

tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains

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Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of the world of clinic
Collections:	SBI superheroes/powers au my beloved , Dream SMP Fics (Mainly Tommy (Yeah I'm That Bitch)) , SBI fics that give me the will to live , SBI Fics for the soul , Vic's procrastination fics , Keep it going , fics that are stuck in my head (rent-free) , i feel as though i have seen god , lee's favorite fics that you should definitely read as well :) , self employed!! , Banger MCYT Fics that Nearly Caused Me To Fail University , Noopa's Inspirations , DSMP Fics I adore - Mainly about Tommy because that boy is my - traumatized - comfort character 😊 , incomplete v good fics , unfinished fics i adore!!! , i want to reread many a time , heroes villains and vigilantes fic recommendations , but mummmm i wanna be a vigilante (dsmp) , DSMP_favs , 📚 Fanfic Forum Discord Recs , It WAS meant to be fuckers , The best MCYT fics you've ever read , Fics I Wish Were Books , International Fanworks Day 2022 - Classic Fic Recs , bee's fics for ariel , Famous Fics that are Worth the Hype
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tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains

by [bonesandthebees \(bonesandcacti\)](#)

Summary

“W-What do you- I mean can I- are you here to rob us?” The person managed to stammer out.

Siren snorted. “No. I’m just here to order some food.”

“Wh-What about him?” The cashier asked, glancing at Tommy. “Did you- did you kidnap him?”

“I mean... yeah, let’s go with that in case this ends up on the news,” Siren shrugged, looking back at Tommy. “I kidnapped you, right?”

“Yeah, sure,” Tommy agreed, knowing that if they said he was kidnapped, it would keep people from getting suspicious of why he was seen in public with Siren. “Anyway, can I get the chicken nuggets happy meal, with a coke?”

or, how Tommy—who is not a hero, or a villain, or even a vigilante—saves the life of one of L'Manberg's most feared supervillains, and accidentally ends up becoming the resident doctor for every supervillain in town (and maybe gets a family along the way too).

Notes

hi besties... yeah look I'm disappointed in myself too for starting another WIP

but here's the thing, I think trying to pre-write so much stuff is really just damaging my motivation in the long run sooooo I decided to start posting this story BEFORE I wrote a ton for it, but I have a lot planned and I'm very excited about where I'm going with this

anyway I've been wanting to write a superhero-verse au for SO LONG now and it took me ages to come up with a concept that I felt I could really dig into, and I came up with this last week and fiddled around with it until we got what we have now! so uhh hope yall enjoy!

TW for this chapter: graphic descriptions of a stab wound

- Translation into Русский available: [tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains \(клиника томми иннита для суперзлодеев\)](#) by [gorch](#), [spoiledbleach](#), [Tsu_01](#)

- Translation into Español available: [tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains \(La clínica para supervillanos de TommyInnit\)](#) by [PolarCM](#)
- Translation into Français available: [Tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains_French Version](#) by [G4bwastaken](#)
- Translation into Português brasileiro available: [tommyinnit's clinic for supervillains \(A Clínica de TommyInnit para Supervilões\)](#) by [BreezeHurricane](#)

mondays amiright?

Chapter Notes

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

You saw a lot of weird shit walking around the city at night.

For one thing, Tommy saw a lot of rats. Big, fat rats scurrying into gutters, looking like little more than blurred shadows in the gloom. He also saw drunk people stumbling down sidewalks, sometimes laughing in groups, sometimes alone, usually muttering strange things under their breath. And of course there was the occasional vigilante he'd pass by, patrolling the smaller neighborhoods that so often got overlooked by heroes. Tommy always made sure to wave at the vigilantes whenever he saw one.

But his current situation was one he hadn't actually come across before. He'd been taking the closing shift at Puffy's cafe for nearly a year now, and had gotten used to the strange shit he'd see on his walk home after the sun had set. At this point, Tommy was pretty convinced he'd seen every weird thing this city had to offer after dark.

However, finding one of the city's most wanted supervillains bleeding out in an alleyway wasn't something he could say he had experience with.

It was a miracle Tommy had noticed the guy at all. He'd just been strolling down the sidewalk, humming to himself while he thought of what he was going to harass Ranboo into making for dinner tonight, when he'd heard a loud thud come from the alley he was passing by. Now usually when you heard a strange noise coming from a dark alleyway at night, the smart thing to do was to mind your own damn business and walk away. But Tommy could admit he was a bit on the impulsive side, and his curiosity immediately flared at the strange sound. So he turned on his phone's flashlight and went to check it out.

Which was how he ended up in his current position. Squatting in the corner of a dark alley, staring at the unconscious body of one of L'Manberg's most wanted supervillains.

Tommy had recognized Siren the moment his flashlight had landed on him. Although Tommy had never had very many run-ins with supervillains in the past, everyone knew who Siren was. He was one of the Big Three Bads in the city. It was Siren, The Blade, and Zephyrus who made up the Syndicate—a trio of supervillains that had been terrorizing L'Manberg for years now. No matter how many times they'd gone up against the city's best heroes, no one could take them down. They were beyond dangerous, and in a way, Siren was the worst of the trio. His power made it so he could coerce anyone into doing his bidding just by using his voice. Mind control was a terrifying power, and Siren made sure to put it to good use.

When Tommy had realized the unconscious figure was Siren, he had considered simply turning around and pretending he hadn't seen anything. While the 'noble' thing to do was probably to call the police, Tommy wasn't an idiot and wasn't going to get himself on the Syndicate's bad side by turning him in. So, the logical thing to do was to turn around and let

fate run its course. This wasn't his problem. Siren was a supervillain. Normal people like Tommy needed to stay far away from supervillains.

But as Tommy had been approaching the unconscious Siren, he heard a splash and realized he'd stepped in something wet. Shining his flashlight on the ground, Tommy's jaw clenched when he saw he was standing in a pool of blood. Siren's blood.

Siren was hurt, and badly so. There was a gaping hole in his stomach, and although his coat was already dark, Tommy could tell it was soaked through.

Tommy had no idea what happened. He hadn't heard anything about a fight going on while he'd been at work, and usually the news made sure to keep citizens updated on any hero-villain altercations going on so they would know to avoid the area. That night, he hadn't heard a single thing about Siren.

But here he was, and Tommy knew it was him. The dark blue stretch of fabric that covered the upper half of his face like a blindfold almost glittered in the harsh light of his phone. Siren's curly dark hair splayed out behind his head in a mess of knots. Lips that were always seen curled into a dangerous smirk weren't smiling for once. Instead, his mouth was slightly open, with no words coming out.

If the giant blood pool wasn't a dead giveaway, Siren's skin was deathly pale. Tommy knew that if he left now, Siren would bleed out very *very* soon.

"C'mon Tommy, just walk away," he muttered to himself, unable to tear his gaze away from the giant wound in Siren's abdomen. "This isn't your problem. Just leave."

He willed his feet to move. To carry him to the end of the alley and go back to his apartment where his roommates were waiting for him.

But he couldn't. He was frozen. Siren may have been a supervillain, but he was still a *person*. A person who probably had family, and friends. People who would miss him if he was gone.

While Tommy wouldn't necessarily call himself a good person, he knew that no one, no matter how bad, deserved to bleed out all alone in a dirty alleyway.

"Fucking hell," Tommy cursed, dropping his bag and kneeling down next to the supervillain. If he was going to do this, he had to do it fast before someone else showed up. While he didn't think there was anyone around, it was clear Siren had been in a fight, and whoever had inflicted this wound might still want to finish the job. Tommy definitely didn't want to be around if that person found Siren, so he should just be as fast as possible with this.

Rolling up his sweatshirt sleeves, Tommy cracked his fingers and gently tried to lift the fabric of Siren's shirt away from the wound. The dark cotton clung to the blood, and Tommy winced as it tugged at the raw skin, nervously glancing over to Siren to see if he stirred.

Thankfully, the man stayed unconscious.

Once he'd lifted the shirt, he hissed between his teeth at the sight of the wound. It was nothing short of a literal hole in his gut, as if he had been impaled with something. Tommy didn't see the remains of any spear-like object that could've been the weapon nearby, meaning Siren likely didn't pull it out himself. If he did, he was an idiot because the one thing you should never do if you were stabbed is try to pull out the thing that stabbed you.

When you get impaled, that object is holding in all your blood like a cork. If you're not in a place where you can get medical attention to close up the wound immediately, removing the object is going to just make you bleed out. So yeah, don't try to remove the knife or whatever if you get stabbed, otherwise you'll end up like Siren.

Either way though, it didn't seem like Siren had been the one to pull out whatever had gotten him this good, so Tommy couldn't fault him too much. He narrowed his eyes, noticing the ragged edges around the wound itself. It wasn't a clean slice, meaning it wasn't something sharp, like a sword or spear. It was more likely some kind of debris, something not meant for impaling but was going at a high enough speed to slice through him anyway. A pipe maybe? Tommy wasn't sure, but it didn't matter much now. He was running out of time.

"Better fucking thank me for this," he muttered to the villain.

Taking a breath to steady himself, Tommy put his hands on the edges of the wound, doing his best to push the skin together. Then, he closed his eyes, and concentrated.

For the longest time, Tommy was completely unaware he had powers. He had always thought it was just plain luck how he rarely got scratched up, or how injuries that usually took weeks to heal would only last a few days for him. Then one day Tubbo had sliced his palm open while trying to open a box. Tommy had grabbed his hand to wrap it up, and noticed a strange warmth coursing through his palms. Then, he watched with wide eyes as his hands began to glow orange, and the cut on Tubbo's hand knitted itself back together. That was when Tommy learned he could heal people.

So of course after that he started practicing with his power because that's fucking *cool*. Any time Tubbo or Ranboo came home with a cut or scrape, Tommy would fix it for them. It was pretty easy for the most part, he just had to focus on fixing the wound and his powers did the rest.

A wound like this though... this was way bigger than anything Tommy had ever tried to heal before. It didn't matter though. Tommy was a Big Man with the best powers. He could fix this.

Hopefully.

As soon as his hands began to warm up, Tommy could tell this was going to take a lot more out of him than any other wound had before. He kept his eyes shut, focusing on keeping the energy flowing from his hands. He could tell that it was working. Underneath his fingers, he could feel the skin knitting itself back together. But as the seconds ticked on, Tommy's head began to pound. There was a throbbing behind his eyes that he'd never felt when using his powers before, and it was getting worse with every beat.

Tommy grit his teeth, struggling to keep his focus. It fucking *hurt* healing this wound. The pain behind his eyes was like being stabbed in the head over and over, and it was getting hard to breathe. He just needed to get the wound to stop bleeding. It didn't need to be a complete fix.

Finally, when his head felt like it was going to explode, Tommy lifted his hands from Siren's stomach. He breathed a sigh of relief, the pounding in his head fading almost instantly. He took a few moments to catch his breath, shoulders shaking with exhaustion, before opening his eyes to see his work.

The wound wasn't fully healed. Tommy had figured that already. Healing a wound as massive as that wasn't something Tommy could do in one go. But the gaping hole was much smaller now, and had stopped bleeding entirely. Along with that, there was more color in Siren's cheeks, and Tommy wondered if his powers had helped fix some of the blood loss Siren was suffering from as well.

Either way, his work here was done. Looking at his hands, Tommy winced when he saw they were slick with blood, and ended up using the edge of Siren's jacket to wipe them off. Hopefully he wouldn't mind. The thing was already covered in blood anyway.

As he pushed his sleeves back down though, Tommy didn't notice the way Siren's lip twitched. Nor did he notice the way he flexed his fingers.

No, Tommy didn't notice any of that until Siren was bolting upright and lunging for him. Tommy yelped as the villain grabbed his shoulders, slamming him into the hard brick wall and pinning him there.

"Hey man! What the fuck?!" Tommy shouted, squirming against the arm pressing his back painfully into the wall.

"Where the hell am I?" Siren hissed in a scratchy voice. Logically, Tommy should be terrified considering one of the most dangerous supervillains was awake and *pissed*, but the exhaustion weighing down his bones smothered any fear he might've felt at this moment.

"Take a look around, dickhead. You're in an alleyway," Tommy snapped, wincing as his skull dug into the stone.

"Yeah, I fucking figured that, Einstein," Siren shot back, sneering at him. "What part of the city am I in?"

"Eastside. Quite lovely at night, save for the rats and trash everywhere," Tommy deadpanned.

Although Tommy couldn't see Siren's eyes behind his mask, he could imagine the man was frowning. "Eastside, yeah, that sounds right," he muttered, nodding to himself. "What happened? How did I get in this alley?"

"Beats me, mate. I was just walking home when I found you here lying in a pool of your own blood," Tommy told him, still squirming against the arm pinned against his chest.

“Blood?” As if he had been too confused by his situation to feel any pain, suddenly Siren winced and glanced down to his stomach, pulling his shirt up to see the partially-healed wound. “Oh fuck, yeah, that.” He stared at the wound for a moment, pursing his lips, before he whipped his head back up to Tommy. “I should be dead right now. How am I not dead?”

Tommy attempted to shrug, but it was kind of difficult with Siren pressing him into the bricks. “That would be thanks to me. I saved your life, *you’re welcome.*”

“But there’s no bandages. What did you do?”

Holding up his one free hand, Tommy grinned. “It was your lucky day. You were found by the one Big Man in this city who can heal people with his hands.”

Siren was (likely) frowning again as he glanced at Tommy's hand. “You have healing powers?”

“Sure do. Though lemme tell you, it was a bitch trying to heal that stab wound you got. I’m not used to healing bigger stuff like that, so it’s all the more reason to thank me.”

There was a beat of silence as Siren considered him, a faint dripping noise echoing through the alley. The grin slowly slid off Tommy’s face as he realized he might’ve pushed it a little too far. Here he was demanding a thank you from one of the greatest supervillains around. If Siren wanted, he could tell Tommy to go jump in the river right now and Tommy wouldn’t be able to do anything about it.

“Do you have any idea who I am?” Siren finally asked. Surprisingly, he didn’t sound angry. More than anything, he just seemed... confused.

Tommy had to admit, that wasn’t what he was expecting. “I think you’d be hard-pressed to find someone in this city who doesn’t know who you are, Siren,” Tommy said, giving him an unimpressed look.

“What do you want from me, then? No one would just save my life without expecting something in return,” Siren asked, a deep bitterness in his voice.

“Uh... nothing?” In all honesty, Tommy hadn’t even thought of that as an option. “I dunno, man. I didn’t really have a reason. I just didn’t think it was right to just leave you to die.” Tommy paused, then smirked. “Besides, it would’ve been really embarrassing for the Big Terrifying Siren to bleed out in a random alleyway. I figured I’d save you the humiliation.”

Siren’s lips twisted. “You’re lying,” he snapped. “You want something, or you’re working for someone, or—” Siren cut himself off, stiffening suddenly. “You looked under my mask, didn’t you?”

“What?! No—”

“*Tell me the truth,*” Siren said, a strange echo reverberating through his words.

Tommy blinked. The words rushed out without him thinking of them.

“No I didn’t look under your fucking mask! That’d just be a shitty goddamn thing for me to do, now wouldn’t it?” Tommy snapped, bristling at the accusation.

“Then why did you save my life?”

“I told you already! I didn’t think anybody deserved to bleed out all alone in a gross ass alleyway! If you’re gonna die on the street you at least deserve to do it in a nice neighborhood, like West End or some shit. Somewhere the rats won’t get you.”

Siren stared at him for a moment, the confusion practically radiating off of him. Even so, after a few tense seconds, the grip on Tommy’s shoulders loosened and Siren backed off.

Tommy slumped forward immediately, rubbing the back of his head where it had been pressed against the brick. “Fucking hell, mate. You’re stronger than you look.”

“What, do I not look strong or something?” Siren asked, now leaning against the opposite wall of the alley.

“I mean, next to The Blade you’re a bit of a twig,” Tommy shrugged, rolling out his neck.

Siren scoffed. “Okay, yeah, compare me to the fucking Blade who I’ve seen lift a car. I know I look like a twig next to him, literally everyone does.”

“Eh, Dream holds up pretty well next to him,” Tommy pointed out.

“Oh, are you a Dream fanboy or something?” Siren asked in a mocking tone.

Tommy resisted the urge to grimace. “Uh, no way. That guy’s a douche.”

This made Siren snort. “You’re not a fan of the city’s ‘Number One Hero?’”

“Not really. You can only watch so many ‘say no to peer pressure’ and ‘stay in school’ videos during detention before you start resenting the guy.”

“Wait, he’s in those?” Siren asked. Tommy nodded, and the villain let out a bark of laughter. “Holy shit! That’s fucking hilarious! Oh I am so gonna make fun of him with that next time we fight.” Then, as if a switch had been flipped, Siren’s smile fell as he glanced at his stomach once again. “Well, that probably won’t be for a while.”

There was something in Siren’s voice that made Tommy frown. There was a reason that talking about Dream had made Siren remember the wound, and the logical explanation was that Dream was the one to do that to Siren. But that wound was... brutal. Even when it came to the most dangerous supervillains, heroes were always encouraged to incapacitate, not kill. While Tommy could understand accidentally hurting someone enough to kill them, there was no way a wound like that could be accidental.

“Did... did Dream do that to you?” Tommy asked in a low voice.

Siren glanced over to Tommy and sighed. “You don’t need to know, kid.” Gripping the edge of the wall, Siren pushed himself to his feet, wincing as he held a hand over his stomach.

“Anyway, I should probably get going. I guess I’ll, uh, see you around.”

“Wait, are you gonna be able to make it back to your evil lair or whatever like that?” Tommy asked, standing up as well.

Through the blindfold over Siren’s eyes, Tommy could *feel* the deadpan stare.

“Evil lair?” He questioned.

“I dunno! You’re a big supervillain! You guys have evil lairs, right?”

Siren snorted. “For the record, no, we don’t have evil lairs. We have houses like normal people. And yes, I should be able to get back on my own.”

“Oh.” Tommy looked at the ground. “Well, you should have an evil lair anyway. It’s a lot fucking cooler than just having a boring ass house.”

“You’re such a weird kid,” Siren muttered, shaking his head.

“I’m not a kid! I’m a Big Man!” Tommy protested

“Whatever you say, strange child.” Before Tommy could argue, Siren was limping out of the alley with one hand over his stomach, waving at Tommy with the other.

Tommy watched as the shadowy figure turned left out of the alley, disappearing from sight. When Tommy followed, he looked down the street trying to see where Siren went, but only saw empty sidewalks bathed in the orange glow of the streetlights.

He was gone.

While it felt a little strange to just go back to his apartment after saving the life of one of the city’s most dangerous supervillains, Tommy didn’t exactly have much else to do. So he ignored the way his legs shook his fatigue, swung his backpack back over his shoulder, and continued down the street like nothing had happened.

It was a cool night out in the city. The air was thick with the promise of rain, the stars blotted out by the dark clouds that hung overhead. By the time Tommy got back to his neighborhood, he breathed a sigh of relief he hadn’t even known he was holding. Sure, he was Tommy Innit and never got scared of anything, but those streets were pretty damn creepy when they were super empty like that.

Trudging back into his apartment building, Tommy slumped against the back wall of the elevator and closed his eyes as it began to go up. The vibrations of the elevator car reverberated through his head, and all he could think of was how excited he was to pass out in his bed.

“Guys, I’m home,” Tommy announced as he swung open the door to his apartment. Stained carpet crunched under his shoes as he stepped inside, the door slamming shut behind him.

“It’s about damn time,” Tubbo called out from where he was sitting at his computer desk, the bleached strands of his hair glowing in the white-blue light of his monitor. “You should’ve been home ages ago.”

“Yeah yeah, I got held up by something but it’s fine,” Tommy said, waving off Tubbo’s concerns as he dropped his backpack to the floor.

Shuffling over to the couch, Tommy collapsed against the cushions next to Ranboo, promptly stretching his legs out across the length of the couch (with his feet ending up right on top of Ranboo’s own legs).

Ranboo glanced down at the feet in his lap and sighed, but didn’t say anything as he readjusted his own sitting position to be more comfortable. This was a battle they had fought many times before, and Tommy always won out of sheer stubbornness—his most valuable asset.

“What held you up? Everything alright at the cafe?” Ranboo asked instead, resting his elbow on the arm of the couch.

“Oh yeah, everything’s fine. I just, uh, had to fix the espresso machine again,” Tommy lied, eyes darting to the old TV that was playing some random cartoon he wasn’t familiar with.

While Tommy didn’t like lying to his roommates, he had already decided on the way home that he couldn’t tell them what happened with Siren. In retrospect, what he had done was stupid and dangerous. He wanted to trust that Siren was a decent person who was grateful for Tommy’s help, but it was also very likely that he saw Tommy as a loose end now. A thing that needed to be taken care of because he’d seen something he wasn’t supposed to.

Although Tommy didn’t think that was particularly likely, it was a real possibility, and the last thing he wanted was to get Tubbo and Ranboo involved in this. They didn’t need to get caught up in all the bullshit that was superheroes and supervillains. If he kept them in the dark, even if his connection with Siren got him fucked over, Tubbo and Ranboo could continue their normal, civilian lives.

“Breaking news,” the TV suddenly blared before Ranboo could respond, a news screen popping up over the cartoon. “Wanted vigilantes Nuke and Ender were spotted in South Bay earlier this evening after halting the robbery of a convenience store.” The TV showed grainy footage of two figures—a small figure wearing a gas mask, and a much taller figure wearing a black and white face mask and ski goggles—as they finished tying up two muscular men dressed in dark clothes, leaving them in front of the convenience store doors.

“The two suspects were pursued by police, but escaped via rooftop.” More footage, this time of the taller one, Ender, grabbing the smaller one and teleporting to a nearby roof in a flurry of purple particles. “While they are not considered to be active threats, please report any possible sightings to the vigilante tip number. Also, do not approach, as they are wanted criminals. Holt, back to you.”

The news switched back to the cartoon that had been on before, and Tommy frowned at the screen. There was no mention of Siren being spotted, and usually any mention of one of the

Syndicate would completely take over the news for the entire evening and following day. Was there really no one who had witnessed the fight that had gotten Siren so badly hurt?

“Tommy? You good?” Ranboo asked, waving a hand in front of Tommy’s face.

“Oh shit, yeah, sorry. I zoned out for a second,” Tommy said, glancing back over to his friends. “Just thinking about, uh, Ender and Nuke,” he continued, laughing awkwardly.

Ranboo for some reason stiffened at this and quickly turned his head away. “Oh, um, really? What about- what about them in particular?”

Shit. Tommy needed to come up with something to say.

“They seem pretty cool,” he shrugged, although he had barely paid attention to the two vigilantes in the past. “The small one can blow shit up, right?”

“Yup, he sure can,” Tubbo chimed in from the computer.

“That’s poggers,” Tommy muttered, leaning back against the couch. Then, in as casual of a voice as he could muster, he added, “there hasn’t been any other vigilante or villain or hero activity tonight, has there?”

“Uh, besides Ender and Nuke? I think I heard something about Arson and Iceman getting into a fight with the police, but they escaped before any heroes could arrive,” Ranboo said, tapping his chin in thought. “Why? Did you see something?”

Tommy bit his lip, trying to think of how he could say this without sounding suspicious. “I just thought I might’ve seen, uh, Siren earlier tonight. But it was just for a split second so it probably wasn’t him.”

Instantly, Tubbo spun around in his computer chair while Ranboo leaned towards Tommy. “Wait, you saw Siren? As in, *The Siren*?” Ranboo asked.

“Uh, maybe? Like I said, it was super fucking dark-”

“Where?” Tubbo demanded. “If you saw him here in Eastside that can’t mean anything good.”

“Just a few blocks down. I was walking down the street and I thought I saw a flash of his coat from the rooftop, but it was probably just my imagination,” Tommy said, scrambling to back up the conversation.

“Okay, but just in case, where do you think you saw him exactly?” Ranboo pushed, giving Tommy a strangely intense look.

“I-I don’t know! What the fuck does it matter? Like I said, it probably wasn’t him, and even if it was he’d be long gone by now!” Tommy exclaimed, looking wide-eyed between his two friends. “Besides, what the hell are you two gonna do about it? You’re not gonna call the police for an empty street.”

Ranboo and Tubbo shared a look for a brief moment, before they turned back to Tommy.

“You’re right, sorry. I think we both just got freaked out hearing that you might’ve seen Siren,” Ranboo explained, slumping back down against the couch.

“Yeah, I don’t wanna think that the Syndicate is hanging around anywhere near Eastside. God knows the last thing we need is to come home and find the Blade fighting Dream on top of our apartment building.”

Tommy snorted. “Well, while that would definitely suck, there’s not much we could do to prevent that if it happens,” he shrugged, also falling back against the couch.

Once again, Tubbo and Ranboo shared an unreadable look, and Tommy frowned.

“Why are you two giving each other those weird looks?” Tommy asked.

“What weird looks? We’re not looking at each other,” Tubbo shot back, immediately turning his head away from Ranboo.

Tommy rolled his eyes. He could tell there was something going on between the two of them, and if he was a bit less exhausted he probably would’ve pushed to find out more. But his energy reserves were completely sapped from healing Siren, and the pounding headache behind his eyes was only growing worse by the second.

“Well, I’ll leave you to your weird staring contest or whatever,” Tommy said as he pushed to his feet. “Meanwhile, I’m gonna go pass the fuck out.”

“Wait, but you haven’t had dinner yet,” Ranboo pointed out, giving him a worried frown. “I left yours in the microwave so flies wouldn’t get to it.”

“I appreciate it, big man, but I’m too tired to eat right now. I’ll eat it tomorrow for breakfast,” Tommy told him, patting Ranboo’s shoulder as he shuffled towards the bedroom.

“Spaghetti for breakfast?” Ranboo muttered under his breath, which Tommy ignored as he shut the bedroom door behind him.

Given the nature of their less than stellar incomes, the three of them could only afford a one bedroom apartment. The bedroom itself had come with a queen-sized bed, and it ended up being cheaper to just hold onto that instead of trying to buy three single beds. As a result, the three of them had a rotation going as to which two slept in the bed, and who took the couch. More often than not though, Ranboo would voluntarily take the couch because his feet hung off the end of the bed since he was ridiculously tall. Tommy didn’t mind this arrangement at all, due to the fact that Ranboo had a tendency to talk in his sleep.

If Tommy remembered correctly, it was supposed to be him and Tubbo sharing the bed tonight. And knowing Tubbo with his horrible sleep schedule, he wasn’t going to crawl into bed for a while, meaning Tommy could stretch out as much as he wanted.

Starfishing onto the bed, Tommy groaned and buried his head under his pillow. There was a lot he had to think about tomorrow when he woke up, namely how the hell he was going to

deal with the possible issue of Siren, but for now his most important job was to just fall asleep.

And that he did. Within minutes, Tommy was out like a light.

Chapter End Notes

OKAY so here are some things I wanted to clear up real quick: one, if you're having trouble picturing what Wilbur's mask looks like, basically picture a dark blue version of 2B's mask from Nier Automata. I just can't take the stereotypical domino masks seriously so I had to come up with alternative cool masks for everyone to wear and that's what Wil gets lmao

second thing: sorry for the random rant about stab wounds and not pulling out the object if you get stabbed. that's just a very common trope in movies and tv shows and as someone who worked in a hospital for a year and a half pls! do not pull out the object if you get stabbed!

third thing: if you're wondering what the fuck Tommy meant by being forced to watch videos in class with Dream encouraging them all to stay in school and stuff, please imagine those PSA's with Captain America we saw in Spiderman: Homecoming. If you haven't seen the movie, here's a clip on youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoxh_6TgUVY

ANYWAY i'll post the second chapter sometime soon but please let me know what you thought down in the comments! comments are my lifeblood and give me motivation to continue my fics so pls tell me if you enjoyed. I only respond to comments with questions but pls know i see all the comments I get and frequently reread them <3

check me out on tumblr @bonesandthebees

(and I have twitter now! also @bonesandthebees)

mcdonald's

Chapter Summary

Tommy finally gets a thank you

Chapter Notes

HELLO LOVELIES I AM BACK WITH ANOTHER CHAPTER

ok first off I wanted to say thank you all so much for the love you've shown just on chapter 1, the response was way more than I expected and I'm so glad you guys are enjoying this! I promise things are going to get a lot more fun as time goes on!

I can't promise regular updates but I'll try my best to get as much of this out before I go back to university, so we'll see how that goes

anyway, hope you guys enjoy!

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

Tommy wasn't sure if he was going to see Siren again after that fateful night. While a part of him wanted to, just so he could get the chance to ask, 'hey, you're not going to kill me for the whole saving your life thing, are you?' he really just hoped the supervillain would leave him alone and pretend like they had never had their strange encounter.

And for a while, it seemed like that was going to be the case. Tommy went back to his normal routine, and waited for something to happen. Days were spent making lattes for stuck up people in Puffy's cafe. Nights were spent watching Netflix on a crammed couch with his two roommates. And when he walked home after sunset, he would rush past most dark alleys to avoid any more moral crises like before.

It had been about a week since the incident with Siren when that changed though.

Yet again, Tommy was walking home from the closing shift at the cafe. It had rained earlier that day, and the orange glow of the streetlights glittered against the water that had seeped into the sidewalk. His backpack thumped steadily against his back with every step, and Tommy grumbled to himself about an asshole customer he'd dealt with earlier that day.

He thought about all the ways he would've loved to cuss the guy out. If Puffy hadn't been watching him from one of the tables, he probably would have. Although Puffy had told him

not to get into arguments with customers before, she never got seriously upset with Tommy over it, because she knew Tommy was usually in the right.

Because Tommy was always right. He was just That Cool.

Unfortunately for Tommy, he was so distracted while thinking about how cool and right he was all the time that he didn't notice the shadowy figure lurking in the alleyway he was passing by. A hand wrapped around his arm and yanked him into the alley. He opened his mouth to scream, but a second hand slammed over it before he could make a peep.

"Mmph mrph mmm!" Tommy screamed behind the hand, squirming against the iron grip pinning him to the wall.

"Shut up, gremlin child! It's just me!" A familiar voice hissed from the shadows. Tommy's eyes widened as his vision adjusted to the gloom, and he was able to make out a familiar blue mask covering the upper half of a man's face.

A rock dropped into his gut. *Siren.*

"I'm going to drop my hand now, and you're not going to scream because I'm not here to hurt you, got it?" Siren asked, and even though he couldn't see his eyes, Tommy could feel his intense stare.

Tommy nodded as best he could against the wall. Siren loosened the grip on his arm and dropped the hand from his mouth.

"What the FUCK?!" Tommy shouted as soon as his mouth was free. "Who the hell do you think you are just grabbing a guy off the street and pulling him into a fucking alley like a goddamn creep-"

The hand slammed over his mouth again. "I said no screaming," Siren repeated.

Huffing, Tommy stopped squirming against the hand. He raised an eyebrow at Siren, and after a few beats of silence, Siren dropped the hand once more.

"I wasn't screaming, dickhead. I was yelling at you for scaring the shit out of me," Tommy snapped in a much lower voice this time.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," Siren said, actually sounding kind of embarrassed. That was... weird. Getting an apology from a supervillain just felt wrong.

But hey, Tommy would take it.

"Then why did you decide to just grab me and shove me in an alley like a goddamn kidnapper?" Tommy hissed.

"I didn't know how else to get you in a private place to talk! In case you haven't realized, I can't exactly just come up to you on the street," Siren explained, gesturing wildly with his hands.

“So what, were you just waiting in the dark on the off chance I’d walk by this place?” Tommy asked, glancing around the alley and realizing it was the same one he’d found Siren in a week before.

Siren at least had the self-awareness to look embarrassed. “Uh, yeah. Pretty much.”

“And you want me to not think you’re a creep?” Tommy questioned, raising an eyebrow again. “Because that’s pretty fuckin’ weirdchamp.”

“How else was I supposed to find you? I don’t know your name or where you live or anything like that,” Siren explained.

Siren... was looking for him? Tommy’s heart rate began to pick up as his earlier worries came back full force.

“Why were you looking for me?” Tommy asked, trying to sound more confident than he felt. “You-You’re not gonna kill me or anything, right?”

Siren stared at him for a moment, and Tommy’s heart pounded in his ears.

“What the fuck? No, why would I kill you?” Siren sounded offended at the question.

“Because, uh, I dunno, I saw you injured? I dunno man! Why else would a supervillain be looking for me?!”

Sighing, Siren shook his head. “No, I’m not here to kill you. Quite the opposite really. I was so out of it when I woke up after you healed me that it wasn’t until I got home that I realized I never thanked you for saving my life. So, uh, I wanted to say a proper thanks.”

Tommy blinked several times. “You... wanted to thank me?”

“Yeah. I was kind of a dick when I woke up and I’m sorry for that. Like I said, I was pretty out of it from all the blood loss and looking back I should’ve been a lot nicer to the guy that saved me from bleeding out,” Siren explained, pushing his hair back with his hand. “Most people would’ve seen someone... like me and just decided to let me die. Or worse, they would’ve called the police. But you didn’t. I owe you for that.”

“Uh, no, you don’t owe me anything,” Tommy said, shaking his head. The last thing he wanted was for a supervillain to owe him something. That would just get him way more involved with this kind of stuff than he wanted to be. “Trust me, it wasn’t a lot of trouble to fix you up. Just saying thanks is fine.”

“It’s not though. You drained your own energy to heal me, and didn’t even report the sighting to the news afterwards. I owe you for that. You don’t have to call it in, but if you ever need a favor you can let me know,” Siren said, his tone leaving no room for argument.

Tommy sighed. “Ah, yes, because I can just call up one of the city’s greatest villains next time I need someone to pick up something from the grocery store for me,” Tommy deadpanned. “I appreciate it, but seriously don’t think anything of it. Maybe if you wanna

repay me so badly, just make sure a fucking building doesn't fall on me if I'm ever caught in the crossfire during one of your big hero villain battles."

Siren snorted. "Fair enough I guess, but just keep the favor in mind. If you need something we'll figure out a way you can contact me," he said, smirking at Tommy.

Tommy rolled his eyes again, ready to tell Siren he was fine and that he really had to get going now, when he was cut off by a loud gurgling noise.

His face flushed red as Siren glanced down to Tommy's stomach, which was growling in an unreasonably loud manner.

"Are you hungry?" Siren asked, quirking the corners of his lips like he wanted to laugh.

"No I'm not," Tommy snapped, wincing when his stomach growled again as if to directly contradict him.

"Yes, you clearly are," Siren laughed. "You want some dinner? I think there's a McDonald's near here we can walk to."

"What, are you just gonna walk in like 'hello it is me the Siren I will have the happy meal?'" Tommy scoffed, struggling to even imagine the sight.

A few minutes later, Tommy found himself standing in the middle of a McDonalds in this exact situation.

The McDonalds was mostly empty at this time of night. The harsh white lights stabbed into his eyes, reflecting against the dingy tile floor. There were three customers in the fast food place itself: a man in the far back table hunched over a plate of fries like they were going to be stolen any moment, and a young couple practically making out in one of the stained booths against the wall. None of these customers seemed to notice the two new patrons that had walked in.

It was rather comedic to see Siren standing in the middle of a McDonalds. His long, dark trench coat practically brushed the tile floors, and Tommy could just make out a few remnants of blood stains on the fabric in the fluorescent lighting. Tommy also realized that the reason Siren's mask had glittered in his flashlight beam that one night was because the fabric itself literally fucking sparkled. It was some kind of strange, shimmering blue cloth that completely covered everything above his nose, yet didn't seem to impede his ability to see whatsoever.

The villain stuck out like a splash of darkness in the bright restaurant. He had his hands shoved into his pockets, and was casually glancing at the menu while they waited for the cashier to reappear from the back.

"Hi sorry for the wait, welcome to McDonalds what can I-" the cashier cut themselves off the minute their eyes landed on Siren. They let out a sharp gasp, stumbling over their feet and looking as if they were going to launch themselves over the counter to run away.

Instead of doing that though, they ended up freezing in place, breathing rapidly while glancing between Siren and Tommy.

“W-What do you- I mean can I- are you here to rob us?” The person managed to stammer out.

Siren snorted. “No. I’m just here to order some food.”

“Wh-What about him?” The cashier asked, glancing at Tommy. “Did you- did you kidnap him?”

“I mean... yeah, let’s go with that in case this ends up on the news,” Siren shrugged, looking back at Tommy. “I kidnapped you, right?”

“Yeah, sure,” Tommy agreed, knowing that if they said he was kidnapped, it would keep people from getting suspicious of why he was seen in public with Siren. “Anyway, can I get the chicken nuggets happy meal, with a coke?”

“You heard him,” Siren said to the cashier. “One chicken nuggets happy meal with a coke. Also just a large fry a la carte.”

“Uh, a chicken nuggets happy-happy meal with a coke, and a large fry. Do you, um, want any sauce with that?” The cashier asked, their hands trembling as they typed in the order.

“You want any sauce?” Siren asked.

“Ranch sounds good,” Tommy nodded.

The cashier nodded, gulping as they typed in the order. They told Siren the price with a terrified expression, and Siren just nodded as he dug the cash out of his pocket and dropped it on the counter.

Once they got their food, they left the McDonald’s and Siren led Tommy to a nearby rooftop, showing him how to climb up the fire escape safely. He said it was better to eat on the rooftop, because they would be less likely to be spotted by police (even though the cashier had probably called the cops as soon as they left the restaurant).

The building wasn’t a very tall one. They sat on the ledge, Tommy kicking his legs as he dug into his chicken nuggets. Siren sat next to him, munching on a french fry as he looked out at the city skyline. While Tommy didn’t want Siren to think he owed Tommy anything, he also wasn’t going to turn down the offer for free food, even if it was coming from a supervillain. Besides, he had been craving McDonalds for the past few days. This was just fate actually being kind to him for once.

“So,” Siren began after Tommy had gotten through about half of his nuggets. “What’s your name, anyway?”

“I’m Tommy,” he answered, taking a bite of a ranch-covered nugget.

“And you’re how old?”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “What’s it to you, creep?”

Siren scoffed. “I’m just curious. You look like you’re, what, fifteen?”

“Excuse me, bitch!” Tommy protested. “I’m not fifteen, I’m not a fucking baby! I’m seventeen!”

“Oh wow, such a difference,” Siren teased. “Still a child either way.”

“Oh fuck off. What are you, old man? Forty?”

“I’m not forty!” Siren immediately shot back. “I’m-” he cut himself off before he could say his age, and glared at Tommy for a moment before shaking his head. “I’m not telling you my age because I don’t want to compromise my identity, but I’m not forty.”

“Until proven otherwise I’m gonna say you’re forty,” Tommy teased, smirking at Siren.

“You’re such a little shit,” Siren muttered, shaking his head even though Tommy could see he was suppressing a smile. “You’re almost done with school then though? Since you’re seventeen?”

“Already graduated actually,” Tommy shrugged. “Took some extra classes online so I could graduate early. I needed to be able to work full time to afford my rent.”

“You don’t live with your parents?” Siren asked.

“Don’t got any,” Tommy said, taking another bite of nugget. “Got myself out of the foster system as soon as I was able to, same with my roommates. We have our own place now and we take care of ourselves.”

Tommy doesn’t mention how it took nearly everything to get himself out of that horrid system. How he spent years being shuffled from house to house, leaving with bruises painted across his skin more often than not. How finally being placed in a group home where he met Tubbo and Ranboo was his saving grace because he had something to look forward to for the first time in his life—a future he wanted.

No, he didn’t mention any of that. That fucking foster system nearly killed him. Siren didn’t need to know that.

Siren nodded, looking at the streets far beneath their feet. “And you’re not in the hero training program? Or do vigilantism on the side? Healing powers aren’t common. You’d be considered a pretty valuable asset.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Even if I did, you really think I’d tell you?” He shook his head, leaning back on his hands. “Nah, I’m not though. Don’t really feel like getting involved in all that shit. I’ve got enough on my plate just trying to pay my rent. I don’t need to get involved with your whole world on top of it.”

“But you still saved my life,” Siren pointed out, tugging at the edges of his mask absently.

“That’s just because it was the right thing to do,” Tommy grumbled. “Speaking of, how is your healing coming along? If you need, I can do another session and it’ll probably fix it completely.”

“I think it’s okay. I had some healing potions so I’ve pretty much completely healed up,” Siren explained, lifting the edge of his shirt to show a healthy pink scar on his abdomen.

“That’s good. I didn’t exactly feel like getting a headache trying to fix you up even more,” Tommy snorted.

“Wow, you have wonderful bedside manner,” Siren drawled sarcastically, flicking a french fry at Tommy’s forehead.

“Oi! You’re lucky I offered at all!” Tommy argued.

In the back of his mind, Tommy knew how strange this entire situation was. Here he was, sharing McDonald’s with one of the most terrifying villains this city knew, joking around and teasing him. On the news, Siren always seemed so... cruel. He would whisper his commands with a blank face, ordering police officers to walk off the edges of rooftops without the slightest bit of hesitation. If Blade or Zephyrus were injured (which was a very rare occurrence in itself), Siren’s face would contort with rage, and he would bark out his orders with the unbending force.

But now, Siren was just laughing and eating french fries while bickering with some random teenager. It was like the villain on the TV and the villain in front of him were two entirely different people. While Tommy knew he should be afraid of Siren still, it was hard to treat him as a serious threat when he was flicking french fries at his head.

He debated voicing this to the supervillain, but decided not to. For all he knew this could offend him, and even if Tommy wasn’t afraid of Siren right now, it was better not to push his luck.

Suddenly, there was a beeping sound coming from Siren’s wrist, and he paused to look at whatever alert he’d just gotten. Pursing his lips, he sighed.

“This has been nice, but I think it’s time for me to go,” Siren declared, swallowing the last french fry he had as he pushed to his feet. “I got some stuff I need to take care of. You know how it is.”

Tommy snorted. “Ah, evil villain stuff. Good luck with that.”

Siren smirked at him. “Thanks. Can you get home from here by yourself?”

“Of course I can! I’m not a child!” Tommy argued, frowning at the man.

“Alright alright, just making sure I’m not stranding a child on a roof,” Siren teased, holding his hands up in mock surrender.

“Oh fuck you bitch I’m not a child-”

“I’ll see you later, Tommy,” Siren said, cutting him off as he walked to the door that led inside the building from the top of the roof. Although the door was supposed to be locked, Siren swung it open easily and waved at Tommy from the doorway, before letting it slam shut behind him.

Now left alone on a windy roof in the dead of night, Tommy stared at the McDonald’s in his lap. This had to be one of the weirdest nights of his life, and all he had to show for it was a half-eaten happy meal.

But hey, at least he got free food out of it.

Once again, Tommy didn’t tell Tubbo and Ranboo about his encounter with Siren when he got home. Instead he made up some excuse about Puffy offering to take him out for dinner, pointedly not mentioning that he got McDonald’s when he noticed that Siren’s little McDonald’s trip had made it onto the news.

Thankfully, there were no pictures of Tommy from the McDonald’s. Instead, they just had grainy security footage showing Siren and a blond boy whose face was obscured leaving the fast food joint, and a physical description of him provided by the cashier. It was reported as an attempted robbery which was ridiculous since Siren had paid for their food, but he figured they couldn’t make a news story out of Siren just going to get some french fries.

“Why would Siren want to rob a McDonald’s of all places?” Tubbo asked while they were all sitting on the couch, watching the news story flash on the TV.

“I’m not sure. With someone as powerful as him, you’d think he could take on, like, a bank or something,” Ranboo replied as he leafed through the pages of his journal. “Not to mention, they only said it was a robbery *attempt*. Not that it succeeded. How would Siren fail to rob a McDonald’s? All he needs to do is tell them to give him all the money in the register.”

“Maybe he wasn’t robbing it at all,” Tommy muttered.

Both Tubbo and Ranboo’s heads snapped to him.

“Huh?”

“I mean, sure the news says he was robbing it, but that security footage doesn’t seem like he is. Maybe he just wanted food,” Tommy shrugged, trying to keep his expression neutral as he messed with a fidget cube Ranboo had bought him a while back.

“Well... I guess that would explain why he had a kid with him,” Ranboo said, tapping his chin. “If he was getting the kid food then he might not have been robbing the place at all, like you said, Tommy.”

“I feel like they kinda just brushed over the fact that he kidnapped someone,” Tubbo chimed in, frowning at the TV. “Like, is he okay?”

“According to the cashier they said he seemed calm, but that was probably the influence of Siren’s powers,” Ranboo explained.

Fuck. It was really hard to keep quiet during this conversation. Tommy was struggling to look as uninterested as possible even though his two friends were literally talking about him, and watching security footage of him play on repeat over and over again. While he doubted his friends would put two and two together, he *really* didn’t feel like explaining why he was in a McDonald’s with Siren to them right now.

Thankfully, right when Tommy was considering going to bed just to escape this conversation, the news moved onto the next story of the night. Apparently those two vigilantes, Nuke and Ender, had been spotted engaging in a fight with the villain Jester earlier that night. Tommy had gotten an alert on his phone that Jester had been spotted, and later saw that the hero Flame had been sent to go take care of him. He hadn’t heard that Nuke and Ender had been involved though.

The footage on the TV showed the two vigilantes dodging Jester’s playing cards that he wielded like shuriken, with Nuke jumping from side to side, while Ender just teleported out of the way each time one of the razor sharp cards came close to him.

“If Nuke can blow shit up, why isn’t he doing it?” Tommy wondered aloud as he watched the two vigilantes struggle to avoid Jester’s deadly aim.

“Maybe he’s trying to wait for a good opportunity,” Tubbo replied, reaching for the bowl of popcorn that sat on their coffee table and dropping a few pieces in his mouth.

As if on cue, right when Tubbo said that, a strange orange light began to emanate from Nuke’s hands on the screen. Tommy watched as a small explosion forced Jester to jump back, and it took Tommy a moment to realize Nuke was throwing glowing spheres that exploded on impact.

“Holy shit that’s sick!” Tommy exclaimed, eyes widening as he watched the fight continue on. The two vigilantes seemed to have a system worked out where Nuke would attack Jester with his explosions, and Ender would teleport Nuke out of the way if a card came close to hitting him.

“Do you think they’re cool?” Tubbo asked, raising his eyebrows at Tommy.

“I mean, I think they’re cooler than that last vigilante guy that got arrested,” Tommy shrugged, thinking back to the vigilante Slimecicle and his very publicized arrest. “Plus, they seem to actually be doing pretty well against Jester.”

As the two vigilantes on the TV continued to dodge, there was a bright flash in the sky as a literal fireball came crashing down on the roof where the fight was happening. The two vigilantes jumped backwards as Flame appeared in all his ‘hero glory’. Flames flickered off the top of his dark hair and on his hands as he turned to face Jester. In response, Jester took a step back as golden wings sprouted from his back. Apparently Nuke and Ender didn’t provide enough of a threat to make Jester activate his shapeshifting abilities, but Flame did. With the

distraction though, Nuke and Ender took the opportunity to escape with Ender grabbing Nuke and teleporting away.

The footage cut there, apparently the fight between Flame and Jester too boring to gain its own news story. The reporter mentioned that Jester eventually escaped, and once again repeated the message about reporting Nuke and Ender to the vigilante hotline if they were spotted.

“I gotta admit, I wonder what their goal is,” Tommy muttered, twisting the little spinning disc on the top of his fidget cube. “Usually they just stop robberies and shit, but now they go one on one with Jester? Seems a little bold for two newer vigilantes like them.”

“I mean, maybe they just saw Jester was in the area and didn’t want to risk him hurting someone,” Ranboo pointed out, staring down at his journal.

Tommy snorted. “Jester’s not an idiot. He wouldn’t just randomly attack civilians unless he was actually pulling a job, like that casino heist he pulled a while back. If anything, he was probably just going to meet with some people before Nuke and Ender interrupted him.”

Still staring down at his book, Ranboo wrung his hands together. “You, uh, you really think he wasn’t going to do anything?”

“I can’t know for sure. I’m not a supervillain mind reader after all. But judging by the way Jester has acted in the past, even if he pretends he just likes chaos for the hell of it, he’s a lot more calculating than that.”

Both Tubbo and Ranboo were quiet for a moment, Ranboo looking strangely embarrassed, while Tubbo was still stuffing his face with popcorn.

“Tommy-”

“I think we should go to sleep now!” Tubbo suddenly announced, cutting Ranboo off and giving him a pointed look. Tommy blinked at the strange interaction, watching as Tubbo and Ranboo had some sort of silent conversation and trying to shove down the prickle of jealousy that resulted from that.

“You didn’t seem that tired a few minutes ago, Tubbo,” Tommy pointed out, narrowing his eyes at his friend.

“Oh no, trust me, I’m exhausted,” Tubbo said, yawning and stretching his arms above his head. “Ranboo is too. Right Ranboo?”

“Oh, um-” Ranboo yawned as well, although his attempt was painfully fake compared to Tubbo’s. “Yeah, I sure am exhausted. Real tired.”

There was obviously still something going on between the two of them, something they didn’t want to tell Tommy about. He had a feeling it was related to the same strangeness he’d noticed between the two of them the other night, when he’d healed Siren.

It stoked embers in his chest that were hard to reconcile, something angry but low burning. He didn't like the idea of his two best friends keeping secrets from him, but he also had known the two of them long enough that he knew they wouldn't keep stuff from him without good reason.

Plus, Tommy was actually very tired. He'd had quite the night, and was going to suggest turning in right before Tubbo had brought it up.

So he decided to let the strange behavior between Tubbo and Ranboo go once again. At the moment, he had bigger things to worry about. Namely the fact that Siren felt he owed Tommy a favour, which was something Tommy vehemently did not want.

"Alright, what's the bed schedule for tonight, lads?" Tommy asked, putting his fidget cube down.

"You and me are taking the bed again, Tommy," Tubbo said.

Tommy frowned. "I'm pretty sure me and Ranboo were supposed to take the bed-"

"Nope! You and me. Plus, Ranboo wants the couch tonight, right Ranboo?" Another pointed look was thrown Ranboo's way.

"Uh, yeah. My back is a bit sore anyway so the couch would be better for tonight," Ranboo agreed, although he was shooting a half-hearted glare at Tubbo.

"Oookayyyy," Tommy said, drawing out the 'o' and the 'k' sounds as he glanced between the two of them. Pushing to his feet, Tommy headed out of the living room and to the bedroom, trying to ignore the way Tubbo immediately darted down to whisper something in Ranboo's ear the second Tommy was out of earshot.

Crawling into the bed, Tommy curled up on his favorite side, tugging the blankets securely over him because he knew how much of a blanket hog Tubbo could be once he fell asleep. Only a few moments later, Tubbo followed him into the room and hopped in the bed beside him, grunting a bit as he struggled to get comfortable.

There was silence between them, and it wasn't the usual silence that came with going to sleep. It was something heavier. Something tense. In the other room, he could hear Ranboo shuffling around to make his bed on the couch. Although Tommy had told himself he was going to let it go, he knew he wasn't going to be able to fall asleep if he didn't at least try to ask.

"Tubbo?" Tommy whispered, his voice booming in the quiet.

"Yeah?" Tubbo whispered back, rolling over so he was facing Tommy.

"Are you... are you guys hiding something from me?" He asked, wincing when his voice squeaked. "Because I feel like there's something going on between you and Ranboo that you're not telling me."

There was a beat of silence as Tubbo considered his response. In the gloom of the room, Tommy could just barely make out the place on Tubbo's head where his overgrown brown roots met his bright bleached hair.

"We wouldn't keep anything from you if you needed to know it," Tubbo said after a moment.

Tommy frowned. "Do you not trust me?" Shit. That sounded whinier than he meant it to.

A warm hand wrapped around his, and Tubbo gave him a comforting squeeze. "Of course we trust you. And if you trust us, trust me when I tell you you don't need to know what's going on."

"Will you tell me eventually?" Tommy pushed, gripping tightly onto Tubbo's hand.

"We will, bossman. When it's a bit easier," Tubbo reassured. "It's not something that's a big deal anyway, so don't worry too much about it."

Tommy snorted. "The fact that you're telling me not to worry doesn't help matters."

"Nah, it's nothing bad, I promise," Tubbo said again. With one last squeeze, Tubbo slipped his fingers out of Tommy's and rolled back onto his other side, telling Tommy that the conversation was over.

While Tommy didn't want the conversation to be over just yet, he knew how Tubbo could get, and he knew he wasn't going to get anything else out of his best friend tonight. It was a miracle he'd gotten even this much out of Tubbo, seeming how secretive he was being about whatever this *thing* was.

"Goodnight Tubbo," Tommy muttered as he rolled onto his other side so his back was facing Tubbo's.

"Night Tommy," Tubbo replied, readjusting once before falling quiet.

Thankfully, it didn't take long for Tommy to fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

god the mcdonald's scene was so fun to write, can you guys tell I have way too much fun writing crimeboys banter?

also we'll be getting to meet wilbur in civilian form very very soon so keep an eye out for that! also poor tommy, he knows his friends are hiding something from him but he has no clue what because he's very clueless

anyway please make sure to leave a comment if you enjoyed! comments give me so much motivation to keep working on my fics and I cherish every single one I get <3

you can find me on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees (I know i made a twitter! shocking!) (don't expect me to use it much though I don't understand how twitter works all that much)

a bastard named wilbur

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets a new regular at the cafe

Chapter Notes

hello hello! I have returned with yet another chapter!

so actually when I wrote this chapter it was over 7k words, but then I realized it might be better to split it for pacing reasons and also just so I'm not having super long chapters so you're getting two chapters instead. I'm posting this one today, and I'll post the next one either tomorrow or the day after

anyway thank you all so much for how much love you've shown this fic so far! i'm so glad you guys are enjoying this dumb thing and I think this chapter and the next will be ones you guys really enjoy lmao

ok enough rambling, on with the chapter!

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

While it wasn't uncommon for customers at work to annoy Tommy, this new customer was somehow both ridiculously frustrating to deal with, while somehow also being the customer he's had the most fun talking to in his entire time working at Puffy's.

His shift at the cafe that day was the same as it always was: boring and tiring. Tommy's left hand was bright red from where he'd burnt himself while trying to pour some coffee earlier, and while he'd been able to heal the burn easily enough, the regrown skin was still a bit raw to the touch. His eyes were heavy as he went through the motions of making a flat white, as he had been forced to take the midday shift instead of his usual closing shift when Foolish had begged him to switch shifts. Apparently he was meeting up with an old friend that day for lunch, and since Foolish was Puffy's son, if he wanted a shift switch then he got it.

So here Tommy was, stuck on the midday shift when he usually spent this time lounging in his bed or vegging out on the couch with his roommates. He poured the milk over the coffee in his hand, sprinkling a dash of cinnamon on top before slamming a lid on top. He pushed the drink out on the counter calling out the name, and quickly turned back behind the counter to wipe down some milk he had spilled.

The door chimed as another customer came in. Thankfully the lunch rush had ended so there wasn't a line, but Tommy still internally groaned as he forced himself to turn to the register and put on his Customer Service Smile.

“Welcome to The Cloudy Cafe, what can I get you?” He recited from memory, knowing he would've gotten chastised for sounding so dead inside if Puffy was here right now.

The customer in front of him was silent for a beat, and Tommy glanced up from the register to actually look at who was standing in front of him. The guy looked to be the epitome of a hipster in their early 20s—he had those wire-rimmed glasses you saw all over Pinterest boards, a mess of curly brown hair that reminded Tommy a bit of his own, and was wearing an obnoxiously yellow sweater.

And he was gaping at Tommy. Just, like, outright staring at him with his mouth slightly open.

“The fuck you looking at?” Tommy asked, frowning at the customer.

The guy blinked, as if having been zoned out, and quickly straightened up. “Oh shit, sorry about that. I thought, uh, you looked like someone I met,” the guy explained, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“Sounds like a very great and handsome guy. Anyway, are you gonna order, or are you just gonna gape like a fish some more?” Tommy pushed, not having the patience to listen to a customer's weird story right now.

The customer raised his eyebrows in surprise, and Tommy braced himself for the dreaded *can I speak to your manager?* It wouldn't have been the first time he'd had to call Puffy because a customer wanted to complain about his ‘quality of service.’ But instead, after a beat of silence, the guy started to *laugh*.

“Do you always speak to customers that way?” The guy asked, grinning at him.

“When they're being fucking annoying I do,” Tommy shot back, secretly relieved that the guy didn't seem to be pissed.

“What counts as annoying?” The customer then questioned, smirking at Tommy.

“Trying to make stupid chit chat when I'm trying to do my job,” Tommy shot back with a flat stare. “Also gaping at me like I got something weird on my face instead of just saying your order.”

“Well, you have a little bit of lettuce in your teeth so you kind of do have something on your face,” the guy pointed out.

“Wait, shit, really?!” Tommy dug into his pocket under his apron to pull out his phone, trying to use the front camera as a mirror. The customer's shit-eating grin never left his face as Tommy searched for the piece of lettuce, only remembering a moment too late that he'd had soup for his lunch break.

“You bastard!”

The guy wheezed out another laugh, leaning his elbows on the counter as his composure completely dissolved. Tommy scowled at him, struggling to hold back the urge to shove him away from the counter.

“I’m sorry, that was immature of me,” the guy apologized, although he was still fighting back giggles as he said it.

“You better fucking tip me for that, bitch,” Tommy snapped, pointing to the tip jar next to the register.

The guy wheezed out another laugh as he straightened up, immediately digging into his pocket and dropping a handful of cash in the tip jar. Tommy’s eyes widened, not having thought that would work.

“You know, that usually just makes customers ask for the manager so they can complain about me,” Tommy said, eyes still fixed on the tip jar.

“Do you get complaints a lot?” The guy asked.

“Kind of. I don’t see why though. I’m a fucking *delight*.”

This made the guy start laughing again, and Tommy had to fight the urge to laugh with him.

“Aren’t you just a ray of sunshine?” The guy commented after he caught his breath. He straightened back up and glanced to the menu, and Tommy suddenly remembered that he was supposed to be waiting for this guy to place his order. “Can I just get a medium quadruple shot latte?”

Tommy nodded, grabbing one of the medium cups and scribbling the order on the side. “I suppose if you want a heart attack then sure,” he shrugged, smiling a bit when he heard the guy huff in response. “What’s the name for the order?”

“Wilbur.”

Who the hell names their kid Wilbur these days? Tommy wondered as he wrote down the name on the cup. Surprisingly, he managed not to let this thought slip out of his mouth, and instead just typed the drink into the register and gave the customer his total.

“Thanks Tommy,” the guy said as he walked away from the register with a small wave.

Tommy blinked, briefly wondering how the guy knew his name, before remembering that he had a literal nametag on the front of his apron. Cursing to himself, Tommy set about making the drink.

He pulled the first shot from the espresso machine, watching as Wilbur settled down at an empty table next to the window. Reaching into his bag, Wilbur pulled out a rather expensive-looking laptop and started to type rapidly onto it, his eyes narrowed as he leaned closer to the screen. Hopefully his glasses had blue light filters, otherwise his eyes were going to be wrecked.

“Quadruple shot latte for Wilbur,” Tommy called out after he put the lid on the drink, sliding it out onto the pickup and moving to wipe down the espresso machine.

Wilbur jumped up from his table and ran over to get the drink. He picked up the cup, pausing when he noticed the crudely drawn middle finger Tommy had put next to Wilbur’s name.

“How artistic,” Wilbur snorted as he took a sip of the drink.

“What can I say? I’m like fucking Mozart over here,” Tommy shot back with a smirk.

“You realize Mozart was a musician and not an artist, right?” Wilbur questioned, quirking an eyebrow at Tommy.

“No, because I’m not old and don’t remember it, unlike you.”

“Are you implying that I was alive when Mozart was?”

“Maybe. Certainly seem elderly enough.”

“Fuck off, I’m twenty-four.”

“Old bitch,” was all Tommy said in response.

Huffing out another laugh, Wilbur flipped Tommy off as he went back to his table and resumed whatever work he had on his laptop. Another customer came up to the register so Tommy had to go back to pretending that he liked his job, but he kept sparing glances at Wilbur whenever he got the chance. He wasn’t like most of the customers Tommy served. He was actually fun to talk to, and seemed to enjoy Tommy’s banter that was so tragically underappreciated in the customer service industry.

It’s not like Tommy thought he was cool or anything. Like, Wilbur was definitely going to kill himself with that many espresso shots. Not to mention, his name was *Wilbur*. Like the pig from Charlotte’s Web. That was, like, the definition of uncool.

A few hours passed. Tommy dealt with another rush, burning his hand a second time and barely restraining himself from letting loose a rather ungodly stream of curses that would make even a sailor flush. He steamed milk, pulled shots, ground beans, and blended way too many frappes. By the time he got a moment to breathe, he could see that it was almost the end of his shift, and nearly collapsed in relief.

It was only a few minutes before Foolish was supposed to show up to take over for him when Wilbur finally got up from his seat. He dropped his laptop back into his bag, slung it over his shoulder, and dropped his cup in the trash can as he passed by the register.

Tommy expected him to just walk out of the shop like most customers did when they were finished with their work. But of course Wilbur couldn’t do that, and instead he stopped by the register again.

“I don’t care how much you tip me, I’m not giving you another quadruple shot latte today,” Tommy deadpanned without preamble. “Don’t wanna deal with an old man having a heart

attack on the floor.”

“Wasn’t gonna ask for one,” Wilbur replied as he glanced up at the menu. “I’m heading out anyway. Just thought I’d get something for my brother.”

“Alright, what does he usually get?” Tommy asked.

Wilbur’s brows furrowed. “You see, that’s the tricky part. I have no idea what he usually gets from cafes.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Well, does he take his coffee black?”

“Sometimes, but I don’t think he’d want coffee this late. Plus, he’s more of a tea guy.” Wilbur paused, pursing his lips as he continued to skim the menu. “What kind of tea do you recommend?”

“Uh... London fog’s are pretty good?” Tommy shrugged, not used to getting asked for recommendations.

“That’s Earl Grey, right?” Tommy nodded, and Wilbur tapped his fingers against the counter. “Yeah, okay, I’ll have a medium London Fog. And maybe don’t draw a middle finger on it this time.”

Oh. Now that was a challenge.

“Sure thing,” Tommy replied as he rang up the order, giving Wilbur a saccharine smile.

Wilbur blinked a few times. “I have a feeling I’ve made a mistake.”

“You have.”

Before Wilbur could say anything else though, Tommy processed the order on the register and whirled around to grab a cup. He purposefully didn’t look at Wilbur as he scribbled onto the side of the cup, and kept his hand wrapped around the side of it as he made the familiar drink. Steamed milk, earl grey tea, and a splash of vanilla was all it took to make the drink, and within a minute Tommy was sliding the drink over to Wilbur.

“There you go,” Tommy grinned.

Narrowing his eyes, Wilbur lifted the cup up and spun it around in his hand, looking for whatever Tommy did to it. When he found Tommy’s message, he sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Dear Wilbur’s Brother, you brother is a bitch and an old man. He also looks pretentious af. You should do something about that. Signed, The Biggest Barista Ever,” Wilbur read out, sounding very dead inside as he did so. “You spelled pretentious wrong, by the way.”

“Don’t care,” Tommy smirked as he went back to rinsing out the container he used for the steamed milk. “Now get out of here before it gets cold. It’ll taste like shit then.”

“You should know I’m gonna be coming back here every day now just to bug the shit out of you while you work,” Wilbur threatened, although he was smiling as he said it.

“I’m taking that as a challenge to annoy you out of my cafe,” Tommy shot back, struggling to hide the laughter in his voice.

“Bring it on.” And with that, Wilbur turned and left the cafe, waving at Tommy on his way out. Tommy just flipped him off in return.

Midday shifts sucked ass. But Tommy had to admit, that was the most fun he’d had on shift in a while.

Technically, Wilbur broke his promise to show up every day to annoy him the first day after their meeting. In fact, Tommy didn’t see Wilbur in the cafe again for three days, and he tried to ignore the stabbing disappointment he felt when Wilbur didn’t show up.

But the fact that Tommy was feeling disappointed was stupid. Wilbur was just another customer, certainly not the first one Tommy had cracked jokes with. Sure, their banter was a lot more fun than any other time he’d fired shots at customers because Wilbur could dish it out just as much as he could take it, but that didn’t mean Tommy liked the guy or anything. It just made working customer service a slightly more tolerable version of hell.

But then, he showed up again.

It was only an hour into Tommy’s shift. He was back to his closing shifts, and was grateful for it. He worked much better later in the evening, when there were no nightmarish lunch rushes to deal with. It was a lot calmer, with the light from the setting sun bathing the inside of the cafe in golden light the color of egg yolk.

Tommy was moving through the motions like usual. His sweatshirt sleeves were rolled up to his elbows as he drizzled caramel on the inside of a plastic cup. The whirring of the blender came to a halt as soon as he had put the caramel bottle down, and he flipped the lid up with his elbow before pouring the frappe into the cup.

With a puff of whipped cream and a lid snapped on top, Tommy yelled out the name and slid the drink onto the counter. He rinsed out the inside of the blender in the sink when he heard the door chime. Biting back a groan, Tommy glanced up, prepared to plaster his Customer Service Smile on his face once again.

Instead, when he met a pair of dark brown eyes, he had the urge to smile for real.

However, he squashed that urge down and covered it up with a scowl. Couldn’t have the bastard thinking Tommy was happy to see him, now could he?

“Oh great, you’re back again,” Tommy complained, rolling his eyes as he sauntered over to the register.

Wilbur was grinning widely at him. “Yup, sure am! I came here yesterday to see if you were working, but there was just a really buff dude working behind the counter instead. He was

actually nice to me, which felt wrong.”

Oh. Shit. Wilbur had come to the cafe looking for Tommy earlier, but he’d come at the wrong time and gotten Foolish instead.

“Ah, you met Foolish then,” Tommy said, pushing his sleeves down to his wrists. “You see, he’s usually the one who works the afternoon shifts when we have rushes. I’m banished to the closing shifts, when we have the fewest customers so I don’t scare anyone off.”

“Now *that* would’ve been good to know,” Wilbur chuckled, shaking his head. “Though I don’t think I’d describe you as scary. You’re more like a... a feral raccoon you’d find eating out of the garbage, or maybe a possum with rabies.”

“It’s almost impossible for a possum to have rabies because of their low body temperature,” Tommy corrected him without missing a beat. “Also I’m not a fucking raccoon you stupid bitch. I’m the best barista in town!”

“Do you just know possum facts off the top of your head?” Wilbur questioned, raising an eyebrow at him.

Well, not exactly. Tubbo liked to watch nature documentaries about bees, so during the trio’s Netflix binges they frequented the documentary section of the site. While Tommy didn’t particularly care for bees, he liked animals in general, and would often get into arguments with Tubbo about which nature documentary they were going to watch.

“I just saw it in a documentary,” he answered, not mentioning how he’d specifically argued with Tubbo for fifteen minutes straight about the merits of watching a documentary about ‘garbage’ animals like possums and raccoons. Tommy thought they were very underappreciated creatures and wanted to learn more about them, while Tubbo thought they were gross. Ranboo ended up being the deciding factor, and of course he went with Tommy’s side because Tommy has the Best opinions and ideas. “Anyway, I’m not a raccoon, and I can be plenty scary if I want to be.”

“Oh really?” Wilbur looked doubtful. “You don’t look scary at all. If anything you look a bit like a goldfish.”

“A goldfish?!” Tommy clenched his hands into fists at his sides, sorely tempted to reach over the register and deck Wilbur in the face. Screw what he said about missing the guy, he was just a bastard through and through.

Wilbur snorted when he saw the indignation painted across Tommy’s face. “Okay, maybe that was a little far-”

“Order your drink, Wilbur,” Tommy cut him off, eyeing Wilbur carefully.

Now this made Wilbur visibly pale. “You’re going to do something to my drink.”

“What? Me? Never!” Tommy gasped in fake offense. “I would never sabotage a customer’s drink. Especially not after they just said I look like a goldfish.”

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. “If you spit in my drink I *will* get revenge.”

Tommy didn’t have to fake his disgusted expression. “What the fuck? That’s gross as shit. I was just gonna, like, give you decaf coffee instead of normal coffee.”

“Wow, such terrible revenge,” Wilbur drawled. “I wasn’t even going to get coffee today, so checkmate.”

Tommy snorted and rolled his eyes. “Well, get on with it then. Tell me what you want.”

“Just a medium hot chocolate for me,” Wilbur replied, shoving his hands in his pockets.

“What are you, five?” Tommy snarked, even though he’d literally been sipping on a hot chocolate yesterday while he walked home from work.

Huffing but not replying to the dig, Wilbur was smiling as he dropped the money on the counter, adding a few extra bills to the tip jar as well.

Just like last time, Wilbur set himself up next to a window and pulled out that nice laptop again. He took his glasses out his pocket and leaned close to the screen again, his brows furrowing as he dove into his work.

In the end, Tommy did not sabotage Wilbur’s drink. It was only because Wilbur tipped him and for no other reason. It wasn’t like he was worried Wilbur wasn’t going to come back or anything. Tommy Innit was a delight, and Wilbur should be honored that a Big Man such as himself even deigned to be in Wilbur’s presence.

And from there, the routine continued. Now that Wilbur knew when Tommy’s shifts were, he showed up nearly every evening around the same time. Sometimes he would order hot chocolate, other times he would order tea, and once he’d ordered a black coffee. On that day, there had been heavy bags under his eyes and a harsh edge to his tone, although he didn’t use it on Tommy even when Tommy joked about how tired and old he looked.

Each time Wilbur showed up, Tommy would spend far too much time antagonizing the man and Wilbur would antagonize him right back. They would shoot barbs at one another, Tommy struggling to smother his laugh while Wilbur would full on wheeze while gripping the counter.

And maybe, just maybe, Wilbur slowly wormed his way into becoming one of Tommy’s favorite customers.

Chapter End Notes

is this chapter just entirely crimeboys banter? yes. yes it is. and the next chapter is literally just more crimeboys banter. I have way too much fun writing this dynamic as you guys can tell

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed this! like I said I'll post the next chapter either tomorrow or wednesday so make sure to keep an eye out for that! please comment what you thought, even though I usually only respond to questions know that I read every single comment and cherish all of them <3

follow me on tumblr or twitter @bonesandthebees !

fried chicken sandwiches

Chapter Summary

Wilbur buys Tommy some food.

Chapter Notes

hello hello lovelies i'm back with more of this! I told you I would post the second half within two days so here I am, keeping my promises! don't expect a regular upload schedule from me though, I'm terrible at those

anyway I just wanted to say thanks again for all the love and support, I'm a little floored at how much reception I've gotten on this fic with only 3 chapters out (now 4). all your comments make me so happy every time I check my email I'm just like :D

<3

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

Although Tommy had regular customers, none were like Wilbur. Some of his regulars would ask how he was doing when they came up to order their drink, but none would joke around with him like Wilbur. None would laugh at his taunts or smile at him the way Wilbur did. Not to mention, Wilbur left a tip in the tip jar every time he came by, which also made him excited for Wilbur's visits.

A full two weeks passed of this. His life had seemingly returned to the peace it had before he healed Siren—he hadn't seen any glimpses of the villain during his walks home after that McDonald's trip. Tubbo and Ranboo continued to share strange whispers with one another, but made an effort to stop more if Tommy was in the room with them. Tommy tried very hard not to care, but it was an effort to stamp down the jealousy that stirred in his gut anytime he noticed Tubbo and Ranboo sharing a knowing look.

They were supposed to be a team. The three of them against the world. Why was he being excluded now?

It was this situation that made his work shifts all the more enjoyable. Not only did he get to escape the apartment that was practically smothering him with the weight of Tubbo and Ranboo's secrets, but he also got to annoy the shit out of Wilbur. It was a win win.

Once again, Tommy was working yet another shift where Wilbur was keeping him on his toes. This time, Wilbur had waltzed in less than an hour from closing time, giving Tommy a shit-eating grin that told him the bastard had done it on purpose. While usually customers coming in to hang out so close to closing time drove Tommy nuts, Wilbur was a different case because Tommy could tell him to fuck off without getting fired.

After getting his drink (a flat white, which had led to Wilbur insisting he would be fine with the caffeine this late at night), Wilbur had settled himself at his favorite table and was once again consumed by his work. The last hour of Tommy's shift ticked by, all the remaining customers slowly dripping out like pour over coffee until it was just him and Wilbur left in the cafe.

"Y'know we're closing soon, dickhead," Tommy called out from behind the counter, no longer needing to pretend to be polite since everyone else had left.

Wilbur glanced up from his computer, blinking a few times as he rubbed at his eyes. "Oh shit, that went by fast, didn't it?"

"That's what happens when you show up less than an hour before we close," Tommy said, rinsing out the rest of the cups and shakers in water.

"I suppose that's true," Wilbur agreed. He closed his laptop and put his glasses back in his coat pocket. After sliding the laptop back in his bag he stood up from his seat, taking one last sip of his coffee before he dumped it in the trash bin. Then, he sauntered over to the counter and rested his elbows next to the register. "So how long does it usually take you to close?"

Tommy shrugged, wringing out a wet rag to wipe down the counters. "Depending on how busy it was, usually twenty to thirty minutes?"

Wilbur nodded. "Well then I have a proposal for you," he said, smirking at the teenager.

Tommy narrowed his eyes, waiting for Wilbur to go on.

"You see, I'm very hungry right now. I'm also hopped up on caffeine. You've been working for quite a few hours now, which means you're probably hungry too. So I was thinking you and me go out to this fried chicken place that my dad never wants to go to with me, and we just gorge ourselves on some real big fried chicken sandwiches. How's that sound?"

...huh?

Staring at Wilbur blankly for a moment, Tommy tried to figure out what was going on. Because sure, it was one thing for the two of them to bicker constantly every time Wilbur showed up to order a latte, but it was another thing for Wilbur to actually invite Tommy to *hang out*. Which is exactly what it sounded like he was doing.

After struggling to come up with a response for a beat too long, Tommy said the first thing that came to his mind.

"I just paid my rent so I don't know if I could afford that right now."

Unfortunately for Tommy, that was completely true. While the trio of him, Ranboo, and Tubbo were usually able to pull in enough income with their respective jobs to pay the rent without issue, anything outside of that... got a bit tricky. They usually had enough cash to buy groceries for the week (although god knows they had gone a bit hungry for a week or two before), but going out to eat was almost always out of the question. It was a rare luxury the three of them only let themselves indulge in on birthdays and never at any other time.

So yeah. Even if Wilbur actually wanted to go out to get food with Tommy *for some reason*, it didn't matter, because Tommy couldn't afford it.

"Oh, don't worry about that. I was gonna pay," Wilbur said, waving the concern aside with his hand.

"I don't need your pity. I'm not a starving street kid," Tommy snapped without thinking. He'd met those types before. The 'good samaritans' who thought of street kids as charity projects they could take on. Tommy had met quite a few of those after he first left the foster system, when he and his friends had an apartment that could barely qualify as real shelter, and went hungry on more days of the week than not.

The 'good samaritans' would film him while giving him food to post to their stupid social medias. They wanted the world to see just how *good* and *selfless* they were to give a hungry teenager a sandwich. Tommy fucking hated those people, and he hated how he had to take the food anyway because it was all he could get.

So yeah, he didn't appreciate pity.

"This isn't pity," Wilbur quickly replied, not seeming phased by Tommy's harsh tone. "I'm inviting you out, I should be the one to pay."

Tommy narrowed his eyes at Wilbur. It was one thing to let a supervillain whose life he saved buy him McDonald's—it was a lowkey way of letting Siren repay the favor without actually fucking Tommy's life up—but it was another thing to let a customer of his that he insulted on a near daily basis buy him dinner.

"Why do you want me to come get food with you?"

Wilbur blinked. "Because... we have a fun time talking every time I'm in here so I just thought it would be nice to hang out when you're not working?" He seemed confused by Tommy's reaction. "Look, Tommy, if you don't want to you can just say no—"

"I'll go," Tommy cut him off, making the decision in a split second.

He wasn't sure what compelled him to agree, but if Wilbur was being honest and he only wanted to hang out with Tommy because he actually *liked* talking to him, well, Tommy wasn't going to say no to free food.

A bright smile spread across Wilbur's face. "Alright then! Hurry up and close this place so we can go."

Tommy huffed as he returned to wiping down the counters like he had been before Wilbur interrupted.

As he went through the closing routine, Wilbur hung out by the door of the cafe, scrolling through his phone with his glasses perched on his nose. A part of Tommy felt guilty for making him wait, but Wilbur didn't seem impatient, and was just humming to himself as he scrolled through whatever social media he was looking at.

Like he had predicted, it took Tommy twenty minutes to finish up the closing routine. He chucked his apron into the back, grabbed his backpack to sling over his shoulder, and headed towards the front door where Wilbur was waiting.

"All done," Tommy announced, swinging the keys to the cafe in his hand.

Wilbur pocketed his phone and straightened up. "Sweet, let's head out then."

A few minutes later, they were walking down the street, Wilbur's hands in his pockets and Tommy swinging his arms from side to side. The night air was cool, a chilly breeze ruffling Tommy's hair and making him grateful that he'd worn his thick hoodie. Under the orange streetlights that lined the sidewalks, Tommy couldn't make out any stars. Stupid streetlights.

"So where are we heading?" Tommy asked, glancing around as they made their way down a street opposite the direction to Tommy's apartment building.

"The fried chicken place is right down the street, so it shouldn't be too far of a walk," Wilbur explained, his bag thumping against his hip as he walked.

"You don't have a car?" Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow at Wilbur.

"Thought kids were taught not to get into cars with strangers," Wilbur retorted.

"Is that your way of telling me you're going to kidnap me? Because you're doing a kind of shit job at it," Tommy told him.

"I don't think anyone would ever kidnap you, Tommy. And if you were, they'd let you go in less than an hour because they wouldn't want to deal with you," Wilbur shot back.

"Well what can I say? Most people find me annoying at first," Tommy said with a shit-eating grin.

"Only at first?" Wilbur gave him a disbelieving look, and Tommy elbowed him in the side.

"Don't be a bitch boy, Wilbur," Tommy scoffed. "Anyway, you're dodging the question. Why don't you have a car?"

"We live in a city. Do you see any available parking around here?" Wilbur asked, gesturing around the street with his stupidly long arms.

Tommy raised an eyebrow. "You can't drive." It wasn't a question.

Wilbur glared at him for a beat before sighing. “No, I can’t drive.”

“If you can’t drive, how the hell do you get around?” Tommy asked as he skipped over a crack in the sidewalk.

“We have a subway system,” Wilbur shrugged, kicking a rock off the concrete. “So I usually take that, or my brother will drive me around.”

“Must be nice to just have someone to drive you around all the time like that.”

“It’s not that easy,” Wilbur snorted. “I usually have to convince my brother if I want to get him to take me somewhere.”

“Is that why you get him tea sometimes before you leave the cafe?”

“Sometimes. Bribery is a pretty good tool to get what you want, but also I’m just a very persuasive person in general,” Wilbur explained, a knowing smirk growing on his face.

Tommy was about to respond asking Wilbur what he meant by that, when they turned a corner and were blinded by bright lights. There, sitting at the corner of an intersection, was a food truck that had floodlights sitting on top. The floodlights illuminated the parking lot in front of it, where a few foldout tables had been set up to eat at.

They crossed the street, Tommy noticing that only one of the foldout tables was occupied. Wilbur walked past the tables, heading straight for the window of the food truck with a grin on his face that was almost as bright as the floodlights above.

“Fundy!” Wilbur exclaimed as he stopped in front of the order window.

Settled behind the order window was a red-headed man that looked only a year or two younger than Wilbur himself. He had sharp features that reminded Tommy of a fox, and a few streaks of white in his hair that stood out in the harsh fluorescent lighting. He matched Wilbur’s smile as they came close, half-leaning out the window with his hands perched on the metal counter.

“Hey Wil, I see you still haven’t convinced Phil to come here,” Fundy said, quirking an eyebrow at him.

“Nope, not yet. Old man still doesn’t like eating chicken,” Wilbur told him, before glancing at Tommy. “But I managed to convince my new friend Tommy here to come join me for dinner.”

“Nice to meet you, Tommy!” Fundy quipped. “I’m Fundy, Wilbur’s son.”

Tommy frowned. “Wait, your son?” What the fuck? Wilbur had said he was only twenty-four, and Fundy looked like he couldn’t be anything less than twenty years old. Tommy may have sucked at math, but he knew that was impossible.

Wilbur chuckled. “He’s not actually my son. I’m only a few years older than him. It’s just kind of a running bit between us that I’m his dad,” he explained.

“Can’t believe my own father denies I’m his kid,” Fundy fake-pouted, shaking his head while flipping Wilbur off.

“I’m not denying it! My darling son, please, tell me how work is going tonight. Pops wants to know,” Wilbur replied, smiling innocently at the red-head.

Tommy shuddered. He never wanted to hear Wilbur refer to himself as ‘Pops’ ever again.

“Work’s been alright. The dinner rush was kinda crazy but things are pretty slow now,” Fundy told him, leaning back in the window to rest his elbows on the counter.

“Glad to know business is still going strong. Any more interesting faces pass through?” Wilbur asked, folding his arms over his chest.

“Oh yeah! Today Flame and 404 stopped by to get lunch while they were on patrol.”

Holy shit. Flame and 404 were here? They were two of the top ten heroes in the city. And they came to a random fried chicken truck for lunch?

Huh. Maybe this place was better than Tommy thought it was going to be.

“Oh, that’s a good sign for business I’d say. Did they tip well?” Wilbur continued.

Fundy snorted. “Flame tipped, 404 didn’t.”

“What an asshole,” Tommy muttered, shaking his head. With the kind of salary heroes got, he would’ve expected both of them to tip extremely well. Then again, he’d never had a hero show up at the cafe, so it was probably normal for them not to tip. Stuck up bastards.

“I like this guy,” Fundy said, looking over at Tommy. “So kid, what’ll you have?”

Tommy blinked, having been too distracted by the whole ‘father son’ bit that he forgot to look at the menu. “Uh... Wil, what do you recommend?” He was paying after all. It was probably better to let Wilbur pick out something cheap for him.

“Their signature fried chicken sandwiches are the best thing they have here,” Wilbur told him, pointing at a picture next to the ordering window of a large piece of fried chicken stuck in between two fluffy buns.

“Then I’ll take that.”

Nodding, Wilbur gave Fundy the order, getting both himself and Tommy the same sandwich. He also ordered Tommy a coke and himself a water, and Tommy wondered how Wilbur knew he’d like coke. Then again, coke was a pretty popular soda, so it wasn’t a stretch to say he just assumed Tommy would drink it if he got it for him.

After their food was ordered, they stood by the truck to wait for Fundy to cook it up. It only took a few minutes, and once they had their meals, Wilbur led Tommy to one of the empty foldout tables near the truck to sit down at.

Wilbur waited for Tommy to take a bite first. He was confused as to why, until he took a bite of the sandwich and realized that *oh*, this was fucking good.

Admittedly, Tommy hadn't had the opportunity to go to a lot of good restaurants in his life. But even still, he would argue that this was probably one of the best places to get food in the city. Not only was the fried chicken perfectly crispy, the buns were soft and had just a hint of sweetness, and there was some kind of delicious sauce on the sandwich as well that Wilbur called aioli. Whatever the hell that was.

"So Tommy," Wilbur started when they were about halfway through their sandwiches. "Who's your favorite hero?"

"My favorite hero?" Tommy repeated, furrowing his brows. Wilbur nodded. "I don't like any of them. I think heroes are fucking assholes." He paused for a beat. "Well, the Captain was pretty cool when she was still active. But after she retired it just went downhill from there."

Wilbur seemed surprised. "What don't you like about the heroes?"

Scoffing, Tommy rolled his eyes. "They claim they protect the city from all the villains, but they only protect the rich bitches over in the Hero district. They couldn't give less of a shit about the poorer areas like Eastside."

Nodding, Wilbur took a sip of his water. "I gotta agree with you there. They don't even try to hide it considering they patrol the Hero district way more than any other part of town. Well, except for West End of course, since that's where all the rich fuckers are."

"Exactly!" Thank god Wilbur had some sense in his head. "You get it! Fucking Dream, 404, Flame, none of them care about most of this city. There's literally so much crime all the time in the poorer areas. The only reason it's even remotely safe to walk alone in Eastside is thanks to vigilantes."

"You like vigilantes then?" Wilbur questioned.

"I do. I mean, it depends on the vigilante in particular, since they all can kinda do their own thing and have their own priorities. Like that Slimecicle guy was a bit lame, but Dryad was really cool. I haven't heard much from her in a while though," Tommy said, thinking of the vigilante who could control plants and was always seen wrapped in thorny roses.

"I heard Dryad became a villain. She goes by Rosethorn now," Wilbur told Tommy in a hushed voice.

Tommy's eyes widened. "Seriously?" That made sense, he supposed. It was rare for a vigilante to stick around for longer than a few years. If they weren't thrown in jail, they were either brought into the hero training program, or they were recruited by the villains and rebranded. "What about Monarch? They're still a vigilante, right?"

For some reason, the mention of Monarch made Wilbur grimace. "Yeah, Monarch's still a vigilante. The villains can't seem to kill them, heroes can't arrest them, and they don't seem interested in working for either side."

“They’re cool. They saved me from getting mugged once, actually,” Tommy said, remembering how the vigilante’s pure white eyes glowed in the orange street lights as they knocked the guys mugging Tommy unconscious.

“Oh really?” The grimace on Wilbur’s face faded. “Huh. Good to know I suppose.” He took another bite of his sandwich and chewed thoughtfully. “Have you had any other run-ins? With heroes, villains, or vigilantes?”

Tommy’s jaw clenched as he thought back to eating McDonald’s on the roof with Siren only a few weeks before. Obviously he couldn’t tell Wilbur about *that*. It would just raise too many questions.

“Nah. I once saw Rewind across the street, but I didn’t interact with him. Heroes are bastards after all,” Tommy answered, taking a careful sip of his coke.

“Huh, makes sense.” Wilbur said, wiping his fingers on a napkin. “Y’know though, I met Siren once.”

Stomach dropping, Tommy took a huge bite of his sandwich to hide his expression.

“Oh really?” He asked, his voice muffled by food.

“Yeah, I did. I mean, it’s not like I sat and had a full conversation with the guy, but he wasn’t all that terrible. For a supervillain of course,” Wilbur shrugged, taking another swig of water.

“Yeah, of course,” Tommy repeated, staring intently at the table. When the hell did Wilbur meet Siren? Was he trying to get Tommy to say his opinion on the supervillain? Was he going to get pissed if Tommy defended him? It didn’t sound like Wilbur hated Siren, but there was something odd going on in this conversation, like Tommy was being led into a trap.

“What do you think of him? I guess all the Syndicate really. You think they’re the horrible scary bad guys the news keeps telling us they are?”

Tommy tried to look as nonchalant as possible as he thought over what to say. “I think the news can exaggerate some things for sure. But they’re self-proclaimed villains, so I’m not gonna say I think they’re all innocent either.” He took the last bite of his sandwich, wiping his face with his own napkin. “Either way, it’s not like we know them personally or anything.”

“Well, technically you could. They have secret identities after all,” Wilbur pointed out.

The tension leaked out of Tommy’s shoulders a bit as he scoffed. “Trust me, I think I’d know if someone I knew was fucking *Siren* whether he had that stupid blindfold mask on or not.”

Wilbur chuckled at that. “Considering all the villains have got voice changers it might not be as easy as you think to recognize them. But why don’t you think his mask is cool?”

“It’s stupid. How the hell does he even see in that thing anyway?” Tommy shook his head, crumpling his sandwich wrapper in his hands. “The Blade’s mask is pretty cool though. The boar skull looks super fucking intimidating, I’ll give him that.”

“Well, Blade always has had a flair for the dramatic,” Wilbur agreed, crushing his own sandwich paper in his hand as well. “But anyway, are you ready to head out?”

“Sure thing, bitch,” Tommy nodded, pushing out of the chair and to his feet.

They threw their trash out near the food truck, gave their goodbyes to Fundy, and headed back the way they came. Although Tommy insisted he could walk home by himself, Wilbur said it didn’t feel right to let a kid walk home alone at this hour, which led to Tommy screaming at Wilbur about how he wasn’t a child for most of the walk to his apartment anyway.

By the time Tommy realized they were in front of his building, he was out of breath from all the cursing. Wilbur didn’t seem phased, as per usual, and Tommy had the urge to punch his stupid smug face.

But he didn’t. Because Wilbur bought him a really good sandwich and he had to admit he was grateful for that.

Reaching the front door to his building, Tommy sighed and glanced back over to Wilbur.

“Y’know, despite being an old bitch, you weren’t all that bad to hang out with tonight,” Tommy muttered, eyes quickly falling to the ground.

“Awwwww, Tommy, are you saying you had fun hanging out with me?” Wilbur teased, his voice turning into a croon as he beamed.

“Pfft. I didn’t have ‘fun’, I just said you weren’t terrible to be around,” Tommy rolled his eyes, trying to keep himself from looking at Wilbur. “Plus, you bought me a sandwich, so I do appreciate that.”

“Look, I’ve been trying to find someone who will go with me to the fried chicken truck for ages now because I always hate eating alone. My brother never wants to leave the house, and my dad doesn’t eat chicken, so honestly you were doing me a favor by going tonight,” Wilbur explained, still giving Tommy that easy grin.

“Well, of course I did. I’m such a kind and gracious Big Man that I could tell you needed me to come with you, so I took pity on you, you know?” Tommy bullshitted, leaning against the wall.

Wilbur snorted. “Jesus christ, you’re such a little shit,” he muttered, shaking his head fondly. A beat passed and he glanced back up to the apartment building itself. “So this is where you live?”

“Yup. It’s like the fucking Ritz up in here,” Tommy told him, gesturing to the sagging brick and rickety fire escapes that lined the sides of the building.

Tommy could tell that Wilbur wanted to say it was a dump, because it was. But not everyone could be well-off like that bastard seemed to be. Not everyone could live in nice apartments

without strange smells coming through the vents and walls stained with dark substances that may or may not be dried blood.

Thankfully though, Wilbur held his tongue and didn't comment on the apartment building itself.

"I should be heading out," Wilbur said instead, nodding at Tommy. "I'll see you at the cafe tomorrow though, right?"

"Sure will."

Wilbur grinned again, and waved as he walked off. Tommy waved in return, and waited until Wilbur rounded the corner to head inside his building.

As strange as that whole situation with Wilbur inviting him out to eat was, Tommy had to admit, he had a good time. The sandwich was delicious, and talking to Wilbur was usually pretty fun.

Still, Tommy was suspicious of his motivations. Wilbur clearly knew Tommy was poor, and even though he wasn't living on the streets, he was pretty damn close to it with his shitty apartment. The last thing he wanted was for Wilbur to be taking him on as a pity case. While he would like to think Wilbur wouldn't do that, it was still something he was worried about.

One thing Tommy learned through his time in the foster system: you couldn't trust adults. Not completely. Even when they were only in their early twenties, like Wilbur was. The only adult he remotely trusted was Puffy, and that was just because she genuinely needed another barista at the cafe. Tommy didn't have his job out of pity.

There was something strange about Wilbur though. Tommy liked talking to him, but he was going to have to be careful. The minute he got too comfortable, the niceties would fall and Wilbur would end up fucking him over like almost every other adult in his life. (Well, young adult in Wilbur's case.)

But for now, Tommy had a full stomach and roommates waiting for him to get back home.

So Tommy turned on his heel and headed into his building.

Chapter End Notes

did i forget to mention until this chapter that heroes villains and vigilantes use voice changers? Maybe. Haha i'm a totally competent fic author yall. Anyway just assume that siren's voice changer is like a choker thing wrapped around his neck which is why his mouth isn't covered

ANYWAY this is the second half of all the crimeboys banter I wrote, we're gonna jump back into more plot stuff next chapter, but we just needed some fun bonding for Wilbur

and Tommy :)))

as always, hope you guys enjoyed and please leave a comment if you did! again, I don't usually reply to comments that aren't questions because I don't want to just be repeating thank you over and over again, but I promise I see and cherish every single one

feel free to send me asks on tumblr or twitter @bonesandthebees ! (if you ask me for sneak previews of the next chapter I'll probably give them to you ;)

unexpected visitors

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets a surprise visit.

Chapter Notes

hey hey everyone! yes I'm back with more!

not gonna ramble too much, just wanted to say ty all for all the insane attention you've given this fic so far. i'm so happy you guys are enjoying it so much!

anyway, TW for this chapter: graphic wound descriptions, lots of mentions of blood, basically similar stuff from chapter 1

hope you guys enjoy!

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

Someone was pounding on Tommy's front door.

He groaned, sinking deeper into the sagging couch that was currently vegetating on. The static TV was on in front of him, playing another nature documentary about spiders that Tommy was very invested in.

Tubbo's computer, which was almost always on and shining painful blue light into the room, had gone dark for once. The apartment was quiet save for David Attenborough's tinny voice blaring out from the TV—and of course the knocking.

This was one of the rare times where Tommy had the apartment to himself. After getting home from his shift at Puffy's, he'd found a note from Tubbo telling him that Ranboo had to work late and Tubbo had gone to walk him home. Once again, Tommy was hit with that familiar ache in his chest knowing that his best friends were off doing their own thing again. Still, it's not like there was much he could do about it now.

So he had turned on a documentary on spiders that Tubbo had been adamant they couldn't watch because spiders were 'gross'. Tommy didn't agree with that, because spiders could actually be pretty damn cute. Maybe he could get a pet spider one of these days. People kept tarantulas as pets, right? He could name it Shroud and put him in Tubbo's hair when he wasn't expecting it.

More knocking. Oh right. Tommy should get that.

Turning down the volume on the TV, Tommy pushed to his feet and shuffled over to the door. If Ranboo and Tubbo both forgot their keys, Tommy was going to smack them both in the head.

Not bothering to look through the peephole, Tommy swung open the door and was greeted by two people that were most certainly *not* Tubbo and Ranboo.

“What the fuck?”

Of all the people who could end up in front of his door, Tommy had to admit, the Blade and Zephyrus weren't high on his list.

The Blade was every bit of a tank in person as he seemed on TV. His long pink hair was twisted into a complicated braid in the back of his head, a large boar skull covering most of his face save for his glowing crimson eyes. There was a small black band wrapped around his throat, similar to one he'd seen Siren wear before, and figured it was his voice changer. And of course, there was the golden crown that was always seated on top of the boar skull, the points of the crown spiked and seeming as though they were razor sharp to the touch.

The Blade didn't really catch Tommy's full attention though. Instead, he immediately noticed the man who was leaning heavily on Blade's shoulder. Zephyrus.

Zephyrus' huge black wings were drooping behind him, the glossy black feathers dragging along the ground. Light blond hair was tied into a small ponytail at the back of his neck, but even through the veil that covered his face, Tommy could see more than half of his hair had come out of the hair tie. His dark green and black robes were stained with blood, and despite the veil being too dark for Tommy to make the details of his face out, he had a feeling the villain was grimacing.

The Blade and Zephyrus were standing at his front door, and Zephyrus was injured.

Again, *what the fuck?*

“Why are you here?” Tommy finally managed to spit out after staring at the two in shock for a solid minute.

“Siren told us you were a healer,” Blade said simply.

Oh, that *bitch*.

“Jesus fucking christ. You save a guy one time and suddenly he's giving your address to every villain in the goddamn neighborhood,” Tommy grumbled, scowling at the two.

Now, Tommy wasn't stupid. As much as he wanted to slam the door shut in the villain's faces, he also knew that that was a horrible idea. Because even if Siren had been friendly with him and bought him McDonald's, somehow, he had found out where Tommy lived and told the other two members of the Syndicate. If Tommy refused to help Zephyrus, it wasn't going to give him a good name with the villains, even if he had saved Siren's life already.

Great. This was exactly what he didn't want.

"I don't have a choice in this, do I?" Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow at Blade.

"No, you don't," Blade answered. Well, at least they were honest.

Letting out a deep sigh, Tommy nodded and opened the door wider. "Bring him in and put him on the couch."

"Sorry about this," Zephyrus apologized as Blade helped him inside. "We just happened to be in the area and I don't think I could make it back to our place like this."

"Yeah yeah, I get it," Tommy muttered, shutting the door behind the supervillains once they were inside and locking it tightly.

Blade helped Zephyrus onto the couch. Once sitting down, Zephyrus' wings spread out and almost knocked a lamp off the table. Tommy pinched the bridge of his nose, silently praying that Tubbo and Ranboo didn't come home right now.

With Zephyrus settled, Blade seemed a little lost about what to do. He hovered by the couch, looking between the man and Tommy. Biting back a sharp retort that probably wasn't the best thing to say to someone people called the Blood God, Tommy instead cleared his throat to get both villains to look at him.

"Blade, you can sit on that chair over there," he said, pointing to Tubbo's computer chair.

"Are you sure I can't stay here-"

"No, you'll be in my way," Tommy snapped.

Blade stared at him for a moment, and Tommy's heart started to pick up as he wondered if he went too far. But then, after a beat, the Blade silently moved to sit down in the chair.

Okay. He had two supervillains in his apartment, and one of them was injured. Fucking peachy. Exactly how he wanted to spend his Wednesday night.

Taking a deep breath, Tommy walked over to the couch and knelt down next to Zephyrus. He glanced up at the villain, straining to see his eyes behind the veil. While he could faintly make out an outline under the veil, he realized the villain was wearing a black mask over the lower half of his face under the veil as well. So basically, he couldn't see shit. Giving up on looking at his face, his eyes then fell to Zephyrus' hands, noticing the way the skin was tinted black on the tips of his fingers, and how his nails curled out into razor sharp talons.

Okay, better not get near those.

"Zephyrus, I'm gonna need to lift your shirt so I can see the damage," Tommy told him, glancing back up to the veil.

"Sure thing, mate," the villain said in a voice much friendlier than what Tommy had expected, although it was tight with pain.

Making sure to keep his movements slow, Tommy reached for the green and black fabric covered in blood. Upon closer inspection, he realized that a lot of Zephyrus' shirt had blood on it, and it only took a glance at the staining pattern to realize that most of it wasn't his own.

Tommy lifted the shirt away from the skin, moving the fabric up and trying not to wince at Zephyrus' pained gasp when the fabric pulled at his wound. Once he actually saw what had happened though, Tommy breathed a sigh of relief.

The wound wasn't anywhere near as bad as Siren's had been. It looked as though he'd been shot, with a clean hole going through his side. Tommy was just able to make out an exit wound on Zephyrus' back, meaning that the bullet wasn't still lodged in there. This was painful, yes, but it wasn't anything that Tommy couldn't fix.

"Some rando got a lucky shot on you?" Tommy asked, narrowing his eyes at the wound to see if there was any debris stuck inside.

"Yeah, I don't think the dickhead was even aiming for me," Zephyrus said with a low chuckle, making himself wince again when it jostled his wound.

Looking closely at the wound, Tommy noticed a few pieces of green fabric stuck inside the hole. Back in the alley, it had been far too dark for Tommy to get a proper look at Siren's wound, and he wouldn't have had time to clean it before Siren bled out. If there had been any debris in Siren's wound it wouldn't have killed him to have Tommy heal it anyway, but it probably wasn't great.

Right now, Zephyrus clearly wasn't bleeding out, and he was sitting in Tommy's brightly lit apartment. He could take the time to clean it out.

"I need to get that debris out before I heal it. Let me grab the first aid kit," Tommy muttered, pushing to his feet to rush to the bathroom.

The first aid kit hadn't been used since the boys had discovered Tommy's healing ability. None of their injuries since then had required cleaning, so the box had stayed tucked away in the far back corner under the bathroom sink collecting dust.

Pulling it out, Tommy coughed as the dust made his eyes water. Heading back into the living room, Tommy set the white box on the counter, clicking it open and digging inside for the pair of tweezers he knew they still had in there.

"Got it," he muttered, kneeling back down beside Zephyrus. "This might hurt a bit, so fair warning for that."

"I can handle a little pain," Zephyrus shrugged, although Blade made a noise of complaint from the chair.

Ignoring Blade, Tommy started trying to pull out the fabric as carefully as he could. He set up a small bowl on the coffee table, dropping the bloody fabric bits into it so they didn't have even more strange stains on the carpet. Sure, the couch was definitely going to be stained

with blood after this, but Tommy could just lie and say he cut his finger while Tubbo and Ranboo were out.

It was strangely calming to work like this. Tommy's confused thoughts that had been racing in his head ever since he opened the front door started to slow down as his focus solely shifted to getting the fabric out of Zephyrus' bullet hole.

"So you're the kid who saved Siren's life?" Zephyrus asked as Tommy pulled out another fabric piece, only wincing slightly at the pain.

"Yup. Sure am," Tommy replied, leaning closer to the wound. Normally he would've protested at being referred to as a kid, but he was so focused on not hurting Zephyrus that the thought didn't even cross his mind.

"Well, I wanted to say thank you for that. As I'm sure you can imagine, Blade and myself are pretty fond of Siren and we'd rather keep him around," Zephyrus said, sounding completely genuine in his thanks.

Behind him, Blade snorted. "I dunno. It might be nice to get rid of him so we don't have to hear his whining every time Dream beats him in a fight."

"Oh shush," Zephyrus scolded, and Tommy frowned at how much it sounded like a father scolding his kid. "He may be a shithead, but he's our shithead."

"Speak for yourself, old man. I have no claim over him," Blade shot back.

"Now you and I both know that's not true," Zephyrus said, turning to give Blade a flat stare. "He's just as much of your problem as he is mine, and you're just as much of a problem to me as he is."

"Hey now, don't turn this around on me. I'm not the one who charmspoke his way into getting a free plane ticket to the Netherlands when he was seventeen so he could take out the Prime Minister," Blade argued.

"That's true, but you also hijacked a train when you were sixteen and killed the conductor just because you wanted to know what a high-speed train chase was like, so I can't say you're any better," Zephyrus deadpanned. "You're both chaotic shits who are the reason for 90% of my grey hairs."

Tommy snorted as he pulled out the last piece of fabric, and set the tweezers down in the bowl. Clearly the group had all known each other for a while, given how Zephyrus was mentioning things Siren and Blade had done when they were teenagers. In the back of his mind, he wondered if they were related, but figured it was probably best not to ask that.

"Alright, it's cleaned out now so I can heal it," Tommy told Zephyrus.

Zephyrus nodded, and Tommy placed his hands on the edges of the bullet hole. He carefully pushed the edges together, ignoring Zephyrus' sharp hiss of pain, and focused on the warmth building up in his hands.

The warm energy tingled as it poured out from his hands and into the wound. He could feel the skin knitting itself back together, and there was a bright orange glow shining against his eyelids. In front of him, Zephyrus sighed in relief as the pain faded away. Tommy meanwhile frowned as his head began to pound again, though not as badly as it did with Siren.

This time, he didn't try to hold out until the pounding in his head became too painful to bear. He didn't need to do that. The wound was completely closed up by the time Tommy pulled his hands away, leaving a fresh pink scar where it had been.

"Goddamn. Now that's impressive," Zephyrus commented, staring down at the new scar. "Does healing usually take a lot of energy out of you?"

Tommy shrugged, a headache forming behind his eyes. "It depends on how serious the injury is. Siren's nearly made me pass out because of how fucking big it was. Yours wasn't that bad. Definitely more tiring than healing a cut, but the bullet went straight through so it wasn't as bad as it could've been."

Suddenly, there was a warm hand on his shoulder, and he glanced up to see that the Blade had gotten out of his chair and was now standing over him. "You alright, kid?"

"I'm not a fucking kid," Tommy snapped, actually noticing the comment this time. However, the retort lacked its usual bite now that Tommy's energy had been sapped. "And yeah, I'm fine. Just have a stupid headache."

Zephyrus cocked his head while staring at Tommy, the motion eerily reminiscent of a bird. He considered Tommy for a moment, as if he was sizing him up, and Tommy tried not to squirm where he was still kneeling in front of the couch.

"Why did you heal Siren that night?" Zephyrus asked after a moment. "He told us he was unconscious when you found him. No one was around, no one would've known you could've helped but didn't. You could've called the police, or just left him there, but instead you helped him."

"You don't think I know that?" Tommy scoffed, rolling his eyes. "Of course I know I didn't have to. I even tried to talk myself out of it. But even if you guys are villains, that doesn't mean you automatically deserve to bleed out in an alleyway. I'm sure you guys all got families and shit like anyone else, and I know I'd feel terrible if someone I loved never came home one day and I had no clue why."

Tommy tried not to wince as he thought of Tubbo and Ranboo. The idea of anything happening to either of them made Tommy's chest tighten to a near painful degree. He'd already seen bruises on his best friend's faces before, he'd already had to confront the terrifying possibility of losing them.

The group home they all met in was a rough place with a very strict hierarchy, but the injuries they got there was nothing compared to the time Ranboo had gotten sick. It was only a few months after they had first moved out, and the place they lived in didn't even have running water half the time. Of course one of them was going to get sick, and it ended up being Ranboo. Tommy's powers didn't help with viruses, and they couldn't afford to take Ranboo

to the hospital. It had been a horrible week with Tubbo and Tommy taking turns watching their friend at all times, checking his weak pulse and trying to get water down his throat as often as possible.

The fever had eventually broken, but Tommy never forgot what it felt like to have to regularly check for his best friend's pulse. To know that one moment Tommy could look over, and Ranboo wouldn't be breathing anymore.

They'd started an emergency fund after that. Putting the little spare money they had from their paychecks into a separate savings account they could dip into if any of them ever needed to go to the hospital again. It put an even worse strain on their already tight budget, but it was worth it.

"You're very empathetic, Tommy," Zephyrus commented, startling Tommy when he used his name. "Most people wouldn't even consider the fact that villains have loved ones too."

"Yeah, well," Tommy coughed to try and hide the way he flushed at the compliment, "it's just called having basic human decency."

Zephyrus laughed, and it sounded distorted through his voice changer. "I suppose that's true." He brushed off his clothes, glancing around the living room before nodding to Blade. "I think it's time we get out of your hair now though."

Tommy huffed. "Yeah, you should. You're lucky my roommates weren't here or else this would've been really awkward to explain."

"You have roommates?" Blade asked. Tommy nodded. "Well, you should give us your number then. If this happens again we'll be able to call you in advance instead of just showing up at your door."

"If this happens again?" Tommy questioned, narrowing his eyes at the villain.

Zephyrus sighed. "Look, Tommy, we're not going to force you to heal us if you don't want to. But now you have two favors owed to you from the Syndicate, and that's something people would kill for. You understand how helping us is beneficial to you, correct?"

Tommy scoffed. "Of course I get that there are benefits, but it's not like I saved Siren because I wanted a favor out of him. And it's not like I helped you tonight because I wanted you to owe me another favor. I don't want anyone to owe me shit. I'm not involved in your world, and I don't want to get dragged into your problems."

"That's very understandable," Zephyrus nodded. "You don't have to make any decisions right now, but just consider the possibility of working out an arrangement with us. We could promise protection, and money as well if that's what you're after."

While Tommy scoffed again at the words, he had to admit, the latter part of that piqued his interest. Money was always going to be a sore subject for him, Tubbo, and Ranboo, and the idea of having something to supplement what he already got from Puffy's... well, he wasn't going to cross it out yet.

He knew it was a bad idea to get in business with the Syndicate. That was exactly the opposite of staying out of their world. But it was tempting nonetheless.

“I’ll think about it, but I’m not making any promises,” Tommy muttered.

“Great. Until then, do you think you could still give us your phone number? If there’s an emergency, we’re probably going to come here whether you’ve made a decision or not,” Zephyrus told him.

Of course. Typical fucking villains.

“Yeah, whatever. I better not be getting calls every fucking hour because one of you twisted your ankle or some shit,” Tommy grumbled, grabbing a piece of paper off the counter and writing his number down on it.

The Blade took the paper and folded it into his pocket. “Thanks. We owe you one for this.”

“Bring me McDonald’s one day and we’ll call it even,” Tommy muttered as he guided the two villains out the door.

With one final wave goodbye, Tommy slammed the door behind Blade and Zephyrus as soon as they were out of his apartment. He made sure to lock the door behind him, and huffed as he turned back to look at the state of his apartment.

Well, the couch already looked like shit before, so the massive blood stain that was now present where Zephyrus had been sitting wasn’t really that much of a tragedy. Tommy headed over to the coffee table, throwing out the bloody fabric pieces that he’d pulled out of Zephyrus’ wound and put away the first aid kit back where he’d found it under the sink.

As Tommy straightened up from where he’d been crouched to reach under the sink, he caught a glimpse of himself in the bathroom mirror and flinched. He hadn’t noticed it before, but not only were his hands covered in Zephyrus’ blood, but somehow he’d gotten bloody handprints all over his shirt as well.

Lovely. That totally wasn’t gross as fuck or anything.

Figuring it would just be easiest to shower all the blood off, Tommy buried his shirt in the bottom of the laundry basket, and gritted his teeth to mentally prepare himself for the icy water that awaited him.

While he was grateful they had running water a hundred percent of the time in this new place, which wasn’t always a guarantee in their old one, that didn’t mean it was *good*. It was always a fifty fifty as to whether the water was going to be scalding hot or freezing cold. You’d either step out of the shower shivering violently, or looking like you’d been sunburnt. There was no in between.

Tonight was a cold water night. Tommy made his shower as quick as possible, and his teeth wouldn’t stop chattering as he changed into his clean (and decidedly non-bloody) clothes.

After sitting on the floor of the bathroom for a few minutes to try and regain feeling in his toes, he eventually stood up to head back into the living room.

Before he could open the door to the bathroom though, he heard voices on the other side, and froze.

“I’m just saying, I don’t understand why we’re still keeping it from him,” Tommy sagged in relief when he recognized Ranboo’s stupid American accent. Blade and Zephyrus hadn’t decided to come back. It was just his roommates.

“Look, you said it yourself, it’s better this way,” Tubbo hissed in reply, and only then did Tommy realize that the two were talking about him.

“I said that in the beginning, but it’s been a while now, Tubbo. Don’t you think he deserves to know?” Ranboo asked, his voice just on the edge of pleading.

Oh. They were talking about that *thing* Tubbo had mentioned before.

“I do think he deserves to know, but only when we know it’s- wait, did the shower turn off?”

Ah shit. That was probably Tommy’s cue to stop eavesdropping.

Opening the door to the shower, Tommy didn’t bother trying to hide the fact that he’d been listening to their conversation.

“What do I deserve to know?” Tommy questioned, rubbing at his wet hair with a towel as he looked over his two best friends.

Ranboo and Tubbo both seemed a little worse for wear than what Tommy had expected. Ranboo’s normally pristine black and white split hair was sticking up in random directions, as if he’d been blasted by a weirdly strong gust of wind. Tubbo on the other hand looked tired, even the hair covering part of his face not being able to hide the bags under his eyes.

They shared a look with one another. Ranboo stepped forward.

“Tommy, we need to tell you something.” He paused, wringing his hands in front of him, while Tubbo’s eyes widened. Ranboo took a shaky breath. “We are-”

“GETTING MARRIED!” Tubbo’s voice cut in.

Both Ranboo and Tommy’s heads whipped over to Tubbo.

“*What?!*” The two shouted in unison.

Tubbo shot Ranboo a dirty look and elbowed him in the side—*hard*. Ranboo grunted in pain and glared at Tubbo, but after a beat of silence between them, Ranboo sighed and nodded.

“Um... yeah,” Ranboo started, pushing a hand through his hair. “We’re, uh... getting married?”

...what?

This was the thing Tubbo didn't want to tell him about? That he was fucking marrying Ranboo of all people?!

"It's for tax benefits!" Tubbo quickly added, noticing Tommy's confusion. "Y'know, married couples get tax breaks and shit. Thought it could save us some money."

Tommy blinked, looking between his two friends as he struggled to comprehend what he was hearing. They were getting married to commit tax fraud. That was the secret that had been going on this whole time.

"What the fuck?! You're committing marriage fraud without me?!" Tommy shouted, gaping at his two best friends.

"Well, legally only two people can get married you see," Tubbo started, holding his hands out in a placating gesture. "And you're the youngest out of all of us, while Ranboo and I are pretty close to being legal adults. So it's just easier for the two of us to be the married ones."

Ranboo, who had a thousand yard stare and seemed as though he was regretting all of his life choices, just nodded at Tubbo's words.

"Why the hell wouldn't you tell me this sooner?" Tommy asked, his thoughts racing as he continued to try and wrap his head around the absolute bombshell that had been dropped.

Now Tubbo started to seem a bit lost for words. "Um, well, we weren't sure if we were gonna go through with it, and we didn't want you to take it the wrong way. And, uh—" Tubbo glanced around the apartment suddenly, as if he was trying to find a way to change the subject. His gaze fell on the couch, and his eyes widened. "Oh! I was gonna ask, why is there blood on the couch?"

Oh shit. Tommy needed to explain that without mentioning that two of the city's biggest supervillains had been sitting in their living room less than an hour before.

"Uh, I just, um, it was really fuckin' stupid but I cut my thumb and I think I must've hit a big vein or some shit because that thing bled like a motherfucker," Tommy explained, laughing awkwardly. "I healed it pretty easily, but I kinda got blood on the couch, so sorry about that."

"That much blood from cutting your thumb?" Ranboo questioned, raising an eyebrow.

"Like I said! I hit something big because that thing was just *squirting* blood—"

"Okay! That's enough!" Tubbo shouted, cutting him off. "Don't need that much detail, bossman."

Phew. Going into detail was the perfect way to make his friends not want to push the issue further. He was so smart sometimes. Genius Man Innit.

"Anyway, I'm gonna go take a shower," Tubbo suddenly announced. "Then I'm gonna go to sleep because I'm fucking tired. Ranboo, we have the bed tonight, right?"

“I think so.” Ranboo looked to Tommy for confirmation.

Tommy nodded. “Yup. I’m taking the couch.”

He kinda forgot that it was his turn to sleep on the couch when he was letting Zephyrus bleed all over it. Ew. That was kind of gross. He’d have to lay down a lot of towels to make sure it didn’t get on him.

“Sounds good. I’ll be right back,” Tubbo told them, darting into the bedroom to grab a change of clothes before disappearing into the bathroom.

Now alone with Ranboo, Tommy glanced at the couch again and winced. Biting back a sigh, he pulled out a box from under the couch and took out an old towel they used as a rag. He laid it over the blood stain, hoping that would be enough for now. Then, he collapsed onto the couch itself, dragging his hands over his face and dropping his feet on the coffee table. From the other room, he heard the shower start up.

“Is your thumb okay now?” Ranboo asked as he sat down next to Tommy, glancing at his hand.

“Yup! Totally fine!” Tommy quickly said, dropping his hands from his face to hide them in his pockets. “Healed it completely, not even a scar.”

“That’s good to hear,” Ranboo said, leaning back against the couch and dropping his head onto the cushion.

There was a moment of silence between them, hanging in the air like a thick cloud. Ranboo tapped his fingers against his thigh, while Tommy fiddled with his hoodie strings.

“So are you seriously gonna marry Tubbo?” Tommy asked after a minute.

Ranboo sighed and let out a soft laugh. “I guess I am.”

“That’s... fucking weird,” Tommy muttered, also laughing a bit at how ridiculous the situation sounded. He turned to Ranboo and grinned at him. “But if Tubbo breaks your heart, let me know and I’ll beat him up for you.”

“Tommy, it’s not like that, it’s for tax benefits-”

“Oh I know! But just saying, if he breaks your heart I can kick his ass,” Tommy pushed.

Ranboo snorted. “Considering Tubbo can pick both of us up if he wants to, I don’t know how you plan on winning a fight against him.”

“Nah, it’ll be easy. I’ll just bite him,” Tommy smirked.

Grimacing, Ranboo shook his head. “Of course, I shouldn’t have expected anything less.” He fell silent for a moment and Tommy debated turning the TV on, when Ranboo made a confused noise.

Glancing over, Tommy's heart skipped a beat when he saw Ranboo picking a black feather up from the ground. He frowned as he looked the feather over.

"Where did this come from?" Ranboo asked as he ran his fingers over the glossy surface.

"Oh, uh, must've come in from the window or something!" Tommy answered, laughing awkwardly as his eyes darted around the floor for any more feathers.

"What kind of bird would have feathers this big?" Well, Ranboo had a point there. Zephyrus' feathers, like his wings, were fucking massive.

"Beats me, mate. I dunno shit about birds," Tommy shrugged, twisting his hoodie strings around his fingers and pleading in his mind for Ranboo not to push the issue further.

Ranboo opened his mouth as if to ask another question, but then the door to the bathroom opened, and Tommy thanked every god out there for the blessed timing. He hadn't even heard the shower turn off, but there was Tubbo with dripping hair and clean pajamas on.

"You ready to go to bed, Ranboo?" Tubbo asked, leaning against the doorframe.

With one last spared glance at the feather, Ranboo let it fall to the floor and nodded. "Yeah, let me just get changed and I'll be right in."

"Sounds good," Tubbo nodded. Then he waved at Tommy. "Do I need to wake you up for your shift tomorrow?"

"Nah, I have the closing shift again," Tommy replied. "Night Tubs."

"Night Tommy!" And with that, Tubbo disappeared into the bedroom, while Ranboo headed into the bathroom to change.

Tommy pushed himself to his feet then, and set about preparing the couch to sleep on. He took out the blankets they kept under the couch and draped them over the itchy cushions, throwing an extra pillow on the armrest so his neck didn't ache in the morning.

By the time he was finished, Ranboo had already followed Tubbo into the bedroom, the door shutting behind him. Now alone, Tommy shut off the lights in the living room and settled onto the couch bed, staring up at the ceiling as he thought over that evening.

The Syndicate knew where he lived, and now had his cell phone number. He'd healed Zephyrus. Ranboo and Tubbo had told him they were getting married. Yet it still felt like they were hiding something from him.

Tommy didn't regret saving Siren's life. But he couldn't help wondering how much easier his life would be if he hadn't come across the supervillain in that alley. In such a short time, Tommy's life was already spiraling out of his control. He hadn't wanted to get involved with all the super shit, and yet he couldn't help but feel like he was getting sucked into that orbit anyway.

If Tommy was an astronaut, then Siren was a black hole. No matter what he did, Tommy was going to get sucked into this world.

His only hope now was to try and keep Tubbo and Ranboo from getting sucked in with him.

“Why the hell did you tell him we’re getting married?!” Ranboo whisper-shouted to Tubbo as soon as the bedroom door was closed.

“You were going to tell him about Nuke and Ender and I panicked!” Tubbo whisper-shouted back, smacking Ranboo in the arm. “I know you want to tell him, but we need to wait until we have more of an established presence in L’Manberg!”

Both boys were sitting on top of the bed, glaring at each other in the dark. A beam of moonlight stretched across the bed from the window, outlining Tubbo’s head and making his bleached hair practically glow.

“But why do we need to wait for that?” Ranboo asked, wringing his hands in his lap.

“I’ve told you before, Boo. Tommy is gonna be worried off his ass about us when he finds out. But if we’re already established vigilantes who have proven we can handle ourselves, he won’t freak out as much,” Tubbo explained, folding his arms across his chest.

“I think he’s going to freak out no matter what,” Ranboo pointed out.

Tubbo huffed. “Probably. But I just want to wait a little longer.”

“Yeah, well now we have to get married because you want to keep waiting,” Ranboo muttered, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t worry, we won’t actually get married,” Tubbo snorted. “We can just tell Tommy that we tried and figured out it wouldn’t work for some reason. Or that we changed our minds.”

“No.”

Tubbo frowned, squinting to try and make out Ranboo’s expression in the gloom. “What do you mean ‘no’?”

“I mean that I think we actually should get married,” Ranboo argued, a slow grin spreading across his face.

“What the- why though?”

“Because Tubbo,” Ranboo leaned forward to rest his hands on Tubbo’s shoulder. “One, we could actually use a tax return. Two, you need to stop dragging me into your schemes without telling me ahead of time, so this is going to be how you learn that lies have consequences. And three, it would be really funny.” Ranboo was full on smirking now, and Tubbo worried that he had unlocked something feral in his best friend.

Tubbo scoffed. “You can’t force me to marry you, dickhead.”

“I mean, I can’t,” Ranboo conceded, “but I can tell Tommy that you broke my heart and he’ll be mad at you.”

“What the- but we’re not even actually together! He knows that!”

“He still threatened to beat you up if you broke my heart,” Ranboo explained, holding back a laugh.

Tubbo narrowed his eyes. “If you want to play it that way, then I’ll just tell him you’re the one that broke up with me!”

“You can do that, but which one of us do you think he’s gonna believe did the heartbreaking, you or me?” Ranboo asked, raising an eyebrow innocently at Tubbo. “I have the backbone of a chocolate éclair, Tubbo. You seriously think he’s gonna believe that *I* broke up with *you*?”

“But that’s-” Tubbo sputtered as he tried to argue against that, even though he knew it was true. “That’s so stupid! We’re not even in a relationship!”

“Do you want Tommy to be mad at you?”

Clenching his jaw, Tubbo glared at Ranboo in the dark, both of them knowing what the answer to that was.

“That’s what I thought,” Ranboo said after a beat, squeezing Tubbo’s shoulders once before he let go. “Now come on *fiance*, let’s go to sleep.”

“I fucking hate you,” Tubbo grumbled, even though he was struggling not to laugh as he climbed under the covers. As he settled onto his pillow, a brilliant idea flashed in his mind, and he was glad Ranboo couldn’t see his evil smirk when he was turned away.

“Night Bo,” Ranboo called out once they had both gotten comfortable.

“Night, *hot stuff*,” Tubbo called back, pressing a hand over his mouth to hide his laughter.

There was a beat of silence.

Then, Ranboo groaned.

“I brought this upon myself, didn’t I?”

“You sure did, cutie.”

“Can I take it back? I don’t want to get married to you anymore.”

“Nope! You committed and I need to learn the consequences of my actions, remember?”

There was another loud groan from Ranboo, and Tubbo fell asleep with a wide smile on his face.

Chapter End Notes

SHOUTOUT TO THE PERSON IN THE COMMENTS FROM LAST CHAPTER WHO GUESSED THIS WAS WHERE IT WAS GOING, you know who you are and I laughed so hard when I saw you guessed it

anywayyyyy we finally have met Blade and Zephyrus! Tommy is... not thrilled with Siren rn to say the least. Also Tubbo and Ranboo are getting married now to keep their cover story up lmao

hope you guys enjoyed the chapter! it was definitely a lot of fun to write, we're finally getting into some of the plot! please lmk what you thought in the comments, I read all of them and they really make my day :D

I'm @bonesandthebees on tumblr and twitter! feel free to shoot me asks or dms, I love talking about my fic <3

the demon's diner

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets to meet Wilbur's family.

Chapter Notes

hey hey everyone! yes I'm back again! I'm updating this so frequently, I'm very proud of myself although I know I won't be able to keep this update schedule once I go back to uni so enjoy it while it lasts lmao

anyway thank you all so much again for all the love and support, I'm literally awed by how much attention this is getting. also make sure to check the end notes as I have a question for you guys my readers!

no TWs for this chapter, just some happy times! enjoy!

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

Tommy wasn't sure when to expect getting a call on his phone from an unknown number, but he waited out the rest of the week watching his phone with the vigilance of a hawk. If supervillains were going to start showing up at his door for healing, he couldn't afford to miss a single ring. Not to mention, he was hoping Siren would call so that Tommy could yell at him for giving out his name and address like it was nothing. That bastard was going to get an earful next time Tommy talked to him.

But the week passed, and his phone stayed silent. The tension Tommy had began to loosen its grip on his shoulders, and he was gradually able to push the worry to the back of his mind. Although things still weren't completely normal with Tubbo and Ranboo, admitting their marriage plans seemed to ease things in the household at least a bit. Tubbo would obnoxiously flirt with Ranboo every chance he got, while Ranboo threatened a divorce every day. Tommy teased the two of them about their upcoming union relentlessly, which neither of them particularly enjoyed but Tommy found hilarious all the same.

He had a feeling there was still more they weren't telling him. They still shared secretive glances, they still spent hours out in the evening and only telling Tommy they were dealing with work stuff (although the vast majority of Tubbo's work was stuff he could do at home on his computer.) But it was better. They weren't as tense around Tommy, and Tommy hoped that if they were still keeping stuff from him, they would let him in on it soon.

In the meantime, work was still a nice escape for Tommy. Wilbur continued to show up at the cafe nearly every day, and together they'd gone back to the fried chicken truck a few more times after Tommy had closed for the night. Every time Wilbur would insist on paying for Tommy's food, despite his protests. Although Tommy didn't like Wilbur spending so much money on him, he knew he wouldn't be able to afford it for himself, and the fried chicken was *really* good.

Things were just... pretty nice. Save for the nagging worry brought on by the fact that Tommy was basically an on call doctor, of course.

One night, Tommy was closing up the cafe like usual. Wilbur was hanging around still, waiting by the door for Tommy to finish wiping all the counters down. He was typing rapidly onto his phone, the blue glow of his screen reflecting against his glasses. As Tommy checked to make sure there weren't any grounds left in the espresso machine, Wilbur spoke up.

"Do you mind if we go eat somewhere else other than the chicken truck tonight?" Wilbur asked, pocketing his phone and glancing up at Tommy.

Tommy shrugged. "It's your money, man. We go where you want."

"Well, there's a pretty good diner near here I was thinking we could eat at, but there's something else you should know before we go," Wilbur said, sounding a bit sheepish as he pushed his hair back from his face.

Pausing his cleaning, Tommy looked up to meet Wilbur's eyes. "Is something wrong?"

"No! Nothing like that," Wilbur reassured him. "It's just- well, if you wanna say no you can. But my brother and dad wanna go get dinner, so I was thinking you could come with me and meet them."

This made Tommy do a double take. Wilbur wanted Tommy to meet his family? But why? Tommy was just some random kid Wilbur hung out with sometimes. Why the hell would his family want to meet him?

"I mean, uh, I wouldn't wanna intrude on your family bonding shit," Tommy muttered, looking back down at the espresso machine.

"No, don't worry about that, I want you there! I think you would get along really well with my dad and brother, and they're pretty curious about you too," Wilbur reassured him.

"Wait, they know who I am?"

Wilbur nodded. "Yeah, of course they do. They know about all my friends."

Friends. Were they friends? Tommy supposed it made sense, considering how often the two hung out now. But for some reason, Tommy hadn't had the full realization that he and Wilbur were actually *friends*. Hell, Tubbo and Ranboo still had no idea Wilbur even existed.

"Oh," Tommy said rather dumbly, hands resting on the edge of the espresso machine. "So, uh, we're really friends?"

Wilbur blinked. “Yeah, of course we are. At least I’d like to think so.”

“No, yeah, of course. Sorry, that was stupid-”

“Tommy, you don’t need to apologize,” Wilbur said, cutting Tommy off as embarrassment reddened his cheeks. “Do you wanna come to the diner or not? There’s no pressure.”

Tommy stared at his hands, noticing the ground coffee that was stuck under his nails, and the way the skin on his palm shined from his many past burns. Did he want to meet Wilbur’s family? He didn’t like talking to adults all that much, with Puffy and Wilbur being the two exceptions. But if they were Wilbur’s family, that probably meant they were a lot like him. Chill, good at joking around, and fun to hang out with.

Also, if Tommy went he’d get another free dinner, which was hard to turn down.

“Yeah, I’ll go,” Tommy agreed.

Wilbur beamed. “Cool. I’ll let them know you’re coming.”

Nodding, Tommy hurried up his cleaning. He finished wiping down the counters and double-checked to make sure the espresso machine was in working condition. Then, he hung his apron up on the wall, checked his sweatshirt for any gross coffee stains, and then slung his backpack over his shoulder to join Wilbur by the door.

After locking up, they headed down the street under the glow of the streetlights that had become so familiar to Tommy. He shoved his hands in his pockets as he walked, anxiety buzzing in his chest as he tried to remember how to make a good impression on someone. The last thing he wanted was to piss Wilbur’s family off, not after he had just realized that Wilbur was his friend.

“You look like you’re about ready to jump out of your skin,” Wilbur commented after they’d been walking in silence for a few minutes.

“I’m fine,” Tommy snapped, hunching his shoulders and staring at the ground.

Wilbur frowned. “Wait, are you nervous?”

Tommy shook his head. “Me? Nervous? That’s ridiculous. A Big Man like me doesn’t get nervous!” Although he tried to go for his usual brand of loud and obnoxious, the attempt was weak, and even Tommy had the urge to wince at how forced it sounded.

“Awww, you’re nervous about meeting my family, aren’t you?” Wilbur crooned.

“No I’m not! Fuck off!”

Wilbur just laughed and suddenly there was an arm wrapping around Tommy’s shoulders, pulling him close to Wilbur’s side as they continued walking down the street. “You don’t have to be nervous, Toms,” Wilbur reassured, his smile warm as he ruffled Tommy’s hair. “Trust me, they already like you from everything I’ve told them. You don’t need to worry about making a good impression.”

Grumbling, Tommy resisted the urge to lean further into Wilbur's side as he focused on not bumping into Wilbur's ridiculously long legs. "Of course I do. It's your family. I don't want them to think I'm an asshole."

"Well, you are kind of an asshole," Wilbur teased, expertly dodging the hand Tommy swiped at his face. "But I am too, so they get it. You're like a mini me. They like me, so of course they're gonna like you."

"First off bitch, I'm not a mini you," Tommy argued, still not making an effort to get Wilbur's arm off of him. "I am so much cooler than you will ever be. I get so many more women than you and I'm so much bigger and I'm not a pretentious prick who wears hipster glasses-

"Oh shush, gremlin. Just accept it. You wanna be just like me when you grow up because you're like my little baby brother," Wilbur teased, although there was an undercurrent of warmth in his tone that made Tommy want to smile.

"I'm not your little brother," Tommy bit out, although the attempt was half-hearted. "You're just a bitchy customer of mine that's taking advantage of the fact that I have to pretend I like my job."

"Sure Toms, sure," Wilbur nodded, clearly not believing a word he was saying.

In truth, Tommy didn't believe what he was saying either. Although he knew Wilbur was just joking around, there was something so kind in his voice that made it stick in Tommy's head, playing on repeat. Wilbur was just a customer he'd gotten close with, but now he was a friend, a friend who joked about Tommy being like a little brother to him. It made Tommy feel as though the sun was shining right on his face, turning everything into gold and warming him from the inside out.

Of course, he wouldn't ever admit that out loud.

They turned a corner, and the diner came into view. It was the epitome of a classic twenty-four hour diner. The outside was painted robin's egg blue, with large windows looking into the restaurant to reveal cherry red booths and black and white checkered tile. On top of the diner there was a neon sign lit up in shades of crimson, reading out, *The Demon's Diner* in cursive lettering.

The name did not match with the cute aesthetic of the place at all, and Tommy wondered what the fuck that was all about.

"Here we are," Wilbur told him, squeezing his shoulder as he guided Tommy towards the front. "This place has the best muffins in the entire city, let me tell you."

"Why is it called The Demon's Diner? Isn't that a little... scary sounding?" Tommy questioned as they approached the front door.

"You'll see why," Wilbur reassured him, pulling open the door and gesturing for Tommy to walk through first.

As soon as he stepped inside, the smell of baked bread washed over Tommy, making his mouth water. He could hear the sizzling of burgers on a grill, while spotting a stack of muffins piled high on a plate steaming on one of the counters. A waitress with a red uniform and a rose tucked behind her ear passed by them, carrying a silver tray that had waffles dusted with powdered sugar and fruit piled on top. Tommy's stomach growled, and Wilbur laughed.

"We'll sit down quickly, don't worry," Wilbur reassured him. He glanced around the restaurant, clearly looking for someone.

"Do you need help finding a table?" A voice suddenly asked.

Tommy looked over at the same time Wilbur did, and his heart instantly leapt to his throat as he took in the figure standing in front of them.

The figure was... tall. That was the first coherent thought Tommy could make about it. It was taller than Wilbur and probably even Ranboo, which was an impressive feat considering they were both freakish giants. It was wearing some kind of hooded black robe (with a rather hilarious frilly red apron tied over it), and when Tommy tried to get a look at the things face, he couldn't make any individual features out save for glowing white eyes. It was as if the void had been giving a face and a voice, and Tommy resisted the urge to shudder.

"Hey Bad," Wilbur greeted cheerfully as if it was perfectly normal to see a strange void creature standing in the middle of a diner. "How've things been? Business still good?"

"Wilbur, it's been so long since you came here I almost didn't recognize you, you muffinhead," Bad teased, his voice friendly despite his foreboding appearance. "Things have been good though! Business has been doing pretty well, all things considered." The creature—Bad, apparently—then paused as his glowing eyes flickered over to Tommy. "Oh! You've brought a new little muffin here, haven't you?"

Wilbur grinned and squeezed the arm around Tommy's shoulder again. "Yup. This is Tommy, a friend of mine."

"Well, it's very nice to meet you, Tommy," Bad said, a glowing mouth appearing from the void of his face to smile at him. "I'm Bad, I run this diner. Any friend of Wilbur's is a friend of mine, so feel free to stop in whenever and you'll get the VIP treatment."

Tommy resisted the urge to cringe back from the creature, and nodded instead. "Uh, thank you," he said quietly instead.

Noticing his discomfort, Wilbur spoke up again. "We're here to meet Tech and Phil. Are they here yet?"

Turning his glowing eyes away from Tommy, Bad nodded. "Yup! Right over at your usual table. I'll send Hannah over to get your orders in a minute."

"Thanks Bad," Wilbur said with a wave before he started pulling Tommy towards the back of the diner. As soon as Bad was out of earshot, Wilbur leaned down to whisper into Tommy's

ear. “You don’t need to be afraid of him. I know he looks scary, but that’s just because of his powers. Trust me, he’s one of the kindest people you’ll ever meet.”

Tommy nodded in understanding, although he was still relieved to be away from those glowing eyes. He trusted Wilbur when he said he didn’t have to be afraid of Bad, but the guy was still a bit unnerving.

“Wilbur!” Another voice then called out.

Having been distracted by Bad, Tommy had forgotten the entire reason they were at this diner in the first place. His anxiety returned in full force as he noticed two men sitting at the table in the far back corner of the diner, one of whom was standing up and grinning at the two of them as they made their way over. Right. Tommy was meeting Wilbur’s family.

The man standing up had to have been Wilbur’s father, although he wasn’t as old as Tommy expected him to be. He was shorter than Wilbur and Tommy both, with straw blond hair that fell to his chin, and kind blue eyes the color of faded denim. Tommy also noticed the man had earrings, with one ear simply having a gold stud in it, and the other having a dangling gold chain with a bright emerald on the end. That... couldn’t have been cheap.

“Hey dad,” Wilbur said casually, stopping in front of the table and finally letting his arm drop from Tommy’s shoulders. “Tommy, this is my dad, Phil. And the one sitting down because he’s antisocial is my brother, Technoblade.”

“Stop telling people I’m antisocial,” the man still sitting down protested, his flat voice betraying an American accent.

If Tommy was startled by the emerald on Phil’s earring, just glancing at Technoblade gave Tommy a complete shock. Even though the man was sitting down, Tommy could tell he was *built*. Broad shoulders crowded the booth, contrasted by blossom pink hair that was tied back into a low bun on the back of his neck. Glasses sat perched in front of eyes so brown, they were almost crimson. He had several gold earrings in his ears, with gold chains dangling from his lobes and a few gold-encrusted gems sitting higher up in his helix. He also had a long golden necklace that sat on top of his button-down shirt, and Tommy noticed a similar emerald to the one he saw on Phil’s earring acting as a pendant.

How fucking rich were these people?

“Tommy?”

Wilbur’s voice suddenly brought Tommy back to reality, and he glanced away from Technoblade to see Wilbur giving him a concerned look.

“Oh shit, uh, sorry. I zoned out for a second,” Tommy muttered, ears burning as he resisted the urge to shrink into Wilbur’s side. “Um, nice to meet you both.”

“It’s nice to meet you too, mate,” Phil said, his voice gentle as he smiled at Tommy. “Wil’s told us a lot about you.”

“I liked the note you wrote on my cup that one time,” Techno chimed in as Wilbur dragged Tommy down to sit in the booth across from Phil and Techno. “You’re right. Wilbur is pretentious.”

“Hey! Like you’re any better than me,” Wilbur protested, slumping down in his seat.

“He’s got a point,” Tommy agreed, smirking at Technoblade. “You’re not exactly humble yourself with all that gold shit in your ears.”

Techno frowned, hand coming up to mess with some of the earrings in his ears. “I like gold, what can I say?”

“Makes you look, uh, osten... osten-” Tommy started, before realizing he couldn’t remember the word he was trying to say.

“Ostentatious?” Phil offered.

“Yeah! Ostentatious,” Tommy nodded.

Wilbur snorted. “I mean, he’s got a point, Tech. The gold is a bit much.”

Techno opened his mouth to reply, when a figure stopped in front of their table, drawing all their eyes up. It was the waitress with the rose in her hair from earlier, and she had four menus in her hand.

“Hi guys, it’s good to see you again,” the woman greeted, passing out the menus to the four of them.

“Hey Hannah,” Phil waved. “Can you get us a round of water for the table while we look at the menu?”

“Sure thing, Phil. I’ll be right back,” Hannah said, smiling at them before rushing off again.

“You guys must come here a lot if everyone knows you,” Tommy commented as he started idly looking through the menu. His eyes were immediately drawn to a picture of chocolate chip pancakes with strawberries scattered around it, and his mouth started watering again.

“We do. It’s one of our favorite places to eat at,” Phil explained, tapping his fingers against the menu absentmindedly.

“What are you thinking of getting?” Wilbur asked, looking over Tommy’s shoulder at his menu.

“Chocolate chip pancakes sound pretty damn poggers,” Tommy said.

“The pancakes here are great,” Wilbur told him, nodding in approval. “But then again, pretty much everything here is really good. Bad and Skeppy are both great in the kitchen.”

“Wait, can someone explain what poggers means?” Techno asked, cutting into Wilbur and Tommy’s conversation.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Of course *you* wouldn’t know it. Poggers basically is a way to say something is awesome or cool.”

Techno stared at him blankly for a moment, blinking a few times before leaning over to Phil.

“Phil, do children scare you these days as much as they scare me?”

“They sure do, mate,” Phil nodded. “Don’t understand them in the slightest.”

Snorting, Tommy leaned back in his seat. “You should definitely be afraid of me. I’m extremely intimidating.”

“I dunno, there are some supervillains that probably have you beat there,” Techno commented, eyes still skimming over the menu.

Tommy thought back to Siren flicking french fries at his forehead, or Blade sitting awkwardly in his living room while he healed Zephyrus. Of course they could be intimidating, but it was hard to think of them that way when Tommy had already seen them in such... casual situations.

He was about to further press his point about being intimidating when Hannah returned, setting down waters in front of each of them before pulling a notepad out of her apron. “We ready to order?”

“I think so, right?” Phil asked, glancing at each member of the table. They all nodded, and Phil smiled.

They all went around, saying their orders. Phil with Belgian waffles, Technoblade with some kind of veggie burger, Wilbur with a normal burger, and Tommy with his pancakes. Hannah scribbled all of it down quickly, finishing it off with a flourish of her pen.

“Alright we’ll have that-”

“Oh wait!” Wilbur cut her off suddenly. “Also four blueberry muffins. Tommy here hasn’t gotten to try the muffins before.”

“Well this is your lucky day then,” Hannah smiled at him. “I’ll have that right out for you.”

Hannah disappeared again, leaving the group in a moment of silence. Tommy took a sip of his water, and tried not to shrink at the awkward air that had fallen over the group for the first time since they got there.

“So Tommy,” Phil started, breaking the silence with surprising ease, “Wil told us you work in a cafe, but not much else. Are you in school?”

Tommy shook his head. “No, I graduated high school early by taking extra classes.”

“Impressive. Do you plan on going to college?”

“Nah, not really my thing. Even if it was, I definitely couldn’t afford it,” Tommy explained, folding his hands over his glass. “I just graduated so I could take more shifts at the cafe. Gotta pay the rent somehow, y’know?”

He waited for the surprise to set in as the group realized he didn’t live with parents, but it never came. Instead, Phil just nodded in understanding. “Who do you live with?” He asked instead.

“My two roommates, Tubbo and Ranboo are their names,” Tommy told them.

“How’d you meet?” Techno then chimed in.

Now this was where Tommy shrunk back. It wasn’t like he was ashamed of admitting he’d been in the system. Hell, he’d told Siren about that without thinking twice. But it was different this time because he was with Wilbur and his family. Tommy hadn’t told Wilbur much about himself, outside of his age and that he wasn’t in school. While he wasn’t embarrassed that he’d been in foster care, he knew what ‘normal’ people thought about it. The pitying looks they would shoot his way, the way they would treat him as if he were made of glass. He didn’t want Wilbur—or his family—to start treating him like that.

But he knew Wilbur. Wilbur didn’t seem like the type to pull that shit with him. He knew Tommy wasn’t some broken, sad kid because of his past. They were friends, he’d said it himself. Tommy could trust that Wilbur wouldn’t start treating him differently... right?

They were waiting for an answer, and Tommy didn’t want to lie. So he swallowed down his nerves.

“In a group home. We were all in the foster system, but all of us were ‘problem kids’ and kept getting kicked out, so we ended up in a group home together. We all just kinda clicked really well with each other, and made plans to get out of the system and get our own place, which we did,” Tommy explained.

He wanted to keep his head down, but he had to know their reactions. Glancing up through the hair falling over his forehead, he expected to be met with sympathetic gazes, or pitying frowns.

But again, they surprised him. None of them seemed to blink twice at the admission.

“Wil, Tech, were either of you ever put in a group home?” Phil asked instead, making Tommy almost choke on his water.

“I was in one for a while. That place sucked,” Techno shrugged.

“I almost got put in one, but I ran away before they could,” Wilbur explained, smirking into his drink.

Tommy gaped, first staring at Techno, before turning his full attention to Wilbur.

He... he had been in the system?

“You never told me you were in the system,” Tommy said quietly, staring at Wilbur in shock.

Wilbur shrugged. “You never said you were either.”

“But you ran?” Tommy asked, having heard of the kids who tried to escape and live on their own. He had tried it himself multiple times, but had been dragged back each time with his longest run lasting only a few months.

“Yup. After I got kicked out of my last foster home they wanted to put me in a group home, so I said fuck that and ran. Phil found me on the streets about a year later,” Wilbur explained, his smile softening at the mention of his dad.

“What the- how’d you last that long? My longest record was four months!” A *year*? Either that had been a hellish year for Wilbur, or he had some advantage that most kids didn’t.

“Let’s just say I had my ways.”

Okay. Like that wasn’t ominous as fuck.

“Your ways weren’t that great. Need I remind you I found you half-starved and looking a stone’s throw away from freezing to death,” Phil said, giving his son a knowing look.

“Well, I still hadn’t been caught and was still alive after a year on the streets, which isn’t too bad for a twelve year old,” Wilbur argued, taking a sip of his water.

“Wait, okay, so what happened exactly? Wil ran from the system and was on the streets for a year before Phil found him, but how did you end up with Techno?” Tommy asked, trying to wrap his head around the story.

Phil folded his hands in front of him. “I found Wilbur first, after he’d been living on the streets for quite a while. It took ages to get him to trust me, but once he did and I got him to come live with me I actually registered to be a foster parent legally. It took a fuck ton of arguing and going through loopholes and shit, but I managed to get legal guardianship of Wil. Once I had that, I got a call not too much later about another boy who needed a placement, which happened to be Techno. After a year of us all living together I adopted both of them, so we’ve been a family ever since.”

Damn. How lucky for Wilbur and Techno. Of course it wasn’t lucky that Wilbur had lived on the streets for a full year, but Tommy couldn’t help the twinge of jealousy that curled in his chest all the same. From what he could see, both Wilbur and Techno really loved their father. They’d gotten the happy ending all foster kids dreamt of. Someone to love them.

It was fine that Tommy had never gotten that ending though. He had Tubbo and Ranboo as his family. He didn’t need anyone else.

“So you’re emancipated?” Phil asked after a moment when it became clear Tommy wasn’t going to say anything else.

“Yup. Was a bitch to get worked out, but we managed it,” Tommy explained, leaning back in his seat.

“And now you make my lattes,” Wilbur teased, nudging Tommy in the side with his elbow.

“Unfortunately I do,” Tommy grumbled. “But at least I’m good at making coffee.”

“I have to admit that’s true,” Wilbur agreed, tapping his chin. He glanced back over to Phil and Techno. “You guys should go by the cafe sometime. Tommy’s a pretty damn good barista, except he’ll cuss you out while he makes your drink.”

“It’s part of my charm,” Tommy added, baring his teeth at Wilbur in something that was only reminiscent of a smile.

A flash of red in the corner of his eye signalled Hannah’s return. She handed out the plates of food, and Tommy’s pupils grew twice their size when he saw the steaming chocolate chip pancakes placed in front of him.

Wilbur laughed at Tommy’s excitement. “Eat up, gremlin. You look like you’re about to tear those to shreds.”

“Don’t have to tell me twice,” Tommy replied before he started digging into the food. Holy shit. These guys were right. This was delicious. The pancakes were perfectly fluffy, the chocolate chips were melted just the right amount, and the strawberries on top were sweet but not overly so.

So engrossed in his food, Tommy didn’t notice the concerned stares he was getting from the two men across the table.

“Jesus christ,” Phil muttered. “You weren’t kidding, Wil. He’s a gremlin.”

“Or a rabid raccoon,” Techno added.

“For the last time, I’m not a goddamn raccoon,” Tommy snapped, not noticing the chocolate he had smeared from the corner of his lip to his chin.

The three men at the table all shared identical looks before bursting into laughter, startling Tommy away from his food. It took several minutes for Tommy to notice the chocolate on his face but by then the damage had been done. The table wouldn’t shut up about him being a raccoon after that.

The rest of dinner went really well. They talked a bit about several other things, with Phil asking Tommy what he did in his free time and Techno asking him when the last time he’d read a book was. Wilbur and Tommy got into another bantering session which Techno and Phil watched with a mixture of amusement and exhaustion. Tommy finally tried one of Bad’s muffins and nearly cried at how good it was. Then, despite his protests, Wilbur ended up ordering another four muffins for Tommy to take home.

Tommy had to admit, he liked Techno and Phil. Techno had the best deadpan out of anyone he had ever met, and Tommy liked how little bullshit there was with him. Phil very much seemed to wear his heart on his sleeve, his face softening every time they were talking about Wilbur and Techno as kids, or whenever Wilbur said something nice about Tommy. He also

seemed genuinely interested in getting to know Tommy, unlike most adults he'd met in the past. And most surprisingly, no one told him to shut up when he started rambling about spider facts on the way back to his apartment building, which was a huge win in Tommy's book.

While he knew he had to be careful—these were still adults after all, and Tommy wasn't going to let himself become another charity case on the off chance Phil wanted another fixer upper kid—he really liked the Soot family. More than he thought he would.

When Tubbo and Ranboo asked Tommy where he'd been that night (and where he'd gotten the box of muffins from), he told them he was out with a friend and ignored the way they pushed for clarification. If they could have their secrets, so could he. He wasn't ready to share Wilbur with them yet, and if they had a problem with it that was their problem.

That night, Tommy fell asleep with a full stomach and laughter in his ears.

Chapter End Notes

ok so I know emancipation from the system is a very hard thing to get and you usually need to be 17 to do it, but we're gonna ignore the details of how tommy ranboo and tubbo got emancipated at like 15 for the sake of plot. also we're gonna ignore how phil managed to get custody of wilbur after he ran away from the system because, again, plot lmao

anyway we get some backstory and tommy gets to meet the rest of SBI in their civilian forms! this was just a fun bonding chapter, we're gonna get real back into the action in the next chapter so look out for that

AND I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU GUYS! if I were to start a discord server would any of you be interested in joining? I could send snippets of upcoming chapters or talk about other wips I have going on, and you guys could ask me any questions you have about my stuff! I don't want to start one if there aren't people interested though, so please let me know in the comments if you would join

please leave a comment telling me what you thought of the chapter as well! I don't reply to most comments unless they're questions, but I read all of them and love them sm <3

feel free to hmu on tumblr or twitter @bonesandthebees !

new patients

Chapter Summary

Tommy's healing skills get put to the test.

Chapter Notes

sup people i'm backkkk and i'm here with a big boy chapter

honestly I didn't intend for this to be such a long chapter but one thing led to another sooooo have this nearly 8k word monster I guess??

anyway ty all so so much for all the love and support you've given this fic! i'm seriously in awe of how much attention this is getting and i'm so glad you guys are enjoying it. also make sure to read the end notes of this chapter, there's something special there for you guys!

TW for this chapter: descriptions of burn wounds, mention of vomiting

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

The call Tommy was waiting for actually didn't end up being a phone call at all.

It happened in a text.

It was evening. Moonlight filtered through the window, lighting up the carpet with glowing white lines. For once, Tubbo and Ranboo weren't out doing whatever it was they got up to when it was late. Instead, they were there. Tubbo was working at his computer, head tilted so close to his screen Tommy debated yelling at him about how he was going to damage his eyes. Ranboo was settled on the couch next to Tommy, legs propped up on the coffee table and playing Mario Kart on the beat up Nintendo DS he found for cheap at a garage sale. Tommy, meanwhile, was trying to sew a patch onto Tubbo's sweatshirt because he got a hole in the armpit, and they couldn't afford to buy any new clothes right now.

It was quiet, and peaceful.

There was a buzz from Tommy's phone. He sighed and put down his sewing needle, digging into his pocket to take it out. When he saw the notification blaring across the screen though, his mouth went dry.

Unknown Number: Is this the number for the healer?

Fuck. *Fuck*. It had been almost two weeks since his run in with Blade and Zephyrus, and Tommy was starting to think they'd given him a break after all. That was stupid of him. He should've known this was going to come back up sooner or later.

Clenching his jaw, Tommy glanced at Ranboo from the corner of his eye, and was relieved to see he was still focused on his DS. Carefully angling his phone away from the boy, Tommy typed out a shaky response.

Tommy: Yeah, it is. Who is this?

The reply was almost instantaneous.

Unknown Number: A friend of the Blade's. I need help, and fast. Where can I meet you?

Swallowing down a lump in his throat, Tommy bit back a groan and dropped his head against the couch cushion. Shit. Tubbo and Ranboo were here, meaning he couldn't bring whichever villain this was back to the apartment to heal them up. Where the hell could he go where they wouldn't be found?

Tommy checked the time on his watch. It was a bit after midnight, and he had closed the cafe a little over an hour ago. Every other shop in that area was closed, and Tommy had the keys to the place sitting in his back pocket.

A plan was forming in his head. He wasn't thrilled about it.

Tommy: Can u get to The Cloudy Cafe? I can send u the address

Unknown Number: I know where it is

Tommy: get over there and head to the back alley behind the cafe, I'll meet u there in a few

Unknown Number: I don't care if the Syndicate is fond of you, if this is a trap I'm going to make you regret it

Tommy gulped, staring at the threat on his screen. Whoever he was dealing with, they didn't seem to be in a very cheerful mood.

Tommy: this isn't a trap, I'm not a fucking idiot

Unknown Number: Fine. See you soon

Dropping the phone on his lap, Tommy took a shaky breath and dragged his hands down his face. Great. Now he had to get to the cafe to heal another supervillain who may or may not kick his ass if they got too suspicious of him.

"You okay?" Ranboo's concerned voice made Tommy's head whip up.

"I'm fine," Tommy said immediately, shoving his phone in his pocket. "I just remembered that I forgot to put the milk back in the fridge at work. I need to go now before it goes bad."

“Wait, you’re going back to the cafe?” Tubbo asked, spinning around in his chair to frown at Tommy. “It’s late. One of us should come walk with you.”

“I’ll be fine, don’t worry about it,” Tommy reassured, waving them off as he jumped to his feet.

“I mean, would Puffy really be that upset over one thing of milk going bad?” Ranboo asked, his frown mirroring Tubbo’s as Tommy slung his backpack over his shoulders.

“Uh, well, we’re running low,” Tommy lied, beelining towards the front door. “We’re not scheduled to get another delivery till the day after tomorrow, and I don’t want us to run out of milk in the middle of the day.”

Tubbo and Ranboo still seemed skeptical, but Tommy was in a time crunch here.

“I promise I’ll be fine. I’ll text you when I’m on my way back,” he promised. And before either one could protest, he swung open the door and rushed out, hurrying down the hallway without looking back.

That could’ve gone a lot better. Tommy hated the way the guilt about lying to his friends clawed into his chest, but he knew he couldn’t exactly tell them, *oh by the way, I’m going to the cafe to heal some supervillain because I’ve kind of fallen into business with the Syndicate unwillingly. Do you want me to pick up groceries on the way back?*

It would be fine. Once again, Tubbo and Ranboo had their secrets, and Tommy had his.

The night air was cool against his flushed cheeks as he hurried down the sidewalk. He tightened the straps of his backpack, glad he’d remembered to throw a miniature first aid kit in there exactly for one of these situations. While he didn’t feel great about volunteering Puffy’s cafe to be his makeshift clinic, it wasn’t like he had a much better option besides the literal alleyway next to his apartment building. At least this way he could clean up any spilled blood, and knew they wouldn’t be disturbed while he was doing his work.

As his footsteps pounded against the sidewalk, a stabbing pain under his ribs protesting his fast pace, Tommy wondered who was going to be waiting for him when he got to the cafe. All they said was that they were a friend of the Blade’s. While usually he would take that to mean Siren or Zephyrus, if it was one of them they would’ve just told him. This had to be someone he hadn’t met before, but he couldn’t think of any villain off the top of his head outside of those two that had connections to the Blade.

Nerves buzzed in his chest like bees, swarming him with their worries and making him second guess what the hell he was doing. He knew the Syndicate wasn’t going to hurt him since they thought they still owed him for saving Siren, but this new villain might not follow that same logic. This person could be volatile, and Tommy might end up getting screwed over before the night was over.

Well, if he got his shit rocked at least he could (probably) count on Siren kicking some ass on his behalf in revenge. Siren seemed like the type of guy to do that.

Finally, he reached the cafe. From the front, nothing seemed amiss. The blinds were drawn shut, the lights shut off inside just like how he'd left it. After checking to make sure no one was watching, Tommy unlocked the front door and darted inside, making sure to lock it again behind him. Then, he headed straight to the backroom, dropping his backpack onto the table and taking a deep breath as he stared at the door that led to the dumpster in the alleyway behind the shop.

There was a villain waiting on the other side of that door for him.

Tommy shook his head to try and clear that thought. There was someone *hurt* waiting on the other side of that door for him. Waiting for help. That was how he should be thinking of this. This was a person first, and a villain second. He needed to remember that.

Dragging his hands through his hair, Tommy forced himself to take several deep breaths, counting in his head just like Puffy had taught him. Then, he stepped over to the door to the alley, and didn't let himself hesitate before he swung it open.

Tommy wasn't sure what he expected to see on the other side, but it wasn't... this.

There were two people. One was a woman, bright pink hair tied back into a tight ponytail with strands falling loose around her face. The upper half of her face was covered by a gold metal mask shaped like a 'V' with no visible eyeholes to be seen, yet Tommy knew she could somehow see out of it anyway. The only part of her face that was visible was her lips, which were pressed into a thin line, acting as the only thing that betrayed her nerves.

When Tommy saw the other person with her though, his stomach dropped.

A guy was laying across her lap as she sat pressed against one of the walls of the alleyway. His face was covered by a grey bandana and a pair of goggles with one lens that was red, and another lens that was blue. But what caught Tommy's attention was his chest. The remains of what had once been a sweatshirt barely clung to his skin, the charred fabric looking as though it had partially melted onto his skin. Burns were littered across his entire torso, and the sight alone made Tommy want to gag.

He recognized these two. It was Arson and Iceman, two villains that weren't as intimidating as the Syndicate, but were well-known nonetheless.

Arson—the woman—stiffened as soon as Tommy opened the door. “Are you the healer?” She asked, her voice tinged with metal by the voice change pressed against her throat.

“Yeah, that's me,” Tommy breathed, unable to tear his eyes away from the charred figure that was Iceman. “Jesus fucking christ.”

“Yeah, I know,” Arson muttered shifting so she wasn't leaning against the alley wall anymore. She seemed wary of him, looking past his shoulder and into the backroom behind him, but still asked, “can you help me get him up? I carried him here but I don't know if I can carry him more.”

“Shit, yeah, of course. Let’s get him inside.” Tommy rushed forward, kneeling down to help pick up Iceman. He grabbed Iceman’s legs while Arson got his upper half, and together they carried him into the back of the cafe.

As soon as they were inside, Tommy set Iceman down on the tile floor, cursing himself for not grabbing a towel or something to put him on instead. In the fluorescent light of the backroom, the burns somehow looked even worse than they had outside. They wrapped around his torso like vines, carving scars into his skin that Tommy knew even the strongest healer couldn’t fully erase.

Shutting the backdoor behind them, Tommy then dropped to his knees next to Iceman, reaching forward to press his fingers against his throat. There was a pulse there, fluttering weakly against his fingertips. At least he was still breathing.

“What the *fuck* happened to him?” Tommy asked, already looking for a way to try and get the sweatshirt off of him without aggravating the burns even more.

“It was Flame,” Arson said softly, kneeling on the other side of Iceman and clutching his hand in her own. “We got into a fight with him and he just landed a perfect hit on Ja- Iceman. I just barely managed to escape with him in my arms.”

Tommy clenched his jaw. Flame was one of the top heroes. He couldn’t imagine a top hero purposefully giving someone an injury this horrific.

“Isn’t Iceman supposed to be immune to fire?” Tommy asked, grabbing a pair of scissors from his first aid kit to try and cut the sweatshirt off of Iceman’s chest. “Like, he’s got fire powers, so why can he get burnt?”

That was the one strange thing about Arson and Iceman that Tommy never understood. Iceman had fire powers, able to conjure up flaming projectiles and surround himself with them to send off towards his enemies, while Arson had water powers and could drown someone just by wrapping a bubble of water around their head. Their names didn’t make any sense.

“Flame’s fire is different than most,” Arson explained, rubbing her thumb over Iceman’s knuckles. “We call it hellfire. We don’t know why, but it can burn Iceman, and it can burn him badly. He’s gotten hurt before by it, but never like this.”

“You can say that again. Most burns like this would kill someone,” Tommy muttered as he peeled away some of the fabric.

Arson turned her face away from Tommy, although he couldn’t see her expression because of her mask anyway.

“He... he actually stopped breathing, and his heart stopped before you got here,” she said in a low voice. “But I was able to bring him back.”

Tommy paused what he was doing to look at Arson, and noticed the way her lip had been bit to the point of bleeding.

“Did you perform CPR?” He asked, having a strange feeling that there was something she wasn’t telling him.

Arson was silent for a moment, and bit her lip again. Tommy winced when he saw another bead of blood well up from the wound she had there. “Kind of. I did chest compressions, but I also... encouraged his blood to flow again.”

Tommy blinked. “What do you mean?”

“Blood is partially made up of water, meaning I can control it if I need to,” Arson admitted, keeping her face angled towards the ground. “So I made his blood move through his heart again.”

You’ve gotta be fucking kidding. Arson could control *blood*?

“Is that okay?” Arson then asked when Tommy didn’t say anything. “His blood is flowing on its own now, I’m not doing it anymore. Is that okay that I did that? Will it hurt him in the long run?”

“I’m gonna be honest, I have no fucking clue if that’ll have long-term consequences because I’m not exactly experienced with bloodbenders,” Tommy said, forcing himself to look back at Iceman and take off more fabric. “If his heart is beating on its own now it should be fine. Either way, I’m glad you did it because I can’t do shit once someone’s heart stops beating.”

“I try not to manipulate blood if I can help it. It... disturbs me, to be able to control someone like that. I only use it in life-threatening situations,” Arson explained, sounding strangely defensive.

Another scrap of fabric was peeled off of Iceman’s chest, revealing burnt pink tissue with a few patches of black here and there. Tommy winced, hoping the third degree burns were few and far between.

“Did you do that to Flame so you could escape?” Tommy asked, keeping his eyes down.

Arson sucked in a breath, but after a moment of silence, she released it.

“Yes,” she whispered. “I’ve never used it on a hero before today, because I didn’t want them to know I had that ability. I’m probably going to be moved to top priority after tonight.” She paused, and Tommy stayed quiet to let her collect her thoughts. “Though I don’t think we’re going to be going out for a while after this.”

Tommy nodded, setting the last swath of fabric aside. “Yeah, it’s probably gonna be best for you guys to lay low. I can heal him enough so he’s stable, but he’s still gonna need time to heal these burns on his own, and he’ll have permanent scarring.”

“As long as he’s alive, that’s what matters,” Arson muttered, mostly to herself.

Well, no point in delaying the inevitable.

Tommy's gaze skimmed over the burns one more time, and he tried to hide his grimace. It was going to suck ass healing this. Healing the minor burns on his hands from when he worked wasn't a big deal, but something as severe as this was going to take a lot out of him.

Taking a deep breath, Tommy placed his hands as gently as he could on Iceman's now bare chest. Then, he closed his eyes.

Arson stayed silent as he healed Iceman. He heard her soft gasp as his hands began to glow, but didn't open his eyes to see her reaction as he focused on spreading the energy over Iceman's burns. His head began to pound almost immediately, with a strange warmth building up in his hands that quickly became painfully hot. Still, he forced himself to hold on, knowing he only had this one shot to heal Iceman tonight before he was too exhausted to try again.

His head throbbed as Tommy's heart pounded in his ears. He was grimacing in pain now, and lights began to dance behind his eyelids. If he kept this up, he was going to pass out.

Like with Siren, Tommy stopped right before it became too much. Gasping for air, Tommy threw himself away from Iceman, curling up against the wall and burying his face in his knees to try and catch his breath.

"Oh fuck that hurt," Tommy muttered, clenching his jaw as a wave of nausea rolled over him.

"Are you alright?" Arson asked.

"I'll be fine," Tommy spit out between his teeth. "Just give me a-" Another nausea spike and Tommy was on his feet, pushing past the way his legs shook like jelly as he darted for the sink in the corner of the backroom. As Tommy puked into the sink, he felt a hand rest lightly on his back, drawing gentle circles over his shoulder blades and helping him tether himself back to reality.

After another minute, Tommy lifted his head from the sink, clutching the sides of the basin to keep himself upright. Arson seemed to notice his struggle and wrapped her arm around his back, walking him back over to where Iceman was still on the ground, and setting him down so he was sitting against the wall.

The cold tile floor was heavenly against his sore hands, and Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as he tried to catch his breath.

The backroom was silent as Arson waited for Tommy to recover. His head was spinning but Tommy forced himself to take deep breaths, knowing it would pass if he gave himself time. He heard Arson stand up again, but couldn't summon the energy to ask what she was doing. There was the sound of a cabinet opening, followed by running water, and soon there was something cool being pressed into his hand.

"Drink some water," Arson instructed.

Cracking open his eyes, he saw the villain crouched right in front of him, helping him hold a glass of water she'd gotten for him. She helped him lift it to his lips, and the water was

heavenly for his pounding head. Nodding in encouragement, she kept a hold on the bottom as he downed the entire thing in one go. Then, she put the glass down on the ground next to him when he was done.

The water settled into his system, and Tommy's head finally stopped spinning. He opened his eyes completely, and saw Arson had moved back over to sit by Iceman.

"Thank you," Tommy muttered, straightening up against the wall and wincing when it sent another bolt of pain through his skull. "How's Iceman?"

"He looks a lot better," Arson told him. Looking over at the two, Tommy could see that Arson was right. While the burns on his chest were still numerous, there were no more third degree burns that he could see. There were a few second degrees still, but the majority had been reduced to first degree redness with a bit of blistering. Along with that, where Iceman had been barely breathing before, now his chest was moving up and down at a steady pace, as if he was just sleeping.

Although Tommy now felt like shit, at least his healing had worked. Iceman was going to live another day.

"How long until you're feeling better?" Arson then asked, glancing up at Tommy.

Tommy shrugged. "The worst should pass in ten minutes or so."

"Then we'll stay with you until then. I want to make sure you can get home safely," Arson said.

Tommy opened his mouth to argue, but could tell by her tone that wasn't going to work. Plus, he didn't really have the energy to insist he was fine right now, and figured it wouldn't be bad to have some company while he waited for his head to stop throbbing.

"Can I ask you a question?" Tommy spoke up after a moment, figuring this was the opportunity to ask about something he'd always wondered about.

"Shoot," Arson replied.

"What the hell is up with your names? I mean, you have water powers but you're named Arson, and he's got fire powers yet he's named Iceman. Why did you guys do that?" Tommy asked, frowning his brow.

"It was Iceman's idea," Arson muttered, her tone betraying a hint of amusement as she squeezed her friend's hand. "He said we could be like Greenland and Iceland. You know, with how Greenland is actually covered in ice while Iceland is super green, and they were named that to confuse outsiders?" She shook her head, a smile barely quirked at the corners of her lips. "It's ridiculous, but it does take people by surprise, so I suppose it does the job."

Tommy snorted. "I guess it works, yeah. But it's still kind of stupid."

"Believe me, I'm aware," Arson said, although she was giving a fond smile to Iceman.

Silence fell between them once more. Iceman's breathing continued to be steady, a rhythmic in and out of whooshing air as Arson sat quietly beside him. Tommy had no idea how long it was going to take him to wake up, but he wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't for a few hours. Tommy's head rested against the wall, trying not to wince as his eyes drifted up towards the fluorescent lights.

"Thank you," Arson's whisper cut through the silence like a hot knife, demanding attention without any dramatics. "Thank you for saving him."

The thanks was so sincere, so heavy on Arson's tongue, it made Tommy squirm. "Um, you're welcome. But it wasn't a huge deal. Besides, it's not like I have much of a choice in this," he said, laughing awkwardly.

"That's not true," Arson said, keeping her gaze fixed on Iceman. "You could have called the cops and had them waiting here for me. You could have called someone when Blade and Zephyrus showed up at your apartment. Or you could have left Siren to bleed out in that alley, and no one would've known you were there. But you didn't. You chose to help all of us, despite who we are. That deserves a thanks."

Tommy wrapped his arms around his knees. "You're making such a big deal out of it. I'm just doing some healing. It's not even like it takes that much out of me most of the time."

Arson smiled, but there was something sad in it. "You don't understand how valuable you are to us, Tommy. Villains don't have anyone to patch them up after they get hurt. Heroes can go to the expensive doctors they have in the Hero Tower, vigilantes can sometimes go to the hospital depending on the nature of their injuries, or can find an independent healer and pay them to help, but villains rarely can do anything except patch themselves up and hope for the best. Most healers turn us away, and hospitals usually can recognize the wounds caused by hero fights. If a villain gets mortally wounded, that's usually it for us."

"But... but you guys don't get that badly hurt all that often, right? Heroes aren't supposed to try and kill you. They just try to incapacitate," Tommy pointed out.

"Tommy." Arson's voice was flat, but non judgemental as she pointed to Iceman. "Did this look like a wound meant to incapacitate, or a wound to kill?"

Tommy blinked, knowing what the answer to the question was.

"And with Siren," Arson continued before he could speak again, "that hole in his stomach, again did that seem like a wound meant to incapacitate?"

There were a few beats of silence before Tommy shook his head.

"The media lies to you," Arson said softly, tracing a finger up Iceman's arm. "They tell you that the heroes are noble. That they're the ones you need to look up to. But many villains aren't doing this because we like to hurt people. We have a reason for choosing our side. We're just trying to do what we need to do to survive, but we're getting killed off, one by one."

“Are you saying that heroes have killed villains before?” Tommy asked, unable to hide the horror in his voice.

Arson nodded. “Yes, they have. And if you hadn’t saved Iceman, he would’ve been another death they covered up.”

Nausea was creeping up Tommy’s throat again, but this time it wasn’t because of his powers. It was one thing to have his suspicions, but it was another thing entirely to get them confirmed. He’d thought that Siren could have been hurt in a fight with a hero, but he wasn’t sure about it. Now, he knew that was exactly what had happened, and that it had happened many times before as well.

The media had been lying to them. All of them.

“We need you, Tommy,” Arson then said when Tommy was silent. “Of course you’re not going to be forced to do anything you don’t want to, but we need you so much more than you realize.”

A faint groan from the floor tore Tommy’s attention away before he could respond, and Arson was immediately kneeling over Iceman, grabbing his face in her hands and trying to meet his eyes.

“Iceman? Iceman, are you awake?”

“Fucking hell,” Iceman muttered, his hoarse voice difficult to make out through his voice changer. “I feel like I got baked in a fuckin’ oven.”

Arson let out a relieved laugh, and Tommy noticed a stray tear roll down her cheek. “Yeah, yeah you probably do.”

“What the hell happened, Ni-” Arson slammed her hand over Iceman’s mouth before he could finish the word.

“We’re not alone, Iceman,” Arson told him, jutting her chin in Tommy’s direction. She lifted her hand from Iceman’s mouth and he nodded, turning his head to the side so he could see Tommy. “This is Tommy,” she explained. “He healed you.”

“Ayup, big man,” Tommy greeted.

“...ayup,” Iceman replied, albeit a bit weakly. “So you’re the kid that saved Siren, huh?”

Tommy sighed. “Jesus fucking christ, does everyone and their mother know about that?”

“Everyone in our circle does,” Arson told him with a soft laugh.

“I guess this means a lot of villains owe you one,” Iceman commented, making no moves to get up as he continued to meet Tommy’s gaze. “Which includes me.”

“Seriously, it’s fine. Don’t worry about it,” Tommy grumbled, knowing it was too late to insist that he didn’t want to get involved in their world, but still hating the idea of having a

favor owed to him because he helped someone.

“Well, thank you anyway,” Iceman said, nodding at him. “Though I think it’s about time me and my partner here got going, because this floor is really fucking uncomfortable.” Pausing, Iceman glanced around the room, and Tommy could just make out the frown behind his goggles. “Wait, where the hell are we?”

“The cafe I work at,” Tommy explained, straightening up against the wall as he prepared to stand. “My roommates were home so I couldn’t bring you to the apartment. I do the closing shift here so I had the keys to this place, and figured it would be the next best thing.”

“Convenient,” Iceman muttered. It was then he glanced down at himself, noticing the burns for the first time. “Jesus christ, that ain’t pretty.” Then, his frown deepened. “Wait, where the fuck is my shirt?”

“Uh, I kinda had to cut it off of you,” Tommy explained, sheepishly pointing to the fabric strips that sat near Iceman’s feet. “Hope you weren’t attached.”

“Aw dammit, I really liked that one,” Iceman whined.

“We’ll get you another one,” Arson reassured him. “But for right now, I think we should focus on getting you up. Do you think you can stand?”

It was a struggle for Iceman to get to his feet. He let out a rather impressive string of curses when moving tugged at the burns on his chest, and if Tommy wasn’t still a bit dizzy, he probably would’ve tried to heal him more. Finally though, he was standing upright, leaning into Arson who had both her arms wrapped around him.

“Can you guys make it back alright?” Tommy asked, having stood up himself and was now leaning against the wall for support.

“Yeah, we’ll be fine,” Arson reassured him. “Though, um, do you think you could let us change into our civilian clothes? It’ll be easier for us to walk down the street that way.”

Tommy blinked. “Oh, shit, of course. Don’t worry, I, uh, won’t look or anything.”

“Thanks,” Arson smiled at him, and Tommy felt warm inside.

A few minutes later, from the front part of the cafe where Tommy had gone while the villains changed, he heard a muffled call from the backroom of, *we’re leaving now!* and Tommy yelled back a goodbye.

The only thing he saw as he opened the door to the backroom was a flash of pink hair as Arson and Iceman slipped out into the alley. Figuring he should give them time to get far away before he started heading home himself, Tommy set about cleaning up the remains of the two villains so Puffy and Foolish would be none the wiser when they came in for work tomorrow morning.

There wasn’t much blood on the floor thanks to the fact that burns usually didn’t bleed all that much, but Tommy still wiped the entire backroom down with a mop just in case. He also

made sure to clean out the sink he'd puked in, and ended up grabbing himself another glass of water to lessen the headache that was now pounding behind his eyes.

He was still dizzy and his head hurt like a bitch, but Tommy didn't actively feel like he was going to pass out, so that was a plus. The only real challenge was going to be getting home, because even just standing for a few minutes to clean up was making his fatigued legs shake violently.

While Tommy knew the logical thing to do was to call Tubbo or Ranboo, that was going to open up way too many questions about why he was suddenly very ill when he'd be fine less than an hour before. If he could just make it back to the apartment on his own, he could just pretend he was really tired and pass out as soon as he got home.

Yeah, he could do that.

Hopefully.

Shutting off the lights in the cafe again, Tommy stumbled back out to the front of the shop, his keys jingling in his pocket. Once he was out in the cool night air he gasped in relief, the breeze wicking away the sweat that had formed on the back of his neck. His hands shook as he twisted the key into the lock, his forehead resting just a bit too heavily against the cool glass doors.

Shit. This was going to be harder than he thought.

Tommy was mentally preparing himself to push away from the door when there was a rustling sound from above. Before he even got a chance to look up, there was the sound of footsteps slamming against concrete, and Tommy whipped around to see who was there.

He didn't expect to find himself face to face with a *vigilante*.

Nuke was taller in person than he seemed on TV, although that was probably because he'd always been standing next to Ender, who seemed to be a literal giant. His gas mask covered his entire face, with yellow lenses over the eyeholes. Tommy noticed that the guy had similar hair to Tubbo, with the bleached ends and the overgrown brown roots. Huh. Guess Tubbo's style wasn't as unique as he thought.

"What the fuck, dude?!" Tommy yelped as soon as he'd gathered his thoughts somewhat, still putting most of his weight against the glass doors. "You're gonna scare a man half to death like that!"

"Sorry!" The vigilante yelped, his voice also tinged by his voice changer. "I didn't mean to scare you, I swear!"

"Were you just sitting on the roof of this place waiting for me to come out like a fuckin' creep?" Tommy accused.

"No, I wasn't! I was just, um, in the area and I saw you go inside earlier, and since it's so late I thought I'd just keep an eye to make sure everything was alright. Y'know, vigilante duties

and all,” Nuke explained, letting out a nervous chuckle.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. There was no way Nuke would’ve been able to see Arson and Iceman enter or leave from the front of the store, as the alley let out onto another street entirely. Plus, a vigilante would ask him if he’d spotted two villains heading towards his cafe, right? This had to just be a weird check-in.

He hoped that’s all it was.

“Well, you checked and everything’s fine. I work the closing shift of this place and I forgot some stuff so I came back for it. So you can leave now,” Tommy snapped, not having the energy to deal with a vigilante right now.

“Are you sure? You were in there for a long time,” Nuke pointed out.

Tommy bit back a curse, trying to think of some excuse he could tell Nuke for why he’d been in the cafe for so long if he was just grabbing stuff he forgot.

“I... I got sick,” he finally admitted, figuring it was at least partially true. “Threw up and all that nasty shit. So I really just wanna go home so I can go the fuck to sleep.”

“If you’re sick, are you okay to walk back on your own?” Nuke asked, taking a step closer to him. “If you need, I can walk you home.”

“I’m fine,” Tommy spit out, hoping the vigilante couldn’t see his legs shaking as he gripped the door handle.

“You really don’t seem fine,” Nuke said, looking him up and down. “In fact, you kinda look like shit.”

“Your face looks like shit,” Tommy snapped back.

“You can’t even see my face behind my mask,” Nuke argued.

“Yeah, but I bet it looks like shit. I bet you don’t get any ladies because they all think Ender is cooler since he’s taller than you,” Tommy pushed, saying whatever the hell came to mind to try and get the guy to leave him alone.

Nuke snorted. “I’m not exactly looking for ladies right now, but okay.”

“Oh, you swing the other way? Good for you man, live your truth.”

“That’s not what I-” Nuke cut himself off, sighing deeply and shaking his head. “Fine. You wanna walk back on your own, I’m not going to stop you.” With that, Nuke took a step back, gesturing for Tommy to start walking down the sidewalk. After a few beats of staring down the vigilante, it was clear he wasn’t going to leave until Tommy proved he could make it down the street without tipping over.

Clenching his jaw, Tommy pushed away from the door, ignoring the way his legs screamed in protest. He managed one step onto the sidewalk, followed by another, but when he went for a

third, his leg immediately crumbled under the weight.

Before he could fall face first into the concrete, there was an arm grabbing him and yanking him back upright. Tommy leaned heavily against Nuke, thinking it was a bit ridiculous considering how much taller he was than the vigilante, yet the guy didn't seem to struggle with supporting his weight at all.

"Yup, thought that would happen," Nuke muttered, grunting as he threw Tommy's arm over his shoulders. "Alright, where am I taking you?"

While Tommy wanted to argue, he knew full well that if Nuke weren't here right now, Tommy would probably just end up sleeping on the sidewalk for the night.

"Down that way," he said, pointing towards his complex.

Nodding, Nuke started in the direction he gave with Tommy stumbling against him.

The two were silent for the few minutes of walking. Tommy was focusing too much on putting his legs in front of each other so he didn't fall again, because the last thing he wanted was for Nuke to pick him up bridal style.

After they'd made it about a block though, Nuke seemed to tire of the silence because he spoke up.

"So, uh, nice weather we're having, right?"

Tommy raised an eyebrow at the expressionless mask. "Seriously? You're making small talk about the weather?"

"Well the silence was awkward and I wanted to say something. I'm not an uber driver you can just be quiet with!"

"You're the one who insisted on helping me home!" Tommy exclaimed.

"Yeah, because you were gonna pass the fuck out if I didn't!" Nuke shot back.

Tommy groaned. "Don't be so dramatic," he muttered, although he knew Nuke was probably right. "Where's your tall friend anyway? Don't you guys usually do your patrols together?"

"Oh, Ender?" Nuke let out a nervous laugh. "He's, um, he's at home. Things seemed a bit quiet so I decided to take the patrol on my own."

Huh. So the fight Arson and Iceman had with Flame wasn't something Nuke knew about.

"You didn't hear about anything going on?" Tommy pressed. "No villain sightings or hero sightings or anything like that?"

Nuke slowed his walking pace down, turning his head to glance at Tommy. "No, I didn't. Did you see something?"

Tommy debated what he should and shouldn't tell Nuke. On the one hand, Nuke's job was to fight villains, meaning he probably shouldn't mention that Iceman had been hurt. But on the other hand, Nuke wasn't a hero either. He didn't have any obligation to the Hero Committee, and wasn't as likely to just blindly take their side in any altercation. That was what Tommy had always liked about vigilantes. They weren't bound to the stupidity of the Hero Committee, but still helped people all the same.

"I thought I saw Arson and Iceman at one point," Tommy said carefully, keeping his tone casual. "It was from far away, but I could've sworn I saw them going at it with Flame."

"You saw Arson and Iceman fighting Flame? Did you report it?" Nuke asked.

Tommy shrugged. "Like I said, it was from far away, and Arson and Iceman dipped pretty quickly from what I saw. Plus, Flame was there, so I just figured he had it handled."

"That's... weird though," Nuke muttered, shaking his head. "I'm usually able to intercept police radio transmissions so me and Ender can find out where shit is going down, but I didn't hear anything about Flame being sent out tonight."

Arson's words flashed in Tommy's mind again. *If you hadn't saved Iceman, he would've been another death they covered up.*

He thought back to the night he saved Siren. There had also been no news about that fight.

A picture was starting to form in Tommy's head, and he really didn't like what it was turning out to be.

"Hey, you okay?"

Nuke's voice dragged Tommy back to the present. "Uh, yeah, I'm fine. Sorry, I zoned out there for a second."

"It's alright. I think we're almost here though," he said, gesturing with one hand to Tommy's apartment building.

"Yeah, this is it, big man," Tommy told him.

Nuke dragged him up to the front door of the building, and Tommy was actually able to stand on his own as he dug in his pockets for his scanner.

"So, uh, are you good now?" Nuke asked, shifting from foot to foot. "Because if you can make it back to your apartment from here, I'm gonna go."

Tommy snorted. "I'm gonna give you a terrible Yelp review. 'The vigilante Nuke only dropped me off in front of my apartment building instead of walking me to my door like a wrong'un. I give him one out of five stars.'"

"Oh fuck off. I should be getting five out of five stars for walking a poor, sick child home," Nuke shot back, and Tommy could hear the smirk under his mask.

“Excuse you, bitch! If anyone’s the child between the two of us it’s you!” Tommy exclaimed. “You look like you’re twelve years old!”

“Wh- is it because I’m short?!”

“Yes, it’s entirely because you’re short. You’re so small, you’re probably even shorter than my friend, Tubbo, and he’s one of the shortest people I know.”

Nuke huffed. “Well I bet Tubbo isn’t all that short at all, because I know I’m not short either. I’m perfectly average.”

“Sure you are. You look like a toddler next to Ender.”

“*Everyone* looks tiny as fuck next to Ender! He’s unreasonably tall!”

“I’ll believe it when I see it, bomb boy,” Tommy laughed, using his scanner to unlock the door to his building. “Now go off on the rest of your patrol and save a cat from a tree or some shit.”

“You’re a very ungrateful citizen,” Nuke said as he walked away from the building.

“Name’s Tommy, bitch! Don’t wear it out!”

Right before Tommy shut the door to the apartment building, he saw Nuke flip him off and chuckled to himself. Although he was annoyed that he’d needed help walking back, that had gone a lot better than he expected. Thankfully, Nuke hadn’t questioned him too much about why he’d been at the cafe so late at night, and he’d actually been kind of fun to talk to.

If Tommy wasn’t in the habit of helping some very illegal villains, he wouldn’t even mind actually befriending the vigilante. But it just so happened that he *was* in the habit of helping villains, and he had a strange feeling Nuke wouldn’t be too thrilled if he found out about that.

Tommy sat down on the floor of the elevator as it tugged him up to his floor. It was a monumental effort to push himself back to his feet, and the only thing that kept him from falling over in the hallway was the promise of his warm bed that was so tantalizingly close. He just needed to make it a few more steps, and he would be able to pass the fuck out and kiss his headache goodbye.

His hand landed on his doorknob, and he almost started crying in relief. When he tried to twist it though, he was met with resistance.

The door was locked.

“Tubbo!” Tommy yelled, slamming his fist on the door. “Ranboo! Someone let me in, I forgot my key!”

From inside the apartment, he could hear something fall over, and then footsteps were rushing towards the door. “Sorry Tommy, one second,” Ranboo called back, his voice strained. The doorknob jiggled as Ranboo tried to open it, but somehow his attempt didn’t result in the door swinging wide open like it should have.

“Ranboo, seriously, let me in,” Tommy said, pounding on the door again.

“I-I’m trying!” Ranboo stammered. “I think, uh, I think the lock is jammed!”

“Then try harder to open it!” Tommy yelled, his legs starting to shake again. There was another crash from somewhere in the apartment, and Tommy frowned. “Ranboo, what was that noise?”

“Oh, um, nothing! Tubbo just dropped something,” Ranboo said, still jiggling the doorknob.

“Well wherever he is, can you get him over to the door so he can fucking open it? Since he’s not the one with noodle arms over here?!”

From inside the apartment, he heard a door slam shut. Then, the doorknob twisted, and it swung open to reveal a harried-looking Ranboo.

“Got it!” Ranboo said in a voice that was way too cheerful.

Scowling at his roommate, Tommy shoved his way inside, his head spinning as he dropped his backpack on the floor. Right as he crossed over to the couch, he saw the bathroom door open, and Tubbo stepped out with red cheeks and damp hair.

“Oh, hey Tommy, you’re back,” Tubbo commented, rubbing at his hair with a towel. “What took you so long?”

“I feel like shit,” Tommy said in lieu of an answer. “I’m gonna go to bed before I pass out on the floor. Ranboo, you’re sharing with me tonight, right?”

“Uh, yeah, I think so. But are you alright?”

“Alright, I’ll put earplugs in so I don’t get woken up by your weird horror movie sleep talking,” Tommy grumbled, once again ignoring a question his roommate asked.

While he knew he owed them more of an explanation than what he was giving them, he was pretty sure that if he stayed standing for another minute, he was literally going to pass out. In the morning he could tell them the same thing he told Nuke. He went to the cafe and got sick while he was there. Probably just ate something bad, nothing to be too concerned about.

Maybe he’d also mention that Nuke walked him home. After all, Tubbo seemed like a bit of a Nuke fanboy considering how he perked up whenever the vigilante was mentioned. If he could distract his roommates with the fact that he met Nuke, then hopefully neither of them would push for more information about his night out.

Tommy didn’t bother turning on the lights as he stumbled into his room. Instead, he collapsed face first into the blankets, and was out as soon as his head hit the pillow.

okay please know I'm not trying to make a joke speculating about cc!tubbo's sexuality or anything with that one bit between tommy and nuke, for one thing I write about the rp characters and not cc's, and also that joke was meant to just be more like tubbo being like "ladies are not the topic of conversation right now since you are sick" while tommy just misinterpreted what he meant so pls don't take it the wrong way (just don't speculate on cc's sexualities that's weirdchamp)

ANYWAY I really hope you guys enjoyed this chapter, it was super fun to write especially with getting to introduce Arson and Iceman while also finally getting to see some Nuke and Tommy interaction!

now time for the fun stuff: I have a discord server now! feel free to join and ask me questions or just scream at me about my fic or whatever, it's just a fun place for all of us to vibe! <https://discord.gg/RFXqgK4CRN>

last stuff: I saw in someone's bookmarks for this fic that my fic might've gotten recced on tik tok?? I'm super curious about that so if you have the link to that pls leave it in the comments lol

OK THAT'S ALL! pls leave a comment if you enjoyed, I read all of them and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr or twitter @bonesandthebees

tommy needs a day off

Chapter Summary

The day after Tommy's run-in with Arson and Iceman.

Chapter Notes

helloooooo besties i'm back with more

ok so just fair warning, my updates are going to start becoming a little less regular because I'm starting uni next week. I'm gonna see if I can get the next chapter finished before I move back to my campus, but I can't promise anything soooo if I suddenly go a week or two without updating I swear it's not abandoned I'm just about to get very busy in my real life

ANYWAY ty all so much for the crazy attention this is getting, you guys are all so sweet!! ok enough rambling, there's not any trigger warnings for this chapter as far as I'm aware so hope you guys enjoy!

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

Although his headache was gone by the time morning arrived like he had predicted, Tommy was still exhausted for the entirety of the day after his run-in with Arson and Iceman.

After waking up, he ended up explaining to Tubbo and Ranboo about how he'd gotten sick the night before while he was at the cafe. Before either of them could press him about that though, he brought up how Nuke had walked him home, expecting to get some sort of big reaction out of the two of them that would distract them from asking any more questions.

Suffice to say, the plan didn't exactly work. In fact, neither of them seemed all that surprised about Nuke walking him home. Both of them said it made sense since he'd been seen patrolling their area before, and that it was nice of him to help Tommy get home.

In all honesty, Tommy was a little offended on Nuke's behalf. If he had learned that Tubbo had been walked home by a vigilante none of them had met before he would have certainly had a bit more of a reaction. But no, all his roommates wanted to talk about was if he knew what caused him to be sick, how he was feeling now, and if he still planned on going to work that evening.

Which, of course he was. Just because he was tired that didn't mean he could afford to take a shift off.

Besides, while he was tired, he wasn't on the verge of passing out like he had been the night before. It was more like a lingering heaviness in his limbs that wouldn't go away. There was a bit of extra effort he needed to put into lifting his legs, a slight delay in reaction time between his brain and his hands, making it feel as though he was moving underwater. However, while he'd never exhausted himself this badly from healing someone before, he somehow knew that the lingering side effects were going to be gone the next day.

Again, he could deal with a little fatigue. He wasn't going to be a pussy about it.

Unfortunately for him, Puffy didn't exactly feel the same.

As soon as he walked into the cafe for his shift, he spotted Puffy sitting in the far back corner of the shop with Foolish working behind the counter. Before Tommy could walk over to the counter to put his apron on though, Puffy waved him over.

Late afternoon sunlight was spilling into the cafe, turning every inch of the shop into gold. The air was heavy with the rich scent of coffee beans while the taste of sugar was heavy on his tongue, making Tommy wonder if Foolish had been baking pastries. Puffy was sitting with her back to the window, the sun illuminating the edges of her wild brown and white curls like a halo.

"Hi Tommy," she said as he walked over to the table, gesturing for him to sit.

"Hi Puff," Tommy replied, settling down awkwardly into the chair. "Is everything alright?"

"Oh yeah, everything's fine," Puffy told him, her smile almost as bright as the sunlight wrapped around her. "I just wanted to check in with you since we haven't gotten a chance to talk much this week. You still alright with doing this many shifts a week? I can cut you down if you-"

"No!" Tommy cut her off, wincing when the sudden interruption made her flinch. "Shit, sorry, I didn't mean to say it like that. But please don't cut down my hours, Puffy. I really need the money."

"It's okay, no need to freak out," Puffy reassured, reaching a hand out to rest it over his own. "I can keep you on your current schedule. It's just... you look really tired, Tommy."

"I'm fine," Tommy said, using the hand Puffy wasn't holding to rub at his eyes. "I just got shit sleep last night, but I'm totally fine, I swear."

"Are you sure? Because if you ever need someone to talk to, you know I'm here for you. Not just as a boss, but as your friend." Her tone was gentle, but firm. Comforting yet solid in the way only Puffy could balance.

It had taken a while for Tommy to trust Puffy. From the first day he came into her cafe with a wrinkled resume in his hand, pointing to the 'help wanted' sign on the door with all the

desperation of a nearly homeless teenager, she had always been kind to him. She heard him out when he had something to say, and seriously took his words into consideration. She would offer him extra food to take home at the end of every shift, giving calm reasons as to why he should take the food in a way that didn't make it feel like pity. Even so, Tommy fought tooth and nail against her kindness for the first month of working for her, desperate to not become another charity case.

But Puffy didn't look down on him. She didn't see him as a poor kid that she just felt bad for. Puffy respected him. More so than any other adult he'd met up until that point ever had.

So he knew that when she gave him *that* concerned look, it wasn't one borne out of pity, but genuine worry. The way Puffy looked at Tommy always made something tight form inside of him, like there was a dam that was waiting to be released.

He knew he could tell her secrets and she wouldn't betray him. But if he admitted one small thing, he was worried the rest was going to come spilling out along with it.

Besides, Puffy probably wouldn't take too kindly to finding out Tommy had used her cafe as a makeshift clinic for two wanted villains the night before. She was understanding, but she wasn't a saint, even if she seemed like one more often than not.

"Thanks Puffy, but I promise I'm okay," Tommy told her, fiddling with his hands in his lap.

Puffy raised an eyebrow, and Tommy could tell she didn't believe him.

Maybe... he could tell her one part. Something small, not involving the villains, but enough to keep her from pushing further.

"Okay, well, maybe there is one small thing," Tommy started, dragging his hands through his hair. "Tubbo and Ranboo have just been really weird lately. They're keeping all these secrets from me, and they're always out doing shit together really late at night. It's just bugging me a lot so I guess it's making it a bit hard for me to sleep."

"Oh Tommy," Puffy murmured, squeezing his hand. "Have you tried just asking them outright what's going on?"

Tommy snorted. "Well, I did, and first Tubbo said they couldn't tell me yet. Then later on they told me it was because they were getting goddamn married for tax benefits. But I don't think that was the real secret, or at least not the entire thing because they're still acting super fucking weird."

"Wait, they're committing marriage fraud?" Puffy questioned.

Tommy blanched. "Um... maybe forget I said that part."

There was a beat of silence as Puffy stared at him, before shaking her head and laughing under her breath. "Jesus christ, guess that's not something I really want to know about," she muttered, smiling at the table. Then, her smile faded as she met Tommy's eyes again. "But you don't have any idea what this other secret they're hiding from you might be?" Tommy

shook his head, and Puffy sighed. “Well, if you’ve asked and they won’t tell you what’s going on, they probably have a reason for keeping it from you. As hard as it is, Tubbo and Ranboo are your best friends. They wouldn’t be keeping secrets to purposefully leave you out. I’m sure you just need to give it time so they can tell you about it when they’re ready.”

Sighing, Tommy sank down in his seat. “Great. Just gotta keep doing what I’ve been doing this entire time.”

“I know it’s hard, but try to be patient with them,” Puffy told him, squeezing his hand one more time before pulling away. “And please, try to get more sleep. You really look awful today.”

“Excuse you, I’m always extremely desirable to my many wives.”

Puffy snorted. “Ah, yes, I forgot. Who needs beauty sleep when you have so many wives.”

“Exactly. Now, I know you are still in the market for a wife-”

“I’m what?”

“And I can give you so many tips on how to get all the ladies. I’m the master at it,” Tommy told her, smirking at her from across the table.

“I appreciate the support. But I’m not exactly looking for a wife right now,” Puffy explained, struggling to hold back her giggles.

“Oh come now, what about Foolish?” Tommy exclaimed, gesturing to the counter where Foolish was blending a frappe. “Now you are a fantastic father, don’t get me wrong, but the poor child needs a mother!”

“Tommy, Foolish is an adult,” Puffy pointed out with a raised eyebrow.

Tommy faked a horror-filled gasp. “And because he’s an adult he no longer needs his parents? I thought you were a better father than that, Puffy.”

“You always tell me that you’re a Big Man who doesn’t need adults telling him what to do,” Puffy argued.

“Yeah, well I’m *me* so of course I don’t need parents or any of that shit. But poor Foolish deserves a mother!” Tommy exclaimed.

Puffy laughed again and Tommy beamed, having always enjoyed hearing Puffy’s laugh. It was one of those really nice laughs, the ones that weren’t too dainty but weren’t too harsh either. It was genuine and hearty, making anyone around want to join in even if they didn’t know what the woman was laughing at.

“I appreciate the concern. I’ll get right on searching for a wife,” Puffy grinned, leaning back in her seat. “While I set up a dating profile though, you should probably go get behind the counter. Foolish’s friend just arrived so I think he probably wants to head out.”

She pointed to the front of the store where a rather tall person was waiting by the doors. They had dark curls that almost reached their shoulders, and they were wearing a rather nice blazer and pants with a ridiculously tall pair of boots. Along with that, they had a pair of dark sunglasses covering their eyes, and Tommy wondered if they were only wearing those because of the setting sun, or if it was more of a permanent fashion statement.

“Alright, yeah, I’ll get on it,” Tommy muttered, pushing to his feet and heading towards the counter with his backpack hanging off of one shoulder. When Foolish noticed Tommy heading his way, his grin was almost as bright as the golden streaks in his hair.

“About time you got done talking to my mom,” Foolish teased, yanking his apron off and throwing it into Tommy’s face. “Did she try to get you to take less shifts?”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Yup. But I convinced her I needed them.”

“Told her you wouldn’t budge,” Foolish snorted, rinsing his hands in the sink as he and Tommy switched places behind the counter. “Uh, so, that cup over there is the start of an iced caramel macchiato. Also the honey is being a bitch today so you might wanna run the bottle under hot water before trying to use it.”

“Got it, thanks,” Tommy said as he shoved his backpack under the counter with his foot while tying the apron around his neck. “Who’s your friend, by the way? I don’t think I’ve seen them here before.”

“Oh! That’s Eret. They’re an old friend of mine. We go wayyyy back,” Foolish chuckled, jerking his thumb in their direction. “Anyway, I’ll see you later, Tommy.”

“Later,” Tommy called back as he picked up making the caramel macchiato where Foolish left off. As he pulled the shots, he saw Foolish head over to the table where Puffy was to give her a quick hug, before throwing his arm over Eret’s shoulder and leading them out of the cafe.

As Tommy settled into the routine of his shift, he wondered if Wilbur was going to come by today. While Wilbur tried to stop by whenever he could, it wasn’t always a daily thing. Tommy didn’t know what his job was, but it certainly seemed to keep him busy considering how he was working on his laptop nearly every time he came into the cafe. He considered that Wilbur could be in business, but the mental image of Wilbur wearing a suit and debating things like stocks and shit made him want to laugh out loud.

Either way, Tommy wasn’t all that surprised when Wilbur didn’t show up to the cafe that evening. It was probably for the better anyway, because Wilbur would definitely notice Tommy’s exhaustion and probably question him about it.

Puffy left the cafe a little after sunset, telling Tommy she had left a tupperware container of food in the backroom to be his dinner. He thanked her and promised her he would eat it, and went about the rest of his shift trying not to groan every time a new customer came in.

It was a quiet evening, made all the more slow without Wilbur’s presence. But Tommy was grateful for the relaxed pace due to his fatigue, although he felt a lot better at the end of his

shift than he did when he first got there.

Grinding beans, brewing dark roasts, steeping tea—the motions were simple and routine as the evening played itself out. When the last customer left the shop, Tommy breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, he could go home and sleep off the rest of this exhaustion.

He checked his phone while cleaning up the day's work. There were no texts from any unknown numbers, which he was very thankful for. If he had to heal another person that night, he definitely would throw up again, and wasn't eager to repeat that experience.

Once the cafe was clean, Tommy turned off the lights and headed out the front door. His hands weren't shaking this time as he twisted the key in the lock, and he silently hoped there wasn't going to be a surprise visit from another vigilante.

“Hey Tommy.”

Freezing with his hand on the key, Tommy took a slow breath as he tried to psyche himself to turn around and deal with whatever new bullshit was about to happen this time.

Shoving the key in his pocket, Tommy turned around and was met with the blindfolded gaze of Siren.

Well, at least it wasn't a vigilante.

“Now what the fuck do you want?” Tommy asked without preamble.

It had been ages since he'd last seen Siren. And in that time frame, he'd had to deal with Blade, Zephyrus, Arson, and Iceman. All because Siren had thought it would be a good idea to give his information out as if he was a service to be hired.

Oh, he had some *words* for the villain standing in front of him.

“Hey now, why so hostile?” Siren asked, seeming confused. “I thought we left off on good terms.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “Yeah, that was before the Blade and Zephyrus showed up at my front door because you gave them my fucking address,” he snapped, leaning against the doors to the cafe with his arms folded over his chest.

Siren grimaced, and awkwardly reached a hand up to fiddle with the ends of his hair. “Uh, shit, yeah, I did do that.”

“It was just stupid luck that my roommates weren't home when that happened. Do you have any fucking clue how bad it would've been if they'd seen Blade and Zephyrus there?!”

“I mean, do you think they would've turned them in?” Siren asked, lips turned down in a frown.

“I don't fucking know but that's not the point!” Tommy exclaimed. “The point is that I don't want my roommates to get involved in this shit! I didn't want to get involved in your world in

the first place, but obviously that's too late now. The least I can do is make sure the two of them don't get dragged in with me!" The more Tommy spoke, the angrier he got. The frustration he'd had towards Siren had been building inside of him for the past few weeks, and that combined with the fatigue still weighing down his limbs from the night before was a bad combination for his temper.

Siren was obviously taken back by Tommy's anger. "Shit, dude, I'm sorry. Seriously. I just—" Siren paused, tugging at his hair. "I wouldn't have told Blade and Zephyrus about you if Zephyrus hadn't gotten hurt. I just wasn't in a place where I could go help them, and Blade called me telling me Zeph was hurt and that they weren't gonna be able to make it back home and I..." Another pause. "I panicked," he finished in a weak voice.

Tommy narrowed his eyes at him. "So... you hadn't been planning on making me your personal healer after I saved your life that night?"

"No!" Siren balked. "I swear it wasn't like that. I just knew Zephyrus was hurt and wasn't able to help, so I thought of you."

He sounded genuine. And truth be told, Tommy knew it didn't matter all that much at this point anyway. He was involved now, and after talking to Arson the night before, he knew it wasn't something he could just stop doing.

Tommy had a right to be pissed at Siren. But he was tired, and really didn't want to have a screaming match with a supervillain in front of his place of work.

"Then why are you here?" He asked instead.

"I heard what you did for Iceman yesterday," Siren told him. "You saved his life, all of us that are friends with him deeply appreciate that. But I wanted to apologize because Blade had no right to give your phone number to Arson without asking you first. And the only reason he knew who you were in the first place was because of me, so it's my fault you were dragged into this at all. I know that's not what you wanted, and I'm genuinely sorry for that."

Well... that was pretty much exactly what Tommy had wanted to hear from Siren.

All the anger left his body in one rush, making his shoulders drop and his scowl fade.

"I appreciate the apology, but it's fine. What's done is done, and I'm glad I was able to help Iceman," Tommy said. "And honestly, I had a feeling giving my number to the Blade was going to lead to something like this, so I'm not really that upset about it. I've basically made my peace with it."

Siren's frown turned into something sadder. "You don't have to say it like that. If you don't want to do this, no one's going to force you into it."

Tommy snorted. "Don't think the Blade would agree with that, but alright."

"Don't worry about the Blade," Siren said, his voice hardening. "If he gives you any trouble, I'll handle him."

Oh. Well... that was good to know.

But even with Siren giving him an out, Tommy had already made his decision.

“Yesterday when I was healing Iceman, Arson and I... had a talk,” Tommy began, eyes falling to the ground. “And she explained how when villains like you guys get hurt, there’s no one you can turn to. If I hadn’t been around yesterday, Iceman would’ve died.”

“So are you saying this is something you *want* to do?” Siren asked. “Or is this a guilt trip? Because you shouldn’t feel guilty for anything. You have no obligation to help us. We’ve been taking care of ourselves for a long time before you came along.”

“I want to do it because it’s the right thing to do,” Tommy said evenly, staring at the place on Siren’s blindfold where he guessed the man’s eyes would be. “I don’t know why you’re trying to talk me out of this. I thought you’d be happy to hear you get to have a healer on call for you and your friends.”

Sighing, Siren shuffled over to the doors of the cafe and leaned against them, so that his and Tommy’s shoulders brushed. “I am grateful, don’t get me wrong. But you’re... you shouldn’t be caught up in something like this. You’re a kid. You should be able to keep living a normal life without worrying about all the stupid shit we villains get ourselves into.”

“Why the hell do you care so much?” Tommy asked, frowning at Siren. “We’ve only met twice. It’s not like you know me or anything.”

There was a moment of silence as Siren stared at him, a strange weight settling in the air between them. It was as if Siren wanted to say something, but couldn’t seem to make the words come out of his mouth.

Finally, Siren shook his head. “Sorry. I guess you just remind me of someone I know,” he muttered. Tommy wasn’t sure how to respond to that, so he stayed silent as Siren scratched his chin in thought. There was another beat, and Siren’s shoulders slumped. “Fine. If you’re absolutely sure that you want to help, then you should probably get properly introduced to everyone.”

Tommy frowned. “What do you mean?”

“The Syndicate is having a meeting at the end of the week. You can come to it and we can work out the details of our arrangement with you. Like payment, how we can contact you, things like that.”

Wait. Siren wanted to bring Tommy to a Syndicate meeting?

At this point, Tommy shouldn’t really be intimidated at the idea of meeting with supervillains face to face considering it’s happened multiple times already. But there was a difference between meeting a villain that’s desperate for help, and willingly walking into a meeting room full of the most dangerous people in the city.

“So what, it’ll be you, me, Blade, and Zephyrus?” Tommy asked, fighting to maintain his casual facade.

Siren chuckled. “Actually, the Syndicate isn’t just me, Blade, and Zephyrus like you’re led to believe. We’re just the only ones who refer to it publicly.”

...what the fuck?

“Wait, who the hell is in it then?”

“You’ll see if you come to the meeting,” Siren said, smirking at him. “So what do you say? Are you in?”

Tommy took a shaky breath as he thought it over. Going to a *Syndicate* meeting. That was... a lot to agree to.

“I’m going to be safe, right? Even if I want to back out, I can still go back home and no one will fuck with me?”

Siren’s smirk fell, and he stepped around so he was face to face with Tommy.

“Nothing, and I mean *nothing* is going to be a danger to you if you go to that meeting, Tommy,” Siren told him in a low voice. “I swear on my own life that you will be safe, and if anyone tries anything, I’ll handle it.”

There was something dark in Siren’s voice when he said *I’ll handle it*. Something that made a shiver run down Tommy’s spine as he remembered exactly how dangerous Siren was.

“Okay.” Tommy nodded. “I believe you.”

This time when Siren smiled, it wasn’t a smirk, but something more genuine. In a way, it was almost familiar.

Siren opened his mouth to say something else, but another voice interrupted them.

“Get away from him, Siren.”

Both Tommy and Siren whipped their heads to the source of the voice, and Tommy cursed under his breath when he saw Nuke and Ender standing on the sidewalk in front of the cafe.

Nuke looked exactly as he had the night before, his arms crossed and gas mask hiding the entirety of his face. Beside him, Ender was an even more imposing figure than he appeared on TV. He was ridiculously tall as Nuke had said, and had a dark hood covering most of his head. The part of his face that was visible was covered by a pair of dark purple ski goggles, with a black and white face mask over his mouth.

Not to mention, there was something that was inherently... off, about Ender. It was difficult to look at him directly. Purple particles floated around his head, and trying to stare at him made Tommy’s eyes hurt in the same way that watching TV static did. He was a bit fuzzy, as if he wasn’t fully there.

Either way, Tommy was not happy about this development. Vigilantes were exactly the opposite of what he needed when he was trying to work out a business deal with a supervillain.

“Oh great, it’s you two,” Siren grumbled, turning around to face the two of them while still standing in front of Tommy. “I’m not looking to cause any trouble tonight so you can both just head on out of here before I make you.”

Neither Nuke or Ender seemed phased by the threat. “We don’t want to make this a big deal either. Just let the boy go, and we’ll be on our way,” Ender said in a deep, flat voice.

“Let him go? I’m not holding him hostage,” Siren explained, sounding almost amused.

“A bit hard to believe,” Nuke commented, his tone casual despite the fact that he was shifting from foot to foot. “What, you expect us to think you’re just having a friendly chat with some random kid?”

Okay. Tommy had enough of this.

“For fuck’s sake, I’m not a fucking kid!” Tommy exclaimed, drawing all eyes to him. “Nuke, Ender, I appreciate the concern, but Siren’s not lying.”

Nuke stopped his shifting. “Wait, what?”

“Yeah, I’m not a hostage. We were just...” Shit, how did he explain what he was doing with Siren without telling the vigilantes they were working together. “Having a chat?”

“Why were you having a chat with *Siren*?” Ender asked, his voice dripping with suspicion.

“And how do we know he hasn’t just used his power to make you say you’re not a hostage?” Nuke added.

Tommy blinked. “How the hell would I even prove that? I’m not a fucking hostage! Siren just owes me a favor!”

While Tommy would really just like to forget about the favor thing entirely, he knew that the two vigilantes understood the favor code that existed among the hero-villain-vigilante population. If they knew a favor was involved, Nuke and Ender would also know that Siren had no intention of hurting him. Then, hopefully, they would back off.

“Why would Siren owe a civilian a favor?” Ender questioned.

“That’s none of your business,” Siren growled, cutting in again.

“When there’s an innocent civilian being cornered at night by a supervillain, it kind of is our business,” Nuke countered. “I don’t care if there’s a favor involved. Back the fuck off.”

Things were escalating, and Tommy was getting nervous. He could see how Siren’s lips had twisted in a grimace, while Nuke’s hands were clenched into fists at his sides. If Tommy

looked close enough, he also thought he could see a faint yellow glow starting to shine from Nuke's palms.

Shit. That couldn't be good.

Apparently Siren noticed Nuke's hands as well, because he let out a harsh laugh.

"What are you going to do, Nuke? Gonna blow up the innocent civilian you're trying to protect?" Siren asked in a mocking tone.

"Not exactly," Nuke replied.

Then, before Siren could respond, Ender disappeared from sight in a flurry of purple particles. Suddenly, Tommy felt rough hands grabbing him, yanking him backwards from Siren.

It was like Tommy was falling. His stomach swooped as the world went dark one second, and reappeared in the next. His vision spun as he stumbled, glancing around to realize he was standing across the street from the cafe where Nuke and Siren were still having a standoff.

Ender was grabbing onto his arms. Snarling, Tommy shoved the vigilante back.

"Get the FUCK away from me, asshole!" Tommy shouted. Ender didn't chase after Tommy as he rushed back across the street, instead just watching with his hands frozen midair, as if he was at a loss for what to do.

Similarly, Nuke didn't make any moves to grab Tommy as he stumbled back into Siren's side, leaning in when Siren wrapped an arm protectively around his shoulders. In a blink, Ender reappeared next to Nuke, and the glowing in Nuke's hands immediately died down.

"What the hell is the matter with you?!" Tommy hissed, glaring at Ender. "What makes you think you can just grab a guy and teleport him without warning him first? Consent, asshole! It's a thing!"

"I-I'm sorry I just thought-"

"I *told* you idiots I'm not a fucking hostage!" Tommy hissed, his head still spinning from the teleportation.

Ender curled in on himself, as if he was embarrassed. Meanwhile, Nuke's shoulders stiffened.

"So you're working with him then?" Nuke asked, his voice lacking the teasing warmth it'd had the night before.

"What the- no! I'm not working with a goddamn supervillain!" Tommy exclaimed. "He owes me a favor, and that's that. I'm not gonna tell you why, but trust me when I say I know he's not gonna do shit to me. So can you *please* for the love of FUCK leave us alone?!"

Nuke and Ender shared a look. Even without being able to see their faces, it was obvious that they were both very confused by the situation. Tommy couldn't blame them. He knew that to

an outsider, seeing a random teenager talking to a supervillain in the middle of the night didn't exactly imply the best things. But now he kind of felt like throwing up because of Ender's stupid fucking teleportation, so the only thing he wanted at the moment was for the two vigilantes to get away from him.

A few beats of silence hung heavily in the air between the four of them. Before Nuke and Ender could make a decision on what to do though, Siren's hands came up to cover Tommy's ears.

Both Nuke and Ender's hands moved towards their ears, presumably to cover them, but they weren't quick enough.

"Leave now." Tommy managed to lipread from Siren's mouth.

It was like watching two puppets be strung up. Both Nuke and Enders stiffened, their backs straightening as they turned on their heels without saying a word. Then, they walked the opposite direction of the cafe, and Siren dropped his hands from Tommy's ears once they were out of sight.

As soon as they were gone, Tommy's shoulders dropped in relief. The absolute last thing he wanted to do tonight was have to heal more burn wounds—this time on Siren. The thought alone made his head throb.

"Are you okay?" Siren asked, still keeping his arm wrapped around Tommy's shoulders.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Tommy mumbled, rubbing his eyes. "That fucking teleporting shit Ender does sucks ass though. Thought I was gonna throw up for a second."

"Well, to be fair, that would've been a good way to get Nuke and Ender off our asses," Siren chuckled.

Tommy snorted. "Oh yeah, I could've thrown up right on their shoes and turned into a Karen on them for being shitty vigilantes."

"I cannot imagine you as a Karen," Siren said.

"Oh, Big S, I can be such a great Karen when I wanna be. I work with Karen's all fucking day, I've mastered their behavior at this point," Tommy bragged, smirking at the villain.

"One of these days, you're gonna have to show me your Karen impression," Siren chuckled. "But while I'd love to stay and chat some more, I have some other business matters to attend to this evening. And you should probably get home before my power wears off and Nuke and Ender come back."

"I just hope they don't try to question me or anything, because god knows that'd be fucking annoying," Tommy grumbled, rolling his eyes.

The smile faded from Siren's face at that. "Look, I don't expect Nuke and Ender to do anything to you, but vigilantes can be volatile. If they start bothering you in any way that feels like it could be an actual threat, contact me and I can take care of them."

Tommy's eyes widened at the implication, a rock dropping into his stomach. "You-You don't mean that you would kill them, do you?"

"That would only be a last resort, but I don't think it would come down to that," Siren told him, which really didn't help the nerves clawing up his throat. "I like vigilantes. They try to be what the heroes are supposed to be, so I try not to hurt them too badly whenever we get into fights. But if they were to *ever* hurt you, then I wouldn't hesitate to take them down."

Siren was protective of him, even when it came to vigilantes. It shouldn't have been as much of a surprise as it was, given that Siren had already emphasized several times this night that he wasn't going to let anything hurt Tommy. But it was still strange to hear.

Not to mention, he *really* didn't want anyone to get hurt because of him.

Gulping, Tommy nodded. "Um, alright then. Got it." It was then another realization occurred to him. "Wait, how am I supposed to contact you?"

"Oh shit, I almost forgot!" Digging into his pocket, Siren pulled out a cell phone. "Usually I just use one of those fake number apps when I need to contact someone by phone, but if we're gonna be talking to each other regularly then I think we need an alternative."

Tommy nodded. It made sense that Siren didn't want to give him his personal number. "What do you have in mind?"

"Do you have discord?" Siren asked.

...huh.

Discord. Siren was asking Tommy for his *discord*.

"You-You use fucking discord?!" Tommy barked out a startled laugh. "Of all the things, *discord* is gonna be the way I secretly message a supervillain?"

"What's wrong with that?" Siren frowned.

"Nothing's wrong with it, it just wasn't what I was expecting," Tommy said between giggles. "I mean, discord isn't exactly a professional app for this kind of stuff. Why don't you use something that's encrypted? Hackers could read your messages, y'know?"

Siren scoffed. "That's literally why we use it. No one is gonna think that a supervillain uses discord to talk about shit, and if they do hack our messages, they'll probably just think it's like those weird roleplays people do on twitter."

Well, Siren had a point there. There *was* somewhat of a fanbase for certain villains on Twitter that enjoyed roleplaying as the villains themselves, which Tommy didn't understand in the slightest. Still wasn't as bad as those people who photoshopped flower crowns onto serial killers, but it had similar energy.

"Fair enough I guess," Tommy snorted. "Here's my tag." He held up his own phone to show Siren his user, and after a few moments of Siren typing it in, he got a friend request from

someone with just the username 'Siren' and a solid black profile picture.

"You're so fucking lame, man," Tommy muttered as he accepted the friend request, smirking at the villain.

"Shut up, gremlin child," Siren said, punching his arm. "Anyway, I need to go now. Try not to die on your way back."

"Maybe we can vc while I walk!" Tommy called teasingly. "Use the rhythm bot to listen to some tunes together!"

Siren flipped him off as he walked away, his dark coat fluttering behind him in the breeze. Once he disappeared around the corner, Tommy turned towards his own apartment and headed off.

The walk home was, thankfully, uneventful. He kept an eye out on the rooftops, watching for any flashes of movement against the dark stars to make sure Nuke and Ender weren't going to follow him back. He also kept his phone in his hand, thumbing over Siren's discord profile in his phone. It was literally just the name and nothing else, but it was still hilarious to Tommy that he had one in the first place.

Finally, he arrived outside his apartment building with half-lidded eyes and heavy limbs. The elevator ride was a haze as he stumbled to his door, this time having made sure to remember his key so he didn't have to deal with Ranboo getting the door stuck again.

Tubbo and Ranboo were sitting in the living room when Tommy walked in. He grinned at both of them as he dropped his backpack on the ground.

"Hey guys, sorry I'm late again. I swear to fuck that stupid espresso machine is gonna be the death of me," he told them, knowing they were going to ask about his late arrival anyway.

Where he expected Ranboo to give him a sympathetic smile and Tubbo to huff and roll his eyes before launching into a story about his day, instead he was met with sadness coloring Ranboo's gaze, and coldness masking Tubbo's.

"That sucks," Tubbo said in obviously fake sympathy, something angry curling around his voice. "Seems like that espresso machine breaks a lot."

"Um, yeah, it does," Tommy muttered, squirming underneath the heavy stares directed his way. "I keep telling Puffy she should get a new one, but she insists it's fine."

"Guess she really should," Tubbo hummed, glaring at him while leaning back in his desk chair. Ranboo still hadn't said anything, and was now instead keeping his eyes focused on his lap.

Tommy frowned. "Is something wrong? You two are acting weird."

"Oh, nothing's wrong," Tubbo scoffed. "Nothing at all."

What the fuck? Tubbo was clearly pissed at him for some reason, when just a few hours before he'd been excitedly rambling to Tommy about his latest coding project and how cool it was going to be.

"Ranboo?" Tommy asked, turning to the other boy. "Can you tell me what the fuck's going on?"

Ranboo flinched, as if he had been called on in class by a teacher without warning. "I-I mean, um, you do say the espresso machine breaks a lot," Ranboo said quietly, wringing his hands in his lap. "It just, uh, feels like you're hiding something from us."

...fuck. He should've known his best friends would be able to tell he was lying to them. They could read him better than anyone else.

But it's not like he could tell them what was going on with him and the Syndicate. It was his job to keep them away from that whole mess, not to mention it would probably make them both worried sick. Even worse, if they found out he was working with villains, they might try to turn the villains in. They would never turn Tommy in, he wasn't afraid of that, but they might try to follow him one night if he went out to heal someone to call the cops.

Shit. He had to turn this around somehow. Get the subject off of him before they pressed him for information he couldn't give.

Anger would do it. As much as he didn't want to start a fight with his friends, it would shift the pressure away from him.

"Oh, *I'm* hiding something?" Tommy snapped, letting his exhausted frustration bleed into his voice. "That's fucking bold of you two to say."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Tubbo asked, narrowing his eyes.

"It means I know you guys are still keeping something from me!" Tommy exclaimed. "You tried to say it was the marriage shit but I know that's not all of it. You're still acting dodgy as fuck around me and it pisses me off, but I want to trust that if you're not telling me something, it's for a good goddamn reason."

"We're not hiding-"

"Oh that's bullshit and you know it, Tubbo," Tommy snapped again, cutting Tubbo off. "If you're allowed to have secrets, then why am I not allowed to have my own?"

"Tommy, we're just worried about you," Ranboo said in a weak attempt to calm things down.

"I appreciate the concern, but if you needed to know this, I would tell you. I'm not pressing you for your secrets, why can't you do the same for me?" For once, Tommy's anger was short-lived. His fatigue was making itself painfully known, and all he wanted to do now was go to sleep.

Tubbo opened his mouth to say something, but Ranboo put a hand on his shoulder and gave him a look. There was a silent exchange between them, and after a beat, Tubbo sighed and

dropped his shoulders.

“See? There it is again!” Tommy pointed out. “You two and your fucking silent conversations that I’m never apart of!”

“It’s not like that,” Ranboo tried to argue.

“Sure it’s not. It’s not like we’re supposed to be best friends or anything.”

Now *that* was what hit the mark. Both Ranboo and Tubbo’s expressions darkened at that, and Tommy knew he’d ended the conversation then and there. As much as he hated saying something like that, it was true. They were supposed to be a trio. The three of them against the world. But lately it had felt like there was a glass wall separating him from Tubbo and Ranboo, and neither of them cared enough to try and break through it.

“Fine, keep your secrets,” Tubbo snapped after a few beats of silence. He pushed to his feet and stormed past Tommy, shoving his shoulder as he went. “I’m going to bed. Ranboo, you’re taking the bed with me tonight.”

Ranboo seemed as though he wanted to say more, his mismatched eyes filled with worry and sadness as he watched Tubbo walk off. But a few moments passed, and Ranboo apparently decided listening to Tubbo was the better option.

“Sleep well, Tommy,” he offered softly as he passed by him.

Then, without another word, he shut the bedroom door behind him, leaving Tommy alone in the living room.

Tommy should’ve been more upset. He should’ve gone up to that bedroom door and shouted his apologies from the other side. He should’ve tried to smooth things out, to try and keep the weight of the secrets they all held from tearing their trio apart.

But Tommy was tired.

So instead he just turned out the lights in the living room, curled up under a blanket on the couch, and ignored the way the closed bedroom door felt like it was taunting him.

Chapter End Notes

hehe the tension in the bench trio household is risingggggg

also soon yall will meet all the members of the syndicate and it's gonna be a fun time pog

btw I have a discord! feel free to join and chat with me it's a fun chill place
<https://discord.gg/RFXqgK4CRN>

anyway that's all for now! please leave a comment if you enjoyed, i read all of them and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr or twitter @bonesandthebees !

a day off

Chapter Summary

Tommy has the day off from work and decides to get out of his apartment for a bit.

Chapter Notes

hello hello! slightly earlier update than usual because I have a thing I need to do at noon, so you're getting this right now! this is definitely the last chapter I'm going to be able to post before I get busy as I'm moving tomorrow and starting my last year of uni this week, so I have no idea how regular updates will be from now on but I'll try my best to get them out as quick as I can!

thank you all so much for the love and support you've given this fic, I'm honestly blown away that we have over 50k hits now. this is the most popular fic I've ever had so i'm definitely reeling a bit

anyway no trigger warnings for this chapter, hope you enjoy!

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

Usually, Tommy enjoyed his days off from work. Although he tried to take as many hours as he could, there were still times when he had a day or two off. In the past he, Tubbo, and Ranbo would try to coordinate the days they had off so they could all spend time together. These days off were special for the trio, almost always spent curled up on their couch in a pile of blankets and pillows, snacking on whatever food they had in the apartment while rewatching their favorite movies together.

Today... wasn't like that though.

It had only been a few days since their argument. The air in the apartment had been nearly suffocating with tension as Tubbo gave Tommy the cold shoulder, with Ranboo awkwardly trying to act as a mediator between them. Tubbo had made it clear he wasn't going to stop with the pissy attitude until Tommy came clean with his secrets, while at the same time Tommy refused to say anything unless Tubbo and Ranboo opened up about their own shit first.

So basically, they were at a stalemate.

Tubbo was sitting at his computer, working on some more coding assignments although he technically had the day off. Ranboo was curled up into the far corner of the couch, headphones over his ears as he tried to put all his focus on his DS. And Tommy was trying to watch a documentary on sharks to take his mind off things, but it wasn't working very well.

Tommy was bothered by two major things right now. One was obviously the fight he was having with his roommates, but the other was the knowledge that at the end of the week he was going to go meet with the Syndicate for the first time. The idea of going to the supervillain meeting loomed above him, his anxieties popping up in the back of his mind to remind him of everything that could go wrong.

Siren said he would protect him, but how far would he go? Were the villains going to be grateful for his help, or were they going to demand more than he could give?

There were a lot of ways the meeting could go wrong, but Tommy also couldn't forget the fear in Arson's voice. If Tommy hadn't been there, Iceman would've died. That was going to happen to more villains, because the heroes lied to the public to make themselves look better.

Going to the Syndicate meeting was like walking into a lion's den, but Tommy knew he had to do it. If another villain died when he could've helped them, he would never be able to bury the guilt.

So, yeah, suffice to say he was stressed out of his mind. Sitting in the apartment, struggling not to think of the Syndicate meeting while his roommates gave him the cold shoulder was practically torture for his nerves.

He needed to get out of there. Do something to distract himself.

Well... he hadn't talked to Wilbur in a few days, now had he?

Wilbur had given Tommy his number a little while ago, but he hadn't had a reason to call him on it before. Although they had only hung out on the days Wilbur came into the cafe, Wilbur had said he and Tommy were friends, so it wasn't too weird for Tommy to want to hang out with him on his day off, right?

Hopefully not. If Wilbur wasn't available or didn't want to see him today, Tommy was probably just going to wander around the city anyway just to escape Tubbo's icy glances.

Picking up his phone, he typed in Wilbur's contact and pressed the call button, not bothering to move to another room as the phone rang in his ear.

One ring.

Two rings.

Then,

“Hello?”

“Hey Wil,” Tommy greeted, ignoring the surprised glances from Tubbo and Ranboo since they hadn’t noticed him making a call. “Are you, uh, busy today?”

“Uh, not particularly. I was actually gonna stop by the cafe to see you today since it’s been a while if that’s alright?”

Tommy smiled a bit knowing Wilbur had been wanting to hang out with him too. “Actually, big man, I’m not working today. But I was wondering if you would still want to hang out?” He winced when his voice cracked a bit at the end.

Thankfully, Wilbur’s response was instantaneous.

“Oh sure! What did you wanna do?”

“I dunno, I just need to get out of my apartment for a bit,” Tommy told him, meeting Tubbo’s cold glare without flinching.

“Well, if you wanted you could come over to my place and we could watch a movie or something? Techno is making his signature baked potatoes tonight and they’re ridiculously good.”

Going to Wilbur’s *house*? That wasn’t something Tommy had expected, but if it got him out of his own apartment, he’d take it.

“Yeah, that sounds great. How should I get there?”

“Tech and I can come pick you up at your place. We can be there in about fifteen minutes if you want?”

Tommy smiled at the relief that washed over him. “Yeah, that sounds awesome. Just text me when you’re outside.”

“Will do. See you soon, Toms.”

“See you soon.”

As soon as Tommy hung up and shoved his phone in his pocket, Tubbo’s voice rang out over the living room.

“Who was that?” He asked, having spun around in his spinning chair to face Tommy.

“Wilbur, he’s a friend of mine from work,” Tommy shrugged, now carefully avoiding Tubbo’s gaze.

“How come you haven’t told us about him till now?” Ranboo asked, sounding at least a bit less suspicious than Tubbo.

“I’ve mentioned him, just not by name. Remember when I brought those muffins home a little while back and said my friend took me out to a diner? That was Wil.”

“And he’s coming to pick you up?” Tubbo questioned.

“Uh, yeah? He and his brother are gonna be here soon.” This was the most he’d spoken to Tubbo in several days, and he really wasn’t appreciating how it felt like he was about to be scolded by a parent.

“Are you sure you trust him?” Tubbo pushed.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “What the fuck? Of course I do! We’ve been friends for months now!”

“I just think it’s a little strange how you’ve never mentioned Wilbur to us before now,” Tubbo snapped, folding his arms over his chest.

Oh. So he wanted to bring this up again?

“Alright, we’re not getting into this fucking argument again,” Tommy grumbled, standing up from the couch and grabbing his backpack off the floor. “Sorry I have a life outside of you, Tubbo, but I don’t have to get your permission to go hang out with a fucking friend of mine. You’re not my goddamn parent so stop acting like one.”

“Well maybe I wouldn’t have to act-”

“Tubbo!”

Ranboo’s shout made both Tommy and Tubbo jump, and Tommy quickly realized that was the first time in a *long* time he’d heard Ranboo actually sound angry. He was full on glaring at Tubbo, and Tubbo immediately shrank back in his seat. “If Tommy wants to go hang out with a friend of his, we don’t need to interrogate him about it. So stop being so rude and just let him go.”

Tommy blinked, while Tubbo stared at Ranboo in blatant shock. Although Ranboo hadn’t cursed or screamed or any of the other things most people did when they were angry, Ranboo calling someone out was a very rare occurrence.

“Thanks Ranboo,” Tommy said quietly, offering his friend a small smile.

“Just text us if you need anything,” Ranboo told him.

Nodding, Tommy waved at Ranboo as he headed for the door. Tubbo had turned back around to focus on his computer, and Tommy waited for him to glance back to wave goodbye.

But he didn’t. And after a beat of waiting, Tommy gave up and slammed the door shut behind him.

Tommy stepped outside the apartment building and into the afternoon sun, taking a deep breath of the fresh air after having been stuck in his apartment all day. The sky was blue, but there was a swell of white clouds on the horizon. Tommy wasn’t sure if it was supposed to rain, but at least he didn’t have work tonight and wouldn’t have to get soaked walking home.

It wasn't long before a sleek, silver car drove up in front of the building. A car as expensive as that wasn't a common sight in Eastside, and Tommy instantly straightened up at the sight of it. The door to the passenger seat swung open, and Wilbur's smiling face popped out.

"Hey Tommy!" He said, climbing out of the car and shutting the door behind him. "You ready to go?"

Shit. Just hearing someone greet him with that much joy in their voice after days of Tubbo's coldness and Ranboo's silence was enough to make him grin like an idiot. He rushed over to Wilbur, almost reaching out to hug him, but stopped himself at the last minute.

Wilbur seemed to notice Tommy's hesitation though, because he ended up throwing an arm over Tommy's shoulder to give him a sort of side hug.

"I'm glad you asked to come over today, I would've been bummed out if I'd gone to the cafe and you weren't there," Wilbur said, guiding Tommy to the backseat of the car.

"Thanks for having me. I would've gone crazy if I had to spend the entire day in my apartment," Tommy told him, sliding into the backseat with Wilbur following right behind.

The inside of the car was just as luxurious as he would've guessed. The seats were soft, cream-colored leather, and everything seemed perfectly clean. It was nothing like Foolish's car—which he'd only been in twice—with loose papers shoved under the seats and random shit piled in the back.

As he clicked his seatbelt on, he heard a monotone voice come from up front.

"Nice to see you again, Tommy," Technoblade drawled.

Oh yeah. Wilbur had mentioned that he couldn't drive, so he just made his brother drive him everywhere.

"Sup Techno," Tommy greeted. "Thanks for, um, coming to pick me up."

Techno snorted. "Wilbur would've bit my head off if I didn't."

Wilbur, who had just buckled himself in next to Tommy and was already leaning across the middle seat towards him, paused and frowned. "Don't say it like that, Techno!"

"What? You don't want the kid to know how whiny you are?" Techno asked, raising an eyebrow.

Wilbur scowled. "I'm not whiny, shut up."

"You are extremely whiny," Techno shot back. "It's like dealing with an overgrown toddler."

"I'd believe it," Tommy chimed in, shooting Wilbur a shit-eating grin. "You are a bitch after all."

“Hey!” Before Tommy could react, Wilbur lunged at him, pulling him as far out of his seat as he could with Tommy’s seatbelt in the way, and wrapped his arm around Tommy’s head in a headlock.

“Hey now, no wrestling in my car!” Techno protested.

“Fuck you you fucking bitch I’m going to kill you-” Tommy was yelling, struggling to pull Wilbur’s arms off of him while Wilbur just laughed.

“Take it back. Say I’m not a whiny bitch,” Wilbur told him, readjusting his grip to make sure he wasn’t accidentally choking Tommy.

Tommy glanced up at Wilbur through the hair that had fallen in his eyes, and saw mischief glittering behind his glasses.

“You are not a whiny bitch,” Tommy finally said. Wilbur smiled and relaxed his grip, and Tommy squirmed out of his arms and back into his own seat. As soon as he was free though, he grinned at Wilbur again and opened his mouth. “You are a stupid dumb shithead with the temper of a toddler and you’re also still pretentious as fuck.”

Wilbur’s eyes widened. “You little-”

Tommy yelped as Wilbur grabbed him again, reaching out to try and smack his friend as he twisted to avoid another headlock. Wilbur tried to grab his wrists but Tommy slapped his hands away, shrieking like a demon as he got himself tangled up in his own seatbelt.

“If you two don’t stop roughhousing back there I’m going to pull this car over,” Techno called from the front seat.

“Do it, pussy!” Tommy challenged.

Sighing, Techno turned his right blinker on and began to turn to park on the street.

“SHIT WAIT I WAS KIDDING!” Tommy then yelled.

“Techno, we’ll be good!” Wilbur added, quickly moving back into his own seat and folding his hands in his lap.

Techno glanced at the two of them in the rearview mirror, and shook his head as he turned his blinker off and pulled back onto the road. Tommy breathed a sigh of relief, falling back into his seat before squirming to try and get his seatbelt untwisted.

“It’s his fault,” Wilbur muttered after a few minutes of silence.

“It’s not my fault! It’s your fault!” Tommy snapped back.

“Wil, stop trying to blame the gremlin,” Techno deadpanned.

Huffing, Wilbur folded his arms and slumped back against his seat. He shot a half-hearted glare at Tommy, which Tommy responded to by sticking his tongue out at the man. When

Wilbur flipped him off, he giggled, and Wilbur's frown quickly grew into a smile.

God, he'd missed hanging out with Wilbur. It hadn't even been a full week since they'd seen each other, but so much shit had happened since then that it felt like it had been eons. At least right now he didn't have to worry about suspicious glares from roommates or surprise texts from villains.

(Well, technically he did still need to worry about getting a text from a villain, but it was the middle of the day, and villains almost exclusively went out at night, so he was pretty much safe for the time being.)

Soon, the car started to slow down, and Tommy realized they were in a *very* nice neighborhood. Brownstones with arched windows lined the streets, with carefully attended to trees settled every few squares in the sidewalk. This wasn't West End—West End was the part of the city where the mansions were—but these places were still nearly as expensive. This was the nicest part of South Bay, the place where everyone who wasn't rich enough to live in West End but higher class than the rest of the city went to live.

Shit. He knew Wilbur's family had money, but he didn't realize they were this well off.

The car came up to another brownstone, with this one having a garage under the main level. Techno pulled the car into the lower-level garage, which Tommy noticed was almost completely empty save for a water heater settled in the corner.

The garage door squeaked as it shut behind them. Wilbur hopped out of the car first, gesturing for Tommy to follow, which he did as soon as he was able to force his seatbelt out of the lock. Yeah, he'd really fucked up by letting it get so twisted.

Techno opened a small door in the garage and held it open, letting Tommy and Wilbur inside first.

The inside of the house was even nicer than what Tommy had expected.

The garage door led right into a large kitchen that looked as if it came straight out of a magazine. Rich oak wood cabinets and shining granite countertops reminded Tommy of all the fancy ass kitchens he'd seen in movies. They had an extremely expensive-looking espresso machine settled near one of the windows, along with a myriad of other stainless steel appliances.

Past the kitchen was what looked like some kind of living room. The space was dominated by a plush, grey couch, with a large window overlooking a small backyard. There was also a huge TV settled in front of the couch, along with a glass coffee table covered in expensive-looking and ultimately useless knick-knacks.

"You didn't tell me you were a fucking rich bastard," Tommy said, shooting a glare at Wilbur.

"Wh- we're not that rich!" Wilbur protested.

Tommy raised an unimpressed eyebrow. “You’re telling me this isn’t rich?” He asked, gesturing to the kitchen and living room.

“Well-”

“He’s got a point,” Techno said, scooting past Wilbur and making his way into the living room.

“Okay, true, but it’s not like we live in West End,” Wilbur argued.

“Yeah, but you’re pretty damn close to it,” Tommy told him. “Now it makes sense why you’d always tip me so much. It’s not like it did any damage to your wallet.”

Wilbur huffed and rolled his eyes, but didn’t argue further with Tommy’s point. “Do you wanna come see my room?” He asked instead.

“Yeah, sure,” Tommy shrugged. “Lead the way, rich bitch.”

Scoffing at the nickname, Wilbur led Tommy through the kitchen and living room, passing Techno who was now settled on the couch with a book in his hands. Outside the living room there was what Tommy guessed was the foyer, a narrow space near the front door with a tall staircase leading up.

It turns out, this place had more than two stories. In fact, it had four stories with a bedroom and study on each floor, as a result of the building itself being so narrow. As they climbed up the steps, Wilbur explained to Tommy that the second floor was Techno’s, the third floor was Wilbur’s, and the fourth floor was Phil’s.

Tommy thought that even if each floor was mostly only made up of a small room or two and a narrow hallway it was still dumb as fuck to have a floor for each person. Rich bastards.

“That’s my ‘study’ right there, although I never use it so it’s more of a guest bedroom at this point,” Wilbur explained when they got to the third floor, pointing to a closed door on the left hand side of the staircase. On the right hand side there was another nondescript door, which Wilbur swung open with a grand swing of his arm. “And this is my room,” he announced proudly.

The inside of Wilbur’s room was... pretty much just what Tommy expected.

Expected as in, it was a fucking mess.

It wasn’t too big, with a double bed pressed up against a window that overlooked the backyard, a desk shoved into the far corner, some clothes scattered around the floor, and random pieces of notebook paper strewn about on the bedsheets. There was also a guitar settled on the floor next to the bed, and a bunch of posters for different bands Tommy had never heard of taped to the walls.

There were two weird parts to the room though. One was a jar of sand that was settled on the corner of his desk, and the other was a picture of a salmon taped above his laptop.

“So? What do you think?” Wilbur asked, giving Tommy an expectant look.

“It’s messy,” Tommy pointed out, narrowing his eyes at a sweatshirt on the floor. “Also, why do you have a jar of sand?”

Wilbur shrugged. “I like sand. Also I promise it’s usually not this messy. I just didn’t expect anyone to come over today so I didn’t get a chance to clean up.”

“What the fuck do you mean you ‘like sand’?” Tommy questioned.

“I like sand! It’s crunchy!”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “Please tell me you don’t fucking eat sand.”

Wilbur ducked his eyes to the ground. “There is nothing wrong with eating sand, technically speaking.”

...maybe Tubbo and Ranboo were right. Maybe he needed to be more careful about the people whose houses he went to.

“You’re so fucking weird,” Tommy muttered, shaking his head as he dropped his backpack on the floor.

Glancing at the bed again, Tommy’s gaze caught on one of the crumpled pieces of notebook paper that sat on top of the sheets. He picked it up and started to skim through the pencil scribble, only to have the paper torn out of his hand without warning.

“Don’t go snooping, gremlin,” Wilbur chastised, holding the paper close to his chest.

“Aw c’mon, I was reading that!” Tommy protested. “What is it? It looked like poetry or something.”

Wilbur stared at him for a moment, the paper still half-crumpled in his hand. After a few beats of silence though, he unclenched his fist around the paper, and smoothed it out to look down at it.

It took Tommy a moment to realize that Wilbur was *embarrassed* by whatever he had been writing.

“Hey, look, if you don’t want to share it that’s fine,” Tommy reassured him. “I was just curious. But if it’s personal shit that’s okay.”

“No, it’s okay,” Wilbur said, running his finger along the edge of the page. “It’s just, uh, song lyrics I was trying to write.”

Tommy blinked. “You write music?” At some point, Wilbur had mentioned to Tommy that he played guitar, but Tommy didn’t remember him mentioning that he wrote songs at all.

“I just mess around with stuff sometimes,” Wilbur shrugged, staring at the paper for another beat before holding it out to Tommy. “You can read them if you want.”

“If you don’t want me to, that’s fine. I was just being a nosy shit,” Tommy told him, shaking his head at the paper. Wilbur frowned, taking the paper back, and Tommy had another idea. “Or... if you wanted you could sing one of them for me?”

Wilbur’s head whipped up in surprise. “You, uh, you’d wanna hear my songs?”

The disbelief in Wilbur’s tone almost made Tommy laugh, but he had a feeling it’d be taken the wrong way if he did that, so instead he just nodded eagerly. “Yeah, of course! I haven’t heard you play before, but I’m sure you’d fucking rock it.”

There was a moment of silence as Wilbur considered Tommy’s words. He seemed to be scrutinizing him, trying to determine if Tommy genuinely wanted to hear the songs or if he was just being polite.

Tommy *did* actually want to hear Wilbur’s music. If anything it was because he was very curious as to what kind of music his friend would make.

“Okay then,” Wilbur finally said, sitting on the bed and picking his guitar up. “I guess I can play you one.” He patted the spot on the bed next to him and Tommy settled himself down, bouncing his legs while he waited for Wilbur to check his guitar’s tuning. “Uh, I call this Saline Solution.”

And then, he started to play. While Tommy wouldn’t say he was a connoisseur of good music or anything, he *really* liked Wilbur’s style. He had a great voice and his lyrics were very honest, but as the song went on Tommy understood why Wilbur had been hesitant to let him read the lyrics at first.

By the time he ended the song, Tommy was grinning widely at him.

“Holy SHIT dude! That was amazing!” Tommy exclaimed.

Wilbur flushed at the praise. “You really think so?”

“Yeah dude, one hundred percent. That was fan-fucking-tastic. You could totally be a singer if you wanted!”

“Thanks, Toms,” Wilbur said with a smile as he set his guitar aside. “I don’t really have time to be a singer, but it’s always been something I’ve liked to do in my free time. Only Phil, Techno, and my friend Niki have heard me play though.” He paused. “Well, now you as well, I guess.”

“Well thanks for letting me hear it. I’m gonna have that song stuck in my head for ages now,” Tommy joked. “But, uh, are you good? Like, that song was great but also kind of-”

“I’m fine, don’t worry,” Wilbur reassured him with a laugh. “I wrote that song a few years ago when I was dealing with some shit, but it’s all good now.” Tommy breathed a sigh of relief at that, and was about to ask Wilbur more about the song when he spoke up again. “But are you okay though?”

Tommy froze, forgetting what he was going to say and blinking at the man. “Uh, I’m alright. Why?”

“You really wanted to get out of your apartment today, and you’ve just seemed a bit more quiet than usual. Is everything alright?” Wilbur asked, giving him a concerned look.

Ah shit. Tommy should’ve known this would come up.

But hey, maybe he could talk about it with Wilbur. Not about any of the villain stuff obviously, but about Tubbo and Ranboo. Maybe Wilbur would have advice for him. Or maybe it would just feel good to vent his frustrations.

“Um... well my roommates and I got into a fight a few days ago,” Tommy started, staring at his hands.

“What about?” Wilbur’s voice was soft in the way that told Tommy he didn’t have to go into detail if he didn’t want to, and that Wilbur wasn’t going to push him for anything more than he wanted to give.

“Just, um, complicated shit,” Tommy muttered, picking at one of his nails. “I just know they’ve been keeping some big secret from me, and they keep saying they’ll tell me eventually but that they can’t right now. But now both of them—well, really just Tubbo—is pissed at me because there’s something going on I can’t tell the two of them about either.”

“Wait, so your roommates are mad that you’re keeping a secret from them, while they’re also keeping a secret from you?” Tommy nodded. “Isn’t that a bit hypocritical?”

“That’s what I said!” Groaning, Tommy dragged his hands down his face. “It’s so fucking annoying because Tubbo doesn’t even seem to realize what a hypocrite he’s being with this. I think Ranboo wants to tell me what their secret is, but Tubbo won’t let him, so now we’re all just ignoring each other and it fucking sucks.”

Wilbur furrowed his brows. “Have they given you a reason why they can’t tell you their secret?”

“Tubbo told me a while back that it was just something I ‘didn’t need to know’. And the thing is, I was fine with that! I trusted that if they weren’t telling me something they had a good reason for it. But I just think it’s a little unfair that they’re not giving me the same kind of trust,” he huffed, wrapping his arms around himself.

“Honestly? Yeah, that really sucks. It’s unfair for Tubbo to expect you to tell him your shit when he’s not doing the same for you,” Wilbur told him. “So are you just refusing to tell them your secret until they tell you theirs?”

Tommy sighed. “No. I’m not that fucking petty,” he huffed. “I have a good reason for not telling them what’s going on. If I did, they wouldn’t understand, and it wouldn’t be good for anyone involved. It’d just fuck everything up and it would put them-” Tommy cut himself off right before he could say *it would put them in danger*. “It would, um, just not be good,” he stammered to correct himself.

“Tommy,” Wilbur started, and his tone told Tommy he’d already fucked up. “Were you going to say that it would be dangerous for your roommates to know about your secret?”

Shit. So far, Wilbur hadn’t pushed him about his own secret, but that could change if he found out it was something... not exactly safe. But of course, it’s not like he could just tell him about the wild shitfest that his life had become for the same reasons that he couldn’t tell Tubbo and Ranboo about it.

But Wilbur had heard his slipup. He doubted the man would believe any lies he made up to try and explain it away.

Tommy kept his eyes trained on his lap. “Can I just tell you I can’t answer that?” He asked quietly, begging Wilbur to understand.

Wilbur was quiet for a beat, and Tommy felt his eyes boring into his skull. After a few tense moments though, he sighed and snapped the taut wire of tension between them.

“Yeah, I won’t push you if you really can’t say anything,” Wilbur said, although it was obvious he wasn’t happy about it. Then, in a softer voice he added, “I just worry about you. It seems like this shit is weighing really heavily on you.”

Snorting, Tommy glanced up from his lap to meet Wilbur’s concerned gaze. “Do I really look that bad?”

“You do,” Wilbur answered with startling honesty. “You look exhausted, Tommy.”

Tommy frowned. He hadn’t healed anyone since Iceman, and his energy had completely returned since then. He was fine. He shouldn’t look tired.

Noticing his confusion, Wilbur spoke again. “I don’t mean in the physical way. I mean, like, emotionally. You just look so fucking drained.”

Oh. That made a bit more sense.

“Uh, yeah, I guess you could say fighting with my roommates isn’t something I’m used to,” he muttered.

“You guys are really close, aren’t you?” Wilbur asked.

“Yeah.” Tommy winced at how sad he sounded. “They’re pretty much the only thing I have.” *You might not have them forever*, the unhelpful voice in his head reminded him.

Wilbur took a moment to consider that, and then there was an arm slinging over his back, pulling him close to Wilbur’s side. Instinctively, he rested his head on Wilbur’s shoulder.

“You still have them,” Wilbur said, as if he could read Tommy’s thoughts. “You’re not going to lose them over something stupid like this. From what you told me, the three of you are family. Family—the family you choose—stays together.” One of Wilbur’s hands came up to his hair, his fingers absently running through the curls. “Even if you guys are fighting right now though, you’re still not alone. Do you know why?”

“Why?” Tommy’s voice was muffled by Wilbur’s sweater.

“Because you have me.”

The answer was simple. Short. Yet the four word sentence still hit Tommy like a truck.

“Wh-What do you mean?” Tommy stammered, lifting his face from Wilbur’s sweater as he struggled to understand what the man meant.

Wilbur’s smile was small, but genuine. “I mean that I care about you, Tommy. You’re one of my best friends, and I wanna be there for you if you need anything.”

A lump formed in Tommy’s throat at that, his mind repeating *best friend* over and over again. Tubbo and Ranboo were his best friends, but he was beginning to realize how Wilbur had clawed his way up to being one of the most important people in his life right alongside the two of them.

Yeah, Wilbur was his best friend. The thought made something warm blossom in Tommy’s chest.

“Thank you,” Tommy whispered, knowing he’d get choked up if he lingered too long on the realization. “You’re one of my best friends too.”

“Well that’s good,” Wilbur snorted, his tone returning to something teasing as he ruffled Tommy’s hair and squeezed the arm around him. “If I’m admitting that one of my best friends is a teenager, you better be willing to call me your best friend too.”

Tommy huffed out a laugh, pulling away from Wilbur’s side. “You’re such a lame old man, Wilbur. Can’t find any friends your own age so you’re out here hanging out with a seventeen year old.”

“Oh fuck off, you’re way lamer than I am,” Wilbur teased, lightly shoving Tommy away. “Most kids your age are out doing rebellious stuff like partying, not hanging out with a bored twenty-four year old.”

“Parties are stupid,” Tommy said, thinking back to the one party he’d been invited to before he’d graduated from school. The air had been thick with the smell of weed and liquor, the place was dark as fuck, the music they played was shit, and they were only there for less than an hour before someone spilled beer on Ranboo’s shirt making them decide to call it a night.

“Y’know, that’s fair. They’re not for everyone,” Wilbur shrugged, leaning his hands behind him on the bed. “I wasn’t much of a party-goer myself when I was your age either.”

“Oh? Then what kind of stuff did you do back in the stone age?” Tommy asked, smirking at Wilbur.

“Ah yes, the stone age.” Wilbur rolled his eyes. “I had fun in my own ways, but it’s not the kind of stuff I could ever tell you.”

Tommy blinked. “What does that mean?”

“It means I can’t tell you,” Wilbur repeated, his smirk now identical to Tommy’s.

“But Wilburrrrrr,” Tommy whined. “You can’t just say that and not expect me to be curious!”

Instead of acknowledging Tommy’s pouting, Wilbur instead pushed to his feet, and grabbed Tommy’s wrist to drag him up from the bed as well. “Come on, child. We’re gonna go downstairs and watch a movie.”

“You can’t tell me even one little thing you did? Did you steal something? Or smoke cigarettes? Oh! Did you smoke stolen cigarettes?” Tommy rambled as they headed out of the room and down the stairs.

Wilbur didn’t respond to him, and by the time they got downstairs, Tommy was forced to admit defeat.

They ended up watching some animated movie about a girl whose parents got turned into pigs, so she had to work at a magical bath house to save them. It was a bit weird to Tommy at first, but the animation was really nice and the story was almost fairytale-esque in a way, and he ended up really enjoying it.

At some point near the middle of the movie, Tommy had started to doze off. His head ended up on Wilbur’s shoulder, and soon enough Wilbur had an arm wrapped around his shoulder, allowing him to slip into the twilight between sleeping and wakefulness.

He didn’t fall asleep completely. Behind them in the kitchen, he could hear Techno clattering pots and pans as he shuffled around the kitchen, followed by the occasional beep of an oven or microwave.

Tommy ended up waking up completely towards the end of the movie when Phil came in to join them.

“This is one of my favorite movies,” Phil told Tommy when he noticed him sleepily blinking his eyes open. Tommy tried to sit up straighter to give Phil some room to sit on the couch with them, but Wilbur just tightened his arm around Tommy’s shoulder, and Tommy huffed but gave up trying to move away.

Phil chuckled at the interaction between the two. “Wil, you’re being clingy again.” Phil’s tone was light and airy with amusement.

“Shut up,” Wilbur mumbled, and that was when Tommy realized that Wilbur’s face was buried in his hair, and that he sounded even more tired than Tommy felt.

“Looks like you’re being used as a pillow,” Phil said, as if Tommy hadn’t noticed.

“Yup, by a clingy bastard,” Tommy grumbled, shifting under Wilbur’s arm but not trying to get out of the hold.

“You’ll get used to it,” Phil chuckled. “I think Tech’s almost done with dinner. I can bring your plates in here for you two since Wil looks like he’d fall asleep at the table if I made him get up.”

Tommy opened his mouth to insist that it was fine, that he could get up and get his food himself since they were already being kind enough to let him have some, but Wilbur slapped a hand over his mouth before he could.

“I know what you’re gonna say, and you don’t need to be grateful for us feeding you,” Wilbur slurred, his cheek still pressed against Tommy’s head. “Let Papa Bird bring us our baked potatoes.”

“Papa Bird?” Tommy questioned, frowning as Phil disappeared into the kitchen behind the couch.

“Yes, we are baby birds and Phil is our Papa Bird,” Wilbur said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

If Tommy flushed a little at Wilbur saying *our* Papa Bird, no one saw it.

A few minutes later, Phil walked back in while carrying two steaming plates with a baked potato on each of them.

“Dad! Me me hungry!” Wilbur whined as Phil set the two plates on the coffee table in front of them. “Feed me, Papa!”

“Your food is right there, baby bird,” Phil told him with a wry grin. “Unfortunately, you gotta actually get up and use a fork and a knife to feed yourself.” Tommy could feel Wilbur frown as he lifted a hand to flip off his father, which just made Phil chuckle. “Tech and I are gonna go eat in my office to talk over some work stuff. Sorry I can’t chat longer, but it’s nice seeing you again, Tommy.”

For as much as Tommy wanted to be wary of the older man still, it was nearly fucking impossible to keep his guard up around Phil’s kind smile and easygoing laugh. Especially when he was joking around with Wilbur and bringing him food.

“It was nice seeing you too, Phil,” Tommy told him, and was surprised when he realized he actually meant it.

Shooting the two of them one last grin, Phil waved as he left the room, disappearing around the corner in a flash of green.

Tommy’s stomach growled as soon as Phil was gone, and he ignored Wilbur’s whines of protest as he threw the man’s arm off of him so he could grab his plate. After a few beats, Wilbur did the same, although he shot Tommy a fake dirty look at having been so rudely woken from his nap so they could both eat.

While Tommy didn’t know what the standards for baked potatoes were, he had to say this one looked pretty damn good. Steam was still curling from the cut in the center of the potato, revealing fluffy white potato-y goodness drenched in melted cheese, topped with green onions and some pepper.

He and Wilbur were quiet as they ate their food and watched the rest of the movie. Tommy hadn't realized how hungry he was until he had the first bite of his dinner, but it was fucking *good*, and he ended up finishing it very quickly.

By the time their plates were empty, the credits were rolling across the screen. Wilbur stood up with his dirty plate in hand and Tommy followed, both of them moving slowly with grogginess still weighing heavy on their limbs.

The kitchen was empty. Wilbur turned on the sink to rinse his plate off, and then held a hand out for Tommy to hand him his own plate.

“So,” Wilbur said as he grabbed a sponge to wash off their forks. “What did you think of the movie?”

Hopping up on the counter next to the sink, Tommy scratched his chin in thought. “I liked it,” he said. “It’s not something I’d normally watch on my own, but it kind of reminded me of a Disney movie, but like... different. And that’s not just because it’s animated.”

Wilbur nodded. “No, I get what you mean. I was mostly curious what you thought of the ending.”

“Well, what about it?”

“Do you think she sees him again?” Wilbur asked, moving the clean forks aside to sponge off the plates.

“Oh yeah, I definitely think so,” Tommy nodded. “They already met before, when she was younger and fell into the river. After finding each other twice, I don’t see how they wouldn’t find each other a third time.”

Wilbur smiled. “You think it’s like fate? Or do you think she’s gonna seek him out intentionally?”

“I’m not sure, but I don’t think it really matters which one it is. I think it’s more just one of those situations where you know there’s someone that’s gonna be important in your life, and no matter what you do you’re gonna find yourself running into them over and over again. I feel like that’s what that type of movie is trying to tell you. Something all mystical and shit like that,” Tommy explained, tapping his fingers against the granite counter.

“A bit like being trapped in their orbit,” Wilbur hummed under his breath, almost too low for Tommy to hear it.

“Yeah,” Tommy muttered, “Like that.”

Before Wilbur could reply, he let out a sharp hiss of pain and the knife he’d been washing clattered to the bottom of the sink. Immediately, he shut off the water and grabbed his hand, and Tommy noticed a bit of blood dripping into the metal basin.

“Shit,” Wilbur cursed, keeping his hand over the sink. “Cut myself with the stupid knife.”

Eyes widening, Tommy hopped down from the counter. “Need help?”

“Yeah, there’s a first aid kit in the upper cabinet next to the fridge. Can you grab that real quick?” Wilbur asked, wrapping his uninjured hand around his palm.

Tommy headed over to the cabinet and found the first aid kit easily. He dropped the box next to the sink and opened it up, reaching for the large band-aids piled neatly in the back row, but hesitated before he could grab one.

He and Wilbur hadn’t talked about powers before. A large percentage of the population had them, but it was generally considered a bit rude to ask someone what their powers were. Usually, only people really close to someone knew about your powers, unless they were unable to be hidden in day to day life (or you had to use them to save someone from dying like what happened with Tommy and a certain supervillain).

Tommy had no idea if Wilbur had a power or not, and in turn, Wilbur had no idea about his healing powers either. While he hadn’t exactly been planning on telling Wilbur about his powers, he found that he didn’t actually mind the idea of him knowing about them.

After today, Tommy wanted to trust Wilbur. Wanting to trust someone wasn’t exactly something he was familiar with, and of course he couldn’t trust Wilbur with everything. But... he wanted to help Wilbur right now. Not to mention, the cut on his palm looked like it hurt.

“Actually, we don’t need this,” Tommy said, shoving the first aid kit aside.

“Tommy, what are you talking about?” Wilbur asked, clutching his hand still. “I’m bleeding, I need a band-aid.”

“No you don’t. Just give me your hand,” Tommy said, holding his own hand out.

Wilbur frowned at him for a moment, before his eyes widened. Tommy expected more arguing, more confused comments about what he planned on doing, but to his surprise Wilbur just gave him his hand without question.

The cut was relatively easy to heal. It was shallow, and the only side effect Tommy felt as the orange light faded away was the fact that he yawned as he pulled his own hands back to his sides.

Wilbur was staring at his hand, running his thumb over the thin white scar that would probably fade in a day or two.

“You have healing powers,” he said in a strange voice.

“Um, yup, I do,” Tommy replied, shoving his hands in his pockets. “But, uh, you don’t- I’m not expecting you to, like, tell me what your powers are if you have any. Like, that’s not why I healed you, I just knew I could take care of that cut pretty quickly so, um, I did.”

Wilbur was silent for a moment. He glanced between his hand and Tommy’s face, his brows furrowing with something unreadable. If Tommy didn’t know any better, he’d almost say

Wilbur seemed... sad? Like there was an emotion akin to guilt sitting heavily behind his thin glasses.

“Tommy,” he started, his voice thick. He took a shaky breath, as if he was steadying himself. “I’m-”

“Wilbur.” Techno's voice, although flat and not raised whatsoever, still boomed across the kitchen with the force of a shout. Tommy hadn't even noticed him appear in the doorway. “It's getting late. Tommy's roommates are probably getting worried about him.”

The unreadable look on Wilbur's face flashed with anger, before quickly smoothing itself out as he turned towards Techno. “Uh, yeah, you're probably right.”

“Yeah, I am right,” Techno agreed, staring Wilbur down.

A few more seconds ticked by in suffocating silence, and Tommy wanted nothing more than to slink out of the kitchen unnoticed. But he knew he wouldn't be able to do that, so he stayed put, watching Wilbur and Techno have a silent conversation through facial expressions alone.

Damn, did everyone besides him just know how to have silent conversations like that?

“Where's your backpack, Tommy? Tech and I will drive you home,” Wilbur then asked, none of the conflict from just a few moments earlier visible on his face.

Tommy blinked at the sudden mood change. “Um, it's in the living room. I'll grab it right now.”

A few minutes later, Tommy found himself settled into the backseat of the car with his backpack on his lap, while Techno and Wilbur both sat up front. The air was, once again, suffocating. It was as if a dark cloud was settled inside the car, ruining any chance at a normal conversation in favor of an awkward silence broken only by Wilbur occasionally asking him random stuff in an attempt to make the car ride just a bit less painful.

Tommy had no clue what the fuck happened back in the house. It seemed as though Wilbur was about to tell him something, but Techno stopped him. Of course, this made Tommy really curious as to what he had been about to say, but he wasn't going to push the issue. Once again, they all had their secrets, and he wasn't going to pull a Tubbo and demand Wilbur finish his sentence when Techno was out of earshot.

Not that he would even get a chance like that anytime soon. Techno was practically shooting daggers at Wilbur with his eyes every time he looked his way, and Tommy had a feeling that as soon as he was out of this car, the two of them were going to have a very loud conversation.

And that was how the rest of the car ride went. Stony silence broken only by Wilbur's occasional commentary. For most of the drive, Tommy kept his head against the window, the smooth glass cooling his forehead as he watched the streetlights pass by in soft blurs of orange and yellow. When they pulled up in front of his apartment building, Wilbur reminded Tommy that if he ever needed anything, he was just a text away.

Once the car had pulled away, Tommy trudged into his apartment building, and got a buzz from his phone while he waited for the elevator.

Wilbur: Sorry about Techno, he can be a real bitch sometimes when he's pissy

Tommy: dw about it, I still had a really fun time today

Wilbur: Me too

Wilbur: See you at the cafe tomorrow?

Tommy smiled at his phone as the elevator dinged to announce its arrival.

Tommy: you bet

And with that, Tommy shoved his phone in his pocket, and squeezed his eyes shut as the elevator began its shaky ascent.

Chapter End Notes

wilbur did not fuck a salmon in this i promise. do I know why he has a picture of a salmon over his desk? no. but he did not canonically fuck a fish in this. hopefully.

ANYWAY yes I know tubbo is still being a dick but I promise he's not supposed to be a bad guy or anything in this, his dickish attitude is coming from a place of genuine worry and care, he's just not handling it like he should.

also YAY CRIMEBOYS, I wanted to have another bit of a chill interlude chapter because we're gonna be getting more plot next chapter so look out for that ;)

oh and we have a discord! feel free to join and hang out, I sometimes give sneak peaks at upcoming chapters and we all just tend to vibe and have fun :D

<https://discord.gg/RFXqgK4CRN>

ok that's all, please let me know down in the comments if you enjoyed! i don't reply to most of them but I promise I read every single one and they make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees :D

business negotiations

Chapter Summary

Tommy attends a Syndicate meeting.

Chapter Notes

hello all! yes I'm back with another chapter, sooner than expected! I had a few free days before classes started following my move, so I used the time to crank this out and it turned out way longer than I thought it would

anyway now I'm in a rush to post this before I have to leave for class lol hence why you're getting an early chapter. thank you all so much for all the love you've given this fic so far again, i'm literally blown away by how many hits and kudos we have

ok hope you guys enjoy this one! I don't think there are any necessary TWs

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

Siren was waiting for him outside the cafe when he finished his shift on Friday night.

They had arranged it before his shift began, with Tommy curled up in the corner of his couch, keeping his phone carefully angled away from his roommates as he went over the plan for the evening with the supervillain (over *discord* as ridiculous as that still seemed.)

The Syndicate meeting was that night. Before Tommy left for work, he told Tubbo and Ranboo that he was going to go out for dinner with Wilbur again after his shift, so they shouldn't wait up for him. Tubbo barely acknowledged the information, while Ranboo mumbled a half-hearted *have fun* his way. Although he could tell Ranboo wasn't happy with Tommy's secret keeping like Tubbo was, at least Ranboo was trying not to be a bitch about it.

Tommy had told Siren when his shift ended so he could wait for him, and then he could take Tommy to the meeting without issue. A part of Tommy had been worried that Wilbur was going to actually show up that day and invite him to dinner, and he'd have to make up some excuse about why he couldn't go. But it must've been his lucky day, because Wilbur didn't stop by the cafe that night, and Tommy was saved the dilemma.

As the door to the cafe shut behind Tommy, he quickly spotted Siren peeling himself from the shadows under the awning. He had been scrolling through his phone when Tommy opened the door, but quickly pocketed it to step up beside him as he locked the door to the shop.

“Did your shift go well?” Siren asked as Tommy twisted the key.

Asking about his work day. What a way to start an evening with a supervillain.

“Um, it was fine I guess,” Tommy said, resisting the urge to give Siren a weird look as he shoved the key ring in his pocket. “Has, uh, your day been good?” He asked awkwardly, feeling like it was a bit rude not to return the small talk Siren had offered.

Siren snorted at Tommy’s obvious discomfort. “Yeah, it was fine. Did lots of ‘evil villain’ stuff.”

Tommy snorted, relaxing a bit as he followed Siren away from the store. “Have you gotten around to getting an evil lair yet?”

“Not yet. We’re still working on the renovations. Thinking of having the Property Brothers take a look at it,” Siren joked, his long coat spinning out behind him as he turned into an alleyway.

Unlike many of the alleyways in the city, this one didn’t lead to a dead end. Instead, it led to a maze of different alleyways and Siren navigated through them like a pro. It was a labyrinth of brick walls and drain pipes, but Siren clearly knew these pathways, and within minutes the two of them were popping out into an empty parking lot blocks away from the cafe.

The parking lot was lit by only a few flickering streetlights, giving the entire place an eerie glow. The stars above were blotted out by dark clouds, and Tommy almost felt like he was being smothered under a blanket. Under one of the flickering lights was a sleek, black SUV, which Siren headed straight towards without any hesitation in his stride.

“Is that our ride?” Tommy asked, quickening his pace to keep up with Siren’s long strides.

“Sure is,” Siren replied. “Our meeting place is too far to walk to from your cafe.”

“Got it,” Tommy muttered, hunching his shoulders as they neared the car.

Siren opened the door to the backseat for him, gesturing for him to climb inside first. Tommy scooted across the rich leather to the far window, with Siren sliding in on the other side. The SUV was obviously very expensive, and from what Tommy could tell, the windows were tinted as well which was probably necessary for supervillains driving around town. When Tommy glanced up to the front, he jolted when he noticed the pink hair and boar mask sitting in front of the steering wheel.

“Oh shit. Uh, hey Blade. Long time no see,” Tommy muttered, shrinking back in his seat when those bright red eyes met his own through the rearview mirror. While he’d known that Blade was going to be at the meeting, it was still nerve wracking to see him again. After all, Blade had been the villain that hadn’t given Tommy a choice in the matter of healing Zephyrus, he’d been the one to pass his phone number to Arson. Blade had made it clear he didn’t give a shit about what Tommy wanted when it came to healing people, and that was enough to solidify Tommy’s dislike of the guy.

“Uh, hey Tommy,” Blade replied, sounding just as uncomfortable as Tommy was. “Have you been... good?”

“Blade,” Siren’s voice cut into the conversation like a hot knife through butter. “Don’t you have something you want to say to Tommy?” His voice was tight with anger, his lips pressed into a thin line. Clearly, Siren was pissed at Blade about something.

There was a moment of silence as Blade sighed.

“I wanted to apologize, Tommy,” Blade said after the beat, twisting around in his seat to face Tommy fully. “I shouldn’t have given your number to Arson without asking you if that was alright.”

Oh. Siren must’ve put Blade up to this, judging by the way Blade kept glancing Siren’s way as he spoke.

Tommy huffed. “You don’t have to apologize just because Siren wanted you to.”

Blade shot a nervous look Siren’s way, and Siren pointedly turned his head so he was looking out the window. After another beat, Blade sighed again.

“I don’t regret what I did,” he said.

Siren whipped his head back around. “Blade-”

“No, Siren, I’m not gonna lie to the kid like that. Arson called me and she was damn near having a panic attack because Iceman wasn’t breathing, so I did the only thing I could and sent her your number, Tommy. It wasn’t right but Iceman would’ve died if you hadn’t helped him.”

Tommy was silent, trying to figure out how to respond to that because he knew he didn’t regret helping Iceman.

“Think about it this way,” Blade continued. “If I had called you beforehand and asked if you were willing to help save my friend’s life, would you have said yes?”

Shit. Yeah, he got him there because Tommy knew he would’ve said yes in a heartbeat.

“Yeah, I would’ve,” Tommy muttered, slinking down in his seat.

“That’s not the point though, Blade,” Siren cut in. “The fact is you *didn’t* ask for Tommy’s permission. You treated him like a service for hire, not like a person with their own thoughts and feelings on matters.”

“You did the exact same thing with Zephyrus,” Blade shot back, glaring at Siren.

“I did, and I apologized to Tommy for that already,” Siren retorted. “It was wrong of me to do that and it was wrong for you to-”

“Jesus christ can both of you shut up?” Tommy groaned, dragging his hands through his hair. “Look, Siren, buddy, I appreciate what you’re trying to do here but I don’t need an apology from Blade to feel better about shit. What’s done is done.”

“Tommy, I never said I wasn’t apologizing,” Blade cut in. “I said I didn’t regret it, but I do owe you an apology. So I’m sorry about invading your privacy like that, it wasn’t right.”

Once again, getting an apology from a supervillain was *very* weird.

Still, Tommy did his best to take it in stride, just shrugging and nodding his head. “Thanks, I appreciate it.”

“You’re welcome. Now can we head out, Siren? We’re going to be late to our own meeting,” Blade asked, shooting Siren a pointed look.

Siren snorted. “Yeah, sure, we can head out. Don’t want Zephyrus to get there before us and get all pissy.”

As Blade started the SUV and pulled out of the parking lot, Tommy leaned back in his seat with his backpack on his lap. “Is Zephyrus flying there?”

“Yup, sure is. He has to hide his wings during the day so he likes to stretch them out when he can,” Siren explained, resting his head against the back of the seat.

“How does he hide them?” Tommy asked. “I feel like that’d be kinda hard to do, considering how big they are.”

“It’s hard to explain,” Blade chimed in. “But essentially he can make them disappear, although he can still feel them as if they’re being pressed really tightly against his back. Pretty uncomfortable overall.”

“Gee, that sucks shit,” Tommy muttered.

“Zeph is used to it, so it’s not a huge deal,” Blade replied, although Tommy still felt bad.

He supposed that was one of the main drawbacks of being a supervillain (of course besides the heroes trying to murder you all the time), having to hide any identifying factors about yourself to make sure no one noticed the similarities between you and your alter ego. Must’ve been really tiring, especially if you had powers that weren’t easily hidden.

Leaning his head against the window, Tommy watched the streetlights pass by as they drove further and further away from Eastside. They passed into South Bay, and Tommy wondered how far their car was from Wilbur’s house.

He wondered what Wilbur was doing right now. If he was sitting at home, working on his computer with those stupid glasses perched on his nose, thinking about if he should’ve gone to get coffee that night. Or maybe he was watching a movie with Phil and Techno, laughing and joking around a mouthful of baked potato.

Glancing to his left, he saw Siren leaning against the car window in a mirror of his own pose. His hands were folded in his lap, and although Tommy couldn't see his eyes under his mask, he had a feeling they were closed.

As they began to make their way out of South Bay, Siren straightened up and leaned over to reach into the center console in the front of the car.

“Tommy, I apologize in advance for this, but we're gonna have to blindfold you until we get there,” Siren told him, taking out a swath of black fabric and holding it up in front of Tommy's face.

“Seriously?” Tommy winced at the whine in his voice. “I could've turned you guys in so many times now. Do you really still not trust me?”

“It's not because we don't trust you,” Blade said, eyes focused on the road. “It's for your own safety. The less you know about us—our identities, where we're based, things like that—the less of a target you are.”

Tommy frowned. “But no one even knows I'm working with you.”

“They don't, but people can still see things they're not supposed to. You said it yourself, you don't want to be involved in this world. We're trying to keep you out of as many things as possible, do you understand?” Normally, Tommy would bristle at being spoken to like that—as if he was a child who didn't know how to handle himself. But the way Blade said it didn't make it feel condescending. It just made sense, and Tommy appreciated the thought the villains had for him in that regard.

“Alright,” Tommy muttered. “Put it on.”

Siren carefully tied the blindfold over his eyes, being as gentle as he could not to knot his hair as he secured the fabric around the back of his head. Everything was black, and Tommy couldn't even make out the faintest trace of light.

Taking a deep breath, Tommy leaned back in the seat and tried to keep himself calm. It was fine. He was fine. He was blindfolded and being taken to a supervillain meeting spot and no one knew where he was, but he had agreed to go to this. He trusted Siren, and Siren promised that he wouldn't get hurt.

It would be fine. Hopefully.

It was dizzying to feel the car turn without being able to see where they were going. Tommy did his best to ignore the twists and tried not to count when they made a left versus a right.

After a few more minutes of driving, the car suddenly went into a steep decline. They were driving down into what Tommy guessed was some kind of underground parking structure. They went around and around in circles, deeper under the city until Tommy thought he might get carsick. Then, all of the sudden, the car stopped.

Tommy reached up to take the blindfold off, but Siren's hands gently grabbed his wrists.

“Not yet,” he said apologetically, pulling his hands away from the blindfold.

Sighing, Tommy listened as Siren and Blade got out of the car. Then, his own car door opened, and someone who he figured was Siren guided him out of the vehicle with the blindfold still on. His shoes smacked against concrete, and Siren helped guide his arms into his backpack straps before taking his shoulder to lead him away from the car.

The air in the parking garage was cool and smelled slightly of dust. Siren led him in a direction Tommy couldn't even begin to guess, but he could hear Blade's footsteps a bit behind them.

“There's a step here,” Siren warned. Tommy carefully stepped up, trying not to lean into Siren's guiding hand too much despite how freaked out he was about walking around without being able to see anything.

They took a few more steps until they stopped abruptly. There was a dinging sound, and Tommy realized they were going into an elevator.

There was a soft woosh as the elevator doors shut, followed by a jolt as the machine began to move down. Then, a hand reached up to untie the blindfold. He winced at the bright light that hit his eyes, having to blink a few times for his vision to adjust as he took in the wood paneled walls of the elevator, with Blade and Siren standing on either side of him.

“You're good now,” Siren told him as he held the blindfold in one hand, giving him a reassuring smile. “Hope that wasn't too bad.”

“It was fine,” Tommy told him. “Little creepy, but not as bad as it could've been.”

“Sorry, I know it's not ideal,” Siren apologized.

Tommy shrugged again because it's not like there was anything they could do. They were right in saying that the less Tommy knew, the better. He didn't want to know where the meeting place was, and if he had to deal with a blindfold to (both literally and metaphorically) keep himself in the dark, then he'd do it.

Glancing around the elevator again, Tommy noticed that he was right in assuming they were moving down. Numbers flew by on the screen above the button panel, heading towards a floor labeled B-10.

This was fucking weird. Was this entire underground building used for Syndicate stuff? Or did they just casually rent out a room for their villain meetings?

Finally, they reached B-10 with a smooth stop that was nothing like the shuddering elevator in Tommy's own apartment. The doors slid open to reveal a long hallway with plain grey walls. There were no windows, no other doors, and no decorations. The hallway just seemed to go straight from the elevator to a set of double doors at the other end.

God, this was really fucking creepy. Tommy felt like he was walking into a horror movie, but didn't voice this thought as he followed Siren and Blade to the end of the hall.

The double doors were made of some dark wood that was covered in swirled carvings. The carvings were intricate, showing different designs of what looked like mortals fighting great monsters, the style reminiscent of Ancient Greek art.

At least the villains had style.

There was a black scanner on the wall next to the double doors. Siren took a keycard from his jacket and swiped it over the device, and the light on the small box switched from red to green. Then, Blade grabbed the door handles.

“Welcome to the Syndicate,” Blade said with a grin, before swinging the doors open in a grand flourish.

The room was much *much* bigger than what Tommy had been expecting. It was like a conference room had been built out of a literal cavern. The walls were made of a smooth black stone with arches carved into them, and the floor was a rich kind of dark marble. There were sconces hanging on the walls, but there was also a very modern looking chandelier in the center of the room.

The chandelier sat immediately over what Tommy imagined was supposed to be the main focus of the room. A huge table made of similar carved wood as the door dominated the space, sitting on a slightly raised platform with chairs lined all around.

What made Tommy freeze though was the realization that those chairs were occupied.

Not all of the chairs were occupied, actually. In fact, most of them were empty. But five of them were currently in use, and Tommy felt his breath catch when the occupants turned to look at the new arrivals.

Zephyrus sat at the head of the table. His face was obscured by his veil like before, while his wings were spread out behind him, the glossy black feathers looking far less ruffled than when Tommy had seen them last.

As Siren guided him towards the table, all of the villains stood up to greet him, and Tommy felt his mouth go dry as he recognized the figures he'd only seen on TV up until now.

Daedalus was sitting on Zephyrus' left. His mechanical black and green armor was even bulkier in person than it had seemed on TV, and the second set of robotic arms that rose up above his shoulders were currently limp at his sides. Tommy could see in this lighting that his hair was dyed a dark green, and above the steaming gas mask that covered most of his face, his eyes were entirely pitch black.

Daedalus was one of the most feared villains around, right up there with Zephyrus, Blade, and Siren. While a part of this was because of his terrifying ability to control technology and create the most absurd inventions to do his bidding in fights, more of the terror surrounding him came from the fact that Daedalus had formerly been a renowned Hero.

In the past, Daedalus had gone by the name Warden. He was one of the ultimate threats against villains, having been lauded for the capture of dozens of villains and vigilantes. Until

one day, in the middle of a fight with the Syndicate he went rogue. He turned on his fellow heroes, even going so far to attack the healer on the heroes side—Supreme. It had been a bloody affair and Warden escaped with the Syndicate. When he came back on the scene a month later, he announced that he was now Daedalus, and had been considered a top-ranked villain ever since.

Daedalus was the first of the villains to look at him directly as they approached the table. He dipped his head in Tommy's direction, and when he spoke, his voice was much softer than Tommy would've expected.

"You must be Tommy," Daedalus said, holding out a hand to shake. "It's great to finally meet you. We've heard a lot about you from Blade and Zephyrus."

Tommy shook his hand carefully, and was surprised at how gentle Daedalus' grip was. "Um, it's nice to meet you too," he said quietly, hoping his nerves weren't too obvious.

"Guys, let's let Tommy sit down," Zephyrus said, gesturing to one of the empty seats on his right. "You can all introduce yourselves then."

Awkwardly, Siren guided Tommy around the table to the empty chairs, sitting right next to him while Blade took the seat at the opposite end of the table from Zephyrus. Tommy set his backpack on the floor by his feet, and glanced around the table to meet the eyes of the other villains there.

"Alright, let's get things started," Zephyrus began, standing up from his seat. "This is Tommy, as you all know. Everyone else want to introduce yourselves?"

"I'd be surprised if the kid didn't know who any of us were," a voice to Tommy's left snorted. He craned his head to look around Siren, and was met with the half smiling half frowning split theater mask of Jester. He was much smaller than Tommy thought he would be in person, although he supposed that the shapeshifter could change his height if he felt like it, so the small stature must've been a purposeful choice. He had long dark hair shoved under a blue beanie, and was dressed in the almost too casual uniform of a blood-stained button up shirt, slacks, and suspenders.

Tommy blinked a few times as he stared at Jester. Jester, who was known for being fiercely independent and only working with others for big jobs like his casino heist. Jester, who viciously defended himself from an onslaught of heroes, without the help of anyone else. Why the hell would Jester be part of the Syndicate?

"You're part of the Syndicate, Jester?" Tommy blurted out before he could stop himself.

Jester's mask whipped towards Tommy, and Tommy fought the urge to shrink back under his gaze. "See? Told you the kid would know who we were," Jester chuckled. "And to answer your question, no, I'm not technically a part of the Syndicate. Think of me more like... a business partner, if you will."

Huh. Tommy had no idea what that meant, but he'd roll with it.

“I think I might need to introduce myself,” a female voice then cut in. Tommy glanced across the table to see a woman sitting beside Daedalus. Her mask looked as though it were made of tree bark, with flowers blooming all through her curly hair and a vine of roses twisting up her arm. “I’m Rosethorn, though I used to be the vigilante known as Dryad.”

Oh shit, of *course*. Dryad had been a popular vigilante for a brief period of time, before she disappeared without any warning. Wilbur had mentioned that he heard she became a villain, and apparently that was true, considering she was sitting in the middle of a Syndicate meeting.

Now there was only one figure left at the table. Looking next to Rosethorn, Tommy noticed a woman with light pink hair let loose around her shoulders, wearing a lacy, black masquerade mask. He frowned, because he recognized her almost immediately, but she looked different than the last time he’d seen her.

“Arson? What’s up with the new mask?” Tommy asked, leaning across the table to get a better look at her. “And where’s Iceman?” He added, realizing the seat next to her was empty.

Arson gave him a surprisingly sweet smile. “We’ve decided to do a bit of rebranding since you last saw us. I go by Nemesis now, and Iceman goes by Thanatos,” she explained. Then, she reached up to tap her ear, and Tommy noticed she was wearing an earpiece. “Thanatos is taking it easy right now because he’s still healing from his injuries, so he’s just listening in for today.”

Oh. Well, the rebranding was a surprise, but Tommy knew that sometimes villains switched things up like that.

“Well, I’m glad to hear Thanatos is actually taking time to recover,” Tommy said, knowing he would’ve been pissed if the villain ended up needing another healing session so soon. “Tell him I said ‘ayup’.”

Nemesis giggled as she touched her earpiece briefly. “He heard you, and he says ‘ayup’ right back.”

“Good man,” Tommy said, before shrinking back in his seat when he realized all the villain’s eyes were on him. Siren squeezed his shoulder briefly, and Tommy felt a bit of the tension in his back loosen at the kind touch.

“Well, uh, I think that’s everyone then,” Zephyrus spoke before the ensuing silence could get awkward. “I suppose we should move onto the reason Tommy is here with us today. As you all know, he has healing abilities, and we want to work out an arrangement where he can act as a healer for all of us when we need it.”

“Within reason of course,” Siren chimed in, straightening up in his seat. “Healing takes a lot out of Tommy, so while it might seem easier to come to him whenever you get a minor cut or stab wound in a fight, I think it would be best if we reserve going to Tommy for emergencies only.”

“You don’t, uh, have to do that,” Tommy then cut in, figuring he should probably speak for himself on this. “It actually takes a lot less out of me if it’s a smaller wound. Like when I healed Zephyrus’ bullet wound it only gave me a bit of a headache and tired me out, but when I healed Ice- I mean Thanatos’ wounds, I ended up puking.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s okay for us to just use you as a catch all healer,” Siren argued. “You shouldn’t have to deal with regular headaches and fatigue like that unless we have no other options.”

“I think if he’s willing to be a catch all healer for us, and if we’re paying him, then we should be allowed to go to him whenever we want,” Jester pointed out.

“Why can’t you just use potions for the minor wounds?” Siren asked, his voice edging on something sharp as he whipped his head towards Jester.

“Not all of us have easy access to potions,” Daedalus then said, leaning back in his seat with his arms folded over his chest, and his robotic arms folded above his head.

“I mean, I could probably work out a way for the rest of you guys to get easy access to potions,” Rosethorn chimed in. “Ba-” She cut herself off from saying the name with a glance at Tommy, and coughed before continuing. “I mean, uh, my boss at work usually has a lot just in the backroom in case someone burns their hand or something.”

“See? You can get potions without issue, so Tommy should only be a last resort,” Siren huffed.

“Exactly. I don’t think we should be tiring Tommy out like that unless it’s absolutely necessary,” Nemesis agreed.

While Tommy appreciated how aggressively Siren was arguing on his behalf, he also had to admit, it was getting a little tiring to be talked about like he wasn’t there.

“Guys,” Tommy said, drawing all the eyes in the room back to him. “How about I say what I’m comfortable doing, and then we can work things out from there?”

The villains all shared awkward glances, clearly embarrassed about not giving Tommy the opportunity to speak on his own behalf.

“Go for it, Tommy,” Siren said, patting his arm.

Nodding, Tommy straightened up in his seat. “While I agree with Siren in that I don’t want to be the one you call every time you get a scrape, you also don’t have to literally be on death’s door to come see me. For example, if there’s a bullet wound that won’t kill you but it’s gonna be a pain in the ass to deal with, you can text me. If you show up with a small cut on your arm though, I’m just gonna bandage you up the normal way. How does that sound?”

“I think that’s very fair,” Zephyrus said, almost sounding like he was proud of Tommy for speaking up. “As far as salary goes, what kind of payment are you looking for?”

Oh shit. Yeah. They had mentioned something about payment before, although Tommy hadn't thought all that much about it.

"I mean... I don't really know how much to ask for, if I'm being honest," Tommy admitted, ignoring the heat that rose to his cheeks. "I could, uh, write down how much I make working at the cafe and we can go from there?"

"However you want to do it is fine with us, Tommy," Zephyrus reassured him.

Nodding, Tommy reached into his backpack to pull out a notepad and pen, and scribbled down his hourly salary at the cafe. Puffy paid him above the minimum wage which was pretty good for a rather basic barista job, so while he definitely struggled with money, he didn't think his pay was anywhere near unfair for what he did.

To his surprise though, when Siren saw the number he was writing on the paper, he let out a pained noise.

"Jesus christ, how the hell do you live off of that?" Siren asked.

"Oh fuck off, not everyone can be a rich supervillain like you, asshole," Tommy scoffed, passing the paper over to Zephyrus.

Zephyrus took the paper, and even with the veil hiding his face, he could *feel* the man's frown.

"Aw mate..." he said softly, the pity evident in his tone. "We can do much better than this."

"Uh, I guess then whatever you think is fair?" Tommy thought his salary was perfectly fine, but apparently it wasn't good enough for these villains.

Zephyrus took a pencil that Tommy hadn't noticed was on the table and scribbled a number, then tilted the pad to show Daedalus, whispering with him and nodding. He then scratched out that number and rewrote it, and after showing Daedalus a second time, Daedalus gave him a thumbs up.

"How about we can deposit this into your bank account every time you heal one of us as a standard flat rate?" Zephyrus suggested, pushing the notepad back to Tommy.

Tommy looked at the paper and his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

That was a LOT of fucking money. Did these villains really just have that kind of cash laying around that they could throw at some random teenager to fix their wounds?

"Jesus fucking christ," Tommy muttered as he stared at the page in shock.

Siren leaned over his shoulder to look, and immediately scoffed. “Come on, Zeph. You can do better than that.”

“What?! No, that’s fine!” Tommy protested, whipping his head towards Siren. “This is- no this is way too much, honestly! I don’t need this much, you can go way lower-”

Siren slapped a hand over his mouth as the notepad was yanked from his hands. “See? The child doesn’t even know what fair payment is. Don’t take advantage of a kid and give him more.”

Tommy frowned and tried to pry Siren’s hand off of his mouth, but Siren wouldn’t budge. After a few more seconds of fighting, Tommy resigned himself to his fate, and slumped back against the chair while Zephyrus took the notepad back to revise the number.

A few moments later, Tommy was presented with another figure, and he only managed to let out a strangled noise under Siren’s hand.

“That’s a good number,” Siren said, grinning at the paper while keeping one hand over Tommy’s mouth.

Tommy shook his head, trying to convey that he really didn’t need *that* much money, and Zephyrus chuckled.

“Siren, let the kid speak for himself,” Zephyrus scolded, although there was a smile in his voice. Pouting, Siren dropped his hand.

“I don’t need this much!” Tommy said as soon as he was free to speak. “How do you people even have that much money to just throw around like that?”

“We’re not just throwing it around, Tommy,” Zephyrus said, and Tommy could feel the villain’s eyes on him under his veil. “We’re paying you for helping us. This is a business arrangement.”

“Yeah, but I don’t need that much money to do that!” Tommy argued.

“Let me see the paper,” Jester then jumped in, reaching towards the middle of the table.

Siren slid it towards him, and Jester skimmed over the page for a few seconds in silence. Then, after a beat, he nodded. “Nah, that’s fair, kid. I’m pretty sure this is pretty close to what Supreme gets paid by the Hero Committee.”

From the corner of his eye, Tommy noticed Daedalus flinch at the mention of Supreme. However, no one commented on it.

“If it’s the standard rate for healers, then I think that’s totally fair,” Rosethorn said as Jester slid the paper back to Tommy.

Tommy squirmed in his seat as he stared at the number on the page again. That was a *lot* of money. He knew his view of money was a little skewed because he’d basically been living

paycheck to paycheck for several years now, but that still felt like way too much for him to accept in good conscience.

While he knew he desperately needed the money, there was a part of him that was deeply uncomfortable with the idea of taking any payment for saving people's lives. He didn't save Siren because he wanted to get something out of it. He was lucky enough to have powers that could really *help* people, and it felt wrong to ask for money to do that.

Noticing his inner turmoil, Siren leaned over to whisper in his ear.

"What's wrong? I thought you'd be happy about getting paid."

Shrinking back from the way the other villains were very obviously trying not to listen to Siren and Tommy talk, Tommy scooted his chair closer to Siren so he could reach his ear easier.

"I don't like the idea of taking money for healing you guys," Tommy whispered, hating the way his cheeks flushed red at the admission. "Makes me feel like a wrong'un."

Siren let out a noise of surprise. "You don't- Tommy, that doesn't make you a bad person. Doctors get paid for healing people. Supreme gets paid for healing the heroes. You're taking time out of your personal life and using up your own energy to help us. You deserve compensation for that," he explained, keeping his voice as low as possible.

It made sense, what Siren was saying. But even still, Tommy couldn't help the whine of protest that rose from his throat, which made Siren smile.

"I swear to god, you're too kind for your own good," he said fondly, ruffling Tommy's hair before letting him go.

"Shut up," Tommy muttered, although his cheeks only burned brighter at the compliment.

Very few people had ever described Tommy as kind before. When they met him, most people heard his aggressive jabs and loud voice and wrote him off as annoying. And Tommy knew he wasn't the easiest person to get along with. He had always been too much. Too loud, too impulsive, too sharp. That was why he'd been moved between so many foster houses as a kid. No one wanted to put up with him for a long period of time. Even the ones that promised they would love him no matter what got sick of him eventually.

Tubbo was the first person to ever say Tommy was kind. In the early days of their friendship, back in the group home they all met in, Tubbo had once cried when some of the other kids had made a game out of stepping on as many bees as they could find in the pathetic patch of grass that was their backyard. Tommy had gotten into a fist fight with the group to make them stop, and although he lost (and earned a nasty black eye from it), he didn't regret it in the slightest. Especially when Tubbo had practically crushed him in a hug, and said Tommy was one of the kindest people he'd ever met.

Ranboo was the second person to call Tommy kind. When they were nearing the end of their days at the group home, the trio was high strung trying to make sure they were set to move

out and ensure that nothing went wrong. They were so close to freedom and were terrified of it slipping away from their fingers. And apparently when Ranboo got really stressed, he was prone to sleepwalking, which terrified him because he'd nearly fallen out a window before during a sleepwalking episode.

One night, Ranboo woke up with a hand on the front door to the group home, and he ended up having a panic attack. Once he had calmed down, he admitted to Tommy that he was terrified of falling back asleep and waking up somewhere else. To Tommy, the solution was obvious. Tubbo slept like the dead, but it wasn't all that difficult to wake Tommy up. So he climbed into Ranboo's bed with him, explaining that if Ranboo got up, Tommy would feel it and drag him back under the covers. They kept that arrangement for their last week in the group home, and Tommy woke up every single night to keep Ranboo from wandering off. Ranboo said that was extremely kind of him, but Tommy brushed it off because he was just keeping his friend from getting hurt. It was just common sense.

And now, Siren was calling him kind. Tommy wasn't used to that, but Siren sounded completely genuine when he said it.

"If it really makes you uncomfortable," Siren then said, no longer whispering as Tommy jolted back to the present, "we can lower it. But this is a fair salary."

Grumbling, Tommy folded his arms over his chest. "Can we go back to the first number?"

"On one condition," Zephyrus jumped back in. "In a few months we'll negotiate giving you a raise."

Tommy groaned. "Fine, if you fuckers are so eager to give me money we can talk about a raise in a few months," he relented.

Jester chuckled. "Where the hell did you even find this kid? The only other teenager I know will try to charge you if you ask him where you left your keys."

"I just got very lucky one evening," Siren replied, grinning as he squeezed Tommy's shoulder.

Tommy couldn't help the warmth that blossomed in his chest at that.

After that, the rest of the evening went by without any further issues. All the villains friended Tommy on discord (again, fucking *discord*), so they could contact Tommy if they needed help. Tommy gave the group his work schedule for the next month so they would know when he was off work, and Tommy set a strict rule that none of the villains were ever, under any circumstances whatsoever, allowed to show up at his apartment.

Once that was settled, the Syndicate moved on to discuss other business.

"Alright, we're not going to get into detail regarding future plans with Tommy here, but there was one thing I wanted to bring up before he left," Zephyrus began, folding his hands in front of him. "Tommy, you're familiar with the vigilantes Nuke and Ender, correct?"

Oh shit. Those two.

“Uh, kind of. Siren and I had a run in with them the other night,” Tommy shrugged.

Zephyrus nodded. “Yeah, Siren told us about that. We just wanted to check in and see if you’ve heard from the two of them since. Siren mentioned they were suspicious of the fact that you were talking to him, and we want to make sure they’re not bothering you.”

Tommy gulped, remembering Siren’s promise that if things got too dicey, he wouldn’t be opposed to taking the two vigilantes out. While he didn’t think the Syndicate would do that unless the two of them did something to harm him, he didn’t want to worsen the Syndicate’s view of the two all the same.

“No, I haven’t. I don’t think they’re anything worth worrying about. They both just seemed more focused on the idea that Siren was holding me hostage or some stupid shit like that,” Tommy said, leaning back in his seat. “They’re not bad people. Nuke walked me home after I healed Thanatos because I was super sick and could barely stand.”

“We’re not saying they’re bad people,” Blade jumped in for the first time all evening. “We don’t usually have a problem with vigilantes. We’re not fans of thieves and muggers, and they help keep those types of people off the streets. But Nuke and Ender are still new on the scene and don’t seem to know the rules, considering they tried to go after Jester that one time.”

“It wasn’t hard to deal with the two of them,” Jester snorted, propping his feet up on the table. “They seem pretty young and inexperienced. I just hope they run into Monarch soon so they can educate the two of them on how things work between villains and vigilantes.”

Tommy frowned. “How things work?” As far as he was aware, vigilantes and villains didn’t fight as often as heroes and villains did, but they weren’t friends or anything of the sort.

“When I first became a vigilante, I ran into Monarch pretty early and they explained some stuff to be about how it works out in the field,” Rosethorn suddenly spoke up. “If a villain isn’t actively harming civilians in that moment, then vigilantes need to stay the fuck away and only deal with minor criminals. As long as that’s being upheld, villains won’t bother the vigilantes if they run into each other. Vigilantes don’t have the same resources heroes have, and most of the time they’re just trying to do the things heroes are supposed to do and actually help out the little guy, so we don’t think it’s fair to go after them with the same ferocity that we go after heroes with. But if they fuck with us unprovoked, then that falls apart.”

“Maybe one of us can get into contact with Monarch and ask them to find Nuke and Ender so they can explain that?” Daedalus suggested.

Nemesis pursed her lips. “Possibly, but Monarch might be a little busy since it seems they’re training a new vigilante to be their partner.”

All the heads at the table suddenly whipped towards Nemesis.

“Wait, *what?*” Jester questioned.

“Have you guys not seen?” Nemesis asked, raising her eyebrows. “Monarch was out a few nights ago with someone new. He said his name was Aurelion.”

“Y’know, now that I think about it, I heard something about a guy in a gold outfit being spotted with Monarch,” Blade said, nodding his head. “Do you know what his powers are?”

“Lightning,” Nemesis answered. “I was in civilian clothes walking by when I saw them stopping a robbery together.”

“That’s not good,” Daedalus muttered. “Getting hit by lightning would make it hard to get away from Monarch’s wither effect.”

“Well, as we were saying, Monarch knows the rules. They won’t attack us unless provoked, and I trust them to teach Aurelion the same,” Zephyrus said, folding his hands in front of him. “So just remember not to piss Monarch off unless you want to deal with lightning scars and that damn wither effect for three days,” he added, shooting a pointed look Siren’s way.

Siren huffed like a petulant child, but didn’t argue with the point. There was a story there and damn if Tommy wasn’t curious about it, but he knew it wasn’t the time to ask.

“So if Monarch’s busy training Aurelion, what the hell do we do about Nuke and Ender?” Jester questioned.

“Just try to avoid those two if possible,” Zephyrus instructed. “Like Jester said, they seem pretty young and new to using their powers, so we don’t want to engage with them if we don’t have to.”

Tommy breathed a sigh of relief. As annoying as Nuke and Ender were, he really didn’t want them to get hurt because they were just trying to protect Tommy. All he could do was hope that the two wouldn’t bother him anymore, and would also be wise enough to stay away from the villains as well.

And... that was it. After they had hashed out everything regarding Tommy’s job as healer for the Syndicate, and once the discussion on vigilantes ended, Siren told him that it was time to go and guided him out of the meeting room with Blade at his side.

The others stayed behind, apparently having business to discuss that Tommy couldn’t be present for. Once again, it was the rule of making sure Tommy knew as little as possible to ensure his safety. While a part of him was still hurt by the idea that they might not trust him, he shoved that down because he knew it wasn’t like that.

The drive home was significantly less awkward than the drive there had been. Tommy was blindfolded again as soon as they stepped into the elevator, and stayed blindfolded until they were passing back through South Bay.

Blade dropped him off in front of his apartment building. Tommy said his goodbyes to the two villains, wondering if they were planning on going back to the meeting or if they were

done for the night. Either way, he didn't ask, instead just waiting until the SUV was out of sight before he trudged into his building.

When he opened the door to his apartment, he expected to get a small 'hello' from Ranboo and an icy stare from Tubbo. Instead, he was met with silence and an empty living room.

Frowning, Tommy glanced towards the bedroom and saw the door was open, with no one inside. Tubbo's screen saver was bouncing around his computer monitor, while Ranboo's DS was charging on the edge of the couch.

They went out without him. The realization hurt more than Tommy thought it would, but he shouldn't have been surprised. He had told them he was going out with Wilbur tonight, it made sense for the two to decide to head out as well. But he had no idea where they would even go if they wanted to get out of the apartment. It wasn't like they could afford to go to a restaurant. Maybe they went to McDonalds to get milkshakes? While they didn't do that often, it was a treat the trio would give themselves in particularly bad weeks. It was the only explanation Tommy could think of as to where they would be if they weren't here.

But the idea of Tubbo and Ranboo going out to get milkshakes without him... his eyes burned at the knowledge that he was now being purposefully left out of their traditions. It was stupid. It was just milkshakes. But he didn't think things were that bad between them all.

Still, Tommy wasn't going to give in. If Tubbo wanted to be pissed at him while being a hypocrite, he could.

Besides, Tommy had Wilbur to hang out with instead. And, in a weird way, he also had the Syndicate. Even if they weren't really 'friends' and more like 'business associates'. It was still something to keep him out of the apartment.

Collapsing on the couch, Tommy turned on the TV, ready to switch the channel to some cartoons, but he paused when he saw a news report playing across the screen.

"This just in: Number One Hero Dream is currently attempting to capture wanted vigilantes Nuke and Ender over in Eastside. We have a chopper on the scene granting us live footage now."

Eyes widening, Tommy practically lunged for the remote, turning up the volume as the screen switched from the news reporter to shaky helicopter footage. Tommy clenched his fist when he spotted Dream standing across the rooftop from Nuke and Ender, his smiling mask mocking the two vigilantes as he floated several feet in the air.

Dream's power was that he was telekinetic. He could lift things in the air with just his mind, and besides using it on himself to make it so he could fly, he also tended to use this ability to straight up chuck random things at his opponents.

Right now, it seemed as though Dream was using pieces of a nearby construction project to fight the vigilantes. Bricks were flying towards Nuke and Ender, with Nuke jumping from side to side to try and dodge the objects, while Ender teleported around the rooftop to avoid the hits.

Nuke's hands were glowing bright yellow, and Tommy winced as a ball of gas flew Dream's way. To Tommy's shock though, the explosive sphere stopped right in front of Dream's face, before it ended up being tossed towards the sky, exploding harmlessly above Dream's head in a flash of orange light.

Dream could even control Nuke's explosives? *How?*

Nuke seemed just as startled as Tommy was by this revelation. He leapt back, grabbing onto Ender's side presumably to teleport away with his partner. Before he got the chance though, Ender was being knocked backwards by an invisible force (presumably Dream again), and Tommy grit his teeth when he watched the cloaked vigilante slam onto the ground.

As the fight continued, the helicopter pulled back, and Tommy let out a strangled sound of surprise when the cursive letters of *The Cloudy Cafe* came into view above the doorway.

They were fighting on top of his cafe.

Why the *fuck* were they fighting on top of Tommy's cafe?

Had Nuke and Ender been searching for Tommy again to try and question him about Siren? But why would they run into Dream there? Dream never came to Eastside unless the Syndicate was involved. He almost exclusively stayed in West End, and the only hero that even occasionally popped up in Eastside without a Syndicate sighting was Rewind.

Tommy was reeling as the fight went on. Nuke yanked Ender to his feet, and the two continued to dodge Dream's onslaught, but they were slowing down. Tommy was on the edge of his seat as he watched, knowing that neither of the vigilantes deserved to get thrown in jail for just trying to help people.

Then, a brick slammed into Nuke's chest, and he collapsed onto the ground in a heap. Ender sprinted over to him, grabbing Nuke and pulling him close, and suddenly the two disappeared in a flurry of purple particles.

Dream flew around the roof, searching for the two vigilantes, but it seemed as though they had completely disappeared. He ducked into a few alleyways near the cafe, the helicopter following him all the while, but soon Dream shook his head and flew off. The helicopter footage switched back to the reporter, and Tommy breathed a sigh of relief.

Shit. Getting caught by Dream was almost worse than getting caught by a villain for vigilantes. As Tommy had learned tonight that villains had respect for vigilantes. Dream, however, had none. While the Hero Committee had recruited vigilantes to become full heroes in the past, Dream took any opportunity he could to arrest vigilantes by any means necessary. Yet another reason why Tommy hated the guy.

Thankfully, Nuke and Ender had managed to get away. Briefly, Tommy considered running down to the cafe to see if the two of them were nearby in case they needed healing, but Tommy squashed the idea down as soon as it crossed his mind. Although Dream had flown off, he could still be patrolling the area, and the last thing Tommy needed was to get on *his* radar right now.

Besides, the hit wasn't bad. From what Tommy saw, it likely just knocked the wind out of Nuke, and at worst it might've cracked a rib or two. Nothing that was life threatening.

Relieved by the knowledge that Nuke and Ender were safe, Tommy sank back into the couch and changed the TV to cartoons.

It didn't take long for Tubbo and Ranboo to come home.

As soon as they opened the door, Tommy felt the mood instantly drop. Tubbo was hunched over while Ranboo had his arm wrapped around his shoulders along with a heavy backpack on his back, and the two of them barely acknowledged Tommy as they walked in.

"Uh, hey guys," Tommy started awkwardly, searching for any signs of milkshakes in their hands. "Where were you?"

"Fuck off," Tubbo snapped, shooting Tommy a withering glare that chilled him to his core. "I can't deal with your shit tonight."

The anger was hot and twisted Tubbo's voice into something entirely unfamiliar. Tommy immediately shrunk back into the couch as if he had been slapped, already preferring the cold shoulder Tubbo had been giving him the past few days.

"Wh-What did I do?" Tommy asked, wincing at how his voice cracked with the question.

Ranboo, who still had his arm slung over Tubbo's shoulder and was guiding him to the bedroom, just sighed and shook his head. "Not tonight, Tommy," he said in a much softer voice, but with none of the warmth that it usually held.

Tommy blinked quickly to try and rid himself of the tears burning in the corners of his eyes. He brought his knees up to his chest as he watched Ranboo lead Tubbo to the bedroom, not daring to speak up again.

Neither of them looked back at him as they slammed the bedroom door shut.

Tommy hated crying, but he really kind of wanted to cry now. Either that or pound his fist on the door and demand the two of them tell him what the fuck was going on. He hated not knowing what he did to piss them off this time. Was it because he told them he was going to see Wilbur? But they hadn't seemed that upset when he told them about his 'plans', so why would they be upset now?

It didn't make sense. Tommy should've gone up to the bedroom door to ask what was going on, but he was terrified of hearing that snarling anger from Tubbo again.

So, like a coward, he just made up the couch with blankets and pillows even though he was supposed to be in the bed tonight, and ignored the soft murmur of conversation going on behind the bedroom door.

His sleep that night was restless, to say the least.

Chapter End Notes

ok before I get questions in the comments I wanna clarify what Rosethorn said about the unspoken rule between vigilantes and villains respecting each others spaces: she specified that vigilantes won't fuck with villains as long as villains aren't actively harming civilians. yes, villains in this universe are villains so they do sometimes pull shit that harms civilians like heists and the like, so if that's occurring then vigilantes have every right to step in. the rule is more when a vigilante or a villain is out walking around and not really bothering anyone, they won't fuck with each other. meanwhile, heroes are kind of a fight on sight type deal

also tubbo and ranboo aren't actually mad at tommy, they were both just tired, scared, and frustrated after their fight with dream and neither one had the energy to try and dodge his questions (still not right to take it out on him though)

anyway I hope you all enjoyed this chapter! we finally got to meet the Syndicate and see some familiar faces! also sorry I didn't specify any salary numbers for tommy, I really didn't feel like trying to figure out what a proper salary for something like this would be plus I didn't want to have to try and choose between using dollars or pounds for the currency as well, so just fill in the blanks with whatever you think is appropriate lol the specific number isn't all that necessary in the end

ALSO the inspiration for my daedalus/sam villain design came from @beckyblah on tumblr and @beckyblah_art on twitter! i'll link the tumblr post with her sam design [here](#) (note: I'm not using her au names or any of the information she has on there for her own au, I'm just using sam's character design)

we have a discord server! it's a lot of fun chill vibes and sometimes I post sneak peaks of upcoming chapters so feel free to hop on in! <https://discord.gg/RFXqgK4CRN>

please comment if you enjoyed! I don't respond to most of them but I read all of them and love seeing your thoughts :)))

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees !

confrontation

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets used to his job as the Syndicate's healer.

Chapter Notes

sup everyone! another chapter so soon? I know, I'm surprised too

I wrote most of this chapter literally the day I posted the last one because I was just super excited to finally write this scene. you guys are going to hurt lol

BUT BEFORE WE GO INTO IT I've been noticing that some people are a bit confused about who's who in terms of the hero/villain/vigilante names I bring into play, and I try to provide yall with enough hints to figure out who I'm referencing because I'm not trying to keep the identities of everyone a secret from my readers. just to clear up any confusion, I'm gonna list the heroes/villains/vigilantes that we've had so far and tell you who's who (besides the obvious ones though lol)

Daedalus - Sam, Jester - Quackity, Rosethorn - Hannah, Nemesis/Arson - Niki, Thanatos/Iceman - Jack, Monarch - Eret, Aurelion - Foolish, Flame - Sapnap, 404 - George, Rewind - Karl, Supreme - Ponk, Captain (retired hero mentioned in chapter 4) - Puffy

OKAY so TW's for this chapter: mentions of injuries and lots of talk about broken bones/bones in general

hope you all enjoy, this is a fun one ;)

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

Tommy supposed you could get used to anything after enough time, and strangely enough, it didn't take long for him to get used to his new job in the Syndicate.

The next few weeks passed by in a blur. Tommy spent as little time at home as possible, which wasn't exactly hard when he was always either at the cafe or spending time with Wilbur.

The first Syndicate member to need Tommy after their official negotiations was Rosethorn. Tommy had closed the cafe already and was going through the standard motions of cleaning,

when he'd received a text from the villain saying she was already outside the back door. When he let her in, he'd grimaced at the long slash she had across her back, but it wasn't too deep and therefore wasn't that hard to heal. Before Rosethorn left, she used her powers to grow a daisy in her hand and tucked it behind his ear with a grateful smile, and Tommy pressed the flower between the pages of an old book when he got home.

His payment had been deposited in his account the next day. Thankfully, Tommy didn't share a bank account with Tubbo and Ranboo, otherwise they would've gone ballistic at the huge deposit Tommy had inexplicably received. Even though he didn't want the two of them to know about the money, he still took the opportunity to use the cash to pay the next two month's worth of their rent to their landlord. Then, using the little that was leftover, Tommy tried to make a subtle grocery trip and restocked their fridge in a way that Tubbo and Ranboo wouldn't notice.

Somehow, neither of his roommates seemed to question why the milk that had definitely been close to empty the day before was suddenly full. In fact, Tubbo and Ranboo didn't seem to question much of anything in those following weeks.

The two were always distracted. It wasn't the same purposeful silence as before, although Tubbo was still taking care to ignore Tommy when he could. But most of the time, the two just seemed... out of it. Ranboo had always been a bit spacey, but he was even more out of it than normal, and when Tommy poked his arm when he didn't respond to one of Tommy's questions, the boy had flinched back as though he had been burnt.

Tubbo was similar. He would stare blankly at his computer monitor, fingers still on the keyboard as he got lost in his own thoughts. Other times he would turn on the news without a word, watching whatever the latest report on heroes and villains was with a strange twist to his lips.

Another thing Tommy noticed: Tubbo's hands shook now. He wasn't sure when that started, but he knew the constant trembling in his fingers wasn't something that had always been there.

There was something wrong with both of them, and despite how much Tommy wanted to help, he couldn't do that if they wouldn't talk to him. And they had made it clear long ago that they didn't want to talk to him about their problems.

The next Syndicate member Tommy healed after Rosethorn was Daedalus, who had to take off part of his armor to reveal the hole in his shoulder. Despite Daedalus' reputation as a ruthless killer who had scorned his fellow heroes, Tommy found that the man wasn't all that intimidating when you actually spoke to him. The entire time Tommy was working on his shoulder, Daedalus rambled about his dog and how he was trying to teach her how to roll over, but she seemed to just be trying to trick him into giving her treats.

The healing gigs were tiring, but Tommy could manage well enough. Sure, he was burning himself on the espresso machine more often than ever because he kept letting his focus slip, and sure the bags under his eyes were starting to worry Puffy, but it was fine. The healing wasn't causing his lack of sleep. More than anything, it was just hard to fall asleep when the tension in his apartment was thick enough to be cut with a knife.

At the very least, Tommy got a reprieve from all the stress when he hung out with Wilbur. Despite how busy the man seemed to be with work, he still made time for Tommy whenever possible. The two would go out to get food at least twice a week, and Tommy had gone over to Wilbur's house several more times since that first day. Sometimes, Techno and Phil would join them, and sometimes they wouldn't, but Tommy didn't mind either way. He loved hanging out with Wilbur, but he also really found himself enjoying his time with Techno and Phil too. They were all just so easy to joke around with and be around. It was such a drastic difference to the eggshells he was walking on back home.

So despite the stressors in Tommy's life, he had to say, things weren't going too badly.

Until everything went to shit in the span of a single night.

It had been a normal day at the cafe. Foolish had been eager to leave, Eret waiting for him by the door like they always were now when Tommy came to take over. After a quick goodbye Foolish had dipped, and Tommy had gone through the evening rounds with practiced ease. At one point, a woman with pink hair and a kind smile gave him a tip that was more than the cost of her drink alone. Later on, a man brought his dog into the store, which he told Tommy was a wolf-husky mix, and the sweet thing licked his face when he gave her a small cup of whipped cream with the man's drink.

It had been a good shift. Wilbur was busy that night, but Tommy didn't mind as he bounced around the cafe after closing, humming a song Wilbur had showed him under his breath as he mopped the floors.

The lights in the cafe had been turned down low, and Tommy's eyes drooped as he swiped the mop back and forth. He was still smiling from those two nice customers, and even though he knew he was going to have to go home to his icy apartment soon enough, the hazy warmth of happiness clung to his skin as he went through the closing routine.

A buzz from his phone startled him out of his reverie. Immediately, Tommy set aside the mop, and clicked open the phone to see who was texting him.

Jester: You around?

Tommy: ya I'm still at the cafe

Jester: Ok I'll be over in five

Jester. One of the only villains who hadn't come to see him yet. Tommy was a little surprised that Jester was going to come over, considering how rarely he seemed to get into physical fights. Jester was all about using his wit to get the upper hand. Similar to Siren, he wasn't a brute force fighter. Instead, he outsmarted his opponents, aiming to confuse and delay them instead of fighting them head on. If he had gotten hurt, that meant he must've been cornered.

Tommy rushed to finish the closing routine so he wouldn't have to do it after he healed Jester. He finished mopping the floor and scrubbed down the counters at record speed, his shoes squeaking against the wet tile as he then raced to prepare the back room.

After having more experience with using the back of Puffy's cafe as a makeshift clinic, Tommy knew how to prep the area to minimize his cleanup. He laid a few towels down on the ground near the backdoor, dragging the first aid kit out from under the sink and popping it open so he could grab bandages if Jester was actively bleeding. Then, he filled up two cups of water and set them nearby, one for himself to drink after he was done healing, and the other for Jester in case he was thirsty.

Then... he waited. He sat down on the tile and watched the door, counting the seconds until the knock arrived.

It had been a little over six minutes since Jester's text when that knock rang through the backroom.

Leaping to his feet, Tommy rushed to the door and swung it open, revealing a hunched over Jester.

Tommy's eyes swept over the man, searching for any sign of blood. To his surprise, Jester's white button down shirt was free of any bloodstains, and although his pants were dark, it didn't seem like there was any blood on them either.

However, Jester definitely seemed as though he was in pain. His left arm hung limply at his side, and he was tipping to the left, as if holding his shoulder up was too much effort. Even though his face was completely covered by his mask, Tommy could tell he was grimacing.

"Sup kid," Jester greeted, although his voice was tight with pain.

"Here, come in," Tommy said, stepping aside and gesturing for Jester to get out of the alley.

Once the backroom door was closed, Jester settled himself onto the towels Tommy had laid out without having to be asked. His left arm was still limp, and he let out a hiss of pain when he had to sit down.

"Did you break something?" Tommy asked, figuring that was the likely explanation given the lack of blood.

Jester nodded. "Yeah, that fucking smiley face bastard nearly crushed my collarbone," he gritted out between his teeth.

Tommy frowned. It wasn't surprising anymore to hear about the things Dream would do to the villains. The slash across Rosethorn's back had been 404's doing, but the hole in Daedalus' shoulder was thanks to Dream.

Still, collarbone? The collarbone was a bitch of a bone to break.

"Shit man," Tommy winced, settling down on the ground across from him. "Did you at least land any good hits on him?"

Jester snorted. "I managed to land a pretty nasty scratch with some claws I grew, but shifting was a bad idea because I think it fucked up the bone even more."

Oh *great*. If Jester had been stupid enough to use his shapeshifting abilities with a broken bone, this could be way more fucked up than it seemed.

“Kind of a dumbass move if you ask me,” Tommy muttered as he reached for Jester’s arm. Jester pulled back immediately, and Tommy raised an unimpressed eyebrow at him. “I need to get an idea of how bad the break is, idiot.”

“Why? Can’t you just heal it without all that?” Jester questioned.

Tommy resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “I don’t know about other healers, but that’s not how my powers work. If I’m healing a stab wound, I need to be able to hold the skin together. If I’m healing a broken bone, I need to at least try to shift the bone somewhat back into place before I heal it, or else it could heal wrong.”

Tommy unfortunately had learned that the hard way. One time he’d broken this thumb when he accidentally smashed it in a really heavy door. He tried to let it heal itself, but the bone had healed incorrectly and he ended up having to get Tubbo to re-break it so he could fix it.

That hadn’t been a pleasant evening for anyone.

There was a beat of silence as Jester considered him.

“If you don’t trust me with your injury I don’t know why you agreed to me being a healer for your little club in the first place,” Tommy deadpanned. “Either you let me do my job, or I’m kicking you out so I can go home.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, Tommy regretted it. Even if the others in the Syndicate seemed to like him, Jester was still someone who Tommy hadn’t gotten to talk with much yet. He *really* shouldn’t be so rude to a supervillain, especially not one with as much power and influence as Jester.

But to his surprise, Jester *laughed*.

“Jesus christ, I can see why Siren likes you so much now,” he chuckled, flinching when it shifted his arm again. “Anyway, yeah, go ahead and do your thing. Sorry I’m being an ass, I’ve had a bit of a night.”

Tommy instantly relaxed at the reassurance. The nice thing was that all of these villains seemed to have an unusual amount of patience for his sharp tongue, which was good for him because god knew he needed to learn how to think before he spoke.

“Alright, I’m not gonna do much right now, just feel around for a sec,” Tommy explained as he reached for Jester’s shoulder again.

His hands delicately ran over the fabric of the shirt, and Jester hissed in pain. Tommy poked at a few spots, wincing when he felt a bone that was definitely out of place.

“Shit, okay, that’s not good,” Tommy muttered as he tried to poke around more of his shoulder.

“I don’t think a doctor is supposed to say that,” Jester huffed.

“Well I’m not exactly a doctor, now am I?” Tommy shot back, carefully feeling another piece of bone. “Hm, okay, this is gonna be tricky but I think I can heal this without having to move it around too much. But it’s gonna hurt like a bitch for the first few seconds.”

“Let’s just get it over with,” Jester said.

Nodding, Tommy put his other hand on Jester’s shoulder, and mentally mapped out how he was going to do this. Then, once he figured out what he thought was the best way to move things, he let his hands glow as he quickly pushed on the shoulder to get the bones in the right place.

“MOTHERFUCKER!” Jester shouted.

Tommy didn’t pay attention to him. Instead, he kept his grip on Jester’s shoulder tight as the energy from his hands seeped into the man’s skin, shutting his eyes as he focused on healing the injury as quickly as possible.

By the time Tommy was done, his body was aching, but it was manageable. Dropping his hands from Jester’s shoulders, he slumped back down onto the floor before leaning against the wall.

“Don’t move it yet,” Tommy ordered through half-lidded eyes. “Wait a few minutes to let it settle.”

“Got it,” Jester muttered, carefully scooting over until he was leaning against the wall next to Tommy.

The two were quiet for a few moments. Tommy’s ragged breathing evened out as his heart slowed, and the familiar pressure behind his eyes settled in. Beside him, Jester seemed to be doing much better already, the tense line of his shoulders gone as he was finally free of the pain that had been plaguing him.

It was then that Tommy remembered the water.

“Do you want something to drink?” Tommy asked, shifting to reach for the two glasses he’d set aside. “Sometimes healing can make you thirsty.”

Jester glanced his way. “Sure,” he said, reaching out with his good arm for the cup.

Tommy handed it to him, taking a sip of his own water and sighing as the cool liquid ran down his throat.

Then, Jester reached up to take his mask off, and Tommy nearly choked.

“What the fuck are you doing?!” Tommy yelled, leaping backwards while trying to cover his eyes.

“Uh... I can’t drink with my mask on?” Jester said, as if it were obvious.

Tommy squeezed his eyes shut and turned away from Jester. “You should’ve given me some warning, dude! I’m not allowed to know your identity, remember?”

Jester snorted. “Tommy, I’m literally a shapeshifter.”

“So?”

“So I can change my face to look however I want it to. I wasn’t going to show you my real face,” he explained, the smirk evident in his voice.

Oh.

Yeah, okay, that made a lot more sense.

“Uh... so it’s okay for me to look?” Tommy asked.

“Dude, it’s fine. Turn around.”

Taking a deep breath, Tommy forced open his eyes and turned back around to see the fake face Jester had put on.

Tommy shrieked when he met his own eyes.

“Do you like it?” Jester asked with *Tommy’s* face. Tommy gulped as he stared into his own eyes, thinking of how this reminded him of some kind of fucked up fun house mirror. He wasn’t sure if it was better or worse that Jester’s voice stayed the same.

“That’s just fucking wrong,” Tommy said with a wince. “Can you change to something else?”

Jester snorted, and then his face was swirling as it turned into something else.

Tommy clenched his jaw when he recognized Siren’s face—blindfold and all.

“Not that either,” Tommy spit out, already growing annoyed at this game.

“Ugh, such a tough crowd,” Jester groaned, before his face began to swirl once more.

This time, when Tommy was met with the grinning visage of Mayor Schlatt, he let out a startled laugh.

“Okay, that’s kinda funny,” he admitted.

The Schlatt-faced Jester grinned wider in front of him. “Hey kid, I’m Mayor Schlatt, what do you think about our great city?”

“Uh, I think you’re doing a shit job as mayor and that you falling off the stage during that one speech was pretty funny,” Tommy said, matching Jester’s grin.

“Oh shit, yeah, I was so drunk that day,” Jester mocked, struggling to make his voice sound gruffer to match the actual mayor’s tone. “I can’t get through the day without having three drinks, and even then I’m still strung tighter than a horse on steroids.”

Tommy let out a startled laugh, and Jester continued to smile as his face swirled and changed once more.

When Dream's smiling mask settled in front of him, Tommy knew he was in for a treat.

"Oh hello Number One Hero Dream," Tommy greeted, dipping his head in a fake bow to the man. "What are you doing in Eastside?"

"Wait, shit, I'm in Eastside?" Jester joked, looking around as if in alarm. "Ew! Gross, I don't wanna remember poor people exist!"

"Well, do you have any advice for a poor teenager like me?" Tommy asked, just barely holding back his giggles.

Jester scratched his chin in thought. "Well kids," he began, attempting to mock Dream's school PSA voice, "always remember the three most important things: eat ass, suck a dick, and sell drugs."

Tommy was full on laughing now, clutching his stomach as he struggled to catch his breath. Jester was laughing right alongside him, and any remaining anxiety Tommy had about being around the villain was long gone. Jester, it seemed, was actually pretty cool.

The laughing quieted down, and things fell quiet as the two of them caught their breath. Tommy leaned back against the wall next to Jester, and silently, Jester's face began to swirl again.

This time, Tommy didn't recognize the face Jester was wearing. It seemed like that of a young man with dark eyes and black hair. But what caught Tommy's attention was the long scar that ran through his left eye, turning it a milky shade that Tommy was pretty sure meant the eye was useless.

"Who is that?" Tommy asked, narrowing his eyes at Jester.

"No one important. Just a random face I saw on the street," Jester explained, although there was something off in his tone that Tommy couldn't read.

Something was nagging Tommy the longer he stared at the strange face. Like the blur that usually accompanied Jester's transformations wasn't there anymore.

If Tommy didn't know any better, he'd almost consider that maybe, just maybe, this was Jester's real face.

But Jester wasn't going to show Tommy his real face. He barely knew Tommy, and Tommy didn't want to know anyone's secret identities. No, this had to just be a random face he saw, and Tommy was looking too much into it.

"Am I good to go now?" Jester asked, startling Tommy out of his thoughts.

Tommy blinked, taking an extra second to remember what Jester was talking about.

“Oh, uh, yeah I think so,” Tommy said, disappointment washing over him at the idea that Jester was leaving so soon. “Try moving the arm a bit and see how it feels.”

Jester rolled his shoulder, eyebrows raising in surprise before rolling it again.

“Goddamn, it feels good as new,” he said, smiling at Tommy again as he rose to his feet. “Thanks man, that’s amazing.”

Tommy used the wall to push himself up as well. “No problem. Just please don’t break it worse next time, I really don’t want to have to try and heal a bone that’s in several pieces.”

Snorting, Jester pulled his mask back over his face. “I’ll do my best, Doctor Tommy.” Walking over to the backroom door, he put his hand on the door handle, but paused. “You’re a good kid. I hope you know that.”

Where did that come from?

Heat rose to Tommy’s cheeks at the unexpected compliment, and he quickly shook his head to try and hide it.

“I’m getting paid for this, dipshit,” he muttered, struggling to make his words sound even the slightest bit gruff. “No need to get all sappy.”

Jester laughed again. “Of course, my bad. I’ll head out now before I embarrass you further.”

“Yeah, get out of my cafe,” Tommy teased.

Giving him one last wave, Jester swung open the door to the alleyway.

Only to immediately freeze when there were two figures standing in front of it.

Tommy stiffened up, his heart jumping into his throat as his eyes struggled to make out the two figures in the gloom. Tall and short, one wearing something bulky on his face and the other...

Oh.

It was Nuke and Ender.

Oh fuck.

Tommy, still frozen behind Jester, jumped when Jester broke the stony silence.

“I have to say, this isn’t the kind of place I’d expect to run into you two,” Jester joked, although there was an underlying tension in his voice.

“What the hell is going on here?” Nuke asked, looking between Jester and Tommy with his arms folded over his chest.

“What’s it to you?” Jester snapped, the joking in his tone having evaporated almost instantly.

“I mean... civilian, supervillain, meeting in the back of a cafe in the middle of the night, you can see why we’re concerned,” Ender said, gesturing between the two of them. It was then his eyes dropped to the floor of the backroom. “Wait, is that a first aid kit?” His head whipped back to Jester. “Are you hurt?”

“Not anymore,” Jester said, rolling his shoulder again. “But that’s none of your business, so I recommend you two get out of here.”

Completely ignoring Jester, Nuke stepped into the backroom to face Tommy. “You helped him?” He asked, something accusatory in his tone.

Tommy bristled under the weight of Nuke’s glare. What, was he supposed to be ashamed of healing people?

“So what if I did?” Tommy challenged. “Jester came here with a broken collarbone, so I healed it because I have healing powers. What’s the problem with that?”

Both Nuke and Ender stiffened at this.

“You... you healed a villain?” Ender asked.

Shit. Well, since the cat was out of the bag, Tommy figured needed to find a way to do damage control so the vigilantes didn’t get too pissed off about the situation.

“I did, yeah, it’s kind of a thing,” Tommy explained, fighting the urge to curl in on himself. He shouldn’t be embarrassed of this. He was helping people. “Sometimes villains come to me to get healed up after bad fights. I’ve never been approached by a vigilante, but if you guys ever need help, I’d be happy to offer my services.”

Was he even allowed to do that since he technically worked for the Syndicate? He wasn’t sure, but if any of the villains said anything, he didn’t have a problem with telling them to fuck off. He could heal who he wanted to, dammit.

“Is that what you were talking about with Siren?” Nuke practically hissed.

“Yeah, it was,” Tommy told him. “We were working out details like how to get in contact with me and stuff.” He decided to leave out the part about the Syndicate paying him. That would probably make it look worse.

“Uh, so let me get this straight,” Ender spoke up, drawing all eyes back to him, “villains come to you here at the cafe so you can heal them with your powers? And this is, like, something you volunteered for? You’re not being forced into it?”

Tommy shook his head. “No, I’m not being forced.” Probably not a good idea to mention that time Blade technically forced him to heal Zephyrus. That was kind of a one off. “Does that answer all your questions?”

“No, frankly it doesn’t,” Nuke snapped. “But first, I want him out of here,” he said, pointing at Jester.

Jester snorted. “You have a lot of nerve trying to tell me what to do. What, you think I’m just gonna leave Tommy here alone with you guys? When you’re about to interrogate him? I think Siren would skin me alive if I let you two idiots hurt him.”

At that, Ender gasped in shock, while Nuke let out an odd strangled noise.

“We’d never hurt him!” Nuke protested immediately.

“Why would you think we’d ever hurt Tommy?” Ender asked, and he sounded so genuinely hurt in that moment at the implication, that it made Tommy ache in sympathy for him.

The genuineness of Ender’s question seemed to catch Jester off guard too.

“Uh... I mean, you two seem kinda pissed at him?” Jester offered, although his confidence from earlier was thrown off.

“We’re trying to protect Tommy, not hurt him,” Nuke snarled, taking a step towards Jester. “We protect civilians from people like *you*.”

“Yo, dude, chill. I wasn’t meaning to offend,” Jester said, raising his hands.

Nuke looked as though he wanted to take another step forward. Jester may have been tired from his previous battle, but he was fully healed, and Tommy knew that Nuke and Ender had already gone after Jester unprovoked in the past before. He doubted Jester would have much issue fighting them a second time, especially if he could justify it as keeping Tommy safe.

Tommy couldn’t let them fight again. He didn’t think the two vigilantes would hurt him, especially if Ender’s horrified reaction was anything to go by.

No, he could handle this.

“Jester, it’s okay,” Tommy cut in before Nuke could get closer. “You can go. I got this.”

“Are you sure?” Jester asked, sounding concerned.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Tommy reassured, having a feeling that while he might be in for an annoying conversation, he wasn’t in danger.

Jester stared at him for a moment, as if considering just ignoring him outright. But after a few tense beats, he sighed and made for the door.

“Fine. But Nuke, Ender, I hope you two know that if you fuck with him, you’re gonna have the entire Syndicate on your asses.”

Nuke bristled at the comment, while Ender nodded.

“We understand. We’re not going to hurt him,” Ender told him.

Jester shared a look with Ender, and after another moment, he waved and headed out into the alley. As soon as he stepped out of the backroom, Nuke slammed the door to the alley shut,

leaving just the three of them inside the cafe.

The two vigilantes stared at him expectantly. The silence was heavy, the buzz from the bright lights above their heads only adding to the suffocating sensation.

“Well?” Tommy started when Nuke and Ender didn’t say anything.

“Well?” Nuke parroted. “What the fuck do you mean by that?”

“I mean he’s gone now. What do you want from me?” Tommy asked, glancing between the two vigilantes. “Do you guys want my number so you can get healing too? I can probably work out a schedule so you don’t show up here at the same time as villains, but this clinic would have to be a neutral zone where no fighting can happen-”

“Jesus fucking christ, Tommy, we don’t want healing!” Nuke suddenly shouted, cutting Tommy off. “We want to know what the fuck you’re doing healing villains!”

Tommy frowned. “I mean... they need help, you know? Heroes really fuck them up sometimes, and they can’t get medical care like the heroes can.”

“So that just makes it okay? To help people who hurt others?” Ender asked in a much softer voice compared to Nuke.

“You don’t know why they do what they do,” Tommy hissed, glaring at the two of them. “For all you know, they could have good reasons for being villains. And even if they don’t, that doesn’t mean they all deserve to die in goddamn dirty alleyways because they couldn’t go to a hospital!”

Nuke scoffed. “Who the hell said they were dying? Heroes aim to incapacitate, not kill.”

Tommy scowled. “Me. I say so because I’m the one who’s actually been healing these goddamn wounds, and let me tell you, the heroes claiming they just try to incapacitate is a load of bullshit,” he told them, wincing as the memories of the hole in Siren’s stomach and the burns tracking across Thanatos’ frame filled his mind.

“Wait, really?” Ender chimed in.

“Yes, *really*. The whole reason I started doing this was because I found Siren passed out in an alleyway one night with a hole blown in the middle of his fucking gut a few months back.”

Now that startled both the vigilantes into silence. There were a few beats as the two took in the information, and Tommy almost wanted to smirk at how well that had shut them up, until Nuke spoke again.

“So you found Siren unconscious, dying, and instead of calling the authorities or leaving, you saved his life. I got that right?” Nuke asked, a deathly calm having settled over him. Tommy nodded. “And you didn’t tell anyone you knew that this happened?”

Tommy frowned. “Uh, no? The only people I could’ve really told were my roommates, but I didn’t want to get them involved in any shit in case that came back to bite me in the ass.”

Nuke scoffed. “You didn’t think that *maybe* it was better for your roommates to know if you were getting involved in some deep shit like that?”

“I wanted to keep them out of it!” Tommy argued.

“And yet you volunteered to keep healing villains, which arguably could’ve just put your roommates in more danger,” Ender pointed out, arms folded over his chest.

“I did what I thought was best to keep them safe,” Tommy snarled, not liking the direction this conversation was going. “They’re not involved in this shit so stop bringing them up!”

“No, I am going to keep bringing it up,” Nuke snarled right back, stepping up so he and Tommy were face to face. “You’ve been involved with the fucking Syndicate for months, and you didn’t think it was a good idea to tell your roommates anything? What if the Syndicate got tired of you and killed you or something? What the hell would they have done then?”

“The Syndicate was never going to hurt me!” Tommy shouted, using his height advantage to try and tower over Nuke.

“You don’t know that! There was no way you could’ve known that for sure! And the people you live with have a right to know about that kind of shit!” Through Nuke’s gas mask, Tommy could make out the faintest outlines of a pair of eyes.

This was ridiculous. Tommy was getting scolded for lying to Tubbo and Ranboo by two random fucking vigilantes who knew nothing about his situation. They didn’t know that Siren took him out to McDonald’s to say thank you for saving his life, or that Tubbo and Ranboo also were refusing to tell him shit. These two had no right to try and butt into his life like this.

“Why the FUCK do you care this much anyway?!” Tommy yelled, glaring at Nuke. “You don’t even fucking know me so it’s not your goddamn problem!”

Immediately, Nuke stepped back. There was another suffocating silence as the vigilante just stared at him, his hands curled into fists at his sides.

“You’re wrong,” Nuke said in a low voice, reaching up to the strap that held his gas mask on his face. Tommy’s eyes widened as he realized what he was doing, but before he could say anything, Nuke was yanking the mask off. “It *is* our problem.”

Tommy’s breath caught in his throat.

The gas mask was off. Familiar bleached hair with overgrown brown roots fell over stormy blue eyes, and suddenly all the pieces fell into place.

Tubbo. Tubbo was Nuke.

His head whipped over to Ender, and despite the fact that he hadn’t moved to take off his mask, it was clear as day that he was staring at Ranboo.

Tubbo and Ranboo were Nuke and Ender.

Tubbo and Ranboo were vigilantes.

That was the secret they'd been hiding from him this whole time.

That was why they'd been so pissed at him these past few weeks.

He'd been lying to them while they knew he was full of shit.

But... they'd also been lying to him.

Wait.

Holy shit. They'd been lying to him for *months*.

“What the fuck?” Tommy whispered, eyes darting between the two boys. “Are you fucking kidding me right now?”

“Tommy, we know you've been lying-”

“No!” Tommy yelled, cutting Tubbo off. “No! You don't get to fucking reveal that you're fucking vigilantes and start scolding me about being the liar!” He snarled with a white hot type of anger he'd never even heard from himself before.

Tubbo was shocked into silence, the rage fading from his face as he stared at Tommy with wide eyes.

“Do you even know how fucking horrible the past few months have been for me?!” Tommy exclaimed, the words spilling out as the anger swelled in his chest. “I have been agonizing for MONTHS over the fact that you didn't trust me and how I was worried I did something wrong. Not to mention, I've been doing everything in my goddamn power to make sure you two would never be affected by the shit I'm doing with the Syndicate, and you mean to tell me you've been going out and fighting villains for even longer than I've been healing them?!”

It was all futile. This whole time, all the secrets that he'd weighed himself down with, all the fighting and arguments about hypocrisy, it was all for nothing. Because he'd never been keeping Tubbo and Ranboo out of danger.

No, they'd been throwing themselves headfirst into danger without even thinking of how Tommy could be affected.

“I can't believe you fucking pulled the 'what if the Syndicate killed you' card just now,” Tommy snapped. “Not when you two have been going out and fighting villains without even *considering* that maybe I should be clued in!”

“We didn't want you to worry!” Tubbo shouted, jumping back into the argument. “We thought that you would be scared if you knew we were going out and fighting villains, but apparently you don't have any goddamn problem with villains considering you hang out with them on a regular basis!”

“I’m giving them medical treatment, literally what is so fucking bad about that?!”

“You’re healing *murderers*, Tommy!”

“The heroes are murderers too!” Tommy argued. “Heroes, villains, one side isn’t good and one side isn’t bad! Heroes are lying bastards who manipulate the media to hide what they’re really doing! Villains at least are honest about the shit they pull!”

“Oh, so it’s okay if they’re honest murderers then?” Ranboo suddenly jumped in, despite having been silent for most of the argument. Apparently he’d slipped his glasses and mask off at some point without Tommy noticing. “Seriously, you’re acting like we *like* heroes. We nearly got killed by Dream a few weeks ago!”

Oh shit. Tommy remembered the footage of Dream fighting Nuke and Ender, and how later that night Tubbo and Ranboo had come home in a much worse mood than usual.

Tubbo had been hunched over. Nuke had taken a brick to the chest.

“I-I could’ve healed you!” Tommy exclaimed, turning to Tubbo with a whine in his voice. “If you had just told me about this I could’ve probably healed you so many times over!”

“Yeah, well, after we saw you hanging out with Siren we didn’t think it was a good idea to reveal our identities to someone working with the Syndicate,” Tubbo spat, narrowing his eyes at Tommy.

Tommy blinked, needing to take an extra second to process what Tubbo meant by that.

They didn’t trust him.

After everything the three of them had been through together, they didn’t trust him after seeing him talk to Siren one time.

“What, did you think I was going to turn you into them or something?” Tommy asked, trying to keep up the same anger as before, but struggling as his eyes began to burn.

“Maybe we did,” Tubbo shot back. “You were pretty damn adamant that you weren’t a hostage when you were talking to Siren, and you even shoved Ranboo when he tried to help you. From what we could tell, you really didn’t like Nuke and Ender.”

“Tubbo,” Ranboo cut in, his voice low. “Don’t say something you’ll regret.”

Surprisingly, this actually made Tubbo falter. He shut his mouth before more hurtful words could tumble out, but the damage had already been done.

“No, it’s fine if you don’t trust me anymore,” Tommy hissed, digging his nails into his palm to try and distract himself from the tears threatening to spill over his cheeks. “It was the first lesson we all learned back in the system, right? We can’t trust anyone. It’s my own fault for thinking you two might be different.”

“Tommy, wait, he didn’t mean it like that,” Ranboo cut in, taking a step in between him and Tubbo.

Tommy snorted. “Don’t try to bullshit me. I know what you both meant.”

There was a beat as Ranboo and Tubbo shared an uncomfortable look, Ranboo clearly trying to urge Tubbo to say something to try and piece back together the shattered situation.

Taking a breath, Tubbo met Tommy’s eyes, the anger having faded completely from his face.

“Look, Tommy, I didn’t-”

A shrill beeping noise cut Tubbo off, making all three of the teenagers wince.

“What the fuck was that?” Tommy asked, glancing at Ranboo since the noise had seemed to come from him.

Sighing, Ranboo dug into his pocket and pulled out a small black device. “It’s our alert system,” he admitted, guilt flashing across his features as he tapped on the screen a few times. “It tells us when there’s criminal activity in the area.”

“What is it?” Tubbo asked quietly, stepping up beside Ranboo to see the screen for himself.

“It’s a robbery,” Ranboo said, making Tubbo curse under his breath.

Tommy frowned. “Wait, where?” He moved over to Ranboo’s side to try and see the screen as well, but Ranboo immediately pulled the device close to his chest, blocking Tommy’s view of it.

Ouch. Now that hurt.

Ranboo seemed to regret what he’d done the second he saw the pain flash in Tommy’s eyes. He held the device back out in clear view so Tommy could look, but Tommy didn’t want to take the obvious pity gesture since it was so clear they still didn’t trust him to see their tech, even when he knew what they were doing.

“You guys should go take care of that,” Tommy said, his voice rough. “You’re vigilantes. You got a job to do.”

“But Tommy, we’re still-”

“No, we’re done talking,” Tommy snapped, cutting Tubbo off. “Nuke, Ender, get the fuck out of my cafe.”

Ranboo gave him a wounded look, while Tubbo’s face only showed a split second of hurt before anger slipped back over his features like a mask. They both geared back up again, their faces hidden once more by their disguises, and Tommy internally cursed himself for not recognizing the two of them sooner. For fuck’s sake, Tubbo even had the same hair!

But he didn't voice any of this internal frustration. Instead, he just leaned against the wall with his arms folded over his chest, glaring at the two as they packed up to leave.

When Tubbo swung open the door to the alleyway to head out, he spared a look back at Tommy.

"This conversation isn't over. We have more to talk about when we get home," Tubbo said in a voice that wasn't as angry as before, but wasn't anything close to warm either.

Tommy didn't bother responding. If he opened his mouth right now, he wouldn't be able to keep his voice from cracking.

With one last pointed look from the two vigilantes, they stepped out into the alley, letting the door swing shut behind them. As soon as the door was closed, Tommy rushed over to slide the deadbolt into place, ensuring no one else would be able to come in.

Then, finally, Tommy was alone.

And as soon as the realization that he was alone hit him, his porcelain composure that had been cracking at the seams for the past twenty minutes finally shattered.

A loud sob tore its way out of his chest as he slid to the floor, burying his face in his knees as his best friend's words played on repeat in his mind. They didn't trust him. His two best friends, his *family*, didn't trust him anymore. They had been lying to him for months.

It was only then that another realization clicked into place in Tommy's head. Tubbo and Ranboo had powers. Of course both boys knew about Tommy's powers, given that he had discovered them with Tubbo. Considering the two had never brought anything up about themselves, Tommy had just assumed neither of them had powers. They were all certainly close enough to know about each other's powers. Or at least, that's what Tommy had thought.

But no. Ranboo could teleport, and Tubbo could create explosives from his hands. Those weren't minor powers. And it was yet another thing the two of them had hidden from Tommy.

Tears soaked Tommy's jeans as he leaned his head against his knees, struggling to take full breaths as he replayed the conversation over and over again. Maybe he shouldn't have kicked them out. Maybe he should've asked them to stay, asked them to explain when they stopped thinking of him as family.

Maybe he wouldn't have liked the answer, but it would be better than being left to wonder.

Maybe it would be better. He wasn't sure.

"FUCK!" Tommy shouted, twisting his fingers into his hair hard enough to make him yelp in pain. He hated this. He hated this entire fucking situation. How the hell had everything in his life spiraled so totally and completely out of control?

Tommy was very grateful the backroom of the cafe was pretty soundproof as he screamed curses and slammed his fists into the wall. His head was a mess of racing thoughts and red

hot emotions, and the only way he could think to express it all was to yell until his voice went hoarse.

Eventually, Tommy started to calm down. Struggling to catch his breath, Tommy stared at the ceiling of the backroom, counting the smudges on the ceiling as he thought about what he was going to do from here.

He should go home. The logical thing to do was to go talk to Tubbo and Ranboo and try to work this out with them, to find out where everything had gone so wrong.

But... he didn't want to. He was exhausted. The idea of rehashing the argument so soon made him want to curl into a ball and hide in a dark corner until everything just left him alone. He wasn't ready to hear them say it yet. He wasn't ready to confront his family falling apart.

Tommy's hand was on his phone before he could even fully figure out what he was going to say.

The phone rang in his ear, and he tried to match his breathing to the dial tone to calm himself down. It was only going to be harder to explain if he was still a blubbering mess.

The phone only rang twice before it picked up.

"Tommy? Why are you calling so late?" Wilbur's concerned voice rang out over the tinny speakers, and Tommy almost had to bite back another sob at how relieved he was to hear his friend.

"*Wilbur,*" Tommy's voice cracked and he winced, the tears already threatening to make a reappearance at the mere thought of even talking about the fight.

"Tommy?" Wilbur questioned when Tommy didn't speak again. "Are you alright? Is something wrong?"

"I'm okay," Tommy managed to stammer out, although it was painfully obvious by his tone that he was not very okay. "I'm just- there was just- I can't-"

"Shit, where are you? You're not hurt, are you?" Wilbur asked, something rustling on his end of the call. It was easy to figure out that Wilbur was probably rushing to put on his shoes.

"I'm not hurt," Tommy told him, not wanting to send the man into a total panic. "And-And I'm at the cafe."

"I'm coming to get you," Wilbur said, his footsteps echoing through his phone speaker.

"You don't have to," Tommy told him quickly, despite the fact that he desperately wanted to see Wilbur right now. "I'm not in danger or anything."

"Doesn't matter. I'm still coming to get you." Tommy could hear the sound of a door slamming behind Wilbur.

“Are you going to take the train?” Tommy asked, not hearing anything in the background to indicate he was with Techno.

“No, I’m gonna drive,” Wilbur explained, and there was the sound of a car engine rumbling to life.

“I thought you couldn’t drive?”

“Legally? No. In theory? Kind of.”

Despite how miserable he felt at that moment, Tommy couldn’t help but chuckle. “Please don’t get into a car crash on your way here. That’ll just make my night worse.”

“I’ll do my best,” Wilbur replied, and Tommy could practically hear the smile in his voice. “Do you want to stay on the phone while I drive? I should be there in about ten minutes.”

Tommy glanced at the towels and first aid kit still strewn across the floor of the backroom and grimaced. “No, it’s okay. I need to finish cleaning up first.”

“Alright. I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“Thanks Wil,” Tommy whispered, gripping the edge of his sweatshirt.

“Of course, Toms.”

And with that, Tommy forced himself to hang up, not trusting himself to stay on the line for any longer without bursting into tears again.

Instead, Tommy tried to use the fact that Wilbur was going to be there very soon to get himself to stand and clean up. His hands were slow as he folded up the towels and shoved the first aid kit back under the sink. Everything felt as though it were moving in slow motion, the chaos of earlier having completely stripped away all of his energy.

He cleaned up the backroom without much issue, considering Jester hadn’t been bleeding when he came in. There was no sign that the villain had been there at all, and there was also no sign of the vigilantes that Tommy had had a full on screaming match with. It was as if the fight had never happened, although the dried tears on his cheeks confirmed to him that it did.

Tommy was waiting outside the cafe doors when Wilbur pulled up. He’d been leaning against the wall, staring at the faded stars through puffy eyes, resisting the urge to watch the rooftops for any sign of two familiar vigilantes.

The car came to an abrupt stop, almost making Tommy chuckle at how bad Wilbur’s driving seemed to be. But the laugh died in his throat when Wilbur jumped out of the driver’s seat, rushing over to stand in front of him.

Wilbur looked Tommy up and down, as if checking to make sure Tommy hadn’t lied about not being hurt. Then, his eyes settled on Tommy’s face, and his jaw clenched. Tommy figured his eyes were pretty red right now.

“You look like shit,” Wilbur said softly.

“Yeah, I uh, kinda feel like shit,” Tommy admitted, sniffing and rubbing at his eye with one hand.

It was then that Wilbur opened his arms in silent invitation.

Tommy didn’t hesitate to collapse into the man.

It was all just so much. First he’d been stressed about Jester, then Nuke and Ender appeared, and then Tubbo and Ranboo turned out to *be* Nuke and Ender, and then they had that horrible fight. So much had happened in such a short span of time, and Tommy felt like a twig that had been snapped in three different places.

“It’s okay,” Wilbur reassured Tommy as a wet patch grew on his jacket. “I’ve got you.” He had his arms wrapped around Tommy’s back, rubbing circles into his shoulder blades as Tommy cursed himself for crying even more that night.

After a few minutes of this, Tommy forced himself to pull back.

“I got into a really bad fight with my roommates,” he told him, ducking his eyes to the ground. “I don’t want to go back to my apartment tonight.”

“You’ll stay with me,” Wilbur said as if it was the easiest thing in the world. “I have some extra pajamas you can change into so you don’t have to go get anything from your place.”

Tommy’s smile was small, but genuine. “Thank you, Wilbur.”

“I’m always gonna be here for you,” Wilbur replied, throwing an arm around Tommy’s shoulder and guiding him to the car. “Let’s go home so I can have Techno make you some of his famous hot chocolate. It’s some of the best you’ll ever try.”

“I think I’d like that,” Tommy replied, the smile staying on his face as he climbed into the passenger seat.

Nothing was okay right now. But at least Tommy had Wilbur.

Chapter End Notes

BEFORE YOU COMMENT

I want to remind everyone of something: yes, I'm aware Tubbo and Ranboo are being unfair but they are NOT antagonists in this fic. Remember, this fic is from *Tommy's* POV, and therefore he doesn't have all the information and the conclusions he comes to about certain situations can be wrong. As an example, just because Tommy says "oh Ranboo did this because of x" doesn't mean that's actually why Ranboo did that thing,

that's just why Tommy thinks he did that thing. If I was writing this from beeduo's POV, you guys would probably have a lot more sympathy for the two of them so please keep that in mind before commenting something angry. (ngl, I legit considered writing out the Nuke and Ender + Dream fight from last chapter from Tubbo's POV to post as a side thing so you guys could see what beeduo was going through at that time, still might do it but no promises lol)

imagine I'm pointing to the 'it gets worse before it gets better' tag I added to this fic a few days ago

anyway I've been wanting to write that chapter for a very long time hehe, shit was going to boil over in the bench trio household eventually but the fun is only just beginning ;)

join our discord! it's a super fun and chill place and I sometimes send sneak peaks of upcoming chapters :) <https://discord.gg/RFXqgK4CRN>

please let me know down in the comments if you enjoyed! they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees (feel free to shoot me an ask or dm to scream at me about this chapter I find it funny)

hot chocolate

Chapter Summary

After his fight with his roommates, Tommy tries to take some time to recover at Wilbur's.

Chapter Notes

sup party peeps I'm eating breakfast rn WOOHOO but also I can't make over easy eggs without breaking the yolk to save my life please if anyone has any tips i'm desperate (btw tho, a really good and quick breakfast you can make is white rice with over easy eggs on top and a bit of soy sauce (maybe some furikake if you wanna season the rice) it's really good and filling highly recommend)

ok anyway ty all so much for all the comments on the last chapter, we had an INSANE amount of comments which tbh is to be expected after the drama lol, but ty so much for them I had so much fun reading all of them. love you guys sorry to put you through pain <3

anyway TWs for this chapter: graphic descriptions of a head injury

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

Sure enough, when Tommy arrived at Wilbur's house, there were two steaming mugs of hot chocolate waiting for them on the kitchen counter.

Tommy didn't need to say much, and for that he was so unbelievably grateful. Techno only said a brief 'hullo' to him as he rinsed out the pot he'd used to make the hot chocolate, before leaving him and Wilbur alone as he disappeared up the stairs. Wilbur didn't push him to talk either, just shoved the mug in Tommy's hands before he started to rummage through the kitchen cabinets, asking Tommy if he'd gotten the chance to eat dinner.

The hot chocolate was rich and warm, and although there was still a hollow aching in his chest, it made it feel like the hole was filled for just a moment. Although Tommy hadn't actually gotten a chance to eat dinner, he told Wilbur he had, simply because he knew he wasn't going to be able to stomach anything more than the sweet drink tonight.

He let the hot chocolate work its way through him as he rested his fingers against the granite counters, watching Wilbur flit around the kitchen, buzzing with nervous energy. It was clear that he was worried about Tommy, but didn't want to push him to talk if he didn't want to.

In the end, despite telling Wilbur that he'd eaten dinner, he still ended up with a slice of peanut butter toast sitting in front of him.

"I told you I ate," Tommy said, his fingers still clutching the hot chocolate mug as tightly as he could. Although his tears had stopped long ago, his voice was rough, and he winced at the sound.

"Yeah, you said you ate before your shift. Normally you eat again after your shift, which I know you didn't this time because that's when you had your fight, so you need something to tie you over," Wilbur explained, resting his elbows on the counter in front of him.

Dammit. Damn Wilbur and his annoying tendency to actually pay attention to all the rambling nonsense that falls out of Tommy's mouth.

"I'm not hungry," Tommy mumbled, pushing the plate away.

Wilbur frowned and pushed the plate back towards him. "You don't have to eat all of it. Just a few bites. It'll make you feel better, I promise."

"How do you know?" Tommy asked, voice growing sharper as frustration flared inside him.

"Because in all the time we've been friends, this is the first time I've ever seen you turn down food," Wilbur said, not reacting to the bite in his words. "Just a few bites, that's all I'm asking for."

Tommy glared at Wilbur, but he knew the silent protest wasn't going to work. Wilbur could be a stubborn bitch when he wanted to, and clearly this was going to be one of those times.

Flipping him off with one hand, Tommy lifted up the toast with the other and took a small bite from the corner.

The peanut butter was sweet but not too sweet, pairing nicely with the nuts and seeds in the bread itself. As soon as he swallowed the first bite, his stomach seemed to wake up all at once, as if suddenly remembering how little food he'd had that day. Next thing he knew, he'd eaten the entire piece of toast, and Wilbur was giving him a knowing smirk.

"Fuck off," Tommy grumbled, pushing the crumb-covered plate back towards him.

"Thank you," Wilbur replied, taking the plate and rinsing it off in the sink.

As loath as Tommy was to admit it, he did actually feel a bit better after eating the toast. His head still ached from his crying, and there was still a painful seize in his chest every time he remembered the betrayal in Tubbo's eyes as they screamed at each other, but the gnawing anxiety in his gut had lessened.

"You done with that?" Wilbur asked, pointing to the hot chocolate mug still in Tommy's hands. Glancing down, Tommy realized the cup was empty, and nodded. "Alright, I'll clean it out later," Wilbur said, taking the mug from him and putting it in the sink. "Let's go upstairs so you can get settled in the guest room."

Tommy followed Wilbur up the many flights of stairs to the third floor, and instead of opening the door to his own room like he usually did when Tommy came over, this time Wilbur opened the door to the room across from his own.

The room itself was a similar size to Wilbur's, if possibly a bit smaller. There was a double bed settled next to the window with plain white blankets, along with a dresser and a desk. Unlike Wilbur's room, the guest room was perfectly clean, with no clothes scattered anywhere and walls that were bare of any peeling posters.

Wilbur left Tommy alone in the room as he went to his own bedroom to grab some clothes for Tommy to borrow, and Tommy took the opportunity to drop his backpack on the floor before collapsing onto the bed.

It was a large bed. Much larger than the one they had back home. In fact, Tommy was pretty sure Ranboo might even be able to completely fit on this bed instead of having his feet hang off. Hell, they could probably fit all three of them on this thing and no one would even end up on the floor in the morning. Maybe one day Tommy could bring Tubbo and Ranboo-

He cut that thought off before it could fully form. Right now, it would be a miracle if Tommy got the opportunity to even stay in his own apartment again. For all he knew, Tubbo and Ranboo could be throwing his stuff out the window right now.

...no. They wouldn't do that. Even though this was one of the worst fights they ever had, Tommy had to be honest with himself. No matter how pissed they were at each other, they would never kick Tommy out.

As if on cue, there was a buzzing from Tommy's phone, and he clenched his jaw as he pulled it out of his pocket.

Tubbo: where are u

Tubbo: we just got back and ur not here

Great. Yeah, of course they were going to want to know where Tommy was. After all, they'd been under the assumption Tommy was going to go back to the apartment, and they would resume their screaming match in the comfort of their own home.

Tommy: fuck off

Tommy: I'm staying at Wil's tonight

Tommy watched the three dots appear after his text was sent, only to disappear as Tubbo stopped typing his response. The dots reappeared and disappeared a few more times, until finally Tubbo sent a reply.

Tubbo: fine.

Yeah, okay, he should've expected that.

Sighing, Tommy tossed his phone back onto the bed right as Wilbur re-entered the room. Without waiting for acknowledgement, Wilbur dropped a pile of fabric onto Tommy's lap, and Tommy quickly realized it was a sweater and sweatpants.

"They might be a bit big on you, but they'll work for pajamas," Wilbur explained.

Tommy scoffed. "You're not that much taller than me, bitch."

"I am too," Wilbur shot back, smirking at him.

Usually, a joke like that would fire Tommy up. It would egg him on, make him want to yell and curse Wilbur out while trying to prove how much of a Big Man he was. But even with a full stomach and the warmth from the hot chocolate chasing away the chill in his bones, he couldn't bring himself to summon up the energy for that.

Wilbur seemed to realize this at the same moment Tommy did, because his smile faded, and he slowly sat down on the edge of the bed next to Tommy. "You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. But I'm here to listen if you need it," he offered gently.

Tommy winced, digging his nails into his palm. Surprisingly, a part of him *wanted* to talk to Wilbur about what was going on. He felt like everything he'd known had been yanked out from underneath his feet, and he was spiraling to try and find something solid to hold onto. He wanted to ask Wilbur for his advice, to listen to his calming voice reassure him that everything was going to be okay.

But he couldn't betray Tubbo and Ranboo like that. Even if they lied to him, even if they didn't trust him anymore, he wasn't going to give up their identities to anyone.

"I... I can't talk about it," Tommy whispered, staring at his hands in his lap.

"That's okay," Wilbur reassured, nudging Tommy's shoulder with his own. "I know it seems like the end of the world right now, but I'm sure there's gonna be a day in the future where you're gonna look back at this fight and laugh at how dumb the three of you were."

Tommy wanted to believe him. He really did. But this was so much more than any of the other dumb fights he'd had with his two best friends before. They were dealing with serious shit, life and death situations. Tommy doubted this kind of betrayal was something that he'd ever be able to laugh about.

His anxious thoughts made the ache in his chest come back tenfold. He wanted to apologize. He wanted to scream. He wanted to tell his two best friends over and over again how badly they hurt him until his voice went hoarse. He wanted a hug.

Tommy pulled Wilbur into a bone-crushing hug without warning, the older man grunting in surprise, but not trying to pull away. Tommy buried his face in Wilbur's shoulder, squeezing his eyes shut with the vain hope that maybe, just maybe, he could hide away from the rest of the world and all his problems. At least for tonight.

Warm arms wrapped around his back, pulling him closer as Tommy took a shaky breath. A hand came up to card through Tommy's hair, and stuttering heartbeat began to slow.

"I just- I didn't think I could fuck up this badly," he admitted, his muffled voice cracking from where his face was pressed against Wilbur's sweater. "It was- It was supposed to be the three of us against the world. I never thought they'd take me out of that."

"I know it hurts," Wilbur whispered, fingers working to gently untangle a knot in Tommy's hair. "But broken trust can be repaired. It can take a while, but when it comes to family, you can always make an effort to glue back together what's been shattered."

Tommy nodded into Wilbur's shoulder. He had to believe that. That things weren't completely fucked between him and the only two people he'd ever considered family. That things would be okay.

That night, Tommy's sleep was restless. Although his bed was more than comfortable, it felt far too empty without either Tubbo or Ranboo to share it with. He tossed and turned until the curtains turned grey in the morning light. Tommy wondered if Tubbo and Ranboo were having the same problems.

As the sun rose higher in the sky, Tommy's boredom rose as well. Although it was still hours before the time he usually got up for the day, considering he couldn't sleep, there wasn't much point in staying in bed.

Tommy crept out of the guest room, watching his footsteps to make sure he didn't wake Wilbur in his own room. Then, he padded down the stairs as softly as he could, sighing in relief when he finally reached the first floor.

His eyes were half-lidded as he trudged to the kitchen, struggling to remember if Wilbur had ever told him how to work the damn coffee machine.

Turns out, he didn't need to remember.

"Hey mate, you're up early."

Tommy jumped at the voice, his shoulders dropping when he met Phil's pale blue gaze.

"Shit, you scared me," Tommy muttered, wrapping his arms around himself and leaning against the counter.

The clothes Wilbur had given him to sleep in were, in fact, too big. The blue sweater Tommy wore covered his hands when he didn't push up the sleeves, and his feet were completely swallowed by the fabric of the sweatpants. Still, the clothes were soft, and when he folded his arms in front of his chest he was impossibly warm.

"Sorry, usually I'm the only one up at this hour," Phil told him, giving him an apologetic smile. "Do you want some coffee? I just brewed a pot."

Oh thank fucking god.

“Yes please,” Tommy immediately replied.

He must’ve looked desperate, because Phil chuckled.

“I shouldn’t be surprised that you would look like you’d die without caffeine since you work at a coffee shop,” he said as he took a mug out of the cabinet, before pouring some of the coffee from the pot into it. Steam curled from the top, and Phil pushed it over to Tommy. “You take it with cream and sugar?”

“Both please.”

A few minutes later, Tommy was sitting at the kitchen counter with his coffee cup in hand. Phil was leaning against the opposite counter, sipping at his own drink and occasionally glancing out the window above the sink. Outside, Tommy could see shades of orange and pink streaking across the sky.

“You know, Wil’s really happy you asked to stay here,” Phil said out of the blue after minutes of silence.

Tommy blinked. “What do you mean?”

“He just was glad that you thought to call him when you needed someone. He’s a bit of a sap like that,” the older man chuckled. “I know it doesn’t seem like it, but he can get pretty insecure about his relationships with people sometimes. It’s kind of why he’s such a clingy shit. It’s reassuring for him.”

Wilbur? Insecure? The two ideas didn’t seem like they could coexist in Tommy’s head. Wilbur was the opposite of insecure. He was able to talk to people so easily, even able to coax Tommy out from just a relationship built on banter and teasing into an actual friendship.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, seriously.” He set his mug down and smiled at Tommy. “I just figured it’s something you should know. If he starts ever being pissy or looks stressed, just remind him how much you care about him. It helps him a lot.”

Oh. Phil was telling him this because he wanted to help Tommy be a better friend to Wilbur. That made sense, and Tommy was surprisingly grateful for that.

“Okay, I think I get it,” Tommy murmured, taking another sip of his coffee. “Thank you.”

“You’re a good kid, Tommy,” Phil said, the emerald in his ear glittering as it caught a ray of sunlight from the window. “If you ever need a break from Wil’s clinginess though, you’re welcome to come find me in my office. I know we haven’t spoken as much as you’ve spoken to Wil and Tech, but I’d like to think I’m not too bad to hang out with.”

Staring down into the swirling shades of almond in his cup, Tommy tried to ignore the lump in his throat. Phil was being so kind to him. Wilbur had already been so unbelievably caring towards him. This family... they were good people.

What would they think if they knew that Tommy saved the lives of murderers? Would they agree that even villains deserved medical treatment? Or would they react like Tubbo and Ranboo, only seeing things in shades of black and white?

Tommy wanted to think it was the earlier one. But after Tubbo and Ranboo, he didn't trust his judgement of what people might think.

"Thanks," Tommy said quietly. Although he wasn't sure if he'd ever actually work up enough courage to knock on Phil's office door, he still appreciated the offer anyway.

The rest of the morning passed by in a soft kind of tranquility. Phil made pancakes for breakfast, adding in an extra heaping of chocolate chips for Tommy's sake. While Tommy was in the middle of eating his second pancake, Techno made his way into the kitchen, looking as though he'd been awake for hours. In contrast, when Tommy was finishing his fourth pancake, Wilbur shuffled in looking as though he'd just come off the set of a zombie movie. It turned out that Wilbur couldn't function in the morning without caffeine, and now it was starting to make sense why he usually had so many shots of espresso in his lattes.

The conversation over the breakfast table was kept light, without anyone questioning why Tommy was there. Wilbur must've told Phil and Techno not to ask Tommy about it, and while he was grateful for that, it was also a bit annoying to feel like he was being treated as if he were made of glass.

Then again, he was made of glass, wasn't he? At least right now. Everything still felt so raw after the night before, and Tommy couldn't help but check his phone every few minutes on the off chance one of his roommates tried to text him, although neither of them did.

After breakfast, Wilbur dragged Tommy to the living room where they both collapsed into a heap on the couch. Wilbur turned on another animated movie, this one about a teenage witch who had to go live on her own for a year. There was one part in particular where the girl stopped being able to do magic, and it wasn't until she took pressure off herself and spent time with the people that cared about her that her magic returned.

Did Tommy side eye Wilbur when that part came up? Yes. Did Wilbur acknowledge it? No. But Tommy had no doubt the bastard knew what he was doing with the movie choice. Although it didn't exactly apply to his own situation, it was close enough to where Tommy got the message anyway.

The day trickled by like sand through an hourglass. He and Wilbur didn't speak much, except to comment on the things they were watching together. It was honestly really nice to just spend a day lounging on the couch, letting his worries drift instead of leaving them to fester at the forefront of his mind.

However, Tommy still had work. When the time came for Tommy to leave for his shift, Wilbur gave him his own clothes back (apparently Phil had washed them), and offered to give him a ride to the cafe.

"I don't think I want to have another near death experience with you behind the wheel," Tommy teased, dumping Wilbur's pajamas onto the guest bed after having changed back into

his own.

“Aw c’mon, I wasn’t that bad!” Wilbur argued.

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “You hit, like, three curbs. I’m honestly amazed we didn’t pop a tire.”

“God, you’re so dramatic. You sound exactly like Techno,” Wilbur scoffed, pouting at him.

“Because we both know you can’t drive for shit,” Tommy shot back, grinning at him.

“Seriously though, it’s fine. I can take the train no problem.”

Wilbur sighed. “Okay. If you’re sure you’re alright with that.”

“I’m not a baby, Wilbur. I can take the train by myself,” Tommy told him, although there was no heat behind the words. “Besides, you’ve done more than enough to help me out.”

This made Wilbur’s eyebrows furrow. “Toms, I was happy to let you come over, and I was really glad you thought to call me in the first place. Don’t feel like I’m doing you a favor or anything. I want to help you.”

Biting his lip, Tommy glanced at the ground. Sure, Wilbur was probably telling the truth, but Tommy couldn’t help but feel like a burden. Wilbur had picked him up from the cafe in the middle of the night, made him dinner, gave him extra clothes, and spent the entire next day with him just because he was upset. Even if Wilbur didn’t seem to think so, he was still doing Tommy a huge favor, and Tommy didn’t want to be more of a bother than he already was.

“I should really get going,” Tommy said instead of addressing what Wilbur told him. “But thank you, Wil. For everything.”

Wilbur looked like he wanted to argue, but Tommy stepped forward to hug him before he got the chance. Wilbur immediately returned the hug, squeezing him tightly and lessening the pain in Tommy’s chest.

“I’ll see you soon, okay?” Wilbur said, smiling hopefully at him.

“Yeah, sounds good,” Tommy replied, giving Wil his own weak smile in return.

It actually wasn’t that difficult to take the train back over to Eastside so he could get to his shift on time. There was a station near the Soot house, and despite the afternoon rush stifling the air and making it difficult to breathe, it was a relatively peaceful commute.

Falling back into the routine of his evening shift was comforting for Tommy. He was able to shut his mind off, to not think about what was waiting for him when he went home after the cafe closed, and instead focus on grinding beans and steeping tea.

Wilbur didn’t stop by that night, which was understandable given Tommy had spent the entire day with the man. Still, he found himself jumping every time the door chimed with a new customer, his heart skipping a beat as he wondered who he was going to see walk in.

Tubbo and Ranboo had been to the cafe before, but it was a rare occurrence. Tommy didn't think either of them would show up during his shift, but he couldn't help his nerves, his eyes skimming the windows outside the cafe for any glimpse of bleached or black and white hair.

As night fell, the rush slowed, and Tommy checked his phone more and more often. He wasn't sure if he wanted his roommates to text him, or if he was dreading the idea. As much as he hated this waiting game of wondering how their confrontation was going to go, he also was terrified of what was actually going to be said when it happened. He had no idea whether they were going to be able to work things out between them, or if it was going to lead to another screaming match.

In all honesty, Tommy wasn't sure if he was ready to even think about forgiving the two of them. Even if they did apologize, which he doubted they would, it wouldn't be something he could accept right away. Along with that, he wasn't ready to apologize either. While he knew he shouldn't have lied to his friends, he also wasn't completely in the wrong, and had good reasoning for what he did. If Tubbo and Ranboo were expecting an apology from him, well, they might be waiting a while on that.

His shift came to an end without much fanfare, and the dread that had been curling in Tommy's gut with every passing hour grasped him by the throat. There was no more putting it off now. He had to go home.

Maybe he went through the closing routine a bit slower than usual, but no one could prove it. And maybe as he started the walk home he dragged his feet a bit more than necessary, but no one was around to call him out on it.

The night air was cool against his flushed cheeks, and he took deep breaths to calm his racing heart as he got closer and closer to his apartment building. Anxiety fluttered in his stomach, and when he took a deep breath to steady himself, he was hit with the sour stench of burnt rubber from the road. Ah, city living.

Tommy was almost halfway back to his apartment when a shrill alert rang out from his phone.

Nearly jumping out of his skin, Tommy stopped dead in his tracks and pulled out his cell phone to see what was going on. There was an emergency alert blaring across his screen, and as soon as Tommy read what it was, he felt his mouth go dry.

Safety Alert: Heroes Dream, Flame, and Rewind currently engaged with Siren, Blade, and Nemesis in the Warehouse District of South Bay. Avoid the area if possible. Collateral damage to be expected.

There was a button below the alert reporting live news footage, and Tommy tapped on it immediately. It took a second for his phone to load the video, but as soon as it did, his eyes went wide.

A news helicopter seemed to be circling a warehouse roof, where six figures were all engaged in different kinds of battle. Blade was battling Dream, the villain expertly matching the blows of the three floating swords Dream was using to attack him. Siren was fighting

Rewind, the time-manipulating hero dodging every single blow Siren tried to use on him, and covering his ears before Siren could even get a single charm spoken word out.

And then there was Nemesis. She had Flame pinned against what looked like some kind of water tower on the roof, but she wasn't pinning him physically. It was clear he couldn't move, but Nemesis was standing a few feet away, holding her hands out in front of her like she did when she was manipulating water.

Nemesis lifted one arm, and Flame's arm lifted in mirror to it. Then, she lifted her other arm, and Flame's arm did the same. Bile rose in Tommy's throat as he thought of how reminiscent it was of a puppet being pulled on by invisible strings.

She was using her blood control again.

Holy shit.

Rewind seemed to realize what was happening, because he tried to sprint over to the corner of the roof Nemesis and Flame were at. But he wasn't able to take two steps before Siren physically tackled him to the ground, and the two started to wrestle to try and pin the other down.

Nemesis didn't even seem to notice the attempted attack. Her icy gaze was focused on Flame, and as she reached up her hand again, Tommy noticed her hand begin to curl in, as if it was wrapping around a throat.

Flame coughed, trying to grab at his throat but struggling to move his arms. Nemesis didn't falter, her hand curling in further and further as she (presumably) compressed the blood flow around his neck.

Nemesis was so focused on Flame though that she didn't notice Dream until it was too late.

Tommy let out a horrified gasp as Dream tackled her from the side, slamming her into a wall with a force that left a dent in the brick. Flame collapsed to the ground, unconscious, and when the camera turned back to Dream, he could see he was now pinning Nemesis to the wall with his powers, and then-

The camera cut off. The screen went black, before switching back to a news reporter who apologized but said that their news crew had been warned to get out of the area as it was too dangerous for them to continue filming.

That was fucking bullshit. The Hero Committee was fine with letting everyone watch as Nemesis attacked Flame, but didn't want anyone to see Dream take her down in return.

Either way, Tommy knew he needed to get back to the cafe as soon as possible.

He sprinted back down the way he came, his backpack thumping against his back with every step. His heart pounded in his ears, the only thought repeating through his mind being the constant *I need to help Nemesis I need to help Nemesis I need to-*

His legs were burning by the time he skidded to a stop in front of the cafe doors. With trembling hands he undid the lock, sprinting inside and practically jumping over the counter to get to the back room.

Chuckling his backpack on the floor, Tommy raced around the room to set up his treatment area. Towels on the floor, first aid kit propped open next to it, gauze already out in case there was heavy bleeding—Tommy prepped whatever he could think of.

There was a ringing in his pocket, and Tommy answered it without even looking at the name.

“Tommy, we need-”

“I saw it on the news, I’m already here,” Tommy said, cutting Siren off. “How far away are you?”

“We’re here, actually.”

And right then, there was a sharp knock at the door to the alley. Hanging up the phone, Tommy flung the door open, and almost stumbled back at the sight that greeted him.

Siren and Blade seemed relatively fine, save for a few tears in their clothes. But Nemesis...

Blade was carrying her. She seemed to be unconscious, and was curled up against Blade’s chest. Her cotton candy hair was sticky with blood, and her mouth was hanging open while her arms hung limp at her sides. It was such a stark contrast to the determined line her mouth had been set in on the news footage, the fierce rage darkening her eyes.

Shit. Okay. No time to panic, he was the healer here.

“Set her down here,” Tommy said, immediately shifting into focus mode and pointing at the towels. “What happened exactly? The news footage cut off as soon as Dream pinned her to the wall.”

“That fucking bastard slammed her into that wall as many times as he could before Blade tackled him,” Siren told him with a sneer twisting his lips, watching as Blade set Nemesis down with surprising gentleness.

“She’s bleeding a lot from her head,” Blade said, shifting Nemesis so she was laying sideways on the towels. “Do your healing powers work on head injuries?”

“I’m gonna be honest, I have no idea,” Tommy said as he dropped to his knees next to Nemesis, using one hand to carefully try and find the injury under her hair. “I’ve never had to heal a head wound before, so I guess we’ll find out together.”

Yeah, there was a lot of blood coming from her skull. Although it was hard to see with all the hair and blood in the way, Tommy was pretty sure he could see cracked bone, and had to clench his jaw to shove down the nausea that rose in his throat.

As he moved her head around to try and find the place to put his hands, he noticed a small, black earpiece settled in her ear, and he could faintly hear a voice coming from it.

Tommy lifted the earpiece and settled it in his own ear, and immediately winced when he heard shouting.

“Hello! Niki! Are you there?! Can you hear me?!”

It was Thanatos. Tommy remembered how Nemesis mentioned that he wasn't going to be in the field for a little while to continue recovering, but figured he must've been listening to the whole fight. Tommy was so focused on Nemesis that he didn't even register the name Thanatos had said.

“Thanatos?” Tommy spoke into the earpiece. “It's Tommy.”

The shouting cut off, and was quickly followed by a deep sigh of relief.

“Oh thank fucking god!” Thanatos exclaimed. “Jesus fucking christ, Nemesis wasn't responding to me and I had no clue what the fuck was happening. Is she okay?”

“She's unconscious right now, but I'm about to heal her,” Tommy explained, moving aside more of her hair so he could get a clear view of the wound. Meanwhile, Siren and Blade had both settled on the ground on either side of Nemesis, both of them pursing their lips in worry. “I've never healed head wounds before though, so I'm not sure how this is gonna go.”

“Well it's gonna be better than nothing, right?” Thanatos asked, although his voice was shaky. “Just, uh, just do it. Don't waste anymore time.”

“Yeah, got it,” Tommy nodded.

He looked down at the wound, trying to figure out where to place his fingers so he'd be keeping everything in place. Then, as gently as he could, he closed his eyes, and let the energy seep out of him.

Immediately, he was hit with a shocking wave of dizziness. Gritting his teeth, he tried to ignore it and kept pushing the warmth out of his hands. Seconds ticked on, and a headache started to pound in its familiar rhythm. His head began to spin, and nausea rose up his throat. Fuck, this wasn't as bad as when he had to heal Iceman, but it really sucked.

Finally, when Tommy could feel himself starting to tip to the side, he pulled his hands away. He pushed himself away from Nemesis' side, taking deep breaths as he swayed in place, sweat beading across his forehead as he struggled to steady himself.

There was an arm around his shoulders to steady him. “I got you,” Siren said quietly, and Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as he leaned into the hold. His ears were ringing now, and Tommy had the urge to run to the sink and throw up like he had the last time he healed Iceman.

Still, he forced himself to sit in place. Thanatos was quiet in his ear, giving Tommy a moment to recuperate.

Finally, after a few moments, Tommy was able to open his eyes again. He still felt nauseous as fuck, and there was still sweat pooling on the back of his neck, but the world wasn't

spinning as much as it had been.

Glancing down at Nemesis, he could see that the fracture in her skull had smoothed out completely. There were still some scar lines, but for the most part, it seemed as though it had been healed.

And yet... Nemesis' eyes remained shut.

"What's going on?" Thanatos asked when Tommy was silent. "Is she awake yet?"

"I-um, her head wound is healed," Tommy mumbled, blinking as he tried to focus on Nemesis' face. "But she's not waking up."

"What the- why isn't she waking up?!"

"I don't know," Tommy admitted, anxiety curling around his gut as he stared at Nemesis' sleeping face. "She's breathing but she hasn't opened her eyes."

"We should try to wake her up, in case she has a concussion," Blade said, reaching out to rest a hand on her shoulder. "Nemesis, you gotta get up. I know you probably feel terrible, but you can't sleep right now."

Nemesis didn't react.

"Nemesis?" Tommy tried, reaching down to squeeze her hand. "Can you hear us?"

"*Nemesis, get up,*" Siren tried, his voice echoing with his charm speak.

There was no response.

"Shit, she's definitely unconscious because if she heard that she would've gotten up," Siren said, dropping his arm from Tommy's shoulders.

"Tommy, Tommy what's happening?" Thanatos asked, his voice now edged with panic. "C'mon keep me updated! Is she awake yet? Is Niki awake?"

Tommy frowned. "Niki?" He questioned, making Siren and Blade's heads whip towards him. That was the name Thanatos had said a few minutes earlier, when Tommy had first put the earpiece in.

There was a beat of silence from the other end of the earpiece.

"Ah fucking hell," Thanatos muttered. "Fuck it, we trust you. Her name is Niki, maybe if you say that it'll help her wake up."

Tommy's heart stuttered at that. Thanatos had just given Tommy Nemesis' name. *He knew Nemesis' name.*

Holy shit. So far none of the villains had given Tommy any identifying information about themselves, despite repeatedly telling him how much they trusted him. Tommy didn't mind

this, he knew it was more to protect him than it was for them to protect themselves. But still, hearing Thanatos say that it was fine that he knew Nemesis' name because they trusted him... well, it made something warm grow in his chest.

Either way, now wasn't the time to focus on that.

"Niki?" Tommy tried, his tongue tripping over the new name. "Niki, can you hear us?"

For a moment, there was still nothing. And then, there was a fluttering behind her eyelids, and Tommy almost cheered.

"Yeah Niki! That's it! Come on, you gotta wake up," Tommy encouraged, squeezing her hand again.

"Niki, c'mon, come back to us," Blade said, still resting his hand on her shoulder.

There was more fluttering, and Tommy turned to give Siren an expectant look.

"*Niki, wake up,*" Siren ordered.

And just like that, Nemesis' eyes were flying open. Gasping, she bolted upright, only to hiss in pain and grab her head. Immediately, Blade wrapped his arm around her to steady her, and she leaned into his side without hesitation.

"Fucking hell," she exclaimed, squeezing her eyes shut as she grabbed her head. "Why does my head feel like it got smashed with a hammer?"

"It was Dream. He tackled you when you were fighting Flame," Siren explained.

"Shit, uh, I think I remember that," Nemesis murmured. Then, she winced. "Yeah, I do. *Fuck, that hurt.*"

"Is that her?!" Thanatos asked in Tommy's ear.

"Yeah, that's her," Tommy said, drawing Nemesis' attention to him.

Nemesis blinked a few times, as if she was struggling to focus. "Tommy? Did you heal me?"

"I did, yeah," Tommy nodded, ignoring how another wave of dizziness washed over him at the gesture. "I've also been talking to Thanatos. Here, you should probably calm him down," he said, pulling out the earpiece to hand back to her.

Nemesis' eyes widened at the mention of her partner, and she shoved the earpiece in her ear in an almost violent manner. "Thanatos? Are you there?" She paused as she listened to whatever he was saying, and then a relieved smile broke out over her face. "Oh god, I'm so sorry I scared you like that." She giggled softly. "Yeah, I promise I'm not gonna do anything stupid like that again." Another pause, and then her eyes widened. "Wait, you told him my name?"

Tommy shrunk back as Nemesis whipped her head back towards him, although the movement made her wince. To his surprise, there was no anger in her eyes as she stared at him. More than anything, she just seemed confused.

“You know my name?” She asked carefully.

“Um, yeah, sorry Niki,” Tommy said quietly, wrapping his arms around himself. “Of course I’m not going to say anything or tell anyone-”

“Don’t worry about that,” Nemesis said, shaking her head. “I trust you, Tommy. You saved my life after all.”

Tommy flushed at how genuine she sounded, and his cheeks only burned worse when she reached out to wrap his hand in her own.

“Seriously, I don’t have a problem with you knowing my name. I trust you,” she told him softly. “And thank you for saving me.”

“You guys really don’t need to thank me every time,” Tommy muttered, curling in on himself.

“But we want you to know how grateful we are,” Nemesis explained. She paused then, a hand going up to her earpiece. “Thanatos also says thank you.”

“Like I said, I’m just doing my job,” Tommy shrugged.

Nemesis smiled at him, squeezing his hand one last time before pulling back and glancing at the Blade. “Blade, do you think you can help me get home? I still feel pretty dizzy.”

“Yeah, of course,” Blade said, huffing as he pushed to his feet. He bent down and scooped Nemesis up in his arms again without any sign of effort, and nodded at Siren and Tommy. “I’ll see you guys later.”

“Bye Blade, bye Nemesis,” Tommy waved.

Nemesis waved goodbye to him, and Tommy watched as Blade easily shifted Nemesis to one arm to open the door to the back alley. Then, they both disappeared into the shadows, and the door slammed shut behind them.

As soon as the two of them were gone, Tommy’s fatigue returned in full force. He slumped down, his head pounding as the nausea that had been stirring in his gut demanded his attention once more. Looked like tonight was going to be a recovery night.

“I need to clean up,” Tommy muttered, glancing at Siren before pushing himself to his feet.

Or, he tried to push himself to his feet.

As soon as he attempted to stand, his vision began to spin, and he found himself tipping heavily to the side. Siren was there in a second, wrapping his arms around Tommy to hold

him upright. Tommy leaned against Siren's chest, taking a few deep breaths as he tried to shove the nausea back down again.

"Are you okay?" Siren asked, his voice thick with worry.

"I'm... I'm okay," Tommy forced out. "I just need to, uh—" There was another roil in his gut, and suddenly Tommy was stumbling towards the sink. Like Nemesis did last time, Siren gently rubbed his back as he puked into the sink. As he was spitting out the last few bits, Siren handed him a glass of water, which he drank with the fervor of a man in a desert.

Once he was done, Tommy slumped against the edge of the sink, and let out a pained whine. "I hate when that happens," he mumbled, his eyes fluttering shut.

"Does that happen often? You throwing up after healing someone?" Siren asked.

Tommy shook his head. "No, it's mostly just for bad injuries. Or I think in Nemesis' case, it was a head injury so it made me dizzy, which fucked up my stomach." He had begun to notice that depending on the injury, the side effects of his healing would be slightly different. Like for Iceman's burns, Tommy's hands had been painfully hot. For Jester's broken bone, Tommy had been extremely sore. Now it seemed that with Nemesis' head wound, Tommy was going to be dizzy as hell for the next day or so.

Siren nodded. "I'll help walk you home then."

At the mention of home, Tommy froze. He couldn't go back to his apartment like this. Barely able to walk, fatigued out of his mind and on the verge of throwing up? Tubbo and Ranboo would know exactly what he had done, and he *really* did not have the energy to try and hash out that conversation, even though he knew he shouldn't put it off.

In fact, just the very thought of going back and continuing that argument right now kind of made Tommy want to cry. He felt like shit, and the only thing he wanted to do was curl up in a bunch of blankets and not poke his head out till morning.

"I-I can't go home," Tommy stammered, blinking fast as the exhaustion started to weigh down his thoughts. "My roommates—we're fighting and I don't- I can't deal with them right now. Not like this."

"Hey, hey calm down," Siren said, his voice going soft. "Don't worry, you don't have to go back there if you don't want to. But I want to make sure you're somewhere safe, with people you trust that you know will take care of you. Is there somewhere like that I can take you?"

Tommy clenched his jaw as Wilbur's face appeared in his mind. He had already taken advantage of his kindness so much in just the last twenty four hours, he hated the idea of coming right back to him, this time sick out of his mind and asking for help. But he trusted Wilbur. He knew the man wouldn't ask him any questions he couldn't answer, and Tommy also knew he was *safe* there. Safe with hot chocolate and warm sweaters and Wilbur's arm thrown around his shoulders.

"There... there's a place I think I can go," Tommy whispered, staring at his hands.

“Where is it? Will there be someone who can take care of you?” Siren asked, squeezing his shoulder.

Tommy nodded. “His name’s Wilbur. But I just stayed at his place last night, and I’d feel bad asking to stay there again, especially now that I’m all sick and shit.”

There was a beat of silence from Siren, and Tommy glanced up to see the villain giving him a strange look.

But then, the moment passed as quickly as it had appeared, and Siren shook his head before speaking again.

“I doubt that, uh, Wilbur would mind having you stay there again. Especially since you’re sick,” Siren reassured. “Do you trust him? Is he, um, a good friend to you?”

That was an easy question at least. “Yeah, I trust him. He’s one of my best friends.” He smiled to himself for just a moment. “I don’t think he’d protest if I asked to stay with him again, he’s way too fucking nice for that. I just don’t want to be taking advantage of him.”

“Tommy, I doubt he thinks of it as you taking advantage of him,” Siren told him. “In fact, he’d probably be happy that you trusted him enough to come to him.”

Tommy thought back to earlier that morning, when Phil had told him Wilbur was really happy Tommy came over. Wilbur needed that reassurance that Tommy trusted him, that Tommy knew he could come to Wilbur when he needed help.

Plus, it wasn’t like he could go back to his apartment tonight, and there really was no other option besides Wilbur.

“Okay,” Tommy finally agreed after a few beats. “I’ll go to his place.”

Siren beamed. “Alright. Let me clean this up for you and then we can head out.”

Tommy frowned. “Wait, I can clean up myself!”

“Shush child, you need to rest so just sit down and wait.”

Although Tommy didn’t like being ordered around like a child, he had to admit, standing was already difficult enough as it was. The idea of moving around the backroom to clean up the towels and gauze sounded unbelievably exhausting.

So with a scowl on his face, Tommy watched as Siren put the towels where Tommy told him to, and threw out the bloody gauze, making sure to hide it under the other trash in the bin. Then, he wiped down the floor like Tommy normally did to make sure there were no blood stains he missed, all without a single word of complaint.

Then, the two of them headed out. When Tommy’s hands were shaking too badly to lock the door, Siren did it for him. At first, Tommy tried to walk down the street towards the train, but after stumbling a few times, Siren picked him up in his arms, ignoring Tommy’s cursing protests. At one point, Siren also handed Tommy a red bandana to tie around the lower half of

his face, just in case anyone decided to take pictures of the local supervillain sighting. It wasn't the best disguise, but it would do the trick for the time being.

The train ride to South Bay was surprisingly uneventful, given that there was a supervillain carrying a teenager as if it was the most normal thing in the world. Unlike in the McDonald's so long ago when the sight of Siren filled the cashier and patrons with fear, the few other subway passengers taking the train this late at night couldn't seem to care less. Sure, there were a few double takes, but no one seemed to want to fuck with their ride home by bothering the local supervillain.

Sitting in the hard plastic seating of the train, Tommy slumped against Siren's side, hiding his face in the man's dark jacket to try and shield himself from the harsh, fluorescent lights of the subway. Siren didn't seem to mind this, looping an arm over his shoulders to pull him closer and help him hide his face even more.

Once they were off the train, Siren carried him all the way to the row of brownstones that the Soot family house was settled at. However, before they got close to the house, Siren put him down.

"This is as far as I can go," Siren said, an apology laced in his tone. "We don't wanna risk Wilbur seeing you with me, now would we?"

Tommy stumbled a bit as another wave of dizziness washed over him, but quickly gained his footing. "Don't worry about it, Big Man. I got it from here."

"Alright," Siren said, ruffling his hair with a gloved hand. "Remember, I'm always just a text away if you need me."

Snorting, Tommy lightly slapped Siren's hand away. "Yes yes, I know. Now go fuck off back to your evil lair."

Grinning at Tommy, Siren nodded once before turning on his heel and disappearing around the corner of the street. Tommy waited a few seconds to make sure he was steady on his legs, before he turned and made his way down the sidewalk, watching the numbers on the houses for the one that matched the Soot house.

It wasn't that far of a walk thankfully. Tommy stumbled up the steps, already feeling embarrassment burn his cheeks as he steadied himself in front of the door. Shit. Despite Siren's reassurance, he still felt bad about coming back here so soon. A part of him wanted to turn around right now and take the train back to Eastside. Maybe he could sleep in the cafe. He's sure Puffy wouldn't mind-

No. Tommy was being stupid. Wilbur would probably call him a dumbass if he knew Tommy was getting so worked up about this. He needed to stop getting embarrassed and learn how to ask for help.

So, gritting his teeth, Tommy lifted a hand and knocked on the door.

For a moment, there was silence. Then there was the sound of something crashing inside, followed by a loud *FUCK!* that sounded vaguely like Wilbur. Then, there was another crashing sound, and Tommy wondered if he should call out to ask if everything was okay.

But before Tommy could get too worried, the door swung open, revealing a panting Wilbur.

His hair was completely messed up, and his cheeks were red, as if he'd just been running. Still, his eyes widened when he saw Tommy.

"Tommy? You're back?" He asked, something strange in his voice.

"Um, yeah," Tommy said, ducking his eyes to the ground. "I-I mean if it's a bother I can leave, but I just- I got sick at work and I kinda don't want to go back to my apartment while I'm sick and-"

Tommy was cut off by warm arms wrapping around him and pulling him close. Tommy took a shaky breath as he leaned his weight onto Wilbur, his spinning head screaming in relief at having someone to lean on again.

"It's okay Toms," Wilbur reassured him, resting a hand on the back of his head. "You're always welcome here. You can stay for as long as you need, it's no trouble at all."

"I just... I don't want to be taking advantage of you," Tommy admitted in a whisper, his voice muffled by Wilbur's sweater.

"You're not taking advantage of me," Wilbur reassured him. "I love having you here. Seriously."

Tommy wanted to believe him. He really really did.

"Okay then," he mumbled into Wilbur's sweater.

He felt Wilbur smile into his hair. "Okay," he repeated. "Now, let's get you somewhere to lay down because you're leaning on me like you're about to pass out."

And suddenly, Wilbur was scooping him up, despite Tommy's loud whine of protest.

"I'm not a baby! I can walk myself," he argued.

Wilbur grunted as he readjusted his arms under Tommy's back. "I'd rather you not fall over while I try to get you to the living room."

Tommy groaned but knew Wilbur was right. He probably would fall over if he tried to walk right now, considering his vision was still spinning with every step he took. So instead, Tommy hid his face in Wilbur's shirt, and tried not to focus on the vertigo-inducing sensation as he was carried into the living room.

Wilbur gently placed him on the couch, pointing a finger at him to get him to stay put as he ran off to grab something. Huffing, Tommy pulled his shoes off and spread his legs out on the

cushions, squeezing his eyes shut to avoid the stabbing light coming from the lamp in the corner.

A few moments later, Wilbur's footsteps padded back into the room. A warm blanket was draped over him, and when Tommy opened his eyes, he saw Wilbur setting a folded pair of clothes on the coffee table in front of him.

"If you feel well enough to get up, feel free to change into these. They're just more pajamas of mine," he explained. "Now, do you want anything to eat or drink?"

Oh god. Food. The very thought made his nausea spike again, and he shook his head.

"Nausea?" Wilbur asked. Tommy nodded, and he tapped his chin. "How about tea then? Peppermint tea can help soothe an upset stomach, if you think that'll help?"

While Tommy really wanted hot chocolate, he knew that having rich hot chocolate while he was still so dizzy was not a good idea. So he nodded again, and Wilbur hummed happily, reaching out to ruffle Tommy's hair as he disappeared into the kitchen again.

With Wilbur working in the kitchen, Tommy took the opportunity to force himself to his feet, and stumbled to the bathroom so he could change into the offered clothes. He almost fell down again, and maybe had to grip the sink a few times, but managed to stay upright before collapsing back on the couch in a heap.

Soon after he was settled under the blanket again, and Wilbur came back carrying two steaming mugs. He handed one to Tommy, and when he sniffed it, it was overwhelmingly mint-scented.

"I put a little bit of honey in it to sweeten it, but if you want more let me know," Wilbur said, leaning back against his side of the couch and sipping his own tea.

Tommy took a hesitant sip, and sighed in relief when the warmth hit his tongue. Despite the strong mint scent, the flavor wasn't nearly as intense. It was sweet with a hint of peppermint, the two in a careful balance that had been perfectly crafted. Although his head was still spinning, the mint immediately calmed the roiling nausea, and Tommy drank nearly half the mug before putting it back on the table.

Then, he settled back into the couch, nestling into the arm of it as he closed his eyes again. Keeping them open was too disorienting, and the fatigue was still weighing down his bones.

But it was hard to get comfortable against the couch. He readjusted a few times, struggling to find a good position to fall asleep in. Then, he heard Wilbur shift beside him, and suddenly he was being pulled towards a warm chest as arms wrapped around him. In his sleepy state, he immediately leaned into the touch, and Wilbur shifted around until they were both stretched out, with Tommy's head resting on his chest.

Tommy was dangerously close to falling asleep now. He was tired, dizzy, and the tea had soothed his stomach for the time being. Not to mention, Wilbur was a very comfortable pillow.

As he started to doze off though, Wilbur's voice pulled him back to reality.

"I'm sorry," Wilbur whispered, his fingers absently playing with Tommy's hair.

Tommy didn't open his eyes, but frowned all the same. "Sorry for what? You haven't done anything wrong." Wilbur didn't need to apologize for anything. If anything, Tommy should be the one apologizing to him, for showing up at his door unannounced and expecting Wilbur to take care of him.

Wilbur sighed. "I have done something wrong though," he admitted, voice still low. "I'm keeping something from you."

...more secrets?

A part of Tommy wasn't surprised. It seemed everyone these days had their own secrets. Especially him.

While he knew he should be upset, he also hadn't told Wilbur about his new 'side job', and he had no plans to. Unlike Tubbo and Ranboo, Wilbur didn't push for his secrets, so in turn Tommy didn't push for his. And along with that, he hadn't known Wilbur nearly as long as he knew the two of them. Their secrets stabbed at his heart because he thought they knew they could trust him after all their years together.

Despite the fact that Tommy trusted Wilbur, he wouldn't expect the same from him. Just because they'd only known each other a few months.

So Tommy found he didn't really care about Wilbur's secret.

"I'm keeping something from you too," Tommy admitted, still keeping his eyes shut. "We all have secrets."

"Yeah, but this is something you deserve to know, but I can't tell you," Wilbur said, and Tommy could imagine the frustrated frown on his face.

"Is it because it'd be dangerous for me to know?" Tommy asked, making Wilbur stiffen.

"Yeah, yeah it would be," Wilbur confessed.

Maybe it was because of how tired he was, or maybe he just knew how to deal with the conversation of dangerous secrets now. But Tommy's response was easy.

"That's why I can't tell you mine either," Tommy replied. "So we're even."

"But-

"It's fine, Wilbur. Seriously," Tommy said, his voice slurring as he got dragged closer to the edge of sleep. "Now stop being a dramatic bitch and let me sleep."

Wilbur sighed. "Okay, get some rest, Toms."

In the morning, Tommy was probably going to think a lot more about what Wilbur's secret could be, and how he felt about the idea of someone else he trusted keeping something from him.

But for now, Tommy let himself sink into Wilbur's warmth, and into the sweet void of sleep.

Chapter End Notes

the virgin mcdonalds cashier: *terrified of siren*

the chad subway riders: *literally don't give a shit about siren*

also during the part where wilbur is sprinting behind the door to change out of his siren outfit so he can let tommy in please imagine cartoon noises with all the crashing because that's how I imagined it

ANYWAY hope yall enjoyed!! definitely thought I'd give yall a bit of comfort to heal you guys after last chapter bc i'm such a kind and benevolent author /j

join our discord! it's a chill place where I sometimes send sneak peaks of upcoming chapters <https://discord.gg/RFXqgK4CRN>

seriously tho lmk what you thought down in the comments!! love you all <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

a new normal

Chapter Summary

Tommy gets used to staying at Wilbur's.

Chapter Notes

hellooooo everyone

so, first off, WE HIT OVER 100K HITS??? WHAT??? on the one hand I'm, like, in so much suffering over the fact that my first ever fic to break 100k is about minecraft roleplay because I just know in like 2 years i'm gonna cringe so hard at the fact that i was into mcYT but yknow what!! this fic is good and i'm having a lot of fun writing it so fuck cringe culture and ty all so much for how lovely you've all been about it!!

anywayyyy hope yall enjoy this chapter lol I was so exhausted from uni stuff this week but i somehow banged most of this out yesterday

TWs: usual wound and blood mentions

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

It's not like Tommy was purposefully avoiding going back home. Definitely not.

It had been over a week since Tommy had stumbled his way back to Wilbur's, dizzy out of his mind with his mouth tasting like vomit. He had fully recovered within two days, and logically, there was no reason for him to continue staying with the Soot's.

But Tommy just... didn't mention the idea of leaving. And no one in the house brought it up either.

The morning after he fell asleep on the couch wrapped in Wilbur's arms, Tommy woke up to a whole stream of texts from his roommates demanding to know where he was. In his half-asleep state, he ended up telling them he was still at Wil's and to not expect him home anytime soon, and from then on he'd proceeded to ignore all of their follow-up text messages.

He was being a coward. He knew this. The right thing to do in this situation was to man up and go home so he could talk things out with his roommates. Then maybe he could stop

wearing Wilbur's slightly oversized clothes to work every day, and things could go back to the way they'd always been.

But things were never going to be fully 'normal' again. Tubbo and Ranboo were vigilantes, and Tommy was working as a healer for the Syndicate. Any sense of the old normalcy they had in their lives was out the window, and even if they managed to patch up their argument (which Tommy truly doubted was possible right now), things would never be as simple or easy as they once were.

And the thing was, Tommy was terrified of that. He knew it was the truth, but he didn't want to accept it. He didn't want to have to walk into that apartment and feel those icy stares on him. He didn't want his evenings to be sitting on the couch playing random documentaries, with no casual bits of laughter or conversation passing between him and his best friends.

It was one thing to accept the truth of your situation, but it was a whole other thing to actually confront it.

So Tommy just stayed at the Soot house, deciding to put off the inevitable for as long as he could. One of these days, Wilbur or Phil or Techno was going to get sick of having him hang around, eating their food and using their stuff, and he was going to get kicked out. Which was fine! Totally fine. Not something that made fear lance through his chest every time he heard footsteps coming down the stairs. It was only a matter of time before he had to leave, and when one of the three family members told him it was his time to go, he was going to thank them for letting him stay as long as he did and force himself to go home.

But he hadn't been given that ultimatum yet, so for now he was still staying at the Soot's.

Strangely enough, no one seemed to mind Tommy's lingering presence in the home. Techno offered to drive him to his shifts whenever he noticed Tommy getting ready to leave, Phil would hand him some food to take with him, and Wilbur showed up at the cafe more often than not with the sole purpose of taking the train home with him. No one was surprised when he kept coming back night after night. He was only ever greeted with warm smiles and kind voices asking how his shift went.

Though, there was something off in the house. It wasn't about him staying there necessarily. Rather it was the fact that Wilbur sometimes stared at Tommy like he was a puppy he had accidentally kicked.

It was frankly a bit ridiculous how guilty Wilbur seemed to be over this secret he was keeping from Tommy. Although there was a part of Tommy that prickled at the idea of someone else he trusted keeping stuff from him, he believed Wilbur when he said it was dangerous for him to know. Unless Tommy was willing to come clean about his own work with the Syndicate to Wilbur, he had no right to want to delve into Wilbur's secrets.

Wilbur clearly didn't seem to agree. It was so obvious that he wanted to just spill out whatever was on his mind, but anytime he got close to it, either Techno or Phil would appear nearby and give him a pointed look that would instantly shut him up.

But besides all the guilty looks, for the most part, staying at the Soot house was something Tommy found he really enjoyed. It was just so... easy. He didn't have to worry about how much food was in the fridge, he didn't wake up with back aches from sleeping on an old, lumpy couch, and of course, the light tension in the house was nothing like the storm that had been brewing in his apartment for weeks.

Tommy spent most of his time with Wilbur, though he also hung out with Techno and Phil on occasion. Sometimes, they would all be busy with whatever work they did, and Tommy would be left to his own devices, which he found he didn't mind. Wilbur had an old GameCube he gave to Tommy to play on, and he spent hours on end playing the oldest version of Animal Crossing available, which was way more fun than he expected it to be.

Tommy tried his best not to listen in when the Soot's talked about work. Sometimes Wilbur would pace down the halls with a phone to his ear, talking in vague terms about different plans they had to run through.

One night, when Tommy was trying to sneak to the kitchen to get a bag of crisps from the cabinet, he had heard Wilbur talking on the phone and froze.

"Quackity, you've been dodging my calls for the past three days. Tell me what the hell happened that night," Wilbur said, his voice sharper than Tommy had ever heard it before. There was a pause as this 'Quackity' seemingly replied, and Wilbur let out a shocked noise. "You left him with *them*?! What the fuck were you thinking?!" Another pause. "Wait... you said this happened three nights ago?" A sharp breath in. "Oh fucking hell, I think I just realized something."

There was one more pause and Wilbur opened his mouth to say something else, when his eyes flitted towards the door, which Tommy was awkwardly peeking his head around. Tommy froze in place, heart leaping into his throat as he realized he'd been caught eavesdropping.

Wilbur's expression was unreadable as he motioned at Tommy to stay there.

"Quackity, I gotta go, I'll text you my thoughts later," he said. And then, he hung up, and shoved the phone in his pocket.

"I-I'm sorry, I didn't mean to listen in, I was just walking by and-"

"Hey, it's okay," Wilbur reassured, an easy smile slipping onto his face. "You just startled me, that's all."

"Is, uh, is everything okay?" Tommy asked, eyeing Wilbur warily. "You sounded kinda pissed."

Wilbur's face softened at that. "It's nothing you need to worry about, Toms. I promise."

Tommy wasn't so sure, but he nodded anyway. "Okay then."

Reaching out, Wilbur squeezed his shoulder. “I gotta make another call, but you should go downstairs. Phil’s almost done with dinner.”

As Tommy began to trudge back down the steps, he could faintly hear Wilbur’s voice again as he picked up another call.

“Hey Sam? I need to get files on two people, but all I have for them is an address.”

After that, there were no more incidents involving overheard phone calls. Wilbur stopped making business calls in his room, and Tommy couldn’t help but feel guilty that it was his fault Wilbur couldn’t do his work without worrying about Tommy eavesdropping. However, every time he tried to apologize for the incident, Wilbur reassured him it was fine, and that he needed to stop taking his work home with him anyway.

Besides accidental eavesdropping, the only difficult part of living with the Soot’s was having to hide his second job from the group, which turned out to be easier than expected.

Tommy never got questioned when he got back late from his shift because he had to heal someone. Sometimes Techno would make a comment about how Tommy should’ve called for a ride instead of taking the train at that time, or maybe Phil would ask if the espresso machine broke again, but there was never any suspicion. There was a certain relief that came with not being under any scrutiny, not needing to make up increasingly ridiculous lies to hide his tracks.

Overall, things were really good. Tommy was avoiding his roommates, hiding his work with the Syndicate from the Soot’s, and was still managing to balance his job as a barista with his job as a healer for villains.

So of course one of those things had to come crashing down.

The back room of the cafe was prepped with Tommy’s usual set up. He had gotten a call a few minutes before, and was now waiting for his latest patient to show up. Thankfully, this wasn’t a potentially lethal injury, just something that was more annoying than anything else and was drawing too much attention not to fix.

There was a soft knock at the door, and when Tommy swung it open, he was met with a blood-covered Daedalus.

Well, he wasn’t really covered in blood. It was mostly just the visible part of his face above his mask.

“Is that your blood?” Tommy asked, stepping aside to let the man in.

“Unfortunately yes,” Daedalus answered, ducking under the door frame to accommodate his secondary robotic arms. “Got nailed right above my forehead with a piece of glass and it won’t stop bleeding now. The cut isn’t too deep, but I can’t see with all this blood in my eyes.”

“Jesus christ, man. Here, sit down, don’t want you crashing into something,” Tommy instructed, guiding Daedalus towards the towels he laid down.

As soon as Daedalus was on the floor, Tommy knelt down beside him, reaching into his first aid kit for a towelette to wipe away the blood with. The movements of preparing his supplies—soaking a towelette in water at the sink and setting aside some spare gauze—it was nearly as familiar to him now as his practiced routines during his cafe shift.

Making sure not to press too hard, Tommy began to wipe away the blood on Daedalus’ forehead. A month or two before, his hands might’ve been trembling while he did this, nerves wracking his body at being so close to the famed supervillain. But now, there was no shaking, and no fear.

Tommy wasn’t sure when he’d stopped being afraid of the Syndicate completely. It had been a gradual shift, and Tommy couldn’t say he minded it in the slightest.

As the towelette was stained with crimson, slowly the natural peach shade of Daedalus’ skin became visible once more. Without all the blood in the way, Tommy was able to spot the cut rather easily, seeing that it was sitting right at Daedalus’ hairline.

This wasn’t a large injury at all, nor one that would be inconvenient for Daedalus to let heal on its own. But also Tommy knew that it wasn’t the type of wound to take anything out of it. Maybe he would be a bit sleepy, but there wouldn’t be any worse side effects to healing it than that.

So after cleaning off his forehead, Tommy reached up with his hands and let his hands glow orange once more. After only a few seconds, the glowing faded, and the cut had turned into a thin, white scar.

Once the glowing was gone, Daedalus hummed, and Tommy realized he had his eyes closed.

“That’s so relaxing,” Daedalus murmured as Tommy pulled his hands away.

Tommy frowned. “It is?” While he knew what it felt like to heal himself—a bit of warmth under the skin—he had never actually asked how it felt for other people. He wasn’t sure if he’d ever heard anyone say it was relaxing.

Blinking open his pitch black eyes, Daedalus nodded. “Yeah, it’s really warm. S’nice to feel.”

“Huh. Didn’t know that,” Tommy muttered, picking up the towel again to wipe away the rest of the blood on Daedalus’ head.

Daedalus frowned, a few wrinkles popping up next to his eyes. “Can’t you heal yourself?”

“Yeah, I can. But it’s never felt relaxing before. Just gets warm but not really in a pleasant way,” Tommy explained.

“Probably because you’re the one doing the work. When you’re healing others, we just get the benefits. If you’re healing yourself, you still have to work to do it,” Daedalus muttered, looking lost in thought as Tommy finally put the towel down.

“I guess so. I dunno,” Tommy shrugged as he set the towel aside to wash off later. “You should be good to go though.”

“Thanks Tommy,” Daedalus said, rolling his neck and lifting his arms above his head to stretch them. “You alright? You don’t seem that tired but I’m worried.”

Tommy shrugged again. “I’m fine. Wasn’t a big deal to heal that.”

“Yeah, but you still just had a full shift at the cafe. Honestly, I’m surprised you’re not more dead on your feet while you’re working,” Daedalus commented, his secondary robotic arms then taking their turn to stretch.

Snorting, Tommy snapped the lid to the first aid kit shut. “I could be, you don’t know.”

Daedalus was silent for a moment, considering Tommy with a thoughtful gaze.

“Well... whenever I’ve come by during your shifts you’ve seemed pretty attentive,” Daedalus said, a forced casualness in his tone.

Wait, what?

Tommy whipped his head up from the first aid kit, eyes widening as Daedalus pointedly looked away from him.

“The fuck do you mean when you’ve come by during my shifts?” He asked.

Daedalus shrugged. “I was in civilian clothes, just happened to be in the area, and figured I’d see if you were as good at making coffee as you are at saving lives.”

What the fuck?

What the fuck?

Daedalus had been to the cafe in his civilian form and *ordered coffee from Tommy?* Tommy had met one of the Syndicate in civilian form and didn’t even know it?

“What the- you weren’t worried or anything?! That I might recognize you or some shit?!” Tommy exclaimed, gapping at the man.

“Not really. Even if you did I figured you wouldn’t say anything, but I had a feeling you wouldn’t.”

Tommy was reminded of when he’d healed Nemesis only a week before. How easily she accepted the fact that he knew her name, without any kind of worry about how that could backfire on her. Instead of being upset, she brushed away all her potential concerns with a casual, *I trust you.*

“Have I met any other Syndicate members without realizing it?” Tommy asked without thinking.

Daedalus chuckled. "I can't tell you that, at least not specifics. But I will say I'm not the only one who's stopped by your cafe while you're working."

"And... it's not because you guys don't trust me and want to make sure I'm not doing anything sus?" Tommy pushed, narrowing his eyes.

"What? No, of course not," Daedalus shook his head. "It's the opposite. We come there because we trust you and want to just make sure you're doing alright."

The idea of the Syndicate stopping by the cafe in their civilian forms, of risking getting recognized just to check in on him... it was strange. It didn't make sense. Sure, the Syndicate kept saying they trusted him, and at this point Tommy was pretty inclined to believe them, but he didn't understand why. How had he earned the trust of the most intimidating supervillain organization in the city?

"Huh, good to know," Tommy muttered, looking at his hands. "Guess if I see a guy with green hair walk in I'll make sure not to look at his face."

Daedalus chuckled. "Probably best for you to keep yourself oblivious if you can," he agreed. Then, with a grunt, Daedalus pushed to his feet. "I better get going though. Don't wanna keep you here too long."

He reached out a hand to help Tommy to his feet as well, and then patted his shoulder once before turning for the door. Tommy waved as he headed out into the alley, the door shutting behind him with a loud click.

Sighing, Tommy turned to look back at the rest of the back room, mulling over the new information in his head. He was tempted to think back on any customers that seemed familiar to him, to see if he could find any similarities between them and the Syndicate. But at the same time, he knew that was a rabbit hole he shouldn't go down. He had a strange feeling that if he started looking for similarities between anyone he'd met and the Syndicate, he would find them all too quickly.

So instead of doing that, Tommy bent down to pick up the first aid kit and move it back under the sink. Right as he was sliding it under the pipes though, there was a sharp knock at the back door, and Tommy frowned. Did Daedalus forget something?

"Hang on, I'm coming," Tommy said, straightening up and heading back over to the door. "Did you forget something Dae-"

As Tommy swung the door open, his words immediately died on his lips, because Daedalus wasn't the person on the other side of the door.

Instead, it was his roommates, expressions hidden behind their vigilante masks.

Ranboo was slightly bent over, with an arm wrapped around Tubbo's waist as Tubbo leaned into him, as if Tubbo was struggling to stand up on his own. Even with the gas mask on, Tubbo was keeping his face tilted towards the floor, the hand not grabbing onto Ranboo pressed against his side.

“What the fuck?” Tommy blurted out without thinking. What were they doing here? Had they really decided to ambush him so they could talk?

“Look, I know we need to talk about stuff, but Tubbo’s hurt,” Ranboo said without preamble.

“Fuck off, I’m fine,” Tubbo bit back, although his voice was tight, and Tommy realized he could see blood staining Tubbo’s jacket.

“You’re not fine, you’ve been dizzy from blood loss the entire walk over here,” Ranboo snapped back, his level voice having turned sharp.

“I’m not dying so it’s not a big deal-”

“Don’t be fucking ridiculous, get your ass in here,” Tommy cut him off, stepping out of the doorway and gesturing for the two to come in.

Tommy’s heart was pounding in his chest as Ranboo half-carried Tubbo into the back room, setting him down on the towels that were still stained with Daedalus’ blood and taking off his mask for him. Feeling as though he was on autopilot, Tommy shut the backdoor, making sure to click the lock, before he wandered back over to the sink to take out the first aid kit once more.

The room was dead silent as Tommy knelt next to Tubbo on the floor, popping open the first aid kit and taking out some gauze while eyeing the blood coating his fingers. Anxiety was twisting his gut into knots, but he shoved it aside and tried to focus on falling into the easy routine of his job like he had with Daedalus.

“What happened?” He asked quietly, pushing Tubbo’s hand to the side so he could actually look at the wound.

“Run in with 404, turns out he’s got a thing for throwing knives,” Ranboo explained, pushing his hood down to rub his temples. “I tried to teleport Tubbo out of the way in time but I was just a half a second too late-”

“Oh shut up, stop blaming yourself for everything,” Tubbo snapped, hissing in pain when Tommy lifted the jacket away from the wound. It was a slash across his side, and while it didn’t look like it hit anything important, it was deep. “You can’t keep me from getting hurt all the time. Shit happens.”

“Yeah, but I should’ve-”

“Ranboo, no self-blame in this cafe,” Tommy said, cutting him off. “Tubbo’s right, accidents happen. It’s not your fault.”

Ranboo seemed as though he wanted to argue, but when he opened his mouth again, Tommy shot him a sharp look and he shut up. He always hated when Ranboo went on one of his self-blame spirals, mainly because it was never actually his fault, but it was always so hard to convince him otherwise

Using the gauze, Tommy dabbed away some of the excess blood. Then, he reached for the wound, but paused.

“This is gonna hurt for a second,” Tommy explained.

“Tommy, you’ve healed me before,” Tubbo pointed out.

“Just warning you so you don’t bite your tongue.”

Leaning forward, he reached out to grab the edges of the wound and pushed them together. Tubbo let out a whine and grabbed Ranboo’s hand, and Tommy closed his eyes as his hands began to glow orange once more.

This wound definitely took a bit more effort to heal than Daedalus’ did. It wasn’t by much, but as the seconds passed, Tommy’s head began to pound. If he had to guess, that headache wasn’t going to go away for the rest of the night.

Once Tommy let go, he immediately leaned against the wall, taking a few deep breaths to push past the throbbing behind his eyes.

There were a few seconds of silence. Then, Tommy blinked open his eyes, and saw Ranboo and Tubbo both watching him.

“Are you alright?” Ranboo asked, reaching out to rest a hand on his arm.

“I’m fine, just got a headache from healing that, that’s all,” Tommy replied, shrugging Ranboo’s hand off of him. “Tubbo, how does it look?”

“Has a scar but otherwise it’s totally closed,” Tubbo said, dropping his shirt back down and laying on his back. “I’m still fucking dizzy though.”

“Just give it a few minutes and it’ll go away,” Tommy told him.

Another hush fell over the group, and Tommy dug his nails into his palm. This was what he had been afraid of. The tension suffocating the air between the three, making even the idea of casual conversation feel like torture.

It wasn’t how things were supposed to be between the three of them. Tommy hated it so much.

“We, uh, saw Daedalus when we were on our way here,” Ranboo spoke up after a minute and a half of dead silence. “Did you, um, did you-”

“Did I heal him?” Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow. Ranboo nodded, and he sighed. “Yup, sure did. Are you gonna yell at me now about how that makes me a terrible person?”

Ranboo’s eyes fell to the ground, and he wrapped his arms around his knees. “Tommy, you’re not a bad person.”

“Do the words, ‘you’re healing *murderers*, Tommy’ not ring a bell? You two gave me so much shit and acted like I was the fucking scum of the earth for wanting to give people medical treatment,” Tommy snapped, his irritation growing in time with the throbbing of his head.

“Yeah but we weren’t implying-” Ranboo started.

“Look, I don’t want to argue about it, at least not tonight,” Tommy said, cutting him off. “I know we need to hash it all out and have another scream fest or whatever the fuck, but my head is killing me and I don’t have the energy to get into it with you two right now.”

“I agree,” Tubbo chimed in, still laying on the floor. “I’m way too tired to get mad right now.”

Sighing, Ranboo pulled his knees closer to his chest. “I get that—that’s fine. But when are you coming home?”

Tommy blinked, frowning at Ranboo. Home? They wanted him to come home?

“I mean... I didn’t think you two would exactly be waiting for me to come back,” Tommy admitted quietly.

At this, Tubbo sat up again, his brows furrowed. “It’s your home too, idiot. We weren’t gonna kick you out or anything just because we had a fight.”

“Not to mention, the landlord told us you paid for the next two months’ rent in advance, so if anything you have more of a right to it than we do right now,” Ranboo added. “Also I would ask how you got that kind of money, but I think it’s kind of self-explanatory at this point.”

“Syndicate must be paying you a shit ton for you to get that kind of money so fast,” Tubbo said, rolling his neck. “But anyway, yeah, are you gonna stop sleeping on Wilbur’s couch and come home?”

Tommy shouldn’t be surprised that they wanted him to come home. Things were clearly still off between the three of them—no apologies had been made, and they had nearly gotten into another shouting match just a few minutes earlier—but the two of them wanted him to go back to the apartment.

Tommy should go home. He knew that. But seeing the two of them again stirred up all the ugly emotions that had come out the week before during their fight, reminding him of the stabbing pain in his chest that was still there and was probably going to stick around for a long time.

“I...” Tommy wrung his hands in his lap, trying to figure out how to put his jumbled mess of thoughts into words.

Could he go home tonight? Just follow the two of them back to their apartment and take his shift in the bed like there was nothing wrong?

“No,” Tommy finally said, forcing himself to look up and meet his friend’s eyes. “Not yet.”

Tubbo let out a noise of confusion. “What? Why not?”

“I’m not ready to come back yet,” he admitted, hunching his shoulders and glancing back at the floor. “I need time to think about everything that happened, and how I feel about it all. I just- I need some time to sort out my emotions and shit.”

He waited for the yelling. For the accusations that he was trying to avoid their confrontation. This was something that was going to piss his two friends off, he knew it.

But instead... Tubbo just nodded. “Okay. That’s understandable.”

“It’s probably better for us to have some time to sort things out too,” Ranboo added, although he seemed much sadder than he had been a few moments before. “So we can figure out what we’re going to do with all of our... situations.”

“Yeah, I guess we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” Tubbo muttered, shaking his head. “So you’re just gonna keep staying at Wilbur’s?”

“I am, yeah,” Tommy nodded.

“He doesn’t mind that you’re staying so long?” Ranboo asked, frowning his brows.

“Nope. He said I can stay as long as I need to,” he explained, tapping his fingers against his calf.

There was a beat of silence as both Tubbo and Ranboo considered this.

“He sounds like a good friend,” Ranboo commented.

Tommy nodded. “Yeah, he really is,” he said softly.

There was another silent moment, before Tubbo spoke up again.

“So, uh, kinda random, but what the hell was up with that picture of Siren carrying you on the subway from last week?” He asked, leaning back on his hands.

Oh shit. Yeah. The pictures of him with the bandana on his first, being carried in Siren’s arms into the train car at nearly one in the morning had circulated around Twitter, although it hadn’t made the actual news. Should’ve figured he’d get asked about that.

“Dream did a number on Nemesis during their fight last week, so I healed her and it took a lot out of me. Siren ended up having to carry me back to Wil’s because I was too dizzy to walk,” Tommy explained.

“Wait, did Wilbur see Siren?” Ranboo asked, frowning at him.

Tommy snorted. “Fuck no. He just dropped me off on Wilbur’s street and left.”

“So Wilbur doesn’t know about...” Tubbo trailed off, gesturing to the first aid kit.

“No, of course not. I already have you two involved in this hero villain vigilante shit, I don’t want to drag Wil in too,” Tommy scoffed, shaking his head.

Tubbo and Ranboo shared a wide-eyed look, and Tommy recognized it as the look they gave each other when they were having another silent conversation.

“What? Why are you giving each other that weird look?”

“Uh, well,” Ranboo scratched the back of his neck. “We kinda, um, thought that Wilbur *was* Siren?”

...huh.

Tommy blinked, trying to wrap his head around what Ranboo just said. He and Tubbo thought that *Wilbur was Siren?* If his head wasn’t pounding, he would’ve laughed out loud at the idea.

Ah yes, Wilbur, who talked about eating sand and couldn’t function without three espresso shots in the morning was one of the most feared supervillains in L’Manberg. Yup. Made total sense.

“That’s so fucking stupid, of course Wil’s not Siren,” Tommy snorted.

“Well, you have to admit, you started mentioning Wilbur to us around the same time we saw you talking to Siren, so it just made sense,” Ranboo argued.

“Nope, I don’t know who Siren is outside of the mask,” Tommy told them.

“Huh, weird timing then I guess,” Tubbo shrugged, although he still shot Ranboo a pointed look.

Tommy resisted the urge to scoff again. Of course Wilbur wasn’t Siren. Sure, maybe they both had curly brown hair and liked to banter with Tommy, and maybe sometimes Siren’s jokes did remind him a bit of Wilbur’s, and maybe the way Wilbur slung his arm over Tommy’s shoulder reminded him of Siren a little bit...

No. Tommy was going to shove that out of his head. There was no way Wilbur was Siren. It’s not like it was rare to find a white guy with brown hair in the city anyway.

Tommy was so caught up in his thoughts that he didn’t even notice that Tubbo was pushing to his feet, and reaching down to pull Ranboo up as well, until they were both standing by the back door.

“We should get going now I think,” Tubbo said, pulling his gas mask back on. “I guess we’ll see you later?”

“Yeah, uh, I’ll see you guys,” Tommy replied, although the words tasted like sand in his mouth.

The door clicked shut as the two of them disappeared into the alley, leaving Tommy with bloody towels and a pit in his stomach. Although he didn't regret saying no to going back home, it still felt wrong to not leave with the two of them. They were meant to be a team, and it was still difficult for Tommy to adjust to the idea that they weren't really a team at all. At least, not right now.

His head was throbbing as he stared at the harsh fluorescent lights above his head. Fatigue weighed at his bones, begging him to just lay down and fall asleep on the tile floor right now. But he really didn't want to find out how Puffy would react to finding Tommy passed out next to a bunch of bloody towels in the back of her cafe, so as tempting as the idea of sleep was, he forced himself to stand so he could clean everything up.

He chucked the bloody towels in the washer with the rest of the dirty rags from the day and added extra bleach before turning the machine on. Then, he threw out the used gauze, making sure to hide it underneath other trash. Lastly, he put the first aid kit away for a second time that night, and was relieved when there wasn't another knock on the door to the alley.

Like usual, Tommy went out through the front of the cafe, his hands steady as he twisted the key in the lock. A breeze passed down the street, making goosebumps rise along Tommy's arms under the sweater he'd borrowed from Wilbur. They were getting further along into autumn now, and Tommy found himself hoping that Tubbo and Ranboo weren't too cold tonight in their heater-less apartment.

Maybe with the extra money they saved from Tommy paying the entirety of the next two month's rent they could buy extra blankets, or maybe a small space heater. Tommy remembered how last winter it had gotten so cold in their apartment the three of them had had to suck it up and pile onto the bed together in a single heap, using each other's body heat to keep from shivering while they slept. It was cramped as hell, and Tommy had definitely ended up on the floor a few times, but it had been warm.

It wasn't that cold yet though. He was sure Tubbo and Ranboo would be fine.

As he shoved his keys into his pocket and turned to head towards the subway station, something made him pause.

He wasn't sure what it was, but his eyes darted around the shadows across the street, searching for... well, he didn't know what he was searching for. A person? An animal? A scary monster from a children's book?

Tommy didn't know what he was trying to see across the street, but he knew one thing.

He felt like he was being watched.

Finally, his eyes flickered on something white on the rooftop across from the cafe. As soon as he locked eyes on it though, there was a flash of movement, and it was gone.

Digging his nails into his palm, Tommy hurried away from the cafe as fast as he could without outright sprinting.

The being watched feeling didn't go away until he climbed down into the subway station. Only once he was off the street did he stop feeling eyes bore into the back of his head, and his shoulders sagged in relief.

It was probably just his own paranoia. But something in the back of his head told him that it was something more.

Thankfully, the rest of his ride back to Wilbur's house didn't involve any creepy moments like that. By the time the brownstone came into view, Tommy had almost completely forgotten about the incident at all, and was instead ready to collapse on his bed under a mountain of blankets and hide there until his headache went away.

Using the spare key Wilbur had given him a few days earlier, Tommy pushed open the front door and made his way into the living room.

Usually, if Wilbur was home, he'd either be in his room or waiting in the living room for him. But instead of Wilbur sitting on the couch today, Techno was there in his place, idly scrolling through Netflix.

For once, his hair wasn't pulled back in a bun or a braid. Right now, it was loose and hanging around his shoulders in pink waves. While his ears were still filled with the usual gold jewelry that adorned them, he didn't have any rings or necklaces on, and he seemed to be wearing pajamas.

Now, this wasn't the first time Tommy had seen Techno in pajamas. He'd been living in the house for a week now after all. But it was still rare to see the man looking so relaxed and actually just sitting in the living room watching TV. Along with that, usually Techno spent most of his time either in his room, the kitchen, or Phil's office. Tommy was pretty sure this was the first time he'd ever seen the guy pick up the TV remote.

"You're home late," Techno commented, although there was no unsaid question in his voice, asking for Tommy to give him an explanation. "Was work alright?"

"Yeah, it was fine," Tommy shrugged, dropping his backpack and settling on the other side of the couch. Squeezing his eyes shut, he pressed his fingers to his temples and leaned back against the cushions. "Is Wil in his room?"

"Nah, he and Phil are out doing work stuff right now," Techno explained, skimming through a random Netflix category, although he didn't seem very interested in any of the options.

Tommy frowned. "This late at night?"

"You know how it is," Techno shrugged.

No, Tommy did not in fact know how it was. But there was a lot about the Soot family business that didn't seem to make sense, so he decided it was just easier not to go asking about it.

“Yeah, I guess so,” Tommy shrugged, wincing when the movement sent another throbbing pain through his skull.

Techno frowned. “You doin’ okay?”

“I’m fine, I just have a headache,” Tommy admitted, shutting his eyes to try and ignore the faint pounding.

“Let me get you some painkillers,” Techno said, the couch shifting as he pushed to his feet.

“Techno, I’m fine-”

“I’m not old like Phil, my knees can handle standing up,” Techno hushed him, his footsteps fading as he headed into the kitchen.

Tommy sighed and sunk deeper into the couch, the heaviness in his limbs tempting him to fall asleep right here and now. He listened as Techno moved around the kitchen, faintly clinking glasses and rattling pill bottles as he presumably got Tommy some water to wash down the pills with.

A minute later, the footsteps returned, and Tommy’s eyes flickered open to Techno holding a glass of water in one hand, and two pills in his other palm.

“I’m also making you some tea, so that’ll be ready in a minute,” Techno told him.

“You didn’t have to do that,” Tommy mumbled, taking the pills and water and quickly downing both.

“You look like you’ve had a bit of a rough night. Figured it might help,” Techno shrugged before wandering back to the kitchen.

Tommy frowned in the direction of Techno’s turned back, before letting his eyes shut again as he waited for the medicine to kick in. While it wasn’t unusual for Techno to do small things for him like this—offering him rides, making him tea or food—the two of them hadn’t exactly spoken much during his week here so far. Most of their talking had been done in group conversations, not really one on one. Not that Tommy minded. He thought Techno was a really cool dude. Still though, he felt bad that the guy was going out of his way to make Tommy tea just because he said he had a headache.

A few minutes later, Techno came back with a cup of steaming tea, and placed it on the coffee table in front of Tommy. Then, he walked around to the other side of the couch, and returned to his original spot.

“Thanks Tech,” Tommy murmured, picking up the tea to sip at it. He stared at the gold liquid that smelled of honey and peppermint, swirling it a few times absentmindedly.

“Either you’re thinking really hard about something right now, or you’re about to fall asleep into your cup,” Techno commented, raising an eyebrow at him.

Tommy wanted to tell him it was fine and that he was just tired. But a part of him also wanted to say what was actually on his mind, at least as a way to make up for Techno making him tea and getting him painkillers.

“I guess... I’m sorry that I’m still here. I’m pretty sure you guys didn’t invite me over thinking I’d be staying for over a week and I promise I’ll leave soon, but-”

“Wilbur told you you can stay as long as you want, right?” Techno asked, cutting him off.

Tommy shrugged. “Well, yeah, but he’s *Wil*. Plus, it’s not like you and Phil signed up to live with some random kid Wilbur’s friends with, so I’m gonna leave eventually for your guys’ sake.”

Techno stared at him for a moment as if he was trying to read Tommy’s thoughts, before furrowing his brows and sighing. “For as chaotic as Wilbur is, he wouldn’t just drag a child in here without asking us if it was okay beforehand. Not to mention, I don’t like most kids. The fact that I said yes to you is, like, a huge compliment,” Techno explained. “You’re here because we all like having you around, Tommy. Plus, it’s not like we can’t afford to feed another mouth, even if you do eat like a rabid raccoon.”

“You say that now,” Tommy muttered, keeping his eyes on his tea, “but what if I stay for two weeks? Or three? You’re gonna get tired of me eventually. Everyone does.”

It was a pattern Tommy was all too familiar with thanks to the foster system. The first few weeks in a new home would be generally pretty great. Everyone would be nice, trying to make him feel welcome and help him settle in. But then the novelty of having a new kid in the house would wear off, and the families would grow tired of Tommy’s loud voice and impulsive words. Things would steadily get worse and worse, and eventually Tommy would find himself packing his bags.

“I know you think that because of the foster system,” Techno cut in, startling Tommy out of his thoughts. “I was the same way. Problem kids can never stay in homes for too long, right?”

Shit. Tommy had forgotten Techno was a foster kid like him.

“Well, yeah, but I’m not saying you guys are like those foster families or anything. I’m just saying people get tired of me-”

“Stop that,” Techno said, his voice somehow both firm but gentle. “You’re a good kid, Tommy. This isn’t a foster home where you have to pass a bunch of secret tests to find out if you’ll be let into the family. We all genuinely like having you around just because we like you as a person. We’re not going to get tired of you, and we all mean it when we say you can stay for as long as you want.”

Bringing his knees up to his chest, Tommy bit the inside of his cheek to keep his eyes from burning. He took another sip of his tea, not trusting himself to speak right now.

Techno took that as permission to keep talking. “I’m not, like, great at this social stuff, so you don’t have to talk to me if you don’t want to, but this had to have been brought on by

something at work today.”

It wasn't a demand. It was an option. If Tommy wanted, he could tell Techno about seeing Tubbo and Ranboo today, and maybe get his advice on that whole situation (in as vague of terms as possible of course).

Tommy started talking before he'd even made the conscious decision to do so.

“You know how the reason I'm here is because my roommates and I are fighting?” Tommy asked, finally glancing up from his tea cup.

Techno nodded. “Yeah, they had a secret they kept from you, you had a secret you kept from them, it all got revealed and everything turned into a mess, right?”

Snorting, Tommy nodded. “Yeah, it was something like that. Anyway, I haven't really talked to them since our fight, but tonight they came by the cafe so we ended up having a bit of a talk.”

“I'm guessing it didn't go well?” Techno questioned.

“I wouldn't say it went badly, but no one apologized. They also asked when I was going to come home and I told them I wasn't sure when I would, because I just feel like...” he trailed off for a moment, running his finger around the edge of his tea cup. “I dunno, I guess I feel like I just need more time to figure out how I feel about all the secrets they kept from me and everything? Like I understand why they did it, but it also hurts a lot because it was a pretty big thing they kept from me. But I don't know if that just means I'm trying to avoid a confrontation.”

“I think that was a pretty good response,” Techno said, leaning back against the couch. “Phil's all about ‘healthy boundaries’ and being in touch with your emotions and stuff, and you recognizing that you need time to think about how you feel about everything would probably make him cry tears of joy since it took ages for him to teach me and Wil that.”

This made Tommy grin into his cup. “Glad I can make the great Philza Soot proud of my emotional intelligence. All the ladies love how in touch I am with my emotions, because that's how real men are,” he joked, albeit in a slightly quieter voice than usual.

Techno huffed in what Tommy was pretty sure was supposed to be a laugh. “But seriously though, you're a smart kid for recognizing that you need some time. Don't rush yourself, just think things over, and when you're ready for you guys to have that conversation you can let them know.”

“Thanks Tech,” Tommy said, draining the last of his tea. “That makes me feel a bit better.”

“No problem, kid,” Techno replied, shooting him a wry grin as he picked up the remote again. “Now, do you have any recommendations for what I should watch? Because every time I ask Wilbur for recommendations he just sends me really weird pretentious art films.”

Eyes lighting up, Tommy made grabby hands for the remote and immediately started scrolling for the documentaries category. “Oh, Technoblade my man, I have got *the* best movie for you to see.”

And that was how Wilbur and Phil came home to Tommy being passed out on the couch, while Techno sat completely engrossed in a documentary about polar bears.

Wilbur ended up moving Tommy back to his own bed, but the next morning, Tommy and Techno spent the entirety of breakfast talking about how Steve was the best polar bear in that movie and that he deserved only the best things.

Chapter End Notes

remember kids, you are never obligated to forgive people immediately. set up healthy boundaries for yourself and take time to process things if you need it <3

also oh my god I'm so not used to writing techno let's pray I got his characterization at least somewhat decent for that convo

we have a discord server! i disabled the previous link due to some trolls joining, but feel free to hop in! I send sneak peaks at upcoming chapters a lot and it's a fun time :)
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

please let me know down in the comments if you enjoyed! I don't respond to most but they really make my day <333 also shoutout to the discord server for basically counting down me publishing this chapter yall are awesome (and another shoutout to my betas i love u guys sm and Darling ty for beta-ing this super last minute last night and reassuring me that it wasn't shit i owe you my life)

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees (feel free to send me asks or dms i love getting them sm)

urban planning

Chapter Summary

Brothers.

Chapter Notes

hey hey peeps I am here with more!!

sorry this chapter took a little longer than usual, I'm still within the 1 week update range but school is really starting to pick up so if updates become a little more sporadic, I promise this fic hasn't been abandoned I'm just a very stressed 4th year in uni lol but tysm for all the love as always!! you guys are all so sweet <3

TWs for this chapter: usual descriptions of bloody injuries

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

Tommy had been staying with Wilbur for nearly three weeks before he ended up having to explain his new living situation to Puffy.

In all honesty, he was surprised she hadn't picked up on something being amiss sooner. Tommy didn't end up going back to his apartment to get his clothes, and while he was content to keep wearing Wilbur's old stuff, one day he came back from work to find a pile of new clothes in his own size sitting on his bed. It wasn't the ratty t-shirts and thin sweatshirts that had practically been his uniform. These new clothes were high quality, brightly-colored, and had 100% been picked out by Wilbur since they all looked like they belonged on a Pinterest board.

So Tommy's style change alone should've been enough for Puffy to realize something was up with him. But he hadn't gotten much chance to see her in the cafe as of late. She only stopped by for a few minutes at a time every few days, always with her mouth set in a thin line, and Tommy wondered what got her so worried.

Puffy wasn't the only one who seemed off though. Although Tommy and Foolish's conversations were limited to the few minutes they got to chat while they switched for their shifts, Tommy could tell that Foolish was *tired*. There were bags under his eyes, and the gold streaks in his hair seemed duller than they used to be.

And yet, in complete contrast, his smile was brighter than Tommy had seen it in years. His friend Eret was always waiting for him to get off work, and Foolish would beam at them before waving goodbye to Tommy, slinging an arm over his friend's shoulders and guiding them out of the cafe with the kind of ease that only came with knowing someone for years on end.

It was a strange situation. Foolish was clearly exhausted, but he was happy about it. Puffy was worried about something, but was trying not to let it show. It made Tommy wonder what was going on in their house, although he knew that wasn't any of his business and didn't pry.

But still, when he saw the frown lines creasing Puffy's forehead as she waved at him when he came in for his shift, he couldn't help but try to figure out a way to ask her what was going on without being too nosy about it.

"Sup Puff," Tommy said as he approached her table in the far back corner, squinting at the bright sunlight that was glowing against her curls.

"Hi Tommy, we haven't had a chance to chat in a while," Puffy said, smiling at him as he sat down across from her. "Which is totally my fault, by the way. I've been so swamped with other work stuff that I haven't been checking on the cafe as much as I want to."

"You're fine, Puffy. Not much has been happening with me," Tommy told her, leaning back in his chair and trying not to think of how he'd had to scrub the backroom floor for nearly an hour last week when Rosethorn bled all over it.

"Really?" Puffy asked, raising an eyebrow at him. "Nothing new at all? Because you've been wearing a lot of new clothes lately, and you look like you put some weight on meaning you've finally gotten a healthy eating schedule."

Frowning, Tommy shrunk down in his seat. He might as well come clean about it. It's not like he was trying to hide it from Puffy or anything.

"Well, to be honest, I got into a fight with Tubbo and Ranboo so I've been staying at a friend's place for the past few weeks," Tommy admitted.

Puffy blinked a few times in surprise. "Wait, you're not living with Tubbo and Ranboo anymore?"

"Not, like, as a permanent thing. Just till we can figure out our shit," Tommy shrugged, turning his head to look out the window and not at Puffy's concerned face.

"Did they kick you out?"

Tommy shook his head. "No, of course not. I left on my own. Need some time to figure out how I feel about everything, y'know." He knew where this was going. Puffy was going to get worried and then she was going to start doing her therapy thing to him, and while he appreciated her trying to help, he really didn't need it right now.

"And you're staying at a safe place?" Puffy asked.

“Yeah, I’m staying at my friend Wil’s. He’s a really good guy,” Tommy told her. “He and his dad Phil and his brother Techno have all been super nice about letting me stay for as long as I need.”

“Wait, do you mean the Soot’s? Wilbur, Phil, and Technoblade?” Puffy asked, furrowing her brows.

“You know them?”

At confirmation, Puffy immediately relaxed, her shoulders dropping as she leaned back in her chair. “Yeah, Phil and I are old friends. I’m glad you’re staying with them. They’re a good family.”

Something in Tommy’s chest warmed at hearing how positively Puffy thought of the Soot’s. Of course he knew how good they were, but it was nice to know Puffy liked them too.

“They really are,” Tommy grinned.

“Well, I feel a lot better knowing you’re being taken care of by them,” Puffy laughed, looking far more relaxed than she had a moment ago. “I think you should ask about having them drive you home from the closing shift though. I don’t think Techno would mind.”

“I mean, Techno already drives me home sometimes, and a lot of times if he doesn’t do it then Wilbur will walk back with me,” Tommy said, frowning a bit. “But why do you say that? It’s honestly quicker to get to the subway from here than it is to walk back to my apartment.”

“I’ve just noticed an uptick in hero villain sightings in this area,” Puffy told him, her smile falling again. “Like less than two months ago, Dream was seen fighting two vigilantes on top of this cafe, and you know Dream doesn’t normally patrol in this area.”

Oh yeah. The night Dream fought Tubbo and Ranboo, just a little over a few weeks before he found out Tubbo and Ranboo were Nuke and Ender. While he’d been more distracted by Tubbo’s anger towards him at the time, in retrospect, it was pretty weird that Dream had been there at all.

“Do you, uh, think there’s any reason he was out here?” Tommy stammered, mind racing at the implications that could have regarding the Syndicate.

“I’m not sure, but I think it’s because of the increased villain activity in the area,” Puffy said casually, tapping the side of her cup.

Tommy stiffened. “Oh, uh, really? I hadn’t noticed.”

Puffy raised an eyebrow. “Really? I feel like I’m getting an alert on my phone every few days that someone saw Daedalus or Nemesis or, hell, even Siren in Eastside.”

“Do you think we need to be worried?” Tommy asked, trying to force himself to relax his shoulders.

“Nah, I wouldn't say we have much to worry about. I doubt villains are going to be coming after this cafe,” Puffy said, giving Tommy a strange look that he couldn't decipher. “Besides, I think villains get a bit of a bad rap anyway.”

Tommy tried not to clench his jaw. “What do you mean by that?”

“Most of them aren't as volatile or unpredictable as the media makes them seem. They have reasons for doing what they do, we just don't know what those reasons are.” Then, Puffy snorted. “Anyway, it's not like the heroes haven't pulled the same shit. They're just allowed to get away with it.”

Holy shit. *Holy shit.*

Puffy had the same views he did on villains. She understood how unfair the whole damn system was. Finally, someone else outside of this whole mess who got it.

“Y'know,” Tommy started, keeping his voice level, “not a lot of people would agree with you on that.”

Glancing up from her cup, Puffy smiled. “But I have a feeling you do.”

Tommy wasn't sure what to make of that. Puffy could've just meant that as a compliment, trying to tell him she knew he was an understanding person. But there could've been another layer as well. There was no way Puffy knew about his business with the Syndicate. If she'd found out, she would've confronted him by now since he was literally using her backroom as a makeshift clinic. Even if she didn't mind villains, he had to imagine she would've at least minded the blood.

No. There was no way Puffy knew. He was just reading way too much into things.

That seemed to mark the end of their conversation. Puffy told Tommy she needed to head out, and walked up to the counter where Foolish was in the middle of making another drink. The two of them had a quiet conversation, and then Foolish was handing his apron to Tommy to switch shifts. Once Tommy was settled behind the counter, he watched as Puffy guided Foolish out of the cafe, reaching a hand out to grab Eret—who had been waiting by the door but seemed surprised at Puffy's being there—and dragged them along with.

The start of the shift was slow. There was the usual lack of a late afternoon rush, and the only thing of note was that Tommy was finally allowed to open the bottle of pumpkin spice Puffy kept under the counter since fall was almost here. He made a few pumpkin-based drinks, soaking in the scent of cinnamon, cloves, and nutmeg, all while the golden light of the setting sun faded to something more akin to burnt orange.

It was when the sun was little more than a red line on the horizon that two new customers walked into the cafe.

It was two men, both looking as if they were in their early twenties. One of them had dark brown hair and even darker eyes, while the other was dirty blonde and kept his head down.

“Welcome to the Cloudy Cafe, what can I get you?” Tommy asked, forcing his customer service smile on.

“Uh, hi, can we get um... what do you want?” The brown-haired man said, nudging his friend with his elbow.

“I dunno. Something without caffeine?” The blonde replied with a shrug.

“We’re at a coffee shop and you’re not even going to get something with caffeine?” The brunet scoffed.

“Hey! I’m sure they have plenty of other drinks here that don’t have caffeine in them,” the blonde snapped.

The brunet sighed deeply before looking back at Tommy. “Sorry about him. He’s an idiot. What do you have that doesn’t have caffeine?”

“Uh... we have herbal tea, or hot chocolate?” Tommy suggested.

“Hot chocolate is good,” the blonde said.

“Okay, great. We’ll have one small hot chocolate, and a medium vanilla latte,” the brunet ordered.

Nodding, Tommy typed the drinks into the register.

“Oh, uh, by the way, does this cafe connect to the alley that opens up on Lemon Street?” The blonde suddenly asked as Tommy was preparing to ring them up, lifting his head so he wasn’t staring at the ground anymore.

That... was a random question.

“Um, yeah?”

The blonde nodded, his green eyes darting around the cafe at surprising speed. “Hm, alright. Sorry if that seemed weird, we were just walking on Lemon and I noticed that the alley is longer than it should be, and I wondered if it connected with the adjacent street.”

“He’s studying urban planning so he notices pointless shit like that no one else ever will,” the brunet said, smirking as he patted his friend’s shoulder.

“I just thought it was a weird city layout!” The blonde protested.

Tommy resisted the urge to roll his eyes. “Yeah, alright then. Anyway, what name do you want for the drinks?”

The two men shared a look, before the brunet answered. “George.”

Nodding, Tommy wrote the name down on both cups and George handed over the money. Then, he set about making the two drinks, glancing at the two new customers every once in a

while.

There was something up with them. The blonde one kept shifting his eyes and hunching over on himself, as if he was afraid of someone recognizing him. While Tommy thought the question about the back alley was weird, if the guy really was into urban planning, he supposed it would make sense. Either way, it wasn't his problem. If two random customers wanted to ask him about the layout of the back alley, that was their deal, not his.

Once Tommy called out the name for the drinks, the two men came to grab their cups. George left with a casual wave, but the blonde was slower to follow.

"See you later," he said, giving Tommy a strange look before walking out the door George held open for him.

Weird ass customer. Shrugging it off, Tommy quickly turned to the next customer at his register, and didn't think about the blonde and brunet men for the rest of his shift.

Things slowed down after that. The rest of the evening faded along with the rest of the daylight, into a relaxed atmosphere of a few customers typing on laptops, with one or two people murmuring softly to one another. Hours passed, and during an off moment, Tommy texted Wilbur if he wanted to come to the cafe at the end of his shift so they could get food on the way back to the house. When he checked his phone again half an hour later, he was surprised to see Wilbur hadn't responded.

Huh. Usually Wilbur responded almost instantly to any text he sent.

Shaking his head, Tommy watched as the rest of the customers trickled out like sand in an hourglass. Luckily for him, the shop emptied out early. So he went through the familiar cleaning routine much sooner than he usually would, checking his discord to see if he was going to be visited by any villains tonight.

Right as he took his phone out to check, he heard the distinctive discord ringtone and held the phone up to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Hey Tommy?" It was Blade, and he sounded out of breath. "Is the cafe closed yet?"

"Technically no, but everyone's already left so I was closing early anyway," Tommy explained, eyeing the empty street through the front windows. "You need to stop by?"

"It's not for me. It's for-" Blade's voice was suddenly cut off as someone else grabbed the phone.

"I don't need healing, I'm fine!" It was Siren, and his voice was tight with pain.

Tommy resisted the urge to roll his eyes. "What happened?"

"I just got lightly scratched-"

“He just about cut his foot off-”

“Don’t be so dramatic! It’s fine, all I need are some bandages.”

“Siren, stop being a fucking idiot and get your ass over here,” Tommy said into the phone. “Blade, carry him if you have to.”

“Hey, that’s not fair! You can’t just tell Blade to-”

There was a muffled shout as the phone was grabbed again.

“We’ll be there in five minutes,” Blade told him.

And with that, the call cut off, and Tommy sighed as he shoved his phone in his pocket. Time to go prepare the backroom.

A few minutes later, Tommy found himself leaning against the wall of the backroom, towels laid out and first aid kit ready to be used if it was necessary. He tapped his fingers on his thigh, scrolling through Twitter absentmindedly as he waited for a knock at the door.

Checking his texts again, he noticed that Wilbur still hadn’t replied. He must’ve been busy with work or something. Tommy could probably ask him about it when he got back to the house. Either way, it was a good thing now that Wilbur hadn’t replied, considering he was now going to have to take care of an injured Siren.

In the back of his head, he could hear Tubbo and Ranboo’s voices as he thought about how strange it was that Wilbur hadn’t replied, while Siren needed healing.

“We kinda thought that Wilbur was Siren?”

But... that was ridiculous. Wilbur was just busy with work. It was a coincidence, and nothing more.

That’s what he told himself as there was a knock at the door, and Tommy shoved his thoughts to the back of his head as he pushed to his feet to swing it open.

As expected, it was Blade and Siren. Siren had his arm slung around Blade’s shoulders, and his left leg was lifted slightly off the ground with blood dripping on the asphalt. Tommy stepped out of the doorway and gestured for Blade to bring Siren into the room, and Siren cursed as he sat down on the towels.

“Tommy, you don’t need to go through the trouble of healing me,” Siren argued as Tommy knelt down to inspect the leg.

The fabric of his jeans was ripped at the calf, taking a large chunk of his leg with it. It wasn’t anything life threatening, or even could cause permanent damage since it was just the fleshy part of his calf, but it had to be painful as hell. Not to mention, it was gushing blood.

Grabbing some gauze, Tommy immediately pressed it to the wound, ignoring Siren’s hiss of pain at the pressure. It only took seconds for the gauze square to be soaked, so Tommy

grabbed a few more and added them to his fistful.

“Don’t be so dramatic. The last thing I want to do is find you in a dark alleyway passed out from blood loss again,” Tommy shot back, rolling his eyes. “Besides, this thing has to hurt like a bitch. Did Dream chop a piece of your damn leg off or something?”

Siren snorted. “Actually, it was Rewind who did this. I don’t think he meant to. While I’m not clear on exactly what happened, I think he was trying to use his time powers to rewind and grab me, but he misjudged the timing and instead of blocking my legs so I tripped, he accidentally put a pipe through my leg.”

Tommy almost dropped the gauze he was holding. “What the fuck? How does that even happen?!”

“I’m not sure, but one second I was fine, and the next I had a literal pipe going through my calf. And not like I’d been stabbed, but as if it had just been embedded in there. Like when you glitch through a wall in a video game or something.”

“And did you just end up ripping it out?” Tommy asked, shoving down the nausea that rose in his throat at that description.

“Yeah, I did, even though that probably wasn’t the smartest thing. Again, I don’t think Rewind did it on purpose, because the second he saw me screaming about the pipe in my leg he started panicking right with me,” Siren explained, tilting his head up to the ceiling. “Didn’t apologize though. Bastard.”

“Good thing Dream wasn’t there. I think he would’ve just laughed,” Blade snorted.

“Oh, he would’ve gotten such a kick out of that,” Siren huffed, smirking to himself. “I haven’t seen him recently though, have you?”

Blade shook his head. “No, I haven’t. He’s been less active for the past few weeks, which is odd for him.”

Frowning, Tommy glanced up at the two villains through his hair. “Dream’s been quiet?”

“Yeah, we haven’t been seeing him nearly as much as we were a few weeks ago,” Siren explained, his lips twisting with a frown. “Even stranger, I’ve heard reports that he’s been spotted in Eastside. Not looking to fight someone, just sneaking around like he’s doing espionage or some shit.”

Tommy suppressed a shiver from running down his spine. “What the hell could he want in Eastside?”

“I’m not sure,” Blade murmured, although Tommy could see through the eye holes in his boar mask that he was staring at him directly. “I have my theories, but I want to wait until I get more evidence before bringing it to the others.”

“Yeah, that sounds reasonable,” Tommy muttered, tilting his head back down to look at the wound again. “Anyway, uh, Siren you ready?”

Siren groaned. “You can just bandage me up, it’s fine-”

“Shut up, bitch. I’ll heal what I want,” Tommy said. And before Siren could protest again, orange light started to shine from Tommy’s hands, and both of them went silent as Tommy’s healing powers went into effect.

It was a nasty wound, but it didn’t hit anything important. After a few beats of silence, Tommy’s head was pounding considerably, and pins and needles were shooting up his hands, but otherwise he was alright.

Sighing, Tommy let go, and he didn’t even need to say anything before Blade was shoving a glass of water in his hands.

“Thanks,” Tommy muttered, taking a long sip of the drink.

After waiting for the lights to stop dancing behind his eyes, Tommy leaned back over to check on the leg, and was pleased to see it had almost completely sealed itself over. The patch of skin that hadn’t been there before Tommy healed it was a much paler shade than the rest of the leg, but otherwise the scar didn’t seem all that bad.

While Tommy was looking at the leg though, he felt a hand reach over and ruffle his hair.

“You didn’t need to do that,” Siren said quietly, guilt dripping from his tone.

Sighing, Tommy shoved the hand away from his head and straightened back up. “Why are you so upset? This is literally my job.”

“I just... I guess I’m worried about you burning yourself out,” Siren admitted.

Tommy resisted the urge to flip him off. “I’m fine, seriously. I’ve been staying at my friend’s place for a while now and things are really good because of it. I’m not going to burn out.”

“You sure?” Tommy nodded, and Siren hummed. “Is this the same place I dropped you off a little while ago? Uh, what was his name? William?”

“Wilbur,” Tommy corrected, missing the pointed look Blade shot Siren. “I’ve been staying at Wilbur’s place with him and his family.”

“And you like it there? They’re all good to you?” Siren pushed, and even though the blindfold, Tommy could feel his intense stare.

“Siren, don’t push him for personal information,” Blade stepped in, the warning obvious in his tone.

“He doesn’t have to answer me if he doesn’t want to,” Siren snapped back.

“Blade, I appreciate it but it’s fine,” Tommy reassured the man, taking another sip of his water. It’s not like he minded talking about how kind the Soot’s were. And hopefully knowing how great the Soot’s were being would make Siren feel less guilty about letting him do his job. “Yeah, they’re all really good to me. Phil, Wilbur’s dad, is a really cool guy. He’s

super easy to talk to, and he makes really good tea too. I'm not nervous around him like I am with most parents, so that's pretty pog. Then there's Techno, Wil's brother. He's super cool and tries to act all gruff but he's actually really caring. He'll offer to drive me home from work a lot, or make me food without me having to ask for it, just stuff like that."

Blade had his arms folded over his chest, and was staring at the wall while Tommy spoke. Meanwhile, Siren seemed enraptured by what he was saying.

"Go on," he encouraged with a small smile.

Leaning further back against the wall, Tommy grinned. "And Wilbur is- well, Wilbur's just fucking fantastic. He's my best friend, even if that is a bit weird to say since he's in his twenties and I'm a teenager, but that's just because he's kind of a loser," Tommy joked, missing the way Siren pouted at this. "But honestly, uh, it's not that weird I guess because... well, this is kind of stupid of me to say since this is just a joke between us, but I kind of think of him as an older brother?" His cheeks flushed as he admitted it out loud, even though he'd been thinking that for weeks now. "I dunno, it's kind of stupid-"

"No, it's not stupid," Siren cut him off. His voice was strangely tight, as if he was holding back tears. "It's not stupid at all. I think, uh, Wilbur would be really happy to know that."

Tommy ducked his head. "I don't think I need to tell him. It's a bit embarrassing, innit?"

"Why would it be embarrassing? You guys are obviously really close friends. I think he'd appreciate hearing-"

"*Siren*," Blade suddenly snapped, cutting him off. "Your leg should be good by now, so I think it's time for us to go." Tommy frowned, confused by the Blade's change in demeanor. He didn't understand why he seemed so upset about the conversation that was going on, but something had changed the minute Siren started asking him about his personal life.

Siren pouted at Blade. "Aw, c'mon, let me give Tommy advice!"

"You're not the right person to be giving him that kind of advice," Blade shot back, pushing to his feet and holding a hand out for Siren.

Although Siren seemed reluctant, he took the hand and grunted as Blade pulled him upright. Then, Blade offered Tommy the same hand, which he took gratefully as the villain helped him up.

"Thanks for the help, Tommy. We'll get out of your hair now," Blade said, patting his shoulder before turning for the door.

Siren, meanwhile, lingered.

"I hope you know I don't mean to come off as pushy," Siren told him, running his hands through his hair. "I just get worried and want to make sure you're in a good place, y'know?"

"Don't worry Big S, I get it. But I promise I'm in a good place. Really."

Nodding, Siren smiled at him. “Alright, I trust you. Just make sure to get some rest.”

Snorting, Tommy rolled his eyes. “Okay *mom*. I’ll make sure to go to bed early.”

Siren huffed and followed Blade out the back door, giving Tommy one last wave before the door shut completely.

Finally alone, Tommy’s shoulders sagged as he rubbed his temples to try and ease the headache pounding behind his eyes. It wasn’t a bad headache by any means, especially compared to what he’d dealt with before, but it wasn’t pleasant either.

Shaking his head, Tommy went through his now standard cleanup routine. Scrub down any blood that got on the floors, throw the towels in the wash, take out the trash so there wasn’t any bloody gauze in there, stuff like that. Once the backroom looked presentable, Tommy then headed back out to the front of the shop and slung his backpack over his shoulder, ready to get on the subway so he could head back to the house.

Tommy didn’t even make it out the front door when he got a call on his phone. Not his discord, but his cell. Checking the screen, he saw it was Wilbur, and answered it immediately.

“Hey Wil, what’s up?” Tommy asked as he held the phone up to his ear.

“Hi Toms, are you still at the cafe?”

“Uh, yeah. I was just about to head out.”

“If you want, I can be there in five minutes and we can get dinner? I had a work thing nearby.”

Tommy’s stomach growled at the mere mention of food.

“Sounds good to me.”

“See you soon.”

The line clicked off as Wilbur hung up, and Tommy grinned as he leaned against the wall. He was starving, and getting food with Wilbur was going to be just the thing to cure his headache.

Siren’s encouragement was still echoing in his ears. *Wilbur would be really happy to hear that*. Would he? Tommy didn’t want to come off as too clingy, especially not when Wilbur had already been kind enough to let Tommy basically move in without having to pay rent or anything.

But Tommy also remembered what Phil had told him, early on in his stay at the Soot’s. About how Wilbur was the kind of person who needed verbal reassurance of his relationships with others. How even though he might seem confident, he actually had a lot of insecurity when it came to the people close to him.

Maybe... maybe not. Tommy wasn’t sure. Either way, he needed food first and foremost.

Sure enough, five minutes after Wilbur's call, a familiar figure knocked on the door to the cafe.

"Hey gremlin," Wilbur grinned, hands shoved in his pockets as he leaned on one leg.

"Old bitch," Tommy shot back, stepping out of the cafe and twisting the key in the lock. "Where are we going?"

"I was thinking Bad's diner? We haven't been there in a while," Wilbur told him, already turning to walk down the street.

"Can I get another muffin?" Tommy asked, bouncing on the heels of his feet as he followed Wilbur.

Wilbur chuckled. "Of course. Just make sure to get some real food too."

Tommy cheered as he hurried behind Wilbur, already daydreaming of which muffin flavor he was going to get.

Then, his steps faltered, and he whipped his head to the other side of the street.

"What's wrong?" Wilbur asked, pausing mid-stride.

Furrowing his brows, Tommy's eyes scanned the rooftops. He could feel eyes watching him again, prickling the back of his neck and practically boring a hole into his skull. He had to suppress the urge to shudder.

"Nothing, I just-" He paused again, narrowing his eyes, but not being able to make anything out in the shadows. "Just feel like we're being watched."

Wilbur frowned, whipping his head in the direction Tommy was staring. "By who?"

"I don't know. But I feel like someone's staring at me," Tommy admitted. When he still couldn't see anything across the street, he sighed and shook his head. "Probably just my imagination. I'm getting paranoid."

"No, you're not being paranoid. Now that you mentioned it, I feel it too," Wilbur said, watching the rooftops with the same intensity. There was a beat of silence as they waited for something to happen, someone to appear.

The orange streetlights buzzed above their heads with the faint hum of electricity. Other than that, everything was silent.

Finally, Wilbur sighed and turned away.

"I think you should stop walking alone at night," Wilbur said, throwing an arm over Tommy's shoulders and pulling him close as they started walking again. "From now on I want you to call me or Techno so one of us can take you home."

Tommy ignored the way Wilbur said take you *home*, as if it was just as much his home as it was theirs, and instead focused on the other part of that sentence.

“I’m not a damn baby, Wil. I can walk to the subway station by myself,” Tommy argued.

“It’s not that I don’t trust you, it’s that I don’t trust this part of town,” Wilbur explained, pulling Tommy along while still eyeing the opposite side of the street, although the feeling of being watched had faded.

“Wow, you know I technically still live down here, right?” Tommy huffed. “Don’t need to be so judgemental.”

Pausing in his steps, Wilbur turned so both his hands were on Tommy’s shoulders, and he leaned down to meet his eyes. “I’m not trying to be judgemental. But I’m worried about you because we were just being watched by someone we couldn’t see.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “You’re so overprotective. I promise, I’m fine.”

Wilbur sighed. “Please, let me act like your overprotective older brother. I’d rather you get annoyed at me for that than wind up getting hurt.”

Older brother. Tommy froze at the words, thinking of how Wilbur put a voice to exactly what he had admitted to Siren less than half an hour ago.

“You... you think of yourself as my older brother?” Tommy asked, blinking at him.

The worry faded from Wilbur’s eyes at that, replaced by something soft instead. “Yeah, I do.”

Warmth filled Tommy’s chest. “That’s, uh, cool. Me too. I mean, like, I think of you as a brother too.”

“Don’t say that, I’ll cry,” Wilbur joked. “But now do you understand why I’m so worried about you?”

Sighing, Tommy nodded. “Yeah, but I still think having you or Techno walk me home every night is overboard.” In truth, the last thing he wanted was for Wilbur or Techno to show up unexpectedly when he had a villain bleeding out on his backroom floor. “What if I just call you guys to come get me if I notice anything suspicious?”

Wilbur frowned. “But you might not notice anything weird.”

“I mean, I noticed someone staring tonight, didn’t I?” Tommy asked. “Besides, you guys are working a lot and I don’t want you to have to take time to come get me unless you really need to.”

“I’d rather miss out on work than have you potentially be in a dangerous situation,” Wilbur pushed. Tommy met his gaze with a flat stare of his own, trying to show Wilbur that he wasn’t going to back down on this.

There were a few more beats of silence. Then, Wilbur sighed and shook his head.

“Fine. If you promise to call me the second you notice something suspicious, we can make that a deal,” Wilbur relented. “But you need to promise that if you have *any* kind of bad feeling, anything at all, you’ll lock yourself inside the cafe and come call us.”

Tommy thought Wilbur was being a little overdramatic, but he nodded anyway.

“Yeah, fine, I promise.”

Shoulders dropping in relief, Wilbur nodded before pulling Tommy in for a hug.

“Your older brother instincts are already annoying,” Tommy joked, although he leaned in to rest his forehead on Wilbur’s shoulder.

“Shut up, gremlin,” Wilbur grumbled, squeezing him tightly.

The hug lasted a few more moments, Tommy basking in how warm he felt despite the chilly fall air. Then, there was a loud gurgling noise from his stomach, and he flushed red as Wilbur laughed.

“Oh no, the poor child is starving!” Wilbur exclaimed, letting go of the hug to grin at him.

“Fuck off, of course I’m hungry! I just got off work!” Tommy shot back, frowning at Wilbur.

“Let’s go get the starving baby some sustenance,” Wilbur teased, ruffling Tommy’s hair as he resumed walking down the sidewalk.

“You’re such a prick, I’m not a baby!”

“My little baby brother!”

“Shut up you old bitch!”

The two continued to shout all the way to Bad’s diner, ignoring the eyes still watching them from afar.

Chapter End Notes

ok so first things first what wilbur did in this chapter was not okay! I know it seemed like a cute scene that ended all nicely, but as I'm sure you guys could tell, techno was *not* happy with the fact that wilbur was taking advantage of his secret identity to find out what tommy thought of him without him knowing. so after siren and blade left the cafe techno gave wil a very long lecture before wil was like "oh well I gotta go walk tommy home time to change into my civilian clothes bye tech-"

(but hey at least we got cute brothers content)

also shoutout to the fact that because of this fic I met one of my readers on tumblr and it turns out not only do we go to the same uni, but we literally shared a class in our 1st year which was surreal as hell but she's super cool so shoutout to her go check out [her ao3](#) she has a great crimeboys fic set in the rust universe <3

and ty to both of my betas as well! ily both so much I wouldn't be able to write this without you guys <3 check them on ao3 too

[phantom](#)
[darling](#)

AND last shoutout to the fact that we had an ANIMATIC GET MADE?? I forgot to link it in earlier a/n but go [check it out](#) on youtube it's so great

make sure to join our discord if you haven't! it's a super fun and chill place and I sometimes share sneak peaks at upcoming chapters in there :)
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

ANYWAY sorry plot has been a bit slow lately, I swear I'm just placing down a bunch of building blocks for shit to pop off. we'll get back into the action *very* soon

make sure to leave a comment if you enjoyed! I do actually read all of them even if I don't respond to most, but if you leave a question I'll do my best to answer it! they all really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter [@bonesandthebees](#)

overprotective

Chapter Summary

Tommy is getting real annoyed at how overprotective everyone is of him now.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone I have returned with another chapter! as always ty all so much for the love you keep giving this fic, and I'm very excited for all of you to read this chapter

don't have much to say except usual violence warnings apply I think? anyway, hope you enjoy!

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

Although Tommy knew he should probably be worried about someone spying on him when he left the cafe, he had to admit, everyone being overprotective of him was starting to get annoying.

First it started with Wilbur, with his whole insistence that Tommy call him if he ever sensed anyone watching him again like that night they went to the diner. Then of course Wilbur told Techno, who gave Tommy a bottle of pepper spray and a pocket knife, making him promise that if anyone tried shit, he wouldn't hesitate to use either of those things. Then Phil took the pocket knife away much to Tommy's disappointment, but he let him keep the pepper spray, and doubled down on Wilbur's whole 'call one of us if you notice anything suspicious at all.'

Then, of course Tommy knew he should probably mention it to the Syndicate, which made Siren want to set up a guard rotation for the cafe, and Tommy had to argue with the man for nearly ten minutes over discord dms to get it through his head why that would be a terrible idea. It didn't help that Jester came up with the same idea, and Tommy had to spend another fifteen minutes explaining everything to him all over again about how he wouldn't exactly be able to explain to his boss why he had a bodyguard.

He appreciated how worried everyone was for him. But he was fine. Nothing even happened. He thought someone might be watching him, but that was it. There was no use in panicking over something so small.

But yeah, now everyone in Tommy's life was acting ridiculously overprotective of him. Wilbur texted him every time he got off work, it wasn't uncommon for someone from the Syndicate—usually Daedalus, Jester, Siren, or Nemesis—to show up at the cafe just to watch

over him while he went through the closing shift, and Techno kept talking about wanting to train him in self-defense. The only reason he hadn't yet was because they just hadn't found the time.

In complete contrast, Tommy had barely heard from Tubbo and Ranboo in weeks. Ever since he told them that he needed time before he could come home, the two had been keeping their distance. Sometimes he would get a text from Ranboo, asking where he put the soy sauce in the cabinet, or Tubbo would text him just to check that he was alive, but otherwise they didn't bother him.

Tommy was frustrated by how conflicted he was over this. On the one hand, they were doing what he asked them to. They were giving him space, and he was grateful for that. But on the other hand, he missed his best friends. He hated whenever he saw a funny meme and went to send it to Tubbo, but had to stop himself at the last second. He hated it when he saw a cool recipe he knew Ranboo would love to try and make, but had to stop himself from saving the video.

This was what he wanted. He still didn't feel ready to go talk things out, but there was still a hole in his chest that used to be filled by his two best friends. It ached, and he knew that he was going to have to confront things eventually.

Eventually, but not yet.

At least he had the Soot family. Whenever he got too sad thinking about Tubbo and Ranboo, Wilbur would usually be there to drag him to his room to ask for advice on songwriting, or Techno would offer to watch whatever nature documentary on Netflix Tommy wanted to put on.

One day, when Wilbur and Techno were both out, but Tommy found the ache of missing his best friends throbbing painfully in his chest, he finally worked up the courage to knock on Phil's office door like he had offered to Tommy when he first started staying there. Although they had spoken plenty of times now considering Tommy had been living there for over a month, he still had yet to ever find himself in Phil's office. Until now.

"Tommy? Is that you?" Phil called out after Tommy had knocked on the door.

"Um, yeah, it's me," Tommy called back, already wanting to run back and hide in his room.

"Feel free to come in, the door's unlocked."

Shit. Well, too late to turn around now.

Taking a breath to steady himself, Tommy twisted the door knob and stepped into the office.

The office itself was more... quaint than he expected it to be. It wasn't particularly large, although the room wasn't cramped either. There were two bookcases on the wall next to the door, and the wall behind Phil's head, both filled with a wide array of books that Tommy didn't recognize the titles of. There was a soft-looking, worn leather couch behind Phil's

desk, with a few blankets tossed over the cushions. Then, there was Phil's desk itself, which was a grand old thing made of dark wood, with two large computer monitors sitting on top.

There were also several candles burning, Tommy noticed. There was a dark orange one next to Phil's computer, along with two more sitting on the bookshelves. It made the room smell of cinnamon, apples, and sandalwood, and it almost reminded Tommy of the cafe.

Phil was leaning back in his desk chair, eyes skimming some article on one of his monitors, but he turned his gaze away from the computer when Tommy walked in.

"Hi Tommy," Phil said, smiling at Tommy as he walked into the office. "Feel free to sit down wherever you like."

There was another small chair settled near Phil's desk, one that he could hypothetically drag over so he could be closer to Phil, but he decided against it for the time being and plopped down on the couch instead.

As soon as his butt hit the seat though, he started sliding down the leather, and yelped as he tried to steady himself on the smooth surface. Phil, unsurprisingly, let out a sharp laugh.

"Oh yeah, I should've warned you about that. That couch can be pretty damn slippery at times," Phil told him with mirth dancing in his eyes.

"How the fuck do you even get a couch this smooth?" Tommy asked, grunting as he pushed himself back up to a normal sitting position.

"It's just from being worn down over the years," Phil explained, grinning at him. "I've had that couch since before I adopted Wilbur and Tech."

"Damn, so this is ancient then. It's a miracle it's still standing," Tommy snarked, sliding down again and eventually deciding it'd be easier to just lay across the damn thing.

"Wow, calling all three of us old in one go, huh?"

Tommy smirked. "Well, obviously. All three of you could qualify to go to an old person's home, I'm sure. But don't worry Phil, I'd never send you to an old person home. Only Wil and Tech."

"I appreciate it, mate. Glad to know I got my youngest on my side," Phil joked, seemingly oblivious to the slip up he'd just made.

Tommy didn't miss it though. He froze, the words *my youngest* repeating in his head. What did Phil mean by *his* youngest? Tommy was the youngest in the house, sure, but from the way Phil worded that, it almost seemed like he was implying that Tommy was the youngest of his kids. That Tommy was one of his sons, just like Techno and Wilbur.

Phil noticed the way Tommy stiffened, and seemed to catch onto what he said.

"Oh, uh, I didn't- I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable, Tommy," Phil stammered, suddenly straightening up in his seat. "Guess you've just been staying with us so long,

y'know I-" he cut himself off with a nervous laugh. "I'm just being silly. Sorry about that."

Tommy stared at Phil, trying to get a read on what he was saying. He wasn't taking back the implications in his words, just apologizing for possibly making Tommy uncomfortable.

There were two ways Tommy could react to this. He could let the fear gnawing at his insides rise up, lash out and run away like he had done before when anyone acted like they wanted to try and parent him. It never worked out. They never actually wanted Tommy, they wanted a perfect child who they could mold in their own image.

But Phil wasn't like that. Tommy knew that. And there was another way he could react to this.

He could trust that Phil wouldn't push too far and too fast. He could trust that this family was different from the others. He could trust that he already had a brother out of Wilbur, and while he might not exactly know Phil well enough to think of him as a father, that didn't mean that day would never come.

Tommy chose the latter option.

"Do you see me as a son figure, Philza Soot?" Tommy asked with a shit-eating grin.

The tension immediately dropped from Phil's shoulders, and he chuckled to himself. "Um, maybe a little bit? I dunno, I guess you living with us just reminds me of the first few months I had Wilbur here and it's making me nostalgic. But I get you haven't known me for very long, and you have your own life with your own job and apartment that you're going to want to go back to eventually, so don't feel any pressure to stay here just because I'm a sappy old man." He paused then, smile softening as he tapped his finger on the arm of his chair. "Just know that even after you leave, you'll always have a home here if you ever want to come back."

Oh.

A home.

Tommy could have a home here.

His throat suddenly felt a bit tight, and he had to swallow a few times before he could speak.

"I appreciate that a lot," he said softly, keeping his eyes on the floor. "I... I don't really know what I'm going to do once I talk to Tubbo and Ranboo again, but I'll remember that."

"You don't need to know your plans yet. Just know that the door here will always be open for you, but if you don't end up going through it, none of us will mind," Phil told him, still smiling.

There was a silence between them. Tommy wondered if he was supposed to say something else, if he should make an effort to continue this conversation, but thankfully Phil spoke again before he had to try and figure it out.

“So anyway, ignoring all that sappy shit, what did you wanna come see me for?” Phil asked, rolling his shoulders as the nostalgic look in his eyes faded.

“Oh, uh, I didn’t have a real reason,” Tommy admitted, ducking his head again. “It’s just, um, you said I could come into your office if I ever wanted, and Wil and Techno aren’t here and I was kinda, um,” *lonely* “bored. But I can leave if you’re busy, I don’t wanna distract you from work-”

“Tommy, it’s fine,” Phil reassured him, gesturing for him to sit back down when he started to stand. “I was just thinking of taking a break from work anyway. It’s boring shit that I really don’t feel like doing right now,” he said, clicking out of a few windows on one of his monitors without letting Tommy see what they were. “Usually when I take breaks from work I play video games. Do you play a lot of games?”

Tommy shrugged. “I’ve played Animal Crossing on Wil’s old GameCube, and I’ve played Mario Kart before on a DS. I think one of the foster homes I was in had a Wii, but I don’t think I got to play much before they sent me back.”

Sympathy flashed across Phil’s face, but it was only for a brief moment before he was reaching under his desk.

“Well, have you ever played Halo?”

“I’ve heard of it,” Tommy said, remembering how in one of his foster homes, his ‘brother’ had spent hours on end playing it, but would yell at Tommy to get out of the room if he ever tried to watch. “Don’t know much about it though.”

“You wanna play?” Phil asked as he straightened up from under the desk with two xbox controllers in his hands.

“Do I get to do cool stuff in it?” Tommy asked, already reaching for the controller.

“You get to shoot aliens in the face.”

Tommy grinned. “Sounds poggers as hell.”

Matching his smile, Phil switched the monitor to the video game, and Tommy watched the xbox loading screen start up.

As it turned out, Tommy was not very good at Halo. He had never played one of those shooty games before (Phil called it a ‘first person shooter’ or an ‘FPS’ because he was a fucking nerd), and the controls were nothing like Animal Crossing or Mario Kart. Phil did his best to teach Tommy how to play, but even with the NPC’s set on easy mode, Tommy kept getting his ass handed to him.

Eventually, Phil switched the game mode over so there were no enemies to kill, and instead it was just the two of them in an empty valley with random weapons and vehicles scattered all over the place. Once Tommy found a strange purple plane thing that Phil called a ‘ghost’, he

stopped caring about trying to aim the gun in the right direction. Instead, he just started flying around the whole map in his alien spaceship, cheering while Phil tried to shoot him down.

Tommy had a lot of fun that day, even if he did suck at Halo. After that, he started going to Phil's office when Wilbur and Techno weren't home, and the two would play games like Halo or Minecraft (which Tommy had never even heard of before Phil and quickly realized it was one of the best games in the world, second only to Animal Crossing).

Nearly two weeks after Wilbur and Tommy had felt eyes watching them when they left the cafe, Tommy found himself once again arguing about how he really didn't need someone to walk him home.

"Nemesis, I'm telling you, I'm fine," Tommy insisted, his keys jingling in his pocket as he finished the last of the closing routine for the cafe.

"Why can't you just let me walk you to the subway station?" Nemesis asked, leaning against the counter while Tommy pushed the mop towards the backroom. She had a cup of hot chocolate in her hands, the steaming curling up and around her face as she took small sips of it.

"Because every hero in the goddamn city is gunning it for you right now? And I'd really rather not have to fix your cracked skull again," Tommy said, grunting as he shoved the mop in the broom closet. "Plus, if there's anyone I should avoid being seen in public with, it's you. I already know your name, and that alone is risky as shit for the both of us."

Nemesis huffed, pushing a few strands of cotton candy hair out of her face. "I know, but I'm just worried about you. We all are." Her voice softened at this part, and Tommy resisted the urge to sigh, because he understood that they were just worried about him and he really appreciated it. But again, the overprotectiveness was a little frustrating.

"Damn right we are," another voice chimed in.

Thanatos strolled out from the cafe bathroom, readjusting the skull mask on his face that he'd replaced his original blue and red goggles with after his rebranding. Then, he settled himself next to Nemesis, their shoulders brushing as he lifted up his own iced coffee (yes, he asked Tommy for an iced coffee at midnight) and took a long sip with loud slurping noises coming from the straw.

It was the first time Tommy had seen Thanatos in person since he healed him all that time ago, and it was relieving for him to see that his powers had done wonders on the burn scars. Sure, they were still there, but Thanatos didn't have trouble moving with them and didn't seem to be in any pain, so that was enough for Tommy to think of it as a job well done.

Not to mention, he liked talking with Thanatos. The guy was funny, and banter flowed easily between the two of them. Tommy had a feeling that if he ever met Thanatos in civilian form, the two of them would become fast friends.

"Not you too," Tommy groaned, slamming the door to the broom closet shut. "C'mon Thanatos, you know I'm a Big Man! You're all such fucking mother hens."

“Yeah, because you’re being watched by some creepy fuck that probably doesn’t have great intentions,” Thanatos shot back. “But I gotta admit, you also have a good point about not being seen with Nemesis.”

“Thanatos,” Nemesis protested.

“You know I’m right,” Thanatos shot back. “You’re literally one of the most wanted villains in the city right now. If there’s anyone Tommy shouldn’t be seen with, it’s you.”

“Exactly. Which means I’m walking home by myself,” Tommy said, slinging his backpack over his shoulder as he headed towards the doors. “C’mon you two, get out of my cafe before I drag your asses out.”

The two villains followed Tommy towards the doors, checking to make sure no one was out on the street who could see them. Once they were all outside, Tommy twisted the lock to secure the door, and then raised an eyebrow at the two waiting villains.

“Alright you two, get goin’ now, I got it from here,” Tommy said, making shooing motions at the two of them.

Thanatos, who once again sipped loudly on his iced coffee, huffed. “If anything happens at all you better call one of us, got it?”

Rolling his eyes, Tommy nodded. “Jesus christ, I’ve promised this about ten times now, yes I’m fine.”

With one final nod, Thanatos patted Tommy on the shoulder while Nemesis gently ruffled his hair. Then, the two turned down the opposite street Tommy had to walk down to get to the subway station, and Tommy watched until they turned a corner and were gone from sight.

Then, Tommy headed out towards the subway station. He kept his phone in hand, looking for that prickling feeling on the back of his neck that would tell him if he was being watched, but he didn’t feel it. His eyes skimmed the rooftops across the street, but he didn’t see any more strange flashes of white. The only sounds on the street were his footsteps squelching against the wet concrete, as it had rained earlier that afternoon and the sidewalk was still damp.

He didn’t have an umbrella, but the rain seemed to be over. Still, Tommy kept nervously glancing up at the swirling clouds above his head, feeling the weight of the moisture in the air, and he hurried his footsteps just in case his luck decided to die out tonight and the downpour started up again.

Tommy was so focused on the clouds in the sky and searching for movement on the rooftops that he didn’t even notice the two figures across the street until there was a sudden shout.

“Shit! That’s not exactly helping!” A man yelled.

“I’m sorry but we need to get home one way or another,” the other person replied.

Whipping his head across the street, it took Tommy a moment to locate the two figures bathed in the orange glow of the streetlight. One was leaning heavily against the other, and

they were walking with the pained slowness that could only come from an injury.

It took Tommy a moment to recognize Monarch. He hadn't seen them since they'd saved him from getting mugged over a year before, but their general look was relatively the same. White blouse, gold corset, and a literal cape that was made out of a sheer, sparkling fabric that looked like actual stars. Everything about Monarch screamed royalty, as they were the type of vigilante to go all out with matching their look to their name. And if that wasn't enough, the mask that covered the lower half of their face was white and gold and covered in gorgeous embroidery, and they had a literal golden crown to keep their hair back.

The other person with Monarch though... Tommy didn't recognize him.

He was about the same height as Monarch, although had significantly broader shoulders and very well-muscled arms. Like, this guy wasn't as buff as the Blade, but he was close. His face was completely covered by a golden mask shaped that made him look like a living statue. He was dressed in a similar color scheme to Monarch, but with more gold as opposed to white accents. His clothing was looser and made of more draping fabrics, and it reminded Tommy of something you'd wear in a desert.

Wait, the Syndicate had mentioned Monarch had a new partner, right? Aurelion, the guy who dressed in a bunch of gold? This guy certainly fit that description.

The man he presumed to be Aurelion was the one leaning heavily against Monarch's side, and even from across the street, Tommy could see a dark splotch on his shirt that must've been blood. Monarch was struggling to guide Aurelion down the street, and although Tommy had no clue where they lived, it didn't look like they should wait that long for Aurelion to get medical attention.

Alright. Guess he was back on the clock.

"Hey!" Tommy shouted as he walked across the street, causing both vigilantes' heads to whip up. "You guys okay?"

"To-" Aurelion started, before Monarch shot him a look and he dragged the syllable out instead. "Toonight? Yeah, we're doing great tonight, how about you, random citizen?"

"Excuse him, he's delirious from blood loss," Monarch apologized, looking sheepish.

...yeah, okay, Aurelion definitely seemed like he was a bit delirious.

"Uh, you guys are Monarch and Aurelion, right?" Tommy asked, although who the hell else would be dressed like this bleeding out on a random street at this time of night?

"That's us," Monarch answered. "If you need help with something though, you might want to call the authorities instead of us. As you can see, Aurelion isn't in great shape right now."

"I'm fine! Just a small stab wound, we're good," Aurelion insisted, despite the fact that he couldn't stand up straight.

“A stab wound isn’t very good,” Tommy deadpanned. “In fact, it’s kinda shit. You look like you need help.”

“We’ll be fine. We’re heading back to my place now so we can get him patched up,” Monarch explained, grunting again when Aurelion slumped further against them.

“How far away is that? Because he doesn’t seem like he’s gonna be able to walk for much longer,” Tommy pointed out.

“Just a few blocks, we’ll make it no problem,” Monarch said, although Tommy could hear the uncertainty in their tone.

A few blocks. They were only a block away from the cafe.

Well, it’s not like the Syndicate ever said he wasn’t *allowed* to heal non-villains, right? Besides, it’s not like he could just leave a vigilante to bleed out. Especially when the vigilante in question was Monarch’s partner. Tommy still owed Monarch for saving him that one time, after all.

“I can patch you up. My place is only a block away from here,” Tommy said, jerking his thumb back towards the cafe.

Monarch frowned. “You have a first aid kit?”

Tommy snorted. “I have everything you’ll need to get that fixed up,” he told them. “Plus, I have a lot of experience with patching up wounds like this.”

“You do?” Aurelion questioned, sounding a bit breathless now.

“Sure do. Now are we gonna go before Aurelion bleeds out, or what?” Tommy questioned, raising an eyebrow at Monarch.

Monarch’s frown deepened, their pure white eyes crinkling at the corners as they glanced down at Aurelion, as if checking to see what he thought. Tommy had no idea how they had a silent exchange when Aurelion’s entire face was hidden behind his mask, but they certainly seemed to, because after a few beats, Monarch nodded.

“Okay, we’ll go with you,” Monarch said.

“Sounds good! I’ll lead the way,” Tommy told them, turning on his heel and leading them towards the cafe.

It was a slow going process. Aurelion really wasn’t doing too hot despite his insistence that it was just a baby stab wound and nothing to get worked up about. At one point, Tommy ducked around to his other side to help Monarch carry him, and the two worked together to drag Aurelion towards the cafe.

Was it a good idea for Tommy to be bringing the two of them to the cafe? They were vigilantes after all. Vigilantes he didn’t know. With the Syndicate, not only did he have an

arrangement, but he trusted them. And obviously he trusted Nuke and Ender not to blow his secret. But what would Monarch and Aurelion think?

They ended up passing the front of the cafe and going around the back so they could go through the backroom. Tommy wasn't too keen to enter in the front with two vigilantes following him, especially now that he might've had a stalker, so he figured the extra steps were worth it.

Thankfully, Tommy also had a key for the backdoor. As Monarch leaned Aurelion against a wall in the alleyway, Tommy twisted the lock to open the backdoor, and the room lit up with harsh white lights as he darted to set up his area.

Dumping his backpack on the floor, Tommy spread out the towels and yanked the first aid kit out like he always did. Then, with his area prepared, he called out, "Monarch, you can bring him in now!"

Monarch grunted as they pulled Aurelion off the wall and guided him into the backroom. Tommy shut the door behind them, and gestured for Monarch to set Aurelion down on the towels.

As soon as Aurelion was laying down though, he let out a confused noise.

"Wait, why the hell are we at the Cloudy Cafe?"

"I work here so I had the keys," Tommy shrugged, kneeling down next to Aurelion and moving to lift his shirt.

Monarch settled down on the opposite side of Aurelion, and eyed the towels Tommy had laid down. "You seem like you've done this before," they commented.

Tommy snorted as he carefully peeled the fabric back from the bloody wound, sighing in relief when he saw it had clean edges—done with a knife and not a piece of debris. That would be a lot easier to deal with. "Yeah, you could say that."

"Wh- dude, what do you mean you've done this before?!" Aurelion asked, his voice strained as Tommy pressed gauze on the wound. "Do you just regularly bandage stab wounds in the backroom of the cafe you work at?"

"Pretty much," Tommy shrugged, nodding to himself as he cleaned up the worst of the blood. "Alright, now don't move for a few seconds."

Aurelion made a noise like he was about to ask another question, but Tommy put his hands over the wound before he could, and he let out a pained whine. Monarch leaned forward to see what Tommy was doing, and flinched when Tommy's hands began to glow.

Closing his eyes, Tommy sunk into the energy flowing out of his hands. It wasn't a bad stab wound, and while he was definitely going to have a headache after this, it wouldn't be anything terrible.

When Tommy lifted his hands, the only evidence of the stab wound was a faint scar on Aurelion's side. Sitting back, Tommy wiped his hands off on the edge of the towel and took a moment to catch his breath.

Then, he opened his eyes to find both Monarch and Aurelion staring at him.

"You have healing powers?" Aurelion questioned, poking at his scar as if he wasn't sure it was real.

"Sure do. I would've just healed you on the street but I figured someone might see us, plus it's easier if I'm able to look at the thing in proper lighting like this before I heal," Tommy explained, pushing to his feet to get himself a glass of water.

As he reached for the glasses, he almost grabbed two more for Aurelion and Monarch as well, before realizing they wouldn't be able to drink without removing their masks. So, he ended up just grabbing one for himself, and greedily gulped down the cool water from the filter pitcher in the fridge.

Once he set the glass down, he saw that Monarch was leaning over to look at the healed stab wound. Meanwhile, Aurelion seemed to be watching Tommy, but it was hard to tell with his mask covering so much of his face.

"If you're gonna stare so much take a picture," Tommy muttered, grumbling as he took another sip of his water.

Aurelion didn't look away. "So you heal people, like, *in this cafe* on a regular basis?"

"Uh, yeah. I heal people in, um, your line of work," Tommy muttered, unsure if he should mention to the vigilantes that he heals villains.

"Vigilantes?" Monarch asked, cocking their head to the side.

"Yeahhhh," Tommy said, eyes fixating on the wall behind Monarch's head. "And, uh, others."

Monarch narrowed their glowing white eyes at him, and Tommy had to suppress the urge to shiver at how unsettling that was. "You mean villains, don't you?"

"You heal villains in this cafe?!" Aurelion gasped, shooting upright.

Shit. This might not go as well as he thought.

"Monarch, I thought you were on neutral terms with villains?" Tommy asked, remembering the discussion they'd had on Monarch and Aurelion during the Syndicate meeting.

"I am when they're not harming civilians. I never said I had a problem with you healing them," Monarch shrugged.

"Well *I* have a problem with it!" Aurelion exclaimed. "Why are you healing villains in the back of this cafe?!"

Tommy frowned. "I thought you were trained by Monarch, and they literally just said they don't care. What's your problem?"

Aurelion huffed, folding his arms over his chest as he glanced around the backroom again. "I guess I should clarify, I don't have a problem with you healing villains. But why do you have to do it in this cafe?"

"Because... I live in a tiny apartment with roommates and this place is just easier to get to." Tommy really didn't understand what Aurelion's fixation on the cafe was. "Why the hell do you care so much? What, are you a regular customer of mine or something?" God, wouldn't that be the icing on the cake. Not only would he have villains stopping in to get coffee on a regular basis, but he'd have vigilantes too. The Cloudy Cafe would be super-central.

Aurelion shared another look with Monarch, who gave him a tiny shake of their head in response to whatever his silent question was. At this, Aurelion sighed deeply.

"You could say that," he said, picking at the threads of his shirt. "I'm familiar with the place, and I know the owner. Does she know about this?"

Tommy shook his head. "No. But I clean everything up as soon as I'm done, and it's only after I close for the night. Her business isn't affected."

"Yeah, sure, but you're still literally using her backroom to heal supervillains!" Aurelion exclaimed, bolts of electricity flickering around his fingertips. It was kind of mesmerizing to watch how it danced between each of his fingers in little blue zaps, and Tommy could only imagine how painful it would be to get hit by a large one of those.

Monarch put their hand on Aurelion's shoulder after his outburst, and the electricity died down. Aurelion's shoulders dropped, and there was an awkward silence while Tommy waited for one of them to speak again.

"Why did you offer to help us?" Monarch then asked, clearly trying to change the subject. "I mean, I'm sure you knew we were going to ask about this kind of stuff."

Tommy rolled his eyes. "What, you expect me to just leave you and lightning boy alone on the street so he can bleed out?" He leaned against the counter, folding his arms over his chest. "Nah, I don't do that. I help vigilantes and villains because you guys can't get healthcare anywhere else, so I wasn't just going to let Aurelion bleed out because you might ask me a few awkward questions."

Monarch nodded, something softening in their white gaze. "You must be a very compassionate person," they commented, and although Tommy couldn't see under their mask, he had a feeling they were smiling at him.

"Ugh, shut up about me being compassionate and shit. Everyone I heal says that and I'm just trying to be a decent human being," Tommy grumbled, shaking his head.

Monarch laughed, and it was a warm, filling sound. "Well, if it's worth anything, I think you're very kind and that it takes more than a 'decent human being' to do what you do."

“Once again, everyone says that,” Tommy muttered, downing the rest of his water.

“Maybe you should consider that it’s true then,” Monarch chuckled again. Then, they pushed to their feet, their tall boots thumping loudly against the tile floor. “Aurelion, you good to go?”

“Yeah, help me up,” Aurelion said, holding out a hand.

Monarch grunted as they pulled Aurelion to his feet. Then, Monarch reached out a hand to steady Aurelion, before they both turned back to look at Tommy.

“What’s your name by the way?” Monarch asked.

“Tommy.”

“Nice to meet you, Tommy,” Monarch said, dipping their head.

“Yeah, it was nice to meet you too, Tommy. And, uh, thanks for healing me,” Aurelion added on, sounding a lot less incredulous than he had a few minutes before. “Sorry about, um, getting worked up like that. But you really do need your own place to do this stuff at, y’know?”

“Ah yes, I’ll use my barista salary to buy myself a clinic, great fucking idea,” Tommy snarked.

“Hey man! Just sayin’, goals for the future,” Aurelion shot back, holding his hands up in mock surrender.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Tommy said flatly.

With one final wave, Monarch and Aurelion walked back out in the alleyway, letting the door swing shut behind them.

Turning his head back to the floor, Tommy looked at the now bloodied towels scattered across the floor, and sighed. And here he thought he’d have an early night.

Rolling up his sleeves, he got to work on cleaning.

A little while later, Tommy had just finished up cleaning the backroom and was heading back into the front of the cafe. As he slung his backpack over his shoulder, keys in hand so he could lock the front door again when he left, there was a loud buzzing from his phone.

Taking his phone out, he resisted the urge to groan when he saw Wilbur’s name flashing across the screen. Tommy was late coming home. That meant he was going to get a lecture.

“Yeah yeah, I know I’m late,” Tommy said as soon as he answered the phone, trudging across the cafe towards the front doors.

“Why are you late? Is everything okay?” Wilbur asked, voice dripping with concern.

“Everything’s fine, don’t be such a dramatic bitch. The espresso machine just fucked up again,” Tommy lied. Even though Tubbo and Ranboo had stopped falling for that a while ago, the Soot’s hadn’t gotten that far yet, which meant Tommy could go back to pinning all his problems on the stupid goddamn espresso machine (god knew it deserved it, it was a piece of junk).

Wilbur breathed a sigh of relief. “Okay, that’s fine. I just got worried. But are you sure there’s nothing weird outside?”

Well, besides two vigilantes?

“I’m not outside yet, I’m heading out right now and I’ll let you know,” Tommy said, putting the phone between his shoulder and his ear as he opened the door to the cafe. “When I get home though, can we watch another Ghibli movie? Like, whatever the one you were telling me about most recently is. The one with the old lady and the wizard that Techno says acts like you.”

Wilbur sighed on the other end. “Oh fuck off, I’m not like Howl! If anything, Techno’s more similar, since he spends way more time on his hair than I do.”

“I dunno Wil, you have, like, three different hair gels,” Tommy teased him.

“They’re used for different kinds of looks!” Wilbur argued. “Y’know what, when you get home I’m gonna show you my hair products and then show you Techno’s hair stuff, and you can compare which one of us is worse.”

Twisting the key into the lock, Tommy hummed in response. There was the satisfying *click!* as the lock was shut, and he pocketed his keys before grabbing the phone to hold it again.

“Alright bitch, I’m-”

Another voice cut him off before he could update Wilbur.

“Tommy.”

Whipping around, a rock the size of a goddamn boulder dropped into Tommy’s gut as his eyes met a simple smiley face set against a porcelain mask.

It was Dream. *The* Dream. The Number One Hero Dream. The one who had nearly killed every member of the Syndicate at some point or another. The one who could’ve killed Tubbo and Ranboo just for being vigilantes.

Tommy’s breathing hitched. Dream was standing right in front of the cafe in all his Number One Hero glory.

And he knew Tommy’s name.

“Tommy? You just went quiet, are you okay?” Wilbur asked, his voice tinny over the phone.

“D-Dream,” Tommy stammered out, frozen as he stared at the superhero.

There was a sharp intake of breath on the other end of the phone. “*Dream* is there?! Shit, fuck, Tommy I need you to-”

Suddenly, the phone was flying out of Tommy’s hand. He could only watch with wide eyes as the phone was pulled into Dream’s hand as if being yanked by an invisible string. Then, without looking away from Tommy, Dream chucked the phone at the ground and stomped on it with a loud crunch, and Tommy’s heart skipped a beat as the screen immediately went black.

“Sorry about that, but this isn’t a conversation for outside ears,” Dream said, his calm tone sending chills down Tommy’s spine.

“I don’t know what conversation you’d want with me, Big Man,” Tommy said, a voice in his head screaming *play dumb play dumb!* over and over at him. “I’m, well, I’m just a little ol’ barista boy, y’know? Don’t see why the Great Dream would want-”

“Shut up and stop playing dumb. I know what you’ve been doing,” Dream told him. “I mean, working out of the backroom of the cafe you work at isn’t exactly the most subtle way to run a healing business.”

Tommy clenched his jaw. Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

“I-I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Tommy repeated, although the lie felt weak even to his own ears. “I don’t- I don’t even have powers. Let alone healing powers!” His own laughter was forced, and reminded him of nails on a chalkboard.

Dream took a step towards him, and Tommy stumbled backwards. Maybe he could make a break for the subway station. Or at least for one of the alleyways and hide behind a dumpster or something.

Either way, he had to get the hell away from Dream.

“Don’t make this difficult on yourself,” Dream said, taking another step his way.

Tommy took another step back on instinct, but shrieked when he bumped into another body behind him.

Twisting his head so he could look behind him, ice cold fear raced down his spine when his eyes met the signature white goggles of 404.

“What the-”

Before Tommy could say anything, 404 placed his hands on either side of Tommy’s head.

“*Sleep,*” he ordered.

And Tommy had no choice but to obey.

As the world went dark, he felt strong arms catch him before he hit the ground, and the last thing he saw before being swallowed by the void were the beady eyes of Dream’s mask.

Chapter End Notes

I promised shit was gonna pop off soon didn't I? :)

also hooray for finally getting a monarch and aurelion appearance! foolish is, uh, less than thrilled to find out that tommy is running a clinic out of the back of his mom's cafe

and to everyone who's been calling the fact that tommy's gonna get kidnapped in the comments, I've literally had this planned since like chapter 3 istg yall started guessing it so quickly (tho tbf it's not a hard thing to guess) but haha bye bye healer boy

please please let me know what you thought down in the comments, they really make my day <3

check me out on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

this is bad

Chapter Summary

Tommy is gone.

Chapter Notes

hello again everyone! the reaction to last chapter was... quite something LMAO you all had a lot to say in the comments I wanted to say thank you for nearly 300 comments in the first day of posting ALONE

my email inbox was filled all day like holy shit

anyway I now come bearing more! we finally get to see some Wilbur POV so be excited for that!

hope you guys enjoy!

tws for this chapter: description of a panic attack

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

The line went dead, and Wilbur found himself staring at the phone in shock as he tried to process what the hell just happened.

One minute, he'd been talking to Tommy about Studio Ghibli movies. Then, Dream was there, and the call hung up.

Immediately, Wilbur tried to redial, but Tommy's phone went straight to voicemail without even ringing. He tried again, and again, and by the fifth time he heard the automated voice message, he was ready to chuck his phone across the room.

Holy shit. Holy fucking shit, Dream had found Tommy. And Tommy had sounded so *scared* when he said Dream's name. Like he could tell Dream wasn't there with good intentions.

Wilbur wanted to believe that Dream didn't know. For the first time in his goddamn life, he wanted to give that bastard the benefit of the doubt and pray that he was still pretending like he was a good guy and wanted to offer to walk a teenager home.

But Wilbur wasn't an idiot. He knew Dream. Hell, Dream had tried to kill him dozens of times before. The only reason Dream would show up in Eastside at this time of night to

confront Tommy would be if he knew about Tommy's work with the Syndicate.

Oh god. If Dream knew that Tommy worked with the Syndicate, he was probably going to want to interrogate Tommy for information on all of them. And if that was his plan, that meant he wasn't going to do it in the middle of the street.

He was going to kidnap Tommy. Oh *fuck*, he probably already had. While Wilbur was sitting on his ass trying to process what happened, Dream could be grabbing Tommy right now and dragging him to god knows where.

No. No no no. This was the worst case scenario. This was exactly what Wilbur had wanted to prevent this entire time.

He couldn't breathe. He had to get up. He had to go save Tommy before Dream kidnapped him goddammit! But his thoughts were racing and his heart was pounding in his ears, and he couldn't breathe because what if Dream hurt Tommy? What if he pulled out all the stops on the interrogation? That fucking monster would do it, Wilbur wouldn't put it past him.

Shit. He needed to get to the cafe right now.

"PHIL!" Wilbur screamed, slamming the door open to his room and practically jumping down the stairs. "PHIL! TECHNO!"

As soon as he got to the bottom of the stairs, Phil and Techno were rushing out of the kitchen, staring at him with wide eyes.

"What's wrong?!" Phil asked.

"I-It's Tommy. I was- I was on the phone with him- and he was leaving the cafe- and then he there was a voice- he said Dream's name and I think- holy fucking shit this is all my fault-"

"WILBUR!" Techno's shout startled Wilbur out of his panicked rambling, while his father stepped forward to grab his wrists to pull his hands away from his hair, which Wilbur hadn't even noticed he was yanking on.

"Tell us what happened. You said something about Tommy and Dream?" Phil questioned in a gentle voice.

Taking a shaky breath, Wilbur tried to explain again. "I-I was on the phone with Tommy while he was closing the cafe. Then I heard a voice say his name, and Tommy said it was Dream. Then before I could say anything the call went dead. And-And I tried calling him again, but the phone didn't even ring, it just went straight to voicemail."

As he explained, Techno and Phil both visibly paled.

"So you think Dream's kidnapped him?" Techno asked, clenching his jaw.

"I don't see why Dream would've been there otherwise," Wilbur said, wrapping his arms around himself. "He must've found out about Tommy working with us. It's the only thing I can think of."

“It would explain why he’s been acting so weird recently,” Techno murmured, a deep frown settling over his face. “It makes too much sense.” His shoulders were hunched as he thought over the previous few weeks in his mind, and Wilbur could practically see the gears turning in his brother’s head as he pinpointed all the places he could’ve figured this out sooner.

While he wanted to reassure him that it was alright, that there was no way any of them could’ve known for sure that Dream was targeting Tommy, he also knew now wasn’t the time to focus on any of that.

“We need to get to the cafe,” Wilbur repeated, turning to Phil. “For all we know, they could still be there.” It was a futile hope, but he had to hold onto something. The only thing he could do right now was beg and plead with luck that Tommy and Dream would still be there when they got to the cafe.

“Okay, but does Wilbur need to show up there, or Siren?” Phil asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Siren, obviously!” Wilbur scoffed, already racing back up the steps to grab his mask. “If they’re still at the cafe, we’re going to have to fight Dream, and we can’t do that as civilians.”

“Grab my mask for me!” Techno called up the stairs. “I’ll start the car!”

“I’ll get my veil,” Phil muttered, rolling his shoulders as wings materialized on his back. “Don’t bother grabbing your full outfits though. We just need our identities covered.”

A few minutes later, they were all settled in the black SUV they’d originally driven Tommy to the Syndicate meeting in. Techno was in the driver’s seat with Phil in the front passenger side, while Wilbur had the back all to himself.

Wilbur was hunched over as they drove, clenching and unclenching his fists while rapidly tapping his foot against the car floor. His mind was still racing as he thought of all the terrible things Dream could be doing to Tommy right now.

Tommy. His little brother. The boy who saved his life when he only knew him as one of the most feared supervillains in L’Manberg purely because it was the right thing to do. The boy who he had grown to love as family in only a few months time.

Tommy could be getting fucking *tortured* by Dream for all he knew, and it was all Wilbur’s fault.

A part of him was desperately trying to spiral into anxiety thinking about how Dream could be hurting his brother right now, but Wilbur knew he had to hold off on the panic. If they got lucky and Dream and Tommy were still at the cafe, then he would need to have his head on straight so he could choke the life out of Dream with his bare hands.

“Wilbur?”

Startled out of his thoughts, Wilbur straightened in his seat. “What, Tech?”

“I asked if you knew if anyone was keeping an eye on him tonight. I thought I saw something about Niki and Jack stopping by while he closed up,” Techno said, his voice calm despite the

white-knuckled grip he had on the steering wheel.

Holy shit. Wilbur had seen that too.

While the Syndicate had never established a formal guard schedule, after Wilbur had told them all about the incident involving them being watched when walking home that one night, the members of the Syndicate had taken it upon themselves to set up times to watch over Tommy while he went through his closing routine. They weren't able to have someone with him every night, but it was damn near close enough, and tonight Wilbur knew he'd seen Niki say something about heading by the cafe with Jack.

But when Wilbur was on the phone with Tommy, he didn't hear any other voices. Had Niki and Jack been there but had stayed quiet? Or had they already left at that point? If they hadn't left yet, did they try to fight Dream off? Were they still fighting him?

Pulling out his phone, Wilbur dialed Niki's number and dug his nails into his palm while it rang.

"Hello?" Niki greeted, sounding perfectly fine and not like she was in the middle of a fight.

"Niki, where are you?" Wilbur asked without preamble.

"Um, I'm at home. Why?"

"Did you go see Tommy tonight?"

"Yeah, me and Jack were at the cafe with him when he closed up," Niki explained, and he could hear the confusion in her voice. "Why? Is he not home yet?"

Wilbur frowned. "Was he on the phone with me when he closed?"

"Uh, no, he wasn't," Niki told him. "If he's not home yet, that's really not good because he closed the cafe about an hour ago."

...what?

"That's not possible. I was on the phone with him ten minutes ago and he told me he was closing then. I could hear him locking the door through the phone!"

"That doesn't make any sense, though. Jack and I watched him close everything up and lock the door," Niki said, her voice tightening as she picked up on Wilbur's panic. "Wilbur, what's going on? Did something happen?"

Taking a breath to steady himself, Wilbur felt his nails cut through the skin of his palm, and he winced as blood began to ebb out. "I was talking with him and he told me he was locking up. I heard him lock the door to the cafe, and then I heard a voice, and Tommy said Dream was there."

There was a sharp gasp on the other end of the line. "Dream?!"

“Yeah, he sounded fucking *terrified*. Then before I could ask him anything, the call went dead and now his phone’s not ringing when I dial him.”

“Fuck!” Niki cursed. “Jack and I can be at the cafe in ten minutes if you want us over there,” she said, and he could already hear her shuffling around her room.

“Don’t come over here yet. I’m on my way with Techno and Phil. We’ll let you know if we need backup,” Wilbur said, tensing as they turned onto the cafe street. “I gotta go now, Niki. I’ll text you soon. Let the others know what happened.”

“Got it, Wilbur. We’ll be on standby.”

Wilbur hung up without another word, shoving his phone in his pocket and jumping out of the car while it was still slowing down in front of the cafe. He stumbled to keep his footing, and rushed over to the front doors of the cafe.

There were no people there. But there were two things on the ground that made bile rise in Wilbur’s throat.

One was Tommy’s backpack. The annoyingly red back that had an Animal Crossing pin Phil had given him sitting on the front of it was sitting right in front of the doors to the cafe, tossed carelessly to the side. The other thing was hard to recognize at first, but when Wilbur realized what it was, he sucked in a sharp breath.

Tommy’s phone was nearly in two pieces because of how badly it had been cracked. It was almost like someone had taken a hammer and smashed it several times over in a fit of rage.

That explained why Wilbur’s calls stopped going through.

Slowly, he knelt down to pick up the phone, wincing when broken glass fell into his palm. This hadn’t been broken by accident, and even if it somehow had, Tommy never went anywhere without his backpack. It had his wallet, phone charger, earbuds, pepper spray—everything that he wanted to keep on him at all times was in there.

Tommy wouldn’t have left those things willingly.

The only option was that he had to have been kidnapped.

Gripping the phone in his hand, Wilbur leaned back against the wall of the cafe, struggling to catch his breath as Techno and Phil ran over. Tommy was gone. Tommy was gone, and it was all his fault. If he had been more careful about keeping Tommy’s identity a secret, or maybe if he had never taken him to a Syndicate meeting, or hell, maybe he just never should’ve given Techno Tommy’s number in the first place. If none of this had ever happened, Tommy would still be living with Ranboo and Tubbo, and Dream wouldn’t even know he existed.

This was all his fault. He’d been the one to get Tommy involved in their world, and now he was paying the price. Tommy didn’t deserve this. He hadn’t even wanted to get involved in the first place, but Wilbur had pushed and pushed because that’s all he could ever do. He was way too fucking pushy and could never let things rest until they went *his* way. He was so

goddamn selfish. So selfish and self-obsessed, and now his little brother was being held hostage by Dream, and who the hell even knew what Dream could be doing to him?

Dream could be hurting Tommy right now, and it was all Wilbur's fault.

He couldn't breathe as the words repeated in his mind. *All your fault. All your fault. All your fault.* They looped over and over like a broken record as his thoughts began to fully spiral, the panic he'd been clawing to keep at bay finally breaking out of his chest. Tommy could be hurt right now. He could be bleeding out. He could be begging Dream to let him go. He could be scared. He could be in pain. He could be fucking *dead* for all Wilbur knew.

His hands twisted tightly in his hair as he struggled to suck air into his lungs. No matter how many breaths he took, it wasn't working. His heart was racing in his ears, his chest was rising and falling faster and faster with every second, and he couldn't fucking breathe because holy fucking shit Tommy could be dead right and it would be all his fault-

Suddenly, there were cool hands on his wrists, pulling his hands away from his hair. Looking up from the ground, he was met with Phil's veil, and although he couldn't see his father's face right now, he could imagine the gentle expression he was wearing all the same.

"Wil, you need to breathe with me," Phil whispered, taking exaggerated breaths for him to mimic. "Just breathe."

But he didn't want to focus on breathing. They needed to fucking find Tommy!

"Wil, you can't do anything to help Tommy like this. C'mon, just work with me."

Clenching his jaw, Wilbur struggled to mimic Phil's breathing as his chest stuttered with every rise and fall. He hadn't even felt the tears on his cheeks till now, but as he tried to only focus on copying Phil and nothing else, he could feel the chilly night air tingling against the warmth on his face.

Slowly, his breathing began to steady. He let out a few shaky breaths, head bobbing up and down as he copied his father. They continued this pattern for a few minutes, and eventually his pounding heart began to calm, as did the spiraling of his thoughts.

Finally, after what felt like ages, Wilbur slumped against the wall of the cafe, his panic attack having fully ebbed away.

"Better?" Phil asked, letting go of his wrists.

"Yeah, better," Wilbur muttered, his voice rough.

Just then, boots clicking against asphalt sounded from behind Phil, and Wilbur glanced over his father's shoulder to see Techno making his way over to them.

"I checked the entire block. There's no sign of them," Techno said, his hands curling into fists at his sides.

Fuck. Of course Wilbur hadn't thought they'd still be in the area, but to have that last small hope squashed so quickly was like another stab in his chest.

"We're going to get him back," Phil told them both, with no room for argument in his tone. "We just can't lose our heads over this."

"But what if he's hurting him, Phil?" Wilbur asked, his voice cracking. "He could try to hurt him to get information out of him!"

"He very well could be doing that," Phil nodded. "Which is just all the more reason to focus on finding Tommy as quickly as possible."

"Do you think he took him to the Hero Tower?" Techno asked while Phil pushed to his feet, before holding a hand out to help Wilbur up.

Wilbur grunted as he straightened his legs again. "I don't think so. The Hero Committee might be a bunch of bastards, but I don't think even they would be able to legally condone kidnapping a child."

"So you think he's doing this outside the Committee?" Phil asked.

"I don't know. The Committee might just be turning a blind eye while Dream keeps everything off the record, or they might not know about it at all. Either way, I doubt he's at the Hero Tower," Wilbur said, shoving his hands in his pockets as the gears in his head began to turn again.

"What you're saying is that he could be just about anywhere in this city and we have no clue where?" Techno then asked, raising an eyebrow behind his mask.

Letting out a shaky sigh, Wilbur nodded. "Pretty much."

Phil cursed under his breath. "Alright. We have to work with what we can then. We should ask Quackity if he can find any information through his network-"

Suddenly, Phil was cut off by the sound of two pairs of footsteps running up behind them.

"What the hell is going on here?"

Wilbur clenched his jaw, resisting the urge to groan out loud. These were the last people he wanted to see right now.

Turning his head, Wilbur saw Nuke and Ender standing a few feet away from the three of them, the two boys staring at the red backpack still on the ground.

"Nuke, Ender, maybe now isn't-"

"That's Tommy's backpack," Nuke said, cutting Phil off. "Why the fuck do you have Tommy's backpack?"

Shit. Just great. Perfect fucking timing.

“And is that Tommy’s phone?” Ender asked, sounding much more timid than Nuke.

Nuke turned his head towards Wilbur, and next thing he knew, the vigilante was storming towards him.

“What the FUCK did you do to him, Siren?!” Nuke snarled, grabbing his shirt and yanking him down with surprising strength so they were at eye level.

Beside him, he heard Techno and Phil both shout in surprise, and Wilbur held up a hand to tell them to stand down.

“I swear, we would never do anything to harm Tommy,” Wilbur told the vigilante, keeping his hands where Nuke could see them. “We have reason to believe Dream took him.”

Nuke stiffened at that, but didn’t let go of his shirt. “What the fuck would Dream want with him?”

“We think he figured out that Tommy was working with the Syndicate,” Techno explained, his hand sitting on the hilt of his sword just in case Nuke tried anything. Although they technically hadn’t gotten any confirmation that Nuke and Ender knew about Tommy’s job as a healer, it was easy enough to figure out through context clues.

The lack of surprise from either of them at that statement only confirmed it.

“Oh god. Oh no that’s really bad,” Ender muttered, wrapping his arms around himself. “That’s really really bad.”

“So he just kidnapped him?” Nuke asked, finally letting go of Wilbur’s shirt and taking a step back.

“He did. I was on the phone with him when it happened, but by the time I got here, they were already gone,” Wilbur explained.

Nuke took another step back so he was standing next to Ender, and Wilbur could see his hands were curling in and out of fists. He took a few breaths, shaking his head as he ran a hand through his hair.

“This is all your fault, you know?” Nuke spat after a few beats of silence, the words full of poison. “Tommy would never have gotten involved in this shit if it weren’t for you.”

The words stung like a slap to the face, but Wilbur knew they were true.

“I know,” Wilbur said quietly. “I accept full responsibility for this. I should’ve done a better job keeping him safe.”

“It’s not just your fault, Siren,” Phil stepped in. “The Syndicate agreed to hire Tommy. We were all responsible for Tommy’s safety.”

“Yeah, but-”

“Let’s not waste time arguing about whose fault it was,” Techno cut in. “We need to focus on finding Tommy first and foremost.”

Taking a breath, Wilbur nodded. He was right. It wouldn’t do them any good to waste time arguing about this right now. Once they had Tommy with them again safe and sound, then they could see who he hated the most for letting this happen.

And if it was Wilbur he hated, then so be it. God knew he deserved it. Even if Tommy never spoke to him again, it would be worth it as long as Wilbur knew he was safe.

“Blade’s right,” Wilbur said, shoving his self-hatred down to turn his attention back to Nuke and Ender. “We need to focus on finding Tommy. And we’re going to need your help.”

“Heh?!” Techno grunted, while Phil made a confused noise.

Nuke and Ender both stiffened. “Why us specifically, Siren?” Ender asked, voice dripping with wariness.

Well, Wilbur had a reason. They weren’t going to like it, but they deserved to know.

“Because *Tubbo and Ranboo*, you’re his family,” Wilbur said, meeting both of their eyes as he said their names.

Nuke reeled back as if he’d been shocked, while Ender gasped sharply.

“How the- What- Did Tommy fucking tell you?!” Nuke snarled, looking like he was two seconds from lunging at Wilbur again.

Wilbur shook his head. “No, of course not. He’d never betray you like that. I figured it out on my own.”

That was true. It hadn’t been hard to put all the pieces together when he was the only one who was able to see the whole picture. The night Tommy called him in tears, asking him to come to the cafe because he’d gotten into a fight with his roommates, Quackity told him that he’d just been healed by Tommy before Nuke and Ender showed up out of the blue. The two wanted to talk to him alone, and Tommy had insisted he’d be fine with them, so Quackity ended up leaving.

After connecting those dots, Wilbur had contacted Sam to ask him for the public records on Tommy’s roommates. When he saw the descriptions for the two boys from their foster care records, noticing how they both matched the heights and builds of Nuke and Ender, the conclusion was obvious.

Wilbur had never intended on using the fact that he knew their identities against them. Tubbo and Ranboo were Tommy’s best friends, and once he knew the vigilantes that had been a pain in the ass for the Syndicate weren’t just Tommy’s family, but *kids* to boot, he had doubled down on the Syndicate making sure they avoided Nuke and Ender as much as they could.

Still, Tubbo and Ranboo didn’t know that.

“So what, are you going to blackmail us now?” Nuke asked.

“No, I’m not. I have no intention of using your identities against you. I just want your help to find Tommy,” Wilbur explained. Nuke scoffed, clearly not believing the sentiment, but that was fine. He could distrust Wilbur all he wanted, as long as they focused on finding Tommy first.

“But... how do you even want us to help? This is *Dream* we’re talking about. He’s one of the most powerful people in the city,” Ender pointed out, wringing his hands in front of him.

Wilbur opened his mouth to reply, but before he could, Techno cut in.

“While I’m sure Siren would love to explain whatever plan he has right now, I think we should probably not continue this conversation in the middle of the street, y’know?”

That... was a fair point. They were still standing in the middle of the street in front of the cafe, and while there was no one around to listen in on them, it probably wasn’t a good idea to just be hashing this all out right in the public eye.

Wilbur’s coat whipped around his legs as he tried to think of where they could go. Obviously they couldn’t take the vigilantes back to their own place, and the Syndicate base was a bit far.

Thankfully, Ender gave them a solution.

“Since you guys already know who we are, you can just come back to our place. It’s not far from here,” Ender suggested.

Nuke whipped his head towards him. “*Ran-Ender!*”

“What? They know where we live, it’s not like it’s new information,” he pointed out.

Nuke seemed to be glaring at Ender, but after a few beats of silence, he sighed. “Fine. Why the fuck not at this point? Just let the goddamn supervillains into our home. They already know everything else about us.”

“Tubbo, c’mon, not right now,” Ender pleaded. “We need to focus on Tommy.”

Now this seemed to hit home. Nuke’s shoulders immediately deflated, and his head dropped as he let out a shaky breath.

“Fuck, yeah, you’re right. Sorry,” he muttered. He looked back up and turned towards the three of them. “So, uh, do you guys wanna walk over there or...?”

“We brought our car,” Techno said, jutting his thumb over to the black SUV that he had parked under a streetlight while Wilbur was having his panic attack. “Let’s just drive over.”

Nuke and Ender shared a look, before they both shrugged.

“It’s not like this day can get any weirder,” Ender muttered as they both began to trudge towards the car.

They brought Tommy's backpack and his phone with them into the car as they all piled inside. Wilbur sat in the back, with Nuke in the middle seat, and Ender next to the other window, while Techno and Phil took the front again. Tommy's backpack sat heavily on Wilbur's lap, a strange buzzing growing under his skin the longer he stared at it. It was some mixture of anxiety and anger, making him unable to relax for even a second as his mind was once again filled with the chanting of *it's all your fault it's all your fault* on repeat.

Tommy had been wearing his backpack less than an hour before. It had been with him, just like it always was, and now the backpack was here and Tommy wasn't. Mindlessly, Wilbur zipped open the top of the backpack as the car started up, and saw a dark blue sweatshirt stuffed inside the largest pouch.

Wilbur's chest ached when he recognized the sweatshirt as one he'd let Tommy wear when Tommy was still borrowing his stuff—before he and Phil had ordered Tommy his own clothes to have at the house. This was one of the sweatshirts Tommy had taken from him and just never given back, and Wilbur never really wore the thing that much so it wasn't like he cared and was fine with letting him have it.

Tears burned in his eyes again, and he had to take a few shaky breaths to keep himself calm. It was going to be alright. Even if this was the worst case scenario, they were going to find Tommy before Dream could lay a finger on him. That's what he had to believe right now. He couldn't let himself panic over any other possibility.

The car ride was silent as they drove down to the dilapidated apartment building. Nuke and Ender both kept their eyes on their laps, and Phil and Techno seemed to know better than to try and make awkward conversation with the two vigilantes. When they pulled to a stop in front of the apartment building, Wilbur thought back to the first time he'd walked Tommy home, and how worried he'd gotten when he noticed how poorly kept the place seemed to be.

Nuke and Ender were clearly used to it though. Once Techno found street parking, they all hopped out of the car and headed through the ground lobby of the building. Wilbur was a bit worried about all of them—Siren, Zephyrus, Blade, along with the vigilantes Nuke and Ender—being spotted, but neither Nuke or Ender seemed worried, so he figured they must know when the lobby will be empty.

Sure enough, there was no one in the lobby as they passed through, and they all clambered into the dusty-smelling elevator that rattled as it brought them up several floors.

Nuke and Ender led the three of them to their apartment, Ender unlocking it and gesturing for the villains to go inside first. While Wilbur knew Phil and Techno had been here before, he realized a bit belatedly that he'd never actually seen the inside of Tommy's apartment.

It was small, which Wilbur expected. But what he didn't expect was how cold the inside was. How the trash was filled with leftover ramen packaging and little else. How there were several thin blankets filled with holes tossed over a couch that had to be older than any of the three boys who lived here.

Wilbur knew Tommy struggled for money. That was why he worked so many shifts at the cafe. But it didn't fully hit him until now just what that entailed.

A freezing apartment with no heating. Having to save what you could on food. It brought Wilbur back to days he didn't like to think about very much: the time he'd spent on the streets before Phil had found him. Although he had used his power to convince police officers to not look twice at him, or shopkeepers to look away when he stuffed a loaf of bread under his shirt, it wasn't something he could do all the time.

He remembered spending nights huddled in dark alleys, shivering so hard that he couldn't fall asleep. He remembered how difficult it was to force himself to eat the same bread loaves every day, but not having the resources to really make or buy anything else. He remembered how terrified he was of every glance his way, of adults watching him for just a second too late, of having his freedom pulled away from him again.

Tommy had fought and gotten his freedom from the system that Wilbur himself had run from all those years ago. And then he put that distrust aside and put his faith in Wilbur. He trusted Wilbur to keep him safe, and more importantly, free.

And Wilbur had failed him.

"Siren?" Techno suddenly called out, drawing Wilbur out of his thoughts.

"Huh?"

"I asked if you were alright. You were kinda just standing in the front doorway," Techno said, giving him an odd look.

Wilbur shook his head. "I'm fine, sorry, got lost in thought for a second." He finished stepping through the doorway and into the apartment, Nuke shutting the door behind him.

Glancing into the small living room, Wilbur saw Ender pulling off his goggles and face mask, while Nuke tossed his gas mask onto the couch.

God, they really were children, weren't they? Although the pictures Wilbur had seen of the two boys from their files were a few years old, they really hadn't aged all that much since then.

Nuke—or Tubbo, Wilbur supposed he should think of him now—noticed his staring and blinked.

"Y'know, if you want, you can take your mask off too," Tubbo said in a strange voice, eyeing him with a challenging gaze.

Wilbur smirked at Tubbo's audacity. "Yeah, no thanks, kid."

Tubbo raised an eyebrow. "You sure? I mean, we might as well be on an equal playing field, *Wilbur Soot.*"

Phil and Techno both stiffened when Wilbur's name left Tubbo's lips, and Wilbur felt himself freeze on the spot. Tubbo knew his name. Tubbo *knew his identity.*

How the fuck did he find out? Tommy didn't even know Wilbur's identity, so how the hell could Tubbo, someone Wilbur had never even met before, know who he was?!

The only people who knew Wilbur was Siren were his family and the rest of the Syndicate. That was it. Phil was extremely strict about keeping their identities a secret from anyone who didn't need to know. They had to minimize risk at all costs. That was why Wilbur hadn't been allowed to tell Tommy, despite how many times he'd wanted to just get it off his chest.

So how in the hell did fucking Tubbo know?

He considered playing dumb, trying to act like Tubbo was ridiculous for thinking he was Wilbur Soot. But considering how he, Phil, and Techno had all frozen at the mention of his name, he knew it would be pointless to try and convince the boys Tubbo was wrong now.

"How did you find out my name?" Wilbur asked immediately, letting honey slip into his words to tug the truth out.

Tubbo snorted. "No need to use your powers, bossman. We found out the same way you found out our identities—just figured it out on our own."

"When we saw Tommy talking with Siren in front of the cafe that one night, and then started hearing him talk about his new friend named Wilbur just a few days later, it wasn't hard to put two and two together," Ranboo added in, looking downright smug at Wilbur's shock.

So they'd known before Wilbur had told them he knew their identities. They'd just been holding onto this card to see what Wilbur's intentions with their identities was first. And now that they were in a private space, alone with three supervillains, the two revealed the card up their sleeves. It was a bold move that held a lot of risk. But Wilbur admired it.

Goddamn. And Wilbur thought Quackity was a card shark.

"Philza, Technoblade, you guys can take off your masks too," Tubbo added, although it wasn't so much a request, but more so an order. If Nuke and Ender were going to be maskless, so were Siren, Blade, and Zephyrus.

"Heh?!" Techno exclaimed.

"How..." Phil trailed off, blinking in shock.

"C'mon guys, it's not hard. When Tubbo looked up Wilbur's public records he was able to find out he had a brother and a father, the brother sharing the Blade's build and pink hair. People have suspected Siren, Blade, and Zephyrus are family for a while, so it just made sense," Ranboo shrugged, smiling innocently at the three of them.

Great. They really had leveled out the playing field.

Sighing, Wilbur reached up to pull his mask off, and watched from the corner of his eye as Phil lifted his veil, and Techno set the boar mask on the kitchen counter. Then, Wilbur leaned against the counter, and folded his arms over his chest.

“How were you able to figure it out and not Tommy?” Wilbur asked, frowning at the two of them.

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “Wilbur, if Tommy wanted to know who Siren was, he would put it together in seconds. The only reason he doesn’t know is because he’s purposefully trying not to think about it.”

“We pointed it out to him once,” Ranboo added, “that we thought you and Siren were the same person. He shut it down, but it was easy to tell he was just pushing it away.”

Frowning, Wilbur stared at his hands, thinking back on his interactions with Tommy. Tommy had never acted like he suspected anything, although he really wasn’t doing a good job being subtle, and he knew it. In truth, a part of him had wanted Tommy to figure it out on his own, just so that Techno and Phil couldn’t get on him about revealing his identity to Tommy himself.

But Tommy had never seemed suspicious of Wilbur and Siren’s similarities, so he’d just assumed he was clueless. However, what Tubbo and Ranboo were saying made a lot of sense. Tommy knew it was dangerous for him to know the Syndicate’s identities. Of course he was going to push away any suspicions he had.

He deserved to know though. Considering the worst case scenario had happened without Tommy knowing their identities, Wilbur was going to make the case for revealing it all to Tommy as soon as they got him back, and he wasn’t going to take no for an answer.

But they had to get Tommy back before that could happen.

“Alright, well we’re all on the same level here now,” Wilbur said, gesturing at his own uncovered face. “We need to get down to business.”

“Right. We need to figure out what you need us to do so we can help find Tommy,” Ranboo said, folding his hands in front of him.

“Actually, I think I came up with something I can do on the way over here,” Tubbo chimed in, spinning around in his desk chair. Everyone turned to look at Tubbo, raising their eyebrows and waiting for him to continue. He stopped spinning and tapped on his mouse, his computer screen flickering to life. “I dunno if you guys know this, but how much information is stored on the database for the Hero Committee?”

“Well if you’re asking if you could find out Dream’s real identity or something by hacking into their files, I’d say you’re out of luck,” Techno told him.

Tubbo shook his head. “Nah, I’m not trying to find that. But I’m wondering if personal contact information, like emails or something, is stored there.”

Phil frowned. “I mean, from what Daedalus has told us about the way the Hero Committee is run... probably? But I don’t see how that would be helpful unless you plan on spam calling Dream to find out where Tommy is.”

“While that would be funny, that’s not where I was going with that,” Tubbo said, typing rapidly into his computer and pulling up the website for the Hero Committee. “Do you think Dream has a phone or computer that’s separate from the one he uses for his work related stuff?”

“Definitely. Daedalus told us that every hero is given work devices, and then they have their own personal devices as well since the Committee has full access to the data on their work devices,” Phil explained. “Technically, the Hero Committee has access to their personal devices just as well, but they’re not supposed to look through their personal devices unless there’s an official investigation or warrant sent out against that hero.”

“Dream’s not keeping Tommy at the Hero Tower, right?” Tubbo asked, pulling up the source code for the Hero Committee website.

“No, he’s definitely not. He probably has a private place that the Hero Committee doesn’t know about to hold him at,” Techno answered.

Tubbo nodded. “Just what I thought. So it’s not unreasonable to assume if he had to, say, arrange for wherever he’s holding Tommy to be empty for an extended period of time, he would’ve done that on a phone or computer that the Hero Committee didn’t know about?”

“That would be logical to assume, yes,” Wilbur agreed.

“Cool. Then I know what I need to look for,” Tubbo said, his screen turning dark as lines of green code began running across. “I can’t promise anything, but I think our best bet is going to be for me to try and gain access to Dream’s secret phone or computer through the ones he has connected to the Hero Committee. Obviously this might not work depending on how strictly he’s been keeping the devices disconnected from each other. But I have some ideas for how I can find connections between the two that he might not have thought of. Then once I have access to that secret phone or computer he’s got, I can go through it to try and see if there’s any record of where he’s keeping Tommy.”

Wilbur blinked. That... actually wasn’t a bad idea.

But there was one glaring issue.

“How long would that take?” He asked, furrowing his brows.

Tubbo didn’t stop typing on his keyboard, but Wilbur noticed his shoulders drop a bit. “I... don’t know, honestly. I could get lucky and find out in a few hours, but that’s pretty unlikely. I’d say it’ll take me a few days at least, depending on how much I have to search through.”

A few days. That was too long. Way too long. Wilbur didn’t want Tommy to spend another hour with Dream, let alone several days.

“Is there nothing we can do that’s faster?” Wilbur asked, clenching his jaw.

“This is what I can do. Anything more is on you guys. You’re the big scary villain organization with tons of resources,” Tubbo said, shooting Wilbur a dirty look over his

shoulder.

Shit. Yeah. Wilbur was getting too caught up in his own head and was forgetting all the resources they had at their disposal.

“We’ll contact Jester and ask him to see what he can find out through his network,” Wilbur said, tapping his fingers against his arm. “I know he’s got a few mercenaries in his contacts who will work with just about anyone, so one of them could have information on Dream if he ever needed someone to do his dirty work for him.”

“Punz could know,” Techno nodded. “I’d ask Jester about him first.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. Punz would be our best bet,” Wilbur agreed, thinking of the mysterious mercenary who was the go-to person in the underground for discreet work. If there was anyone Dream would’ve hired, it would be him. “Shit, okay, I need to make some calls.”

“I think it’s time for us to go anyway,” Phil said, straightening up. “Tubbo, Ranboo, do you need our numbers?”

“I got them from your phone bill,” Tubbo said casually.

Phil frowned. “How did you-” he cut himself off, seeming to realize what a dumb question that was considering they were talking to a hacker. “Never mind.”

“We’ll let you know as soon as we have anything,” Ranboo said, standing up so he could walk them to the door. “And if you need anyone for anything like spying or infiltration, I can teleport, so, uh, feel free to contact me. I might not know computers like Tubbo does, but I’m gonna help in any way I can.”

It was such an earnest offer, and although Wilbur wasn’t sure if they were going to need someone with teleportation skills for finding Tommy, he could tell that Ranboo just wanted to feel like he was doing something. They were all searching for something to cling onto, something to make them feel like they were actually working towards saving Tommy.

“Thank you, Ranboo,” Wilbur said, nodding at him. “We’ll let you guys know.”

The three of them pulled their masks on again, and after one last round of goodbyes, Siren, Zephyrus, and Blade found themselves heading out of the apartment building.

Wilbur didn’t realize how much he had been running on adrenaline until he got back into the car, practically collapsing into his seat. His head was aching, his chest still tight from his panic attack earlier.

The car started up, and Wilbur stared at his hands in his lap. It could take them several days to find Tommy, and that was assuming Tubbo’s plan would work. Wilbur knew he shouldn’t be worrying himself sick over what could be happening to Tommy right now. He should be focusing on what to do now. He should be calling Quackity, calling Punz, asking anyone and everyone he could think of for information on Dream.

But as the car rumbled down the street, Wilbur felt frozen. His heart sat in his throat, and all he wanted was to wake up from this living nightmare.

Wilbur barely registered the ride home. One moment, they were in Eastside pulling away from Tubbo and Ranboo's apartment, and the next they were pulling into their garage.

The door to his left opened.

"Wil? You gonna come in the house?" Phil asked, his voice gentle.

Wilbur knew he should get up. But he was staring at Tommy's backpack sitting by his feet.

"He's going to hate me when we get him back," Wilbur whispered. "And he should. I deserve it for putting him in danger."

"Wilbur, it wasn't just you who got him involved. We all did," Phil reminded him, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"But I'm the one who started it. I'm the one who gave Techno his number. I'm the one he decided to save in the alley that day." He curled further in on himself, the seatbelt he was still wearing tugging against his shoulder. "If he hadn't saved my life, he'd be alright right now. He'd be safe."

Wilbur literally owed Tommy *his life*, and this was how he repaid him. By being stupid enough to let him get kidnapped.

"But he chose to save your life because that's the kind of person he is," Phil said, squeezing his shoulder. "Not to mention, it's not like you asked him to save your life. You were unconscious at the time."

"Yeah but-" Wilbur's breathing hitched. "I've just been so fucking *selfish* this whole time. I've been taking advantage of the fact that he doesn't know I'm Siren and asking him stuff he'd never tell me as Wilbur, I've dragged him into our whole mess when he repeatedly told me he didn't want to get involved, I just- I've been such a fucking asshole to him and he doesn't even know it!" His eyes started to burn again, and he squeezed his eyes shut as a shuddering breath ran through him. "He's such a good kid, Phil. He's so good and he deserves so much better than this."

"Wil-"

"I want him to hate me when he gets back," Wilbur continued, his voice cracking. "But I know him and he's going to forgive me anyway because that's the kind of person he is, and I don't deserve his forgiveness."

"Wilbur-"

"I-I just don't know how I'm going to face him when we get him back," he confessed. "How am I supposed to-"

"*Wilbur!*"

Wilbur went silent, looking up at Phil through tears.

Phil placed a hand on Wilbur's cheek, using his thumb to wipe away a stray tear.

“Whether or not you believe Tommy should hate you for what happened, it's his own choice whether to forgive you or not. But if he does, you shouldn't try to take that choice away from him and tell him he shouldn't. What you need to do instead is work to earn that forgiveness, to try and make things right even if Tommy believes that it's fine. Don't just sit and mope about how you deserve to be hated,” Phil told him, his stare so intense, Wilbur felt like it was burning a hole into his head. “You're not perfect, Wilbur. You've made mistakes, and so does everyone else. What's important is that you recognize when you've fucked up, and you put in the work to fix it.”

Wilbur nodded. That... made sense.

“Okay. I think I get it,” he whispered.

Phil smiled at him. “Then let's go inside and find our boy.”

“Alright. Let's find him.”

Chapter End Notes

not the identity reveals yall were expecting huh?? :))

also sorry but you guys don't get to know what's going on with tommy just yet ;) however you finally got to see a bit of what's going on inside our favorite siren boy's head, and it's a whole lot of guilt! :D

OKAY NOW FUN STUFF! so just for shits and giggles I decided to make a playlist for clinic! to be completely honest, I don't listen to these songs while I write. I rarely can write while listening to music with lyrics so I have a specific instrumental playlist for clinic, but this playlist is just songs that reminded me of the general vibes of this fic. also I took a few songs off a different playlist my dear friend Mabs made for clinic as well, so I'm going to link hers too bc I listen to it all the time when brainstorming

[My playlist](#)

[Mabs' playlist](#)

anyway thank you all so much for reading, I promise I'll try to get the next one out as soon as I can, I have a lot of plans for next chapter and I'm very excited to write it ;) please let me know in the comments what you thought! I promise I read all of them (even when I get over 300 in a single day lmaoooo)

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

dreaming of a better place

Chapter Summary

Things seem off and Tommy can't figure out why.

Chapter Notes

hello everyone! I did NOT expect to finish this next chapter so soon but when I intended to write just the first half of this chapter, it turned out a lot longer than expected so yall get a full chapter right now!!

as always thank you all so much for the love on the last chapter, I really hope you enjoy this one because it was so unbelievably fun for me to write

TWs for this chapter (they're different than usual): usual descriptions of wounds, minor dissociation, somewhat derealization, HEAVY themes of unreality and struggling to distinguish what's 'real'

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

“I still don’t know how you managed to get stabbed in the foot.”

“It was that bitch 404. Fucker’s got stupidly good aim.”

Tommy snorted as he pressed the gauze against Siren’s foot, blood soaking the cotton and making him quickly switch it out for a new handful.

It was just the two of them in the backroom of the cafe tonight. Siren had showed up with a knife sticking out of his boot, and now Tommy was kneeling against the tile floor, trying not to wrinkle his nose as he tried to figure out the best angle to heal Siren’s foot from.

“Get better at dodging then, lame ass,” Tommy teased, moving the gauze away and placing his hands on the foot. He closed his eyes, feeling warmth pool from his hands as his energy seeped into the wound.

In front of him, he could hear Siren sigh in relief, and by the time Tommy opened his eyes, he saw Siren was slumped against the floor.

“Thank you, Tommy,” Siren breathed, looking much more relaxed than he had been a few moments before. “That hurt like a bitch.”

“No shit,” Tommy huffed, moving his hands away and standing up to wash them off in the sink.

When he turned the sink on, there was a split second where the water pouring out of the faucet looked as though it were blood red. But then Tommy blinked, and it was normal water.

Must’ve been a trick of the light.

Shaking his head, Tommy washed off his hands, watching Siren’s blood trail down the drain in lazy swirls. Then he used a towel to dry them, and moved back to sit next to Siren, who was now leaning against the wall.

“You’re such a good kid, Toms,” Siren said, smiling at him and reaching out a hand to rest on his shoulder.

The gesture felt so familiar. It was something Wilbur would do sometimes when they were chatting. Just a gentle squeeze of his shoulder, with Wilbur’s calloused fingertips dragging roughly against his sweater fabric.

Glancing at Siren’s hands, he noticed how there were similar callous marks on Siren’s fingertips. He gulped.

Tommy shoved away his first thought in favor of wondering if Siren played guitar too.

Stop lying to yourself, a voice in his head suddenly echoed.

Stiffening, Tommy whipped his head around, trying to figure out where the voice had come from. He glanced around the cafe backroom for anyone who could’ve said that, but only saw Siren giving him a concerned look.

“Are you alright?” Siren asked, cocking his head slightly.

He opened his mouth to reply that yes, he was totally fine. But instead, he found himself hesitating.

There was something off about Siren. Although the twist of his smile was painfully familiar, along with the messy curls that fell over his forehead and the casual way he was still holding onto Tommy’s shoulder, something wasn’t right.

It was in his voice. His voice changer was still on, but it sounded different than normal. Was it running out of battery?

“Tommy?”

“Sorry, I’m fine,” Tommy said, shaking his head and placing his hands on the tile floor to try and ground himself. “Just zoned out for a second.”

But he *wasn’t* fine. As he pressed his palms against the floor, he expected to feel the icy tiles jabbing into his skin. Instead, the floor was warm. The floor of the cafe backroom was never warm.

You know who Siren is. Stop pretending you don't, that same voice echoed in his head again.

Tommy frowned. "No I don't. Shut the fuck up," he whispered back.

"Tommy? Who are you talking to?" Siren asked, looking more concerned with every passing second.

Just ask him. Point blank. I'm sure he'll tell you.

"Shut up!" Tommy hissed again, twisting his fingers into his hair.

The hand on his shoulder moved, and Siren crouched down in front of him. "Tommy, can you hear me? What's going on?"

Shutting his eyes to avoid looking at Siren's face, Tommy shook his head. "Siren, I think I need a minute alone."

You're such an idiot, letting him get away with these lies.

"I don't want to leave you. Not when you seem this upset." And fuck, of course Siren had to sound so goddamn caring when he said that. Just like-

No. No he wasn't going to think of that. He wasn't going to let himself think of who Siren reminded him of.

Coward.

"SHUT UP!" Tommy shouted, clenching his jaw as he pulled at his hair, wincing at the sharp pain that flashed across his skull. "Siren, please, for the love of god give me a minute alone."

Siren sucked in a sharp breath, and Tommy expected more arguing. But after a few moments, he heard footsteps leading away, and listened as the door to the alley clicked shut.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Tommy slumped against the wall, letting his hands fall out of his hair. He placed them on the tile again, and found that it was still warm.

It shouldn't be warm.

It's obvious, when you take a minute to think about it.

Tommy wasn't sure if the voice was referring to the floor being warm or who Siren reminded him of, but he didn't really care either way. What he did care about however was the fact that the voice was much, *much* louder now.

Just open your eyes. Stop being such a pussy.

"I'm not being a pussy."

"Yes you fucking are."

When the voice was no longer an echo in his head, Tommy's eyes flew open, and he shrieked when he saw a familiar face filling up his vision.

It was... It was *him*. Tommy. It was his own face staring back at him. He was reminded of the time Jester had copied his face as a joke, but it was ten times more unsettling because unlike with Jester, this thing was speaking with his own voice too.

"What the shit?!" Tommy yelped, pressing himself against the wall. "Who the fuck are you?!"

The other Tommy huffed in laughter. "Please tell me you're not stupid enough to not recognize your own face. I mean, I know you're pretty face blind, but you should recognize yourself when you're talking to him."

Tommy scowled. "Am I dreaming?"

"You better fuckin' hope you're dreaming or else you're gonna have to start looking for a therapist," the other Tommy teased, although there was nothing light in his voice.

This was weird, talking to himself like this. Even though it had to be a dream, it still made something cold settle in his gut, and he wanted to wake up as soon as possible.

"Why are you here?" Tommy asked, narrowing his eyes at the other him.

"I dunno, you tell me," the other Tommy shrugged. "Seems to me like you got some internal issues you need to work out. Mostly involving our favorite supervillain."

"There's nothing to work out," Tommy spat. "I'm not trying to find out Siren's identity."

"But you already know it. You're just lying to yourself," the other him taunted.

"I don't know his identity," Tommy shot back. "There are plenty of guys in this city with brown hair who play guitar."

"That's not just it though, is it?" The other him said, leaning in close. "There's more you're picking up on."

Gritting his teeth, Tommy tried to ignore the images flashing through his mind. The familiar laugh. The way he spoke. The way in which he'd sling his arm over Tommy's shoulders, as if he'd done it a million times before.

"Fuck off!" Tommy shouted, lunging forward to push his other self back. "It's just a coincidence!"

That's what he was going to keep telling himself. Even if a part of him wondered if he was just setting himself up for the same kind of pain that he went through when he found out about Tubbo and Ranboo being Nuke and Ender.

"I want to wake up," Tommy growled at his other self. "Wake me the fuck up."

The other him smiled, and it sent a shiver down his spine. “Fine. Your choice.”

And just like that, the world around Tommy began to fade. Colors bled out of the back of the cafe, and Tommy squeezed his eyes shut as he slowly lost awareness of everything.

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A few beats passed. Then, Tommy jolted awake.

Bolting upright, Tommy glanced around wildly, taking in the familiar sight of his room at the Soot house.

Shit. That was a weird fucking dream.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Tommy wrapped his arms around himself and struggled to steady his racing heart. That dream was strange, but it wasn't anything to think too hard about. He shook his head to try and forget it, even though the events kept replaying in his mind.

His own voice, taunting him. Telling him he knew the truth, even if he was pretending he didn't.

No. He didn't know anything. Fuck that voice in his head.

After a few minutes of calming down, Tommy forced himself to climb out of bed. He should probably go downstairs and see what time it was.

As Tommy headed down the stairs, he trailed his hand along the wall, listening as a babble of voices echoed up the floors. Seemed like Wilbur, Techno, and Phil were already awake. He focused on the bumpy texture of the wall brushing against his fingertips, and the cool wood against his bare feet. It was fine. He was fine. It was all just a dream.

When he got downstairs, he heard a lot more voices than just Wilbur, Phil, and Techno's. Frowning, Tommy crept around the corner, peering into the living room, before gasping at the sight that greeted him.

The entire fucking Syndicate was sitting in the living room.

Nemesis and Thanatos were crammed together on one corner of the couch, each of them holding a plate of pancakes on their laps and chatting animatedly to one another. Jester was settled on the opposite side, holding a glass of orange juice in one hand, and waving his other hand around while talking to Daedalus. Rosethorn was sitting in the middle of the couch, with Blade settled on the floor in front of her, and she was carefully braiding the flowing pink hair that was usually kept hidden under his skull.

As soon as he peeked his head around the corner, someone was throwing their arm around his shoulders.

“Tommy!” Siren cheered, pulling him into the living room so everyone could see him.
“You're finally awake!”

“We were worried about you, mate,” Zephyrus said, Tommy noticing he was standing at the kitchen stove, flipping pancakes in his fully-veiled outfit like nothing about that was strange.

Tommy blinked, his mind stumbling over what he was seeing. “Wh-Why the hell are you guys here?” He managed to spit out, shrugging Siren’s arm off of him.

“We just thought we’d stop by and visit,” Rosethorn told him, giving him a sweet smile.

“We wanted to check in on you,” Daedalus added, nodding at him.

“But-What about the people who actually fucking live here? Phil, Techno, Wilbur?” Tommy kept whipping his head around, but he didn’t see any of them. Only the masked Syndicate members.

“Oh don’t worry about them, they know we’re here,” Zephyrus explained with a grin in his voice.

For some reason, the words made a shiver run down Tommy’s spine. Something was still wrong about this.

“What the fuck are you all doing here? Seriously?” Tommy hissed, backing away from the Syndicate members.

“We just wanted to make sure you were okay,” Nemesis said, seeming hurt by his suspicion.

“This doesn’t- no, that doesn’t make sense,” Tommy muttered, shaking his head as he pressed his back against the wall. He pressed his hand to the glass, knowing that at this time of the morning, the glass was still cold to the touch since this window didn’t see the sun until the afternoon.

The glass was warm. Tommy frowned.

“I’m... am I still dreaming?” He whispered to himself.

There was a harsh laugh that grated on his ears, and Tommy scowled as a flash of blonde sprinted down the stairs and bounced into the living room.

“Took you longer than I thought it would to figure it out,” the other Tommy said, smirking at him. At his appearance, all the Syndicate members seemed to freeze in place, as if they had been paused in a movie.

“Fine, I failed your stupid fucking test. Can I please wake up for real this time?” Tommy snapped.

“Maybe, maybe not. It’s up to you to figure out if you’re dreaming or not,” the other Tommy shrugged. “I mean, if you’re still dreaming, it’s probably because you got a lot on your mind. Like how comfortable Zephyrus seems to be in Phil’s kitchen.”

“Shut the fuck up and just wake me up,” Tommy said, squeezing his eyes shut again.

The other Tommy snorted at that. Then, he clapped his hands, and the world faded away once more.

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It was dark.

He was laying on something soft.

Tommy blinked open his eyes and found himself staring at his ceiling once again.

...was this real?

Sitting up in his bed, Tommy looked around the room and saw nothing out of the ordinary. His backpack was on the floor, his sheets were rumped, and he was wearing one of Wilbur's old sweatshirts.

Tommy ran his hands up and down his arms, feeling the fabric tug against his skin. Did everything feel floaty, or was that just his imagination?

Twisting in his bed, he pressed his hand against the glass of his window, and couldn't tell if it was warm or cold. It was somewhere in between.

Reaching his hands up, he twisted his fingers around his hair, tugging hard and yelping when pain flashed through him. That had felt pretty damn real. But then again, the pain had felt real before when he was in the back room of the cafe with Siren.

Pulling his knees up to his chest, he whimpered quietly as he dug his nails into his palms. Was this real? He couldn't tell. It didn't feel like a dream, but how the hell was he supposed to trust what was a dream and what wasn't?

His heart rate quickened. What if this wasn't real? What if he was just trapped in a never ending spiral of dreams?

Stumbling to his feet, Tommy rushed out the door of his bedroom. If he got downstairs and the Syndicate was sitting on his fucking couch again, he'd know this was a dream. There. He just had to look for stuff that was out of the ordinary. Dreams were always weird like that.

The smell of food wafted up to greet Tommy as he rushed down the steps. The wood floor was cool against his feet, and he ran into the living room, half expecting to find the entire Syndicate waiting for him just like before.

But the living room was empty. In the kitchen, Tommy saw Techno's pink braid swinging behind him as he moved between the stove and the counter, and he realized that Techno seemed to be in the midst of making hash browns.

"Techno?" Tommy tried, carefully creeping towards the kitchen as he searched for any sign of the other Tommy.

Techno glanced up at him through a few strands of hair that had fallen in his face. “Hullo,” he greeted, grabbing a spatula and using it to stir the potatoes in the pan. “I was just making breakfast if you want some?”

“Where are Wil and Phil?” Tommy asked, still unsure if this was reality or not.

“Doing work stuff. Y’know how it is,” Techno shrugged. “They’ll be back in a few hours though.”

Huh. Everything *seemed* normal enough. It wasn’t unusual for Tommy to wake up to one or more of the Soot members missing because they were off doing work related stuff. Not to mention, the floor was still cold, and the nails he was digging into his palm still hurt. It didn’t feel like a dream at all.

“Okay,” Tommy said, his shoulders slackening a bit as he slid into a chair at the kitchen island counter. “What’re you making?”

Techno held up the pan for him to see. “Hash browns. If you want eggs I can make some for you too, but I was planning on just eating these.”

“Just hash browns is fine, thank you,” Tommy said, tapping his fingers along the granite countertop.

Techno hummed and looked back to the pan, using the spatula to flip the potatoes every once in a while. As the minutes passed in relative peace, Tommy began to relax more and more. It seemed like he’d finally woken up from that trippy ass dream, and he couldn’t be more relieved.

Still, he couldn’t ignore the nagging feeling in the back of his head. That there was something important he was forgetting about. Something that was wrong with the scene in front of him.

Suddenly, Techno let out a hiss of pain, and Tommy was pulled out of his thoughts.

“Dammit,” Techno hissed, holding his left hand while moving the pan off the stove. He walked over to the sink and turned the faucet on, sticking his bright red palm underneath the cold water.

Tommy didn’t think before he was standing up to walk over to the sink. “Here, I can help,” he said to Techno.

Techno raised an eyebrow at him. While Tommy hadn’t technically told Techno and Phil about his healing powers, he’d assumed that Wilbur would’ve mentioned it at some point. But judging by the skepticism on Techno’s face, he wasn’t so sure anymore.

Either way though, he trusted Techno. It wasn’t like he had a problem with him knowing, and he figured it would’ve come up eventually. Besides, he wasn’t just going to let the man deal with a burn on his hand when Tommy could fix it in seconds. He knew all too well how burns on your hands could be annoying as hell thanks to that stupid espresso machine.

“Gimme your hand,” Tommy said, holding out his own.

Techno frowned but didn't say anything as he gave Tommy his injured hand. Tommy eyed the burn, wincing at the shiny, bright red skin that was already starting to peel. As gently as he could, he placed his own hand on top of the burn, and closed his eyes as energy began to pour out of him.

There was the familiar orange glow behind his eyes. It only took a few seconds for the burn to disappear, and when Tommy let go of the hand, his only side effect was a lingering warmth in his own fingers.

"You're a healer," Techno said, staring at his palm with an unreadable expression.

"Sure am, big man," Tommy replied, smiling at him.

"Well that's pretty good I suppose," Techno huffed, dropping his hand back down to his side. "Gives you some actual use around here instead of just taking up space."

The words hit Tommy like a punch to the chest. He reeled back, meeting Techno's flat stare and wondering if this was some kind of mean joke he wasn't understanding. It was possible that this was just another one of Techno's deadpan quips he just wasn't reading correctly, but it didn't feel like the man's usual jabs.

"What-Is that a joke?" Tommy asked, his voice small.

"No. All you do around here is eat our food and take up space. At least as a healer you can do something for us instead of just being a mooch," Techno continued, meeting his gaze calmly. "I mean, why else would people keep you around? You know how annoying you are."

Tommy winced at the cruel words thrown his way, wrapping his arms around himself as he tried to shove down the burning in his eyes. Of course he knew he was annoying. All his foster families had told him that dozens of times over. It wasn't a secret that people didn't like him at first, but he'd never thought he'd hear Techno say the same thing to him.

"But I-I thought you guys didn't mind having me here?" Tommy's question came out as more of a squeak, but his thoughts were spiraling too much to let him be embarrassed about it.

Techno snorted. "Nah, Wil just wanted us to tell you that so you'd be willing to stick around. After all, it's not like he wants to get rid of a healer either."

Tommy gulped. "That's not true. Wilbur doesn't find me annoying."

"Are you sure?" Techno raised an eyebrow. "Or do you think he just knows a good opportunity when he sees one?"

No. No, that couldn't be true. Wilbur had befriended Tommy and started inviting him out long before he knew Tommy had healing powers. He only found out about Tommy's powers that first day he came over to the Soot house.

Unless... Unless he was Siren. Then he would've known about Tommy's powers the first time he came into the cafe.

But Wilbur wasn't Siren. Sure, they were similar, but the two weren't the same and he refused to believe that.

"You're lying," Tommy choked out, his throat closing in on itself.

"If you wanna keep believin' in your little fairy tales you can, I'm just trying to tell you the truth since no one else will," Techno huffed, stepping back over to the pan and resuming his cooking.

Tommy stumbled away from the kitchen, his eyes burning as he tried to fight the tears threatening to pour down his cheeks. Techno found him annoying, and he claimed Wilbur and Phil did too. Had it really all been just a lie? An act made up to keep their precious healer close?

No. It didn't make sense. Wilbur didn't find out about his healing powers until they'd already become friends because he *wasn't Siren*.

Tommy leaned against the wall opposite to Techno. The man had gone back to his cooking, seemingly uncaring about the breakdown Tommy was having. There was a twinge in Tommy's palm as he wrapped his arms around himself, and he realized he'd been digging his nails even harder into his palms than he meant to.

Looking at the skin on his hand, Tommy felt the familiar tingling in his blood telling him to heal the wounds. But there was something off about his hand.

He'd broken the skin with his nails. There were half moon crescent shapes dotted around his palm, but there was no blood spilling out. Reaching down, he gently tugged one of the crescent moons apart and saw that, yup, that had definitely broken the skin. But the blood flowing underneath was staying in place. Not dripping out onto the floor.

That... that wasn't normal.

Wait.

The puzzle pieces fell into place when Tommy heard his own laughter ring throughout the kitchen again.

"Okay, sorry, I'm done for real this time. I promise," the other Tommy said, stepping into the kitchen from the garage.

"I don't even want to talk to you right now. Just please wake me up," Tommy whispered, closing his eyes and leaning against the wall.

"Will do, big man," the other him replied.

And once again, the world faded out.

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There was darkness.

He could feel his heart thumping steadily in his chest.

Warm blankets were wrapped around him.

A hand was gripping his own.

Tommy's eyes flew open, gasping awake like a man returned from the dead. He whipped his head around, seeing that he was in his own room still, but he wasn't alone this time.

Wilbur had a chair pulled up next to the bed. There were deep bags under his eyes, and he had his hand wrapped around Tommy's, holding him like he was afraid he would float away. Tommy's head was spinning as he was overwhelmed with relief that the things Techno said were just part of those fucked up dreams, but he still wasn't sure if he was awake or not.

"Wil?" Tommy whispered, his voice strangely hoarse.

Wilbur's eyes widened as he met Tommy's gaze, a bright smile spreading across his face. "Holy shit, Toms, you're awake! Oh my god, we've been so worried!"

"Worried?" Tommy asked, frowning.

The smile fell from Wilbur's face. "Do... do you not remember what happened?"

"What do you mean?"

Something troubled settled over Wilbur's expression. "Dream kidnapped you. We were on the phone when it happened."

And suddenly it all came flooding back.

Talking with Nemesis and Thanatos. Helping Monarch and Aurelion. Talking to Wilbur about what movie to watch when he got home, only to be greeted with a porcelain smiling face and a pair of white goggles.

Holy shit. He'd been *kidnapped*. By Dream and 404.

"Holy fuck, I remember," Tommy whispered, sitting up to wrap his arms around himself. "I-I don't remember what happened after 404 put me to sleep though."

Wilbur pressed his lips into a thin line. "You got rescued by the Syndicate, but you were stuck with Dream for a few days. You were unconscious when they found you, and no one was able to wake you up. We think it might've been 404's ability keeping you in some sort of coma, but I guess it finally wore off."

Shit. That made sense, although Tommy wasn't sure why 404 would keep him in a coma for the entirety of his captivity. Maybe he and Dream had planned to use him as a bargaining

chip with the Syndicate? Although from what Wilbur said, that didn't seem-

Wait.

"You... You know about the Syndicate?" Tommy whispered, staring at Wilbur with wide eyes.

Wilbur nodded. "Yeah, I know."

"And you're..." *you're Siren?* he wanted to ask. But he didn't want to ask that either, because after that dream with Techno, he was terrified of the implications that would come with Wilbur being Siren.

Maybe he wanted to believe that Wilbur actually cared about him just for a little while longer.

"And you're okay with that?" He asked instead, bringing his knees up to his chest.

Wilbur's face softened. "Of course I am. You were helping people, trying to do what was right. I don't have a problem with that at all."

Tommy breathed a sigh of relief, even as his suspicions continued to linger in the back of his mind.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you," he whispered.

"You don't have anything to apologize for," Wilbur reassured him. "I'm just glad you're okay."

And despite the little voice in the back of his head screaming at him that Wilbur didn't actually care, that Wilbur was just using him, Tommy found himself leaning forward anyway.

Wilbur hugged him tightly, and Tommy buried his face into his shoulder, letting himself sink into his older brother's warmth. He was okay. Dream wasn't here, and he had been rescued. He was safe. Everything was fine.

Still hugging Wilbur, Tommy lifted his head out of Wilbur's shoulder and blinked open his eyes, gaze flickering towards the window by his bed.

Then, he froze.

Because when he looked out the glass panes, Tommy realized he couldn't see anything outside.

It was as if there was a white void sitting outside his window. It wasn't fog. Fog was never this thick and this opaque. Instead, it seemed like the entire Soot house was sitting in a chunk of a video game that hadn't loaded yet. An empty space of pure nothingness.

Tommy was still hugging Wilbur, and he could feel Wilbur's hands carding through his hair. He wanted to sink into it. To not think about the void outside the glass and let himself be comforted by his brother.

But the nagging in the back of his head had turned into full on shouting.

This wasn't real.

Tommy was still dreaming.

And if his memory was right and he had really been kidnapped by Dream and 404, then he knew exactly why his dreams had been so fucked.

Tommy pulled away from the hug. Wilbur let out a noise of confusion, but Tommy ignored it as he shoved the blankets off his legs and stumbled to his feet.

"Where are you going?" Wilbur asked as Tommy headed to the door.

"To find someone," Tommy replied, swinging open the door to his bedroom and rushing into the hall.

404 was an interesting hero for sure. Unlike Dream, he didn't do many things for publicity, preferring to stay out of the public eye unless Dream dragged him to some press conference or interview. But more than that, the most interesting thing about 404 was his power, and how unique it was compared to most.

404 had the ability to make people fall asleep with a single touch. But it wasn't just that. He could also enter someone's mind while they slept and manipulate their dreams. While this aspect of his abilities wasn't often used in fights, it was one of the Hero Committee's preferred methods of interrogating suspects given how it wasn't torture (which was obviously illegal), yet it was extremely effective. 404 would enter the suspect's dreams, and manipulate the dreams into revealing the information he needed.

"WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU, YOU STUPID BASTARD?!" Tommy screamed into the house, whipping his head around for any sign of the other Tommy.

"Tommy? What's going on?" Wilbur asked, standing in the doorway to his room.

"STOP HIDING LIKE A PUSSY AND TALK TO ME!" Tommy shouted again, ignoring the fake Wilbur completely.

"Mate? What's going on?" Phil asked, appearing on the stairs.

"Is something wrong?" Techno chimed in, looking as though he was ready to fight someone.

Tommy laughed, and it was a horrible, grating sound. That piece of shit was really going all out to try and convince him this was real, wasn't he?

"I'm not falling for this shit again!" Tommy yelled, not even acknowledging Phil and Techno's presence. "I know I'm dreaming, so get the fuck out here!"

"Tommy, you're not dreaming," Phil told him in a gentle voice, holding his hands up placatingly. "I know you're probably freaked out after Dream took you, but--"

“Stop it!” Tommy snapped. “I’m not stupid! I know this isn’t real!” He backed up until he hit the railing of the stairs, shrinking back as Techno, Phil, and Wilbur all began to close in on him.

“Just calm down and take a moment to breathe,” Wilbur said. “I promise we got you out.”

“But you didn’t! I know you didn’t because I can tell this isn’t real!” Tommy insisted. He wasn’t wrong. He wasn’t. This wasn’t real or else he’d be able to see outside the windows. “You fucked up the windows again, 404! That’s how I know!”

“Tommy, tell us what’s wrong with the windows,” Techno was talking as though he were speaking to a scared animal, and in a way, Tommy figured that’s what he was right now. A scared animal trapped in a corner, ready to bite his way out if that’s what it came down to.

“I can’t see out of them,” he explained. “There’s nothing outside. Just white fucking void.”

Techno opened his mouth again, but Tommy spoke before he could.

“You’re not going to be able to convince me otherwise. I *know* I’m right.”

There was a beat of silence.

And then just like that, Techno, Wilbur, and Phil all froze in place, as if a pause button had been hit on them. The door to Wilbur’s bedroom opened, and Tommy watched the other Tommy stroll out with a grin on his face.

“I’ll admit, I wasn’t expecting you to figure it out this time,” the other him taunted.

Narrowing his eyes, Tommy shoved past the frozen figures and barreled straight into the copy of himself. With a loud shriek, he slammed the other Tommy against the wall, holding his arm up on his chest to press him back into the plaster.

“This isn’t going to work. I figured it out you fucking bastard,” Tommy hissed.

The other Tommy laughed, not trying to fight against the grip Tommy had on him. Then, as if a photoshop layer was being turned down in opacity, Tommy watched as his own face faded away, leaving 404 in place of the other Tommy.

“Well, it was worth a shot, don’t you think?” 404 said, now speaking in his own voice.

“Sure it was, but it didn’t fucking work you lame ass bitch,” Tommy shot back, pressing the hero further into the wall. “So let me wake up for real this time.”

404 shrugged. “Alright, I can do that. But just trust me when I tell you that this would’ve been a much easier way of doing things.”

And once again, the world began to fade to black around Tommy. But something about it felt different this time. It was heavier. As if the darkness was quite literally swallowing him whole.

Then, everything went dark, and Tommy was gone.

Tommy's head hurt.

His ears were ringing as he slowly came to. He was sitting on something hard and cold, and his back ached from where he was hunched over. Blinking open his eyes, the first thing he saw was his feet being tied to the legs of a wooden chair.

When Tommy tried to move his arms, he was met with resistance, and realized his wrists were tied down as well. Then, he heard footsteps walking towards him, and his heart leapt into his throat.

Whipping his head up, he saw Dream walking towards the chair he was tied to. They seemed to be in some sort of abandoned warehouse, with rotting wood walls, and stained concrete floors.

Behind Dream, 404 was leaning against a wall, smirking at him. Tommy would've flipped him off if he was able to lift his hand.

"Tommy, I'm glad to see you're finally awake. Did you sleep well?" Dream asked, leaning down so he was at eye level with Tommy.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "What the hell are you planning on doing with me besides fucking with my dreams?"

Dream leaned closer, and despite the mask, Tommy could tell he was smiling underneath it as well. "That's an easy one. We just want to ask you a few questions," Dream explained.

"What, like an interrogation?" Tommy asked, deepening his scowl so Dream couldn't see the fear those words struck into him.

"It doesn't have to be an interrogation. We don't want this to turn ugly, so if you just answer our questions, it'll be easier for all of us," Dream told him, resting a hand on Tommy's shoulder. "The Syndicate has hurt a lot of people, and I just want to stop them from doing that anymore."

Fucking bastard. Acting like he was the good guy here when he'd tried to kill everyone in the Syndicate ten times over.

"What do you want to know?" Tommy pushed.

Dream squeezed his shoulder, but it wasn't like when Wilbur or Siren did it. It wasn't meant as a gesture of comfort, but as a threat.

"I want you to tell me the civilian identities of everyone in the Syndicate."

George you bitch <3

it was so funny how you guys kept talking in the comments about Dream but no one blinked twice at George. If you're wondering why George is an asshole, c!George in the dsmp is apathetic as fuck and really doesn't give a shit about morality, so he just doesn't really see much of an issue with kidnapping a teenager if they have good reason for doing it, which in his mind they do lol

ALSO I wanna clarify something about his powers: George does not control dreams completely. He didn't know anything about Tommy's relationships with the Soot family prior to entering his dreams. Tommy's subconscious provides the dream and the information about the people in it, George can just push dreams in certain directions (ie: making Tommy think he's woken up when he's not, trying to get Tommy to think about the Syndicate's identities, pushing the dream to focus on his insecurities). So it's not like George was speaking through Techno or Wilbur at any point, he just can push Tommy's subconscious to highlight things he's already thinking/worried about if that makes sense

ANYWAY I hope you guys enjoyed, this chapter was so much fun for me to write. I really love mind-fuck type trippy stuff and I'm really glad I got to play with that in this fic lol. Sorry for the false hope tho lovelies :) next chapter we'll really get to see Dream take center stage lmao

we have a discord server! feel free to hop on in and join us, it's a chill time!
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I also have a spotify playlist for this fic so check that out [here](#)

please leave a comment letting me know what you thought! I read all of them and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

questioning

Chapter Summary

Dream and Tommy talk.

Chapter Notes

hey guys!! so sorry that this update was way later than usual, I just had a lot of other ideas last week and also found it kind of hard to focus on getting this chapter exactly how I wanted it to be, but I'm finally happy with the end result!

anyway as always tysm for all the love and support you give me on these chapters, I'm still in awe of how popular this silly little fic of mine is and ily all so much for being so kind about it <3

TWs for this chapter: brief mention of past child abuse

hope you enjoy!

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

I want you to tell me the identities of everyone in the Syndicate.

Dream's words echoed in his mind, sending a shiver down Tommy's spine as he struggled to keep his expression neutral. He could admit the truth. He didn't know the identities of anyone in the Syndicate (save for Nemesis' name), they had been so careful to keep that from him just in case a situation like this came up.

But judging by Dream's tone, the way he was leaning into Tommy like a predator assessing their prey, Tommy had a feeling he wasn't going to believe him even if he told the truth.

So instead, Tommy did the next most logical thing he could think of.

He spit on Dream's mask.

There was a heavy silence as Dream stared blankly at Tommy, Tommy's spit trailing down the front of the porcelain. Then, Dream took a deep breath and straightened up, and Tommy braced himself to be slapped. That's what they did in interrogations, right? He was probably about to get the shit slapped out of him.

Dream curled his hands into fists, but then took a second, *very* deliberate breath as if he was struggling to keep his composure.

“That was rude,” Dream said in a flat voice.

“There’s your answer,” Tommy hissed, narrowing his eyes at the hero. “I’m not telling you shit, bitch.”

His heart was about to beat out of his chest, and if he hadn’t been tied down to the chair, he was certain he wouldn’t be able to stand because his legs were shaking so badly. But Dream didn’t need to know that. He didn’t give a shit what the hero did to him, he wasn’t going to give up his friends.

Dream let out a low chuckle, and it was bone-chilling to hear. This man was the complete opposite of the Number One Hero he’d watched give him lectures about responsibility in detention. This was the real Dream. One who was determined to get what he wanted by any means necessary.

“You’re loyal. The Syndicate got lucky in finding you,” Dream commented, reaching behind him for his cape. He used the edge of the dark green fabric to wipe the spit off his mask before letting it flutter back down around his ankles. “Or is it that you’re afraid of them? Afraid of what they’ll do to you if you reveal their secrets? Because if that’s the case, Tommy, I can keep you safe. You’d never have to worry about the Syndicate again, if you were to help me.”

Tommy scoffed. “I’m not afraid of them, dickwad.” Maybe he had been afraid in the beginning. Afraid of saying no to their offers. Afraid of what they might do if he refused to help them. But things were different now. Tommy wasn’t afraid of them at all.

But was he afraid *for* them? Yes. Very much so. Which was why he wasn’t going to give Dream anything. Not if he could help it.

“So it’s the first one then. Loyalty.” Dream folded his arms across his chest. “That one’s tougher. Breaking manipulation always is.”

At this, Tommy frowned. “Manipulation? I haven’t been manipulated.”

“Yes, you have,” Dream said, his tone gentle as though he were speaking to a child. “You don’t realize it, but they’ve been manipulating you to their side. To see them as the good guys and me as the bad guy.”

“Oh fuck off. You’re not gonna get anywhere trying to gaslight me or whatever the fuck,” Tommy snapped.

“Wh- I’m not trying to *gaslight* you, Tommy! I’m trying to help you!” Dream exclaimed, and there was such a genuine note of concern there that it almost made Tommy falter. “The Syndicate’s been pulling you to their side. Getting you involved in something you should’ve never been involved in. I mean, for fuck’s sake, you’re just a kid!”

For a moment, Tommy blinked in surprise. Of all things he had expected the hero to bring up, he hadn't once considered that Dream would care that he's a kid.

No. That didn't matter. Dream didn't actually care. He was just trying to make Tommy think that he did. He wouldn't fall for it.

"Pretty bold of you to go around kidnapping children as the Number One Hero," Tommy pointed out.

Dream sighed. "I didn't have any other choice. I couldn't get a warrant to arrest you, and if I just tried talking to you the Syndicate would've been on my ass in seconds."

"Then untie me if you just want to talk," Tommy challenged.

"I can't do that because you'll just try to run away."

Tommy snorted. "Damn right I would. Whatever you might think of the Syndicate, they didn't kidnap me."

"But didn't they?" Dream asked, cocking his head to the side. "Maybe not literally. But they pulled you into their world, got you to work with them as their healer until you were so deep in you couldn't escape."

Tommy clenched his jaw. That wasn't true. Sure, Blade had forced him to heal Zephyrus once, but that was the only time he'd really been forced to heal someone. He hadn't been dragged into the Syndicate against his will.

...right?

It didn't matter now. He didn't regret getting involved with the Syndicate. Not anymore.

"They never forced me to do anything I didn't want to do," he said. It was a slight lie, but again, his hand had only been forced once. It was close enough to the truth that it sounded genuine on his tongue. "Besides, they wouldn't have been so desperate for a healer if you weren't trying to kill them every time you got in a fight."

Dream huffed at that. "You think I want to have to go that far? I'd love to be able to focus on incapacitating villains, but when they're trying to kill *me*? Or my friends? I mean, I'm sure you saw Nemesis almost kill Flame. If I hadn't stepped in, he would've died."

"Only because Flame almost killed Thanatos!" Tommy argued.

"Did you see that fight? When Nemesis and Thanatos still went by Arson and Iceman, and Flame was sent out on his own to go take care of them?" Dream challenged, his voice going hard.

"No, but I saw the aftermath. I nearly passed out when I healed Thanatos from those burns," Tommy told him.

“How do you know that wasn’t self-defense on Flame’s end?” Dream then asked. “Villains attack us, and we act in self-defense. Sometimes we have to go to extreme lengths to protect ourselves. I don’t like it, but it’s the way things are.”

“What the hell kind of threat could Siren have posed to you that meant you had to shove a pipe through his fucking stomach?!” Tommy snarled, remembering that fateful night in the alley that started all this.

Dream stared at him for a moment, and Tommy tried not to squirm in his seat.

“You don’t realize how dangerous your ‘friends’ are, do you?”

“I’m not an idiot. Of course I do,” Tommy shot back. He’d seen plenty of news reports on the Syndicate in the past. He’d seen the kinds of things they could all do, the battles they’d won, the lack of mercy they showed their enemies. It was precisely why he’d been so terrified of them in the beginning.

“And yet you still choose to help them? They’re murderers, Tommy. Don’t you see that?” Tommy opened his mouth to argue, but Dream made a tsking noise and shook his head before he could. “Tell me how many people you think Siren’s killed,” he challenged.

Tommy blinked. Of course he knew that Siren had killed people before, but he hadn’t actually thought of specific numbers.

“I... I’m not sure,” Tommy admitted.

Dream reached into his pocket and pulled out a phone. He tapped a few times on the screen, before turning it to face Tommy, showing him grainy security footage down by the ports in South Bay.

The video started to play. Tommy watched as Zephyrus and Blade fought against armored police officers, the two moving with a type of fluidity and synchronization that only came from years of working together. Blade would send his sword slicing through the air and Zephyrus would lift higher than the blade without needing to be told. Zephyrus would swoop down from his flight to snatch someone up, and Blade would lift his sword to send his sword straight into their middle. It was almost like a dance.

But there were a lot of police officers. If Tommy had to guess, he might even say there were a hundred of them. And despite how powerful Zephyrus and Blade were, there were only two of them.

Tommy’s breathing hitched when a bullet ripped into Zephyrus’ side, and he came crashing to the ground. Blade was immediately on him, shielding him with his body as the police advanced with their guns drawn.

Then, a honey-coated voice broke through the staticky white noise of the video footage.

“*Stop,*” Siren ordered as he suddenly appeared beside Zephyrus and Blade, making all the police officers freeze in place.

Tommy stared at the video with wide eyes, his heart dropping into his stomach at Siren's next words.

"Kill each other. Until there's no one left standing."

And just like that, the police officers turned on each other. Bright flashes exploded across the screen as the officers shot each other over and over, their black-armored bodies collapsing into piles like a puppet whose strings had been cut. Blade dragged Zephyrus off screen, while Siren stayed to watch the chaos unfold.

Although Siren was his friend, although Siren was someone Tommy trusted wholeheartedly, it was in that moment that he remembered exactly *who* Siren was. Watching his dark coat billow in the breeze blowing in from the sea, his expression unreadable under his mask as he watched these officers murder each other under his orders... a shiver ran down Tommy's spine.

When there was only one officer left standing, the sole survivor of the chaos, Siren stepped over the bodies until he was standing right in front of the man.

"Now kill yourself."

The officer didn't hesitate as he pressed his gun to his chin and pulled the trigger.

When Siren turned back around, Tommy saw blood splattered across his face, and felt bile rise in his throat.

Dream pulled the phone away from him, clicking out of the video and pocketing it once again. Then, he stared down at Tommy, his smiley face gaze as unreadable as ever.

"What did you think?" He asked, as if that was some sort of film he'd shown Tommy and wanted to get his opinion on.

Tommy grit his teeth as he tried to hide the nausea that was rolling over him like a wave. He'd known that Siren killed people before. The media talked about how he could control entire crowds, and took full advantage of that ability whenever it was necessary. This wasn't news to Tommy.

He'd just... never seen footage like that before. Usually the news would only show small clips of Siren's mass mind control before cutting away, citing that the footage was often too graphic to show on live TV. Now he understood why.

"What were they doing down by the ports? Before the police officers showed up?" Tommy asked, struggling to keep his voice level.

"There was a warehouse there that had just received a shipment of highly-dangerous weapons designed for Hero use. Like 404's knives or my swords. The Syndicate was trying to steal them," Dream explained.

"How long ago did that happen?"

Dream tapped his finger against the bottom edge of his mask in thought. “A few months ago, I think.”

Something cold settled into Tommy’s gut at that. A few months ago Zephyrus and Blade showed up at his apartment for the first time, and Zephyrus had a bullet wound in his side. According to them, Siren was busy doing something else, which was why he’d given Blade Tommy’s address so he could heal Zephyrus.

That’s what Siren had been doing. Taking care of those police officers while Blade dragged Zephyrus to *his* apartment.

A part of Tommy was tempted to ask Dream for a bucket so he could throw up into it. But took shaky breaths, refusing to let Dream see how much this was getting to him. He knew the Syndicate did things like this beforehand. This wasn’t news to him. Why was he so affected by this?

He knew it was because there was a difference between hearing about the horrible things the Syndicate did and actually seeing them with his own eyes. But even as the cold horror settled onto his shoulders like a physical weight, he had to remind himself that this was what Dream wanted. Dream was trying to shake his loyalty to the Syndicate.

Besides, Zephyrus had been injured. Of course Siren was going to resort to drastic measures when they were surrounded on all sides, with Zephyrus hurt and the group of officers crowding in on them.

He didn’t need to go that far though. He could’ve made all of them fall asleep a traitorous voice in his mind whispered.

No. This was what Dream wanted him to think. Tommy knew that even if Siren was a villain, he still deserved to be healed. All of them did.

“If you think showing me some shitty security camera footage is gonna make me break that easily, you’ve got another thing coming,” Tommy said, meeting Dream’s mask with a silent challenge in his eyes.

Dream chuckled. “You’re stubborn. Good to know.”

Suddenly, 404 appeared at Dream’s side, resting a hand on the taller hero’s shoulder.

“Ask him about his brother,” 404 told him, smirking at Tommy. “I saw it in his dreams. There’s some sore spots in the family.”

Tommy frowned. Brother? Family? Who the hell was 404 talking about? He hadn’t seen Tubbo or Ranboo in his dreams at all.

“What’s his name?” Dream asked, glancing at 404.

“Wilbur,” 404 replied, looking so self-satisfied, he was like the cat that had just gotten the cream.

Oh. *Oh.*

It seemed like even though he'd been able to manipulate his dreams and watch what happened in them, 404 wasn't able to read his thoughts during them. He'd just seen his interactions with Wilbur and assumed that Wilbur was his brother, not that Wilbur possibly had any connection to Siren.

Thank god. That was one less thing he had to worry about.

But now Wilbur could be a target if they thought he was Tommy's family. So he squashed down the warmth in his chest that still showed up at Wilbur being referred to as his brother, and forced himself to let out a sarcastic laugh.

"You think Wilbur is my brother?" He asked, matching 404's smirk with one of his own. "You might be able to see my dreams, but you really don't understand shit, do you?"

404 frowned, his smirk disappearing. "Wait, he's not your brother?"

"No, he's just a friend of mine. I met him at work," Tommy explained, trying to sound as flippant as possible in the hopes that they would think Wilbur wasn't important to him.

"But you had a room at his house," 404 pointed out.

"Yeah, his family's been letting me stay with him for the past few weeks because my living situation is a bit shit right now. That's all though. He's not my family or anything," Tommy said, and although it was the truth, it felt like lies passing between his teeth.

"So he's not important to you?" Dream asked, folding his arms over his chest.

Tommy didn't like the way he asked the question, but kept his expression still as he shrugged. "I mean, he's my friend of course. But I wouldn't say he's that important to me."

"So you wouldn't mind if we paid him a visit?" Dream pushed, and Tommy felt every cell in his body freeze at that. "Just to chat with him, ask if he knows anything about your... side job?"

His heart raced in his ears. Dream was just bluffing him. He wasn't actually going to visit Wilbur.

"I mean- I don't think that's necessary. I don't want him to find out about all this stuff, the last thing he needs is to get involved in it," Tommy said, his veneer of forced casualness slipping fast.

"Nah, I think he's already involved in it thanks to you," Dream replied. "That's the consequence of working with villains. Anyone you care about is going to get dragged into their problems right along with you."

"I know what he looks like," 404 jumped in, pulling out his phone. "Shouldn't be too hard to find his file. How many people are even named Wilbur these days anyway?"

“Good to know. Maybe we can even bring him here to join you, Tommy. For all we know, maybe he saw the Syndicate one night when you were leaving the cafe.”

Tommy clenched his jaw. They were just bluffing. That was all.

“Found his file!” 404 declared after a few beats of silence, lifting his phone in the air with a triumphant grin. “Wilbur Soot, he lives in South Bay with his dad and his brother.”

“Let’s see that address,” Dream hummed, leaning over to look at 404’s phone screen. “Oh yeah, shouldn’t take too long for us to get there—”

“NO!” Tommy shouted, cutting them both off.

Shit. They knew Wilbur’s name, and they knew where he lived. It might not be a bluff, and if it wasn’t, then Wilbur was going to get hurt because of him. Because of his shit. He couldn’t let that happen.

Dream glanced up from the phone and hummed. “Oh? You don’t want us to do that?”

“Don’t you fucking touch him!” Tommy snarled. “Him and his family have nothing to do with this shit, okay?!”

404 and Dream exchanged a knowing look. “Seems like 404 hit the nail on the head with the brother comment,” Dream said, sounding amused.

“Fuck you,” Tommy spat. “Your problem is with me helping the Syndicate, right? Wilbur’s got nothing to do with that, so leave him the fuck alone.”

“How about this,” Dream began, taking a step towards Tommy. “You start answering my questions, and if you don’t, we’ll go find your brother and see if he knows anything.”

Tommy gulped. He’d fucked himself over, and now they knew they could use Wilbur as leverage against him. Fuck. Shit. Fucking shit.

“But I don’t *know* anything,” Tommy admitted, looking up at Dream with pleading eyes. “I don’t know the Syndicate’s identities. They never told me anything just in case something like this happened.”

“Now that’s bullshit,” Dream said, resting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder. “You’ve been working with them for months. They trust you completely. There’s no way they never let anything slip.”

Tommy thought of Nemesis, and how he had her real name—Niki—floating in his mind. He thought of Siren, and how with each passing day, it was getting harder and harder not to compare him to Wilbur.

No. He wasn’t giving those things up.

“I don’t know anything, I swear!” Tommy whined. “Please, Dream, they never told me shit! I was even blindfolded the day they brought me to their secret base because they didn’t want

me to know the way!”

The grip on his shoulder tightened, and Tommy felt his body tremble as Dream leaned down so they were face to face again.

“I don’t like liars,” he said quietly.

There was a beat of silence as Tommy waited for Dream to make a move. He wasn’t going to break. Fuck him.

Suddenly, the tense silence was shattered like glass as a phone began to ring.

Tommy breathed a sigh of relief as Dream straightened up, patting his pockets until he pulled out his phone. His ringtone was obnoxiously loud, and Tommy wondered who the hell even had their phone off silent these days.

Dream sighed when he glanced at the screen. “404, keep an eye on him. I need to take this.”

404 nodded as Dream took a few steps away from the chair, holding the phone up to his ear as he answered the call.

“Hey Flame,” he said in greeting, the mention of the other hero making Tommy instantly straighten to attention. “Um, yeah, we’re in public right now. We’re patrolling down in Eastside.” A pause. “Yeah, of course everything’s fine. There’s just been some sightings. Nothing unusual.” Another pause. “No, we haven’t seen anything. Did you hear about anything going on?” ... “No? Then why does he want me back at the Tower?” ... “I mean, does it have to be right now?” ... “Shit. Fine, okay. I’ll be there soon.”

Dream hung up. “Seems like our conversation is going to have to be cut short because I’m being called back to the Hero Tower,” he told Tommy.

Tommy couldn’t stop the next words that came out of his mouth. “Flame doesn’t know about me?”

404 twisted his lips into a scowl, while Dream sighed. “That’s not for you to know.”

“I mean, it’s pretty fucking obvious. You lied to him about where you are and what you were doing. If Flame knew you’d kidnapped me, you would’ve just told him,” Tommy snorted, a strange sense of satisfaction washing over him at the knowledge that the heroes weren’t as put together as they pretended to be. “Kinda funny, innit? You, 404, and Flame are supposed to be the Dream Team or whatever the fuck. But I bet Flame wouldn’t be happy if he found out you kidnapped a teenager, is that it? He’s not as fucked in the head as you two-”

“Shut UP!” Dream shouted, his voice echoing around the warehouse and making Tommy jump in his seat. He stormed back towards Tommy’s chair and twisted his fingers into his hair, making Tommy yelp as he pulled their faces close. “Don’t talk about shit you don’t know the first thing about.”

While Tommy’s heart was just about to pound out of his chest as his head throbbed where Dream was grabbing it, he found himself grinning wildly at the hero. “This is all gonna blow

up in your face soon enough, asshole. You're not nearly as in control as you think you are."

There was a low growl in Dream's throat, and Tommy's grin widened.

"Do it, you fucking pussy. Hit me. I know you want to." It was a familiar mantra, one he'd said to old foster parents when he'd just had enough of walking on eggshells. When he just wanted to get to the bad part and stop hovering in a terrified limbo of will they or won't they.

Dream stared at him for a moment, and Tommy could hear his harsh breathing through his mask.

Then, the hand let go of his hair, and Dream was storming away from him. "Keep an eye on him, 404. And don't try your dream shit on him again. It's not going to work a second time."

"You got it, Dream," 404 replied, leaning back against the wall, looking like the picture of boredom.

Dream disappeared around the corner, and Tommy distantly heard a door being slammed.

Now alone with 404, Tommy turned his gaze towards the white goggles.

"So how's the bathroom situation supposed to work? Do I just gotta tell you when I need to piss or-"

"If you don't shut up I'm putting you to sleep again," 404 cut him off.

Tommy sighed. Well, this was going to be boring.

That statement turned out to be truer than expected. Dream didn't come back for the rest of the day. Tommy watched the sun pass overhead from one of the dusty windows set high against the warehouse walls, its crawl up and up painfully slow as the hours passed on.

His arms and legs were horribly sore from being tied to the chair for so long. Eventually he started to complain to 404, who looked just as bored as he was, but it didn't take long for 404 to get sick of his whining.

This time, Tommy didn't dream when 404 put him to sleep. Instead, he woke up when the sky was just turning the soft grey of dawn. He couldn't feel his arms and legs anymore, and figured that was at least better than them being sore the whole time.

Dream showed up before the sun had fully risen. Tommy expected the interrogation to resume, but Dream seemed strangely tired. His voice was subdued, and he kept running his hands down his mask as if he was rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

404 left after Dream showed up, saying that he would be back in a few hours but he needed to get cleaned up and check in at the Hero Tower. Once he was gone, nervousness settled over Tommy like prickling over his skin, waiting for Dream to make a move now that the two were alone.

But to his surprise, instead of standing up and threatening him again, Dream just sat on the floor leaning against a nearby wall.

“Do you know why the Hero Committee exists, Tommy?” Dream asked, something weary bleeding through his tone.

“To protect the rich from villains and fuck everyone else over?” Tommy shot back, raising an eyebrow.

Dream chuckled, although it sounded sad. “No, although I can see why you might think that.” He paused, wringing his hands in his lap. “Heroes were created to protect the city from individuals who used their abilities to get power over others. At first, it was just because standard police officers couldn’t always fight back against bank robbers or crime organizations who had individuals with very strong abilities in their ranks. But when highly-powered people were made heroes and given the tools to fight back against these criminals, the criminals in turn organized themselves as well. And that’s how we started the hero versus villain narrative.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “That’s not all it is anymore though, prick. It’s not about protecting civilians. It hasn’t been for a long time. It’s about getting one up on each other, trying to defeat the other by any means necessary, even if civilians get hurt in the collateral damage.”

“It’s harder than you think trying to take down a man with literal invincibility like the Blade without needing to damage a few buildings,” Dream pointed out. “I would love it if we could contain the fights better. If we could minimize damages while still keeping our heads up in fights. But it doesn’t work like that.”

“I remember when you made that office building collapse with all those people still inside it,” Tommy snapped. “You just had to take out one of the support beams because you ‘had no other choice’. But people died because of you, Dream. Innocent people who weren’t involved in this shit.”

Dream’s shoulders tensed at that. “That... That was a terrible accident,” he murmured, looking down at his lap. “I didn’t- I had no idea that the building was unstable. Usually there’s, like, redundancies for support beams. You can take out one and the others will still hold. If I’d known I never would’ve pulled out that beam.” Even through the voice modulator, Tommy could hear genuine sorrow in Dream’s voice as he spoke.

“But you still did it. And you didn’t even manage to get a scratch on Blade in the end,” Tommy said, his frown deepening. “You say you’re protecting civilians, but who are you really protecting in the end?”

“So what, you think we should just let villains run wild? Should I have just not tried to stop Jester from robbing that casino? He killed three hostages,” Dream argued.

“You only cared about that because those gamblers were rich,” Tommy scoffed. “People get mugged and hurt all the time in Eastside, and I never see you hero fucks patrolling down there.”

Dream huffed. “You think we have freedom over where we patrol? I can’t just say, ‘oh I want to patrol in Eastside tonight’, the Hero Committee is largely funded by donations from people who live in West End. We’re given schedules from the city for where we have to patrol and for how long, and more often than not it’s usually centered in the areas where our biggest donors live.”

“Oh please, you’re the Number One Hero. What are they gonna do if you go patrol in Eastside one night instead of West End? It’s not like they’re gonna fire you.”

“Being the Number One Hero doesn’t grant you as much freedom as you seem to think it does. Why do you think the Captain retired? She got sick of not being able to do the kind of work she wanted to do, so she left,” Dream explained, finally looking up to meet Tommy’s eyes. “I know the Committee has problems. But I think it’s more effective to try and do what I can instead of just leaving entirely.”

Many had suspected that the Captain’s retirement had something to do with her disapproval for the way the Hero Committee worked. Although she wasn’t a very public figure who refused to do interviews unless she had no other choice, there had been rumors that she frequently had gotten into arguments with higher-ups, with her ultimately leaving when they couldn’t reconcile.

Now Dream claimed to be in the same position. He wanted to help, but he was restricted by the Hero Committee. It was frustrating for Tommy because while he wanted to dismiss anything Dream said outright, he also could hear at least some grains of truth in what he was saying.

“That still doesn’t give you the right to try and kill villains though,” Tommy said, narrowing his eyes at Dream. “Not when you lie and say you only aim to incapacitate.”

“You don’t understand, Tommy. It’s kill or be killed out there,” Dream explained, the beady black eyes of his mask boring into Tommy’s head.

Tommy met his gaze head on. “Then why did the Warden become a villain?” He asked coolly.

When Dream straightened up at the question, Tommy knew he’d hit his mark.

“The Warden... was a complicated situation,” Dream said, stepping over his words with the care of walking through a minefield. “He was like the Captain in that he didn’t like the way things were run. But the Syndicate had managed to talk to him, got into his head and fed him lies about how they were the ones doing the right thing. How the system was corrupt and the only way to fix it was to destroy it completely. And so the Warden turned against us during a fight, and when our healer, Supreme, tried to stop him, he... he hurt him. Badly.”

Tommy thought of Daedalus with his soft voice and gentle tone. The way he spoke so fondly of his dog, and how he listened to Tommy’s rambling with a surprising amount of patience, and how he never spoke ill of the heroes he used to work with. On the rare occasions Tommy had tried to ask Daedalus about his switching sides, he only ever spoke of it as a necessary thing he had to do. Something he couldn’t see an alternative for.

“Daedalus thinks he’s doing the right thing,” Tommy said, tapping his fingers against the arm of the chair.

“Everyone thinks they’re the one in the right,” Dream replied, slumping further against the wall. “Do you think the Syndicate is in the right, Tommy?”

Tommy bit the inside of his cheek as he turned the question over in his mind. The Syndicate wasn’t good, but neither was the Hero Committee. He still didn’t know what the Syndicate’s true goal was, but Dream claimed his goal was to stop the Syndicate from hurting people. But actions spoke louder than words, and Tommy wasn’t stupid enough to take Dream’s words at face value.

But that wasn’t the question though. The question was if he thought the Syndicate was in the right.

If Tommy said yes, he would be lying. At least partially so. Because he didn’t agree with a lot of what the Syndicate did, especially after seeing that security footage of Siren. But at the same time, if he said no, then where did that leave him? After stating over and over again that he was healing the Syndicate because it was the right thing to do, if he admitted that he thought the Syndicate was bad, did that make him bad by extension? Was he admitting that he was doing the wrong thing?

It was all so complicated, it made his head spin just trying to think about it.

So instead of giving an answer, Tommy just stayed silent.

He hated how it felt like he was handing a victory to Dream.

Chapter End Notes

so many of yall were expecting outright torture but this fic has a specific tone and I'm not going to suddenly darken it out of nowhere, especially not without adding more warning tags for it. so while I can't promise Tommy is getting out of this unscathed, we're not gonna see outright torture or anything

anywayyyy that was a doozy to write! just 5.5k words of almost pure dialogue lmao, hope I managed to keep it interesting enough!

join my discord! sometimes I share sneak peaks at upcoming chapters and it's just a chill time! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I also have a spotify playlist for this fic so check it out [here](#)

please leave a comment letting me know what you thought! I don't reply to most, but I promise I read all of them and they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

but they're family

Chapter Summary

Tommy's captivity continues.

Chapter Notes

sup people!! i'm back with another chapter and currently writing this author's note while i wait for wilbur's stream to start bc MANS HAS GONE LIVE so anyway gonna probably make this quick

as always ty all so much for all the love and support, we passed 250k hits like HOLY SHIT i feel like i'm never gonna fully comprehend just how popular this fic is like it's insane

TWs for this chapter: character getting severely injured, descriptions of pain

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

It wasn't long before 404 came back to the warehouse with two brown bags crinkling in his hands.

"I brought food," 404 announced, holding up the two bags to show to Tommy and Dream. Tommy's eyes caught on the yellow 'M' symbol printed on the side, his mouth watering when the scent of McDonald's fries hit his nose.

"Did you get me my usual?" Dream asked, pushing off the wall to grab the bag 404 was holding out to him.

"No, I decided to get you something you hated just because I felt like being a dick," 404 drawled sarcastically. Dream flipped him off and 404 ignored him as he brought the other bag towards Tommy. "I didn't know what you wanted so I got you a chicken nugget meal. Figured it was pretty neutral."

Oh. They got him McDonald's too? That was surprisingly nice for kidnappers.

"Uh, nuggets are fine," Tommy muttered, eyes widening when 404 dropped the bag on his lap.

"Dream, can I untie one of his arms so he can eat?" 404 asked, digging into his pocket.

“Go for it. Just don’t take your eyes off of him,” Dream said, sliding down the wall again and taking a burger out from the bag.

Yeah, like Tommy would try to escape with only one arm free while both heroes sat only a few feet away from him. He may have been impulsive, but he wasn’t an idiot. Even he knew that would be a pointless attempt.

Nodding, 404 pulled one of his razor sharp throwing knives from his pocket. Tommy shrunk away at the sight of the weapon, but 404 didn’t make any moves to hurt him with it. Instead, he wiggled it underneath the zip tie on Tommy’s right wrist and sliced it off in one swift motion. The zip tie fell to the floor, and when Tommy lifted his arm, he gasped at the feeling of pins and needles rushing through his hand.

Pocketing the knife again, 404 settled down next to Dream on the floor, reaching into the bag he had and taking out a second burger. Tommy noticed that Dream had pushed his mask up enough to show his mouth, and it was almost disconcerting to be reminded that Dream actually had a face under the mask. That he wasn’t just the Hero Dream, but he was a person too who ate McDonald’s and bickered with his friend and seemingly hated pickles, judging by the way he kept tossing them off his quarter pounder.

Tommy then glanced down at the bag left on his lap. Inside he could see a ten piece box of nuggets, a medium french fry, and a water bottle.

It took a few seconds of stretching his fingers to try and get feeling back into his hand. But once he did, he immediately grabbed a handful of fries and shoved them in his mouth, moaning at how good it was since the only thing he’d had to eat since being kidnapped were the shitty granola bars Dream had been feeding him.

After he swallowed the fries, he struggled to open the water bottle with one hand, but managed it after a few seconds of struggling. Dream and 404 had been giving him plenty of water so far so he wasn’t thirsty, but it was nice to actually have some water that was ice cold.

Then he grabbed the nuggets. There were two sauce containers at the bottom of the bag, and there was a flare of disappointment when he saw that 404 had gotten him BBQ sauce.

Stupidly enough, he thought back to the night Siren got him McDonald’s as a thank you for saving his life. The beginning of the entire mess that had become his life. He remembered the judgemental look Siren gave him for getting ranch with his nuggets, and how Tommy had laughed while calling him a bitch for having taste buds so inferior they couldn’t appreciate the deliciousness of ranch dressing.

There was an ache in his chest as the memory flashed through his mind. He missed Siren. He missed the banter, the jokes. He missed the reassuring squeezes on his shoulder, the familiar smirk set under a dark blindfold.

Tommy missed the Syndicate. He missed Zephyrus’ kind voice. He missed Blade’s loud huffs. He missed Nemesis’ warm smiles. He missed exchanging ‘ayups’ with Thanatos. He

missed Daedalus' calm way of speaking. He missed Jester's loud laughter. He missed the way Rosethorn would tuck flowers into his hair when he wasn't looking.

And of course he missed the others. Ranboo and Tubbo, who he hadn't gotten a chance to make up with before being kidnapped. What if he never got the chance to make things right between them? Did they hate him for staying away for so long? Should he have gotten over himself and come home sooner?

Did they even *know* he was kidnapped? Tommy was sure the Syndicate knew by now, but would they have told Nuke and Ender? There was no reason for them to. It's not like they knew Tommy had any connection to them.

They probably didn't know. Maybe Tubbo had tried calling Tommy, or Ranboo texted him asking him if he was okay, but he never responded since he didn't have his phone. Would they worry about him? Or would they think he was still ignoring them?

Shit, did the Soots know? Tommy had been on the phone with Wilbur when Dream showed up. What the hell did he think? Dream didn't seem worried about the authorities knowing what was going on, so it seemed Wilbur hadn't called the cops.

There was a very good reason why Wilbur might not call the cops if he knew Tommy had been kidnapped by Dream. But he wasn't going to think about that anymore, because he was working off guesses here. Nothing concrete.

But fuck, he missed the Soots. Playing Halo in Phil's office, watching documentaries with Techno, and of course listening to Wilbur brainstorm new music. If he closed his eyes, he could almost imagine he was laying on Wilbur's bed, face shoved into blankets as he listened to Wilbur try a few new chords. Wilbur would be humming along, maybe quietly singing a few lyrics as he tried to find a tune to fit them. And Tommy would just listen, voicing his opinion here and there, but mostly just letting the soft notes wash over him.

It was strange, how he had the urge to go home, yet there were two homes he was thinking of.

One was his home with Tubbo and Ranboo. With their stained couch, ratty blankets, the smell of ramen basically ingrained into the walls. He wanted to listen to Tubbo rant and rave about why his code wasn't working without understanding a single word of it, letting Tubbo use him as a sounding board until he figured out the problem on his own. He wanted to lean against Ranboo's shoulder, watching the DS in his hands as he tried to beat his record time at Mario Kart for the hundredth time.

His other home was with the Soots. He wasn't sure when he'd started thinking of the Soot house as home, but his chest ached with longing to go back there. He hoped they weren't worrying about him too much. The last thing he'd want to do is make them worried.

Fucking hell. He just wanted to go home.

Something wet dripped onto the nugget in his hand, and it took Tommy a moment to realize there were tears on his cheeks. He quickly wiped his eyes, trying to hide the fact that he'd

started crying without realizing it, and started devouring his chicken nuggets to try and distract himself from his thoughts of home.

Of course it wasn't his lucky day though. He'd run out of luck long ago apparently.

"Are you crying?" Dream asked, sounding strangely horrified as he put his burger down.

"No, I'm not," Tommy snapped, keeping his head down. "I'm fine. Fuck off."

"Shit, are you okay? Do you, uh, not like nuggets?" For some reason, Dream almost sounded panicky. Like a parent who had no idea what to do when their toddler started screaming.

Tommy almost laughed at that. Yes, it was definitely the nuggets that were making him cry right now. For a superhero, Dream seemed like he could be pretty damn stupid.

"I said I'm *fine*," Tommy said, shoving another nugget in his mouth. The last thing he wanted was to tell Dream he was crying because he wanted to go home. He was being pathetic. He had way bigger things to worry about than just missing home.

So he decided to change the subject.

"What's your problem with vigilantes?" Tommy asked abruptly, still keeping his eyes down as he chewed on his nugget.

Dream seemed taken aback. "Huh? Tommy, I can see the tears on your face, you can't just change--"

"Let it go, Dream. He'll be fine," 404 cut in, much to Tommy's relief. "If he doesn't wanna talk about it he doesn't wanna talk."

With his mask still pushed up, Tommy could see Dream opening his mouth as if to argue. He hesitated though, and after a moment, he fell quiet again. Sighing, he shook his head and moved back to sit next to 404, although he didn't pick up his burger again.

"Are you gonna answer my question?" Tommy spoke up after a moment. "About vigilantes?"

Truth be told, after talking with Dream about the Syndicate the day before, he was now curious to see how vigilantes fit into Dream's view of things. Everyone knew Dream didn't like vigilantes, but he didn't understand *why* he hated them so much.

Dream folded his hands in his lap, pushing his mask back down as he leaned the back of his head against the wall. "I mean, isn't it obvious? Vigilantes are just villains who put on a better face for the public."

Tommy frowned. "The fuck are you talking about?"

"Villains are people who use their abilities to get power over others. Vigilantes do the same thing, using their abilities to assert themselves as being above normal civilians," Dream explained, stretching his arms above his head.

“Wh- That’s not what vigilantes do at all, dumbass!” Tommy argued. “Vigilantes try to help civilians. They do what you heroes fucking won’t. They stop all the petty crime without any of the glory that you rich assholes get.”

“But don’t they get glory? The people love vigilantes,” Dream scoffed. “Besides, if being a vigilante was really all about helping civilians, why do so many of them end up becoming villains? Like Dryad. She was a vigilante for only a few months before she became Rosethorn. She just got her recognition, waited to make some connections with villains, and then switched sides.”

“Maybe they wouldn’t switch sides if heroes didn’t try to fucking hunt them down all the time!” Tommy hissed, anger flaring up inside him as he remembered the way Tubbo had collapsed like a rag doll when that brick hit him in the chest. “Besides, Monarch’s been a vigilante for years and they haven’t switched sides.”

“Look, Monarch is an outlier. They’re the only vigilante that has stayed independent for this long, but I can guarantee you they’re just waiting for someone to make them an offer good enough so they can switch sides,” Dream huffed. “If vigilantes really wanted to help people, they’d join the Hero training program.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “You said it yourself, the Hero Committee is fucking busted and doesn’t let you guys do what you want. Why would someone who actually wants to help people willingly chain themselves to that?”

“The system isn’t great, but it’s better than just going off on your own, not being bound by any rules and acting like just because you have powers you can do whatever the fuck you want,” Dream told him, straightening up in his seat. “Vigilantes aren’t bound by anything, just like villains. There’s no consequence for them if they go too far.”

“Oh yeah, because the heroes have such strict consequences if they fuck up,” Tommy snorted. “Tell me, Dream, how long were you taken off duty for when you made that building collapse? Less than a month, right?”

“It was supposed to be three months suspension, but then Jester pulled his casino heist, and they needed all hands on deck so I got called back in,” Dream shot back, folding his arms over his chest.

“Wow. Real big consequence for your actions there,” Tommy huffed, his food completely forgotten about now.

“It’s still more than what vigilantes get!” Dream pushed to his feet again, 404 barely glancing up as he munched on a french fry. “Like, take Nuke and Ender for example. Nuke’s power’s are *insanely* dangerous. He’s only caused minor damage with his explosions so far, but if he wanted to, he could level out a fucking city block. And right now, there’s no one to stop him from doing that.”

Tommy stiffened at the mention of Nuke and Ender. Although his connection to the Syndicate wasn’t a secret, it seemed like so far, Dream and 404 had no idea he had any sort of relation to the two vigilantes, and he’d obviously prefer to keep it that way.

He kept his face as neutral as possible as Dream continued. “And sure, you might argue that even if Nuke could do that, Ender wouldn’t be able to cause that much damage. But his issue is that if he really wanted to help people, there are so many other ways he could do it. Do you realize how useful teleportation as a power is? Ender could be teleporting injured people to hospitals in less than a second so they don’t have to wait for ambulances! Or he could help people get out of burning buildings, or even help people caught in the middle of hero and villain fights! But no, instead of using it for that, he just uses his power to keep his friend out of danger during fights. It’s so fucking selfish when you think about it.”

Tommy’s free hand curled into a fist. How dare Dream call Ranboo selfish. He wasn’t selfish. He was one of the most kind-hearted people Tommy had ever met. In that moment, it was taking all his control not to go off about how wrong Dream was.

“I don’t know why I bothered asking,” Tommy huffed, stuffing another fry in his mouth.

Dream fell silent after that, and Tommy didn’t ask anymore questions. Instead, he stewed in his anger, eating the rest of his McDonald’s and trying very hard not to let himself think back to the people he missed.

Once again, it wasn’t long before Dream got another call, and he said he had to go. 404 stayed behind to babysit him again, making sure to put another zip tie on his wrist after he was done eating. Then, he didn’t waste any time before putting Tommy back to sleep, clearly not wanting to deal with Tommy’s smartass remarks without Dream by his side.

Tommy was disoriented when he woke up again. Dream was back while 404 was gone, and Dream told him it was late morning. While one part of Tommy was irritated that 404 just kept knocking him out, if there was any plus side to the whole kidnapping thing, it was that he was getting more sleep than he had in years.

The morning sun was filtering through the smudged warehouse windows, dust dancing in the beams of light that crossed the floor. It was getting difficult for Tommy to keep track of how long he’d been here for. He was pretty sure this was the third day of his capture, but for all he knew, 404 could’ve kept him sleeping for more than 24 hours. It’s not like he had any way to check what the date was.

404 brought McDonald’s for him again. This time it was breakfast food—an egg McMuffin with a hashbrown and more water. They repeated the same routine as yesterday with Tommy having one hand free to eat with, and he winced at the way his wrist joints cracked when he moved his hand again.

Once Tommy was done eating, Dream tied him down again and threw out the trash. Then he sauntered over to Tommy’s chair, his cape swishing around his ankles with every step.

“So, are you going to tell me the identities of the Syndicate yet?” Dream asked.

Tommy snorted. “Fat chance, fucker.” It didn’t matter how many moral crises the hero gave him. Tommy still wasn’t going to betray the Syndicate to the asshole who kidnapped him.

Dream huffed. “Come on, Tommy. Think about what we’ve been talking about. Why are you protecting them? They’re not-”

Before Dream could continue his spiel (that he’d probably prepared beforehand, fucking loser) there was a loud pounding noise. Dream froze, his head whipping towards the door of the warehouse that Tommy couldn’t see from his point of view, but had heard Dream and 404 going in and out of all the same.

Tommy’s heart began to beat faster. Could that be the Syndicate? Had they found him?

Dream whipped his head to 404, who was on his feet in a flash. Holding up one finger, Dream pointed to Tommy, and 404 nodded as he took his place next to Tommy’s chair. Tommy gulped when he noticed the knife in 404’s hand, and took a shaky breath as Dream walked around the corner towards the door.

Tommy heard the door to the warehouse squeak open. Then, Dream spoke.

“Flame? What are you doing here?!”

404 stiffened beside him as Tommy’s eyes grew wide. *Flame* was here?

“What am I doing here? Dream, I’m not an idiot. You and 404 have been acting so fucking weird over the past few days! I’ve barely seen you at the Tower, you’re not responding to my texts for hours, and now I find you hiding out in some creepy ass warehouse? Like, dude, c’mon, I can tell there’s something going on,” Flame explained, sounding pretty damn pissed.

Dream’s voice was tight as he replied. “We’re just investigating a lead on our own, and it’s not exactly in line with what the Committee lets us do. You don’t want to be involved in this.”

Wait. Flame didn’t know that Tommy was kidnapped. Dream had been actively trying to hide it from Flame over their phone calls. The only reason Dream would be doing that would be if he knew Flame wouldn’t be happy with what they were doing.

“What do you mean it’s not in line with what the Committee lets us do?” Flame asked.

Before Dream could respond, Tommy opened his mouth.

“*HELP!*” He screamed as loud as he could. “HELP ME! I’M IN HE-”

Tommy was cut off by 404’s hand slapping over his mouth. Still, he was a second too late. Tommy’s voice had been heard.

“What the fuck was that?!” Flame demanded, and Tommy heard pounding footsteps echo through the warehouse.

“Flame, seriously, you don’t want-”

“NO! Dream, you don’t get to fucking hide shit from me, not when it sounds like you have a goddamn-”

Flame rounded the corner. He looked almost exactly like he did on TV. Long dark hair pushed back with a white bandana, a flame-patterned mask covering the lower half of his face, black wrappings around his hands leading up to his mid-elbow. The only thing Tommy would say was different about Flame than how he looked in interviews and on the news was that he seemed... younger? Like, although Tommy could only see his eyes, something told him this guy had to be in his early twenties at most.

Right now though, those onyx black eyes were staring at Tommy with pure and utter shock.

Dream rounded the corner behind Flame, shaking his head as he folded his arms over his chest.

"I told you you didn't want to know," Dream muttered.

Flame blinked a few times, as if he was trying to make sure he wasn't hallucinating. Tommy squirmed against his restraints again, trying to yell past the hand muffling his voice.

"What the- WHO THE HELL IS THIS?!" Flame shouted after his moment of shock passed, whipping his head towards Dream. "YOU KIDNAPPED A FUCKING KID?!"

"Look, Flame, he's not just some kid," Dream said, dropping his arms to hold his hands up in a placating motion.

"He works for the Syndicate," 404 chimed in, grunting as Tommy struggled against his grip.

Flame's head turned back towards Tommy, and he could see now that there were flames dancing in his dark eyes. "No he doesn't! This kid is, like, fifteen!"

Well, he wasn't fucking fifteen, but he wasn't exactly in a position to correct that right now.

"He does," Dream insisted. "You know how villains have been coming back from injuries that should've either killed them or taken them out for months? Like when I told you I fought Siren a few months back? Hell, like *Nemesis*?"

Flame winced at the mention of Nemesis' name, but quickly schooled his expression. "What does that have to do with anything?"

Dream gestured towards Tommy. "He has healing powers. The kid runs a healing business for the Syndicate in the backroom of the coffee shop he works at."

"That doesn't make it okay for you to fucking KIDNAP HIM THOUGH!" Flame shouted, waving his hands around wildly. "Why the hell didn't you just get a warrant to arrest him?"

"I didn't have enough physical evidence," Dream admitted. "But there's an alley that connects to the back of the cafe. I hid around the corner and watched villains go in with bleeding injuries, only to come out minutes later completely healed."

"It doesn't matter if you knew he was healing villains! Why the hell did you kidnap a teenager?!" Flame demanded, and Tommy noticed literal flames now starting to dance on his fingertips.

“For fuck’s sake, he knows the identities of the Syndicate!” Dream yelled, his booming voice echoing around the warehouse.

At this, Flame paused. The flames on his hands died down as he gave Tommy a long look, before turning his eyes back to Dream. Silence hung in the air, thick and choking the room like smoke. Tommy could hear his own ragged breaths against 404’s hand, the hot air puffing back against his mouth.

Tommy watched as Flame dug into his pocket, meeting Dream’s mask with an eerily calm expression as he pulled out his phone.

His breath caught in his throat. Was he going to call someone? Was Tommy finally going to get out?

A shiver ran down Tommy’s spine when instead of getting upset at the gesture, Dream *laughed*.

“What are you gonna do? Call the Hero Committee? You know they’re just gonna make me let him go and pay the kid off so he doesn’t tell anyone,” Dream said, and Tommy could hear his cocky smirk.

“No, I know reporting this to the Committee would be useless,” Flame responded, tapping a few buttons on his phone. Then, he pointed the phone in Tommy’s direction. “But I could take a picture right now and send it to every news station in the city.”

It was as if an icy breeze had blown through the entire warehouse as soon as Flame uttered those words. 404 was frozen, his hand still holding Tommy to the chair, keeping him from speaking. Tommy’s hands and legs were zip tied, and 404’s signature goggles were sitting right over his eyes like they always did. There was no way this picture didn’t look incriminating as hell.

“Flame, I know you’re upset we didn’t tell you, but let’s be honest here, you won’t do this,” Dream said, sounding completely calm.

Flame narrowed his eyes. “Yes, I absolutely will. You’ve gone way too fucking far this time. You included, 404.”

404 grumbled, but didn’t respond.

“I’m doing what’s necessary to take down the Syndicate once and for all,” Dream explained. “We’ve reached a standstill with them. They keep doing more and more damage to this city, and there’s nothing we can do to stop them. The only way is if we know their identities, and this kid has the information we need.”

“Dream, you have a *problem*, don’t you see that?” Flame hissed, snapping his head towards the other hero. “You’re so focused on trying to take down the Syndicate that it’s like you’ve completely forgotten why you became a hero in the first place! Our job is to protect citizens, not kidnap them for information!”

“He’s not a citizen though!” Dream argued. “Sure, he might not technically be a villain, but he’s not a citizen anymore. He’s just as caught up in this as the rest of us are.”

“It doesn’t matter, what you’re doing is insane!” Flame exclaimed, stomping his foot on the ground. “I don’t care what your reasoning is. This is *wrong*.”

“Of course I know it’s wrong! I’m not fucking proud of what I’ve done here! But I didn’t have any other choice, don’t you get that?”

“You keep telling yourself you don’t have any other choice, but that’s just an excuse and you know it, Dream,” Flame said, clenching his jaw. “I’m going to take a picture of this and send it straight to the news, unless you let the kid go right now.”

There was another heavy silence. Even though Tommy couldn’t see either of their eyes, he had a feeling that 404 and Dream were having a conversation just through their looks at one another right now. In contrast, Flame kept his eyes locked on Tommy’s, the camera of his phone still pointing right at Tommy’s face.

After a few agonizing beats, Dream took a breath.

“No.”

The hush that followed was so silent you could hear a pin drop.

“*No?*”

“I said I’m not letting him go, Flame,” Dream told him, stepping in front of the camera. “Because I know you, and I can tell that you’re bluffing. You wouldn’t actually send this to the media because you know what would happen to both me and 404 if you did. We’d go to *jail*. Probably for at least a few decades. I know you better than anyone, and I know you couldn’t do that to us.”

More silence as Flame glared at Dream. Tommy’s heart was pounding in his ears as he tried to meet Flame’s eyes, tried to beg him through looks alone to *please for the love of god get him out of this situation*.

The seconds ticked on like hours.

One.

Two.

Three.

Then,

“Fuck you, Dream,” Flame muttered, shoulders sagging as he pocketed his phone again.

No. That couldn’t- he was just giving up? Just like that?

“You can take the hand off his mouth, 404,” Dream said.

“Ugh, finally,” 404 muttered, taking his hand off of Tommy’s mouth and wiping it against his pants. He walked away from Tommy’s chair, heading back over to stand by Dream’s side while Flame stayed frozen in place, staring at Tommy with an unreadable expression.

“Flame,” Tommy started, meeting the man’s eyes, “why aren’t you doing anything?”

Flame winced at the sound of Tommy’s voice, his hands curling into fists at his sides. With his head down, he walked over to Tommy’s chair, crouching down in front of it so he wasn’t standing above Tommy.

“I’m sorry,” Flame said quietly. “I want to help you. I really do.”

“Then why don’t you?” Tommy asked, his voice cracking. “You could get me out of here right now. I-I don’t even know the identities of anyone in the Syndicate, I swear! They never told me just in case something like this happened!”

Flame winced again. “I know but... I can’t turn them in like that,” he admitted, looking away as if he was ashamed to meet Tommy’s eyes. “They’re my family. Even though I know this is wrong I can’t-I can’t lose them. You get that, right?”

Tommy wanted to say he didn’t understand that. That he would stand up for what was right even if it meant losing the people he loved.

Maybe he could. Maybe if he actually found himself in that situation, he would be able to push past his own wants and do what was right.

But... he knew it was more likely he wouldn’t do that. Although he didn’t want to admit that to himself.

So he stayed silent, and Flame took that as an answer in itself.

“I’ll-I’ll do my best to make sure things are okay for you,” Flame told him. “I won’t let them hurt you.”

There was a loud huff from behind Flame. “You really think we’d hurt a kid?” Dream asked, sounding offended at the suggestion.

“Normally I’d say no, but I also didn’t think you’d kidnap a kid, so I really don’t fucking know anymore,” Flame snapped, shooting a dirty look at Dream over his shoulder.

“C’mon! I’m not that much of a dick!” Dream argued, seeming genuinely offended at the idea that he’d hit Tommy.

“Considering you kidnapped me, I’d say you kinda are,” Tommy decided to chime in.

“Oh come on, Tommy, we got you McDonald’s,” Dream then pointed out, walking back over to the wall and sliding to the ground.

“Wow, you got me nuggets and an egg mcmuffin, I can forgive you for literally tying me to a chair now,” Tommy mocked, his voice dripping with sarcasm.

Suddenly, Flame cut in again. “Your name is Tommy?” He asked.

Oh yeah. Flame didn’t know shit about this, so he had no idea who Tommy was.

“Yeah, that’s me,” Tommy answered. “Also, I’m not fifteen, dickhead. I’m seventeen.”

Flame snorted and held his hands up in mock surrender. “My bad. I was just trying to say you look young.”

Tommy scowled, but Flame seemed to be able to tell there wasn’t much heat behind it. At this point, Tommy didn’t have the energy to actually get worked up over being called young. It was such a silly thing compared to his current situation. Sure, it was a nice thing to focus his anger on to pretend he wasn’t literally in captivity, but it only worked for a few seconds.

No, Tommy was fucked. Flame had been his only hope at possibly getting out of here, and he wasn’t going to do a damn thing to help him.

He could only hope now that the Syndicate somehow managed to find him. But it had been days. How had they not found him yet? They had so many resources at their disposal. If they hadn’t found him yet, how were they ever going to find him?

How long was Dream even going to keep him here? Tommy genuinely didn’t know the identities of the Syndicate, but it seemed like he wasn’t going to believe that. How long would he have to wait before Dream got tired of holding him captive?

He had to let him go at some point. It’s not like Dream could just keep him here forever.

...right?

Tommy didn’t know, and that terrified him.

The rest of the day was strangely quiet. Flame refused to leave, instead sitting on the floor near Tommy’s chair, sometimes trying to chat with him about random stuff (“*Do you like video games?*” “*I like Animal Crossing.*” “*I meant games that were cool.*” “*Bitch, I’ll have you know Animal Crossing is extremely cool!*””), but mostly just staying quiet. At one point he laid down on the hard concrete floor, and Tommy was 90% sure he’d actually fallen asleep.

Dream seemed reluctant to continue his usual questioning with Flame here now. Instead of going back to the back and forth they’d been having the past few days, Dream instead was just... quiet. He was slumped against the wall, occasionally looking at Flame and running his hands over his mask in the same way someone would drag their hands down their face.

404 was definitely the least affected out of the three of them. He’d fallen asleep pretty quickly after Flame had settled in, and woke up when the sun was setting only to pull out his phone and scroll through Twitter for another hour.

Eventually, 404 left to get food again. It seemed like he was the only one that could make the food runs, given that Flame wasn't going to leave Tommy alone with either Dream or 404, and Dream definitely wasn't going to leave Flame alone with Tommy.

The silence between Flame and Dream was stony at best, downright suffocating at worst. Even if Flame refused to turn Dream in, it was clear he was very pissed at Dream, shutting down any of Dream's attempts to talk with either a sharp comment or just outright ignoring him.

It kind of felt like Tommy was the kid in the middle of the divorce argument. Despite how annoying 404 was, he found himself desperately wishing for him to come back so Tommy could fucking breathe again.

Thankfully, 404 came back about an hour after he left with a huge take out bag on his arm. It wasn't McDonald's this time, and the smell of something fried and delicious made Tommy's stomach growl.

"Oh thank fucking god," Flame muttered, pushing to his feet as he ran for the takeout bag. "What'd you get?"

"That fried chicken food truck we went to that one time," 404 said as he dug into the bag, pulling out a sandwich wrapped in paper. "Tommy, you're fine with fried chicken, right?"

Tommy clenched his jaw. Again, another reminder. Hopefully he didn't cry over his food again.

"Yeah, I'm fine with it," he replied, relieved when his voice didn't crack.

404 walked over, taking his knife out of his pocket and cutting off the zip tie on his wrist once again. Flame glanced over, frowning when he noticed Tommy using his one hand to start eating the sandwich.

"Dude, c'mon, let him use both hands to eat."

"No way," Dream cut in, having already pushed his mask up to start eating his sandwich. "I'm not risking him escaping that easily."

"What the hell is he gonna do? There's no way for him to get the zip ties off his ankles with just his hands!"

Tommy decided to ignore their arguing, not really caring whether or not Dream decided to untie his other wrist. While it would be nice, he could eat the sandwich well enough with just one, as he was already doing.

The sandwich was just as good as it was the first time. Fundy's fried chicken was the perfect balance of crispy and juicy, and Tommy wished so badly he could be eating this with Wilbur right now.

He glanced up at the moonlight streaming through one of the windows. It was a full moon tonight, and it lit everything up in the warehouse with a soft white glow. Even through the

dust on the glass, Tommy could make out stars twinkling against the black. It was strange how some of the stars weren't white though, and instead seemed to be a dark shade of glittering purple-

Wait.

Those weren't stars.

Furrowing his brows, Tommy strained to try and focus more on the odd purple particles that seemed to be floating right outside the window. He'd seen those before, he knew that. He just couldn't remember where.

Suddenly, the sound of the warehouse door being kicked down helped Tommy remember where he'd seen those purple particles before.

Ender left those behind when he teleported. Meaning Ranboo had just been here. Meaning Ranboo was probably outside, along with Tubbo and possibly even the rest of the Syndicate.

Tommy smiled as Dream and Flame's argument abruptly cut off. As the sound of storming footsteps began to echo around the warehouse, the three heroes jumped into action.

"WHERE IS HE?!" A gruff voice boomed.

Blade. It was Blade, holy shit. The Syndicate was here. Tommy wanted to cry. They came for him.

Before he could celebrate though, the Dream Team jumped into action. Flame's arms lit up in swirling shades of orange and red, while 404's throwing knives glinted in the moonlight. Both of them sprinted around the corner, and suddenly there was loud shouting as the fight began.

Dream, meanwhile, stayed where he was. He tossed his sandwich to the side, pushing down his mask and turning to face Tommy.

"I don't want to hurt you, so don't make this hard on me," Dream said quietly, his voice barely audible above the loud yelling and the clanging of metal on metal coming from the part of the warehouse Tommy couldn't see.

And before Tommy could ask him what he meant by that, he felt a strange pushing underneath of him. Looking down at the ground, Tommy yelped when he saw that Dream was using his power to *lift Tommy's chair into the air—with Tommy still sitting on it!*

"WHAT THE- DREAM PUT ME DOWN!" Tommy shouted, struggling against the three zip ties still holding him down. He kept moving up. Up up up, until he was almost hitting his head against the ceiling of the warehouse, which was *really fucking high*. It was making him dizzy to even try and look down at Dream.

The sound of footsteps got louder, and Tommy's breath caught in his throat as several figures rounded the corner.

There was Blade at the front, his pink hair tumbling loose around his shoulders as he huffed like a true wild boar. Zephyrus swooped down beside him, his wings somehow looking even darker than usual. Daedalus stood beside them as well, his mechanical arms holding a deadly looking trident.

Then Tommy spotted Nuke and Ender, and even with their masks on Tommy could tell they were looking at him with terror written across their faces.

While Tommy was pretty glad to see them here, he had to wonder when the *hell* those two started working with the Syndicate.

And then Siren ran in behind the others, freezing in place when he saw Tommy floating near the ceiling, fighting desperately against his restraint.

Judging by the shouts he heard coming from the part of the warehouse he couldn't see, Jester, Rosethorn, Nemesis, and Thanatos were battling it out with 404 and Flame.

Holy shit. The entire Syndicate came here for him.

"If you come any closer, I'll drop him!" Dream threatened, snapping Tommy's attention back to him.

Siren opened his mouth, but Dream immediately pressed a button on the side of his mask.

"Siren, either you keep your mouth shut, or we're going to have a really hard time with negotiations since I won't be listening to a word you say," Dream said, and Tommy realized he must have some kind of deafening feature in his mask.

Zephyrus placed a hand on Siren's shoulder, silently shaking his head no. Siren grit his teeth, and Tommy could feel his eyes boring into him through his mask. But he shut his mouth, and Dream pressed the side of his mask again.

"Good. Now, where were we?" Dream asked, cocking his head to the side.

"How about you give Tommy back to us and we won't paint the walls with your blood?" Blade growled, tightening his grip on his sword.

"While that's a tempting offer I think you might have to do better than that," Dream hummed, tapping his chin with the hand not holding Tommy up.

"Dream, you're outnumbered pretty badly here. If you hand him over to us without issue, we'll do you one mercy and not kill you right now," Zephyrus warned, his voice like ice compared to the fire in Blade's.

"Oh? You think you're outnumbered?" Dream laughed, and it was that harsh and grating laugh that he hated.

Suddenly, Dream whipped his free hand over, and Nuke shrieked as he went flying. His body slammed against the wall to his left, and he was pinned there by Dream's invisible force.

“NUKE!” Ender screamed, teleporting to his side. He tried to pull Nuke off the wall, but Nuke was gasping as he tried to struggle against the telekinesis, and neither of them were strong enough to push against it.

“Let him go, you bastard!” Tommy screamed, still fighting desperately with the zip ties. His wrist was starting to bleed now from where the zip tie was cutting into his skin, but he didn’t care. Tubbo was getting hurt. He had to try and do something to stop Dream.

“Dream,” Daedalus’ calm voice suddenly broke over the chaos, “you know this isn’t going to end well for you. You’re not able to take all of us.”

Dream whipped his head in Daedalus’ direction so fast, Tommy thought his neck might break. “Oh really, *Warden?* You really think I can’t take all of you?” He laughed again, and it made Tommy’s blood run cold. “I am not going to give up until I get what I want, and that’s the identities of everyone in the goddamn Syndicate!”

Then, Nuke fell to the ground, and he gasped as he struggled to sit up. Now with his second hand free again, three swords rose out of the sheaths on Dream’s back, floating around his head ready to strike.

Dream kept glancing between Blade, Zephyrus, Daedalus, and Siren. He was waiting for one of them to strike first.

Which is why he didn’t see Ender until it was too late.

In one moment, Ender was kneeling next to Nuke. The next, he was right in front of Dream, sprinting at him with a battleaxe in hand (that he definitely got from Blade), leaving behind a flurry of purple particles in his wake.

One of Dream’s swords rose up to easily block the heavy swing Ender made with the axe. But as soon as the sword blocked it, Ender disappeared again, the axe clattering to the ground as Ender reappeared on Dream’s other side. Tommy watched as he body-slammed Dream’s side, and then everything went in bullet time.

Dream began to fall backwards with Ender on top of him.

The hand Dream had been using the whole time to keep Tommy up flew to the side, before moving backwards as Dream struggled to catch himself.

Tommy felt the chair he was in suddenly jerk backwards with violent force.

Tommy was moving very fast towards the wall behind him.

Far too fast.

“SHIT! TOMMY-” Dream yelled, trying to reach up towards Tommy again, but it was too late.

The chair, with Tommy still tied to it, slammed into the wall with the kind of force Tommy imagined you’d feel in a car crash. He heard loud cracks as the wooden chair splintered

underneath him.

Then, he was falling.

The concrete floor rushed up to greet him with open arms, and when Tommy hit, there was a deafening *CRUNCH!* as his bones met the floor with more impact than what was probably healthy.

For a moment, he was numb. His head was spinning, and all he heard was a loud ringing in his ears.

Then the pain hit.

Yeah, definitely wasn't healthy to fall that far.

It was a hot flood of burning pain that washed over him all at once. Sharp stabs were shooting through his head, fire was licking his veins, and every breath felt like needles were jabbing into his lungs.

The ringing in his ears began to fade just enough for him to hear a voice.

"*TOMMY!*" Siren screamed, his trench coat flaring out as he sprinted towards Tommy.

And suddenly, Siren was there. He was kneeling at Tommy's side, hands hovering over his arms, and Tommy realized his head was sitting on something wet.

"Oh my god, fuck, Tommy I'm so sorry. I'm so goddamn sorry-"

He was cut off by a shriek coming from behind, and Tommy tried to move his head to see what it was, but it sent another wave of pain through his skull and he *screamed*.

"Fuck! D-Don't try to move, Toms. You'll only make it worse," Siren said, his voice cracking as he struggled to keep calm. "It's just- It's just the others fighting Dream. They're taking care of him."

Shit. Yeah. Dream. They were fighting him right now, weren't they? God, he wanted to see what was happening so badly, but the pain was only getting worse by the second, and it was making his vision spin.

A whine rose up out of Tommy's throat as a bright light began to shine from his chest. His healing. His body was probably trying to heal itself.

There was a loud *pop!* in his ears when he felt a rib shift back into place, and he cried out again at how badly it hurt.

Then, more purple particles flooded his already swirling vision as Ender appeared next to Siren.

“Holy- this is bad. This is so bad,” Ender stammered.

“Ender, I need you to teleport us out of here,” Siren ordered, grabbing Ender’s arm. “It doesn’t have to be far. Get us to a nearby roof or something.”

Ender gulped. “Okay. Um, okay, but I don’t know if I should try to teleport him while he’s-”

“It’s better than staying here and risking him getting hurt more!” Siren snapped, making Ender jump.

Another rib snapped back together, and Tommy screamed again. The orange glow was getting brighter, making his shirt entirely see through as he writhed on the floor.

Then, there was a hand grabbing his wrist, and Tommy whimpered at the touch.

“I’m sorry, Tommy. It’ll be fast,” Ender whispered.

Then another voice shouted behind them.

“SHIT! 404, GRAB ENDER BEFORE HE TELEPORTS THEM OUT!” Dream yelled, sounding much more winded than before.

There were footsteps getting louder, and Ender shut his eyes. Tommy’s eyes widened as 404 appeared behind Ender, reaching for his head to put him to sleep, but right before he could touch his hair everything disappeared.

There was the darkness and the stomach swooping sensation again. Tommy screamed at the vacuum that pulled over his body, jostling all his broken bones and sending more and more pain through him.

And then suddenly, the world was back. Cold air stung his cheeks as he landed against another hard surface, and although his vision was still spinning, he could just make out the stars.

“Are you okay?” Siren asked, his face blurring into swirls of deep blue-black fabric and soft brown hair.

Tommy could only whimper as the glowing in his chest grew brighter. His shoulder wrenched back into its socket and he shouted again, the tears streaming down his cheeks hot against his skin.

“What should-What do you think we should do?” Ender asked, still holding onto Tommy’s wrist with so little pressure, it was like a feather.

“You need to go back to the warehouse and help them out,” Siren told him. “I’m gonna be fucking useless in there compared to the rest of you. I can stay with him and get him home. You need to make sure Dream doesn’t come after us.”

Ender frowned. “But-”

“Ranboo, I swear to you on my life I’m not going to let him get hurt again,” Siren whispered, and Tommy jolted hearing Siren use Ranboo’s name. “I made that mistake once. I’m never making it again.”

There was a beat of silence, and Tommy could see the orange light from his chest shining against Ranboo’s black hair.

“Okay,” he finally relented. “Tommy, Tubbo and I will be back soon.”

Tommy would’ve nodded if he could, but it was getting so hard to even comprehend what people were telling him. By the time he processed what Ranboo said, he had already disappeared again, leaving him with Siren.

Siren gently rested a hand on the shoulder that had just popped back into its socket a few moments earlier, and Tommy was relieved when it didn’t worsen the pain.

“Can you hear me, Toms?”

Barely. His head felt like it was full of cotton, and as the pain gradually began to dissipate as his healing pushed itself to the limit, his body was getting heavier than he’d ever felt it before.

“Kinda,” Tommy muttered, his words slurring.

“You’re gonna be alright,” Siren told him. “It’s okay now. You’re safe. You did *so* good.”

Tommy whimpered as another bone snapped together, and suddenly there was a hand in his hair.

Siren took care to avoid the blood spot on the back of his head, although Tommy was pretty sure it had mostly healed itself by now. Instead, he carded his fingers through the curls on top of his head, and the touch was soft, so reassuring, that he melted into it. He tried to use the little energy he had to put all his focus onto how nice it felt, instead of the lingering pain that was still echoing through his limbs.

It was so familiar, having these fingers run through his hair. It reminded him so much of the times Wilbur would do this when they would watch movies together, or when Tommy wasn’t feeling good after having to heal people.

The same callused fingertips worn down from years of guitar playing were the only thing keeping him from focusing on the cracking sounds of his own ribs forcibly slotting themselves back into his ribcage.

He was so tired. Both physically and mentally.

He was tired of pretending.

He was tired of lying to himself.

He was too tired to stop himself from finally giving voice to the thoughts he'd shoved into the back of his mind for so long.

"It hurts, Wilbur," he whispered, leaning further into Siren's hand. "It hurts so much."

The fingers stilled for just a moment, and Tommy whined at the loss. Then, after a few beats, the fingers went back to tracing small circles in his scalp.

When Siren spoke again, the metal tinge that was always there because of his voice changer was gone.

"I know it hurts, but you'll be okay," Siren reassured him in Wilbur's voice. "You just gotta hold out, Toms. Just a little longer."

Tommy forced his eyes open again, his lashes sticking together because of his tears. When he glanced up, his vision wasn't spinning anymore.

Wilbur had pushed the mask up, so Tommy could finally see Siren's eyes.

He'd been right. Of course he wasn't surprised, but there was an ache in his chest as he met Wilbur's dark gaze while he still wore Siren's clothes.

Tommy knew that this was a big deal. This had a lot of implications, and he probably should be pretty damn pissed at Wilbur right now.

But he was so unbelievably tired. Every thought came to him slowly, as if his mind had been filled with honey when he wasn't looking. The orange glow had finally faded and taken the pain with it, leaving a bone-deep exhaustion that he'd never felt before.

Tommy was too tired to care about being mad at Wilbur right now. He was just so relieved to see his brother again.

"I missed you," he whispered, his voice little more than a rough wisp of sound.

Tears made their way down Wilbur's cheeks. "I missed you too," he whispered back, his voice cracking.

"Can I sleep now?" Tommy then asked, already letting his eyes flutter shut.

"Yeah, yeah you can sleep now," Wilbur nodded, giving him a small smile. "I'll be here when you wake up, but-"

Sleep grabbed onto Tommy like an ocean pulling him under its depths. Tommy sunk into the void so quickly, he didn't hear the last part of Wilbur's sentence.

"-only if you want me to be."

HAHAHA IT'S FINALLY HAPPENED :D THE MOMENT YALL HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR

(also don't worry Tommy's not dead he just passed out after having to heal himself)
(Tubbo is fine too he's not seriously hurt or anything)

now for fun stuff! join our discord server, it's super chill and I sometimes give sneak peaks of upcoming chapters! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

I also have a spotify playlist for this fic! check it out [here](#)

let me know what you thought in the comments down below! i read all of them and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

a small piece of home

Chapter Summary

Tommy is recovering.

Chapter Notes

SUP PEOPLE i am back with your regularly (not regularly lets be real) scheduled clinic update!

we have gotten a HUGE influx of new readers as of late, largely in part due to some great tik toks that have been created by my lovely readers! ripplesarestable has so many amazing ones on their page with her fantastic art, and .tv_static also has some hilarious ones I've been enjoying a lot as well! I've been perusing the #tommyinnitsclinicforsupervillains tag on tik tok bc I'm not on meyt tik tok at all, so that's the only way I can see tik toks about my fic. if you put something there i'll be sure to see it so please do! i love seeing all the amazing content you guys make for my silly story so much. anyway, welcome to everyone who came here from tik tok!

tws for this chapter: mentions of reality confusion/not being sure if things are real, minor panic attack early on

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

The first thing Tommy noticed when he woke up was that he was thirsty as *fuck*.

Oh, also his head was killing him. And his body was pretty sore too. Honestly, he was just kind of having a shit time all around.

His thoughts were fuzzy as he struggled to remember why exactly he felt so shitty. He knew there was a reason. Something had happened. Something big. But he was still half-asleep, and trying to grasp onto blurred memories was like grabbing at wisps of smoke that were blowing just out of his reach.

Tommy tried to focus on figuring out where he was first and foremost, because that seemed like a good place to start getting his bearings. He was laying in a bed, he could tell that much. The mattress was plush, and cradled his sore limbs in all the right places. His head was also on an unbelievably squishy pillow, and he could feel his cheek being smushed into a soft pillowcase. It was... odd. He wasn't used to sleeping in a bed after-

Wait.

All at once, everything came flooding back.

The kidnapping. Talking to Dream. Flame not helping him. The Syndicate showing up to save him.

The memory of hearing his own bones break echoed in his ears, and although the memories were added by pain, he unfortunately could recall the entire past few minutes he'd been conscious with perfect clarity.

Ender teleporting him out. Siren, crouched down next to him, apologizing over and over and running his hands through Tommy's hair.

Seeing Wilbur's eyes staring out at him from under Siren's mask. Tommy finally giving in and letting the puzzle pieces slot into place in his mind.

Siren was Wilbur. The confirmation felt like someone knocking the wind out of him. Of course a part of him had already known. Hell, looking back, it was painfully obvious in retrospect. Wilbur had even joked about meeting Siren over fried chicken sandwiches, back when Tommy was still unsure if he could even call Wilbur a friend.

So much had happened since then. Wilbur had lied to him, over and over again. Acting like he didn't know Tommy had healing powers when he healed him in the Soot kitchen the first time he came over. Politely not questioning all the times Tommy came back late from a shift at the cafe. Asking Tommy what he thought of Wilbur after healing him as Siren.

Oh fuck, he had just been sitting there *basking* as Tommy praised Wilbur to high heavens. Anger stirred in Tommy's gut. He took advantage of his secret identity and used it to find out what Tommy thought of him in his civilian form. That was just—it was fucking embarrassing for him!

But... could he really be mad at Wilbur for that? If Tommy was in the same position, given the opportunity to find out what Wilbur thought of him while hidden behind a mask, could he really say he wouldn't do the same?

Tommy wasn't sure. There was so much to think about, and his head was throbbing far too much to make any sense of his conflicted thoughts right now. So instead, he decided to put off that crisis and instead traded it for another.

He opened his eyes.

Despite his conflicted feelings towards the Soot's right now, Tommy couldn't help the wave of relief that washed through him when he realized he was back in his bedroom at the Soot's.

But just as quickly as that relief came, it was replaced with bone chilling fear. Was he really back at the Soot's? Or was this another 404 dream? He'd already been tricked into thinking he was home before because of the hero. What if all of that—Flame wanting to save him, the Syndicate breaking in, Ender teleporting him and Siren out—what if that was a dream?

Tommy bolted upright, ignoring the twin gasps from two figures sitting next to his bed. He didn't even look at who it was, instead lunging for the window behind his nightstand, pressing his hand against the glass and peering outside.

The glass was cool, but not too cool. There was no fog blocking the view of the outside. He just saw the Soot's backyard, the same as it always was. But what if there was something else? What if 404 had learned his lesson with the windows and instead found another way to hide that this was a dream? Could he really trust anything he was seeing-

"Uh, Tommy?" A voice asked behind him, breaking him out of his thoughts. "What are you doing?"

Tommy froze. He hadn't heard that voice in his dreams before.

Whipping his head around, Tommy felt something seize in his chest when he saw Tubbo and Ranboo sitting next to the edge of his bed, both staring at him with identical expressions of worry.

Neither of them appeared in the dreams with 404. If they were here... maybe that meant this was real.

"Tubbo? Ranboo?" His breathing hitched. "Is-Is this real right now?"

Fuck. What if this was still a dream?

His breathing picked up as his eyes darted around the room, trying to find a tell that this wasn't real. His heart pounded in his ears as he tried to find something—*anything*—that could prove to him that this was 100% reality.

"What do you mean? Of course this is real," Ranboo said, giving Tommy a worried frown.

Tommy shook his head, curling his hands in and out of fists. "I-I need you guys to prove it to me. Prove that 404 isn't- that he's not fucking with my head again!"

Tubbo and Ranboo shared a look. Suddenly, both of them lunged forward, and Tommy felt a sharp pinch on his arm, followed immediately by a stinging slap against his cheek.

The pain startled him out of his panic. What the fuck was that for?

"What the fuck was that for?!" Tommy yelled, cradling his bright red cheek with his hand.

"Tubbo! Why'd you slap him?!" Ranboo asked, staring at Tubbo with wide eyes. "I thought we were just supposed to pinch him at the same time!"

Tubbo put his hands up in mock surrender. "I just thought a slap would be more effective!" Tommy gave him a flat stare, and Tubbo at least had the decency to look sheepish. "I mean, at least you know you're awake now, right?"

Well... he had a point. If this had been one of 404's dreams, Tommy was pretty sure getting pinched and slapped at the same time would've caused *something* weird to happen, and so far

everything seemed completely normal.

His hands were still trembling as he took a shaky breath, twisting his fingers into the soft blanket covering his legs. This was reality. It had to be.

Then, there was a hand tugging his own away from the blankets, and he glanced up to see Ranboo squeezing his fingers.

“You’re awake, Tommy. I teleported you out of there with Siren, remember?”

Tommy nodded. He remembered.

“Good. This is real, I promise,” Ranboo reassured him, his hand around Tommy’s giving him something to focus on.

Ranboo’s hand felt perfectly real. There was even the ridge of a scar on his ring finger tip pressing into Tommy’s hand, which Tommy knew the boy had gotten when he was trying to cut dry ramen noodles in half with a knife because Tubbo wanted to be able to eat the dry noodles ‘on the go’ as a ‘convenient snack.’

“Okay,” Tommy breathed, the tension in his shoulders seeping out. “I believe you.”

This was reality. He had actually been saved.

He was finally home.

“Fucking hell,” Tommy muttered after a few moments of silence, a pounding headache slamming into him with the force of a truck. “Breaking all your bones really does make you feel like shit.”

“I’ll say. You were passed out for, like, a day and a half,” Tubbo told him.

Tommy froze. “A day and a half?” Tubbo nodded, and Tommy dragged a hand down his face. “Jesus christ. What the hell even happened after I passed out?” What he wanted to ask was *what happened to Dream? Did the Syndicate pin him down?*

Did the Syndicate kill him?

As strange as it might seem, Tommy really hoped the latter wasn’t true. Despite the fact that Dream literally kidnapped him, the idea of the Syndicate killing the man put a bad taste in his mouth. Dream hadn’t meant to hurt him, and despite Tommy trying to get a rise out of him, he’d never been cruel to Tommy during his captivity. Sure, he was an annoying bastard with a superiority complex, but... it didn’t seem like he was a genuinely bad person. More like someone pushed to the edge of desperation, just trying to do what he thought was necessary. He didn’t deserve to die.

“Um, well,” Ranboo began, his eyes falling to his lap. “After I teleported you and Siren out of there, I went back to the fight and we were all trying to pin Dream down. But I guess since you were gone and he knew he wasn’t going to be able to find you again, he decided to just get out of there.”

“The fucker basically sent out like a giant shock wave to knock us all down,” Tubbo chimed in. “We all fell onto our asses, and Dream launched himself, Flame, and 404 out the nearest window. By the time we all got to our feet, he was long gone.”

“So he escaped?” Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow.

Both of them nodded, and something loosened in Tommy’s chest. Sure, it wasn’t great to know that Dream was still out there running free and could very well kidnap him again if he wanted, but it was better than him being dead.

“I’m sorry, Tommy,” Ranboo said, his voice strained.

Tommy shrugged. “Not your fault. You guys tried your best, and honestly I think it might be better this way. God knows what the Syndicate would’ve done to him if you guys managed to catch him.”

Ranboo winced. “I mean, I’m sure it wouldn’t have been pretty. But I’m also just so incredibly sorry for letting you get hurt.”

Tommy frowned. “What do you mean? It’s not your fault Dream decided to make me float in the air like some fucking ghost movie.”

“But it’s my fault he threw you,” Ranboo argued, gnawing on his lip. “If I hadn’t knocked into him he wouldn’t have chucked you into that wall and you wouldn’t have gotten hurt.”

...jesus christ, Ranboo really did blame himself for everything, didn’t he?

“Ranboo, are you fucking kidding? What you did was totally *awesome!*” He exclaimed. “You were so badass out there! You literally charged at Dream and faked him out. No one else would’ve been able to pull that.”

Ranboo blinked. “B-but you got thrown into the wall because of that. I should’ve been more careful.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “There’s no way you could’ve known that would happen. Plus, there was probably no way of ending that standoff without me breaking at least a few bones.”

“Still-”

“Nope, Ranboo, you’re done with the self-blame,” Tubbo cut in, slapping a hand over Ranboo’s mouth. “Remember we’ve been working on this.”

Ranboo sighed deeply, but didn’t bother trying to fight the hand over his mouth. Tommy would’ve laughed at the utter defeat on his face if the context were any different.

“So you guys really worked with the Syndicate to save me?” Tommy asked after a few moments of silence, realizing he still had no idea how that came about.

“Yup, we sure did,” Tubbo nodded. “By the way, we should probably tell you this before one of us slips up and you freak out, but we know Wilbur, Techno, and Phil are Siren, Blade, and

Zephyrus.”

...wait, what?

Tommy blinked. They knew? How the hell did Tubbo and Ranboo know Siren was Wilbur? Did he tell them? But why wouldn't he have told-

Before he could finish that thought, the second part of Tubbo's sentence slammed into Tommy's mind like a train.

“The fuck do you mean Blade and Zephyrus are Techno and Phil?!” Tommy gasped, staring wide-eyed at his friends. “Like, I figured out that Wilbur was Siren but-”

And then, the rest of his sleep-addled mind put the rest of the pieces into place. Siren, Zephyrus, and Blade had always acted like a family. Tommy had suspected the three of them were family ever since that time he had healed Zephyrus up when he had teased Blade about his antics as a teenager. If Wilbur was Siren, then of course Blade was Techno and Zephyrus was Phil.

Groaning, Tommy dragged his hands down his face. “Do I know *any* fucking civilians?” He grumbled into his fingers. “How did you guys even find out their identities anyway?”

“We just figured it out,” Ranboo shrugged. “But, um, we should probably also mention that they know we're Nuke and Ender.”

Tommy's head whipped up at that. “*What?*” Suddenly, his eyes widened. “Wait, I didn't tell them if that's what you're thinking. I swear on my life I haven't told anyone about you two-”

“Tommy, it's okay, we know,” Tubbo cut him off. “Wilbur just figured us out like we figured him out. We know it wasn't you.”

Oh thank god. Tommy really didn't want his friends to think he'd betray them like that.

Shoulders slumping, Tommy ran a hand through his hair, wincing when his fingers snagged on blood-matted curls. “Can you guys just please explain how the fuck this all happened? You guys working with the Syndicate and finding out each other's identities and just... being okay with it all?”

Tubbo and Ranboo shared a look, as if they were silently debating which one of them had to take the job of explaining everything. After a few beats of their staredown, Ranboo sighed and glanced back at Tommy, and began to explain.

Ranboo told him how they'd found Siren, Blade, and Zephyrus standing in front of the cafe, Siren clutching onto his broken phone and his backpack discarded on the ground. He went over Siren calling them by their names, and their subsequent return to their apartment where all identities were revealed.

Tubbo explained how he found Tommy, having managed to get access to a secret phone Dream used to rent out the warehouse he'd been kept captive in. Nuke and Ender joined in on

a Syndicate meeting to report their findings, and the group made a plan for how to break Tommy out.

Tubbo and Ranboo only knew the identities of Siren, Blade, and Zephyrus. And those three were the only ones who knew Nuke and Ender's identities as well. Since rescuing Tommy, the Soot's had been letting Tubbo and Ranboo sleep on the couch in the living room, knowing neither of them would want to leave.

As Tubbo finished talking, Tommy found himself frowning at his blankets, his biggest question still being left unanswered.

"So are you guys like... okay with working with the Syndicate now? Or are you gonna go back to hating them after this?" Tommy asked, the silent question of *where do we stand now?* hidden underneath the words.

"I mean... the Syndicate isn't as bad as we thought they were," Ranboo admitted, looking sheepish. "They all seem to really care about you, and while I think we both expected them to be more focused on taking Dream down, that wasn't actually the case. After Dream, Flame, and 404 got away, no one bothered trying to chase after them. Instead everyone started hounding me about you, asking if you were okay."

"I wouldn't say we're working *with* the Syndicate now," Tubbo chimed in. "But... I wouldn't be opposed to hearing them out if they'd ever need our help with future stuff."

Tommy frowned, his mind flashing back to that security footage of Siren killing all those men. "But you guys said it yourself, they're murderers! I thought you'd never want to work with them!"

"Considering the Number One Hero literally kidnapped you and had you tied up in a warehouse on the edge of the city, I think the whole villain hero situation is a bit more complicated than we thought," Ranboo murmured, picking at his nails.

Tubbo nodded. "If Dream is willing to go that far to get information, then I think I can understand why the Syndicate goes to the lengths it does."

Tommy stared at the two of them in shock. Of all people to reconsider their stances on the Syndicate, Tommy wouldn't have guessed it would be Tubbo and Ranboo. But here they were, saying that they wouldn't mind hearing the Syndicate out if they ever wanted to work together again in the future. As if that whole screaming match the three of them had had over Tommy's healing just meant nothing.

"So where does that leave us?" Tommy asked, struggling to keep the bitterness out of his voice. "Are you guys still pissed at me for healing them?"

To his surprise, Tubbo's response was immediate.

"No. Neither of us are pissed about that anymore, and honestly it was fucking stupid of us to react like that in the first place," he said, scooting a bit closer to the edge of the bed. "That

was so fucking shitty of us. Especially me. I was a proper dick to you for no good reason, even before you found out we were Nuke and Ender.”

Tommy shrugged. “I mean, I was keeping my own secrets, so it’s kind of understandable.”

“No, it’s not,” Tubbo said, his voice firm. “It was unfair to you. I was just being a stubborn idiot. We were keeping a huge secret from you, so I had no right to be pissed at you for doing the same.”

“And I should’ve tried harder to tell you what was going on,” Ranboo added. “I shouldn’t have just given up as easily as I did, even though I could see how things were splintering between us because of the secrets.”

Tubbo nodded, nudging Ranboo’s shoulder before reaching forward to take one of Tommy’s hands. “Look, we both fucked up, but me especially. I was an asshole to you in so many ways, and I shouldn’t have let my stubbornness let everything go to shit the way it did. Just... I’m sorry, Tommy. For all of that shit.”

Suddenly, Ranboo joined in to rest his hand on top of Tubbo’s. “I’m sorry too.”

Tommy’s breathing hitched as he looked between his two best friends—his family. His heart ached because *god* he had missed them. He’d missed both of them so fucking much.

Without saying anything, Tommy just opened his arms, and the two of them got the message as they surged in for a group hug. Tommy was still a bit sore, but he held back his wincing as Tubbo buried his face in Tommy’s shoulder, and Ranboo rested his chin on top of Tommy’s head.

“I also owe you guys an apology,” Tommy said, his voice muffled by Ranboo’s sweatshirt.

“You don’t-”

“No, I do need to apologize,” Tommy continued, cutting Tubbo’s argument off. “Even if you weren’t Nuke and Ender, I shouldn’t have hidden my healing from you guys. It just put you guys in more danger to be in the dark than if I had just been honest with you. I won’t fuck that up again.”

“How about we just agree not to lie to each other anymore?” Ranboo asked above Tommy’s head.

Tommy laughed as the arms around him squeezed tighter. “Sounds good to me.”

“Me too,” Tubbo agreed, his hair tickling Tommy’s jaw.

The three of them stayed like that for a few moments, Tommy just relishing in the fact that he had his best friends back. The awkwardness between them had dissipated, and even though Tommy wasn’t sure how things were going to go forward from here, at least he knew he had the two of them by his side again.

After a little bit, Tubbo and Ranboo pulled back so they were properly sitting in their seats again, and Tommy felt lighter than he had in weeks.

Though now that the three of them had said what needed to be said, Tommy noticed the other odd absence from his room.

“So, uh, not that having you two here isn’t fantastic because it is, but where’s Wil? I thought he would’ve been hovering by me waiting for me to wake up all worried and shit,” Tommy asked, frowning at the closed door to his bedroom.

“Um, well, Wilbur wasn’t sure if you’d want to see him when you woke up,” Ranboo explained, wringing his hands in his lap. “He thought it’d be better if he just kind of stayed away until you figured out if you wanted to talk to him or not.”

Tommy’s frown deepened. *Did* he want to talk to Wilbur? Thinking about him again brought back that same anger from when he’d first woken up. Wilbur had lied to him. He’d been lying to Tommy ever since that first day he came to the cafe. He knew exactly who Tommy was and what he could do, but pretended like that was their first time meeting.

Had... Had Wilbur even wanted to be Tommy’s friend? Or had he just wanted to keep Tommy close by because of his powers? His heart twisted painfully at the idea that Wilbur might’ve just befriended him because he was a healer. Was that all he was good for?

No. Wilbur genuinely cared about him. He’d called Tommy his brother for fuck’s sake. Of course he cared!

...right?

Or was it all just a ploy? To get Tommy to trust him so he could keep him close?

Tommy wanted to believe it wasn’t all a lie. But considering how much Wilbur had already lied to him, he honestly wasn’t sure.

A part of him wanted to ask Wilbur directly. But the idea of seeing him right now, when his body still ached and his thoughts were still stuffed with cotton, leaving everything feeling a bit too raw, a bit too bright... he wasn’t sure if he was ready for that conversation yet.

“Do you want to talk to Wilbur?” Tubbo then asked, noticing Tommy’s pained expression.

Tommy stared at his hands for a moment, before shaking his head. “Not right now. I need some time to think things over.”

Both of them nodded in understanding. Neither of them were going to push him to see Wilbur if he didn’t want to, and Tommy was glad for that. Techno and Phil were probably going to want to see him at some point too, and while Tommy wasn’t as mad as them as he was at Wilbur, they still had some explaining to do.

Before Tommy could worry too much about his future confrontations though, there was a buzz from Tubbo’s phone, and he furrowed his brows at the screen. “Apparently you have a visitor, Tommy.”

Tommy blinked. “A visitor?”

“Phil says she’s waiting outside your door,” Tubbo said, reading the text.

They all turned their heads to the door, and Tommy frowned as he tried to figure out who it could be. If the person was a woman, then maybe it was Nemesis? She seemed like the type who would visit him while he was sick. Maybe she had Thanatos with her. Hopefully Tubbo and Ranboo were cool with all the Syndicate members and not just the Soot’s, because if not things would get really awkward.

“I’ll get the door,” Ranboo said, pushing to his feet.

Tubbo moved to stand as well as the door swung open, and Tommy’s eyes widened when he saw who was on the other side.

“*Puffy?!?*” Tommy exclaimed, lurching forward to try and stand up, only for Tubbo to hold him down to the bed with a hand on his shoulder.

Puffy, who was holding a tupperware container of food and a take out cup from the cafe, smiled at the three of them. “Hi guys, I wanted to stop by and check on Tommy,” she said, her bright curls bouncing around her head.

Ranboo blinked. “Oh, um, come in,” he stammered, awkwardly standing aside so she could come into the room.

Why the hell was Puffy here? There was no way she could’ve known what happened. Phil must’ve lied to her and said he got sick or something as the reason he had missed his shifts. They were friends after all so Tommy wouldn’t be surprised if they talked. But why hadn’t Phil warned them what the cover story was?

Puffy stepped into the bedroom, making her way over to Tommy’s bedside and setting down the food and steaming cup on his nightstand. “You look like shit,” she teased, pressing a hand to his forehead to check his temperature. “You feeling alright though?”

Tommy was floundering, trying to figure out what he could and couldn’t say in front of her. “Um, yeah, I’m okay.”

“Do you feel up to having a conversation? There’s something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about, but I don’t want to push you if you need more rest. It can wait,” Puffy explained gently, running her fingers through his curls.

“Am I fired?” Tommy asked, frowning at her.

Puffy laughed. “No, you’re not fired. It’s not one of those conversations.”

Well thank fucking god for that. Tommy breathed a sigh of relief, and leaned further into Puffy’s hand, enjoying the way her nails scratched his scalp. “I’m good to talk then.”

“Alright. Tubbo, Ranboo, do you guys mind leaving us alone for a bit? This is kind of private,” she asked, shooting an apologetic glance at the two boys.

Ranboo and Tubbo shared an uncertain look, but Tommy tried to reassure them with his eyes. This was Puffy. Even if he wasn't sure what lie Phil had told her, he could manage on his own.

After a moment of hesitation, both of his friends filed out, letting the door click shut behind them. Once they were gone, Puffy settled herself in the seat Tubbo had been in, and gave Tommy a warm smile.

"Phil told me what happened," she said without preamble.

Tommy blinked. That could mean a lot of things. "He told you..."

"That Dream kidnapped you and the Syndicate had to go rescue you?" Puffy finished without missing a beat. "Yeah, he explained it all."

...what?

Tommy froze, staring at Puffy in shock. She knew that Dream had kidnapped him and that the fucking Syndicate had rescued him, but she didn't even seem surprised! Had Phil told her about the healing thing? Hell, she didn't even seem confused as to why Phil was the one who told her all that stuff. Did she know Phil was Zephyrus? How the fuck would she know that?!

"I- um, did you-" Tommy's thoughts were reeling as he tried to form a coherent sentence in response to that.

Thankfully, Puffy seemed to take mercy on him. "I know about your work with the Syndicate."

Tommy blinked. "Did-Did Phil tell you?"

Puffy's smile stayed soft and warm, not seeming even the least bit phased by what she was saying. If anything, she almost looked sympathetic.

"Tommy, there's a camera in the backroom of the cafe."

And just like that, Tommy's breath caught in his throat.

There was a camera in the backroom. That wasn't possible. He'd never seen a camera in there before! He would've noticed it, right? There's no way he could've missed something as obvious as that.

If that was true though, that meant Puffy had known this whole time. Ever since he first healed Thanatos in the backroom, Puffy would've known. Which meant she had let him lie to her face for months without saying anything. Without even trying to stop it.

"What?" Tommy squeaked out, unable to piece together a sentence more complex than that.

"The camera is kind of hidden behind the shelves. I didn't put it like that on purpose, things just got moved around. But yeah, I've known about your healing since you first helped Thanatos and Nemesis," Puffy explained, her tone impossibly gentle.

“So you’ve known the whole time?” Tommy asked, his hands shaking.

“Who do you think was keeping the first aid kit stocked with bandages?”

Oh shit.

Fucking hell, how could he have been so stupid? How did he never notice that the first aid kit never seemed to run out of bandages, despite the fact that he never bothered to refill it?

“I’m such an idiot,” Tommy mumbled, hiding his face in his hands. “Are you pissed at me?”

Puffy snorted, and reached out a hand to pull his away from his face. “Do you really think I would’ve kept refilling the first aid kit if I didn’t approve of what you were doing?”

Tommy frowned. “But how are you not pissed?! I lied to you! And-And I was using your backroom to heal fucking supervillains! You should hate me!”

“You were trying to help people,” Puffy reassured him. “I understand why you didn’t want to tell me, because if I were anyone else, I probably would’ve turned you into the police. But you’re just a kid, Tommy. One who got thrown into this world of villains and heroes without any kind of warning. You did the best you could because you just wanted to help. I can’t be mad at you for that.”

Fucking hell. Tommy was shocked he hadn’t had a heart attack from all the bombshells being dropped on him today.

“I’m sorry Puff,” he muttered. “I wouldn’t have used your backroom if I had another option. I just- I couldn’t bring them back to my apartment, and since I worked the closing shifts I knew no one else was going to be around, so I just figured-”

“Like I said, it’s fine. I’m just glad you’re safe now,” Puffy said, squeezing his hand. She then pulled her hand away from his, and shoved something warm between his fingers. “Drink that. I had Foolish make it for you before I came here from the cafe.”

Tommy took a sip of the drink, and almost moaned when the vanilla floral taste hit his tongue. It was a London Fog. Not too sweet but not bitter either, with a comforting taste that warmed him from the inside out.

“Thanks for bringing me this,” Tommy said, wrapping his hands around the cup.

“Of course. I figured coffee might make you a little too wired, so I thought a London Fog might be a nice change of pace,” Puffy told him. Then she gestured to the tupperware on his nightstand. “I also brought you some pastries from the cafe. Thought you deserved something sweet after everything you went through.”

“Oh fuck yeah!” Tommy cheered, grabbing the tupperware with his free hand and prying off the lid. His eyes widened when he saw the chocolate croissant sitting on top, and immediately picked it up to tear a bite out of it. “Thank you Puffmy,” he said, his mouth full of croissant.

Puffy chuckled. "You're welcome."

There was a moment of silence as Tommy chewed his food, the chocolate melting across his tongue and washing down the sticky sweetness with his tea. It was then he thought more about what Puffy had said, and suddenly something clicked.

"Wait," he said, swallowing the bite of his croissant. "Do you know the Syndicate's identities?"

Puffy's smile faded, and she nodded. "Uh... yeah, I do. Phil and I go way back."

Tommy frowned. There was still something not adding up. "But how does being old friends with Phil mean you can just casually know that he's one of the scariest supervillains in the city?"

Dropping her eyes to her lap, Puffy shrugged. "I mean... I guess there's no point in hiding it from you now," she muttered, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. Taking a breath, she looked up to meet his eyes. "Did I ever tell you I had powers?" Tommy shook his head.

Puffy stared at him for a moment, as if debating something in her mind. Then, she reached over to his nightstand.

Before he could ask what she was doing, her hands began to glow bright red. Tommy watched as the little figurine he had of the Able Sisters lifted off of his nightstand, and settled itself so it was floating in between Puffy's palms.

She began to move her hands like she was stretching dough, and although she wasn't touching the figurine directly, it moved as if she was. The figurine went from hard plastic to some kind of soft, playdough like material, and Tommy's eyes widened as he recognized what she was doing.

"That's matter manipulation," he whispered, staring as Puffy reshaped the hard plastic into a similarly sized figurine, albeit having turned the colors into a swirling mess.

"Yup, sure is," Puffy confirmed, pressing her hands together to compress the plastic into a flat disk, before she resumed her dough-like stretching with it.

Matter manipulation. The ability to reshape just about anything as long as you weren't creating or destroying the matter itself. There had been one Hero who had that ability. One whose palms glowed red whenever she used it. One who had a wild head of curly white hair and an impossibly kind smile.

"You're The Captain," Tommy said, staring at Puffy in awe. Even though her hair was now split dye between brown and white, it was so obvious now that he knew it was her. The Captain had always been dressed in her bright red coat, the upper half of her face covered by a sheep-like mask that only showed her mouth, with her white curls pulled back into an impossibly puffy ponytail. Puffy, while no longer donning the sheep mask, had always had a preference for bright red shirts and keeping her hair tied back, and although Tommy would've never figured it out on his own, it still felt painfully tongue in cheek in retrospect.

“I *was* the Captain,” she corrected him. “I retired when the Hero Committee and I couldn’t exactly see eye to eye on some things.”

Holy shit. Holy fucking shit. Puffy was the Captain. The Captain was his *boss*.

“Holy shit! You-Oh my god, you were my favorite hero when I was a kid!” Tommy exclaimed, beaming at Puffy.

“Wait, seriously?” Puffy asked, raising an eyebrow.

“Yes seriously! You were the only hero I ever liked! All the others were such stuck up assholes, but you weren’t. You were so cool and just so fucking badass!” He laughed, feeling somewhat in shock. “Holy fuck, I can’t believe I work for the *Captain*. This is the coolest day of my life!”

Puffy flushed at the compliments. “I appreciate it, but unfortunately those days are long behind me.”

“Doesn’t mean you’re not still a badass,” Tommy grinned.

Puffy snorted. “Thanks Tommy.” She stopped stretching the plastic in her hands, returning the figurine back to its original state, before the glow on her hands faded away. Mable and Sable dropped into her palm, and she gently put the figurine of the duo back on the nightstand. “The reason I retired was because the Hero Committee was going in a direction I didn’t like. They were becoming more focused on the donors’ wants instead of what the city needed. Plus, they were turning more blind eyes to heroes who broke the rules.”

The joy of finding out Puffy was The Captain quickly faded when he caught up to what she was saying. “Do you mean heroes trying to kill villains?”

Pursing her lips, Puffy nodded. “Not just trying.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “Wait, do you mean a villain actually got killed?”

“...yeah. But it’s not my place to talk about the details of who he was. I just- I watched it happen, I was at that fight, and there was nothing I could do. I tried to stop it, but soon he was dead and when I reported the hero responsible to the Committee they just... didn’t do anything. They covered it up so the media didn’t hear about it, and the hero got off scot free.”

Bile rose in Tommy’s throat. “So what happened when you left?”

Puffy kept her eyes on her lap. “Well, I’d already considered leaving because my face had gotten revealed to Zephyrus during a fight. It was an accident, but I didn’t know what he was going to do since he knew what I looked like and could easily find out who I was. So when that other villain was killed, that was just kind of the final straw,” she explained, wringing her hands together. “After I retired, Zephyrus found me walking down the street one night. I thought he was going to kill me for revenge or something, but he instead congratulated me on leaving the Committee and asked if I wanted to join the Syndicate.”

“But you said no?” Tommy asked.

“I said no,” Puffy nodded. “I was just tired of all the hero villain bullshit at that point. Plus, I wanted the chance to spend more time with my son. So I refused his offer, and instead of getting upset, he took off his veil and introduced himself. And so we’ve been friends ever since.”

“Holy shit,” Tommy blinked, trying to process all of that. It made sense how Puffy and Phil knew each other now, but it was still reeling to find out that Puffy was The Captain (and to be honest he was still a bit taken back by the realization that Phil was Zephyrus, despite how stupidly obvious it was).

Puffy gave him a tight-lipped smile. “Yeah. I know it’s a lot to process, but I figured you deserved to know the truth after everything you’ve gone through.”

“I appreciate that but, like-” Tommy cut himself off, frowning as he tried to think of how to word this. “You know what Phil and the rest of the Syndicate have done, better than anyone else probably since you were literally a hero. But you still choose to be friends with them?”

No matter what he did, Tommy couldn’t seem to get rid of the mental image of Siren killing all those men in that security footage. That was *Wilbur*. Wilbur killed all those people. How the hell was Tommy supposed to look at him the same way knowing he’d done something like that?

Puffy seemed to understand what he meant. “I know that Phil, and by extension the rest of the Syndicate, aren’t good people, but I understand why they do what they do. I know I’m not going to get any of them to change their ways, especially not Phil, but I don’t want to lose my friendship with him either. So yes, I still choose to be friends with the Syndicate. Maybe that doesn’t make me a good person, and in the past that would’ve upset me a lot more, but I’ve gotten to a place where I can be okay with that.”

That... made sense. It reminded Tommy of Flame. How he knew what Dream and 404 was doing was wrong, but he still couldn’t turn them in because they were his family.

The question that lingered in Tommy’s mind was really what his stance on that was. Every time he thought back to that footage, he felt like he was going to be sick. But... could he really cut ties from the Syndicate for that? Did he even want to?

There was so much more to that situation that needed to be answered before he could even consider that question. More than anything, he needed to find out if any of it—his relationship with Wilbur, Phil saying he saw him as a son, just everything about his friendship with the Soot’s—he needed to find out if that was real, or if they had just been using him.

He wanted to think it was real. He wanted that so fucking badly. But he just wasn’t sure anymore, and it *hurt*.

Not to mention, his body also hurt. Just, like, physically. His head was still pounding, and even though the croissant had soothed his grumbling stomach, his heavy limbs were begging him to lay down again.

“You falling asleep there, bud?” Puffy asked, quirking an eyebrow at him.

It was only then that Tommy realized he had started swaying, and he shook himself awake again so he could try to meet Puffy’s eyes. “Um, I’m alright. M’just really tired.”

“You should try to get some rest,” Puffy told him, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder again before she pushed to her feet. “If you want anything from the cafe just send me a text and I’ll make Foolish bring it over.”

Tommy snorted, watching as Puffy headed for the door. “I’m gonna make Foolish my bitch.”

Puffy grinned. “If he complains I’ll yell at him that you’re sick and he needs to be nicer to you.”

“You’re the best boss, Puff,” Tommy told her, slumping back against his pillows.

“And you’re a really great kid, Tommy,” Puffy said, her eyes softening as she stood in the doorway. “Do you want me to have Tubbo and Ranboo come back in here?”

Tommy nodded, and Puffy held the door open as Tubbo and Ranboo both filed back in. He wondered if the two had been waiting outside the door the whole time. It wouldn’t surprise him. They probably wanted to make sure whatever the talk with Puffy was about wouldn’t upset him.

Puffy let the door click shut behind her as she disappeared in the hall. Tubbo and Ranboo both stared at Tommy, as if they weren’t sure why they were there.

“Get your asses over here,” Tommy grumbled, waving them towards the bed. “I’m tired as fuck and this mattress can fit all three of us.”

“Are you sure?” Ranboo asked, furrowing his brows. “We don’t wanna keep you up.”

Tommy gave Ranboo a flat look. “If I was passed the fuck out for a day and a half, I don’t think you two are gonna keep me up. Now seriously, you guys need to feel this mattress, it’s like a million times better than ours back home.”

Tubbo was already moving before Tommy had finished speaking. He crawled up on the bed, yanking at the pillow under Tommy’s head so it could fit both of them, while Ranboo sighed and settled himself on the other pillow.

“Oh fucking hell, bossman. You’ve made a mistake,” Tubbo said, squeezing up against Tommy’s side. “We’re stealing this mattress. I’m never sleeping on anything but this again.”

“To be fair, Tommy could probably just buy this mattress for back home with all the money the Syndicate’s paid him,” Ranboo pointed out.

Tommy snorted, his eyes already falling shut as Tubbo responded. “Yeah, but I want this mattress.”

“How would you even steal a mattress? It’s not like it’s something you can easily hide,” Ranboo argued.

“That’s easy. You just gotta throw it out a window.”

“Wh- we’re not throwing a mattress out the window! It wouldn’t even fit!”

“It could if you try hard enough.”

“It literally couldn’t.”

Even though there was still that conflicted ache in his chest, Tommy slipped off to the sounds of his best friends arguing, feeling like a small piece of home had slotted itself back in place.

Chapter End Notes

OKAY I KNOW YALL WERE EXPECTING WILBUR AND TOMMY INTERACTION AND I PROMISE I HAD THAT PLANNED BUT THEN BENCH TRIO AND PUFFY TOOK UP 7.3K WORDS ALONE SO I HAD TO SPLIT IT

im so sorry i promise we're gonna get sbi stuff next chapter kjdsflkds

anyway i hope you guys enjoyed! i've been wanting to drop the bombshell that puffy knew the whole time for a while lol. you really think she wouldn't know what's going on in her own cafe?

ok now fun stuff. make sure to join my discord server! sometimes I send sneak peaks at upcoming chapters, you'll be the first to hear about updates, and I also send updates for all my non-clinic fics as well! it's a fun time so feel free to hop in!
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

also I have a spotify playlist for this fic, so make sure to check that out [here!](#)

let me know what you thought in the comments! i promise I read all of them even if I don't respond, and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

late nights

Chapter Summary

Tommy continues to recover, and has a few more important conversations.

Chapter Notes

HEY GUYS IM SO SORRY THIS CHAPTER IS SO LATE

I know I said I'd aim for updates at least once a week but things just got really hectic with me regarding the holidays and school so this chapter ended up taking me longer than I thought it would, so I'm sorry about that but hey it's lore day so you guys get clinic AND quackity lore hell yeah. also I hope you all had a good thanksgiving if you celebrate it!

ALSO TIK TOK HAS BEEN POPPING OFF WITH CLINIC AND I WANNA TY GUYS SO MUCH FOR IT!!! I check the #tommyinnitsclinicforsupervillains tag on tik tok every day to see what you guys are posting and I've seriously seen some super cool and funny stuff from all of you. [this art](#) by @mjc.artistry is so so gorgeous so please go give it love. also [this art](#) by @planetarium_stickers is another amazing piece I want everyone to see!! also I wanna give a shoutout to @parkersrecs for having a SUPER COOL clinic!tommy cosplay, and @l3m0n_b4lm for posting a TON in the tag, it's always fun to see your videos :D

(I unfortunately can't mention everyone who I've seen tik toks from regarding clinic but if you post in the tag I promise I've seen it!! I check the tag every night, my tik tok just has my irl name and face on it so I don't tell anyone what it is)

I don't think there are any needed tws for this chapter so let's get to it! hope you guys enjoy!

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

Tommy ended up sleeping through the rest of the day.

He woke up long after the sun had gone down, with his mouth feeling like the literal desert. The water glass on his nightstand was empty, and he groaned internally at the realization that he was going to have to get up to fill it.

Tubbo was dead to the world, snoring with his legs thrown over Tommy's, and his head resting on Ranboo's stomach. Tommy had no idea how he even got in such a strange position in his sleep, but it was Tubbo, there was usually a lot of unexplained stuff going on with him.

Thankfully for Tommy though, Tubbo wouldn't wake up even if Tommy smacked him in the face with a pillow (which was something he had tried before). So he was able to shove Tubbo's legs off of him without disturbing the boy's snores, and stumbled out of the bed and to his feet without much issue.

Well, except for the fact that he was fucking *sore*.

His entire body ached, which wasn't exactly surprising, but god it was a pain in the ass. His ribs screamed in protest with every step he took, so he ended up holding onto the wall as he slowly made his way down the stairs and towards the kitchen.

He crept down as silently as he could, listening just in case he heard footsteps either above or below him. It wasn't like he was *afraid* of running into Wilbur or anything. No way. Not at all. He just... would rather avoid that confrontation at the moment if he could.

The kitchen light was off, and the stove clock told Tommy it was nearly two am. Great. His sleep schedule was fucked up now. At least the kitchen was empty.

Grumbling under his breath about how this was going to make his shifts hell if he couldn't get his sleeping back on track, he set his cup down on the counter and opened the fridge to take out the water pitcher.

When he closed the fridge, he nearly screamed when he closed it to find Techno standing on the other side.

"Jesus christ!" Tommy yelped, clutching a hand to his chest. "Give mans a fucking heart attack, why don't you?"

"Oh, uh, sorry 'bout that," Techno apologized, taking a step back. "I thought you were Tubbo or Ranboo."

It was still weird for Tommy to remember that the Soot's knew Tubbo and Ranboo now. He hadn't actually seen any of them interact, but they'd been staying at the house since they all rescued Tommy. He wondered if they were all awkwardly formal with one another, or if they were actually becoming friends. He'd always thought that Ranboo and Techno especially would get along, and despite the shitfest that was his relationship with the Soot's right now, he couldn't help but hope there was some kind of friendship there.

"No, it's just me," Tommy replied, turning around to pour the water into his cup.

"I see that," Techno said flatly. God, he'd gotten used to Techno being less awkward around him over his past month staying at the house, so it was strange to see Techno be so unsure now. "Are you, um, feeling any better?"

“Still feel pretty shit if I’m being honest,” Tommy said, taking a sip of the water and sighing in relief as the desert in his mouth washed away. “I’m super fucking sore.”

“Yeah, that tends to happen when you break all your bones,” Techno deadpanned.

Tommy let out a surprised laugh. “Y’know, that’s a good point. My bones really did just kinda go snap crackle pop, now didn’t they?”

Techno huffed, as if he was trying to hide a smile. “Don’t say it like that, you’ll give the old man a heart attack.”

At the mention of Phil, Tommy’s smile faded as he thought back to their conversation a little bit before he was kidnapped. How Phil mentioned thinking of him like a son, and Tommy thinking that even if he wasn’t there yet, he could see Phil becoming a father figure to him.

That... That had to have been real, right? Phil wouldn’t have needed to say that just for the act. It wouldn’t make any sense.

As if on cue, another set of footsteps came towards the kitchen, and Tommy barely got time to prepare himself before Phil was rounding the corner.

“Techno, where did you-” Phil cut himself off when he made eye contact with Tommy, and Tommy froze with his water cup halfway to his mouth.

They looked at each other for a few moments, blue eyes meeting blue in an unblinking staredown.

“Uh, hey Phil,” Tommy said after a moment, setting down his water cup.

It was like hitting the play button on a paused TV. Phil was suddenly rushing forward, and Tommy didn’t even get to open his mouth again before Phil was wrapping his arms around him and pulling him close.

“Shit, it’s so good to see you awake,” Phil muttered, hugging him tight enough to the point where Tommy almost wanted to ask Phil to loosen up because it was hurting his ribs.

Almost.

Instead of trying to pull away, Tommy found himself melting into the hug. He wasn’t sure why. This was Zephyrus. *The Zephyrus* was hugging him after having lied to him for months.

But it was also Phil. Phil who taught him how to play Halo with a seemingly endless amount of patience. Phil who always had coffee ready for him in the morning. Phil who affectionately called him a little shit and would smack Wilbur upside the head whenever he tried to convince Tommy that he needed to eat sand.

Besides, it’s not like Phil (or Techno for that matter) had lied to him as much as Wilbur had. For the most part, the two of them had just... kept their identities a secret. And yeah, he wasn’t sure where he stood at the moment regarding the Syndicate and their way of doing things, but... he could let himself just have a hug from Phil for the moment, right?

They stayed like that for a few moments, Phil holding onto Tommy with the same kind of relief that Tommy had always imagined parents had when they lost their kids in a mall, only to be reunited with them a few minutes later thanks to a friendly security guard.

“Uh, Phil, you might not wanna hug him so hard. The kid’s a bit sore,” Techno eventually chimed in.

Almost instantly, Phil’s arms relaxed and he pulled away, and Tommy was both relieved that his ribs were no longer aching, but also found himself missing Phil’s warmth.

“Sorry about that,” Phil said, taking a breath to steady himself. “I just- Got a little overwhelmed for a second seeing you up and about again.”

“It’s okay,” Tommy said, folding his arms over his chest as he leaned against the counter. “I didn’t mind.”

Phil’s face softened at that, and Techno shot him a teasing look.

“Don’t even start. I’m allowed to be glad my-” Phil cut himself off abruptly, glancing at the ground. “I’m allowed to be glad Tommy’s back, so don’t be a little shit, Tech.”

Techno huffed. “You’re such a sappy old man.”

“Oh fuck off,” Phil rolled his eyes. “Anyway, Tommy, what are you doing awake? It’s pretty late, mate.”

“I got thirsty,” Tommy shrugged, pointing to the water pitcher behind him.

“Well, it’s good for you to stay hydrated, so drink as much as you can,” Phil said, nodding in approval. Tommy snorted at how much of a dad he sounded like there, but decided not to voice that thought.

There was an awkward silence that fell over the three of them then. Tommy took a long sip of his water, waiting to see if Phil and Techno were going to keep trying to talk to him, or if they were going to leave him be.

Techno shuffled over to the cabinet, pulling out a bag of chips. Phil seemed as though he wanted to say something else to Tommy, but wasn’t sure how to go about it.

Finally,

“I think you know we owe you an apology, Tommy,” Phil said, folding his arms over his chest.

Tommy wasn’t sure what he had expected Phil to say, so he just nodded at that, figuring it was best to let him continue.

“You didn’t want to get involved in our problem, and we kind of forced you in anyway. And then you came here to stay with us, not knowing that you were just getting even more caught up in the villain bullshit than you already were,” Phil explained, glancing at the ground. “We

thought it was better to keep you in the dark about our identities, but in the end it didn't really matter. You still got hurt."

Tommy frowned. "I mean, Dream kidnapping me wasn't your fault. I should've been more careful."

"It was our fault," Techno cut in. "We had an obligation to keep you safe, and we didn't figure out what was going on until it was too late. There were a lot of ways we could've been smarter about this whole deal, and you were the one who had to deal with the consequences."

Falling silent, Tommy wrapped his arms around himself, one question burning in his mind.

He didn't want to ask it, terrified of what the answer was going to be. But at the same time, he knew it was going to eat away at his mind unless he found out the truth.

"Did... Did you guys ever actually care about me?" He whispered, keeping his eyes on the floor. "Or did you just agree to let me stay here because you could keep a better eye on your healer?"

Phil sucked in a sharp breath at that. "Oh-Oh Tommy, no, how could you even think that?" He asked, something hurt dripping from his tone as he stepped towards Tommy. "Of course we care about you. I wasn't lying when I said what I said that day in my office."

Fuck. It was exactly what Tommy wanted to hear, but how could he even be sure it was true?

"You don't have to lie," Tommy said, squeezing his arms around himself tighter. "I'm not going to stop healing you guys if you tell me the truth."

Suddenly, there were warm hands on his face, and his head was being tilted up to meet Phil's eyes.

"We're not lying," Phil said, meeting his gaze steadily. "I don't give a shit if you decide you never want to heal any of us again, and I wouldn't try to stop you if you wanted to cut us off entirely. But if you're worried about what we think of you, I hope you know I consider you just as much mine as Wil and Techno are."

Tommy's breathing hitched as another warm hand was placed on his shoulder, and he saw Techno giving him a pained look.

"It wasn't fake," Techno reassured him. "We all care about you, Tommy."

Tears burned in the corners of Tommy's eyes, and he found himself leaning into Phil and Techno's gentle touches.

"What... What about Wil?" He whispered, his heart pounding. "Did he just befriend me because I healed him?"

"I think that's a conversation you need to have with Wil himself, but I can tell you he loves you so much, Toms," Phil told him, pulling him into another hug. "He was an absolute wreck when you got taken from us."

“He’d been hiding in his room since you woke up because he doesn’t think you’ll want to see him,” Techno explained, squeezing his shoulder. “But before that, when you were still passed out, we couldn’t get him away from your room. Even when we kept telling him you had healed yourself he was convinced you were gonna stop breathing or something.”

Shit. Had Wilbur really been that worried? It sounded like him for sure.

He didn’t know anymore. But the sincerity in both Phil and Techno’s voices right now made Tommy want to believe everything they were saying. He wanted to believe it so badly. That he wasn’t just a tool. That he actually meant something to them.

Still, he needed to talk to Wilbur.

But maybe not right now considering it was the middle of the night.

“Okay,” Tommy muttered, pulling away from Phil’s hug. “Thanks.”

“Of course, mate,” Phil said, dropping his arms. “You can take your time with this. I’m sure it’s a lot to process.”

Tommy huffed. “Yeah, you could say that again.”

“You should probably go try to sleep some more,” Techno then chimed in. “You’re still recovering, so you need as much rest as you can get.”

Resisting the urge to roll his eyes, Tommy refilled his water cup again, before putting the pitcher back in the fridge. “You’re such a mother hen, Techno,” he grumbled.

Techno narrowed his eyes. “I’m not a mother hen.”

“You totally are,” Tommy shot back.

“Phil, the child is bullying me,” Techno complained, shooting a pleading look Phil’s way.

Phil snorted. “I dunno, Tech. You were the one checking his temperature and his pulse every hour when he was still sleeping.”

“*Phlllll*,” Techno whined, the pleading look only getting stronger. “C’mon, I got a reputation.”

“Aw Techno, were you worried about me?” Tommy teased, giving Techno a shit-eating grin. “You’re such a fucking softie, man. Imagine if people knew the terrifying Blade himself was all motherly and shit. All the edgelords who worship you on Twitter would be heartbroken!”

“Even if you exposed me on Twitter, no one would ever believe you,” Techno joked, almost cracking a smile.

Tommy pouted, and Phil chuckled.

“Well, Twitter aside, you really should be getting back to bed, Tommy,” he said, putting a hand on Tommy’s shoulder to guide him out of the kitchen. “If you wanna come down for breakfast in the morning feel free, but Wil will probably be there so you can also just text me or Techno and we’ll come bring you something.”

“Thanks guys,” Tommy said, shooting them both a small, but grateful smile over his shoulder.

Then, with one last look, Tommy headed back towards the stairs. He kept his steps as light as he could, but it was hard when his bones felt like they were filled with lead. Despite how awake he’d been before getting up, he was already starting to feel the exhaustion creeping over him once more. Damn. Had to make a mental note not to go and break all his bones again anytime soon.

Once he reached the third floor landing, he headed towards his room, but paused when he heard the soft *click!* of a door shutting. Tommy whipped his head towards the sound, and his heart leapt in his throat when he saw it came from Wilbur’s room.

A soft yellow glow was peeking out from under the door. Wilbur was still awake, and it seemed like he’d watched Tommy come up the steps before shutting the door so he didn’t spot him. Tommy stared at the door for a moment, practically able to feel Wilbur standing on the other side, both of them holding their breath as they waited for Tommy to make his move.

Tommy found himself in front of Wilbur’s door, hand raised to knock against the wood.

This was it. He could knock right now and ask the question that was burning a hole in his mind. He could ride off the high of how well things had gone with Techno and Phil and use the momentum to rip the band-aid off.

But if Phil was wrong, and Wilbur really had just been using him... well, it was late, and Tommy was getting really tired now. He definitely wasn’t in the best state to deal with that kind of pain.

Was it an excuse to put the hard conversation off? Yes. Did he do the same thing with Tubbo and Ranboo? Also yes. So was he going to do it again?

Absolutely.

Letting out a deep sigh, Tommy dropped his hand and turned away from Wilbur’s door. He ignored the eyes he felt on the back of his head as he headed back into his own room, and slipped into the darkness as quietly as he could. He didn’t look back as he shut the door behind him.

Crawling into his bed again, Tommy grunted as he shoved Tubbo’s legs to the side so he could stretch out again. As soon as he got settled though, Tubbo huffed in his sleep and his legs fell on top of Tommy’s again, and Tommy only sighed because he knew there was no way he was going to get Tubbo to move off of him when he was this deep in sleep.

Somehow though, despite Tubbo's legs resting heavily on his own, Tommy's fatigue was all too eager to pull him back under for more sleep.

The next morning, Tommy woke to sunlight filtering in through his curtains, creating slanted shadows across his face. He blinked open his eyes and tried to turn on his side to grab more water, but paused when he felt a heavy weight on his shoulder.

Tubbo had once again shifted in his sleep, now splayed out like a starfish with his limbs falling over both him and Ranboo.

"Fucking hell, Tubbo," Tommy grunted, trying to shove his friend off of him.

Tubbo groaned. "Five more minutes," he slurred, burying his face into Tommy's shoulder.

"No, Tubbo, move," Ranboo cut in, and Tommy glanced over to see the other boy staring at the ceiling with one of Tubbo's arms laying on top of his face.

"Fuck you," Tubbo grumbled.

"No, fuck you, you clingy bitch," Tommy shot back, reaching blindly behind him to smack Tubbo in the face.

"Asshole!" Tubbo yelled, smacking the back of Tommy's head in retaliation.

"Hey! I'm the injured one here!" Tommy argued, now turning around to face Tubbo.

Tubbo finally moved his arms and legs off of Tommy and Ranboo, now fully awake scowling at the two of them. He huffed as he sat up, his hair sticking up in every direction while Tommy stretched out in relief at finally being free.

"I hate you both," Tubbo mumbled, rubbing at his eyes with a closed fist.

"You love us," Ranboo teased, nudging Tubbo with his elbow.

Tubbo rolled his eyes, but there was a sleepy grin spread across his face, so it kind of ruined his attempt at pretending to be annoyed. Instead of trying to argue with Ranboo, he instead turned to Tommy, his eyes heavy with exhaustion. "How are you feeling, Tommy?"

Tommy shrugged, sitting a bit straighter against the wall. "I'm alright. Still kinda sore and shit, but better than yesterday. I could probably get up and do stuff and be fine."

"You should probably stay in bed today," Ranboo argued. "Better to just get as much rest as you can."

Well, that was a fair point. Tommy didn't exactly want to be up and about in the Soot house right now, just on the off chance he ran into Wilbur. But on the other hand, he was *bored*. Not to mention, his stomach was growling like a motherfucker. Besides the pastries Puffy brought over yesterday, he hadn't felt like eating much, and it seemed like it was catching up to him.

“If you’re gonna make me sit in bed like a fucking sickly victorian kid or whatever can you at least go get me food?” Tommy asked, shooting a pleading look Ranboo’s way.

“Can you get me some food too? I think Phil’s making pancakes,” Tubbo chimed in, matching Tommy’s puppy-dog eyes perfectly.

Ranboo sighed at both of them. “Why can’t you go, Tubbo?”

“Because I’m sleepy,” Tubbo whined, leaning heavily against Tommy’s shoulder. “Plus, you should do nice things for your husband sometimes.”

“You two still on about the whole getting married bit?” Tommy asked, furrowing his brows.

“Not really,” Ranboo said.

“But it’s funny to call Ranboo my husband,” Tubbo added.

“Tubbo, I’m not just going to do stuff for you because you say I’m a bad husband-”

“What kind of man refuses to get his husband breakfast in bed?” Tubbo asked, fluttering his lashes at Ranboo with far too much innocence to be genuine.

Sighing again, Ranboo pinched the bridge of his nose. “Fine. I’ll go get you guys breakfast.”

“Thanks Boo,” Tubbo grinned.

Huffing, Ranboo disappeared in a flurry of purple particles, and Tommy jolted back in surprise.

Obviously he’d known that Tubbo and Ranboo were Nuke and Ender for quite a while now. But this was the first time the three of them had been spending time together since the reveal with Tubbo and Ranboo not in their vigilante outfits. Even though Tommy *knew* Ranboo could teleport, it was still strange to see Ranboo his roommate teleport out of his bedroom instead of Ender the vigilante teleporting around.

An old question that he’d had when the three of them first had their fight reappeared in his head. Why had Tubbo and Ranboo hidden their powers from him for so long? As far as he knew, they hadn’t been Nuke and Ender for very long. So why had they kept their powers a secret from him the entire time they’d known him?

Tubbo was quiet while Ranboo was gone, scrolling through his phone with his hair falling into his eyes. Tommy tried to do the same, absently looking through Twitter to see what was going on, but he couldn’t actually focus on the words on his screen. Instead, all he could think of was how they’d known each other for *years*, how they’d known all about his own powers, yet neither of them had bothered disclosing theirs to him.

Had they always planned to become vigilantes? Or was there some reason they hadn’t trusted him even before Nuke and Ender came into the picture?

Ranboo appeared back in the room a few minutes later, balancing a tray full of plates and cups. Each plate had two chocolate chip pancakes on it, along with three cups of coffee, all with varying levels of sugar and cream in them (Tommy's was the palest shade of brown, Ranboo's was somewhere in the middle, and Tubbo took his coffee black like a madman).

Once they all had their food settled on their laps, Tommy tried to eat, but he couldn't ignore the nagging in the back of his head as the question turned itself over and over in his mind.

If the air was really clear between the three of them now, it shouldn't hurt to ask. Hopefully.

"Um, guys," Tommy started as he cut his pancake into tiny pieces, moreso for something to do than to actually eat. "Can I ask you something?"

Tubbo raised an eyebrow, the steam from his coffee curling around his face. "What's up, bossman?"

Tommy took a breath, trying to figure out how to word the question. "You guys have only been Nuke and Ender for, what, six months now?"

"Uh, yeah, around there," Ranboo nodded.

Yeah. Not long at all. Not long enough to justify having hid their powers from Tommy in the many past years they'd known each other.

"I mean, I guess I get it if you don't wanna answer this, but, um, why... why didn't you ever tell me about your powers? Like, before you became Nuke and Ender?" Tommy asked, keeping his eyes fixed on his plate.

There was a pause. Silence hung heavy in the air, and when Tommy glanced up through the hair falling over his face, he could see Tubbo and Ranboo exchanging uncertain looks.

"I thought we agreed no more secrets," Tommy complained, ignoring the way his heart clenched at seeing the two of them have another one of their silent conversations.

"No, Tommy, we're not trying to keep any more secrets from you at all," Ranboo rushed to explain, putting his coffee mug down. "I guess, um, I'll go first though. The truth is I didn't even know I had powers until, like, a month before we started the whole vigilante thing."

Tommy blinked. "What?"

"Um, yeah, I know. Weird, right? But it's the truth. One day you were at the cafe on a shift, and Tubbo and I were just hanging out at home when he decided to try and scare me as a prank. It worked, but I ended up teleporting myself across the room by accident, which was how I found out I could do that." He paused, picking at his nails. "I was gonna tell you as soon as you got home, but Tubbo, uh, kinda convinced me not to."

Tommy narrowed his eyes at Tubbo, wincing as a pang flashed through his chest. "Tubbo?" He prompted.

Tubbo looked like he wanted to crawl into his coffee mug and hide. “Uh, yeah, okay I know that sounds bad, but I promise it had nothing to do with you,” he tried to explain, shrinking back against the pillows. “I had already been thinking of doing the whole vigilante thing for a while at that point, so when I saw Ranboo had powers, I told him to keep it a secret because I wanted to see if he could train it and get better at it. Then I told him about my own powers and my plan to be a vigilante, and asked if he wanted to do it with me. I wanted to keep you out of it because of the whole ‘not wanting to worry you’ shit that I told you before. It was fucking stupid in retrospect, but, um, yeah, it’s my fault Ranboo didn’t tell you about his powers.”

Blinking, Tommy’s shoulders dropped just a bit, knowing Ranboo hadn’t been keeping that huge of a secret from him for that long.

But that still left Tubbo. Tubbo, who clearly *had* been keeping his secret for quite a long time.

“Why didn’t you tell me about yours though?” Tommy asked, his voice small.

Tightening his grip on his mug, Tubbo took a sip of his coffee. He was silent for a moment, and Tommy noticed his hands were shaking.

“I... don’t like my powers,” he said quietly. “I’ve gotten a bit less scared of using them recently, but for most of my life, I tried to suppress them.”

Tommy frowned. “Why?”

“I found out about them when I was eight,” Tubbo explained, shoulders hunching. “It was my first foster home. I’d lived there since I was five, after I was found in that box that I told you about. Anyway, one day I was just messing around with my foster sister, and then she shoved me and I got freaked out. Then my hands started glowing and next thing I knew...” Tubbo made a *whoosh* noise and mimed an explosion with his hands, making Tommy wince.

“Jesus fucking christ,” Tommy whispered.

“It’s okay. It was a while ago,” Tubbo brushed it off, although Tommy could see the regret swirling in his eyes. “She lived, but she was pretty badly burnt. We were in the kitchen at the time so it got written off as a gas explosion from the stove being left on. But I think my foster parents knew I had something to do with it, because they asked my social worker to take me away not long after that.”

Fuck. Tommy had thought he knew everything about Tubbo and Ranboo’s histories in the foster system before the three of them got put together, but apparently that wasn’t the case.

He didn’t blame Tubbo for not telling him that though. That was intense.

It was at that moment that Tommy realized that even though they both had powers, Tommy was never going to understand what it was like to have a destructive power like that. The only thing Tommy could do with his power was help people. He didn’t think he could hurt anyone with his ability even if he tried. But seeing the mixture of fear and guilt swirling

behind Tubbo's eyes like an ocean made him try to imagine what it would be like to constantly be afraid of what you were capable of. If one small lapse in control could lead to him killing someone.

It had to be exhausting to worry about that all the time.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you talk about something you didn't want to," Tommy said, dropping his eyes.

"Nah, it's okay," Tubbo shrugged. "I told Ranboo the same story when I told him about my powers. You deserved to know the truth."

Tommy nodded. "I appreciate it," he murmured, taking a mechanical bite of his pancake. He chewed for a moment, mulling over the new information in his head, before another question came to him. "But then why the whole fucking crimefighting thing?"

"I guess I just got sick of seeing all the hero bullshit on the news," Tubbo explained, perking up a bit at the change in topic. "I knew I had a powerful ability that I could really fuck some people up with, and even if I didn't like using it, I felt like I should at least try to learn how to control it instead of just pretending like it didn't exist. And if I was able to help some people at the same time then that was even better, y'know?"

"Yeah, I get it." Reaching out, Tommy rested a hand on Tubbo's shoulder, and squeezed. "Don't worry, I get it, big man."

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you about my powers earlier. I promise it wasn't that I didn't trust you or anything. I just didn't want to have to explain that whole thing to you guys," Tubbo said, giving Tommy a sad smile.

"It's fine. Like I said, I understand," Tommy nodded, the weight having lifted itself from his chest completely now. "Anyway, enough of the depressing shit, you guys have gotta try Phil's pancakes. These are the best fucking things you're ever gonna eat."

"Haven't gotten a chance to try Phil's cooking yet. So far we've mostly just been eating Techno's potatoes," Ranboo told him.

"Baked potatoes?" Tommy asked.

They nodded.

"The mashed potatoes?"

More nods.

"Potatoes au gratin or however the fuck you say it?"

"I think it's potatoes au gratin, and yes, he's made those too," Ranboo corrected him. "It's not bad. Like, Techno's a really good cook, but I'm kinda relieved we're getting a break from potatoes."

Tommy snorted. “Try living with him for as long as I have.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “Oh poor Tommy, getting to live in this fancy ass house eating all this rich ass food while Ranboo and I live off ramen like peasants. You’ve already forgotten us for the bourgeoisie, haven’t you?”

“I haven’t forgotten you for the bourgeoisie!” Tommy protested.

“I dunno Tommy, your sweater looks more expensive than half our closet back home combined,” Ranboo pointed out, reaching over to tug at the heavy knit fabric.

“Rich boy, Tommy!” Tubbo teased, giving Tommy a shit-eating grin. “Sorry, but when the revolution comes I’m gonna have to guillotine you.”

Letting out a fake gasp, Tommy clutched at his shirt dramatically. “I can’t believe my own best friends would do this to me!”

“Look man, we gotta eat the rich, I dunno what to tell you,” Ranboo chimed in, his grin matching Tubbo’s.

Groaning, Tommy buried his face in his blanket to hide his smile. Even if his friends were being annoying, he had missed this so much. Just the stupid back and forth the three of them would have, back when things weren’t so complicated between them.

It felt like the world between them had finally fallen back into balance. Like everything was back to normal.

And for the trio, it was. They spent the rest of the day holed up in Tommy’s room, Ranboo occasionally teleporting out to grab snacks or board games for them to play together. They joked around, caught up on how things had been going in the time they’d been apart, and really just enjoyed being back as a group. It was like an ache Tommy hadn’t even realized was there had disappeared, letting him breathe easier than he had in ages.

But even though one thorn had been removed from his side, there was still another one buried deep in his chest. Despite how much fun he had just hanging out in bed with Tubbo and Ranboo the whole day, he found himself missing Wilbur.

Not counting the whole half-conscious reveal that he was Siren, Tommy hadn’t had a proper conversation with Wilbur since the night he’d been kidnapped. He missed sitting with him as he practiced his songs, or curling up on the couch with him to watch movies, or just listening to him ramble about the random shit that came to his head. It was strange to go this long without seeing him, and even though Tommy had a whole slew of complicated emotions towards the man right now, he just missed when none of that mattered.

Before his suspicions had been confirmed.

Back when Wilbur was just Wilbur. His best friend. His brother.

Was Wilbur like a brother to him anymore?

The ache in his chest told him yes, but Tommy wasn't sure. And he was too scared to really think about what that could mean for the future if the answer turned out to be no.

Tubbo and Ranboo were a great distraction to keep him from focusing too much on these problems. But distractions couldn't last forever.

That night, Tubbo and Ranboo told him that they needed to go out and patrol Eastside, as Nuke and Ender hadn't been seen since the night Tommy was rescued. Tommy argued that it was too dangerous with it being so soon after his rescue, but the two reassured him they'd be extra careful. If they saw even the slightest flash of a hero in the distance, Ranboo promised he'd teleport them back to the house, because neither of them wanted to risk getting in a fight when Tommy was still too weak to heal anyone.

They changed into their vigilante outfits and waved goodbye to Tommy as Ranboo teleported them out into the streets, leaving Tommy alone in his room with nerves bouncing around his chest.

He knew Tubbo and Ranboo would be fine. They'd gone on countless patrols before without having issues, and they were going to be extra careful this time. No, it wasn't them he was worried about.

It was that he no longer had anything to distract him.

He tried to keep himself busy. At first, he tried listening to music on his phone, but nearly half his Spotify library at this point were songs Wilbur had recommended to him. Then, he tried booting up his GameCube so he could play Animal Crossing, before remembering that Wilbur had been the one to give the old GameCube to him.

Eventually, he resorted to just scrolling through Twitter mindlessly. There were a few news reports talking about some reported fight at a warehouse in South Bay regarding Tommy's rescue, but there had been no confirmed sightings as to which heroes and villains were present. Fairly typical for the useless media, if you asked Tommy.

It was nearly midnight when Tommy heard footsteps outside his door, which was just barely cracked open. He paused the Tik Tok he was watching about a hedgehog so he could listen closer, and saw a flash of brown come from outside.

Tommy resisted the urge to sigh as he realized what was going on.

He should just get it over with. He wasn't going to get any peace until he jumped headfirst in the water, no matter how cold it might be.

"Wil, stop fucking creeping outside my door and just get in here!" Tommy called out, wincing at how his voice slightly wavered.

The pacing steps froze.

"Sorry, I didn't mean- shit, I'll just go," Wilbur called back.

Tommy huffed. "No, get your ass in here. We need to talk."

Another pause. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, I’m sure! Now hurry up before I change my mind,” Tommy grumbled, trying to shove down the fear making his heart pound in his chest.

There was another beat of silence, and then the door to his room slowly creaked open. Wilbur poked his head in, and Tommy immediately flashed back to being on the roof, pain making his head spin as Wilbur’s face stared out at him where Siren had just been a moment before.

Wilbur looked terrible right now, to say the least. There were dark bags under his eyes, and his hair was a complete wreck, as if he’d completely given up on his complicated hair routine. He was dressed in a loose sweatshirt and sweatpants, and honestly, it looked like he hadn’t gotten out of bed in days.

Though, to be fair, Tommy doubted he looked much better.

“Where are Tubbo and Ranboo?” Wilbur asked, glancing around the room.

“They’re out patrolling in Eastside, didn’t wanna let Nuke and Ender disappear from public eye for too long,” Tommy explained.

Nodding, Wilbur made his way into the room, awkwardly shuffling towards the chair that was still settled next to his bed from the day before. Wilbur seemed to be trying to avoid Tommy’s eyes, but there was some complicated emotion on his face that Tommy couldn’t place. It was like he was guilty, but also on the verge of tears, but also relieved all at once?

Tommy didn’t understand it. But instead of asking, he just waited for Wilbur to sit down.

Then, once he had settled, Tommy realized he had no fucking clue where to go from here.

Shit. Maybe he should’ve thought this through a bit more.

“Hey,” Tommy said quietly, for lack of knowing how else to start this.

“Hi,” Wilbur replied, keeping his eyes on his lap as he wrung his hands together.

Things fell silent between them again. So far, going great.

Jesus christ, Tommy was an idiot.

It was much, *much* harder than Tommy had expected it to be to just sit there with a straight face with Wilbur only a few feet away from him. There were so many thoughts and emotions swirling in his head, it felt like a hurricane had started up inside his mind. He was angry, he was sad, he was hurt, but he was also just so fucking happy to see Wilbur again. A small part of Tommy desperately wanted to reach out and hug him, but he kept his arms firmly at his sides.

After taking a few moments to think over what to say, he figured starting with the obvious made the most sense.

“So you’re Siren,” Tommy said, bringing his knees to his chest.

Wilbur nodded. “Yeah, I am,” he answered, pushing his hair back from his face. “I... I wanted to tell you. I tried telling you several times actually, but Techno and Phil were really strict about making sure I didn’t reveal my identity because we didn’t want to put you in danger.”

Tommy thought back to their conversation on his second night at the Soot house, when Tommy was so dizzy from healing Nemesis he could barely stand up straight. How Wilbur had confessed he was keeping something from Tommy, and Tommy had replied that he was keeping something from him too.

God, the irony.

“I’m not mad you didn’t tell me you were Siren,” Tommy started, resting his chin on his knees. “I understand why you couldn’t tell me that. You guys were just trying to keep me safe.”

Wilbur snorted, but it wasn’t out of humor. It was more bitter than that. “Yeah, look at how that turned out.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “It was good you guys didn’t tell me. 404 used his freaky fucking powers to spy on my dreams, and if I’d known your identities he probably would’ve seen it.”

“Wait, 404 used his *dream interrogation* on you?” Wilbur asked, something pained edging his tone. Tommy nodded, and Wilbur’s face fell. “Shit- I’m-I’m so sorry, Tommy. I’ve heard stories about what 404 can do. I can’t imagine how nightmarish that must’ve been for you.”

Clenching his jaw, Tommy pressed his face into the blankets over his legs. “I don’t want to talk about his dream shit,” he muttered, before reaching his right hand over to pinch the skin of his left palm. There was a sharp sting, and Tommy took a breath to remind himself again that this was real. “Maybe I’ll tell you later, but that’s not what we’re talking about right now.”

“Yeah, no, of course,” Wilbur agreed, although he still seemed upset.

Whatever. Not the focus of the conversation right now. Tommy pinched himself a little harder before forcing himself to let go of his palm.

Taking another shaky breath, Tommy thought of the next burning question in his head. One of the main thoughts that had been circulating in his mind since he first let himself fully accept that Wilbur was Siren.

“Like I said, I’m not pissed that you hid your identity from me,” Tommy repeated, staring at the small bead of blood on his palm from where he’d broken the skin pinching himself. “But you took advantage of the fact that I didn’t know who you were under the mask. Siren asked me what I thought about Wilbur, and it just- I dunno, I guess I just want to know if this was all some fucking game to you?” Tommy asked, wincing when his voice cracked at the end.

There was a sharp intake of breath from Wilbur, but Tommy didn't look up to meet his eyes. "What?"

"Was it real?" Tommy pushed, pulling his knees closer to his body. "You and me being friends? The whole brothers shit? Was that real? Or were you just trying to keep your healer close by?"

A beat of silence passed with Tommy's heart racing in his ears. He risked a glance up at Wilbur, and saw he was staring at him with one of the most heart-broken expressions he'd ever seen Wilbur make.

"Tommy," Wilbur whispered, reaching out to grab his wrist, squeezing it gently. "None of it was fake. I swear on my life. I didn't befriend you for any reason to do with your healing. I just genuinely thought you were fun to talk to. Then I got to know you better, and you just—you *got* me. And I got you. We just clicked, y'know?"

Nodding, Tommy lifted his head a little bit from his knees. They had clicked so well, it was like they had already known each other for years. Sure, he'd technically met Siren before he met Wilbur, but he had only talked to Siren twice, and one of those times he was passed out for most of their time together.

No, Tommy had gotten to know Wilbur first. And Wilbur was right in saying that they just clicked together. Like puzzle pieces.

"I swear on my life I wasn't even planning on telling Phil and Techno about you until Phil got shot that night," Wilbur continued when Tommy didn't respond. "And then I just panicked because I didn't know how badly Phil was injured. I didn't plan to use you as a healer again, it just happened. But that's not why I became friends with you, I promise."

Tommy winced at the mention of the night Phil was shot, his mind flashing back to the security footage of Siren.

"Y'know, Dream showed me some security footage from that night," Tommy said softly, now watching Wilbur's face. "When you were fighting those cops at the warehouse."

Wilbur paled. "You saw what I did?"

"Yeah," Tommy whispered, "you told all those men to kill each other."

Wincing, Wilbur let go of Tommy's wrist. "I did. Yeah."

Tommy took a shaky breath. Of course the footage was real, but some small part of him had been hoping it was fake. That Dream had somehow doctored it.

But no. It was real, and Wilbur just admitted it.

"...why?" Tommy asked after another beat. "You didn't have to kill those guys. You could've just made them fall asleep."

Clenching his jaw, Wilbur nodded. “You’re right. I could’ve done that. The truth is, I just didn’t think of it,” he admitted, wringing his hands again. “Like I said, when Phil got shot, I panicked. I could tell it was bad, but there was so much going on, there was no way for me to tell just how bad it was. I didn’t know if he was dying, or if it just grazed him. All I knew was that I had to take care of the police officers left behind, and I just... got angry. They could’ve killed my dad, and I was fucking pissed. So the order just slipped out without me really thinking about it.”

Somehow, the confession was both a relief, and a horrible weight on Tommy’s shoulders at the same time. On the one hand, Wilbur knew full well what he did was wrong, but he’d done it out of fear and anger for his father. His family had been hurt, and he retaliated. Tommy understood that.

But he had killed so many people. Only one of those officers had shot Phil, but all of them paid with their lives. Wilbur hadn’t even thought twice about *killing* people. As if their lives just meant nothing to him in that moment.

Tommy felt vaguely sick as he met Wilbur’s eyes again.

“Do you regret it?” Tommy asked.

“I do,” Wilbur nodded. “I... I’ve killed before, but never that many at once. I barely slept for the rest of the week after that happened.”

Letting out a shaky breath, Tommy nodded. There was another question burning in his mind, but he didn’t know if he wanted the answer to it.

But now was the time to hash these things out. He either discovered the truth now, or he was never going to.

“Can you stop killing people?” Tommy whispered, feeling like a little kid asking if he could skip school that day.

This time, Wilbur was silent for a long moment. He stopped wringing his hands, instead staring at the ground, with Tommy practically able to hear the storm in his mind. As the seconds ticked on, he squeezed his eyes shut, before opening them again and letting out a breath.

Wilbur glanced up to meet Tommy’s eyes through the curls falling in his face.

“No. While I can try to keep from losing control of my emotions like that again, I can’t promise I’ll never kill someone again. Not in my line of work.”

It was a confession. An apology. A plea.

Tommy heard all the different tones in Wilbur’s words. The infallible truth in his voice.

This was the way things were in the world of villains and heroes. People died, and no pleas of Tommy’s were going to change it.

When Tommy didn't say anything for a long moment, Wilbur spoke again.

"Is that a dealbreaker?" He whispered, fear dripping from his voice. "I understand if it is. If you don't want anything to do with me because of this."

Was this a dealbreaker?

Tommy wanted to say yes. God, he really wished he could open his mouth and say that yes, this was too far for him. He had already stretched his moral boundaries enough healing the Syndicate, but if innocent people were going to continue to be harmed, then he wanted nothing to do with the villains. That's what he should say. That was the right thing to do, and Tommy had always said he was just trying to do the right thing.

But Tommy knew the truth. And as much as he hated to admit it, Wilbur deserved to hear it.

"No," Tommy whispered, twisting his fingers into the blankets. "I should say it is. I know I should. But I can't because I'm too fucking selfish."

Sitting here, Tommy could see exactly why Flame had done what he'd done. Why he had refused to turn Dream and 404 in despite not condoning them kidnapping Tommy. As much as he wanted to resent Flame for refusing to help him, Tommy couldn't, because he understood it now.

Dream and 404 were Flame's family, and even if he didn't approve of what they were doing, he was too selfish to live in a world without them by his side.

Tommy was the same way. He was too selfish to cut Wilbur off, to leave behind the Syndicate and go back to the life he had before. The Syndicate was his family now. *Wilbur* was his family. The idea of leaving was too painful for him to bear.

"You're my brother, Wil," Tommy said, his voice cracking. "I can't cut you off like that, even if I wanted to."

And suddenly, Tommy leaned towards Wilbur, arms outstretched with Wilbur meeting him halfway. He pressed his face into Wilbur's shoulder and hugged him as tightly as he could, wanting to sob in relief at how good it felt to just be back with his brother again.

Maybe he was selfish, but he could be okay with that.

Wilbur squeezed him just as tight, burying his face in Tommy's hair and holding him like he was afraid Tommy was going to disappear at any moment.

"I-I don't deserve this," Wilbur told him, sounding rough. "I don't deserve to be your brother. I'm not a good person. Not after all the shit I've done."

Tommy scoffed into Wilbur's sweater and pulled him closer. "Shut up," he said into the fabric. "I chose you as my family and I don't go back on that shit. You're my brother whether you like it or not."

Wilbur let out a wet laugh, bringing one hand up to run his hand through Tommy's hair. "Fuck, I missed you so much. I'm sorry for everything. The lying, the tricking you into telling me what you thought of me, letting you get hurt- I'm just so fucking sorry for all of it."

"I missed you too, you idiot," Tommy told him. "I dunno if I forgive you for all that shit just yet, but I'm back now and you're not gonna be able to get rid of me, dickhead."

"I'm going to hold you to that if you get kidnapped again," Wilbur joked, and Tommy could feel his laughter reverberate through his chest. "But seriously, I promise that I'm going to work everyday to make sure I deserve to be your brother. Because you deserve the best family possible, Toms."

Fuck. Wilbur that bastard couldn't just *say* shit like that. Tommy had already been fighting to hold back tears, but that broke the dam entirely.

Tommy cried into Wilbur's shoulder, so many emotions running through him at once. Happiness, relief, guilt, sadness—Tommy knew he was being selfish, but he couldn't bring himself to care because he had just missed his brother so much.

This was his family now. Phil had said that if Tommy wanted it, Tommy could be theirs.

He wanted it. Even if it was selfish of him, he wanted it so badly.

Eventually, after Tommy stopped crying, Wilbur went to his room, and came back with his guitar on hand. He settled down on the bed next to Tommy, strumming out a few tunes while Tommy played Animal Crossing on the GameCube, with Wilbur making a game out of trying to match the town music playing in the game.

When Tubbo and Ranboo came back from their patrol, they found Wilbur and Tommy both passed out on Tommy's bed with the GameCube still turned on. Tommy had his head resting on Wilbur's chest, and Wilbur had an arm protectively laid over his shoulders.

Ranboo turned off the TV, while Tubbo moved Wilbur's guitar so it was no longer half-hanging off the bed. Then, they shut the lights off in the room, and headed downstairs to remake their bed on the couch.

And finally, for the first time in days, the night was peaceful.

Chapter End Notes

CRIMEBOYSSSS MY BELOVEDSSSS

look, I get people might not be exactly happy with the moral implications of tommy just accepting what the syndicate does and not really bothering to stand against it, but if you have an issue with it, that's not really my problem. I'm not here to try and tell a story of

villains learning to be good and tommy changing the bad guys for the better, i'm here to give my take on a superhero/supervillain society where shit is just very grey and there's almost no such thing as black and white morality, so I'm sorry if you don't like this direction but this is what I've had planned for a very long time

ANYWAY now onto the fun stuff

I have a discord server! if you're in it you'll be the first to hear when I update + I sometimes send sneak peaks at upcoming chapters, and you can also just get lots of fun behind the scenes info on clinic so join us! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

also I have a spotify playlist for this fic so check it out [here](#)

please leave a comment letting me know what you thought! I don't reply to most of them but I promise I read every single one and they make me so happy!

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

back to work

Chapter Summary

Tommy has healed up.

Chapter Notes

HI EVERYONE IM BACKKKKKK

i am so so sorry for how long this update took. I had finals week and I really needed to focus on that, but in exchange for the long wait this chapter is extra long! so hopefully that makes up for it

in the time between updates though tik tok has been POPPING OFF! I'm gonna try to call out some more tik tok accounts I've seen making clinic content that I really enjoy, the first of which are both [heyhaycosplay](#) and [stamporoni13's](#) amazing siren cosplays, [karsonist](#) has some really funny clinic videos that make me laugh a shit ton, and also i spotted this great art video from [oakkeik](#) so make sure to check these all out! I check the #tommyinnitsclinicforsupervillains tag daily so I'm sorry if I didn't mention your tik toks but I promise i've seen them! i just can't link all of them or else these notes would be miles long

TWs for this chapter: talk of someone dying

ANYWAY that's all for now, hope you guys enjoy!

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

Days passed. Tommy's soreness faded away, and it wasn't long before he was fully recovered from his kidnapping. At least in the physical sense.

Tommy spent his days lounging with either Tubbo and Ranboo or Wilbur by his side (because now that they had talked, Wilbur was back to being a clingy shit). Sometimes, all of them would pile onto the couch and watch movies, although there was still a bit of tension between Wilbur and Tommy's roommates. It seemed to be getting better with each passing day though, and Tommy wondered if one day, Tubbo and Ranboo would consider the Soots as friends. He certainly hoped so.

But now with Tommy healed up, a new question hung over the entire Soot household.

What happened now?

Briefly, Tommy wondered if he was going to move back in with Tubbo and Ranboo since they'd made up, but that idea was quickly shut down by Wilbur reminding him that Dream was probably still going to be looking for him since his rescue. Just because Tommy was free now didn't mean Dream was going to give up, so they had to be careful until they could figure out what to do.

Technoblade and Wilbur both wanted Tommy to stay in the house until they managed to... well, make a deal with Dream or take him down permanently. Just get him out of the way to ensure Tommy's safety. But there was no fucking way Tommy was going to go for that. He'd been stuck inside for five days and he was already going stir crazy.

Shockingly, despite how much he complained about his job, Tommy found himself actually missing going to work. That's how bored he was.

When Tommy first approached Wilbur with the idea of going back to work at Puffy's, Wilbur laughed in his face.

"Are you fucking kidding? The last time you were at Puffy's, you got kidnapped. You're insane if you think we're letting you go back to work," Wilbur scoffed, half-sunken into the couch.

Tommy frowned. "I'm not just gonna stay in here forever! Plus, Puffy's gotta be scrambling for someone to cover my shifts, and that's not really fair to her."

"Don't get me wrong, Puffy's like an aunt to me, but I think she'd rather you be safe and deal with being understaffed than let you get hurt again," Wilbur argued.

"Wilbur's right," Techno cut in from the kitchen where he was currently in the midst of peeling up—you guessed it—potatoes. "We're not lettin' you get kidnapped again. It was pain enough the first time finding that dumb warehouse Dream rented."

It was early evening. Outside, the setting sun had turned the city sky a dark shade of fiery orange, and Tommy knew that soon, Tubbo and Ranboo would be out in the city on patrol. Right now they were back at their apartment since, unlike Tommy, they didn't have any clothes of their own at the Soot house. They would be back later that night, but they were set to have Ender and Nuke do another swoop around Eastside, keeping an eye out for any sign of activity from Dream.

So that meant the only people in the house were Tommy, Wilbur, Techno, and Phil. Just like before.

On one hand, it was almost nostalgic. For things to feel the way they did before Tommy knew the Soot family's biggest secret.

But on the other hand, it was really fucking annoying. Because now he knew he wasn't just dealing with the overprotective Soot's, but the overprotective Syndicate at the same time.

“But Technooooo,” Tommy whined, dropping his head back against the couch. “C’mon! I’ll be fine! Dream’s not gonna try to kidnap me twice from the same place. He’s not that fucking stupid.”

“Tommy, we’re not letting you go back to work. The risks are too high,” Techno repeated.

Huffing, Tommy glanced back at Wilbur, who was giving him a smug look. Tommy stuck his tongue out at him, and in turn Wilbur stretched his legs across the couch and kicked his thigh. Narrowing his eyes, Tommy kicked Wilbur back, and soon the two were kicking each other back and forth. It wasn’t enough to hurt, but Tommy could tell it was annoying the shit out of Wilbur, and that’s what was most important.

Suddenly, Tommy landed a hard kick against Wilbur’s side, and he hissed.

“You fucking gremlin!” He exclaimed.

“You shouldn’t have been kicking me!” Tommy hissed.

“You stuck your tongue out at me!” Wilbur argued.

“Oh like sticking my tongue out at someone is the same as fucking kicking them-”

“Boys.”

Both Tommy and Wilbur fell silent at Phil’s booming voice, the two of them sheepishly glancing above the couch to see Phil standing in the archway to the living room.

Not for the first time, Tommy jumped seeing Phil’s massive, black wings just casually sticking out of his old rock band t-shirt. Now that everyone was in on the secret, Phil had no reason to hide the wings around the house. And of course, Tommy *knew* that Phil was Zephyrus, but it was still startling to be reminded of all the same.

“Phiiiiiii,” Tommy whined after his moment of surprise passed, hoisting himself up so he was half-draped across the back of the couch. “The bitchy duo over here won’t let me go back to work!”

“Dad, please tell him he’s crazy if he thinks we’re letting him go back to the same place Dream kidnapped him,” Wilbur said, shooting his dad a pleading look.

Phil sighed, his feathers ruffling behind him. “You’re gonna hate me for this, but actually, I think Tommy has a point.”

”*WHAT?*” Techno and Wilbur demanded at the same time.

“I mean, it’s not like we can just keep him here forever. He’s got a life of his own, and even if Puffy understands the situation, it doesn’t mean it’s necessarily fair to her to just take one of her only baristas,” Phil explained, walking to the kitchen so he was leaning against the kitchen counter. “God knows Foolish has probably been working way too many double shifts since Tommy got taken.”

“Phil, c’mon, you gotta understand how risky that is,” Techno asked, turning away from his potatoes to raise an eyebrow at Phil.

“I wasn’t saying we just send him out there with no protection!” Phil shot back. “Obviously we’d have someone from the Syndicate assigned to stay at work with you and get you home, Tommy.”

Tommy shrugged. While it wasn’t ideal, it wasn’t like he was trying to hide his healing business from anyone anymore. Having someone there to keep an eye on him really wouldn’t be much of a bother in the long run. “That’s fine by me.”

“See? He agrees,” Phil said, gesturing to Tommy while shooting Techno and Wilbur sharp looks.

“I think you need at least two of us assigned to you every night,” Wilbur argued, looking back at Tommy.

“Wil, I get where you’re coming from, but we don’t exactly have the numbers for that,” Phil cut in. “Besides, I think having one person there should be plenty to get Tommy away should Dream show up. The goal wouldn’t be to fight Dream head on. The goal would just be to get Tommy back here as quickly as possible.”

“I don’t like it,” Techno huffed.

“Me neither,” Wilbur agreed.

“I have no issues with this arrangement,” Tommy said, flashing Phil a bright smile.

Phil shot him a fond smile back, while Wilbur rolled his eyes.

“If it makes you two feel better, I want to open this as an actual discussion at the next Syndicate meeting,” Phil continued, glancing at both Wilbur and Techno.

“Everyone’s gonna take our side I bet,” Wilbur snorted.

“Wil, I swear to god if you use your voice to rig the vote-”

“Me? I would never! Philza, how dare you accuse me of such a thing!” Wilbur gasped in fake offense.

“You’re such a dramatic little shit,” Phil muttered, shaking his head. “But anyway, we’re gonna have a discussion about that, and we’re also just going to need to fill Tommy in since there’s really no point in keeping stuff a secret from him now.”

Tommy frowned, straightening up in his seat. “Wait, what do you mean by fill me in? Fill me in on what?”

And there it was again. That fond smile.

“Everything, Tommy. We’re gonna fill you in on everything.”

Holy shit.

Holy shit.

Did... Did that mean Tommy was going to get to learn why they formed the Syndicate in the first place? And what their goal was? Sure, everyone knew the Syndicate's general goal was to take down the Hero Committee, but there was obviously so much more to it than that. But the Syndicate were a mysterious group, and for the most part, their motivations were shrouded in secrecy.

But apparently, Tommy was going to be told everything.

He had to admit, he was pretty excited.

"Also, I think you should go to work tomorrow, Tommy," Phil then added after a few moments.

"Heh?!" Techno blurted out as he dropped a potato in a pot of water.

"Tomorrow?!" Wilbur exclaimed. "Wh- No! He's still recovering!"

"I'm fine, asshole!" Tommy argued, clambering higher up against the couch.

"No you're not! You literally broke, like, half your fucking bones!"

"And I have healing powers, dumbass."

"It still takes energy out of you."

"Yeah, but I've gotten it back now-"

"Wilbur!" Phil snapped, seemingly fed up with Wilbur and Tommy's bickering.

Wilbur's mouth immediately snapped shut as he spared a nervous look at his father. Tommy had to fight the urge to snicker, knowing it would probably earn him a similarly stern look from Phil.

"I understand you're worried, but I genuinely think Tommy needs to get out of the house, just for his own mental health's sake. You'll stay with him in the cafe throughout his entire shift, and you'll bring him back here afterwards so we can all take him to the meeting as a group. Does that sound alright to you?" Phil asked, pinching the bridge of his nose.

Glancing between Phil and Tommy, Wilbur huffed and folded his arms over his chest. "I guess I can live with that."

Turning back to Tommy, Phil raised an eyebrow. "Think you can handle the dramatic one over here during your shift tomorrow?"

"Hey!"

“I dunno, Phil. This is a pretty big favor you’re asking,” Tommy said, letting out an exaggerated sigh as he fell back into the cushions. “Having to put up with a bitch like *Wilbur* is so exhausting!”

“Oh you little- come here!”

Before Tommy could do anything, Wilbur was lunging at him. Tommy yelped as he got pulled into a headlock, struggling against Wilbur’s grip as Wilbur tried to push him off the couch.

“Phil! Techno! Help me!” Tommy yelled.

Techno stared at the two fighting for a beat, before snorting and looking back at his potatoes. Phil just shrugged and left the room, ignoring Tommy’s pleas for mercy as Wilbur pinned Tommy down, laughing all the while.

In the end, Tommy *may* have accidentally elbowed Wilbur in the face and gave him a bloody nose, but it was his own fault for being a dick (though of course Tommy ended up healing it for Wilbur, despite Wilbur’s protests that it was just a little bit of blood.)

That night, Tommy texted Puffy to tell her he was going to come in to work the next day. After she checked to make sure it was alright with the Syndicate, she seemed very relieved at the idea of having Tommy back at work, and Tommy couldn’t help but feel a twinge of guilt for being gone for so long (even though he knew it wasn’t his fault).

Surprisingly, Tubbo and Ranboo seemed fine with the plan for Tommy to go back to work, as long as Wilbur was there the whole time. As it turned out, with Dream having been off the radar since Tommy’s rescue, petty crime was spiking—especially in Eastside. This meant Tubbo and Ranboo were even busier than usual, so they were going to be patrolling again the next night.

A part of Tommy didn’t like the idea of them out patrolling while he was stuck in a meeting with the Syndicate. But at the same time, he knew that if the worst happened and one of them got hurt, it would probably be better to be with the Syndicate so they could drive him to wherever Tubbo and Ranboo were (since the cafe was kind of unusable as a clinic now considering Dream could ambush them at any moment there).

So the next day passed with Tommy lounging around the house like he had been for the past few days, but this time with excitement running through his veins at actually getting to go do something again. Sure, it was work, but considering how unbelievably bored he was, he’d take just about anything.

When late afternoon rolled around, Techno drove Wilbur and Tommy to the Cloudy Cafe. Walking in, Tommy hesitated for just a beat by the front door, remembering the bone chilling fear that had run through him when he’d walked out those doors and found himself face to face with Dream. But then Wilbur placed a hand on his shoulder and Tommy reminded himself that he was safe, that Wilbur was going to watch out for him, and things would be fine.

As soon as the two of them made their way through the doors, there was an unholy shriek of joy from behind the coffee bar.

“Tommy!” Foolish yelled, nearly jumping over the bar to run towards him. Tommy grunted in surprise as the man wrapped him up in a tight hug, and for a brief moment Tommy wondered if Puffy had told Foolish the truth about what had happened.

Then,

“Oh thank god you’re back,” Foolish giggled, practically dropping all his weight onto Tommy. “I’m never gonna shit talk the way you organize the bar again, I literally can’t keep doing your shifts, man.”

Tommy blinked, stiffly hugging Foolish back. “Um... sorry?”

“You’re forgiven as long as you never leave me to cover all your shifts again,” Foolish said, taking another beat before pulling himself back from the hug.

Now getting a proper look at Foolish, it was easy to see that he was probably on the verge of collapsing from exhaustion. There were dark circles under his eyes, and he was swaying on his feet the longer he stared at Tommy with a manic smile on his face. While Tommy was sure Puffy had probably taken a few shifts herself to cover, it was clear that Foolish had gotten the majority of the work thrust onto him, and Tommy wouldn’t wish that on anyone—not even Dream.

“Don’t worry, I just got, uh, really fuckin’ sick. But I’m all good to work now,” Tommy reassured him, awkwardly patting his arm.

Foolish smiled and nodded at this, although his eyes were glazed over in a way that told Tommy he was nearly asleep on his feet. “Okay, cool, *great*. You do that, and I’m gonna go pass out for the next eighteen hours,” he told Tommy, taking off his apron and shoving it into Tommy’s arms.

Before Tommy could respond, Foolish stumbled away from him and Wilbur and out of the cafe doors. Both Tommy and Wilbur silently watched Foolish from the windows until he disappeared around the corner, leaving Tommy back in control of the cafe.

“Is he okay?” Wilbur asked with a frown.

“I don’t think so,” Tommy replied.

There was a beat of silence between them.

Then, Tommy unfolded the apron and pulled it over his head. “Alright, well, I should get to work. You, uh, go sit somewhere and don’t bug me.”

Wilbur smirked. “But bugging you at work is how we became friends in the first place.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “I’ll spit in your coffee.”

“No you won’t. You’re too nice,” Wilbur teased, flicking Tommy’s forehead.

While Tommy wanted to argue, he knew Wilbur was right, and that Tommy wouldn’t go that far because that was just gross.

“Fuck off,” Tommy grumbled as he made his way back behind the coffee bar.

Wilbur, in all his bitchy glory, sauntered up to the counter and rested his elbows in front of the register. “Let me be your first customer of the day.”

“Ugh, fine, what do you want?”

“Flat white,” Wilbur told him.

Rolling his eyes, Tommy rang him up and watched as Wilbur went over to his usual table in the corner. It was strange. Despite so much having changed, there was so much familiarity in this routine. Bickering with Wilbur during his shifts, trying to figure out ways to fuck with him to make his job more entertaining—so much was different now, but in a way it was like nothing had happened at all.

It was so easy to fall back into his work. Tommy barely thought as he pulled the espresso shots and grabbed a bottle of caramel, fully intending to not make Wilbur the drink he ordered just to fuck with him. Late afternoon sun streamed through the large windows of the cafe, once again bathing everything in gorgeous shades of gold and orange. The smell of roasting coffee beans filled the air, and Tommy’s shoulders slumped as he took a moment to close his eyes and just *breathe in* his work.

A few minutes later, Tommy was sliding Wilbur’s cup onto the pickup bar. He called out Wilbur’s name, and Wilbur smirked as he sauntered back over to the bar to grab the drink.

When Wilbur picked the cup up, he huffed at the words written on the side.

“‘Pussy boy’? Really?” Wilbur asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

“It’s what you are,” Tommy shrugged, trying to keep his expression neutral as Wilbur took his first sip of the drink.

As expected, Wilbur instantly frowned at the taste. “Wh- Is this a caramel macchiato?!”

“Yup,” Tommy answered, popping the ‘p’.

“You brat!” Wilbur exclaimed, scowling at him. “You know I think caramel macchiatos are way too sweet!”

“Shouldn’t have put me in that headlock yesterday,” Tommy told him, struggling to stifle his laughter.

Wilbur’s scowl deepened. “Make me my proper drink.”

“Nope. Maybe if you’re nicer to me I’ll make you the right drink later tonight,” Tommy teased, flipping him off as he went to go help a customer waiting at the register.

Huffing, Wilbur stalked back over to his table, and Tommy was pretty sure he heard him mumble “fucking gremlin,” under his breath as he reluctantly sipped at his coffee.

And just like that, Tommy was back on the clock. An hour and a half passed with nothing very noteworthy happening. Customers filed in, Tommy made coffee, the espresso machine took a shit and Tommy spent ten minutes cussing at it until he managed to get it working again, and Wilbur worked on his laptop the entire time.

The yellow light of the setting sun turned darker and darker, until it disappeared completely. Night was falling earlier now that it was getting close to winter, and Tommy had to admit, he was grateful he wasn’t going to have to walk to the subway in the chilly air tonight.

Then, there was the sound of a chiming door, and Tommy’s attention was pulled to the front as two customers made their way to the register.

It was a man and a woman, and Tommy realized he recognized the woman. With her cotton candy pink hair, razor sharp eyeliner, and her kind smile, Tommy thought back to a time she’d stopped by and tipped him far more than she needed to. The man with her was unfamiliar, albeit rather nondescript with the only noticeable thing about him being his shaved head.

Putting on his Customer Service Grin, Tommy greeted them as they came up to the counter.

“Welcome to the Cloudy Cafe, what can I get you?”

“Um, I think I’ll have a small mocha,” the woman told him, something warm flashing in her eyes.

“And I’ll have one of those, uh, blended caramel coffee things,” the guy chimed in, gesturing vaguely to the menu.

Tommy frowned. “You mean the caramel frappe?”

“Yup. That thing,” the guy nodded.

Shrugging, Tommy wrote down the drinks on the cups before meeting the woman’s eyes again.

“Alright, name?”

The woman met his eyes steadily, a grin tugging at the corners of her lips.

“Niki.”

Nodding, Tommy started to write the name down on the cup, but froze before he’d even gotten to the ‘k’.

Niki.

Niki was Nemesis' real name.

This girl had the same cotton candy hair that Nemesis did. She was the same height and build as the villain as well.

As the realization dawned on Tommy's face, Niki let her warm grin take over her face.

"It's good to see you again, Tommy," she said softly.

"Holy shit," Tommy whispered.

This was Nemesis.

Without even thinking about it, Tommy rushed around the counter and Niki immediately pulled him into a hug. He laughed as he bent down to hug her properly, and he felt her own laughter dance through her shoulders as he squeezed her tight.

They stayed like that for a few moments, Tommy too shocked to even think of what Nemesis just casually identity revealing to him implied, before the two of them were interrupted by a cough.

Glancing up, Tommy saw the guy with the shaved head smirking at him.

"Ayup, mate," the guy said.

Oh. Oh Tommy was fucking stupid.

"Both of you are here?!" Tommy asked, letting go of Niki to give Thanatos a hug.

"Of course we are! We wanted to come by and see if you were okay," Niki explained.

"Name's Jack, by the way," Thana- no, *Jack* told him, patting his shoulder a few times before pulling away from the hug. "It's really good to see you, man."

Nemesis and Thanatos. Niki and Jack. Such normal names for the two villains that were the entire reason he actually *decided* to start helping the Syndicate willingly.

"Fucking hell, it's good to see you guys too," Tommy laughed.

And it was good to see them. Besides the Soot's, Nemesis and Thanatos had been the closest to being his friends out of the rest of the Syndicate. It was just... surprisingly nice to see them here.

But then, the full realization hit Tommy.

"Wait, why the fuck did you two just reveal your faces to me?!" Tommy asked, frowning at them. "Isn't that breaking the Syndicate rules?"

Before either of them could respond though, another voice joined in the fray.

“Well well well, looks like you guys were too impatient to wait for tonight,” Wilbur chuckled as he walked up to the counter.

Niki at least seemed a bit sheepish. “C’mon! Can you blame us? You and Phil and Tech haven’t told us anything about how he’s doing!”

“I told you he was fine!” Wilbur argued.

“Yeah, but nothing else,” Niki said, shooting Wilbur a pointed look.

“Besides, you got to reveal all dramatically to him right before he passed out, so you can’t say shit,” Jack added. “Plus we were both craving coffee, so we figured why not.”

Wilbur huffed. “I mean, you know *I* don’t actually give a shit. But Phil and Techno are super strict on that stuff.”

Tommy listened to the conversation going on, a few more puzzle pieces falling into place.

“Wait, so you guys all know each other's identities?” Tommy asked, lowering his voice to make sure no one else in the cafe could hear (despite the fact that no one was paying attention to them).

“We do,” Wilbur nodded. “You were the only one we kept out of the loop. Everyone else already knew each other’s names and faces.”

“But it’s probably best for us not to go into it here,” Niki pointed out, glancing around the cafe. “We’ll be able to talk more about it tonight.”

Tommy raised his eyebrows. “Wait, so are all of you guys gonna-”

“That should be the plan unless Phil changes his mind,” Wilbur answered before he even finished. “But since you now know who five out of the eight are, I don’t think Phil would go back now.”

Holy shit. Tommy was going to learn everyone’s identities in the Syndicate tonight.

“Is that- I mean, is that even safe?” Tommy asked, thinking back to 404.

“The worst has already happened, and we’re not going to let ‘you know who’ get his hands on you again,” Wilbur told him, brown eyes meeting blue. “You deserve to know after everything you’ve been through.”

Fuck. They really trusted him that much.

If anyone asked Tommy if that made him a bit choked up, he would say that was ridiculous to even ask because he was a big man who didn’t get choked up at silly shit like that. But, well, if he quickly excused himself from the conversation to make Niki and Jack’s drinks because his vision was getting a little blurry, well that was none of their business.

After he made Niki and Jack their drinks, they went to sit at Wilbur's table, and the three fell into a hushed conversation Tommy couldn't make out from the coffee bar. Another few hours passed without much fanfare, and it wasn't long before Niki and Jack had to head out. They both promised they'd see him in a few hours though, and Tommy waved them out while fighting to contain his bright smile.

Soon, customers started filtering out of the shop. Laptops were closed, empty cups were tossed in trash cans, and it wasn't long before Wilbur was the only one left in the cafe.

At one point, Tommy slid out another hot coffee cup onto the pickup bar.

"Bitch boy, come get your flat white!" Tommy yelled across the shop as he began to wipe down the counters.

Wilbur laughed as he grabbed his drink, giving Tommy a wry smile when he met his gaze. "Aw, did the child feel bad for being mean to big brother Wilby?" He teased.

Tommy blinked, fighting the sudden urge he had to smack Wilbur in the face. "I will dump that coffee on your stupid fucking head if you don't shut up."

"Sure you will. You'll dump the drink you just spent time making on a floor you'd have to clean-" Wilbur cut himself off with a yelp when Tommy lunged across the counter, trying to make a grab for the cup. "You're a fucking feral raccoon, I swear to god!"

"I'll bite you," Tommy threatened.

"Y'know, I don't think I doubt that anymore," Wilbur snorted.

After that, Tommy finished cleaning up the rest of the cafe, and Wilbur waited by the door like he had so many times in the past. This time though, he wasn't scrolling through his phone like he usually did while he waited for Tommy to finish up. Instead, his eyes were locked on the windows, watching like a sentry for any sign of movement outside.

Right when Tommy was heading towards the door, a sleek, black SUV pulled up in front of the cafe, which Tommy recognized as the same one they took when he went to the first Syndicate meeting.

Wilbur kept an arm wrapped around his shoulders as Tommy locked the doors to the cafe. Tommy leaned into him, his heart beating a little louder in his chest than usual at being outside the cafe in the middle of the night, just like before.

They went straight to the SUV though, and Tommy didn't see any sign of Dream or 404. When they climbed in, Tommy saw Techno was driving again, with Phil sitting up front meaning Wilbur had to sit in the back with him. The two of them were already decked out in their villain outfits, and after Tommy and Wilbur had settled themselves in the backseat, Phil tossed a bundle of clothes at Wilbur's face.

"You can get changed when we get there, Wil," Phil said, his voice changer turned off for the time being.

Despite the fact that Tommy obviously knew Phil was Zephyrus, it was still disconcerting to hear his voice come out from under Zephyrus' veil. This was definitely going to take a bit to get used to, Tommy could tell.

"Couldn't have let me just change in the bathroom of the cafe?" Wilbur asked, frowning at the front seat.

"I dunno about you, but I'd rather not see a news report about Siren walking out of a well-beloved cafe in Eastside," Techno deadpanned, making Tommy snort.

"Who knows? Maybe I'll just tell the news that Siren loves my coffee," Tommy joked. "Imagine if you just came into the cafe in the full getup, Wil. How do you think my customers would react to that?"

"That's probably not something we wanna deal with, so let's not talk about making the Cloudy Cafe a regular haunt for Siren," Phil cut in. "Anyway, Tommy, how was work?"

Tommy shrugged, slumping back into his seat. "It was fine."

Wilbur snorted. "Fine? You're not gonna mention the fact that you learned Nemesis and Thanatos' real names?"

Tommy shot Wilbur a flat stare. "Well I didn't *know* if it was okay to tell Phil about that or not!"

"Wait, you met Niki and Jack in their civilian forms?" Phil questioned, twisting around in his seat to actually look at Tommy.

"He did, yeah. They basically just went up to the register to order their drinks and told him outright," Wilbur laughed. "I mean, I don't think it's a big deal since that was gonna happen tonight anyway. The two of them just wanted to see him and make sure he was okay."

"But they won't get in trouble, right?" Tommy asked, furrowing his brows. "Because I don't want them to get in trouble because of me."

Phil chuckled. "No, don't worry, I'm not gonna scold Nemesis and Thanatos because they wanted to properly introduce themselves to you before everyone else could."

"Okay, that's good," Tommy murmured, leaning against the window and watching the street lamps blur into one streak of orange light.

The rest of the drive was quiet after that. Tommy waited for them to get closer to the Syndicate compound, to the point where they would blindfold him again, but it never came. They crossed through South Bay and further up until they were nearing the middle of the city, with the buildings changing from nice townhouses to actual skyscrapers. It wasn't until they pulled into the parking garage of a nondescript office building that Tommy realized they just weren't going to blindfold him at all.

There was the steep decline Tommy had remembered making him feel sick before with the blindfold on. The underground parking structure was dark, only lit up every few spaces with

harsh white light, making the entire place feel very eerie. There were no cars in any of the parking spots either, with everyone who worked in that building clearly having gone home for the day.

The car drove down deeper and deeper into the parking garage until they were at the bottom level. Then, Techno pulled the SUV into a random empty spot and cut the engine.

“We’re here,” Techno announced.

“So... there’s really no blindfold this time?” Tommy asked, glancing between the three of them.

“No. No blindfold this time,” Phil reassured him, lifting up his veil to flash Tommy a reassuring smile.

Nodding, Tommy hopped out of the car, hit shoes smacking against the concrete as Techno and Phil did the same. Wilbur didn’t get out of the car though, and it took a moment for him to realize that when Phil said Wilbur could change into his Siren clothes when they got there, he meant *change in the car*.

It was pretty funny to listen to Wilbur struggle to change in the narrow confines of the backseat of the car. There was a lot of grunting, swearing, and at one point a foot smacked against the window. But then, finally, Siren climbed out of the SUV, donning his black coat, dark jeans, heavy boots, and his signature blindfold.

“I hate changing in the car, you know that, Techno,” Wilbur hissed as soon as he was on his feet again, Techno locking the car as Phil led them towards an elevator near the wall.

“Wouldn’t be such a problem if you didn’t decide skinny jeans just had to be part of your supervillain wardrobe,” Techno shot back with a smirk.

Wilbur scoffed. “It’s about having a cohesive look. Besides, I’m not one to do a whole bunch of physical fighting, so the jeans work out fine unless I need to change in the backseat of a fucking car.”

“By the way, I’ve always wanted to ask,” Tommy suddenly chimed in, shoving his way between the two brothers. “How the fuck do you even see out of that mask?”

“Oh, it’s just got, like, dark mesh around the eyes while the rest is just solid fabric. But it’s hidden well so you can’t really see the mesh from the outside,” Wilbur explained. “I used to put dark makeup around my eyes to kind of hide them even more behind all the black, but eventually I got lazy so I stopped doing it.”

“You mean I called you an emo and you got mad,” Techno huffed. Phil snickered at this comment, but didn’t say anything as he pressed the button for the elevator.

“I did not stop just because you called me an emo!” Wilbur protested, punching Techno in the arm. “Besides, it’s not emo to try and wear makeup that helps conceal my goddamn identity!”

“Sureeee,” Techno drawled. “Keep telling yourself that while you walk around in doc martens and a black trench coat.”

Wilbur let out an indignant noise as the elevator chimed, signaling its arrival. The four of them all piled into the small metal box, with Phil pressing the ‘B-10’ button before beginning their descent down.

The elevator jolted as it moved deeper and deeper underground. Once again, Tommy wondered if this whole building was used for Syndicate stuff, or if they just rented out this one underground office for their dramatic villain meetings.

Once the elevator stopped, the doors opened to reveal that same plain, undecorated hallway that led straight to the double doors of the meeting room. Now out of the elevator, Phil rolled his shoulders to manifest his wings, having had them hidden during the car ride.

The double doors to the Syndicate room were no less impressive than they were the first time Tommy saw them. The intricate carvings were just as stunning as he remembered them, and Tommy made a mental note to ask at some point who the fuck did the interior decorating for the Syndicate.

When Phil opened the doors to the meeting room and led them inside, Tommy was met with the waiting faces of all the other Syndicate members he’d come to know so well.

Daedalus, Jester, Rosethorn, Nemesis, and Thanatos had already taken their seats. Phil took his place at the head of the table, with Techno sitting at the other end. Wilbur and him sat in the same seats they had before, and despite the fact that Tommy knew the Syndicate far better than he did the first time he’d been in here, he couldn’t ignore the nerves buzzing in his chest.

As soon as everyone was settled, Phil wasted no time in jumping right into things.

“Hey guys, glad you all could make it on such short notice,” Phil said, folding his hands in front of him. “As you all know, tonight we are welcoming Tommy in as a full member of the Syndicate.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “Wait, I’m what?”

All eyes in the room suddenly turned to him.

“Phil, did you forget to tell the fucking kid he was gonna be a Syndicate member?” Jester asked, his feet resting up on the table.

“Well- no, I didn’t forget. I told you yesterday, Tommy,” Phil said, lifting his veil so he could meet his eyes. “I said we were gonna tell you everything.”

“Okay, but how was I supposed to know that meant I’d be an official member of the Syndicate?” Tommy asked, his heart pounding in his ears.

Phil’s brows furrowed. “I mean... I thought it was obvious? You already worked for us, so this is just the next step.” He paused then, something worried flashing over his gaze. “Do you not want to be a member of the Syndicate, Tommy?”

The question was gentle. There was no pressure or judgement in Phil's voice. Just genuine concern. But even still, Tommy couldn't help but shrink back in his chair as all the eyes in the room stayed squarely on him.

It wasn't that he didn't *want* to be a member of the Syndicate. Phil was right in saying that he basically already was. This would just be making it official.

But if Tommy agreed to this, he could no longer say he was just a civilian. He would officially be a villain. Or, at least in the city's eyes he would be. Either way, he'd be choosing to fully join this world that he had tried so hard to stay out of.

Suddenly, there was a warm hand on his shoulder. Wilbur had pulled up his mask, and was staring at him with worried eyes.

"Are you okay?" He whispered.

Tommy stared at Wilbur, trying to think if he was okay or not. While he was definitely shocked... he knew that he was already in this world. Hell, he'd already been kidnapped by a hero! Tommy had lost his civilian card long ago, and at this point he knew full well there was no way to get it back.

Besides, his family was here, weren't they? He'd chosen this as his family, and when he told Wilbur he didn't go back on that stuff, he meant it.

Again, this was just making things official.

"No, I want it," Tommy said after a few beats of silence. "Sorry, just confused me for a second."

Relief washed over Phil's face as he nodded. "Okay, that's good to hear. Then we'll cast a vote. All those in favor of Tommy joining the Syndicate, raise your hands."

Immediately, everyone at the table raised their hands. There wasn't an ounce of hesitation in anyone's eyes, and warmth bloomed in Tommy's chest at their trust.

"Alright, then that's settled. We'll need to come up with a code name for you at some point, Tommy. But for now, we have bigger things to focus on," Phil said, lifting the hat with his veil entirely off his head. "You all know the drill. Masks off."

And just like that, with those simple words, everyone in the Syndicate took their masks off.

Techno rested his boar skull on the table. Wilbur shoved his blindfold in his pocket. Niki set her masquerade mask lightly on her lap. Jack moved his skull mask on top of his head. But these were the faces he already knew.

There was a loud whirring noise as Daedalus pulled his mechanical mask off his face. His eyes faded from being entirely pitch black, to having normal dark green irises. As Tommy took in his face, he realized he had definitely seen Daedalus before.

"Wh- You came to the cafe!" Tommy exclaimed. "You brought your dog to see me!"

Daedalus laughed and nodded. “Yup, Fran really likes you. You gave her whipped cream once and you earned her undying loyalty.”

Wow. Tommy really shouldn't be surprised considering Daedalus literally told him he'd been to the cafe before, but it was still strange to think about in retrospect.

“I'm Sam by the way,” Daedalus introduced himself.

Sam. What a boring name for such a badass guy. “Nice to meet you, Sam,” Tommy snorted.

“Nice to meet you too, Tommy.”

Then, there was a pointed cough to Sam's left, and Tommy's eyes fell on *another* familiar face.

“Hannah?!” Tommy asked, recognizing the waitress from Bad's diner. “You're a villain?”

“Yup, sure am,” Hannah grinned, playing with her tree bark mask in her hands. “Let me tell you, it was so fucking hard to keep a straight face every time you and Wilbur came in for dinner.”

“Sorry about that, Hannah. But he wanted muffins, and it's not like I could just say no,” Wilbur defended.

Hannah raised an eyebrow. “Still a dick move, Soot,” she teased. “But it's nice to properly meet you, Tommy.”

“You too,” Tommy chuckled, leaning back further in his seat.

This only left one other person in the room Tommy didn't know.

He turned his head to the left, and found himself staring into a young man's face with a jagged scar going through his left eye.

“I fucking knew it,” Tommy whispered, meeting Jester's eyes. “I knew that was your real face!”

Jester chuckled. “I could see it in your eyes that you knew I was bullshitting you with the whole, ‘oh it's a random stranger off the street’. Truth is, I was just too fucking tired to put on a different face, and I knew I could trust you at that point. So I figured it was fine.”

Tommy grinned. “Well, tell me your name then.”

“Call me Quackity,” he told Tommy, grinning wide enough to show a gold tooth he had embedded under where the scar went through his eye.

“Wait, did Quackity already show you his face?” Techno asked, frowning as he looked between the two of them.

“Technically yeah,” Quackity snorted.

“Can’t trust any of you little shits,” Phil muttered, although his voice was fond as he shook his head. “For those who don’t know, apparently Niki and Jack took matters into their own hands and introduced themselves to Tommy earlier today.”

All the eyes then fell onto Jack and Niki, both of whom were smirking in their seats.

“What can I say? We wanted coffee,” Jack huffed.

“Can’t believe Sam and I are the only ones who can keep a secret identity,” Hannah muttered.

“Hey! I kept it a secret too! Tommy just guessed mine on his own!” Wilbur protested.

“Like you weren’t trying to get him to figure it out by being as obvious as possible-”

“Okay boys,” Phil said, cutting Techno off. “I know you all like to bicker about stupid shit, but we actually have more business to attend to this meeting, so we should get on with it.” Folding his hands in front of him again, Phil focused back on Tommy. “Tommy, do you have any particular questions for us, or should we just start at the beginning?”

Tommy gulped as he tried to think if he had any particular questions. There was just so much he felt he didn’t know about the Syndicate, trying to come up with a single question to encapsulate everything he was wondering about felt impossible.

“I mean... I guess I just wanna know what the hell you’re all even trying to do,” Tommy said, bringing his knees up onto the chair.

Phil nodded. “That’s a good place to start. To give you the short answer, our goal is to destroy the institution of the Hero Committee and get rid of the entire system of government-sanctioned heroes.”

“And to take down the government and establish an anarchical society in its place,” Techno chimed in.

“Well, yes, that too, but that part comes later,” Phil said, dipping his head at Techno. “Our primary focus is the Hero Committee.”

Tommy blinked, wondering if he’d heard that right. “Oh, yeah, so nothing too big or anything,” he drawled sarcastically, mind reeling at how *insane* that sounded.

“I know it seems like a lot to take on, but the Captain was the last bastion of any kind of good that existed in the Hero system,” Phil explained, leaning back in his seat. “She was the last hope we had in possibly reforming things. Now we aim to take the system down entirely, because it’s far too corrupt to try and fix.”

“The idea of paying people with the most powerful abilities in the city to play cops but with even less restrictions is just a recipe for disaster,” Techno added, folding his arms over his chest.

“Well... I mean, I guess that makes sense,” Tommy muttered, glancing at the table. “But you want to take down the government too?”

Both Wilbur and Techno answered at the same time.

“Not necessarily.”

“Yes.”

The two brothers gave each other incredulous looks, and Tommy would've laughed if he wasn't still struggling to process everything they were saying.

“Wilbur,” Techno started, staring intensely at his younger brother. “You know we've talked about this.”

“Please don't get us into this fucking argument again,” Quackity groaned, dragging his hands down his face.

Tommy frowned, looking between all the tired faces of the different Syndicate members. He had a feeling this had been a conversation they had gone through several times before.

“Um, can someone tell me what I'm missing here?” He asked.

“We have different ideas on what our next steps will be after the Hero Committee is gone,” Sam cut in to explain, much to Tommy's relief. “Phil, Techno, and Niki are anarchists and want to take down the government entirely. Wilbur, Jack, Hannah, and myself are more on the side of government reform.”

“And I don't really give a shit either way as long as I can keep running my business,” Quackity said, folding his arms behind his head.

“But we're gonna cross that bridge when we get to it,” Phil said, giving Tommy a reassuring smile. “Although I would prefer anarchy, I'm not completely against the idea of government reform myself-”

“I am.”

“But either way, none of this is relevant until we first take down the Hero Committee,” Phil continued, ignoring Techno's interruption.

Huh. Okay. Well, Tommy already knew Techno was an anarchist considering he had rambled to Tommy about anarchist theory multiple times, but he hadn't realized Phil and Niki were anarchists as well.

In truth, Tommy didn't really understand much about anarchism, so it wasn't like he had a super strong opinion on the subject. So he decided not to comment on that, and figured he could learn more about it when it actually became more relevant to the Syndicate's goals, which at the moment it didn't seem like it was.

“Alright, focus on the Hero Committee first, I get that,” Tommy muttered, nodding to himself. He looked up to meet Phil's eyes again as another question appeared in his mind. “How did this all start in the first place though? I feel like I just woke up one day and the Syndicate was all over the news.”

“How did I come to create the Syndicate in the first place?” Phil asked. Tommy nodded, and Phil took a breath. “Well, that’s gonna require a bit of backstory.” Tugging his hair out of his ponytail, Phil ran his hands through his hair, before taking a breath and straightening up.

“When I first started out as a villain, I didn’t have any goals to destroy the Hero Committee or take down the government or any of that shit. The truth is that I was a single dad who had unexpectedly ended up with two kids in a very short period of time, and money became way more of a problem than I thought it would be,” Phil explained, looking between Wilbur and Techno before returning his gaze to Tommy. “I didn’t necessarily want to turn to crime, but I’d already had my issues with the way the heroes ignored the poorer neighborhoods, so it was easy to decide that if I needed to rob a bank to make sure my boys got to eat dinner, then I was gonna go rob a bank.”

Pausing, Phil’s expression darkened. “It didn’t take long for me to learn the truth about the way the Hero Committee dealt with villains, and how they manipulated the media in their favor. It wasn’t as bad as it is now—the only hero who was working at this time that I think you would’ve even heard of is the Captain—but it was still pretty damn corrupt. When I realized this, I got fucking pissed. The entire system that was put in place to protect L’Manberg citizens was a lie, and the only people who knew the truth about it were the villains.”

Tommy leaned forward in his seat when Phil took another pause, enraptured by the story.

“Still, I was a pretty minor villain for my first five or so years. I just did what I had to to take care of my kids. I didn’t want to get involved in anything too intense, because the last thing I wanted was for Wil and Tech to get caught up in this shit.”

“Little did you know, we knew the whole time what you were doing,” Wilbur cut in, smirking a bit. “You weren’t subtle about it, Dad. Like, at all.”

“I tried my best, okay?” Phil huffed, grinning sheepishly.

“Well, you sucked at it, old man,” Techno teased. “But yeah, Wil and I knew the whole time that Phil was a villain. So when we thought we were old enough, we both decided we wanted to help him out.”

“I still remember the first time you two brats showed up during a fight because you followed me,” Phil mumbled, dragging a hand down his face. “Gave me about twenty fucking heart attacks that night.”

“But it was worth it because we proved our point,” Wilbur said. “We proved to you we could help, and you let us join you.”

“Only because I knew you two would just start sneaking out to do shit on your own if I said no. I wanted to at least be able to keep an eye on you,” Phil argued. “But yeah, basically when Wilbur was around eighteen and Techno was nineteen, the two of them decided they wanted to be villains too and wouldn’t take no for an answer. So the three of us formed our little group, and together we could actually accomplish a lot more than what I was able to do on my own.”

“Also I, unlike Phil who had just been an edgy lone wolf up until then, actually started talking to other villains we ran into,” Wilbur cut in, smiling proudly. “And I found out that others actually thought a lot of the same things we did about the Hero Committee.”

“Does it really count when you literally mentored one of our only two allies at that point?” Techno asked, raising an eyebrow at Wilbur. “You’re the one who taught Fundy to hate the Hero Committee just as much as we did.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes. “He was gonna hate them anyway. I just happened to run into him during his first attempt at robbing a place.”

Wait, did Wilbur just say *Fundy*?!

“You mean to tell me the fucking fried chicken food truck guy is a villain?” Tommy asked, shooting Wilbur a confused look.

“He *was* a villain. Went by the name Vulpes because he was a sneaky little shit who could turn invisible. He later retired and now has the food truck you and I love so much,” Wilbur explained, nudging Tommy’s shoulder.

Faintly, Tommy remembered hearing one or two things about a villain called Vulpes, although he couldn’t recall much. Having the power to turn invisible is probably what kept him under the radar, though Tommy would probably try to google stuff on him when he got home.

“But why did he retire?” Tommy asked, figuring he must not have been a villain for very long since his food truck seemed rather well-established.

At this, a hush fell over the table as everyone’s smiles disappeared, as if a candle had been blown out and darkness had descended. There was a tense silence and the group shared knowing looks with one another, with even Quackity looking serious for the first time all night.

“Have you ever heard of the villain H94, Tommy?” Phil asked after a few beats of silence.

Tommy frowned, trying to think if he could remember anything about an H94. There was some faint flicker of memory there, but it was barely anything substantial.

“I’ve heard the name, but not much else,” Tommy answered.

“Well, his real name was Hbomb, and besides me, Wil, and Techno, he was the first official member of the Syndicate,” Phil explained, staring at the table as he spoke. “He was a kind man who had been put in a similar position as myself, where he became a villain to survive. He agreed with us about the unfairness of the Hero Committee, so we agreed to start working together to find a way to take them down.”

Tommy noticed how they were only referring to Hbomb in the past tense, and dread began to pool in his gut.

“What... What happened to him?” Tommy whispered.

“Dream happened,” Techno said, clenching his jaw. “Me, Hbomb, and Phil were in a fight against Dream, Flame, and the Captain. At the time, Dream and Flame were both still newbies on the scene, and we weren’t really sure what either of them were capable of. All we knew was that Dream was being mentored by the Captain, and we hardly knew anything about Flame. But the Captain was someone we were familiar with, and she had always been one of the only good heroes in the system, so we trusted she’d keep her new kid in line.”

From there, Phil picked up the story.

“That wasn’t what happened though. The fight got rough. Techno was fighting the Captain, while Dream seemed like he was still struggling a bit with using his powers, and when Hbomb went for Flame, well... Dream killed him.”

Distantly, Tommy remembered what Niki had told him all those months ago when he was first healing Jack.

”Are you saying that heroes have killed villains before?”

“Yes, they have. And if you hadn’t saved Iceman, he would’ve been another death they covered up.”

And then, what Puffy had told him less than a week ago.

”I tried to stop it, but soon he was dead and when I reported the hero responsible to the Committee they just... didn’t do anything.”

“The Hero Committee covered it up, didn’t they?” Tommy asked in a horrified whisper.

Phil nodded. “After it happened, Puffy stopped the fight and apologized for what happened. She also promised to make sure that Dream received proper punishment, and that if he didn’t, she would stop working for the heroes.”

“So that’s why she retired,” Tommy finished, nodding to himself. “Because nothing happened when Dream killed Hbomb.”

“Exactly. Fundy ended up retiring not long after because it scared him so badly,” Phil finished, looking pained. “And that was when I knew I had to do whatever I could to take that organization down.”

Bile rose in the back of Tommy’s throat. He’d been told that heroes had killed villains before, but to see how much pain the Syndicate was in because of the friend they lost, to hear his name and know that Dream was the one responsible... Tommy was starting to understand why Wilbur said he wouldn’t be able to promise Tommy he wouldn’t kill again.

“Hbomb was my best friend,” Niki then chimed in, her voice softer than usual but echoing in the room all the same. “He was the one who introduced me to Wilbur, Techno, and Phil in the first place. I wasn’t involved in any of the villain vigilante hero stuff, but I knew who Hbomb and his friends were, and I understood why they did what they did.”

She kept her eyes on the table, and a scowl flashed across her face.

“When Techno called me to tell me what had happened though, I realized I couldn’t just sit on the sidelines and wait for this to happen to more people. The system was bullshit, and I wanted to play my part in taking it down just like the rest of them,” Niki continued, her voice still quiet, yet razor sharp at the same time. “So after I met Jack and we got our footing as a duo, I contacted Wilbur again and asked if we could join the Syndicate, which is how we ended up here.”

“From there, our numbers just grew,” Phil picked up. “After Hbomb’s death and the loss of Fundy, it was just back to me, Wil, and Tech. But then Niki and Jack joined, and then about a year later Quackity contacted us about making a business deal. Then, well, I started talking to Sam.”

“Oh yeah,” Tommy frowned. “How did that whole thing happen anyway? With Sam, uh, switching sides?”

At this, Sam cleared his throat, drawing all eyes in the room to him. “Well, uh, the story is kind of simple in all honesty? The gist of it was that Phil just... started talking to me during our fights. He just pointed out a lot of the flaws in the system and how unfair it all was, and I got me to start really thinking about what I was doing.”

“Truth be told, I didn’t think that would work at all,” Phil said, chuckling a bit. “I was just saying shit to distract him. Had no clue Sam was actually listening to me.”

“It worked out in the end because I actually did pay attention,” Sam replied. “I just started noticing all these problems, and how we as heroes rarely ever got punished for our actions. And I’d known the Captain, she and I had been friends before she retired, so I’d heard her complaints plenty of times before then too but I never took them to heart. But I guess what really changed things for me was when Dream made that building collapse, and the Hero Committee barely did anything to punish him.”

Sighing, Sam took a beat to push his dark green hair out of his face.

“I know it was an accident. But he was supposed to be grounded from hero duty, and then the Committee pulled him out the second they had an excuse. That was really the moment where I saw that this organization didn’t actually care about keeping its heroes in check, as long as funding kept rolling in. So when I next found myself and my fellow heroes in a fight against Phil, Wilbur, and Techno, and Phil started asking me again why I was doing this, I just... couldn’t find a good answer. So I left.”

“You left mid-fight?” Tommy asked.

“I did, yeah. I decided I wanted out, so I tried to just flee down a nearby alley. But, um, I had a run-in with Supreme,” Sam said, dropping his eyes to the table as his lips twisted into something pained.

Tommy thought back to all the news reports when Warden had first deserted the heroes. How there were rumors about how Warden had viciously attacked his own healer without warning.

Looking at Sam now, Tommy could see none of the bloodlust that the media claimed Warden had been holding inside of him. He could only see regret, and guilt. So much guilt, Tommy could see from his eyes that it was practically drowning him.

“I-I didn’t mean to hurt him,” Sam admitted, his voice barely more than a whisper as he wrung his hands together. “I ran into him in the alley when I was trying to leave, and when he figured out what I was doing, he tried to get me to stop. We got into an argument, and I just- I swung my trident out, but not with the intent to hurt him. I just wanted to make it like a warning. To get him to back off. But then he- he-” Sam’s breathing hitched as he grimaced, as if just remembering the story was almost too painful for him. “I think he was trying to move towards me. Not to attack—I know he wouldn’t do that. I’m not sure what he was doing, but he came towards me when I wasn’t expecting it, and my trident just-”

He cut himself off, and Phil leaned over to rest a hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay, Sam. I think he gets it.”

Nodding, Sam took a breath to steady himself.

“I was horrified by what had happened, but Dream showed up in the alley right at that moment, and I knew Supreme could heal himself so I decided I just had to get away from him. I ran out and rejoined the fight, but this time I fought with Phil and the others. When they decided it was time to flee, they took me with them, and I’ve been a member of the Syndicate ever since,” Sam finished, his shoulders slumping as he stopped wringing his hands.

Tommy let out a breath he didn’t know he’d been holding. That was... a lot. The media had made Warden’s betrayal sound so much more spiteful than it was. Instead of the hero suddenly getting a taste for blood and wanting to kill his fellow heroes, he’d just wanted to leave, and ended up having to fight his way out.

“Jesus fucking christ, man,” Tommy muttered. “That’s rough.”

“It’s alright. I know that leaving was still the right thing to do, even if I didn’t go about it in the best way,” Sam shrugged, the mechanical arms behind his head shrugging as well. “But yeah, that’s how I ended up joining.”

“And then he recruited me a year later,” Hannah announced proudly, cutting through the tension with a cheerful smile. “My situation was pretty simple. I worked as a vigilante because I thought heroes were bullshit. I ran into Sam a few times when I was on patrol and he started talking to me about my motives and stuff, and then he eventually convinced me to become a villain and join the Syndicate.”

“Convinced you? You practically begged me to join,” Sam said, looking less tense now as he shot a wry grin at Hannah.

“Oh shut up, no I didn’t!” Hannah protested, punching him in the arm. “You were the one begging me.”

“You literally stabbed me at one point. Why would I beg you to join the Syndicate?”

“C’mon, don’t be such a baby. It was one tiny little stab wound and you were fine,” Hannah groaned, rolling her eyes.

“Please don’t stab each other and give me more headaches to deal with,” Tommy grumbled, running his hands through his hair.

There was a chorus of laughter at this, and Tommy felt a familiar arm slide around his shoulders.

“Don’t worry, Toms. There’ll be no unnecessary stabbing anymore,” Wilbur reassured him, tugging his chair closer.

Tommy huffed and elbowed Wilbur in the side to get him to let go, but the clingy bitch refused to move his arm, so Tommy sighed and leaned against his older brother in defeat.

“Alright, so Tommy, do you have any more questions for us?” Phil asked once the table had gone silent again.

“I don’t think so,” Tommy shook his head. “But I’ll let you know if I think of anything.”

The truth was, while Tommy probably would have more questions later on, he had already learned so much in such a short span of time that he needed a break to process everything. He’d already learned how and why the Syndicate was formed, how each of the members joined, and he’d even learned about the death of H94. If he got told any more stories, he was pretty sure his head was going to explode. Besides, he lived with Phil, if he got more questions later he could just ask him there.

Phil nodded. “Sounds good. So I suppose this leaves us with our next order of business for the night. What to do about-”

The blaring of a ringing phone cut Phil off mid sentence. There was an awkward pause as everyone glanced around the table to see whose phone it was, and it took Tommy an embarrassingly long time to realize it was coming from *him*.

Cheeks flushing red, Tommy pulled his buzzing phone out of his pocket, wondering how the hell he even got service down here. When he saw it was Tubbo calling him though, he paused, because he knew that Tubbo was supposed to be out patrolling tonight with Ranboo.

Shit. Wait. Had they gotten hurt? Fuck, he needed to take this in case they were injured.

“Uh, shit, sorry guys, I need to take this,” Tommy coughed awkwardly, ignoring the villain’s eyes on him as he pressed answer on the call. “Hey Tubbo, is everything okay?”

“Fucking hell- we’re fine, Tommy. But some bad shit just went down out here.”

“What’s going on? Are you hurt?”

“No, we’re not hurt at all. We weren’t even in a fight or anything.”

“Then what’s wrong?” Tommy asked, frowning.

There was a pause on the other end.

“We ran into Dream,” Tubbo said quietly. “He didn’t do anything to us, but he told us to pass you a message.”

Tommy froze, his blood turning to ice in his veins.

“Wh-What was the message?” He asked, struggling to keep his voice steady as his heart began to race in his chest.

Tubbo took a shaky breath.

“I don’t- well, I dunno how the fuck he did it, but I guess he finally got evidence of you healing Siren or something,” Tubbo explained, his voice wavering. “And he basically said that if you don’t give him what he wants, he’s going to have you arrested for aiding the Syndicate.”

What he wants.

Tommy knew exactly what he wanted. There was only one reason he had even kidnapped Tommy in the first place.

Dream wanted the identities of the Syndicate.

And if he didn’t get them, he was going to arrest Tommy.

“Oh, fuck me.”

Chapter End Notes

NO ONE EXPECTS THE CANONICAL HBOMB DEATH

anyway if you're a bit confused as to why hbomb seemed to come out of nowhere, I based his connection with the syndicate off of the friendship between dsmp!hbomb and dsmp!niki because I figured it would make sense for motivation as to why niki joined the syndicate in the first place. sorry to hbomb though my guy :(

also guess what, I actually have a side story one shot already written about how hbomb died. if you'll notice, i've made clinic part of series now so if you subscribe to that series you'll be able to find out when I post that side story, and if I decide to write any other in universe one shots I'll be posting them all within that series as well so make sure to hit that subscribe button (only a small percentage of my readers are subscribed so-
gunshot)

oh and here's a funny: the anarchist side of the syndicate vs the other half is literally just [this meme](#)

OK ANYWAY THAT WAS A LOT OF INFO! hope you guys enjoyed getting all that backstory, now we are really getting into the final act :)

I have a discord server! make sure to join it if you want updates on how chapters are progressing and possible sneak peaks <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

also I have a spotify playlist for this fic so check it out [here!](#)

please leave a comment if you enjoyed! i don't respond to most but I promise I read all of them and they really make my day!

also if you're looking for more stuff written by me I just finished posting a crimeboys centric modern au fic called [i'm somewhere, you're somewhere](#) so uhh self promo time haha! please read the tags before reading it though, it's got some serious topics that can be triggering for people so above all keep yourselves safe lovelies!

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

blackmail

Chapter Summary

Dream is blackmailing Tommy.

Chapter Notes

merry christmas eve everyone!! I'm so glad I was able to finish this before christmas so I could post it as a bit of a christmas gift to all you lovely readers! if you don't celebrate christmas though I hope you all have a wonderful day either way <3

also tik tok is once again popping off!! I have seen SO MANY amazing cosplays and I'm just so happy because you guys are all so talented. like [Offbranduraraka](#), [itsalysonisuppose](#), [lampvr](#), [pantaseacos](#), [icarusveneno](#), [mercurydoescosplay](#), all of you guys are so awesome and I love seeing these cosplays!! (so sorry if you have a cosplay I didn't link, there's so many people cosplaying now it's insane and I love all of them)

then of course there's also just some great comedy content too like from [pyromania20](#), [cloudsun](#), and [nxvocxine](#) just to name a few! i love checking the #tommyinnitsclinicforsupervillains tag on tik tok and all of you guys are just so great with the content you make, it really makes my day :D

anyway, I hope you guys enjoy this chapter, it's another big one at nearly 11k words lol

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

Tommy stared blankly ahead for a few moments with the phone still pressed to his ear, trying to process what Tubbo just told him.

He was fucked. Completely and utterly fucked.

“Bossman? You still there or did you go into shock?” Tubbo asked, his voice crackling a bit over the phone speaker.

“I’m here,” Tommy muttered, ignoring the worried glances from Wilbur and the rest of the Syndicate. “Was, um, was that all he said?”

“Actually, he made us take a video of him saying his demands. I just kind of paraphrased it for you,” Tubbo explained, his voice shaking. “Do you want me to send you the video?”

Gulping, Tommy nodded before remembering Tubbo couldn't see that over the phone. "Yeah. Do that."

"Alright. Are you still at the meeting?"

"Yup. We were in the middle of talking about shit when you called."

Tubbo made a noise of sympathy. "You need to tell them about this, okay? They'll help you work it out. Ranboo and I are gonna head back to the Soot house and we'll be waiting there when you get back."

"Okay. I'll see you soon, Tubbo," Tommy told him, biting his lip. "Stay safe out there."

"Will do. And don't worry, Tommy. We're not letting you go to prison," Tubbo reassured him, although he didn't sound too confident as he said that.

The reassurance fell flat though because Tommy knew there was no way Tubbo could promise that. *No one* could really promise that right now. If Dream had evidence of Tommy healing the Syndicate like he claimed, he could turn Tommy in at any time, and there'd be nothing Tommy could do about it. He would just be fucked.

"Bye Tubbo," Tommy said before hanging up the phone.

A few seconds after he hung up, he got a ding notification, and saw Tubbo had texted him two videos: one that looked like grainy security footage, and one with Dream standing in the center of the thumbnail. Tommy flinched when he saw the still image of Dream, and was too focused on the phone to notice Wilbur leaning over his shoulder until it was too late.

"Why the fuck did Tubbo send you a video of Dream?" Wilbur asked, eyes widening. When Tommy was silent, Wilbur grabbed his chin and forced him to look up and meet his gaze.

"Tommy, c'mon, what the hell was that call about?"

Shit. Tommy had to explain what was going on, and everyone in the Syndicate was going to freak out. Great. Just what he needed.

"Apparently, uh, Dream ran into Tubbo and Ranboo while they were on patrol and told them to pass along a message to me," Tommy started, his eyes dropping to the table. "Tubbo has a video of it."

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. "Then let's play it."

"Slide it to the center of the table so we can all hear it," Phil ordered, a shudder ruffling his feathers behind him.

Nodding, Tommy turned his volume all the way up, and pushed the phone to the center of the table as ordered. Then, he leaned over and pressed the play button.

"Tommy," Dream's voice rang out over the tinny speakers, and just hearing Dream say his name again was enough to make Tommy's heart leap into his throat. "If you're watching this,

then you know I ran into your friends Ender and Nuke, and they were kind enough to let me pass on a message to you.”

Behind the camera, Tommy heard Tubbo mutter a, “fuck you.” He would’ve smiled at that if the situation were anything less dire.

“Anyway, I’m just gonna get straight to the point. With 404’s help, I managed to find CCTV footage of you healing Siren for presumably the first time. If you don’t believe me, I’m sending a copy to Nuke so he can send it to you. But the gist is that I can use this footage to send out a warrant for your arrest. Now, I haven’t sent it to the Hero Committee yet, because frankly, I don’t want to arrest you. You’re just a kid who got caught up in shit he shouldn’t have, and I don’t think you deserve to be punished for that.”

“That’s fucking rich, coming from him,” Wilbur muttered, his jaw clenched.

“I’ll give you a few days to decide, but if you don’t want to get arrested, then you need to give me what I want.” Dream paused then, folding his arms over his chest. “And don’t even think about trying to skip town, Tommy. If I find out that you left the city, then the next time I see either a Syndicate member, including your precious little ‘vigilante’ friends over here since it’s obvious you’re all working together now, I’ll kill them. I don’t want to, but if it’s what needs to be done then I’ll do it.”

“We’re not part of the-”

“Don’t bullshit me, Ender,” Dream said, cutting off Ender who wasn’t in view of the camera. “You worked with the Syndicate to help Tommy escape from me. In my eyes, and in the eyes of the Committee, that makes you villains now, and I’ve already had you both reclassified as such.”

“What?! That’s not fucking true though!” Tubbo protested.

“Shouldn’t work with villains then,” Dream shrugged. “Anyway, that’s all I have to say to Tommy. You can end the video now, Nuke.”

And with that, the video ended, and Tommy felt like he was going to throw up.

There was a moment of silence as everyone at the table stared at the phone, all with similar expressions of horror painting their faces.

After a few agonizing beats, Techno spoke up. “Well... That’s a problem.”

“Yeah, no shit, Techno!” Wilbur hissed.

“Wil, don’t snap at your brother,” Phil cut in, giving his son a stern look. “Now I know this situation isn’t ideal, but we can’t start panicking at the first sign of trouble. We knew Dream was going to retaliate at some point for Tommy’s escape, and now we know what his strategy is.”

“Tommy, did Tubbo send you the footage Dream mentioned?” Sam then said, sounding much calmer than anyone else. Tommy nodded. “Can I see the footage? Dream might be

bullshitting when he says it's enough to get you arrested. I know what kind of footage the Hero Committee would consider strong enough to send out an arrest warrant, so I want to make sure he's not bluffing."

"Um, yeah, sure." Standing up out of his chair, Tommy reached over to grab his phone from the middle of the table. He pulled up the second video Tubbo had sent, and walked around to Sam's chair, holding the phone in front of him so he could watch. Wilbur, of course, followed Tommy and stood over his shoulder to watch as well, while everyone else stayed in their seats. Then, Tommy pressed play.

The footage was staticky as hell. A camera was sitting on what seemed like a streetlamp, pointing right outside a dark alley. After a few seconds of nothing happening, Tommy stiffened when he saw a flash of movement from inside the alley, just barely able to make out Wilbur in his full Siren getup falling off the edge of the roof and onto the lid of the dumpster in the alley, before going limp and rolling off onto the ground.

At the same time, Tommy himself came into view of the camera, pausing right outside the alley as Wilbur fell off the dumpster. From this view, he could only see the back of his own head, but Tommy recognized his backpack all the same.

Then, the footage showed Tommy walking into the alley and staring at the unconscious figure of Siren for a few moments. They were just barely within view of the camera, and if the two of them had been two feet further back, they would've been invisible.

But unfortunately, that wasn't the case. Tommy's mouth went dry as he watched himself drop his backpack and roll up his sleeve. He tugged Wilbur's shirt up, examining the wound, before his hands very clearly began to glow.

Tommy knew how the rest of the scene went from there. The camera showed the two of them talking in the alley, although there wasn't any sound. Then, Siren got to his feet and stumbled out of the alley, the camera catching a full view of his blindfold mask as he turned down to the cafe. A few seconds later, Tommy emerged from the alley as well, the camera also catching a full view of his face, before he turned down the opposite way of Siren. Then, the footage ended.

There was a moment of silence as Sam stared at the phone, his lips pressed into a thin line.

"...that's pretty damning," he finally admitted. "I hate to say it, but the Committee could definitely arrest you with that."

"Great," Tommy muttered, shoving his phone back in his pocket. "So I'm fucked then. Fucking fantastic."

"Tommy, you're not fucked," Wilbur immediately said, sliding an arm around his shoulders and guiding him back to their chairs. "We're not letting you get arrested. That's a given."

"Exactly. No way in hell are we letting that green bastard put you in jail," Quackity added on.

The rest of the Syndicate all murmured in agreement, but it didn't make Tommy feel any better.

“But what are you gonna do to stop him? It's not like you can fucking give into his demands!” Tommy exclaimed, staring wide-eyed at the different villains.

Phil folded his hands in front of him, and seemed to be struggling to remain composed. “What are his demands, Tommy? He only said you knew what he wanted, so what does he want?”

Tommy laughed, and it was a harsh, bitter thing that tore through his throat in a painful way.

“There's only one thing he wants,” Tommy said, shaking his head. “He wants the identities of the Syndicate.”

And just like that, a hush fell over the group.

Tommy wasn't surprised by the tense expressions that lined the table. Niki and Jack were exchanging nervous glances, Hannah was staring down at her hands, Quackity had straightened up in his seat, Sam just looked sad, while Techno, Phil, and Wilbur all looked as though they had swallowed something sour.

“And... You're sure that's what he wants?” Phil asked slowly, as if asking for confirmation might make it not true.

“It's the only damn thing he wanted to know when he kidnapped me,” Tommy confirmed, nodding his head. “He kept asking me over and over again to tell him your identities, and I kept trying to tell him I didn't know, but he didn't believe me.”

Phil took a deep breath, furrowing his brows as he wrung his hands together. “Well then that's certainly a problem.”

“It doesn't matter,” Wilbur then cut in, pulling Tommy tighter against him. “We're not letting Tommy get arrested, and that's final.”

“I mean, I agree with that, don't get me wrong,” Quackity said, pulling his shoes off the table. “But then that means we might have to make a sacrifice.”

Tommy's eyes widened, and the others at the table all made indignant noises.

“Wait, are you saying we should give in to him?” Niki hissed, glaring at Quackity. “We can't give up anyone, are you insane?!”

“Then how do you suggest we solve this, Niki?” Quackity challenged, meeting her gaze head on. “We can't try to smuggle Tommy out of town, or else Dream will kill one of the kid vigilantes. If we get all three of them out, he'll kill one of us next time he sees us. And it's not like we can just keep him locked in a basement for the rest of his life, so what the hell is it gonna be?”

Niki curled her hand on the table into a fist, but didn't have a response for Quackity. Instead, she slumped back into her seat, shooting daggers at Quackity with her eyes.

"Phil, c'mon, you know I'm right," Quackity continued, looking over at Phil. "I don't want to do it either, but I think we need to at least talk about the possibility of sacrificing someone, because if we can't find an alternate solution, we can probably get Dream off our asses if we give him one skull."

"One skull? You mean one sacrifice instead of all of us?" Techno asked, watching Quackity with something dangerous in his eyes.

"Exactly. Dream isn't an idiot. He knows he's not gonna get all of us to reveal ourselves for Tommy's sake. But I'm sure he'd drop the warrant shit if we give him one person that he feels is worth the trade off," Quackity explained, leaning back in his seat.

Another silence descended over the table. Now, the looks the Syndicate was sharing were filled with suspicion. The question now hung over their heads like a cloud. *Who could the sacrifice be?*

Finally, after a few beats, Phil spoke up. "While I don't want us to jump to sacrifice yet," he began, and Tommy straightened up hopefully in his seat. "I do think it's worth a discussion."

Just as quickly, Tommy slumped back down. He didn't want to sit and listen to the Syndicate debate about who they were going to sacrifice on his behalf. It was a nightmare scenario, and the thought of them even entertaining the idea was ridiculous.

"No one is sacrificing themselves for me," Tommy cut in, glaring at Phil. "I'm not a little kid you need to protect. I can handle going to jail."

"Tommy, there's no need to get all noble right now," Phil told him gently. "We're just discussing possibilities. And either way, we're not letting you go to prison."

Tommy clenched his jaw, wanting to argue, but knew it would be pointless. If Phil wanted them to discuss options, they were going to discuss options whether he liked it or not.

"This is fucking stupid," Tommy muttered, folding his arms over his chest.

There was another beat of silence around the table. As expected though, Quackity spoke up first.

"So if this is an open discussion, then can I start out with a suggestion?"

Techno huffed. "If it's anyone besides yourself, we're gonna have problems."

Quackity rolled his eyes. "While I have no issue with volunteering myself, let's be real, no one even knows I'm associated with the Syndicate. Dream wouldn't give two shits about me compared to the rest of you guys."

"Typical," Techno muttered, shaking his head.

“Look, I’m just being honest, man,” Quackity said, holding his hands up in surrender. “If you want someone that Dream would probably take back though they’re not one of the Big Three, Sam would probably be the best bet.”

Hannah let out a sharp gasp at this. “Fuck off, Quackity! Sam isn’t going back to the heroes! The Committee literally has it out for him!”

“I mean, he has a point,” Sam muttered, dropping his eyes to the table.

“No, don’t be ridiculous. You’re not going back there,” Hannah insisted, putting a hand on Sam’s arm. “Besides, if we want someone the heroes have a grudge against but can’t reasonably be outright cruel too, then I think, well, just speaking from a totally objective place... Niki would be a good option.”

“Oi! Back the fuck off, Hannah!” Jack shouted, frowning at her. “Why the hell would even say that?!”

“Because Dream’s had it out for her ever since she choked Sarnap that one time!” Hannah exclaimed, gesturing towards Niki. “Look, Niki, you know I have nothing against you. I’m just speaking from a logical standpoint here, but Dream would probably jump at the chance to get your identity.”

Niki scowled. “Yeah, I fucking get that. But it’s awfully bold of you to suggest me when you could be an option too.”

Hannah barked out a laugh at this. “Me? Dream barely even knows I exist. I doubt he’d give two shits about finding out who I am.”

“Then what about both you and Quackity, since you’re both so eager to point fingers?” Jack suggested, raising an eyebrow at Hannah. “Jester with a few Rosethorn sprinkles on top?”

“Hey!” Quackity protested.

“What the fuck does ‘Rosethorn sprinkles’ even mean?” Hannah asked, glaring at Jack.

“It means that neither of you would be enough to get Dream to back off on your own, but if we put you two together, Dream might accept that for a sacrifice,” Jack explained.

“Quackity’s like a sundae, and we throw some Rosethorn sprinkles on top to sweeten the deal.”

“I told you already, Dream doesn’t even know I work with the Syndicate,” Quackity pushed, leaning forward in his seat. “He won’t care.”

“Again, that’s why we have the Quackity sundae with Rosethorn-”

“If you say Rosethorn sprinkles again I’m going to reach across that table and punch you, Jack,” Hannah snapped, glaring at him.

“Hannah, I wouldn’t do that if I were you,” Niki shot back, lifting one of her hands off the table.

Oh fuck. Were they about to fight?

Tommy stiffened in his seat as he wondered if he was going to need to heal Niki and Hannah in a minute, but was stopped when someone else spoke up.

"All of you shut up," Wilbur ordered, his voice echoing around the room.

Instantly, everyone else in the room fell silent, although Niki and Hannah continued to glare at one another from across the table.

The silence held for a few beats. Tommy tried to open his mouth to speak, but quickly realized Wilbur had directed the order to everyone in the room, which included him.

"Good," Wilbur nodded after a few seconds. "Now, I think there is one obvious choice here that none of you have suggested yet. But first, *you can all speak again.*"

"Did you really need to shut all of us up for that?" Phil asked, raising an eyebrow at Wilbur.

"Considering you all were being fucking idiots, yeah, I think I did," Wilbur nodded, not looking ashamed of what he'd done at all. "Anyway, like I said, there's an obvious choice here—the only person that even makes sense to sacrifice."

Quackity gave Wilbur a suspicious look. "Who?"

A feeling of dread curled into Tommy's gut before Wilbur even said the words. As if he already knew what his brother was going to say.

Meeting Quackity's gaze evenly, one word left Wilbur's mouth.

"Me."

Tommy's head whipped back towards Wilbur.

"What the- no! It's not going to be you!" Tommy nearly shouted, grabbing Wilbur's shoulder and forcing him to meet his eyes. "Don't be fucking stupid, Wil! You're not going to give up your goddamn identity for me!"

Wilbur gave Tommy a sad look. "Toms, c'mon, I'm the only person that makes sense."

"No! No you fucking don't!" Tommy argued, his heart rate picking up speed.

"I do," Wilbur repeated. "Dream needs a skull big enough to satisfy him with just one of the Syndicate member's identities, so one of the leaders should be more than enough. But more importantly, I'm the entire reason you're in this mess in the first place. The security footage Dream has on you is literally of you healing me. If you hadn't done that, none of this would be happening right now."

"Oh don't go blaming yourself again, you dumb shithead," Tommy snapped, glaring at Wilbur. "I *chose* to save your life that night. I knew that if I got caught, there'd be consequences. You didn't ask me to heal you, so stop acting like it's your fucking fault."

“But even ignoring that, I’m still the reason you’re here now,” Wilbur pushed, not reacting to Tommy’s anger. “I sought you out after you healed me. I decided to befriend you in the cafe. I gave your address to Techno. It’s all been me. I’m the only person that makes sense!”

“Wilbur,” Techno cut in, glaring at his younger brother with a ferocity that made even Tommy want to shrink back, despite it not being directed at him. “You’re not sacrificing yourself, end of story.”

“Techno, kindly shut the fuck up,” Wilbur shot back, although he didn’t use his siren voice to force anyone into silence this time. “Trust me, I’ve thought this through, and Dream won’t back off unless he gets me, Techno, or Phil. And out of the three of us, I’m the one who has fucked Tommy over the most, so I need to be the one to make it up.”

“You haven’t fucked me over-”

“Yes, I have! We literally talked about this last week!”

“Yeah, but I didn’t mean you should go fucking sacrifice yourself for me!”

“Look, someone has to do it so it might as well-”

“Wilbur! Tommy!” Phil yelled, his booming voice silencing both the boys immediately. “For the love of fucking god, stop shouting at each other for two seconds so we can talk about this as a group!”

Tommy scowled at Phil. “You’re not seriously going to entertain the idea of Wilbur sacrificing himself like a goddamn idiot, are you?”

Phil was silent for a beat, sighing as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Trust me, I don’t like the idea any better than you do, Tommy. But we’re discussing options right now, not making any decisions. Ideally though, we won’t have to sacrifice anyone,” he explained, his talons clicking against the table as he set his hand back down.

“Wait, can I bring up a point to counter Wilbur volunteering?” Niki spoke up, her voice having gone soft again after snapping at Hannah.

“Niki-”

“No, Wilbur, I have a point and you’re going to let me say it,” Niki said, staring the man down. “Ignoring all personal feelings, you still can’t be the one we sacrifice.”

“Why not?” Wilbur challenged, raising an eyebrow.

Niki gave him a look that just screamed *you’re an idiot*. “If you give yourself up, all Dream has to do is look at your file and see the files for Phil and Techno, and he’ll figure out who Zephyrus and Blade are too. That’s how Tubbo and Ranboo figured you guys out, right?”

For the first time since bringing this point up, Wilbur actually seemed taken aback.

“She’s got a point,” Techno grunted. “That’s exactly how the kids figured us out.”

Wilbur frowned. “But- No, c’mon! They only figured you guys out because Techno has fucking pink hair. If Techno just dyed his hair or started wearing a wig or something as the Blade, then it’d be fine.”

“I don’t know, Wilbur. Phil and Techno still have the same heights and builds as the Blade and Zephyrus, so it’d at least make Dream suspicious,” Sam added, leaning back in his seat.

“Well, he’s not going to accept anyone else besides one of us three. You’re lying to yourselves if you don’t think that’s the case,” Wilbur argued, glaring at the rest of the table.

Tommy was getting a headache now. He groaned and dropped his head into his hands, and quickly felt warm fingers run through his hair. Tommy almost leaned into the comforting touch, but stopped himself at the last second, instead slapping Wilbur’s hand away as he glared at his brother through his fingers.

Hurt flashed in Wilbur’s eyes as he pulled his hand back. Tommy would’ve felt guilty if Wilbur wasn’t being such an idiot. He didn’t even want to think about Wilbur being the one to sacrifice himself. After all the bullshit he’d gone through to get this family, he refused to lose it so quickly.

“Look, I think we’ve discussed the possibilities of who to sacrifice enough for tonight,” Phil then said, sounding much calmer than he had before. “I’d rather try and focus on alternative options.”

“I mean, I feel like we only have one other option if we’re not going to give him anyone’s identity,” Techno shrugged, drawing all eyes back to him. “We need to kill Dream.”

He said it so simply. As if it would be the easiest thing in the world.

A wave of nausea washed over Tommy. More killing. Great.

“Y’know, as great as that sounds to me, I don’t actually think that’s the best idea,” Quackity chimed in. “Trust me, I don’t have any moral qualms with killing the green bastard. But didn’t he say in the video that 404 helped him out with finding that footage?”

“If we kill Dream, 404 will just send out the warrant for Tommy instead,” Niki murmured, gnawing on her lip.

“Then we just kill both Dream and 404,” Techno pushed, fingers drumming along the boar skull in front of him.

“Wouldn’t we have to kill Flame too?” Jack asked, eyebrows pinched. “He was at the warehouse when we rescued Tommy, so he also probably knows about the footage.”

Tommy stiffened at the mention of Flame’s name. He thought back to those days in the warehouse, how guilty Flame looked when he realized he couldn’t help Tommy. How he refused to leave his side to make sure Dream didn’t do anything to hurt him. How much Tommy saw of himself in the hero.

“You can’t kill Flame,” Tommy said without thinking. “Hell, you shouldn’t even kill any of them! But especially not Flame! He actually tried convincing Dream to let me go when he found out Dream had kidnapped me.”

“Wait, Flame wanted to let you go?” Wilbur asked, leaning towards Tommy.

“He did! But Dream wouldn’t listen to him, so Flame stayed in the warehouse to keep an eye on me and make sure Dream and 404 didn’t do anything to hurt me,” Tommy explained, shrinking back in his seat as all the attention turned back to him. “He’s not a bad guy. Trust me.”

“But he could’ve turned Dream and 404 in, couldn’t he?” Wilbur challenged.

Tommy met Wilbur’s eyes and forced himself to keep a poker face. “And I could’ve turned you in for killing all those cops, but I fucking didn’t. It’s the same goddamn thing.”

Wilbur flinched back as if he’d been hit. Hurt once again flashed in his dark gaze, but Tommy couldn’t think of another way to explain it to Wilbur.

“I’m not the same as Dream,” Wilbur hissed, baring his teeth.

“Really? Because if you tally up both of your kill counts, let’s be real, you definitely have the higher numbers,” Tommy snarled, the frustration simmering under his skin boiling to the surface. “So get off of your high fucking horse, Wilbur.”

Wilbur opened his mouth, ready to snap back, and Tommy waited for it. He waited for the sharp insult, for Wilbur to either tell him to fuck off or go into even more reasons why he wasn’t like Dream.

But instead, he paused. He shot a dark look at Tommy and shut his mouth, looking away from him and shifting fully back into his own seat so he was no longer leaning into Tommy’s space.

Tommy was tired of this. He hated hearing the Syndicate get into arguments about who they were going to sacrifice on his behalf, and he also hated hearing them talk about killing Dream, 404, and Flame like it was no big deal. Like they were just obstacles to be dealt with and not people.

Huffing, Tommy slumped back in his seat, and shot Wilbur one last dirty look before meeting the eyes of the rest of the table.

Everyone was glancing between him and Wilbur in that awkward way friends always did when two people got into an argument, and everyone else just felt very uncomfortable watching from the sidelines. Tommy knew he probably should’ve held his tongue better, but he was pissed off about a lot of things right now, and frankly just didn’t care.

“Sooooo,” Techno finally broke the silence with a long drawl. “We just kill Dream and 404 then?”

“If we kill them, Flame might end up releasing the footage anyway as revenge against us,” Phil pointed out, tucking a strand of hair behind his ear. “I think it would be better if there were some way we could get Dream to back off without killing him.”

“What? Like, we scare him?” Techno asked, frowning at Phil.

“Maybe? I don’t think there’s much we can scare Dream with. But I think if we can talk to him face to face we might be able to reach an alternate compromise,” Phil explained.

“I doubt he’s gonna compromise on this. He knows he’s got us by the throat,” Quackity huffed, rolling his eyes.

“Very true, but I think it’s still worth it to try,” Phil noted.

“The only problem with that though is that I have no idea how we can talk to Dream one on one,” Techno pointed out, fiddling with the ends of his braid. “If we tell him we want to meet, he’s just going to think it’s a trap. And if we go out looking for him, he’s probably gonna avoid us like the plague.”

Phil sighed, brushing his hair back from his face with one clawed hand. “That’s very true. While a meeting would be the best chance we have at working this out, I don’t see how we can get Dream to agree to show up.”

“So are we just back at square one then?” Jack asked, glancing between Techno and Phil. “We’re not sacrificing someone, but we also have no way to get a meeting with Dream, so we’re fucked all around?”

“Or you guys could stop being idiots and just let me go to pri-”

“No!” All the Syndicate members (save for Wilbur who still seemed like he was pissed at Tommy) snapped at once, cutting Tommy off.

Groaning, Tommy flipped the group off, and they ignored him as they went back to their discussion.

“I think we’ve all had a very long night,” Phil began, dragging a hand down his face as he spoke. “And since Dream said we have a couple days to make a decision, it might be beneficial for us to take some time to think our options over.”

Almost instantaneously, a wave of relief seemed to wash over the entire group.

“I agree,” Sam nodded, fiddling with his mask in front of him. “Let’s all go home and try to think of alternate ways we can figure this out. Then we can reconvene in a few days.”

“Thank you, Sam,” Phil smiled as he put his veil back over his head. “With that, I declare this meeting over. Tommy, Wil, Techno, let’s head out.”

And with that, the three boys all got out of their chairs and followed Phil out of the meeting room, while the others all began to put their masks back on. Before the door shut behind them, Tommy glanced back and saw Niki and Hannah talking softly to one another, seeming

much calmer than they had been earlier. That was a relief. Things had gotten a bit nasty during the sacrifice discussion, and Tommy would hate for there to be lingering tension in the Syndicate because of him.

It didn't take long for them to get home. As expected, Tubbo and Ranboo were already waiting for Tommy, both looking eager for answers to what the plan was. Instead of explaining that they didn't come to a conclusion, he just shook his head and headed straight for the stairs, figuring Phil or Techno could explain to the duo.

Wilbur was ahead of him on the staircase, also going straight for his room. A part of Tommy figured he should apologize for what he said during the meeting, but he also didn't want to because he wasn't wrong. Dream and Wilbur really weren't all that different when it came down to it, and that along with Wilbur's apparent ideas of 'noble self-sacrifice' were pissing him off.

So Tommy hurried back to his room, and he heard him and Wilbur slam their doors shut at the same time.

Later that night, Tubbo and Ranboo came and crawled into the bed with him, and the three of them silently decided not to talk about the dark cloud hanging over their heads. Instead, they just turned on Tommy's TV, and Tommy played Animal Crossing while his two best friends watched until they all fell asleep.

The next day, things were tense in the Soot household.

The six of them—Phil, Techno, Tommy, Wilbur, Tubbo, and Ranboo—all huddled around the dining table, drinking coffee with bleary eyes and giving half-hearted attempts at conversation. Ranboo tried asking Techno about potatoes, which led into a small segment where the two of them talked about gardening, but the topic died out quickly. Phil asked Tommy if he was going to work again today, and Tommy said he wanted to, and Techno quickly volunteered to watch over him during his shift this time.

The day passed quickly. Wilbur holed himself up in his room, Phil said he needed some alone time in his office to think over their options, and it wasn't long before Techno joined him. Meanwhile, Tubbo and Ranboo took it upon themselves to try and distract Tommy from his possible upcoming prison sentence.

It was like the days they'd spend on the sagging couch in their tiny apartment, watching nature documentaries and bickering about the most random things. They were all piled onto the couch in the living room, watching whatever Tommy wanted on the big TV that hung on the wall. At one point, Tubbo actually had to go to Tommy's room because he got called in to do a last minute work assignment, because despite everything he and Ranboo still had jobs. So that just left Tommy and Ranboo on the couch, and Tommy liked watching nature documentaries with Ranboo a lot better than Tubbo because he actually was interested in a lot of the strange animals they learned about, and would frequently ask questions that Tommy would jump to answer.

Surprisingly, it was a good day, given the circumstances. When the sun began to dip towards the hills, Tommy changed out of his pajamas, said his goodbyes to Tubbo and Ranboo, before

he and Techno headed out.

The ride to the cafe was quiet, but not in an awkward way. Techno had soft classical music playing over the speakers, and Tommy had his head leaning against the window, watching the green and orange trees that lined the sides of the road turn into little more than blurs as the car drove by.

It was a pleasant contrast to the chaos of the night before. Although Tommy could still see the tension lining Techno's shoulders, he didn't seem visibly upset about the situation, and that alone was easing Tommy's nerves just a bit.

They got to the cafe, and Foolish almost started tearing up again when he spotted Tommy walking in. He wasted no time in running out of the cafe as quickly as he could, with Tommy filling his spot without any trouble or fanfare.

Unlike Wilbur, Techno didn't order anything, instead immediately settling himself at Wilbur's usual table. As Tommy ran the bottle of honey under some hot water to make it easier to squeeze, he watched as Techno reached into a black bag he'd brought with him, pulling out a thick book with yellowed pages before flipping it open to read.

For the first few minutes of the shift, there was no line. All the customers inside had already been given their drinks by Foolish, so Tommy didn't have much to do. He kept glancing at Techno, wondering if he should make him something to drink despite him not ordering anything. After all, Tommy knew what he liked, and if he didn't want it he could just throw it out.

Before Tommy could blink twice, he found himself pulling out the tea bags and preparing a cup of earl grey. As he let the tea steep in the hot water, he steamed a bit of milk, and carefully poured the frothy mixture on top of the tea. Then, he grabbed some vanilla extract from the cabinet and poured a few drops in there as well, stirring it quickly before slapping a lid on the cup and sliding it onto the pickup bar.

"Techno! Come get your drink!" Tommy called out, waving him down.

Techno glanced up from his book and frowned. He replaced the bookmark in his book and pushed to his feet, folding his arms over his chest as he eyed the drink sitting at the pickup spot.

"I didn't order anything," he said, picking up the cup and eyeing the blank side of it (it wasn't like Tommy had needed to write that one down after all, considering he was just making it for Techno for fun).

"I know. But figured you might as well get something to drink since you're gonna be here for my whole shift," Tommy explained, shrugging as he rinsed out the cup for the steamed milk. "If you don't want it you can throw it out."

After staring at Tommy for a beat, Techno took a hesitant sip, before letting out a pleased hum.

“London fog,” he muttered, nodding to himself. “Thanks, Tommy.”

Then, before Tommy could argue, Techno was digging into his pocket and pulling out a handful of cash.

“Tech, I didn’t-”

“Take it and put it in the register. I wouldn’t wanna mess with Puffy’s profit,” Techno huffed.

Tommy frowned as he counted the dollars. “This is way more than that drink costs.”

Techno, who was already walking back towards his table, just shrugged. “Put it in the tip jar then.”

Fighting the urge to roll his eyes, Tommy dropped the extra change in the tip jar. Fucking rich people. Just had cash on them at all times and weren’t even sure how much they were carrying. Typical.

Luckily (or unluckily, depending on how you’d define it), the usual flow of customers resumed after that. The rest of the evening passed by how it always did. Tommy burnt his hand on the espresso machine for the billionth time and had to hide his skin glowing as it healed itself, he tried to make a cappuccino for a Karen and she tried to lecture him for ten minutes on how to make it ‘properly’, he muttered some things under his breath that would get him fired if Puffy heard it—just business as usual all around.

Time passed quickly. Although the worry about his current situation lingered in the back of his mind, it wasn’t that difficult for Tommy to lose himself in the comforting routine. As it got later into the evening, more customers began to filter out, and soon enough Techno was the only one left in the shop and it was closing time once again.

Tommy went through his usual clean-up routine of wiping down the equipment, taking out the trash, and putting all the ingredients back in their correct places. Techno noticed that he was cleaning up and moved to stand by the door, watching the outside like a sentinel, even without a sword on his hip.

Things were quiet at first, and for once Tommy was content to leave it that way. With his shift already being over, there was no longer anything to distract Tommy from his anxiety, and he was once again being eaten up by worry over this whole mess. He *really* didn’t want to go to prison, but he didn’t want anyone else to go to prison for him either. The very idea of Wilbur pulling some stupid self-sacrificial move made him sick to his stomach, which was only worsened by the bitterness that had been hanging between them since Tommy snapped at Wilbur during the Syndicate meeting the night before.

So yeah. Tommy was fine with letting things be quiet, because he had a lot going through his mind. But to Tommy’s surprise, right as he took out the mop to wipe down the floors, Techno actually spoke up for the first time since he’d gotten his tea.

“So what are your thoughts on this whole, uh, prison thing?” Techno asked with all the grace of a bull in a china shop.

Huffing, Tommy kept his eyes on the ground as he started pushing the mop across the floor. "I'm still pissed at the idea of any of you guys sacrificing yourself for me."

Techno hummed. "Yeah, I definitely wasn't thrilled when we were all talkin' about that yesterday. But it's not like we can just let you get arrested for helping us."

"It's a shitty situation all around, but let's be real. I'd go to prison for, what, three years? I'm not technically a villain, I just help you guys out and shit. If any of you guys revealed your identities and got arrested you'd probably never see the light of day again," Tommy said, pushing the mop with a bit more force than strictly necessary.

"I think you have a bit too much faith in the system to think you'd only get three years," Techno snorted.

Stiffening, Tommy glanced up at Techno and saw he was now flipping through the pages of his book, but didn't seem to actually be reading any of it.

"How long do you think I'd get then?" Tommy asked, struggling to keep his voice even.

Techno shrugged. "I dunno, man. Technically, the usual sentence for assisting criminal activities would be somewhere around three to five years, but the Hero Committee would definitely try to pin more on you. They'd wanna make an example out of you, so that other people don't get the same idea and start trying to heal villains. Which is why our top priority right now is making sure you don't end up behind bars."

Gulping, Tommy stared at Techno for a beat, before he put his head back down and resumed his mopping. His heart was pounding in his chest at this new information, but he tried to force himself to calm down by focusing on the cleaning. "So am I really just fucked then?" He asked, unable to keep a sliver of fear from leaking into his tone.

There was no hesitation from Techno when he responded.

"No. We're not letting you get screwed over like that," Techno reassured him, sounding so calm that Tommy couldn't help but relax the tiniest bit. "Even if we gotta smuggle you, Tubbo, and Ranboo out of here in suitcases, we'll do that before we let the Committee get its hands on you."

Tommy snorted at the mental image, and the tightness in his chest unwound just a bit. "I think Tubbo is the only one of us who could fit into a suitcase."

"I dunno about that, Ranboo seems pretty bendy," Techno commented, leaning back against the wall.

"That's- Well, honestly, you have a fair point there," Tommy replied, chuckling a bit as he remembered all the terrifying ways Ranboo had won Twister games in the past. "But, um, is our only alternative plan still to try and meet with Dream to talk it out?"

"At the moment, yeah. But Phil is contacting some outside resources, and we're hoping one of those might be able to help us fix the situation," Techno explained.

“That’s good,” Tommy muttered, pushing the mop further across the room. “That’s, um, really good. Good idea.”

“We’re hoping so,” Techno shrugged again. “Though it seems like it might be hard to get Wilbur off this whole ‘self-sacrifice’ idea he seems to be fixated on.”

Gritting his teeth again at the reminder, Tommy nodded. “You can say that again. He’s being such a fucking idiot. Avoided me all day today like the dramatic bitch he is.”

“He has a tendency to do that when he’s mad about something,” Techno said, shoving his book in his backpack. “I think he’s more upset about you comparing him to Dream than anything else though.”

Looking up from the floor again, Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Are you going to scold me for that?”

Techno shook his head. “Nah, I think you made a fair point. Wil’s got this whole schtick where he can call himself the bad guy and claim he’s fine with that, but only if he’s being called a bad guy in a way that lines up with whatever story he’s telling himself in his head. Like, if you call him out on something he thinks he was in the right for doing, or in this case compare him to someone he hates, he’s gonna get real defensive or upset about that.”

Tommy raised an eyebrow. “You don’t mind being called a bad guy though?”

“I don’t really see the point in labeling myself a ‘good guy’ or a ‘bad guy’. I have my goals and I do what I need to do to get them done, that’s all I care about,” Techno explained, tucking a strand of pink hair behind his ear. “But all that aside, I know my little brother, and he’s got a lot of guilt over you getting dragged into our world, which is why he’s pushing the self-sacrifice thing so hard.”

“That’s stupid though. He explained to me why he gave you my number that one night, and it just- it wasn’t something malicious,” Tommy argued, frowning at Techno.

“I thought you would’ve figured out by now that Wilbur blames himself for just about everything, even when it doesn’t make sense,” Techno snorted, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, I think I’m starting to realize that,” Tommy muttered, wheeling the mop bucket back to the closet.

Techno was quiet as Tommy put away the rest of the cleaning items, finally having finished what he needed to do for closing. After Tommy hung up his apron and slung his backpack over his shoulder, Techno took a look around outside the cafe doors before he gave Tommy the all clear.

They didn’t speak again until they were back in the car, driving safely away from the cafe.

“I still think you should talk to Wilbur sometime tonight,” Techno said, picking up the conversation from where they’d left off like there’d been no pause. “Mostly because I’m

gonna bang my head into a wall if tomorrow we have another painfully awkward breakfast like this morning.”

“I guess you’re right,” Tommy grumbled, sliding down in the leather seat. “I don’t like fighting with him anyway, so might as well just stop letting him be a little bitch and make him talk this out.”

“If it doesn’t work, let me know and we can hide in my room to eat breakfast,” Techno joked, shooting Tommy a sly smile.

Tommy grinned. “Sounds like a plan.”

They made it home without issue. Once they were inside, Techno headed to Phil’s office, while Tommy went straight for his room. He was startled when he saw Tubbo and Ranbo had both seemingly fallen asleep in his bed while he was at work, and put his stuff down as quietly as possible before leaving the room again.

Tommy was way too wired still to even think about sleep. There was still the lingering anxiety about the prison sentence hanging over his head, and then there was the entire conversation with Techno about Wilbur.

Standing outside his room, Tommy glanced across to Wilbur’s room, noticing the light on under the door. While he could go downstairs and watch movies on the couch until he got tired, he’d promised Techno he’d try to talk to Wilbur, and right now seemed like the perfect opportunity.

Groaning to himself, Tommy trudged across the hall and didn’t let himself think before he knocked on the door three times.

“Who is it?” Wilbur called out from behind the door almost immediately.

“It’s me,” Tommy called back, grimacing at how awkward he sounded. “Can we talk?”

There was a pause. The fact that Wilbur didn’t say yes as soon as he asked was enough to make him wince, even though he knew it wasn’t nearly as big of a deal as he was making it out to be.

Then, after a few beats,

“Fine.”

Breathing a sigh of relief, Tommy pushed open the door to Wilbur’s room.

It had actually been a while since Tommy had been in Wilbur’s room. In fact, he might not have been in there since before he got kidnapped, and he could tell because it was the cleanest he’d ever seen it.

Sure, there was still a bunch of dirty laundry in there, but it was all shoved into a single corner this time. And yeah, there were still a ton of loose papers, but they were all contained to his desk, with his bed actually being clear to lay down on. String lights criss-crossed over

the bed, reflecting a soft orange glow across the entire room. Wilbur was settled against his pillows with his guitar on his lap, wearing the same pajamas he'd worn at breakfast that morning, his hair a frizzy mess of curls.

Wilbur eyed Tommy warily as the door clicked shut behind him. There was an awkward moment where they both just stared at each other, before Tommy walked over to sit on the edge of Wilbur's bed.

Once he was settled down again, Wilbur spoke.

"You just got home from work?"

Tommy nodded. "Yup."

"And you decided we needed to talk right now?" He pushed.

"Yeah. Tubbo and Ranboo are sleeping in my room so I can't hang out in there, plus I saw your light so I knew you were awake. Figured no time like the present," Tommy shrugged, picking at a stray thread on his shirt.

Wilbur raised an eyebrow and pushed his guitar off his lap, setting it on the other side of the bed. "Are you here to apologize then?"

...apologize?

Tommy scoffed. "No, I have nothing to apologize for. If anything, you should be apologizing to me."

The raised eyebrow quickly dropped as Wilbur frowned. "The fuck do I have to apologize to you for?"

"For being an idiot with the whole 'I'm gonna sacrifice myself for you Tommy' bullshit you pulled at the meeting last night," Tommy explained, fighting the urge to roll his eyes.

"Jesus Christ, you're still going on about that?" Wilbur snapped. "It's called taking responsibility for your actions, Tommy. But I guess you wouldn't know about that since you're such an immature goddamn child."

...ouch. While Wilbur had called Tommy an immature child before, he always said it with an air of fond teasing. It was part of their banter. Tommy called Wilbur an old man, he called Tommy a child. It had never been something Wilbur had said as an actual insult, but this time, it'd be impossible to mistake his words as anything but.

"That's not taking responsibility for your actions, you fucking prick," Tommy snapped back, his already thin patience waning. "It's called feeling guilty over things you shouldn't because you want to throw yourself a goddamn pity party instead of dealing with your shit!"

Wilbur recoiled, his frown deepening even more. "I'm not throwing myself a pity party! I'm the one who dragged you into this shit. I don't know why you're acting like I didn't!"

“Not everything is about you, Wilbur!” Tommy shot back. “It wasn’t just you! It was Techno, and Phil, and Niki, and basically fucking everyone in the goddamn Syndicate!”

“But I was the one who-”

“Who gave Techno my address, I know, you’ve said it about a hundred damn times,” Tommy hissed.

Huffing, Wilbur folded his arms over his chest. “I just don’t get why you’re so pissed at me about this. I said I was going to try and make up for all the shitty stuff I did. This is me trying to fix what I fucked up!”

At this, Tommy paused. Was Wilbur really that stupid? He searched Wilbur’s eyes, trying to see if he was just saying shit, but it seemed like he was telling the truth.

“If this is you trying to fix all that, then you’re going about it in a really shitty way,” Tommy scoffed, although his voice was a bit lower now.

“What, trying to keep you from going to jail isn’t a good thing?” Wilbur asked sharply, narrowing his eyes.

“No, actually, it’s not,” Tommy said, meeting Wilbur’s eyes. “When you fuck up, you don’t get to fix it by just sacrificing yourself for some bullshit noble cause. If you actually want to fix things, you need to *stay*. Stick around and face what you did instead of just jumping at the first opportunity to become a martyr.”

Wilbur clenched his jaw, eyes dropping to his lap. “Did you get that from one of Phil’s spiels about being a better person or whatever the fuck?”

Tommy ignored the weak attempt to change the subject. “I’m serious, Wil. How the hell do you think you’re helping me by going to jail for the rest of your life?”

A beat passed. Wilbur took his glasses off and began to fiddle with them in his lap.

“I just- I thought it would be the best option for everyone involved,” Wilbur muttered, keeping his head down.

“I finally have a family outside of Tubbo and Ranboo for the first time in my whole life, and you thought that me losing my brother was the best way to make it up to me?” Tommy asked softly.

Wilbur flinched, continuing to mess with his glasses. “I don’t know, it just made the most sense to me,” he muttered. Another moment of silence passed, and Wilbur looked up again. “Plus, after I suggested it, you literally compared me to the man who kidnapped you. What was I supposed to think about that?”

Oh.

Oh.

“Shit- Look, I didn’t mean it like that,” Tommy said, desperately trying to backpedal. “It’s hard to explain, but basically when Flame found out Dream had kidnapped me, he almost turned Dream and 404 in. But in the end, he didn’t, because he said they were his family. He didn’t approve of what they did, but he didn’t want to send them to jail. And I guess- just- I don’t know, I’m the same way? I don’t like that you killed all those people, Wil, but you’re my family. I’d rather stick by you even when you do shit I don’t like then not have you around.”

“And not having me around includes me being in jail,” Wilbur muttered, seeming a bit calmer now.

“Yeah, basically,” Tommy agreed. “And as stupid as it sounds given all the shit we’ve dealt with, I don’t actually like to get you involved in my shit either.”

Now this made Wilbur look up, and instead of scowling at Tommy like before, he was just frowning like he was confused. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, like, I chose to heal you that night in the alley. I knew that if I got caught, I could be arrested, but I did it anyway. I don’t think you should get thrown in jail for my choice,” Tommy explained. “Or, like, back when Dream and 404 had me kidnapped, they threatened to kidnap you too. Like Wilbur Soot, not Siren. And I didn’t know you were Siren at the time, so the idea of you getting dragged into that too just scared the shit out of me.”

“Wait, why would Dream and 404 want to kidnap me as a civilian?” Wilbur asked.

Tommy shrugged. “When 404 watched my dreams that one time, you kept popping up in all of them and he ended up thinking you were my brother. Like, legally, y’know? So he told Dream about you so that they could threaten you to get me to talk.” Pausing, Tommy took a shaky breath. “And again, I hadn’t really made the connection you were Siren yet, so I was just- I was fucking *terrified* of what they’d do to you. I didn’t want you getting hurt because of me. And even though I know who you are now, that’s still true. I don’t want you getting thrown in jail for me.”

Wilbur was silent for a moment, no longer fiddling with his glasses and instead just staring at his lap. His frown fully faded, leaving something like regret in its place.

“I’m sorry,” Wilbur finally said, dropping his glasses onto the bed. “I didn’t think about things like that.”

“It’s okay,” Tommy nodded, wrapping his arms around himself. “I’m sorry for not explaining what I meant when I said you were like Dream.”

“It’s alright,” Wilbur reassured him. “How you explained it makes sense.”

Another beat passed between them, and Tommy shifted on the bed so he was fully facing Wilbur.

“Can I hug you now you fucking idiot?” Tommy asked.

A small smile quirked the corners of Wilbur's lips. "You're so clingy," he teased as he leaned forward, wrapping his arms around Tommy's shoulders to hug him tightly.

"Pretty bold of you to call me the clingy one out of the two of us," Tommy scoffed as he buried his face in Wilbur's shoulder.

"Says the one who just begged me not to go to jail because you'd miss me," Wilbur shot back, his chuckles reverberating through his shoulders.

"Y'know, I think I've changed my mind actually. Go to jail and stop annoying me all the time," Tommy teased, pulling back from the hug after a few moments.

"Too bad. You're stuck with me now," Wilbur grinned, reaching out to ruffle Tommy's hair.

Tommy laughed as he slapped Wilbur's hand away from his head. Wilbur smacked the back of his head in retaliation, before he leaned back against his pillows, picking up his guitar off the side of the bed and gesturing for Tommy to sit with him.

As Tommy scrambled over against the pillows as well, Wilbur's smile faded, and he reached over to rest a hand on Tommy's shoulder once he was settled.

"We're gonna find a way out of this," Wilbur promised him, staring right into his eyes.

Swallowing down a lump in his throat, Tommy nodded. "I believe you, Wil."

The problem was that again, Tommy knew there wasn't anyone who could promise that for sure. But he let the reassurances soothe his anxiety anyway, and tried to shove it all out of his mind as he listened to Wilbur start playing a new song on his guitar, wanting to get Tommy's opinion.

Another day came and went, and there was still no progress on their plan. Dream had said he'd give Tommy a few days to decide, but he hadn't specified exactly how many days that meant. The more time passed, the more Tommy's anxiety grew. When was their time going to be up? When was Dream going to get tired of waiting for an answer and just send out the warrant for Tommy's arrest?

As Tommy went through another shift like usual, he couldn't help his heart from skipping a beat every time the door chimed with a new customer. He was just waiting for the moment a police officer strolled in, holding up a pair of handcuffs and telling Tommy he was under arrest.

This time, Hannah was keeping an eye on Tommy during his shift. She hung out at a different table than Wilbur usually was at, playing some kind of a video game on a bulky laptop the entire time. One benefit of knowing the Syndicate's identities now was that they were no longer confined to just showing up after work hours in their full villain getups. Now, everyone else in the cafe was oblivious to the fact that there was a villain in their midst, but Tommy could still be watched over all the same.

The shift was calm. By the end of it, the smell of coffee beans was ingrained under his fingernails, and he had a dark splotch on his jeans from where he'd accidentally spilled black tea on himself.

Because Techno wasn't here to pick him up, Hannah said she was going to walk him all the way back to the Soot's house. He knew it was pointless to try and argue that she didn't need to walk him all the way, and frankly, he didn't actually want to argue that. Even though he felt guilty about Hannah needing to escort him all the way back to his home, he was more nervous than ever about Dream, and he knew Hannah wouldn't let anything happen to him.

"And we're done," Tommy muttered as he twisted the key in the door, locking up the cafe.

Hannah smiled and offered her arm. "Let's get going then."

Rolling his eyes at the gesture, Tommy looped his arm through hers. "You don't need to hold onto me, you know."

"This isn't for you," Hannah snorted. "I don't want creepy men to catcall me, and they won't with you and I walking like this."

"Couldn't you just, like, choke a guy with a vine if he pulls shit with you?" Tommy asked as they started down the sidewalk towards the subway.

"I could, but I'm not in costume right now, so I'd rather avoid showing my powers to other people if I can," Hannah explained. "Though of course, if I'm subtle about it..." trailing off, Hannah shot Tommy a mischievous grin as a small flower blossomed from her hair, right above her ear.

Tommy snorted. "I'm sure that was very necessary."

"It was!" Hannah argued. "The more plants I have on me, the more energy I have. So if I'm going to be guarding you on this walk then-"

Suddenly, Hannah was cut off by loud laughter coming from across the street.

Stiffening, Hannah whipped around to see the possible threat. Tommy did the same, his heart pounding in his ears, but as soon as he spotted who it was, he let out a breath of relief.

Walking on the opposite side of the street from Hannah and Tommy, Monarch and Aurelion were laughing as they talked with one another. Tommy hadn't seen the two of them since that one night he healed Aurelion, and it was nice to know that neither of them looked any worse for wear.

Tommy was about to wave to the two vigilantes, when a realization hit him in the face.

The Syndicate needed to find a way to meet with Dream, but Dream would think any meeting the Syndicate arranged would be a trap. While he'd already met with Nuke and Ender to pass his threat along, he also was under the assumption the two of them were part of the Syndicate as well.

But Dream didn't know about Tommy's connection to Monarch and Aurelion. He'd only met with them once, and Dream hadn't brought them up to Tommy at all when he had been kidnapped. As far as Dream knew, the two vigilantes had no idea who Tommy was.

Which meant that Dream wouldn't have any reason to be suspicious if the two of them asked to meet with him.

Holy shit.

Tommy might've just found his way out of this mess.

"Monarch! Aurelion!" Tommy called out, aggressively waving the two vigilantes down.

The two of them immediately turned towards his voice, waiting as he rushed across the street with Hannah in tow.

"Tommy," Monarch greeted, dipping their head. "It's a pleasure to see you again. It's been a while."

"Yeah, there's a reason for that," Tommy told them, not bothering with any preamble.

"Did something happen?" Aurelion asked, tilting his head a bit to the side.

"You could say that again," Tommy huffed. "Dream fucking kidnapped me."

Both vigilantes reeled back.

"What?!" They both hissed in unison.

"Dream kidnapped me for helping the Syndicate," Tommy explained in a rush. "But anyway, I got rescued, but I'm in a bit of trouble again."

"What's going on?" Monarch asked, furrowing their brows. "Also, uh, is it okay for your friend to hear this?" They added after a beat, pointing at Hannah.

Oh yeah. They didn't know Hannah was Rosethorn.

"Yeah, she's fine, don't worry about her," Tommy said, ignoring the confused look Hannah was giving him. "Long story short, Dream's blackmailing me now because he wants to send me to prison."

"Wait, can we go back to the part where you got kidnapped?" Aurelion questioned.

"Hang on, Aur," Monarch told their partner before turning back to Tommy. "What are you planning to do?"

At this, Tommy grinned.

"Well, actually, I have an idea that I think you two can help with."

Chapter End Notes

hope you guys enjoyed!! a whole lot happened this chapter but we're really getting into the juicy bits now heh

that entire scene with the syndicate arguing about who to sacrifice was actually inspired by a scene in my favorite tv show lol so if you recognize it congrats you're very cool

also don't forget, this fic is part of a series! I have a side story that talks about the night hbomb died if you'd be interested in seeing that bit of backstory! definitely make sure to check it out :)

I have a discord server! it's very chill and I give updates on how chapters are progressing plus I sometimes give sneak peaks so make sure to join <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

don't forget to check out the spotify playlist I have for this fic [here](#)

please let me know if you enjoyed down in the comments! I don't respond to most of them but they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

getting ready

Chapter Summary

The plan is prepared, now all they have to do is wait.

Chapter Notes

hello hello happy upcoming new year people!! if it's already 2022 in your time zoon, HAPPY NEW YEAR! for me it's still 2021, but I will soon be joining you all in the future so let's uh... yknow what not gonna manifest anything for 2022 I think we're all tired of that LMAO

anyway as you can see I updated the total chapter count for clinic from 25 to 26. yall know me, I can't write short stuff to save my life so I ended up having to split what was supposed to just be chapter 24 into two chapters because it was insanely long. on the plus side, that means chapter 25 is already written, and I will be posting it in a few days

OKAY TIME FOR TIK TOK! again there have been so many insanely amazing cosplays I've been seeing from clinic and i'm just so in shock, they make me so happy!! you guys are all so talented! I've seen ones from [tigerslol.cos](#), [athenahennah](#), [wallflower42](#), [sky_cosplays13](#), [bispy.cos](#), [autumn...cosplays](#), and [justanotherhallucination](#)

so sorry if i missed anyone, the tag is getting pretty big so it's harder for me to sort through all of them but I promise I try to watch all the ones I see!! thank you all so much again for all the love you've given this fic, it's really made my entire 2021. I love all you guys so much, I can't describe how unbelievable it is knowing my silly little story has reached this many people.

anyway this chapter is mostly fluff before we get to the intense stuff, so I hope you enjoy!!

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

“So? What do you think?”

Tommy turned the mask over in his hands, feeling the weight of it, wondering how heavy it would be once it was on his face. The mask itself was stylized to look like one of those KN95 face masks, with the main difference being that instead of being made of a soft, white fiber, this mask was made of a thin metal that was painted to be bright cherry red. There were black

straps like there would be on a medical face mask too, but besides the two that he would expect to loop around his ears, there were two more straps as well, which seemed designed to buckle behind his head.

When Tommy looked up from the mask in his hands, he saw Phil giving him a worried smile.

“I thought that it would be fitting to make it, uh, look like one of those medical masks doctors wear. Since you’re a healer and all,” Phil continued, laughing nervously. “But if you don’t like it, that’s fine. We can design it however you want. I just thought it’d be a fun surprise!”

Phil grunted as Tommy threw himself at the man. He wrapped his arms around Phil’s back, burying his face in his shoulder and hugging him close. Despite being taken by surprise, Phil immediately hugged him back, and Tommy felt dark wings circle around him, as if they were shielding him from the rest of the world.

“It’s great,” Tommy told him, his voice muffled by Phil’s shirt. “Thank you.”

“I’m glad you like it,” Phil said, obvious relief flooding his tone.

He was obviously expecting Tommy to let go after that. Tommy didn’t.

“Tommy, are you okay?” Phil asked softly, his wings curling in closer around them. When Tommy didn’t say anything, Phil asked another question. “Are you worried about tonight?”

Tommy didn’t lift his head from Phil’s shoulder as he nodded.

“Oh, you shouldn’t be,” Phil reassured him, tightening the hug. “It’s gonna be okay. I promise.”

“You don’t know that,” Tommy argued, still refusing to lift his face from Phil’s shoulder. “A lot of shit could go wrong.”

“I get why you’re worried, but I’m not new to this game,” Phil explained, lightly scratching at Tommy’s scalp with one of his talons. “I’m still working out the fine details, but I have a plan, I swear. And it’s going to work.”

Although the anxiety buzzing in his chest didn’t disappear, it was eased a bit knowing that Phil had a plan. Phil always seemed to know what to do, and never got flustered when things went wrong. Tommy trusted Phil. Trusted that this would work, just like he said.

“Okay,” Tommy whispered, lifting his head up.

Phil smiled when he met Tommy’s eyes again. “Trust me, Tommy. I’m not losing anyone in my family tonight, got it?”

“I believe you,” Tommy told him, nodding once. “We’re not gonna lose anyone in our family.”

His heart was pounding in his chest when he said the words *our family*. Of course he knew this was his family, but it was still strange to say out loud.

Phil seemed to notice Tommy's nervousness, because his smile turned teasing. "Do you see me as a father figure, Tommy?" He joked, mimicking the time Tommy had asked Phil if he saw Tommy as a son figure.

Tommy snorted as he pulled away from the hug, and Phil pulled his wings back so they were no longer encircling him. "Maybe a little bit," he grumbled, pretending to pout even though he was actually struggling to fight his own smile now.

There was a warm hand on his shoulder, and Tommy looked up to see absolutely beaming at him. "Well, that's pretty good, because I've already started telling people I have three sons instead of two and it'd be kinda awkward if I had to backtrack on that."

Tommy let out a surprised laugh at this, and buried his face in his hands to hide the redness of his cheeks. "Yeah, it'd be pretty awkward if you had to tell people your third kid died or something."

"Ah, but then I'd get sympathy points from people and they'd bring over food and shit," Phil joked, leaning back against the couch.

"I mean, if we want free sympathy food we can always just fake my death," Tommy fired back, shooting Phil a wry grin.

"And this is why you're smarter than both your brothers," Phil said with a sage nod.

Tommy chuckled, leaning back against the couch as well, and slumped against Phil's shoulder as he went back to fiddling with the mask. "I can't wait to tell Wil and Tech you said that. They're gonna be so pissed."

"You little shit. I take back every nice thing I said."

"Too late. No take backs," Tommy snarked. "I'm the favorite son. You admitted it."

"I don't have favorites. I love you all equally," Phil corrected him, wrapping an arm around Tommy's shoulder.

Warmth bloomed in his chest at hearing Phil say he loved him. Of course it was a given since he literally just called Tommy his son, but still, it wasn't something he'd been expecting to hear.

Of course he wasn't going to tell Phil all that mushy shit.

"Oh yes, you definitely don't have favorites, Philza Soot," Tommy teased, nudging Phil's shoulder. Then, in a whisper he added, "but it's okay, we all know it's me."

Phil rolled his eyes and reached up to flick Tommy's forehead. "Enough of being a little shit. Try on the mask so I can see it."

Oh yeah. He hadn't actually bothered putting it on yet.

"Uh, so I loop these two straps around my ears, right?" Tommy asked, holding up the mask so Phil could see. "And then I need to buckle these two together at the back?"

"Yup. I can help you with the back at first if you can't figure it out. It might be tricky to do without looking."

Nodding, Tommy slipped the normal mask straps behind his ears, noticing how even on his face, the metal was surprisingly light. It really didn't feel that much different from wearing a normal medical face mask, and there was a soft fabric lining around the edge of the inside to make sure the metal didn't hurt Tommy's skin.

When Tommy tried to do the strap and buckle behind his head, he blindly fiddled with the pieces of fabric for a few moments, before giving up and turning around so Phil could do it for him.

"You'll figure it out eventually, but basically you gotta loop one end of the fabric through the buckle, and then loop it back through a second time to secure it," Phil explained, and Tommy felt the strap tighten around the back of his head. "And there we go. It's all done."

At that, Tommy turned around to face Phil. "So? How do I-" Tommy cut himself off when he didn't recognize his own voice. Instead, his voice sounded almost deeper, with a metallic tinge making it completely different from his own.

"Oh yeah, forgot to mention, it has a voice changer in it," Phil explained, grinning proudly. "Sam designed it for you."

"Holy shit," Tommy muttered, eyes widening hearing the strange voice come from the mask again. "Holy shit! This is weird as fuck!"

"You get used to it," Phil chuckled.

A part of Tommy immediately wanted to point out that he'd only get the chance to get used to it if Phil's plan tonight worked, which was a big 'if'. Otherwise, he'd never get the chance to really use this mask, and the whole thing would've been a waste.

But he didn't want to bring down the mood. So instead, Tommy tried to grin at Phil, but then realized it was hidden underneath the mask. Although the mask wasn't uncomfortable to wear, he felt a little silly just sitting there and wearing it in front of Phil, so he reached up to try and undo the buckle and strap on his own.

Phil watched him struggle with an amused expression. But Tommy didn't want to ask for help because he was going to have to figure out how to do this on his own eventually. So he stuck it out and messed with the buckle until it came undone, and then he undid the straps around his ears, letting the mask fall back into his lap.

"That's pretty cool," Tommy grinned, relieved to hear his normal voice again. "So I got my mask, does this mean I have a code name too?"

“You will, but I can’t tell it to you yet,” Phil told him.

Tommy furrowed his brows. “Why not?”

“Because Techno is still trying to pick it out,” Phil snorted. “He practically begged to be the one to choose your name, and he’s been making notes in his Greek mythology books ever since. If you don’t like the one he chooses for you that’s fine, I think he’s gonna have a few choices lined up in case you don’t like his first one.”

Frankly, Tommy didn’t actually care what his code name was. He was more warmed by the fact that Techno had wanted to be the one to pick it out, and was clearly taking time to try and make sure it was a good fit for Tommy.

“I think I’m gonna like whatever he comes up with,” Tommy said, fiddling with the straps of the mask again.

“I’m sure he’ll be happy to hear that,” Phil replied, pushing up from the couch and stretching his wings out behind him. “Now, as much as I love having you in here, I gotta finish up preparing for tonight.”

“Aw, I’m not allowed to stay and bug you?” Tommy asked, fake pouting as he got to his feet. “But I’m gonna be bored!”

In truth, Tommy didn’t necessarily think he’d be bored if he wasn’t hanging out with Phil, but he didn’t want to be left alone with his thoughts right now. If he was alone, he was going to think about all the ways that things could go wrong tonight, and it would send him spiraling.

“I’m sure you can find someone else to keep you entertained,” Phil reassured him, wacking Tommy lightly with his wing to push him towards the door. “Now get.”

Huffing, Tommy stuck his tongue out at Phil before he headed out of the office.

Now alone in the hallway, Tommy let the smile drop from his face as he swung the mask around by the straps. In just a few hours, he was going to be seeing Dream again. Hopefully, this would be the last time Tommy had to worry about the Number One Hero. But that would require a lot of luck, and Tommy wasn’t one to consider himself lucky.

The base plan was simple. After explaining his situation, Monarch and Aurelion had been more than happy to offer their help to keep Tommy out of jail. Basically, because Dream didn’t know of their connection to Tommy, they had agreed to set up a meeting with Dream, claiming they had information on the Syndicate he wanted to know. However, this was a complete lie on their end.

In truth, as soon as Dream arrived at the meeting point, Monarch and Aurelion would give a signal, and the Syndicate was going to show up. Phil would then try to negotiate with Dream to get him to delete the CCTV footage, without giving up anyone’s identities in the Syndicate.

Tommy didn't know what Phil's plan of negotiation was. Dream had the upper hand here, and he knew it. He wasn't going to just give up his only playing card because Phil asked him to.

But Phil kept reassuring him he knew what he was doing, and that he had a plan for how to make the negotiations work. Tommy wasn't sure why Phil wouldn't just tell him outright what that plan was, but he supposed he'd find out what it was soon enough, so it didn't really matter.

The part of the plan that Tommy hated the most though was that the only people showing up to the negotiation were going to be Phil, Techno, Wilbur, and Tommy himself. The rest of the Syndicate was being told to stay behind, although they would be waiting in case things went to shit and they needed backup. This was because Phil said that if the entire Syndicate rolled up to the meeting at once, Dream would take it as a threat, and would probably flee before a real negotiation could take place.

Tommy understood that. But it didn't stop him from thinking about all the ways that could go wrong.

Wandering into the living room, Tommy collapsed onto the couch, so caught up in his thoughts that he didn't even notice the other two boys sitting next to him until he felt a head drop onto his shoulder.

"Tubbo?" Tommy asked, glancing down at his friend. "When did you get here?"

"About five minutes ago," Tubbo answered, scooching closer to Tommy. On the other side of him, Ranboo gave Tommy a small wave. "We wanted to see how things were going with the 'big plan'."

Tommy shrugged, trying to keep the worry out of his face. "Oh, y'know how it is. Phil keeps telling me he knows how to make Dream agree to the negotiations, but he's being super fucking vague about it."

"Has he said why he doesn't want to tell you more about it?" Ranboo asked, furrowing his brows.

"Just that he's still working out the details," Tommy explained, staring at his lap.

"Do Wilbur and Techno know what it is?" Ranboo continued.

"Techno might know, but considering Wil hasn't stopped fucking pacing for the past day and a half, I think Phil's keeping him out of the loop," Tommy said, certain that if he went up to Wilbur's room right now, he'd see the man walking up and down the length of his carpet over and over again.

Both Tubbo and Ranboo frowned at this, and Tommy couldn't blame them. It was frustrating not to know, but again, Tommy trusted that Phil knew what he was doing.

An awkward silence fell over the trio. Tommy hated whenever they had these kind of silences, but there really wasn't much they could say in a situation like this. They were all

forced into a waiting game, left to twiddle their thumbs as the hours passed on and the sun got lower and lower in the sky.

In a way, Tommy wondered if this was what it felt like to wait for your verdict in a trial. Just the constant flood of questions, wondering if what you've done was good enough, trying to prepare for either outcome in case fate didn't go your way.

Thankfully, Tommy was pulled out of his thoughts rather quickly this time by Ranboo speaking up again.

“What's that in your hands, Tommy?”

Glancing down, Tommy remembered he was still holding his mask that Phil had given him.

“It's a mask that Daedalus made me,” Tommy explained, looping the thin straps around his ears, but not bothering with the buckle. “It's to help hide my identity.”

With the latter half of his sentence, the voice changer went into effect, making both Tubbo and Ranboo jump at the sudden switch.

“Holy shit, you've got a voice changer and everything!” Tubbo exclaimed, leaning forward to get a closer look at the mask.

“Guess you're really like the rest of us now,” Ranboo chuckled. “Have you decided on a name yet?”

“Techno's picking it out still. Apparently he really wanted to be the one to choose it for me,” Tommy explained, tugging the mask off his face again. Tubbo immediately grabbed it out of his hands, looking inside to see how Sam fit the voice changer inside.

“This is so cool,” Tubbo muttered, running his fingers over the metal. “It even has gas filtering in it, but it's so small you don't even see it! Daedalus is a fucking genius!”

“Considering his power literally is manipulating technology, I'd assume he can make some pretty cool fucking stuff,” Tommy snorted.

“God, I'd love to sit down and just ask him how he made his suit,” Tubbo said, holding the mask up to the light on the ceiling.

“I mean, I don't see why you couldn't, considering...” Tommy trailed off, knowing that Ranboo and Tubbo would know what he was saying.

Tubbo's excited grin faded, while Ranboo folded his hands together.

“Have you guys thought more about their offer?” Tommy asked quietly, glancing between his two best friends.

The two shared a look.

“We’re still thinking it over,” Ranboo told him, wringing his hands in his lap. “We really appreciate the offer of course. It’s just- well- it’s a big decision.”

After Tommy had approached Monarch and Aurelion to set up the fake meeting plan, the Syndicate had met again, and they discussed where Nuke and Ender were going to fit into things since they wouldn’t be content to just sit on the sidelines of this. It was there that Phil had brought up the idea of extending them official invites to join the Syndicate, especially considering their recent re-classification as villains.

That night after the meeting, Phil had told Tubbo and Ranboo this over dinner. The two boys had promised to think it over, but Tommy hadn’t been able to get a read on what they were leaning towards.

“Yeah, of course. I get that,” Tommy murmured, glancing down at his hands again.

Maybe it was selfish for Tommy to want his two best friends to join the Syndicate now that he was an official member himself. But it was the truth. While the two of them were on good terms with the group now, that didn’t mean it would always be that way. In the future, things could go wrong, and maybe they would hate the Syndicate again. But this time, they’d be hating Tommy as well.

Tommy was terrified of what that would mean for the three of them. Again, it was selfish, but if they joined the Syndicate, that would be less likely to happen.

“Can you guys just- can you tell me what you’re thinking about it?” Tommy asked, his voice small. “Like, if you’re leaning one way or the other?”

Handing the mask back to him, Tubbo took a breath before he spoke. “The thing is, we agree with what they wanna do. After seeing the bullshit heroes pull up close, I think I can speak for both of us when I say Ranboo and I both want the Hero Committee gone,” Tubbo explained, fiddling with the ends of his sweatshirt sleeves. “But it’s just... shit, how do I word this?”

“I think what he’s trying to say is that if we join the Syndicate, we’re really going to be villains. Like, full blown villains in the public eye,” Ranboo cut in. “Like, yeah, Dream already re-classified us as villains, but most of the public still sees us as vigilantes. We started doing this because we both wanted to help people, but if we join, people will be scared of us. We won’t be able to help like we used to.”

Tommy frowned. “You know that you don’t have to publicly be a member of the Syndicate to join it, right?” He asked. “Because, like, no one knows Jester is in the Syndicate, and not many people have realized Rosethorn is in it either. It’s not like they slap a brand on you with the Syndicate’s logo or anything.”

“Well, yeah, we get that,” Ranboo said, furrowing his brows. “But you know how Dream is. He could go on live television and announce that we’re top-ranked villains or something.”

“But Dream already thinks you guys are in the Syndicate, so if he was gonna do that, he would’ve done it already,” Tommy pushed, his frown deepening at the flaws in their logic.

Ranboo dropped his head further. “I guess- I don’t know. It’s, um, it’s just hard.”

The perks of living with the same two people for years on end in a very tiny space included being able to read them better than anyone else. Tommy could tell there was something they weren’t telling him right now.

Taking a breath to try and quell the anxiety humming in his chest, Tommy started twisting the straps of the mask around his fingers so he had something to do with his hands.

“Look, you don’t have to lie to me,” Tommy said softly. “Is it because you don’t approve of what the Syndicate does?” *Do you not approve of what I’m doing now?*

It was the same fear Tommy had had way back when Tubbo and Ranboo first found out about Tommy’s healing business. The fear that his two best friends wouldn’t support him. That he had pushed things too far, and they wouldn’t stick by him anymore.

Tommy had thought they were past that. But right now, it really didn’t feel like it.

To Tommy’s surprise though, Ranboo seemed to immediately recognize what Tommy was thinking, because suddenly there was a cloud of purple sparkles in front of him as Ranboo teleported to the other side of the couch, so he could sit next to Tommy without Tubbo between them.

“We’re not mad you joined the Syndicate,” Ranboo immediately promised him.

Tubbo, who had been silent for a while now, straightened up and frowned. “Wait, is that what you’re worried about?”

Tommy shrugged, heat flooding to his cheeks as he realized his worries were unfounded. “Um, kinda? You guys got so pissed at me for it before, and now you don’t want to join the Syndicate and so I just thought-”

“Jesus Christ, that’s not it at all, we swear,” Tubbo reassured him, grabbing one of his hands while Ranboo grabbed the other. “We just don’t know if we’ll still be able to help people like we want if we’re labeled villains. But we know why the Syndicate does what it does, and we don’t really give that much of a shit anymore. Of course we don’t like it, but it’s a fucked up situation all around, y’know?”

Ranboo nodded in agreement, squeezing Tommy’s hand gently. “Exactly. It’s a complicated situation to be in, and we get that sometimes they have to do things that aren’t super great.”

A little bit of the anxiety twisting Tommy’s gut loosened, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

“And even if we still hated the Syndicate, it’s not like it would matter,” Tubbo continued. “You’re our best friend, Tommy. I know we both fucked up before with how we handled shit, but the Syndicate and the people in it are important to you, so that makes it important to us.”

God, Tommy missed Tubbo and Ranboo being able to practically read his mind.

“Thanks guys,” Tommy murmured, squeezing both their hands. “I just- I dunno, it’s stupid but I thought that if I joined the Syndicate and you didn’t, one day we might be against each other on something and I can’t imagine going against you two on anything.”

“Awww, that’s so sappy of you!” Tubbo teased, using his free hand to poke Tommy’s cheek.

“Tubbo, be nice,” Ranboo reprimanded gently. “But don’t worry, Tommy. That wouldn’t happen. Like Tubbo said, we’re all still best friends, and that’s not gonna change. Even if we don’t end up joining the Syndicate.”

“That’s not to say we won’t join. Like I said, we’re still thinking about it,” Tubbo added. “I just think it’d be a little easier to weigh our options when we’re not dealing with the imminent threat of you getting arrested.”

Tommy snorted, leaning into Ranboo’s side and tugging Tubbo along with him. “Yeah, that’s fair.”

Tubbo didn’t protest at all to the pull, instead curling up against Tommy’s side, while Ranboo just chuckled and rested his head on top of Tommy’s.

“We’ll figure this all out after tonight,” Ranboo reassured him.

“Thanks guys,” Tommy mumbled, burying himself deeper in the pile of limbs he now found himself in. “Love you both.”

“Clingy,” Tubbo joked, poking his cheek again. “But love you too, Tommy.”

“Love you,” Ranboo echoed, before reaching over Tommy to flick Tubbo’s forehead.

When Tubbo yelped in surprise, the hug pile quickly disappeared, and Tommy laughed as he watched Tubbo try to smack Ranboo in revenge. But Ranboo kept teleporting around the room, never letting Tubbo get close. Soon, Tommy was laughing so hard he couldn’t breathe, and they all collapsed again into a breathless pile on the couch.

A few hours passed like that. But then, Tubbo said he had to go and fix something on his mask before that night, with Ranboo adding that he needed to stitch up a tear on his costume. So they both left, leaving Tommy alone with his thoughts once again.

It was almost dark now. Golden light spilled in through the slitted blinds, and Tommy could see bright shades of pink sitting on the edge of the mountains that sat behind the house.

When Tommy began to wonder if they had windows in prison cells, or if this was the last sunset he was going to see for a while, that’s when he decided to go find someone else to take his mind off things.

Wilbur was the obvious choice. And just like Tommy had predicted, when he knocked on his bedroom door and Wilbur called for him to come in, he found the man pacing.

Unlike when he’d gone in there a few nights ago and was surprised by how clean it was, now Wilbur’s room was even more of a mess than usual.

Clothes scattered the floors, papers littered every open space available, and the string lights that had hung above the bed had fallen on one side but Wilbur hadn't bothered to put them back up. Tommy couldn't even read Wilbur's scribbles this time, which made him wonder what kind of song lyrics he could've been writing on them to vent his frustration.

Wilbur himself didn't seem much better. There was a half empty mug of coffee sitting on his nightstand, dark circles under his eyes, and his glasses were smudged to all hell and back.

"Oh, hey Toms," Wilbur said when Tommy entered the room, stopping his back and forth. "What are you up to?"

Tommy shrugged, stepping over the clothes and papers on the ground to drop himself on top of Wilbur's bed. "Nothing much. Kind of wanted to take my mind off things, so I figured I'd come bother you." He paused, making a point to look around the room. "Though I think you need a distraction more than I do."

Wilbur let out a soft huff before trudging over to the bed, collapsing on it right next to Tommy. "Yeah, that's probably fair. I've been a bit of a nervous wreck since we decided on that plan."

Tommy snorted. "Tell me about it. I can't stop thinking about all the ways shit could go wrong."

Sighing, Wilbur slung an arm over Tommy's shoulder and gave him a side hug. "It's gonna be okay. Phil keeps saying he has this great plan, and I trust him."

"I trust him too," Tommy nodded, leaning into Wilbur's side. "Doesn't make me any less worried though."

"Yeah, I get that," Wilbur muttered, shaking his head. "But there's no sense in worrying about that shit till tonight."

"Speak for yourself," Tommy teased, gesturing around the room. "It looks like a bomb went off in this place."

Wilbur groaned, using his free hand to drag his hand down his face. "I know, it's a fucking wreck in here. Sometimes when I'm anxious about something, writing music helps me feel better, so I've been trying to do that. But it hasn't really been working that well today."

"Aw, so you don't have anything new to play for me?" Tommy asked, pouting at Wilbur.

The puppy dog eyes always worked on Wilbur, because a slow grin grew across his face. "Well... I didn't say that."

Bolting upright, Tommy's face immediately split into a wide smile. "Can you play me something?"

Laughing, Wilbur dropped his arm from Tommy's shoulder so he could lean down to grab his guitar. "Sure I can. But you're not allowed to complain about my voice. I haven't done any warmups so it's gonna sound terrible."

“I won’t complain,” Tommy promised. “But I *will* make fun of you relentlessly if your voice cracks.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes. “Fucking gremlin.”

“Bitch boy,” Tommy shot back.

This only made Wilbur laugh again. Then, he leaned back against his pillows, hoisted his guitar onto his lap, and started to play.

Wilbur mostly just played songs of his that Tommy had heard before. A few were soft and slow, some were a bit faster. At one point, Tommy had stretched out across Wilbur’s bed and closed his eyes, letting the music just wash over him to try and forget about his worries.

The light of the dying sun crept its way in through the cracks in Wilbur’s blinds. Slivers of orange and red highlighted the room, growing darker and darker as Wilbur kept playing. Slowly, the tension in Tommy’s shoulders trickled out like sand from an hourglass. The constant buzz of anxiety in his chest faded, until there was only a soft hum left in its place.

Soon, the sun had set completely, and Wilbur stopped his playing. Tommy’s eyes fluttered open to a now dark room, and when he saw the relaxed smile now spread across his brother’s face, he was hit with a new realization.

If things went to shit tonight, this would probably be the last chance Tommy got to talk to Wilbur one on one.

While he wasn’t one for dramatic goodbyes, he knew there was something he needed to make sure Wilbur knew. Just in case it all went wrong.

“Wil?” Tommy said softly, sitting up on the bed.

“Yeah?” Wilbur asked, grabbing a water bottle off his nightstand and taking a few sips.

Looking down at his hands, Tommy took a shaky breath as he tried to figure out how he wanted to word this.

“Look, I’m not saying that I expect things to go wrong tonight-”

“That’s not a promising start,” Wilbur cut in, frowning at him.

“Just let me say this, okay?” Tommy shot a glare at Wilbur, and he sighed as he put the water bottle down. “Like I said, I don’t expect things to go wrong tonight, but if they do... well, I’ve said this before, but you need to know I don’t regret any of it.”

Wilbur’s frown deepened. “Tommy, c’mon, don’t talk like that.”

“I’m serious,” Tommy said, meeting Wilbur’s eyes. “I know you, Wil. You blame yourself for everything, and I want to make sure you don’t pull that shit if I end up getting arrested tonight. Because if I do, you’ll say it’s all your fault and drown yourself in guilt again, but I don’t regret saving you that night and I never will.”

There was a beat of silence as Wilbur squeezed his eyes shut, burying his face in his hands.

“You shouldn’t say that. You won’t think the same thing if that happens.”

“You’re wrong,” Tommy said, pulling Wilbur’s hands away from his face. “Look into my eyes. I’m telling you the truth. Even if I get thrown in jail and get sentenced to thirty years or some shit, I’d do it all again. Because I got the best goddamn family I could ask for out of it, and even if I only got these few months with you guys, it was worth it. Getting *you* as my brother was worth it.”

Reaching up, Wilbur wiped a tear away from the corner of his eye, and shook his head.

“You’re not going to jail. I promise you,” Wilbur said, his voice rough.

“And I believe you,” Tommy told him. “But just in case everything goes wrong, I don’t want you to blame yourself. Because you’re a dramatic bitch who does that way too much, and I don’t want you pulling that shit if I’m not around to tell you to knock it off.”

Wilbur let out a weak laugh, and nodded once. “You’re too fucking sweet sometimes, do you realize that?”

Tommy immediately scowled. “Wh- I’m not sweet!”

“You are,” Wilbur said, giving him a soft smile. “Now, you just made me cry so you owe me a hug to make up for it.”

Scoffing, Tommy pretended to be annoyed at the request, but wrapped his arms around Wilbur without a second of hesitation. “Clingy ass bitch,” he whispered into Wilbur’s shoulder.

Wilbur laughed again, and rested his chin on top of Tommy’s head. “That’s right. I am a clingy bitch and I’m proud of it.”

The two stayed in their hug for a few moments, with Tommy just listening to the pattern of Wilbur’s breathing, and trying to match his own to it. He didn’t want to let go. Because once he let go, he’d start thinking about how that could be the last hug he got from Wilbur.

This day was filled with too many potential ‘last things’ for his liking.

But then, there was a quiet knock at the door that broke the calm silence that had surrounded the two of them.

“Uh, Wil? Is Tommy in there?” Techno’s asked on the other side of the door.

Grumbling, Tommy buried his face into Wilbur’s shoulder, and Wilbur chuckled. “Yeah, he’s in here.”

“Cool. Phil’s serving dinner, so come down to get something to eat,” Techno told them both. Then, Tommy listened as his footsteps faded as he went back down the stairs, leaving them alone once more.

“C’mon, we gotta go get food,” Wilbur said, pushing Tommy off of him.

Tommy fell back onto the bed and groaned. “I don’t wanna walk,” he whined.

Wilbur raised an unimpressed eyebrow at him. “I’m not carrying you.”

A few minutes later, Wilbur made his way into the kitchen with Tommy on his back.

Phil chuckled when he spotted the two of them, and Wilbur rolled his eyes as he let go of Tommy’s legs, forcing him to drop to the floor.

“Thanks for the ride,” Tommy grinned, patting Wilbur’s shoulder as he sat down at the dining table.

“I’m too nice to you,” Wilbur complained, plopping down in the seat right next to Tommy.

“Thought you said I was *sweet*,” Tommy teased, nudging Wilbur’s shoulder.

“Yeah, I said you were. But I’m not,” Wilbur shot back, elbowing Tommy in the side.

Techno, who had just sat down across from the two of them, snorted at that. “Wilbur, you’re a huge sap, don’t even try to deny it.”

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. “I’m not a sap!”

“Are too.”

“Am not!”

“You are.”

“No-”

“For the love of fuck, not before we eat,” Phil cut in, sighing deeply as he set a large bowl of pasta in the center of the table. He took his place next to Techno, his wings stretched out above the back of the chair, and handed the serving spoon to Techno so he could dish out his food first.

This was far from the first time they’d had a meal together. They’d done family dinners like this ever since Tommy had first started staying there, but something about it felt different now. Maybe it was because Phil had officially called Tommy his son, or maybe it was just because Tommy was worried for what would happen after tonight.

But for now, he wanted to enjoy it while he could, and did his best to try and shove the anxiety out of his mind.

Dinner was nothing that special. They had agreed on no work talk at the dinner table, so no one spoke about what their plans were after they finished eating. Instead, they just did their best to talk about their days. Tommy showed off the mask Phil had given him (technically work talk but not really), Wilbur talked about some of the songs he’d played for Tommy, and

Techno said that Niki had promised to teach him how to make potato bread soon, so he was excited to try that out.

It was normal, but there was still a cloud of tension hanging over everyone, no matter how hard they tried to ignore it. There was almost a sense of relief when they'd all finished their food, because now they could focus on the elephant in the room.

"Tommy," Techno said after Tommy had rinsed off his plate. "Wanna come to my room real quick? I wanna talk to you 'bout something."

Oh, wait, was Techno finally going to tell Tommy what his code name was?

"Sure!" Tommy answered, quickly wiping off his hands so he could follow Techno up the stairs.

Tommy was practically bouncing on his heels as they walked up to Techno's room. Techno didn't make any comments about Tommy's excitement, but Tommy noticed the small smile ghosting over his face all the same.

Techno held the door open for Tommy to his room, and Tommy ran inside, ready to hear what name Techno had chosen for him.

It wasn't the first time Tommy had been in Techno's room, but it wasn't a place he went in often. The room itself was rather simple, with two plush armchairs settled near a window, a neatly made bed, and a computer desk pushed into a corner. The only things that stood out was the giant bookshelf that dominated nearly an entire wall, and the pair of sheathed swords resting next to his bed.

As Techno closed the door behind him, Tommy noticed how there was a rather thick book laying open on Techno's desk, with a notebook page torn out beside it. From where he was standing, Tommy couldn't see what the note page had written on it, but he could see several words circled and highlighted a few times over.

"You know why I brought you up here?" Techno asked, sitting down in one of the armchairs.

"To give me my code name, right?" Tommy said, hopping into the other chair.

Techno nodded. "Yup. When Phil talked about gettin' you one, I figured I might be able to pick a nice one out since I know a lot about Greek mythology," he explained, folding his hands in front of him. Although he seemed calm, Tommy noticed worry flash over his expression. "But I don't want you to feel, um, pressured into sticking with the name I picked out. If you wanna choose something totally different, I don't mind. Your name should be something that you like first and foremost."

Tommy grinned. "Don't worry, Tech. The fact that you spent so much time trying to pick one out for me is already enough to tell me I'm gonna like it."

Techno snorted at this. "Now don't get ahead of yourself. You might end up hatin' the name and then that's just gonna be, like, pretty awkward for both of us."

“Oh shut up and just tell it to me,” Tommy told him, bouncing in his seat.

“Alright alright! But if you hate it-”

“Technoooo!” Tommy whined. “Stop being a dramatic bitch and just say it already!”

Rolling his eyes, Techno leaned back in his seat. “Well... do you know about the Greek god, Apollo?”

Tommy furrowed his brows. “Um... he’s like the god of the sun or something, right?”

Techno seemed proud as he nodded. “Yeah, he’s the god of sunlight, but he’s also the god of a few other things. Like oracles, archery, or most importantly, healing.”

Tommy’s eyes widened as he realized where this was going. “So my name is gonna be Apollo then?”

“I mean, only if you want it to be. If you don’t like it-”

“Are you kidding?!” Tommy exclaimed, cutting Techno off. “That’s so sick! I love it!”

Apollo. Tommy was going to be named after a literal *god*. Not to mention, the god of a bunch of cool shit.

“Call me by it,” Tommy then said, grinning at Techno. “I wanna see what it feels like.”

Techno snorted. “So Apollo, are you ready to go piss Dream off tonight?”

Somehow, Tommy’s smile got even bigger.

It felt right. The name Apollo just *fit*. Like it was meant for him all along.

“Yeah, I’m fucking ready, Blade,” Tommy replied, jumping out of his chair.

Techno stood up as well, and he seemed very relieved that Tommy liked his choice. “Well, we need to go over the plan, but-” he cut himself off when Tommy pulled him into a sudden hug. Techno kept his arms pinned to his sides, but didn’t try to get out of the hug either.

“Um... I don’t do hugs,” Techno admitted.

“Do you want me to let go?” Tommy asked, worrying he’d made Techno uncomfortable.

“Nah, I’m good,” Techno said, although he still didn’t move his arms from his sides.

Tommy laughed and hugged Techno a bit harder. Then, he said in a quieter voice, “seriously Tech, thank you. I really like the name.”

Although Techno didn’t hug him back, he reached up a hand to pat Tommy’s shoulder. “You’re welcome, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

SHOUTOUT TO EVERYONE WHO GUESSED APOLLO it really wasn't that hard to guess let's be real but I decided that Tommy's name was gonna be that a while ago

also yes, Tommy's mask is literally just a metal KN95 and I'm sure we all know what a KN95 mask looks like at this point in the pandemic lmao. I just figured it fit since he's a healer and all lol

OKAY NOW SOMETHING FUN EVERYONE LOOK HERE

since we're getting to the end of clinic, that means it's time for me to prepare to start a new big project. and wouldn't you know it but the inspiration gods have blessed me with ANOTHER SUPERHERO AU IDEA. I already posted the first chapter which you can find [here](#). It's going to have a bit of a darker tone than clinic so make sure to read the tags. I won't start updating it regularly until clinic is complete, but please go check it out and leave a comment, it helps my motivation so so much.

okay anyway go check out my discord server <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE> it's very fun and you'll be the first to hear about my new fics and chapter updates

I have a spotify playlist for this fic too! go listen to it [here](#)

anyway that's all for now, I'll be posting chapter 25 in a few days so keep an eye out for that! please leave a comment if you enjoyed, I don't reply to most of them but I read them all and they seriously make my day!

hmu on tumblr and twitter [@bonesandthebees](#)

the final battle

Chapter Summary

The plan goes into action.

Chapter Notes

hello everyone we have finally reached the second to last chapter of this fic!

i have been wanting to write this chapter for so long, and i'm so so excited that i can finally share it with you all. I still can't believe we're so close to the end. this has been one hell of a journey for sure

AND AGAIN TIK TOK IS POPPING OFF!!! we have another wonderful cosplay from [peter.piper27](#), this video from [crazyoboeplayer](#) nearly killed me, and there's also this amazing art animation from [amb3rs_](#) that I wanted to shout out!

i'm both very excited and also nervous for you guys to see this chapter, but I really really hope you guys enjoy it

TWs for: violence. lots of it.

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

After Tommy let go of the hug, Techno told him they needed to go get ready because they were going to have to head out soon. Apparently Phil was going to go over the details of what they needed to do while they drove.

Going back to his room, Tommy stared at the mask Phil had given him, trying to think of what he should wear. It needed to be practical, something he could move in. But it also needed to be distinct, since this was going to be his first official 'appearance' as Apollo.

Digging through his drawers, Tommy quickly found a pair of bright red cargo pants that he definitely did not remember being there before. Dozens of pockets lined the legs, which Tommy already knew he could use to hold things like bandages and gauze. They were nearly the exact same shade of red as his mask, and Tommy wondered which one of his family members snuck them into his room (his money was on Wilbur).

From there, Tommy found a plain black t-shirt that he figured would be good to use in case it got stained with blood. Then, he grabbed an old pair of dark brown boots Wilbur had given

him back when Tommy was still borrowing stuff from Wilbur's closet.

He got dressed, and put the mask over his head before he looked at himself in his mirror.

While he wouldn't say he looked like a supervillain, he looked... pretty cool, in all honesty. At least to himself.

Well, if he got his ass kicked tonight, at least he was going to do it in style.

Tugging his mask down, Tommy left his room and headed down the stairs. Wilbur, Phil, and Techno were already waiting by the door to the garage, already dressed in their own outfits, minus the masks.

When Tommy walked into the kitchen, Wilbur immediately beamed.

"You used the pants I bought you!" He exclaimed joyfully.

"Fuckin' knew it was you," Tommy snorted, folding his arms over his chest.

"I just saw them one day and I had a feeling you'd like them," Wilbur told him. "You paired it well with the black shirt to tone it down, and then the plain boots."

"Listen to Mr. Fashion Expert over here," Techno snorted.

"Says the one wearing a literal fucking cape," Wilbur fired back, narrowing his eyes at his brother.

"Bruh, why you gotta come for my cape?" Techno asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Okay you two, not right now," Phil said, shaking his head. He dug into his pocket and pulled out a piece of white fabric, holding it out to Tommy. "Tommy, here's one last thing that I think you should wear. It's an armband."

Frowning, Tommy pulled the armband onto his left arm, noting how the fabric was snug but not uncomfortable around his bicep. When he looked down at the actual symbol that was printed on it though, he grinned.

"Is this to show I'm a medic?" Tommy asked, tracing the bright red cross symbol with his finger.

"Yup. Figured that if the media catches wind of you, might as well have something to show you're our healer," Phil explained, adjusting the armband a bit so the cross was straightened out.

"Oh, and fun fact," Wilbur chimed in, giving Tommy a cheshire grin, "it's technically a war crime to wear the red cross symbol if you're not part of the official 'Red Cross' organization."

Tommy beamed at this. "Hell yeah! My first crime as a villain!"

Wilbur wiped a fake tear from the corner of his eye. “They grow up so fast.”

“Alright kids, you can talk more about war crimes in the car. We need to get going,” Phil ordered, shepherding the three of them into the garage.

A few minutes later, they were back in the black SUV the family always used for Syndicate business. They had all put on their masks, and Tommy slumped down in the backseat, trying to ignore the way his heart was steadily picking up pace the further they drove.

“Okay boys, here’s the plan,” Phil began as they turned down a new street, the orange streetlights casting their familiar glow. “Monarch and Aurelion are already at the meeting spot, and Monarch is going to message me when Dream shows up. We’re going to park a few blocks away, and walk up to join the group. Now, the order I want us in is me at the front, Techno a bit behind me, with Wil and Tommy in the back. Got it?”

They all chorused a quick ‘yes Phil’ before quieting down to let him continue.

“Good. Now, Wil, you’re in charge of keeping an eye on Tommy. If shit starts to go south, I want you to prioritize getting Tommy out of there above all else, okay?”

“Got it,” Wilbur said with a nod.

Tommy frowned. “Wait, if things go wrong shouldn’t I stay in case I need to heal you guys?”

“We can keep doing what we’ve been doing and just come to you to get healed if we get hurt,” Phil explained calmly. “You’re really only coming because I don’t think Dream would negotiate with us if you aren’t with us. But if things get messy, I want you to get as far away as you can.”

While Tommy didn’t like it, he knew that it made sense, and forced himself to nod.

“Thank you, Tommy. Now, we have Niki, Jack, Hannah, Sam, Tubbo, and Ranboo all waiting on standby to help out if shit goes wrong. But I want to call in as few people as possible to minimize risk of injury, so if things go bad the first people I’m calling in are just gonna be Niki and Jack, and we’ll go down the line from there,” Phil continued, sounded so unbothered, it was like he was just talking about the weather.

“Where’s Quackity?” Tommy questioned, noticing the man’s absence from the roster.

Phil let out a small sigh. “He’s busy with his own shit tonight. Remember, he’s more of a business partner with the Syndicate than anything else. He tries to show up for the important stuff, but he’s got his own work that sometimes gets in the way.”

“Oh.” Tommy tried not to look crestfallen at the news, but it definitely bummed him out to hear that Quackity, someone he considered his friend, wasn’t going to show up for something as important as this.

“Don’t feel bad,” Wilbur reassured him, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder. “He cares about you just as much as the others in the Syndicate do. But he trusts us to be able to handle this on our own.”

Tommy nodded. "Okay." He knew Wilbur was right, but he was a mess of nerves right now and even the smallest thing could bring his mood down catastrophically.

"Anything else we need to know, Phil?" Techno then asked.

"Just trust me when I say I have a plan," Phil told them, pulling up his veil briefly to flash all of them a reassuring smile.

Tommy tried to wrap the words around himself like a blanket, to ease the anxiety thrumming in his chest and the electricity buzzing under his skin. But it didn't do much to help. He was just going to have to deal with being a nervous wreck until the night was over.

They left South Bay behind, and Tommy recognized the comforting streets of Eastside. It wasn't long before Techno pulled the car to a stop under a streetlight, and they all did a check to make sure everyone's masks were secure before they hopped out of the car.

It was a bit odd to just be a group of supervillains walking down the street, but Tommy supposed this was normal for the other three. There was no one around at this time of night, and their footsteps echoed between the buildings, making Tommy constantly turn around to make sure they weren't being followed.

The night air was cool against his bare arms, and Tommy wondered if he should've grabbed a jacket to go with his uniform. At least the pants were plenty warm, and the mask kept his nose from getting cold as well. Still, he huddled close to Wilbur as they passed under the glowing streetlights, and Wilbur silently draped an arm around his shoulder.

At one point, Phil took out his phone while walking, and only paused for a second before pocketing it again.

"Dream's arrived at the meeting spot," he told them all in a soft voice. "We're coming up on the street, so try to stay quiet."

Tommy's breathing hitched. Dream was there. The plan had worked, and this was really happening now.

They kept walking. Tommy soon figured out where this 'meeting spot' was, and he almost laughed at the painful irony of it all.

Of course it would be in front of the Cloudy Cafe. Where else would they set this meeting up? It was the only place that made sense. It had practically been the center of everything that had happened ever since Tommy healed Siren.

They approached a corner, and Phil held out a hand, telling them to hold back. Now, Tommy could hear faint voices echoing down the street, and when Phil gave him the go ahead to come closer, he immediately peaked his head around the corner to see what was going on.

Sure enough, standing in the middle of the street in front of the cafe was Dream. His cape billowed in the light breeze as he stood in front of Monarch and Aurelion, the gold accents in both their costumes glinting against the streetlights.

“So?” Dream was asking, his arms folded over his chest. “You dragged me all the way out here. What information do you have?”

“Well, I might’ve exaggerated a bit when I said I had information,” Monarch explained, and Tommy could hear the smirk in their voice. “Really, we just need to repay a favor for a friend.”

“Wh- The hell do you mean by that?” Dream demanded, sounding more than frustrated at this point.

This was when Phil dropped his hand and stepped out into the street, with Techno close behind, and Wilbur tugging Tommy out so they followed the two of them.

Dream immediately heard the footsteps on the asphalt and whirled around, his expression frozen in his smiley face as always as he watched Phil form out of the shadows.

“Oh... Oh I see what this is,” Dream said, and Tommy could feel his gaze skimming over him and Wilbur. He fought the urge to flinch, although his legs felt like they were made of wood as they got closer to the man. “And here I thought you valued neutrality, Monarch.”

“I do,” Monarch said, their white eyes unreadable as they glanced over the family. “I have no loyalties to the Syndicate, just as I have no loyalties to the Hero Committee. Like I said, this was simply me and my partner repaying a favor to a certain healer. Now that we’ve done our part, we’ll be heading out.”

“Nice to see you two,” Phil called out, waving at the two vigilantes as they turned down the road.

“Good luck, guys!” Aurelion said, giving them all a cheesy thumbs up as Monarch dragged him around another corner.

And with that, it was just the three Syndicate leaders, Tommy, and Dream.

Dream laughed as soon as the vigilantes were gone, and Tommy could *feel* Dream’s eyes raking over him.

“Of course, I shouldn’t even be surprised,” Dream said, shaking his head. “Tommy, you do realize that wearing a mask is a bit pointless when I already know what you look like, right?”

“We don’t want any media to see his face,” Phil explained, his wings spread out behind him as if he was trying to block Tommy from view. “And before you start, we’re not here to fight, Dream. We want to negotiate regarding the blackmail threat you made on our healer.”

“By negotiate I hope you mean ‘take off your masks so I can see your faces’, because if it’s anything but that, Tommy is gonna be going to jail,” Dream said, stepping closer so he was face to face with Phil.

“I was hoping we could work out some alternate terms,” Phil proposed, sounding as measured as could be while he spoke.

“Zephyrus, with all due respect, you’re not really in a position to be negotiating right now,” Dream told him. “I have the upper hand here. There’s only one thing I want, and if you don’t give it to me, then the poor kid you dragged into your world is going to pay the price. It’s up to you if you’re willing to let that happen.”

“You know we can’t give you our identities,” Phil said, his wings fluffing up.

Dream shrugged. “I guess you really don’t care about Tommy then. The poor kid is so blindly loyal to your group, he wouldn’t give you up for anything. But clearly, you don’t give two shits about him, which is a shame. I actually thought you’d be above manipulating an orphaned teenager, Zephyrus, but it looks like I was wrong.”

Phil huffed, and Tommy saw Dream flinch. It was barely noticeable, but it was there, and Tommy smiled under his mask knowing that despite his big talk, Dream at least had some level of fear for Zephyrus.

“You say that we’re the ones who have manipulated a child, but here you are, threatening to arrest him for saving someone’s life,” Phil pointed out, his veil billowing in the wind. “We haven’t hurt Tommy. We haven’t forced him to do something against his will. He helps us because he wants to. And here you are having already kidnapped him once, now threatening him outright. You can’t act so high and mighty compared to us when you pull shit like that, Dream.”

“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, I don’t *want* to do stuff like this,” Dream hissed, lurching forward so he was right in Phil’s face. “You think I wanted to kidnap some random teenager? Fuck no! But I knew I wouldn’t get a chance to talk to him any other way. The only reason I’m forced to go to these extremes is because I’m doing it all to try and stop you. Tommy is just one of many, many normal people who have been caught in the crossfire of our war, which *you* started in the first place.”

“Even in war, there are special exceptions given to medics. They are considered neutral as long as they are not a threat to the opposing side, and Tommy has never posed a threat to the Hero Committee,” Phil asserted, meeting Dream’s staredown head on.

“He might not be a threat, but he’s not neutral. The day the Syndicate recruited him was the day he picked a side, and picking a side has consequences. I’m just simply seeing the consequences through,” Dream shot back, clenching his fists at his sides. “Now, you either give me what I want, or I’m going to tell 404 to send the CCTV footage to the Hero Committee right this second. Make your choice.”

Silence fell over the group. Tommy’s heart leapt into his throat, and Wilbur tightened the arm he had around Tommy’s shoulders. Techno was tensed up behind Phil, but somehow, Phil still seemed... relaxed?

Not completely relaxed considering his wings were still puffed up, but he didn’t seem to be preparing for a fight like Techno and Dream were.

Instead, Phil just reached into his pocket and held up his phone.

“Can I make a quick phone call first?” Phil asked, and Tommy could hear the smirk in his voice.

“Um... I guess?”

“Thanks mate,” Phil said, before he tapped a few buttons on his phone and held it up to his ear. There were a few seconds of silence before whoever was on the other end picked up.

“Hey there! You ready?” Pause. “Great, we’re already there. He’s not cooperating, so we’re gonna need you.” Another pause. “Thanks. See you in a sec.”

And with that, Phil hung up.

“Who was that?” Dream questioned.

“Just an old friend,” Phil said smugly.

A few seconds passed. Tommy’s heart was pounding in his ears. Was this the plan Phil said he had?

Then, there was the sound of a bell chiming, and everyone’s heads spun to the right as the door to the cafe opened.

The Captain stepped out of her cafe, sheep mask securely fastened over her face, looking exactly like she did when she had retired.

Holy shit. This had to have been Phil’s plan. And it was fucking genius.

As soon as Puffy stepped out of the cafe, Dream stumbled backwards as if he’d been shot. “Pu- Captain?!”

“Hi Dream,” Puffy said softly, walking out to join them in the middle of the street, her hands folded behind her back. “It’s been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Wh-What are you doing here?” Dream stammered.

Tommy had never seen Dream taken this off guard. The man was tripping over his own words in a way he never had when he had Tommy kidnapped. This wasn’t a part of any of his plans.

Puffy, meanwhile, seemed to slip right back into her element despite her multiple years of retirement. Her steps were measured and slow as she approached Dream. Her hair—though now brown and white instead of just pure white like it had been when she was originally the Captain—was tied back in its signature ponytail, and it swung back and forth over her shoulders perfectly in time with her footsteps.

“I’m here because a certain bird told me that you were threatening someone you shouldn’t be,” Puffy said, having to tilt her head up to look into the eyes of Dream’s mask. Somehow, the height difference didn’t make her any less intimidating.

“Captain, you don’t understand, he works for the Syndicate,” Dream tried to explain, although it sounded more like a little kid trying to tell his mother how the vase got broken, which was jarring compared to how cocky he’d been only minutes earlier.

“He’s a *healer* for the Syndicate,” Puffy corrected, eyeing him up and down. “Not to mention, he’s also a teenager. And one of my employees at the cafe to boot.”

Dream immediately whipped his head back towards the Syndicate. “Wait, they know who you are?”

Puffy nodded. “They do, they’ve known for years.”

“What the fuck, Puffy?” Dream asked, taking another step back. “You retire and become fucking friends with the Syndicate?!”

“I did,” Puffy confirmed. “But this isn’t about that. I’m here tonight because I can’t stand by and watch you ruin a kid’s life all because of your obsession with beating the Syndicate.”

“Oh, not you too,” Dream scoffed, shaking his head. “I’m doing what I have to do. I don’t want to pull this kind of shit, but the Syndicate has left me with no other choice.”

Puffy snorted at this. “You’re wrong, Dream. You absolutely have a choice. You can choose to go back to trying to fight the Syndicate the way we always have, and not through dirty tactics like targeting a civilian that knows them.”

“You haven’t been in the field for years, Puffy. You have no idea how much things have changed,” Dream argued. “You have no right to barge in here and try to stop me when I’m closer to getting the Syndicate’s identities than I ever have before.”

“I have no *right*?” Puffy questioned, her hands beginning to glow red. “You have a lot of nerve saying that to your mentor of all people. I’m the one who taught you how to be a hero in the first place. I would think I still have a right to keep you from going off the deep end.”

Despite the red glow showing that Puffy was preparing to use her powers, Dream only shook his head. “What are you gonna do, Puffy? Fight me? *Kill* me? One, I don’t think you could actually do that to me. And two, that’s not going to stop 404 from releasing the footage to the Hero Committee.”

“If you release that footage, I’m going to come out of retirement and vouch for Tommy myself,” Puffy told him, standing on her tiptoes so they were face to face. “Sure, maybe that footage could get a conviction on its own, but if Tommy has the Captain defending him? What do you think would happen then?”

“You really think L’Manberg still cares about you that much? That they’d take your word over mine?” Dream challenged, although Tommy could hear the uncertainty in his tone.

“As a matter of fact, Dream, I do,” Puffy shot back.

Holy shit.

And just like that, the threat of the CCTV footage was gone. Because Tommy knew that no matter how damning the evidence was, if the Captain came out of retirement to vouch for him, they wouldn't be able to get a single jury in L'Manberg to convict him. Even if the Hero Committee pulled out all the stops, the people of the city *loved* the Captain. They would listen to her above anyone else.

Dream took another step back, and Puffy matched him as she stepped forward. Not letting him get a single inch.

"Why are you doing this for him?" Dream then asked, his voice so low, Tommy could barely hear it. "You've been gone for years, I haven't heard from you since you left, and now you come out of retirement for him. Why?"

Puffy pursed her lips. "Because he's one of mine, Dream."

There was a pause.

Then,

"But I thought I was one of yours," Dream whispered.

And that seemed to strike some kind of nerve in Puffy. Her shoulders slumped, and her expression softened as she reached a hand up to cup the side of his mask.

"You'll always be one of mine, duckling," she told him, gently tracing the porcelain. "But I can't let you hurt him. Even if you think it's your only option."

Dream was silent for a moment at that.

Then, he tapped a button on a watch Tommy hadn't noticed he had on his wrist, and held it up to his mouth. "Backup, I'm gonna need you to come in now."

Just like that, Tommy's heart dropped into his stomach. Puffy took a step back from Dream, the red glow returning to her hands as a thin rod of stone rose up from the asphalt, taking the shape of a thin spear.

"I don't want to fight you, Dream," Puffy warned him, gripping the spear in her hands as she pointed it at him.

"You made your choice, I made mine," Dream said evenly, a sword lifting behind him.

Puffy prepared her spear to strike. Wilbur tightened his grip around Tommy, preparing to bolt.

Suddenly, there was a ripping sound in the air as Rewind appeared in between Dream and Puffy. His colorful, swirling goggles glowed in the low light, and he stumbled backwards when he noticed Puffy.

"Whoa, what's the Captain doing here?" He asked, nudging Dream's shoulder.

“It’s a long story, but she’s not on our side,” Dream muttered, shaking his head. “Where are the others?”

“Uh, they should be coming...” Rewind quickly checked a bright purple watch he had on his wrist. “Oh, right now!”

He pointed towards the opposite end of the street, and Tommy paled when he saw the group running at them.

404 was at the front, already brandishing his knives as he sped towards them. Supreme was there as well, although he hung towards the sides, expression hidden by his red and yellow balaclava. Then, Tommy spotted Flame running a bit behind 404, his arms already lit up by his fire.

A pang of disappointment flashed through Tommy. While he knew Flame probably didn’t have much of a choice, he had wished the hero could’ve stayed out of this fight.

And lastly, there was- wait, was that a fucking panther?

“What the fuck is that thing?” Tommy yelled, stumbling backwards as the literal *panther* slowed to a stop next to Dream.

Suddenly, in the blink of an eye, the panther turned into a guy with bleached hair and a cat mask covering his face. Tommy gave Wilbur a confused look, and he leaned over to explain.

“That’s Felis, he was a minor hero who retired a few years back. Not sure why he’s here, but he can turn into different types of cats,” Wilbur explained in a rushed whisper while Phil and Techno readied themselves for a fight. “Which, like, sounds ridiculous on paper. But he can turn into anything between a lion and a housecat in seconds, which is a lot harder to fight than you think it would be.”

Suddenly, Tommy realized that not only did Dream get another hero to come out of retirement for this, but he also had just had all the heroes waiting as a backup right around the corner. That meant he either had been suspicious of Monarch’s meeting from the start, or he had just been preparing to have a huge showdown with the Syndicate this whole time.

“Fine Dream, if it’s a fight you want, then it’s a fight you’ll get,” Puffy said, drawing Tommy’s attention back to the front.

And just like that, things fell into chaos.

Puffy lunged at Dream with her spear, which he sidestepped easily, blocking her with his sword. A dark knife shot from the air, courtesy of 404, which Phil barely dodged in time as he held his phone to his ear, clearly calling Niki and Jack for backup. Techno, meanwhile, had already jumped into the action, and was taking on both Felis—who was a panther again—and Flame at the same time.

“Tommy, we need to go,” Wilbur whispered in his ear, grabbing his arm to pull him away.

As much as Tommy didn't want to leave the fight, he knew that Wilbur was right. He could heal anyone that got hurt back at their house. There was no sense in him being there right now.

Tommy turned to follow Wilbur back down the other street so they could run back to the car, but they hadn't even made it five steps before Tommy felt something grab the back of his shirt.

“WHAT THE-”

“Not so fast!” Dream called out, using his power to yank Tommy back into the fight. Tommy was violently yanked off his feet, and he screamed as he flew through the air, slamming into the ground right at Dream's feet. “Sorry, but you're not going anywhere.”

Although Tommy hadn't fallen far enough to get hurt, his head still pounded as he looked up to glare at Dream. “Fuck you!” He yelled, scrambling to his feet.

“Come on, don't make me-” Dream was cut off mid-sentence by Puffy body slamming into him out of nowhere, sending him to the ground with a strangled yelp.

“Go! I got him!” Puffy shouted, fighting to pin Dream to the ground as he struggled underneath her.

Nodding at Puffy, Tommy ran back down towards Wilbur, but his eyes widened when he saw Wilbur was no longer alone.

Wilbur and Rewind were dancing around each other, with Rewind dodging every single punch or kick Wilbur tried to throw at him. It must've been annoying as hell to try and fight Rewind considering he could literally just rewind time and predict all your moves, but there was a limit to how much he could alter time before he got exhausted. This meant that Wilbur just had to try and outlast Rewind until he could tire him out.

And while Tommy wasn't a fighter, he could certainly help out with that.

Tommy barreled straight ahead while Wilbur struggled to land a hit on Rewind. Right before he could bodyslam the hero, Rewind jumped out of the way, whipping his head towards Tommy as his mouth opened in surprise.

“Oh! Who are you?” Rewind asked, taking a few steps back as Wilbur pushed Tommy behind him.

Huh. Guess Dream really hadn't told the other heroes about him.

“Apollo,” Tommy answered, curling his hands into fists.

Surprisingly, Rewind grinned at this. “Cool name! I haven't seen you around before, are you new?”

Tommy definitely hadn't expected a hero to be this friendly to him, but he hadn't had much interaction with Rewind before, so he supposed the hero was just more chill than the others.

Meanwhile Wilbur, clearly seeing this conversation as a moment of distraction, suddenly pressed his hands over Tommy's ears before he spoke.

"*Stop using your power,*" he told Rewind, Tommy only able to make out what he said by reading his lips.

And just like that, the smile fell off Rewind's face.

"Dang it!" He yelled, the friendliness that was there a moment before having disappeared completely. "I was just trying to talk to the new guy!"

"Not the time, Rewind," Wilbur said, edging away from the hero with Tommy behind him again. "I don't want to fight anyone right now. Just let us go and my order should wear off in a few minutes."

Rewind frowned, looking like he was considering letting them go. Hope bloomed in Tommy's chest. They just needed to get out of here, and things would be okay. Phil, Techno, and Puffy could handle themselves until Niki and Jack got here. Tommy knew that.

Before Rewind could respond though, suddenly Wilbur yelped, and Tommy saw a small knife sticking out of his shoulder.

"SHIT!" Wilbur yelled, reaching up and yanking the knife out with a pained hiss. Thankfully, the knife was small enough that it only left a small cut on Wilbur, but the issue was more so the implication of *who* threw the knife.

404 strolled towards them, swinging one of his throwing knives around his finger. "You know I can't let your kid get away," 404 told Wilbur, his grip tightening on the knife.

"*You're not going to fucking touch him,*" Wilbur hissed, his words echoing with a force that shook Tommy's bones.

404 winced at the command, but continued to walk forward anyway. "You know just as well as I do that our powers don't work very well on each other, Siren."

"Believe me, I know," Wilbur muttered, still trying to walk backwards away from 404's approach.

"So I suggest that you stop trying to escape down the street with your healer and I won't throw a knife right into your stomach," 404 threatened, pointing his knife at Wilbur.

"Your aim isn't that good, 404," Wilbur scoffed.

404 shrugged at this. "Okay then."

And then, he threw the knife.

Wilbur dodged it easily, ducking down and pushing Tommy out of the way. The knife clattered harmlessly on the ground behind them, but before Tommy could even catch his breath, 404 threw another.

Clearly, Wilbur had practice jumping out of the way of these. He danced between the knives without much effort, dragging Tommy with him to keep him out of range as well. It was dizzying to be tugged around without any sense of where they were going, but Tommy didn't fight it, instead just trusting in Wilbur's senses completely.

At one point though, Wilbur hissed again, and Tommy saw blood drip from the back of his hand. Only a graze, but it had hit him all the same. Immediately, Tommy grabbed his hand and healed it while 404 was distracted trying to get more of his knives out.

"Don't do that!" Wilbur hissed, ripping his hand out of Tommy's. "I'm fine! Don't tire yourself out for me!"

"It's a tiny scratch, it's not gonna tire me out!" Tommy argued, the glow in his hand fading quickly. "Besides-"

Tommy was cut off when Wilbur suddenly yanked him to his chest, and Tommy heard a knife hit the wall behind him.

"Aw, I'm out," 404 then complained.

Wilbur grabbed Tommy's arm, tugging him to run again. But before they could take even a step-

"DREAM! THEY'RE GETTING AWAY!" 404 shouted, cupping his hands over his mouth.

At the front of the fight, Tommy saw Puffy pinning Dream to a wall. But as soon as 404 said that, Dream blasted Puffy back with a shockwave. She flew backwards and landed on her feet, but before she could run at Dream again, he was flying straight for Tommy.

Dream's boots slammed against the ground, and Tommy stumbled at the next shockwave it sent out. Then, before any of them could say a word, Dream lifted up a hand and Tommy felt himself get shoved into the nearest wall.

It didn't hurt. That was the surprising part. Tommy was struggling against the invisible grip pinning him against the brick, but it wasn't holding him down hard enough to actually hurt him. With the other hand that Dream wasn't using to hold Tommy, he lifted two swords out of their hilts to float above his head.

Wilbur opened his mouth to spout out a command.

"Let him-"

Before he could finish his sentence though, the two swords above Dream's head surged forward.

Maybe if Wilbur hadn't already been exhausted from dodging 404's knives, he would've been able to dodge. Maybe if Wilbur hadn't been so focused on protecting Tommy, running at him instead of away from Dream, he would've been able to dodge. Maybe if Tommy hadn't come to this fight in the first place, Wilbur would've been able to dodge.

But Tommy would never get the answer to those ‘maybes’, because Wilbur wasn’t able to dodge out of the way of Dream’s swords.

“NO!” Tommy screamed as both the swords stuck themselves straight into Wilbur’s gut.

There was a horrible moment of silence as Wilbur looked down at the weapons sticking out from his torso, as if he was in shock.

Then, Dream pulled the swords back out, and blood began to pour down the front of Wilbur’s sweater.

Wilbur stared blankly at Tommy for a moment before his knees buckled, and he collapsed onto the asphalt.

“NO! NO LET ME GO YOU FUCKING BASTARD!” Tommy screamed. He screamed as loud as he could, fighting against the invisible hand holding him to the wall. He tried to kick and bite as hard as possible, but there was nothing for him to fight against because there was only air.

The swords floated back to Dream, dripping with Wilbur’s blood. He slid them back into their hilts, before he turned to look at Tommy.

He took one step towards Tommy.

Then another.

Before he could take a third, a sword bloomed from Dream’s chest.

“Don’t. Touch. My. Brothers.” Techno spat, pulling the blade out in one swift motion.

Dream stared in shock at the blood staining his chest, and 404 darted forward to drag him back towards the other side of the fight, where Supreme was already running towards them.

The invisible hand holding onto Tommy disappeared, and he collapsed onto the concrete with a heaving breath. He stumbled to his feet and sprinted towards Wilbur, who was laying face down against the street.

“Wilbur!” Tommy whispered, shaking his shoulder. “Wilbur, can you hear me?!”

“I-I’m here,” Wilbur whimpered, wincing as Tommy pushed him onto his back. Tommy was already rubbing his hands together, preparing to heal the stab wounds, but a hand on his shoulder stopped him.

“You need to get him out of here before you heal him,” Techno told him. “I’ll make sure you guys can escape. Hide where Dream won’t find you. Phil and I will get you when this is over.”

Looking to the front of the fight again, Dream could see 404 holding off Puffy and Felis holding off Phil as Supreme healed Dream. It wouldn’t be long before he was back in the fight, so this would be the only chance they had to escape.

“Got it,” Tommy said, before he grabbed Wilbur’s shoulders and yanked him up.

Wilbur cried out as Tommy forced him up, and Tommy hated seeing his brother in pain, but he knew they didn’t have time to even do a mini-heal right now.

“Fuck!” Wilbur yelled as Tommy pulled him to his feet. He leaned heavily against Tommy’s side, and Tommy could feel his blood soaking into his shirt.

Before they could finally get out of there though, there was another shout of, “wait!”

Glancing behind him, Tommy paled when he saw Flame standing in front of Techno.

Tommy met Flame’s eyes. A beat passed as they stared at each other, with Tommy silently pleading as much as he could with the one hero who had been kind to him before.

Please. If you want to make it up to me, let us go.

As if he was able to read his mind, the flames dancing along the hero's arms immediately died out.

“I’m not going to stop you,” Flame said, holding his hands up in surrender. “Get out of here, now!”

That was all the encouragement Tommy needed. With Wilbur practically dropping all his weight onto Tommy, he did his best to run away from the fight, turning down the nearest street and ignoring the screaming in his legs.

Wilbur was taller than him. By a lot. Tommy knew this full well and had never considered it much more than an annoyance. But now it was his undoing, because being taller than him meant that Wilbur was also heavier than him. To the point where Tommy was panting for breath before they’d even made it a block away.

In the distance, he heard Dream yell.

“WHERE ARE THEY?!”

Knowing he couldn’t run anymore, Tommy dragged Wilbur into a nearby alleyway. There was a single dumpster sitting against a wall, and Tommy set Wilbur down so the dumpster was between them and the entrance to the alley, wincing when Wilbur let out another whimper at the movement.

In a way, it reminded Tommy of the first alley. The one he’d healed Siren in all that time ago. It wasn’t the same, and actually seemed a bit cleaner than that first one, but it was still eerily reminiscent of it.

How ironic. And now here he was again, with a famous supervillain bleeding out in front of him, but things were so different now. So very different.

“T-Tommy,” Wilbur whispered as Tommy laid him down on the ground so he’d be able to heal it better.

“I know it hurts, I’m sorry,” Tommy whispered back, reaching for the edge of his shirt so he could get a proper look at the wound. “I’m gonna fix it, okay? You’ll be okay.”

“No,” Wilbur breathed, fumbling to try and grab Tommy’s wrists. “You-You can’t heal me.”

Tommy paused, and pulled down his mask to frown at Wilbur. “What? Of course I’m gonna heal you, you fucking bitch!”

“No,” Wilbur repeated, shaking his head. “Dream is- he’s still after you. If you heal this, you’ll be too tired to run.”

“I’ve healed worse than this. I’ll be fine,” Tommy said, although he wasn’t sure if that was true.

Wilbur shook his head, a small cry escaping his lips when it jostled the stab wounds. “It’s worse. Worse than- than what you healed when you found me. I can feel it.”

Clenching his jaw, Tommy tried to tell himself that Wilbur was just lying, and pushed Wilbur’s hands away so he could get a look for himself.

...oh.

The first time Tommy had found Wilbur, the hole in his gut had been ridiculous, but had missed his vital organs. That was why bleeding out was his biggest concern, more so than anything else.

This was different.

Tommy had done some studying up on anatomy since becoming a healer for the Syndicate, and he could tell that the swords had sliced clean through both his stomach and his liver. Dream’s swords were razor sharp, and blood was already starting to soak into Tommy’s pants as it pooled out beneath them both.

Bile rose in his throat. Wilbur was right. This was worse.

Still, it didn’t matter. He could heal it.

He had to.

Tommy put his hands on the wound, but Wilbur made a noise of protest.

“Don’t,” he pleaded, using his free hand to pull up his mask. “Please, don’t heal me, Tommy. You- You can’t get captured by him again. It’s not worth it.”

In the distance, Tommy heard something loud crash against a wall, followed by Dream yelling. It was closer than before, which meant he was looking for them. Looking for *him*.

“Don’t be fucking stupid, you’re going to die if I don’t heal you!” Tommy exclaimed, his voice cracking as his eyes began to burn. “I don’t care if Dream captures me again! I’d rather you be alive!”

Wilbur's dark gaze met his own, and there was more yelling that was even closer than before.

"You can't heal me," Wilbur ordered, his voice echoing even though it was barely anything more than a whisper.

Tommy's eyes widened in horror as the command echoed in his mind.

You can't heal him. You can't heal him. You can't heal him.

"W-Why would you do that?!" Tommy whispered, horrified tears spilling down his cheeks. "What the fuck is wrong with you!"

"I'm so sorry," Wilbur whispered, "but you need to run. Please."

Tommy stared at Wilbur in horror, unable to tear his eyes away from the blood still spilling from his stomach. His heart was pounding in his ears as he tried to will himself to put his hands on the wounds and heal them like he'd done so many times before. But anytime he even thought about lifting his hands, the order would echo in his mind.

You can't heal him.

"You're a fucking idiot!" Tommy cried out, realizing that Wilbur was going to die and there was nothing he could do about it. "Now I just have to sit here and watch you die?!"

"No, leave me," Wilbur pleaded, reaching out to squeeze Tommy's hand, but his grip was so weak, Tommy could barely feel it.

"I'm not leaving you," Tommy sobbed, squeezing Wilbur's hand as he tried to think of something- *anything* he could do. "Undo the order so I can fix this!"

Suddenly, there were footsteps right outside the alleyway, and Tommy froze.

"Did I hear someone crying?" Dream's voice called out. "Tommy? Is that you in there?"

Tommy's heart was racing a mile a minute as he listened to the footsteps echo off the alley walls. There was nowhere to run. He was cornered and Wilbur was dying and Dream was going to find them any fucking second now.

So Tommy did the only thing he could do. He threw himself on top of Wilbur to shield him, and hid his face in his brother's shoulder to muffle his cries. Wilbur then rested a hand on top of Tommy's back, but there was barely any rise and fall to his chest.

The footsteps got closer. Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, preparing to feel a hand grip his shoulder and rip him off of Wilbur.

And then, there was another voice.

"Dream! We're not finished yet!" Puffy shouted from outside the alleyway.

The footsteps paused. "Puffy, please, you don't-"

“Get out here *now*,” Puffy ordered. If Tommy didn’t know any better, he’d think she had some kind of siren voice herself, because there was only a split second of hesitation before Dream was practically racing out of the alley.

Tommy didn’t know if Puffy knew he was in here, but she led Dream away all the same. The voices faded as the fight went back towards the cafe, and Tommy nearly sobbed in relief once they were gone.

“They’re gone now, Wil,” Tommy told his brother, straightening up so he wasn’t laying on top of Wilbur any longer. “I don’t think Dream will come back this way, so I can heal you now.”

There was no response.

All of his blood turned to ice in that moment. The hand that had been resting on his back was limp, and there was a quiet ringing in his ears as Tommy glanced up to Wilbur’s face.

Wilbur’s eyes were open, but they were... empty. He wasn’t blinking. He wasn’t trying to say something. He wasn’t doing anything.

“Wil?” Tommy whispered, his eyes burning again. “Please don’t do this to me.”

He searched for any sign of life. Reaching up, Tommy pressed his fingers to Wilbur’s neck, and couldn’t find a pulse.

The tears spilled over his cheeks again as Tommy stared into the eyes of his dead brother.

“No, don’t do this,” Tommy repeated, his voice growing louder. “Don’t fucking do this to me! You don’t get to be dead, you bastard!”

Nothing. No response.

A vicious sob tore its way out of Tommy’s throat as he grabbed Wilbur’s shoulders and began to shake him. This couldn’t be real. There was no way. Wilbur wasn’t dead. He was just fucking with him. He had to be.

“Wilbur please!” Tommy cried, shaking him more. “Stop this! It’s not fucking funny!”

Wilbur had gone completely limp, almost like a ragdoll. It made Tommy want to throw up.

Letting go of his shoulders, Tommy glanced back down at the stab wound that was still oozing blood from his stomach, but at a much slower rate than before. Narrowing his eyes, Tommy found he was able to lift his hands without any struggle now. There was no voice in his head telling him he couldn’t heal Wilbur, and Tommy didn’t want to think about what that implied.

Instead, he pressed his hands on top of the stab wound, and willed them to heal.

Nothing happened.

“Come on,” Tommy muttered, gritting his teeth as he tried to focus all his energy into his hands. “Don’t fucking do this. I can heal this! I know I can!”

But he couldn’t heal something that was dead. Tommy knew that full well.

One time, long before he’d healed Siren, Tommy found a bird on the side of the road that had been hit by a car. He picked it up in his hands and tried to heal it, but his hands refused to glow. No matter how many times he tried, his powers just wouldn’t work on the bird.

And right now, while his hands were coated red with Wilbur’s blood, there was no familiar orange glow.

“Please!” Tommy sobbed, squeezing his eyes shut as he begged his powers to work. “Let me save him!”

He had to save Wilbur.

Tommy refused to lose his brother so soon after finding him.

There was no if’s and’s or but’s about it.

He was *going* to save Wilbur.

And then, as Tommy sobbed while trying to stop the blood from flowing out of the wounds, something happened.

It started with a warmth in his hands. But it wasn’t like when he normally healed people. No, this wasn’t a pleasant warmth. Instead, it was like he was holding fire in his palms. His eyes flickered open and he saw the light had returned to his palms, but it was different than the usual orange.

This light was as gold as could be. It was like Tommy was staring at pure sunlight as the fire in his hands grew hotter and hotter. Soon, the heat raced up from his palms and onto his arms. Then, it spread to his shoulders, his back, his chest—everywhere.

Tommy’s head was screaming in pain, and it only got worse with every passing second. His vision was spinning and he shut his eyes again, trying to focus on the burning energy that was slowly consuming him. Tears poured down his cheeks, but even they felt like drops of magma against his cheeks.

Healing had never been this hard before. The pain was nearly unbearable, but Tommy refused to let go. The golden light behind his eyes grew even brighter, and a scream tore itself from Tommy’s throat as the fire inside of him grew hotter than he could’ve ever imagined. It was like the very core of his being was being pulled into the ground, and it took all of his effort to keep himself from letting himself be yanked into the cool darkness.

And then, it stopped.

All at once, the burning disappeared, and the light went with it. Without thinking, Tommy ripped his hands away from Wilbur, cradling them to his chest as he struggled to catch his

breath.

Black spots dotted his vision. Tommy knew he should be trying to check... something... but his head was in far too much pain to think straight right now.

Without even really willing himself to do it, Tommy pitched forward, collapsing on top of Wilbur once again. His head was spinning and the promise of sleep was creeping up on him.

As the world around him started to disappear, Tommy heard a loud gasp next to his ear, and felt the chest underneath him rise up.

The last thing Tommy felt before he passed out were a pair of cool arms wrapping around him, and Tommy knew he was safe.

Chapter End Notes

NEITHER TOMMY OR WILBUR ARE DEAD I PROMISE I WOULD'VE TAGGED MCD IF EITHER OF THEM DIED! Tommy just passed tf out because he is unsurprisingly exhausted after that move

anyway i've had that fucking 'death' scene planned out in my head since i wrote chapter 3ish of this fic?? like I have been waiting for that scene for SO DAMN LONG you guys don't even know how happy it makes me to finally be able to publish it

also Felis is Antfrost, no I totally just didn't forget to mention him until now haha what are you talking about-

it was really fun getting to see all your theories as to what Phil's plan was, and I hope you all appreciated Puffy calling Dream tf out!! The reason Phil didn't tell crimeboys that it was Puffy will be explained next chapter but it's nothing major. But yeah, Puffy came out of retirement solely to beat Dream's ass because I love her.

anywayyyy please let me know what you thought down in the comments below! next chapter will explain what happens after tommy passes tf out, and will also include the epilogue! so look forward to that, no clue when I'm gonna get it out because my winter break just ended but I'll try to get it finished soon!

remember I have a discord server! it's super chill and I sometimes show sneak peaks at upcoming stuff! <https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

if you're getting sad that clinic is coming to an end, I have a new superhero au fic I'm going to start updating regularly once clinic ends so go check it out [here!](#)

I have a spotify playlist for this fic, so check it out [here!](#)

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

the end is the beginning

Chapter Summary

It's finally over.

Chapter Notes

hi everyone, it's finally here. the final chapter of this fic.

I know this update took a little while longer than expected, and while I actually finished the chapter about a week ago, I was dealing with a bad mental health moment so I decided to wait until I felt better so I could properly appreciate finishing this story. And I feel better now! So here we are. It's the end.

I'm gonna get more mushy in the end notes so make sure to read those, but for now, let's shoutout some more tik tok! You guys are insanely talented and I love seeing what you've all come up with for my silly superhero story. first off, HUGE shoutout to [chaoticqueen02](#) for having a STUNNING cosplay of Monarch, ngl of all the characters I wasn't expecting to get a cosplay of them and I'm SO happy bc I really loved their whole look in my head. Other amazing cosplays I saw were from [cos_why_not](#), [sympathyforavillain_](#), [healixx_](#) (with a super cool Nemesis cosplay that made me so happy to see), [sammyxxmhenjin11](#), [i_like_sushi2](#), [snazzylee](#), [monarch.cosplays](#), [idk.c0spl4y](#), [_spiritfoxcos_](#), [kickmy_sass](#), [gay_leaf.cos](#) (that sfx is so cool holy shit), [ghostycos.7](#), [chirpbox](#), and [coletherando](#)! holy shit that was a lot of html links to include but hey it's the last shoutout section so there's a lot! ty all so much for your amazing cosplays, and for anyone else I've linked in the past as well, it's been insanely fun seeing people actually cosplay my characters and it makes me so happy

also there's some amazing art from [bnush](#) and [emiartse](#) so make sure to check them out too!

OKAY anyway uh TWs for mentions of wounds like usual, otherwise we're good to go!

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

Tommy woke up with a pounding headache.

Blinking open crusted-over eyes, he was just able to make out his familiar ceiling, and could feel soft sheets wrapped around his body.

Everything ached. All of his muscles were sore, his head was throbbing, and even the act of opening his eyes was starting to exhaust him. It felt like he'd been run over by a car, but not just once. It felt like he'd gotten run over, and then the car reversed to run over him a second time, and then it drove forward again to hit him a third time as well—just for good measure.

Suffice to say, he felt like shit.

His mind was groggy as he tried to think back on what had happened. They had been... going to meet with Dream... and then 404 had tried to throw knives at them... and then Dream stabbed Wilbur-

Oh.

Bolting upright in his bed, Tommy hissed as the movement sent a huge spike of pain through his head, and squeezed his eyes shut as he brought his hands up to his temples.

“Tommy?” A familiar voice said.

“Dad?” Tommy mumbled without thinking, keeping his eyes shut.

There was a beat of silence, and Tommy could've sworn he heard Phil snuffle. Then,

“Hey Toms.”

Suddenly, there was a warm hand wrapping around his wrist, and Tommy blinked open his eyes again to see his father.

Phil was sitting on the chair next to his bed, much like Tubbo and Ranboo had been doing when Tommy had first woken up after being kidnapped. He moved his hand down Tommy's wrist to gently squeeze his hand, and Tommy could see there were dark bags under his eyes.

“How are you feeling?” Phil asked, giving him a warm smile despite his eyes glittering like they were full of tears.

Tommy opened his mouth to answer, but paused when he remembered what else happened before he passed out.

The alley. Trying to keep Wilbur from bleeding out. Trying to shake him awake and begging him not to be dead.

That blinding light and the fire racing through his veins. His own screams echoing in his ears.

“Where's Wilbur?!” Tommy asked, ripping his hand out of Phil's. “Is he okay? Did he- I mean I- I thought that I-”

“He's okay,” Phil cut him off, resting a hand on his shoulder.

Tommy took a shaky breath as he remembered what it was like to try and shake Wilbur awake, only for him to sit there completely limp.

“I-I thought he- I could’ve sworn he-” he cut himself off this time, a choked sob bubbling up in his throat. “Are you sure he’s okay?” He asked Phil, tears now swimming in his eyes.

“He’s alright, Tommy. You saved his life,” Phil reassured him, squeezing his shoulder. “He’s alive because of you.”

Oh thank god.

“Where is he?” Tommy asked, looking around his room and realizing he and Phil were the only people in it. “I-I need to see him.” He needed to get the mental image of Wilbur’s dead body out of his head. He needed *proof* that his brother was alive.

“He’s in his room-”

Before Phil could finish his sentence, Tommy pushed the blankets back to try and climb out of bed. But when he put his feet on the ground, the minute he tried to shift his weight onto his legs, they started shaking so badly he couldn’t even find it in him to stand up.

“Fuck, why am I so weak?” Tommy hissed, gritting his teeth as he tried to force his body to cooperate.

“You really over-exerted yourself,” Phil told him, standing up and pushing him back down onto the bed. “Don’t try to get up. Techno can carry you.”

“I don’t need-”

“Techno!” Phil called out, cutting Tommy off. “Can you c’mere?”

From the hallway outside his door, Tommy heard another door open. Then, there were shuffling footsteps, and Techno appeared in his doorway.

As soon as Techno saw Tommy was awake, there was a drop in his shoulders, and something like relief flickered through his face. “Good to see you’re awake, Apollo.”

Distantly, Tommy remembered Techno snarling at Dream not to touch his brothers. *Brothers*. Plural.

If he wasn’t so worried about Wilbur, Tommy would’ve made some comment about it. But at that moment, he only had one thing on his mind. Everything else could wait.

“He wants to go see Wil, but he can’t stand,” Phil explained for him. “Since Wil isn’t really up for getting out of bed either, can you carry him?”

Tommy frowned. “I don’t need to be carried.”

“You literally just tried to stand and couldn’t,” Phil reminded him.

“Trust me, Tommy. You’re like carrying a bag of grapes. It’s not a big deal,” Techno told him as he approached the bed.

While Tommy wanted to argue that he was fucking *fine* and didn't need to be carried like a baby, anxiety was still buzzing in his chest the more he thought about Wilbur. The more he fought, the longer it would take to get proof that Wilbur was okay. So he just had to suck up his embarrassment for the time being and accept the help.

"Fine. Take me to him," Tommy said, reaching his arms up at Techno.

Huffing, Techno leaned down and scooped his arms under Tommy's legs and back. There was no grunting or struggle as Techno hoisted Tommy up, and Tommy found himself leaning into Techno's chest as Phil opened the door to his room for them.

The constant bouncing with every step Techno took made Tommy's already pounding head spin even more, so he squeezed his eyes shut and hid his face in Techno's chest as they made their way out to the hallway.

It was only a few steps across the hall into Wilbur's room. Ignoring the nausea rolling over him, Tommy forced himself to open his eyes when they stepped through the next doorway.

Wilbur's room looked exactly the same as it had before they'd left for the meeting. Messy as hell. But now Tommy could see some blood-stained clothes shoved into the far corner, and some extra bandages sitting on his nightstand.

But Tommy barely paid attention to that. Instead, as soon as he met a familiar pair of warm brown eyes, Tommy's heart leapt into his throat.

"Hey Toms," Wilbur said softly, giving him a small smile.

Wilbur was propped up in his bed, with several puffy pillows supporting his back. He was pale, with deep bags sitting under his eyes. He looked just as bad as Tommy felt, but there was one part of his appearance in particular that caught Tommy's eyes.

"Wil," Tommy whispered as Techno set him on the bed, staring at Wilbur's hair. "Why the hell is there white in your hair?"

Most of Wilbur's hair was the same chocolate brown as it had always been. But one of the curls that fell right in front of his face was now a stark white—reminiscent of snow.

Wilbur huffed out a weak laugh. "I'm not sure, but I think it happened when you brought me back to life."

Tommy blinked, the realization setting in.

He *had* brought Wilbur back to life, hadn't he? Wilbur hadn't been breathing, his heart had stopped pumping blood. Tommy wasn't supposed to be able to heal things that were dead, and yet he'd managed to force his powers to work on Wilbur.

That was... something to work out for another time. When his head wasn't pounding like a jackhammer.

Before Tommy could really try to formulate his thoughts into a response, suddenly Wilbur was leaning forward in the bed, and grabbing a strand of Tommy's own hair.

"But look," Wilbur said, tugging a bit of Tommy's own curls down his forehead so he could see. "We're matching."

Sure enough, the strand of hair Wilbur had grasped in his fingers wasn't gold like the rest of his hair. It was pure white, just like Wilbur's. Tommy went cross-eyed staring at it for a moment, before Wilbur let go and leaned back against his pillows again.

Tommy stared blankly at his brother for a moment. He took in the white streak in Wilbur's hair, the paleness of his skin, the way he was giving Tommy a shy smile, like he was happy to see him, but worried at the same time.

Wilbur was here. He was sitting right in front of him, looking a bit worse for wear but breathing all the same.

Without thinking, Tommy scooted forward on the bed until he was right next to Wilbur. Then, with trembling hands he brought up his fingers to Wilbur's throat, right where his pulse was.

There, underneath his skin, his pulse was thudding in a steady *thump thump thump*. Not like before. The pulse was real, it was there.

Smile fading, Wilbur brought a hand up to cover the hand Tommy had on his neck. "I'm alive," he whispered, squeezing his hand lightly. "I'm not going anywhere, I promise."

And that... that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

A sob tore out of his throat, and Tommy lunged for his brother, wrapping his arms around him and burying his face in his warm shoulder. Wilbur immediately tugged him close, and although Tommy knew Phil and Techno were still in the room watching this all go down, he couldn't bring it in himself to care.

It worked. Somehow, Tommy had done the impossible and brought Wilbur back to life.

Wilbur's arms were tight around his shoulders, and Tommy sobbed as a million emotions flooded through his mind. His fear, his pain, his grief, his relief, his *anger*.

There was so much washing over him at once. Tommy could hear Wilbur's siren voice in his head again, the soft echo of his command to not let Tommy heal him.

Suddenly overcome with white hot rage, Tommy pulled back from the hug, facing Wilbur with tear-streaked cheeks.

"Are you-"

Before Wilbur could finish that sentence, Tommy brought his hand up and slapped Wilbur across the face as hard as he could.

A deafening smack echoed through the room. There were a few beats of silence after Wilbur's head snapped to the side, a red handprint quickly forming on his cheek.

Then,

"Yeah, I think I deserved that," Wilbur muttered.

"You're such a fucking idiot!" Tommy yelled, the relief and anger swirling inside of him to create a strange mix of emotions that he could barely process. "I can't believe you fucking used your voice to keep me from healing you!"

"You did *what?!?*" Phil cut in, while Techno let out an alarmed *HEH?*

Sighing, Wilbur lifted his head back up, not dropping his arms from where they were still wrapped around Tommy. "I... I don't really have a good excuse for that."

"Yeah, you fucking don't!" Tommy hissed, more hot tears streaming down his face. "We talked about this, Wilbur! You aren't a fucking martyr!"

"I know, and it was a fucking stupid thing of me to do," Wilbur said, pulling Tommy back down to his shoulder.

Tommy didn't try to fight it. He curled closer to Wilbur, hiding his face in his sweater as the mental image of Wilbur's dead body just kept flashing in his mind.

"You're such a fucking idiot," Tommy repeated, his voice muffled by fabric.

"I am, I know," Wilbur agreed, bringing a hand up to card through Tommy's hair. "I was just- I was so out of it from blood loss and I could hear Dream coming down the street. I knew I couldn't defend you anymore and I just wanted you to get out of there before he showed up, so I thought if I made it so you couldn't heal me, you would run."

"You were wrong. I'd never leave you like that," Tommy told him, not bothering to lift his head.

"Yeah, I realize that now," Wilbur said, letting out a humorless laugh. "I should've known you'd pull something like learning how to revive the dead just to save my sorry ass."

Tommy still had no idea how he did that, and he wasn't sure he'd ever know. But it had worked, and that was what mattered the most. That Wilbur was here now, and Tommy could yell at him for being a fucking asshole. That he was alive, and hugging Tommy, and Tommy was able to keep his family intact.

"Wait," Phil suddenly cut in, and Tommy felt the bed dip as Phil sat on the edge. "You used your voice to tell Tommy not to heal you?"

Although Tommy didn't lift his head, he could imagine Wilbur's sheepish look.

"Um, yeah. I knew that healing me would make Tommy too tired to run from Dream, and he was getting close to the alley we were hiding in. So in my 'I've just been stabbed' delirium, I

thought it was a good idea to just make it so he couldn't heal me so he'd leave me behind," Wilbur explained.

Techno made a sound of disapproval. "You shouldn't have done that."

"Yeah, I fucking know," Wilbur hissed, sounding a little impatient. "I'm not gonna pull shit like that again. Believe it or not, death wasn't exactly a fun experience that I'd like to go through again."

Frowning, Tommy lifted his head from Wilbur's shoulder just the tiniest bit so he could see his face. "Wait, you remember it?"

The annoyance faded from Wilbur's face at Tommy's soft question, and he nodded as his eyes glazed over. "It's fuzzy, but I remember... there was a train station. And I just- I was so fucking lonely down there. Standing on an empty platform, waiting for a train I knew would never come."

"Sounds more like a limbo than the afterlife," Techno commented.

"Maybe," Wilbur shrugged, gently pushing Tommy's head back down so he could continue to run his fingers through his hair. "All I know is that eventually, a train stopped and Tommy was on it."

"I was?" Tommy frowned, not having experienced anything like that.

Wilbur snorted. "You were. You didn't talk, but you just scowled at me and yanked me onto the train. Next thing I knew, I was waking up here."

That was strange. Tommy didn't experience anything like that. But he had to admit, that didn't sound like a very pleasant afterlife.

"And you're not going to do anything like that again," Phil said, huffing a bit.

"Yeah, I won't," Wilbur reassured. "Like I said, I don't really want to see that train station again."

"Good," Tommy grumbled, readjusting so he was no longer hidden in Wilbur's shoulder, but had his head resting on Wilbur's chest. Underneath his head, he could hear the steady *thump thump thump* of Wilbur's heart, and it eased the lingering anxiety he still had.

Now that Tommy knew that Wilbur was alive, the panic racing in his veins finally eased up enough for his thoughts to clear. Wilbur was okay, which meant that now Tommy had something else to worry about.

"So," Tommy started, drawing all eyes back to him, "what happened with, um, Dream?"

Although no one seemed particularly upset or worried which made him want to believe things had worked out, they might have just been more focused on Wilbur for the time being, and pushed the problems with Dream to the side.

Phil and Techno shared a silent look, before Phil sighed and folded his hands together.

“Well, he’s not going to be a problem anymore. At least not to you,” Phil told him, giving him a reassuring smile. “Basically, after you and Wil left the fight, Puffy and I did our best to subdue him. Eventually, Puffy managed to get him pinned, and she gave him an ultimatum. Apparently she had pictures of Dream’s face, so either she would show us, the Syndicate, his face, or he had to make a deal with her.”

“What was the deal?” Tommy asked, furrowing his brows.

“Since she already agreed to stand by you if he released the video footage, that meant his blackmail was useless. So she made him promise that from his point forward, everything would go back to the way it was before you started healing for us. Dream basically has to leave our healer alone, and in turn, we have to leave Supreme alone as well, although we never targeted him in the first place. Healers need to be considered neutral, and he can’t use your civilian identity against you,” Phil explained, not looking all too pleased at the explanation.

“Wait, so you didn’t kill him?” Tommy asked, having fully expected that to be the news he heard.

“I wanted to,” Techno growled, “but Puffy wouldn’t let me.”

“Yeah, she wouldn’t let anyone kill him, which I wasn’t super thrilled about,” Phil shrugged, his wings shifting with the movement. “But Puffy is a good friend of mine, so I respected her wishes about the whole thing. She promised that if he ever pulls this kind of shit against you again, she’ll handle him.”

For some strange reason that Tommy couldn’t pin, he was actually... relieved? Despite everything Dream had put him through, there had been a lingering knot of worry in his chest that Dream would be dead. While he knew he had no reason to feel bad for Dream given the fact that the hero had literally kidnapped him and tried to throw him in jail, Tommy just couldn’t stand the idea of knowing that he was the reason for Dream’s death.

“Thank you,” Tommy murmured, relaxing further into Wilbur’s hold. “I’m really glad you didn’t kill him.”

“Thank Puffy, not us,” Techno grunted.

This made Tommy snort. “You’re right. Puffy is the real hero here. She gets all the credit.”

“To be fair, she kinda does,” Techno told him with a shrug. “If Phil hadn’t managed to convince her to come out of retirement, we would’ve been screwed.”

“Wait,” Wilbur cut in suddenly, “you never explained that to us, Phil. Why did you keep me and Tommy out of the loop for the plan?”

Ducking his head, Phil laughed awkwardly. “Um, well, it wasn’t anything against you two. It was more that I just wasn’t sure if Puffy was going to end up agreeing to come out of

retirement for this, so I didn't want to get hopes up. I also didn't think it was fair to ask her for something as huge as this and then go 'by the way, if you say no Tommy will know you could've helped him and you didn't.'"

"Well, Tommy makes sense, but what about me?" Wilbur pushed, frowning at Phil.

"Because you're petty as fuck and would've been pissed at Puffy if she said no," Phil explained with a flat stare.

Tommy let out a startled laugh at this. It was true. Wilbur *was* petty as fuck. But Wilbur didn't seem to agree.

"I'm not petty!"

"You are too," Tommy said, shifting his head so he was looking up at Wilbur's face.

Wilbur scowled. "No I'm not, you brat."

"You literally are."

Huffing, the white streak in Wilbur's hair fell over his eyes again, and Tommy paused to pull down his own matching one again.

It was almost like that night never happened. Like it was all just a bad dream, because now Wilbur and Tommy were both here, alive and well. But the hair was evidence that it wasn't a dream. That all that had been real.

Smile fading, Tommy twirled the white in his hair around his finger while the others quieted down.

"So... Is it over then?" He asked after a few minutes, glancing between Wilbur, Phil, and Techno's faces. "Are we okay now?"

Am I going to be able to stay with you? was his silent question.

Reaching out, Phil pushed Tommy's hair back from his face, and Tommy immediately leaned into the gentle touch.

"Yeah, it's over, Tommy," Phil reassured him. "You're home now, and we're going to make sure it stays that way."

As Phil ran his fingers through Tommy's hair, Wilbur rubbed small circles into his shoulder blade, and Techno flashed him a small but wholly genuine smile...

Well, Tommy found himself believing every word of what Phil said.

He was home.

"Holy shit, this place is awesome!"

Walking through Tubbo and Ranboo's new apartment, Tommy gaped at how big the place was, and how much nicer it smelled compared to their last apartment.

"I know, right? We kept telling Phil we didn't need a place this nice, but he really thought we'd like this one best," Ranboo told him, running his hand along the unstained white wall.

The new apartment sat on the border between South Bay and Eastside. It was in a new building, meaning no one had actually lived in this unit—until now. Once Tubbo and Ranboo had accepted the offer of joining the Syndicate, Phil's first order of business had been to make sure the boys had a decent place to live, waving off any arguments as it being part of their 'salary' despite the fact that Syndicate members didn't really have salaries.

Now here they were, standing in the middle of an apartment that Phil had completely bought outright for the boys. There was one wall with floor to ceiling windows that faced out onto the city skyline, letting in so much fresh sunlight, Tommy felt like he could just lay on the floor and fall asleep in the warmth like a cat.

Everything in the apartment was new, save for the few things the boys had wanted to keep from their old place. Amidst the plush furniture and shining countertops, Tubbo's old computer was shoved into a corner, a mess of wires falling over the hardwood floors in a clump that you couldn't pay Tommy to try and untangle. Ranboo's DS was settled on the coffee table, and Tommy's favorite sweatshirt had been tossed over the back of their new couch.

It was strange, seeing these little bits of their old home in this shiny new space. It granted a sense of familiarity, but at the same time it felt foreign. Like if Tommy spilled something, some rich person was going to rush out of the closet and yell at him.

That didn't mean any of the trio disliked it. Quite the opposite in fact. Tubbo had already made himself comfortable on the couch, while Ranboo was digging through the fridge to see what kind of food Techno had stocked it up with.

"It's all potatoes," Ranboo announced after a few minutes of searching, closing the fridge door with a sigh.

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me," Tommy scoffed, rushing over to take a look for himself.

Cold air blasted Tommy as he swung the fridge door open. Sure enough, while there were a few essentials like eggs and milk, most of the shelves were lined with microwavable meals of mashed potatoes or potato pancakes.

"Goddammit Techno," Tommy huffed, slamming the door shut again.

"It's fine. We'll just go grocery shopping to get some other stuff," Ranboo said, not seeming all that annoyed about the copious amount of starch in their fridge.

"It's so weird to remember we can just do that now," Tubbo chimed in, sitting upright on the couch so he could look at Tommy and Ranboo. "Like, it's still taking a bit to sink in that we

don't have to budget so hard for food anymore.”

That was another one of Phil's conditions for the two boys to join the Syndicate. Not only did they get a nicer place to live, they now had an entire spending account to use for whatever they needed. Of course, Tubbo and Ranboo had both already insisted they would only use it for food, but Tommy doubted Phil would care if they bought themselves an xbox with it or something.

“Have you guys gotten all your clothes and stuff moved over yet?” Tommy asked, eyeing the suitcases still sitting in front of the front door.

Tubbo groaned, while Ranboo chuckled. “Yeah, we have them here but we haven't unpacked anything yet.”

“I fucking hate unpacking shit!” Tubbo complained, flopping back down on the couch.

“I think we all do, Tubbo,” Ranboo pointed out, leaning against the counter. “But it's probably a good idea to hold off. At least until you move your stuff over too, Tommy.”

Tommy froze. Shit. Yeah. The reason he'd come over to the apartment today in the first place. He had to figure out how to break the news to them.

While Tommy knew it wasn't something he should feel guilty about, he couldn't help the ache that echoed through his chest every time he thought over his decision. It wasn't that he wanted to put distance between himself and his best friends. But he just... he had other family he wanted to live with too.

Ranboo noticed the way Tommy's face fell at his comment, and immediately pushed off the counter to stand in front of him. “Are you alright?” He asked softly.

“Um, I'm fine but I just- I wanted to talk to you guys about that actually,” Tommy said, eyes ducking to the ground. “About the whole, um, me moving thing.”

“Let me guess,” Tubbo cut in, climbing off the couch. “You want to stay with the Soot's?”

Tommy winced, and forced himself to nod. “Yeah. It's not that I care about them more than I care about you guys or anything. You're still my family and that's never gonna change. But it's just... it's different, you know?”

Suddenly, a pair of warm hands were on his shoulders, and Tommy looked up to see Ranboo giving him a reassuring smile. “Tommy, don't worry. We figured you were probably going to want to stay with them.”

“Yeah, dude, Phil's literally filling out adoption paperwork for you,” Tubbo snorted, having joined the two standing to lean against Tommy's side. “This isn't a surprise at all.”

“But- You're not upset?” Tommy asked, glancing between the two of them.

“I mean, it's not like we're never going to see you again or anything,” Tubbo huffed. “You better be coming over to hang out all the damn time.”

“Of course!” Tommy exclaimed, horrified by the suggestion that he wouldn’t want to hang out with his best friends anymore. “I was already planning on staying over here a few nights a week anyway.”

At this, Ranboo chuckled. “What, like a joint custody situation?”

Tommy flushed and shook his head. “Not a joint custody situation, you dickhead!”

“I dunno, Tommy,” Tubbo teased, nudging his side with his elbow. “If me and Ranboo got married we could get into a custody battle with Phil for trying to adopt-”

“Oh fuck off!” Tommy scoffed, while Tubbo cackled at his own bad joke. “If you keep saying shit like that I’m not gonna come over to visit.”

“Okay, fine, we’ll stop,” Ranboo reassured, giving Tubbo a sharp look.

Tubbo stopped laughing, but the shit-eating grin stayed on his face as he leaned back into Tommy’s side. “Seriously though, we don’t care if you wanna keep living with Phil, Wil, and Techno.”

Ranboo nodded. “Yup. I promise we don’t mind.”

Well that was certainly a weight off his shoulders.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Tommy slumped against Tubbo. “Thanks guys. Like I said, it’s not like I’m going anywhere.”

“Trust me, I’m not worried about that. You’re way too clingy for that,” Tubbo joked.

“I’m not clingy!” Tommy protested. “If anything, you’re the clingy one!”

“You are too,” Tubbo shot back. “You’re so clingy, you literally brought Wilbur back from the dead,” he pointed out, reaching up to tug at Tommy’s white streak.

Tommy slapped his hand away from his hair. “That’s not being clingy! That’s being so incredibly cool and poggers that I got the power to fucking revive someone-”

“That’s like, ultimate clingy right there,” Ranboo chimed in, smirking at Tommy.

“If I die, you’d definitely bring me back because you’d miss me way too much,” Tubbo said, fluttering his lashes in a far too innocent way.

Even though it was a joke, the mental image of Wilbur’s dead body flashed behind his eyes again. Then, he imagined it being Tubbo instead—Tubbo lying too still, his eyes glassy and body limp.

Bile rose in his throat.

“Don’t joke about that,” Tommy suddenly snapped, making Tubbo and Ranboo’s laughter fall silent. “And don’t go dying thinking I can just bring you back either. I’m pretty sure that was

a one time thing with Wil.”

Tommy couldn't explain why, but some part of him just knew that what he did with Wilbur was likely something he'd never be able to repeat. He didn't know if you'd explain it like an adrenaline rush or something of the sort, but somehow, he just knew that bringing someone back from the dead wasn't something he could do twice.

So they had to stay safe. All of them.

Both Ranboo and Tubbo's expressions turned somber as they shared a look.

“Sorry, I was just fucking around,” Tubbo apologized.

“It's okay,” Tommy muttered, resting his chin on top of Tubbo's head. “I just... I don't like thinking about it.”

“And that's okay,” Ranboo reassured him, wrapping an arm around Tommy's shoulder so the three of them were in a group hug. “You don't have to talk about it.”

Leaning further against his friends, Tommy sighed. “Thanks guys.”

Tommy would never be grateful enough for getting best friends as great as Tubbo and Ranboo.

G2/M transition

- *Cell commitment to build the mitotic machinery*
- *Requires that during/by the end of G2 that the cell has*
- *Fully replicated and repaired DNA*
- *Cyclin A and Cyclin B proteins are synthesized*

Tommy stared at the notes on his page, the text blurring the more he tried to comprehend what the hell he'd actually written down. They were going over the stages of mitosis, and his head was already pounding from all the terms he knew he was going to have to memorize.

On the one hand, Tommy really liked the idea of becoming a doctor considering, well, he liked healing people. On the other hand, biology was *really* fucking complicated. Way more intense than he remembered it being in high school.

But it was interesting to learn about the way cells worked at very small levels, and then try to apply that to the way his own powers worked. Although this was only the second college level biology course he was taking, so far he'd theorized that his power probably did something along the lines of accelerating stem cell division over wounds, but he would have to research more before he could come up with a solid theory for it.

For now though, he was stuck focusing on the details of mitosis. It was late at night, and he was hunched over his desk, struggling to ingrain this shit into his memory.

It was almost a relief when he noticed the purple particles floating behind his head.

“Ranboo, what’s up?” Tommy asked, spinning around in his desk chair to face his friend.

Standing in the middle of his room, Ranboo was decked out in his full Ender outfit, his mask and goggles hiding whatever expression could be on his face right now.

“Sorry, I know you’re studying but, um, I was told to come get you,” Ranboo admitted, sounding sheepish.

Tommy huffed, although he was secretly thrilled at having an excuse to ditch his studying. “Who is it this time?” He asked, hopping out of his chair to run to his dresser.

“It’s Jack,” Ranboo told him, and Tommy rolled his eyes as he pulled his cargo pants out of his drawer.

“Of fucking course it is. Did he piss someone off again?” Tommy asked, rushing into the bathroom to change.

“Yup, he taunted 404 and got a knife to the thigh,” Ranboo sighed from outside the bathroom door.

After changing into his cargo pants, Tommy checked the pockets, grinning when he saw he had remembered to stuff them full of bandages and gauze. Opening the door to the bathroom again, Tommy grabbed his mask off his bed and buckled the straps behind his head, before dropping to the ground to pull his boots on.

“How bad is it?” Tommy asked, his voice now tinged with metal from his voice changer as he laced up his boots.

“Not that bad. He’s just complaining for the most part,” Ranboo told him, leaning against the edge of his bed as he watched Tommy tie his shoes. “Wil is holding off 404 now, while Niki, Tubbo, and Techno focus on Dream and Rewind.”

Snorting, Tommy pushed to his feet again, doing one last check to make sure his mask was secure. “I’m sure Wil is thrilled about having to handle 404,” he drawled sarcastically, reaching his hand out towards Ranboo.

Ranboo wrapped his hand around Tommy’s.

“You ready?” Ranboo asked.

Tommy grinned. “You know it.”

Next thing Tommy knew, his stomach was swooping out from underneath him. Everything went black, and Tommy’s head spun as he gripped onto Ranboo’s hand for dear life.

And then, he was stumbling onto a gravel rooftop. He could hear yelling all around, and after shaking himself off to get the ringing out of his ears, he paused to glance up and look around.

It was like Ranboo had said. Niki and Tubbo were tag teaming Rewind as he disappeared and reappeared as he jumped between seconds, while Wilbur was struggling to dodge 404’s

knives like he always was. Then, Tommy noticed Techno and Dream going toe to toe, and while there was still a small spike of fear that shot through him seeing Dream's smiley face mask again, he knew at this point that Dream was going to stay true to his word.

Many months had passed since the night they had their confrontation with Dream, and it had been harder than he thought to readjust to his normal life after things calmed down.

Sometimes, Tommy would still wake up and wonder if he was actually awake, or if this was all some giant trick on his mind and he was actually sitting in a jail cell right now. For the first month after everything had blown over, Tommy's palms were constantly glowing to heal the small wounds he'd created by pinching himself.

But the windows had always been clear, and his reality had proved itself again and again and again. This was real. He could trust that.

Tugging him by the hand, Ranboo led him to the edge of the roof, where Jack was sitting pressed up against the railing with a hand on his leg.

"Ayup man," Tommy greeted as he kneeled down in front of Jack, waving Ranboo off as he jumped back into the fight.

"Ayup," Jack muttered through gritted teeth.

Eyeing the knife sticking out of Jack's thigh, he pulled back the fabric of his pants to get a better look at it, and Jack winced at the pressure. "This looks like it hurts like a bitch."

"It fucking does," Jack hissed. "Can you hurry up and fucking pull it out?"

Rolling his eyes, Tommy nodded. "I will if you promise not to be a little bitch about it."

"I'm not gonna-" before Jack could finish his sentence, Tommy yanked the knife out of his thigh, causing Jack to let out a rather unmanly sounding shriek. "FUCKING HELL!"

Tossing the knife to the side, Tommy ignored Jack's string of curses as he grabbed some gauze out of one of his pockets, and used it to clean off the surface of the wound. While the knife had gotten him good, it hadn't gone very deep. The wound itself wasn't anything major, meaning it would be a pretty simple fix.

Ignoring the sounds of yelling and things crashing from the fight behind him, Tommy placed his hand over the stab wound and shut his eyes.

His hands never glowed gold again like they had the night he saved Wilbur. It had gone back to his normal orange, like the whole revival thing had never happened. (Although, if you asked Tommy, his post-healing headaches had gotten just a bit worse since that night. It wasn't anything he couldn't deal with, but it was still a pain in the ass all the same).

By the time Tommy pulled his hands away, a dull throbbing had already made itself known behind his eyes. He leaned back against the railing next to Jack, taking out some extra gauze from his pocket to wipe his hands on.

“You good, Tommy?” Jack asked quietly, resting a hand on his shoulder.

Tommy gave him a weak thumbs up, keeping his eyes shut for a moment so he could get his bearings.

“Alright, you stay here. I’m gonna hop back in the fight,” Jack told him.

“Sounds good,” Tommy muttered, wincing when the simple act of speaking caused another spike of pain to flash through his skull.

He listened at Jack’s footsteps fading as Thanatos rejoined the fight. Tommy simply took a few deep breaths, letting the pain and nausea roll through him because he knew it would fade to something manageable in a few minutes. Distantly, there was the sound of something exploding, and Tommy grinned knowing that was almost certainly Tubbo’s doing.

Suddenly, there was the sound of footsteps beside him. Opening his eyes, Tommy leapt back when he saw Supreme running straight for him.

“What the hell?” Tommy asked, pressing against the railing.

Supreme, who Tommy could see was dragging a dazed-looking Rewind next to him, glanced up and gave him a small wave. “Hey there! You don’t mind if I, uh, use this spot to heal him, do you?”

Blinking, Tommy nodded. Supreme was a healer like him. Logically, Tommy had nothing to fear from the hero.

“Is that Apollo?” Rewind asked in a slurred voice.

“Yeah, that’s him,” Supreme confirmed, tugging up the edge of Rewind’s charred sweatshirt to reveal a small cluster of burns on his side. Yup. Definitely Tubbo’s doing.

“Hi Apollo- ouch!” Rewind said, blindly waving at him, but cutting himself off when Supreme pressed two fingers on the burns.

“Sorry about that,” Supreme apologized. “I’ll make this quick.”

Tommy’s eyes widened, his curiosity overriding the pain from his headache. He’d never gotten the chance to actually see how another healer’s powers worked, and he wondered how similar it was to his own.

Without thinking, Tommy leaned over to get a better look. Dark brown eyes met his own, and Tommy flushed, immediately pulling back. “Shit, sorry. I was just-”

“You can watch if you want,” Supreme offered, and although Tommy couldn’t see his mouth under the red and yellow balaclava he wore, he had the sense he was smiling all the same.

“If that’s okay,” Tommy said, and when Supreme nodded, he let out a sigh of relief.

Tommy leaned over again, looking down at the hands Supreme had resting on Rewind's sides.

One hand Tommy quickly realized was a prosthetic. It was just being used to hold up the edge of Rewind's burnt sweatshirt, but otherwise wasn't doing much. Then, Supreme used his other hand to start massaging the skin around the burn.

There was no glowing, but it was like watching magic happen all the same. When Supreme swiped his thumb over the burns, Tommy saw the blistered skin disappear, like an eraser had been used on it.

Rewind immediately relaxed. Supreme continued to massaging the rest of the burns, each one disappearing with just a brush of his hands. Tommy was glad he had his mask on, because if he wasn't, Supreme would've been able to see his mouth hanging wide open in shock.

"That's so cool!" Tommy exclaimed once Supreme had healed the last burn, tugging Rewind's blackened sweatshirt back down.

"Are yours different?" Supreme asked, leaning back against the railing next to Tommy. "Also, Rewind, just wait a minute and then you're good to go."

"Yeah, they are. When I heal, my hands get all glowy and hot, and it just heals the wound like that," Tommy explained, looking over his own calloused palms.

"That's so interesting," Supreme muttered, furrowing his brows. There was a moment of silence, and then Supreme lifted his head, holding out a hand for Tommy to shake. "I don't think we've officially met. I'm sure you know who I am, but I'm Supreme."

Snorting, Tommy took the offered hand. "Apollo, but you knew that already."

Before Supreme could respond, there was another explosion sound, and Tommy winced as it sent another pang through his head. Distantly, Tommy registered Rewind getting up and rejoining the fight.

"Are you okay?" Supreme then asked, his dark eyes bright with concern.

"I'm fine," Tommy said, waving off his worry. "Just post-healing headache, I'm sure you know how it is."

Supreme sighed. "Yeah, I know what you mean. I don't get headaches, but after I have to heal something big, my hands will ache for days. Even the one that's a fake," he said, laughing a bit as he held up the prosthetic hand.

"Aw man, that's shit," Tommy said, trying to give Supreme a sympathetic look even with half of his face hidden by his mask.

"Eh, you get used to it." And damn, if Tommy hadn't heard that one before. "But actually, do you mind if I try something?"

Frowning, Tommy eyed the hand Supreme was reaching towards him. "Like what?"

“I’m usually really good for headaches,” Supreme told him. He held his hand in the air between them, waiting for Tommy to give him the go ahead.

While Tommy knew letting a hero use his powers on Tommy probably wasn’t the best idea, there was also something about Supreme that just made him very easy to trust. Maybe it was his kind voice. Or maybe it was the quiet solidarity they had with one another. They may have been on opposite sides, but they weren’t enemies. They were healers.

Or maybe it was just that this headache was really fucking annoying, and Tommy would do anything for some kind of remedy.

Either way, Tommy found himself leaning forward. Supreme brought his hand up to Tommy’s temple, and began to massage small circles into the skin.

For a beat, nothing happened.

Then, all at once, a surge of warmth radiated from Supreme’s thumb and into Tommy’s head. He immediately relaxed into the touch, slumping against the railing as sweet relief swept over him. The warmth flooded through his head, slowing the throbbing down until it disappeared completely.

A few seconds passed, and then Supreme pulled his hand away. The warmth faded and Tommy waited for the headache to return, but it didn’t.

“Holy shit, you fixed it!” Tommy exclaimed.

Supreme laughed. “Glad I could help-”

“Apollo! We got it!” Wilbur’s voice suddenly called out, drawing both healers attention back to the fight.

Looking out onto the roof, Tommy could see that Niki and Jack had already disappeared from the fight. Techno was pinning Dream to a wall, while Tubbo just stared down Rewind and 404—neither of whom were moving.

And Wilbur, in all his dramatic glory, was holding up the prize of the evening. Some kind of strange technology Sam had built for the heroes a while back that he wanted the Syndicate to use. Tommy had no idea what it did, and he really didn’t care to know.

But it seemed like that was the signal to get going.

“It was nice meeting you,” Tommy told Supreme as he jumped to his feet, new energy racing through his veins.

“Nice meeting you too, man,” Supreme called back, already rushing back to his own side. “I’ll see you around!”

“See ya!” Tommy waved.

As soon as he was back by Wilbur, his brother wrapped an arm around his shoulders and pulled him close. Then, Techno shoved Dream to the ground, and hurried back over with Tubbo and Ranboo.

Although Dream was yelling something in protest, as soon as Ranboo reached the group, they all joined hands. Then, the roof disappeared, and Tommy knew they were safe for the night.

“So what does this thing do anyway?” Tommy asked as he sat on Wilbur’s bed, tossing the strange device up and down in his hands.

Wilbur, who was propped up against his pillows with his guitar on his lap, shrugged. “According to Sam, it’s supposed to be able to shut someone’s powers off temporarily. But he never managed to perfect the design before he left the Hero Committee.”

Tommy immediately stopped tossing the device. “Holy shit. If the heroes had that kind of tech-”

“It would be disastrous, I know,” Wilbur said, his voice solemn. “Which was why we wanted to get it back before they could figure out how to get it working.”

Yeah, that was a no brainer. If the heroes had a way of shutting villains' powers off, they would be dead. All of them. It would be a nightmare scenario.

“Are you planning on getting it working again though?” Tommy then asked, his voice much smaller than he expected it to be.

Just like it would be disastrous for the heroes to have that kind of technology, Tommy could see the same thing happening if the villains were able to take advantage of that for themselves.

“I... I don’t know,” Wilbur admitted. “I don’t think Phil wants to use it. But he wants Sam to work on it again. Probably as a ‘just in case’ type of thing.”

Tommy gulped. “Do you believe him?”

Wilbur shrugged, keeping his eyes on his lap. “I’m not sure.”

On the one hand, Tommy knew he should probably be more worried about the fact that neither of them seemed to be sure of what their father’s plan was for this technology. But at the same time, Tommy couldn’t bring himself to be all that upset about it. He trusted Phil to know when a dirty trick was too dirty.

Setting the device on Wilbur’s nightstand, Tommy huffed as he flopped back onto the bed, resting his head next to Wilbur’s side. “Y’know, I talked to Supreme tonight.”

Wilbur, who had gone back to tuning his guitar, raised an eyebrow. “You did?”

Tommy nodded. “Yeah. He’s a really nice person. Plus, he was actually able to fix my headache after I healed Jack.”

“Seriously?” Wilbur questioned.

“Yup. His powers work differently than mine, which I got to see when he healed Rewind,” Tommy told him, grinning at the memory. “It’s so fucking cool. I’d love to figure out how our powers actually work on, like, a scientific level.”

Wilbur snorted and reached a hand out to ruffle Tommy’s hair. “You’re such a fucking nerd.”

“Oi! I’m not a nerd!” Tommy protested.

“You’re literally studying biology in college. You’re the most stereotypical nerd there is,” Wilbur teased.

“Fuck off, disphit. If anything you’re the nerd, you goddamn theater kid,” Tommy huffed, slapping Wilbur’s hand away.

Wilbur frowned. “How did you know I did theater in high school?”

Snorting, Tommy rolled over so his head was pressed against Wilbur’s side. “Lucky guess.”

Rolling his eyes, Wilbur resumed his guitar tuning. A comfortable silence fell between them, Tommy listening to the different strings being plucked as Wilbur tried to test if they sounded right. It was relaxing. A familiar routine they’d developed all the way back when Tommy was first staying at the house.

It felt like years ago now, even though it hadn’t even been a year since he saved Siren’s life.

So much had changed since then. Everything in Tommy’s life was different, all because he took one look at a supervillain bleeding out in an alleyway, and decided that no one deserved to die like that.

“Do you ever think of dyeing it?” Wilbur asked out of the blue, snapping Tommy out of his thoughts.

Blinking open his eyes, Tommy frowned when he saw Wilbur twirling his finger around the white streak in his own hair.

“No,” Tommy immediately answered. “I don’t want to get rid of it.”

“Why not?” Wilbur asked, letting go of his own white streak and reaching down to grab Tommy’s. “Isn’t it a bad memory for you?”

Tommy shrugged. “I don’t think of it like that.”

“Then how do you think of it?” Wilbur asked, being as gentle as possible as he tugged Tommy’s hair.

“I think of it as a reminder,” Tommy told him, letting his eyes slip shut again. “It reminds me that you’re alive, but it also reminds me just of my family in general. How close I came to losing you guys, but didn’t.”

There was a moment of silence. Tommy heard Wilbur snuffle.

“I think you just like that we match,” Wilbur teased, although his voice was thick. “You wanna look like big brother Wilby.”

“Oh fuck off,” Tommy snorted, pressing himself into Wilbur’s side. “I don’t wanna look like you at all, because you’re ugly as shit.”

It was a lie, and both Wilbur and Tommy knew it. Maybe Tommy did like that he and Wilbur had matching white streaks. Maybe it made him feel like they were connected, or that it made them look more like brothers in some strange way.

But of course, Tommy wasn’t going to admit that out loud. Wilbur already had a big enough ego. He didn’t need it to get any bigger.

“Well, I don’t wanna dye mine because it reminds me not to be fucking stupid,” Wilbur told him after a few moments. “I don’t ever wanna leave you guys again, and seeing the white reminds me exactly why.”

“Good,” Tommy said, burying his face into Wilbur’s sweater to shield his eyes from the lights. “You’re never leaving me again, you stupid fuck.”

“Don’t worry, Toms. I’ve learned my lesson about being a martyr,” Wilbur reassured him.

Another silence fell over the two. Wilbur went back to tuning his guitar. Everything was warm and soft right now. The warm glow of the fairy lights, the soft strumming of Wilbur’s guitar strings. As the minutes passed, Tommy felt sleep begin to creep up on him like an old friend.

“What do you want me to sing?” Wilbur then asked after a few minutes.

“Anything,” Tommy mumbled.

Wilbur let out a soft chuckle at Tommy’s slurred voice. “We’ll make it a quick one.”

He started to strum the chords, and Tommy smiled as he recognized a song Wilbur had played for him before.

Then, Wilbur began to sing.

“The roads are my home, horizon’s my target. If I keep on moving, never lose sight of it-”

Right before sleep dragged Tommy under, he smiled into his brother’s sweater.

And then, he was out like a light.

and that's it. that's the end :D

god I can't believe that it's finally over. to think I only started this fic less than five months ago and now it's grown to such an insane scale is just... I can't really comprehend it. thank you to everyone who gave me so much love on this, I really don't think I would've had the energy to finish it out if it weren't for you guys. I've been writing fic for roughly 6 years but this is the first time I've ever been considered 'famous' in a fandom, and it's just been a batshit experience but in the best way possible. thank you all so much for cheering me on and enjoying this ride just as much as I've enjoyed writing it. if you want more from me, make sure to check out my ao3 because I have a lot of other projects in the works and I'm so excited for you all to see them

also, I know this ending might not feel 'complete' to some people, but I was never planning on having the entire hero villain war end with this story. taking down a huge institution like the hero committee in this fic is something that takes a lot of time, and it's a problem that's not going to be resolved easily. this story was about tommy's journey specifically, and I felt this was the best way to send things off. he has his family, and that's what matters.

and before people ask, no, there will not be a sequel to clinic. while I have a few one shot ideas for different pieces of backstory or maybe a few glimpses into the future, there's not going to be an official sequel. As much as I love the world of clinic, I'm very ready to be done with this story and move onto others so I hope you can all respect that.

anyway, if you want links to the discord or to the spotify playlist for this, go check the endnotes of the previous chapter. also please leave me a comment telling me what you thought. they really make my day :D

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

love you guys <3

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[Philzas Guide to Adopting Supervillains](#) by [Mavia_Anon](#)

[Night-Owls, Star-Gazers, Insomniacs, and Criminals](#) by [SovereignVoidDragon](#)

[Bury Me in Your Memory, I'm Not the Girl I Ought to Be](#) by [ServerNotFound](#)

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