

caught in the middle

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by [Corvid404](#)

Summary

“Yeesh, get a room,” someone said, and Bdubs scurried back to his spot next to Etho, his cheeks several shades darker.

Cleo spun the bottle, and—

“Nope,” Etho snapped. The metaphorical knife in his chest twisted.

Etho has a conniption about his best friends, Bdubs and Cleo, and neither of them understand what he's so upset about.

Notes

today we stretch what it means for it to be hermitcraft fic by including so many empires and life series people. everyone featured in this fic has *technically* been on the hermitcraft server or interacted with a hermit so into the hermitcraft tag it goes!! anyway have fun reading, clethubs has to be messy and complicated before it can be fluffy and sweet :)

jealousy is a bitch. i hate her

Chapter Summary

Grian threw a party, and Etho is forced to face his heart after spin the bottle.

The door to Grian's house swung open so quickly that Etho was scared it was about to be ripped off its hinges.

Grian's gaze was sharp, quick, and almost analytical, flicking from the tupperware in Ren's hands clearly labeled on all four sides as "*CONTAINS WEED*" in the best handwriting Etho had managed, to how his fingers gently brushed against Cleo's, before landing on Etho himself. He awkwardly adjusted his mask over his nose.

"Etho! Bdubs, Ren, it's awesome to see you guys!" Grian chirped, tilting his head as his gaze snapped back to Cleo. "No Joe tonight?"

Cleo shook her head. "They're driving back home tomorrow, they need to not be hungover for that."

Grian snorted, finally stepping aside to let the four of them enter. "Well, you're right on time, Tango and Impulse are setting up a *Jackbox* game.

Bdubs shrugged his coat off and tossed it over someone else's coat on the tiny row of coat hangers. "Oh, is Scar here?" he asked, "I haven't seen his face in *ages* since you guys all moved off-campus."

Grian grumbled. "Unfortunately. I couldn't get him out of the house for tonight."

Grian and Bdubs scurried off towards the living room, and Etho watched them go. Every time he'd ever spoken with Grian, he felt on-edge for hours afterwards—he spoke so fast, and he moved even faster, leaving no room for questions—yet here he was, at the pest's house.

Ren had already vanished, probably off to find his people, leaving just him and Cleo standing awkwardly in the entryway.

He shrugged his coat off and tossed it over Bdubs'. "Why are we here again?" he groaned, taking Cleo's coat and hanging it next to his.

She shrugged. "Grian's parties are always fun?" she offered, smoothing her sweater down. "C'mon, lighten up! Enjoy yourself for once, it'd do you some good."

He sighed. He hated that she was right, and he hated even *more* that she was why he'd even agreed to come in the first place.

There was a shout coming from the living room, followed by much *more* shouting, and he glanced down to meet Cleo's gaze. Sounded like the games were starting.

They both made their way to the living room, hanging in the back as they waited for the chaos to sort itself out. Tango had hooked what was probably an unnecessary amount of wires between a

laptop and the TV while Impulse messed around with the remote. Mumbo was standing just to the side, awkwardly trying to help and clearly not. Almost everyone Etho knew—and quite a few he barely recognized—were scattered about on the couches and the floor, most of them holding a cup or a can. He zeroed in on Joel, who was sitting next to his fiancée on the floor, looking up at him and beaming.

Joel waved him over, and Etho was tempted to shake his head. Then Cleo poked his side, and he glared down at her.

“Scott told me he’s here, I’m gonna go find him. Have fun.”

His chest felt tight. He desperately did *not* want all his best friends to just walk off and leave him alone. He didn’t even want to *be here*. Cleo rolled her eyes and full-on shoved him forward.

“Go have fun, or I’ll kill you.”

He snickered. “You wouldn’t.”

She grinned. “I would.”

With that, they went their separate ways, and Etho descended into the ring of people and made his way over to Joel.

“Etho!” he shouted, slinging an arm over his shoulder the moment he sat down. “Good to see ya, mate!”

Suddenly, *everyone* was shouting greetings at him, and he could not bring himself to meet anyone’s gaze.

Tango looked down at him. “Hey, Etho, do you know how to get this to—?”

He’d barely started the question, and Etho had barely had time to look up at him, when they were interrupted by the music to *Monster Seeking Monster* kicking into gear, and a roar of applause kicked up from the dozen or so people all scattered around the living room. Tango and Impulse started explaining how the game worked, while everyone else had already rushed to join the game.

Etho glanced between Joel’s phone and the screen. “*Tall sexy guy? Really?*”

Joel huffed. “You’re just jealous you aren’t as sexy as me.”

He raised an eyebrow, and glanced over at Lizzie. “Curious how you left the word *tall* off there,” she chirped.

Joel sputtered, but didn’t have time to respond before the game began.

Etho was happy to sit back, sway his head to the unnecessarily upbeat and fun music, and laugh at all the terrible flirting. Ultimately, Grian won—he glanced over to where he even *was*, and found him perched over the back of a couch, one of his legs casually draped over Mumbo’s shoulder. Martyn and Jimmy were also sitting on the couch, and Scar had his wheelchair next to it.

Etho kept glancing around for where Bdubs had gone; he’d supposedly been after Scar, but Scar was *there* and Bdubs was—

Etho was suddenly all but knocked over.

“*Etho!* There you are!” Bdubs yelled, right into his ear. His breath reeked of beer.

Joel winced next to him. “Jesus, man, do you have any volume settings below *ear-shattering*?”

Bdubs laughed with his whole chest. “Nope!”

Etho snickered, letting Bdubs settle next to him. The games all started to blur together into a mess of weird jokes—for some reason, one answer or another had compared Jimmy to Sheriff Woody, and that leached into everything—fun music, and cacophonous laughter. The longer he sat there, though, the more he realized he was the only sober person in the room. Oh, he needed to change that.

He mumbled that he’d be back and made his way towards the front door—surely no one would interrupt him there.

The night was *very* cold, and he wished he’d thought to try and dig his coat out of the monster that the coat rack had turned into. Oh well. He sat down on the concrete steps and rolled the best joint he could while shivering and only having his thigh as a table. Not bad.

It was nice to have a few minutes to himself. Just him, the world’s saddest joint, and the sound of laughter through the door. Suddenly, the door creaked open, and he quickly yanked his mask back up.

“Oh, uh, sorry Etho—” someone mumbled. “Didn’t, um, mean to interrupt, but...”

Etho glanced up, and locked eyes with Impulse. “No, no, it’s fine,” he insisted. “I was almost done, anyway.”

Impulse wrung his hands together. “Good! Uh, that’s good.” He cleared his throat. “Uh, Grian wants to get everyone together for um, spin the bottle.”

He raised an eyebrow up at him. “And you’re fetching *me* for this... why?” He gestured to his mask—it didn’t matter that much, he wouldn’t *particularly* care if people knew what he looked like, but he’d prefer it to be on his terms and not from people drunkenly slobbering on him.

Impulse shrugged. “Grian just wants as many people as possible.”

He sighed. “I’ll be in in a few minutes.”

He got what little was left out of his joint and shuffled back inside. Everyone was sitting in a big circle around the living room, or as good a circle as they could manage. Bdubs had saved a place between him and Joel for him to return to, so he B-lined for it. Cleo was sitting on the opposite side of the circle, in between Scott and Pearl. He waved across at her, and she waved back.

Ultimately, there were so many people sitting around the living room floor, Etho lost track. He was *also* much more focused on pulling threads out of the carpet to the tune of the long-forgotten *Quiplash* game than paying attention to anyone. After a few minutes of everyone sitting around and chatting, Grian waltzed through the center and put an empty pop bottle down.

“Alright—ladies, gents, and those of no preference!” he announced, a slight lilt and slur to his words. “I’m sure spin the bottle needs no introduction, but I figured I’d offer those who don’t like their randomly spun partner an out. You can either kiss them, or one of you has to take a shot.”

He didn’t like how Grian locked eyes with him just long enough for it not to be a coincidence as he explained. With that, though, Grian spun the bottle and took his seat in the circle next to Mumbo.

And so it began, he guessed. The first pair was Grian and Scar.

Grian wailed “*No!*” so loudly he was certain the foundations of the house shook. Nonetheless, Grian marched over and pecked his friend on the lips. Someone in the circle whooped. Grian spun the bottle on Scar’s behalf, and Scar was paired with Jimmy. Jimmy went on to Tango, Tango on to Skizz, so on and so forth.

The first to opt out was Lizzie—she’d been matched with Scott.

“Absolutely *not*, that man has cooties.”

Scott cackled on the other side of the circle. “Lizzie, come on. Don’t be homophobic,” he teased.

“I’m *literally* bisexual!” she snapped, standing up. “Where’s the stupid—It’s vodka, right G?”

Lizzie took her shot, and Scott spun again, this time landing on a much happier to be kissed Ren.

Etho watched with quiet amusement as everyone took turns either kissing each other or gagging and leaving the circle to get a shot. Of course, the bottle eventually landed on Bdubs, who was paired with Impulse. Never one to half-ass anything, Etho watched with amusement as Bdubs kissed Impulse as loud as he possibly could.

Bdubs rubbed his hands together as he prepared to spin it for himself, and it landed on...

“Cleo!” he chirped, and Cleo blinked.

For a second, all three of them simply looked between each other. He guessed he didn’t have a problem with it—they weren’t an item, anyway. He subtly nodded to Cleo, and she gestured for Bdubs to come to her.

“I think the edible kicked in, I can’t stand up.”

“Oh, anything for Lady Cleo!”

She giggled, and Bdubs happily shuffled over to her. By all means, Bdubs could’ve just given her an obnoxious peck like he had for Impulse. Unfortunately, Bdubs liked going all out. And Etho had had a few text conversations with him about Cleo. So it came as absolutely no surprise to him when Bdubs and Cleo kissed, it was—well, a *lot* more than a silly little peck between friends. Cleo wrapped her hands around his waist, and Bdubs cupped her face in his hands.

It was certainly something to see, and Etho certainly felt *something* watching them, something that stabbed him in the chest and lit all his nerves on fire. He’d put a name to the emotion when he wasn’t too stoned to stand up.

“Yeesh, get a room,” someone said, and Bdubs scurried back to his spot next to Etho, his cheeks several shades darker.

Cleo spun the bottle, and—

“Nope,” Etho snapped. The metaphorical knife in his chest twisted.

Cleo pouted across the circle from him. “Oh come on, you’ve kissed me before—”

He shook his head, then pointed at the mask on his face. “I have *no clue* what you’re talking about.”

Grian grumbled. “Then *why* did you get in the circle, Etho?”

He shrugged, staving off whatever terrible feeling was climbing up his throat. “Boredom?”

Grian huffed. “You know the rules, then. Go get your shot.”

Etho uneasily got up, and Cleo spun again, though he didn’t care much for who she got on her re-spin. And he didn’t go back to the circle, either, tucking himself away in the kitchen. Why *had* he agreed? His hands were shaking. Why had he agreed to come to this stupid party, anyway? To spend time with friends he didn’t see that much? They could bother him whenever they liked. His heart was pounding out of his chest. He needed to go home. He checked the time—a little before eleven. Surely he could just pick up Bdubs, have him make some excuse, and then he could leave.

He felt sick. He hadn’t had a drop to drink, but he felt dizzy and terrible and—

Someone grabbed his hand, and he blinked and pulled it back.

“Woah, man, chill.” Joel put his hands up placatingly. “Just makin’ sure you’re alright. You ran outta there like you were gonna vomit.”

He blinked a few times. “Oh, uh, no. I’m... fine.” He didn’t feel very fine, but he also couldn’t *explain* the weird spaghetti mess that was suddenly his feelings about his two best friends.

Joel frowned up at him. “Are you sure, mate? Did you smoke something bad?”

“No, um...” Shit, he wasn’t good at excuses. “No, uh, I just—I get kind of anxious, being high in a big group like that.”

Joel nodded, but he could tell he wasn’t convinced. Etho had zero intent on explaining himself—Joel was swaying on his feet, and his eyes were a little red, and he was sure he wouldn’t have good advice. Maybe he’d text him later.

“I’m gonna, uh, head home. We’ll have to talk soon?”

He sighed. “Yeah, I’ll carve some time out for us to hang.”

Joel left the kitchen, leaving Etho alone again.

Alone with his thoughts that did not make sense.

Bdubs kissed Cleo. So what? He had too. She was good at it. But then *he* was supposed to kiss *her* and he just couldn’t do it. He couldn’t stomach that in front of everyone, but he *could* stomach watching his two best friends just short of make out. Except that had set the whole domino chain off, somehow. His chest felt hollow, and his eyes felt oddly hot.

He just needed to go home, needed to get out of there. He shot the roommates group chat a text that he was leaving, just in case they got worried.

He dug his coat out of the pile on the rack and sat outside until his Uber arrived. The cold air didn’t do much to clear his head.

It was six in the morning when Etho heard the apartment door creak open, and he realized he had done nothing for the past four hours other than sit on his bed and stare at the wall, counting his breaths in and out.

The first few hours he’d been home, he had paced his room until his legs were sore, spinning the moment in his mind. *Why* was he so upset over this? *None* of them were items. It was Cleo’s right

to kiss whoever she wanted with whatever level of passion she so pleased, and the same for Bdubs. So *why* did he want to vomit and-or scream and-or collapse into a pile of bones and goop?

He'd since resigned to sitting on his bed in a pile of blankets, staring at his clock as the hands ticked later and later, his eyes wide open. But what if after he left they'd—? What if Bdubs came home *bragging* that—?

It wasn't his damn *business*. It was a little icky, considering they were both his best friends and it'd be a weird situation to be in, but ultimately it wasn't his place to speculate. It didn't stop the thought from continuing to crop up, making him feel sick to his stomach.

The clock ticked.

He heard some shuffling, and Ren and Cleo whispering to each other. Another door opened across the hall, and then there was a knock on his door.

“Etho?” Cleo crooned, “I know you aren't asleep in there.”

“Etho is currently unavailable,” he replied, wrapping the blankets tighter around his shoulders. “Please leave your message after the beep. *Beeep.*”

Cleo giggled, but thankfully left the door shut as she kept talking. “Alright, then. Hi Etho, it's Cleo, just checking in to make sure you got home okay. Ren and Bdubs said you left early, and we were worried.” She paused, before continuing. “I feel like we might need to talk, you me and Bdubs. Try to get some sleep, and text me when you wake up. Okay, bye.”

Etho stared at the door as Cleo's footsteps retreated, and the apartment door opened and closed again.

He didn't end up sleeping, instead grabbing his laptop off his desk and playing mindless video games. If he had to sit in his own head for one more second, he was going to implode.

i can sabotage me by myself

Chapter Summary

Cleo is more than a little confused as to why Etho won't talk to her.

Cleo needed to stop getting high and-or drunk around Etho and Bdubs. In her defense, it was spin the bottle, she should've been a bit more mentally prepared for the possibility that she'd end up having to kiss some of her friends—including the ones she was in a very dubiously romantic relationship with.

Well, *she* thought it was dubiously romantic. At least it was with Etho. If the way Bdubs just about melted into her kiss was any hint, he at least felt *something* towards her that was a little more than friendship. But the *look* Etho had given her afterwards, how he looked like he was going to be sick or sob when the bottle landed on him, the way he all but *bolted* out of the room and didn't say goodbye to anyone before he left the party... It didn't sit right.

It equally didn't sit right when he wouldn't open his door to talk to her. Sure, it was a cute way of saying he wanted to be left alone, but it just didn't feel very much like him. He didn't text her later, either, turning the knot in her chest into a sinking brick. Her phone suddenly buzzed on her side table, but... it wasn't Etho. It was someone she honestly wasn't expecting to hear from.

Joel

*i dont know what the hell is going on between you etho and bdubs but please figure it out
he wont leave me alone*

Cleo

what's going on?

Joel

YOU TELL ME, CLEO

Joel sent an image.

[ID: A screenshot of texts between Joel and Etho.

Etho

*idk i dont feel like i should be upset over this
we're all adults we can do whatever we want
but like theyre my best friends*

Joel

dude why dont u just ask one of them what happened after you left?

Etho

*i dont wanna come across as weird
bcuz me and cleo arent a thing so i dont think its my place to be
is possessive the right word?*

There is another, much longer message from Etho that is cut off.]

Cleo

??? i dont know either??

Joel

*i caught him before he went home and he seemed pretty upset then too
im not going to play mediator in whatever the fuck is going on between you guys
just figured i'd let you know*

Cleo

your knowledge is much appreciated

Well. She was right in her hunch that they all needed to talk.

Etho wouldn't answer her texts. Or return her calls. If she didn't know him better, she would have assumed he had blocked her number, but he wasn't the type to stoop that low. He was *avoidant*, not an asshole. All his avoidance did was confirm that something was up, and he didn't want to tell her what it was.

She knew who he *couldn't* avoid though: Bdubs.

A few texts later, Bdubs agreed to drag Etho out of the house on an innocent adventure to get coffee by themselves, and then Cleo would “coincidentally” also be at the cafe. Sure, it was a little sneaky, but if Etho wouldn't go to her, she'd have to go to him. Plus she'd also get Bdubs at the table, and he was a rather important piece to the whole mess as well. She tucked herself into one of the far booths, sipping at a hot peach tea she'd ordered for herself when she first got there, eyes on the door.

Cleo really didn't think this was such an issue—they were all friends, if any of them really had an issue with any of them wanting a little more out of the relationship, it was as easy as asking them to stop. Then again, she *also* wasn't really sure what was going on between the three of them, considering she had independently made out with both of them on separate occasions.

Her tea was long finished by the time they showed up, Bdubs all but dragging Etho to the register by his hand. Once the two were done ordering, she slinked over to meet them at the drink hand-off.

“What a coincidence, seeing you two here!” she chirped.

Etho's eyes went wide, glancing between her and Bdubs as he cycled through the stages of grief at rapid speed. After a second of absently staring, he took a step back, wringing his hand out of Bdubs'.

“Hi Cleo,” he replied in the absolute smallest voice she'd ever heard from him. “What a... funny coincidence.”

Bdubs beamed, puffing up his chest. “A *-ha!* You can't ignore her now!”

Etho's face scrunched up as he glared down at Bdubs. “Seriously? I'm not—I wasn't—”

Cleo sighed. “It's fine, Etho. I just wanted to make sure we all talked face-to-face before Bdubs went home for the holiday.”

Etho and Bdubs' drinks were handed off, and the three all shuffled to one of the window tables.

Etho markedly did not meet either of their gazes as they sat down, clutching his drink with both his hands and leaving his mask on.

For a minute, a heavy silence hung around them. It wasn't an easy topic, the conversation didn't come as fluidly as it did with everything else. Cleo couldn't blame them for not wanting to touch it. Bdubs, graceless as ever, broke the stalemate with a loud huff.

“Will you *explain* why you're being weird?”

In lieu of answering, Etho pulled his mask down for long enough to take a sip of his drink.

Bdubs frowned, glaring at Etho. “Is it about what happened at the party?”

He sighed, propping his head up on his hand. “I just—I can't put it into words. It just... It irked me, I dunno.”

Cleo rolled her eyes. Ever the wordsmith. Still, Etho kept talking, stumbling over his own thoughts he clearly did not understand, and she started to understand why he'd been avoiding the topic the longer he rambled.

Finally, he sighed. “I—I don't think I have the *right* to be jealous, though. I think that's it. Because, um, me and you—me and Cleo aren't an item. So you've both got the right to do whatever you want together.”

Bdubs suddenly groaned, interrupting him. “Nothing *happened*, Etho. I'm not sleeping with—with *your* girlfriend.”

Cleo felt her face go hot, and she glanced at Etho who was a matching shade of pink.

“She—We—We're not dating,” he sputtered, leaning back in his chair.

Cleo cleared her throat. “I, uh, was actually going to ask about that.”

Both of their eyes snapped to her.

“I mean, don't take this any type of way, but I think we three have something special.” She glanced down, tapping her fingers along the table. “I'm happy to just be friends with you two, and we can continue as we are, but I'd—I'd like to be a little more. If you gentlemen agree.”

None of them spoke. Her heart pounded in the back of her throat. She really hoped they felt the same—some passionate kisses weren't confirmation of any feelings, it just meant they liked kissing her.

After a too-long silence, Etho gently grabbed her hand. “I think it's a good idea.”

Bdubs beamed, throwing his hand on top of both of theirs. “I think it's *more* than a good idea! I think it's a genius one!”

She snickered, putting her other hand on top of Bdubs'. “Good to know that's settled, then.”

“*Yeah!*” Bdubs cheered, “Oh, you have *no idea* how happy I am that's all settled. You're both my favorite people in the whole world, I hated to see you two fighting.”

Etho's entire face had turned a soft shade of pink. “I thought that was just me?”

Cleo giggled. “What? You don't like sharing or something?”

If he wasn't already completely pink, she was certain Etho would've turned into a strawberry. He awkwardly ducked his head. "I—Uh—Um."

She grinned as Etho covered his embarrassment with a sip of his drink, finally taking his mask entirely off and setting it on the table.

The rest of the conversation was a *lot* easier. Their plans for the holiday break was a pretty important topic—Bdubs was leaving in a few days to go home until the spring semester started, while Etho and Cleo would be staying back.

Bdubs tapped his fingers along his cup, before reaching and grabbing both of their hands in either of his. "I'm, uh, sorry? I'd *love* to stay back but—"

Cleo shrugged. "It's fine, Bdubs. Your family's important."

He looked over to Etho. "You'll be fine in the apartment by yourself, right?"

Etho glanced at Cleo. "I mean, you need someplace to stay until the semester starts, right?" he asked. "You can, um, stay with me."

She felt her heart flutter. "Yeah, I—Yeah, I can do that."

By the time they had flattened everything out, made their plans, and set their boundaries—Bdubs had very much insisted on no "funny business" while he was away—the sun had long set, and all the other patrons had left the store. One of the baristas told them the store would be closing in a few minutes, so they gathered their things and shuffled out the door.

"Were we *really* in there all evening?" Cleo asked, checking her phone for the time—7:54.

Etho shrugged. "Time flies when you're with your favorite people, I guess."

Bdubs hummed in agreement.

For a second, all of them simply stood outside the cafe, glancing between each other and shifting on their feet. Cleo had to go a different direction from them to get back to her dorm. It was her least favorite part of hanging out with them, that moment when she had to go left and her friends—boyfriends now—had to go right.

Bdubs pointed from his lips to hers. "Uh, kissy goodbye?"

Cleo broke down laughing. "*Twenty!* We are *twenty years old* and—and you say *that?*"

Etho snickered. "I think he's still nineteen, actually."

"*Hey!*"

Cleo rolled her eyes. "Bdubs, never change. C'mere."

She grabbed Bdubs by the back of his neck and pulled his lips to hers. He tasted a lot less like vodka and beer than the other night, and a lot more like matcha and chocolate. Sweet but bitter in a way that only Bdubs could make work. When she pulled away, Bdubs had the *stupidest* grin on his face.

She turned around and looked up to Etho. "You too, c'mon."

Etho had no say in the matter as she dragged him down to her level, gently pulling his mask down

around his neck to meet his lips. Without the bitter, cottony film in her mouth from smoking, it was a much more pleasant experience, though he could still use a swipe of chapstick—she'd just have to wear extra and kiss it onto him.

He pulled back, but Cleo *saw* how pink he was before he pulled his mask back up.

“G’night, Cleo!” Bdubs chirped, grabbing Etho’s hand and starting the walk back to their apartment.

“Night, fellas!”

tell me it's okay

Chapter Summary

Epilogue.

Chapter Notes

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

The only thing on Bdubs mind as he and Etho walked home was, *Oh thank god*. Etho had been a scittish, anxious *mess* the last few days, barely even looking at him, squeaking little greetings in passing. He even locked his freaking door! Thank goodness for Cleo, honestly, he never could've come up with anything to get him out of his room.

He laced their fingers together and gently swung their hands back and forth as they walked.

“You don't have to hold so tightly,” Etho mumbled.

Bdubs grinned. “I do, actually, because my hands are cold and you're warm.”

Etho snorted in amusement and rolled his eyes.

“Sweetheart,” Bdubs added.

Etho fixed his gaze on the crossing signal, gently squeezing his hand. The rest of the walk home was quiet.

They were greeted at the door by Ren. He poked his head out from the kitchen, his head tilted in intrigue as he looked between them.

“How'd it go?” he asked, gaze glancing between their clasped hands and their faces.

Etho groaned, finally letting go of Bdubs' hand to start unzipping his coat. “I got tricked.”

Bdubs cackled, puffing up his chest and crossing his arms. “Tricked into talking about your problems!”

Etho shook his head, but Bdubs didn't miss the way his eyes squinted like he was smiling. “A trick is still a trick, Bdubs.”

Ren hummed, smirking. “I assume everything's good now...?”

“Oh, fantastic!” Bdubs chirped, “We're all dating now.”

Ren sputtered, his jaw suddenly dropping. “I-I'm sorry? Excuse me?”

Etho pulled his mask off and tucked it into the pocket of his coat. “Me, Bdubs and Cleo. We'll see how it goes.”

Ren nodded, backing towards his room. “Well, as long as you guys are polite about it—”

Bdubs waved him off. “Oh, don’t worry about it! We’ve got all that sorted.”

“Riiight, alright.” Ren disappeared behind his door, leaving Etho and Bdubs awkwardly standing in the living room.

Bdubs cleared his throat, stepping in front of Etho to face him. “So. I’m going to get ready for bed.”

“Uh-huh,” Etho replied. “And...?”

He huffed. “You’re not gonna kiss your new boyfriend goodnight?”

“*Oh!*” Etho chirped, quickly grabbing his hands. “Oh—right. Sorry.”

Bdubs snickered, letting Etho pull him closer. “Well, now I know that girlfriend at another school didn’t exist.”

Etho grumbled, but he was *definitely* still smiling. “C’mon, you had a girlfriend too. I wanted to be cool.”

He stood up on his tippiest of toes, and Etho gently held his jaw to tilt his head up. “Psh, I was *not* the definition of cool in high school.”

Etho sighed. “You were to me.”

Etho pressed their lips together so gently and carefully, like he was scared he was going to break him in half. His heart soared straight into the stratosphere, and he wouldn’t be upset if it never came back down. Etho’s lips slotted against his like they were meant to be there. They were also incredibly chapped, but he was willing to let that slide on account of it being December. His hand on his jaw was barely there, the other one loosely swinging their hands back and forth.

As soon as the moment started, it was over, and he rested back on his feet properly, though Etho’s hand still traced his jaw for a moment. He’d... never noticed that Etho had two different colored eyes before. One was green, the other was strikingly blue. They were pretty, but even prettier glittering down at him like he was the most important person in the world.

Etho smiled and planted another, much briefer kiss to the top of his head.

“That a good enough goodnight for you?”

Bdubs nodded, unable to get a single word out of his lungs on account of not having any air in them, and shuffled off to get ready for bed.

Chapter End Notes

and thats it, folks!! hope yall enjoyed this cute little saga!! clethubs :)
if u liked this, crabbunch wrote a fic inspired by this au!!! :D [go read it its so fun and cute!](#)

leave a comment if u feel so inclined, and have a good day/night <3

(while we're promo'ing stuff, yell at me on [tumblr](#) if you want.)

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