

for you, i'd do anything

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by [sadonmain](#)

Summary

the syndicate has grown uneasy with tubbo's rising power. good thing ranboo and tubbo have a weakness - michael.

or, technoblade plays a villain in order to do what he thinks is right, niki and philza tag along.

a protective parent au

Notes

first of all, the BIGGEST thanks to kisukito of the bootwt commune for putting this idea into my head. without you, this wouldn't have been possible.

warning for a flashback to wilbur's death in manberg, mention of blood.

(hey, if you've come back to this because i made edits, i just found some weird formatting errors. nothing's changed!)

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

technoblade's boots clicked against the stone floors of the corridor. the cold had seeped in through the walls, causing him to draw his cloak tighter around him. he had to stay vigilant. he reached the entryway into the syndicate room. sighing, he stretched his arms upwards. *this might be a difficult meeting*. not wanting to waste anymore time, he walked towards the ender pearl stasis chambers. he glanced at the engraved chairs. *harpocrates, you're welcome anytime*. he knew it was futile. harpocrates would show up when they wanted. this wasn't the best meeting to induct someone, either. walking past the enigma's chair, he arrived at zephyrus. "here goes nothing," techno muttered to himself. there was no telling what the reception would be to his idea. he only hoped that the other members would see eye-to-eye. techno slammed the trapdoor down, pausing a brief moment before walking to the next chamber. the wooden chair was engraved with *nemesis*. niki must have decided on the codename before techno arrived. *fitting*, he thought. chuckling to himself, he slammed the trapdoor shut on the chamber. *any moment now*.

it only took a few seconds of techno adjusting his cloak before philza and niki arrived. they surveyed the room, looking for something. *someone*, techno thought. *things are about to get uncomfortable*. clearing his throat, techno took the leap. "you're probably wondering why i've called you both here. ranboo isn't here because he's checking on his," techno felt a bitter taste rise in his mouth. he tried to swallow it before continuing. "he's checking on his *mansion* with tubbo." the other members glanced at each other. they knew of techno's distaste for tubbo and his new home. they decided to stay quiet. philza exchanged a glance with niki before looking at techno. "i assume that isn't the only reason why he's not here, correct?"

techno played with the silk lining on his cloak. "you'd be right. there's something more going on." he cleared his throat once more. *now or never*. "tubbo's been awful silent recently. i don't trust it." philza let out a small chuckle before techno gave him a seething look. he continued, "i feel he has something up his sleeve. tubbo's been oddly quiet about tommy's death. he hasn't grieved outwardly in any meaningful way like everyone else. tubbo's always been a busybody, that i know. when l'manberg fell, when manberg fell... he always had something to keep himself busy. what is he keeping himself busy with now?"

"my thought is the nukes. he *must* be doing something with the nukes, i just don't trust it. tubbo showed them to me the other day as a sort of peace offering, but that could just be more scheming. he could be throwing me off his trail-

philza cleared his throat. techno stopped, whipping his head around to face the two. as he soliloquized, he had been pacing around the syndicate meeting room, almost unaware of his captive and uncomfortable audience. "techno," philza offered, "i get where you're coming from. truly. but isn't this reaction a bit extreme?"

niki nodded in agreement. “techno, i think your prior interactions with tubbo might be clouding your judgement. i think he’s just trying to make a life, be with his family.” philza shared a smile with niki. if anyone could keep techno in check, it was the two of them.

techno sighed. exasperated, he shouted, “don’t you get it? this is a *singular person* with the power of an entire country!” he slammed his hand down on the table. “he has *nukes*, and you’re trying to tell me he just wants to spend time with his family? are you serious? can you even *hear yourselves?*”

niki and philza looked down at the table. a dreadful moment of silence passed before niki broke it. “philza, he might be right. the implications... it’s a scary thought. we have to find some way of keeping him in check. we don’t necessarily have to act on it now -”

“no. we have to act now. who knows what else he might do if we wait?” techno asked. “how else can we ensure that we don’t have another manberg? we can’t allow tubbo to become president of a nation again.”

philza stood up. he paced around the room, deep in thought. “what do you suggest we do?”

techno breathed a sigh of relief. *finally*, he thought. *now they understand the urgency*. he coughed before answering, “honestly, i don’t know. all i know is that we can’t involve ranboo. he’s too close to the situation. he’s blind to the power his husband has, and that’s dangerous. he doesn’t know what tubbo could do or be capable of doing. or,” he stopped, the dread forming a pit in his stomach. “he could be complicit.”

the room fell silent once more, the awkwardness hanging in the air as they looked at ranboo’s empty chair. lethe might be the downfall of everyone, not just the syndicate. softly, niki began to speak. “there’s one way that we could get to tubbo.”

philza and techno immediately looked up from the table. a vicious grin spread across techno’s face. “do tell.”

niki looked uneasy. *i’m sorry, ranboo. it’s for your own good*. “who would tubbo move mountains for? who would tubbo give up everything for?” she pulled on her fingers to mask her anxiety. “do you know who michael is?”

immediately, niki's pace of speech picked up. flustered, she said, "we would make sure he's safe, of course! we wouldn't put his life on the line -" she locked eyes with techno, who had a bloodthirsty look on his face. he was craving violence. *or the voices are*, she thought. she shook her head. "we wouldn't put his life on the line. we could create a safe room, hidden somewhere. we could do it here, in the syndicate."

philza countered. "ranboo is in the syndicate, you know. we need a room somewhere else. somewhere obscure." he paused, musing, "but that's a good idea. we could use michael as collateral, force tubbo to tell us his plans with the nukes."

"he has to be planning *something*," techno muttered. the voices were getting riled up, demanding blood. they demanded violence, something, anything to sate their appetite. he shook his head. looking around the room at the members. he flashed a grin. "so, it's settled?"

the atmosphere in the room had shifted without his realizing. niki and philza were staring at the carvings on the table.

there was no response.

you'd think it would be hot on the nether roof. but when niki locked eyes with tubbo, she felt chills run down her spine. he was a few steps away from the tunnel to the portal when niki swallowed her fear and shouted, "tubbo! over here!" her smile was disingenuous, barely reaching her eyes. she hoped tubbo wouldn't notice. he waved back at her, smiling wide. *i'm so sorry*, she thought as she dragged her feet towards him.

"tubbo, it's been so long! how are you, how's snowchester?" niki hoped that the dim lighting beside the tunnel would hide the perspiration on her brow. her stomach was in knots, barely allowing her to form coherent thoughts. everything sounded like it was underwater. she attempted to focus on her breathing, but some unintelligible sounds drew her back to reality. "sorry?"

"i was telling you that snowchester is great!" tubbo repeated, the smile standing firm on his face. "foolish is working on the mansion, have you seen it recently? it's absolutely gorgeous..."

niki tried to concentrate on tubbo's words, but all she could picture was tubbo wailing on the ground, his face contorted in pain as he begged for michael back. she shook her head, barely able to

hear what tubbo was saying. they were underwater, and the rushing water was *so loud*, why wouldn't it stop rushing? she wanted it to stop, *please stop* - "how are you doing now that tommy's dead?" she blurted out.

tubbo's face fell flat, devoid of any emotion. he seemed distant as he asked, "what do you mean?" his voice sounded detached from his body.

realizing her mistake, niki panicked. her words flew out of her mouth before she could comprehend what she was saying. "i mean, i know it's hard losing someone you love and all. i just wanted to make sure that you're okay! i didn't mean to phrase it that way, i just -"

"i have ranboo. i have michael."

not for long, niki thought. clearing her throat, she tried to mask the real purpose of her comment. "well, tubbo," she continued brightly, "if those nukes end up being a safety hazard, we'll take them away!" if her stomach was twisted up before, it was one thousand times worse now.

tubbo said nothing.

shifting uncomfortably, niki tried again. *i'm just making this worse, but it's too late to back down now.*

"you were always such a busybody, tubbo. what have you been doing now? any secret projects i should know about?" she attempted to smile once more, hoping the shadows would disguise the pain in her eyes.

tubbo looked at the ground. almost wordlessly, he muttered, "i'm staying busy." he turned away from her, heading towards the portal. "goodbye, niki."

niki watched as tubbo went through the tunnel. feigning a smile once more, she shouted after him. "goodbye, tubbo! nice chatting with you!"

goddamnit, she thought to herself. how could she have been so stupid? for all she knew, tubbo was on his way to ranboo to share the weird encounter. their plot would be ruined, and she would never be trusted by ranboo or tubbo again. *if the plan works, they wouldn't trust me anyway*, she reminded herself. either way, she was severing ties with them for good. she just hoped it wouldn't

end in bloodshed.

convinced that tubbo would be back in the overworld - *and hopefully long gone* - niki crept into the tunnel. she couldn't help replaying the conversation in her head as her footsteps echoed off the walls. she felt like she was underwater again. the nether was hot, *too hot*, and the lava was blinding. the conversation was playing over and over - *why wouldn't it stop?* all she wanted was peace and quiet. she didn't want to antagonize tubbo. she didn't want to take his family away from him. *i don't have a choice*, she thought as she went through the portal. *i'm so sorry, tubbo*. the portal enveloped her in a violet embrace as she closed her eyes. *i'm so sorry*.

the snow stung ranboo's cheeks as he walked home. *only a few more blocks*, he thought, *and i'll be in front of a warm fire*. his bones ached from a long day of mining. tubbo had been gracious enough to stay home with michael as ranboo mined. originally, ranboo had planned to stop at his house to drop off his valuables before spending the night with tubbo and michael. but ranboo couldn't get a conversation out of his head.

"i ran into niki the other day," tubbo shared nonchalantly as they cooked dinner.

ranboo paused, his knife poised above the last carrot. "pardon?"

"i know, it's weird. i haven't talked to her in ages! it was a little odd, though."

ranboo swallowed, trying to keep his anxiety from rising. tubbo can't know about the syndicate, he thought. "weird in what way?"

tubbo placed a bowl of soup in front of michael, who promptly tried to flip it over. tubbo caught it gracefully, deciding to hold it instead. bringing a spoonful to michael's mouth, he said, "well, she made some odd jokes about the nukes. then, to top things off, she asked how i was doing."

ranboo put the last chopped carrot into the pot. wiping his hands on his apron, he turned to face tubbo. "how is asking how you're doing weird? the nukes question is a little off, though, i'll admit."

making faces at michael, tubbo sighed. "well, it's weird because of the context."

ranboo chuckled. "well, i'm not going to know the context if you don't share it with me." he stopped laughing once tubbo turned around to face him, his expression dark.

"she asked about... it."

ranboo wiped his hands on his apron once again. "oh."

walking towards tubbo, he placed his hand on his shoulder. "i'm sure she was asking because she cares about you, tubbo. niki isn't the kind of person to have an ulterior motive like that. besides, she's been struggling a lot recently."

tubbo looked up at ranboo, a gracious smile on his face. he seemed relieved. "you're right, i guess. maybe it was the setting."

he turned to michael, who was trying to stick the spoon up his nose. "the nether is a spooky, scary place, isn't it?" he made cartoon ghost noises as he stole the spoon away.

ranboo had said what he did to tubbo to reassure him, but in all honesty, he was worried. niki was in the syndicate with him. he knew techno's apprehension towards the nukes at snowchester, but they couldn't have held a meeting without him. *is that even allowed?* ranboo wondered. he opened the door to his house, going down to the vault. try as he might, he couldn't shake the feeling that something was off. *why would niki ask tubbo those things? what are they planning?*

he placed the diamonds in his vault, closing the hidden door behind him. something was off. he could feel it in the air, a sense of urgency. the tingling sensation on the back of his neck furthered his suspicions. tubbo would have to wait. he pulled his boots on, careful to not let the residual snow touch his bare hands. wrapping his cloak tightly around him, he made his way to the syndicate entrance.

he stared at the lava pool that hid the entrance long enough that it blinded him. blinking rapidly, he wiped his hands on his cloak. *now or never*, he thought as he leapt into the lava, landing in the cold waters below. he had to stay hidden. *this is further proof that i can't trust anyone*, he mused. *what a lonely way to live.*

he pulled himself out of the water, trying to stay silent. it dripped from the bottom of his cloak, echoing off the walls of the stone corridor. he could hear murmurs coming from the meeting room. he weighed his options. the boat would be faster, but louder. however, his footsteps could echo off

the walls as well. he glanced at his boots. enchanted netherite didn't necessarily come with a stealth boost. *walking it is*, he thought as he mustered up his courage.

feeling a chill blow through the corridor, he wrapped his cloak tighter around himself. he made an effort to conceal his footsteps as much as possible, but as he got closer to the meeting room, the voices went from a dull murmur to a shouting match. ranboo stopped, placing his back against the wall. his breath quickened as he tried to slow his heart rate down.

“you guys are ridiculous, whatever show tubbo put on for niki was just that, a show!” techno slammed his fist on the table. “we have to do this, for the good of everyone here! those nukes wouldn't just decimate wherever they land, the fallout would impact the world. don't you get it?”

niki scoffed as she got up out of her chair. she stormed towards techno, grabbing his cloak. “why don't *you* get it? tubbo is grieving, he's in *pain!* what harm could he do right now? he's a child! we might end up inadvertently causing him more trauma by doing this. do you really want that on your shoulders? ” she shoved techno, making him lose his balance. “especially after you've killed him once before.”

philza shifted in his chair uncomfortably. “i don't have anything against the kid, but you have to acknowledge the amount of power he has right now. i thought we already discussed this?”

niki pointed at philza. “hear that techno? a *child!* tubbo is young, what harm could he do?”

techno laughed. “are you kidding? *tommy* was a child, and look at the damage he caused! besides, tubbo's been a president before. that's a government, which goes squarely against the beliefs of an anarchist organization, in case you forgot.”

“niki, i understand your apprehension,” philza said, “but you have to look at this situation as a whole. we can't trust tubbo, sure, but tubbo can't even trust his husband. hell, ranboo can't even trust himself. how will ranboo keep michael safe if he isn't even fully aware and conscious of his every move? if you're worried about the trauma *we* might cause, think about what trauma the two of them could inflict on their kid.”

ranboo had heard enough. his hands were balled into fists, gripped into white knuckles on his cloak. the suspicions he held before entering the corridor had quickly been accompanied by rage. his breath was heavy, almost in preparation for something - something big. ranboo felt his mind going a mile a minute. *what do they mean? why did they mention michael? what are they trying to do?*

ranboo felt himself slide onto the floor, his head in his hands. his eyes began to glaze over. he felt pinpricks of pain along his waterline. *what am i going to do? how do i get out of here without them*

noticing? his panicked thoughts about escape were quickly overtaken once again by rage.

why are they trying to come after my family? my loved ones, my home? how could they do this to me? i trusted them. the rage that was once confined to his stomach had risen into his chest. its warmth started to overtake the rest of his body, his eyes fully hazy. his vision was blurry; he couldn't see anything clearly. trying to focus his eyes on something, anything, he grabbed the wall once more. then his vision went dark.

techno, niki, and philza put their argument on hold for a moment when they heard a faint *vwoop* from the corridor. techno turned to philza, asking with a raised eyebrow, "didn't you make this place mob-proof?"

philza threw a hand behind his head apologetically. "honestly, i probably missed a spot. i could've knocked a torch over the other day. i wouldn't worry about it too much, honestly."

techno huffed as he straightened out his cloak. "yeah, fine."

niki couldn't let go of it that easily. something was wrong. *it was probably ranboo*, she thought. she brushed it off. *ranboo has every right to defend who and what he loves. no one told him what was happening. if he found out on his own, there's nothing we can do about it.* she cleared her throat. "so, are we all in agreement? we're taking michael?"

philza and techno nodded. niki glanced at the empty chairs. *harpocrates, it sure would be nice if you would start showing up. i need backup.*

ranboo felt something pulling on his tail. it flicked angrily as he tried to regain consciousness. throwing a lazy hand in the general direction of the offender, he heard a small grunt. more specifically, a piglin grunt. using his other hand to rub his eyes, he squinted as he attempted to adjust to the light. holding his hand slightly above his eyes to shield them, he could make out a hazy silhouette. he felt a foot-shaped jab on his side.

"where'd you come from?" the voice asked.

ranboo jolted upwards, adrenaline coursing through his veins. when he took stock of his surroundings, he found himself in tubbo's snowchester cabin. drowsily, ranboo turned to face the voice. "tubbo?" ranboo slurred.

he looked around once again to find whatever menace was toying with his tail. he saw michael trying to grab it, only for his tail to flick away once more. he took a moment to appreciate michael's dopey grin and sweater paws before his brain started to work once again. he quickly got to his feet, eyes wide.

tubbo gave ranboo a once-over before asking, "is everything okay? how did you get here?"

ranboo was finally awake, his brain working overtime. "tubbo, listen to me." he began hyperventilating.

"they're going to take michael - the syndicate, they're going to take michael and take you and -" ranboo gasped for air. why did he feel like he was drowning? "they're going to take michael and make you give up your nukes, and they think you can't trust me and -" ranboo felt tears starting to prick his cheeks once more. "i don't know what to do, tubbo, i don't know what to do!" ranboo's hands were tangled in his hair, yanking on his horns, his breath and heart rate in a freakishly fast tandem. he couldn't focus; his mind was racing.

before he could panic further, tubbo took ranboo's head in his hands and brought it down to his own, slamming their foreheads together. ranboo was in a semi-crouched stance, his forehead throbbing from the sudden contact. "listen to me," tubbo said firmly. "we'll figure this out. we'll be alright. just take a deep breath."

ranboo closed his eyes, taking a moment to breathe before he noticed michael starting to snuffle. tubbo released ranboo's head, allowing him to pick up michael. "hey, buddy, it's alright. we're fine," ranboo cooed. tubbo gave michael a pat on the head as ranboo adjusted his hold. "let's get you to bed, yeah?" michael grunted in agreement as ranboo clutched him tighter. *who would want to take this away from us? why?*

ranboo climbed upstairs, tubbo close behind. as they tucked michael into bed, ranboo softly hummed *everybody loves somebody*. it always seemed to calm michael down, and it seemed to be working for himself as well. he cupped michael's cheek in his palm, hiding his fears behind a smile. michael didn't seem to notice, leaning into the embrace.

"goodnight, lil' piggie. sleep well!" tubbo called.

ranboo and tubbo closed the trapdoor behind them, careful to make sure they didn't make any extra noise. when they got downstairs, the tension rose once again. tubbo cleared his throat. "ranboo, we've delayed it long enough. sit down. tell me what you know, slowly this time."

taking a deep breath, ranboo started to explain. “i don’t know where they’re going to take michael. i don’t know when either. it seemed like they were finishing up final details when i snuck in. the plans seemed finalized, all i know is that they’re going to take him. tubbo,” ranboo’s eyes began to well with tears as he tried to continue. “listen to me.” he said firmly. “we can’t let them take michael. i love him too much, i love *here* too much, i love *home* too much, i -”

tubbo placed a delicate hand on ranboo’s thigh. “we’ve got this. we’ll protect michael and we’ll protect our home. but we can’t do that if we don’t come up with a plan.”

ranboo sighed. “we need to hide him somewhere. a place that’s secluded, somewhere that the others won’t find him.”

“what about your vault?” tubbo offered.

ranboo pulled away from tubbo’s touch. “how do you know about the vault?” he snapped.

“let me just say, you’re not the best at hiding things. your secret-keeping skills are awful. remember how you weren’t supposed to tell me about the syndicate? what’s the first thing you did once you saw me?”

the tension in the room thickened. the air felt heavy as ranboo murmured, “there are plenty of things you don’t know. plenty of secrets that you don’t know about.”

tubbo’s eyes widened. “so? do you think i care about that right now? fine, be mysterious, plan your weird vendettas, that’s fine by me. but right now, we’re focused on michael. keeping *him* safe, remember?”

ranboo sighed, spreading out on the floor. his head made a soft *thunk* on the oak beneath him. staring at the ceiling, he countered, “what about *your* secret room? y’know, the one you’re using to investigate tommy’s -”

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

ranboo sat up. “what do you mean? oh, you’re allowed to know about *my* secret room and i can’t

know about yours?”

the eyes that normally locked onto tubbo’s, full of love and adoration, were full of hostility. try as he might, tubbo couldn’t move. he was frozen in place by ranboo’s stare. softly, tubbo squeaked, “ranboo, please calm down. i know you’re worried, but this isn’t making things any easier.”

a small sound from upstairs caught their attention. ranboo took his eyes off of tubbo to look at the ceiling, hearing a small, high-pitched grumble. they looked back at each other. a silent agreement was reached. *this fight could wait. they had bigger things to worry about.*

ranboo eased the tension in his shoulders. he traced the wood grain of the floor with the pad of his finger. “tubbo,” he began, “there’s an option we didn’t talk about yet.”

tubbo looked up from the floor. “oh?”

ranboo cleared his throat. “well, do you remember when i told you about my panic room?”

“are you sure it’s safe?”

“why would they expect it? i haven’t been there in months and i got rid of the voice. it’ll be fine.”

“isn’t it a bit... i don’t know, obvious?”

ranboo scoffed. “i never told anyone where it was. only person who visited me there was dream, and that was only his voice. i think we’re fine.”

tubbo sighed, flopping on the ground. “i guess it’s time to go then.”

ranboo nodded. “guess so.”

waking michael was an awful feeling. tubbo had been told countless times by puffy and philza to never wake a sleeping child. *they'd make an exception in this case*, he thought. michael grumbled as ranboo scooped him up, bundling him tightly in extra blankets.

the night was cold. the chill sunk deep into their bones. michael took it harder than his parents, whimpering as the wind picked up. ranboo began humming once again, with michael nestling into tubbo's arms. they switched who carried michael once they entered the nether. ranboo unwrapped michael slightly. he sighed at the pleasant warmth, snuggling into ranboo's arms a little tighter. the close knit brow michael had sported relaxed immediately once they entered their new environment. reassured by michael's new expression, ranboo turned to tubbo. they still had details to iron out. the silence had been uncomfortable for most of the journey; this was a welcome distraction.

"tubbo? how are we going to cover for this?"

"what do you mean?"

"i mean, when i go into syndicate meetings, how am i going to explain that you and michael are gone?"

tubbo stretched his arms upwards. "well, i guess we could say that michael and i are having a little father-son bonding time. a little vacation, a little one-on-one time."

ranboo chuckled. "that should work, as long as i sell it right."

tubbo met ranboo's eyes. "i have no doubt. this'll be fine."

michael seemed to sigh in agreement.

the trio reached the portal to the overworld. ranboo and tubbo exchanged one last glance. "are you ready?" tubbo asked.

ranboo let out a quick laugh. "will we ever be?" his forced smile was more of a grimace.

they stepped into the portal, allowing the violet to embrace them in a last ditch effort of reassurance. they closed their eyes, allowing it to overcome them. this was it.

the journey to the panic room was uneventful. spawn was a ghost town, eerily silent. michael was beginning to wake up. he clutched the collar of ranboo's shirt tightly, his tiny fists laying flat against ranboo's chest. his heart ached. *i'll do anything to keep you safe*, he thought.

they made it inside the room, breathing a sigh of relief. tubbo and ranboo faced michael as they fussed over his sleepy state. crouching on the ground, the parents cooed over michael's oversized sweater and the sleep stuck in his eyes. they glanced at each other, offering a small smile as a peace offering. when they looked back at michael, his face was pale. he was looking beyond his parents - something in the distance.

"what's wrong, michael? are you alright?" ranboo asked, troubled. he could tell this wasn't michael's normal inquisitive look. something was awry.

slowly, ranboo and tubbo turned around. they raised their gaze, only for their eyes to meet those of the anarchists.

ranboo and tubbo slowly rose, careful to keep a light hand on michael. ranboo's mind was racing. analyzing the situation, he realized he would have to put tubbo and michael behind him. *i have to defend those i love*. the tension in the air thickened; ranboo found it difficult to breathe. *i just need to ensure they don't get between my family and me*.

before he could finish the thought, tubbo was in front of him. he shoved ranboo to the side, delicately moving michael alongside his other father. his stance was stoic, his voice firm. "get behind me. this is my battle to fight."

ranboo hesitated. *wasn't this all my fault? i can't let this* - he paused. *maybe tubbo's right. i have an important job, too. i have to keep michael safe*. he recalled all the times tubbo had vented to him about stunts techno had pulled to make things inconvenient for him. he placed a light hand on tubbo's shoulder before picking up michael and stepping to the side. he surveyed the room, trying to find a point of escape. *there's no use*, he thought. if he ran with michael, it would only take a few seconds for the anarchists to catch up. *or they might take tubbo instead*, he reasoned. it wasn't worth it. he and michael were staying put.

techno flashed a menacing grin at tubbo. "so we meet again, *government*. i suppose you know why we're here."

for someone who claims to oppose governments and opulence, he sure does a lot of grandstanding, ranboo thought. michael started to snuffle, which prompted ranboo to begin humming once more. *everything is fine.*

tubbo sighed, maintaining his rigid stance like a ram on the verge of butting heads. “i sure do. it’s not going to happen.”

techno gave an overly theatrical frown. “aw, really? you won’t cooperate with us? after everything we’ve been through?”

tubbo’s expression darkened. “you just can’t seem to get enough of me, can you? why do you feel the need to destroy everything and everyone i’ve ever held dear? what is it about making connections that scares you so much?” he glanced at philza, then back at techno. he scoffed. “is it because of tomy? did he *ruin* interpersonal relationships for you?”

“silence, *government*,” techno muttered. “you’re detracting from the point. you hold too much power as it is. those nukes you say are just for insurance? they make you the most powerful person in the world, besides the one that’s been locked in prison. are you trying to speedrun that same fate, tubbo? in the hands of a single person, those nukes are much too dangerous - even for a pushover like yourself.”

the silence was deafening. ranboo could feel the rage emanating off of tubbo. it would only be a little longer before he couldn’t keep it together anymore.

techno smirked. *assured victory, i assume*, he thought. he turned his focus towards ranboo, who had been quietly humming to michael. *i almost forgot about the kid*. techno looked over to michael, fully taking in his appearance for the first time.

michael’s sweater was much too large for him, worn over multiple layers of thermal undershirts. his ears stuck out from under his hat, twitching nervously at the sight of his angered father. his face was contorted in confusion, the way any toddler would in a situation such as this.

techno snapped his fingers. michael turned towards the sound, his thumb in his mouth. he turned his head quizzically. the noise came from someone who looked like him.

“hey kid,” techno sneered. he gave a glance to ranboo, whose hand was protectively hovering

around michael's head. "you know, these aren't your real parents."

michael's eyes widened. *how was this person speaking to him like this?* he hadn't heard this tongue since he left the nether. ranboo gripped michael tighter.

"tell me what you just said." ranboo cautioned. "tell me what you said to him."

techno laughed, taking in the *delectable* sight of two parents in fear. "what, i can't speak to the kid in his mother tongue?"

tubbo and ranboo looked furious. *how fun*, techno thought.

sure, he was a little rusty, but it seemed to be working for the kid just fine. *better than fine for the parents*, he reminded himself. he cleared his throat and continued talking to michael in piglin. "your parents have been keeping you from the nether. you remember the nether, right? the warmth, the lava... your *home*," techno finished. glancing once more at the parents, he knew the work was complete. *time to finish this*.

if tubbo and ranboo were furious before, they were utterly enraged now. michael's eyes welled with tears, his nose dripping onto his sweater. he continued to suck his thumb, wondering why everyone was so upset. *did i do something wrong?* he barely understood what the man had said, all he knew was that it made his parents angry.

techno took a step towards tubbo, who stepped forward defiantly. "you know," techno taunted, "i could always take it a step further. i could blow up snowchester."

tubbo's face paled. "you wouldn't dare," he said lowly.

techno laughed maniacally. "oh, but i *would!* you see, i can't guarantee you won't use the nukes on anyone. but i can use them against *you*. in fact, one might argue that i have no choice! if the only way i can ensure the safety of everyone is by blowing up your home, so be it. i'm trying to protect what *i* love - freedom. no one on this server can have that kind of power. no one can be all-powerful here."

"by doing that, you'd make yourself the all-powerful one," tubbo spat back. he sighed, shaking his head. it was no use. *techno's not the only one here*, he remembered. tubbo turned to niki. "you

know, i thought i could trust you.”

niki lowered her gaze. it was too painful. all she could see was the young boy who followed wilbur so blindly long ago. *when did he grow up?* “i’m sorry, tubbo. truly.” her voice was quiet, barely above a whisper.

“no. sorry doesn’t cut it now.” tubbo’s volume was deafening in comparison. “i know what you tried to do to tommy.” he stepped closer to her. “your little *plot* with jack? you thought i didn’t know? how dumb do you think i am?”

niki couldn’t bear to look up. if she had, she would’ve seen tubbo’s face contorted with pain and anger.

his words dripped with malice, the ultimatum balancing on the tip of a dagger. “i will *never* forgive you.”

niki felt tears sting her cheeks. the little boy she had toyed with was long gone. in front of her stood a man willing to fight for family and country. he would do anything to protect what he loved. a bittersweet smile spread across her face. *like someone else i once knew*, she thought.

ranboo placed a gentle hand on tubbo’s back. tubbo whipped his head around, fist poised and at the ready. he saw the fear in michael and ranboo’s eyes as he realized where his instincts had taken him. slowly, he lowered his fist. he nodded towards ranboo, thanking him silently.

“i know that you’re hurt, niki,” tubbo began, “but grief shouldn’t consume you to the point where you try to bring everyone down with you. why do you do this to me? why did you go after tommy, the l’mantree?”

niki said nothing, staring at the obsidian below her.

philza had been observing the altercation silently. he had been too absorbed in his own thoughts to hear what was going on in the obsidian cell.

wilbur ran towards philza, his face filled with disappointment. “dadza, why can’t i play with the other children? i promise, we’ll be safe! we’ll stay where it’s well-lit, and -”

“no. it’s too dangerous,” philza snapped. he turned around to face wilbur, who had tears in his eyes. “i’m sorry, son.” he said softly. he crouched down to put his hand on wilbur’s shoulder.

“you see, i just want you to stay safe, son. i care about you more than anything in this world. for you, i’d do anything.”

wilbur’s tear-filled eyes grew wide. “anything?” he asked hesitantly.

philza pulled his son into a tight embrace.

“anything.”

now, the two were no longer in their home. they were in the remnants of manberg, wilbur wearing a tattered trench coat and philza his clipped wings.

“kill me, philza.”

“you’re my son, wilbur, i can’t!” philza shouted. his son’s eyes, once filled with light, were empty. cold.

“do it.”

philza vehemently shook his head. “i care about you, more than anything in this world. i would do anything to save you. please,” he begged. “just tell me what i have to do to bring you back!” he knew it was hopeless, but there was a small voice inside that longed for the days when wilbur was full of light.

wilbur pulled out his sword, the diamond glinting in the sun falling through the rubble. “use this.” he tossed it towards philza carelessly. “i won’t need it anymore.”

his father knelt to the ground slowly, delaying the inevitable. “i’m so sorry,” he whispered. “i wish i could’ve done more.”

he pulled his son towards him in a final embrace, plunging the sword into wilbur's chest. they collapsed to the ground as the blood dripped onto his hand. wilbur's arms were wrapped tightly around his torso - until they dropped to the ground, lifeless.

philza revisited that moment every time he went to sleep. he could never escape it. a son isn't supposed to die before his father. a father isn't supposed to abandon his son. a father is supposed to do everything in his power to protect his child, to keep the relationship free from hardship and strife. *like tubbo and ranboo*, he thought. he looked towards the parents, defending their son against the world. for a moment, he could've sworn he saw himself standing there, holding wilbur.

they've never known a love like this, he mused. *a love that is pure and selfless. love for a child that's all their own.* he looked towards niki, who stared at her shoes, defeated. he turned towards techno, his bravado keeping his adrenaline from falling. *i have to do something.*

philza took a step forward, clearing his throat. "techno, listen."

techno whipped his head around, eyes frenzied. "yeah, philza? you decided to finally join the party?"

more firmly this time, philza tried again. "technoblade, you don't know what it's like."

"what do you mean?"

"to lose a child."

"i've lost plenty, phil. i'm sure i can picture it." techno waved his hand dismissively.

"techno, you don't understand. it's different. the death takes part of your soul with it, and -"

techno scoffed. "don't tell me you're getting soft, old man."

philza hesitated. "niki, techno, i can't in good conscience hold a child's livelihood over someone's

head as some sort of ransom -” techno attempted to interject, but philza caught him. “even if it’s for the good of the rest of the world.”

techno rolled his eyes. “you’re kidding me. i thought i could trust you.”

“to them,” philza hesitated. he glanced at ranboo and tubbo. they were still tense. “to them, michael *is* their world.” he turned to techno once more. “please, techno. they’re not a threat. they just want to be left alone. you understand that, don’t you? with your retirement and all?”

techno nodded wordlessly, beginning to lose some of his edge.

“they want to be left alone. they want to live in their big house as one...” philza paused. “as one big happy family.”

niki cleared her throat. “i think he’s right, techno.”

philza continued. “anyone, when their love and life is threatened, will fight back. we see it in nature all the time. why would you continue to provoke and attack them? why give them the opportunity to destroy us? do you really crave death that badly?”

technoblade looked at michael, then at philza. “fine,” he muttered.

the tension lifted slightly.

“i’ve been so worried about another government, another nation. i can’t afford to let it happen again,” techno admitted.

he turned towards ranboo and tubbo. “i’ll leave your dumb kid alone. but a warning for you both: don’t interfere with the syndicate and don’t create any governments. i don’t want to keep destroying this world, but i’ll do it if i feel it’s necessary.” he turned towards ranboo. “i know you’re part of the syndicate. that’s fine, i don’t mind. but *don’t* bring family business into it.”

“don’t bring syndicate business to my family,” the enderman retorted.

techno chuckled. “fine, whatever.” he sighed, stretching his arms upward. “let’s go, i guess.”

philza and niki walked out of the room, offering apologetic glances as they followed behind technoblade.

the family was finally alone. tubbo and ranboo slumped against the wall, falling to the floor. michael sat in ranboo’s lap, playing with his father’s tail.

tubbo turned to ranboo, a dopey smile spread lazily across his face. “ready to leave?”

the first thing the family did once they reached tubbo’s snowchester cottage was light a fire. michael toddled around the room, carrying a chicken stuffed animal. he couldn’t help but think of the man with the large cloak that spoke to him the way no one else did. what had he said, and why couldn’t he let it go?

“michael, come here! the fire’s ready!” ranboo shouted.

those thoughts could wait, michael decided. he was exhausted. it was time to rest. he curled up in his father’s arms, his sweater bunching around his wrists. ranboo adjusted himself underneath michael, allowing tubbo to rest his head on his husband’s shoulder.

within moments, michael and tubbo were fast asleep. the fire was hypnotizing, preventing ranboo from joining them. he couldn’t get philza’s comment out of his head. sure, his enderwalk wasn’t a known commodity, but it wasn’t dangerous. he shook his head lightly so not to wake his family. *we’re fine. we’re safe*, he told himself. *i’ll worry about this later*. his head grew heavy as he let out one final sigh before falling into a dreamless sleep.

we’re safe.

End Notes

listen, i know that the syndicate is a book club. i know. BUT i like to imagine it all dark and angsty, okay?

also, i am a techno apologist. however, writing him as a villain is just... too tempting.

thank you so much for reading, i know this was WAY longer than my normal fics.

mxmranboob on twitter, come say hi, and thank you once again for all the support. i appreciate it more than you know <3

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