

## Arts & Crafts

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## Arts & Crafts

by [yoeyrt](#)

### Summary

Congratulations! Bdubs has successfully found his forever-vessel. Unfortunately, it's a dirty clown doll that's been lying in the mud for a century, and some people in this household don't like the dirt. That's their problem. But Etho doesn't seem too opposed to offer some TLC.

In which I felt the need to write Team Mortal being domestic for 4k. Nothing goes wrong (for real this time)

### Notes

I recommend at least reading 'nothing bad ever happens at a haunted carnival' before this fic! It's the work before this one in the series (written by the amazing lovely May @maybeans ao3)

CW: There's talk about a knife. Nothing graphic but I figured it's good to mention! I tried to fix the formatting this chapter because whew lird it was bothering me. Hopefully it's more readable now.

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

"Are you just going to leave it like that?"

"What do you mean?"

Mumbo's face is scrunched up in disgust, peering over at Etho and the dirty clown doll sitting on the arm of the couch.

"It's filthy." He spits, like the word itself is bitter in his mouth.

"It's not that dirty." Etho tries to reason. He'd cleaned it up a little bit on their car ride home, mostly brushing caked mud out of its curly green hair. There are obvious stains and damage from being outside for a century, and if he's being honest with himself, it is kind of gross.

"Okay, maybe it's a little dirty." He admits with a light chuckle.

*"I'm beautiful."* Bdubs interjects, obviously offended. *"You need to have your eyes checked."*

"It's stained, it's faded, and it's muddy." Mumbo taps his foot. "Now I know beauty is subjective..."

"Don't be rude to him."

*"Don't be rude to me!"*

Mumbo raises his hands defensively as Etho and Bdubs talk over each other. "I'm just saying."

"Maybe you should get a makeover." Etho teases, turning to look at Bdubs. "Get you all dolled up." He pokes him in the belly, pushing it over.

*"Very funny! Ha, ha!"* Bdubs forces laughter out as the doll hits the arm of the couch. *"I see that pun."*

Etho rolls his eyes. He *is* joking, of course, but a makeover does sound like fun. It's been too long since he's had a creative project to work on-- he usually puts all his energy into work. It would be nice for him to take a break and flex his creative muscles again.

*"You're thinking."* Bdubs comments as Etho picks him up, turning the doll over and pinching at its stained clothes.

"I am. A makeover doesn't sound like such a bad idea."

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Bdubs' doll needs a lot of work, Etho realizes as he sits at the kitchen table. What he thought was a fifteen minute project slowly turns into more and more hours of work as he inspects the vessel, turning it over in his hands and lifting its limbs.

*"So I was telling Grian, 'Hey, you need to stop doing that because it's bad for your health,' and you know what he said to me? He said 'fuck off'!"*

"Grian did not say that."

*"Well, he meant it."* Bdubs mumbles under his breath. *"He's gonna drop dead if he doesn't fix his sleep schedule. Staying up late will only-- WHOA! Hey! Buy me a drink first!"*

Etho scrunches his nose at Bdubs, trying to hide the grin behind his mask. "Very funny," He comments lightly as he continues to undress the doll and inspect the damage to its plush torso.

*"I know, I'm hilarious."*

The body of the doll seems relatively intact and unscathed, Etho observes, tilting it and squeezing it between his fingers. Maybe it needs new stuffing. The old stuffing is compacted and smells a bit

too much like wet dog for it to be pleasant.

The clothes, though, those will probably need to be replaced. A century of mud stains probably won't come out in the wash. It's not that bad, he just has to find a dupe of the fabric and copy the pattern.

The porcelain hands and head of the doll are also mostly unscathed. The paint on its face has faded quite a bit, and there's a hairline crack in one of the hands, but as long as they're not too rough with Bdubs it'll be fine.

*"Take a picture, it'll last longer."*

"Do you want me to help you or not?" Etho sighs, brushing caked mud out of his green hair.

*"I'm fine like this. You're the one who's intent on making me pretty."*

Etho doesn't respond to that beyond a scoff. "I need to get some fabric for some new clothes, and maybe some paint for your face. And I need to replace your stuffing, but that's it I think."

*"That doesn't seem too bad."* Bdubs chimes. *"That's like, what, thirty minutes tops?"*

"Yeah, you wish. I could maybe salvage some stuff here for your clothes and stuffing, but the paints will be a nuisance. And it's a delicate operation," Etho begins to dress the doll again, pulling the dirty, yellowed shirt back over its torso. "One that you'll have to shut up for."

*"You know, maybe we don't have to give me a makeover."*

Etho laughs.

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Etho is bent over the kitchen table, a paintbrush pinched delicately between his fingers. The table itself is covered in supplies, from fabric to glue to open jars of paint. There's barely room for anything else to be set down.

"You have enough space there?" Grian teases Etho, holding a bowl of reheated macaroni. He keeps it close to his chest as he sits in one of the empty chairs.

"Sorry." Etho says automatically, not really sorry at all. He's focused, lips pursed and pressing against his mask as he carefully drags the paintbrush over the porcelain head.

Grian watches his meticulous movements curiously as he eats his lunch. Or maybe it was dinner, he wasn't quite sure.

Etho's brush gently paints a bright red smile along the doll's clown mouth, covering the faded pink underneath. He's moving slowly, wary of any sudden movements that could jolt the brush and paint outside the lines. It feels like an eternity as the paint is laid down, drying quickly in the brush's wake.

He pulls his back and admires the steady handiwork when he finishes, pressing the wooden tip of the paintbrush against his masked lips. His lines are a little shaky, but it's not terrible. He'd actually say that they look pretty good.

*"Can I speak now?"* Bdubs chimes in. Etho closes his eyes and lets out a soft sigh.

"Yeah, sure. I think this is a good place for a break."

"It looks good." Grian says, carefully pushing aside some of the fabric on the table so he can set his bowl down. "How much longer is this going to take?"

"Depends on how long Bdubs can stay quiet."

"HEY! ... okay, no, that's fair."

"I'm mostly done by this point, though." Etho hums, moving to clean his brush off in a nearby cup of water. "There's only a few more touch-ups I have to--"

"That's your coffee." Bdubs interrupts just before Etho dunks it.

"Oops." He corrects course to a different mug. "Anyway, just have to finish painting the face and then I can start working on the clothes and body."

"Cool. I was just asking because the clutter's stressing me out."

Etho raises a suspicious eyebrow towards Grian as he wipes the brush off on a rag.

"What?"

"This clutter is stressing you out?"

"Yeah."

"Have you seen your room?"

"Alright, that's different." Grian smiles, pointing his accusing fork at Etho. "That one's different because that's my mess."

"Uh huh." Etho answers in a tone that says *I totally don't believe you*. "Go away so I can finish painting Bdubs."

Grian just laughs, poking at his half cold food as Etho prepares to paint again.

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"*You look stressed.*" Scar remarks, looking over Etho. He's splayed out on the kitchen table, his head in his hands. It looks like a fabric store exploded on the kitchen table, scraps and polyester stuffing littering the wood and the floor.

"I'm fine." Etho groans.

"*He does, doesn't he?*" Bdubs remarks to Scar. "*He's been sitting like this for twenty minutes. I've been trying to get him to get up and go to bed but he keeps saying 'oh, just one more prototype, I'll finish it this time'.*" He doesn't need to manifest for Etho to feel his stare driving daggers into the top of his head.

"*What are you even trying to do here?*" Scar asks, picking up bits of stuffing and turning them over in his spectral hands. "*Looks like a whole bunch of nothing.*"

"I'm trying to fix up Bdubs' doll." Etho's words come out muffled. He raises his head to look at Scar. "Mostly just trying to get the clothes to sit right, like the original design."

"*Why?*"

"*That's what I've been saying.*"

Etho shakes his head. “You don’t get it.”

*“Darn right I don’t get it.”* Scar tosses the stuffing over his shoulder. *“You don’t need to make him look exactly like the stupid thing you picked up off the ground. I’m sure Bdubs would be happy to have a little bit of your own creative touch.”*

“I guess.” Etho purses his lips against his mask and rests his chin on his arms, looking at the half-unfinished doll perched in front of him. Its black, beady eyes, glossy from the new paint, stare back. The eye contact comes easy.

*“Etho,”* Bdubs says, *“Look, I don’t care that it’s not perfect. It’s perfect enough with you working on it, okay? Who cares if it’s a little lopsided.”*

“I do.”

*“I don’t. And it’s my vessel.”* Etho imagines him crossing his arms in a huff. *“So I win.”*

“It’s not a fight.” He feels the corners of his own mouth quirk up in a small smile. “There’s nothing to win.”

*“You need to take a break.”*

He frowns again, his eyes avoiding the doll’s. He’s been working for a few days now, the project much bigger than either of them anticipating. Bdubs is right, he should take a break, but Etho wants this project finished. He’s tired of hearing Mumbo and Grian complain about the lack of table space, and he feels a little guilty for taking it all up.

He would also feel bad giving Bdubs a half-assed makeover, though. This is his vessel, this is his home, his mostly-permanent residence for the foreseeable future. He doesn’t want Bdubs to be running around looking like a fool. Well, more of a fool.

Etho won’t admit it to himself and he certainly won’t admit it out loud, but he’s starting to care about Bdubs. More than he should— mortals should never get attached to ghosts, this is common knowledge in his line of work. The differences between them are too great. Honestly, he should have sent Bdubs on his way as soon as he figured out he haunted his phone. What was he thinking, letting him stick around? Now, not only has he put himself at risk, he’s also setting a bad example for Grian and Mumbo. Hell, now they’ve got *two* ghosts living with them. Where has his caution gone? Where did his integrity go?

It’s dangerous to get attached to ghosts as a mortal. Etho knows this. He’s not attached, he doesn’t care about Bdubs. Not a bit. This doll he’s spent hours agonizing over and trying to make perfect isn’t a gift, it’s not a display of his affection. It’s tactical. It’s building bridges. It’s just business.

*“What a beautiful knife.”*

Etho’s thoughts are snapped abruptly back to reality as Scar picks up a silver pocket knife laid out on the table next to the discarded fabric. He pulls a lever on the side with his thumb, and the blade flicks out, glinting in the dim kitchen light.

“Hey, give that back!” Etho reaches to snatch it out of Scar’s spectral hands, falling over himself and out of his chair in the scramble.

*“Woah, woah, calm down cowboy.”* Scar chastises, stepping back out of Etho’s range.

“Give that back.” Etho’s staring him down with an intensity only rivaled by the time Scar snatched

Bdubs back at the carnival. His glare is measured, level, giving Scar a death stare that usually got him his way.

*“In a minute.”* Scar hums, yet again either oblivious or immune to Etho’s antics. He’s turning the blade over, watching it catch the light and reflect his shimmering form. Etho struggles to get to his feet.

*“What’s got you so worked up?”* Bdubs asks, a bit of concern leaking into his tone. *“It’s not like Scar’s gonna break it. I mean, he was gentle enough with me.”*

*“Yeah, I’m not gonna break it.”* Scar echoes, though there’s a teasing lilt to his voice.

*“Scar!”*

*“It’s mine.”* Etho says curtly, holding out his hand, giving Scar a chance to reconsider his actions. Simply return the knife and no trouble will follow. *“Give it.”*

Scar, however, has taken to floating up just out of Etho’s reach, dangling the blade between two carefully pinched fingers. *“Oh, this old thing?”*

*“Scar, this is your last chance.”*

*“Come and get it.”*

Etho leaps after Scar, who jumps back with a yelp and turns the corner, grabbing his hat so it doesn’t fly off. Etho is right behind him, chasing him, careful of objects littering the floor of the hallway, side-stepping and hopping over them.

*“Watch out!”* Scar yelps as Grian stares at the end of the hall, wide-eyed and barely registering the open knife in Scar’s hands. At the last second, he comes to and flattens himself to the wall as the two rush past him, saving himself from getting impaled.

*“What’s going on!?”* He calls after Etho as he makes another dive for Scar, who leaps up and out of the way, giggling like a madman.

*“Give it back!”* Etho shouts, scrambling to his feet again. *“Scar!”*

*“I took Etho’s knife and he’s mad about it.”* Scar says playfully. *“Let’s play keep-away!”*

*“Don’t give it to me!”* Grian grins, taking a couple hurried steps into the hall and away from Scar. *“You almost stabbed me!”*

*“Suit yourself.”* Scar smiles, flattening himself against the ceiling, out of Etho’s reach. Etho debates trying to jump and snatch the knife from his hands, but decides against it.

*“You’re making this just too much fun, just so you know.”* Scar taunts as he flips the knife open and closed again, listening to it click into place on every open. *“Actually, I used to have a knife just like this one as a kid. It was– hey!”*

Suddenly Scar’s nudged to the side, and he looks annoyed at something unseen to his right.

*“Give it back to him!”* Bdubs cries, attempting to tackle Scar and drag him back down to a more manageable height.

*“Oof, Bdubs, stop that–”* Scar struggles, swatting and kicking his foot at the invisible enemy. Grian laughs as he steals a glance at Etho, who’s watching Scar struggle with a calculated expression.

*“You’re being a nuisance!”*

*“You’re being a dick!”*

*“Get off of me.”* Scar floats to the ground, forgetting the game he was playing with Etho and just trying to get Bdubs to leave him alone.

Etho squares up as Bdubs distracts Scar, shifting his weight to his back foot, narrowing his eyes. In a blink, suddenly he’s leaping forward, arms outstretched, and snatches the pocket knife from Scar’s unassuming hands, sprinting down the hallway and back towards the kitchen. Bdubs whoops and Scar pouts in his wake.

Etho huffs as he slumps back into the kitchen chair, safe. Turning the blade over and over, he inspects it like Scar’s touch alone could have damaged it. It really is a pretty thing – the handle is wrapped in an old, black fabric, tied at the base of the knife. The blade itself is silver and polished to a near-mirror shine. He was lucky grabbing it by the hilt instead of the blade, because he definitely would’ve cut his fingers on its too-sharpened edge. He took pride in this knife, more than he probably should. It’s special for more reasons than one.

He hears a noise as the doll twitches beside him, repossessed once again. Bdubs wheezes, either out of breath as a bit or genuinely tired, Etho was unsure.

*“Where’s my thank-you?”* Bdubs asks, and he resists the urge to turn up his nose in confusion.

*“A thank-you?”*

*“Yes! For distracting Scar long enough for you to get it back.”*

Etho scoffs. He could’ve gotten the knife back without Bdubs’ help. He hadn’t slipped into panic mode at all, he was of sound mind and body in that moment.

On second thought, maybe he should thank Bdubs for the help.

He doesn’t.

He folds the knife carefully and tucks it back into his pocket, his fingers lingering on the leather-strapped hilt.

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*“You should probably apologize to him.”* Grian says, pulling his head back from around the corner to look at Scar.

*“Apologize for what?”* Scar looks surprised, like the thought that Etho got hurt by their silly little game hasn’t even occurred to him. Grian narrows his eyes.

*“Look, the way I see it,”* Scar raises his hands in a placating gesture. *“It was an overreaction. He should know I’ll give it back eventually!”*

*“He doesn’t know that!”*

*“Have I given him any reason to distrust me?”*

*“Yes! Many!”*

Scar feigns offense, putting his hand over his heart.

“The first thing you did to us was split us up and trick us in that silly carnival.” Grian continues. “You trapped him in that house of mirrors—”

*“That was Salem!”*

“-- not the point – and then you tied us up!”

*“All so you could watch our circus act!”* Scar throws his arms open wide. One of them phases through the narrow wall. *“Look, I haven’t done a single thing to harm you, and I’m offended that you guys think I might.”*

Grian gives him an incredulous look, then rights himself, shaking his head. “Maybe stop doing things that make us think you’ll turn on us. You just charged at me with a knife for goodness sake!”

Scar opens and closes his mouth for a moment before putting his arms down, giggling to himself. *“Yeah, alright. I guess I did do that one. Sorry about that.”*

“Now go apologize to Etho.”

*“Fine.”*

Scar straightens out his jacket, smoothing down the wrinkles from their excitement. He adjusts his hat, making sure it’s perched just so, before striding out of the hallway and back into the kitchen.

Etho’s not sitting at the table anymore, to Scar’s surprise. Bdubs’ half-finished doll is missing, too. He furrows his brow, wandering deeper into the house to look for the two of them.

Turning the corner into the living room, he sees Etho sitting on the fold-out couch he calls his bed, his legs folded under himself and Bdubs tucked close to his chest. He’s turning his laptop on, plugging in cords and headphones, getting himself situated for the evening.

Scar takes a deep breath and strides in, putting on his best apologetic smile. Etho ignores him.

*“Etho, I’ve come to say I’m sorry.”*

He’s still ignoring him, typing his password into his computer.

*“Etho, this is very important and you need to listen to me.”*

Silence.

*“Buzz off!”* Bdubs pipes up from Etho’s lap like an overconfident chihuahua. Scar has to stifle a laugh at how ridiculous he looks, half-naked and trying to threaten *him* of all people.

*“I’m trying to apologize!”* Scar exclaims instead, throwing his arms out in a grand swooping motion. “Doesn’t he want an apology?”

*“He wants to be left alone!”* Bdubs continues speaking for Etho, who’s silent but grateful. He slips his headphones over his ears, keeping his attention trained on the computer.

*“What, does he want me to grovel and beg for forgiveness?”* Scar scoffs, too proud to even entertain the thought beyond a passing mention. Etho’s eyebrow quirks up in response.

*“I’m not doing that.”* He says, crossing his arms over his chest and turning away from him, taking a step back towards the kitchen. *“You can keep your hard feelings for all I care.”*



Etho rolls his eyes, smiling under the mask.

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“I think... it’s finished.”

*“About time!”*

Etho sits back as he runs his fingers over the shirt of Bdubs’ vessel, smoothing down the lace at the end of the sleeves. Hours’ worth of work over a few days and it’s finally done.

The doll’s originally wiry green hair has been replaced with a more fluffy, curly green synthetic hair. It puffs out from beneath a red cap, carefully pinned into place atop its porcelain head. The face of the doll is a simple white, with blue triangles framing each eye, rosy red cheeks, and a prominent red nose. A delicate smile is drawn between the cheeks, making it look cuter than it otherwise should be. The shirt is a yellowy-cream color with lace decorating the collar and sleeves. It’s tucked into a poofy pair of red plaid pants, held up by matching suspenders and fastened with black buttons. The hands and shoes have been cleaned up the best Etho could manage, hands painted white to match the clown’s skin and pointed shoes painted black.

He feels himself puff out his chest in pride. It’s good. It’s not perfect, though he tried his hardest to make it so. It’s good enough for him, and it’s good enough for Bdubs.

“Oh, did you finish?” Grian asks, coming around the corner from the kitchen to inspect.

“Yeah.” Etho picks the doll up from the table and holds it up high enough for Grian to see. “What do you think?”

“I think it’s cute.” He smiles. Etho offers it over to Grian to hold, and he accepts.

*“It’s super well-done.”* Bdubs’ grin is evident in his voice. *“I think it was totally worth the wait.”*

“Aw.” Etho says as he’s beginning to clean up the mess on their kitchen table. “Thanks, guys.”

“The detail is incredible.” Grian remarks, manhandling Bdubs, turning him over and checking out the stitches and seams. “You know, I gotta say, I didn’t know you had it in you.”

“Oh, geez, thanks.”

“That’s a compliment!”

“Sure it is.”

Grian passes the doll back over to Etho, who tucks it into the crook of his arm as he continues to clean.

“Have you found any new jobs, by the way?” Etho asks nonchalantly. “I haven’t really had much time to look.”

“Um, a few.” Grian leans against the back of the kitchen chair. “The pay’s not great, though. There’s one I saw that paid a bunch, but it’s too far out, I think.”

“How far is too far?”

“It’s a road trip.” He taps his nails against the wood. “I don’t know if we should take it, though.”

“Well, why not?” Etho looks over his shoulder at Grian. “Is it dangerous?”

“Well, no, but the listing was super vague about it. ‘Contact owner for more info.’”

“But they advertised the price?”

“Yeah. In the thousands,” Grian chuckles, “so it’s safe to assume it’s probably gonna get us killed.”

“*Not on my watch!*” Bdubs says enthusiastically.

“And what exactly are you going to do to stop it?” Etho asks with a disbelieving smirk.

“*I’ll fight ‘em. They won’t get anywhere near enough to getcha.*”

“*I seem to recall,*” Scar interrupts, poking his head through the wall. Etho jumps back in surprise.

“*That it was incredibly easy for me to separate you two.*”

“*HEY! Okay, that’s different. I’m a new man now!*” Bdubs shouts in indignation. Etho turns to show Scar his finished vessel.

Scar’s face falls at the sight of the doll. He retracts back into the wall with a disgusted look. “*Oh, he’s horrid. Put that little beast away.*”

“*HEY!*”

Etho and Grian laugh as Etho tucks Bdubs away again, hiding his vessel from Scar. “You watched me paint it.”

“*Yes, and it wasn’t scary until you put it all together.*” Scar’s voice is pathetic as he walks a wide circle around Etho to get to Grian’s side. “*You can’t tell me he doesn’t look a little bit creepy.*”

“I think it’s cute.” Grian says, looking up at Scar. “You’re really scared of it?”

“*No! I’m not scared.*” Scar says defensively. “*It’s just gross and creepy and I don’t like looking at it.*”

“*You are being incredibly rude to me right now.*” Bdubs huffs. “*I think you should apologize.*”

“Yeah, because he’s great at those.”

“*Oh, you don’t get to say anything about that!*” Scar points an accusatory finger at Etho. “*I was trying to apologize, and you just ignored me! Didn’t even give me the time of day. I’m insulted, actually. I think you should apologize.*”

“*Yeah, Etho, I think you’re right.*” Bdubs drawls. “*I don’t think Scar can give an apology.*”

Scar scoffs and splutters, turning between Etho and Grian with an incredulous look. Grian is just laughing at him, not even attempting to defuse the situation.

“*You all are so awful.*” Scar shakes his head. “*I’m going back to the carnival.*”

The threat is empty, but it doesn’t stop him from making it. Etho finishes cleaning off the table with a little help from Grian and no help from Scar.

“Hey,” he says to Grian as he grabs his laptop from his bed, “can you send me the link to the job you were talking about?”

“Which one? The road trip?” Grian asks, looking up from his phone. Etho nods as he sits at the

table.

“Yeah. I think it might be fun.”

## End Notes

Thanks for reading! ^\_^ again as always, you can find me @yoeyrt on tumblr, and my amazing co-writer and editor May @maybeans on ao3! (or @maybeanns on tumblr)

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