

broadripple is burning

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/34927570) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/34927570>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	3rd Life Last Life SMP Series
Relationship:	EthosLab & BdoubleO100
Character:	Ethoslab , BdoubleO100 , Technically nearly everyone in Last Life will be mentioned though this fic focuses on Etho and Bdubs
Additional Tags:	i refuse to use rpf tags , Not RPF , Murder , No beta we die like Bdubs , Ghosts , Angst and Mild Fluff , Alternate Universe - Modern Setting , Ambiguous Relationships , this is written as queerplatonic but can be interpreted as romantic , Murder Mystery , Faked Suicide , Ghost Bdubs and Widow Etho , i predicted ghost bdubs before session 8 came out /j , Last Life - Freeform , trans etho didn't come up too often in the story but know that it's canon in my heart , Complete , Trans Male Character , Transgender Ethoslab
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2021-11-04 Completed: 2021-12-06 Chapters: 9/9 Words: 19141

broadripple is burning

by [cobalt_shade_of_blue](#)

Summary

Bdubs' manner of death was declared suicide. And yet, he woke up, remembering not even his own name.

Bdubs' manner of death was declared suicide. Etho knew better than to believe this.

An AU based on a combination of the song Broadripple is Burning by Margot & The Nuclear So And So's, Session 7, ghosts, and fueled by my inability to give my favorite characters a happy ending

Notes

i'm very uncreative so all the chapter titles are just various lyrics from the song this fic is named after. enjoy my post-session 7 sadness fueled fic.

darling i'm lost, i heard you whispering that night in fountain square

The first thing he felt was the cold.

Not the same crisp autumn air that one would expect this time of year, not the clear feeling of inhaling after the snow settled on the ground in the winter, not even the same cold that he felt when Etho stole all the covers and left him freezing all night. It was a hollow cold, one that felt like his heart was ripped out of his chest, one that made his whole body numb.

That thought didn't make sense. *What the hell even was an Etho, anyway?*

He blinked his eyes open, awakening in an unfamiliar room, a lifeless one, dirty clothes scattering a pile on the other side of the floor, a few band posters, some machinery that he could never guess how to figure out, a trash can overflowing with cans and snack bags. Two twin beds that were shoved together, both sides unmade. It was familiar, but he couldn't quite put a name as to why.

The second thing he felt was that same numb emptiness, only stronger, that grew as he looked around the room. A strange tightness formed in his chest, one that made it harder to breathe than normal. Physically, he was fine, but it felt like he was withering away, dissolving into the dust that caught the light streaming in through the gaps in the curtains.

Where even was he, anyway?

He glanced at the mirror on top of a dresser, observing his reflection. It looked lifeless, tan skin duller than it should be, dark circles under his eyes. He lifted up his hand and moved his fingers, watching as the reflection did the same. It didn't seem right- almost as if it wasn't himself in the mirror, but just a body he was puppeting around. It hurt his head to think about it too hard, so he turned his attention away, towards the various photographs tucked into the frame of the window.

Most had photos of two men. One looked like himself, with the occasional dyed blonde hair instead of the typical brown, often in a green hoodie of some sorts. The other was taller than he was, pale with white hair, with a scar over one eye and wearing a mask that concealed the lower half of his face.

Others had more, a blonde who exclusively wore red-tinted glasses, another with fluffy black hair and a wide smile. Occasionally a woman with red hair popped up, or a man with blue, or group photos with so many people that he couldn't even begin to think of who they were.

He furrowed an eyebrow in confusion. These were obviously friends of his, but he couldn't even name a single one of them. Who were any of these people?

He brushed his fingers against a photo of himself. Better question- why couldn't he even think of his own name? He racked his brain, trying his best to think of anything that could fit, but nothing came to his mind.

He glanced down at his hand again, noticing a glint in the small amount of light—a golden ring, wrapped around his left ring finger, with Roman numerals ranging one through twelve carved into them. It was a nice ring, though the better question is why was he wearing one? He wasn't really a fan of rings- and he didn't *think* he was married, you would think that being married is something that a guy would remember.

Some of the photos of himself had the same ring, those photos also showed the white-haired man wearing a ring as well. *I married that guy? The anime-protagonist wannabe?* He chuckled in

disbelief, almost.

Of course, all he learned from this wasn't any sort of names or any sort of important information that could clue him into who he was or why he couldn't remember anything, but the fact that he married someone who looks like they're straight out of a comic book. *Just my luck.*

There were a few sticky notes scattered around the room, switching between many colors, almost all in the same messy handwriting. Some were stuck to plants saying things like "Water Me-" others slapped onto the mirror or onto walls with various messages such as "Pick up T refill," or "Pay back Cleo," or "Dentist appointment on 12/1," all various mundane messages.

A couple others had different but equally messy handwriting, saying things like "Put away your goddamn laundry Etho," or "Your month to do dishes."

Etho- that was the name that he woke up thinking about. It wasn't his, that was for sure. Must be the white haired guy's name then, *cause like- if I'm married to that guy, it'd make sense for us to live together, right?*

It was still weird to think about how he married that dude. Maybe it wasn't marriage and just like- friendship rings or something, who knows. Certainly not him.

The sound of distant footsteps pulled his attention away from the various notes along the walls. He glanced towards the open bedroom door. Someone was awake- maybe that Etho guy could explain to him his life story or something.

The rest of the apartment was in a much worse state than the room. The kitchen was filled with old takeout boxes and scattered dishes, the living room with loose papers and a blanket thrown onto the floor near the couch, as if someone was just sleeping on it.

And there was Etho, sitting on that couch, holding his phone in one hand with an untouched plate with a slice of pizza on the coffee table. He looked significantly worse than he did in the photos, not in a mean way, but more in the sense that he looked like he was barely hanging on, his white hair sticking up in four different places with darker roots growing in, wearing a hoodie that he almost definitely had been sleeping in for a few weeks. His mask was off, showing the scar that went over one eye tracing down his face, looking especially painful down by his mouth.

"Dude, you okay? You look terrible," He remarked, before he could think of a better thing to say to Etho.

It was evidently a stupid thing to say, seeing as Etho didn't respond.

He took a seat on the coffee table across from this Etho guy, hoping that he'd acknowledge him, but he never did, switching between looking at his phone and looking around at the apartment.

"Hello? Are- did ya go deaf or something?" He asked again, and once again, Etho didn't acknowledge him. Maybe the two had a fight the night before or something, and this was the silent treatment. But even then, the guy seemed to stare straight through him.

Etho sighed, grabbing the reheated pizza, and walking over to the kitchen to put it in the trash.

"Rude- I could have eaten that," he remarks, standing up to follow Etho.

There was a rush of that same numb cold throughout every ounce of him as Etho, quite literally, walked straight through him.

Both of them stopped, pausing for a second. *He must have felt it too.*

Etho had started to look around the room, trying to find the source of the cold. Just for a moment, the two met eyes.

Etho blinked, looking almost taken aback, but after a second, muttered to himself that it was just his imagination.

“No- I’m- I’m real, right? I’m here- hello-” He ran back to Etho, waving his hands violently around Etho’s face as panic picked up in his voice “Look- I’m here- you can see me, right?” But every single time, as if he was made of thin air, Etho passed straight through, sending the same chill throughout his soul every single time.

He had sat back down on the couch now, pulling up his phone. Glancing over his shoulder, he could see a Google page open, as Etho typed out “Does grief cause hallucinations?” into the search bar one letter at a time, not even reading the results before shutting his phone off and putting it down beside him, putting his head in his hands.

He pulled out a necklace from under his shirt, holding the two rings that were held up by a chain. Etho ignored the silver one which slid down the chain, instead holding the golden one up and turning it over and over in his hands.

It was the same golden ring that he had woken up with on his hand, complete with the same detail of the Roman numerals reading one through twelve, like a clock. He glanced back down at his hands, and then to the ring in Etho’s.

He was starting to connect the dots, but the way that these dots connected were starting to scare him.

“I’m dead, aren’t I?”

He asked the question out loud, hoping for a response he was never going to get

The silence was enough of an answer.

the trashed filled streets made me wish we were heading home

Chapter Summary

Days fade into each other so easily without any discernable things to break them apart, without anything to build memories on time becomes a haze.

Chapter Notes

trigger warning for discussions of suicide this chapter, (if you need to skip over, it's the part where etho reads the journal).

i'm still uncreative so yet another lyric from broadripple is burning as a chapter title- it's easy, and i'm stupid.

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

Day in, day out, day in, day out.

It became a haze of sorts, endless days of Etho waking up on the couch, stumbling through the day through finding any way possible of turning his brain off to keep his thoughts away. It was numbing and hollow but he was still at least surviving.

He wonders what stage of grief this is, if he skipped over the first three and went straight to depression, or if this happens to be denial, denying himself any real ability to think about what happened to him.

What happened to Bdubs.

Maybe denial is what's currently scribbled into a notebook and loose sheets of paper; the endless hours upon hours of research, of begging people to look further, of trying his best to convince agents to give him any confidential papers he can get his hands on, because there has to be something that they missed.

Maybe denial is the bedroom that's been abandoned for weeks, untouched ever since Etho received the news. He's been trying to work himself up to at least going in for ages, but every time he gets close to the door, his chest gets tighter and he can't seem to keep himself from shaking.

Maybe denial is the split second of seeing Bdubs' face that morning, looking directly into his eyes, before blinking and the image was gone. Maybe denial was in all the times he fell asleep imagining his voice comforting him, even though the memories of how he sounded started to grow more and more distorted as time went on.

He can't keep living like this, can he? He's surviving, but he isn't living. Day in, day out, barely letting himself think enough to feel anything.

A knock on the door distracted him. Right, it was Friday.

He and Scott developed a sort of tradition on Friday, that Scott would bring a coffee over and the two would sit in awkward silence for a while. They started doing it a few weeks back, after Scott accidentally bought three coffees even though his roommates were out of town.

Etho had grown to appreciate the tradition, it was really his one chance to get any sort of socialization in each week, even if the extent of that socialization was sitting in silence with someone he didn't really know too well for about ten to twenty minutes. It was nice knowing that Scott did this out of sympathy rather than pity, his own boyfriend having gone missing earlier that year.

"You don't need to knock Scott, you can just come in," Etho remarked from the couch, grabbing his mask off of the coffee table. He didn't really need to wear it around Scott, but he still did. Granted, he didn't need to wear it in general, he just always felt more comfortable with it on.

There was the sound of someone fidgeting with the door for a few seconds, "It's locked," replied a muffled voice from outside.

"Is it? Okay, hold on-" He sighed, getting up to go open the door, feeling faint as he stood up so suddenly.

He was, as expected, greeted by Scott holding out two coffees. "Hi," he said, handing Etho a coffee, "I see you haven't gotten off the couch this week."

Etho chuckled slightly, patting down his hair that was undoubtedly a mess, "You know me, the most productive member of society," he remarked, accepting the coffee and stepping aside to let Scott in.

Scott sat down on the armchair across from the couch, glancing around the room that has gotten progressively more of a mess. "So uhh, how have you been?"

Etho hesitated, having already forgotten the events of the past week. It was a lot of the same old, same old of trying to find the motivation to do anything, and never accomplishing that task.

He considered telling Scott about the journal, about the hours he's poured into research, into hypotheticals and connections that don't ever fully line up. He's been wanting to share it with someone, to have someone finally listen to him, someone who wouldn't immediately try and shut him down. But he doesn't know how Scott would respond though, maybe it wouldn't be the best to bring up casually-

"Hello? Earth to Etho," Scott asked, doing a small wave with his free hand to grab Etho's attention

"Right, sorry. I guess I've been okay, about standard for me. You?" The default response fell off his tongue, it wasn't a lie but wasn't fully the truth. It was a response nonetheless.

"I've been alright, Cleo's trying to get me and Pearl into her whole gym program as like- a roommate bonding activity. This is me escaping from that-" he responded with a slight laugh.

Etho nodded, giving a hum of amusement. "Can't really blame you there," he remarked, before both returned to silence for more than a few moments.

Something brushed against his hand, and Etho tensed up. The same, bone-numbing chill that he felt through his whole body earlier, starting in that palm and shaking through his entire soul. It's probably just a draft, Or bad blood circulation. That's what it had to be, right? And yet, he still looked up, almost hoping he'd see Bdubs face again, even if it was a hallucination. He was met with nothing.

“Did you feel that?” Etho asked.

“Feel what?”

He frowned slightly, disappointment shielded behind his mask, “I don’t know, it suddenly got cold. I think I might’ve left a window open or something.”

Scott looked back at Etho, puzzled and maybe just a little bit judgemental, “Why would you even have a window open, it’s December.”

Etho shrugged, “I don’t know. It’s just been weirdly cold here all morning.” He lifted the bottom of his mask up slightly to take a sip of his coffee, in a slight effort to warm up again. He thought about it for a moment, racking his brain for what the answer could possibly be. “The heat kept breaking in here last year, that’s probably what it is.”

"You know, you can always stay with us, if the broken heater becomes a problem," Scott offered, "Cleo and Pearl wouldn't mind, we have the space."

Etho answered before fully thinking about it, "Thank you, but I'm okay here."

“That’s fine, just know that the offer is there.”

He could tell that Scott was offering for reasons beyond just the broken heater. Maybe Scott was right and it’d be smarter for Etho to stay with someone else, but he was fine on his own, as fine as he could be, at least.

“Well, I better get going, I don’t want Pearl getting upset again because the ice in her coffee melted,” Scott explained, excusing himself, “Nice to see you again Etho.”

“See you later.”

Etho sighed, flopping back against the couch, peeling the mask away from his face as the door shut behind Scott. *There’s my socialization for the week*, he thought. Scott’s company was nice, even in the silence it was a distraction from being alone with his thoughts. But once a week was enough for him, it got draining beyond that.

He found himself alone with his thoughts a lot recently. It wasn’t necessarily the greatest, but he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t used to it.

Maybe he was a bit of a liar. He thought back, throughout freshman year of college with the NHO crew, and Bdubs sticking with him as the two befriended Tango and Skizz in junior year, and even before college he could always rely on Beef and Pause, back when the three of them were dumb highschool kids trying to find anything to do in the most boring town in the rural parts of Canada.

He’s long since lost contact with Doc, Beef, and Pause, and then Tango and Skizz seemingly disappeared off the face of the earth since Bdubs died. They were good memories to think back on, but that’s all they were now. Not anything he could ever get back, not anything he could ever return to.

He could feel his face fall as he slowly realized how few people he still had in his life. Maybe he wasn’t used to being this alone.

No, I’m not in the mood for being sad right now, he thought to himself.

He looked towards the notebook tossed haphazardly onto the floor, and grabbed it, to give himself

something new to do.

It was a mess of notes endlessly scratched out and rewritten, detailing anything that could even possibly be relevant, the binding was starting to get ruined from the sheer number of pages he tore out and threw into the corner of his room. The first page was the most important.

Last seen 10/28. Declared missing 10/30. Body found 11/2. Death could have occurred any point in those five days.

The bed next to him was cold the morning after he last saw Bdubs. It was the most mundane morning he could think of, piled in blankets and still drowsy, laying in bed for ages. The whole time, Etho guessed that Bdubs was just up early, and he'd eventually come back in to drag Etho out of bed, or maybe he stayed the night when he left for that party. He waited for so long before even considering calling Bdubs. Why had he waited so long? He should have called as soon as he noticed Bdubs wasn't there. Maybe those five hours made the difference. He should have-

The body was found in the woods.

He was offered the chance to see the body, to help identify it. The image was seared into his mind, seeing it in nightmares, in the moments where he closes his eyes and allows his thoughts to drift for a little too long, in the nights where his room is dark enough that he can't tell if he's awake or asleep. It was dusk then, the sky a deep blue that now makes him sick to his stomach whenever he sees it. He wishes he never saw it.

Roughly a mile from his last known location. Manner of death was declared suicide.

Etho knew that was a lie. It had to be a lie. He's known Bdubs for years, he's been with him throughout his highest and lowest points, and there was nothing that indicated he was even remotely close to that low. He wouldn't have- right? He couldn't have. The two of them had plans, ones that Bdubs was always so enthusiastic about- murals of a perfect future that he had always been the artist of-

No further investigation was deemed necessary.

He begged for someone to do any sort of further investigation. Every single time, the police overlooked his requests, shutting him down and directing him instead to a grief counselor. They had no cause to believe it wasn't a suicide, and with so many missing people in one town, everyone's focus was shifted elsewhere. It pissed him off.

Tango and Skizz had gone missing on the same night. They are still missing.

The disappearances and Bdubs' death- they must be connected, right?

But that would mean Tango and Skizz may have met the same fate as Bdubs did. The thought made him want to hurl. He already lost Bdubs, he couldn't have lost the other two as well.

Jimmy was declared missing as of 6/1, five months ago.

It was closer to five and a half now, the first in the chain of these disappearances, though it was long before all the others. He had heard that a friend of Jimmy, Mumbo, left town about a month later, though it was more of a 'moving-to-get-a-fresh-start,' disappearance than an 'investigation-required' disappearance.

Other official disappearances include Elizabeth "Lizzie" Shadow, who went missing three months ago.

He never really knew Lizzie, aside from the fact that he knew Cleo was once close with her, and at some point Bdubs borrowed a book from her and never returned it. She was nice, from what he's heard. He didn't expect her to still be alive, and maybe part of him wishes he got to know her better while he had the chance.

A suicide note was found in Bdubs' pocket, addressed primarily to me.

He hasn't read it. He doesn't want to. If anything, he wants to burn it, to watch it turn to ashes, because it can't be real.

He skimmed over the rest of the pages in the journal, glancing over each absentmindedly, not processing any of the words he read over. Etho wasn't getting anything from this except for frustration.

He closed the notebook and tossed it on the ground, walking over towards the kitchen without giving what he was doing much thought. Maybe he'd start to clean up a little, at least throw out all the old takeout boxes, it's only taken what, six, seven weeks? He's lost track of time.

He glanced at the four unopened cans of soda on the countertop. *Dang, I meant to give those to Scott today*, he thought, seeing as he couldn't really drink them himself. *I'll do that next week.*

Something pulled at the corner of his mouth as he remembered Bdubs' voice.

"Seriously? Soda? That's the thing you're allergic to?" Bdubs exclaimed, looking back at Etho in shock.

Etho shrugged, "I don't know what to tell you, I just am."

"Since when?" he questioned, holding the two bottles of Coke that he had just bought, with the intention that one was for Etho, "I've known you for how many years, and this is the first time you tell me this?"

"It never came up, Tango and Skizz always drank it all anyway."

"You've got to be kidding me. Etho- we're literally married, how did I just never know this," he responded.

Married. The word still felt strange to attach to their relationship, they've only really been married for about a month at this point. It was a long running joke between the two of them, saying that they should get married for tax benefits, but one night of staying up too late and making too many bad decisions and they actually did. Even got the rings to match it, both of which were custom-made (which in hindsight, was more expensive than it was worth—Etho would have been happy with something from a thrift store.)

"How are you even allergic to soda anyways? How does that work- is it the caffeine or something?"

Only Bdubs would try and argue with someone on why they have an allergy. "I don't know, it gives me nosebleeds."

"Why nosebleeds?"

"You think I know?"

The conversation devolved into ages of lighthearted bickering that anyone but them would find

insufferable. But it's exactly what brought both of them joy, finding ways to poke fun at each other, the satisfaction of throwing pillows or snowballs in faces just to see how the other reacts. It was childish, but they were young then, and they were happy then.

They were happy then.

Chapter End Notes

shoutout to 1- the anonymous tumblr user who bribed me into finishing this and 2- all of yall for reading and enjoying last chapter so much, yall have made my week with all the nice comments :D

also my apologies if the ending especially had weird pacing, i'm Tired and Wanted To Post This Tonight

somebody moves, and everything you thought you had has gone to shit

Chapter Summary

Bdubs is still adjusting to his life as a ghost, but he finally has a bit of help.

Chapter Notes

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

He had been laying on the couch for the past hour, and Etho has done absolutely nothing. They never tell you how boring being a ghost is, he might as well have been watching paint dry, because at least that way he could shove his hand in it and mess up the paint if he got bored.

A knock on the door, followed by Etho saying “You don’t need to knock Scott, you can just come in.”

“It’s locked,” responded a strong Scottish accent from behind the door.

Finally something interesting, I was getting bored of watching you do nothing, he thought, looking back as Etho stood up to answer the door.

Two people walked into the apartment: one slightly shorter with blue hair, and one a bit taller, with blue hair and the other blonde. He vaguely recognized both of them, from the photos that were tucked into the frame of the bedroom mirror. The guy with blue hair sat down in the chair, and Etho on the couch across, both of them holding a coffee. At least something was happening now. Maybe he’d manage to learn something from this conversation, though that was a big maybe, considering it just seemed like awkward small-talk.

The blonde ran into him, causing him to stumble back for a moment. “Hey! Watch it,” he complained, before fully processing what happened.

Etho ran through him. This guy didn’t.

“Oh- sorry,” the stranger apologized, looking towards him. *At* him.

“Wait a second. You can see me?” He asked, looking towards the blonde man in confusion.

“You can see me?” He responded, looking equally confused, “That’s never happened before. Are you...”

“Dead?” He asked, still not having fully wrapped his mind around that fact, “Apparently.”

The other man held a hand out, “Me too, have been for a while. My name’s Jimmy.”

He shook Jimmy’s hand, but didn’t say anything in response, for a moment. Jimmy looked back at him expectantly, probably looking for a name that he didn’t have.

“I- I don’t know my name.”

“Oh. How long have you been dead for?” Jimmy asked

“I don’t know. I’ve been “awake”- I guess, for a couple hours.”

He frowned, “Right, okay. You’re here with Etho, so I’m just gonna assume you’re Bdubs, he died a couple months ago and you definitely don’t look like a Lizzie.”

Something about that name...fit. It felt familiar, the same sense of familiarity that was held with everything about his life, like remembering a word that's been on the tip of his tongue for a decade. Yeah. That must have been his name.

“You don’t know that, I could be the most beautiful Lizzie there is,” Bdubs joked.

“Are you?”

“No.”

“Well- I knew that,” Jimmy said, backtracking his previous confusion. There was a lull in the conversation, neither having anything to say or do other than watching Etho and the blue-haired guy that Bdubs didn’t know the name of.

“So, how do you like- yknow, ghosting around?” Jimmy finally asked, breaking the silence.

“Not the greatest. I don’t remember anything and also can’t do anything. Pretty bad, as far as afterlives go,” Bdubs complained.

He nodded. “Yeah, I remember what that was like. Good news is that you might get a couple memories back, at least I did, bad news is that the whole not being able to touch things part- that’s permanent.”

“So you're telling me I’m just gonna be sitting here for all of eternity watching stuff happen and being unable to do anything?” He asked, frustrated

Jimmy looked about as disappointed as Bdubs was, “Yep. I was able to briefly interact with this one flower that Scott had, but a couple weeks ago it got wilted so he threw it out. It's been wilted for a solid few months, but I think he finally gave up trying to preserve it,” he responded, dejected.

He sighed, “This is just great. Just great. Absolutely fantastic. I’m dead now, I know nothing, and all there is for me to do is occasionally scare this guy by poking him forever.” Bdubs slapped Etho’s hand to prove a point, the slap phasing straight through and landing on the table instead.

Etho briefly looked up towards Scott, startled. “Did you feel that?”

“Feel what?”

“Better than what I could do. Scott doesn’t even notice when I do that anymore,” Jimmy said, waving his hand in and out of Scott’s head, with absolutely zero reaction from Scott.

“I really am gonna be stuck like this, aren’t I.” He asked. The future looked grayer every second he thought about it, an eternity of nothing but being trapped. Maybe if he was lucky Etho would open a door long enough for him to leave, giving him a chance to see more than the same four walls forever, but even then it’d become a game of hoping strangers would open doors and trying to find anything that could be done to entertain himself for...well, for forever.

“Unfortunately. But hey, things could be worse!” Jimmy suggested, faking a bit of optimism.

“How?”

Jimmy stayed silent for an awkwardly long time, as Etho and Scott wrapped up their little meeting in the background. “I don’t know, actually, now that I think about it. This is pretty bad. But I guess I’m used to it.”

Bdubs sighed.

The silence was broken by Etho and Scott’s conversation, “Well, I better get going, I don’t want Pearl getting upset again because the ice in her coffee melted. Nice to see you again Etho,” he said, standing up from the chair.

“I think this is my cue to leave, if you make any developments in the ghosty world, let me know, because I could also use them.” Jimmy said, watching as Scott started to leave the apartment. “Seeya around, Bdubs.”

He gave a half-hearted wave in response as the man and the ghost left, leaving him alone once again.

Etho was looking over a notebook, one that looked worn and slowly falling apart at the seams. Bdubs tried to get closer, to peek over Etho’s shoulder, but he couldn’t quite make out the words from the handwriting. Maybe if he was lucky Etho would leave it laying out in the open, so he could at least review parts and pieces of what was being written.

He doubted he’ll find his life story in a random notebook Etho had, but at this point, any hints at his past life were appreciated. There wasn’t much of a future for him, at least not any that would be worthwhile to look forward to, so the best thing to do was to focus his present on the past.

~~~

Bdubs couldn't sleep. Of course he couldn't. It was a bit of an oversight on his part, to assume that ghosts could sleep, honestly. Sleeping was something that came naturally, and his existence was anything but natural. He tried for hours before, as soon as it got dark and it was obvious that Etho wasn't going to do anything but lay there for the rest of the night, he had tried to lay back in the bedroom, counting sheep, making up stories in his head, laying as still as possible for as long as he could, but nothing seemed to work. He wasn't even tired. So he gave up.

He sat there on the armrest of the couch, glancing down at Etho, who was in fact asleep, still in his clothes from today. The chain necklace he wore hung from around his neck and draped down onto the couch, something he wouldn't have noticed had the world not seemed strangely bright. Maybe that was a perk to being dead, this strange sort of night vision he seemed to have now.

He hopped off the armrest and went to look at the necklace, the ring that matched his own.

“Wonder where the whole clock thing came from,” he thought to himself, turning over the ring on his own finger to look at the numbers. Maybe an inside joke, maybe something he did at some point, maybe he just had a special love for clocks that he didn't know about now. He might never know the answer.

He looked towards the rings on the necklace, poking it slightly, expecting his finger to phase through and hit the couch.

It didn't, instead he just slightly nudged the ring over.

“That’s not supposed to happen.”

*Jimmy was able to interact with the flower. Maybe I can move the ring?*

He picked up the ring, such a simple action but for a brief second, it made him feel human again. It fit perfectly on his finger, taking the place of the one he already wore.

“Alright, that’s good. That’s good! I can work with this,” he said, putting his thoughts into words since he was sure nobody could hear him.

He had an idea. It was a stupid idea but it’d be funny. He yanked on his hand and pulled the chain of the necklace taut for a brief second, to see if it’d wake up the sleeping Etho. He blinked a little in his sleep, maybe opening his eyes for a brief second, but nothing happened.

“Dang it.” He chuckled lightly, wishing it had worked. He glanced back at the ring, a slight glint in whatever thin strand of moonlight made its way into the apartment.

*He glanced at the ring, late afternoon light glinting off the gold, a wide smile on his face. “You even got the clock on there!” He exclaimed, looking back up at Etho, “You do know we don’t need the rings, right?”*

*Etho shrugged, “I know. Just thought it’d make it more official.”*

*“We got married for tax benefits,” he reminded, “I don’t think anything about it is official.”*

*He smiled, one of the rare smiles that only Bdubs ever got to see, mask pulled down to show the lower half of his face. “Doesn’t mean we can’t have fun with it, you know?”*

*“You’re just secretly a big ol’ softie.”*

*He rolled his eyes, “Nuh-uh-” he protested.*

*“Yuh-huh-”*

*“Do you want me to return the ring?” Etho jokingly threatened, “I still have the receipt, we could always use the extra cash.”*

*Bdubs frowned. “No.”*

*“That’s what I thought,” he said, a smug look of satisfaction on his face, one that Bdubs desperately wanted to smack.*

*“You’re terrible. I hate you so much,” He said, unable to hold back his laughter.*

*Etho smiled, “You hate me, and yet you’re still wearing that ring,” he teased,*

*Bdubs had run out of arguments. He was too stubborn to let Etho win though, dammit. Thankfully, he had the perfect rebuttal saved, one he fell back on far too often. “I want a divorce.”*

*“We aren’t even legally married yet.”*

*“I still want one! Or I’m gonna become one of those trophy wives that kills their husband in their sleep. You’re gonna wake up with poison in your mask and I’ll inherit everything.”*

*Etho scoffed, faking offense, “Can’t believe you’re only marrying me for my money.”*

*“I am! And at this rate you’re spending so much of it that I won’t even get to use any of it, you shopaholic.”*

*“Hey, it’s not an addiction, I can stop at any moment.”*

*“Then do it!”*

*“No!”*

The memory tore at his heart, making him feel even more dead, if that were even possible. He took the ring off his finger, laying it down on the couch by the sleeping Etho, and left to sit elsewhere.

He thought he wanted to know more about the past, but remembering hurt, hurt more than forgetting. If he forgot, then those moments might as well have never happened, the ties he had to life could be snapped like a thread, he could be an observer of this living Bdubs’ life without ever connecting it to him. But remembering meant that those memories were his, that those snippets of a life he once lived still clung to him, that the universe could mock and tease him with something he could never return to.

## Chapter End Notes

sorry for the late update, i originally planned to update every other day, but I got sad, then sick, then sad again, it's been an interesting week. no promises on forming an update schedule, it'll at least be once weekly though.

i really need to start editing these chapters more. hope yall're doing well, i've greatly appreciated all the nice comments :D

edit: AS A SIDE NOTE there's been some excellent fanart for this AU! go give <https://dsymphone.tumblr.com/post/666945937763139584/spend-each-night-in-the-company-of-ghosts> and <https://nowplaying-13.tumblr.com/post/667124779330977792/the-silence-was-enough-of-an-answer-consider-you> some love, both pieces are absolutely wonderful and made me immensely happy. (i don't think those links work. dammit.)

## so pack your bags and come back home

### Chapter Summary

Connecting the dots is much harder to do when the dots in question can't exactly communicate with him, but if anyone could find a way to do it, it'd be Etho.

### Chapter Notes

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

*Late afternoon, autumn. October 28, to be exact.*

*Golden sunlight filtered through the open curtains, merging with the softly twinkling Christmas lights strung around the bedroom, casting his world in a golden glow. There was a coding project opened on his computer, one he's finally found the motivation to work on again after a couple weeks spent jumping between his other unfinished projects. Etho always had at least five things to work on at any given moment. It's how he stayed happy and motivated, the same way a shark has to keep swimming to survive. Bouncing between projects made it easiest to stay afloat.*

*"Hey Etho, you still going to that party tonight with me?" came a voice from the other side of the room.*

*Bdubs had popped his head into the bedroom, glancing over at Etho. Most people knew better than to disturb Etho while working, there was nothing he hated more than people interrupting his work flow. But it didn't bother him as much when Bdubs did it.*

*He shrugged, "I dunno. I'm kinda starting to get a headache." He blinked, looking away from the computer screen for a moment. It wasn't just a lie to get out of leaving the house for once, there was in fact a slight ache forming in his skull.*

*Bdubs snickered, "And you call me the poor fragile flower."*

*"Listen, I have a good immune system, I just forgot to drink water again."*

*"Again?"*

*"Again."*

*He sighed, "Dude, I don't wanna face Tango alone. I think he's still mad at me, I know it's been over a year but he holds a grudge."*

*The infamous incident, the whole reason that Team BEST fell apart after they got out of college. A mess of top surgery and a poorly timed car crash, two separate piles of unaffordable medical bills, and the two of them asking for favors that they knew they couldn't repay. It was shitty all around, and while Bdubs recovered, Tango never quite forgave the two of them for asking for so much.*

*"I'm sure he'll be fine. I did try to reach out to him a year or so ago to start paying him back, but he never responded."*

*"I know, I just- he scares me when he's mad. I thought he was gonna break my legs again during all of it." He shifted his weight from side to side, "I could probably take him in a fight now though,*



*if worst comes to worst.”*

*Etho gave a hum of amusement, doubting every word that came out of his partner’s mouth as he typed a couple more lines of code into the program, “Mhh-hmm, sure you could. Remember how well it went when we gave it a go? And that was just play-fighting.”*

*“Yeah, but that’s you. This is Tango. I could take on Tango if I needed to.”*

*“Whatever you say,” he remarked. He gave it a second of thought, remembering that it could be more than just hypotheticals that he and Bdubs were talking about. “If things do go south though, call me.”*

*He scoffed, “I’ll be fine, I’m sure of it. Don’t you worry your pretty little head.”*

*“You were just worried about Tango a second ago.”*

*“I’ll be fine!”*

*Etho looked back towards Bdubs, “Alright, I trust you. Have fun, good luck dealing with Tango, if you stay the night let me know.”*

*“I don’t need luck, I’ve got this! Seeya, Etho.” The door closed softly behind him, as Bdubs left the room and disappeared for the rest of the night, leaving Etho alone in the golden glow of their shared room.*

*That was the last time he ever spoke to him.*

*If Etho knew what was coming, he would have begged him to stay, to come back and spend the rest of the night in their room together, watching Halloween movies or playing games together. Or he would have gotten over the growing pain behind his eyes and would have stuck by Bdubs’ side, stuck by his side the entire night, refusing to do as much as let go of his hand. He would have done anything to confirm that he would have seen Bdubs again after that point.*

*But he never did. He sent Bdubs off to die without a second thought, without even a proper goodbye. Why didn’t he do more to protect him?*

*He should have done more.*

*He should have done more.*

*He should be doing more.*

*~~~*

Another day, another day, another day. It was all far too infinite, far too indefinite.

He really was just going to have to live like this, wasn't he? The grieving process typically took about two years, to cycle through all the stages, but considering that it hasn't even been two months, it was far too long to sit and wait through like this.

Maybe he’d take up Scott’s offer, probably only for a week or so, just to have a change of scenery. It was the smartest option, to at least have someone around, rather than sitting and waiting around just in case things got better.

Something tugged at the back of his neck.

He glanced down, and as if they were being held up by a string, the rings chained around his neck were floating a couple inches away from him.

“What the-” Before even processing how strange it was he ducked away, stepping backwards in hopes that whatever was holding on would let go. The rings bounced back, landing against his chest.

He blinked, trying to think of an explanation.

The only explanation is that he was hallucinating...again. Man. He really doesn't need to start dealing with hallucinations, he's got enough issues to worry about on his own. Maybe he just needed to go back to sleep. He sighed, laying down on the couch, and closed his eyes again.

It took about five seconds for the rings to land on his face.

And it wasn't just an illusion, he *felt* them land against his cheek, slipping off and landing back down on the couch underneath him with a soft thud. “Okay- what's even going on now. This doesn't make any sense,” he said, trying to laugh a little to cover up the mild to moderate amount of panic he was starting to feel.

He thought back to the strange drafts, the split second of witnessing Bdubs' face.

Could it?

“No, ghosts aren't real. Right?”

The rings floated up and whacked him in the face. If there was a ghost here it was definitely Bdubs. *But there's no ghost here*, he reminded himself, before he let himself run off with the thought.

This was starting to mess with his head.

Okay. He can do this logically, he can put the possible-ghost through a test. He took off the necklace, holding it out by the chain, letting the rings dangle in the air like a pendulum.

“Okay. Is someone here? Move this back and forth if so.”

Instead of moving back and forth, the rings floated up, and landed on top of Etho's hand.

“I get you're trying to be a smartass, but that's not what I asked,” he says, but sighs. It was undeniable at this point. There was definitely a ghost.

“Are you Bdubs?” he asked, shaking the rings off his hands. “Just- do that again if you are.”

The rings landed on top of his hand once again.

There was the warmth inside his heart, one he hasn't felt in a while. He smiled softly, as the weight of the ring laid softly on his hand. A cold shiver passed through the hand as the ring gently lifted off of it.

“So you are here. I wasn't imagining things yesterday.”

“Hold on, I've got something-” Etho started, setting the rings down and ripping out pages of his notebook. Grabbing a pen, he started writing out letters spread across two pages, A through Z, along with *Yes* and *No*.

He set them down on the floor, and sat in front of it. "It's not perfect, but it'll work temporarily," he said.

"I guess this is the part where I ask you things," he sighed, thinking for a second. What could he even ask? Well, he knew what he wanted to ask, but he was hesitant to say it.

"How did you die?"

The rings lifted up, and dropped on top of *No*.

"No? Does that mean you didn't die, or...?" He asked, his voice trailing off.

The rings started moving around the papers, the chain of the necklace occasionally knocking one of the pages out of place.

*I-d-k. No. M-e-m-o-r-y.*

"You don't remember things." He sighed, maybe this wasn't going to be an easy way to figure out Bdubs' death. Hell, with no memory, Bdubs might not even remember who he is, "You know who I am, right?"

*E-t-h-o.*

He smiled, "Yep, that's me. Your husband, we got married for tax benefits," he said, laughing a little. It all seemed so stupid in hindsight, "That's why we have rings. It was you that was making things cold, right?"

*Yes. I. T-h-i-n-k*

He nodded. That was good to know, at least.

"I'm not gonna lie, this is a lot slower than I imagined it would be. There's gotta be a better way to do this," he said, thinking out loud.

Etho looked at the pieces of paper, scattered around, with a ring gently floating on the letters. It worked, the makeshift Ouija board he constructed to talk with Bdubs, but...it could be better. The itch to create returned to him, to invent, an urge he hasn't properly felt in ages. He already imagined perfectly what he could do, given he had the materials on hand to do so.

"Hold on, Bdubs, I have an idea. Can I see the ring?"

The metal clattered to the ground.

"Thanks." He grabbed the necklace, and walked towards his bedroom, not even fazed by the room he once was unable to even think about stepping in. Etho turned towards the closet, knowing that the numerous half-broken keyboards he owned had to be buried in there *somewhere*.

He finally found one, pulling it out from the depths of the closet. Holding the metal ring in his hand, Etho pressed it against the key, smiling as he heard the satisfying click.

Perfect.

"You there, Bdubs? Take this, try doing the same thing," he said, setting the ring down on the ground.

Surely enough, the ring floated into the air, and landed on the keyboard, pushing into the key.

“It works!” he said, feeling his cheeks hurt and his lips crack from smiling so wide. “Now I just need a few more of these, I’m sure I have them, I need to hook them up to my computer, reprogram the keys to some basic words, and find a good text to speech program to connect to this all. We’re gonna get you a voice again, Bdubs.”

He felt something cold press against his shoulder, and leaned into the touch. Goosebumps raised along his arms, and it sent a cold shock through his bones, but it was the kind of shock that makes you feel alive, that makes you feel real.

His mind was racing a mile a minute thinking of ideas to make it all work, of things he could do to connect to Bdubs once again. It all felt so right to have something to work towards, to have hope and inspiration that he once thought died alongside the ghost that stood beside him. Like an artist who rediscovered their muse, things felt *right* again.

“It’s nice to have you back, buddy.”

## Chapter End Notes

happy last last life day folks, i'm gonna miss this series. fingers crossed for etho to win.

## and i'm wasted, you can taste it, don't look at me that way

### Chapter Summary

Talking with a ghost always leaves an elephant in the room, specifically on the topic of death.

### Chapter Notes

warning for discussions of suicide and death again this chapter, nothing too explicit, it's mentioned like how it was in chapter 2

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

Keyboards and wires scattered the floor, originally the floor of the bedroom but the project eventually migrated back into the living room, due to lack of space. And in the center, sat Etho, hunched over the computer which he moved to the center of it all. Right by Etho sat Bdubs who occasionally tossed the ring at his corporeal counterpart, to signify that he wanted attention.

Etho talked while he worked whenever he remembered to, mainly just to himself. He talked about what he was working on as he worked through bugs and errors, some sort of fancy communication device for Bdubs, using many keyboards and text-to-speech bots and such. It was all too technical for Bdubs' interest, and he couldn't even really respond too well yet, so for the most part, Bdubs just watched.

“You see, the hard part about this is trying to make sure every shared key has a different output. It's not really difficult necessarily, just tedious,” Etho explained, staring into space as if he was trying to make eye contact with Bdubs, though missing him by about twenty degrees. “Cause K on this keyboard means “That,” and K on this one is just K, but the computer just wants to register both of them as K or as That, so I have to manually provide that distinction by—”

Bdubs tossed the ring at him, which got Etho to be quiet and turn his attention away.

“What's up?” Etho asked, looking towards the piece of paper.

*N-e-r-d.*

Etho chuckled, “Listen, I'm the one getting you a voice, you better be nice to me or you'll be stuck with the sheets of papers.”

*I. W-o-u-l-d. B. F-a-s-t-e-r*

Etho thought for a second, glancing down at the paper like he was trying to decipher what Bdubs said with his limited letters. “You would have done this faster?”

*Yes.*

He gave a small laugh, “Mmh-hmm, sure. I'll let you come over here and possess this computer,

then you can do all the hard work and I can sit back and watch,” he remarked. “As you are obviously so much more skilled in coding than I am, code master Bdubs.” His tone was sarcastic, a sarcasm that Bdubs could only fight with more of his playful arrogance.

*I. A-m.*

Etho rolled his eyes, “You haven’t changed a bit.” He turned back to the project, typing more and more, “What should we call this, do you think? Every good project needs a name.”

*B-d-u-b-s. M-o-s-t. W-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l. V-o-i-c-e. I-s. G-o-n-e. S-o. I. U-s-e. A. S-t-u-p-i-d. C-o-m-p-u-t-e-r.*

Etho sighed, looking at the paper. “Come on. Really? I don’t even think I could figure out what you were trying to say if I wrote it all out.”

*T-h-a-t-s. O-n. U.*

Etho ignored Bdubs. He was wrong earlier when he thought the bad part of being stuck like this was how lonely or eternal it all was or whatever, all of that sad depressing shit. The real tragedy of this situation is that all Etho needed to do to ignore him was slightly look the other way.

*D-u-m-m-y.*

No response. He tossed the ring at Etho’s face.

“Come on, Bdubs, you almost hit the monitor.”

*B-o-r-e-d.*

“Well I’m almost done, if you let me finish, you’ll be significantly less bored.” He glanced back at the project. “You know, in hindsight I didn’t even have to set all this up. I could have had you just use the standard keyboard to type everything by hand, but that’d be a lot slower since you can only press one key at a time. That would basically have just been one step above what we have now, and this is at least two steps up.”

*That’s such an Etho thing to do,* Bdubs thought. He doesn’t know why, exactly, it felt like it was something Etho would do, but it just did.

Etho moved out of the way, giving Bdubs a chance to fully observe the setup. “Alright. Just put the ring onto the corresponding keys, just like earlier.”

There were three keyboards, connected to the main computer. The center keyboard had all of the standard letters and numbers as usual, but the other two on the side were rigged up to type out full words in one press, complete with a small sticky note taped to each indicating which word was each key. Most were some of the more common words in English, and others were more specific to Bdubs’ scenario, with words such as his own name, Etho, ghost, dead, et cetera, et cetera.

Bdubs looked around the keys, trying to think of a sentence to compose. He pushed the ring into a various assortment of keys, watching as the words showed up on the screen, and then hit Enter.

“Hello Etho. I can talk now. Took you long enough.” spoke a robotic voice, emitting from the computer. It was so monotone and felt so fake, but at this point, he was just happy to have something that could talk again.

“I did all this work just for you to complain about it, huh,” Etho said, but he was smiling wide.

A couple moments of typing later, the voice emitted from the computer again, *“You do the same to me. We’re even.”*

“I do not!”

*“You do.”*

Etho rolled his eyes playfully, “I do have to admit, it isn’t as nice as your usual voice. I’m gonna miss that. If I had more recordings of your voice, and more time, I could’ve figured out how to set up your voice as the text-to-speech.”

*“Always told you to take more videos.”* He had to type out the word ‘videos’ letter by letter, which was admittedly kind of tedious, but Bdubs already had practice from using that piece of paper for about five hours.

“I know, I know, you were right, I was wrong, you’re pretty, I’m ugly, you’re smart, I’m stupid, all that stuff.” Etho almost sang it like a little song, a bit mockingly if anything.

Bdubs laughed at the stupid little tune, *“I don’t know that. I like it.”*

Etho smiled, “Right, you probably wouldn’t remember it, it’s just a stupid little song you introduced me to.”

Etho went silent for a couple minutes, looking hesitant to say what was on his mind. “Do you...mind if I bring up the topic of your death?” he asked.

Bdubs took a second to think about it. It was a strange thing to consider, the fact that he was, well, dead. He adjusted to the ghost aspect, but the fact that he has technically died was still strange to him, especially since he didn’t know how, or really anything about it.

Did he even want to know? He thought he wanted memories of his past life back originally, but once he got them back, it made things worse. Curiosity killed the cat, and he was fairly certain satisfaction would not be enough to bring him back.

But he had Etho now. Plus, he could tell Etho to shut up at any moment, and Etho would drop it. Etho even made him a specific shut up button for this purpose.

*“Sure.”*

Etho nodded, and stood up for a second, walking towards the couch and bringing back a plain black journal. Bdubs recognized it as the one Etho was reviewing yesterday. “You were going to a party with some of our friends from college, and well, you never came back. Nobody really gave me a good answer on how you died, so I tried to take matters into my own hands,” he said, opening up the journal and setting it on the floor.

Bdubs started glancing over the journal on the floor.

*Last seen 10/28. Declared missing 10/30. Body found 11/2. Death could have occurred at any point in those five days. The body was found in the woods, roughly a mile from his last known location. Manner of death was declared suicide. No further investigation was deemed necessary.*

He looked back over at Etho and said, “Really? That’s- I don’t think I died that way.” He was pretty certain he was happy when he was alive, even if he only had one memory and a couple photos to prove it. But he can’t say for sure, he had no idea what he was dealing with when he was alive, and he probably never would know, unless those memories came back to him. It doesn’t feel

like something he would do.

Etho didn't respond, and it took Bdubs a second to remember that he had to use the computer to talk to Etho. *"I don't think that was right."*

"I didn't think so either. You didn't show any of the warning signs of someone who was about to...do that, but nobody ever listened to me when I tried to say that. They all wrote me off as some crazy widow, I started to think I was one," he said, chuckling a little bit as if that was enough to cover up the pained look on his face.

"They said it was from a drug overdose, but couldn't identify what, it was probably a mix of things," Etho explained, "Does that sound...familiar at all?"

A bitter taste filled his mouth, the burning of alcohol but complete by being combined with something even worse. Whatever it was, it made him want to vomit. *"Yes. Kind of."*

Etho thought for a second. "Do you think someone drugged you? Or some sort of poison, maybe?"

The bitter taste still had not left his mouth, if anything it grew stronger. It was starting to make him feel like he was going to pass out, whatever subconscious memories Etho was bringing up were not pleasant ones. *"Yes. Shut up."*

The fact that there was a note made him curious, but Bdubs didn't care at this point, he just didn't want to talk about this anymore. He'd ask Etho about that later.

Etho blinked, sitting up and looking a little surprised, "Alright, we can move on."

*Tango and Skizz had gone missing on the same night. They are still missing. Jimmy was declared missing as of 6/1, five months ago. Other official disappearances include Elizabeth "Lizzie" Shadow, who went missing three months ago. There were a few side notes scrawled in the margins, written in blue instead of black pen. Lizzie and Jimmy are cousins, I think. Lizzie was trying to find Jimmy but disappeared before she could, and a bit further down, Grian also missing? Maybe. Don't know.*

"Who are T and S?" Bdubs asked, not bothering to spell out their full names. They were on the tip of his tongue, the names felt so familiar but he couldn't quite tell why. His mind flashed back to the photos in the bedroom, they were probably on there somewhere.

Etho grimaced a little, which was enough to tell Bdubs all he needed to know.

"They were friends of ours, junior and senior year of college. But about a year ago, we had a big argument, and things kind of fell apart. I had just gotten surgery, and you got in a car crash, and seeing as we were both kind of broke to begin with, we couldn't pay the medical bills. I asked Tango for help, since he comes from a richer family than ours. He felt like he was being used. We got into this big fight, and I don't think he ever really forgave us."

"That's why you wanted to go to the party," Etho continued, "You wanted me to go too, so we could both try to reconnect to Tango and Skizz. But it didn't work out that way, I guess." His face fell as he talked, and a hand reached to fidget with a necklace that he was no longer wearing.

Bdubs took a moment to try and think how he was going to phrase this, especially with the limited options he had for communication. *"Did they kill me?"*

Etho frowned, "I don't know. I don't think so. Tango's the type to hold a grudge, but I don't think it would have been that bad, Skizz would have talked him down. But the two of them might be



related to the other disappearances, in some way.”

“*So maybe.*”

He nodded, “A maybe. The alternative is they...also died or went missing at the same party, or it was all a big coincidence.” His nose scrunched up a little in disgust, like he was sickened at the thought of Tango and Skizz also dying.

It made sense, even if the two of them had a falling out, Tango and Skizz dying would mean Etho had lost his other two closest friends. Bdubs wanted to give him a comforting hug, though he was fairly certain his hugs were the opposite of comforting.

He decided to change the subject instead. “*I know Jimmy. He was here, also a ghost.*” He had to spell out Jimmy letter by letter due to there not being a quick button to press and get his name.

“So Jimmy’s dead?”

“*That is how ghosts work.*”

Etho stayed silent for a moment, and let out a sigh. “I know that. Do- I should ask Scott if he knew anything about Jimmy’s ghost- but also, I don’t really know the guy that well, I feel like it’d be awkward to ask him ‘Hey, you know how Bdubs is dead, yeah well I met his ghost and Jimmy’s also a dead ghost now.’”

“*Do it.*”

He frowned, “Yeah, I know, just- he’s basically the one person who I’ve kept in touch with throughout this, don’t want to think I’m being weird. I’ve tried keeping in touch with Cleo too, but just- wound is too fresh for both of us, I think. You dying kinda messed with her, from what I’ve heard.”

*Cleo.* He knew that name. Again, much like Tango and Skizz, it was one of those things that were just on the tip of his tongue, something felt so familiar about her but once again, Bdubs couldn’t figure it out. Feelings with no memories attached came back to him, the same warmth of a strong bond, like the same joy he gets with poking fun at Etho. “*I want to meet her.*”

Etho looked back at the computer, “Cleo? I mean, it makes sense, you two were pretty close when you were alive. You want me to invite her over or something?”

“*Yes.*”

He glanced at his phone, lying down on the ground, “I guess I can make that work. Fair warning, it’ll probably take her longer to wrap her mind around the whole ghost thing than I did.” Etho grabbed his phone, and started messaging someone.

“*Don’t care.*” Bdubs responded, and set the ring down on the ground. He backed away from the computer to glance over Etho’s shoulder, standing close enough that had he not been intangible, he’d be able to lean on him.

Etho swatted behind him, his hand passing through Bdubs’ face a couple times, “Back off, don’t look over my shoulder,” he said, a hint of a laugh in his voice. “You know I don’t like it when people do that— well, you probably don’t know, but here I am reminding you.”

Bdubs rolled his eyes in defeat, but didn’t bother to move back over to the computer to protest. It was too much effort, and he was starting to get tired. Well, that was a lie, ghosts didn’t get tired, he

was just lazy.

Something was so peaceful about all this, even if it was a mess. Sure, this was probably nothing like being alive. If he had any concept of what his life was, he was sure it wouldn't be anywhere nearly as complicated as this. But it felt right, to be laying here on the floor of Etho's apartment, as the two made plans to meet up with a friend, teasing each other and joking and getting into playful arguments. It wasn't living, he's lost that, but it was the second closest thing. He'll compromise, just this once.

## Chapter End Notes

this has been the Longest chapter of broadripple i have written yet, damn. it's barely even edited jhfgkjahs-  
struggling with motivation on this since last life ended. it may be over, but i'm too far invested in this story to end it here.  
hope yall are doing well tonight/whenever you may be reading this :D

## and i wrote this on an airplane where the people looked like ants

### Chapter Summary

Some people, like Etho, are quick to accept the fact that ghosts existed with open arms. Other people, such as Cleo...need more convincing, to say the least.

### Chapter Notes

TW for this chapter: mentions of drugs (overdose and drugged drinks), death. (a brief mention, marked here just to be safe)

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

A couple days had passed since Etho first reached out to Cleo. He didn't expect her to respond immediately, he wasn't even fully sure if she would respond, she's been rather distant since Bdubs died. Granted, he didn't know Cleo too well beforehand, but he knew that she and Bdubs were close. Losing Bdubs had been hard on both of them, and while he could tell Scott was trying to get the two of them to reconcile again, they were both stubborn (Cleo especially), and weren't quite ready yet.

It was Bdubs who brought it to his attention, ringing the bell of what was arguably the most annoying alarm ever created. "*Etho. Etho. Etho check your phone. Etho. Etho. Etho.*"

He buried his head in his hands, still not fully awake, "The day you learn how to copy and paste stuff is the day that I unplug you," he threatened. He was fairly certain that Bdubs couldn't- it'd require at least two inputs at once to copy and Bdubs, having one ring, could only use one key at a time. But there was a chance he could and that chance would mean hell for Etho.

"*How?*"

He laughed, "I'm not telling you! You'd use it to torment me."

Bdubs used to joke that their love language was annoying each other, and there was definitely a bit of truth in that. The return of their lighthearted arguments gave Etho the most joy he's had in the past few months.

He stretched his arms out, feeling his joints crack as he did so, "I will check my phone though, is it Cleo?"

"*Yes.*"

"Alright, I'll go see it."

"*Did you tell her about me yet?*"

"Not yet, I'm waiting until she comes over."

He glanced at his phone, looking at the response. *I'll be over soon.*

“She says she’ll be here soon. I should- probably grab some breakfast, maybe tidy this place up a little,” Etho thought, trying to budget how much time he had left.

*“It’s a mess here.”*

Etho sighed, “I know that, you don’t have to rub it in.”

*“Just saying.”*

About thirty minutes later, there was a knock on the door, and Etho took it as his cue, slipping his familiar black mask on. “Hey, Cleo, nice to see you again,” he said, opening the door to invite Cleo in.

“Hi,” Cleo stepped into the apartment, surveying the mess of a living room, only more of a disaster with Bdubs’ communicator nestled right in the center. “Well this place has seen better days. Is that your computer just in the middle of the floor?”

“Yeah, sorry about that, I meant to clean up a little bit. The computer is important though, you’ll see why in a moment,” Etho explained, clearing a spot on the couch for Cleo and him to sit down.

He felt the bone-chilling cold of Bdubs’ hand landing on his shoulders, and tried his best to not tense up visibly. “Cleo, this might sound a bit crazy, but. What do you think about ghosts?”

Cleo narrowed her eyes, “You said you wanted me to come over to talk about Bdubs,” she stated, her voice becoming a lot more stern.

“Just answer the question, trust me.”

She sighed, thinking for a second, “Well, they’re fake, just a made-up story to scare kids, aren’t they? They can be neat in stories and such, but that’s about it.”

Etho grabbed his necklace, to prevent Bdubs from doing so, and a little bit just out of habit, “Well, I thought so too, but uhh-”

She glared at Etho, “No- don’t even start this with me.”

Etho started to take off his necklace, and walked towards the communicator to set it down, “Just hear me out-”

“Scott thought he was haunted for a solid month due to this stupid flower that Jimmy gave him, you better not even try to start this with me, Etho.” She was starting to scare him, a little bit, admittedly. Cleo was a terrifying woman, which Etho normally admired, though when that anger was directed at him it became significantly less admirable and significantly more scary.

“Humor me, just this once, Cleo. If nothing happens, you can go right back to your everyday life, you don’t even have to talk to me ever again if you don’t want to.” Etho clarified. “I’m setting this ring down, and I’m going to walk back over to the couch, and then, it should happen.”

And, just as has happened thousands of times before, the ring hovered in the air slightly, with the chain dangling behind it. A series of clicks later, and a computer-generated voice read out. *“Hello Cleo. It’s me, Bdubs.”*

She immediately shook her head, “No, no, no this isn’t real. This doesn’t make sense. How do I

know this isn't some sort of trick?" She asked, glancing back at Etho.

"No strings, no illusions, no nothing. I'm a man of science, I wouldn't have told you about this unless I was sure it was real."

*"I am real."*

She frowned, a look of doubt and distaste on her face. "If you're real, tell me something only Bdubs would know," she challenged.

Etho grimaced. Bdubs' amnesia would only make this seem more like an elaborate prank, "Uhh, there's a problem there, he doesn't exactly remember a lot."

She glanced back at Etho, "You're kidding me. You set up this whole thing, to try and convince me there was some sort of ghost Bdubs here, and you try to pull the whole 'Oh, he won't remember' card on me?" She asked, her voice teetering on the verge of yelling as she stood up to leave, "You're kidding me. You're absolutely kidd-"

She was cut off, as the computer read out, *"You stole Pizza. Zombie Cleo."*

Her face fell, and so did she, sitting back against the couch. "You're right, I did steal Pizza, I still have that stupid little llama plushie," she said, laughing a little as she started to calm back down. "It's been ages since anyone's called me Zombie Cleo."

Etho had no context for this, but it seemed to mean a lot to Cleo and Bdubs, so he nodded and stayed silent.

Cleo must have noticed his confusion, but didn't offer any explanation other than saying "Some inside jokes, back from highschool."

He was curious, but recognized now wasn't the time to pry, even if he did desperately want context for the Pizza story.

The computerized voice added, *"Etho is right. Only some memory. That is one of them."*

"Well, I'm honored that it's that of all things," she smiled, wiping at her face a little, maybe trying to discreetly hide tears of some sort.

*"It was funny."*

She nodded, "It really was, it was probably the only good part of that biology class," she said, and turned to Etho for a second, "So there's just, let me get this straight, Bdubs is a ghost, and he's just haunting your house, and he can only talk through this weird computer you set up?" she asked.

"Close. From what I can gather he can only move this ring around, I just set it up so he can talk to us by using this ring to type," Etho explained, holding his hand out as a signal for Bdubs to return the ring to him. After a couple moments, the cold chain fell into his palm. "He can also occasionally make things really cold."

She scrunched up her face, backing further into the couch, "Yeah, I can feel that, this isn't great," she said, swatting at the air in front of her as if it would help. After a couple moments Bdubs apparently left her alone, as she sat back up straight again, "And how long has he been here, all seven weeks? And you only just thought to tell me now?"

He shook his head, "Nope. He's only been here for about five, maybe six days. I told you right as

soon as I got this set up, he wanted to talk to you again.”

“Right. So Bdubs was the one who wanted to talk to me.”

“Yep, this was his idea. Though I don’t mind your company, of course, you’re welcome over any time,” he offered.

She glanced around the messy apartment, “I think next time you can come over to my place.”

He nodded, “Yeah, that’s fair I think. Though it’d be hard to bring Bdubs over,” Etho said, glancing back at the computer.

“Fair enough,” she responded, “So Bdubs is just kind of a ghost who’s been hanging out in your apartment this whole time. This is not at all how I expected my day to go.”

“Oh, it gets weirder,” Etho added.

Cleo looked back at him in disbelief, “What do you mean, ‘it gets weirder’?”

“So, as a bit of a side project before all this happened, I uhh-” Etho pulled out the journal again, “I would normally say this sounds crazy, but in comparison to the ghost thing I feel like this is significantly more normal. I don’t think Bdubs’ death was accidental, or by his own hands, I think-”

“You think he was murdered?” Cleo asked, looking back at Etho.

He nodded.

Cleo glanced at the journal, opening it up and flipping through the pages, “I believe you,” she responded, no hesitation.

“You do?”

“Of course I do, it all lines up too perfectly. First Jimmy disappears out of nowhere, then his cousin Lizzie, and then this party happens and three different people who were all in the same circle disappear. There has to be something else going on here.”

Etho breathed a sigh of relief, not expecting Cleo to be on his side. “You went to the party, right? Do you remember anything?” he asked.

She shook her head, “Not really. We left about an hour after we arrived. Scott told me his drink tasted funny, and Pearl and I didn’t want to take any risks, especially considering the disappearances. We left shortly after, and Scott was sick for a solid two days after that. I don’t know what was in that drink, but whatever it was, it was strong.”

“His drink was drugged?” Etho asked, starting to connect the dots.

“Well, Scott always described it as more of a poison than anything, but yeah. We don’t know why though.”

“Bdubs died from, uhh, from a drug overdose. They couldn’t identify what it was.” Etho explained, flipping to the page on the journal where notes from the autopsy were summarized. “Do you think it was the same thing they tried to give Scott?” He asked.

She looked over the notes, and back towards Etho, “It very well could be.”

Etho felt the chain pulling against the back of his neck, and glanced down at the ring being tugged away from him, "Hold on, Bdubs," he said, taking off his necklace so Bdubs could use the ring on the end to talk.

After a couple moments of waiting, the computer-generated voice remarked. "*I taste alcohol and bitterness. Not a good combo.*"

Cleo nodded, "Scott said it tasted bitter too. Do you remember anything else from that, Bdubs?" she asked.

"No."

"Alright, fair enough," she responded.

"Did you see Bdubs talking to anyone at the party?" Etho asked, "Or Scott, for that matter."

"I don't think so, none that I can recall, at least. I think I saw Scott talking with Impulse at some point, maybe, a bit before we all went home."

"Impulse?" He asked. The name was familiar, but Etho didn't know the guy.

"Yeah, he was a friend of Jimmy's. So was Grian, Mumbo, and Martyn, two of which ran off somewhere, and Martyn, well, Martyn's great, he and Ren come over for game night every so often. We're considering starting a D&D campaign." She shook her head, "Sorry, got distracted."

Etho hummed, "So Impulse is a suspect of trying to poison Scott, do you think he would also try to do the same to Bdubs?"

"I don't know, I don't even know why he'd try to do that to Scott." She thought for a second, "Bdubs and Tango were in a bit of bad blood, weren't they? Tango and Impulse could have messed with Bdubs and Scott respectively," she suggested.

"So you think they were scheming together?" He asked, pulling a pen out of his pocket to turn to a new page to take a couple notes down. *Known- Scott was drugged, likely by the same thing Bdubs died to. Possible- Impulse was at fault for Scott. Theory- Impulse and Tango collaborate to kill Scott and Bdubs, only Bdubs died.*

She nodded, "Maybe. Though like I said, I don't know why Impulse would have tried to go after Scott. He hasn't done anything wrong here."

"Maybe something to do with the previous disappearances? What do Jimmy, Lizzie, Scott, and Bdubs all have in common?" he asked.

Silence grew as both of them tried to think of any similarities.

Etho drew a blank. Everything he could think of either made no sense or only applied to a couple of people, there seemed to be no definite answer.

"They're all married? I don't know, I've got nothing." Cleo responded.

"Yeah, I can't think of anything either," Etho added.

Cleo hummed, still trying to think of an answer. "The only thing I can think of is that Lizzie and Scott were both close to Jimmy, but I don't know how Bdubs fits into thi-"

She got cut off by the quiet clink of metal falling against hardwood. The sound alerted both of

them, glancing over towards the ring which now lay limp on the ground.

“Bdubs?” Etho asked, not knowing why he’d suddenly just drop the ring. “You doing okay, buddy?”

There was no response.

Etho and Cleo glanced back at each other, sharing a look of concern. There was no way to tell what was happening, but this was out of character for Bdubs. He’d usually at least give the ring back to Etho, or if he was feeling playful he’d throw it at one of them. He didn’t normally just drop things and abandon it.

Cleo spoke up again, after a moment of silence. “Bdubs, are you still there?”

No response, yet again.

“Well that can’t be good.”

## Chapter End Notes

enjoy that nice little cliffhanger :)

it won't leave you hanging for long though, as hopefully next chapter will be out soon!

it's already halfway written.

if any of you want to know what happened with cleo, bdubs and pizza let me know because i do in fact have that planned out even though it's never gonna come up in canon hjfhsjdghk

also haha chapter 6/9 that looks like 69. nice. (i am a actual child).



# if my woman were a fire she'd burn out before i wake

## Chapter Summary

The second hardest thing to do is remembering the events that ruined you. The hardest thing is opening up about them.

## Chapter Notes

TW for this chapter: death, semi-graphic descriptions of pain

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

There were two sitting on the couch, laying out papers and trying to talk through a complicated situation that they both knew they couldn't solve on their own. The white-haired man holding a journal with a pen scribbling in notes, with the black mask that muffled his voice, and the redheaded woman with torn dark clothes adding on suggestions and recounting everything she could possibly know.

And Bdubs sat, watching the two of them, trying his best to tune out the conversation as all it caused was a headache for him. Any focus he paid to them made the world feel like a blur, made him feel even less alive, if it were possible, like he was fading out of his nonexistence even more. Did he always feel this dizzy, this disoriented?

He tried not to think about the memories that loomed, soon to crash over his head in a wave. Some were helpful, like the spontaneous spark that reminded him of Cleo, of Pizza the stuffed llama, but these ones did not feel so benevolent.

The ring fell from his grasp, and clattered to the ground.

~~~

It was loud, bright, with LEDs that shifted through numerous colors in the crowded apartment. Truly the peak college party, despite the fact that most of them were over a year out of college at this point. It was nostalgic in that sense, almost, reminding him of a different time, one that was arguably a bit worse, but a different time nonetheless.

Bdubs was glad that Etho stayed home, all the noise and people would only have made his headache worse.

A drink was abandoned on the table. He was fairly certain it was Scott's, who already left. It was arguably a bad decision, especially if Scott were to come back, but who was he to waste a free drink? Sure, he could get one from elsewhere, but it'd go to waste otherwise.

Bdubs took a sip and ignored the bitterness in it, he had no right to judge Scott's taste in drinks seeing as he stole it. He picked it up and carried it with him, figuring he'd finish it and get something else that was more his taste once he was done.

It was blurred, all a haze for most of that night. But he was fine with that, at the time, he was here to have fun, after all, not remember every minute detail.

He seemed to crash into everyone as he made his way through the crowd, that drink was way stronger than he expected. Maybe he ran into people, talked with them along the way, but it must have not mattered, because either way, he ended up running into a familiar blonde-haired man, and the night quickly devolved

“Tango, hey-” Bdubs started, hoping to make the reunion friendly.”

The voice in response was stern, surprisingly flat for someone who had been partying and laughing a moment before, “Bdubs.”

“How’re you doing, man? We haven’t spoken in forever.”

“Go away, I don’t care. Get out of my face.”

He frowned, not expecting the sudden aggression. Maybe he should have, “What’s wrong? If it’s about what happened back then, I’m sorry, and like, even Etho-” Bdubs started, before getting cut off.

Tango was always an angry drunk. “Etho, this! Etho, that! You never cared about me, you only care about Etho! Hell, you only cared about yourself!”

“I did care about you guys! Why the hell else did we save up to try and pay you back, but you never responded!”

“You never did that! I would have seen it, or Skizz would have seen it- it doesn’t even matter. I didn’t even care about the money!”

“Why are you so mad then?” Bdubs asked

“You used me! You always used me, all of you did! You didn’t care about me, you cared about how you could use me. Tango, can you pay me for this? Tango, can you drive me to this? I might as well have given you all my life at this point, Tango, the life dispenser!” He yelled, his words growing more and more slurred as he spoke.

Bdubs felt guilt grow in his heart. He didn’t even realize he did any of this, that any of them did any of that, “Tango, we had no idea you felt that way, you could have told us sooner,” he offered.

Punches were thrown. Bdubs blocked the first one, trying to push his former friend away so he could get away from this. He should call Etho, he needs to get home.

“You’re so full of crap, ‘talk it out?’ Would you have even listened? You always side with Etho anyway, Skizz is the only one who even cared about me!”

“Tango-”

Before he could even reach for his phone he felt another punch right at his face, sending his world spinning, sending him spiraling down, sending him falling onto the hardwood floor. He heard a deafening crack as he collapsed against the ground.

It became nothing.

It was cold the next time he was awake enough to think. He could barely open his eyes, trying to

do so made the searing pain in his head intensify tenfold.

His bones felt like they were made of lead, pulling him down onto the ground, keeping him frozen in place like a statue. He couldn't even feel his arms or legs anymore, and there wasn't even the familiar static of a limb falling asleep. Something dripped from his nose onto his lip, he was willing to bet it was blood.

The most painful part wasn't the splitting headache, or the blistering cold, it was the strange sickness he felt in his stomach, in his throat, which made him want to claw his entire chest out. It felt like he was on fire from the inside out, the type of heat that was so hot that it didn't even feel warm. But it was painful, it was slowly destroying him from the inside out.

Was he in a coma? Is this what a coma felt like, being aware but not conscious?

Was this even real? Was he dead, and this was his eternal limbo, an eternity of nothing but darkness?

He wanted to scream, to scream for help, yelling the name of anyone who would help him. He wanted Etho. He wanted Cleo. He'd take anyone who would be able to talk to him, to remind him that he was real, to wake him up from this nightmare.

He couldn't even open his mouth, couldn't even breathe loudly enough to make a hum.

What he could do was hear, at least.

"Bdubs- are you there? Bdubs-"

Yes. He's here. I'm him. I'm here-

His thoughts wouldn't save him, not here, where nobody could hear him.

"Skizz- I think I killed him. Or at least knocked him out, badly."

Skizz's voice was heard in the background, "That's- not good. I'm sure it's fine, he's probably just unconscious?"

"We have to get out of here. I can't- even if he's just unconscious, I don't want to be here when he wakes up. If he wakes up."

Footsteps which slowly grew more and more distant left him alone, leaving him with nothing.

It was dark after that. Nothing but a pure black void, like he was permanently in a state of falling asleep, close but not quite losing consciousness. His heartbeat felt drowning, far too big for his own body. It was the only part of him that felt like he was alive. Everything else was slowly withering away.

The air was cold, if anything the freezing winds felt like the only thing to keep him awake. It was something to cling to, so he wouldn't fall asleep here, and wouldn't fully lose his awareness. He didn't want to die here, he didn't want to die yet. He didn't ever think of how he wanted to die, but it wasn't here, it wasn't like this.

He wanted to see the moon, the stars, the world, he wanted to sing again and laugh, he wanted to say goodbye to his friends once again, he wanted to say goodbye to Etho. He didn't want to die here.

Maybe he did fall asleep, or maybe this state had warped his sense of time, leaving time to pass faster or slower than it did. Either way, the next thing he remembered was feeling like he was being lifted up, and thrown over someone's shoulder, his limbs limply dangling over that person's shoulder.

A British accent, male, high-pitched spoke the first voice. "I think you got the wrong guy."

A sigh, followed by a slightly lower voice, American. "Yeah, I don't know how that happened honestly. I don't even know this guy."

"Impulse, you quite literally poisoned an innocent stranger. That's exactly how we got into this mess in the first place!"

If he could coherently think, he would likely start panicking about the use of the word 'poison,' but the words seemed to pass through his mind, in one ear and out the other, not even fully registering to him.

"Look, I could have sworn I gave it to Scott—"

The first voice started yelling, "We were so close to this going off without a hitch! We already got his cousin, all we needed to do was take care of his husband! After that, nobody else would be left to look into why Timmy fell off the face of the earth."

"Look, it was you and Mumbo who accidentally killed the guy, don't take this out on me! I'm just trying to make sure you don't get caught for what, three murders now?" The second voice — Impulse?— responded.

The first voice sighed, "Let's just put him in the woods somewhere, if we're lucky then nobody will notice this guy's gone. Mumbo had the right idea when he bailed. I'm leaving after this, and if you have any brain left at all, you would too."

The two went silent. At least, as far as he was aware. It wouldn't matter either way, because he felt himself drifting away now. The ever-growing pain suddenly halted, leaving him empty and drained. All of his thoughts, which had already started to slow, had come to a stop.

It was cold. It was lonely.

It was inevitable.

~~~~

"I don't know what could have happened, maybe the talk of his death scared him off?" a voice proposed. It was a comforting voice to hear once again, Cleo's voice was always nice.

"He has a Shut Up button that he uses to tell me to stop talking about this kind of thing, he usually uses it if we go to far, he usually doesn't just run off like this," Etho responded.

He blinked open his eyes, observing the world again. Something still felt off about it though, almost like he was watching it through a screen, from behind some sort of metaphorical barrier. Everything felt slightly off, he couldn't quite put a name to it. Maybe it'd go away, hopefully.

Bdubs looked over at Etho, noting that he was still wearing the necklace. He walked over and tugged on it softly, which caught Etho's attention.

"Hold on, he's here, crisis averted," Etho said, looking down at the necklace, not quite making eye

contact.

Cleo breathed a sigh of relief, “Thank god.”

Etho took off the necklace, and held it out, “You want to talk about anything, Bdubs?” he offered, “We’re here for you.”

He did not really want to talk, at least, not about whatever memories had just been brought back. Bdubs knew he needed to, but they still felt too fresh, even though they must have been months old at this point, the fear and isolation and pure neverending cold still clawed at his stomach. Maybe he’d at least give the dust time to settle.

He grabbed the ring, and went back over to the keyboard, painstakingly typing in every letter. This entire ghost-thing would be significantly easier if he could have just talked. *“I remember my death. Don’t want to talk yet.”*

Etho and Cleo went silent for a moment, before Etho spoke up.

“That kind of thing must be rough to think about, but you don’t have to tell us yet, if you don’t want to.” Maybe Bdubs was biased, but even though Etho always said he had a hard time comforting people, hearing him immediately made him feel slightly more at ease, “You have all the time in the world, you don’t need to rush into this.”

Cleo nodded, “Exactly what Etho said. If you aren’t ready to talk yet, you don’t have to.”

*“Thank you.”*

He frowned, thinking over what Etho said, one thing in particular feeling wrong to him.

*You have all the time in the world.*

Did he really have all the time in the world? Etho didn’t know that for fact, neither did Cleo, or Bdubs, or anyone, really. It was slow, but it already felt like he was fading. Jimmy wasn’t able to use the flower he once was able to talk through, who was to say that Bdubs would always be able to hold the ring.

He twisted it around, passing it from hand to hand. How long would this even last? What if he ran out of time, ran out of this indefinite time he has to watch over the world?

Bdubs didn’t want to talk about it yet. But sometimes the best thing to do is the hardest thing, and sometimes the hardest thing is as simple as opening up.

He sat down, and typing out each painstaking word or letter, he told them everything.

## Chapter End Notes

you ever just casually murder three people. no? that's not something that happens? oh. grian must be an outlier then.

# we've got a lot, don't you ever dare forget that

## Chapter Summary

Sometimes good things aren't meant to last. But sometimes, they are, and sometimes, all that you can do is hope they last and enjoy the good times while it does last

## Chapter Notes

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

*“One last thing-”* the automated voice of Bdubs read out. *“It’s not related to this.”*

Etho has heard that automated voice talking for what felt like an hour, all the while he had been scrawling notes into the notebook as quickly as he could. He didn’t even get the chance to make anything of what he had been writing yet, barely even fully processing the words, just transcribing them to review later.

“Yeah, what’s up?” He asked, looking over towards the computer.

There was silence, which Etho expected. It takes a while for Bdubs to type stuff out, especially things with less common words. It could take anywhere from a minute to twenty.

He used the chance to retrace some of the scratchy handwriting, trying to make sense of what he had written down. The general grasp he had on it was Tango and Bdubs got into a fight, Bdubs got knocked out, and the combination of whatever poison was meant for Scott and being knocked unconscious (maybe a concussion, from what Bdubs described,) inevitably killed him. Someone named Impulse along with another man dragged him out to the woods to hide the body. He’d need more time to lay it all out, and maybe, just maybe, he could get into contact with anyone who would be able to make more sense of all this-

His thoughts were cut off by Bdubs.

*“Every so often, I’ve felt weirdly distant from the world. Cause I’m a ghost. But I’ve been more distant, especially when remembering things. It feels like I’m fading. I might not be, but I might be. I don’t know if I am going to stay around or not, or for how long.”*

*Oh.*

That couldn’t possibly be a good sign.

“So- you,” Etho took a breath, trying to compose his words, “You aren’t going to uhh, stick around, is what you’re saying,” he said, trying his best to not let his shakiness come into his voice.

Bdubs- he couldn’t just lose him again, could he?

No, no- he couldn’t. Etho already lost him once, he can’t lose him again. Fear sank into the quickly-growing pit into his stomach.

He couldn’t lose Bdubs. Not again.

The automated voice alone started making him anxious. “I might not. I don’t know yet. It may just be due to the bad memories. If I don’t think about those I might be okay.”

Etho nodded, feeling a pang of guilt. This was his fault, he shouldn’t have pushed so hard to ask Bdubs about what he remembers- It was his fault again, just like the first time, his fault, his fault, *his fault* -

He felt a hand on his shoulder, a physical one. “We don’t have to worry about that yet, for now you’re here, Bdubs.” Cleo’s words were meant to comfort Bdubs, it felt selfish to Etho to claim they were for him. But it was certainly reassuring, letting him ease his tense shoulders.

*“Cleo is right. I’m here now. Thinking about my inevitable demise is not fun. Good thing I’m too powerful to die twice.”* It took Etho a second to register that as a joke, getting confused by the flat robotic tone instead of Bdubs’ usual varied voice, *“Maybe I’ll stick around. Maybe I won’t. Maybe if I don’t think about the bad stuff I might be fine! You’re stuck with me.”*

He still disliked the uncertainty of it all, the *mights* and *probablys* and the *inevitables* did nothing but make his skin crawl with worry. But now wasn’t the time for that. Etho gave a small hum in agreement, both his former husband and his new friend calming his worries. “You’re right.”

*“I’m always right.”*

Cleo chuckled, “Debatable.”

The three sat together in silence for a little, before Bdubs spoke—well, typed—up, *“This is boring. Let’s have some fun. What are some ghost activities?”*

“I mean, the only one that comes to mind is a Ouija board, which we basically already have,” Cleo said, looking over at the computer and keyboards, “I just realized that this is essentially just a very fancy Ouija board.”

Etho nodded, “That’s exactly what it is. The normal Ouija board took too long and I thought it could be better.” He glanced around the room, “There isn’t much for us to do aside from talking, or if we could somehow get Bdubs to play video games, which I doubt is possible.”

*“I want to try.”*

“I think you need more than one finger for that,” Etho remarked.

*“This is stupid. I hate this.”*

“Well maybe you shouldn’t have died,” Cleo joked without thinking, and a couple seconds later, winced as she realized what she said, “Too far?”

Etho shared the same wince, “Maybe a little.”

“No.” Bdubs responded after a moment.

“No?” Cleo asked.

*“It was kind of funny.”*

She snorted out of amusement, “Good to know I have the dead guy’s approval.”

*“Okay, zombie.”*

She rolled her eyes, "I'm one-hundred percent human, thank you very much," she protested.

Etho smiled at the lighthearted banter, "Exactly what someone who wasn't human would say," he pointed out.

"Not you too," she complained, trying her best to hide her smile.

*"Good one, Etho."*

A stupid idea popped into his head, and without even giving much thought, he shared it. "We could always throw the ring around and have Bdubs chase it. Like fetch. Or toss it between us and play monkey-in-the-middle." Etho joked. He didn't even want to do it, he just wanted to see everyone's reactions to his brain's stupid ideas.

Cleo burst out laughing, "That's terrible," she managed to eventually say.

*"No."*

Oh, if only Etho could see Bdubs, or hear him properly, just to see and hear the complete offense in his tone. It would have been hilarious.

"Why not? It'd be funny," Etho pointed out, not letting the joke die yet.

*"I hate you."*

He chuckled, "You're the one who proposed, not me."

*"Don't use my no memories against me,"* the automated voice read out, but after a few more moments of typing, spoke again, *"Wait. I did?"*

Etho nodded, "Yeah, you proposed. We always kinda joked about getting married, but you ended up suggesting we actually do it. I think we were both kinda drunk when it happened, honestly, it was also like three in the morning, but it sounded like a good idea at the time."

He smiled at the thought, remembering the night of the snowstorm where they had stayed up so late clustered together for warmth, drunk and sleep-deprived and desperately waiting for the power to come back on. How he had originally laughed when Bdubs suggested it, realized he was serious, and said yes without giving it a second thought.

*"Nice."*

Cleo gave a hum of amusement, "Judging by how Bdubs is and the brief interactions I've had with you, I am not surprised in the slightest that that's how it went down," she commented, "I am a little offended that I wasn't invited to the wedding though."

"Don't be. It was literally just the two of us in thrifted wedding dresses in our living room. We didn't even get anyone to be a priest or anything, we just did it cause we thought it'd be funny," Etho responded.

Cleo laughed, "Now I'm even more offended, I would have loved to see that."

*"That was our wedding?"* Bdubs asked, and Etho could get the feeling that Bdubs was probably reeling from that information. *"We need a do-over. New one."*

"I have photos of it, Cleo, if you wanna see."



“Oh I would love-” Cleo’s phone buzzed, twice, three times cutting her off., “Oh, what is it now,” she complained, glancing at the screen, “Dammit.”

Etho tilted his head to the side, a little confused, “What’s up?” he asked.

She sighed, “I forgot I told a coworker that I’d cover their shift today, I have to head out.”

*“No. Stay.”*

She grimaced, “I would if I could, Bdubs, trust me. Last thing I want is to ditch you for work,” She started to stand up from her spot on the couch, and glanced back at Etho, “Do you mind if I drop by tomorrow?”

“Not at all. You’re always welcome here, Cleo,” he responded, smiling, “Plus I think that one would be mad if you didn’t.”

*“I would.”*

“He would,” Cleo added, nearly simultaneously with Bdubs, “Well, I’m out, talk to you two later.”

“Bye,” Etho said, taking his mask off as his new friend left.

*New friend*. That was nice to think, he always just considered Cleo an acquaintance before this, a friend of Bdubs. But he enjoyed Cleo’s company, and the three of them got along well.

“You have a good taste in friends,” Etho commented.

Bdubs’ response was surprisingly fast, *“I have great taste. In everything.”*

He laughed, “No, but seriously. I kinda wish I got to know Cleo better before, yknow, all this,” he made a vague gesture with his hand.

*“Well, you can get to know her now.”*

It took Etho back a bit, how correct Bdubs was. Even after all this time, he tends to forget that behind the arrogant personality that Bdubs puts on, he was genuinely pretty wise sometimes. A lot of the time, actually. “You’re right, I can. I hope we can spend more time together, the three of us, y’know?”

*“We have all the time in the world, Etho.”*

Maybe it was a lie, maybe it was the truth, maybe it was just hope. But they had time, a lot more time than most, a lot more time than they admittedly deserved. Maybe the hope-fueled lie was one he should believe for now. “We do.”

## Chapter End Notes

hey yall, sorry that this took significantly longer and is shorter (and maybe lower quality) than usual, i was having a Time this week. i hope yall enjoy nevertheless, and the final chapter should be out soon. i hope yall enjoyed reading, because i sure

enjoyed writing <3

# cause i'll be hanging from rope, i will haunt you like a ghost

## Chapter Summary

This is it, isn't it?

It was so strangely comforting.

It was warm, it was bright, it was painless.

## Chapter Notes

Side note: the breaks are for POV switches, I couldn't make this chapter work all from one POV.

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

Etho had it all laid out, finally connecting the dots, making some sort of sense of the words of Bdubs that he had transcribed the day before. He had gone over the thoughts countless times, finally able to construct a complete story.

Jimmy was killed by Mumbo and Grian. The way that Bdubs described the conversation made it almost sound like Jimmy's death was accidental, though that may just be him reading too far into things. Shortly after, Mumbo ran away. Lizzie was killed next, and Scott was third on the hit list. From what he can tell, the reason why Lizzie was killed and Scott was the next to die was to prevent them from looking into Jimmy's disappearance.

Not the smartest move, in Etho's mind. He would have done what Mumbo did, leaving as soon as he could. Though to be fair, he wasn't a murderer, so he didn't even really need to worry about that hypothetical.

And then, of course, Bdubs was just in the wrong place, wrong time, surrounded by the wrong people.

*Wrong people was the kind way to say it. Tango left him there to die.*

He had once hoped to reconnect with Tango and Skizz. They were brothers once, all of them, they were Team BEST, with their shitty college rock-band that never took off. But now he'd throw his fist into Tango's face if even given the chance.

*He left Bdubs to die.*

Maybe he understood why. Tango was drunk, got into a fight, knocked the other person out, and scared of the consequences, he ran. But it was so selfish of him, knowing that he could have killed Bdubs, to have just dumped Bdubs outside, and have ran away. It was so selfish-

*You weren't there either*, something in his brain told him.

Etho could play the game of blaming everyone all day, he could trace the lines and connect the

dots and plot out exactly who was at fault, whose guilt led them to run away, who should have done more, who should have done less.

It helped *nobody*.

The guilty still outran their consequences, the innocent were still gone.

“What did I even do all this for? Grian and Impulse are long gone, I could try and turn this in somewhere, but I don’t think anyone’s gonna take ‘I talked to a ghost’ as evidence.” Etho sighed, tossing the journal aside, “This did nothing, and now you’re gonna be gone one of these days....”

One of these days was growing sooner and sooner. He tried not to think about it too much, but he knew that Bdubs was growing more and more distant from the world. It had gotten worse since yesterday, according to him, and was only getting worse.

“*You know the truth now,*” Bdubs pointed out after a moment.

Etho hummed, “I guess so. But I just—I don’t know. I thought that knowing who was at fault was going to magically make everything better, and it didn’t,” He paused for a moment, “I do that a lot, don’t I. Try to convince myself that one thing will be the solution to all my problems, but it never is,” he said, chuckling softly to try and lighten the mood, in contrast to how personal he got.

“*I’m still here, stupid. Don’t get all sad on me yet.*”

Etho laughed, “That is true, you’re still here...” He hesitated, leaving off *for now*. “And I guess it’s good that we both know basically everything now, in regards to this.”

“*Not everything for me.*” Bdubs started, “*You said I left a letter. I want to know what it says.*”

Etho was confused. “The note? Why would you want to see that—I mean, it was faked, right?”

“*Did you ever read it?*”

Etho shook his head.

“*Why not?*”

“I...” his voice trailed off, as he racked his brain to find the right words, “I knew you didn’t. But I just- I guess I was afraid to read it, because there was still a chance, and I just—” He took a deep breath, recomposing his thoughts, trying to get himself back on track. “But it isn’t real. So I can open it now.” Etho asked, looking at the folded-up paper that he had danced around for ages.

He held the paper in his hands, turning it over a few times. Etho took another deep breath, and then opened it.

It wasn’t Bdubs’ handwriting. It looked similar, terrifyingly similar, but it wasn’t. Just the work of a talented forgery. But it was hard not to feel a pang through his heart, no matter how many times he kept note of the differences in handwriting, how this person crossed out their mistakes in one line while Bdubs would scribble it out, how this person remembered to dot their I’s while Bdubs wouldn’t.

He kept those differences in the forefront of his mind, trying to constantly remind himself that this handwriting didn’t belong to Bdubs.

The most notable part to him was that it never even used Etho’s name. It made sense to him, he

doubted that either Grian or Impulse knew that he and Bdubs were married, they probably just took note of the ring on Bdubs' finger and made something up, to try and keep people off their tail.

*"This is a load of horse crap."*

Etho chuckled at how lighthearted Bdubs' response was in comparison to how dark the writing was. "I guess it is, huh."

*"We should burn it."*

"Exactly what I was thinking. I have a couple other things I want to burn too, I'll go grab them."

~~~

There was that barrier again, constant, only getting stronger.

Of course, it wasn't a real barrier, only one that he had imagined. One between his thoughts and the world around, one that made the world feel so fake, one that reminded Bdubs constantly that he was going to fade away so soon, it could be days, it could be minutes, it could be seconds.

When he brought it up to Etho again, Etho had guessed it was because they had figured out the reason why he died, that he had no real reason to stay on the mortal plane, unfinished business had been finished. That's how ghosts worked in stories, at least, Etho had said.

Bdubs didn't think his business was finished, it wouldn't be until Etho and Cleo were with him. He wanted to stay by the side of his friends, that was his true business.

It all gave him a headache. He tried not to think about it.

Etho walked back into the room, holding a metal trash can, and a few photos, the photographs that Bdubs remembered seeing when he had first woken up. Specifically the ones of him, Etho, and two others, the two others being people he now recognized as Tango and Skizz.

He grabbed the ring off the floor, and typed out *"You're going to burn those?"*

Etho shrugged, "Not the whole photo, just the parts with Tango," he said, while carefully tearing the photos. Bdubs looked over to see pieces of photos of Etho and Bdubs sat in one pile, and then Tango and Skizz in another.

Apparently he had stood up too fast, because Bdubs was getting lightheaded again. He sat back down on the ground, passing the ring from one hand to another.

Etho opened the window, and sat down across from him, the metal trash can between the two of them. "You ready to see stuff burn?"

"Yes."

Etho threw the scraps of photos into the trash can, and once he lit the letter on fire, he let it fall into the can as well. Something was therapeutic about watching it burn, watching the flames dance around each other, as the paper slowly turn to ash.

Etho looked like he felt the same, face calm, almost smiling slightly, as he watched the photos disintegrate into smoke. "I hope the fire alarm doesn't go off, that would really interrupt the moment."

Bdubs laughed, looking away from the fire to respond, *"You just ruined it yourself."*

“I did not-” Etho protested, as the last of the flames faded out, leaving a pile of ash in the bottom of the can. He scooted the trash can to the side, just out of reach of both of them, “I’ll just clean that up later.”

“*Will you?*”

He frowned, “I will, I’m making it my new project.”

He didn’t believe Etho for a second. “*Good luck with that.*”

Etho laughed, “You know, you are the rudest ghost I have ever met. Granted, you’re the only ghost I’ve ever met, and you’re you, so I don’t know what I expected.”

Bdubs started to plan out a snarky response, thinking something along the lines of *I’m the best ghost you ever met*, he’d workshop it.

But it seems the universe had other plans.

As he reached his hand out the ring clattered to the ground, the sound of metal against hardwood echoing through the apartment. Bdubs saw it against the hardwood through his fading fingertips, as his hands slowly turned transparent, disappearing from the world.

It took him aback for a second, in all his time as a ghost, he had always seen himself whole. But now he was starting to fade away, tracing up his arms and legs, turning him transparent, into nothing.

Oh . This is it, isn't it?

The strangest part was that it was warm, like he was melting into sand, into sun. It was still so strangely comforting.

“Bdubs? Are you okay?” Etho had asked.

"Etho- I think I'm dying."

He knew Etho wouldn't respond, he could scream and shout until his throat gave out, until his lungs caved in, he could have yelled his name for all of eternity and Bdubs knew he would never be heard.

But he had to make himself known, in any way possible. Etho needed to know.

He stumbled walking on decomposing legs, trudging as every fiber of his being fought against him. Every ounce of his strength grew weaker by the step, but he had to get to Etho.

He collapsed into Etho’s arms, and was surprised to feel something, to feel the body of someone instead of the cold hard floor below. Etho grunted slightly, not expecting the weight, but a second later he could feel arms wrap around him

Bdubs opened his eyes, only to see Etho looking back, directly into his eyes. *He can see me* .

"I'm sorry to leave you again," he said, with a slight chuckle. "I'll wait on you, Etho."

Dying was painful the first time, fading into an endless darkness, cold and alone. It was brighter this time, but his arms and legs still slowly dissolved into thin air, soon his body, his head, his heart would be gone too.

It was warm, it was bright, it was painless.

I'll wait on you, Etho.

~~~

A ring clattered to the ground, echoing all throughout the apartment.

“Bdubs? Are you okay?” Etho asked, knowing he wouldn’t get an answer.

But he still waited, hoping for something, any indication that Bdubs was okay.

Something collapsed into his arms. Something warm. Human. He immediately felt himself tense up, not expecting the sudden weight to be dropped into his lap, but looked down at what it was.

It was Bdubs, looking right back at him. He was there. *I can see him.*

Etho immediately held onto the form, holding tightly, feeling the warmth of another person against him for the first time in ages, *his* Bdubs was back in his arms. But a second later, he noticed the translucent arms that tried to cling on back, and noticed the fact that the person in his arms was slowly disappearing from the world.

*This is it, isn't it?*

When Bdubs left his life for the first time, the news sent him spiraling, thoughts of how he could have done more, he should have done more, he should have at the very least given a proper goodbye. And now that he was given the chance to rectify his mistake, he couldn’t.

He should be happy, right? Happy that he got a chance to reunite, happy he got the chance to say his proper goodbyes and move on. He was given so much, and yet, it still wasn't enough. The words of farewell now sat on the tip of his tongue, but he couldn’t bear to open his mouth to say it.

If he said goodbye now, it would be true. So, instead, he lied to himself, that if he clung on a little tighter, the fading ghost in his arms would stay for just a little longer.

Etho closed his eyes, not able to bear the sight of watching Bdubs disappear. as the warm body he held in his arms slowly turned into nothing. He could swear, just for a second, he could hear Bdubs’ voice say his name.

Before he knew it, he was alone again.

"I'm gonna miss you buddy. I love you."

## Chapter End Notes

And with that, the story draws to a close.

I never got better with chapter titles or summaries djhgfd- I think those are just the two things I'm not gonna get good at.

I'm glad that you all enjoyed this story, I had a lot of fun while writing it. Maybe the next story I write will end a little happier (complete lie).

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!