. There was a snap and everything went bright.

The world suddenly flew above them. They grabbed onto whatever they could find and tried to hang on for their life- which was literal, in this case.

The patch of dirt they held onto was starting to crumble, but Sid thankfully made it back onto the ledge before it could fall. They collapsed onto the ground and clutched their chest while panting.

They looked up at the sky.

As soon as Sid regulated themselves, they ran. They knew this cliff. They ran and ran away from it and through the forest and they didn't stop running.

Words: 8,875

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