

that's, like, a hundred miles

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by [No one you know](#)

Summary

Dream would kill him. Dream was going to kill him- he was going to- no, he wouldn't. Dream was his friend- friends don't hit each other- Dream was supposed to take care of him- Dream /was/ taking care of him.

It hurt to breathe. It hurt to think. He couldn't clear his thoughts as he stumbled to the family computer, pulling up a tab on google and frantically typing the name into the search bar.

The words Technoblade Watson stared back at him, the little black bar at the end of the letters blinking slowly, mocking him.

Why, of all people, did it have to be Technoblade?

in short: the one where dream sucks as a parental figure, tommy runs away, and visits his least favorite family member technoblade

Notes

just in case you didn't read the tags, this does deal with heavy child abuse by a guardian! and a lot of the emotional manipulation stuff that comes with dream as a character. so this is your warning

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

sleep on the floor

The straw that broke the camel's back was a phone. It wasn't even a *good* phone, just a cheap burner he'd managed to get his hands on. He wasn't even doing anything *bad* with it, he'd just been using it to message a few people from school.

Tommy wasn't allowed to have a phone. He *knew* he wasn't allowed to have a phone. It was one of the few (many) rules Dream had put in place. It was so stupid of him to buy a phone, he'd betrayed Dream's trust by doing so.

Maybe he deserved what happened to him. No, no, he didn't. He just wanted to talk to his friends. But Dream had made it so clear that--

It was hard to think. His thoughts were jumbled together, like a string, all tangled up with no hope of being straightened out.

It was so much easier when he lived with his family.

Back when he was a kid, it wasn't him and Dream. No, no, it was him and Phil and Wilbur and Technoblade, and it was great. He was so energetic and loud and just happy. Sure, he was the only kid on the block, but he had his brothers, Will and Techno, who were only about twelve years older than him. And, sure, he annoyed them to no end, but that was what family was for.

It got harder to think clearly when Phil and Techno left for... He couldn't remember why they left. He was six, and Wilbur, though only eighteen, ended up raising him. Tommy was so excited. He loved his older brother, and he loved living with him.

Their personalities worked well together, and even when they were annoying each other, they always made up at the end of the day, unlike with Techno and Phil.

He wished it could've stayed that way. That Wilbur could've raised him until he went off to some University somewhere, till Tommy was old enough to live on his own.

Wilbur died four years later. He was twenty-two, and way too young to die. It was a car crash, an unavoidable incident, and there was nothing anyone could have done to change what had happened.

Wilbur's funeral was the first time he'd seen Phil and Techno since they had left him with Wilbur. Technoblade was huge, then, towering over Tommy. Tommy was equally impressed by and terrified of him. Phil was a little more comforting to be around, but overall, more of a stranger than a father.

It wasn't a surprise that neither men wanted to take care of Tommy after that. He couldn't blame them, either. They were grieving, the loss of losing a son and brother much more important than taking in a new one. Even at ten years old, Tommy knew that.

What *was* a surprise was when Dream had stepped up to the plate, saying he'd be happy to take full custody of Tommy. Tommy didn't even *know* Dream that well. When they were younger, Dream and Technoblade would fight (sometimes with words, sometimes with fists), but apparently they got along well enough at that point for Phil to sign over the adoption to him.

Every moment after that had been hell.

At ten years old, Tommy walked into a living nightmare. Daydream. No, not daydream- not nightmare- he-

His head hurt.

Living with Dream came with a lot of unspoken rules that Tommy was apparently supposed to know from the minute he moved in. The first rule, and the one Dream enforced the most, was that he wasn't allowed to keep everything he owned.

The night he moved into Dream's house, everything changed. Dream took away most of his belongings, saying he "didn't need all this crap", referring to his toys, his clothes, his pictures of Wilbur. Tommy refused to let go of the pictures, though he gave everything else to Dream.

After that night, the things Dream took seemed random. Candy that Tommy had gotten from school, a toy Tommy had bought with his own money, the blanket Dream had given him (only for him to replace it a week later). It was weird. It was confusing.

Secondly, he wasn't supposed to talk back.

Wilbur had raised him to be as loud as he liked. Yelling at the tv, complaining about school, rambling about his interests and hobbies. He also would have regular shouting matches with his brother, rarely actual fighting but what they liked to call "loud discussions". Dream preferred the silence, and he hated when Tommy argued with him. It didn't take long for Tommy to learn it was easier to be quiet, even if he hated it.

Third, he couldn't have many friends.

Not that he couldn't talk to people, he could. Dream encouraged it, actually, to talk to the kids at school. But then he would come home and Dream would remind him that they weren't real friends, that they didn't care about him as much as Dream did. That they would drop him in a second for a simple reward. He was right about that, probably.

Finally, he couldn't leave the house.

Not without asking permission, at least. He'd snuck out once when he was eleven and Dream had screamed at him for what felt like hours afterwards. He'd been beaten black and blue and locked in his room for the next three days with no food. He stopped sneaking out after that.

That wasn't normal. Tommy knew it wasn't normal. Guardians aren't supposed to hurt you, they're not supposed to starve you, you're not supposed to be afraid of them. But what was he supposed to do about it? He was a kid, and it wasn't like he had anywhere else to go.

He'd emailed Phil about it once, when he'd first moved with Dream. He'd never gotten a response.

Tommy was fourteen years old. He'd lived with Dream for four years now, and he hated to think it was the same amount of time he'd lived alone with Wilbur.

It was Wilbur's death-iversary, as Tommy called it. It was crude, but Tommy liked to think Wilbur would have laughed if he heard it referred to as that.

The burner phone was something a kid from school had suggested, after everyone was exchanging numbers and Tommy sheepishly explained that Dream didn't let him have a phone.

"Just get a burner." The other boy said. "They're, like, twenty dollars."

"That's so stupid. He'd find out."

"No, he wouldn't. Just don't tell him. Look, I'll even pay half." The kid pulled ten dollars out of his pocket and handed it to Tommy like it was nothing.

Dream very rarely let him keep money. But Tommy *had* been keeping a small stash in his school backpack (which Dream rarely checked), and so...

He bought the phone after school. He'd holed up in his bedroom afterwards, plugging his friends numbers into the device and texting them. It was difficult to do- the buttons were small and he kept pressing the wrong things. Nothing like sending emails on the desktop in the living room.

He scoffed. Nobody sent emails anymore, texting was the way to go. The small buttons were annoying, but he'd get used to it.

Dream got home early that day. Quietly too, apparently, considering Tommy didn't realize he was there till his bedroom door opened, and-

"Tommy, what are you doing?" To anyone else, it would've sounded calm and collected, but Tommy could hear the anger bubbling underneath.

He tried to hide the phone behind his back, even though Dream had already seen it. "Nothing! I'm not doing anything!" His voice was loud. *Too* loud. Dream preferred the quiet.

The man had already crossed the room, grabbed Tommy by the wrist, and pulled him to his feet.

"Where did you even get a phone?" With his free hand, Dream grabbed the phone, examining it.

"I-" Every instinct in him told him to lie. But Dream would know, and it was better to tell the truth than get caught with a lie. "My friend gave me money for a burner."

"Who?"

"A friend."

"*Who?*" He repeated, more forcefully.

"...Freddie." He couldn't look Dream in the eyes, electing to stare at the floor instead.

The phone was dropped to the floor. He watched as Dream stomped on it, the screen shattering, the insides probably breaking, too.

A hand grabbed his chin roughly, and Dream moved it to force Tommy to meet his eyes.

"You're not allowed to have a phone, Tommy. You know this." He said it all sweet-like, and Tommy knew he was right. Dream had given him that rule, and he'd broken it. He only had himself to blame.

"I'm s-" He didn't get the chance to finish his apology as the hand moved off his chin, and then Dream slapped him. Hard.

He didn't stop at the slap. Dream's shouts went in one ear and out the other, but Tommy *felt* everything. Punches to his face, his arms, his stomach. Over and over and harder and harder. Dream was berating him at the same time, he was pretty sure, but he'd stopped listening.

In all honesty, he'd detached himself from it as much as he could. Dissociating, he thought it was called. Techno had mentioned something like that once, said it was feeling like you weren't in your body even though you were.

A sharp kick to his ribs brought him back. When had he ended on the floor? Why was his head bleeding? How was Dream *still* yelling?

"You know what, Tommy? I'm done." Dream took a step back, crossed his arms, and stared down at the boy beneath him. "I've tried so hard to be the nice guy. I've given you everything you needed, and you *still* go behind my back." He found himself agreeing with Dream. Staring as Dream crossed the room again, before grabbing a picture frame off of Tommy's dresser.

His eyes widened.

"No, no, Dream! Not that one, *please* it's the only one I have left of-" Dream tossed it onto the floor, stepping on it much like he did to the phone. The glass shattered with a painfully loud crack. He watched in horror as Dream pulled the photo of the frame, ripping two of the corners off in the process.

"I don't want to do this, you know. But I don't think I have a choice, none of my other punishments have worked."

"Dream, no, *please*, don't do it. I'll be good, I promise I'll be good. *Please*, I can't lose that, it's all I have left of him!" His voice was more desperate towards the end of the sentence, and he was crying before he even started it.

Dream ripped the photo in half, letting the pieces fall to the floor.

Tommy wanted to curse him out. He wanted to sob and apologize for everything he'd ever done. He wanted to punch Dream and make him regret breaking the photo. He wanted to curl up in a ball and never be seen again.

It was Tommy's fault. He knew that. He shouldn't have bought the phone, but he did, and now he was paying the price. Dream had been so kind to him and he had to go screw it up.

"I need some air." Dream said. "I'll be back tomorrow morning. Clean this mess up before I'm

back.” He turned on his heel and walked out the room. Shortly after, Tommy heard him grab his keys, then heard the front door open and close.

Tommy laid on the floor for at least half an hour longer before he convinced himself to sit up.

This was one of the worst beatings he’d had in a long while. Everything hurt so badly, and moving only made it worse.

He had to move, though. Dream wanted him to clean the mess up, and maybe if he did it, Dream wouldn’t be so mad at him. Maybe Dream would be nicer then. Dream always liked it when Tommy did what he was told.

He grabbed the smashed phone and threw it into the trash, then did the same with the picture frame and the biggest pieces of glass.

His hand hovered over the (now ripped) photograph.

It was of him and Wilbur. Tommy was around ten when the picture was taken, too big for Wilbur to be giving him a piggyback ride, though the picture showed otherwise. Tommy was holding cotton candy bigger than his head and grinning widely at the camera. Wilbur had a similar expression, though was grinning at Tommy instead of the camera. He remembered that day well. Wilbur had taken in to the state fair as a reward for getting good grades, and they’d spent the whole time eating food and going on rides and pranking people. Tommy hadn’t been to a fair since.

The photo was in two pieces now, split right across where Will’s eyes were, and the disfiguration of the face brought Tommy to tears again. This was the only picture he’d had left of Will, and now it was ruined.

Dream had ruined his last picture of Wilbur.

He let that thought sink in for a moment, before making his decision and stuffing the pieces of the picture in his pocket.

He didn’t bother picking up the rest of the glass. Instead he grabbed his school bag, and dumped out the contents.

Tomorrow’s homework isn’t important anyway, was it? No, not when he wouldn’t be there.

He should've stuffed clothes inside, but he didn't have very many anyway. Instead, he stuffed his most important belongings. A few scratched cd's, a compass he'd found on the road, a bee plush Phil had bought for him forever ago.

He raided the kitchen next, though it was already almost bare. Dream never gave him enough food to eat (maybe he just needed to eat less). He dumped a box of granola bars in. A bag of chips. Three water bottles. Their kitchen was practically empty now, despite the fact he'd taken so little.

After that, Tommy stood in the kitchen for a moment, considering his decisions.

Dream would kill him. Dream was going to kill him- he was going to- no, he wouldn't. Dream was his friend- friends don't hit each other- Dream was supposed to take care of him- Dream *was* taking care of him.

It hurt to breathe. It hurt to think. He couldn't clear his thoughts as he stumbled to the family computer, pulling up a tab on google and frantically typing the name into the search bar.

If his head was just a little clearer, maybe he would've realized he should've used an incognito tab, because it would only take one look at his history for Dream to know where he was headed.

This was a bad idea. This was an *awful* idea.

The name *Technoblade Watson* stared back at him, the little black bar at the end of the letters blinking slowly, mocking him.

"Screw you." He whispered to the bar, and pressed search.

A few seconds later, his screen was filled with pictures of his brother, and he almost teared up at the sight, because that was Wilbur's face. They were all Wilbur's face, in unfamiliar pictures. He had to remind himself that it wasn't Wilbur- not actually. Wilbur was dead. This was just Techno, and it was so obvious thanks to the glasses and, more obviously, the long pink hair, pulled back in a bun in almost every picture.

Scrolling past the pictures, he searched for actual information.

Technoblade Watson had a masters degree. Technoblade Watson had a PhD in literature.

Technoblade Watson was currently teaching at a university only a state away from Tommy, in South Dakota.

He scribbled down the university address on a sticky note. He tried to find a room number or anything, but couldn't. That was fine. He could find it once he got there.

This was a mistake. He shouldn't be doing this. Dream would be so mad, and Dream was his only friend, and Technoblade hated him.

For the entire time Tommy had lived there, he'd kept a secret stash in the bottom of his school bag. Considering how often he used it, and the occasional times Dream would find it and take the money, it only added up to about fifty dollars. That wasn't enough to get a car all the way there. It wasn't enough for hotel rooms. That was fine, he-

That was not fine. Dream would hate him for leaving, but Dream already hated him anyway. Maybe he should go look for Phil instead, but Phil didn't want him.

Why, of all people, did it have to be Technoblade?

Tommy swung the backpack over his shoulder, and closed the tab he'd had open. He stuffed the sticky note in his pocket.

"Screw you, Dream." He whispered as he walked out of the house.

He got two blocks down the street before regretting everything that had led him to this point. Dream loved him, Dream was his only friend, Dream would be so sad to see him gone.

Dream screamed at him, Dream hurt him, Dream took the only thing that mattered to him.

He kept walking, a little faster than before. His ribs ached with every step. He kept walking. It started raining at some point. He kept walking.

The university was about a hundred miles north. He didn't know the exact location, but he figured he could at least get to South Dakota before asking for directions.

For the next four days, Tommy spent his days walking. He walked whenever he was able to, whether it was night or day, occasionally sleeping on park benches, or under bridges, or even in trees occasionally. It was a miracle he didn't get kidnapped.

Tommy ran out of food on the fifth day, and honestly his diet of granola bars and chips weren't doing him many favors to begin with. But he kept going, anyway. He should've bought some food, but he was terrified some other emergency would come up, and he'd need money to deal with it when he did.

The closer he got to the university, the colder it got, too. He really wished he had thought to grab a jacket, instead of just the stupid long sleeve shirt he'd left in. Or, at the very least, was wearing something other than shorts and tennis shoes. It was *freezing*, and even though he was constantly moving, he never seemed to get fully warm.

Two more days of walking passed. It had started snowing halfway through the last day, but it was too late to do anything about it. He ended up in the town of the University, and, after asking a few concerned looking families, he made his way to the university.

To say it was huge was an understatement. It was a whole campus, with huge buildings going at least three stories into the air. Snow covered the ground, and Tommy could feel himself shivering violently. That said, the sidewalks were all shoveled, and there were even lights hanging on some of the buildings. It was... Actually, kind of pretty. He knew he had no chance of ever going to a school like this for himself, so he'd enjoy it while it lasted.

He made his way to the directory, where he met a younger-looking woman sitting behind a receptionist desk. Upon seeing him, she sat up straight, eyes wide.

"Are you alright, hun? Are you lost?" She spoke in that voice people used with little kids. He wanted to gag.

"No, I'm not lost, I-"

"Are you hurt?" Oh. The bruises- had he even cleaned off the blood from Dream's outburst? He couldn't remember.

"No, I'm fine. I-"

"Do you need me to call someone for you?"

"No. No, no, I'm actually- I'm looking for a teacher- professor?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Which professor are you looking for?"

“Mister- no, *Doctor* Watson? Technoblade Watson.”

The receptionist stared at him for a moment, raising an eyebrow.

“And may I ask *why* you’re looking for him? We usually only give out information to students, and no offense, but you look a little young.” Of *course* Tommy looked young, he was fourteen and criminally underfed, even if he was taller than most kids his age.

“I... I’m his brother.” Not a lie. “I wanted to surprise him. Like- like a prank. That’s why I look like...” He gestured to himself. The dirt on his face, the rips on his clothes.

For an awful second, he thought she didn’t buy it. That she was going to yell at him to get out. But then, she smiled. “Fair enough. Let me get you a map.”

She grabbed a university map, then circled the building with Techno’s room in it. She wrote the room number, too, explaining it was on the basement floor (apparently some of the rooms were underground? Weird).

He thanked her and practically ran out of the building.

He couldn’t believe how close he was to seeing his brother.

His brother... His brother who hated him, who had glared daggers at him during the funeral, who didn’t want to raise Tommy, who didn’t so much as call him in the last four years.

He should go back to Dream.

He was *not* going back to Dream.

Before he knew it, he was standing in front of the door. The room number was written in a nice gold, with the name “Dr. Watson” underneath. It felt pretentious. Techno wasn’t even a doctor, the PhD was in literature.

How did universities work? Did he knock? Could he just walk in? Was he supposed to make an appointment?

He settled for knocking. And, once he got no response, he knocked again, louder this time. Still, no response.

It wasn't breaking and entering. It was *not* breaking and entering, because this was a public university, and the door was already unlocked. This was just entering, and barely so, because Technoblade was his brother, and crimes against family didn't count.

The room he ended up in wasn't a classroom, but an office. Did Techno teach somewhere else? He... Had no idea how universities worked, so maybe.

He made himself at home in the office-classroom, starting by looking at the sparse decorations. A PhD was on the wall, a framed photo of Techno and Phil, too. A small picture of a very young Wilbur and Tommy hung underneath.

Huh. He hadn't seen that picture before. Wilbur couldn't have been older than Tommy's age, maybe? He looked fourteen, which would've made Tommy about two years old. In the photo Wilbur was teaching him how to ride a bike. They both looked so happy. When was the last time Tommy had been that happy..?

Tommy snatched the picture off the wall and stuffed it in his bag, hiding it underneath a few empty wrappers in case Techno glanced inside.

He went through the drawers next, and- score! He found an apple. Granted, it looked a little old and bruised, but Tommy would take anything at that point. He ate it quickly, barely stopping himself from eating the core.

In another drawer, he found what he assumed to be Technoblade's jacket. He thanked whatever gods existed that it was there, because he'd been shaking the entire time he was inside, and was pretty sure he was partially ice at this point. He put the jacket on, and even though it was way too big for him and a shade of blue he frankly hated, he couldn't have been more grateful to find it.

He poked around in the room for a few more minutes before he heard someone walking down the halls.

Dream. It had to be Dream- Dream was so mad and-

Dream was going to kill him. Dream was coming right now, probably with a gun or a knife or whatever, and he was going to kill Tommy. He'd already beaten him, this wasn't too far of a stretch.

Without thinking, he dove under the desk, right as the door opened.

He heard heavy footsteps against the soft carpet floor. Boots. Dream usually didn't wear boots, opting for tennis shoes. But it had to be Dream, because-

Oh, no.

This wasn't Dream. This was Techno. Techno, who hated him. Techno, who would also probably kill him.

Tommy's plan of hiding out with his brother came crashing down around him, because this was a stupid mistake and Techno wanted him dead just as much as Dream did and-

There was a loud thump above him, and the table shook. Technoblade had put something down on his desk.

Don't move. Don't move, don't think, don't even breathe. He pushed himself back as far as he could underneath the desk.

Techno sat down in the chair. Tommy prayed he wouldn't put his legs under the desk.

"Hey, Phil." Techno said. Was Phil there?

"Yeah, no, nothing yet. I've been looking, but I don't even know how he'd find me." Techno continued, and Tommy realized that, no, Phil wasn't there. It was just a phone call. "You sure he's not with you? He's *your* son, after all."

A pause, and then, "Well he hates me, so... Not really sure why he'd come... Yeah, I'm keeping an eye out, but unless he's hiding from me, then he's not here."

He's your son, Techno had said. Oh. Oh no, did Techno know he was coming? But Tommy hadn't told anyone, how would he know?

“Of course, you’ll be the first to know. But he’s not coming. I don’t even think-”

The next few seconds happened in slow motion, as Techno moved in his chair and put his legs under the desk. He’d kicked Tommy, not hard, but it was right into existing injuries. Since he was surprised, he cried out, before slapping a hand over his mouth.

He didn’t have anywhere to run or hide when Techno leaned over to look under the desk. He watched as his brother’s expression changed in surprise, as he stopped talking into the phone, still held to his ear.

“Phil... I’ll call you back.” Techno said, before hanging up.

And then Technoblade stood up, grabbed Tommy by his shirt collar, and dragged him out from the desk.

Tommy closed his eyes tight, and waited for the beating that he was sure to come. He remembered Technoblade learning all different types of fighting when they were kids, too, which meant he knew exactly how to make Tommy hurt.

After ten seconds of nothing, he tentatively opened his eyes.

“Tommy?” Techno was staring at him wide-eyed. His voice was quiet, like he didn’t want to be heard by anyone outside.

Tommy bit his lip and looked down at the floor. “Hey, Technoblade...”

Tommy was still waiting to be hit. To be screamed at or kicked out or handed back to Dream.

Didn’t he want to go back to Dream, anyway? No, no, he didn’t. He’d rather live on the streets than be with Dream. But Dream was so nice to him...

Techno let go of his shirt, and stared at him for a long moment.

The silence was almost worse than just getting hit.

“Thomas. Theseus. Watson.” Technoblade said. Tommy flinched at the use of his full name- it’d been a while since he’d heard it. “Just *what* do you think you’re doing here?” It started out quiet, but the words got louder as Techno continued. “Everyone’s been looking for you for a *week*, you disappeared! We thought you were dead! And now I find out you’re *here*, under my *desk*, hiding like some sort of racoon?!”

“I wasn’t hiding!”

“You were under my desk, *clearly* not wanting to be seen!” There was less anger in Technoblade’s shouts than there was in Dream’s. It made the confrontation less scary.

“Because you scared me! You didn’t even knock- that’s very impolite, you know!”

“I- it’s *my* office!”

“What are you even doing here?”

“It’s *my* office!” Techno repeated, more exasperated.

It was painfully clear the conversation wasn’t going anywhere. Techno sat back in his chair, and Tommy climbed on top of his desk.

Techno put his head in his hands, shaking slightly. After a long moment, he looked back up at Tommy. He looked... More tired than Tommy remembered. He knew Wilbur’s death had been hard on him, but he thought Techno would look better, not worse, than he did at the funeral. Techno must’ve been looking him up and down, because the man narrowed his eyes slightly.

“You look awful.”

“So do you.”

“Shut up. Is that my jacket?”

“I was *cold*. You keep your office at like ten degrees.” Tommy swung his legs over the edge of the desk, lightly kicking the chair as he did so.

Techno scoffed. “What are you doing here, Tommy?”

“What, can’t I visit my brother with no ulterior motives?”

“Not when you’re fourteen, can’t drive, and ran away from home to come here.”

Tommy’s face dropped. “He told you?”

“Of course he told me. Told Phil, Niki, everyone he could think of.”

Oh. Dream was looking for him. Dream wanted him back- Dream *missed* him! Maybe he felt bad about what he did, maybe he wanted to apologize. Maybe Dream finally realized what would

happen if Tommy left, and now he was going to make things better.

No, no, no, Dream never rewarded him for going against what he was told. If Dream wanted him back, it wasn't for good things. It would mean pain for Tommy. Dream- oh, Dream was going to kill him.

He forced the panic off his face. "Huh."

"You've been missing for a week, you know."

"I know."

"Did you walk here?"

"Yeah."

"The whole way? Tommy, that's, like, a hundred miles."

"Hundred and two."

"Hm. So *that's* why you're all beat up."

He wanted to argue that, no, he didn't get beat up on the walk. Dream had done it, and he was just still healing. But that would require him to admit Dream had hurt him in the first place, and that felt wrong.

"Can I come home with you?" Tommy asked, looking at his brother intently. His hair was longer than he remembered. He wondered if the man had cut it at all in the last four years. Probably not. He hated people touching his hair.

"No."

"Techno! That's so unfair!"

"No, it's not. You can't come home with me, I don't have a place for you to sleep."

"The couch. Or the floor. Or the bathtub, or backyard, or whatever. I'll find a place."

"I don't have extra blankets."

"Don't need 'em."

"Or food."

"I'll get my own."

"How?"

"Steal it."

Techno's eyes widened. "Theseus-" When they were kids, Techno would call him by his middle

name. It had been a long time since then, though. “Theseus you are *not* stealing. And you’re *not* staying at my house, either.”

Tommy frowned deeply as Techno turned his phone on, seeming to be typing something.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m calling Dream and telling him to come pick you up.”

for one night

Chapter Notes

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

Technoblade was more than surprised when Dream called him. It wasn't like they hated each other, no, they hadn't for years now. They just never talked. Like, ever. So why was he calling him now, out of nowhere?

“Hello?”

“Hey, Techno.” Dream's voice came, slightly crackled, from the other side of the receiver. His words were dragged out, almost... Uncertain? Weird.

“Yeah, Dream, do you need something?”

“Actually... Yeah. I was wondering if you've seen Tommy?”

Okay, that question came out of left field. Tommy lived with Dream, in a completely different state. How would Techno possibly have seen him?

“Uh... No? How would he even be here right now?”

“Well, see, we had a little argument a day ago, and he ran off. I think he might try to visit you, and was just wondering-”

“Look, he's not here. I'm in the middle of teaching a class, I'll have to call you back later, okay?”

“Sure thing. Just let me know if you see him-”

“Will do.” He hung up before Dream could get another word in.

It wasn't that he hated Dream, it was just that the guy sort of gave him the creeps. A bad feeling, so to speak. But Phil had trusted the man enough to let him take care of his youngest son, so who was Techno to decide if he was good or not?

It was weird, though. That Tommy ran away. Probably just ended up at a friend's house or something. It wasn't like the kid would have enough money to uber to South Dakota. Part of him wondered why Tommy would have run away in the first place. Maybe something at school, though Dream said the two had an argument... He didn't know his brother well enough to make any good guesses.

Techno didn't have time to worry about that, though. He was in the middle of a big lecture when Dream called him, and he had to get back to it. So he shoved the thought out of his head and went back to finish the class.

The thoughts of his little brother lost and alone somewhere kept coming back to him though. It was stupid. He'd kept the kid out of his head for four years now, and Dream made one mention of him and now he couldn't stop thinking?

He kept trying to push the thought out of his head for the next five days, until he found the kid hiding underneath the desk in Techno's office.

Tommy was wearing Techno's jacket and still shivering. He was so much taller than Techno expected, and painfully thin. Dried blood crested his forehead, and a fading bruise lay on his cheek. His knees (why was Tommy wearing shorts in the middle of the winter in the north?) were torn up, too, covered in cuts and scrapes and bruises that hadn't quite healed. They looked about a week old, maybe less.

His first instinct was to argue, and they did, for a bit. But then Tommy had tried to convince Techno to let him stay at his apartment, and Technoblade was *not* going to deal with the conversation of why he couldn't raise the child. He'd dealt with this when Wilbur died, and he didn't want to think about it again.

Technoblade pulled out his phone.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm calling Dream and telling him to pick you up. I don't know how you got here, but I want him to take you home..." Techno's voice wavered at the end of his sentence as he watched Tommy's reaction to his words.

All color drained out of his little brother's face. His breathing picked up. Tears pricked his eyes. It looked like he had gone into pure panic mode, and, before Techno could do anything, Tommy started speaking.

It was rushed, the words slurred together. "No, no- no no no, Techno, you can't, you can't- you can't send me back to him- *please* don't send- I can't- Techno he'll kill me," He was crying now, the words kept getting cut off by sobs. "You can't- don't- please don't-"

"Tommy, Tommy, calm down." He took a step towards the boy, who in return took a step

backwards.

“*Please*, I- I’ll do whatever you want- *you* can do whatever you want. You can scream at me- or- or beat me- I won’t even cry- I don’t- I don’t have anything left to give you- I’m sorry-” he cut himself off with a few more quick breaths, then finished with, “*Please* don’t call Dream.”

He didn’t have time to unpack all of what Tommy was saying. The main focus right now was just calming the kid down. Was Tommy still a kid? How old was he now? Twelve, thirteen, maybe? He looked younger, especially with all the tears.

“Tommy- Theseus, calm down. Take a breath, you’re okay. Can I touch you?” After not getting a clear “no”, the boy still mumbling “please don’t’s and “I’m sorry’s, he wrapped the boy up in a tight hug. Techno hated hugs, personally, but Tommy was such a touchy-feely person, and he vaguely remembered, as kids, it would always calm Tommy down. When he did it now, however, the smaller boy just tensed.

“Tech- Blade- I can’t- I can’t go back there- please don’t make me go back there.”

“Take a deep breath.”

“Techno-”

“Breathe, Theseus.”

“Please-”

“Breathe in, count to four.”

“I’m sorry...” Tommy wrapped his arms around Techno, hands grabbing tightly to the back of his jacket.

“Hold your breath, count to seven.”

“I can’t-”

“You can. Breathe out, count to eight.”

“I can’t go back there.” It was annoying, him trying to speak in between the breathing exercise. Maybe if Techno was the one counting...

“Breathe in, two, three four.”

“I *won’t* go back there.”

“Hold, two, three, four, five, six, seven.”

It was probably the fact he was trying to multitask that actually calmed him down. Attempting to follow the breathing exercise, *and* speak, *and* panic all at the same time was a difficult feat.

Tommy didn't speak again, and Techno prayed it was because he was focusing on the breathing.

"Breathe out, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight."

He repeated this for at least two more minutes even though Tommy's breathing had mostly steadied after one. Slowly, he pulled away, holding his brother at arms length.

Tommy really did look awful. The bruise on his cheek, the dried blood on his forehead. The dark bags under his eyes; it was as if Tommy hadn't gotten any sleep since Wilbur's--

He wasn't going to think about that.

"I... You can stay. For one night. It's getting late, anyway." He shouldn't have said that. What he was doing was technically kidnapping. He could land in jail for a long time, even if Tommy was his little brother.

Tommy stared at him, looking just seconds away from another panic attack. "Really?" Oh. He didn't believe Techno, he thought it was a trap.

"Really."

Tommy practically jumped off the desk to hug him again. "Thank you- thank you, thank you so much, you have no idea how grateful I am- I swear I'll be so good and quiet and you won't even know I'm there."

Good and quiet didn't sound like the Tommy he knew, but maybe he'd changed in the years since Techno had last seen him. He was a lot older now, so it was entirely possible.

Techno quickly gathered his things. Tommy got the hint, and slung his own beat up backpack over his shoulder.

He paused when he got to the door. On the wall were the usual decorations- the PhD, the teaching license, the picture of him and Phil...

Where was the one of Wilbur?

“Tommy.”

“Hm?” There was a tinge of nervousness in his voice.

“Where’s my picture of Wilbur?”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“My picture of Wilbur. It’s been hanging on the wall since I got this office. Where is it?”

“I didn’t see any picture.”

“Tommy.” He took a step towards him, and Tommy immediately shrunk back.

“I’m not giving it back.”

It would be silly, to get in a physical altercation with his little brother, especially at this age. He used to spar with Wilbur all the time as kids, whenever they got into arguments that neither would change their stance on. Techno almost always won those, unless Wilbur was cheating (“I’m using my brains, that’s not cheating” he would say).

Techno never fought with Tommy, though. Despite the boy constantly trying to get into fights. Techno, at seventeen, was not going to fight a five year old, no matter how much the latter wanted to. Even if Techno *had* wanted to, Tommy was way too small, and Techno was too good at fighting. It would certainly have ended up with Tommy in the hospital.

That didn’t stop Techno, at the age of twenty-six, from *wanting* to fight his twelve (thirteen?) year old brother.

“It’s *my* picture.”

“No, it’s not, you’re not even in it! *I’m* in the picture, that makes it mine.” It was almost impressive how quickly Tommy could switch from having a panic attack to majorly annoying everyone around him.

“What- that’s not how it works at all. You can’t- you’re not serious right now.”

“It’s *mine*, you can’t have it.”

Tommy was holding the backpack strap with a white knuckles. Ah, so that’s where he put it.

“Empty your bag, Tommy.”

Fear flashed across his brother’s face. Why did he look so scared at that? And... Heartbroken. As if Techno had just kicked his puppy.

He expected more fighting. He expected Tommy to lash out at him again, or at least keep arguing. Instead, Tommy almost immediately pulled the bag off his shoulder, unzipped the big pocket, and dumped the contents onto the carpet.

Out of the bag fell two cd's, a compass, a small stuffed animal... three empty water bottles, several granola bar wrappers, an empty chip bag, the photo, and a wad of cash.

Technoblade stared at Tommy for a minute, before picking the picture out of the pile.

“Please don’t take it.” Tommy whispered, staring at the place in the pile the photo used to be. “He tore my other one. I don’t have any more pictures left.”

He frowned. “Who tore what? What are you talking about?”

“My picture. He tore it.”

“What picture?” He’d really appreciate it if his brother would be a little more clear on what he was talking about.

“My picture!” He said it like it was obvious. It wasn’t, Techno still didn’t know what he was talking about. “I don’t have any more photos- and it’s all ruined and now I don’t have *any* pictures of him.”

“Pictures of who?!”

Exasperated, Tommy pulled two crumpled pieces of a picture out of his pocket and handed them to Techno. “Just take it. It’s all ruined anyway.”

He had never seen this photo before. It was Tommy and Wilbur at some sort of carnival. They both were grinning wildly. Wilbur looked around twenty-two there, but it was clearly Summer which meant... Oh, this couldn’t have been more than a few weeks before...

He hated how his mind always wandered to the death of his brother.

Two of the corners were missing, and the picture itself was torn in half, right through Wilbur’s face. He tried his best to line them up, but it was ripped in a way that you still couldn’t see his eyes.

Tommy had crossed his arms at some point, and was glaring at the ground. Techno handed him the pieces back, and he seemed... Surprised? He wasn’t sure why.

“You said “he” tore it. Who?”

“Doesn’t matter.” Tommy mumbled, stuffing the photo back in his pocket.

“It does. Who tore it?”

He mumbled something unintelligible in response.

“Speak up.”

“It doesn’t matter. I deserved it.”

Techno thought to earlier, when Tommy begged Techno not to call Dream. When he said Techno could “scream at” or “beat” him, unprompted. The way he flinched back at the hug.

“Did Dream tear your picture?”

“Only because I wasn’t listening to him. It was- it was my fault.” Tommy said, quickly. “I should’ve just listened. It’s fine, it’s not a big deal. I don’t even care about the picture.”

“Really? ‘Cause it sounds like you care-”

“I don’t.” Tommy snapped.

He stared at Tommy for a long moment, trying to piece together the story. Dream had definitely ripped up the picture, but Tommy claimed it was his own fault. Dream called Techno all worried and asked if he’d seen Tommy, but Tommy had a panic attack at the mere mention of going back home. It didn’t... It didn’t make sense. Dream was supposed to be a good guardian for the kid, that’s what Phil always said.

Tommy had dried blood on his head. He’d flinched back at every sudden movement Techno made. He switched rapidly between being insanely stubborn and scarily obedient.

No, no, Dream wouldn’t do that. He was a family friend. He was Tommy’s guardian. He would never...

“Phil can get you another one.”

“He won’t.”

“Why not?”

“Phil doesn’t like me.”

“And you know that... How?”

“He doesn’t even respond to my emails.” Okay, he was aware Phil hadn’t visited Tommy. But emails? As far as Techno knew, Tommy had never emailed his father.

Why *hadn’t* Phil responded to Tommy’s messages? Why hadn’t Phil ever told Techno about the emails? He’d have to call Phil, he decided, once they got home. Maybe he knew what was going on.

Tommy pushed the items (mostly trash) towards Techno with his foot.

“...What are you doing?”

“You said empty my bag.”

“...Yeah?”

“You’re... Not gonna take the rest of my stuff?”

Techno just stared at him. “No, I don’t want your trash, Tommy.” Next thing he knew, Tommy was on the floor, scooping it all back into his backpack. Why Tommy even wanted the trash, he didn’t know, and frankly didn’t care.

“Can we go now?” Tommy asked, standing up. Techno nodded, making sure to lock his office as they left. Leaving it unlocked the first time must have been how Tommy got inside in the first place.

Tommy was shivering before they walked out the front door, and was fully shaking as they trekked through the snow to the car.

Techno’s car was older than Tommy was, beat up, and barely running. But it was enough to get them to the apartment in one piece.

As he climbed into the driver's seat, Tommy moved to go into the back.

“You- you can ride shotgun, you know. Not like there’s anyone else here.”

Tommy’s face blanked for a second, and he looked... Confused? “Oh. Dream always... Yeah, okay.” The poor kid must have been out of it after the panic attack earlier. Techno couldn’t blame him, either. It seemed pretty bad. Tommy moved into the front passenger seat instead. Techno had to nudge him to put his seatbelt on.

The ride home was quiet, but Tommy said he was going to be quiet, so Techno tried to not question it. The boy looked exhausted, anyway, leaning against the window of, eyes closed. It was hard to tell if he was actually asleep or not, but Techno hoped he was, because he clearly needed it.

Dream wouldn't have actually hurt him, right? No, no, he wouldn't have. Sure, all the signs pointed to it, but signs could be wrong. Techno was probably misinterpreting the whole thing.

He glanced at Tommy, who was still shivering.

The rest of the car ride was silent. He didn't turn on the radio to avoid waking Tommy up on the off-chance he was actually sleeping.

He pulled into the parking lot and stopped the car.

“Come on, Theseus.”

Tommy stirred (so he *was* sleeping. Good), he rubbed his eyes before unbuckling the seatbelt.

The jacket Tommy had taken could barely be called a jacket, it was more of a sweater and definitely not meant for snowy weather. “Here.” Techno pulled off the jacket he was wearing and wrapped it around Tommy's shoulders. “Your legs will still be freezing, but you'll be a little warmer.”

To his surprise, Tommy immediately shoved the jacket back at him. “I don't want your pity coat.”

“It's not- it's not a pity coat.”

“It's a coat you gave me out of pity. That's the definition of a pity coat.”

“I didn't give it to you out of pity.”

“You did!”

Ah. *This* was why he had refused to take Tommy in years ago. No, not really. If kids were sent away for simply being annoying, Phil never would've raised Will to begin with.

“Put the coat on.”

“I'm not wearing your stupid jacket!”

“You're literally already wearing one of my jackets! This is just another one!”

“I don't want it!”

As kids, whenever they would go out in the snow, he'd fight Wilbur to put on a jacket. Wilbur always refused, but as soon as they got outside, Wilbur would immediately complain about how cold he was. Tommy reminded him so much of Wilbur it hurt.

"You're going to get hypothermia."

"No I'm not. I'm too strong to get hypothermia."

"You... You know what? Sure. Whatever. Let's go." Tired of arguing, Techno slung his bag over his shoulder, threw the coat at Tommy again, and exited the car.

Tommy got out of the car, too, and defiantly as ever held the coat in his arms instead of actually putting it on.

"My apartment's on the fourth floor, come on." He expected more complaining as they ascended the stairs, but got none. They got to his apartment and he unlocked the door, leading Tommy inside.

"It's a bit of a mess, but..."

Tommy's eyes were wide. He looked... Awestruck?

"You *live* here? All by yourself?"

"Uh, yeah..."

"Blade!" Techno had always hated that nickname, "That's so cool! This is- this is sick!"

Techno snorted. "It's a crappy two bedroom apartment, but sure, it's "sick"."

Tommy strutted into the living room like he owned the place, dropping his backpack and the coat on the couch, before sitting down himself.

"I think it's nice."

Techno looked at him for a moment before trying to test the waters and leading the conversation towards Tommy's home life. "I'm sure it's not as nice as your house."

"I mean, Dream's house isn't *bad*, but yours is cooler."

"How so?"

"Dream's house is too stuffy. And he always wants it super clean, and I am *not* a clean person."

Tommy laughed. It was odd, Tommy had lived there for years and still only referred to it as Dream's.

"Okay, wow, my house is *usually* clean, I just wasn't expecting to have to harbor a fugitive today." It wasn't even that messy. Sure, the sink was filled with dishes, blankets were strewn across the floor, and there was still sawdust everywhere from his latest wood carving project, but... Okay, it was pretty messy.

"Fugitive?"

"I guess runaway would've been a better word, but I bet you've got cops looking for you, too."

"I haven't even committed any crimes yet!"

He ignored that 'yet'. "Dream reported you missing a week ago."

Tommy looked equal parts happy and terrified. "He really cared enough to report me missing?"

Something about it didn't sit right with Techno. "Uh, sure."

Tommy frowned, squeezed his eyes shut, and shook his head. "No, no, I still don't want to go back. Don't make me go back." It was moments like this, that made Techno keep questioning what had happened. Tommy seemed so unsure about himself there, but Techno had no idea why. Obviously, Dream had done something. But without proof of what, he couldn't just keep his brother without permission.

"I already said you could stay the night. I won't tell anyone anything till tomorrow."

They both sat there for a minute, unsure what to do, until he heard Tommy's stomach growling.

"I'll order pizza. You cool with pineapple?"

"Obviously, that's the only good kind."

Techno grinned. "Now there's something we can agree on."

The pizza was ordered, and then Techno sat down on the couch, a seat away from Tommy.

Tommy's eyes lit up. "Do you want to know a secret?"

"Uh... Sure?"

"One time, Wilbur told me he doesn't actually mind pineapple on pizza, he just pretended to hate it to bother us."

"No he didn't."

"No, it's true! He told me one time when we went out for pizza!"

Of *course* Wilbur would do something like that. He wasn't at all surprised- Wilbur had always been one for pranks and teasing. But letting Techno spend his whole life thinking his brother despised pineapple pizza? That was a low blow.

For maybe the first time since his brother's death, he genuinely laughed. "That son of a- son of a gun."

"You can swear, you know. I'm not some little kid."

"Aren't you, like, twelve?"

"Fourteen."

"Same difference."

"Is not! I'm a big man, the biggest man, actually."

"You're half my height and weigh eighty pounds."

"*Ninety pounds of pure muscle*"

Wait, he really only weighed ninety pounds? He knew the kid was underweight, but that was a little more than unhealthy. That was malnourishment. That was... That was a sign of abuse. That was a step closer to unlocking the full story, wasn't it?

"Seriously, Tommy," he forced himself to keep the same joking tone, to keep Tommy's guard down as he led the conversation further. He leaned forward and poked his brother in the stomach. "Has Dream even been feeding you?"

"Yeah, yeah, sometimes." Tommy waved it off like it was nothing. Techno wasn't willing to drop it.

"Sometimes?"

Tommy nodded.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Dream doesn't really like cooking, so usually I was the one making food." Oh, so Tommy just had to cook. That wasn't as bad as Techno thought, until he added, "Unless I was bad or whatever."

"...Bad?"

"You know, broke rules and stuff. Didn't listen to him. Or if I talked back."

"Then what, he'd send you to bed without dinner?"

“I mean, usually it was for the day or whatever. Multiple days if I’d been really bad.”

“And this happens a lot?”

Tommy shrugged. “I dunno. Maybe once a week?” Tommy paused, then his eyes widened. “It’s- it’s okay, though. If it’s more than two days, we go out to eat afterwards because-” Techno had stopped listening. He couldn’t hear his brother over the sound of his heart beating in his ears.

The last time Techno had felt such strong dread was... Techno *really* didn’t want to think about it. He thought about it anyway. It was four years ago, at the hospital, when the doctor had told him that his twin brother was dead. It was the dread that came after hearing the terrible news, but before fully accepting it as truth.

Now, he felt the dread as his younger brother casually explained how the man that was supposed to be taking care of him was starving him. What hurt worse was how Tommy didn’t seem to see anything wrong with that, as if that was a completely normal thing to happen. He wanted to pull Tommy into his arms, to hold him close and apologize for leaving him, to-

“Bla-ade, hello?” Tommy waved a hand in front of his eyes, and that was enough to bring him back to the present.

“Hm?”

“Were you even listening to me?”

“No.”

Tommy pulled a mock-hurt expression, but it was clearly just teasing. Well, maybe not clearly, but Techno was pretty sure.

He looked at his brother for a moment. His little brother, stupidly malnourished, constantly switching between arguing and obeying, and covered in dirt and... There was still dried blood on his face. “You know, you’re really dirty. I shouldn’t have even let you sit on my couch, it’s going to be all gross now.”

“I’m a dirty crime boy, Tech! What’d you expect?”

Techno groaned and stood up off the couch. “If I find you some clothes, will you at least take a shower?” He wanted to get Tommy out of the room and have a minute to himself to think, anyway, this seemed like as good a reason as any.

“I don’t want your clothes, they’re probably all gross and teacher-y.”

He slowly blinked. “Gross and teacher-y. Sure.”

Tommy trailed behind him as Techno walked into his room and searched through the drawers. “Nothing’s going to really fit you, but,” He pulled out a maroon sweater that was slightly too small for him and tossed it at the boy, then doing the same with a pair of sweatpants, making sure they had a drawstring since there was *no* way one of Techno’s belts would help, “These at least won’t

look *too* ridiculous hanging off you.”

Tommy stared for a minute, looking down at the clothes, then back up to his brother.

“Thank you, Technoblade.”

He listened from the living room as the shower turned on. There was a loud shout of “Your shower makes no sense!” and then, quieter, “Nevermind I figured it out”. Techno sat on the couch and took out his phone, quickly dialing a number.

He should call Dream. He *knew* he should call Dream. Tommy was Dream's kid (not really, not by blood, he reminded himself),

Techno didn't want to raise a child. He hadn't four years ago, he didn't now. And it wasn't like much had changed since then.

But if Dream had been hurting Tommy? Then there was no way he could let that man near him again.

"Hey, mate." A groggy voice on the other end of the phone said. He didn't realize he hit the call button.

"Phil." He could hear the strain in his voice, and knew Phil heard it as well. "Are you busy?"

"No, no, I just woke up. It's five AM here." Right. Phil wasn't even in the country at the moment.

"Oh, sorry, didn't realize."

"It's fine, Tech. Did you need something?"

He paused. Would Phil know Tommy was there if he asked? Of course Phil would know. He had to ask anyway. "Did Tommy ever email you?"

"What, like, recently? No, not that I've seen, anyway." He paused, and then, "He hasn't emailed you, has he?"

"Uh, no. No, I mean when Dream first took him in?"

Another pause. "No. I tried to reach out to him a few times, but he never responded."

That was... Sketchy. Tommy sounded so sincere about Phil ignoring him earlier, why would it be the other way around?

"I called Dream about it a while later," Phil continued unprompted, "He said Tommy didn't want to

talk to me anymore. I couldn't blame him, really, I know losing... Well, you know. It was really hard on him. I just thought.. " he let out a humorless laugh. "I thought eventually he'd change his mind."

Techno let out a quiet sigh. "He said that, huh?"

"Mm. Dream told me Tommy said a lot of other things, too, but... I dunno, I think it was just part of the grieving process. I know he was so angry at everything, even at the funeral..."

His chest hurt. This was yet another reason why he wasn't a big fan of Tommy. Whenever they spoke about him, the conversation always drifted to Wilbur. He should've been over it already, and he *knew* he should've been over it, but he wasn't. It still hurt, whenever he thought about him.

"Do you ever regret it?" Techno asked, surprising himself with the question.

"Regret what?"

"Giving him away. To Dream, I mean."

"I wasn't- I didn't give him away, Techno." Phil snapped. This was the most defensive he'd heard his father in a while. "We had just lost Wilbur. You know for a fact that neither you or I were in any state to take care of Tommy. It was a miracle when Dream said he'd be happy to take guardianship, honestly. I don't know what I would've done if he hadn't stepped in."

"We could've taken him though, couldn't we? You *are* his father. You raised me and Wilbur, why couldn't you have raised him, too?"

"I couldn't-"

"And why not?" he didn't know why he was getting so angry. He shouldn't have been so angry, not at this. He barely knew Tommy, he hadn't for *years*. He shouldn't care what happened to the kid.

"Techno that's enough!" Phil shouted, and Techno froze. Phil never shouted. "I don't know what's gotten into you, but cut it out."

There was a lapse in the conversation, and the house fell silent.

He hated fighting with his father. Phil loved him, Phil was the only person outside of work Techno really talked to anymore. They were closer than anything, and he knew that, even if he couldn't with anyone else, he could trust Phil.

Techno spoke again in just above a whisper. "I think Dream's been hurting him."

It took a long time for Phil to respond. “How?”

“He’s too skinny, Phil. Said Dream won’t feed him for days, and he-” His voice cracked, “He didn’t even see anything wrong with that. He panicked when I mentioned calling Dream, too.”

“Tommy came to you, then?”

“Found him under my desk at work trying to steal my stuff. He said he walked the whole way here.”

Phil sighed once again. “And where is he now?”

“I brought him home. He’s taking a shower right now.”

“I’ll book a flight to your state as soon as possible, shouldn’t be more than-”

“Dad, it’s fine.” He cut him off. “Your trip ends in a week, right? I can take care of him for now. Till I figure out exactly what’s going on. Just- please don’t tell Dream he’s here, okay?”

“Of course not.”

He could hear a door creak open behind him and the almost silent steps as Tommy made his way to the living room.

He glanced back, locking eyes with Tommy. “I’ll have to call you back later, okay?”

“Sure thing. Make sure you get him some food and let him sleep.”

“Yeah, yeah, of course.”

“Love you, bye.”

“Bye.”

Tommy still looked ridiculous, the sweater reached past his knees and the pant legs were rolled up more than just a few times. If he wasn’t thinking about the reason *why* the clothes were so big, Techno might have poked fun at him.

It was both a nice thing and a bad thing to see his brother with all the dirt off. It was nice because, well, he was actually clean. However, the bags under his eyes were more prominent now, and, more noticeably, so was the bruise on his cheek. He had a nasty scab on his forehead where the blood had been.

If Tommy noticed him staring, he didn’t mention it as he plopped himself back down on the couch.

“Who was that on the phone?”

“Phil.”

Tommy stuck his tongue out. “What does he want?” Before Techno could respond, his face fell. “You didn’t tell him I was here, did you?” The panic forming was already clear.

It was clear Tommy didn’t trust Phil. He barely trusted Techno, and that was iffy. What else could Techno do but lie?

“Relax, I didn’t tell him anything.”

“Good.” Tommy grabbed for the TV remote, but instead of turning it on, he froze.

“...You good there, Theseus?”

“Can- can we watch a movie?” He wasn’t sure what had happened to make Tommy so hesitant, to sound so scared. He hated how Tommy swung back and forth between confident and terrified like a pendulum.

“Yeah, go ahead. I really only have Netflix, though.”

There was another moment of hesitation before Tommy turned on the TV. He flicked through a few choices before putting on some movie Techno had never heard of.

Five minutes later, Techno glanced at his brother- to ask him the question that had been bothering him since he’d first seen him.

Tommy was sound asleep, curled up on the couch. He looked even smaller now, Techno thought. They’d have to work on that.

There was a lot they needed to work on, really. He had a feeling there was an entire legal battle ahead of them, especially if Dream was going to try and fight for custody of the kid.

But for now, Techno didn’t need to think about it.

For now, it could just be him and Theseus.

So, I don't actually like this chapter as much as the first one, but I wanted to add in Techno's perspective. Part of me wants to end it here, but the part of me with 3 pages of scenes I cut from this chapter and an idea of how to continue it kind of wants to make this at least 5 chapters.

I guess if you're interested in a continuation of this uhhh comment? idk how this whole author thing works

you named your cat bee

Chapter Notes

Ok I was absolutely not expecting all the support on last chapter, but I super appreciate it! I tried to get this chapter out quickly, but I think the next one will take a little longer

Warning for, though not technically an eating disorder, there is description of basically starvation and a somewhat eating disorder mindset

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

The rest of the night went fairly quietly. They ate pizza and then watched movies as Techno graded papers. Tommy had read some of the essays over Techno's shoulder, but got bored quickly and went back to the movie.

At some point, maybe around midnight, Techno went back to his own room to sleep, though not before giving Tommy a few blankets and a pillow.

Tommy listened as he heard the man get ready to sleep. Watched as he closed the door, and then the light go out. He listened to the creaking of Techno getting in bed, the rustling of blankets.

Sound traveled far through the house, he noted, because after maybe twenty minutes, he could hear light snoring coming from the room. He picked up his backpack.

Sound travelled well through the house, his thoughts repeated. He slowly stood up off of the couch.

If he was too loud, he'd wake Techno. He took a few hesitant steps forward.

When he first moved in with Dream, it took him less than a week to learn how to walk through the house at night without alerting Dream. He'd memorized which doors creaked by the second day, how to maneuver the kitchen silently by the third, and knew every loud floorboard by the fifth.

It was easier to breathe when Dream wasn't present. Not- not that there was anything wrong with Dream. Dream was great. Dream was just... A lot to handle sometimes.

He knew it was wrong, even when he was doing it, but when he first moved in, Dream would watch him like a hawk. He wanted time *alone*, and if that meant sneaking around at night, then

that's what he would do.

It took him getting caught and punished four times before he stopped. He was more stubborn when he was younger, and it took multiple times for the "lesson to sink in" like Dream would say.

He wondered what Techno would do if he found Tommy sneaking around the house. Yell at him? Hit him? Techno seemed like the type to beat people. Would it be worse than Dream, though? Actually, probably yes. He remembered Wilbur talking about all the martial arts classes Techno took. Tommy tried not to think about it. If he was quiet enough, he could avoid the situation altogether.

Before he knew it, he was standing in the kitchen, slowly opening drawers and cabinets, taking stock of everything Techno had.

The cupboards were so, *so* full. Cereal, oatmeal, snacks, and a bunch of other food lined the shelves. Tommy hadn't seen a kitchen this well stocked in years.

Techno would be so angry when he inevitably found his food in Tommy's bag. But Tommy needed food for when he left to go... He didn't know where. Techno said he could only stay one night, and he knew Techno stuck to his word. He wouldn't take much food, anyway.

He grabbed a few energy bars and chip bags, even though he was sick of both. Unfortunately (or fortunately, he wasn't quite sure), they were full of protein and calories, both of which Tommy desperately needed more of.

He only ate one slice of pizza with Techno before he couldn't handle any more. He vaguely knew that wasn't right, because he'd barely eaten at all that week, and with all the walking he should've been extra hungry. There was something he'd read once, about a body going into 'starvation mode' when not fed for long enough, but he couldn't remember what he was supposed to do about it. If he ate any more, he'd be sick, anyway.

His hands shook as he went through the fridge. He shrugged it off as nervousness. He used to shake a lot when he first moved in with Dream, it made sense he'd shake now that he was in a new house, too. Breaking new rules he didn't know existed. Waiting for unknown punishments.

Techno was going to be so angry.

Maybe he should put the food back.

He should definitely put the food back. Dream- no, not Dream, he wasn't with Dream. He was with

Techno. Techno wouldn't have to know anything had even happened. Tommy would put the food back where it belonged and he'd just spend the little money he had on food.

The backpack slipped out of his shaking hands, landing on the floor with a loud *thud*.

The same thud as when Dream threw the burner phone on the floor.

The same thud as when a fist connected hard to his face.

The same thud as Dream slamming the front door as he left.

He didn't even hear the door to Techno's room open, but he saw the dark figure move in the shadows and Tommy scrambled back to the furthest point in the kitchen, pushing himself against the cabinets and trying to make himself small as possible.

"I'm sorry!" He yelled. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I swear I wasn't going to take anything- I'll put it all back. Please don't be mad at me- please don't kick me out, I won't do it again. Dream, I'm sorry-" He hadn't meant to call him Dream. He knew it wasn't Dream, but the name just slipped out. Maybe from habit?

Tommy waited for a punch that never came. He was expecting his brother to yell or smash things, but he didn't.

Slowly, he opened his eyes (he must've closed them when bracing for a hit). Techno wasn't standing in the kitchen. Techno wasn't... He wasn't there at all. Standing on the kitchen table in front of him, however, was a cat.

"Oh." Tommy mumbled. Dream would've called him stupid, to get so worked up over something like that. He would've laughed at how scared he got because of a *cat*. He imagined Techno would have a pretty similar response.

"Hi, hello." He dropped his voice down to a whisper as he stepped towards the animal. He couldn't tell what color it was in the darkness, and he wasn't going to risk turning on a light to find out. "I'm Tommy. Techno's brother. He didn't mention he had a cat." He slowly stretched his (still shaking) hand towards the cat, letting the animal sniff it before-

It immediately stuck his face on his hand, clearly trying to get him to pet it.

“You’re friendly, huh? That’s nice. Techno could learn a thing or two from you.” he found himself grinning at the comment.

Oh, he looked like a lunatic. Standing in a practical-stranger's kitchen in the pitch dark, talking to an animal.

He wondered what Dream would think of him. Wait, no, he didn't. The whole point of being here was to get away from him.

Tommy eventually stopped petting the cat and picked his backpack up. "I need sleep. I'm taking the couch, but the floor is a nice option if you want it."

He ended up curling up on the couch, hiding the backpack on the floor next to him underneath one of the blankets. The cat ended up sleeping on top of his chest.

He woke up to someone shuffling around the kitchen, much louder than he had been last night.

"Mmm... Morning, Dream." He mumbled, rolling over on his side. The sound stopped.

Oh no, he'd done something wrong. He didn't even know what he did, Dream hadn't been moving around angrily (Tommy knew what that sounded like), and he expected to be greeted in the mornings so... what did he do wrong?

"Go back to bed, Tommy. I'll wake you up when breakfast is ready."

That wasn't Dream's voice. It was way too deep, and there was none of the undertones that came with Dream speaking.

He opened his eyes and sat up fast enough to make his vision spin. He felt positively nauseous as the previous day's events popped back up in his mind.

Tommy had run away from Dream. He'd been away from him for a week now, and as far as he knew, Dream had no idea where he was. He was currently sitting on Technoblade's couch. Technoblade was... cooking something. He couldn't tell what from the smell.

His head was spinning. His vision was blurring. His stomach lurched. This was not good. This was a *mistake*, he should never have left Dream, but now it was too late and Dream was-

Dream would've killed him if he stayed.

Dream was going to kill him now that he left.

"Hey, you look sick." A hand was on his shoulder. When had techno gotten so close?

He flinched back on impulse and regretted it immediately. Dream hated when he flinched. Dream wasn't here. Dream would find out. The hand was no longer on his shoulder.

"I'm fine." He rubbed his eyes, blinked slowly, and looked around.

"You sure? I can get you some water or something."

Trap. It was a trap. Techno just wanted to call him useless for not being able to take care of himself. Or he'd dump the water on him. Or... Something. That's what Dream would do.

Techno wasn't Dream.

But he wasn't willing to risk it.

"No, I'm good."

Techno just rolled his eyes. "Suit yourself. Breakfast is ready." He hated how monotone his brother's voice was, it always made it hard to tell his emotions. Sure, he didn't *sound* annoyed, but that didn't mean he wasn't.

Tommy blinked and they were sitting at the table. Huh. Maybe he really *was* sick. Sure, sometimes he'd misremember or forget about things, but usually nothing like this. He would blame it on the tiredness, he decided, as Techno set a plate of pancakes in front of him. He didn't miss the man sliding a glass of water across the table to him.

"I wasn't sure if you liked anything in your pancakes, so I just made them plain. There's syrup, if you want it." Technoblade explained. Tommy didn't even *know* if he liked anything in pancakes. He hadn't had them in... He couldn't remember when. At least a year, maybe more.

"Thanks." He took the syrup and poured it over the two pancakes stacked on his plate, not quite drowning them, but coming close. He wasn't even hungry.

"I have to go to work in an hour."

Tommy hummed as a reply, trying to use his fork to cut the smallest piece of the food he possibly could.

Techno cleared his throat, and for a moment, Tommy felt absolute panic. Of course. It made sense, he should've expected what was coming next. Part of him wished Techno wanted him to stay, but he wasn't surprised that he didn't. Technoblade had said Tommy could only stay for one night, and that night was up.

"Right, right." Tommy said. "I'll change clothes real quick, I can be out of here in five." He was already pushing his chair away from the table and standing as he spoke.

"...What?"

"I don't actually know where my clothes... uh... are. I think I left them in the bathroom, I can go check-"

"Theseus." Techno spoke firmly, but it wasn't angry. At least, it didn't seem angry. "Do you think I'm kicking you out?"

"Yeah?" Wasn't it obvious? "What else would you be doing?"

"Theseus," Techno said again, "Why would I kick you out?"

"You said one night. And I know you don't really like me already, and I especially know you don't want to take care of a kid- and- and that's fine, I totally get it. I wouldn't either. But that's why I'm going. Please just let me grab my stuff and it'll be like I was never even here." Tommy rambled, speaking so fast it was even hard for him to understand himself.

He moved to the living room, now, slinging his backpack over his shoulder and grabbing his shoes from where Techno had set them at some point near the front door.

"I'm not kicking you out, Tommy."

The words made him freeze in his tracks.

"You're not?"

"No, no. Sit back down."

He obeyed, setting the items down on the floor next to him, right in arms reach in case Techno changed his mind.

"I wasn't... I wasn't saying that to make you leave." Techno explained. "I just... I wanted to make sure you'd be okay on your own for the day."

Tommy stared at him for a long moment, examining his expression for any tells that he was lying.

After a moment of examination, he couldn't find anything.

"Oh." Was all he could say.

"It sucks, but the administration is screwed. They really won't let you miss any work days unless you're dying. Apparently "I want to hang out with my fugitive little brother" isn't a good enough excuse to miss work." Technoblade joked. It was enough to get Tommy to crack a smile.

"Gee, you think they'd understand." Tommy said sarcastically.

"Mhm. Really, though, you'll be alright on your own here for a bit?"

"Yeah, of course. I told you, I'm not a little kid, I can take care of myself."

Technoblade rolled his eyes. "Sure, whatever you say."

They fell into bickering rather quickly. Not mean, angry stuff, but the jokey kind he used to do with Wilbur. It was nice. Comfortable.

Techno was almost done eating. Tommy had taken maybe two full bites.

"Techno," Tommy finally said during a lapse in conversation, "Do you own a cat?"

"No?"

"Oh."

"Why are you asking?"

"I just... thought I saw a cat last night. Must've been a trick of the light, I guess."

His mood immediately changed. He wasn't crazy, he knew he saw a cat. But Techno didn't own a cat, which meant he didn't see a cat.

His head hurt.

It felt like he was going crazy.

"Tommy, I don't know what you're talking about." Dream would always say. "I didn't see it, maybe

you're just misremembering". Or, "I never said that", or "that never happened". He hated moments like that, hated moments where he misremembered. It made him feel like he was losing it.

"The neighbor's cat sneaks in sometimes." Techno said, after a moment. "It might have snuck in again."

Huh. Dream never offered explanations like that. Even if they probably weren't true, Tommy appreciated it.

"Yeah, yeah, that's probably it."

He pretended not to notice the way Techno grimaced at how little Tommy had eaten. If he had asked for an explanation, he would've said he rarely ate breakfast as it made him feel sick. That was his practiced excuse for school, but it wasn't a lie, either.

Techno didn't ask, though, just told him there was leftover pizza for lunch, and he could have as much as he liked.

He went over who to call in case of emergency, where to go, what to do. Tommy was honestly barely listening, not caring enough to. It wasn't like there would be any real emergencies while he was there.

And then Techno was at the door, halfway in, halfway out. Telling Tommy he had free reign of the house (minus Techno's bedroom), and could watch TV, read, play computer, or whatever, as long as he cleaned up after himself.

"And don't answer the door for anyone-"

"Except girl scouts selling cookies, in which case, buy thin mints." Tommy mumbled.

Techno let out a surprised laugh. "Where'd you learn that?"

"Wilbur said it."

Another laugh. "Phil said it first."

"Will said it better!" He retorted as Techno closed and locked the door behind him.

And then Tommy was alone.

That wasn't a big deal, though. Dream would leave him alone quite often, usually as a punishment for when he broke rules, but sometimes Dream was just busy. It was fine, he knew how to entertain himself.

He went through every book in Techno's office, reading the titles and immediately declaring them too boring to read. It was a lot of old literature, big important books that Tommy would probably have to read for school at one point, but not yet. It all looked long and dull, and he had no interest in any of it.

He didn't want to touch Techno's computer. Dream only let him use the computer at home with permission (though Tommy would occasionally sneak on it anyway), and he figured Techno was the same way.

Techno didn't have any board games or anything. No video games either. What a boring old man his brother had become.

Eventually, he settled to watch TV instead.

After maybe ten minutes, the cat came to join him.

He could see it more clearly in the light. It was a... Tabby, he thought? He didn't know much about cat breeds. But it was brown and stripey with blue eyes. Definitely real, definitely not a trick of the light.

The cat immediately laid down on his lap, despite Tommy's protests.

They sat there for the rest of the morning. Tommy was tired, anyway, and it wasn't like there was much to do around the house.

A knock on the door startled him out of his spot. The cat darted off to... Somewhere. It was probably just some solicitor, or people trying to get him to join their church or whatever. He wasn't interested either way.

But it could be Dream.

Yeah. Yeah, Dream might be looking for him. And of *course* Dream would be looking for him, because Dream was worried about him. Dream wanted him to come home.

Did Tommy even want to come home? No, no, not really. Dream terrified him, and he left for a reason. He did *not* want to go back.

Even so, he found himself drifting over to the door.

Tommy was tall for his age. Around 5'8 when he'd last measured. He still had to stand on his tiptoes to reach the peephole, though.

Part of him was expecting Dream to be staring back at him. It would make sense, Dream was worried about him, Dream wanted him to come home, Dream-

No, no, Dream didn't care. It didn't matter, anyway. Because it wasn't Dream standing at the door.

It was a kid who looked around his age, maybe younger. He had brown hair and blue eyes (like the cat, he thought) and was about to walk away before Tommy swung the door open.

The boy's eyes widened and he took a few steps back in surprise. "Oh- sorry, you're not Technoblade."

"He's at work. You need something?"

"Yeah, actually. I was wondering if you've seen my cat? He sneaks into other people's apartments sometimes through the balconies."

"Stripey brown cat? Super friendly?"

"That's her!"

"Yeah, she snuck in last night. Uh..." He glanced back into the apartment with a frown. "She *was* on the couch. Ran off when you knocked, though."

The boy didn't hesitate to step inside the apartment, clicking his tongue and shouting the word...
Bee?

For a moment, Tommy panicked. Techno wouldn't want him letting some stranger into his apartment. Oh, Technoblade was going to be so mad at him.

“You named your cat Bee?” He choked out through the panic, relieved the boy didn’t notice.

“Okay, okay, don’t make fun of me.” The boy laughed. “I named him when I was, like, nine. I didn’t know better.”

“Mhm, sure, whatever helps you sleep at night.” He mumbled back.

The cat- Bee- darted out of Technoblade’s room and straight into the boy’s arms.

“Bee! You have to stop running out on me!” The boy exclaimed. Tommy just stood there, awkwardly, not sure what to do. He should get this weirdo out of the apartment, but he didn’t want to be rude, and he wasn’t sure how to talk to him without being rude.

The boy turned to him and smiled. He stuck a hand out for a handshake. “Hi, I’m Tubbo.”

Hesitantly, Tommy took his hand. He had no reason to lie, not really. Maybe he was just a bit paranoid of being found, or maybe he was just excited about living with Technoblade, because when their hands met, he didn’t find himself saying his actual name.

“Theseus.”

“Woah, that’s cool. The-see-us. Hard to pronounce, though.”

He shrugged.

“Do you mind if I call you Theo?”

Theo. Huh. “Yeah, that’s fine I guess.” He stuck his hands in his pockets.

Tubbo looked him up and down for a moment, eyes narrowing. “Shouldn’t you be in school?”

“Shouldn’t you?”

“I had a doctor’s appointment this morning, my dad didn’t see the point in making me go a half day. You?”

“I’m visiting Techno, took the week off for it.” He wasn’t sure how long he’d actually been away from school, maybe two weeks, now? He’d lost count.

“That’s cool.”

They both stood there for a moment, neither sure what to do or say next.

“Do you want to come over and play video games?” Tubbo finally asked.

Obviously, Tommy should have said no. Techno would kill him for sneaking out (was it really sneaking out if he casually walked out the front door?), and he wasn't even sure how Techno felt about him talking to people. If he was anything like Dream, he wouldn't like it. But... Technoblade wasn't Dream. Everything Techno did confused him and made his head spin because it was all so different from what he was used to.

Besides, he would only be gone a few hours at most. Techno wouldn't even know he was missing.

“Sure.”

Tubbo lived in the apartment right next to Techno, so it wasn't like he was going far.

They spent the next two hours on Tubbo's living room floor, playing Mario Kart, Call of Duty, and a few other games Tommy didn't bother to learn the names of. He rarely got to hang out with kids outside from school, and Dream never let him play video games, so this was a real treat.

It'd be more of a treat if he wasn't so bad at it.

“You're cheating.” Tommy announced, setting his controller down as Tubbo lapped him for the second time that race.

“I'm not *cheating*, I just know not to run into the walls.”

“I know not to run into the walls! I just- all the controls are messed up. I think this controller's broken.”

“It's not broken, Theo, you're just bad at video games.” The boy teased, and Tommy lightly shoved him.

“This is bullying. This, *this* right here is bullying.”

“Have you tried being better?”

Tommy replied with a shout as he drove into yet another wall. This game shouldn't have been so difficult.

They kept playing, Tubbo desperately trying to show him the mechanics of the game (“If you just turn the remote a little- okay, see, turning your body doesn't actually do anything-”). They kept joking and arguing and it reminded him of how he used to play video games with Wilbur. He quickly pushed that thought out of his head as “I will totally beat you at smash bros, I used to be a

pro at that” turned into “what do you mean there’s a new version”.

He found himself subconsciously sinking down a little as he heard the front door being unlocked and opened. Tubbo didn’t care, apparently, not even pausing the game as whoever-it-was walked through the door.

Tommy glanced back, hearing the tell-tale noise of Tubbo killing him in-game, and electing to ignore it. A man walked through the door. He was tall, and couldn’t be more than a few years older than Technoblade. He had the same brown hair as Tubbo, though his was wavier, and he had some weird facial hair thing going on that reminded Tommy of some war heroes they’d heard about in history class. He looked back to the TV.

“Tubbo, I thought you were going to stop bringing home strays.” The man said. Oh. His voice was deeper than he thought it’d be, though not as deep as Techno’s.

“I went looking for Bee and met Theo. He’s Technoblade’s... Brother?”

Tommy nodded in response.

He had listened to the man’s boots thump against the floor as he walked. They stopped at the word ‘brother’.

“His brother?”

“Yeah, yeah. But it’s not creepy or anything, he’s my age.”

The boots thumped against the floor again, and next thing he knew the man was squatting down in front of him, looking him up and down.

“You’re the kid Wilbur was always talking about, huh?”

“Uh... Yeah, I guess?”

He smiled. “He was a good man, you know.”

“I know.”

“Good.” The man stuck his hand out to Tommy, similar to how Tubbo did earlier. Was this just how his family greeted people? “I’m Schlatt.”

“...Theo. You knew Wilbur?” He shook his hand.

Schlatt stood up, complaining to himself when his knees cracked at the movement. “I’m getting too old for this. Yeah, I used to know him. Dinner’s going to be a little late, but you’re welcome to stay as long as Techno doesn’t care.”

Dinner?

He glanced at the clock, and his heart dropped. It was six-thirty. He was *not* supposed to be out this late. Techno was going to kill him. Before he could register it, his game controller was on the floor and he was on his way to the door.

“I, uh, I actually have to leave.” He spoke quickly, the words rushing together.

“Aw, man.” Tubbo paused the game and stood up, too. “Do you really have to?”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“Can we play again tomorrow?” The way he phrased it made him sound like a little kid. Tommy weirdly didn’t mind it.

“I’ll... I don’t know. But I have to go now. Bye.” He was out the door before either person could reply. He moved towards Techno’s door, but stopped with his hand hovering over the doorknob.

Techno was going to be furious at him. For leaving the apartment without so much as a word, for talking to strangers, for answering the door in the first place. The punishment would be awful, he already knew that. Maybe he should just turn around and go. He might be better off on the streets anyway.

No, he couldn’t. Everything that mattered was in his backpack, which he’d conveniently left in the kitchen. Even if he didn’t care about that stuff, his money was there, too.

He took a deep breath and pushed the door open.

Technoblade was pacing the living room, a phone held to his ear. He hadn’t noticed Tommy yet.

“No, I don’t know where he went. He just disappeared.” He paused. “Yeah, no, but I couldn’t exactly take him with me, could I? ... No, there’d be too many questions. I’m pretty sure there’s amber alerts for him... I don’t even know where he *would* go... He left his backpack here, so maybe... As far as I know, no...” His tone was panicked, though clearly trying to hide it.

Maybe if he made his presence known, and apologized, it would be better for him. The punishment would be less, anyway. Dream always liked it when Tommy could tell him exactly what he’d done wrong.

Awkwardly, he coughed a little.

Technoblade paused his pacing and turned towards him. He looked... Really, really tired. He dropped his phone, and Tommy flinched as it skittered across the floor.

Then, he rushed towards Tommy, before Tommy even had any time to say anything. He immediately tried to block his face, but then... Techno wasn't hitting him, he was *hugging* him. Tightly. He actually was lifting Tommy off the floor slightly.

"Tommy- *Tommy*, you idiot." Techno whispered. He was holding him so tightly, almost uncomfortably so. But his hug was warm and comforting and Tommy wasn't going to complain. "I thought Dream found you. You disappeared, you didn't leave a note." This was the most emotion Tommy had heard from his brother in... Maybe ever.

"I- I'm sorry Tech- I swear I- I didn't mean to do that." Tommy was forcing down panic again. He seemed to be doing that a lot lately. "I lost track of time."

Techno let go of him and took a step back. "Where were you?" There wasn't the anger that laced Dream's tone when he asked it. No, when Techno asked it, it was just a question, nothing more.

"Uh... You know how I asked if you had a cat? Well, this kid- Tubbo- came looking for her- her being the cat- and I told him she was here- cause she was-"

"Tommy, take a deep breath."

He did so, then continued. "And then he asked if I wanted to play video games with him, and I thought it'd only be like two hours, so I said yes- and I'm really sorry about that, because I shouldn't have, but I did anyway," He always rambled when he was nervous. It was annoying, even to him. "And then some guy named Schlatt came in, and I realized what time it was, so... I came back." His voice faltered at the end.

Technoblade stared at him for a long minute, then sighed. "Leave it to you to make friends with the *one* child in this whole apartment complex." He stepped away and picked his phone up.

"...Are you mad at me?"

Techno brushed off the phone screen. At least it didn't look like it was cracked. "No, I'm not mad at you." He raised the phone to his ear. "Hi, sorry, Phil... Yeah, he's here... You remember Schlatt? ... Yeah, him..."

Tommy leaned forward slightly in an attempt to hear Phil's voice. That was weird. He didn't even like Phil, didn't want to hear him. He leaned forward slightly. Techno noticed, and, with an eye roll, put the phone on speaker.

"-older than you." Phil was saying.

“Well, yeah, but his kid’s around Tommy’s age.”

“Is he really? I didn’t realize.”

This was the first time he’d heard his dad’s voice since... The funeral. When Phil was giving some speech about how wonderful Wilbur was. How heartbroken he was to lose a son. How much family meant to him.

Phil didn’t actually like him. He knew that, of course. Because if Phil liked him, he would’ve visited, or called, or returned his emails. But, no, Phil didn’t like him. Phil didn’t want him. He couldn’t blame Phil.

“Apparently they were playing video games the whole time. Teenagers.” Techno grumbled.

Phil just laughed. “You act like you and Wilbur weren’t the same way. You two used to disappear all night- I swear you gave me a heart attack at least once a week.”

“Okay, first of all-” Techno started to rant, and Tommy stopped listening. He felt the same feeling as lying on the floor a little over a week ago when Dream had hit him. The sense of being not-fully there. Not purposefully blocking out the world around him, but not feeling it, either.

Phil and Techno spoke like old friends. Like they talked every single day. They probably did, actually, and that hurt. Because neither of them had even tried to reach out to him once, even after he reached out first. Well, he reached out to Phil, anyway. He didn’t particularly like Technoblade, especially when he was ten.

“Tommy?” Techno said, nudging him slightly, sending him sprawling back to reality. “Do you have anything you want to say to Phil?” He was holding the phone out towards him, and Tommy instinctively took a step backwards.

He couldn’t get his voice to work. He didn’t want to talk to Phil. Phil didn’t want to talk to him. Phil didn’t love him, no one loved him- except Dream, maybe. He wasn’t even sure of that anymore.

He mouthed the word “no” and shook his head. Techno got the hint, switching the phone back to regular mode and giving Phil a quick goodbye.

He waited until Techno hung up and put the phone in his pocket before he spoke.

“You said you weren’t going to call him.”

“You disappeared. I thought you were in danger.”

“I wasn’t.”

“I didn’t know that.”

It was like a staring match between the two of them, each waiting for the other to give up. It was at least forty-five seconds before Techno sighed.

“If you’re going to disappear again, will you at least tell me first?”

“Are you mad?” Tommy asked again.

“Why would I be mad?”

“I was hanging out with Tubbo. I left your house.”

“I’m not mad.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Techno groaned, and Tommy took another step backwards.

“I’m not angry. I just... I was worried, okay?”

“The great Technoblade, worried?”

“You showed up at my work all hurt yesterday, and then you disappeared. Yes, I was worried.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“Just tell me before you leave like that again, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah, will do.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

Technoblade stared at him for a minute longer, then stalked over to the kitchen. “I’m making potato soup for dinner. Did you eat lunch today?”

“Yeah.” The lie rolled easily off his tongue.

Maybe not easily enough. “You have to eat a whole bowl of this, too.”

“I hate your potato soup.”

“Brat.” There was no harshness behind the words.

“Priss.”

Chapter End Notes

Everyone's relatively happy. I sure hope nothing bad happens next chapter

(also psst I super appreciate comments, it really keeps me motivated to keep writing)

i think it's time you go home

Chapter Notes

everyone's comments: take your time writing or you'll get burned out
me, speedrunning this chapter: yall hear something?

Actually I had a bunch of this written for chapter two, and scrapped it because it didn't fit, so the bulk of this chapter was pre-written

Technoblade was in the hospital. Well he wasn't- he wasn't the one hurt. He was just inside the hospital, after six hours of driving to it as fast as the speed limits allowed him to.

Phil was already sitting in the waiting room, trying to console the sobbing ten year old.

They waited hours for a doctor to finally come. When the man did finally come, Tommy jumped to his feet.

Tommy was saying something, but his voice was so high and annoying, Techno just tuned him out, focusing instead on the doctor's quiet words.

Techno only caught the "We did all we could do" and "I'm so sorry" before everything went quiet save for a painful ringing in his ears. No, no, no, he couldn't- Wilbur couldn't be dead. There was no way. It was a mistake. It had to be a mistake. Wilbur wasn't gone, not really.

At some point, Techno had sunk to his knees. The hospital floor was freezing and gross but he couldn't bring himself to care. He wouldn't care about much for a very long time.

Next thing he knew, he was holding a child- no, not *a* child, Tommy. He held him tightly by the arms to keep him from running into the hospital room. Phil didn't want him to see the body. The ten year old was struggling hard against his grip, kicking and squirming, screaming the words "I hate you" over and over again, occasionally throwing in a "let me go" and "I want to see him".

Techno wasn't really listening.

He wasn't really anything, not anymore.

It wasn't like he based his whole life on his brother like some twins did. No, they were their own, separate people. At the time, they were only talking to each other occasionally. But the fact that Wilbur was gone, forever? That Techno would never be able to see his brother again? That broke him.

"Tommy, shut up." Techno groaned, shifting his focus to his little brother. Except--

Tommy wasn't ten anymore. He was twelve (no, fourteen, just painfully skinny), hair overgrown and shaggy, the bags under his eyes too dark. He wore Techno's jacket and cargo shorts. Tommy had a black eye. He was covered in blood and bruises.

Tommy wasn't screaming anymore. He flinched away at Techno's movements, eyes apologizing for things Techno didn't understand.

They were standing at the funeral as the casket was lowered in. Tommy was still fourteen and blood still covered his face. For some reason, Techno knew it was Tommy's blood, and he knew Dream had caused it.

Dream. Dream, who was standing behind Tommy, a hand on his shoulder. Dream, who's stupid smile stretched across his stupid face.

"You..." Techno muttered, stalking up to Dream. "You hurt him."

"I did no such thing."

"You hurt him."

"Did I?" The room shifted slightly. Now he was in his apartment, and Dream's voice came through over his phone. "I wasn't the one who abandoned him."

"I didn't abandon him. I needed time. I lost my brother!"

"So did he." Dream laughed. "And he lost the rest of his family, too."

"We couldn't take care of him, you know that."

"But I could?"

Dream was standing behind him now. The phone was no longer in his hand.

"I didn't know..." Techno mumbled.

"I wonder what happened. To make him so afraid of everything. To make him flinch back every time you move. To apologize for everything."

"Don't act like you don't know."

"He's dying, Technoblade." The voice was more urgent, now, shifting into someone else.

"He's what- no, no, he's safe now. He's with me."

Wilbur stood in front of him. Not alive Wilbur, though, this was dead Wilbur. The face he'd stared

at in the coffin, with the sunken cheekbones and the closed eyes. "He won't eat. He's starving and can't even do anything about it."

"We're working on it."

"He'll die, Technoblade. And then you'll have no more brothers, not that you really had him to begin with."

Techno took a step back.

"That's what you want, isn't it?" Wilbur morphed back to Dream.

"No-"

"You should just send him back. He's awfully annoying anyway."

"I'm not doing that."

"It's not like you can care for him anyway."

This was stupid. He turned away, only to be met with Phil.

"You don't want to keep him, do you?"

"*You* didn't."

"No, I didn't. But we're not the same."

"Yeah, I know."

He was standing at the side of an intersection on the road, a car speeding down the street. Techno wasn't actually there at the time, but he remembered the police report. Wilbur had been driving home in the dark.

It was human error, that's all it was.

He couldn't have noticed the car speeding through the red light, not when they had their lights off.

"Wilbur!" He shouted, running toward him to try to get him to stop. It wouldn't work. He had to try. "Wilbur, look out!"

And then--

There was screaming, he didn't know from who. The sound of tires screeching, metal crunching, glass shattering. Airbags inflating and bones breaking.

Funny thing about a car crash. It's so hard to look away, even if you want to.

He could see Wilbur clearly, even from where he was standing. And he ran up to him, jerking the car door open (that wasn't right. The car was upside down in a ditch when they found him, not still in the road. Firefighters had to cut the car apart to get to him).

His brother wasn't dead on impact. Techno almost wishes that he was.

Because all he could see was red. Not anger, not this time, but the red of blood everywhere. Limbs pushed into awkward angles. Wilbur's head had fallen against the airbag. He was passed out, barely breathing.

Wilbur was passed out when the cops found him, the doctors had told Phil that... Wait, who had called 911?

It didn't matter.

Techno shook his brother frantically.

"Wilbur, Wilbur- please, guy, you gotta wake up. You need to be awake right now, *please*." This wasn't real. He knew it wasn't real. He still had to try anyway. "Will, wake up. Please, *please* wake up. Please I can't lose you- don't make me lose you."

"Techno..?" Will murmured. He didn't move.

Techno had been having that dream for the last four years. This was the first time Will ever woke up.

"Will? Oh- hey, stay with me, buddy, you-"

"Techno?" That wasn't Wilbur's voice, was it? No, not really. "Techno, can you hear me?" The

voice shifted, and it took him a moment to recognize it. Tommy.

Techno opened his eyes with a groan.

Of course, it was just a dream.

Tommy stood at the side of his bed, staring down at him like some child of the corn. Technoblade thought himself to not be scared of anything, but this might've changed his mind.

"You talk in your sleep." Tommy said. He was wearing the same sweatshirt (had he not given Tommy a change of clothes yet?) and was holding one of Techno's mugs.

Technoblade groaned in response, pushing himself to a sitting position with his elbows. "You need something?"

"Were you having a nightmare?"

"No." He lied.

Tommy handed him the mug. "Warm tea." He explained, then hastily added, "The packet was almost expired anyway, this was so it wouldn't go to waste. And I'll wash the mug soon as you're done."

"You don't have to explain yourself, it's fine." Techno fully sat up and brushed his hair out of his eyes. It was already a tangled mess and he wasn't looking forward to brushing it in the morning.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

His head was drowning in thoughts of the dream. In thoughts of Dream, too. And Wilbur, and Tommy.

"No." He took a sip of the tea, managing to burn his lips in the process. He must have made a face, because Tommy rolled his eyes.

"I told you it was hot."

"You said it was *warm*."

"It's relative. Compared to fire, it's warm."

Techno rolled his eyes. "You're insufferable, you know that?"

Hurt flashed on his face for just a second, before it shifted into determination. "That's not true."

"No, it's not." He patted the edge of his bed, and Tommy sat down.

"I used to get that dream a lot, too." Tommy spoke softly. It was weird, the kid rarely spoke quieter

than a yell.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I'm assuming, anyway. The one about Wilbur's death?"

Techho faltered. Tommy had said it so casually, as if it meant nothing. As if it didn't affect him at all, and for a moment, he was jealous.

He was jealous, okay? He wasn't proud of it, but he was. Because he couldn't force himself to move on from it but here his baby brother was casually talking about it.

"...How'd you know?"

"You kept saying his name. Dream said I did that a lot, too, when I first moved in."

Tommy already looked better than he did when he first arrived at Techno's office. It was amazing what a shower and change of clothes could do for a person. The bruise on his cheek was almost healed.

"Dream says a lot of things, doesn't he?" Techno muttered.

He couldn't get the visions out of his head. Dream, with a hand on Tommy's shoulder. Tommy, covered in his own blood and looking terrified out of his mind. Maybe it was just Techno's imagination going too far again.

Then again, Dream hadn't been feeding Tommy. Dream had given him a reason to run away.

Techno dreaded the answer he was going to receive, but he had to know.

"Theseus, I need you to look me in the eyes. Did Dream ever hit you?"

Tommy didn't answer. He wasn't even looking at him, eyes fixed to a spot on the carpet.

"Theseus."

"Theseus is such a dumb name, you know. All the kids made fun of me for it in middle school." He muttered.

"Would you prefer I called you Thomas?"

"...No." He grumbled.

"Please, Theseus. This is so, so important. Did Dream ever hit you?" He repeated the question.

Tommy took a deep breath. "No, no, he would never hurt me." He turned, looking Techno in the eyes. "I know I talk... I talk all weird about it sometimes, but Dream's a good guy. He's really the only one who cares about me anymore."

That sentence lingered in the air for a long moment. Technoblade wasn't sure whether or not to believe it. The "he'd never hurt me" part, not the "no one cares about me" part, but they could work on self esteem later.

"It's okay, if you don't want to talk about your dream." Tommy finally said. "But at least drink the tea, that's supposed to help with nightmares."

"I think you're making things up."

Tommy yawned. "Maybe, but I'm too tired to lie. It's, like, two AM. You woke me up."

Techno rolled his eyes. "Then go back to bed, then."

"I don't *have* a bed, Technoblade." Tommy whined, leaning backwards until he was laying across Techno's legs. "You make me sleep on the couch like we're a fighting couple."

"You're not sleeping in my bed, Tommy."

"Please?"

"No."

Tommy groaned again and sat up. "You're so mean to me, Technoblade. Maybe I should go stay with Tubbo, I bet he'd let me have a bed."

Techno snorted. "That kid's a pushover, he would give you literally anything you asked for."

"Then I'll go ask for a bed."

"Mm, you do that, Tommy."

"I'm going to. I'll go over right now." He stood up.

He didn't actually go over there, ending up back on the couch. Techno realized that if the boy was going to be staying much longer, he really should at least find him a mattress or something. Maybe he could set him up in the office...

Tommy had closed the door behind him when he left, but when Techno woke up in the morning he noticed the mug on the nightstand gone, and was clean and back in the cupboards when he got up to make breakfast.

Over the next three days, they'd built up a routine.

Techno woke up first and made breakfast, Tommy wouldn't eat the breakfast. Techno would go to work, Tommy would hang out with Tubbo or muck around in the house. Techno would come home, Tommy would apologize about something or the other, and then they'd eat.

Techno had called Phil almost every night, panicked about something Tommy did or said, or just worried he wasn't caring for the kid correctly.

No, no, not panicked. He wouldn't say he was panicked. Just... concerned. That's all.

He could hear Tommy's nightmares even with his door closed, even with the boy clearly trying to keep quiet.

Occasionally he would hear words, mostly "please" and "sorry" and "Dream".

Techno tried to check on him multiple times, but every time Techno got near Tommy quieted down, stopped thrashing as much, too. Techno almost considered sleeping next to him, on the floor, but figured that would screw up his back, and he really didn't want to spend the next day in pain.

Their routine was thrown off once it hit the weekend. Tommy had officially been staying at Techno's house for five days now, with no word from Dream.

All good things came to an end, he supposed.

The knock on the door was loud and brief, nothing like the usual quiet taps on the door Tubbo would always do until someone answered. That should've been his first clue it wasn't Tubbo.

Instead, he only realized when he came face to face with the man he hated so much.

Blonde hair was pulled up in a messy man-bun. Green eyes glinted in the dim apartment lights. His jacket matched his eyes, and Techno took note that it definitely wasn't warm enough for the current weather.

Good, he deserved to freeze a little.

“Technoblade.”

On one hand, this man has definitely hurt his brother in one way or another. There was no denying that, even if he didn't know the exact specifics. He wanted this man nowhere near his house and especially not near Tommy.

“Dream. You get lost or something? I thought your house was a few miles south of here.”

“No, I came to visit you. Mind if I come in?”

On the other hand, technically speaking, Techno had kidnapped the child Dream was in charge of. If police were involved, Techno was almost certainly going to be arrested.

“Uh...” A quick glance into the apartment revealed that Tommy wasn't in the living room anymore. Techno wasn't really religious, but he found himself silently praying that Tommy had heard Dream and went to hide somewhere, because, by the sound of things, if he didn't they'd both be screwed. “Yeah, sure. Come in.”

He opened the door wider and Dream walked inside. Techno didn't lock it as he closed, hoping that would give the man a little motivation to leave. It didn't, as Dream moved into the middle of the living room, looking around.

“This looks really nice, Techno. I like what you've done with the place.”

Was there anything distinctly Tommy in here? No, Tommy hadn't gotten the chance. Except--

Techno stepped in front of the couch, standing in a way he prayed hid the boy's backpack. It was beat up and dirty, too, so it wasn't like Techno could just pretend it was his and it was just some coincidence.

“Thanks, I really tried to make it more... Homely... Sure.... Anyway, you said you needed something?”

Either Dream didn't hear the question, or was blatantly ignoring it. Either way it made Techno's blood boil. The two never got along even at the best of times, and after the almost-week Techno had had, this wasn't the best of times. “I'd love to get a house tour.”

“There's really not much to see.”

“Still.”

Tommy, please, *please* be hiding. Even if it's in a closet or whatever, just *somewhere*.

Techno grit his teeth. "Sure, why not." He feigned friendliness.

He showed him the kitchen and the office. The bathroom had been left messier than Techno would ever keep it, but he couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief when he saw at the very least, Tommy didn't leave his clothes in there.

"This is really nice, Techno. I remember, Will always left his bathroom a mess, too."

Oh, Techno was going to kill him.

Mentioning his dead brother to What? To get under his skin? To traumatize him into giving up Tommy? He didn't get it. Didn't want to get it.

"Anyway, I see one more room?" He gestured to Techno's room. The door was closed and the lights were off.

He had neither shut the door or turned off the lights when he'd left the room last.

Right now, the door was closed *and* the lights were off.

"Right, yeah, the bedroom." Techno spoke a little louder now, giving Tommy the most warning he could before opening the door.

He paused, hand over the doorknob.

This could go so badly so quickly. He should kick Dream out right now, he should do *something* other than lead Dream straight to Tommy. But he was under pressure and definitely wasn't thinking straight.

He opened the door.

It was just his room. The bed was made, his book was still untouched on his nightstand. Tommy wasn't in there. Or, if he was, he was doing a very good job of hiding.

“Yeah, this is my room. Not sure why you’d want to see it, but you know, whatever.”

There was a small cough from underneath the bed. Techno immediately cleared his throat *loudly*.

"Anyway, let's go back to the living room." Techno all but grabbed Dream by the arm to drag him out. "I can make you, like, coffee or something if you want?"

Dream lingered, just for a minute, in the doorway. Techno held his breath.

Finally, thankfully, he followed him into the living room.

“No, I don’t want any coffee, Technoblade.”

“Then what *do* you want?”

Dream shrugged. “I’m still looking for Tommy.”

“So you drove, what, a hundred miles to check for him?” Techno asked, doing his best to sound incredulous.

“Well when you put it like that... But yeah, he’s a stubborn kid, and he’s had enough time to walk here if that was his plan.”

“I don’t think he even knows where I live.”

“Really? It was easy enough to find your address online.”

“I really doubt that-”

“I know Tommy’s here, Technoblade.”

“Who?”

“Your table is set for two-”

“I was expecting Phil.”

“There’s two blankets on your couch-”

“I was very cold this morning. That’s not a crime.”

“I can very clearly see Tommy’s backpack.”

They stared at each other for what felt like hours.

“Listen, Techno. We can do this one of two ways.” Dream spoke like one would to a cornered animal. Slow and calm, but still very clearly talking down to them. “Either you nicely hand over Tommy and let us go on our way, *or*,” His tone darkened, “I call the cops, explain to them how you kidnapped my child, and you spend the next twenty-ish years in jail.”

Techno glowered at him. “You wouldn’t.”

“I wonder how Wilbur would feel about that.” Techno’s heart was pounding. His head was spinning. “His favorite brother in prison. I know you were in Juvie once, but he seemed to think you left that life behind you.”

It was cheap and dirty and *wrong* for Dream to use his dead brother against him. That was all he was doing, and Techno knew it, too.

But at the same time... He didn’t want to disappoint Wilbur.

Wilbur wasn’t there. Wilbur was dead.

But... Still, Dream would end up with Tommy no matter what, wouldn’t he? It’s just one way would end with Techno helpless in jail, too.

His heart sunk. This wasn’t what he wanted. He wanted to be the big strong brother he couldn’t be four years ago. He wanted to protect Tommy till his dying breath, to keep him away from this man (this monster?). But he had to make a choice. He could pretend that it was because he wanted to be able to help Tommy and not so much the fear of disappointing someone who wasn’t even around anymore.

“Tommy!” Techno shouted. He didn’t know where Tommy was, didn’t want to look for him, either. He didn’t want to be doing this, but he had to. If he had to go physically search for his brother, he wasn’t sure he’d be able to stand it.

Luckily (unluckily. If Tommy stayed hiding, maybe he wouldn’t have to go), there was the sound of shuffling from Techno’s room. A bang as Tommy dropped something (or hit something. Maybe he was hurt-). A creak of the door opening.

Tommy stood in the doorway of Techno’s room, eyes wide. He looked like he was barely breathing, and he kept staring right at Dream.

Techno wanted to move in between the two. Wanted to punch Dream and not stop until the man promised to never touch his brother again.

There was no proof of any actual abuse. At least, none that Techno knew of. If there were to be a legal case, Techno would lose. If he were to keep Tommy, Techno would be charged with kidnapping.

Phil would be sad.

Wilbur would hate him.

“Come on, Tommy.” Techno spoke quietly. “I think it’s time you go home.”

“T-Technoblade? What?” Tommy took a step backwards. The pain on his face was so clear it made Techno want to cry (but he didn’t. He hadn’t cried in a long time, he wouldn’t start now).

“He’s in charge of you, not me. I can’t do anything.” Apologize to your brother, please, please just apologize-

Tommy stared at him, eyes wide, and for a moment, Tommy was ten years old again.

They were back in the hospital as the doctor told him their brother was dead. Techno was clutching his brother with numb hands while Tommy screamed and cried.

Except this time, Tommy wasn’t screaming and crying. Despite the obvious hurt on his face, he remained pretty calm.

“I hate you, Technoblade.”

And then he walked to Dream. As soon as he was in arm’s reach, Dream’s hand was on his shoulder. Like Techno’s dream-

No, not like the dream, because that Dream wasn’t real. This was all Techno blowing things out of proportion. Tommy would be fine. Tommy *was* fine.

Dream flashed him a smile. “Thank you so much for being cooperative, Techno. If you were like this all the time, I really do think we’d get along much better.”

Maybe Techno said something snarky in reply. He couldn't recall. He couldn't *think*. Everything in his head was screaming for him to stop them, to help Tommy, but he *couldn't*.

They left, at some point. Not long after Tommy said he hated him.

He was back in the hospital, sunk to his knees. Hardwood floors, not tile, but it still stung just as cold. There was no screaming child in his arms.

He was alone. Wilbur was gone. And now Tommy was, too.

And it was all his fault.

i'd never do anything to hurt you

Chapter Notes

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

Once they were in the parking lot, Dream pulled Tommy into a hug. It didn't have any of the warmth of Techno's, and it made him flinch back in surprise.

"Are you okay? Did he hurt you? I was so, *so* worried about you." Dream said, holding him tightly as if Tommy would run away if he loosened his hold.

"I'm fine." He whispered. He wished Dream would let go of him, or at least wouldn't hold him so tight.

"You were missing. For two weeks. I thought you *died*." There was genuine fear in the man's voice. Part of him wanted to believe it was fake, but the other part wanted to believe it was genuine. The latter won.

"I'm sorry." He couldn't force the same emotion in his voice. It was blank, empty.

Techno hadn't protected him. Phil hadn't protected him. Wilbur was gone. Was he really this awful of a child? Did he really deserve all this? Maybe. Dream certainly thought so. And Dream was usually right.

Dream only let go to walk to the car. An ugly gray thing, some new-ish model that Tommy couldn't care less about. Dream took the driver's seat as Tommy sat in the back.

Even from the backseat he could see how tightly Dream gripped the steering wheel. He sunk back in his seat as if that would get him any further away from the man.

"This must be really hard for you."

Tommy didn't reply, staring out the window.

"I tried to warn you, I really did. I told you, Techno and Phil don't want you. They never have." Tommy refused to cry, even if tears did prick his eyes. "That's why they sent you to me in the first place."

"No, no, it's different now." Tommy whispered.

"Is it? Technoblade called me when you first came, you know. Practically begged me to take you off his hands, to take you home."

No. No, no, no, no, no, he wouldn't. Technoblade *wouldn't*. There was no way.

"He doesn't want you, Tommy. If he did, he would've taken you on when your brother died. If he did, he would've fought for you now. Heaven knows it wouldn't be the first time he's tried to fight me" Dream laughed.

The car was moving. Had it always been moving? Going quickly down the street in the direction of ho- not home. Dream's house.

"Listen, I know it must be hard finding out like this. Maybe if you'd listened to me when I told you before, it wouldn't be like this, but you can't take back your mistake now, can you?"

"Yeah..." Tommy muttered in response.

"At least I'm here. And you know I'll never give you up."

"Mhm..." he brought his knees up to his chest. It was a dangerous way to sit in a car. His mind flashed to when he was a kid, watching Wilbur put his feet up on the dashboard as Techno yelled at him about how unsafe that was.

But there was no Wilbur there anymore. No Techno, telling him to be safe. It was just Tommy and Dream. It was *always* just Tommy and Dream, wasn't it? Them, alone, against the world.

They didn't speak again for two hours, until Dream pulled into their neighborhood.

"Now you know how much I hate punishing you," Dream would never lie to him, but that didn't feel like the truth. "But I can't let you just get off free for this one, can I?"

Tommy said nothing.

"Tommy." His voice was harsher now. "When I speak to you, I expect a response."

He couldn't force himself to respond. It was like his voice wasn't working, the words caught in his throat. He... he couldn't breathe.

He couldn't breathe. Dream was saying something else and Tommy couldn't hear him. He didn't want to be there, he didn't want to go with Dream.

Why couldn't he breathe?

What had Techno said to do, when he was in that office? Something about breathing. Breathing *how*? There was counting but Tommy couldn't remember the numbers.

He couldn't remember the numbers. Techno had counted, but Tommy hadn't listened.

He couldn't breathe if he didn't know what to count to.

Tommy cowered down in his seat, pressed his hands over his ears. He was going to die. He was going to die Dream was going to kill him Dream was already so angry before he left and now it could only get worse.

The car stopped. A door opened, closed. His door opened, and a pair of rough hands pulled him out of the car.

He followed Dream into the house. At some point, he'd started breathing again, if just barely.

"Go to your room. I don't want to hear a word from you until I come and get you. Understand?"

Tommy nodded. He stared at the floor. He walked back to his room, Dream following practically on his heels. Dream closed the door, and Tommy didn't miss hearing the lock latch behind him.

He stood maybe two steps into his room for at least three minutes, still barely breathing. It felt like the world was crashing down around him and there was nothing he could do about it. He had screwed up- he had done that by leaving.

Maybe that was what hurt most about everything. Because somewhere along the way he had convinced himself that Technoblade was helping him. That Technoblade wanted him, that Technoblade was someone who cared.

Technoblade wasn't any of those things.

Maybe... Maybe it was because there was nothing to save him from. Yeah, that must be it. That... That would make sense. It had to make sense, there were no other options. Tommy was just... He was... Misinterpreting things. Maybe everything going on at home was just normal, and he was just being dramatic about it.

That's why Phil never responded to the emails.

That's why Techno sent him back.

Dream *was* his caretaker, after all. He was a family friend (at least, somewhat). If this wasn't normal, surely someone would've found out by now. Some teacher from school or something would've called someone. Phil would've messaged him.

Besides, Dream was his home. Dream- no, he wasn't. He wasn't home. Because every time Tommy was near him it felt like his chest was caving in and he couldn't breathe.

He could breathe, with Techno.

But Techno didn't want him.

So Dream was his only option. Dream was the only person that cared. Not even his school-friends cared, not really. Middle-school friendships weren't real, anyway, that's what Dream always said.

Tubbo, however...

Tubbo wasn't a school friend. He wasn't obligated to see Tommy five days a week, and chose to hang out with him anyway. They'd played video games, they'd bonded.

What was the point, though? It wasn't like Tubbo's dad was going to take Tommy in, too. He'd send him back, just like Techno had done, and like Phil had done, before him.

Still, he at least could send Tubbo a message. Maybe when Dream went to bed, he'd sneak to the computer and email him. No, he didn't have Tubbo's email. But he *did* have some gamer-tag. He could message him through that. Yeah, Tubbo had helped him sign up for an account earlier-

No, Dream was furious with him already. He wouldn't go behind Dream's back again. He *couldn't* go behind his back again. That was like signing a death warrant. No, not a death warrant, it wasn't like Dream would actually kill him.

He might.

He wouldn't.

Tommy heard the door unlock, and quickly scrambled to sit on his bed, as if that was where he had been the whole time, and not pacing back and forth in his room for the last... He had no idea how much time had passed.

Dream walked in, holding something in his hands. Tommy didn't care to try and figure out what it is.

When had Dream said he was allowed to talk again? Was it once he came back, or once he spoke? He couldn't remember. He decided to stay quiet.

Although... Dream might've wanted him to speak first, in which case, he should speak.

Unless Dream wanted him to stay quiet, in which case, talking would be bad.

"Sit down on the floor, Tommy." Dream practically commanded. Tommy moved without hesitation, but not silently.

"Listen, Dream, I know I messed up- I shouldn't have run away- I know that now, I was just- I was scared- I guess- and not scared of you, just- I didn't know- I was upset, and-"

"What have I said about rambling?"

"Sorry, Dream... But I'm really sorry, about the whole running away thing... I didn't... I shouldn't have done it." He said, softer.

"You're right, you shouldn't have. I'm glad you know that, I'd be worried if you somehow thought you were in the right." He laughed. There was no humor behind it.

"And.. I shouldn't have stayed with Techno, either. I... I thought he cared about me. I was wrong."

Dream sat down next to him, carding his fingers through Tommy's hair. "You're still learning. I tried to protect you from that, I really did, but sometimes you have to find out firsthand."

Tommy nodded.

"But-" Dream spoke again. "I hope you don't think that you admitting what you did wrong is going to lessen your punishment."

"No- no, I wouldn't. You just- I-" Tommy actually had no idea what the purpose of saying everything he did wrong was, but Dream made him do it often times when he did something wrong, usually before the punishment, sometimes after.

It always made Tommy panic when he couldn't think of an explanation. When he'd done something to warrant a punishment, but had no idea what he'd done wrong. Usually he'd just make

something up, and Dream would give him a disappointed look at leave.

Dream didn't seem disappointed in this answer, though.

"Now, I've thought about this for a while, now. How did you get to Technoblade's house, anyway? It's far away."

"...I..." Tommy paused. Should he lie? No, Dream would find out. "I walked."

"Exactly."

Tommy glanced at the object Dream held in his hands. It looked metal.

"Honestly, I was surprised you were able to get that far, but we simply can't have that happen again. I won't let it happen again." Dream leaned closer to him, holding the object (weapon?) tightly.

Panic swelled in his chest. This couldn't... This couldn't be happening. There was no way. Dream wouldn't. Dream *couldn't*.

Wouldn't he? He'd hurt Tommy before- but that was different- but it wasn't. Not really.

"Dream... Dream, no, you wouldn't-"

"I'd never do anything to hurt you, you know that. This is for your own good."

"*Please.*"

"It'll be okay, Tommy. Just take a deep breath."

Take a deep breath, just like Techno had said.

And then everything was white hot pain. It was fire snaking up his leg. It was knives sawing through his bones. It was the brakes of a car being slammed just a little too late.

And then it was nothing.

He must have blacked out. Dream was holding him now, shushing him and rocking him back and forth like a baby.

"Shh, you're alright. You did so good." The praise shouldn't have made him feel better. It did

anyway. "I'll wrap it up nicely and it'll be good as new soon." That was a lie. That was the biggest lie Tommy had ever heard. He couldn't bring himself to care.

He couldn't breathe. It wasn't like the panic with Techno, no, this time it was from the pain. He couldn't force air into his lungs, he couldn't even *cry*, because everything hurt at once and he couldn't feel his leg and Dream had hurt him and--

No, no, Dream would never hurt him-

His ankle was broken. Dream had broken his ankle.

Technically, he didn't *know* that. It might not actually be broken. Maybe it was just fractured.

It felt like his leg was on fire. It was the worst pain he'd ever experienced in his life multiplied by ten, and he couldn't focus on the world around him any longer.

He didn't want to pass out. He *couldn't* pass out. Couldn't let his guard down. He had to get out of here, he had to leave.

His eyes rolled to the back of his head, despite his attempts to fight it.

He woke up in his bed, underneath the covers. He could feel something wrapped tightly around his ankle. That didn't stop the pain that was still spreading through his leg. It hurt, it hurt so badly and he wasn't even standing.

There was no way he could walk.

Dream had hurt him. Dream had hurt him. Dream had hurt him. Dream said he wouldn't hurt him but he did.

He could brush past being hit occasionally. A few bruises were nothing. Even shallow cuts could be overlooked.

But this was too much.

It was that scene in a horror movie- where one of the character's found themselves backed into a wall, the killer standing in front of them. There was nowhere to run, they're trapped, and everyone watches in suspense as they wait for the inevitable.

His brain felt both the fuzziest and clearest since the night Dream had broken his burner phone. That felt like so long ago, but it couldn't have been more than two weeks ago, could it?

No. A week on the road, and then five and a half days with Techno. That was almost two weeks, but not more.

It was hard to focus past the pain in his leg. His foot. His ankle. All three? No, it was worst in his ankle.

He couldn't think.

But he had to think. Because-

Dream would never hurt him.

Dream had hurt him.

"Please, Theseus. This is so, so important." Techno had said. His voice was bordering on begging. "Has Dream ever hit you?"

And Tommy lied to him. Told him "no", just like he'd been trained to do.

He remembered when Dream had sat him down and talked about how people might come wanting to take him away. How he needed to say specific things in order to keep them from doing that.

As he got older, he realized Dream was talking about CPS and foster care. Dream was telling him that if he talked about his punishments, he would be sent to foster care. And Dream had made it very clear that it wasn't somewhere Tommy wanted to go.

It still wasn't. He'd heard horror stories of terrible things happening to kids in care, and he didn't want to end up one of those kids.

So, he lied to Techno. He'd lied to Techno and Tubbo and... To himself, too. He'd convinced himself Dream had never hurt him.

But he had, hadn't he?

He swore he was thinking in circles.

He was on the verge of a migraine.

Okay, so Dream had hurt him. Dream would never- he *hurt* him. A broken limb wasn't something you walked off. Dream had hurt him, so.... Now what?

He had to get out. This wasn't a matter of "I'm scared of a punishment" anymore, this was actual, deep fear.

Because there weren't many things more painful than breaking bones, and Tommy knew if he screwed up again, chances were, Dream would actually kill him.

No, he wouldn't. Dream was his guardian- Dream had hurt him.

He kept repeating that, as if to ground himself. If he remembered the reason, he'd be able to focus on what he had to do.

And he had to leave, and go-

Go where?

Phil had never wanted him. Techno had gotten his hopes up and then smashed them to the ground. Wilbur was gone. He had no one, but he couldn't stay here, either.

He'd find someone.

He had to.

And it was alright if it took a while, because he was currently in no state to run away, not with his ankle, and-

Technoblade had taken his backpack. His backpack, filled with every important thing he'd ever owned, and now Techno had it.

He'd stolen it, that son of a-

The door unlocked. Dream walked in.

"You're awake." Dream smiled. "Good, good. I know teenage boys sleep a lot, so I wasn't too worried."

Please don't get closer, please don't come closer. Stay far, far away, across the room. He'd prefer across the continent, but at least across the room.

"How are you feeling?" How could he ask that? As if he was so innocent? As if he was still looking out for Tommy, after what he'd done?"

"My ankle hurts." Tommy muttered. It came out more bitter than he intended.

"I can imagine. Twisting an ankle doesn't feel good."

"What?"

"You sprained your ankle. Getting out of the car earlier."

No, no, no, he didn't. He didn't. Dream broke it. He remembered Dream breaking it. He wasn't confused, he wasn't misremembering, this was... Dream was lying to him.

Why was Dream lying to him?

"Oh... Right." It felt safer to agree, even if he didn't actually believe in it. "It really hurts, Dream. I think I need to go to the hospital."

"No, you don't. You're fine. You just need some ice and some bed rest."

"Please, I can't-"

"You're fine. I'm going to bring you some dinner, okay? Stay here." Dream closed the door, and Tommy barely caught the sound of the lock being set yet again.

He barely waited for the door to be closed before he moved.

Carefully, he slid out from the blanket and up to a sitting position, his legs dangling over the side of his bed. He could see now that his right ankle was wrapped tightly in ace bandages. It made it difficult to move, not that he really wanted to, anyway.

Every movement sent a shock of pain and nausea through him, and he figured walking would be a bad idea. But he *had* to, he couldn't just wait. He had to see how badly his ankle actually was, because he had to get out of here, and that meant walking.

He pushed himself to a standing position.

His vision went white and next thing he knew, he was on the floor. He hadn't even put half his weight on the thing and had still crumbled to the ground in seconds.

Dream was in his room in an instant. Tommy expected screaming and yelling and hitting. Dream should've been mad at him for getting up. Instead, Dream was hugging him and picking him up and setting him back in his bed.

"You've always been so stubborn." Dream muttered. "Don't put weight on your ankle, you'll make it worse."

Tommy couldn't force words out of his mouth. The room was still spinning and his vision was blurry and he couldn't bear to think about the pain shooting through his leg.

"I'll call your school tomorrow." Dream noted, "To let them know you're injured and won't be able to attend for a while. Considering you can't even stand. I *told* you not to get up, Tommy."

"I'm sorry." It was barely above a whisper, choked out the struggle to breathe.

Dream set a plate of food (Tommy didn't care what it was) on his nightstand and left him shortly afterwards. The door was, of course, locked behind him.

Okay, he had to think clearly now. He *had* to, because he couldn't afford *not* thinking clearly, even if he just wanted to sleep, even if the pain was almost unbearable. Because if he stopped thinking now, he wasn't sure he'd ever start again. Dream would start feeding him more lies, and Tommy would believe them again. He didn't want that.

He wanted to leave.

He was going to leave. He had decided it, and now he just had to make a plan.

Sure, he couldn't walk. Nor could he leave his room. He couldn't... he couldn't exactly contact anyone without leaving his room, though. It wasn't like he had a spare phone lying around, or even a laptop. The only connection to the outside world in the house was the family computer, but that was in the middle of the living room and Tommy was in too much pain to even think about leaving his bed again.

Well, no, the computer wasn't the *only* thing he could use to contact people.

Dream had a cellphone.

Dream would kill him, if he took it. That was almost certain.

Right now, it was his only hope. His only chance. The only slightest possibility of getting out of this wretched house and going...

He had nowhere to go. No one to call, even. Techno had been his last resort, and now that Techno had sent him back... He had no one. No one, not a single person that cared about him. Dream cared- Dream did *not* care. If Dream cared, Dream wouldn't have hurt him.

Tommy would figure something out. He always did.

Besides, right now he had more important things to figure out. Like, how he was going to leave the house and how he was going to walk, considering his (almost definitely) broken ankle. Crutches, maybe? He didn't own any.

Then he'd convince Dream to give him some. He'd be extra nice and non-argumentative, he'd do everything he was told to do, and just be the kid Dreamed so desperately to wish he could be.

The plan was stupid, risky, and could barely even be considered a plan. If Dream caught on to anything Tommy was thinking about, he knew he'd never get the slightest chance to leave again. There were so many ways everything could go wrong, but...

It was his only chance. He was going to leave, he was going to survive, and if he had to do it all on his own, then he'd do so.

Chapter End Notes

I'm not gonna lie, the pacing of this one feels a bit funky, but I've messed around with it enough to just leave it as it is

i want to talk to tommy

Phil didn't believe him. And why would he, anyway?

Techno had barely believed it either.

Because Dream would never hurt or neglect Tommy, not purposefully, not the way Tommy said he did.

"He's a kid, they make stuff up for attention sometimes." Phil said. "I remember, even when he was barely talking, he'd make up stories just to get me to listen to him."

"Phil, he looked *terrified* when he saw Dream."

"Of course he did, he ran away from him, didn't he?"

"No, not like *that*. He looked like he thought he was going to die. He wasn't just being dramatic."

Phil sighed and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Mate, I know you can be a bit paranoid about things, but I promise you, Tommy's fine. Dream and I talk occasionally, and he tells me about him. Says he's growing up to be a fine young man."

Techno groaned, barely refraining from smashing his head against the kitchen table. Phil didn't understand, and Techno didn't understand why Phil didn't understand. "And if he's lying? If he's lying, and if he hurt Tommy, then what?"

"He wouldn't."

He didn't want to fight. His near-constant arguing with Tommy the past week had been enough fighting for him for a long time. Besides, he hated fighting with Phil, it always made him feel bad in the end. Phil was his father, and Techno was an adult, and they shouldn't be arguing like he was still a teen.

"You're right. He wouldn't." Techno muttered.

Maybe Phil was right. Technoblade was overreacting. He'd misunderstood the situation, and was now blowing things out of proportion.

Phil had gotten into town the morning after Dream took Tommy back. Techno was relieved, to be honest. It was awful to have the house so quiet, and he'd surprised himself with how quickly he'd

gotten used to Tommy's loudness.

He would believe Phil more if Tommy was always loud. But he wasn't; some moments the boy was so incredibly quiet, Techno barely knew he was in the room. The moments after an argument, when Techno would raise his voice and Tommy would immediately go silent. Those moments where Techno questioned everything that had been happening.

Tommy wouldn't walk over a hundred miles for nothing. He was stubborn and always had been, but he was not *that* stubborn.

That was the one thought he couldn't get out of his mind, no matter how hard he'd tried. It was ridiculous, really. Techno had managed to forget about Tommy for... well, pretty much the kid's entire life. But after spending a week with him? It was annoying. Tommy was probably fine, especially if Phil thought so, too.

Techno almost broke down when he saw the neighbor's cat pawing at Tommy's backpack, which had been shoved into the corner once Techno realized Tommy had left it. He'd bring it back to the kid, at some point, he just couldn't. Not yet.

Tommy loved that stupid cat, though. And apparently the cat loved him back, because it snuck into the apartment fairly often to be with him. The cat must have not gotten the memo, that Tommy wouldn't be returning.

With a sigh, he scooped the cat up into his arms, muttering a quick explanation to Phil before he made his way out of the apartment and to Tubbo and Schlatt's front door.

It took a solid two minutes after knocking for someone to answer.

"Hey, Technoblade." Schlatt was leaning against the doorframe, giving him a tired smile. "Can I help you with something?"

Phil had been sitting on the couch in view of the front door. He looked up from his phone and waved. "Hi, Schlatt. I have your cat?"

Schlatt and Wilbur had been good friends, despite the fact Schlatt was at least four years older than him. Something about how "raising children brings people together" or whatever, Techno didn't really get it.

It had been a surprise, at first, when he found out he had moved into the same apartment complex as the man, but their schedules were so different that they rarely saw each other. At least, they

didn't, until Tommy made friends with Tubbo.

Schlatt just laughed. "I don't even think Tubbo noticed she was gone. Hang on, I'll-" He turned back into the apartment, cupped his hands around his mouth, and shouted for Tubbo.

Tubbo was there in an instant, taking the cat out of Techno's arms and into his own. Looking up at him, he spoke. "Uh, hi, Technoblade."

"You know, you can just call me Techno. I really don't care."

"Right, yeah. I was... I just... I was actually just wondering- I haven't seen Theo in a while?"

Techno raised an eyebrow. "Who?"

"Theo?" A long pause, and then, "Thee... The-see-us. But he said I could call him Theo, 'cause it's easier to pronounce."

"...Oh. Right." Tommy had insisted on using his middle name with Tubbo. Techno hadn't bothered to ask why.

"Is he here right now? I have something for him."

No, Theo's not here right now, I had to send him back to the man who almost definitely abuses him, and now I have no idea what to do about it.

Is what he wanted to say. Instead, "No, he had to go home."

Tubbo frowned. "I thought he lived with you?"

"...No. He was just visiting."

"Oh... Well, when you see him, can you give him this back?" Tubbo set the cat down on the floor and handed him... Huh. It was a small stuffed bee, the same one Techno had seen earlier, when Tommy had dumped the contents of his backpack onto Techno's floor. Why Tubbo had it, Techno had no idea. He didn't ask, didn't want to know. He wanted Tommy off of his mind as soon as possible.

He hated it. Hated how he couldn't help but fixate. For the last few years, he couldn't get the death of his twin out of his mind, but now Tommy had managed to weasel his way in and replace him.

No, no, not replace. Wilbur would never *ever* be replaced.

Still... Tommy didn't deserve to be forgotten about.

"Schlatt." Techno said, suddenly. "I was wondering if I could have a word with you in private?"

Tubbo looked hurt. Techno pretended not to notice, as Schlatt replied.

"Uh... Sure? Is the hallway fine?"

It was. The door was shut behind Schlatt, and they both were left out in the cold. Techno really should've worn a thicker jacket, but at least he wasn't like Schlatt, who was currently barefoot.

"You've dealt with CPS before, haven't you, Schlatt?" Techno asked, realizing how harsh the words were as soon as they came out of his mouth.

Schlatt gave him a look. "Excuse me?" That answer was completely fair, to be honest. Schlatt had, in the past, had some issues with drinking and money, and Wilbur had mentioned to Techno more than once about how the man was worried about not being able to take proper care of his son.

"I didn't mean it like that. I just think... I don't know what to say, if I were to call them."

Schlatt looked... Uneasy. "I told you, I don't drink anymore, Techno. If this is some sick power-play or whatever, because you think Tubbo was a bad influence on your little brother--"

"I want to call them on Tommy's guardian."

"You what?"

Techno and Schlatt exchanged looks.

"Well, obviously I'm not one for taking kids away from their parents, but... He wasn't really with his parents to begin with, is he?" Schlatt laughed, but it was in poor taste. Techno had to bite back a snide comment. "As long as you suspect there's abuse or neglect going on, you can report it. Proof is best, but--"

"All I *have* are suspicions." Techno groaned.

"We can work with that. What are you suspicious of, exactly?"

Techno bit his lip, glancing down at the ground for just a moment. Phil already thought he was ridiculous for thinking Dream was doing something wrong. Was Schlatt just going to laugh at him,

too?

He forced himself to look the man in the eyes. “He already told me Dream doesn’t feed him often- or makes him go days without food as some kind of punishment. When I first saw him, he was all bruised, and I don’t think it was just from walking here.”

Schlatt stared at him, long enough to make him uncomfortable. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, almost waiting to be told he was just being paranoid.

“Quackity.” Schlatt said, suddenly.

“Gesundheit?”

“No, no, Quackity’s his name. This lawyer kid I met a few years back when I was in college. He was studying adoption laws and stuff.”

Techno’s eyes widened. “Woah, hang on, I didn’t say anything about adoption.”

“Of course not, you just wanted him to stay at your apartment... Indefinitely? Come on, you think Tubbo didn’t tell me?”

“I didn’t realize Tubbo knew...”

“Theo- Tommy told him a few things here and there. There’s nothing wrong with it, you know. Settling down and raising a kid. You know, Wilbur-”

“Shut up.”

Schlatt raised his hands, palms towards Techno as if trying to show he was unarmed. “He doesn’t just do adoption, he’ll be able to help you get him out of... What’d you say his name was? Dream? He can get the kid out of Dream’s care.”

That was... Actually exactly what he needed.

“Does he have a card?”

Quackity did have a card. A business card that he was sure Tommy would’ve called “boring” and “the worst thing I’ve ever seen”, had he seen it. All it had was a name, email, and phone number.

Not even a company or address.

Currently, the card was tucked into his front shirt pocket. It wasn't that Phil was going to get mad at him or anything, it was just... Phil seemed almost hostile about the whole situation. Every time Techno tried bringing up Tommy, Phil would shut him down.

He wondered if this was how Phil felt about Techno when they'd lost Wilbur. Techno would snap at him every time the man was so much as mentioned. It had taken him a long, long time to get past that phase.

But it wasn't like Phil had lost Tommy. Not yet, anyway. Unless...

No, *that* was him being paranoid. Dream wouldn't kill Tommy. He may have been cruel, but he wasn't a monster. (Was he?)

They were eating dinner now. Phil had cooked it special, but Techno couldn't bother to even pick up his fork. There was this terrible, gnawing feeling in his gut, like something was wrong.

The rational part of him told him it was just anxiety, and nothing was wrong. The irrational part said that something awful had happened to Tommy.

"So... You still like your job at the college?" Phil had been trying to make small talk all day. It hadn't worked.

"It's alright."

"Techno." Phil reached across the table to lay a hand on his arm. "What's wrong?"

"Tommy is what's wrong. I don't- I don't get why you keep ignoring it. He's so clearly *not* okay, but you keep pushing that he's fine."

"He *is* fine!"

"Phil! Why do you keep denying it?" He raised his voice slightly.

"I'm not denying anything-"

"No, Phil, you *are*. You're not even listening to me when I try to explain it."

"Because there's nothing to explain!" Phil was almost shouting now.

"You don't think it's suspicious at all that he came here all beaten up, or that he flinches back at

every touch? You don't think it's weird how underweight he is? You don't-

"I can call Dream, if you want. I'm sure he has answers to all your questions."

Techno paused at the offer. He really didn't want to talk to Dream, but... Dream could explain. Or, he couldn't, and Techno could call CPS and get Tommy away from him.

Either way, he wanted Tommy away from him. He couldn't help but think about when Schlatt mentioned adoption...

"Sure, call him."

Phil's phone was placed in the middle of the table, set to speaker mode. The phone rang three times before it was answered.

"Hello? Phil?" He hated Dream's voice. He hated how smug it sounded. Like he was thinking about an inside joke that you weren't a part of.

"Dream."

"Oh, Technoblade. I'll be honest, I didn't expect to hear from you so soon. How are you doing?"

"I don't care about small talk, Dream." He spit back through gritted teeth. Before he could say more, Phil cut in.

"Techno's just a little worried about Tommy, is all. Would you mind just telling us he's alright?"

Dream let out a light chuckle, as if the idea Techno was worried amused him. It probably did. "Of course he's alright. He's been such a ball of energy lately, though. I don't know how much sugar you've been giving him, Tech, but he's still on a high from it."

"See?" Phil gave Techno a look. "He's fine."

"I want to talk to him." Techno hadn't expected himself to say that. He hadn't meant to, the words just sort of came. It didn't mean they weren't true. "I want to talk to Tommy. For him to tell me he's okay."

"If it'll put you at peace of mind, sure." That also wasn't what he expected, but he wouldn't complain.

There was shuffling on Dream's side of the phone, the sound of a door opening. Dream spoke, though not directed to the phone, "Tommy?"

He couldn't make out a response.

"Technoblade wants to talk to you. Will you tell him you're okay?" There was a faint undertone of... Something, in Dream's voice. Was it anger? He didn't know the man well enough to tell.

There was a muffled answer, and then more shuffling. Then the line went silent.

"Theseus?"

"...Hey, Technoblade." The words were quiet. Almost strained. Tommy's voice sounded hoarse.

"Are you alright? Answer honestly, or I swear, I'll-"

"I'm fine."

The words hung in the air for a long moment.

"Tommy, can he hear me right now?"

"Yeah, of course he can. You're on speaker." The more Tommy spoke, the more Techno realized how the words slurred together. There was a slight edge to it, too. Almost like he was in pain.

"...Okay." There went Techno's plan of speaking to him in private. "I saw Tubbo today."

"Oh."

There was another sound of shuffling, and a barely audible "who's Tubbo?" followed by a "nobody".

"He gave me something of yours today. Some stuffed bee?"

To his surprise, Phil made a face at that, his eyebrows furrowing slightly.

"He-" Tommy started.

Dream must have noticed the strain in Tommy's voice, too, because he quickly took over the conversation. "You can keep it. Tommy doesn't want it back."

"Actually, I figured I'd drive down there tomorrow and drop the bee and your backpack off at your house." Even if Dream was talking, he still spoke to Tommy.

Tommy must have perked up at that, because the next word was just a little more pep in it.
“Really?”

“Of course.”

"Techno," The phone was being picked up now, and there was a change of audio quality as Dream presumably set it back to regular call mode. "Tommy doesn't want to see you." It was clearly meant as a warning, one of which Techno blatantly ignored.

"Oh, really? He sounded pretty excited when I-

"He wasn't. You just don't realize since, you know, you haven't been around him much."

"Well I want to be around him more now. I'm coming tomorrow."

"Technoblade,"

“See you tomorrow, Dream.”

Techno hung up.

He and Phil stared at each other for a long moment.

"You don't have to be so rude to him, you know." Phil said in his reprimanding tone he always used when he and Wilbur were kids.

"Did you not hear Tommy, or were you just ignoring him like you always do?"

“I wasn’t ignoring him.”

“He sounded hurt. Scared, almost. And Dream barely even let him talk.”

Phil simply sighed. “Are you really going over there tomorrow?”

“Yeah, I am. I want to give him his backpack back and just... Make sure he’s okay.”

It didn't make sense, he couldn't grasp why Phil didn't care. He was always so kind and loving when Wilbur and he were kids. Every scraped knee was treated with bandaids, every nightmare was calmed and reassured, every good grade was rewarded and Phil would spend hours helping them with homework as they got older.

Why wasn't it the same with Tommy?

“I think he at least deserves someone to care enough to check up on him.” Techno added. The words were harsh, even for him, but he couldn't help it.

He wasn't sure why he was so mad at Phil for it. After all, hadn't Techno spent the last four years pretending Tommy never existed, too? It was different, maybe, but not really. He'd still abandoned the kid, just like Phil had done.

He wasn't going to do it again.

The last two nights, Techno had gotten the same nightmare, the one that started with Tommy injured and ended with Wilbur dying. It was awful, and he'd struggled to sleep the night before. At least Phil was there to comfort him when he woke up, though the man never made him tea or confided in him about having similar nightmares like Tommy had done.

Techno vaguely wondered if Phil even got them, if it was a family thing, or just something the brothers shared.

The morning finally came. He unzipped Tommy's backpack to put the bee inside it and paused. The backpack was partially filled up with food. *Techno's* food. When had he even gotten the chance to take this? He thought Tommy spent most of his time with Tubbo.

Shaking his head, he put the bee in, pausing before he zipped it back up.

"It's all ruined and now I don't have *any* pictures of him." Tommy had said. Dream had apparently ripped the only photo Tommy had of Wilbur. Techno had said he'd ask Phil for another one, but considering their arguing earlier...

There was a small picture frame on the desk in Techno's office. The photo was old, and they couldn't have been more than thirteen when it was taken. It was Wilbur and Techno, standing out in the snow, bundled in jackets and hats and scarves. It was back before Techno started dying his hair, the only visual difference between them was Techno's glasses, which had a small crack across one of the lenses. Wilbur was holding a tiny child in his arms, bundled up even more than the older boys, you couldn't even see his face. All that was visible was a small tuft of blonde hair sticking out of his hat.

It was one of the very few pictures with all three of them. Most of their photos were of Techno and Phil or Wilbur and Tommy, and there were maybe two photos of all four of them together.

He ended up putting the photo towards the bottom of the bag, partially hidden underneath everything else. Would Dream take it away if he found it? No, no, he wouldn't. He might. It was hard to say.

“I’m going now, Phil.” Techno said. The offer for Phil to come with was unspoken, but he knew his father knew it was there.

“Alright, Techno. Be safe, yeah?”

“...Yeah.”

He locked the door behind him. He slung the worn backpack over his shoulder.

Technoblade called the lawyer- Quackity- once he got in the car, and they spoke practically the entire drive there, over different legal problems that could arise with trying to get Tommy out of Dream’s custody.

“Well,” Quackity’s voice was slightly higher than expected, and full of energy, too. The man kept making frankly inappropriate jokes, but Techno didn’t have the energy to be bothered by them. It almost reminded him of Tommy. Almost. “The state isn’t too happy with pulling kids out of nice homes. It sounds like the easiest thing to do would be to prove that his current guardian is neglecting him.”

“Right, yeah. How do we do that?”

“You said he wasn’t being fed, right? We start with that.”

“Okay...”

“Once we’re done, call Child Protective Services. Tell them that you suspect the kid’s being neglected, and they’ll send someone out. They’ll be able to see that he’s underweight, they’ll ask questions. Heck, they’ll probably look through the cupboards to see if they even have any food in the house.”

Techno found himself nodding along as the lawyer spoke. He almost wished that he would use more legal jargon, finding the casual way Quackity spoke almost unsettling.

“It shouldn’t be hard to get him out of Dream’s custody if what you’re saying is true.” Quackity continued. “However, it’ll be a lot harder to get him into *your* custody.”

Techno’s heart sunk. Which- wait, why did he feel like that? He didn’t want custody of him anyway. Raising a child was *not* in any of his plans.

Still, he found himself asking, “Why? When Wilbur got custody, all Phil had to do was sign over a

paper.”

“Chances are, Wilbur only had limited custody over Tommy. Their father still technically had full custody, and the child would have gone back into his care after Wilbur’s death. However, since Dream fully adopted Tommy, Phil has no legal say over where he goes afterwards.”

“Then... Who does?”

“The state.”

“But we’re family.” Why was he pushing for this? “They wouldn’t even consider me?”

“The state *might* give you a chance, especially since you’re blood related, but since you’ve already passed up guardianship previously, it’s hard to say.”

“...Right. Okay.”

They spoke for a while longer, going back and forth about the different processes, what they could do to change the custody, et cetera.

He hung up once he pulled his car into Tommy’s neighborhood. It wasn’t bad looking at all, there were even kids playing outside (though none of them were Tommy).

Maybe he *was* overreacting. Maybe it *was* him being paranoid. Phil was right, Tommy was okay, he should leave it at that.

Still, he was going to give the backpack to him (he wanted to see him), and found himself standing in front of the door.

He knocked loudly, just so Dream wouldn’t have the excuse that he didn’t hear him, and waited out in the cold for an answer.

After five minutes of waiting, right before Techno just called Dream to ask, the door opened. Dream stood there, with his usual smile on his face, wearing the same stupid jacket he had when he took Tommy back. Speaking of Tommy... He was nowhere in sight. There didn’t even seem to be a sign that the kid had ever lived there.

“I’ll take the bag now.” Dream held out a hand, but Techno didn’t move.

“Actually, I’d like to see my little brother.”

take him to the hospital

Chapter Notes

warning for vague depictions of a car accident and graphic depictions of injury

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

Tommy had gotten to say maybe a dozen words to Technoblade during that phone call.

Maybe Techno wanted him back. No, no, no, Techno sent him back to Dream. If Techno wanted him, he wouldn't have done that.

It shouldn't have hurt.

It shouldn't have hurt, but it did.

Dream hadn't locked Tommy's door after leaving, too caught up in the phone call to pay attention to it. Tommy, however, was not caught up in it. He noticed, and couldn't stop thinking about it.

Dream would be asleep by eleven. If Tommy waited until midnight, he could sneak out and-

And what? He could barely stand with Dream helping him up, even then it made him incredibly dizzy. Every time he moved his leg he had to bite back a scream of pain. There was no way he could physically leave yet.

Not until he could convince Dream to give him crutches.

Speak of the devil (not the devil, Dream was nice to him- no, he wasn't), Dream walked into the room with a deep frown on his face. He must have noticed the door was unlocked.

“Hi, Dream.” He wanted to be nice, to keep up the doing-whatever-Dream-wanted act, but he was just so exhausted. Not to be dramatic, but every waking moment he was in practically unbearable pain.

He knew it was from the ankle. Of course it was. It was broken, the bone probably shattered, and left completely untreated except for the bandage wrapped tightly around it. This was going to heal all wrong if he left it like this, but it wasn't like there was much he could do about it.

"Tommy," Dream's expression had switched to that smile he always did. The one with anger hidden behind it. That smile always led to pain. "I think we should talk. About that phone call earlier."

"...What about it?"

"What did you say to him?"

Tommy paused. "What? Dream, you were there the entire time, you heard everything I said."

Dream grabbed him by the arms, as if Tommy would run away from him if he wasn't holding him. As if Tommy could even do that in his current state. "I meant before- when you were at his apartment. You clearly told him something to make him worry. What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything! I swear!"

"Tommy, I'm going to ask you one more time." His grip tightened and Tommy was certain it would bruise. "What. Did. You. Do?"

"Nothing!" He was getting dizzy again. He hated this, he hated it so much, he just wanted to leave but he couldn't yet.

Dream let go of him and took a step back. "It's like you *want* to get taken away. Is- is that what you want, Tommy? You want to go live with some family of strangers who don't even love you?"

"That's not-"

"If you think what I do is bad, I promise you haven't seen anything." Dream laughed. Tommy cringed.

"That's not what I want."

"Really? Because you're acting like it is. After everything I've given you, everything I've done for you, out of the *kindness of my heart*, and you still try to run away. You still lie to your brother, telling him who-knows-what, just to get away from me. I just don't understand why."

"I'm not trying to get away from you." Tommy whispered.

"Are you sure? It looks like you are."

"...I'm sorry."

Dream was mad at him. Dream was angry. Dream was going to take it out on Tommy, and Tommy couldn't stand the thought of it. He couldn't *breathe*, couldn't *think*, couldn't-

Dream had sat down on the bed next to him.

“I need you to do something for me tomorrow, if Technoblade comes.” Dream was back to using the sickly sweet voice.

“...Okay.” He wanted to listen to Dream. Needed to, even. Dream cared about him. Dream only wanted to keep him safe.

“If he comes, I need you to stay in your room. Don’t make any noise, don’t open the door, nothing. Just stay there until he leaves.” There was an unspoken “or else” at the end of his sentence. “Understand?”

Tommy didn’t understand. If Technoblade didn’t want him, Dream shouldn’t have to worry about Tommy seeing him. It wasn’t like Techno wanted to take him away from Dream or something.

Did he?

No, no, he didn’t.

No matter how much Tommy wanted him to- wait, no, he did *not* want to live with Technoblade. He never had and never would. He didn’t even miss Technoblade, so it wasn’t like he even *wanted* to see him. What Dream was asking Tommy to do was very reasonable, so of course, he’d comply.

“Yes, Dream.” He whispered.

“Good.” Dream leaned forward and ruffled his hair, and Tommy had to suppress a flinch, almost sure the man was going to hit him. Again.

“Dream...” He started. He knew this was risky, but the sooner he did it, the better.

Dream hummed in response, now carding his fingers through his hair. The feeling made Tommy shudder.

“I was thinking... He’s... People are going to question my ankle. At school or when I see friends? They just... They might call someone if they see I can’t walk? I think if I had crutches people wouldn’t worry. I dunno.... It’s... it’s stupid, I’m sorry...” His voice wavered at the end, words trailing off as he lost the brief bout of courage that had seemingly come out of nowhere.

Dream's hand fell from Tommy's hair down to his cheek, lightly tilting his head upwards so Tommy would look him in the eyes.

"You don't need to worry about that, Tommy. I pulled you out of that school."

"You- what?"

"The kids there were bad influences over you."

"What? No they weren't, everyone there was so nice."

"They constantly encouraged you to break my rules. Do you really think that constitutes "nice"?"

Dream was right. Wait, was he? Some of Dream's rules were overbearing, or didn't make sense, or whatever, surely those rules could be broken, right?

"You're right, Dream," Tommy lied through his teeth, "I'm sorry."

"You should be. I swear, Techno's gone and undone everything I taught you, hasn't he?"

Tommy wasn't sure whether he only wanted to be agreeable to assure he'd get the crutches he needed to escape, or because he was starting to side with Dream again. It really made no sense, but Dream in general made no sense. He would often hurt Tommy and tell him he was helping him.

Wasn't Dream helping him?

He would often hurt Tommy. Tommy had to keep reminding himself of that.

No, no, no, he was *not* helping Tommy.

A broken ankle wasn't helping. Leaving it untreated so it would heal incorrectly (if at all) was not helping. Locking him in his room alone all day wasn't helping.

Giving him crutches so he could run away, however? *That* would be helping.

Dream put a hand on Tommy's shoulder now. "Really, Tommy, I'm so relieved to have you back. I don't know what I would've done if I lost you."

Tommy narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean?"

“You’re like a son to me, Tommy. I want to take care of you, I’d be heartbroken if I lost you.”

Like a son to him.

Yeah, right.

Dream left shortly after, closing the door tightly behind him. He... he left it unlocked. Tommy almost wondered if it was a trap- so he could yell at Tommy for leaving his room without permission.

Tommy didn’t have time to worry about that. While Dream was gone, Tommy had a good chance to look at his injury and see if there was anything he could do to make it feel better.

Tommy had barely left his bed since the... Incident. Yeah, that's what he'd call it, the incident. He'd barely done anything, honestly, the pain making it difficult to stand, much less do things.

That wasn’t good. That was probably a very bad sign.

He found himself propping his ankle up on a stack of pillows, recalling something about blood flow or whatever from an old health class.

The movement alone made him want to scream. He had to bite back tears as he slowly undid the bandage wrapped around the ankle.

Once the bandage was gone, he could see the injury clearly, and he wished he couldn’t, because it looked *awful*. It was fairly swollen, but more importantly, deep purple and yellow bruises covered nearly the entire thing, going down to his foot and spreading up towards his calf.

It hurt. Just looking at the injury made the room spin, and touching it was out of the question

But he had to, right? To figure out how badly it was broken. Maybe to reset the bone? No, that was stupid, he didn’t even know *how* to do something like that.

He had a vague memory of Wilbur breaking his arm when Tommy was still in kindergarten. That would’ve meant Wilbur was, what, seventeen? It wasn’t too long before Wilbur started caring for him full-time. Tommy... Didn’t remember how it had broken, but remembered it was somehow his

fault. Maybe he'd accidentally pushed his brother out of a tree or something.

He remembered Wilbur all teary-eyed as he swore he was okay and wasn't in pain. He remembered Phil rushing forward and frantically examining the injury.

Phil.

Tommy hated Phil.

No, that was harsh. He didn't hate Phil, not really.

He barely even knew the man.

Wilbur would tell him stories about Phil and how wonderful he used to be. Phil was an adventurer through and through, taking his boys to explore far-off countries and learn about different cultures. The man, despite having two young sons, refused to be tied down for long, and they moved around a lot as kids.

Tommy wondered if he was responsible for ruining that, too. If he had done something to make Phil stop taking his sons on adventures after he was born. Phil was always more distant with Tommy than he was Wilbur and Techno, but Tommy had never questioned why.

He didn't have time to question why as he desperately replayed the distant memory over and over in his head, trying to recall what Phil had done with Wilbur's arm.

Bruises. The first thing Phil had done was look for bruises, and Wilbur's arm was covered in them.

Wilbur's entire body was covered in them. Yellow and purple and blue hidden behind pools of red and it was grotesque and Tommy couldn't look away no matter how much he wanted to because he was stuck in the seat and he couldn't get out and he was forced to stare at-

He didn't have time to freak out, either. He'd have to do it later, or preferably shove the thought down and never think about it again.

Tommy's ankle was covered in bruises, to the point that more of his skin was bruised than not.

Next, Phil had checked Wilbur's arms for swelling. Tommy couldn't remember if there was any, but considering it had broken, there probably was.

There wasn't time for anything to swell. Of course not, it had happened in seconds and swelling took hours and he couldn't afford to wait for hours because he had to get help now but his hands were shaking and he didn't have a phone and-

It was obvious the ankle had swelled. It could have been worse, and maybe it would have been, if he hadn't kept it bandaged. He didn't know how it worked.

Phil asked Wilbur to wiggle his fingers. Wilbur did so, and was assured that that was a good sign.

Wilbur wasn't moving at all, not after everything else went still. He sat there like a corpse and Tommy would have thought he was a corpse if it wasn't for the unsteady rise and fall of his chest, the slow blink of his eyes as he stared back at Tommy

Tommy couldn't wiggle his toes. Couldn't flex his foot. Couldn't bend his ankle (not that he tried). If Will being able to move was a good sign, did that make this a bad sign?

Then Phil lightly touched Wilbur's arm, and Wilbur swore like a sailor. That was the moment they were sure it was broken. Wilbur wasn't quiet, no, but he didn't shout curses out unless he was in serious pain.

Wilbur hadn't spoken a word, he probably couldn't. It was deathly silent and all Tommy could hear was the staccato wheezing of his breathing, half-muffled from the car running, and he wished Will would just say something because the silence was killing him, and it wasn't the only thing killing him because-

He set a hand on his ankle, and almost simultaneously clapped the other hand over his mouth.

Ithurtithurtithurtithurtithurt

It hurt worse than busted lips and bruises and cuts and broken ribs and shattered glass and-

He let out a loud whimper, grateful that it wasn't a scream. Terrified that Dream had still heard it.

Would Dream be angry if he found out Tommy unwrapped his ankle? No, why would he? He wasn't hurting anything.... Was he? There was something about setting bones and how you're not supposed to move them until they healed. That was the point of casts, he was pretty sure.

His foot had fallen to the side slightly, and Tommy cried internally for what he knew he had to do. It was going to hurt so badly, but he didn't have a choice. He wanted out of here, and if he wanted out, he had to get better. Leaving his ankle unchecked and in a worse position than before would make everything worse.

Agonizingly slowly and even more agonizingly carefully, he forced his foot back into a position, ninety degrees in relation to his leg. His breathing had gotten more rapid, and he had to focus on not throwing up as he carefully wrapped the bandages back around it as tight as he could (not too tight, he didn't want to cut off blood circulation).

That shouldn't have made him tired. It was barely any movement, and he couldn't even chalk it up to mental strain, because he'd barely been focusing on what he was doing.

Maybe he could blame it on the flashbacks.

No, no, they weren't flashbacks. Despite what Dream had said, he wasn't crazy, he didn't get flashbacks. He didn't see things, he didn't hear things, he was *fine*.

There were no flashbacks. Just... Memories. Harsh memories that hit him like an oncoming truck (bad metaphor), but memories nonetheless.

If they left him shaking and crying afterwards, that didn't change what they were called.

He was still tired. Exhausted, even. And he was already in his bed...

Sleep overtook him before too long.

He woke to a loud knock on the front door. Well, he assumed it was loud, considering he heard it all the way from his room on the other side of the house.

Techno?

Was Technoblade here already? There was no way he had come this early in the morning.

Light was streaming through his window blinds. It had to be... What, noon? Huh. He hadn't thought he had slept that long.

Tommy wanted to see Technoblade. He shouldn't have, not after everything he did, but Techno apparently had his backpack, and he wanted it back.

After all, it had practically everything that was important to Tommy.

Instead of attempting to stand up, he more or less rolled off of the bed and onto the floor. It was easier when he wasn't up so high, anyway. He crawled towards his door, about to open it, when he heard voices come from the living room. Well, just outside of the living room, at the front door.

"I'll take the bag now." It was Dream's voice, muffled heavily as the sound traveled through the house. It was nothing like Techno's apartment, where you could hear sounds clearly no matter where in the house you were.

"Actually," That was Techno, voice lower than usual. More gravelly. "I'd like to see my little brother."

Techno wanted to see him. Technoblade wanted to see him! Did... Did Tommy want to see Techno? He did. Kind of. Maybe not... It was complicated.

He forced himself into a standing position, cringing at the sharp pain it sent through his leg. He was leaning heavily against the door, hand floating over the door handle, not quite ready to touch it.

“Oh, really? You’ve never wanted to visit him before.” Dream’s tone was almost... Mocking. That was a good word for it.

“Well, I do now. Can I come in, or..?”

“Oh, of course you can come in.” Before Dream could say anything else, there was the loud thump of Techno’s boots across the hardwood floors.

The sound was comforting in a weird way that Tommy didn’t quite understand.

"But Tommy doesn't want to see you. After the phone call yesterday, he practically begged me to not let you come" Dream finished. Why was Dream lying? Why did it sound so convincing?

"I'd still like to see him."

"No, that's not going to happen."

"Look, I don't know what act you're putting on but I don't care."

“I’m sure I don’t-”

“I know you’ve been starving him.” Techno growled. “And I know you’ve been hurting him. And I won’t let you get away with it anymore. I’m going to-”

"Haven't you done enough?"

Tommy leaned further against the door, trying to hear better.

Technoblade sounded... taken aback. "What?"

"It just feels mean, is all. To get his hopes up and bash them down like you did."

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

He carefully twisted the door handle and opened the door. This was stupid, this was risky, this was a big mistake. Dream would be furious with him and any slight chance Tommy had at leaving would be tossed out the window. Still, he couldn’t stop himself. He took half a step forward, feeling the wave of dizziness and nausea and pain wash over him. He just wanted to see Techno, just for a minute, and then he'd leave.

“He seemed pretty convinced he was going to be staying with you. I don’t know what you told him, but I’d appreciate it if you didn’t feed lies to my child.”

“He is *not* your child. Don’t you *dare* say that.” Techno snapped. He heard the sound of a fist being

slammed against a table (he wished it wasn't a familiar sound), and it was enough to make him pause his trek down the hallway.

"Isn't he? Last I checked, *I* was the one who raised him."

"Last *I* checked, my *brother* raised him. You only came along afterwards."

The screech of car breaks. The world spinning upside down. Red and black and shattered glass and the reflection of lights and the radio still playing in the background.

Tommy stepped forward, temporarily forgetting about his injury.

The reminder came all too suddenly, as the blinding pain came back. He didn't even have time to scream before he collapsed to the floor, with a thump quite similar to Techno's boots, albeit much louder.

Speaking of boots.

Dream and Techno were there in an instant, Dream pulling Tommy to his feet (he didn't want to stand. It hurt terribly and he'd much rather lay on the floor where he wasn't putting any pressure on it) and moving to stand almost as a blockade between him and his brother, who was standing only a few feet away from them.

Techno's pink hair was down and unbrushed. His glasses were askew. He looked like he hadn't slept in a solid month (though he always looked like that, but it was even worse now). He was still holding the backpack. *Tommy's* backpack.

"Tommy," Dream whispered harshly into his ear, "I thought I told you to stay in your room." Practically all of Tommy's weight was being held by Dream, but he couldn't find it in him to complain. It was easier.

"I'm sorry." Was all he could manage to mutter back.

"Th- Tommy?" Techno's eyes were wide and he took a step towards him. "What happened? Are you alright?"

"He's perfectly fine. Just had a little fall, is all." Dream cut in.

"And what caused this 'little fall'?" Techno practically spit the words back in Dream's face. Part of him wanted to praise Techno for sticking up to him, part of him wanted to beg him to stop.

Tommy spoke before Dream could. He'd be punished for it later, probably, but he didn't care. "I hurt my ankle and walked on it."

Techno's eyes narrowed. "What happened to your ankle?" There was anger on his brother's face, something he hadn't seen once the entire week he'd stayed with him. Well, it wasn't like Techno hadn't gotten angry at all, but it was nothing like *this*. This was a hundred times more terrifying

What was he supposed to say? Not the truth, obviously, that would make Techno more mad, but he couldn't remember what the lie was supposed to be. Whatever Dream had told him after it had happened? Tommy couldn't even remember what he had said.

Tommy glanced at Dream, unsure of what to say.

"He tripped getting out of the car yesterday." Dream said it like it was rehearsed. Maybe it had been. "It's just a light sprain, it'll heal soon. Scared me out of my mind when it first happened, but he's fine. I'm keeping a close eye on it."

Techno frowned heavily. "If it was just a slight sprain, he'd be able to put weight on it. It looks broken."

Tommy's foot *was* splayed out in an uncomfortable looking way, although it didn't *feel* uncomfortable. To be frankly honest, he was starting to lose feeling in it, and was kind of hoping he would lose feeling in his ankle next. At least then it wouldn't hurt as bad.

"What are you trying to say, Technoblade?" Dream straightened his posture slightly, though he was still a few inches shorter than Techno. Techno and Wilbur had always been ridiculously tall, though where they got it from, Tommy didn't know, because Phil was at least a foot shorter than them.

"Take him to the hospital."

"Don't tell me how to raise my child."

My child. Tommy was *not* his child.

The tension in the air was thick enough to take a knife out and cut it. That's what Techno used to say, anyway. Tommy was pretty sure he had stolen the phrase from some book.

"Take him to the hospital." Techno repeated the words more firmly this time.

"Get out of my house, Techno."

Techno wasn't listening, and it was starting to scare Tommy. Dream wouldn't hurt Techno, right? No, no, he wouldn't. He couldn't. Techno was too big and strong, and Dream wasn't stupid.

What if Dream hurt Tommy instead, though?

"Take him to the hospital," Techno said, for the third time, "Or I'll call CPS."

He could feel Dream freeze at that, though Tommy wasn't sure why. Was Dream... Afraid? No, he'd never seen Dream afraid of anything before. That couldn't be it...

"You know, Technoblade, I see why you didn't take Tommy in originally." Dream was smiling, any air of fear had vanished in an instant. "Wilbur was a much better pseudo-parent than you. You're only embarrassing yourself."

He saw the pain wash over Techno's face. The way his posture changed and his shoulders slumped. He saw the anger and strength Techno had moments ago fall away in a matter of seconds.

Dream wasn't done. "You're lying to yourself, you know. When you think you can take better care of Tommy than I can. You can't, and I really think that deep down, you know it." Dream took a step forward, Tommy forced to move with him. "You just feel bad for losing your brother, and now you're making things up to convince yourself that Tommy needs help when he doesn't."

Another step forward (Tommy held back a yelp of pain). Techno took a step back.

"That's it, isn't it? This is all just some big play-pretend game for you. You couldn't save Wilbur, so now you're trying to save Tommy." Dream laughed. "You're making up this plot in your head to make yourself feel better."

And then... Dream's expression morphed from rebuking into something mimicking concern.

"It's okay, Techno." His voice was softer now. "I know coping can be hard, but you can't drag your little brother away from a loving home to make yourself feel better. Deep down, you know that, don't you?"

Techno didn't say anything. He didn't need to. He had always been one to cave into peer pressure, no matter how good at fighting he was, emotions were something he was awful at. This fight would be one he'd lose.

"I think it's time you leave. It'll be best for everyone if you do." Dream said.

Technoblade stared at Dream for a long moment, and then shifted his focus to Tommy. He stared at him all too intensely, enough to make him more than just a little uncomfortable. Tommy fidgeted under his gaze, but he couldn't really hide or anything given the circumstances.

Techno glanced down at his ankle, which was still wrapped tightly in the bandages Tommy had done last night. He looked back up at Tommy.

Tommy stared back at him, glaring daggers at his stupid hair and clothes and his face which looked *way* too much like Wilbur's. Well, it looked exactly like Wilbur's, but that was beside the point.

Technoblade handed the backpack to Tommy, who took it all too gratefully. Sure, Techno might have stolen everything inside and filled it with rocks or something (that was such a weird thought, why would he do that?), but at least he had the bag. It would be easier to run if he had something to store the few items he had in.

Dream's fingers twitched, as if he wanted to grab the bag away from him, but stopped himself.

Techno looked straight into Tommy's eyes, and Tommy felt immediately uncomfortable. Instead of saying anything to him, however, Techno turned his gaze back to Dream.

"Hospital. Take him, or I'll call CPS. Got it?"

Dream simply smiled. "Goodbye, Techno."

Techno was gone.

Dream practically dropped Tommy to go and lock the door, only to come back and drag him back into his room, releasing him back onto his bed.

Dream spent the next... Hours? Yelling at him. Screaming and berating and telling him how stupid he was for doing that, how he was tearing apart everything Dream had worked for and how he couldn't believe he was so selfish.

If he was honest, Tommy had mentally clocked out the minute Techno had left.

Somewhere, in the back of his mind, he was just glad Dream hadn't hit him yet. There had to be a reason for it, surely, but he couldn't piece it together. Not in the moment, at least.

Dream took the backpack and told him that he would get it back once he deserved it. Dream told him that Techno had "some nerve" showing up like he did. Dream told him that he wasn't allowed to leave his room unless Dream specifically told him to. Dream told him that he had half a mind to chain Tommy to the bed, since even with a broken ankle he still kept trying to run away.

"You're acting like... A wild animal." Dream explained. "I'm trying to help you, but you keep trying to escape because you don't understand." There was a pause as Dream made eye contact with Tommy. "You're not a wild animal, are you, Tommy?"

Tommy didn't respond. He wasn't sure he'd be *able* to respond, even if he wanted to.

"Maybe you are. But in that case, wild animals definitely don't deserve computer privileges. Or backpacks. You probably don't even deserve that bed, you're very lucky you still have it."

Tommy forced himself to nod.

Dream cared about him.

No, Dream did not care. Not really.

Technoblade cared about him.

Technoblade definitely didn't care.

Phil had never cared.

Wilbur had cared. He had made that so clear, and Tommy could never doubt that.

Wilbur was gone. Wilbur was never coming back.

He had to get out. He had to leave, he had no choice. It was as if Dream was losing his mind but Tommy was the only one noticing. Maybe Techno noticed, but he still listened to Dream, and that ultimately wasn't helpful.

If Techno listened to Dream, had Dream listened to Techno?

“Are you going to take me?” Tommy’s voice was just above a whisper.

“Take you?”

“To the hospital. Like- like Techno said.”

"No, you don't need a hospital. You're fine."

"My ankle really hurts, Dream. Techno thinks it's broken-"

"Techno isn't a doctor. He's not your guardian. And he doesn't get to tell me what to do."

"I know, but I can barely stand up on my own, much less walk-"

"You don't *need* to walk. There's nowhere you need to go, so it doesn't matter. Unless you want to try and run away again."

That’s exactly what he wanted to do, but he wouldn't say that.

Dream sat down on the edge of the bed again, and then... Set a hand roughly on Tommy's bad ankle.

Tommy yelped this time, jerking his leg away.

Dream's expression darkened, and that's when it finally dawned on him.

The ankle breaking wasn't simply a punishment. It was to keep him from leaving. Dream had no plans of getting him help because he *wanted* him to stay hurt... This was Dream's way of keeping him from leaving. Well, that and keeping him locked in his room all day. But Tommy would've been able to escape already if it weren't for the ankle.

Oh.

Oh.

This would make his plan harder.

That meant he couldn't wait for his ankle to properly heal because Dream wasn't going to give it the chance to.

Dream cared. Dream wanted him to stay so much that-

No, that wasn't it.

Dream... He wanted control. He wanted Tommy there and would do anything to keep him.

Which meant Tommy had to leave. He would have to wait for a good chance, of course. Dream hadn't left the house once since Tommy had gotten back, and he knew his escape would be less than quiet.

Besides, Tommy needed his backpack back before he left.

It wasn't just because of the food. Dream would take that as soon as he looked in the bag (and Tommy knew he'd look through the bag). It would all probably be thrown away, and Tommy was fine with that.

No, what mattered were the important things he'd stuffed inside it before running away.

Deep down, he knew that the things inside were less than useful. The CD's, the bee, the compass. They weren't much more than trinkets. But they had sentimental value of sorts. The CD's had Wilbur's favorite songs burned on them, the bee had been given to him by Phil. The compass... Actually, he just sort of found the compass and decided to keep it.

"Tommy, look at me." Dream spoke, snapping Tommy out of his thoughts. And he sounded... Nice. It was almost calming, and Tommy found himself subconsciously leaning towards the voice.

He didn't say anything back. Didn't need or want to, either.

"You're fine. Your ankle is fine. I'm sorry for snapping at you earlier, I was only upset because Technoblade was being... Well, you know."

Tommy nodded in response. Dream couldn't trick him, not this time. He wasn't sure why he was acting all innocent now, but Tommy wasn't going to fall for it. He couldn't risk it.

There was a silence, just for a moment, before Dream shattered it by speaking once again.

“He still doesn’t care about you, you know.”

He knew Dream was lying. Maybe. Okay, he didn’t *know*, but he *suspected*. “He visited me.”

“He only did because he felt bad for taking your backpack. That’s all.”

“What, like a pity visit?”

“I wouldn’t use those exact words, but sort of, yeah.”

Maybe Dream wasn’t lying. Even a stopped clock was right twice a day, yeah? Technoblade had left awful quickly... But he’d been arguing with Dream earlier. Didn’t that count for anything?

“Huh...”

Dream just shrugged. He rested his hand on Tommy’s ankle again, this time more lightly. Tommy held back another whimper of pain. He couldn’t just *ask* Dream to get away from him, though.

“Can I take a nap? I’m... really tired, after all of that.” He wasn’t. He’d barely woken up maybe twenty minutes ago. He just wanted Dream to leave.

Dream looked at him for a long moment, and then moved his hand away and stood up. “Goodnight, Tommy. If you’re good, I’ll come visit you soon, okay?” Dream walked out the door before he had an answer. There was, once again, the loud sound of the lock clicking.

Tommy knew that meant he’d be locked in his room for at least a day. However, this time, it felt like less of a punishment and more of a relief.

He couldn’t wait much longer to leave. There was no way he’d survive until his ankle healed. Not... not survive physically. He still doubted Dream would actually kill him. But he felt like the longer he was in the house the more he trusted Dream, like a fog was covering his brain again.

As soon as Dream left the house, he would go. At some point, Dream would have to leave. He couldn’t stay away from work for forever, he couldn’t go months without visiting his friends. Besides, he’d have to go out for groceries at some point.

And when that time came, Tommy would take his chance. He’d run and he wouldn’t stop running. Ever.

Metaphorically, of course. Tommy was in no state to actually run, but the thought was there.

Chapter End Notes

you didn't think it would be that easy, did you?

anyways, I'm actually going to be attempting to reply to comments this time (i make no promises tho. either way i super appreciate them!)

at least i didn't kidnap a child

Chapter Notes

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

He hated how he still shut down at the mention of Wilbur, even after all this time. Well, it wasn't just the mention of him. It was how Dream had used Wilbur against him. How *easily* he used Wilbur against him.

What Dream had said wasn't true, and Techno knew it. But that didn't mean it didn't hurt.

Techno dropped his head against the steering wheel. He couldn't believe he'd walked out like that. Again. To top off sending the child straight back to his abuser the first time, now Techno had walked out and left him alone with Dream.

He felt awful. He felt sick. He felt like he should march back up to the door and demand that Dream hand Tommy over.

He wasn't doing this because he couldn't save Wilbur. No matter what Dream said, Techno knew that it wasn't true.

When Tommy had first arrived, part of the reason Techno had taken him in was because of Wilbur. Because if Wilbur could spend four years (really ten years, Wilbur practically raised Tommy since he was born) with that gremlin, surely Techno could handle one night. It would have been like... Proving himself to Wilbur, almost.

And yes, he felt awful about Wilbur's... No, he wasn't going to go down this route. He refused to go down this route. That route led to awful thoughts and bad decisions and he couldn't deal with that right now.

Not when Tommy needed him.

He had memorized the hotline number on the first night Tommy had stayed over. Techno wasn't exactly the most trusting of Dream's parenting, and Tommy's actions had all but confirmed it. For peace of mind, Techno memorized the number for CPS, just in case.

This was the in case.

He dialled the number and pressed the phone to his ear.

“Hello? Yeah, I’d like to make a report. About my brother, Tommy, uh…”

At least the person on the other side of the phone was friendly. Er, friendly sounding, anyway, though that was kind of their job. “Of course. What’s Tommy’s full name?”

“Thomas Theseus Watson.”

“And how old is Thomas?”

“Fourteen. I think.”

“Do you know where he currently lives?”

He gave the address easily. He could still see the house from his current parking spot.

“And you said you’re his brother? Do you live with him, too?”

“What? No, I’m an adult. And he doesn’t live with our dad, actually, he was adopted a few years ago by Dream. That’s… Why I’m calling, actually. I think he’s at the very least neglecting the kid.”

“Please, give me a little more information about the extent of the neglect.” She spoke like she was reading a script. Maybe she was.

Techno considered it, for a moment. Maybe this woman would tell him off like Phil would, or hang up the phone altogether. Maybe Techno had misinterpreted everything and Tommy really was fine and calling CPS was wasting everyone’s time.

But Schlatt had believed him, and so had Quackity. He couldn’t believe he was trusting *Schlatt’s* judgement of all people right now, but it was all he had to go off of. Besides, Quackity had more or less assured him that CPS would see the issues and help him.

So he gave her the information. He told her about how malnourished Tommy was, how he stole food and (more importantly) told Techno about how Dream wouldn’t feed him. He spoke about the bruises that had been on Tommy when he’d first shown up, shivering, underneath Techno’s desk. He talked about how the boy walked over a hundred miles to see his estranged brother. There was more, of course. There were so many tells Techno had noticed in the last week that, as he spoke, he started to wonder why he had questioned himself on the abuse.

It wasn’t until he mentioned the broken ankle that the person on the other end of the phone stopped him.

“And do you believe this Dream may have possibly broken his ankle?”

Techno froze. He hadn't even considered the possibility. Dream would never. Would he?

When Techno moved too quickly towards Tommy, the boy would flinch back. He'd usually try to cover it up like he was moving anyway, or just flat out ignore it altogether, but Techno noticed anyway. People don't flinch at every movement without any reason.

“I don't know.” He said honestly. There was no point in lying. “I really don't know. But it looks broken, and no matter the cause, Dream is refusing to take him to the hospital.”

Their conversation continued for a little while longer, the person pausing every once in a while to take notes on a piece of paper. That seemed outdated, but Techno didn't know their system, nor did he particularly care about it.

“I think I have all the information we currently need. We'll get this reported right away and have someone come and check on him.”

“Wait- wait. Can I give you my contact info or something? So I know what happens to him.”

“Of course. We always take down contacts in case we need more information.”

Techno ended up giving them his name, address, phone number, and email. He only hung up when he was promised to receive updates on Tommy's case as soon as possible.

That was... A start. A step in the right direction. Because if CPS could get Tommy out of the household, then maybe Techno could end up getting him in his care.

Techno still wasn't completely sure he even *wanted* Tommy in his care, but the idea of him being passed around by strangers (again) was enough to decide to keep him. Assuming they could get him out of Dream's care, anyway.

After a moment of sitting in the car, Techno frowned. What did he do now? He couldn't just sit there, but he couldn't just drive back home, either.

Technoblade had spent six hours in a hospital waiting room, sitting next to an anxious Philza and a squirming child. The experience was awful, and not just because of the reasoning at the end. No, it was because Techno, despite what he liked to pretend, hated sitting around and doing nothing.

And this was just like the hospital. Techno was stuck, waiting for somebody else to do their job, praying that it ended up saving his brother's life.

Ironic, that it would happen twice.

Before he knew what he was doing, he was dialling Phil's number. Well, not dialling it. Phil was always on his recent calls list (really the only people he got calls from were coworkers and Phil, anyway).

"Phil?"

"Hey, mate. How'd it go?"

"What, you don't want to tell me he's fine without even seeing him?" He snapped. He didn't mean to, but it happened anyway.

"Techno..."

"He seemed out of it. I don't know if Dream drugged him, or what, but his eyes were all foggy."

Tommy had seemed much too small in that hallway, being held up by Dream. His foot was bent out in a funny way (less funny and more concerning), and every time he even slightly moved, he winced. He had looked Techno in the eyes exactly once the entire (brief) time he was there, but the boy's eyes never fully focused on him. They hadn't quite focused on anything, if he was being honest with himself.

"Drugged him?" Phil sounded concerned, but Techno frankly didn't care.

"He might have just been in pain."

"Pain." He repeated.

"His ankle is- well, *Dream said* his ankle is sprained, but I don't... It looked pretty broken to me."

There was a long silence on Phil's end before he spoke up again. "Huh."

Of course. Techno tells Phil that his child had an untreated broken bone, and all he could manage was "huh". Even the CPS person had seemed more concerned. Speaking of which.

“I called CPS.”

“When?”

“Right now. There’s... There’s not really much else I can do about it now.”

“I see. Are you coming home, then?”

“No.” It was a stupid answer, and he didn’t know why he said it. It wasn’t like staying in the state would help Tommy, but the idea of leaving him alone again seemed worse.

“You should come home, Techno.”

“I’m not. Tommy needs me.”

“Staking out Dream’s house isn’t going to help him, you know.” It was like Phil could read his mind.

“Well I have to do something! Nobody else will!” Technoblade exclaimed.

There was a long pause after that. It wasn’t the first time Technoblade had yelled at him. It wasn’t even the first time that week. But it was just painful to watch Phil do nothing. To deny anything was even wrong.

Phil had always leaned into denial, though. It was probably his favorite stage of grief. Refusing to do anything until the thing was staring him down the face.

Phil hadn’t cried until the funeral. Techno was pretty sure it was because the man didn’t believe Wilbur was gone until that moment.

“Schlatt’s lawyer friend will be here in about... Three hours. I figured since you’re the eyewitness, it’d be better for you to talk to him than me.”

“...What?”

“Schlatt came over and said... What was his name? Something-city. He was coming to visit Schlatt and Tubbo, thought it’d be a good time to meet with you, too. You should head back soon, though, if you want to make it on time.”

Techno tapped his fingers on the steering wheel. He didn’t want to leave his brother alone again, but sitting in front of the house wouldn’t do much for Tommy. Meeting with a lawyer to discuss adopting him once CPS got him away from Dream, however, would.

“I’ll be there soon.”

They didn't hang up the phone until Techno was in the parking lot of the apartments.

When he got inside, Quackity was already there, chatting with Phil about something Techno didn't want to question. Quackity was much shorter than Techno had thought he'd be, and was wearing... Shorts. There was snow on the ground outside and this guy was wearing shorts.

Their conversation was boring, Quackity going on about the legal logistics of the situation, mostly things Techno already knew and had discussed with him earlier. Techno told him about calling CPS and was assured that that was the best thing he could have done, but now they would just have to wait.

They waited two days before Techno called CPS again, explaining how he'd made a report, but had never been told anything afterwards.

The person on the other line sounded confused. "That's... Odd. Hang on, I'll pull up the file. What is the child's name?"

"Thomas Watson."

There was a shuffling of papers on the other end for a long moment. The sound of drawers being opened and closed. A sigh.

"You made this report... Two days ago?"

"Yeah."

This person was a lot less patient than the previous one had been. "Sir, once the case is closed you'll get a letter telling you if the report was indicated or not."

"You can't just tell me now?"

"Legally, no."

"Not even- look, he's my little brother. I'm very worried for his well-being," he forced some emotion into his voice, "*Please.*"

There was a moment where he thought the other person hung up. When they spoke again, he wished they had just ended the call. "Your report was marked as unfounded."

"What does that mean?" He knew what that word meant, or course he did, he was an English major, but he didn't quite grasp it in this context.

"There was no sign of abuse or neglect-"

"No sign? The kid is forty pounds underweight!"

"-So the case was closed. CPS found no reason to step in."

"You can't be serious. He has an untreated broken ankle-"

"If you believe he's in immediate danger, you can call the police."

"Are you kidding me? Police aren't going-"

"Have a good day sir."

The phone beeped once they hung up.

The house was quiet for the next few days. It felt like everything was at a standstill. Techno could try to call CPS again, but it wasn't like anything would really change from the last time. He had no new information for them. Tommy hadn't shown up on his doorstep again like Techno was secretly wishing he would. He hadn't even called Techno, though Techno was starting to wonder if that was his choice or Dream's.

Phil, who had seemed to actually pay attention when talking to the lawyer earlier, had shifted back into his passive not-caring mood again, as if he forgot about everything Techno had told him. Honestly, though, Techno couldn't blame him. It was easier to just ignore it, since there wasn't anything they could do about it.

They were helpless, and they knew it. It wasn't like they could go and just take Tommy themselves. Phil had no legal power and neither did Techno. If they couldn't prove the abuse (and apparently, they couldn't), there was nothing they could do.

At the same time, they couldn't just leave Tommy there alone.

Phil had taken to calling Dream more regularly, once every third day or so, to ask how the kid was. Dream stopped answering the phone after the third time.

It had been four years and five weeks since Wilbur's death. Four weeks since Tommy had shown up. Three weeks since Tommy was taken away again. Two weeks and six days of fighting an uphill battle and losing every step of the way.

Technoblade didn't give up easily, but he didn't know what else to do. Tommy was completely out of his and Phil's reach, and Dream kept pulling the boy further away. CPS said there was no sign of abuse. Quackity said they couldn't do anything without CPS. It was useless and tiring and Techno...

Techno just wanted to be done. He wanted to give up. He wanted to decide it was a lost cause and go back to how it was before, back when he barely remembered the ten year old (not ten, not anymore) existed.

Wilbur would hate that. If he was there, he would yell at Techno, he'd throw punches and yell and tell him how much of an idiot he was for abandoning their baby brother. Techno would shoot back how Tommy was hardly his brother, and Wilbur... Wilbur would look hurt. Techno always saw the tears prick his eyes before he turned away.

Wilbur would want him to keep fighting.

Wilbur had always been a fighter. No matter what it was, he'd always manage to rally a group to go after his cause. He'd always win the war (though not always the battles). Techno admired that about him.

It seemed like Tommy was a fighter, too. It takes a lot of bravery to run from an abuser (when had he started referring to Dream as that?), even more so to ask a practical-stranger for help. And that wasn't even including whatever fights were going on in Tommy's head, because despite how little Tommy tried to show, it was clear how hesitant he was about everything. How often he'd go back and forth on decisions, between calling Dream his friend and saying he never wanted to see him again.

Techno couldn't be done with this battle. Not yet. He had already lost one brother and he wasn't going to lose another one.

So he stayed up late, reading court cases, trying to find anything he could use to help Tommy. He wrote down everything he knew, his theories, his thoughts, everything. Phil had tried to get him to sleep, but he refused. He was too busy. He needed to do this, for Tommy. For Wilbur.

It was three AM when he heard the loud knocking at the door.

"Police! Open up!" A deep voice shouted, and Techno froze. Police? What? He made his way to

the door and opened it, staring at the group standing in front of him.

Six police officers stood at his door, and for a moment, Techno's anxiety spiked. He felt like he was seventeen and he'd been caught fighting again, he was going to be arrested, Wilbur was going to be so disappointed-

No, no. Techno hadn't committed a single crime (maybe kidnapping, but he could talk his way out of that one).

Time slowed down for a moment.

"...You need something?"

"Are you Technoblade Watson?"

"Yes?"

"Please put your hands behind your head and step out of the apartment."

And then time sped right back up. Techno was outside of his apartment. His hands weren't cuffed, but they insisted he keep them in their sight at all times. Phil was being led outside, too. The cops were currently inside Techno's apartment, looking for... Something. He had no idea what. No one would tell him anything.

"You can't just search his house like that, you need a warrant." Phil argued with one of them.

"We don't need a warrant with reasonable suspicion. Sir, put your hands where we can see them."

Phil frowned, but complied.

"Technoblade," The cop continued, "When was the last time you saw your brother Thomas?"

"What?"

"When was the last time you saw your brother." The man repeated. This time it was less of a question.

"Uh... Almost three weeks ago. Why?" Panic rose in his chest. "Is he okay? Did Dream hurt him?"

"We have reason to believe you abducted Thomas and are keeping him here. We are not detaining you yet, but you still have the right to remain silent, anything you say-"

"Yeah, yeah, I get it."

“Can and will be held against you.” The man continued. “If you’re detained today, you will have the right to an attorney and if you cannot afford one an attorney will be appointed to you.”

Techno just stared at the guy. He stood still, but his mind was running a thousand miles per minute.

“Tommy’s missing?”

“Yes.”

“Dream said I took him?”

The man didn’t respond.

Tommy had gotten away. Again. Except this time he didn’t come to Techno... Not walked, of course. Techno doubted the child could walk at all, but he could’ve taken a taxi or something... But no, because Tommy wasn’t here.

The four remaining police walked out of the apartment and confirmed it.

“You’ll still have to come in for questioning. Your friend will, too.” The one speaking earlier had said, gesturing to Philza.

Techno nodded. “You- you have no idea where he is? You don’t-”

“He’s not even in our jurisdiction. Honestly, we doubt he’s here at all, but we have to check every lead.”

He nodded again.

He could hear a car pull into the parking lot below, but ultimately ignored it.

Dream must not have known where Tommy was, either. He wondered if Dream had found the note. No, he had hidden it enough that he was worried that Tommy wouldn’t find it.

"He- Tommy's run away before, you know. Uh, a few weeks ago." He paused, expecting them to ask him to continue. When they didn’t, he went on anyway. “He basically broke into my office, but I let him stay for a little while anyway, until I sent him back to Dream.”

There were light footsteps running up the stairs of the apartment building.

“We can wait until you get to the station to get your statement.” It was clear the officer didn’t really care about the whole situation. But Techno wasn’t done.

“He couldn’t just run away this time. His ankle is broken.”

Techno hated where his mind led him. It always seemed to jump to the worst possibility every time. But he had heard the anger in Dream’s voice when he had whispered to Tommy in the hallway. He’d seen how Dream jerked Tommy to his feet.

Dream had been angry that day. Angry people do stupid things. And if Dream had already hurt him... What if he had killed him?

“So someone must have taken him?”

“No- no, I’m not saying that. I just mean... Have you questioned Dream yet? He could have taken Tommy somewhere and-”

A voice interrupted him. Not just anyone’s voice, Dream’s.

“Where is he?” Dream sounded uncharacteristically panicked, and Techno couldn’t tell if that was an act or not. He stood there in that green jacket once again, glancing around rapidly.

“He’s not here, mate.” Phil grumbled.

Dream ignored him, opting to march right up to Technoblade.

“Where. Is. He.” He repeated. Demanded.

“I don’t know. If you can’t keep track of the kid, that’s not my fault.”

“I know you’re hiding him here.”

“Cops already searched the place-”

“Then you hid him. I don’t know what you have with trying to take him away from me-”

“Maybe it’s because you’re a terrible guardian to him. You ever think about that?”

“I’m the terrible guardian? At least I didn’t *kidnap* a child! Don’t think I didn’t tell them about your little escapade with Tommy a few weeks ago.”

“He’s not here, Dream. And I’m glad he’s not with you, either.” Techno was so sick of being civil with this man.

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not lying.”

“You’re clearly lying to me, Technoblade. You know, Wilbur wouldn’t-”

Maybe it was the fact that Dream kept holding Wilbur’s death over Techno. Maybe it was his stupid, smug face. Maybe it was Phil denying anything was ever wrong. Maybe it was how Tommy was badly injured (and apparently missing), and Techno felt helpless about it.

No matter what the reason, all the anger Techno had been feeling over the last few weeks came out at once.

Before he knew what he was doing, his fist had connected with Dream’s nose with a satisfying crack, and Dream was on the ground and Techno was on top of him. He tried to grab Dream by the shoulders, but the other man was too fast and sent a sharp kick to Techno’s stomach.

And then...

They were fighting. Honest-to-goodness fighting like back when they were teenagers. Not even back when they had taken martial arts classes together, no, this was back when they were throwing punches behind the school as classmates cheered.

Except this time there were no cheering classmates.

This time it was Phil desperately trying to pull Techno off the man, the cops trying to separate them, and Tubbo watching it all unfold from his open front door, though how long they had been there, Techno didn’t know.

Techno tried to slam his fist into Dream’s nose again, but was met with hard concrete as Dream moved out of the way. That shocked him enough for Dream to get the upper hand, rolling them over so Dream was above him.

There was screaming in the background. Maybe it was Tubbo. Maybe it was another neighbor.

Dream hit him in the eye, hard enough that Techno could tell it would bruise. Techno responded by grabbing Dream’s shoulders and-

Dream was yanked off of him at the same time Tecno was yanked away. Both men's hands were quickly cuffed behind their backs. Dream sneered at him and Techno snarled in response. Prick.

It would be a lie to say Technoblade didn't like hurting people. It wasn't his favorite thing in the world, but he did enjoy it. That's why he always ended up in martial arts and MMA and any other fighting-type classes Phil could find for him as a kid.

If he was being completely honest, he wished the fight had lasted longer.

Techno ended up spending the night in jail. Of course Dream pressed charges, despite Phil desperately trying to talk the man out of it. Techno was grateful Phil bailed him out, at the least, knowing that it probably took a lot of money and even more of his patience.

He expected the car ride back to his apartment to be awkward. Techno *had* just beaten up the man who Phil apparently trusted his child with. Plus, Techno was sporting a nasty black eye as well as a few other bruises, which couldn't have been a pretty sight, either.

They spent most of the drive in silence, music that didn't suit the mood playing faintly over the radio.

"We'll find him." Phil spoke quietly.

Techno glanced at him, but didn't say anything in response.

"I'm not losing another son. We'll find him."

Chapter End Notes

writer's block hit my really hard this chapter, and i'm not gonna lie, this is definitely not my best work, but like,,, i wanted t o get a new chapter out, so here we are. more action will be happening next chapter, i swear!

do you sell gingerbread cookies

Chapter Summary

warning for use of drugs (medical pills, but y'know), and technical overdose? Kind of??? idk

Chapter Notes

Sorry this chapter took so long to come out! I don't actually have a good excuse, just that it was a struggle to get through lmao

Dream shoved four white pills into Tommy's left hand, and a half-filled glass of water into his right. Tommy took them without question.

He shouldn't have. He *knew* he shouldn't have. They could've been sleeping pills, or poison, or... He didn't know. It didn't matter, anyway. He wasn't going to fight back. Fighting back would raise Dream's suspicions, fighting back would lower his chances of escape.

Escape. That was a funny way to put it, as if he was in a prison and not his home.

It had become a prison, in a way. He wasn't sure when that had happened... It could have been when Dream broke Tommy's ankle. Or when he ripped up Tommy's last picture of Wilbur. Or... It could have been all the way back when Tommy had first moved in. When Dream had told him the rules of living in his house. When Dream first screamed at him. When Dream first hit him.

At times, this home-prison felt inescapable. He was locked in his room, usually in too much pain to move, and the only attention he would get was when Dream came to sit with him and bring him meals occasionally.

He knew Dream was mistreating him. Knew it was bad, knew that this all was Dream's fault. Still, he couldn't help but be grateful for it. Dream didn't have to visit his room, but he did anyway. That was nice of Dream.

No, stop that. It wasn't nice of Dream. It was Dream's fault he was stuck there to begin with.

Tommy expected the pills to make him feel worse. To feel more tired or more dizzy or more in pain, but instead... He felt better. The pain was still there, his foot was still numb, he still could still barely walk, but the pain lessened.

"They're pain meds." Dream explained. He had been sitting on the bed next to Tommy for... He didn't know how long. Long enough that the meds had kicked in. "You've been really good lately, I wanted to reward you."

That was another lie. He knew it was, because just yesterday he had left his room to go see Technoblade, despite Dream specifically telling him not to. He had broken rules, and he should've been punished. Should've been beaten, or not fed, or something, but he wasn't.

So why was Dream rewarding him?

"Oh." Was all Tommy could manage in response.

"What was that?"

"I mean- thank you, Dream."

"That's better." Dream patted him on the head.

They spoke- or Dream spoke, really, while Tommy barely listened, for a little while longer. Until Dream mentioned something about calling a friend or whatever and exited the room. Tommy didn't fight back, didn't care enough to. He had definitely grown to prefer being alone than to being with Dream.

The medicine had initially worked great, softening the ache in his ankle and letting him think almost clearly. Until maybe ten minutes after Dream left, when he started to feel worse than he had originally. His head spun more than before, and nausea crept into his throat.

A knock at the door interrupted his thoughts, and Tommy hoped with all his heart it was Techno coming to save him. Which was a stupid wish, because Techno didn't want him, and it was Techno's fault he was stuck here in the first place. Still, he missed his brother. Which was weird and wrong but he couldn't find it in himself to care.

It wasn't Techno at the door. It was... Someone else. A lady. Dream spoke to her for a long time in a voice too hushed for him to understand.

“And may I speak with Tommy in private for a moment?”

“Of course. Is it alright if I wait outside the door? He gets... Anxious, when I’m not around.” No he didn’t. Dream just wanted to listen in so he knew what Tommy was saying to her.

“That’s fine, yes.”

Tommy’s bedroom door was opened and a woman walked in. She wore a dress and was carrying a clipboard. She looked professional, if not a little bored.

The woman looked at him with sad eyes and a fake smile. “Hi, Thomas.”

“I go by Tommy.”

The smile faltered. “Hi, Tommy. I’m just going to ask you a few questions and I need you to answer me honestly, alright?”

Dream must have given him too many pills by mistake (or on purpose, he considered), because his vision was blurring slightly and there was a quiet, distant ringing in his ears. He did his best to ignore it and focus on the woman, pushing down the drowsiness that was starting to wash over him.

“Okay, sure.” Why couldn’t he focus? He may have been a little buzzed on pain meds. Was buzzed even the right word? Wilbur had told him a little about drugs, but not enough for him to totally understand, and Dream mostly refused to speak on the topic. No matter, he was quite sure Dream had given him too many pills. That could be dangerous, but he’d be fine, right? Dream wouldn’t hurt him on purpose.

“Okay, so, what’s your full name?”

“Thomas Theseus Watson.”

He vaguely wondered who this person was and why she was asking him questions, but it didn’t feel very important. It probably should have.

“You don’t share a last name with your dad?”

“I do. Dream’s not my dad.”

“...Alright. And how do you feel about living with him?”

“S fine, I guess.” Sure, it wasn’t the best living standards, but he knew there could be much worse.

“And you’ve lived with him for four years now, right?”

“Mhm.”

“Do you like living here?”

“It’s fine.” He said, slightly more firmly than before.

“Do you think Dream is a good guardian?”

Guardian. Not parent. It was the use of that specific word that made what was happening click in Tommy’s head.

This lady had been sent by CPS to investigate them. Dream had coached him on this, years ago, when he’d first moved in. Told Tommy the horror stories of foster care and assured him that he never wanted to go through that, that it was much better to stay with Dream.

Dream told him the types of questions they’d ask, and the types of answers they wanted. They had practiced for hours what to say, and whenever Tommy got a question wrong, he would receive a literal slap on the wrist. That was back when punishments were light, though, back before Tommy was starved or had to really question his safety.

Tommy looked at the woman for a long moment.

He could tell her everything. He could tell her about all the times Dream had screamed at and hit him. He could explain the broken ankle. He could tell her that Dream wouldn’t feed him for days on end, that Dream would lock him in his room and refuse to let him out. He could tell her about how Dream made him feel so, so alone, and how he wanted to be anywhere else.

The words caught in his throat.

“Yeah.” He said instead. “He’s great.”

Every word that came out of his mouth after that was a lie. Every time she asked him about Dream and his home life, he answered exactly the way Dream wanted him to.

“Is Dream nice?”

“He’s very nice.”

And,

“Have you ever been afraid to come home after school?”

“No.”

And,

“Has Dream ever hurt you on purpose?”

“No.”

“Your ankle is bandaged, can you tell me what happened?” She looked at him expectantly.

“I sprained it a few days ago. I was getting out of the car and tripped.” He repeated Dream’s excuse, mimicking the tone Dream had used when he had lied to Techno.

The woman smiled at him. “Well, I think that’s all I need to know. I’m going to talk to Dream for another minute, and then I think I’ll be on my way.”

She left him alone in the room again.

He wondered if he made the right decision. Lying. Because she might have been the only person who’d be able to get him out of Dream’s care... But he would go somewhere worse. He knew he would, it was what Dream had always said. Said how lucky Tommy was to be in a house like Dream’s, because it could have been so much worse for Tommy.

Weirdly enough, Tommy still didn’t doubt what Dream had said.

Maybe he should have, but it was too late now. He heard the front door close and lock as the woman left.

Tommy was tired by the time they were halfway through their conversation. Now, he was exhausted. His head was pounding now and the nausea was just getting worse, and not only from the pills. He should have told her. Should have begged her to take him out of there, to bring him anywhere else.

Now he was stuck in his locked room, once again, waiting for a chance of escape that he was starting to think wasn’t coming.

Dream didn't give him any more pain meds after that. He wondered if he only did it because of CPS- but how would he even know they were coming? It didn't make sense. It didn't matter, anyway. That was in the past, and Tommy was in pain again, but at least he could see straight.

Dream stood in the doorway of his room. "I got you another present."

Tommy gasped. "Really?" Dream would very rarely give presents, especially not without expecting something in return, which Tommy would argue didn't really count as a present, but that was neither here nor there.

"Yes, really." Dream spoke as if it was obvious. It was not obvious. Or, it wasn't, until he remembered the events of two days ago- where Tommy had blatantly lied to CPS (and regretted it immediately, but Dream didn't know that). Dream ducked out of the room, and returned moments later with a set of crutches.

Crutches.

That was his escape. That was his way out. Dream handed him the metal crutches and Tommy held them with a death grip, as if he was terrified they'd be ripped out of his hands before he even got the chance to use them.

A smile washed over Tommy's face. An actual, genuine one, too. "Thank you, Dream." Immediately he tucked the crutches under his armpits and pushed himself to his feet, almost immediately toppling forward.

Dream grabbed Tommy's arm to steady him.

It made Tommy feel awful for what he was planning. Here Dream was, being so nice to Tommy, all the while Tommy was plotting behind his back to run away.

No, stop thinking like that. Dream had hurt him and was just trying to make up for it now. That didn't make him a good person, and it definitely didn't mean Tommy should stay.

Unless... It didn't matter. It was fine. Tommy wasn't even going to run away yet, despite how desperately he wanted to (why did he want to leave? Dream was his friend). He had to get his backpack back first, and he needed to grab food and money for his journey. He couldn't do that until Dream was out of the house.

However, that didn't mean he couldn't do other things now that he (sort of) had the ability to walk again.

It was two AM when he pushed himself to his feet and, with the help of the new crutches, stumbled his way to his bedroom door.

It was unlocked. Dream must have trusted Tommy enough to not lock it, and now, here was Tommy, going behind Dream's back and betraying him. Was it betrayal if they were never truly on the same side? He didn't know. Didn't care. Well, he cared a little bit, but that didn't currently matter.

Once he reached the living room, he froze in his tracks.

The front door was right there. It would be so easy to walk out and... And what? He didn't have food, didn't have money. As much as he wanted to leave immediately, he knew it wasn't the time yet. Part of running away was actually surviving afterwards.

Instead, he made his way to the computer, cringing at the dull thump of the crutches against the floor. Tommy dropped himself into the chair and leaned the crutches against the desk. He turned the computer on and stared blankly at it.

The last time Tommy had used a computer was to track down Technoblade, to beg him for help and safety. Clearly, that hadn't worked out all that well. But that was fine, instead, Tommy could contact...

Who?

Technoblade didn't want him. Neither did Philza. His school friends would send him back.

Tubbo.

Well, not exactly. Tubbo lived too far away from Tommy and much too close to Techno for Tommy to go there, but... It was someone to talk to. And that was what Tommy needed more than anything at the moment.

He pulled up the online game he and Tubbo had been playing last and signed into the account Tubbo insisted he make. Tubbo had already friended him on it, which was quite nice of him, Tommy thought.

Tommy opened up Tubbo's profile, which was just called '*Tubbo_*', and pulled up the messages.

He hadn't expected Tubbo to already have messaged him, but apparently he had done so two days ago.

Technoblade says you left?? He soundd worried r u ok???

Tommy stared at the message for a moment, not sure how to answer, not even sure if he wanted to answer. Tommy had tried his best not to lie to his new friend, other than the whole 'my name is Theo' business.

So, Tommy ignored the message, and sent a few of his own.

'Tubbo'

'Tubbo'

'Tubboooooo'

'Tubbo answer me you prick'

Tubbo was offline. Of course he was, it was nearing three in the morning, why would Tubbo possibly be awake at-

There was a little grey dot next to Tubbo's profile picture. It changed to green. Then there was the symbol of him typing.

'Theo?' Was the message he received back.

Weirdly enough, Tommy's first instinct was to tell the boy off for being awake so late. His second instinct was to tell him everything that had happened. He went with his third instinct, instead.

'I need you to promise me that you'll never tell anyone about this'

'About what?'

'Me messaging you'

'???' and 'Ok' were sent quickly in reply, and that was good enough for Tommy.

'I'm going to run away from home and I don't know where to go'

There wasn't a reply for a long moment, and Tommy was already imagining Tubbo running to go get Schlatt, who would certainly tell Dream about what he was doing, and that would end up bad for Tommy, but at the same time-

'You could come here'

'Too far'

'Where r you'

'Wyoming'

'My aunt lives there!!'

'Is she looking to adopt?' Tommy snorted at his own joke, but became much more serious as he saw Tubbo's answer.

'She would take you if you needed'

'Really?'

'Yeah she's super nice'

'Tubbo I'm being serious'

'I am too'

Before Tommy could reply, Tubbo messaged again.

'I can ask her tomorrow if u want'

'No. Your aunt can't know. Or Techno or your dad or Phil or anyone but you and me'

'I can keep it a secret'

'You swear you can?'

'Swear on my life'

There was shuffling in Dream's room. Tommy wasn't sure if it was the man adjusting in his sleep or what, but he wasn't going to take any chances

'I have to go'

'Message tomorrow'

'Ok big man'

Tommy frantically closed the computer tabs, shut the monitor off, and hobbled back to his room. Dream didn't come to visit him that night, thank goodness.

Over the next few days, Tommy and Tubbo came up with a plan.

Tubbo's aunt was called Aunt Puffy. She worked at a place an hour's bus-ride away (and maybe fifteen minutes of walking) from Tommy's house.

Tommy still hadn't told Tubbo about the entire... Situation with Dream, other than that he had to leave and that nobody could know. He mentioned that it would be dangerous for him to be found out.

He thanked his lucky stars that Tubbo didn't ask too many questions. Tubbo even suggested making up a lie to his aunt to convince her to let him stay.

Tommy could go in asking for a job at the bakery she worked at and, according to Tubbo, Puffy was so nice she couldn't say no. During the days, Tommy could work at the bakery (which would get him money), and at some point he would mention that he was homeless, in which case Tubbo was sure his aunt would insist Tommy would stay with her.

The thought of staying with another stranger scared him. But, then again, he didn't have many options. He could always just run away from her, if things went south.

Tommy had mapped out the route to her house, and since he couldn't print it out (or write it, not without Dream finding it, anyway), he had pretty much memorized the route.

The plan was all in place. It was just a matter of waiting until Dream left the house before Tommy could put it into action.

As it turned out, waiting for Dream to leave was incredibly boring. Or maybe Tommy was incredibly impatient. Or both. In his defense, staying in the house just made him... Anxious. Was that the right word? It was just that he was constantly on edge that Dream was going to do something to him. Which didn't even make sense, because Dream wouldn't...

Hang on, wait.

Oh, he hated that. Hated how the memory of his ankle was starting to blur, that sometimes he had to verbally remind himself that he wasn't safe there. That he was still defending Dream in his thoughts, despite everything.

Finally, after an insane amount of time (two weeks? Maybe? That was Tommy's best guess), he listened from his room as Dream closed the front door behind him. Tommy barely noticed he took the crutches with him when he left.

It was one in the afternoon. He was going to visit friends, Dream had said so, and would be back in two hours. He told Tommy that if he left his room, Dream would know, and there would be consequences. The crutches had been moved to somewhere else, too, but Tommy didn't care.

His hands had started shaking when Dream walked out the front door and hadn't stopped since. He forced himself to push past it- there would be bad consequences if he couldn't, and he couldn't take that risk. If he stopped now, he would never be able to leave.

Tommy limped to his door, ignoring the fire in his ankle as he did so. Yeah, it was definitely a good thing he had crutches (or would have them, whatever), because there was no way he'd make it anywhere without them.

The door was locked. Of course it was. Dream didn't trust him anymore, despite how hard Tommy had been trying to be "good". Tommy didn't even flinch at the setback, though. He knew how to pick locks.

Wilbur had taught him that.

Looking back, it probably wasn't a good thing to teach a seven year old how to pick locks, as Tommy had promptly started doing it to get inside their home instead of using his key, as well as to break into Wilbur's room. In his defense, he was seven. Wilbur didn't really seem to mind, either, just chiding him a little bit and telling him that it was only supposed to be for emergencies.

This definitely counted as an emergency, Tommy thought, as he forced the lock open. He wasn't as good at it as he used to be, but whatever worked, right?

Tommy had to lean against the wall as he walked down the hallway, struggling to stay upright. His ankle was still on fire, and it sent jolts of pain all the way up to his leg every time he put weight on it, but he still couldn't really do anything.

Another lucky break, his crutches were in the living room, leaning against the couch. Tommy quickly grabbed them and shifted to a more comfortable position, thankful for the pain immediately lessening.

He glanced around the house, now, trying to guess where Dream stashed his backpack. He paused when his eyes landed on a closed door.

Dream's room. Tommy definitely wasn't allowed to be in Dream's room.

But he wasn't allowed to run away either, and here was. He didn't waste time worrying about it, knowing he had a very limited window to do what he needed and get out.

Dream's room was normal, if not a little bare. It had a bed, a desk, a few drawers, etc. What Tommy focused more on was the backpack crumpled in the corner of the room.

He reached it in a matter of seconds, opening it to see if there was anything left inside. And to his relief, there was.

Tommy pulled the items out and set them on the floor as he took check of what was there: the bee plush, the compass, and the CD's. The food he had taken from Techno was gone, but that was to be expected. He paused as he pulled out a framed photo.

What?

It was a photo of him and Wilbur, back when Tommy was a baby, one that he vaguely remembered seeing, but certainly didn't own. Where had he seen it before? Oh, yeah... Technoblades desk. In his house.

So why was it in Tommy's backpack now?

Whatever. He didn't have time to worry about it. He could do that once he was out of this house and away from Dream.

He quickly stuffed the items back in, but paused as his hand brushed against a rip on the inside of the bag.

It didn't go all the way through the outside, so it wasn't like anything could fall out, but that tear definitely wasn't there last time he'd used the backpack.

Weird.

Tommy stuck his fingers in it, trying to determine how big the hole was. He frowned as he felt paper. With a bit of struggle, he managed to pull it out, nearly dropping it in surprise.

It was a hundred dollars. One hundred dollars, and Tommy knew that none of it was his original fifty, because these were all twenties and Tommy didn't have any bills over ten... Where had it come from? Dream hadn't put it there, obviously, but then who...?

He turned the wad of cash over and realization struck. Or, not realization, because it was quite obvious who had put it there due to the sticky note on the back of the bills.

Scribbled onto it was Technoblade's address, which he surprisingly still recognized (despite him trying to block it out of his mind), as well as a phone number, which he assumed was also Techno's.

It didn't make sense. Why would Techno give that to Tommy? Techno didn't want Tommy, no one did, not even Dream, which was why Tommy had to leave. Still, he paused at the note, before shoving it into his pocket. He couldn't worry about it right now, because he only had maybe an hour and a half before Dream got back, and he did *not* want to be here when he returned.

Tommy zipped up the backpack and struggled to his feet. He prayed that at some point adrenaline would kick in, because walking was torture, and he didn't know how he'd survive the walk to Tubbo's aunt's if simply moving around the house caused so much pain.

He'd find a way. He had to.

For a moment, he considered looking for the pain meds Dream had given him earlier, but the nausea and haze that came from them was not something he wanted to deal with, especially if he

was out on his own.

Tommy pulled a thin red and white hoodie on, ignoring how it was already fairly worn out. It wasn't that Dream didn't buy him actual winter jackets, because he did, but this one was Tommy's favorite, and it felt more important to bring that than any warm jackets. He'd probably regret that later, but for now he didn't care.

He pulled his shoes on, having to majorly loosen the laces of his right one. His foot and ankle were still majorly swollen and bruised, and putting the shoe on was, once again, torture. He considered not wearing the shoe altogether, but figured that going barefoot would do more harm than good in the long run.

Tommy paused when he reached the front door, shaking hand hovering just above the door handle. This was it. He was leaving, and he was never coming back. He *couldn't* come back. Last time, he was running off of fear and adrenaline, too scared to plan things out. That was where he went wrong the first time. Now, however, he had a plan. He knew where he was going and how he would get there.

Plus, this time, the person he was staying with wasn't friends with Dream. Somewhere, in the back of his mind, he knew Techno wasn't friends with Dream. He ignored that thought and pushed the door open.

Walking was a challenge. His legs were tired after the first few minutes (probably an after-effect of being trapped in his room for weeks), his arms were hurting and bruised from the crutches, and every time he moved, it felt like his ankle was breaking all over again. Which didn't even make *sense* because it happened when he wasn't even putting pressure on it.

Luckily, Tubbo had found a bus route that cut out most of the walking, and Tommy got there just in time to get to the bus.

It took twenty minutes after the bus ride to get to Puffy's work. It would have been ten if he hadn't had to stop every few minutes to stop his head from spinning or just get a break from the pain.

He stared up at the building in front of him. A bakery. More specifically, one named *Niki's* bakery. Tommy couldn't help but get his hopes up as he pushed through the door.

Growing up, Wilbur had a best friend called Niki. She was less of a parent figure to Tommy and more of an occasional babysitter, but she hung out with Wilbur, and by extension, Tommy, almost constantly. Niki loved baking, and she and Wilbur had regularly talked about starting up a business

for it, going so far as to create a menu and look at buildings.

Obviously, they didn't actually end up doing it. They never got the chance.

This wasn't Niki's bakery. Well- it was named Niki's bakery, but he doubted it was actually hers, because it wasn't Niki standing up at the cash register. It was another woman, with a mess of curly white hair (it must have been dyed as she couldn't be much older than Schlatt). She had eyes similar to Tubbo's, which probably meant... Oh, he could see her nametag. Yeah, this was Puffy.

He considered going up to her right away, but his leg was protesting, so he ended up half-collapsing onto a chair near the door. He could afford to rest for a minute.

He ended up sitting there for fifteen minutes. It didn't feel like that long, but the clock hanging on the wall assured him that it had been.

The lady- Puffy- must have noticed he had been sitting there for a while, too, because she walked up to him with a slightly concerned expression.

"Hey," she said, "Are you okay? Are you lost?"

Tommy stared at her. He was debating what to say, but words were already spilling out of his mouth. "Do you sell gingerbread cookies?"

"Uh... Yeah, we do."

"How much for one?"

"It's on the house."

She disappeared in the back and returned shortly after with two gingerbread cookies and a small bottle of water. She set them down on the table before sitting down in the chair across from him.

"Seriously, though. You okay? If you need to call someone, you can use-"

"I don't need to call anyone. I'm fine."

Puffy stared at him, unimpressed. She leaned back in the seat and crossed her arms, challenging him.

He stared at her, then slowly reached for the gingerbread cookies. "You're Tubbo's aunt, right?"

And the challenging demeanor melted at that. Tubbo hadn't mentioned her being *that* sentimental. "Yeah. Are you a classmate or something?"

Tommy took a bite of the gingerbread. "I'm his friend. He says... Uh, he says you're a nice person." How did he want to word this, so it didn't sound as suspicious? Maybe suspicious wasn't the right way to think about it. The word 'weird' would work better, since he wasn't doing anything wrong.

No, he was. He was running away from his guardian, his *friend*. He had done it before and he was doing it again, and he was going to be caught and punished and- he shook the thoughts from his head.

“I mean... I’d like to think I am. Did Tubbo tell you to come here?”

“I... “ he paused, then leaned forward, dropping his voice to a whisper. “I need help.”

She quirked an eyebrow. “What kind of help?”

“Tubbo said... He said you would... Well, you see, I’m kind of... Uh... Homeless...”

“And Tubbo said you could stay at my place.” She finished the sentence for him, giving him just the hint of a smile. “Well, I would’ve preferred a heads up, I could’ve straightened up the spare room a little beforehand, or at least...” She trailed off. “Obviously I’m not going to turn away a kid in need. You’re welcome to stay as long as you need.”

Tommy stared at her for a moment, processing the words she had just said. “Really?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“...Thank you, Puffy.”

“It’s no problem, really... Sorry, I don’t think I asked earlier, what’s your name?”

“Oh, it’s- uh... Theseus. But you can call me Theo, if it’s easier.” It made sense to give her a fake name in case Dream ended up searching for him. Plus, Tubbo was convinced his name was Theo, and that would be difficult to explain later down the road.

“Nice to meet you, Theo. My shift ends in thirty minutes, think you can wait that long?”

Tommy nodded and she went back to work.

He ended up moving from the chair he had collapsed in, to a booth towards the back corner of the building. He had curled his knees to his chest, ignoring how painful that sitting position was. It made him feel smaller, more hidden (and subsequently less vulnerable). The idea of Dream walking in and finding him kept playing over and over in his head.

Dream was going to be so mad. Oh, he was going to be so, *so* angry. Tommy had *thought* Dream would kill him, originally, when he ran away to Technoblade, but now? Tommy was sure of it. He was dead. At any moment the man was going to walk through the door and just...

Dream didn’t walk in and find him, and quickly enough Puffy was at his side, a purse slung over her shoulder. “Hey, kid, you ready to go?” He nodded.

It was a short drive to Puffy’s house. She played some music that Tommy had never heard before, and though she tried to get him to talk several times, Tommy was really too tired to try. It had been a long day.

Before he knew it, she had already given him a house tour. It was a three-bedroom house, which Tommy thought a bit weird, since she lived alone. According to her, though, she had friends who visited often, so it made sense to have places for them to stay, which was part of the reason she was so okay with Tommy staying over.

The final room she showed was the guest room Tommy would be staying in. It was nice- with green walls and a bed covered in quilts and comforters. The room was more decorated than his own, too, with posters and photos plastered across the wall.

"I don't get it." Tommy had said. He stood in the center of the room, leaning heavily on his crutches.

"Get what?"

"Why you'd let some strange kid into your house like this. You don't even know me. I could be crazy."

"Are you?"

"Huh?"

"Are you crazy?"

"...No?"

"Then it's not a problem. Look, Theo," She stepped towards him, and he had to force himself not to flinch away, "I'm always willing to help someone in need."

"Why?"

"You're a kid. You shouldn't have gone through... Whatever you went through."

"I didn't go through anything-"

"Hey, whatever happened to you? None of my business, yeah? But you don't have to lie about it."

The thing was, he *hadn't* gone through anything. Not really. Sure, Dream was a little rough, but- no, he was doing it again. Downplaying what happened, trying to defend Dream, even after everything.

He didn't understand why he kept doing that.

"...Thank you, Miss Puffy."

She gave him a smile. "Of course. You should get some sleep, you look pretty tired." He was exhausted, but he didn't think it was that noticeable. "If you need anything, I'm right across the hall, okay?"

"Okay."

Tommy had no plans to go across the hall for any reason. He planned to stay in the room, with the door closed, through the rest of the night (and maybe the next morning, too). Even though he trusted Tubbo, and Tubbo said she was nice, he still didn't know her rules. Just because he wanted to trust her didn't mean he was going to.

Honestly, he was anxious about this. Running away, staying with a stranger, *lying* to said stranger. Everything he was doing was incredibly risky. But, he was resourceful. Wilbur always said so, anyway. Wilbur said he was a bright kid, and that he would find his way through any situation life threw at him. Though, at the time, Wilbur definitely meant more like getting in trouble at school, not being on the run.

Despite his anxiety over the new situation, he fell asleep rather quickly.

And woke up in a panic.

Someone was screaming. Loudly.

His chest hurt and he couldn't breathe and his head was spinning and Dream was there and Dream was going to kill him for leaving and Tommy didn't want to die, not really, but here he was and-

Dream put his hand on Tommy's back. Tommy violently jerked away, crying out as the movement jostled his ankle.

"Deep breaths, hun, you're okay." Said Dream, except that wasn't Dream's voice.

Oh. It wasn't someone screaming. It was Tommy. He stopped.

'Stopped', meaning stopped screaming. He didn't stop panicking. *Couldn't* stop panicking. Because Dream had found him and Dream hated him- no, Dream was his only friend- Dream would take him home- or out back and shoot him- no, Dream wouldn't do that, that was ridiculous-

"Can you hear me right now?" Said the voice who wasn't Dream.

"He's going to kill me, I'm sorry- I don't- I didn't mean to- well I did mean- but I didn't- I'm sorry- please don't- he'll hurt me- don't send me back- I'm sorry-" The words tumbled out of his mouth, all rushed together.

“No one’s going to hurt you, you’re okay. You’re safe. Do you know where you are right now, Theo?”

Tommy was in his bedroom. Except it wasn’t his bedroom, because Dream didn’t let him put posters on his walls, and his bedroom wasn’t green.

Where was he?

That question made him pause, enough for the panic to not come to a complete stop, but at least enough to lesson as he tried to deduce where he was.

Slowly, not trusting himself to not just shout more of the word-vomit from earlier, he shook his head.

“That’s okay. You’re in my house. Uh, Puffy’s house.” not-Dream said.

Not not-Dream. Well, yes, it wasn’t Dream, but the voice was Puffy. Tubbo’s aunt.

“Oh.”

“I want you to take deep breaths for me, alright? Can you do that?” Once he nodded, she continued, “In for five, hold for seven, out for eight.”

She repeated this counting, slow and monotonous, and despite her voice being so much higher, for a second, it was Technoblade, calming him in his office.

Except Techno hated him.

“Thanks.” He muttered, refusing to meet her eyes. Sure, it was one thing to have a breakdown in front of his *brother*, but Tubbo’s *aunt*? That was where he drew the line.

“Don’t mention it.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Hey, don’t be. We all have bad nights sometimes.”

He could see her smile from the corner of his eye, but didn’t bother returning it. “I can go.”

“What? No, no, you don’t have to go.”

“You’re not gonna call him?” He looked up at her, surprised to find her teary-eyed. That was weird. She didn’t even *know* him.

“...Call who?”

Tommy looked away again, staring at the carpet. "I... I think he'll kill me. If he finds me." Tommy whispered, the words barely coming out at all. Panic rose as soon as he said them, the regret almost instantaneous. Dream would definitely kill him now, if he found out Tommy told someone.

He suppressed a flinch as Puffy put a hand on his arm. "Who, Theo?"

"My... I don't know what he is. Guardian, I guess?"

"Did he ever hurt you?"

"No." He said quickly. Too quickly. "I don't know- I can't- it doesn't matter, but if he finds me he'll kill me, and I don't know what to do, and-"

She cut him off before he could spiral again. "You're safe here. Whoever he is, he won't find you."

"You don't *know* that."

"I do. We can go to the police in the morning, and-"

"No, no, we *can't*, he'll convince them he's right, 'cause he always does, and then he'll take me away again and I *can't* go back." His breathing picked up.

"Hey, calm down. You're going to be okay." She paused. "I... I have a friend I can invite over, if you want. He's strong, he could protect you."

Tommy was skeptical to say the least.

Nevertheless, she continued. "Plus, he has a very scary attack dog."

"...Okay."

"Okay?"

"Yeah."

She gave him another smile, and nudged him slightly. "Good. I'll call him in a minute, but I think you'll like Sam. He's pretty cool, once you get to know him."

Tommy nodded, shifting a little under blankets he was honestly surprised to still be underneath. "Thank you."

"Again, don't mention it. Are you planning on going back to sleep?"

He could lie. But she... She really seemed nice. Besides, there wouldn't really be a point to it, would there? "Not really."

"Come on, then." She handed him his crutches from where they were leaning against the side of his bed. "You hungry? I was thinking a midnight ice cream run would be nice."

your brother is a terrible influence on my son

Chapter Notes

this is for everyone yelling about awesamdad in last chapter's comments :)
Also, sorry this took so long! We're in the home stretch of this story and my brain decided it was the perfect moment to stop working.

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

He dreaded even the idea of going back to work after the confrontation with Dream. As much as Techno wanted to call this in as a family emergency, he really couldn't. Even if he could, it wasn't like it would be useful, he had no idea where Tommy was. He could only wait and plan for when Tommy was found.

Still, he wished Tommy had at least called him. Maybe he hadn't found the note in his backpack? Tommy wasn't the most observant person in the world, there was a chance he hadn't seen it yet.

There was a chance Dream had taken it, too. Or that Dream hadn't given the backpack to Tommy at all. Techno hoped that wasn't true.

The college classroom fell silent as Techno walked into the room. Not a I-respect-my-professor quiet, either, because that never happened, no matter how many times Techno asked for it. No, this was a my-teacher-just-walked-in-and-he-has-a-black-eye quiet.

How they managed to make it through the entire lesson before someone asked him about it, Techno didn't know, but he was grateful for it. It was only when he got to the end and asked if anyone had any questions, did someone speak up.

"What happened to your eye?"

"I meant questions about the curriculum."

"No one has any questions. *Please* tell us what happened to your eye?"

Techno paused, considering. This was... This was the most engaged his class had looked in a while. Obviously, he couldn't tell the entire story, not without getting in trouble with the dean (or maybe even the chancellor), but he could tone it down a little.

"...Tell you what, if everyone promises not to tell the dean, and actually does this week's homework, I'll tell you."

There was an immediate loud agreement. Granted, they were probably lying, but at this point, Techno was too tired to argue.

“I got in a fight.”

There were a few gasps, before the same student as before spoke up again. Techno expected them to ask who, but instead, “Did you win?”

He paused. “More or less. I was pulled away before I could do much, but I did break his nose.” He didn’t say it smugly. Okay, maybe he said it a little smugly, but he had absolutely earned it. Dream completely deserved that broken nose (and a few other broken limbs and a lifetime in jail, but that could come later).

“Why’d you fight this guy, anyway?”

Techno hesitated again. What could he say before getting too personal? “He hurt my family.”

Another student spoke up. “Who? Phil?”

Phil was the only family Techno really talked about, and even then, it was vague mentions of the man, nothing concrete. Techno didn’t talk about family at work. He must have just been feeling extra sentimental after everything that had happened lately.

“No. My brother.”

“You have a brother?”

“Yes, I have a brother.” At this point, Techno started shuffling through his papers, trying to signal it was time for the students to leave. He didn’t want to have this conversation anymore.

“And you never told us about him?”

“I barely know the kid.”

“Barely know him? He’s your brother!” As if that made him suddenly have a relationship with him.

“I left for college when he was young, we... Never really saw each other after that.” Except for when Tommy broke into his office barely a month ago. Except for when Tommy ended up staying at his house. Except for when Tommy brought him tea for nightmares, or suggested movies to watch, or gave him panic attacks when he disappeared.

Techno stood, before anyone could ask any more questions. “Class is over. The next group will be coming in, soon, so...” They got the message, and left quickly after. He swore he got a few looks of sympathy by some people, but promptly chose to ignore it. He didn’t want pity.

“I don’t want your pity coat.” Tommy had said, shoving Techno’s jacket back into his arms, despite the fact the child (teen?) was actively shivering.

Techno shook the thoughts from his head.

This was going to be a long day.

He survived, though.

He didn’t even need to go to his office, and considered heading straight home, but he went back anyway, just to check for Tommy, praying that the kid would show up hiding under his desk just like he did the first time.

Tommy didn’t show up. Not the first day, nor the second, nor the third.

Techno went to work, came home, and spent the rest of the days researching what he could do to get Tommy out of Dream’s care, where the boy could be, and occasionally chatting with Phil.

Phil had to give him gentle reminders to eat and sleep, both of which Techno had been doing less and less. He considered himself too busy to eat, especially since Tommy could be out and alone, shivering and starving to death. As for the sleep...

The nightmares seemed to get worse every time. Usually, Wilbur died. Occasionally, Tommy died, too. That was as much as Techno had explained to Phil, and that was as much as Techno wanted to think about it.

Nightmares weren’t important, anyway. What was important was getting his little brother back as quickly as possible.

One week.

It had been seven entire days since Techno's brother had gone missing. Well, seven days since Dream had reported it to officials, it could have been longer, and Techno would have no idea.

Technoblade knew he shouldn't have cared as much as he did. Knew Tommy was smart. Knew Tommy could survive out on his own.

That was a lie. Techno didn’t know any of those things. He knew Tommy had been a loud and annoying child growing up, and it seemed like that, for the most part, hadn’t changed. He also knew Tommy had been through Hell, and somehow it had become Techno’s responsibility to get

him out.

Currently, Techno and Phil sat at the kitchen table. Phil was calling local businesses (near Techno's house, as well as around Dream's), asking if anyone had seen a blonde child. Techno, wanting to avoid the social interaction of phone calls, was researching child abuse laws and figuring out how Dream could get the most jail time possible.

"There's no way I'm letting him get away with only five years." Techno grumbled to himself.

Phil must have been in between calls, because he replied. "Is five years really the minimum?"

"Five is the *maximum* in his state." Techno corrected with a groan. "It's probably why he moved them there in the first place."

"Techno," Phil started with a warning tone.

"There's no way it hasn't been going on for *years*, Phil. It could've started the minute you handed him over to--"

"That's enough, Techno--"

"Stop denying it! Just because you're upset that mom--"

Techno had gone too far. He had crossed several lines in the last few weeks, but that was by far the worst. He opened his mouth to apologize, but stopped as he heard the loud knock on the door.

Techno considered himself observant, at least when it came to who was knocking on his door. Dream (and the police) would do a few incredibly loud knocks. Tubbo would rap his fingers against the door quietly, but wouldn't stop until the door was opened. Phil knocked four times instead of three. Schlatt always knocked shave and a haircut.

Which was why Techno was saying "Schlatt" before the door was even open.

Schlatt was standing in front of him, arms crossed in front of his chest. He was wearing a jacket and flip flops, but what was more concerning were the tears forming in his eyes.

Schlatt pushed his way into the apartment before Techno could do anything about it.

"Sure, Schlatt, of course you can come in. Thanks so much for asking." Techno muttered sarcastically.

"Your brother," Schlatt said, turning back to face him, "is a terrible influence on my son."

"I... What?"

With an eye roll, Schlatt uncrossed his arms and handed Techno a note, which he read aloud.

'be back soon -Tubbo'

“You’re not seriously blaming Tommy for that, are you?” Phil asked, standing up from the table.

“I’m not “blaming him”. But Tubbo definitely went to go find Tommy.”

“How do you know?” Phil walked over to stand near them.

“He took about two-hundred dollars from my wallet, some food, clothes, and our bus passes.”

“That still doesn’t point to Tommy?” Since when did Phil get defensive in *favor* of his son?

“The kid’s never broken a rule in his life. At least, not ‘till Tommy came around. Look- those kids were attached at the hip when he was around. If Tubbo was breaking any rules, it’d be to go to Tommy.”

“But Tommy’s missing.” Techno cut in. He realized it before Schlatt could voice it. “You think Tubbo knows where he is.”

“I think he might.”

Techno wanted to grab Schlatt by the shirt collar and shake him. Instead, he remained still. Calm. Impassive. “And you didn’t think to mention that before?”

“I was *getting there*, before your dad questioned my word choice. Look, Tubbo has a lot of friends he talks to online, but he’s never been secretive about who he’s talking to. Usually just kids from school, whatever. The past few weeks he’s been hiding it, though.”

“And you never questioned it?” Phil asked, taken aback.

“Of course not. I respect my child’s privacy, thank you.”

“And look how much good that’s doing.” Techno mumbled. “Does he have his phone?”

Schlatt nodded. “He already turned tracking off and won’t answer any of my calls or texts.”

“Think he’d answer me?”

“Technoblade, please tell me that you, an adult man, do not have my teenage son’s number saved in your phone.”

“...I don’t. But Tommy said I scared him, he might answer out of fear if I called.”

“He wouldn’t know it’s you calling.”

“Right, what do you suggest, then? Since you know everything?”

Schlatt stared at him for a long moment. He blinked, slowly, and then started laughing. *Loudly*. It wasn't quite hysterical, but it was annoying. “You sound just like him.”

“What?”

“Will. He'd always say that to me, too.”

He could hear Phil take a sharp breath as soon as Schlatt said the name, but surprisingly, Techno didn't mind. It was always interesting, on the occasions Schlatt spoke about Wilbur. He didn't talk about him with the same adoration as Tommy, but it wasn't the disingenuous way Dream spoke of him, either. Techno wasn't sure what Schlatt and Wilbur's relationship was, exactly. Sometimes he spoke like they were old buddies, sometimes enemies. When Wilbur had originally told him about Schlatt, Techno had thought they were lovers, but that was neither here nor there.

“Of course, he'd say it with less malice and more love,” Schlatt continued, and ah, that was why Techno had assumed what he had, “But you get the point.”

Phil was giving Schlatt a disapproving look. “Right, so back to the missing children.”

Schlatt just hummed in response. “Look, I don't know where they've run off to, but if they're together, I'm sure they'll be fine.

“Or they're committing crimes.” Techno let out a strained chuckle.

“Sure, but he learned that from you, so...”

Phil's phone started ringing. Odd. Phil pulled the phone out of his pocket, gave them an apologetic look, and headed for Techno's office. He was already answering the phone before he had made it through the doorway.

“Hello? Yes, I was the one asking about the missing child.” The door shut behind him, and Techno and Schlatt were left alone in the living room.

Techno tapped his foot on the floor. Schlatt drummed his fingers against his leg.

“I just don't know where he would've gone...” Schlatt said, softly.

“Well, like you said, wherever Tommy is. We find Tubbo, we find Tommy.”

“You make it sound so easy.”

“Hey, I never said it was easy.” As he spoke, Schlatt's phone buzzed, indicating a text.

“Ah, so everyone has a better social life than me, it seems.” Techno joked.

Schlatt frowned down at his phone. “No, no, it’s just my sister.”

“You have a *sister*?”

“We’re not close. Why she’s texting me, I don’t know...” He trailed off, looking up to Techno.

“You don’t think..?”

“Call her.”

And then Schlatt had his sister on speaker phone.

“Really, Schlatt, I just think a little warning would have been nice, is all.”

“I... You’re right, I’m sorry. Warning for-”

“You know, you could be a little nicer to me. After all, it’s been, what, two years now?”

Techno gave Schlatt a look. “Two years since what?”

“Who’s that?” Schlatt’s sister groaned, over the phone.

“Friend of mine.” Friend was a strong term. “Warning for what?”

“For Tubbo coming. I know I have spare rooms, but I can’t just start-”

“Tubbo’s at your house?”

There was a long silence. “...No. No, he’s not.”

“Puffy, I swear to-”

“You’re just confused. It’s the old-man brain. Or, you’re drunk.”

“Don’t you dare start that, you know-”

“Okay, well it was really great talking to you, Schlatt, but I think I better-” Schlatt hung up on her before she finished. He looked up at Techno with a look of amusement and annoyance.

“So Tubbo’s at my sister’s house. Easy. She’s not even that far away.”

“Is she in this state?”

“No, Wyoming, actually. But it’s only, like, three hour’s drive.”

Techno was filled with both relief and fear. “Tommy lives close to there.” Tommy was with Tubbo- and Schlatt’s sister, apparently. Tommy was safe. Er, most likely safe, anyway. Still, it hurt that Tommy had decided to go to a stranger instead of his brother. Or that Tubbo had been dragged into it at all. It was bad enough to have one child deal with the after-effects of abuse, but now Tubbo was helping Tommy run away? That might not end well.

“Great. What are we waiting for?” Schlatt paused and must have figured out the answer for himself. “Phil!” He shouted, “We know where the kids are, and if you don’t come out right now, we’re leaving without you!”

Phil was out of the office in an instant, the phone still pressed to his ear. “You found him?”

“Sort of. Schlatt’s sister-”

“Puffy.” Schlatt cut in.

“-said Tubbo “stopped by”, but was clearly lying. She’s close to Dream’s house, so Tommy must have ended up there.”

Phil didn’t want to come. Techno didn’t bother asking why, more focused on finding Tommy. Soon enough Schlatt and Techno were piled into a car, and headed off to find Tommy (and Tubbo).

Techno didn’t have to look far for the kid. He parked in front of Puffy’s house, and as he got out of the car, he saw him.

Well, not him. Not Tommy. Of course not Tommy, because life couldn’t be that easy. No, it was just Tubbo. Tubbo, who was currently... Walking a dog? It was a large, fluffy, white dog, big enough to come up past Tubbo’s waist. If it wasn’t wagging its tail so much, it would’ve looked intimidating.

Tubbo, much like the dog, did not look intimidating. In fact, he looked more akin to a deer caught in headlights. Tubbo was staring straight at Techno, eyes wide as saucers.

And then Tubbo turned heel and started sprinting in the other direction.

Techno was after the kid in a moment, Schlatt following close behind him.

“Tubbo!” Techno yelled. The kid was fast, but Techno had the height advantage, and it didn’t take

him long to catch up and grab the boy by his sweater, only to be nearly immediately slammed into the ground.

Technoblade had *not* expected the sweet-looking, fluffy dog to attack him. It wasn't biting him (thank heavens), but it more or less tackled Techno onto the ground, and certainly would have bitten him if Tubbo hadn't immediately started pulling the dog back by the leash.

"Fran! Stop it! Bad girl!" Tubbo shouted, clearly struggling against the weight of the dog. The animal probably weighed more than Tommy, and Techno shuddered at the thought.

Techno had raised his arms to protect his face the best he could, though he didn't have to, as the dog immediately backed off at Tubbo's words.

He pushed himself to his feet in an instant, brushing off the dirt from his clothes.

"Tubbo? Are you insane? Running away like that, *stealing*, turning your phone off?" Schlatt sounded exasperated. Tubbo gave him a sheepish look, but he kept going. "You could've been hurt, you could've *died*!"

"I... I know. But it was important!"

Schlatt took a deep breath, but Techno spoke before he could. "Where's Tommy?"

"...Who?"

"Tommy. My brother."

"Theo?"

His patience was wearing thin. "Yes, sure. Where is he?"

"He's... Not here. I don't know where he is. Schlatt says he's missing."

Schlatt and Techno exchanged glances.

"Check the house, man. I need to have a *talk*." Schlatt said, turning back to Tubbo.

Techno left them (and the dog) to deal with family stuff. Techno had family stuff of his own to deal with, and apparently that involved meeting Schlatt's sister and convincing her that he needed to help his brother.

Or... Not?

Because the person who answered the door definitely was *not* Schlatt's sister.

This man was *tall*. Techno was tall, over six feet tall himself, but this guy was at least four inches taller than Techno.

He had green hair, blonde roots sticking out. He also had a mask covering the bottom half of his face, and if Techno had to guess, it was to cover scars that were just barely poking out from the bottom of it.

"You need something?" The man asked.

"I'll cut to the chase- where's Tommy?"

"I don't know who that is, but he's not here.."

"Look, I don't know who you are, or what you did to him-"

"What *I* did to him? Last I checked, I wasn't the one that hurt him. Don't think that isn't obvious, Dream." The man spoke with such venom, Techno almost didn't realize that he called him the wrong name. And suddenly, the harsh attitude made a lot of sense.

"No, no- gross, no, I'm not Dream."

"Mhm. I'm sure. Again, I think it's best if you just leave."

"I'm Techno. His brother. Look, I just want to see him-"

"Not happening. Go."

Dream had pushed him out, too. Techno wasn't going to be pushed out. Not again, not ever.

Techno had barely gotten to break Dream's nose. This time, he wanted to break at least a few ribs, too. Maybe a wrist if he was lucky.

Despite being shorter, Techno had the advantage of surprise on his side. So, when he punched the man, he barely had time to react before Techno kned him in the gut.

Where this guy had learned combat, Techno didn't know, but it was clear he was at least somewhat trained, because he started fighting back immediately, and was actually doing a pretty good job.

He wasn't as good of an opponent as Dream, mind you, but it was at least a slightly more fair fight than usual. Punches were blocked, kicks were countered. This man fought less offense and much more defense.

Techno was about to punch him in the jaw when he heard screaming.

Screaming that he recognized.

Tommy.

“Don’t hurt him!” Tommy was yelling, and he must have been right behind the man (who somehow hadn’t managed to move from the doorway in their fight), because his voice was so, *so* close. “Don’t hurt Sam!”

That was enough to make Techno hesitate, and enough for the man (Sam, according to Tommy), to send him to the ground.

His head hit the floor with a loud thud, and for a moment Techno thought he was going to pass out. Well, maybe he did pass out, because this Sam guy should have hit him again, but instead he was extending his hand to Techno.

Slowly, not having many other options, Techno took the extended hand and slowly pulled him to his feet.

Without much word, Techno was brought inside the house and told to sit on the couch before the man disappeared off to somewhere. Awkwardly, he sat on the couch, taking in his surroundings.

There was a coffee table, a tv, and several mis-matched chairs, but Techno really could only focus on the armchair next to him. Because that’s where Tommy sat, curled up, a set of crutches leaning against the seat.

Almost immediately, Techno was visually scanning him for injuries. There were no clear bruises or cuts (thank goodness), and his hair actually looked brushed for once. He was wearing a striped sweater that fit Tommy much better than Techno’s had, but still didn’t look the right size. He wore fluffy socks, and what looked like a splint on his right ankle.

“Tommy?”

Tommy’s gaze snapped up towards him, and it was like Techno could see his emotions in real time. Fear, confusion, anger, relief, and then anger again. “Dream was right.” He spit the words out like they physically hurt him. “I don’t want to see you.”

Techno grimaced. “You don’t mean that.”

“I could tell Sam to make you leave, right now, and he would. He’s very cool. A better protector than you.”

“Tommy... Tommy, I am so, *so* sorry.” Techno didn’t move, didn’t want to scare him more. “I mean it. I really do.”

Confusion again. Sadness. Relief? Anger. “You don’t. You sent me back to *him*. You left me alone *again*.”

Techno took a deep breath. “I did. I shouldn’t have, but I was scared, and I made *ahuge* mistake.”

“You’re lying.”

"Theseus, please..."

Tommy stared over at him for a painfully long moment.

"He died in exile, you know."

Techno frowned. "Who?"

"Theseus. He was all alone and then he died. You never told me that part of the story." If Techno hadn't known better, he would have thought there were tears in the corners of Tommy's eyes.

“I was twelve. I didn’t know the full story.” What else was he supposed to say? Oh, maybe, “Look, I know I messed up. I did. Over and over again. But I want to help you- I want to make it up to you.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “How?”

“I want to make sure Dream can never hurt you again. Get him sent to jail and have him lose his guardianship of you. And, if you’d like... I want to adopt you.”

His eyes widened. Confusion (yet again), excitement, wariness. “Really?”

“I swear on it.”

Tommy stared at him for a long moment, then ever so slowly and carefully, he reached his arms out, so awkwardly that Techno didn’t know what he was doing until Tommy sprung up from his chair (standing on one foot) and toppled forward, somehow ending up in the seat next to Techno, wrapping arms around him a hug.

“Don’t think this means I like you. Or trust you.” Tommy muttered, pulling away as Sam walked into the room.

The man was holding an ice pack, which he gave to Techno with a sheepish expression on his face. “Sorry about that, earlier. If I knew you weren’t Dream, I probably wouldn’t have hit you so hard.”

“S fine. I attacked first, you were in your right.” Techno paused, looking up at the guy. “You’re... Actually a pretty good fighter, you know.”

“Right back at you.” He took a seat in the chair abandoned by Tommy. “The ice pack’s for your

head. You hit the ground pretty hard.”

Techno nodded, pressing the ice pack to the back of his head. “So... You’ve been watching Tommy?”

“Yeah, Puffy and Fran and I.”

“Fran?”

“My dog. Tubbo was walking her...” He trailed off, narrowing his eyes at Technoblade.

“Oh, right. I ran into them- he’s fine. Schlatt, his dad, wanted to talk to him. I’m sure they’re having a great conversation right now.”

His expression relaxed. “Of course.”

They sat in silence for an uncomfortable amount of time. Techno was on the verge of asking to just take Tommy and leave, when the Sam dude spoke again.

“I heard you say you wanted to adopt Tommy, earlier?”

Techno nodded again, quickly. “Yeah, that and send Dream to jail for as long as possible. Sick ba-”

“From what I’ve heard, it seems like you and I are on the same page.”

“We still don’t have any proof to get him arrested, though.”

Tommy spoke up, surprising both of them. Tommy would often go back and forth on his opinion of Dream, and the idea that Tommy would be so quickly willing to get him arrested was a bit confusing. “What about my ankle?”

Techno’s heart just about dropped out of his chest. Sam was the one to speak up.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, if you need proof that he... You know...” Tommy clearly wasn’t comfortable talking about the situation yet, “My ankle hasn’t healed yet.”

Sam nodded, but Techno was still distracted by his horror. “Because he didn’t take you to the hospital? Yeah, that would be a good start.”

“...Yeah, that’s what I meant.”

Techno couldn’t let this one be swept under the rug. He had to ask. He *had* to ask, despite the fact that he really, *really* didn’t want to know. “Tommy... How did you break your ankle?”

“I didn’t. I sprained it-”

“It’s been a month. If it was sprained, it would have healed by now.” He paused, then continued. “I need you to tell me, honestly, what happened.”

Tommy glanced at Sam, then back to Techno. Then he leaned forward and whispered into Techno's ear, barely loud enough to hear, clearly not wanting to say it at all. "He broke it..."

"Who did?"

"...Dream."

Of course he did. Techno knew it before Tommy said it, but it was something about the child fully confirming it that broke him. Techno wrapped Tommy in another tight hug. Tommy flinched at first, but didn't hesitate to hug back, albeit a little awkwardly.

"Woah, okay there, big man, it's fine. No big deal, I'm okay." The words started coming out faster after that, "It's fine, seriously, I deserved it anyway, he-"

"Don't say that. Don't you *dare* say that." He could feel Tommy's flinch at the harsh words, but didn't stop. "You didn't deserve anything you went through. I need you to understand that."

"No, really, I did. I broke rules, I didn't listen, it was my fault."

"Nothing that happened was your fault," Sam cut in, "It's normal to feel guilty for what happened, but that doesn't mean it's true."

"But it *was*. I ran away. Twice, now! Oh, he's going to be so mad..."

"No, because he can't hurt you again." Techno said. "We're going to keep you safe. I promise."

They conversed for a while longer, until Tubbo and Schlatt came back inside, the dog, Fran, immediately pulled out of Tubbo's reach to jump onto Tommy's lap. If the dog hadn't attacked him barely over half an hour ago, Techno might have found it cute.

"Hey, Theo, Tubs, why don't you two go hang out in your room for a bit?" Sam suggested.

Tubbo gave him a look. "Why?"

"We want to talk about boring adult stuff."

Tommy nodded solemnly. "Ah, taxes."

And then the kids were gone, taking the dog with them. It left Techno, Sam, and Schlatt, all in the living room of this stranger's house.

"So... The kids are here. Safe. What do we do, Techie?" Schlatt asked, arms crossed. If he hadn't already reached his weekly quota of fights, Techno would have socked him in the mouth for the nickname.

“I... Don't know, actually. Last time I called CPS, it didn't end so well.”

“Don't call them, they're pretty useless.” Sam said with a sigh. “Honestly? Call the cops, tell them you found the missing kid and explain the whole Dream situation.”

“Are you sure that'll work?”

“Pretty sure. And if not, I will personally kill Dream myself.” Sam's voice got scarily serious on that last part. Techno honestly had to respect it, as he felt the same way.

They did what Sam said. Techno ended up calling the cops and explaining the entire situation- the abuse, the running away, everything.

Before he knew it, they were all standing outside of Puffy's house, Tommy leaning on Tubbo instead of his crutches, which Tubbo had tucked under his own arm. Schlatt was talking to the kids. Sam was talking to the cops. Techno was talking to a social worker.

“And you're his... Brother?”

“Yes. His older brother.”

“Alright. Well, I'll see what I can do in terms of temporary custody, but for now, I will have to take him with me.”

“His ankle is broken.” Techno spoke quickly, “It has been for a while now, he hasn't been able to get to the hospital.”

She blinked. “Oh. Well, we usually take them there first, anyway. That's no big deal. Thank you Mister...”

“Technoblade.”

“Thank you, Mister Technoblade.”

She then walked over and started talking to the children and Schlatt. After barely a minute of talking, Tommy was staring at Techno. Techno had never seen his eyes with such clear pain in them. “You're sending me away. Again.”

“No- no, Theseus, look at me, I would *never* send you away again.”

“You *are*.” He let go off Tubbo and limped forward, the flashes of pain on his face so awfully clear.

“I'm *not*. But they need to take you to the hospital.”

“I don't need a hospital! I am perfectly fine!”

“Tommy, your ankle is broken. They'll take you to get it fixed.”

“Then why can’t *you* take me?”

“I can’t, Tommy. I wish I could but I legally can’t.”

“What if Dream comes?” The fear was evident in his eyes, and Techno saw the way his hands started to shake.

“He won’t. I’ll come to the hospital with you, and even if they won’t let me in, I’ll stand right outside the room and make sure he won’t come in. Okay?”

“...Okay.”

Tommy was led into the back of a car, the woman spoke to him as she got into the front seat. She talked to him like she would a five year old, and Tommy looked very insulted at that.

She drove off with Tommy, and Techno went to his car to follow, but was quickly stopped by a police officer.

“Sir, we have more questions.”

Techno closed his eyes for a long moment. He didn’t want to deal with this. He wanted to make sure his brother felt safe. He wanted to bring his brother home. He had to remind himself that this was an important part of helping Tommy.

Really, this was the final stretch. Dream would be brought to court and prosecuted, and then Techno would be able to adopt Tommy. This was the closest he had been to helping his brother since the kid had shown up originally, and this time, he was going to finish through.

Chapter End Notes

Me? Planning to reply to a bunch of comments this chapter? It's more likely than you think

he's my friend

Chapter Notes

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

Hate was a strong word, but it wasn't strong enough to describe Tommy's feelings. Despise? Loathe? Abhor, that was a good one. Gross, Techno's english major-ness was starting to rub off on him.

Tommy Abhorred hospitals. Nothing good ever happened in them. It was where people went to die.

It was where Wilbur went to die.

It took too much energy to think about Wilbur right now, which didn't really make sense, considering thinking about Wilbur wasn't exactly doing anything physical. Sam and Puffy had talked a little about mental health and "emotional energy", but Tommy hadn't exactly been paying close attention to their words.

What was easier, however, was thinking about words. Like abhor, a word Tommy vividly remembered Techno explaining to him back when Tommy couldn't have been much older than five. They had argued back then, just like they did now, and Tommy's thoughts drifted towards Technoblade.

Techno wanted him. Techno wanted him. Techno was only gone for a little bit. This was temporary. Techno would come back and take him home and they would be okay. This was just temporary.

Tommy sat on a chair in the waiting room next to the woman who brought him there for what felt like ages. Memories of waiting for Wilbur kept creeping in, and it was hard to shake them off.

It was a funny thing, about car crashes. Some people die horribly whereas others come out with nothing more than a few scrapes and bruises.

They had sent Tommy to the waiting room as soon as the doctors determined that he didn't have a concussion or any serious physical injuries. Looking back, he wondered why they would make a ten year old child wait alone. Sure, he was a big man, even back then, but it seemed... Harsh. Uncaring. Cruel. Those were good words, Techno would have liked them.

Eventually he was brought back to an exam room. He was sat on a table where someone checked his arms and legs for something (bruises, probably), though pretty much everything had healed, except for some (apparently very obvious) scars on his back as well as a few on his arms and legs. They'd asked him how he got them, and he answered honestly: telling them that he didn't know.

They came from Dream, of course he knew that, but he didn't remember specific circumstances. Maybe that wasn't exactly what they were asking, but Tommy was still struggling with the whole admitting-what-Dream-did thing.

Which was a problem, as the only way to keep Dream away from him was to tell people what he did.

But didn't Tommy deserve what happened? Maybe the ankle was a little too far, but everything else? He knew he was annoying, he knew he could be hard to live with, he knew that no one else wanted him... Techno talked about adopting him, but that didn't count.

No, no, what Dream did was wrong. The ankle wasn't an accident, and that should be enough for Tommy to realize that he wasn't safe to stay at home anymore. Even if Tommy didn't want to admit it, deep down, he knew it would just get worse.

"Can you move your ankle at all?" The doctor asked out of nowhere. Or maybe he had been talking the entire time and Tommy just hadn't noticed.

"Yeah." He made no move to do so. It felt like knives going through his skin whenever he did, so over the past four weeks, he had kept movement to a minimum. The hospital had even brought him inside in a wheelchair (which Tommy *hated*, simply because he did *not* enjoy the feeling of being pushed around).

"...Do you want to try moving it for me?"

"No."

"Alright, let me phrase it this way," He said, staring right at Tommy, "Move your ankle."

Tommy had to hold back a flinch, because for a moment, the doctor wasn't a doctor, no, the doctor was Dream and Dream was going to hit him and someone put a hand on his back.

Tommy jerked away from it before it finally hit where he was. Still in the hospital, no Dream in sight. The social worker, who had tried putting her hand on his back, now had both hands clasped in front of her. She was glaring at the doctor, asking to be switched to a pediatrician and going off about how she was going to get his medical ID revoked if he tried to talk to a child like that again.

Tommy blinked, and he was in a different room. It was purple. Oh, this must be the children's part of the hospital, which was annoying, because Tommy wasn't a *child*, he was practically an adult at this point. Well, he had four more years until he was legally an adult, but he had stopped caring about legality a long time ago.

The new doctor, the... What word had the social worker used? Pedi... Pedia... Something. The new doctor was a lot nicer than the previous one, politely asking questions and not demanding answers.

Which was good, because Tommy didn't feel like answering anything.

"How long ago were you injured?"

"I don't know." To be fair, he really didn't. It had happened the day after Dream had taken him back, and then... He didn't really know, his brain was kind of in limbo for most of the time, waiting in his room for something. He had started talking to Tubbo, but hadn't kept track of the dates. "A week, maybe two." That was his best estimate, anyway.

"How did you break it?"

Tommy avoided eye-contact. Yes, he had said it to Techno, but that was because Technoblade was *scary*.

That was a lie. It was because he trusted Techno, because he wanted Techno to help him, and he knew that telling the truth was the best way to get that help. He wasn't sure how much doctors could help.

"That's alright. You've been walking on it, haven't you?"

Tommy bit his lip, focusing his vision on the floor tiles below his dangling legs. They were some ugly cream with small dots and streaks of grey, like some gross version of cookies and cream ice cream.

"I see you have crutches, have you been using them?" There was no malice behind the voice, not like how Dream would have asked it. It was probably just to lull him into a false sense of security, but he was willing to take it at this point.

"Yeah. And an ankle brace." The splint had been taken off when the first doctor examined him.

"That's good." This man wasn't a good liar.

"Okay."

He proceeded to ask more questions, to poke around his ankle, though not actually touching it, and Tommy couldn't blame him. It was an ugly shade of purple, his foot practically blue. That could *not* be healthy.

"We need to take a few X-rays, just to check the damages. But you'll definitely need surgery. Have you ever had an X-ray before, Tommy?"

"...No. My brother got one, once."

“Did he tell you about what it was like?”

“Kind of.”

The man then described in detail what an X-ray was as Tommy was wheeled to the machine. It should have bothered him more how he was treated like a kid, some weak child who couldn't even walk, but it didn't. He was too tired to fight it, and at least he wasn't being yelled at or hit, so he allowed it.

That said, it didn't help the anxiety that bubbled in his chest.

It had taken six hours for Wilbur to get his broken arm checked out all those years ago. Phil, Techno, and Wilbur had been at the hospital for six *hours*, and Tommy had been *sure* Wilbur had died. He hadn't, of course, and Will later explained to him that unless you're literally dying, the hospital was a really slow process.

It had been that explanation that made Tommy panic when Wilbur had been rushed through the hospital after the accident.

It was now that explanation that made Tommy panic as he had what he thought to be the fastest X-ray in his life. Maybe it was normal, he didn't know, but it certainly hadn't taken him six hours like Wilbur had.

“Well, it's definitely broken.” The doctor said with a tight-lipped smile. The kind of smile you make when something's bad, but you don't want it to look that way. “You managed to break it pretty badly, actually. Have you ever heard of a comminuted fracture, Tommy?”

“No..?”

“Your ankle broke into four big pieces. It looks like the original break was here and here-” he gestured to two spots on the x-ray, “But as you kept walking on it, you managed to break it into smaller pieces. There are even some tiny pieces over here.” The doctor then looked up at the social worker- Alyssa, she had said her name was when he first met her. “Do you have contact with his parents? The bone isn't infected, but the sooner we can get him into surgery, the better.”

“I... I'll call my boss, see what I can do.” Alyssa said.

Tommy was wheeled into a hospital room. Unlike the boring white walls he remembered from Wilbur's room, this room had brightly colored red and blue walls. It was, honestly, pretty ugly, but at least it wasn't boring. They sat him up in the bed and turned on the TV for him.

He waited twenty minutes before convincing himself that, yes, he was allowed to turn the channel

to something that actually interested him, and settled on watching some animated movie he had never even heard of.

Tommy was a big man, he didn't care about kid's cartoons by any means, he just... He was bored, so he had paid attention to the movie. It wasn't like there was much else to do.

The sound of talking outside of his doorway shifted his focus.

"-My child. You can't stop me from seeing him." He knew that voice. It was Dream.

No, no, no, Dream couldn't be here. Dream could *not* be here. He was actually, genuinely going to kill Tommy. There was no way he wouldn't, not after every rule Tommy had broken. Part of him wanted to reach for the remote and switch the channel back to whatever Alyssa had put on, as if that would make anything better, but he couldn't move.

"Sir, you can't go in there." He didn't recognize that voice.

"I'll sue. I'm his family, his *only* family," Tommy swore the more Dream talked since the incident, the more Tommy noticed his lies, "I have every right to be in there."

"For his safety, you're not allowed in the room."

"For his..." Dream trailed off and Tommy could hear the frown in his voice. "You're kidding. Look, I don't know what his brother told you, but he's always been out to get me."

"It doesn't matter, you're not allowed in the room."

"Please, he's my *child*. He's *hurt*. I want to see him." Dream sounded so genuinely worried that for a moment, Tommy completely forgot that Dream probably wanted him dead.

Until the social worker's voice cut through. "Ah, you're Dream, then? Great, I was worried when you wouldn't pick up the phone."

"...Who are you?"

"Alyssa. Your son-" Tommy was *not* his son, "-has been temporarily placed into the care of the state on allegations of abuse. You're to appear at court soon to testify. You need to get in contact with a lawyer- or you can have one provided to you-"

"Abuse? That's *ridiculous*. I'm not going to stand for this, you can't- you're insane."

Dream sounded... Desperate. Panicked. Like he hadn't prepared for this. It made Tommy shudder- the man was usually so calm (or angry, but this wasn't that), hearing him sound genuinely panicked and... Sad? It was weird

“You can take it up in court. For now, your son is going to be treated for his injuries and will see you in court.”

“No, no, no, you can’t be serious.”

“I am, sir. If you have nothing else to say, I have business to attend to.”

Apparently the ‘business’ was Tommy, because she walked into his room. Dream walked away- he could tell by the sound of his shoes against the tile floor.

Alyssa must not have known he could hear the conversation, because she started a completely different one- explaining how the state was going to sign off on the papers for surgery and he would get his ankle fixed by the end of the day.

Before he knew it, he was being taken off to surgery, someone was putting him under anesthesia (which was a *really* weird process), and then... Everything was dark again.

Tommy woke up feeling better than he had in weeks, maybe years. There were still traces of pain in his ankle, but it was much better than it was before, and didn’t come with the dizziness and nausea that accompanied the pain meds Dream had given him.

Tommy wished he could lie there forever, calm and comfortable, under the blankets.

He wondered if Wilbur felt like this in his last moments, or if he had died scared and in pain.

Yeah, okay, that was enough to get Tommy to jolt up in bed, his eyes shooting open, starting to gasp for air like he hadn’t breathed once during the surgery.

Another hand was on his back and Tommy jerked away from it. Or, he tried to jerk away from it, but really just shuffled around in the hospital bed.

“Woah, it’s alright, mate. Take a deep breath, you’re okay.”

He glanced over at the person. Dream? There was the blonde hair, the green jacket. But no, it wasn’t Dream. The hair was too short, and Dream didn’t wear hats. Dream didn’t have a beard,

either. Tommy felt like he should have recognized this man, though he wasn't sure why.

"...Where's Techno?"

"He's coming here straight from work right now." He looked uncomfortable. Why couldn't Tommy place where he was from? Even his voice sounded familiar.

"Oh."

Tommy sat up a little straighter and sighed.

"How are you feeling, kiddo?"

Who did he know that called him kiddo?

Phil did. Or, dad, he guessed? Tommy had never really called Phil 'dad', even when he still lived with him. Honestly, Wilbur was really the only person who called him that, and now Wilbur was... Whatever.

"I'm okay." Tommy wanted to bring his knees up to his chest for a bit of comfort, but something told him that it wouldn't be smart to do that with a healing ankle. So instead, he stayed where he was.

They lapsed into silence almost immediately. It wasn't like Tommy had anything to say to Phil, not really. And apparently Phil didn't have anything to say back, either.

"Do... You want to watch TV?" Phil tried, gesturing to the remote next to the bed.

Tommy just shrugged at that. He didn't want to watch TV with Phil, not really, but he didn't know what Phil would do if he outright told him 'no'. He understood Dream's "parenting style", he knew what would get him punished. Techno was a little harder to understand, and Tommy hadn't really tried to push anything while he had stayed with him, but for the most part, Tommy had figured out how Techno's "parenting style" worked.

Phil, on the other hand, Tommy had no clue about. Phil was practically a stranger, which was weird, since they had shared a home for the first six years of Tommy's life. But Phil was never a parent to him, not then, not really.

Gosh, Tommy wanted Sam. Sam would have been able to scare away Phil (and Dream, assuming he was still lurking around the hospital somewhere). Sam would have brought Fran with him and

Fran would have sat on Tommy's lap and licked his face and Sam would have given Tommy treats to feed her.

He wanted Techno. Techno would have also been able to scare anyone away, and Tommy could joke with and annoy him without too much consequence.

He wanted Wilbur. Wilbur would have wrapped him up in a hug. He would have brought his guitar in and played Tommy songs until he fell back asleep. Wilbur wouldn't have let any of the last month and a half happen to begin with, though he guessed it was much too late now.

Phil grabbed the remote and turned on the TV, flicking through channels. "Are there any shows you like in particular?"

"No, not really."

This was awkward. This was uncomfortable.

It took Techno far too long to arrive, but boy was Tommy relieved when he did. He had been sitting for the last thirty minutes in silence save for the tv playing whatever show in the background. Phil hadn't said a word to him, and Tommy hadn't spoken, either.

Techno had clearly come straight from work- his hair was still up, his sweater still on, and more importantly, a school lanyard hung around his neck. With his glasses on, he looked like a major nerd. A huge, tall nerd, but a nerd nonetheless.

"Hello." Techno ducked through the doorway with an awkward wave. "How are you feeling, Theseus?"

"Better. Is..." He paused, not sure how to say it without being too blunt. "Is Dream really not allowed to see me?"

"No, he's not. Technically," He lowered his speaking volume slightly, "Phil's not supposed to either, but don't tell anybody."

"Okay."

This was weird. This was *so* weird. Because two weeks ago, he'd been trapped in the house with Dream, in constant mind-numbing pain. He hadn't thought he would actually escape. No, not escape, leave. Escape was too harsh because Dream was (wasn't?) his friend. But now he was here, in a hospital, in the least pain he had been in in weeks. Dream wasn't allowed to see him, which meant he wasn't allowed to hurt him.

Not yet, anyway.

He knew they would have to go to court. The social worker had explained it a little bit, even said that Tommy's testimony would be the biggest determinate in what happened. That thought alone terrified him, but he forced himself to stay calm.

Maybe for now, he could just sit with Techno and Phil. He could watch whatever channel had been put on the TV. He could relish this little bit of peace before his life changed forever.

It had taken a day before the hospital discharged him. Much too long, in Tommy's opinion, despite Techno saying that they should have kept him longer.

The social worker had said they really only let him out this soon because of the court case.

Right, the court case.

Tommy fidgeted the entire drive to the court, not being really able to focus on anything. He didn't know what to do, didn't know what to say, nothing. Because Techno wanted to adopt him, and Tommy wanted that, too. But at the same time... Dream wasn't a bad guardian. Dream had done his best, right? Dream would never hurt Tommy on purpose... Except he had. The cast around his ankle and foot proved that. The social worker even had doctors notes to show just how badly it had been broken.

Tommy was introduced to a man called Quackity, which was, in his opinion, a really weird name. The guy kept making jokes to him, though, and Tommy hesitantly made jokes back, but he was fine for the most part.

Quackity explained to him how the whole thing was going to work. The case would be presented, and then they would basically interview a few people to determine what had happened to Tommy while living there and decide what would happen next.

Quackity and Dream's lawyer would talk to Dream and Tommy, mostly. There was a good chance they'd talk to Technoblade, too. No one else was really an established 'witness', as Quackity put that. Tommy wasn't quite sure what an established witness was, but he didn't ask, either.

Before he knew it, Tommy was sitting on an uncomfortable wooden bench next to Techno and Phil. He had expected to be like those court shows on TV, but there was no jury listening to the

case or anything. He didn't know if that was normal or not.

There was a lot of boring talking, and then Dream was called up to the stand and sworn in.

Tommy couldn't stop looking at Dream, who was looking right back at him. There wasn't anger in his eyes and somehow that made it all worse. Because if Dream was angry at Tommy, then everything would be fine. Well, it wouldn't be fine, but it would be familiar. Tommy would know how to deal with it. Plus, he would be happy to get away from Dream if he was angry.

But now? Now Dream looked sad. He looked innocent. He looked nothing like the man who had screamed at him, who had locked him in his room, taken his things, broken his ankle.

Maybe it was just because he expected Dream to be led out by cops, wearing an orange jumpsuit and his hands chained together, but he wasn't. He was dressed nicely, like he was going to work, not like he was going to prison.

He didn't want Dream to go to prison.

Tommy barely listened to Dream's defense. He had started with "I took Tommy in after Wilbur's tragic death", and quickly tuned out of the conversation. The bits he caught when he wasn't paying attention to the patterns in the carpet weren't very good anyway.

And then the jerk mentioned Wilbur again.

"I think his brother's death hit him hard. Ever since then, he... He's almost been in his own little world. He makes things up, these lies, though I prefer to call them "stories", about the world around him. Tommy is very creative, truly, but I never thought he'd take his stories so far as to run away."

"Right. And why do you think he ran away?" Quackity asked.

"He... he always loved stories about heroes. Knights in shining armor and all that. In his mind, he's the hero, and I think he needed a villain-"

"Get to the point."

The judge banged his gavel down, probably angry at Quackity for interrupting, but Tommy was glad that he had. Dream shouldn't get to ramble over these blatant lies.

"He needed a villain, and that happened to be me. He convinced himself I was the bad guy and the

only way to get out was to run away. He even convinced Techno of his... Delusions, I guess we can call it that."

It went on like that for a while, and the point of Dream's speech basically boiled down to calling Tommy crazy, which Tommy *hated*. Eventually, thankfully, Dream was led off of the stand, and Tommy was led onto it.

They swore him in on a bible, which in any other situation, Tommy would have found very cool. Now he couldn't be bothered to care.

"Tommy, I need you to be completely honest with me, okay? I know some of these questions might be uncomfortable, but answer them the best you can." Quackity said. His voice was softer than it was before, and Tommy was pretty sure it was out of pity.

"Okay."

"What is Dream like as a guardian?"

Tommy thought for a minute before answering. He had a lot of people as 'guardians' lately, and none were even sort of like Dream was. "Strict."

"In what ways is he strict?"

"He..." He glanced at Dream, then back to Quackity. "He has a lot of rules. Stuff I'm not allowed to do."

"Can you name some of these rules?"

"...Don't leave the house without asking. Don't talk back." He swallowed, then continued. "I can't have friends over or go to their houses. I'm not allowed to keep things I haven't earned."

"What constitutes you 'earning' something?"

"I..." Tommy scrunched up his nose, thinking. What *did* constitute earning something? He wasn't sure. Toys and money, things he worked hard for, were taken away. Even presents Dream himself gave him were taken away. "I don't know."

"That's alright. what happens to the things that you haven't earned?"

"He takes them away."

"Can you give me an example of when this has happened?"

"Uh..." He shot another glance at Dream, who's expression was difficult to read. There was a slight smile on lips now, and Tommy knew why.

Dream had trained him on this. Not specifically for being in a court- Dream probably never thought this would happen- but for when adults questioned about his home life. He knew what he was

supposed to do and say. He knew what would happen if he didn't.

Dream would kill him.

Well, no, not really. That wasn't the threat- punishment- whatever- at the time. Back then it would be to lock him in his room without food for a few days, Dream might have beaten him up a little, too.

But Tommy had been locked in his room for weeks beforehand, locking him in there again would do nothing. Tommy had barely been eating lately, so lack of food wouldn't be anything new. And a beating... Dream couldn't go much further than broken bones, and he had already done that.

The longer Tommy had lived with Dream, the worse punishments got. It went from light slaps to full on beatings and then to breaking bones. Tommy wasn't stupid- there wasn't much more he could do besides fully killing Tommy.

But he wouldn't really do that, right?

Then again, there was a point where Tommy thought Dream wouldn't hurt him badly, either.

Dream *would* kill him if Tommy testified against him.

Wouldn't he kill him anyway? After he ran away *twice*, after he messaged Tubbo, after he broke every rule Dream had set, over and over again?

"It's alright, Tommy, just take a deep breath." Quackity's voice cut through his thoughts. How long had he been standing, avoiding the question? He didn't know, but now he realized just how much his breathing had been sped up.

"I bought a phone." His voice was shakier than he intended, but thinking about that day made his heart race. "A burner, uh, a friend suggested it, even helped me pay for it. When Dream found out, he was really mad at me.... He smashed the phone..."

Quackity's eyes flicked to Techno, just for a minute, as if thinking something (though Tommy had no idea what). "Is that all he did?"

"He... He..." Tommy closed his eyes, scrunching up his face again. He didn't want to say it. Didn't want to admit it. Especially not with Dream right *there*, listening to everything. Technoblade would protect him. He knew that, but the panick-y side of his brain wasn't quite understanding that. "He tore up my picture of Wilbur." Honestly, in Tommy's opinion, that was worse than the

beating, anyway.

“And Wilbur is your brother, right?”

“He is. But he died... “ Another pause, “A few years ago. It was the last picture I had of him.”

“Did Dream do anything else?”

He hated how Quackity didn't seem to care at all about the photo. It was *important*, okay? Maybe not to the court, but to *him* it was. Even if Techno had given him a new one, it wasn't the same.

Tommy glanced at Dream. He shouldn't have, he really shouldn't, because Dream was looking right back at him. There was no thinly veiled anger, and the smile was gone, left there was only... Nothing, really. Barely even an expression. He wished Dream was just angry, it would have made it easier.

He switched his gaze to Technoblade instead, whose expression was definitely *not* blank. He looked... Focused, certainly. Worried. When he realized Tommy was looking at him, he gave him an, albeit awkward, reassuring smile.

Tommy's heart was pounding now. He had to force himself to breathe, to think about Tubbo, about Puffy and Sam and Techno.

And Wilbur.

Forget about how he was under oath, *Wilbur* would have wanted him to tell the truth.

“He hit me.”

“Did he hit you very hard?”

“I... I don't know... I kind of... I space out a lot, when I'm being punished like that.”

“That's alright. Did he hurt you in any other ways?”

“He... He kicked me. A lot, I think. I was on the floor at some point.”

“How often does he hurt you, Tommy?”

Oh, no. This wasn't what he wanted. He needed to backtrack. Forget about Techno, forget about Wilbur, Dream was going to be so angry. “No- no- he- I'm sorry, it's not a big deal, it's only when I deserve it.”

“When do you think you ‘deserve it’?”

“When I break rules.”

He swore he saw a shift in Quackity's expression, but he wasn't sure what it shifted to. “Alright. So

you broke a rule by buying the phone, and in return Dream smashed the phone, tore up an important possession of yours, and hit you?”

Well, when he phrased it like that it sounded bad. That *was* what happened, though. “Yeah.”

“And after he hurt you, what happened?”

“He told me to clean up the mess- cause there were bits of the phone and glass, y’know, from the photo frame. And then he told me he’d come back in the morning and left.”

“He left you alone in the house?”

“Yeah.”

“Does he leave you alone a lot?”

“Sometimes, but not really. Only if he’s busy at work or whatever, but he’s usually there for me. He’s a good guardian, he’s my friend.”

Okay, he definitely saw a shift in Quackity’s expression there, the man was grimacing. Had he said something wrong?

“Okay. So, what did he do after he left you?”

“I...” Another glance at Technoblade. The reassuring smile was back. It looked bad on him. “I ran away. I went to Techno’s- to Technoblade’s house.” He corrected himself, trying to sound a little more professional. He *was* in court, after all. “And... And he let me stay there for a bit, before Dream took me home again.”

He would have much preferred to talk more about how nice it was to stay at Technoblade’s house. He would have preferred everything over talking about how Dream treated him, but apparently that was unimportant. Tommy found it very important, personally, but Quackity did not.

“And what happened after he took you home?”

“He put me in my room for a while, and then he came in and he... He...” Tommy couldn’t look at anyone anymore. Not at Quackity, not at Technoblade, not at Dream, not at the judge, no one. He stared down at his hands, which were shaking in his lap.

When he was a kid, Wilbur would grab his hands and squeeze them twice. It was to symbolize... Something. Tommy couldn’t remember the specifics. It might have been “I love you” or “I’m here for you”, or something along those lines.

It was reassuring, he remembered that much. Wilbur had done it on Tommy’s first day of preschool and kindergarten, he had done it when they moved out together, when he was dealing with bullies in school, when Phil didn’t show up to his birthday parties.

He wished Wilbur would do it now.

Tears slipped down Tommy's face and he didn't bother stopping them. He was still staring down at his still-shaking hands. "He told me he wouldn't hurt me." Tommy murmured, voice cracking about halfway through.

"I know it's hard to talk about, but I need you to tell me what Dream did. Can you do that for me?"

He couldn't. He really, really couldn't. But he had to. "He broke my ankle." He whispered, not sure if it was even audible.

"Dream broke your ankle?"

He nodded in confirmation.

"I need vocal confirmation, Tommy."

"Dream..." Deep breaths. Speak up. "Dream broke... Broke my ankle..." It was still barely just above a whisper.

"How did he do that?"

"I don't know." Tommy's gaze snapped up, stealing another glance at Dream. The blank expression was gone, replaced with barely-covered fear.

Was Dream... Afraid? Of Tommy?

"He had some sort of... I don't know. A hammer, maybe? It was metal. I- I was on the floor, he hit... My ankle... With the... The whatever-it-was."

"How many times did he hit it?"

"Once, I think. I'm not sure, I blacked out."

He looked at Phil, just for a moment, and was surprised to see the man's eyes all wide and teary. He looked terrified and sad all at once, and Tommy was quite sure if he could see his hands they would be balled up in fists.

Techno, on the other hand, looked angry.

Tommy wondered what he said that was wrong? Didn't Techno want him to tell the truth? He thought he did... He couldn't panic. Not now. Afterwards, definitely, but not now.

The conversation went on like that for a while. Quackity asked him questions about what

happened, and Tommy responded. He talked about being locked in his room for weeks, the lack of medical support for his ankle, and how he ran away again. He talked about a few older incidents, too. About being screamed at and getting broken ribs and black eyes and other things.

No matter what Tommy said, it was returned with tight, worried expressions from everyone else. Tommy didn't understand what he was doing wrong. He really hoped they weren't going to ask him afterwards, because he had no idea. All he knew was that what he was saying was upsetting people.

Even when he explained what he did to deserve the punishments, and how Dream was right- he was a troublemaker, that he deserved what had happened. Nothing seemed to please them.

“Dream isn't... He's not a bad person. I know I said... I said a lot of things, but he's a good guardian. He's my friend. He doesn't want to hurt me, I just mess up sometimes. Parents have to correct their kids, it's what they do.”

He was taken off the stand fairly quickly after that.

There was more discussion after that. They led Techno up, too, but Tommy hadn't paid attention to what his brother was saying for the most part. He wasn't sure why he couldn't pay attention, but it felt like every time he tried to tune into the speech, his mind pulled him further and further away.

He caught a few words from Techno, though, like, “a hundred miles” and “starving him” and “panic attack” and “he looked terrified”. Considering all those words sounded extremely negative, Tommy didn't mind not having to listen to them.

Eventually came the point where the social worker- not Quackity, which Tommy thought was weird- presented what she thought was the best plan for what to do with Tommy.

“I believe it will be best if he's put into foster care.” Alyssa said. Her hands were folded in front of her and she had this look on her face as if what she said was completely innocent and not totally against what Tommy wanted.

Dream was right: all they really wanted to do was stick him somewhere with some family who would hurt him even worse. Even if he got away from Dream, there would always be someone else, somewhere else, who would hurt him. No matter what he did, he could never truly get away. He should have stuck with Dream- at least he knew what would happen.

“No.” Tommy didn't mean to speak, he really didn't, but he couldn't just stay quiet, either.

Alyssa shot him a look. The judge, however, didn't look as annoyed. In fact, he sort of looked like he wanted Tommy to continue.

So Tommy did just that. "I want to stay with Technoblade. He's taken care of me before, and he's good at it, and he said he wanted to adopt me." A quick glance at Techno assured him as the man nodded slightly. "

The judge took a deep breath before speaking. "Alright. We'll take a fifteen minute recess and will come back to discuss the final decision."

Chapter End Notes

Oops this chapter took so much longer than it should have, considering I wrote the majority of it today.

Mini cliffhanger for today. Next chapter? Who knows.

Also, I'm fairly new to writing on Ao3, so... Hypothetically, if I had written a one-shot type thing about Wilbur's time raising Tommy, would you prefer that as a bonus chapter in this fic, or as a separate one-shot in a series with this story?

i swear on my life, theseus

Chapter Notes

Apologies for the late chapter, but 60,000+ words and 171 pages of a google doc later, and this story is finally finished.

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

Techno switched rapidly between watching Tommy and trying to give him reassuring nods as Tommy explained what happened, to watching Phil, who looked horrified, to watching Dream's even worse expression.

Tommy looked terrified as he spoke, as if he was traversing a minefield. He probably was- mentally, at least. Techno hadn't known the details of what the kid had been through, but hearing Tommy himself describe it, Techno wanted to cry.

Phil was crying. Just a little bit, and he quickly wiped the tears away before most people saw it. Techno did see, though he didn't mention it.

Dream looked... It was hard to describe it. Not angry, not annoyed, not even smug like he had been when he showed up at Techno's house. He looked calm, calculated.

He wasn't surprised by what Dream had said about Tommy. Going off about how confused the boy was, how he was struggling mentally and that was why he had run away. Techno hadn't fallen for it, not even a little bit. Not after everything he had seen and heard from Tommy. He prayed that the judge saw through Dream's words, too.

And then Tommy was called up on stand.

Quackity was the one to ask him questions, carefully coaxing out answers from Tommy. How he managed to be so calm through the entire event, Techno didn't know. The long pauses Tommy would take before answering a question, as if debating whether he was really safe to answer it, was enough to make Techno panic just a little.

He didn't know what had happened when CPS came (if CPS even came at all), but something told him Dream had done something to convince Tommy not to tell anyone about what was happening to him.

The actual answers Tommy gave to the questions were awful. Not that Tommy was doing anything wrong, because he was telling the truth, but the truth hurt so badly.

Tommy had walked over one hundred miles to Techno's office because of a phone. A *phone*. The kid had wanted to text his friends, and Dream had destroyed his property and *beaten* him for it.

Techno was going to kill him.

He was going to stand up in the middle of the court and pummel Dream right then and there. It would be full on pre-meditated murder (maybe voluntary manslaughter), and it would be so, *so* worth it.

His hands curled into fists, nails digging roughly into his palms. He couldn't kill Dream. Not yet, not when Tommy still needed him.

Techno's hands were starting to shake by the time Tommy explained what happened to his ankle.

Dream had been the one to break it. Techno had been suspicious of that for a little while now, but Techno also assumed it was at least somewhat an accident. He had figured Dream pushed him down some stairs, tripped him- something.

But no. It was thought out. Planned, even. Dream had *smashed* it with a blunt object. He had purposefully hurt Techno's baby brother in what had to be the worst way possible. Not to mention, left the injury untreated for over a month.

Techno didn't get time to react before Phil's hand gripped his own. It wasn't comforting like usual- not to calm his shaking hands or ground him in any way. This was fully for Phil's own benefit.

Techno spared a glance at Phil, and was surprised to see the man staring up at Tommy, his eyes filled with horror. Silent tears dripped down his face, and the rise and fall of his chest was unsteady. He seemed paler than usual, too.

He let his hand relax before grabbing Phil's hand back, squeezing it lightly as he did so. If Techno hadn't considered the abuse from the moment he'd seen Tommy, he would have reacted the same way. He still felt like reacting that way on the inside, honestly.

It killed him that Tommy just continued. That he kept talking, kept explaining the hell he'd been put through, the abuse, the manipulation. It was even worse that he kept trying to backtrack and apologize, throwing nervous glances at every person in the room as he did so.

Because, Techno realized, Tommy *had* been manipulated. Despite everything he had been through, he was still trying desperately to excuse Dream's actions. He still called Dream a good person, a friend, even.

He still said that everything that happened was his own fault.

Technoblade had not cried when Wilbur died. He hadn't cried at the funeral, either. It took him a month to compute his feelings enough to even shed a tear.

But right now, Techno wanted to cry. He wanted to attack Dream. He wanted to run up to the stand and hold Tommy and tell him that none of what happened was ever his fault. He wanted to take back everything Tommy had been through in the last four years.

But he couldn't.

"Dream isn't... He's not a bad person." Tommy said. His voice was *shaking*. Techno's breath hitched as the kid continued. "I know I said... I said a lot of things, but he's a good guardian." He wasn't. "He's my friend." He wasn't. "He doesn't want to hurt me." He *had* hurt him. "I just mess up sometimes."

Techno forced himself to take a deep breath. He didn't want to listen to this, but he had to. For Tommy.

"Parents have to correct their kids." He wanted to grab Tommy by the arms and shake him to tell him that what Dream did was lightyears past 'correcting', and that Tommy had done nothing wrong.

It didn't take long for Tommy to be led off of the stand and back to sitting with Techno and Phil. Or- oh... Not Techno and Phil. Just Techno. As soon as Tommy walked back to them, Phil muttered some weak excuse and left the room.

Tommy looked at him with fear. He looked sad, and it broke Techno's heart all over again, and he couldn't even comfort him before Techno himself was called up to testify.

And testify he did. He explained everything he knew about the situation- Tommy, showing up at his office building out of nowhere. How the kid walked a hundred miles (hundred and two, Tommy had corrected). His fading black eye and the dried blood cresting his forehead. The panic attack Tommy had when Techno even mentioned calling Dream.

He spoke of the stealing. The photo of Wilbur Tommy had taken, as well as the food from Techno's kitchen. He talked about when Tommy had mentioned being starved by Dream, locked in

his room for days at a time.

As Techno spoke, he couldn't help the grief that overcame him. Because there was *so much* he could talk about. There shouldn't have been that many things. Tommy had only been with Dream for four years. Techno had only been aware of Tommy's situation for a month. He had only stayed with Techno for a week. There shouldn't be that much information, but there was.

Techno felt himself getting choked up again. He forced himself to continue. He had to be strong, but it was so difficult. He hadn't even *cared* about the kid two months ago, why couldn't he just go back to then?

Before he knew it, he was off the stand. They were on a fifteen minute recess while the judge decided their fate.

As soon as they were out of the room, Techno was forcing himself to slow his breathing. He was on the verge of a panic attack, and now was *not* the time. Tommy had been brought back over to the social worker, despite his protests, leaving Techno to find Phil.

Phil was not hard to find. He was standing right outside the doors, leaning against the wall. Even though his head was down, it was clear he was crying by the shake of his shoulders.

"Phil." Techno spoke softly, moving to stand next to his father.

"Techno. How... Did they...?"

"No verdict yet. Fifteen minute recess."

"Ah."

They stood for a moment, relishing in the silence of the courthouse.

"He... Dream really... I trusted him..." Phil murmured, mostly to himself. Techno stared at him for a moment, then put a (hopefully) comforting hand on his shoulder.

"I know."

"He hurt Tommy... He hurt my... He hurt my son." When was the last time Phil referred to Tommy as his 'son'? It had to have been before Wilbur had moved out, but Techno wasn't sure he had *ever* referred to Tommy as his own child.

No, he hadn't. Techno remembered, now, Wilbur and Phil getting into shouting matches over it. Wilbur kept yelling about how it was 'despicable' how Phil would go so far as to refuse to say he was Tommy's father. Techno hadn't paid attention to much of it, focusing more on getting Tommy away and distracting the kid from the yelling.

He had forgotten about that. How he used to pull the five year old into his room and play games with him, or put his headphones over Tommy's ears under the guise of having him listen to 'cool songs', when really it was just to drown out the shots.

"I know."

Phil's expression turned dark, sparing a glance up at Technoblade. "I'm going to kill him."

He couldn't help the small grin that spread across his face. "You want some help with that?"

"Of course."

"Good."

A beat, then,

"How's Tommy doing?"

"I don't think they'll let me see him 'till after the verdict."

Phil nodded. "But how did he look?"

"Terrified." Terrified wasn't a strong enough word for how he looked, but it was the best Techno could come up with on short notice.

"I just... I never thought... I left him with that... That monster."

"You did." What was he supposed to say? He wasn't going to comfort Phil when it was his mistake in the first place. Granted, it was Techno's mistake, too, and he had been beating himself up over it for the last few weeks.

"I can't believe I ever thought Dream was a good person. Even back when you two were kids, you..."

"We were always getting into fist fights, yeah. But I thought he had matured since then. He seemed so... Normal. Nice, even."

"He used to call me, you know."

Techno furrowed his brow. "No?"

"Back when he first took Tommy in. Just every other week or so, telling me how Tommy was doing- always said he was doing fine- and asking if I wanted to talk to him. I... I told him I didn't. I told him to stop calling me all the time." Phil brought a hand up to his mouth. "This is all my fault."

“Phil-”

“Wilbur used to yell at me for ignoring Tommy. And... He was right, I really did ignore him. Even when he was with Dream, I ignored him.”

“Phil-” He tried again, only to be cut off.

“If I had bothered to check in on him, even once, maybe-”

“You couldn’t have known, Phil. No one did.”

“‘No one’ being who? You and me?”

“His teachers. His doctor. Phil, take a breath, I know you’re panicking.”

Phil took a slow, deep breath. “I wish I had seen it sooner.”

“Me, too.”

Another bout of silence.

Their silence used to be so comfortable, but now it was suffocating. Claustrophobic, even. Because when it was silent, Techno was left to think of Tommy. Of Dream. Of-

“You know” Phil must have read his thoughts, “He would be proud of you.”

“What?” If Techno’s voice cracked a little, neither man mentioned it.

“Wilbur would be so proud of you. For everything you’ve done. For taking Tommy in, for getting Dream arrested. If he was here, he would...” Phil trailed off, seemingly unsure of where to go with that last statement.

If Wilbur was there, none of them would have been in the situation to begin with.

Then again, Phil wouldn’t have called Tommy his son. Techno wouldn’t have gotten to know Tommy at all.

There were times in his life where Techno so desperately wanted his twin brother back. Where that was all he could think about, and how he would have done anything to bring him back, even for a minute.

It was unfair, he thought, that Tommy had gotten to spend so much time with Wilbur, and Techno hadn’t.

He didn't think that anymore.

Because, even with the heavy absence of Wilbur, they were more of a family than they had been in the last eight years. Maybe since Tommy was born. Since their mom died.

"They're going to call us back in, soon. Are you going to come with me?"

Phil nodded, seeming to tear up again.

Soon enough they found themselves sitting in the stands. Tommy was sitting next to the social worker, and Techno tried to flash him a reassuring smile, but his brother refused to meet his gaze.

The judge walked in. Everyone stood, then sat back down.

They gave a vague speech about justice that Techno could care less about. All he cared about was the outcome of the court case. Of sending Dream to prison. Of bringing Tommy home. Of making Wilbur proud.

The judge spoke. "Dream will be sentenced for five years in prison, with possibility of parole, for charges of child abuse, child endangerment, and child neglect."

He deserved more than five years. He deserved *so much more* than only five years. But this was a start, at least.

"Thomas Watson will be put into the care of the state and will be placed immediately into foster care,"

No.

No.

Techno wanted to shout, to yell, to argue. He wanted to explain how Tommy *couldn't* be in foster care, how Techno had promised he could live with him.

He didn't get the chance to, as the judge continued their sentence.

"Temporarily." Oh. *Oh*. Did he *really* have to take a pause before that? "Until his brother, Technoblade Watson, can suitably prepare his accommodations. When he is ready to accommodate the child will be determined by state inspection."

He wanted to laugh. Actually, genuinely, laugh. Not out of humor, but out of happiness. Tears pricked his eyes, but he quickly brushed them away. No use showing emotion right now.

He was ecstatic. The next moments passed quickly, and before he knew it, the social worker was talking to him and Phil, explaining what would happen next and what Techno needed to do in order to 'accomodate' Tommy.

He didn't expect Tommy to be angry.

"You said you'd let me stay."

"I *will*, Theseus." He reassured. "It's just going to take a little time."

Tommy shook his head wildly. "I can't. I don't- I can't live with strangers."

"It's just until I can get your room set up."

"Why can't I live with Schlatt until then? Or Sam and Puffy?"

"Because, legally, they can't take care of you."

"You said I would stay with you."

"You will. I promise, Theseus."

Tommy stared at him for a long moment, his eyes calculating. Techno couldn't help but notice how they seemed to be just a little pink. Had he been crying? Why was he wondering that- of *course* the kid had been crying. He had just gone and testified of his abuse in front of everyone, that had to be terrifying for him.

"It won't be long, I promise." Techno said a little softer than before. "You'll move in before you know it."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm sure. And, you can call me at any point, okay? I'll give you my number, and-"

"I already have your number. On the post-it."

Right, the post-it. The little note Techno had hidden in Tommy's backpack. But if Tommy had

found it, then...

“Why didn’t you call me when you ran away again?”

Tommy immediately stared at the floor, shaking his head slightly. “I don’t know. I didn’t want you to send me back to Dream again.”

“Oh, Tommy...” He paused briefly, before wrapping his arms around Tommy in a hug, lifting the child (teenager) slightly off the ground.

It was uncomfortable, to be honest. Tommy was stick-thin (they’d have to work on that), and the crutches Tommy had been using to stand were currently jutting into Techno’s ribs. Still, he didn’t dare let go. Techno wasn’t going to let him go ever again if he could help it.

Schlatt, Phil, and Sam had been placed in charge of cleaning out Technoblade’s office. Normally, he wouldn’t trust people going through his things, especially considering he had interacted with Sam exactly once, and that had been when he got into a physical altercation with him, but Phil had promised that they would all be very careful with his belongings. He also made Schlatt promise to be on his best behavior.

That left Techno to do the shopping. He thought he would do it alone, but Schlatt’s sister (who’s name Techno had frankly forgotten) insisted on coming with him.

“He really doesn’t have much, so we need to buy the basics and then some.” She said, starting to scribble a list down on the notepad she was holding as they walked through the store aisles.

“Right, of course.” Techno had never raised a child before. That had always been Wilbur’s job. “What counts as the basics?”

She gave him a look. “Clothes. Hygiene stuff. Medicine. And of course, a bed, dresser, sheets and blankets, et cetera.”

“Okay, easy. We can do that.”

It took them six hours to get everything, but considering they had to go to multiple stores, he considered that pretty good time.

They bought him new T-shirts, pants, socks, and even a few pairs of shoes. Techno made sure to get a few ankle braces, too, fairly certain Tommy would need them once he got his cast off. Toothpaste, a toothbrush, shampoo, deodorant, and the like, were all purchased, too. They bought him a twin-sized mattress even though Puffy said he would probably grow too tall for it once he was eating regular meals again.

Techno got him a few non-essentials, too. He remembered dumping out Tommy's backpack and seeing everything Tommy had deemed 'important'. It wasn't much. He wanted to change that.

A CD player, a nerf gun (which Techno was sure he'd regret purchasing), some movie posters, and a few toys (shouldn't the nerf gun count as a toy already?) were added to the ever-growing pile of things in the back of Tommy's car. It would take longer for the mattress and bedframe to actually arrive at Techno's apartment, but it was enough that Techno felt at least somewhat accomplished for the day.

Tommy called him that night while Puffy (yes, he had learned her name) and Schlatt were discussing how the interior design of Tommy's room should go. Tubbo had shown up at some point, too, and was talking to Phil about who knew what.

Techno quickly excused himself into the empty (minus all the bags of stuff) bedroom before answering the call. He hadn't actually known it was Tommy at the time, but it was an unknown number, and Techno didn't know who else would be calling him.

"Hello?"

"Techno?"

He couldn't help the smile that crept onto his face. "Hey, Theseus. How are you holding up?"

"It's... Okay."

For a moment, Techno's chest tightened with anxiety. Tommy also described his living situation with Dream as 'okay', and it was clear the child still wasn't completely convinced that Dream did anything wrong.

"They're weird, Techno."

"Who? The foster parents?"

"Yeah."

"How are they weird?"

"Dream said they would be... Different."

“What do you mean? When did you talk to Dream?” He couldn’t help but feel just a little panicked.

As far as Techno knew, Tommy hadn’t had any contact with Dream since he ran away again. He had been at Puffy’s house, and after he was taken to the hospital, Dream had been taken into custody. There was no way that-

“It’s just what he would always say. He would be like “if you think I’m bad, you haven’t seen anything compared to foster care”,” That sentence made Techno’s heart hurt. It made more sense now, though, that Dream would scare Tommy into hiding the abuse. That would explain why he never ran away before. “But these guys aren’t that bad.”

“Are they nice?”

“I think so. I don’t know, I just barely met them, but you’re... You’re not going to leave me with them, right? I’m still going to stay with you?”

“Of course, Tommy. We’re setting up your room right now, it should be done within the week.”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

They talked for a little while more. Techno described his day of shopping, how this was the most people he had ever had in his apartment at once, and how he was really excited for Tommy to come. He had to repeat that last point several times. It felt like Tommy struggled to believe it.

Tommy talked about the foster home he was in. Apparently they were two men, though Tommy didn’t know if they were married or just friends or what, who he referred to as ‘Mr. Halo’ and Mr. Skeppy’.

“Tommy,” Techno could hear a man’s voice in the background, muffled, but still easy enough to hear, “After you’re done with your phone call, Skeppy and I want to take you out for ice cream, is that alright?”

Techno swore he could hear the smile that stretched across Tommy’s face as he replied. “Yeah, that sounds good.” There was still the hint of uncertainty in his voice.

Techno spoke next. “It’s getting late, I should let you go soon. But, uh, can I talk to Mister Halo before I go?”

There was some shuffling, probably Tommy trying to cover the phone’s microphone. “Techno wants to talk to you.” More shuffling, then, the voice he had heard earlier.

“Hello? Is this Technoblade?”

“Yeah, you’re Mister Halo?”

“Just Bad is fine. Tommy’s told us a lot about you. He’s really excited to move in with you.”

“Oh, really?” He hadn’t expected that. “That’s... That’s good.”

“Yeah... The kid’s been through a lot, hasn’t he?”

“He has. Which is why I need to let you know,” He dropped his voice to a slightly lower octave, just enough to sound a little more intimidating than usual, “If you so much as touch a hair on that kid’s head, I’ll hunt you down and kill you, and that’s a promise.”

“Your brother is in safe hands over here, I promise. You know, Tommy said that you lived out of state, but you’re more than welcome to visit if you’d like.”

“...Wait, really?”

“Of course.”

“I think I’d like that, actually.”

Techno didn’t end up visiting Tommy, but that was on Tommy’s own request. It was completely on Tommy’s insistence, because Techno made sure that it was actually the kid’s choice, and not the foster parents telling Techno that Tommy didn’t want to see him. That was what Dream had done, and he wasn’t about to let that happen again.

But, no, Tommy wanted them to just finish his bedroom so he could come sooner.

It took four days to finish the bedroom. One to move the stuff out, one to move the stuff in, one waiting for a social worker to come and make sure everything was up to code, and one where the social worker actually came.

It was overall a quick process, and it had to be the easiest thing Technoblade had dealt with since he found Tommy hiding under his desk to begin with.

Still, being told that his house was up to standard lifted a huge weight off of his shoulders.

Only a few hours later, he was driving to the Halo household to pick up Tommy and bring him... Home. Maybe he shouldn’t call it ‘home’ yet, but that’s really what it would be.

Tommy met him at the door with his backpack over his shoulders and crutches tucked under his arms. After seeing how in pain Tommy had looked when his ankle had first been broken, seeing him moving around easily was a relief. Of course he knew with how long it had taken to get the injury fixed would cause complications, but for now, at least, Tommy looked happy with the crutches.

It took an hour and a half to get from the foster house to Techno's. An hour and a half of silence, save for the quiet music of the radio. When he looked over at Tommy, he could see the anxiety knit into his expression, as well as how his fingers anxiously gripped the straps of his backpack, which he had sitting in his lap.

"How are you feeling, Tommy?"

"I'm okay." Was the quiet almost-whisper he got back.

"You look nervous."

He could feel Tommy's eyes on him, staring for a long time, as if searching. "I feel like this isn't real. Like I'm going to wake up and I'll be back at Dream's... I don't want to be back at Dream's."

Of course. Techno wasn't sure why he hadn't considered that earlier. After years of living in a nightmare, it would be difficult to be awake again. "It's real. You're safe now. I'm going to protect you this time."

He glanced at Tommy to see the corners of his mouth twitching slightly upwards, and then his eyebrows furrowed. "Watch the road, prick. I don't want to get in another car wreck."

They made more idle chat after that, the air feeling just a little lighter, until Techno pulled into the parking lot, and Tommy went quiet again.

"I can carry you if you want. It's four flights of stairs, I'm not sure you can make that on cr--"

"I am a big man, Technoblade." Tommy declared, a sudden burst of courage coming from out of nowhere. "I can walk up the stairs myself."

They had to take a short break after the second flight. Techno bit back a comment about it. Tommy had been through so much lately, he was allowed to take a little break. Besides, they made it eventually.

He had asked Puffy, Sam, and Schlatt to not wait for him and Tommy to come back. They were all wonderful people, and Tommy adored them, but he didn't want the child to be overwhelmed either.

Techno unlocked the apartment and swung the door open.

“Welcome home, Theseus.”

They walked inside.

“You already know the house, mostly,” Techno continued, “But do you want to go check out your new room?” He gestured to where his office used to be.

Tommy’s eyes widened. “But your office...”

“I was going to make it your bedroom anyway, it’s just legal this time.”

Tommy glanced at him, then booked it to the room. He was surprisingly fast for having a broken ankle.

Tubbo had been waiting in the room to surprise him, and he could hear the boy’s excited shouts as soon as Tommy went inside the room.

Phil had been sitting at the kitchen table, and Techno moved to sit across from him.

“That’s the happiest I’ve seen him in a long time.” Phil murmured, taking a sip from a mug Techno hadn’t noticed he was holding.

“I’d think so.”

“It’s the happiest I’ve seen you, too.”

Techno paused, confused. “Huh?”

“You look *happy*, Techno. I haven’t seen you smile like that since we lost Wilbur.”

“Oh...”

“I meant it when I said it earlier. He really would be proud of you. For everything you’ve done.”

“He’d be proud of you, too, you know.”

Phil shook his head, quickly. “No, he wouldn’t. I denied what was happening, I was complicit, I-”

“Then make it up to him.” Techno put a hand on Phil’s arm, looking him dead in the eyes. “You don’t have to be a father for Tommy, but you could at least be there for him now.”

He took another sip of his drink. “I don’t know if he’d let me...”

“He would.”

“I... I’ll think about it.” The words hung in the air for what felt like ages. “You should go check on the boys. It’s too quiet in there, and if they’re anything like you and Wilbur, that means they’re getting into trouble.”

They weren’t getting into trouble. Nothing major, anyway. Tubbo had been trying out Tommy’s crutches, the sight almost comical, considering they were way too tall for the kid. Tommy was balancing on one leg, loading a foam bullet into the nerf gun. They both froze when Techno walked in.

“Technoblade!” Tubbo shouted, practically throwing the crutches back to Tommy. “We weren’t doing anything, I swear.”

Techno laughed a little. “Of course not. I just wanted to check in on you two, see how Tommy’s doing, you know.”

Tommy snorted. He was struggling to get the crutches under his arms. “I was checking out my new room. It’s-” A crutch slipped out of his hand and tumbled to the ground, the cocky attitude he was putting up went with it. “It’s great. I- thank you Technoblade, seriously.”

“Don’t mention it. This is really only the basics,” And a little more, but Techno wouldn’t mention that, “We’ll go shopping to get you some more decorations and stuff later.”

“Wait, *more* stuff?”

“Of course. I consider myself a minimalist, and even *I* think that you could use at least a few posters around here.”

Tubbo stuck around for dinner, but eventually Schlatt came over to collect him. Phil had gone outside to ‘clear his mind’, leaving the apartment alone to Techno and Tommy.

They sat on the couch, a movie played in the background, but Techno wasn’t very interested in it, he had a stack of paperwork on his lap that he was filling out. Tommy sat right next to him, wrapped up in blankets, and paying close attention to the movie.

Or, Techno thought he had been paying attention, until he spoke.

“I think Dream and Wilbur were wrong.” He said, just loud enough to be heard over the TV.

Techno paused what he was doing to give him a look. “What are you talking about?”

“Wilbur... Wilbur told me that he was the only one that cared about me. That Phil didn’t want me at all, and that Will was the only person I needed. And Dream said the same thing, and said that no

one even liked me, not even my friends.”

That threw Techno off. Why... Why would Wibur say that to him? *When* had Wilbur told him that? How did Techno not know?

Tommy kept talking before Techno could. “But they were wrong. Because you want me. And Tubbo cares. And Sam. And Puffy. And maybe Schlatt and maybe Phil.”

“Tommy... So many people care about you. When did Wilbur-”

“Wilbur didn’t really mean it.” Tommy cut him off quickly with the same frantic energy he got when he was defending Dream, “He was just angry at my teacher. Or at me, I don’t know.”

“Wilbur could never be angry at you. But he was wrong for what he said.”

“He didn’t mean it.”

“Okay.” Techno paused, unsure of what to say. So, he didn’t say anything. Instead, he set his paperwork to the side and opened his arms, gesturing for Tommy to lean on him. Tommy hesitated before doing just that.

“You’re not going to give me away, are you?”

“Never.”

“You swear it?”

“I swear on my life, Theseus.”

He meant it, he really did, and he had the stack of half-filled-out adoption papers next to him to prove it.

Chapter End Notes

So first off, thanks for reading. This was a really fun journey, and I definitely wouldn't have written so much if it wasn't for all your lovely comments. I hope this was at least a somewhat satisfying ending :)

Second, it's self-promo time. If you haven't read it, the prequel to this story has been published, it's called "he's my brother, i just raise him" and you should totally read it if you haven't already.

Third, I think I specifically said in a few replies to comments that I had no plans to write a sequel to this story, but that has changed. I have too many scrapped ideas of what happens next that I want to add and I just didn't have room in this story. So, uhhh subscribe/bookmark the series ig? I don't know how Ao3 works. I'll post the first chapter for it at... some point next week, probably.

End Notes

Just realized I have to update this, because this accidentally turned into a multi-chapter fic after I said it wouldn't... I am simply vibing

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