

anything you say can and will be held against you

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by [Felix_J](#)

Summary

It's funny to see how Red tries to process the little things and guess if they belong to Ash, or Ash's persona that doesn't differ from him as much as he thinks, or maybe much more so, or just things Ash makes up. Ash likes to add a lot to the last pile. Poke around, like a little challenge, reminder he's not all that easy. Currently, with the fucking *fish*.

roses and smoke week, day 6: **aquarium** | fantasy

Notes

swagdoons as shuake bc i can't have them have an aquarium date without at least one of them being a mass murderer. except also i would not write shuake like this. these guys are just silly

title Technically from just one yesterday by fall out boy

Red's strange. Incredibly, mind-glowingly strange, and he *knows* strange and this isn't it. Red has his cheek pressed to the glass so his sunglasses slide to the side a bit, and what he's looking at, not

very discreetly, isn't the fish.

"Hey." He points out softly. "Do you see that, that's absolutely a Clown."

Ash leans in and looks at him instead, and pretends he's actually checking the tablet behind Red's shoulder. It says clownfish. He's staring at Red. A little bit harder than for Red to do the same thing, since he doesn't have anything to cover his face with, but he makes it work.

"Huh." He gives Red a grin, and shuts any thoughts down instead of keeping to second-guess himself, which isn't the smartest thing to do.

Red taps on the glass, next to the sign *Don't tap on the glass*. The closest clownfish turns away from him as swiftly as it can.

Ash would say that Clown wears too much black to be one of them, it's just that one, he doesn't *officially* know Clown enough to be saying that, just as a friend of a... of Red's, and two, this might just be a slip of the tongue, and Clown wears a ton of orange right inside the *Metaverse*. He can't imagine that.

Red turns back at him and makes a small wave with his hands. "You know, because Clown, and... this is clownfish?" He mutters, blinking, and Ash shakes his head, because he *thinks* what's actually happening is being around Red for too long is making him stupid. Not even *act* stupid.

"Yeah, the... similarities are definitely there."

They wander around the hallways, and Ash will admit he's been here a couple times, not for the fish, just checking the place out, not that it's not kind of pretty, the clean kind. "You know, I'd like an aquarium at home." He mumbles, pressing a finger next to Red's on the glass, and *really*, it only says not to *tap*, right?

"Oh?" Red raises his head. Ash grins, and says the first thing that comes to his brain.

"Yeah, just for the corals. I like the corals. The fish's..." He shakes his head. "Taking care of a pet takes *time*, you know, doesn't work well with my job."

It's funny to see how Red tries to process the little things and guess if they belong to Ash, or Ash's persona that doesn't differ from him as much as he thinks, or maybe much more so, or just things Ash makes up. Ash likes to add a lot to the last pile. Poke around, like a little challenge, reminder he's not all that easy. Currently, with the fucking *fish*.

Red nods in understanding. "Guess I'll know what to get you for Christmas." His voice's flat, that kind that makes it hard to guess if he's just joking or joking about joking.

"I don't celebrate." Ash says cheerfully, pats him on the shoulder and walks over to the next exhibit, probably is, with way too many new plates.

"Oh." Red says behind his back. "Okay."

Ash gets here with the expectation of them having another snark-off, and it isn't more than is. Red's too relaxed, and that might be part of the natural charm, and Ash doesn't have it in him to ever hope he's not questioning it inside *what Ash is*, just, wait.

Red taps him on the back like one of his aquarium glass panes. Ash hums and doesn't really turn, thrown off his train of thought. "Wha-?"

Red has to take the double step to him, because whatever he wants to do seems to have something with his face — turns him, then, and slides the shades up his nose. Ash chokes, just a little. Then another step, and Red's already pulling him through one of those nice circular arcs, sideways. Ash turns his head back and only catches a piece of clothing that blurs in with the dark blue water.

"...the hell... was that?" Ash breathes out and puts up a finger to his nose bridge.

"Probably what you'd call quick thinking." Red has a hand against the glass, leaning onto it, and he only realises and lets it go a second later. There's still a print left. "There's a... There was a guy there, a journalist. You wouldn't know him. I'd bet he knows *you*, though, and I didn't wanna ruin the..." He shakes his head.

"And *you* know him, of course." The glasses feel weird. He can observe him from inside his own willingly given away shield, though, that's funny. It's what he does. Red looks a little genuinely thrown off, and that makes something bubble up in his chest, makes him want to giggle, makes *so many things* like the seams of his mask, his persona, show. He jams the sunglasses against his face full-force and swallows the sound down. He's... he's fine.

"I know a lot of people." Red nods, says it in the *voice* of his, that... It's the problem. There is a problem. They're *supposed* to be careful around each other, and the most Ash's *supposed* to find in him is some... something new, not-boring, in this banter, because Red's interesting, and wants to dig under his skin, and he's the fucking leader of the only other people with access to the Metaverse and he *must* suspect something, and then he just. *Doesn't* look like it.

The air's stuck in his throat, so he coughs the laugh out, and there's a hand to his face muffling it. The hand's Red's.

Ash stares back. There is no mental line of *he has shades covering his face like his mask, so it's okay, he won't even see*, and all for Red's words of rivalry he just makes him feel careless, not even just stupid.

Red shushes him, post factum.

"Th... thanks." He wants to check that all the buttons are right on his button-up shirt, wants to catch his breath. Wants to be *angry*, a little bit, but that's what it always boils down to, he doesn't get that option. "That wasn't... that wasn't necessary."

"But you said it anyway. It's fine, you can imagine I wouldn't want to stuck with someone tryin' to interview you, either."

"I *could* just say no." Ash's fingers twitch. He wants the shades off his face, and Red didn't just pull them off taking the hand away as he easily could've, but they're... He likes masks.

"But you wouldn't." Red says easily.

Ash settles for scratching the tablet on the aquarium glass.

He *wants* to say that it doesn't matter, what does it matter, but Red'll latch onto it, then. *What's so bad about that?* Doesn't he like the debates, the arguments, except *these* kinds of arguments are just dangerous, and he ends in a loop. Always the damn loop, where Red is the thing dictionaries would call a *friend* of his, and then de facto he is an enemy, on that other side of perception the Metaverse is, and everyone is an enemy, really.

Ash wonders, if Red truly knew, if he had the proof, if, *if*, he was after all *friends* with Ash only to figure him out back, if he'd kill him.

Ash has always wanted to see how Red fights, so it wouldn't be all that bad.

He shakes his head. Red keeps making him have... he's said it too many times today. Red's way too smart for how stupid he makes him feel.

"So then. Thanks for being my knight in shining armor, Reddoons." He repeats, and hopefully the flatness in his voice matches Red's. He holds himself back from tapping on the glass one moment before disaster, just points then. "Is this the kinda horse you have, then?"

Red's already deep in his studies of the batch of little sea horses behind the glass, and he looks like he doesn't care for Ash's completely internal panic. Which should be good.

Red turns his head in a few seconds, hums. Ash leans down slightly, puts the glasses back on him with two fingers and slides them up his nose.

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