

Then Slowly Grows A Little

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Then Slowly Grows A Little

by [cherylbombshells](#)

Summary

Tandy, Tyrone, the art of caring, and what it really means to change.

Notes

As I said in the tags, this takes place soon after the end of the first season finale and is basically entirely inspired by that last Tandy and Tyrone scene, about Tandy learning to care.

Shout out to [soldierwitch](#) for their awesome beta skills and amazing advice, thank you so much! And to my friends Ikea and especially Kurzelt for the cheerleading.

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

For as long as she can remember, Tandy's been a runner.

But before she learned how to run, she learned how to dance.

Her memory of it is kind of hazy after all these years, like it's a story that was told to her instead of something that she can picture herself, or if she can, it's more like snapshots from another life.

She can recall bits and pieces - the way her slippers felt too tight on her feet and how her leotard clung to her skin; she can hear her teacher scolding her for bending her leg the wrong way and her father planning her Julliard audition.

Tandy can't remember any of the moves, though; her feet are more accustomed to a faster pace now.

But if she tries hard enough, she thinks she could relearn how to slow them down again.

Or, maybe, even learn how to stand still completely.

Being back at the trailer is weird, and not just because her mother's place doesn't feel like home, even though she's lived there longer than she's lived anywhere else.

Tandy doesn't know where home is, really - if it's that big house her dad lived in with them for years or that empty church where she lived all alone for just a few months - she just knows it's not here in this trailer.

But it's where she lives now, because it's where her mother is, and even if it's not home, even if her *mother* isn't either, it feels like it's where she belongs.

At least for now, and that's not nothing.

Her mom already has a new job, one she's been going to every day this week.

It's an office job, even, instead of at a diner, and while it's challenging, it seems like that might be just what she needs.

It's a good first step, but it's not one Tandy hasn't seen her take before. That's the thing with her mother, nothing is ever new.

“I’m gonna do it this time, baby,” Melissa promises her every morning before she leaves.

“I know, Mom,” Tandy always replies with a kiss to her cheek, and every morning she means it a little bit more.

Because maybe this time it *will* be different.

And, maybe, that little bit of hope Tandy has that it will be means that it already is.

Tandy’s days are spent less productively than her mother’s, mostly getting the house together: cleaning it up, throwing away any of her left over drugs and avoiding her father’s things all together.

She’s spent the last month or so pouring over everything she could find of his so she could clear his good name, and now she can’t stand to even think about it.

In the end, she isn’t sure her father deserved the effort, but Tandy didn’t finish the job for him; it had been for her mom and Mina and Ivan, and all those workers that died that night because of ROXXON’s greed and negligence.

She doesn’t regret it, because it had been the right thing to do and had made it easier for her stay, but everytime her stomach twists when she stares at one of the old family photos her mother still has up around the trailer, it feels like it cost her so much more than she gained.

Still, it felt nice to have a purpose again, a goal to reach to distract Tandy from the fact that she had literally nothing else going on in her life.

Now it’s gone, and while Tandy doesn’t quite have *nothing* anymore, her empty days sure make her feel like she does.

“What about your friends?” Melissa wonders one night, when Tandy tells her she didn’t do much all day for the third night in a row.

“What friends?” she asks automatically, because she still has trouble admitting that’s what they are; it’s still such a foreign concept to her.

But then again, so is sitting down to have dinner with her mother, and Tandy might be getting used to this - even if it is just take out.

“What about that girl you were working with, the environmentalist?” Melissa asks as she takes her seat at the table across from her daughter, and Tandy’s actually a little surprised she was listening when she mentioned that weeks ago. “Or that lovely boy you brought to your father’s anniversary?”

Tandy flinches at the thought of that night, but manages to keep her voice steady when she says, “Tyrone?”

“That was it.” Melissa nods, sending her daughter a knowing smile even though she doesn’t actually *know* anything. “He seems like a nice boy, why don’t you give him a call?”

She bites back a smirk at the irony of her mother’s words, considering the reason she can’t call him, even though he actually *is* a nice boy - maybe the nicest Tandy’s ever met.

“Yeah, maybe,” is all she offers as she reaches for the take out carton.

It takes a couple days before Tandy goes to see Tyrone again, and she doesn’t know why.

She thinks about him a lot, and sometimes she swears she can even *feel* him, but it isn’t until Tandy dreams about him that she finally decides to stop putting it off.

Tandy doesn’t remember much of it, but she’s pretty sure nothing earth shattering happened; they just met each other in that nowhere place between light and dark and talked about nothing.

She wakes up cold and unsure whether it really was just a dream or if they can visit each other in their sleep now, but either way, it makes her want to see him.

The church looks different than it did when Tandy was there earlier in the week - still empty and dusty, just a little less messy.

“I got bored,” is Tyrone’s explanation when he spots her looking around at his newly rearranged digs. It’s nothing much, just some upturned benches and things cleaned up a little, but it’s enough to look like someone’s actually living there. “I was wondering when you’d show up again.”

“Sorry, I’ve been busy,” she shrugs, knowing he won’t push for more, even if he doesn’t believe her. “Getting everything settled at my mom’s place.” Tyrone nods, doing just as Tandy predicted, before his eyes fall to her side. “Brought you an extra blanket,” she explains, holding the rolled fleece up for the boy to see before she tosses it to him. “I know it can get cold in here.”

Tyrone catches it with ease, a smile spreading across his face. “Thanks,” he tells her with another nod, hand brushing over the fluffy material. “I was freezing last night.”

“Yeah, I know,” Tandy replies casually, finding it hard not to return his smile as that weird feeling of unease that’s been nagging at her for days starts to settle. “So was I.”

While Tandy doesn't stay long that day, it takes her less time to go see him again.

She finds this old camping flashlight that works more like a lantern when she finally works up the nerve to clear out some of her dad's old things. Tandy decides to bring it over to the church so Tyrone doesn't have to rely on candle light when it's dark like she did.

"I put new batteries in it, so you should be good," she tells him as she places it beside the picture of his family, neither of them voicing the possibility that he could be there long enough to need them replaced.

Tyrone thanks her like the good choir boy he was raised to be, and something catches Tandy's eye while she's standing in his designated sleeping area.

"What?" Tyrone questions as he turns to follow her with his eyes and watches as she bends down to pick something up.

When Tandy stands up, she's got a tiny ballet slipper in her hand and a teasing smirk tugging at her lips. "You got a hidden talent you wanna share with the class?"

The small laugh Tyrone lets out is one of embarrassment, and Tandy's smirk only grows when he brings a hand up to scratch at the back of his head in an attempt to act casual.

"It's, uh, it's yours, actually," he explains after a moment, and for some reason, Tandy hadn't even considered that. "From that night. I found it when I woke up on the beach."

Tandy's smirk falters a little at his words, and her eyes soften as she looks between her old ballet shoe and the boy who kept it for over eight years.

"You took it?" she asks in wonder, voice as soft as her eyes as she watches Tyrone try to shrug it off.

"You took Billy's hoodie," he reminds her, tugging at the jacket he's wearing at this very moment.

"Yeah, 'cause I was cold," Tandy reasons, and while it's not untrue, that's hardly all there is to it and they both know it. She waits a moment before asking the real question. "Why'd you keep it?"

Tyrone shrugs again and ducks his head bashfully, his brown eyes peeking at her from under his hood. "Same reason you kept the hoodie."

She nods in understanding, a small smile playing on her lips as she thinks about all the times she pulled that hoodie on and felt safe with it wrapped around her; as she thinks about Tyrone looking at this tiny old ballet shoe of hers over the years and feeling the same.

It's just another way they're connected, and while that used to freak Tandy out, she finds comfort in it now - having something, and *someone*, in the world she can count on.

She looks up at the boy and finds him smiling back at her, and Tandy can't resist breaking the moment with a joke. "What, so you could wear it to bed?"

Tyrone laughs like he can't believe her, even though there's no way he's surprised, and he reaches forward to snatch the slipper out of her hand.

"I can't stand you," Tyrone lies, and the way his eyes shine give him away.

"How was your day, honey?" Melissa asks her later as they sit down to dinner. She's asked her every night for the past week, but this time Tandy finally has a different answer for her.

"It was good," she admits, twirling the spaghetti around her fork like she wrapped the ribbon of her ballet slipper around her finger earlier. "I went to see somebody."

With the way Melissa's entire face lights up, someone might think Tandy is some social pariah who's never had a friend before, but that's not entirely off base, so she supposes she can't be too offended.

"That's great, baby," her mother tells her, almost sounding as relieved as she does proud. "Maybe you can invite your friend over here some time, too. We can have him for dinner."

That's probably not happening anytime soon, but Melissa just looks so happy that her daughter might not be as damaged and lonely as she thought, that Tandy doesn't have the heart to tell her.

And who knows, maybe it might be possible sooner than she thinks.

(There she goes, hoping again.)

The next time Tandy visits Tyrone, she brings him coffee and he asks her for something else.

"That doesn't sound like something a choir boy would do," Tandy teases, though it comes out sounding a little bit more like a warning.

Tyrone seems to take it as such, because he's quick to counter by throwing her own words back at her. "Thought you said I wasn't that version of me anymore."

"You're not," she agrees, softening as she shifts closer, remembering that day well. "But you're not a dick, either. I'm not breaking up with your girlfriend for you."

"And I'm not asking you to, I just need you to give her this for me," Tyrone corrects her, holding up a letter he apparently spent all night writing. His frustration is obvious - and kind

of funny, to be honest - but he doesn't raise his voice as he gets to his feet. "I don't want her waiting on me, but I can't bring her here and into all this, either. We're not even really official, anyways; it's more like a break than a break up."

He's got a point there, as far as Tandy knows, but it still feels like something she should try to talk him out of, even if she's not exactly sure why.

"Come on, I like her for you," she reminds him, shifting towards the edge of the bench and leaning forward with her elbows on her knees. "She's nice and cares about you; and I bet she kicks you in the ass when you need it."

Tyrone's lips curve up and while his smile isn't disingenuous, his words feel too buttery to be completely serious. "I have you to do that for me now."

Tandy isn't impressed or affected, even though he's not entirely wrong. "I'm not your girlfriend, Ty."

"Neither is Evita," he reminds her and well, he's got her there.

He's playing it off like he always does when Tandy questions him about Evita for whatever reason, but she gets why he's doing all of this, even if he won't say it. Tyrone's not doing this because his feelings for her have changed, he's just trying to do what he thinks is best for Evita and to protect her at the same time, even if that means hurting her.

He sends Tandy a pout for good measure when she doesn't immediately bend to his logic, and it turns into a grin when she sighs and falls back against bench in defeat.

"I'll talk to her," Tandy agrees reluctantly, but she's not happy about it; she's trying to be a better person here and now *he's* being a bad influence, even if his intentions are good. "But you better not be doing this because you're in love with me or something stupid like that."

Tyrone smiles at her joke like he always does, teeth biting into his bottom lip gently, but it doesn't escape her attention that he doesn't deny it.

It takes Tandy two days to work up to going to see Evita, and when she finally does, she finds her right where Tyrone said she would.

The other girl is just starting a tour when she gets there, so Tandy decides to tag along; blending into the background and listening along as Evita takes the group of tourists through various New Orleans monuments. She shares facts and tells stories, and Tandy has to hand it to her, she leads a good tour.

By the time it's over, Evita's brought everyone to her auntie's shop, of course, because she's a good business woman too, apparently, and it's not until then that she finally spots her once the crowd thins.

“Tandy?” She sounds more confused than surprised, until something like realization and then panic flashes in her eyes and she stills in her approach. “If you’re here, that means Tyrone...”

“No, no,” the tiny blonde is quick to reassure her, making a mental note to give that boy a kick in the ass for not letting his kind-of-girlfriend know he was alive before he went into hiding. “Ty’s fine, we’re both fine.”

Evita looks dubious for a moment before she seems to decide Tandy has no reason to lie, but as soon as her shoulders relax, her confusion returns. “But how? My auntie said one of you had to die to stop it.”

Tandy’s hand clutches her bicep, just under her burn mark, as she glances in the store window behind the other girl at the mention of this mysterious old woman. She’s hoping to catch a glimpse of her, but she can’t see much.

She hasn’t really thought much about how they beat fate, and she’s not sure if Tyrone has either; she just knows they did it together, and that makes enough sense to her.

It’s the only thing that make sense to Tandy these days.

“We’re not really sure, how any of it works,” she answers honestly, but keeps the rest of her truth close. She doesn’t understand what happened that day, but whatever did, it’s between her and Tyrone. “Just that we work together.”

That really shouldn’t be news to Evita, considering all that she told them about themselves, but as Tandy watches her reaction, it’s clear she feels some type of way about it, even though she strikes Tandy as the type of girl who wishes she didn’t.

But instead of dwelling on whatever that is, Evita asks the important question, “Where’s Tyrone then? He hasn’t been back to school.”

“It’s a long story,” Tandy sighs, even though it’s more like it’s a story she’s not sure she’s allowed to tell; it’s why Tyrone asked her to do this for him, after all, to keep Evita as far away from the mess he’s in as possible. “He’s gotta lay low for a little bit, but he’s fine. He actually wanted me to give you a message.”

Her stomach twists as she pulls the folded up letter out of her pocket and Tandy suddenly remembers why she always just runs from the hard stuff, because this is fucking awful, and she’s just the messenger.

“Why can’t he tell me himself?” Evita wonders, the new edge in her tone as she eyes the paper in Tandy’s hand suggesting she probably has a pretty good idea of what’s written on it.

“That’s part of the whole *laying low* thing,” Tandy reminds her with a grimace, tucking a strand of blonde hair behind her ear before shoving her free hand in the back pocket of her jeans and offering the letter to the other girl. “He can’t really see people right now.”

Evita looks entirely unimpressed and makes no move to take the offering. “Except you.”

“Well, yeah, but-”

“I want to see him,” Evita declares, her shoulders squaring like she’s ready to physically fight Tandy on this issue.

And honestly, there’s a tiny part of Tandy that kind of wants to fight this girl too, for some reason, if just because fighting tends to be her second instinct after running.

But this is Tyrone’s Not Girlfriend, who gave them answers when they didn’t even know enough to be asking the right questions, and he cares about her - enough to let her go.

And so Tandy just sighs, already sensing this is a losing battle. “He doesn’t want you to get involved, and knowing where he is will get you involved.”

“He’s in the church.” It’s a statement, not a question, and Tandy’s not even surprised; no wonder Tyrone sent Tandy to do his dirty work, the weakling. “Tell him I’m coming tonight.”

Her stare is unwavering, and the determined arch of her eyebrow is the final blow to Tandy’s resolve. “...*Fine.*”

Tyrone’s gonna be annoyed with her, but what else is new?

Tandy doesn’t actually give him the heads up because she doesn’t go by the church again until the next day, but when she does, she’s sure to bring ice cream with her.

She’s never really had any *actual* boyfriends or girlfriends - Liam was more of an accomplice to her than a romantic partner - or girl friends for that matter, but the few chick flicks she’s seen tell her that break ups, even ones that aren’t truly break ups, require ice cream.

“I don’t really wanna talk about it,” she hears Tyrone mumble as soon as she lands on the floor, and it takes Tandy a moment to find him lying in his sleeping bag, buried underneath the fleece blanket she brought him and staring up at the ceiling.

“Fine by me,” Tandy agrees easily as she strolls over, pulling the tub of Rocky Road out of the bag and dropping a plastic spoon onto Tyrone’s stomach when she reaches him. “I just came to eat.”

She plops down on the stool by his legs and waits for him to sit up before she hands the ice cream tub to him to open. As she waits, Tandy can’t help but notice the Saint Sebastian’s letterman jacket that wasn’t there the day before curled up in the corner.

It says everything Tyrone doesn’t want to.

As much as Tandy loves New Orleans, she never really pictured herself staying there.

But as she walks the streets now, takes in the people and places that make this city what it is, she's not sure she can imagine living anywhere else, either.

New Orleans is a special kind of place; it's been through hell and keeps getting back up, bruised and beaten, but still standing, just like her.

She used to think this city was haunted, but as it turns out, it's just some of the people that are. Maybe Tandy's haunted too, by the person taken from her, or least by all she's taken from others in return.

Tandy used to justify taking from the world that took from her, but she only ever took from other people - people that were haunted just like her; haunted by their own loss and their own pain they carry around, that's just as heavy as hers.

She took from others, hoping that if she took enough, it would make up for all that she'd lost, but nothing ever did.

That hole can't be filled, just patched up and healed over, until it's just a dull ache - one that she's slowly learning to live with.

Tandy's on her way to meet her mother for lunch, over on the other side of Canal in Mid-City, and as she passes by Solomon Place, she finds herself thinking of Tyrone's parents.

She thinks of Adina and Otis Johnson, of the son they lost eight years ago and the one they lost just the other week; she thinks of them and wonders if they feel haunted, too.

Tandy looks down their quaint little street, in their nice little neighborhood and she thinks of Tyrone - of the little version of him she met all those years ago and in her dreams just recently; she imagines him growing up here instead of where she did, and how his parents tried to give him everything she'd lost.

She thinks of Tyrone now and what he would be doing if everything were as it should be - if he would be playing basketball in his driveway instead of sitting alone in an empty church on the wrong side of town - and she marvels, not for the first time, about how fast life changes when the ground disappears from beneath your feet.

When Tandy arrives at her mother's office, she finds her standing way too close to some guy as they talk in the parking lot, and it serves as a quick reminder that many things stay exactly the same.

“He’s just a friend,” Melissa insists when Tandy immediately asks who he is, and she’s heard that a million times before. Her mother cups her cheeks and looks her straight in the eyes as she promises her; “I swear, honey.”

Tandy doesn’t really believe her, but she wants to.

Moreover, she *needs* to.

She needs to believe that things can be different, that they can change, and not just for the worst; that *people* can change, not only because they *have* to, but because they *want* to.

Tandy needs to believe that *she* can change, because otherwise, what's the point in even trying?

Ivan’s walking a little better now, but not well enough for him to come home quite yet.

He’s there visiting with Mina when Tandy stops by after lunch, and he welcomes her with the kind of hug that only a father can give before he sits her down and tells her all about how Mina’s been helping clean up ROXXON’s mess since the night everyone went crazy.

Tandy can hear the pride in every word he says, and she finds that it doesn’t twist her insides up anymore like it used to.

As happy as she was to bring Ivan back so she could get answers about her father, it had been hard to see Mina get the reunion she never would - and even harder to pretend it wasn’t hard.

But as Tandy watches them now, she finds it’s easier to just be happy for them, and to be proud of herself for making it happen.

Maybe it’s because the father she wanted back so desperately never existed in the first place, or maybe it’s because it feels better to give than to take.

Or, maybe, it’s because Tandy’s already changed without even realizing it.

Her last stop of the day is the church.

“I come bearing snacks. Homemade,” Tandy announces as she drops down to the church floor with practiced ease, a smile on her face and a bag of cookies in her hand.

Tyrone drops the tennis ball he’d been idly tossing around and steps towards her with a dubious look on his face. “You bake?”

“Mina does,” she corrects him, narrowing her eyes in an effort to look mildly offended at his doubt - that isn’t misplaced, admittedly, but still. “I eat. And now so do you. The special ingredient is Cardamom,” Tandy shares, whispering it out of the corner of her mouth like it’s top secret information. “It’s a natural antidepressant, apparently.” She hands him the bag after tugging it out of his reach the first time he tries to take it. “Figured you could use some. Don’t tell anyone.”

Tyrone scoffs at her request. “Who am I gonna tell?” he asks rhetorically, gesturing to the giant empty church around them.

“Lenny the Alter Rat, of course,” Tandy replies easily, smiling when she sees the corner of Tyrone’s lips start to curl up despite himself. “He’s a huge gossip.”

He rolls his eyes at her dumb joke and rips open the bag before reaching in. “I feel like I’m gonna go crazy in here soon,” Tyrone admits after a moment, breaking one of the cookies in half and holding it up. “Ivan type of crazy.”

Tandy winces in sympathy, taking the other half of the cookie when he offers it to her. “I’d give you some advice from my time in Crazy Town, but I don’t really remember much of it. Other than the obvious.” Tyrone shrugs as he chews, and Tandy’s eyes drift over to where Billy’s hoodie is draped over the back of a pew. “Why don’t you just do your thing? Blip out of here or whatever? You could go anywhere in the city. Hell, in the state. I’d be taking all kinds of day trips if I were you.”

“I don’t think it works like that, at least not yet,” Tyrone sighs, his eyes following Tandy’s for a moment before he looks back at her. “I’m better at controlling it, but only when I can see where I wanna go.”

“And when you’re not in control of it?” she wonders, though she’s pretty sure she already knows the answer.

Tyrone takes a moment to reply, waiting until she’s looking back at him before he does. “It takes me to wherever you are.”

Or to Connors, she knows, remembering the last time they had this conversation, but *well...*

Hearing him say that, though, knowing it’s the truth, makes Tandy feel tethered to him now instead of chained to him, like it did before.

It feels like more change, but also a little like growth.

“It’s been almost two weeks,” Tandy reminds him once the moment has passed, eyes sweeping over the church that used to be home and still kind of feels like it. “I doubt sirens are gonna go off if you step outside for a little bit. Just be careful, keep your hood up and your head down; you’d be surprised how easy it is to be invisible around here.”

“Yeah, because *me* walking around with my *hood* up isn’t gonna draw *any* cops’ attention,” Tyrone is quick to counter with a pointed look.

Tandy cringes and rolls her eyes to the roof. "Right." She usually knows better than that. "Can't believe I forgot about my white girl privilege."

Tyrone fights a smile, but lets out that disbelieving laugh she tends to bring out of him and it's enough for her to know he's not offended. "Yeah," is all he says, his smile holding for a moment longer before it drops a little into something that's not quite a frown.

"I guess that's why they call it privilege," she muses in an attempt to keep it from settling that way. When it doesn't do much more than twitch, she decides to change tactics. "But do you think they're even still looking for you? You, Connors, O'Reilly, you all disappear the night half the city goes batshit crazy," Tandy recaps needlessly, as if Tyrone has been able to think about anything else. "They gotta just think you're all dead by this point, right?"

"More like they think I killed them," Tyrone corrects, sounding bitter and so dejected that Tandy wishes she could disagree with him, just to give the kid some kind of hope, but she can't; that had been the story Connors was going to tell, after all.

All Tandy can really do is remind him of the truth; "But you didn't."

"Not O'Reilly," Tyrone agrees, shoulders slumping as he drops down to sit on the steps. His head hangs, shaking slightly before he looks up at Tandy again with a look she can't quite put a name to, but thinks she might recognize. "I don't know what the hell I did to Connors."

"What you had to," she tells him, the words sounding just as worthless out loud as they did in her head all those weeks ago, after she thought she killed Rick.

Tyrone's nod is weak and it's obvious she's failed to comfort him, but Tandy has nothing else to offer him, so she lets him change the subject.

"You still haven't heard from her?" he asks after a few long beats, eyes following her as she moves to sit down on the step just a little ways away from him.

"Nothing," Tandy sighs as she settles, resting her chin on the heel of her hand and looking towards him. "That *was* her that saved us that night, right?" Tyrone nods. "You think Connors got her before he came after us?"

Tyrone looks stricken at the thought, but not like he hasn't considered it before. It's the obvious outcome, considering all that they know, but one she hopes isn't true - more for Tyrone's sake than anything, if she's honest.

"I hope not," he echoes her thoughts, but somehow Tandy knows his hope isn't selfish. "She's one of the good ones, maybe the only one left in this city."

Tyrone stills then, the silence feeling so heavy in the air that she can almost feel it. "What?"

"Lafayette," he says slowly, eyes pinched as the wheels start to turn in his head. He's quiet for another moment, letting the suspense linger, before he turns his whole body to face Tandy with something she's starting to recognize as hope in his eyes. "I might know someone that could help me."

Intrigued and uncharacteristically eager to help, Tandy's all ears.

She leaves a half hour later, with a promise to think about Tyrone's plan, but as she drops down onto the sidewalk, all Tandy's thinking about is how she's going to let him down the next time she sees him.

Because as much as she wants to help Tyrone, she wants to stay as far away from any and all cops even more.

Tandy and the police don't mesh, and she doesn't involve herself with them unless absolutely necessary, and some half baked plan to clear Tyrone's name just isn't that for her; not if it puts her own freedom at risk.

Being willing to die with Tyrone had been one thing, because Tandy isn't afraid to die. Getting caught, though, that's something else entirely; it's why she's so good at running.

Tandy wishes she was the kind of person he needs her to be - that he thinks she already is - but while she's closer today than she was when they first met, she hasn't changed *that* much.

Nobody, and nothing, ever does.

Melissa isn't home like she expected when she gets there, but it feels like a big deal that Tandy's mind doesn't immediately assume the worst when she finds the trailer empty.

(Yeah, maybe she's with that guy she swears is just a friend, but after Greg and considering this one at least appears to have a job, it could definitely be worse, so.)

Tandy heads straight for the kitchen, where she finds a note informing her that her mother had to go back into work to help with an emergency and that there's leftovers in the fridge for her if she gets hungry before she gets back.

Whether that's true or not, Tandy doesn't know, but either way, it feels both foreign and so painfully normal at the same time that she can only shake her head softly and grab a slice of cold pizza before settling on the couch in the living room.

She sits and eats and doesn't do much else, still not quite used to this whole domesticity thing yet, or staying still at all.

Tandy doesn't have any favorite shows she wants to watch and she doesn't have a Twitter feed to refresh, and one of the only two people she'd consider texting is probably knee deep in a swamp right now, while the other is sitting alone in a church, probably just as bored as she is, pinning all his hopes on her.

Her stomach feels heavy as she thinks of Tyrone and the conversation they just had - of all the misplaced trust he has in her to help him - and she can't bring herself to finish her dinner.

Tandy's never cared much about letting people down, because nobody has ever cared when they've done it to her, but this time is harder. She took Liam's money, left him holding the bag and let him sit in jail for weeks without feeling much remorse for it, but *this* is making her insides feel all twisty for some reason.

She doesn't know if it's because it's Tyrone and they're connected or if it's because she isn't who she used to be, but Tandy just can't shake the guilt of disappointing him.

She gets antsier the more she thinks of it, and suddenly Tandy wishes she hadn't gotten rid of all her pills when she was cleaning out the trailer, because she could really use *something* to settle her growing unease.

Figuring her mother has to have a stash of something hidden somewhere around here, Tandy sets off in search of some kind of relief.

Tandy starts in the bathroom, in her spot in the ceiling, where she used to hide her own stash.

It's as empty as she left it the last time she was dumb enough to think her mother could be trusted, so she moves onto all of her mother's usual hiding spots.

She checks the top shelf in the kitchen cupboards, under the sink and behind the suitcase her mother never uses in the closet; she searches every inch of the living room, and finds nothing before she heads into Melissa's room.

It's fairly small, and mostly bare, so there aren't many places to look, but after checking the drawers on her nightstand and dresser, Tandy gets to her knees and checks under her bed.

Her mother's bedside lamp is cheap and needs a new bulb, so Tandy can barely see, but as she sweeps her arm back and forth on the rug that probably hasn't been cleaned in years, she doesn't have to be able to see what her hand hits to know what it is.

Gripping the small bottle, Tandy pulls it out from under the bed and inspects it as she leans back on her heels, not at all fooled by the Advil label it's wrapped in.

Considering she's found exactly what she was looking for, Tandy really only feels disenchanted as she realizes just how much she'd actually grown to trust her mother. Sighing, she easily pops the child proof lid and she pours the pills out into her hand to see what Melissa's choice of backup drugs is.

But as the round red pills tumble into her palm, Tandy quickly realizes that the only relief she'll get with *these* drugs is from headaches and sore muscles.

Well, maybe that's not the *only* relief she gets from them.

An hour and a full inspection of the trailer later, Tandy finds herself back in the living room empty handed.

There isn't a trace of hard drugs or alcohol anywhere, and as Tandy flops down onto the couch, she finds she's far more pleased than she is disappointed.

Her mother truly is trying this time, more than she ever has before.

Even though it's not easy for her - even though Tandy knows it's a constant battle, every single day, for her to be better - she's *trying*; she's changing.

And so maybe Tandy could stand to try a little bit harder, too.

"Goddamn it," she mutters to herself, feeling like a sappy sucker as she presses the heels of her hands into her eyes and lets out a frustrated groan before reaching for her phone.

She gets less than fifteen minutes into her research before she remembers she has much more informative tools at her disposal, and decides she'll just go right to the source tomorrow.

If she's gonna do the Right Thing, she's at least going to do it her own way.

Tandy picks at her nails as she waits; leaning against a bus shelter across the street from the police station and checking the time on her phone every seven or so minutes to find that's all the time that's passed.

She's impatient, but not restless, and it feels strange, actually hoping for a cop to show up, but when she spots the unfiltered face of Lafayette leaving the station with someone she assumes is his partner, Tandy doesn't hesitate for a moment.

Putting on a practiced accent, she slips into her role effortlessly as she approaches the officers with a friendly smile that almost hurts to wear.

"Hi, hi, excuse me," Tandy calls out as she gets closer, her grin widening when they both stop dutifully and wait for her to finish her approach.

She quickens her steps to get to them sooner, hopping the curb and thanking them for their patience. "What can we help you with, young lady?" Lafayette asks politely, and Tandy immediately starts trying to read him to see if Tyrone's impression of him had been on point.

"My purse," she answers, the unprepared lie rolling off her tongue with ease, and the lilt in her voice does, too. The sweet and helpless young girl in need of a big strong man's help is a

role Tandy has perfected over the years and it never fails. “I think it was stolen and I- That’s something I should report to y’all, right?”

“You were mugged?” the partner clarifies, ready to get his cape on.

“No, no, I put it down and...” Trailing off, Tandy fails to see the purpose in continuing her tale, sees her opening and takes it; reaching out and placing her hand on Lafayette's forearm without any further preamble.

There’s a flash of white and then the brightness settles into more of a glow; Tandy’s eyes taking less time to adjust than they did on her last visit.

She can hear the sound of a baby crying somewhere in the distance before she spins to watch as a little girl with pigtails comes out of the bushes to run past her and towards the glass; the dirty soccer uniform she’s wearing disappearing as she steps inside and grows two feet in size and years in age.

Lafayette is inside and he hugs her first, a bright smile on his face as he picks her up and spins her around; kisses her forehead and walks her over towards another man, who then envelopes them both in an embrace so warm that Tandy can feel the heat of it from outside.

It’s a familiar picture, one she might have found her in own hopes once upon a time. Tandy wishes she could be the type of person that wasn’t tempted to reach out and take from them what was taken from her - or at least that the temptation was easier to resist - but that’s not who she is; it’s probably not who she’ll ever be.

Still, she doesn’t do it; not because she doesn’t want to or even because it would be wrong, but just because that’s not what she came here for.

She has what she needs, but can’t help but stay for a moment longer to stand in the glow of the kind of hope she lost long ago and is still struggling to get back. She eventually even manages a smile, although bittersweet, as she watches the scene play out until the curtains close and it all fades away.

Tandy’s hand is already back at her side by the time Lafayette’s eyes refocus and she offers him an innocent smile when he asks her if she can repeat the rest of her story.

“You know what, nevermind,” she insists, the twang in her voice slipping just a bit as she looks between the two confused men. “I just realized I’m being a total scatterbrain, because I left my purse at home today. Can you believe that?” Tandy doesn’t wait for either of them to answer before she steps away to make her getaway. “I swear I’d forget my head if it wasn’t screwed on. I’m so sorry for wasting y’all’s time. You have a good day, officers.”

Tandy’s gone before either of them can get a word in, the next step in the plan already taking form in her mind as she heads to the laundromat.

She takes a couple days before she goes back to the church, getting what she needs so she has something concrete to offer Tyrone when she shares the fruits of her labor and research.

“He’s a dad,” Tandy informs him in way of greeting, picking up the pink bag she dropped on the floor during her entrance and slinging it over her shoulder as she makes her way towards him.

Tyrone doesn’t even get up from where he’s sitting on his sleeping bag; knees and hood up, looking glum, or maybe just bored. “Who?”

“Lafayette,” Tandy replies like he’s dumb, stepping up and approaching the boy until she’s close enough to give his foot a nudge with her own. “Come on, cheer up; this is good news.”

“How?” he questions, pushing his hood down as he finally looks up at his visitor. “So he’s a father. What good does that do us?”

“Ugh, I still have so much to teach you,” she groans, but sounds more wistful than anything, even as she shakes her head in faux disappointment. “It’s an in we can exploit.”

“What, are you gonna pose as a babysitter and try to seduce him or something?” he guesses with a scoff.

Tandy smirks, a little impressed because that play isn’t half bad and might actually work on someone else, but shakes her head again. “Not exactly,” she answers, shifting her bag to the front of her body. “I don’t think he’d be very receptive to my charms.”

“Hard to believe,” Tyrone mumbles sarcastically, but Tandy chooses to ignore it.

“I was thinking of a different angle,” she tells him, her words a bit hesitant because she’s not sure how he’s going to feel about her plan. He was so adamant about keeping Evita away from all of this, so she can’t imagine he’ll be particularly thrilled about the prospect of involving anyone else he cares about either. “But we’d need some help.”

Tandy leaves it at that, watching the way Tyrone’s brow furrows as the gears start turning in his head, and she can spot the exact moment he realizes what she’s suggesting.

“No way,” he declares as he pushes himself to his feet, then pushes the sleeves of his hoodie up his arms like he’s ready for a fight. “I’m not bringing my parents into this.”

“Just your mom,” Tandy quickly corrects him, like that will make the suggestion any more appealing to him. His dad could work too, father to father, but Tyrone is a mama’s boy and that will go a much longer way. “You said you almost got through to him that day; imagine what your upset, desperate mother could do if she pulled at his daddy strings.”

Tyrone knows she’s right, and Tandy knows he hates it.

He's tried so hard to be the perfect son for them - to not be the reason for any more stress or heartache than they've already suffered after Billy, no matter the toll it took on him - and the one time he slipped up and stepped out of line, it all came crashing down.

Tandy gets it and the guilt he feels, as much as she understands why he had to do everything he did anyways, but this mess isn't going to fix itself; sometimes you've gone so far, you just gotta keep going to get all the way back.

"I don't know, Tandy," he sighs, sounding a lot more resigned than unsure - a sure sign he's starting to consider it.

"You should at least call her, let her know how you're doing," Tandy tries, knowing that if she can't convince him, Adina will be able to. Again, he's a mama's boy. "Moms worry."

Or so she remembers, anyways.

It's been a long while since her own mother has worried about her - or, she considers, thinking of nightly questions over dinner, maybe not *that* long - but Adina is not Melissa, and Tyrone isn't Tandy either, despite their recent reversal of fortune.

"And lead the cops right to me?" he scoffs, looking at her like she's crazy for even suggesting it. "They're definitely tracking our phones."

"That's why you use a burner," Tandy replies easily, already a step ahead of Tyrone as usual.

The boy laughs like he doesn't think she's serious. "And how am *I* supposed to get a burner phone? This isn't the Wire."

Tandy's pulling one out before he's even finished asking, and presenting it to him with a smirk that's somehow both smug and nonchalant at the same time.

"I know a guy," she shrugs, like Elmer didn't make her jump through hoops to get it - but considering what she did to Liam, she's just thankful his guy came through for her at all.

Tyrone looks exasperated but sounds almost fond when he takes the phone with a simple, "Of course you do."

Tandy's next stop is the Johnson house, to deliver the other phone she was overcharged for, but she takes the time to scope out the street for any possible police presence first.

She's pretty confident in her eye for unmarked cop cars, and while she doesn't really see any suspicious looking vehicles hanging around, Tandy still knocks on a few neighboring doors pretending to sell something until she finds herself standing on the Johnsons' porch for the second time.

Tyrone's mother answers the door after her third knock and she looks like she's been doing about as well as her son has.

"Mrs. Johnson," Tandy greets her with a soft smile and a small wave, both more sincere than what she just offered the last four people who opened the door for her. "I don't know if you remember me..."

"You're Tyrone's friend," she realizes after a moment, her voice polite though tired, and she looks behind Tandy as if she's hoping Tyrone will be with her.

"Something like that," she says with a nod and offers her hand. "I'm Tandy."

Adina's smile is tight, but seems genuine as she shakes her hand. "It's nice to see you again, Tandy," she replies and then sighs sadly. "If you're looking for Tyrone, he's not around right now."

"No, I know," Tandy assures the older woman, her hand immediately going to the strap of her bag after it's released. "That's actually why I'm here. Can I come in?"

There's an obvious hesitation, but it's only for a moment, and then Adina is holding the door open and stepping aside so Tandy can enter. She shuts and locks the door once she's in, and leads the blonde towards the kitchen where she offers her something to drink.

"Is Tyrone okay?" Adina cuts to the chase after Tandy declines her offer, proving she's as perceptive as her son - or at least as good at reading Tandy as he is. "Do you know where he is?"

"He's okay," Tandy promises, with what she hopes is a reassuring smile. "He's staying somewhere safe and he's not hurt. He's just hiding out until things blow over."

Adina still looks worried, of course. "He's still in the city?"

"Trust me, he's *safe*," she repeats, though she knows the words of a teenage stranger bring little comfort to a scared mother. Adina nods and even though she doesn't look at all convinced, she does look curious as Tandy pulls her bright pink bag up onto the counter and opens it. "As for why I'm here..." She pulls an old cell phone out and slides it over towards Adina. "I know it's not the same as seeing him, but it's better than nothing, right? His number's on the back."

Picking up the phone, Adina pulls the sticky note off the back and eyes the digits scribbled on it. "His number?" she questions, confused and hopeful eyes finding Tandy. "To call him? Is that safe?"

"Totally safe," Tandy swears, a small grin growing on her face at how obviously emotional Adina is at just the thought of being able to talk to her son after all this time. "Got them from the best guy in the city. Just don't use it outside of the house, don't even take it outside of the house, just to be safe. Other than that, you're good. Ty's expecting a call tonight; cleared his schedule and everything."

Adina's eyes are watering as she clutches the phone to her chest - right over her heart - and Tandy almost has to look away for a moment, just because of the obvious raw emotion of it all.

But she doesn't, because she finds it feels really good, seeing Adina like this; knowing she helped make it happen - that her simple act of caring about Tyrone enough to want to help him, despite the risk she was taking, made someone *this* happy.

"*Thank you,*" Adina chokes out with all the sincerity in the world, barely managing to keep her voice steady as she reaches over to cover Tandy's hand with her own. "For the phone and for helping him."

There's suddenly a lump in Tandy's throat when she tries to swallow, but she's able to offer the older woman a smile and a shrug that doesn't convey the nonchalance she wants it to.

"Yeah, of course," is all she can bring herself to say to that.

"Tyrone, that boy," Adina says wistfully, pulling her hand back. "He likes to think he's grown, but the truth is he's never been away from me, from home, for this long, and I worry. And not just because of those cops out there looking for him." She wipes under her eyes and seems to get her emotions in check as she looks over at Tandy. "You take care of him for me, will you?"

"I'm doing my best," Tandy assures her, and as strange as it is, she likes that that's the truth. "But *actually,*" she continues a bit hesitantly, drawing out the second word as she finishes talking herself into doing it. "There's something *you* might be able to do to help Ty yourself."

Adina perks up and nods without a second thought, clearly ready to do whatever it takes her help her son; something, Tandy's slowly learning, they have in common.

Her conversation with Adina is long and hard, and while she doesn't share everything, Tandy tells her enough to make sure she's able to make an informed decision before she agrees to help.

Adina is a good mom, though, so Tandy suspects all she would've had to do was ask.

Still, with as much as she shared, Tandy leaves the woman to digest everything she's just been told while she goes up to Tyrone's room to see if there's anything she can bring him as a peace offering for the talk he's going to have with his mother tonight.

Because he doesn't want her involved, but she wants to be now, and so she will be.

Tandy just hopes Tyrone is as big of a mama's boy as she thinks he is, so Adina can talk more sense into him than she could and get him on board with the plan.

But if not, hopefully the Nintendo Switch she finds on top of his desk will be enough to stop him from being grumpy with her about it tomorrow.

It isn't.

"I told you I didn't want you involving my mom," is the first thing Tyrone says to her the next day, and the edge in his voice tells Tandy he's more than just grumpy with her.

She grimaces and offers him the peace offering she brought, but when he doesn't even stop glaring at her long enough to look at what it is, she knows she's going to have to engage in this fight.

"Look, I know what I'm doing, okay?" Tandy tries to play it off, moving past Tyrone to put his Nintendo Switch by his sleeping bag. "Trust me, she's our best shot at getting Lafayette on our side."

"*I don't care!*" Tyrone explodes as he turns around to face her. "I didn't want her involved, Tandy! Just like I didn't want Evita involved! It's too dangerous." He pauses then, anger dissipating as quickly as it came, as his shoulders slump and his tone shifts into something softer. "Look at what happened to the last person I dragged into this."

He means O'Reilly.

"That wasn't your fault," Tandy tells him, ducking her head a bit to try to catch his eyes, the steps making her taller than him. "Whatever happened to O'Reilly, that's not on you, Ty." *Neither was Duane, or Billy*, she wants to add, but thinks better of it. "O'Reilly wanted to help you, she *chose* to. Your mother wants to help you, too." Tandy crosses her arms over her chest as she steps down so that she's on Tyrone's level. "And so do I."

When Tyrone finally meets her gaze, his eyes are sad and conflicted, but not really angry. "That's different," he sighs. "You're, we're..."

"Partners," Tandy finishes for him, and it sounds a lot like an admission. *If it's on you, it's on me too*, she hears herself saying in her head. "But we can't do this alone."

Tyrone lets out a breath and nods, but has to look away again. "Just... Can you just go?" he asks her, voice small and pleading. He's not angry with her, just upset, and Tandy can't begrudge him that. "I just want to be alone right now."

"Yeah, sure," she agrees easily, thinking of all the times Tyrone gave her the space she needed when she needed it, but also of all those times he didn't let her push him away, too. "But I'll be back tomorrow."

"Okay," Tyrone mumbles as she walks past him, but it's enough for Tandy to think they'll be okay by then.

(They're not, even though Tandy gets him take out from Bud's Broiler, but when she brings him a basketball the day after that, he finally cracks a smile at one of her jokes, so she knows he'll get over it soon.

She'll just have to keep trying.)

With Connors gone, the head of the snake has been cut off, so Adina's path isn't nearly as dangerous as Tyrone's was, but it's still obvious how much he hates it, even after he eventually gets onboard the already moving train.

He feels useless, hiding out in a church while his mother is potentially putting herself in harm's way, but Adina promises to keep them up to date on everything that's going on, and more importantly, to ask for help if she needs it.

And as it turns out, Tandy was right about playing on Lafayette's daddy instincts, because apparently all it takes is a very impassioned speech and some tears from a desperate mother for him to agree to help the cause.

"I told you," Tandy can't help but gloat when Tyrone hangs up the phone, but even her smugness can't wipe the smile off his face. "Never doubt me, grasshopper. I always know the right play."

"Yeah, yeah," he laughs with a widening grin, pocketing the phone in the front of his hoodie and slipping his hands in with it; leaving them there like he's afraid of what he'll do with them otherwise. "*Thank you.*"

Tyrone sounds and looks all earnest, like he's thinking mushy things and making this into a whole *thing* in his head, and try as she might, Tandy can't quite bring herself to ruin the moment for him.

"What are people forced into your life by fate for, right?" she says instead, and the shrug she gives does nothing to downplay the sincerity of her smile.

*

While Adina and Lafayette work on finding a way to clear Tyrone's name, he and Tandy fall into a sort of routine while they wait.

What used to be sporadic visits whenever the mood would strike turn into daily occurrences.

She always comes with a gift - usually something for him to eat, but sometimes something for him to do - and then stays with him for a bit.

It's about keeping him company more than anything, but Tandy can't deny that she enjoys their time together, too.

Not that she'd ever tell him that, though.

Most days they just talk, about all kinds of different things - from the meaningful things, like their lives and struggles, to the shallow things, like their favorite music and movies - but sometimes they do more than that.

"What do you know about basketball?" Tyrone asks her one day before she's even finished climbing down the scaffolding.

Tandy lands with a thud and tosses him the pack of batteries she promised to get him. "Next to nothing," she admits and shoots him a wary look. "Why?"

"You're always teaching me things, that are mostly illegal," Tyrone explains with a teasing grin. "I think it's time I taught you a few things, too."

He palms the basketball in his hands before he bounces it in her direction and Tandy catches it easily, but holds it in front of her body like she's never touched one in her life.

"So you're gonna teach me how to play basketball?" she questions, eyebrow arched perfectly.

Tyrone grins, slipping his hoodie off and tossing it aside. "We've all got our areas of expertise," he reasons, bending down to check his laces before he makes his way over to her. "And it was either basketball or I teach you all my favorite hymns."

"Basketball it is," Tandy is quick to agree, holding the ball up between them as if asking him what to do with it. "Show me how to ball, Obi Wan Jordan."

Tyrone's face looks like it's about to split open, he's smiling so wide, and that alone might make the next hour of guaranteed embarrassment worth it.

Even with her daily visits, Tandy can tell Tyrone is getting more and more restless by the day, and not just because he never misses an opportunity to tell her.

She offers to jack a car so she can take him out for a late night joyride outside of the city, just to get some fresh air, but he declines - even when she swears she'll put the car back when they're done.

Because as much as Tyrone hates being stuck in the church, he's more terrified of leaving it, even for a second.

It's irrational, but Tandy gets it.

She doesn't Get It, because being a tiny white girl means she'll never have to, but she understands it; Tyrone has seen two boys that look just like him get gunned down by cops right in front of him; *of course* he's scared of what could happen to him if he goes out there while the police think he's a cop killer.

So instead of taking Tyrone out for some fun, Tandy continues to try her best to bring some fun to him.

"Brought you something to cure your boredom," she yells down as soon as she peeks her head inside the building.

Tyrone doesn't reply until she's got her feet on the ground. "What is it this time?" he wonders as he finishes folding up the blanket in front of him. "I'm so bored I'd happily do *homework*."

"Well, I'm not *that* cruel," she jokes, before reaching into her bag and pulling out a huge stack of comic books to present to him. "Here you go, nerd."

Tandy has no idea if they're any good, but the guy she bought them off of at the flea market swore they were fan favorites and he looked like someone who would know.

Tyrone furrows his brow and reaches for them, taking the pile and sifting through it quickly to check out what's in it.

"Where'd you get the money for these?" he wonders, and while his tone's not accusatory, Tandy knows what he's thinking.

He's not wrong, but in her defense, it was money she'd already stolen before she started on this *being a better person* path, and it was for a good cause, so.

"No need to make you an accessory," she brushes it off, making the answer obvious. "You're already wanted for murder."

Tyrone snorts and shakes his head, and at least he can laugh about it now.

"You ever think about going back to school?" Tyrone asks her a little while later, when they're sprawled out on the church floor beside each other.

Tandy almost shudders at the thought. “Not a chance in hell,” she answers, lolling her head to the side to look at the boy to her right. “Can you picture me sitting at a desk for six hours every day?”

“Definitely not,” he agrees with a soft laugh, and Tandy suddenly finds herself wishing he would have seen her in that Saint Sebastian’s uniform that day - he probably would’ve had an aneurysm.

“Nah, school was never really my thing,” she shares, though she doubts it’s much of a shock. “Might get my GED, though.” Tandy had never really thought about it much before, but now, with everything back to what could pass for normal, she has - just a little. “What about you? Think you’ll go back to being preppy when all this blows over?”

(It’s always *when*, never *if*.)

Tyrone is quiet for a moment, holding Tandy’s gaze for a beat before he turns his eyes back to ceiling. “I’m not sure I can ever go back,” he admits, his words quiet but the truth of them echoing in the emptiness.

She doesn’t have to ask if they’re still talking about school.

Tandy stays so long one afternoon that the weather outside goes from sunny to gloomy, and then by the time it’s dark out, rainy.

“Shit,” she curses under her breath when she hears the rain and wind start pelting against the stain glass windows of the church. Tandy hadn’t even noticed the sun had gone down yet and when she checks the time on her phone, she sees it’s way later than she usually stays. “I didn’t realize it was this late.”

“You gonna try to make it?” Tyrone asks from the floor, shuffling the deck of cards Tandy had brought with her to keep them entertained that day. “Sounds pretty bad out there.”

It does, and Tandy hates storms - has ever since that night over eight years ago.

Still, she considers it for the briefest of moments until she hears the crack of thunder and a flash of light soon after.

The trailer isn’t *that* far, but it’s far enough.

“You mind if I crash here for the night?” she asks, turning on her heel to look down at the boy she knows won’t turn her away.

“Yeah, sure,” Tyrone answers easily, and though he sounds casual, he can’t hide the hint of excitement in his eyes, no doubt happy to have her company for longer; Tandy remembers how lonely it can get in here, especially at night. “It was your place first.”

He's got a point, but Tandy still thanks him as she shoots her mother a quick text to let her know she won't be home tonight, but that she's safe.

Once she's done, Tandy pockets her phone and grabs the extra pillow she's suddenly very happy she brought Tyrone last week and sits back down across from him.

"So, you want me to braid your hair first or do you wanna do mine?"

The rain has stopped by morning, and Tandy leaves before Tyrone wakes up.

She doesn't go back to see him that day, but not because of the night before. And when she doesn't go see him the next two days after that, it's not because of their sleepover, either.

It has nothing to do with what happened days before, but rather what's going to happen in a few days time.

Tandy hadn't realized how close the date was until she got home early that morning and noticed it circled on the generic cat calendar her mother has hanging in the kitchen, but she hasn't been able to stop thinking about it since.

It's a day she's dreaded every year for the past eight, but this time, it's for an entirely different reason; one she doesn't want to think about, let alone talk about, which is exactly what she'd end up doing if she went to see Tyrone, so she just... doesn't.

Tandy has had to deal with her own problems for more than half of her life, there's no reason she can't deal with this one on her own, too.

And yet, as the day draws closer, Tandy finds herself walking near the church, and all it takes is a call from Tyrone's burner phone, checking to make sure she's okay since she hasn't been around, for her to start heading in that direction.

But not before she stops to pick up some donuts.

Usually they talk about Tyrone, or Tandy at least lets him steer the topic, considering he's the one with limited options for social interaction lately, and even though it's obvious Tandy has something to talk about today, he doesn't push it; happy to keep the focus on himself until she's ready to say it.

And, Tandy's surprised to note, considering how many days she's been avoiding it, it doesn't take all that long.

"It's my dad's birthday tomorrow," she randomly blurts out, the words she'd been holding in since she arrived twenty minutes ago finally spilling out.

Tandy shoves one of the donuts she brought into her mouth sheepishly when she realizes what she's done and avoids Tyrone's curious eyes.

He knows all too well why it's an issue for her, and he seems to choose his words carefully. "Do you guys usually do anything for that?"

Tandy swallows and shakes her head, wiping her hands off on her jeans. "Not really." It's been a while since she's been with her mother for the day, but when she was, it was acknowledged at most, and while the day was usually sombre, it wasn't anything like what they do for the anniversary of his death. "But I know my mom's gonna want to talk about him, probably tell the story of their first date or the first birthday she spent with him and I don't know if I can stomach it."

"You ever think about asking her about it?" Tyrone wonders gently, no doubt remembering the last time they discussed this topic and he asked the same thing.

Because Tandy remembers it too, all too well, and while that anger and resentment and whatever else it was that boiled over back then is still there somewhere inside her, she has a better control of it now, and has it aimed in the right direction.

She's still got her shit, but she doesn't take it out on other people anymore.

So instead of getting angry and whipping out her dagger like last time, all Tandy says is, "No." Tyrone nods, popping the last of his donut into his mouth as he regards her silently, looking like he's debating with himself, and Tandy can't take it. "Just say it."

He sighs and pulls his legs up to his chest, crossing them at the ankles while his arms rest on his knees. He looks like he's protecting himself, from her and her anger, and as shitty as it makes her feel, Tandy can't say she blames him.

All she can do is listen to his advice and react better this time; show him that she's changed.

"Talk to her," he says simply. "I know it seems like this hard thing to do - to bring up *and* to hear about - but it's better than letting it eat at you. I spent years not understanding why my parents didn't listen to me about what happened to Billy and why they just let the cops lie like that. I was angry all the time, even when I didn't show it - *especially* when I didn't show it. But I get it now."

Tandy purses her lips as she hears what Tyrone is saying, and tries to listen. "You *get* it?" she repeats dubiously, finding it hard to believe, knowing how deep the boy's anger and resentment about it had run.

He had been just as upset as she was that day, after all, even if he handled himself better than she had.

“Yeah,” he shrugs simply, and she envies his ease. “I might not agree with it, but I understand it. Sometimes that’s the best we can get, you know?” Tyrone offers her a sympathetic smile and rocks back so he can lift a leg and nudge her lightly in the shin with his foot. “Talk to her. No matter what she says, I promise you won’t regret it. It can’t be any worse than not knowing, right?”

It makes sense, and it’s probably even something Tandy would advise someone else, but it’s easier said than done.

Still, she appreciates the advice and the fact that he cares enough to give it, especially after last time.

“Yeah, maybe,” Tandy eventually agrees non-committedly but with a small smile, and she kicks him back.

Tandy skips going to the church again the next day, but this time she doesn’t feel guilty about it.

She didn’t warn Tyrone yesterday before she left, because she hadn’t even been sure then, but something tells her that he’s not expecting her.

Instead, Tandy spends the day with her mother, who doesn’t have to work on weekends.

She wakes up to the smell of breakfast - bacon, eggs and hashbrowns, all her father’s favorites - and steels herself for the day ahead.

After spending all night tossing and turning, thinking about what Tyrone had said, Tandy still hasn’t decided whether to finally ask her mother about what she saw in her head all those weeks ago or not.

She wants to know, *needs* to know, but she doesn’t want to ignore what her mother wants or needs, either.

Because maybe Melissa *needs* to ignore that part of her deceased husband to be able to keep moving forward. Oh, but what if that’s not what she *wants*, and she’s just been doing it to keep Tandy’s memory of her beloved father intact? What if what her mother *really* needs is to let the truth out?

No wonder Tandy’s only cared about herself for so long; caring about other people and their feelings can be really fucking complicated.

Tandy makes it through the day without saying anything, even though she can hear Tyrone's voice in the back of her head the whole time.

It isn't until well into the evening, after they've come home from having dinner at a small cafe nearby and Melissa pulls out that *box* of hers and joins Tandy on the couch that she finally can't hold it in any longer.

She really tries to, for her mother's sake, to maybe wait until tomorrow *at least*, but before Melissa can finish her story about the night Nathan proposed, Tandy just blurts it out.

"How can you talk about him like this?" she finally asks, words more accusatory than she means for them to be; it's not about blaming her mother for anything, Tandy just wants to *understand*.

"Talk about him like *what*, honey?"

Melissa's surprised and her confusion seems genuine, and Tandy suddenly starts second guessing herself now, about digging all of this up for her mother again.

But she *has* to know the truth.

She just spent months making sure the world knew the truth about Nathan Bowen; it's only fair she get to know, too.

"How can you talk about him like he was this great man?" Tandy begins elaborating gently, fighting to keep her eyes on her mother's. "When he treated you the way that he did?"

Melissa sucks in a breath, her eyes flashing with something Tandy doesn't catch, but it's obvious she knows what her daughter is talking about now. "Oh, Tandy..."

Tandy has to look away from all the emotions playing out on her mother's face, and she doesn't look up again until there's a hand covering her own. "I'm sorry," she whispers when she sees the tears in Melissa's eyes, but she's honestly not even sure what she's apologizing for.

Sorry for bringing it up? Sorry for possibly being the reason she had to pretend her father was someone he wasn't for so long? Sorry that her mother had to go through it at all?

"You have nothing to apologize for, sweetie," Melissa assures her, her free hand cupping Tandy's chin as she offers her a pained smile. "Things with your father were very complicated, but you loved him so much and you took his death *so* hard, and I didn't want to hurt you any more than you were already hurting. I just wanted to protect you. I failed you in a lot of ways, but that was one thing I could do for you."

Tandy fights back her own tears as her fears are confirmed, and she swallows thickly as she squeezes her mother's hand. "I don't need you to protect me anymore," she struggles to say around the lump in her throat. "I just need you be honest with me."

Melissa's eyes flutter closed as she lets out a deep, sad sigh, but only a few tears fall as she nods her head. "Okay," she breathes out shakily, her hand dropping from Tandy's face to her lap, covering their other hands. "The truth. I can give you that."

They talk for almost two hours, and they're both completely emotionally drained by the end of it; Melissa so much so that she goes to bed early once she's done and leaves her daughter alone to sort out everything she's just heard.

Tandy feels sick to her stomach, both from the information itself and from the grief of having to hear it, and she's not sure if she feels any better now that she's got her answers.

Maybe tomorrow, or in a week she will, but right now, all Tandy wants to do is cry for the loss of her father all over again.

And so she does.

For the first time in as long as she remembers, Tandy allows herself to really cry.

She cries for the father she thought she knew, and the mother she's realizing she's never known at all, and most of all, she cries for herself; for everything she went through to clear the name of a man she's not even sure deserved it.

Soon Tandy's cries turn into sobs, silent but crushing, and she finds herself doubled over from the force of them; her face buried in her hands to try to keep them from reaching her mother in their tiny trailer.

Her mother spent years protecting Tandy from this grief, so she can try to protect Melissa from hers, if only to-

"Tandy?"

The voice somehow reaches her through her crying and the pressure in her ears, and Tandy jumps up in surprise at the sound of it; her dagger flickering to life in her hand for a moment until she realizes who it is.

"Ty?" she chokes out when she sees him standing right in front of her. It takes Tandy a moment to register that he's really here, in her living room; her home. "W-What are you doing here?"

Tyrone looks just as confused as she does, eyes darting around the trailer as his hood falls from his head. "I was in the church, and I could feel you..." He trails off, probably not knowing much more than she does, but he looks less concerned about the *how* and more concerned about the *why*. "Are you okay? What happened?"

Tandy's chest heaves as a new round of sobs sneaks up on her, but she just manages to choke out an answer before she starts crying again; "I asked my mom about my dad."

She doesn't see him come closer, but Tandy feels a weight beside her on the couch and then Tyrone's hand is covering her own before he wraps his other arm around her shoulders and pulls her against him.

Tandy's not thinking about how they're touching for the first time since that night the city almost crumbled, and she's not thinking about how Tyrone left the safety of the church for the first time for *her*, because he could *feel* that she needed him.

All Tandy's thinking about, besides the devastating truth of who her father really was, is just how glad she is that he's there at all.

Eventually Tandy runs out of tears, and when she starts to calm down, Tyrone gives her a little shake.

"You wanna hear some good news?" he asks softly, offering her a momentary reprieve if she wants it. Tandy nods against his chest, but doesn't look up. "My mom called earlier, and they figured out who Connors paid to kill Fuchs. They think they can get him to talk."

Tandy doesn't know why, but she laughs.

It's good news - *great* news, even - and she's so happy to hear it, but she's still so sad and soon her laughter is turning into tears she didn't think she had left in her anymore, and Tyrone just holds her tighter.

Tyrone stays with her all night, even when she eventually passes out and falls asleep against him.

He doesn't try to leave until the sun starts coming up, and even then, it's probably just because he's worried about her mother finding him there.

Tandy starts to stir when she feels him moving, but she doesn't open her eyes until he's finished laying her down on the couch and draping something over her to keep her warm.

She knows what it is without even having to look, and her fingers curl around the familiar worn material instinctively as she inhales the smell of it before looking up at the boy standing over her, who's watching her with a sad smile.

"I have to go," he whispers, eyes and voice soft with caring. "Are you gonna be okay?"

Tandy's throat is sore and dry and it hurts to talk, but she does it anyways, even as she nods. "Don't you need this?" she asks tiredly, eyes drifting down to the hoodie covering her body.

“You need it more,” Tyrone shrugs, and his words give her a rush of déjà vu. “You can use it as your excuse to come see me later.”

She furrows her brow as she slowly registers his words, and even though she kind of just wants to sleep, something about what he says has her needing to know. “What do you mean?”

“You bring something with you every time you visit,” he explains with a hint of amusement. “Like you think you need a reason to come.” He shrugs again, pulling at the arm of his shirt, and without giving her a chance to respond, Tyrone hesitates for just a moment before he leans down to press a kiss against Tandy’s hair. “You don’t.”

He’s so close and then he’s gone before Tandy can even really feel him, already moving towards the door.

There’s a million different things swirling in Tandy’s still sleepy brain, but all she can really focus on right now is that Tyrone’s leaving. “You’re gonna walk?”

He stops at the door and offers her a smile that’s trying to tell her not to worry. “The church isn’t far,” he reminds her simply, like he hasn’t been terrified to go outside for the last month.

“But-”

“I’ll be okay,” he promises, like he knows she’s just as scared for him as he is. “I’ll see you later.”

Tyrone’s gone before she can even thank him for everything, but as she slips her arms through the sleeves of the hoodie he left behind and pulls it tightly around herself, Tandy finds she still feels just as safe as when he was there.

Tandy stays wrapped up on the couch for a couple more hours before she forces herself to stop wallowing and get up to make breakfast.

She’s almost finished by the time her mother wakes up, and as she shuffles into the kitchen, Tandy tenses slightly as she worries about how things will be with her after everything they discussed last night.

But when Melissa wraps her arms around her from behind to peak at what she’s making, Tandy immediately relaxes against her mother in relief.

“Making your favorite,” she tells her before she even has to ask.

“It looks great, honey,” Melissa assures her, giving her a final squeeze before she excuses herself to go take a shower.

Tandy watches her mother leave, still a little worried about what she might have stirred up last night, but more hopeful that whatever it was, it’ll finally give Melissa peace.

She's not sure if it's given her any yet, but after sleeping on it, Tandy's sure she at least doesn't regret it, because at least it helped her understand.

Pushing those thoughts aside for now, Tandy finishes up and gets their plates ready for when her mother comes back, and she resists the urge to leave leftovers to bring Tyrone.

When Tandy stops by the church later that day, she shows up empty handed and wearing nothing over her simple white t-shirt.

"Where's Billy's hoodie?" Tyrone asks when he sees her, pushing himself to his feet and walking towards her so that they meet in the middle.

"Didn't bring it," Tandy admits to him a little cheekily, tilting her head as a smile slowly spreads across her lips. She shows him her hands, so he sees that they're empty, before she drops them to her sides. "I just came to hang out with my friend."

His eyes soften, amusement and something else swimming in them. "Your *friend*, huh?"

"Okay, my BFF," she corrects with an exaggerated sigh, the corner of her smile tugging up into a smirk. "But I have exactly two friends, so don't let it go to your head or anything."

Tyrone's own grin quickly overtakes his face, and it makes Tandy's stomach flip in a way that proves to her that this boy - this boy who saw good in her when she didn't think she had any left and who's been there for her no matter how hard she's tried to push him away; who called her when he needed someone because he trusted her to do the same for him and who understands her in ways that go beyond whatever freaky shit tangled them up together...

This boy is much more to her than just that.

But, maybe, *friends* is a good place to start.

End Notes

To my recipient, it was a pleasure writing these two for you, so I really hope you liked it. Happy holidays! And to anyone else that took the time to read, I really hope you liked it too and I would love to hear what you thought.

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