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Characters:	<a href="#">Dave Strider</a> , <a href="#">Karkat Vantas</a> , <a href="#">John Egbert</a> , <a href="#">Rose Lalonde</a> , <a href="#">Kanaya Maryam</a> , <a href="#">Nepeta Leijon</a> , <a href="#">Equius Zahhak</a>
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# tank time

uumiho

## Summary:

>User: Karkat Vantas

Objective: Sabotage any and all customer attempts to purchase a live pet from the undermanaged retail hell you call a job.

>User: Dave Strider

Objective: Obtain a cat before your sister's birthday next month.

Match: begin.

## Notes:

HOW DO I EVEN TAG THIS

idk this is my gay christmas fanfic enjoy

## Chapter 1

Chapter Text

EB: she's sooo pissed at you.

TG: tell me something i dont know

EB: you're literally more grating and obtuse than a coked up orangutan.

TG: i said something i dont know

TG: ok

TG: so what do i do

EB: talk to her?

TG: shes enacted the silent treatment and her girlfriend called saying she was threatening to block me

EB: jeez...

TG: i know right

TG: seriously though

EB: weeelllllllll...

TG: ?

TG: dude spit it out

EB: her birthday's coming up you know.

TG: do i

EB: shut up.

EB: why don't you get her another cat?

TG: im pretty sure the last thing rose wants to think about in context of me is another cat

TG: all small

TG: helpless

TG: demonically fast

TG: just waiting to dart out the door between some unsuspecting dudes legs and into the dark street never to be seen again

TG: yeah no

TG: ill pass

EB: suit yourself!

EB: okay, i gotta go.

TG: what

TG: no

TG: you have to stay here and help me

EB: that's all i got, dave! my next piano lesson starts in five minutes,  
so i really gotta go.

TG: some bro you are

TG: leaving your best bud in familial exile while you run off to play  
chopsticks to a herd of giggling high school students

TG: dont bother missing me when im gone after roses dead cats spirit comes  
to get its revenge

TG: i hope you tickle those ivories into a somber as fuck melody in my  
memory

TG: that shit better be chock full of regret

TG: fuck you man

TG: just

TG: fuck

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There's a Petco another hour and a half down the bus line, but it's snowing and Dave doesn't have that kind of time. Well, he does. But his iPhone is only at 37% battery and he's not patient enough to go that long without entertainment. Fortunately, there's a small hole-in-the-wall ten minutes from his apartment

that boasts custom aquariums and reptile vivariums, and one of the yelp reviews said they sell live pets.

It looks even shittier in person than it did in the picture. Multiple neon signs have been added since the pixelated, overexposed image was captured somewhere in the early 90s. Combined, they shine so bright they almost distract from the puke green awning, torn from years of weather, with faded navy font that looks like it's trying to be Comic Sans but isn't quite. The visual assault is such that Dave nearly misses the grime on the windows and how there seems to be something alive inside the trash can, although he's not quite brave enough to check.

Any animal bought from this place is guaranteed to have three kinds of rabies and possibly congestive heart failure, in addition to being intellectually dishonest and a kleptomaniac. It sounds perfect for Rose, so Dave spits a wad of tasteless gum into the cigarette disposal (he isn't going near that trash can) and steps inside.

The bell on the door jingles merrily, but upon passing the threshold there's no one in sight: not customers, not pimply teenage employees, not even a grizzled old man to regale him with stories of putting live mice in freezers.

Alrighty then.

Along the entire front wall, not noticeable from the outside, is what must be a six foot long, gargantuan tank full of... sand and wood? Dave looks closer, blinking when he sees some small things skittering through the thick foliage. "They're not for sale," a rough voice says behind him.

He's startled, but not enough to make a fool out of himself. Dave doesn't turn around, but scans the area in his peripheral vision in search of clues. "Dude," he says. "There's a sign right there." He points down at the far corner of the tank,

where 'Hermit Crabs \$5 per ea.' is written in sharpie on an offwhite piece of cardstock. It's placed away from the reach of the fluorescent tank lighting, almost like someone doesn't want it to be noticed.

A dark hand reaches into his line of sight and unceremoniously rips the sign off the tank. "That was a prank," the other person says, "and you can feel free to ignore it."

"Okay," Dave says, because sure, and turns toward the speaker. The voice made him expect someone at least moderately intimidating, but the fluffy hair, round cheeks, and full lips are suspiciously cherubic, despite the rather genuine scowl. Also, this dude is like five feet tall, give or take a few inches. "Do you work here?" he asks, dubious about whether or not this is customer service or an attempt at stealing his lunch money.

The guy rolls his eyes, which makes Dave think the answer is 'no,' and he's about to be held at gunpoint in a pet store, and then he grabs the front of his grey turtleneck sweater and tugs the wrinkles straight to reveal a worn laminated tag that reads 'Hello, my name is KARKAT.' The first thing Dave notices is that his nails are painted black, although heavily chipped. The second thing he notices is that at the bottom of the nametag it looks like there used to be the phrase 'How may I assist you?' but it somehow got cut in half and frayed out of existence.

Mystery for the ages.

He drops the sweater and reaches up to brush his overgrown bangs out of his eyes, then folds his arms over his chest. It turns him into a puffball of rumpled wool and flyaway hair, which Dave fails to find either professional or impressive. Mostly, he looks like a puffed up cat. Speaking of. "Do you have any kittens?"

If Karkat's face looked offended before, now it looks straight up murderous. "If you want a kitten, I invite you to look into one of the mills of inbred, abused, unloved, soon-to-be-abandoned backyard bred animals. Might I suggest Craigslist, or some cushy chain pet shop balanced on the rusty, beloved see-saw of quality photography and appalling ethics? There's at least three of them downtown. If you want to pay five hundred dollars for an animal you'll only care about until it stops being small and inoffensive, be my guest, but I'm afraid I can't fff— I can't help you."

Dave blinks very, very slowly. "Do you have any... cats?"

Hunching his shoulders up around his ears, Karkat jabs a thumb at the wall behind him. "Cat kennels are through that door."

"Thanks."

There are, in fact, no kittens. However, the eight kennels filling in one side of the room give him enough to choose from—the moment he catches the attention of the room's inhabitants there's a chorus of noise as all the cats come to the doors of their steel prisons to bat fluffy paws through the bars in a sordid appeal for pets. Dave obliges the one nearest to him, threading his fingers through a gap and allowing the animal to smash its head into them, purring enticingly. "Nice," he comments, wiggling his hand as best he can to facilitate a more effective petting motion. This one is a skinny tabby, and the note on the front of its—his—cage says he's two years old and calls him Princeton. What the fuck. Dave snorts, and moves to inspect the next prisoner.

In total, there's actually nine cats. Two green-eyed grey longhairs inhabit one of the lower cages, and remain curled around each other, staring dispassionately at Dave from the back of the kennel once they realize that he hasn't come

equipped with a meal. “Fuck y’all too,” Dave comments, leaving both ‘Lacey’ and ‘Casey’ to their own shitty devices.

His favourite is a ten year old abyssinian boy going by the name of Sir Charles, and although Dave wonders who the fuck is naming these cats, he spends about ten minutes trying to cram his whole hand through the bars to stroke the sleek honey-coloured fur, while he lays down a few sick lyrics about how awesome and skinny this cat is. Charles fails to appreciate the genius that went into rhyming ‘sybian’ with ‘abyssinian,’ but he accepts the physical affection readily enough. Much as Dave wants him, though, he doesn’t think giving Rose a pet that might die anywhere within the next five years is the best idea.

He ends up two cages to the left, shoulder pressed against the wall, studying a creamy siamese point. She has a shaggy medium-length coat, faint textured stripes, and piercing blue eyes, with which she regards him coolly before padding over to give his extended fingers an inquisitive sniff. Her body is long and lanky and almost regal—a thought which lasts all of thirty seconds until Dave’s eyes shift to her infocard and he discovers her name is Dumpling. A short, surprised laugh bursts from his chest; Dumpling’s ears flick backward in disapproval. She’s perfect. At a solid four years she’s old enough to know how to use a litter box and hopefully a scratching post, but isn’t quite aged enough that he has to worry about being strongarmed into frequent vet-related errands.

The adoption fee reads \$65, which is a little steep, but manageable. Before he can do anything about it, the door to the kennel room bursts open and Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony Performed Entirely By Cats nearly deafens him. “What the—” you almost miss how his teeth settle for a moment on his bottom lip before relaxing “—are you doing in here?” Karkat asks.



"Just looking," Dave says, pulling his hands away from the cages and shoving it in his pockets as if he was doing something wrong, although he's pretty damn sure petting cats in a pet shop is not actually illegal.

"I've heard people use their eyes to do that," is the surly reply, because of course this jackass would.

"Gonna call the cops?" he asks, rolling his eyes behind the safety of his shades.

Karkat snorts. "Don't tempt me." He wraps his whole fist around a cable laying against the room's back wall and gives it an unnecessarily forceful yank. As it turns out, the wall is actually half window, offering a grease-stained view into the remainder of the store. The thick brown curtain rolls up to the ceiling, letting more light into the small room. Karkat doesn't say anything, but the message of 'I can see you and will rain unholy hellfire down on anything that displeases me about your conduct' is clear.

Dave fails to provide any sort of meaningful response. As Karkat goes to exit the room without another word, Dave stops him. "Hey, wait. I want to buy a cat."

Stopped in his tracks, Karkat's spine goes stiff. Again, Dave imagines some kind of small, furry creature going puffy in a misinformed attempt to look threatening. "We don't sell cats," Karkat says, voice gravelly.

"Uh, what?"

He turns around, jaw clearly set. "I said: We don't sell cats, you—" He clamps his mouth shut.

"What are these here for, then."

Karkat's eyes flick to the kennels, then back to Dave. "They're up for adoption."

Jesus fucking Christ. Dave rolls his eyes again, and doesn't care if the rest of his body language gives the gesture away, even if his eyes are obscured. "Fine. How do I adopt a cat."

Although he looks very much like he'd rather rip his own eyes out and smash them on the floor right in front of Dave, no more than ten seconds tick by before he mumbles, begrudgingly, "Right this way." He turns on his heel and doesn't spare Dave so much as a disdainful huff before thundering out of the room and over to the counter.

Dave follows at a much more resigned pace, hands still stuffed in his pockets. The cat chorus expresses disapproval at being ignored, but he closes the door behind him and wanders out before they can make him feel bad about it. Karkat's rummaging around in some file cabinet, so Dave takes the opportunity to glance around the rest of the building. Along the wall beside the cat room there's a small rack of tanks, about three high and six across. The outsides look scratched and old, but the inside walls are bright and clean of algae, the water clear, and the fish healthy. Dave makes a surprised sound under his breath, and walks past the fish to where there's another rank of tanks, these ones containing reptiles. The two structures are separated by a glass-faced fridge advertising frozen rodents in varying sizes and everything from bloodworms to brine shrimp.

Past the reptiles are bins full of live crickets, framed by cups of assorted worm species. He gets to what must be a door to the back room and turns right, past the aisle of fish and reptile accessories sitting opposite the two racks. There's further aisles of supplies, with nothing more interesting than various bird cages lining the back wall. From the lack of inane screeching, Dave surmises there's not actually any birds here.

The store quickly turns boring, made up of nothing but shelf after shelf of aquariums and vivariums. While he's sure they're all very interesting and unique, Dave doesn't actually give a fuck. He completes his lap around the building, with the only remaining thing of interest being a large ferret cage he hadn't noticed before tucked beside the register. Fifteen seconds into a staredown with one of the slinky weasel-wannabes, a voice cuts through the silence like a rusty axe.

"Do you want the cat or not."

Glancing up over the top of his shades, Dave says, "Yes, I want the cat. How many litres of blood do you need?"

"You can start with this," Karkat says, and slides a thick stack of paper across the counter.

Dave stares at it. "The fuck is this?"

"An adoption form."

"I can read," he says, inspecting the top page. "What's the rest of it?"

For the smallest instant, Karkat almost looks gleeful. Dave swears that he must have hallucinated it, because he's pretty sure this guy doesn't actually feel anything other than a serious Napoleon complex. Still, he senses a badly muffled note of triumph in Karkat's voice when waves his hand at the whole stack of paper. "That's the adoption form. Fill it out and return it at your convenience. We only hold animals after a form has been submitted, so the longer you wait—"

"You've got to be shitting me."

"The management of Tank Time does not take chances on the safety of our animals, sir," Karkat says, and while it's the most professional thing he's said all day, it's also the most smug.

"This is at least twenty pages," Dave says. "I've had final exams shorter than this."

Karkat leans his elbows on the counter. "Your underachieving academic performance isn't really any of my business. The adoption form consists of twelve pages of questions that are all highly successful in matching up pets with qualified caretakers. You have as much time as you need to complete each and every section." Beat. "Unless you're no longer interested."

Dave snatches the adoption form off the counter, wrinkling all twelve pages in his overtight grip. "Thanks for your help." The snow that hits his cheeks when he storms out the door melts on contact, leaving his face wet. By the time the bus comes to take him home, the many sheets of the adoption form are wrinkled and wilting in his hand.