

say a prayer for me in the dark

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say a prayer for me in the dark

by [witchjeons](#)

Summary

Wilhelm stares at Simon's bare shoulders in the dark - the endless rise and fall of his breathing, like the tide lapping at moonlit sand. He's right there and yet Wilhelm still wants him, wonders if this is what it means to go insane. To want something which can never be his.

He slips from the covers before the ache in his heart becomes too much to bear.

Or: the stoner, neighbours, music major! simon and poetry major! wilhelm college au

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

“It’s like autumn arriving. You expect nothing from its arrival. You expect everything.” - Alejandra Pizarnik, from *Extracting the Stone of Madness: Poems 1962-1972* (tr. Yvette Siegert)

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

I

“ you asked me, once, in the stifling quiet between midnight and daybreak, whether i believed we have a choice in love. i told you i didn’t. you said ‘i see.’

i’m beginning to think that if you’d pressed, if you’d asked just a little more, that i’d have spread it all out for you; my aching, still-beating heart, the feverish desire, the deep-seated pain. but you didn’t. and you won’t. and i have to simply be okay with the whispered ‘*i love you’s*’, with the silent ‘*i miss you when i’m gone’s*’, with the choked on ‘*be mine’s*’.

and i am okay with it. because your fingers press new bruises into the skin of my hips and you hold me like i’m worth something more. you whisper my name like something sacred. and if i can’t have you the way i want you then i will simply have you like this.

in the light of day you are a whole new thing. brighter than any star. brown eyes, brown skin, brown hair, warm heart. you laugh and it’s like my heart is outside my body, retreating with every step you take into the horizon. you go to a place that i can’t reach.

you see there’s this whole thing, about stars. how we’re not seeing a star as it is but rather as it used to be. no star is alive. in order to be seen it must die first.

i think that maybe our love was a supernova, if that is the case. “

The first time Wilhelm sees him, he goes unnoticed. He’s dragging himself back from a seminar, stifling a yawn, thinking mournfully of his bed and knowing that he *has* to start this essay tonight or he’ll never do it. He stops short as he rounds the corner into his corridor, steps fumbling on the worn carpet as he catches sight of someone new on his floor. This is not entirely unusual; people move in and out of the flats around him every now and then. The flat next door has been empty for a while and Wilhelm had been quietly hoping that no-one new would move in, because his last neighbour had had a *very* over enthusiastic girlfriend who liked to wake Wilhelm up at ungodly times of the night.

Then again, Wilhelm thinks, his eyes sweeping appreciatively over the mystery man’s lithe form, *if my new neighbour looks like that I’m not so fussed. He can keep me up as long as he’d like.*

The man is currently busying himself with unloading boxes from the trolley next to him, chocolate curls spilling out from beneath the striped beanie shoved onto his head. He’s wearing a well-fitting black jumper that, *god*, leaves little to the imagination, with the sleeves rolled up to reveal tanned, lean forearms that make Wilhelm’s mouth water.

The man glances up from where he'd been balancing boxes precariously and Wilhelm *throws* himself around the corner again, pressing his back to the wall and holding his breath. Oh, god, if he saw him do that it's all over. Wilhelm's going to have to move out, and he *definitely* doesn't have the money for that. He presses his palm to his rapidly rising and falling chest, trying to slow the staccato rhythm of his heart. After a few nail-biting seconds he peeks around the corner again, blowing out a relieved breath as he's greeted by the other man's back.

Wilhelm's eyes trail after him pathetically as he unlocks the door to apartment 10 and disappears inside, taking his boxes with him. He waits another nail-biting ten seconds, during which he can *feel* every breath enter and leave his body, before hurrying over to his apartment and unlocking the door as quickly as he can. He doesn't know what possessed him to hide from his neighbour (though he suspects it's to do with the bags under his eyes and yesterday's wrinkled outfit clinging uncomfortably to him like a second skin), but he's not about to embarrass himself any further.

When Wilhelm finally crawls out onto his balcony it's nearing eleven at night, and the air has turned cold and clean. It's colder this autumn than last year, and he's glad he had the forethought to bundle up in his warmest coat before grabbing his rolling tin and lighter and coming out here. The sky is clear and black, studded with stars that make him think of something wistful, something lost.

Wilhelm settles down against the wall and tugs his joint from where he'd tucked it behind his ear earlier. The city blinks back at him, hundreds of infinitesimal lights twinkling across the horizon. He's always been a city boy at heart; there is something achingly beautiful about the way every tiny light is a person, a family, thousands of human beings living on top of each other like a sea of tiny stars glowing in the night sky.

"Oh. Hi."

"Oh, Jesus!" Wilhelm scrambles to hide the joint from his neighbour, who has suddenly appeared on the next balcony and startled him out of his reverie.

The other man laughs handsomely. "Sorry, I didn't mean to scare you. I smoke too."

Wilhelm relaxes again and brings the joint back to his mouth, holding it between his lips so that he can light it. It takes a couple of tries, but eventually his aged lighter flickers to life and sparks the joint. He eyes his neighbour as he takes a deep pull. The other man has ditched the beanie he was wearing at some point and replaced it with a puffy grey jacket that makes him look smaller than he actually is. It's cute. His nose is all pink at the tip because of the cold, and he's rubbing his gloved hands together in a feeble attempt to generate warmth.

Wilhelm smiles as the earthy flavour fills his lungs, and speaks around the smoke as it escapes from his lips. "You want some?"

His neighbour shrugs. “Sure.” He makes short work of the dividing wall between their balconies and drops down next to Wilhelm.

“I’m Wilhelm, by the way,” Wilhelm offers as he passes the joint to the other man, who takes a deep, smooth drag and settles against the wall.

“Simon.” Wilhelm nods, digesting the name. *Simon*.

“So, you’re my new neighbour,” Wilhelm remarks, watching as the thick smoke tumbles from Simon’s lips and into the night. The sight is addictive; Wilhelm finds himself wanting to study him, commit him to memory. He’s beautiful; all smooth tanned skin and dark, dark eyes, the son of Lilith incarnate. Simon passes him the joint with an easy smile. Wilhelm tries not to think about the way their fingers brush.

“Indeed I am. Anything I need to know?”

“Hmm,” Wilhelm considers, taking another drag. “Most of the laundry machines downstairs are broken so if you want to get your washing done do it late at night like I do. The store down the street sells the sexiest baguette sandwiches you’re ever gonna find. And... don’t bother trying to make friends with the dude who lives in number seven, guy’s a grade A asshole.”

Simon nods appraisingly as Wille passes him the joint again. “Wow, okay. Thanks. How do you know?”

“He’s had a grudge against me since I moved in, always blaming me for shit that happens around here. I’m pretty sure he’s homophobic, or something.” Wilhelm winces a little; Nils managed to score him some stronger stuff this time, and he always gets loose-lipped when he’s high. How much of his high is actually the weed and how much of it is the way Simon looks at him — like he’s intriguing, some kind of puzzle with missing pieces — he has no idea. He eyes the other man tensely, ready to bolt if he turns out to be homophobic, or something.

Simon raises his eyebrows, but his face is still friendly so Wilhelm relaxes marginally. “You’re queer?”

“What, it’s not obvious?” Wilhelm asks.

Simon lifts a shoulder in reply. “I don’t know. I try not to assume, Wilhelm.”

“Call me Wille.” The words are out of his mouth before he can stop them, and he feels himself start to flush. “If you want.” He adds lamely.

“Okay.” Simon smirks at him, and Wilhelm feels it throughout his whole body like he’s just taken a bump of coke.

“*Wille*.”

Vincent has what must be *at least* three skittles shoved up his nose and Wilhelm is so, so tired.

He muses briefly on his own life as he unsticks his forearms from the counter (which, fucking *gross*). He's twenty years old, two years into his degree. His brother loves him, his parents are proud of him, and he's currently two skittle-related incidents away from being fired from his job.

"Come work with us at the diner, Wilhelm," he mutters to himself mockingly. "It'll be fun, Wilhelm."

"I don't know what you're saying, Wille, but know that I don't appreciate it," Vincent gripes, voice coming out nasally and weird on account of the— fucking skittles. Wilhelm honestly contemplates sticking his arm into a meat grinder.

It's like this — he doesn't have a track record of making the best decisions. He once let Erik dare him into hanging from a tree by just his legs, which rather predictably ended in him eating absolute *shit* and breaking his right forearm in two places. Apparently the bone was sticking out of the skin, and everything. (Wilhelm wouldn't know — he had promptly passed out from the pain). Erik still likes to tell that story at parties, conveniently omitting the part where he *dared Wilhelm to do it*.

That was probably the worst pain he's ever been in, if he's being honest. *And* he had to spend the rest of the summer in a cast, which to an eight-year-old boy is essentially a death sentence. However, staring dead-eyed into the clock hanging on the wall across from him (which seems to creep forward even slower in response to his mournful gaze), he honestly thinks that even that isn't equivalent to the sheer pain of being forced to take a night shift with the dumbest people on the planet.

The diner is owned by Vincent's family, which was what allowed Wilhelm to get a spot there in the first place. The coffee tastes a little like dishwater (not that Wilhelm would know, every time he tries to use the coffee machine it *attacks* him and he has long since given up trying), the wallpaper is peeling just a little, and only four of the seven light fixtures actually still work, but it's good money and (mostly) good fun, so he sticks it out. On nights like this, though, he honestly thinks the job is going to drive him to insanity by the time he turns twenty-one.

Think about the money, Wilhelm.

The skittles finally come out of Vincent's nose, shooting across the counter and landing with a sad *smack smack smack* on the floor behind Wilhelm. He'd been right, then — there were three.

"I think there might be something fundamentally wrong with you, dude," he says. Vincent flips him off over his shoulder as he ambles to the back room.

“I’m not picking those fucking things up!” Wille calls after his retreating form. He rather predictably gets no response.

The diner has been dead for the past hour or so, the final drunken partygoers stumbling out of the door at around 3:30, so Wilhelm takes a chance and slips his phone from his apron. Felice is known for pulling all-nighters when she’s studying, so he takes the chance that she’s awake to text her.

wille:

when i die of boredom on this fucking shift you had better play lana del ray at my funeral

felice:

i’m playing mitski

wille:

i thought we were friends :/

you know what that’s fine

i’ll be in heaven listening to crack baby

felice:

it’s rlly cute how you think you’re going to heaven

wille:

i’ll have u know i’m literally an angel

felice:

huh that’s weird

i’ve never known an angel with a bondage kink before

wille:

felice !!!

All he gets in response is a string of cry-laughing emojis. He scowls and shoves his phone back into his apron pocket.

And looks up into deep brown eyes staring expectantly at him. He jumps, because the last person he expected to be in this shitty diner at gone three in the morning is his super hot,

super mysterious neighbour who he has a woefully embarrassing crush on. He's wearing an oversized, comfy-looking black hoodie that turns his edges soft and gilded in the harsh overhead lights. Simon looks like he's trying not to laugh at him. Wilhelm thinks miserably of flushing himself down the nearest toilet like a dead goldfish.

"Hello."

"Hi."

They stare at each other for a second. Simon's eyes are wide and soft, full of amusement. Wilhelm's mind wanders straight to the other night, to the way the other man's lips had looked wrapped around the roach of the joint. He jolts himself out of his thoughts, cheeks colouring. "Uhm— what can I get for you?"

"Two strawberry shakes, please," Simon replies, thankfully not teasing him. Wilhelm is too sleep-deprived to hide his grimace at the other man's choice of drink. Simon raises an eyebrow at him. "What?"

"Sorry, just— *strawberry*?" Wilhelm can't keep the disdain out of his voice.

Simon scoffs. "What's wrong with strawberry!"

"Everything. Everything is wrong with strawberry. At least get a respectable flavour, like chocolate."

Simon leans against the counter, and Wilhelm decidedly doesn't look at his newly exposed collarbones as he does so. "I thought the customer was always right."

"Hmm, that rule doesn't apply after three AM, buddy." Simon frowns so Wilhelm points behind him to the blackboard, where the rules are scribbled in chalk.

HOUSE RULES:

1. No swearing at customers
2. Wear the uniform (looking at you, Stella)
3. Nils is no longer allowed in here after the Great Macaroni Incident of 2021
4. Don't let Wille use the coffee machine!!!!
5. The customer is always right (unless it's past 3am in which case they're drunk and need to go home)

Simon huffs out a laugh as his eyes travel over the words. "Why aren't you allowed to use the coffee machine?"

"Because it hates me. Every time I try to use it it blows up at me and I have to change because I'm covered in coffee," Wilhelm replies with a chuckle. He catches a flash of blond out of the corner of his eye and calls out to Vincent before he can disappear again.

He's surprised to find Simon still leaning against the counter when he turns back after relaying the order. The other man looks lost in thought, gazing out at the tables like he's looking for something. *Or someone*, Wilhelm's mind supplies.

"So, just fancied two milkshakes, or?" Wilhelm asks before he can stop himself, desperate to know more about the mysterious man in front of him.

Simon's dark eyes flash to him briefly before he's looking away again, tucking his hands into his armpits. "I'm meeting... a friend."

A friend. Something about the other man's tone tells Wilhelm there's more to the story than that, but he lets it go because, really, it's not his place to pry. They're only neighbours, after all. Not friends.

Silence settles between them, broken only by the tapping of Wilhelm's fingers against the counter. Simon glances at his hand and Wilhelm stutters to a stop, embarrassed. He clears his throat. Thankfully, the uncomfortable atmosphere is shattered by Vincent's return, bumping into Wilhelm's shoulder and placing Simon's milkshakes onto the counter with a clatter.

"Two milkshakes for you!" he exclaims.

It's a little too loud, and Wilhelm winces. "Dude, how are you so awake right now?"

"ADHD, brother. ADHD." Vincent claps him on the shoulder and jostles him until Wilhelm shoves him off.

"How much?" Simon asks.

"Oh, it's on the house," Wilhelm replies easily, waving Simon off. "Call it a house-warming gift."

Simon smiles, genuine and soft, and Wilhelm only barely refrains from sighing dreamily.

"Thanks so much, Wille."

Wilhelm can't stop himself from smiling back at the other man. "Not a problem, Simon."

And if he feels a little mournful as he watches Simon carry his milkshakes to one of the booths, then that's between him and Felice when he inevitably spills all about his new crush to her.

"You know, I don't think you actually have the authority to do that," Vincent mutters to him. Wilhelm jumps, having forgotten his coworker was next to him, and pushes at the other man subtly. Then he shoves his hand in his pocket and produces a few crumpled bills to pay for Simon's order. Vincent snorts.

Wilhelm points at him. "Not a word."

Vincent holds up his hands, a shit-eating grin on his face. Then he pulls his phone from his pocket and snaps a picture of Wilhelm before Wilhelm can stop him. Wilhelm tugs out his

own phone and opens the notification that pops up. “Motherfucker! Why did you tweet it?”

Vincent cackles and escapes into the back room before Wille can grab him.

@MILFhuntr

guess who just broke work rules for his new crush

[A picture of Wilhelm in his work uniform, staring at something off-camera, lip caught between his teeth as he tries not to smile.]

-> **@felehrencroma**

WTF?!?!?! @froggieprince explain immediately

-> **@nilz**

a truly shocking turn of events

-> **@froggieprince**

not a crush!!!!

Wilhelm is pulled from his phone when the bell rings, revealing a young woman with brown hair walking into the diner. She smiles perfunctorily at him but doesn't come up to the counter, instead heading straight over to where Simon is seated, fiddling with his straw and worrying his bottom lip with his teeth. Simon stands when he sees her and draws her into a stiff hug, patting her on the back.

They're too far away for Wilhelm to hear their conversation so he busies himself with wiping down the counter methodically and humming under his breath. After a while he glances over at the table. Simon is speaking rapidly, eyes intense. The girl across from him is leaning back in her chair, arms crossed and practically *radiating* hostility. Wilhelm winces sympathetically.

He tries to subtly watch the two as their conversation gets more and more heated. It's still too quiet for him to hear anything over the music flowing from the tinny speakers overhead (after 6pm they're allowed to play whatever they want, and Vincent won their thumb war so it's currently Hip hop) but from the way the woman is hissing her words and gesturing angrily, Wilhelm can tell it's bad. A breakup, maybe?

Simon's fingers tear into the napkin he's holding until it's a pile of tiny pieces, like snowfall on the greasy tabletop. His stare is angry but unfocused, an anxiety about his presence that Wilhelm is woefully familiar with. The girl's milkshake remains untouched. She finally raises her voice enough for Wilhelm to hear, and he catches the tail end of her rant as she stands from the table and grabs her coat.

“—God, Simon, you’re so fucking selfish! I can’t do this anymore, I’m going.”

“Well fuck you too, Sara!” Simon calls after her retreating form, eyes flashing angrily under the dingy lights. The door swings shut behind Sara with a deafening *crack*.

Simon stares defeatedly at the table for a long moment, jaw muscles clenching beneath his tanned skin. He scrubs his hands over his face in frustration before standing. Wilhelm quickly busies himself with something behind the coffee machines, not wanting to be caught eavesdropping, but Simon doesn’t even spare him a glance as he strides out of the diner.

It’s only once he’s long gone and Wilhelm is cleaning up the tables for the night that he realises Simon left his jacket on the seat.

Chapter End Notes

this took such a long time to format for no reason at all

a massive thank you to jo for proof reading this one i love her with all of my heart.
godbless

i have about four chapters of this one done already so i will be updating once a week provided that i don’t get writer’s block (which is very possible)

there is a playlist for this one - it’s a combination of songs i associate with the story, songs i listened to while writing and songs that i think this version of wilhelm would like a lot. you can listen to it [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

“Even through the strobes, I caught the glitter of his eyes. And I found myself wondering what colour they were away from the shadows and artificial rainbows of the dance floor. That was a bad sign. That was perilously close to liking someone.” - Boyfriend Material, Alexis Hall.

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

II

Wilhelm stares at the smooth wood of Simon's door, worrying his bottom lip with his teeth. *Has it been too long?*

When he got home from his shift he collapsed straight into bed, tossing the jacket over his desk chair without a second thought and knocking out for a good twelve hours. Then, he kind of just *forgot* it was there — too busy with trying to catch up with work and writing and hanging out with Felice — and so here he is, three days later, trying to work up the courage to just give it back. He huffs a sigh and tugs a hand through his hair.

"Hi. You planning on knocking anytime soon?"

"Oh my god!" Wilhelm jumps out of his skin, whipping around to find Simon standing before him, arms crossed and lips quirked up into a smile. "Hi. Jesus, you have got to stop doing that — I almost *died*."

Simon snorts. "I'm sorry, but I mean, you're the one who's stood in front of my door like a stalker."

Wilhelm winces, but Simon seems to be good-natured about it so he pushes through the embarrassment and holds out the jacket. "Here."

Simon's eyes flash with recognition. "Oh, shit, I was wondering where that went. Thanks."

He takes it from him, and the movement brushes their knuckles together. When he withdraws Wilhelm's fingers tingle and, mortifyingly, he can feel himself start to blush. *Why has this interaction been a train wreck from start to finish?* Usually he's— not *suave*, per-se, but at least confident. Something about Simon gets right under his skin and turns him into a blushing, stuttering teenager every time.

"Yeah, you left it at the diner after... the other day," Wilhelm finishes lamely, internally wincing at his lack of tact. Simon nods, but there's something shuttered about his expression, now.

He smiles tightly at Wilhelm. "Right. Thanks. I'll see you around, yeah?"

He's gone before Wilhelm can reply, shutting his front door firmly behind him. Wilhelm stares at it, something like disappointment sinking in his gut — an urge to knock again, just to be greeted with those dark eyes.

"...Sure."

The air is heavy with the scent of alcohol and sex, heat emanating from the crush of bodies on the dance floor. Wilhelm leans against the wall, not really listening to the girl next to him as she rambles drunkenly about something. She keeps touching his arm and is too drunk to catch the message that he's not interested. Ordinarily the attention would be nice, but for some reason this time it makes him feel— *off*. He shifts slightly and she falls back against the wall next to him, blonde hair spilling over her shoulder. Wilhelm leans his head back and tries to look at ease, letting his eyes wander over the dance floor.

He's only here because Felice knows someone who knows the person hosting the party, and he only came in the hopes that he could take someone home. He's a couple of shots deep, a pleasant buzz settling into his skin as his fingers shift on the neck of his beer. The condensation is cool against his skin, his shoulder warm where it presses into the girl next to him. He thinks about it; letting her wandering hands travel across him, kissing her, taking her home — but, she's drunker than he is. Nevermind that the thought of it leaves something inexplicably sour in the pit of his stomach.

The dance floor is a wall of bodies, some kind of huge, writhing wave illuminated periodically by the pulsing lights. It's hard to make anybody out, faces and bodies blending together until it's skin on skin on skin. Wilhelm can't help but feel like it's the most beautiful thing he's seen in a while.

A flash. A couple pressed against the far wall, one partner's hands tangled in the other's curls, their mouths pressed together in a heated, drunken embrace.

A flash. A girl hanging off of a boy's arm, grinning up at him hopefully — but he doesn't notice, eyes trained on a head of dark hair across the room.

A flash. And that's when Wilhelm sees him.

He barely feels the bass drop, the thrumming music fading to a hum as his eyes light on Simon. He's a force of nature, smooth rolls giving way to sharp, controlled jerks, eyes closed, face tipped back, smiling into the music. It strikes Wilhelm suddenly just how out of his depth he is, sinking deep to the bottom of everything Simon is, drowning in his presence.

He commands the dance floor like some kind of god, like the sun, drawing everyone around him into his orbit. The flashing lights dance across his lithe form, catching on his sharp jaw, his thighs as they flex beneath the thin material of his jeans. The song transitions into something Wilhelm vaguely recognises — Kanye West, he thinks — and Simon's face lights up, grinning widely and whooping.

Wilhelm wants to feel that smile pressed against his mouth, against his neck, against his thighs. He wants and wants and *wants*, unable to hold it in. He takes a long pull from his beer, swallowing the cool liquid, letting his eyes trail Simon.

And then Simon sees him. Their eyes lock and a thrill goes through Wilhelm from the top of his head to the tips of his toes, heart banging against his rib cage like it wants to come tumbling out onto the dirty floor at Simon's feet. Simon's eyes darken beneath the lights, his

grin turning sharp and just a little mean, just the way Wilhelm likes it. He leans back into the wandering hands around him like some kind of dark messiah, letting them touch him, letting them press against him. He keeps his eyes on Wilhelm the whole time.

One of the girls next to Simon leans in to shout into his ear. Simon smiles at her, draws her in by the waist, lets her grind against him with laughter on his lips. Wilhelm feels sick — the drink hitting him all at once, turning his stomach and making his chest hurt. He drags his eyes away from them and pushes off of the wall, shoving through the throng of bodies until he's slamming into the kitchen. It's thankfully empty, bar a couple who shoot him dirty looks for his abrupt entrance and quickly excuse themselves.

He gets himself a glass of water and sips it slowly, leaning against the counter and trying not to think about Simon's heavy gaze, or the way he'd looked under the pulsing lights. Or the way he'd looked pressed against a girl. Wilhelm pinches his wrist and reminds himself that he has no say in who Simon gets with. Stares at the raised welt he leaves behind until he feels strong enough to leave again.

As he leaves the kitchen he collides with someone. He fights the urge to roll his eyes because *of course* it's Simon. He can't seem to escape him tonight.

"Hey. You okay?" Simon asks. There's a sheen of sweat across his forehead that he wipes at absentmindedly with his wrist.

Wilhelm smiles tightly at him. "Peachy. Going home, though. I'll see you later."

Simon's eyebrows twitch inwards. "...Okay. Hey, wait, are we smoking later?"

(Which is something. Them smoking together, whenever they're both free. Wilhelm tries not to read into it).

Irritation flares in Wilhelm's chest. He doesn't want to look beneath the surface emotion and acknowledge how he's *actually* feeling, so he just shakes his head. "I can't tonight."

He pushes past Simon, and the movement brushes their chests together. It sends shivers sparking like tiny lightning bolts across his whole body. Simon snags his wrist before he can escape, and his fingers are a fire brand on Wilhelm's skin. "Wait, let me walk you home."

Wilhelm looks back at him, and their eyes meet. Simon's flicker between his own, something unreadable in them. Adrenaline and ecstasy and something else entirely, directed entirely at Wilhelm.

Magnetic, Wilhelm thinks.

In the end, there's always something about Simon that makes him cave. He nods curtly. "Okay. I'm leaving right now, though."

The cool air wraps around Wilhelm's overheated skin, making him shiver and hug his elbows as they wander down the street. He's slowly sobering up, the buzz fading from beneath his skin as he breathes. Wilhelm trains his eyes on the passing streetlights, glowing like tiny suns beneath the dark blanket of night. Something wistful settles in his chest as he inhales the cool air.

Simon glances at him. "Cold?"

"A little."

"Want my jacket?"

Wilhelm snorts. "No."

They lapse into a silence that is broken only by the crunching of their feet against the gritty pavement. Wilhelm lets his eyes drift to Simon — breath clouding from his soft lips, curls tumbling over his forehead, eyes forward. The question forms in his mind and he drags his eyes away again, focusing on the *left right left right* of his feet.

"You don't have to talk about it but, uh, at the diner the other day..." he manages finally, the pressure in his chest too much. Simon looks at him sharply and he bites his lip, feeling chastised even though the other man's gaze isn't hostile.

Simon sighs. "My sister."

Oh.

"You don't have to talk about it," Wilhelm repeats.

Simon smiles wanly. "You said."

"Right."

They're turning the corner to their street. Wilhelm trails absent-minded fingers over the metal fencing beside him, turning this new information over in his mind. Sara is Simon's sister. He feels briefly relieved that she isn't his girlfriend, then immediately guilty because they're obviously fighting about something. He wants to pry, to ask more, to peel away the carefully constructed layers Simon surrounds himself with, but it is *decidedly* not his place. He doesn't even know if they're friends, really. Doesn't know where he stands.

He holds the door open for Simon as they enter their apartment building, closing his eyes as a wave of clean sweat and Simon's cologne enters his nose, spicy and ever-so-slightly sweet. They travel upstairs quietly, an unspoken agreement to stay silent laying between them like a promise. Wilhelm stares at Simon's back. The wood of the bannister is cool and smooth beneath his hand.

They come to a stop in front of their doors.

Wilhelm takes a breath and forces it out. "I hope you and your sister work through whatever is going on with you."

Simon nods. His eyes are sad, and Wilhelm wants more than anything to know why.

“Thanks, Wille.”

And Wilhelm wants to ask, almost does, but stops himself before he can. His eyes track over Simon’s features; soft lips, smooth skin, doe eyes.

Why did you ask to walk me home?

What is going on with your sister?

Who are you, really?

Instead he just smiles wistfully at the other man and turns to enter his apartment.

“Goodnight, Simon.”

“Willeeeeeeeee.”

Wilhelm swears sometimes he’s the older one out of him and Erik. He glares at the corner where his ceiling meets the wall, watching stubbornly as a cobweb swings back and forth in an imaginary breeze.

“Wille. Wille, I know you’re there! You can’t avoid this forever. Mamma and Pappa want to see you.” Erik’s voice floats out of his phone’s speakers, where he tossed it once Erik started talking about *Christmas* and his *birthday* and his *parents*.

“Ugh, I know, Erik! I know. I’ll be home for Christmas. It’s not like I can avoid seeing them for much longer,” Wilhelm replies, pinching the bridge of his nose.

The thing is, Wilhelm loves his parents. He does. It’s just that his parents wanted him to do something like medicine, or law like Erik did, and Wilhelm is being a bit of a black sheep by taking a poetry and creative writing degree instead. And they are supportive of him, on the surface, but he knows they want him to do something more *respectable* with his life. One can only put up with the thinly veiled insults and suggestions of career changes for so long without beginning to go insane.

“They love you, Wilhelm. They’re just worried,” Erik chimes in. Wilhelm sits up and picks up his phone. Erik gives a little cheer as he comes on screen and Wilhelm rolls his eyes fondly.

“I know. I just wish someone would have a little faith in me. I’ve come this far, haven’t I?” Wilhelm argues.

Erik sighs. “Just come for Christmas. Try not to think about it. Ignore them if they’re weird, you just have to accept that it’s who they are.”

Wilhelm huffs a sigh. He wasn’t expecting Erik to take his side — his older brother thinks he’s overreacting to his parent’s disappointment — but he wishes he would just humour him sometimes.

A knock at the door interrupts them. Wilhelm jumps up, grateful to escape from the conversation, and jogs over to the door. He throws it open to be greeted by Simon standing idly in his doorway and holding a brown package. The other man is dressed in a tight fitting white suit, jacket left almost entirely unbuttoned and revealing a mouth-watering amount of his tanned skin. Wilhelm reminds himself to close his mouth.

Simon gives a sarcastic little wave. “Hey. Got your parcel.”

“Oh, right. Thanks.” Wilhelm lets his eyes trail down Simon’s form. “Going out?”

Simon smirks. “Something like that.”

Their eyes meet, and Simon’s flicker between his own, warm humour and something sweet in them. Wilhelm bites down on a smile. “Cool. Have fun.”

When he returns to his phone, only Erik’s eye is visible, absurdly close to the camera. Wilhelm laughs. “You are so weird.”

Erik ignores him, pulling the phone back so he’s in full view again. “Who was that?”

“Just my new neighbour. His name is Simon,” Wilhelm replies, chucking his parcel onto his bed for him to deal with later.

“Oh? You’ve spoken?” Erik asks.

Wilhelm scoffs. “Why do you sound so surprised? I am capable of making friends, Erik.”

Erik raises an eyebrow at him. “You like him.”

Wilhelm sputters, inhaling his own spit and spending the next ten seconds with his life flashing before his eyes as he hacks up his lungs. “What?!” He manages eventually. Erik laughs, long and hearty, and Wilhelm smiles in spite of his annoyance — Erik always manages to lift his mood.

“You’re blushing. You *so* like him!” Erik teases, his grin wide and shit-eating. He’s going to be *so* annoying about this, Wilhelm can already tell.

“Okay, I’m hanging up now. Bye Erik. You’re so annoying, bye.” Wilhelm dismisses his brother, hanging up and throwing his phone onto the desk like it’s burned him. He groans at the ceiling, unable to stop the dumb grin from splitting his face in two. *God.*

What does love mean to you?

Wilhelm stares at those six words, at the blinking cursor beneath them, until the letters start to blur together and jumble around and he's not even entirely sure they're words anymore. His latest unit is on love and war, and so naturally the first assignment is *this*.

It seems so unfathomably large of a question. There is so much love everywhere, all the time — in words laughed into mouths and cups of steaming coffee and hands held in secret beneath school tables, and Wilhelm has always felt that it was just a little too far out of reach for him. Like some kind of abstract, untouchable thing, always a little too blurry for him to grasp its real shape.

He huffs a sigh. Scrubs his eye with the heel of his hand. Drums his fingers against his desk.

There's familial, of course — mother, father, brother, cousin. There's the feeling of his mother's hand on his head, scratching his scalp lightly with her nails in a way that sends him to sleep in seconds. There's his father's warm laughter, his brother's bright smile. There's his record collection, the first of which was a David Bowie record gifted to him by his aunt before she passed. His brother's old watch, snug against the skin of his wrist. A box of washing powder bought by his mother the last time she visited sitting almost empty in his cupboard. Snatches of people all across his apartment, a patchwork quilt of everyone who's ever touched his soul.

Then, he supposes, there's friendship. Laughter muffled behind hands, jostling each other back and forth, glances full of mirth that make you dissolve into giggles in a silent room. The quiet relief he feels when Felice stands up for him, the exasperated fondness in his chest at Nils and Vincent's antics, the barely-suppressed excitement he is filled with when his phone lights up with a message from their group-chat. Matching tattoos, halls filled with bright laughter, silent support when times are hard.

Romantic love has always been the most elusive. He's had relationships before, but they've always burned out bright and fast, leaving his heart in that stage between healed and broken; not quite long enough to be devastating but still sticking in his mind until the next person came along and swept away all of it in their wake.

His mind drifts to Simon and he slams his laptop shut, standing abruptly from his desk and grabbing his coat.

Felice meets him at their favourite cafe. It's a tiny little thing, stools crammed into the space and warm, buttery lighting spilling into every nook and cranny. He and Felice are regulars, so regular that the owners know them by name and always stop to chat with them when they come by, catching up on Wilhelm's family drama or Felice's work in the labs.

Wilhelm slides into his usual spot opposite his best friend, wrapping his hands around the absolutely huge mug of hot chocolate she slides over to him and humming appreciatively as the warmth seeps into them. "Hey."

“Hi,” she replies, digging around in her bag for something. From where Wilhelm is he can only see her hair puffing out from behind her bag.

He leans forward and flicks the crown of her head until she looks at him. “What are you looking for?”

“This,” Felice replies, emerging from her bag with a crumpled flyer in her hand. She slams it down on the table in front of him and pokes at his cheek until he looks at it. “Poetry slam. Winner takes home prize money. You’re entering.”

“What? No way.” Wilhelm shakes his head, anxiety rearing its nasty head in his chest.

Felice takes gentle hold of his face, forcing him to look in her eyes. “Wille. You’re always talking about how you want to break out into the poetry scene, get your stuff recognised, but whenever the opportunity presents itself, you never do. I’m forcing you this time.” She smiles at him even as he groans.

“Felice, come on.”

“Nope, no buts, Wille! Do you not think you’re good enough, or something?”

No. “I don’t know!”

Felice levels him with a look and he sighs. “Fine. But only because I know I’ll never hear the end of it if I don’t.”

Felice flashes him a bright smile. “This is why I love you. You know when to do what I say.”

Wilhelm snorts and grabs her hand on impulse, bringing it to his mouth and trying to lick it.

“Wille! Agh, gross, stop!” Felice rips her (now slightly wet) hand from his grip and wipes it on his shoulder before shoving gently at his forehead. “You are so weird,” she mutters, but there’s a fond smile stretching her lips. She picks up the flyer and shoves it into his hands. “Take it, idiot.” Wilhelm rolls his eyes but folds it into a square and slides it into the pocket of his jeans anyways.

“So,” Wilhelm says decisively, taking a sip of his hot chocolate. “You gonna tell me about this new girl?”

Felice blinks at him, but there’s a blush starting to form on her cheeks. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Come on, I saw your tweets. You have a new crush. I demand to know all of the details,” Wilhelm says.

“Only if you tell me about yours!” Felice replies, pointing at him.

Wilhelm stops short, caught out. “...Fine.”

Felice cheers. “Okay, I don’t know her name yet, but she joined my biology class today. She’s really, really cute. Brown hair, a little shorter than me? She turned up late but she was *so* apologetic about it, it was so adorable...”

Wilhelm smiles and settles back in his seat, happy to let Felice ramble on. The flyer burns a hole through his pocket but he pushes it from his mind; if he leaves it long enough Felice will forget to remind him to sign up, and he can carry on as he was.

Wilhelm perks up from where he’d been leaning against the wall as his ears pick up on something. He frowns, focusing, and then realises it’s *music* — guitar, drifting in through the open window. (He always has to open his kitchen window after he makes dinner because otherwise his walls get covered in condensation, which leads to mould, which leads to Wilhelm not being a happy bunny and having to resist the urge to fistfight his landlord).

He dog-ears the page of the book he was reading — some obscure thing that Maddy lent him to ‘broaden his horizons’ — and drops it onto the table as he creeps towards the door to his balcony. He slides it open slowly, grateful that it’s not squeaking yet, and steps out into the evening with a shiver.

Wilhelm stops in his tracks, hand pausing on the door handle as he sees Simon. The other man sits, outlined by the setting sun, guitar in his lap. He’s working through a complicated-sounding melody, his back to Wilhelm, humming along to parts of it. Wilhelm feels something stick in his throat as he watches him, eyes tracking over the gilded edges of his curls as the sunset bathes him in light.

Something warm and unnamable curls up in his chest as Simon’s voice travels to his ears and for a moment it’s just he and Simon, a bubble of space surrounding them, quiet and steady. He shakes himself out of his trance, reminding himself that it is *entirely* too early to be having warm fluffy feelings about his neighbour, and steps back inside to shove on his slippers and a hoodie to protect him against the rapidly cooling air.

He shuts the balcony door noisily behind him to give Simon some warning, and the way the other man jumps is almost comical. Wilhelm hides a giggle behind his hand — it’s the most rattled he’s ever seen him. The other man clutches at his chest dramatically, breathing out hard. “Jesus, Wille, a little warning would be nice.”

“Sorry. Payback for the first time,” Wilhelm replies, stepping over the wall between their balconies and plopping down next to Simon. “I didn’t know you played.”

Simon hums. “I’m doing a music degree.”

“Oh! I didn’t know,” Wilhelm replies, filing away this new information in the little box in his head dedicated to Simon. It is woefully empty; even though they’ve hung out periodically over the past couple of weeks, Wilhelm still feels like Simon is a mystery to him. The inside

of the other man's head is shrouded in fog, only the tiniest glimpses of light peeking through that Wilhelm gets to grasp. He wants to unravel him, make him reveal more about himself. Is too shy to do so.

Simon just smiles back, fingers starting to move on the guitar's neck again. Wilhelm settles back against the wall to listen, tilting his head as he considers Simon. There's something about him, tonight. A softness. It stokes the fire in Wilhelm's chest until it's a blaze, burning up his throat, choking away his words.

He draws his knees into his chest, puts his chin on them, and watches.

Chapter End Notes

dw simon is still gay in this he just occasionally dances platonically w women bc dont we all?

that lil dance/party segment is one of my fave things ive written recently, im really proud of it

i hope you guys enjoyed! i read all of your comments even if i am absolutely abysmal at replying to them

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

“When the smoke is in your eyes, you look so alive. Do you fancy sitting down, with me?” - fallingforyou, the 1975.

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

III

Wilhelm, contrary to what his friends may say about him, is usually pretty good at getting dates. He falls for people easily — always has. Maddy always tells him it's because of his moon sign (Cancer — or was it Pisces? No, that's his sun.) but he's never understood astrology the way she does. His brother has always teased him for crushing on the first person to look at him twice, which he supposes is fair. When he was younger he would become infatuated with people at the drop of a hat, going out of his way to help them even to his own detriment. Even when they wouldn't care for him beyond what he could do for them.

His first girlfriend was a red-headed exchange student from England with an upturned nose and a smattering of freckles across her cheeks. They'd been partners for a project in his English class, tasked with translating a piece and then analysing it. She was wickedly funny and undeniably one of the boldest people Wilhelm had ever met. The first time they sat next to each other she'd reached out, uncaring, and taken his hand in her own, leaning over and studying his palm like it was a book, the tip of her nose only an inch away from his skin.

“Um... What are you doing?”

“Shush a sec.” Her voice was soft and lilting. He sat back and let her hold his hand, tracing a gentle finger over the lines in his palm. It tickled, but something told him to stay put, so he did.

“You're strong-willed,” she started. “I like that.”

Wilhelm shifted awkwardly. “Um. Thanks?”

“Look, here,” she commanded, showing him his own palm. “See this? You fall in love so *easily*. I'm almost jealous.”

Wille studied her as she bent over his palm; gold nose ring, crystal blue eyes, dainty hands adorned with rings. He curled his fingers until they rested gently around her own. She glanced at him with a smile and pressed back until they were loosely holding hands.

“What's your name?” he asked, and the butterflies were already taking flight as he said it.

“Faith.”

It becomes a *thing*. He and Simon — smoking weed together, huddled against the autumnal chill on Wilhelm's balcony. Sometimes Simon provides, sometimes Wilhelm. Some nights they talk until the sun comes up, about everything and nothing, and sometimes they're silent.

There are nights where Simon doesn't join him at all, and Wilhelm is left staring at the glowing cherry of the joint and willing away his disappointment. On those nights he goes to bed early.

Wilhelm doesn't know how to suggest that they hang out outside of this little bubble of space they've created. Doesn't want to pop it; doesn't want this illusion of friendship to disappear. Simon feels flighty, like a fawn — like if Wilhelm puts his foot out of place he's going to scare him off. He doesn't think he could cope with that. He's already addicted to these little pockets of time-outside-of-time, where the night air is cold but Simon's eyes are so, so warm and the sparks that fly from his fingers when they brush against Simon's could keep him alive forever.

Tonight, Wilhelm is alone. Simon is at home; he can see that his lights are on and every now and then the other man will walk past the window, but Wilhelm almost doesn't mind the solitude. It's the warmest it's been outside in a couple of weeks, and he's able to sit out in just a hoodie even though it's nearing ten at night. He's pleasantly high, tucked away from the wind and gazing out across the city skyline, aware of Simon's warm presence even though he's not technically *here*.

He looks toward Simon's balcony door as it slides open and Simon steps out. He's carrying a mug with a cat painted on it. Wilhelm grins reflexively and then forces himself to temper it into a smile.

"Hi," Simon whispers, stepping over the dividing wall between their balconies and placing the mug down next to Wilhelm. "Brought you hot chocolate."

"Hi," Wilhelm whispers back with a giggle. Then he frowns. "Wait, really?"

"Mhmm." Simon nods and reaches down to pinch the joint from Wilhelm, bringing it to his lips and taking a smooth drag. "Drink it before it gets cold."

Wilhelm beams, picking up the mug and cradling it. He breathes in the rich, chocolatey scent, feeling like his heart is about to burst out of his chest with happiness. Simon made him *hot chocolate*. He feels like kicking his feet about and settles for giggling instead. "Thank you."

Simon nods at him and hands the joint back before heading back inside. He throws a handsome smile over his shoulder as he slides the door shut again. Once he's gone, Wilhelm throws his head back against the wall and laughs breathlessly at the sky, bubbly elation filling his body.

And maybe it has more to do with the way Simon smiled at him than anything else, but it's the best hot chocolate he's ever had.

felice:

putting it in here so wille can't get out of doing it

there's a poetry slam on @ jewel after christmas break

wille is signing up

stella:

LETS GOOOOOOOO

wilhelm:

i never consented to this u kno

nils:

shut up wille

i want to know about ur new beau

spotted him coming out of his apartment the other day

can i just say

Hunky

wilhelm:

why were u in my apartment building?!?!?!?!?

nils:

unimportant

felice:

oh? please do go on

wille is frustratingly tight-lipped about him

wilhelm:

alex stole your fancy necklace on a dare and then lost it btw. thought u would want to know
that idk

felice:

he did what?????

alex:

have i ever told you how much i value you as a friend x

felice:

alex.

alex:

wilhelm watch your fucking back

Wilhelm snorts at his friend's antics, grateful that the spotlight has been taken off of him for the time being, and slips his phone back into his pocket. It's a slow afternoon at the diner, and he's been alternating between texting the group chat, tweeting, and aiming balled up pieces of napkin at the bin in the corner while he waits for customers to arrive. Fredrika is somewhere in the back falling asleep into a pile of pasta that she's been organising by shape and colour for the past half an hour.

Wilhelm serves an elderly couple that always come in around this time, smiling as he watches them migrate to their usual corner booth, hand in hand. He slips his phone out again and opens the note he's been using to brainstorm ideas for his next poem, typing out *old oaks — gnarled, wise, in love; conquering time even as it licks at our heels.*

A text from Maddy comes through as he's about to put it away again and he grins — Maddy is a newer friend of his, someone he met through Felice, but her bold, unashamedly friendly

aura has had him hooked from the start and he looks forward to anytime they message him.

maddy:

wille wille wille wille wille

wilhelm:

mads mads mads mads mads

maddy:

i

am bringing

a date

to the diner

AHHHHHHHHH

wilhelm:

literally why would u choose the diner for this

are you trying to traumatise her for life

maddy:

SHUT UP

she's so

ugh

her name is rosh

SHE'S SOOOOOO

wilhelm:



real

this place is basically empty so

Half an hour later and Maddy is swinging through the doors to the diner, running up to the counter and slamming their palms onto it eagerly. A girl that Wilhelm vaguely recognises — probably from a party somewhere — trails in behind her, smiling fondly at Maddy's antics. She's wearing a cow-print coat that Wilhelm is jealous of, and her hair is pulled up into a tight plait behind her head.

"Hi!" Wilhelm greets Maddy excitedly.

Maddy grins at him. "Hi. This is Rosh! Rosh, this is Wille, he's totally gonna give us a discount on our food."

Wilhelm holds up a finger. "Uh, I never said I'd do that."

"Wait, Wille?" Rosh interjects before Maddy can reply. "Like, 'lives in apartment nine' Wille?"

Wilhelm tilts his head, confused. "...Yes. How did you know that?"

They're interrupted as the door to the diner swings open again. Wilhelm and Rosh both start as they realise it's *Simon* striding into the diner, dressed in a cosy-looking hoodie and his puffy grey coat and clearly not expecting company. He falters when he sees them, eyes widening.

"Rosh?" He exclaims, jogging over to them and leaning into a side-hug with the taller girl.

Wilhelm glances between the two in surprise and Rosh grins at him, her nose ring shining in the light. "I'm Simon's best friend."

Oh. So that means... does Simon talk about him?

Simon and Rosh seem to be having an extensive argument with just their eyes, one that Simon appears to win if the way Rosh rolls her eyes and shrugs at Wilhelm says anything. Wilhelm raises his eyebrow at her but she just shakes her head. He rolls his lips together and ducks his head, trying not to think about the fact that Rosh *knew who he was*. Oh, god, this does not bode well for his crush.

"Oh! Actually, I've been meaning to ask, Wille," Maddy says, blessedly oblivious to the weird atmosphere that has descended on the rest of the group. "Next game night is at yours, right?"

Wilhelm drags his eyes away from Simon's curls (*so soft-looking, he needs to get a grip*) and nods. "I believe so."

"Soooo, would you mind if I brought Rosh along?" Maddy asks.

Wilhelm raises his eyebrows in surprise. "*Oh?* Of course. You must be serious about her, if you're bringing her to family game night."

Maddy and Rosh both flush bright red, glancing at each other and then away again, the picture of *oh god I like her so much*. Wilhelm smirks, leaning forward onto the counter on his elbows — it's not often that he gets to be the one teasing his friends for being sappy, so he's relishing in the moment.

"What's family game night?" Simon pipes up from beside Rosh.

"Oh my god, Simon, you have to come!" Wilhelm exclaims. "Every two weeks we all get together and play board games, eat pizza, that sort of thing. It's a way of touching base with everyone because we're all so busy."

"Oh, that's cute," Simon replies, smiling. "Sure, I'd love to come. If that's okay with everyone else?"

Wilhelm nods rapidly, an excited feeling filling his chest and bubbling up his throat. "Here, give me your number and I'll add you to the group chat. Rosh, too. If you both want."

"Oh, could we add our friend Ayub, too?" Rosh asks. "We're kind of a package deal."

Wilhelm nods. "Oh, yeah, sure. I know Ayub. I'm pretty sure he and Felice are in the same classes."

And as Wilhelm adds the three of them to the group chat, he can't help but feel like this is the start of something wonderful.

Once Maddy and Rosh have their food and are retreating over to one of the booths, Simon sidles up to the counter and leans against it. He gestures to the couple, snorting as he watches the two of them very obviously playing footsie underneath the table. "They're cute."

"Yeah," Wilhelm replies. "Maddy's really gone on her, you can tell."

"Hm. Rosh, too. I haven't seen her like this about anyone since Yasmina."

Simon shifts on his feet and taps his fingers against the counter. Wilhelm watches the digits move, thinking about how intelligently they had travelled across the fretboard of Simon's guitar. Wilhelm doesn't know what shifted between them that night, but he's spent more time since then entertaining this... *thing*, than he knows he really should. He's never felt so at ease and yet also so keyed-up with someone like he does with Simon, like he's a rocket and all he needs is one dark-eyed look from the other man to send him shooting off into the atmosphere.

Their relationship consists of stolen glances and lingering touches and Wilhelm doesn't *get it*, can't parse the meaning behind Simon's intense stare, can't read between the lines of his tanned skin and soft mouth and dark curls. Maybe there's nothing there at all and he's created it himself, read too far into something that was never meant to be more than friendly. He has a tendency to want more for himself than he's ever going to have.

"Hey, we're not gonna be intruding or anything, are we?" Simon asks, startling Wilhelm out of his reverie. He poses the question like he doesn't care, but Wilhelm sees the insecurity colouring his tone anyways.

He leans a little closer. "I promise you won't be. I want you there."

"Okay, good," Simon says, a tiny smile creeping onto his face.

"Anyways, what brings you to my humble abode?" Wilhelm asks, gesturing vaguely to the ghost town of a diner.

Simon shrugs as he pulls off his coat and takes a seat on one of the stools. "I'm hungry."

"Ah, of course. What can I get you?" Wilhelm asks, reminding himself that he's here to do his actual job that he gets paid for, not to stare at pretty boys.

Simon considers the menu for a moment before shrugging. "Just some fries'll do, thanks."

(If Wilhelm makes sure to pile some extra fries into the basket then that's between him and God).

Simon pulls out a notebook when Wilhelm returns with his food, absentmindedly munching on his fries as he writes, occasionally scribbling things out and drawing arrows across the page. Wilhelm leans over and steals a couple of fries from him, giggling when Simon shoves him back out of his space.

"Are you busy tonight?" Wilhelm asks. Simon shakes his head. Wilhelm steals another fry. "Wanna smoke?"

Simon bats his hand away from the basket, pulling it towards his chest protectively. "Hey—get your own, stupid. And only if you're supplying."

Wilhelm grins, happy to have made plans with him, and lets him get back to his writing.

"Do you believe in fate?" Simon asks, voice so low Wilhelm barely catches the question. His eyes are glazed over, hazy with smoke and blinking slowly. He looks sleepy and just this side of beautiful, soft and real in the buttery light spilling from Wilhelm's kitchen.

Wilhelm shifts slightly and takes a pull of the joint. "That's a loaded question."

Simon turns to look at him. “Is it?”

Wilhelm lifts a shoulder at him and passes the joint back, brushing their fingers together intentionally. Simon catches the move and smirks easily at him as he withdraws again. Wilhelm tips his head back against the wall, feels the cold brick against his head and stares at the stars so that he doesn’t stare at Simon. “I think... there are some things that are meant to happen. That are planned from the start. So, I guess I do.”

“Hmm. It would be nice if that were true. If it wasn’t our own fault that things happen, or—not entirely our fault,” Simon says. Wilhelm glances at him sharply. Simon meets his eyes and then looks away again, a furrow appearing between his brows. Wilhelm wants to smooth it out with his fingers, wants to cradle Simon’s face and trace his features until that blinding smile reappears. He pushes his fingers into the concrete beneath him instead, the grit scratching the pads of his fingers as he forces his gaze away from the elegant slope of Simon’s nose.

“Are there some things you wish could have gone differently?” Simon asks after a while. Wilhelm reaches out to grab his phone and change the song over to something slower, and the movement brushes their shoulders together. Simon reaches out, seemingly on impulse, and pushes his fingers into the side of Wilhelm’s forearm as he withdraws again, his eyes unfocused and glazed. Wilhelm smiles at him, unable to resist the invisible string that pulls him to knock their shoulders together, urges him to get close in any way he’s allowed. Simon sways with the movement and then shoves him back before settling against him, warm and solid. His head lands on Wilhelm’s shoulder and Wilhelm inhales sharply, heart banging against his ribs.

“Of course,” he remembers to reply. His voice is hoarse, barely above a whisper, but Simon must catch it because he nods. *God*, Wilhelm can smell his *conditioner*. (Coconut. He is so fucked). He rests his cheek against Simon’s curls and breathes him in.

Simon sighs. “My sister hates me.”

Wilhelm’s chest tightens at the defeated tone of Simon’s voice. He’d say that’s not true, but he doesn’t know Simon’s sister, and he doesn’t think Simon would appreciate it. Instead he snakes his hand over Simon’s shoulder, pulling him more firmly against him, and asks, “wanna talk about it?”

Simon shakes his head, and his curls tickle Wilhelm’s cheek. “No. Tell me something about you.”

Wilhelm thinks for a moment. He’s hyper-aware of everywhere that Simon is pressed against him, the smell of his hair, the way his shoulder feels beneath Wilhelm’s hand. It’s distracting, his every sense heightened by the high settled deep in his bones.

The joint is long abandoned, smouldering in Wilhelm’s strawberry-shaped ashtray. Wilhelm stares out at the city as it blinks back at him and finally says, “my friends want me to sign up for this poetry slam, but I don’t think I’m good enough.”

Simon pulls away to look at him and cold air snakes into the space he leaves behind, making Wilhelm shiver under his dark, smoke-hazy gaze. He tries not to feel bereft at the loss of him and draws his knees up to his chest.

“Why do you think you need to be good enough? Maybe you just need to be,” Simon says, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world. Wilhelm stares at him, wondering how the hell he managed to find someone so special. Simon watches Wilhelm watching him, a smile creeping onto his face and it reminds Wilhelm so much of the break of dawn that his fingers itch to write about it. He’s sure he could write a hundred pages about the saccharine feelings Simon inspires in him alone.

Simon rolls his lips together and tilts his head to the side as he considers him. “You should do it.”

Wilhelm smirks. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Wilhelm is in the middle of brainstorming his essay when a knock sounds at the door. He glances at the clock — 11:39 — and huffs a sigh before jogging over to the door and tugging it open.

It’s Simon who stands there, fist still raised to knock as he stares at him, mouth hanging half-open in a way that is entirely too tantalising.

Wilhelm suddenly regrets not grabbing a shirt. He’s sure he must look a state; his hair messy and flyaway from the amount of times he’s ran his hands through it, shirtless with his (definitely stained) sweatpants hanging low on his hips, with jazz music floating out into the corridor from the speaker behind him on his desk. A particularly noisy sax solo spills out of his room and he winces. “Shit, sorry, is the music too loud?”

Simon comes back to life, shaking his head as if to clear it and lowering his hand. “Uh, no?”

“Okay, good,” Wilhelm replies, crossing his arms loosely and leaning a shoulder against the doorframe.

Simon clears his throat. “Are you busy?”

“Not really,” Wilhelm replies, confused.

Simon nods, sort of absent-mindedly, and says, “cool. You should come with me. Get dressed, c’mon.”

“Uhm... o-okay,” Wilhelm stutters a little as Simon’s fingers prod at his bare shoulders until they’re both entering his apartment. He suddenly feels absurdly grateful to have cleaned

earlier that day and grabs the nearest shirt, tugging it over his head. He feels a little more comfortable when he's covered up. It occurs to him that he didn't even question Simon, just did as he asked.

He has a feeling he'd follow him anywhere.

Simon's gaze tracks around his apartment, lingering on the extracts taped to his forest-green walls and the copious houseplants lining his window sills. He lets his fingers trail over Wilhelm's desk, disturbing a couple of papers that Wilhelm had been jotting ideas on and picking up the book thrown haphazardly on the end of it (*Demian* by Hermann Hesse — a book Wilhelm has loved and annotated to death, that he returns to whenever he's struggling with anything. Somehow he always manages to find the answers he's looking for in the well-thumbed pages).

Simon turns to look at him as he's shrugging on his coat. "Cozy. I didn't know you were a plant dad."

Wilhelm shrugs, twirling his keys back and forth. "Erik taught me everything I know about plants, so it helped me stay connected to him after I moved out. I name them all, you know."

Simon laughs. "Do you now?"

Wilhelm flushes, a little embarrassed but mostly just caught up in the way Simon's eyes crinkle when he smiles. He nods. "Mhm. I'm not telling you, though. That's between me and my babies."

They get halfway down the corridor before Wilhelm gives in and touches his hand to Simon's elbow. "Where are we going?" he asks. Simon turns to him, dark eyes twinkling and smile so handsome it turns Wilhelm's stomach inside out.

"Trust me?"

And, well, what is Wilhelm supposed to say in response to that?

"You've never ridden a motorbike before?" Simon asks. They're stood in front of *Simon's motorbike*, because apparently the man couldn't embody any more of the hot-neighbour stereotype. Wilhelm is just waiting for him to reveal a set of tattoos and a tongue piercing. Maybe a super hot girlfriend, or something.

"No," Wilhelm replies, feeling the blood start to drain from his face. "No, I have not."

"Wait here," Simon commands, disappearing briefly into the garage and returning with a helmet tucked underneath each of his arms. He holds one out to Wilhelm. "Put it on."

Wilhelm takes the helmet on autopilot but worries at his bottom lip with his teeth, uncertain. Simon catches the movement and smiles. “Come on,” he says, holding out a hand until Wilhelm takes it. His palm is warm in spite of the frigid air surrounding them, and Wilhelm feels his smile all the way through his body. “I’ll keep you safe.”

Wilhelm closes his eyes reflexively, emotion punching through his body and knocking the breath from him. Still, he stumbles forward a few steps and lets Simon help him put the helmet on.

“Okay?” Simon asks, sliding his own helmet on when Wilhelm hums his affirmative.

“Get on behind me, and make sure you hold onto my stomach, okay? You have to hold on tight,” Simon instructs as he clambers onto the *certain-death machine*. (No, Wilhelm isn’t being dramatic, he swears).

“Right, okay,” Wilhelm replies, hearing his own voice as if it’s underwater. He stumbles forwards anyways.

He settles in behind Simon even as the fear starts to wrap around his chest like brambles are winding around his lungs, reminding himself to breathe. Though, that task is made particularly difficult by the feeling of Simon’s firm stomach underneath his hands, the muscles flexing subtly to stabilise Simon on the bike. Wilhelm presses closer to him until they’re chest-to-back, shivering slightly at the proximity.

“It’ll be fine, Wille,” Simon reassures him, but even he sounds strained so Wilhelm isn’t exactly convinced.

They start slowly, rolling out of the garage and onto the street, but soon enough they’re speeding through downtown, buildings flying past them. Wilhelm lets out an undignified yelp as they swerve slightly and Simon chuckles at him.

“Shut up!” Wilhelm manages to shout, though he feels frozen in terror against Simon’s back.

“Just relax, Wille!” Simon shouts back.

The wind is cold against his exposed neck and the hollow of his throat, but it helps to ground him into the moment and eventually the fear of riding a motorbike fades. It’s replaced by an overwhelming exhilaration that sings through his veins and has him whooping into the night, tightening his hold on Simon’s chest as they swerve around a corner. Simon laughs, bright and unrestrained, and the sound is so infectious that soon Wilhelm is cackling, unbridled, watching in awe as the city lights pass them by in an intoxicating blur.

They slow to a stop, still laughing as they swing off of the motorbike and Simon leans it against the side of the building. Simon tugs his helmet off, his hair fluffed up and messy, a grin stretching his features.

“You did it!” he exclaims, gesturing excitedly to Wilhelm.

“I did!” Wilhelm replies, the adrenaline still singing in his veins. Simon throws his head back and hollers into the night, turning in a circle with his arms stretched wide. The floodlights attached to the side of the building shine down on him from above, outlining him in light as he grins at the sky.

Fuck, I want to kiss you, Wilhelm thinks. The thought punches through him, leaving him breathless and shocked as he watches the other man.

Simon doesn’t give him time to ponder on it, though, gesturing for him to follow as he tugs open the door to the building. Wilhelm hurries inside after him, not wanting to be left behind, and sticks close to his back as they traverse the halls.

“Where are we?” he questions, watching Simon’s profile in the dark.

Simon glances at him. “It’s an abandoned pool. They drained the whole thing years ago. My friends and I have been coming here for ages.”

He pushes through a door at the end of the corridor, leading Wilhelm through what used to be a changing room and into the pool.

Wilhelm sucks in a breath, struck by the eerie beauty of the place. The pool somehow still gives off a ghostly blue glow despite being empty, and it dances off of the edges of Simon’s profile, casting him in a Neptunian radiance that makes Wilhelm’s chest ache with want. The bottom of it is scuffed and dirty, no doubt from skaters using it as an impromptu bowl, and the air is heavy with dust and mildew.

Wilhelm can see the moon through the dust-covered windows, a pale slip of a thing just above the city’s skyline in the distance.

“It’s beautiful,” he whispers, not wanting to break the spell of the moment. When he turns he finds Simon already watching him. His eyes are unreadable but his gaze sends heat flying up Wilhelm’s spine anyways.

“C’mon.” Simon leads him to the edge of the pool and they sit down, feet dangling off of the edge and thighs pressed together. Wilhelm tries to focus on anything other than the steady weight of Simon at his side, staring down at his messily-laced converse as he swings his feet back and forth.

“How’d you find this place?” Wilhelm asks.

“When I was a teenager I used to wander a lot. I didn’t like staying in the house, I guess, so I spent a lot of my free time biking around and trying to find places to explore,” Simon replies, leaning back on his hands. “And one day I just stumbled across it.”

Wilhelm hums, staring out at the dim corners of the pool. Something about this place makes it feel like it’s outside of time — like a school after hours, or a supermarket in the middle of the night. Like it should be full of light and bustling activity, but instead it’s eerily quiet. It should freak him out — would, if he was here alone — but something about Simon’s stable presence keeps him calm. Grounded.

Simon reaches out and takes his hand, flipping the palm over and studying the lines there. Wilhelm suppresses a shudder at the gentle press of Simon's warm fingertips to his skin.

"Sara used to try and read my palms when we were younger," Simon says, tapping gently at the flesh of Wilhelm's palm. He doesn't sound sad, like he usually does when he talks of Sara. Just reminiscent. Simon glances up at him and when their eyes meet it feels like electricity crackles all the way up Wilhelm's arm. He sways forwards as if pulled, breath coming shakily, wanting more than anything to close the gap between them but knowing he can't. Simon swallows. His eyes are dark pools, brimming with an emotion that Wilhelm can't place.

Wilhelm curls his fingers and Simon pulls away, dropping Wilhelm's hand and clearing his throat. Wilhelm's hand closes around nothing.

Chapter End Notes

happy wednesday folks! i hope this update is satisfactory <3

she/they maddy is so real i love them

demian by hermann hesse is a book i read when i was a younger teen because i stanned bts (lol) but i remember really enjoying it and i feel like this wille would like it a lot. lots of pontifications on good and evil and free will for you to sink your teeth into.

i don't know how much i like this chapter but i rlly hope u enjoy <3 gimme comments and kudos like i'm a little ferret on your shoulder

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

“Consider the hairpin turn.” - You are Jeff, Richard Siken.

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

IV

“ i keep dreaming about you. i don’t mean to, it just happens — like my subconscious knows what i want before i do.

in my dreams you’re not just you, but something else — a succubus, larger than life, drawing me in relentlessly until i’m spent and lost. your hands are warm but your gaze is cold and empty. i want you so much i ache with it.

no one has ever looked at me like you do. you see me in a way i’ve never known — stripping away my layers and leaving me bare, exposed, vulnerable. i want to kiss you until i run out of air. i want to bury myself alive just to have you dig me out. ”

Wilhelm is seven the first time he is asked to write a poem. It’s a tiny thing, about rain, and Wilhelm’s teacher takes it and cuts it into a raindrop shape and laminates it. Wilhelm takes it home to his mother and grins up at her in pride as she reads it, as she ruffles his hair and tells him it's *wonderful, baby*.

Wilhelm is fifteen when he realises that poems don’t have to rhyme. When his teacher pulls him aside after class and tells him that poetry is *limitless, Wilhelm. It is whatever you make it*.

Wilhelm is sixteen-and-a-half when he starts to write. When he realises that he can try to make sense of his messy, tangled, painful emotions by spilling them out onto paper. And when he starts, he doesn’t stop.

Wilhelm is seventeen when he gets his heart broken for the first time.

The boy’s name is Gustav, and his smile makes Wilhelm feel like he’s walking on air, like he’s freefalling — that breathless exhilaration at the top of a rollercoaster, before everything comes crashing down. He finds him skipping class (Wilhelm’s rebellious streak extended only to avoiding science tests he hadn’t studied for), kicking a football around in the park behind the school. Gustav bums a cigarette off of him and lets him lean into his space to light it up, his smile just this side of crooked and with a whole world of mischief behind his eyes.

Wilhelm falls hard and fast, as he often does, waking one day with a fire in his chest and a knowledge that this one, somehow, was *different*.

They dated for six months, in the end. But they were too different. Gustav was the burning sun where Wilhelm was the moon, on two opposite ends of a wheel that would never allow

them to see eye-to-eye. One that would have Wilhelm chasing desperately, running out of breath, skinning his knees just to grasp the edges of sunlight even as they faded from view.

And Gustav is cheeky, always smiling, always teasing, but he's also— flakey. Indecisive. He can't choose Wilhelm the way Wilhelm wants him to, and this hurts more than anything else he could experience in his naive, seventeen-year-old heart.

So Wilhelm is seventeen when he gets his heart broken for the first time, because someone he was in love with couldn't, *wouldn't* love him back. To Gustav he is good enough to kiss, to fuck, to use. But when he asks for more Gustav disappears like mist between Wilhelm's shaking fingers.

The thing is, he doesn't really know the difference between *thinking* he's in love and *being* in love, but that's okay. He's only seventeen when Gustav breaks his heart, so he has plenty of time to learn.

Game night falls on the second Saturday of the month, and cycles between each of their apartments every time. They also cycle between board games, drinking games, and Mario Kart — this time around Monopoly was pulled out of the hat, much to Wilhelm's chagrin and Stella's delight.

("You always terrorise me when we play Monopoly!")

"You just need to get good, Wille. Honestly."

"Be prepared to deal with Wille whining at you, by the way. He's such a sore loser," Felice remarks as she flops down on the couch between Nils and Maddy, leaning forwards to grab the gin from the assortment of drink bottles on Wilhelm's coffee table and pouring herself some.

"Uh— excuse you! I am perfectly dignified, thank you very much," Wilhelm protests, snatching the bottle off of her to pour some for himself. He tops it off with lemonade and startles when a hand makes its way onto his neck, squeezing gently.

"Mhm, I'm sure you are, sweetheart," Simon says lowly, chuckling when Wilhelm jumps and spills lemonade onto the table. The hand squeezes once more and then is gone as Simon leans forward and pours himself a lemonade. Wilhelm stares at him.

Simon quirks an eyebrow. "What?"

Wilhelm blinks and then shakes his head. "Uh, nothing."

He meets Felice's eyes across the coffee table and tries not to laugh at her shocked expression, tugging out his phone.

wille:

close your mouth

you'll catch flies

felice:

he called you SWEETHEART.

wille:

ik

i'm trying so hard not to think about it

felice:

did something happen??

wille:

no???

“So, I’mma be honest, I’ve never played Monopoly,” Ayub pipes up from Simon’s other side, drawing Wilhelm away from his phone again.

“What?!” Maddy exclaims, bracing herself on Nils’ knee in her shock. Nils shoves them off in mock-disgust, which quickly dissolves into a petty slap-fight, the two of them scrabbling at each other over Felice’s lap. Eventually Felice yanks them both apart with a fist in each of their collars. “God!” she shouts laughingly. “Can you two quit being children for two seconds? Please?”

Nils shrugs her off and grabs a Pringle from the bowl on the coffee table, crunching noisily. “No.”

Wilhelm ignores them and turns to Ayub. “We’ll teach you. The whole thing usually dissolves into chaos pretty quickly anyways — Stella and Fredrika are fucking *ruthless* and they always team up.”

“Precisely,” Fredrika says, grinning and accepting her girlfriend’s high five.

“Your happy— togetherness is sickening,” Wilhelm deadpans, gesturing vaguely at the two of them. Stella sticks her tongue out at him from her spot on the floor next to Fredrika.

“Okay, are we gonna actually play, or?” Rosh asks. She’d been quiet initially, sticking close to Maddy’s side, but a few drinks have loosened her up and now she has her arm slung easily around Maddy’s shoulders, piping up with mocking comments every now and then. To Wilhelm’s delight most of them are at Simon’s expense; he doesn’t think he’s seen the other man scowl so much in a half-hour period since he’s known him.

What Wilhelm learns over the course of the next few hours is that Simon is *viciously* competitive. He is more than happy to throw you under the bus, commandeer the bus, and then drive the bus over you back and forth until you are nothing more than a pancake where a human used to stand. He laughs openly and meanly at Wilhelm when he inevitably loses and threatens to dye all of Ayub’s shirts piss-yellow when the other man refuses to sell him property.

Wilhelm shifts a little further away from him as Vincent packs away the board, declaring with a false air of importance that they would now be moving onto drinking games. He has a newfound respect (and fear) for his neighbour which prompts him to put some distance between them. Simon catches the movement and frowns, reaching out and tugging on Wilhelm’s ankle until he allows him to pull his feet up into his lap.

“You okay?” he murmurs, quiet, just for the two of them. Wilhelm nods, words suddenly failing him, unable to stop thinking about Simon’s warm hand circling his ankle. Simon nods, satisfied, and snags Wilhelm’s drink out of his hand, downing the rest in one go. (A lemonade — Wilhelm hasn’t missed that Simon hasn’t touched a drop of alcohol the whole evening but he doesn’t want to pry). Wilhelm lets him do it, staring at the rim of the glass when Simon places it back on the coffee table and thinking about how they, well— they sort of kissed, didn’t they? Indirectly. If you squint.

Maddy’s bright laughter draws him from his thoughts and he forces himself to relax into this new position with his legs in Simon’s lap, letting his friend’s chattering wash over him and leaning back into the cushions.

“Wait! I know what we should play,” Felice starts, and Wilhelm feels dread start to trickle into his bones because he *knows* that tone of voice. *That’s* what she sounded like right before she locked him and Gustav in a room together after they fought once, declaring that they couldn’t leave until they’d ‘kissed and made up’. He’s heard it many times over the years, and it *never* ends well for him.

“Feli—“ he starts.

“Spin the bottle!” Felice exclaims before he can finish and the room goes up in cheers. Vincent bangs on the table and starts up a chant of *spin the bottle*, because apparently they’re all children, and Nils whoops and whacks Vincent on the shoulder so hard he almost falls off of the couch.

So, they play spin the bottle.

Wilhelm chews at his thumbnail, unhappy to be in this position — not because he wouldn't kiss his friends (has kissed almost all of them while drunk already) but because he doesn't want to kiss *Simon*. At least — not like this. He catches Felice's gaze across the circle and mouths *I hate you*. She just grins in response.

He doesn't even get to sit near Simon, either — he's across the circle, sandwiched between Felice and Nils. Wilhelm tries not to narrow his eyes at the way Nils leans into him.

Maddy goes first, and to everyone's delight the bottle lands on Rosh, prompting a very endearing display of affection that has everyone cheering — probably too loud, if he's honest, but his only other neighbour is a middle aged man that he barely ever sees, so he hopefully won't mind.

Then comes Vincent's turn — the bottle lands on Nils and everyone bursts into laughter.

"The situationship!" Wilhelm hollers, earning twin glares from the two of them, but soon dismayed shouts are filling the room as they begin making out *very* sloppily. Wilhelm catches eyes with Simon across the circle and cackles at the affronted look on his face.

"Alright! Alright, that's enough. You're disgusting." Felice tugs on Vincent's collar until he detaches himself from Nils.

Wilhelm blinks and then it's his turn — he shakes his hands out and leans forward, spinning the bottle sharply. He blows out a relieved breath when it lands on Felice, who graciously leans forwards to accept a kiss on the cheek. Then he promptly zones out for the rest of the round, far too nervous to think about anything other than the fact that it's *Simon* across the circle from him, *Simon's* going to be kissing someone soon, that someone might be *him*.

He watches, almost in slow motion, as Simon spins the bottle. In a cruel twist of fate — because of *course* this would happen when Wilhelm has been begging for it not to since the game started — the bottle slows to a stop pointing directly at him. Wilhelm's eyes shoot from the neck of the bottle to meet Simon's gaze, finds him with a guarded, unreadable expression and bites his lip nervously. Simon's eyes follow the movement and Wilhelm contemplates just getting up and leaving, because *what the fuck*. At what point does this count as self harm?

"You with me?" Simon asks. Wilhelm watches him watching him, feels a sudden rush of courage and thinks *fuck it*. He might never get this chance again.

"I'm with you."

So Wilhelm gets up on his knees, meets Simon in the middle of the circle. He smells good, is the first thought — like sandalwood and citrus, clean and warm, *god*.

He sucks in a sharp breath when Simon gently cups his face, his eyes flickering between Simon's. Stays deathly still as Simon leans closer and brushes their lips together just so. Holds out for a second before he gives in and presses their lips together properly, letting his hands come up to loosely grasp Simon's shirt.

His lips are warm and soft, and he smells so good, that Wilhelm thinks for a second that this is what heaven is, for him. Simon pulls back a little and Wilhelm presses forward, kisses him again, and then Simon is leaning in properly, his mouth opening. Their tongues touch and Wilhelm keens, quiet enough that no-one else can hear, thankfully, but Simon must catch it because he inhales sharply and his hands move into Wilhelm's hair. The image of Simon pulling on it, tipping Wilhelm's head back, flashes across Wilhelm's mind and he licks gently into Simon's mouth, their surroundings melting away until all he can think is *Simon Simon Si*

Someone yanks him back by the shoulder and they disconnect, Wilhelm falling backwards.

“Stop sucking face!” someone — Maddy, he thinks absently — shouts as the rest of the room explodes into laughter. Wilhelm catches eyes with Simon, takes in his flushed cheeks, his eyes glassy and dazed. Simon swallows heavily and smears his mouth with his wrist, his wide eyes making contact with Wilhelm's.

Fuck.

the hurricane: KATRINA

alex:

attention queers

and ayub

ayub:

yo alex!

what's up

maddy:

ALEXXXX

HI

alex:

hi

lake house is free next weekend

iffff you all wanted to come and chill

stay over

yk the drill

wille:

say LESS.

alex i could kiss u

this is exactly what i needed classes are kicking my ass rn

simon:

don't kiss him pls

rosh:



simon:

stfu

alex:

...

anyways

if ur both done being weird

come to mine saturday morning

we'll take two cars

if we leave at 10 we'll be there by lunch?

wille:

FUCK YEAH

stella:

SHIT i forgot me and freddie are going home that weekend :(you guys have fun though

felice:

aw man :(we'll miss you

wille:

next time !!

oh i cannot wait

i'm getting FUCKED. UP.

simon:

responsibly!

wille:

responsibly :)

Wilhelm is brainstorming ideas for an essay on war poetry when his phone rings, cutting Mac Miller off in the middle of one of his verses. Wilhelm scowls briefly at the interruption but

this is soon smoothed out when he realises it's Felice who's calling him. She's been a little distant lately, distracted with her crush. Maybe they both have.

He picks up the phone, kicking his socked feet up on his desk and narrowly avoiding upending the glass of wine that's sitting half-drunk next to his laptop. "Yello."

"I asked her out."

"Hi, Wille, dearest friend of mine. How are you on this fine evening?" he mocks absently, considering his feet. His socks have tiny Snoopies on them, courtesy of secret santa last year — Alex gives the best gifts.

"Shut up. Help me," Felice gripes.

Wilhelm snorts. "Okay. Are you freaking out?"

"Um, *yes?!'*"

"What about?"

"Everything."

Wilhelm rolls his eyes fondly. "Come on, Felice! You're a pro at this."

"No, I am not! I'm a lesbian disaster, Wille. You know this," Felice shoots back.

Wilhelm sighs, letting his eyes wander around his room. "Okay, walk me through it. How'd you do it?"

"Um, well, it was after class, and I just stopped her as she was leaving and asked if she wanted to hang out."

Wilhelm frowns. "Wait, hang out or *hang out?*"

"You just said the same thing twice."

"Did you ask her in a way that could be misconstrued as an offer of friendship," Wilhelm clarifies.

The line goes suspiciously quiet and Wilhelm bursts into laughter. "Oh, Christ, you're worse than me."

"Oh, fuck you, Mr. *what if he's straight,*" Felice shoots back.

Wilhelm gasps. "I asked you that in confidence! Low blow, Felice, low blow."

"It's not my fault your gaydar is so bad you thought *Simon* was straight."

Wilhelm chuckles exasperatedly. "Okay, okay. Can we get back to your gay crisis now, please?"

Felice groans. “I don’t know what to do. I like her *so much*, Wille. I feel like I’m dying.”

I know how that feels, Wilhelm thinks. He sighs and pulls his feet off of the desk, sitting up straight. “Listen to me, Felice. You are a catch and a half, okay? You’re beautiful, and smart, and the funniest person *ever*. Just be yourself. And ask her out properly next time, you absolute boob.”

“Don’t call me a boob!”

What Felice fails to tell him on the phone is that she’s planning to bring her date to the diner. As they wander through the doors Wilhelm snorts to himself. “What is it with people bringing their dates here?” He mutters as they come over to the counter.

Then he stops short, eyes widening, because — oh, *shit*.

“Hey, could we get two veggie burgers?” Sara requests, tucking her brown hair behind her ear and glancing back at Felice. Wilhelm stutters into life, stumbling through the interaction, unable to pull his eyes from Sara’s face.

He only saw her briefly, before, but there’s no mistaking her. *Simon’s sister*. Fuck — things just got a whole lot more awkward for him. Sara glances at him and then away again and Wilhelm reminds himself that staring isn’t polite, forcing his eyes to Felice instead.

Sara turns to Felice. “I’m just gonna go to the toilet quickly, okay?”

Felice nods. “Okay!”

As soon as Sara’s back is turned she snags Wilhelm’s wrist and pulls him over the counter. “Okay, what the fuck is wrong with you? You look like you’ve seen a ghost!”

“When you said her name was Sara, I didn’t think you meant *that* Sara,” Wilhelm replies.

Felice frowns, confused. “What do you mean?”

Wilhelm glances to the door to the toilets and then leans a little closer. “She’s Simon’s sister,” he murmurs.

Felice’s eyes widen. “Oh. She didn’t mention a brother.”

“I think they’re fighting,” Wilhelm replies. “I don’t know what about, though.”

“Hm.”

Sara returns before they can carry on talking, thankfully either not noticing Wilhelm’s weird, half-over the counter position or choosing not to comment on it.

Wilhelm watches the two of them as they wander over to a booth, noting the way Sara glances at Felice, the tiny smile stretching her lips. He's happy for them — he's sure they'll end up together — but he also knows things might get awkward if Simon and Sara are forced to run in the same circles. He makes a note to mention it to Simon the next time he sees him and forces it all out of his head as he serves the next customer.

wille:

mario kart 2nite???

simon:

it would take you two extra seconds to type normally

but yES

come over bby

wille:

OTW. bringing snacks

simon:

i'm going to kiss you on the Mouth

wille:

...

been there, done that?

simon:

don't get fresh with me.

Wilhelm huffs a laugh, valiantly ignoring the airy feeling in his chest as he grabs his backpack and begins to fill it with snacks from his cupboards. Getting closer to Simon has come with the added bonus of experiencing Simon with his guard down, goofy and unconcerned. It's a far cry from the distant, perfect man Wilhelm first met, and seeing Simon crack jokes or laugh openly with him never fails to make him giddy with excitement.

He doesn't bother knocking, just strides in through Simon's front door with a holler. "Honey, I'm home!"

"Oh, my darling! How wonderful it is to see you!" Simon exclaims dramatically from where he's crouching in front of the TV, setting up Mario Kart. Wilhelm smiles as he jogs over to join him, placing his backpack down and starting to pull out the snacks. The place looks the same as it always does; sheet music on the dining table, a half-brewed coffee pot next to the stove, weak autumn sunlight filtering through the blinds.

Simon shoots him a sardonic grin as Wilhelm plops down next to him on the couch. "Prepare to be crushed," he declares.

Half an hour later and Wilhelm is tweeting his victory for all to see.

@froggieprince:

simon just tried to fight me because he lost at mario kart LMAOOO

[a picture of Simon, arms crossed, pouting at the screen.]

-> **@roshftball**

PLS he's so bad at mario kart. it's his one flaw

-> **@ayayayub**

i can think of more flaws Actually but i will keep my mouth Shut.

-> **@simmesimon**

all three of u are dead to me

When Simon looks up from his phone his gaze speaks of violence. Wilhelm wastes no time, taking off at a run, sprinting around Simon's couch and almost slipping over as his socked feet slide on the wooden floor. He can hear Simon thundering after him and he lets out a hysterical giggle, holding his phone high above his head so that Simon can't grab for it. He sprints out into the hallway, making a beeline for Simon's room, hope unfurling in his chest. If he can just—

Simon wedges half his body in between the door and the frame so that Wilhelm can't shut it and Wilhelm lets out an ungainly shriek, throwing himself onto Simon's bed. He pulls up twitter again and types furiously, eyeing Simon warily.

@froggieprince:

he's trying to delete my last tweet but i will NOT be silenced

Simon steps fully into the room, letting the door shut behind him with a threatening *click*. There's an almost predatory glint to his eyes that makes Wilhelm's stomach turn inside out. With Wilhelm's escape route well and truly sealed, he turns to flattery. "You look really cute in the photo, you know."

Simon blinks at him, momentarily stunned. Wilhelm feels interest spark in his chest — *success*? He chuckles at Simon's deer-in-the-headlights expression. "C'mon, baby. Let it go."

And Simon; smooth, suave, unflappable Simon, *blushes*. It starts slow, at the tips of his ears, but soon his whole face is glowing a flushed pink. Wilhelm gapes at him and Simon scowls and then he's throwing himself at Wilhelm, grappling for his wrists and wrestling the phone from his hands. Wilhelm laughs breathlessly, trying to twist away from him.

@froggieprince:

HELP HE'S TRNG TOSTSJAL MY PHN

IM. BEIGN ATTASCJED

Five minutes later, with Simon's knee digging into his ribs and his arm twisted uncomfortably above his head, Wilhelm gives up.

@froggieprince:

simon eriksson is my favourite friend, he's so handsome and amazing and i look up to him also im dumb and stupid <3

-> **@nilz**

this is literally no different to how he normally tweets about u

-> @felehrenchroma

PLSSSS THIS IS SO TRUE

Simon grins cheerily at him as he sends the tweet, throwing the phone onto Wilhelm's chest and heading back into the living room. Wilhelm lets out a breath, staring at the ceiling and trying to will away the butterflies flocking in his stomach at having Simon so close. He sits up, shoulders still shaking with the aftermath of laughter, and takes a second to take in the details of Simon's room.

It's very him; there's a beaten up old record player shoved into the corner and surrounded by teetering piles of records, a keyboard and acoustic guitar placed beneath the window and posters tacked to the walls, most of them faded and peeling away like they've been removed and replaced in different places, on different walls over many years. Wilhelm wanders over to the windowsill, picking up a can of aftershave and, shit, *there's* that scent, clean and warm and *Simon*. Wilhelm swallows thickly and places it back where he found it.

There's a framed picture of Simon and Sara with an older woman on Simon's dresser. She's obviously their mother; they all have the same smile. Wilhelm's eyes linger on Sara before he pushes away from the drawers and out into the hallway.

"Hey, Simon? I have to tell you something."

Simon glances up from where he'd been setting up the next game. "Hm? What?"

"I met Sara the other day."

There's an almost imperceptible flicker of emotion and then Simon's face is smoothing over again into indifference. His tone is intentionally light when he replies. "Oh. How come?"

Wilhelm swallows and tries to think of the best way to word it. He settles on, "uh, her and Felice are dating," and then immediately regrets it because— *really?*

Simon stares at him for a long time. The muscle in his jaw ticks — the only indication he's even heard what Wilhelm said. After a long moment he says, "I see."

Wilhelm flounders a little, panic flaring in his chest. "Or, well— technically they're not dating *yet*, but Felice is planning on asking her out. But— yeah. I'm pretty sure they're, like ___"

"Wille. It's fine. Stop digging yourself a deeper hole and come sit," Simon commands and Wilhelm sits heavily next to him, tugged forwards by an invisible force somewhere behind his navel.

"I'm sorry? I just thought you should know that they're— hanging out. Because if they start dating then Felice will wanna bring her to events and I figured you would want to be prepared for that."

Simon smiles placatingly at him, but there's an edge of resigned sadness to him, now, and Wilhelm can practically *see* his walls going back up and he almost regrets saying anything at

all. "It's sweet of you to think of me like that, Wille. Thank you for telling me."

Wilhelm bumps their shoulders together and every cell in him cheers in victory when Simon bumps him back. He keeps his smile small and picks up the remote, but there's still concern sitting heavy on his chest when he replies. "Okay."

He's warm. It stretches around him, forming slowly into a shape he knows. Blurry at the edges and too close, but it's *him*.

There are hands on his hips. They draw him in until he's pressed against him, flames in his belly, warmth in his heart. A hand at his throat draws him closer still and then Wilhelm is *falling*, deeper and deeper into Simon's kiss.

Simon.

"Wille."

The word is whispered with such reverence, gentle adoration in every syllable.

"Wille, please."

And then Wilhelm is on his back, gazing up at him as he moves languidly. He grips Wilhelm's shoulders with aching surety as Wilhelm enters him, mouth dropping open around a drawn out moan. He leans down to press his mouth harshly against Wilhelm's, all sharp teeth and warm tongue and soft lips, and Wilhelm is lost lost lost in the delicious press of him.

Simon draws back, squeezing around him, lips stretching into a teasing smile.

"Sweetheart."

Wilhelm wakes suddenly, his spent cock rapidly softening in his sleep shorts. He stares at the shadows stretching across the ceiling. Sighs heavily. Drags himself up and out of bed.

It's quiet; their conversation has long since faded into a gentle silence that stretches, yawns like a cat and curls into the space between them as they sit on Wilhelm's balcony. He considers Simon, something bold and relaxed creeping under his skin and prompting him to regard the other man openly.

Wilhelm has always thought that he looks beautiful like this; head tipped back against the wall, face relaxed, breathing smoke into the hazy night. His curls tumble over his forehead and flirt with his collar — Simon has been meaning to get a haircut for weeks but keeps putting it off. Wilhelm doesn't have it in him to admit that he likes it better long. Imagines himself threading his fingers through the soft curls, fisting the hair in his hand, tugging on it. Is ashamed to admit that he thinks about it often.

"You're staring again, baby," Simon drawls, lips splitting into an easy smile as his eyes open to slits, catching Wille's gaze. Wilhelm huffs and leans forward to tug the joint from his fingers so that he doesn't think too hard about the fireworks going off in his chest. *Baby*. A new development, but not an entirely unexpected one. Simon is loose-lipped with his friends, calls them *love*y and *babe* and *honey* like it's nothing. It's something Wille loves about him; that he's so easy with his affection. But *baby*. That's new. Only murmured in these quiet, close moments, where it's just the two of them and the endless night between them. Selfishly, Wilhelm hopes that it's only for him.

He takes a pull, readjusts so they sit beside one another and rests his free hand on the floor between them. Stares at his socked feet and feels stupid. Starts when he feels the hesitant brush of skin against his own. He can feel Simon staring at him. He keeps his own eyes trained on the middle distance, trying not to give away how his heart is banging inside of his chest. Simon huffs a soft laugh and moves his hand, interlacing their fingers easily. Wilhelm tenses.

"Don't overthink it." Simon's voice is warm and rough, rasping out of his throat deliciously.

Wilhelm nods. "Mhm!"

Simon chuckles. "You're cute, Wille."

Wilhelm squeezes his hand. "Shut up."

Simon's thumb traces a slow circle on his knuckles, almost as if he's not aware that he's doing it. He suddenly tugs on Wilhelm's hand and grins at him, something akin to mischief in his eyes. "Shotgun?"

What?

"Are you serious?" Wilhelm chokes out, eyes bugging out of his head.

Simon laughs at him. "Don't tell me you're scared, baby."

And if there's one thing that will get Wilhelm to do *anything*, it is being told he's too scared to do it. He narrows his eyes at Simon. "C'mere, then."

Simon starts a little, like he wasn't expecting Wilhelm to be so confident, but then he's moving forwards too fast for Wilhelm to prepare himself.

And then he has a lap full of Simon; dark eyes half-lidded, smile rapidly fading on his pretty lips, cheeks flushed and skin smooth. Wilhelm's hands find his thighs easily. *Like they're*

meant to be there, he thinks hazily, senses full of the other man.

Simon takes a pull of the joint, shifting forwards on Wilhelm's lap, and, *god*, the movement drags their hips together and Wilhelm swallows involuntarily because it feels so good. He stares up at Simon, just suppressing a whine as he leans up to meet him. Simon presses *close*, a hair's breadth from kissing him, and lets the smoke travel between their parted lips on a slow exhale.

Wilhelm remembers to breathe in, eyes fluttering closed of their own accord, nose brushing against Simon's as the earthy vapour fills his lungs. He turns his head to the side and blows out the smoke, disappointed to see Simon swaying back out of his space when he returns to him.

Simon stares at him, eyes half-lidded and endlessly dark. Wilhelm watches him back. Recognises the challenge in those irises, turned almost-black in the dim light. Wants to meet it with his own — wants to be daring. He quirks his lips up and plucks the joint from between Simon's fingers, bringing it to his lips without breaking their eye contact. Simon's eyes flick down and up again, his teeth sinking into his bottom lip as he exhales shakily.

Wilhelm reaches out and tangles his other hand in those curls, tugging the other man forward until he meets him halfway. Their bottom lips brush together as Wilhelm lets the smoke leave his lips, clouding around them and leaving them in a smoky haze. Simon starts to withdraw again and Wilhelm shifts his hips up unintentionally, swaying to follow Simon's lips, desire burning a hole in his chest.

"You're killing me," he murmurs into the quiet space between them, his voice gravelly and tinged with arousal. He can feel himself starting to get hard, can't bring himself to move even if Simon can feel it. Simon's eyes flutter and he settles more heavily in Wilhelm's lap. When they open again there's something different in them; something wild, something stubborn. He stares at Wilhelm for a moment, eyes tracking over his face, and he mutters, "oh, fuck it."

And then there's a strong hand on his jaw and Simon is tugging him into a kiss, open mouthed and sloppy. Wilhelm whines involuntarily, gasping and bending into it, completely at Simon's mercy. He drops the joint, still smouldering, onto the gritty concrete and the hand once holding it joins his other in Simon's hair.

Simon grinds down onto him and the pressure is so delicious that Wilhelm almost comes right there, stuttering on a gasp and drawing Simon closer. He fists his hand in Simon's curls and Simon moans quietly, licking into his mouth. Everything feels slow and syrupy, the high sinking deep into his bones and heightening his senses until every one of Simon's touches has him panting and aching for it. He slips his hands beneath Simon's hoodie and chuckles lazily when the other man gasps at the sensation of cold fingertips on his overheated skin. Feels up over the bumps of his spine and wants even more.

Simon pulls away, but it's only to unbutton his own trousers and shove them unceremoniously down to his ankles, falling to his knees either side of Wilhelm's legs. Wilhelm scrambles to undo his own trousers, shoving them off of his legs as fast as he can. He has half a second to feel exposed before Simon is crashing their mouths together again, hot and hard and heavy. Simon's hand snakes between them and he takes Wilhelm in his

palm, stroking him surely and smiling, sharp and dangerous against his mouth, as Wilhelm bucks into his fist with a groan. He pulls back to look Wilhelm in the eyes, his own heavy with smoke and arousal, and he bites down on a grin as he takes in Wilhelm's expression.

Wilhelm feels exposed in the best kind of way; messy and well-fucked even though they've done little more than kiss, his mouth dropping open around a moan as Simon squeezes him. The other man appraises him, his curls mussed and his cheeks flushed with desire.

"Wanna fuck me?" Simon asks.

Wilhelm nods rapidly. "Fuck- yeah. Please."

"Hmm. Good boy." And then he's grabbing Wilhelm's wrist and sucking two fingers into his mouth, coating them in spit. Wilhelm stares dumbfoundedly at the obscene display, his cock twitching.

"How are you real?" he mutters. Simon just smirks and encourages Wilhelm's hand to move behind him.

The angle is a little awkward, his wrist cramping slightly as he presses a finger against Simon's hole until it sinks into the heat of him. Simon gasps around the intrusion. "Shit— cold."

"Sorry," Wilhelm murmurs, swallowing as he watches in awe as Simon's eyelashes flutter when he crooks his finger.

"S'okay. I can take another," Simon replies, stuttering on a moan as Wilhelm complies. Wilhelm gets lost in the gentle push and pull, focusing on stretching him, ignoring the burn in his wrist. He presses absent-minded, sloppy kisses to Simon's neck, pausing to suck a bruise just beneath his jaw. Simon shivers against him and draws back.

"S'enough, baby. C'mon," he murmurs, his words slurring together as his hips twitch against Wilhelm's hand. He winces slightly as Wilhelm withdraws and Wilhelm kisses his cheek apologetically. Simon shifts closer, hovering up on his knees, but Wilhelm stops him with a hand on his chest. "Wait. Condom."

"Shit, I almost forgot," Simon groans. "I really don't want to get up."

Wilhelm stretches behind Simon to where he'd discarded his coat earlier. "Check my coat pocket."

Simon fishes around in the coat, finally producing the square foil. He holds it between two fingers and raises an eyebrow. "Expecting to get some, were we?"

Wilhelm rolls his eyes and plucks the condom packet from between his fingers. "Ha ha. Shut up."

"You got lube in here, too?" Simon asks, dissolving into giggles when his search reveals a small bottle. "No way. You *were* expecting to get some!"

Wilhelm snickers and shakes his head as he tears into the condom packet. Simon quiets as he watches Wilhelm roll the condom on, dipping to press open-mouthed kisses to the skin where his neck meets his shoulder. Wilhelm shivers at the sensation and his hands find Simon's hips again, pulling him closer.

"Ready, baby?" he murmurs into Simon's ear, nosing at it and breathing him in; coconut shampoo, the remnants of weed smoke, and underneath it all something that is undeniably Simon. It's intoxicating. Simon pulls back with a nod and then he's sinking down, aching slowly, and Wilhelm stares at the place that they meet as he bottoms out and moans brokenly. "Shit— feels good."

"Mhm," Simon replies, resting his forehead against Wilhelm's temple and just breathing, fluttering around him in a way that sends heat flying up Wilhelm's spine. Wilhelm strokes a steady hand up his back and asks, "you okay?"

Simon noses at his cheek, and somehow it's the most intimate thing they've done so far. It makes Wilhelm's chest swell with emotion, and he closes his eyes against the wave of arousal that follows.

"Me okay," Simon replies, his voice soft and wrecked.

Wilhelm huffs a soft laugh. "Good."

Shuddering, Simon starts to move, aching slow. Wilhelm grips hard on his hips — probably hard enough to bruise, and isn't *that* a thought — and tries to stay grounded, tries not to think too hard about the tight, wet heat of him and the way he surrounds him completely.

"Fuck, baby," Simon moans. His mouth finds Wilhelm's throat and then he's sucking harshly, pulling the skin into his mouth and biting down; *marking him*. It's this thought that has Wilhelm gripping onto his hips and fucking up into him as Simon gasps, hanging onto his shoulders, their kisses growing harsher; gaining teeth and becoming bruising.

Wilhelm changes angle, slightly, and watches in awe as Simon's mouth drops open and he lets out a strangled moan. He leans in and drags his lips over Simon's jaw, needing to be closer even though it's impossible, wanting to become one with him. Breathes in the scent of him; sweat and sex and weed, and lets out a moan of his own.

"Close, Wille, *fuck*," Simon pants out, leaning their foreheads together and letting Wilhelm kiss him sloppily. He snakes a hand between them and takes himself in his palm; two, three strokes and then he's spasming around Wilhelm, moaning loudly and brokenly and spilling all over his fist. It's the sight of his face, the pleasure lining his brows — pleasure caused by Wilhelm — that tips him over the edge. He fucks up into Simon, his vision whiting out as the force of his orgasm rocks through him, keening high in the back of his throat as he starts to slow and eventually stops.

They stay for a long second, just breathing. Simon presses a sloppy, open-mouthed kiss to the skin of his neck and Wilhelm shivers. He draws back to look at Wilhelm, eyes satiated and sleepy, and he smiles softly before disentangling their limbs and standing on shaky legs.

Wilhelm watches, bereft, as Simon tugs his trousers back up and fastens them with a wince. He spares him a glance, pausing to give him an appreciative once-over, and then he licks his lips and clears his throat.

“This was fun. I’ll see you around.”

And then he’s gone, disappearing into his apartment before Wilhelm can reply.

Wilhelm blinks, confusion and hurt chasing away the warm feelings that were filling his chest at finally having Simon where he wanted him.

What?

Chapter End Notes

how likely is it that wille would be carrying around condoms AND lube?? not very. give me a little creative licensing here.

the ‘me okay’ is a teensy weensy CMBYN reference btw

the idea is that simon is trying SO hard to keep wille at arms length for ... reasons but he wants him so badly that he has these moments (swimming pool, them having sex) where he caves to it and then immediately regrets it afterwards. hence him trying to keep his distance with the ‘i’ll see you around’

i hope you enjoy my little honey bunnies <3 gimme comments!! what do you think!! lemme know!!!

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

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Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

* tw this chapter for discussions of child abuse and drug use *

Chapter Notes

“After all, what exactly is a family, if not a brotherhood and sisterhood afflicted with the same terminal disease?” - Eric Larocca, Things Have Gotten Worse Since We Last Spoke.

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

V

“Oh, my *god*. What happened to you? You look like you’ve been attacked by an octopus,” is the first thing out of Felice’s mouth when he enters her apartment. Wilhelm rolls his eyes, colouring at the reminder of the bruises marking the column of his throat. “Thanks, Felice. Thank you.”

Felice just stares at him expectantly. Wilhelm huffs and pinches the bridge of his nose, eyes locked on the floor as he replies. “I fucked Simon.”

“Excuse me?”

Wilhelm scowls at her. “I’m not saying it again.”

Felice blinks in surprise. “What, so— are you together now, or?”

“...No.”

Felice looks at him like he’s an idiot. She scratches at her forehead and then holds a finger up at him — Wilhelm winces in preparation. “Let me get this straight —*don’t* make the joke I know you want to make right now.” Wilhelm snorts and she barrels on before he can speak. “You, Wilhelm, my best friend, had sex with Simon, who you are head over heels in love with, but you’re not together.”

Wilhelm sighs and leans against the wall, crossing his arms grumpily. “‘Head over heels’ is a gross over-exaggeration.”

Felice stares at him. “This might be the dumbest thing you’ve ever done.”

“I’m sure I’ve done worse.”

She ignores him, bringing a thumb to her mouth and chewing at the skin. Finally she points at him. “Tell me you’re not going to do it again.”

Wilhelm winces. “...I’m probably going to do it again. The sex was *insanely* good. I’m talking, like, life changing, Felice. I’m getting flashbacks as we speak.”

Felice flaps her hands at him. “What— ew! Stop that!”

Wilhelm snorts at the expression on her face and they break out into giggles for a second, Wilhelm knocking his head back against the wall and sighing loudly. He can’t believe this is his life. After a moment he levels her with a look. “Don’t tell anyone?”

She mimes zipping her lips and locking them. Then a concerned crease appears between her brows and she reaches out, cradling his face with one hand and stroking his cheekbone with

her thumb. “He’s gonna break your heart.”

Wilhelm lifts a shoulder. “Maybe.”

Felice rubs a hand over his shoulder and he feels a sudden rush of gratitude for her constant presence in his life.

“Is he worth it?” she asks. Wilhelm bites his lip, pondering. Thinks about Simon; the elegant curve of his shoulder, the twinkle in his eyes when he smiles. The way he stretches, long and unhurried, like a cat in the sun. How he works himself to the bone, hiding the ache in his joints and the calluses on his fingertips behind a falsified smile. The pain in his eyes when he talks about Sara. How the light of the swimming pool had turned the edges of him ephemeral, like he was smoke that could disappear at the lightest of touches. How Wilhelm finds himself drawn to him at every turn, whether he wants to be or not.

Eventually he closes his eyes in defeat. “Shit, yeah. Yeah, he is.”

Fate is on his side when he returns from Felice’s, and he turns into their corridor just as Simon steps out of his apartment. Wilhelm sees the moment Simon sees him, spots when he realises he can’t backtrack away from this interaction and slows to a stop, letting Wilhelm make his way over to him. He tries to ignore the flash of hurt that inspires.

Wilhelm takes him in; curls artfully tousled, swimming in an oversized purple hoodie that hangs off of his shoulder and with his bottom lip tucked between his teeth as his doe eyes travel across Wilhelm’s face. Wilhelm’s gaze drifts to Simon’s throat and—*fuck*, there are hickeys smattered across it, matching his own. He feels a flash of possessive arousal kick through him at the sight.

“Hey,” he offers, swallowing, back to being unsure where they stand. Simon steps closer to him and he feels the movement through his whole body, like all of his cells just stood to attention.

“Hey,” Simon replies. His gaze shifts from Wilhelm’s face to his shoes, to the wall and back again, like he doesn’t know where best to look. They linger on Wilhelm’s neck for a second, and he swallows before tearing his gaze away.

Wilhelm shifts his feet. “We should talk, probably.”

Simon offers him a nod but little more. Wilhelm makes an aborted gesture to his apartment door. “Do you wanna come in?”

Simon shrugs. “Sure. I can’t stay for long, though. I have class.”

So Wilhelm unlocks the door, feels the heat of Simon’s presence at his back as they enter and purposefully doesn’t look towards the balcony as he heads into the kitchen.

He grabs a clementine from his fruit bowl, just for something to do with his hands. Leans against the counter as he peels it, watches Simon shift awkwardly, just inside his door like he's ready to bolt. It's not sweet, the clementine — doesn't know why he expected it to be, given the track record of his life, currently — but he chews it valiantly even though it's turning to ash in his mouth. He flicks a bit of pith off of his fingers and watches Simon watching him.

“So, uh—“ Wilhelm starts eventually, when the silence gets too much.

“It doesn't have to be, like, a *thing*. We can just be casual about it,” Simon says suddenly, and he looks even more like he wants to run, now.

Wilhelm swallows the bitter sting of disappointment with the last segment of his clementine as he replies. “What— like friends with benefits?”

Simon shrugs. “Sure.”

“Okay,” Wilhelm says, considering him. “So does this mean I can kiss you?”

“Right now?”

“No, in a week,” Wilhelm deadpans. “Obviously I mean now.”

Simon rolls his eyes, but then he's stepping forwards into his space anyways, quirking an eyebrow at him. “You're not funny.”

“Okay,” Wilhelm says, his eyes trained on Simon's lips.

Casual. He can do casual, if it means getting to watch Simon fall apart beneath his gentle touches, getting to kiss him, feel him. Now that he's had him once, he's not sure he can go on knowing what it feels like without still getting to be with him. He tips Simon's chin up with two fingers. Simon sways forwards.

They do a lot less talking, after that.

Wilhelm shivers as he steps out onto the balcony, October having given away quickly into winter's chill and leaving his breath clouding in front of his face. It's nice, in a way — though Wilhelm will always prefer the summer there is something undeniably grounding about the frigid air, the freezing metal beneath his hands. Gives him something to focus on that isn't the sleeping boy in his bed.

There are times where he thinks Simon might feel the same. The way he looks at him, sometimes — like he and Wilhelm are the only two people alive. Like there's nothing he'd rather be doing than gazing into his eyes. The way he gasps Wilhelm's name, skates his fingertips over his shoulder blades, nudges their noses together.

But then he draws away from him, offers him a tight smile as he's tugging on his shirt and Wilhelm is left nursing the hole in his chest and staring at the place where he once stood. Hugging himself never seems to replicate the warmth of Simon's skin against his own.

He sighs heavily, staring at the vapour as it dissipates into the icy air. It's rare that Simon stays over, or that Wilhelm has the courage to ask to stay at his. Tonight he was exhausted from his assignments, always working his fingers to the bone and then some; this is the only reason that he allowed Wilhelm to press him to the bed and take his time, drawing shudders and whimpers out of him until he eventually slipped into sleep, warm and satiated.

Usually they crash together, heated and rushed, because it keeps things somewhat-impersonal. Hurried. Get each other off and then go back to stolen glances and friendly greetings as if Wilhelm's heart hasn't ripped itself from his body and thrown itself into Simon's hands. As if Simon hasn't winced awkwardly and placed it back between them, wiping the blood from his palms.

The screen door slides open behind him. Wilhelm stays facing forward, begins to count the lights on the block of flats in front of him, breathing in, breathing out. He hears Simon's bare feet pad on the concrete, has a flash of concern because it's *cold*, he should be wearing *shoes*, and then Simon is beside him, their arms brushing together.

"Okay?" Simon mumbles, clearly still half-asleep. He's starting to shiver, clad in just a hoodie — one of Wilhelm's, *Christ* — that he's obviously grabbed on the way out of the door. Wilhelm aches to reach for him but— they don't do that. Instead he just nods.

"You didn't— you know, earlier." Simon makes a stunted, aborted gesture, sniffing awkwardly. Wilhelm huffs a laugh — how he can be so confident when they're having sex and yet so uncomfortable talking about it will always be amusing to him.

"It's okay," he replies. Doesn't know how to explain that he'd rather watch Simon fall apart because of him a million times over than come himself.

Simon looks at him like he's puzzling, then slowly smiles. "You're somethin' special, huh."

Wilhelm feels his eyebrows twitch inwards in confusion. He shrugs and turns again, letting his eyes trail the twinkling lights of the city. Simon does the same, then slowly shifts his hand and touches their pinkies together. Wilhelm feels the touch zing through his body like lightning and looks at Simon sharply. Carefully and quietly links them, as Simon watches. Thinks that if Simon will allow him this, then it will be enough. It will have to be enough.

Simon tilts his head, smiles, looks back out at the city. Wilhelm allows himself a second to just *look* — the gentle slope of his nose, his long eyelashes, the moonlight in his hair — and then he drags his eyes away again.

Wilhelm slams the door to Felice's apartment and flops face-first onto her couch with a put out groan. When she doesn't acknowledge his existence he sighs louder, really puts his back into it, shoving his face into the cushions and then rolling onto his back like an over-dramatic Victorian child with a fever.

"Before you say anything," she starts, "answer these questions. Is this about Simon? Am I going to say 'I told you so'? Is there literally anyone or anything else you could be telling this to? Like, I don't know, your journal?"

"Yes, absolutely, no, already tried that," he fires off in quick succession, ticking them off on his fingers. Then he rolls over again and muffles a scream into the cushions. "He's so *pretty*, Felice. My heart feels like it's shrivelling up and dying whenever I look at him."

"Okay, well, that is disgusting. And morbid," she says. After a moment he feels her fingers thread through the hair at the back of his head, her long nails gently scratching his scalp. She smooths her hand down his head and says, "get up."

Wilhelm sighs. "No, I think I'll stay here. At least the couch loves me."

He feels her stand beside him and tug on his arm. When he doesn't move, she says, "Wille, I'm going to dump a bucket of water on you if you don't get up."

Wilhelm scowls at her but allows himself to be pulled into a seated position. "You wouldn't do that to the couch." He grumbles.

"What did I say?" she implores him. Wilhelm just stares up at her petulantly.

"No, come on. What did I say? I said, 'he's gonna break your heart' and *you* said 'head over heels' was an overstatement but now look at you."

Wilhelm groans. "Felice..."

He sees the moment she softens in the quiet turn of her mouth — Christ, he must look really pathetic — and she moves forward, hugging his head to her stomach. Wilhelm lets his arms come up around her waist and breathes her in; jasmine perfume and vanilla, just as comforting as it was when they were sixteen and fresh-faced. She pulls back and tips his head back, threading her fingers through his hair.

"What are you going to do?" she asks.

He sighs. "I don't know. I can't lose him."

Her eyebrows twitch inwards. "Who says you have to?"

Wilhelm looks away petulantly. "...Me."

"Come on, Wille. Just give it time. Maybe he's feeling exactly the same as you, and you're both too shy to say anything."

Wilhelm shakes his head sharply — he can't allow himself to think that. To hope.

“Well, he’s coming to the lake house, right? There’s only three sleeping spaces including the living room — let me see if I can talk Alex into giving you and Simon a bedroom to yourselves.” Felice continues when he doesn’t say anything.

Wilhelm glances at her in surprise. “You’d do that for me?”

Felice raises an eyebrow at him. “Who do you take me for?” she replies archly. Wilhelm snorts unattractively at the look on her face. After a moment Felice breaks to, giggling. Wilhelm finds himself overcome with gratitude for her presence, not for the first time this week. They’ve always had each other, and they always will — Felice is the one constant in his life.

“Well? What do you say?” she asks after a moment.

Wilhelm finds himself excited at the prospect in spite of himself. He nods. “Okay. Sounds good.”

Saturday comes around quickly; Wilhelm spends two and a half days stressing about an exam, aces said exam, and then has half a day to pack before suddenly it’s time to go and he and Simon are standing with the rest of their friends in front of the two cars that will take them to Alex’s parent’s lake house. Simon shifts anxiously beside him and Wilhelm knocks their elbows together; he can tell that there’s something bothering him, but Simon won’t tell him what. Simon sends him a brief smile before pulling out his phone and Wilhelm sighs.

“Wille, do you know where Felice is?” Alex asks, checking his watch anxiously.

“Uh, no? I actually haven’t heard from her. She’s probably overslept, or something.” Wilhelm shrugs.

There are six of them in total, not including Felice (Nils and Vincent are also away this weekend, on a ‘friends trip’ that everyone knows is code for three day sex marathon), and Wilhelm is suddenly grateful he had the forethought to bring his headphones because a two hour car journey spent squished against Simon with no freedom to touch him or kiss him at all sounds like hell without something to distract him.

“Oh! There she is,” Alex says, looking towards where Felice is power-walking towards them.

“Who’s she with?” Maddy pipes up.

“Sara,” Simon whispers, horrified. Wilhelm glances towards him in concern and finds him pale and drawn, apprehension marring his face. And, sure enough — there’s Sara, tucking her hair nervously behind her ear and laughing as Felice tugs her along behind her. Wilhelm spots their intertwined hands and feels his chest smart a little — are they dating? Why didn’t Felice

say anything? He shoots her a pointed look as the two approach the group and Felice shakes her head imperceptibly at him, eyes narrowing in warning.

“Why didn’t you tell me Sara was coming?” Simon hisses at him under his breath, eyes still trained on the approaching girls, and there’s a hurt in his voice that raises Wilhelm’s hackles — like he feels betrayed.

“I didn’t know!” he replies. “I would’ve told you if I did, I swear.”

Sara’s eyes find the two of them, and the speed at which they harden when they land on Simon has Wilhelm gritting his teeth against a protective flare in his chest. He reminds himself that Simon is an *adult*, and that this is not his fight — whatever happened between the two siblings has to be dealt with by them and them alone. He brushes their hands together intentionally, hoping to offer silent support, but Simon pulls away, shooting him a warning look, driving that icy shard a little further in — they’re not *together*, Simon isn’t his boyfriend. Wilhelm crosses his arms.

Felice and Sara finally come to a stop in front of everyone.

“Hey, Felice!” Maddy greets her excitedly — godbless them for being so normal when everyone else is so tense — and tugs her into a hug. “Who’s this?” she asks as she pulls back, regarding Sara.

“Uh, this is Sara,” Felice says, glancing nervously at Sara. “...My girlfriend.”

Maddy erupts in a squeal, tugging Felice in a circle. “Oh my god!”

“Oh my god,” Wilhelm repeats under his breath. He glances at Simon, then at Rosh — finds them looking at each other, doing that thing where they communicate with just their eyes again. Then he steps forwards and pulls Felice into a hug. “What the fuck! You finally got your shit together and just asked her out, huh?”

“Actually, I asked her out,” Sara clarifies. “She was never going to do it.”

Felice gasps. “I would have!”

Wilhelm snorts. “I like her. I’m Wilhelm, by the way. I’m sure you’ve heard all about me and my dashing good looks.” He tops it off with a theatrical wink, trying valiantly to draw Alex’s keen eyes from where they’d been ping-ponging between Sara and Simon.

“Oh yeah, I told her all about that time you farted in the cinema and four people had to change seats,” Felice replies. This successfully dissolves any awkward atmosphere as everyone collapses into giggles.

Wilhelm feels his eye twitch. “Felice! What the fuck!”

“Sorry, babe. I had to,” Felice manages between snorts, one perfectly manicured hand ruffling through his hair as Wilhelm tries to duck away.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Alex pipes up as the giggles peter out, waving at Sara.

“I hope it’s not too much trouble that I’m coming along,” Sara says, eyes darting from Alex’s face to a spot off to the side of him and then back again, like she doesn’t know where to look.

“Not at all!” Alex waves her off. Then he turns to the rest of them. “Shall we get the cars loaded up and head off?”

As everyone mobilises, dragging their bags over to the cars, Sara steps gingerly forwards until she comes to a stop just before Simon. Now that she’s closer Wilhelm can see where they’re related; in the soft turn of their noses and their dark eyes. She twists her mouth to the side and stares at Simon expectantly.

“Hi,” Simon says, eyes shining with a resigned sort of hope, like he wants this to go well but half-expects it not to.

“Hello,” Sara replies, nodding at him and then sniffing uncomfortably. Wilhelm shifts on his feet and then walks away from the siblings to offer Alex his help, wishing not for the first time that he and Simon were actually together so that he could offer more than hurried, hidden kisses in support. He keeps an ear out for their conversation as he starts to pack bags into the car.

“Sara, could we—” Simon starts and then cuts himself off.

Sara sighs. “You have to understand I can’t just forgive you like that, right?”

“Of course, but Sara it’s been—”

“Look, just- Not right now, okay?” Sara cuts him off and then hurries away, glancing over her shoulder one last time before folding herself into one of the cars beside Felice. Wilhelm looks back as he’s packing away the final bag and finds Simon screwing his heel into the dirt. He tongues at the inside of his cheek, his eyes flashing to Wilhelm as he passes by to open the door to the other car. Wilhelm dutifully follows him in.

“Are you okay?” he murmurs, trying to look Simon in the eye, but Simon just hums and stares out of the window, the line of his jaw sharp and tense and his arms crossed stonily. Wilhelm sighs and settles in for the ride.

Alex’s lake house is beautiful, with huge, floor-to-ceiling windows that allow the sunlight to stream into every crevice and a creaky wooden porch that overlooks the lake, sparkling in the midday sun. Alex directs each of them to their rooms as they wander in through the ornate wooden doors; Felice, Sara, Maddy and Rosh have the big bedroom, with Ayub and Alex taking the pullout sofa beds in the living room. The second, smaller bedroom is Wilhelm and Simon’s; Alex informs them of this with a poorly hidden wink thrown in their direction and Wilhelm blushes, pointedly not looking at Simon.

“Are we hungry?” Alex asks. “My parents were up here earlier in the week, so they’ve stocked up the fridge, thank god.”

In the end they settle on finger food for lunch; sweet fruit and cheese and buttered baguettes layed out in a little picnic on the coffee table, which Maddy and Rosh pull into the middle of the room. They all pile around it like they’re sitting around a campfire, popping open the beers that Ayub brought with him.

Wilhelm connects his phone to the speaker as everyone settles around him, but Felice snatches it out of his hands before he can put anything on.

“No sad stuff!” she shouts, easily navigating to her own playlist and shuffling it.

“I wasn’t gonna put sad stuff on!” Wilhelm protests, grappling with her for his phone. She holds fast and they end up scrapping like children.

“Felice— do you mind— wha— *hey!* Ouch! Can you fucking—“

Felice tries to throw his phone towards Simon but Wilhelm — rather impressively if you ask him — grabs it out of the air as it whizzes past him. He settles back on the floor, huffing his hair out of his eyes and shoving his phone back into his pocket, glaring petulantly at Felice as she grins.

“Wille, I’ve seen your playlists, at least ninety percent of it is sad music,” Simon pipes up, shoulders still shaking slightly at their antics. Wilhelm scowls at him.

“Traitor,” he mutters as the rest of the group dissolves into laughter.

Slowly they all settle into a rhythm, any prior awkwardness evaporating in the presence of alcohol — though he notices Simon sips on a Coke where the rest of them have beer — and Wilhelm leans back on his hands, letting the chattering of his friend’s voices wash over him and smiling.

“What are you so happy about?” Simon asks. The sleeves of his flannel shirt have been rolled up, revealing his forearms and framing his shoulders in a way that makes Wilhelm want to kiss him senseless.

Wilhelm shrugs. “It’s nice to have everyone together.”

Simon bites his lip and Wilhelm has to physically force himself to drag his eyes from that maddening dip in the reddened flesh. Simon snorts softly. “You’re cute.”

And *oh*, that’s bad. Wilhelm feels something inside him leap to attention like a puppy dog. Mortifyingly he finds himself starting to blush.

“Shut up?” he manages, his voice coming out reedy and flustered. Simon snorts harder, bright peals of laughter spilling from his lips and making Wilhelm smile in spite of himself. Wilhelm jostles him as Simon doubles over.

He catches eyes with Sara across the group over Simon's hunched back, finds her looking between the two of them, a crease appearing between her brows. She stands abruptly and heads outside, waving Felice and Alex off when they ask her if she's okay. Wilhelm frowns; he has no idea what could have sparked that particular move, but he's not entirely sure it sits right with him. He stands, leaving his beer on the floor, and tries to follow her, but then Maddy is asking him to pass their vape from their bag and by the time he gets outside Sara is nowhere to be seen.

He sighs — but, really, he has no idea what he would have said to her if he'd caught up in time. He can't get a read on her the way he can with most people — couldn't with Simon either, initially. He wonders if that's a coincidence or not.

It's a beautiful day, the sky a rare, clear blue above him. Wilhelm breathes in deep, watching a flock of ducks swimming across the lake and letting the cold, crisp air stretch his lungs. The door swings shut behind him and the thrum of music and his friend's voices fades to a gentle hum. Wilhelm wanders forwards until he reaches the end of the deck, sliding his hands along the smooth wood and letting himself zone out.

He starts out of his reverie as Ayub appears beside him — he hadn't heard the door opening — taking a slow pull of his beer and leaning against the wooden railing.

"Hey," Ayub greets him.

"Hey. What's up?" Wilhelm asks, mirroring him. Ayub is someone he hasn't had much of a chance to get to know — the guy is quiet, most of the time, tends to tack comments onto conversations rather than start his own — but Wilhelm's found he appreciates his easygoing presence anyways.

"I, uh, I wanted to talk to you," Ayub says, and that sparks alarm bells, because when has *I wanted to talk to you* ever been about good things?

"Okay?"

"Simon is my best friend," Ayub starts after a moment. "He means a lot to me."

"I can see that," Wilhelm replies, feeling oddly like he's about to be chewed out for something but unable to think of what.

"It's been me and him and Rosh against the world for a long time," Ayub continues contemplatively. "Obviously it's awesome that we have all of you guys, now, but it's been an adjustment. For all three of us, I think."

"Right," Wilhelm says, wondering where this is going.

"And, I mean, I guess I have you to thank for bringing us all together." Ayub gestures at him with the neck of his beer.

"Oh, I don't know. I feel like it would've happened eventually anyways," Wilhelm says, shifting his feet. He feels himself growing anxious at the uncertainty of it all; Ayub is here for

a reason, he's just not sure what it is. He starts to catalogue things; the soft music floating from the just-cracked door to the living room, the grain of the wood beneath his fidgeting fingers, the tug of cold air at his hair, now long enough for him to tuck behind his ears again.

"Listen," Ayub finally says. "Simon... he's been through a lot. I won't say anything because he should be the one to tell you, if you're together, but he deserves someone who treats him right." He leans against the balustrade and turns surprisingly intense eyes on him. The warning doesn't need to be spoken aloud for Wilhelm to get it; the shovel talk, *really*, when they're not even—

He looks away guiltily. "We're not together."

Ayub just gazes at him. It's a little unnerving.

"It's— I mean. He wants it that way."

Wilhelm brings his thumb to his mouth, tastes the salty remnants of the cheese they were eating, drags his eyes away from Ayub and out to the glittering surface of the lake. Stares at the weak winter sunlight glinting off of the water and wishes he could be anywhere else — somewhere far from the admission that they want different things, he and Simon.

"I think you're good for him," Ayub says. Wilhelm looks at him sharply, something dangerously akin to hope flaring behind his breastbone.

"Really?" Hates how pathetic it sounds but says it anyway, clings desperately to any slim chance that Simon might—

Ayub hums. "Yeah, bro. He smiles more now. Even after Sara..."

Wilhelm nods, understanding. They lapse into silence broken only by the lone whistle of a robin in one of the trees surrounding the lake. Wilhelm tugs absently at a loose thread on his jumper as he turns the information over in his mind, accidentally pulling too hard and unravelling a whole stitch. He pokes his thumb through the hole.

"He has a tendency to self-sabotage," Ayub says, pushing away from the edge of the porch. He gives Wilhelm a final glance as he starts to head back inside. "Give him time."

And then he's gone, disappearing inside and leaving Wilhelm to mull over what he's said.

Time. Wilhelm supposes he can give him that. Thinks that, really, he would give him anything, if only he'd ask.

It's too cold to go swimming, so as the afternoon progresses they crank up the music and get the drinks flowing. They order pizza, which prompts a fifteen minute long argument about whether olives on pizza is disgusting or not (Simon insists that olives add a *depth of flavour*,

whatever the fuck that means), and scatter themselves across the living room. Wilhelm, Simon, Felice and Alex sit in a little circle to play cards, while Ayub sprawls across one of the armchairs and Rosh and Maddy settle onto the couch, the latter quickly falling asleep with their head on their girlfriend's chest. Wilhelm smiles and snaps a quick picture of the couple, snorting privately as Rosh glares at him, unable to get up because of her sleeping partner.

Sara returns a little while into their first card game but quickly excuses herself to the bedroom, shooting a furtive glance at Simon as she does so. Felice flashes them an apologetic smile and quickly gets up to follow her.

"Hey, Simon, I don't want to overstep, but I was wondering if you already knew Sara?" Alex finally asks, his voice hushed as he watches Felice's retreating back. Simon stiffens, the movement so slight that it's imperceptible to everyone other than Wilhelm, who's hyper-attuned to Simon's every breath. Then he shrugs. "She's my sister."

Alex's mouth drops open — he definitely wasn't expecting that. "Oh! Really?"

"Yeah. It's kind of complicated, but, uh, please don't think she's being rude," Simon replies. "She's just dealing with some shit right now, and she probably just doesn't want to make anyone else feel awkward, or whatever."

"No, yeah, for sure," Alex replies. "I figured something was going on with her, so don't worry."

Simon smiles appreciatively and the conversation drifts to safer territory as they continue playing — three of one, four of the other, a game which Simon is unbelievably bad at. He frowns as Wilhelm throws down his hand, proudly displaying the three kings and four queens he's managed to acquire, and Wilhelm has to take a bite out of a slice of pizza so that he doesn't lean forwards and kiss the pout off of his lips for everyone to see. Being drunk around him was decidedly a bad idea — he's this close to giving in to the urge to kiss him in front of everyone at any given moment.

As they pack away the cards Wilhelm digs out his phone and heads outside to take a few pictures, wobbling only a little as he crosses the threshold to the porch. He had a brief stint with photography in his late teens that never really stuck, but he still likes to snap a few photos when he can — something about being too sentimental to let the memories to fade to nothing, he suspects.

Alex's parents have strung fairy lights around the porch, and they glow faintly like tiny fireflies in the approaching dusk. The setting sun paints the sky behind the treeline in blistering orange and red, and Wilhelm just stands for a moment, stubbornly ignoring the slight chatter in his teeth as he leans against the balustrade and takes it in. His fingers itch to write, suddenly — half-formed sentences and descriptions flit across his mind like songbirds as he watches the crimson hues fade in the burgeoning twilight.

He feels him before he hears him; something about Simon dials his every sense up to a hundred, his heart picking up as Simon's footsteps approach him.

“Aperol spritz?” Simon asks as he appears in his field of vision, holding out the orange drink with dainty fingers. His own drink appears to be a virgin Cosmopolitan; Wilhelm snags it and takes a sip, humming appreciatively at the tangy flavour. Simon scowls at him and steals it back. “What is it with you and stealing my stuff?”

“I wanted to see what it tasted like!” Wilhelm defends. “It’s so *red*. ”

“Okay, and yours is orange so drink it, stupid. Leave me out of it.”

Wilhelm exhales sharply, smiling and knocking their elbows together. They stand in silence for a moment, sipping their drinks, elbow to elbow in the dark. Simon’s profile glows golden beneath the fairy lights, his eyes shining like tiny galaxies swim in them. Wilhelm is caught up in him then, suddenly but not unexpectedly, and it’s here — on Alex’s porch, shivering a little against the frigid night, that the thought finally comes to him.

I love you.

Somehow, Simon and Sara manage to avoid each other for most of the rest of Saturday; Sara disappears with Felice to go explore and Simon stays holed up in their bedroom writing for the evening until Wilhelm can coax him out with promises of Alex’s homemade muffins and card games. Eventually he caves, mumbling something about puppy dog eyes as he allows Wilhelm to gently tug him by the wrist until he’s standing and following him out into the lounge.

He settles against Wilhelm, their backs to the couch, the line of him warm and solid at Wilhelm’s side. Wilhelm tries not to think about it, focuses intently on the cards in his hand and eventually he’s able to lose himself in the game again, stubbornly not letting his thoughts drift to those three little words that seem to be intent on turning his life upside down.

After a while the game ends and people begin to drift; Rosh and Maddy turn in early while Alex and Ayub migrate to the kitchen, leaving Simon and Wilhelm to play a sleepy game of blackjack.

“Where’d you learn all these card games?” Wilhelm asks.

“My Dad,” Simon replies easily. “He used to run poker tournaments out of our basement.”

Wilhelm huffs a surprised breath from his nose — whatever he was expecting, it wasn’t that.

The front door swings open before Wilhelm can reply and Sara and Felice appear out of the dark, shaking rain water from their hair and pulling off their coats. Simon catches Sara’s eye and they both stiffen and, Jesus, Wilhelm wishes they would just sort out whatever’s happened between them because this whole awkwardly-avoiding-each-other thing is getting *really* old.

“Maybe I should go,” Simon says, letting his cards land on the table and standing up. One of them flies from the hand and lands on the floor — Queen of Hearts. Wilhelm takes one look at Sara’s expression and doesn’t dare move to pick it up.

“No,” Sara says, squaring her feet. “I’m tired of you running, Simon.”

“Sara, please. I don’t want to do this in front of them,” Simon tries, gesturing vaguely to Wilhelm and Felice.

“You don’t want to do this in front of *him*, you mean,” Sara says, and, okay, what the hell is that supposed to mean? Wilhelm frowns and stands so that he’s at Simon’s shoulder.

“What the hell are you talking about?” Simon asks.

“I see the way you look at each other. You could’ve told me you’ve got a new boyfriend.”

“Uh, hello? Pot, meet kettle?” Simon replies, gesturing between Sara and Felice.

Sara frowns confusedly. “What? Simon, you know I don’t get what stuff like that means.”

“You didn’t tell me about Felice, either,” Simon explains.

Sara snorts derisively, her eyes flashing. “Well, maybe you would’ve known about her if you’d actually been in my fucking life!”

“I’m *trying*, Sara! I’m trying to fix things but you won’t *let* me!” Simon argues. Sara looks away, chewing on the inside of her cheek as tears spill over her lash line and travel down her face. Simon wipes a hand down his face, weariness suddenly wracking his frame. “Look, can we just— I don’t want to fight with you. I want us to be okay again. I love you, Sara. Mamma, too.”

“Jesus,” Sara says. “You know I really could’ve used that when I was sitting at home all night, wondering if you were hurt, or dead, or whatever! You didn’t seem to care all that much back then.”

“Sara, you have to know by now how much I hate myself for doing that to you. I’m *sorry*, ” Simon replies, his voice raw and pained, and Sara reels back like she’s been slapped at the look on his face. She stumbles back a step, tears staining her cheeks, and then she screws her eyes up and clenches her jaw.

“I just— I can’t do this right now. I’m sorry. I don’t... I don’t know if I can forgive you, Simon.”

And then she’s gone, storming out of the lake house, Felice racing to catch up with her. Simon sits heavily on the sofa, like all of the energy has drained out of him. Wilhelm gingerly takes the seat opposite him. Alarmingly he finds Simon with tears streaming down his face, his breath hitching as his chest shudders with the force of his sorrow. He wipes at his eyes furiously and then glares up at Wilhelm, his red-rimmed eyes full of dejected fire.

“I didn’t want you to find out like that,” he spits out, like the words burn too much to keep them in. “God, you should— I should just fucking go.”

“Hey, hey, no,” Wilhelm says, alarm filling his chest. He grips onto Simon’s arm, pulling him back onto the couch. “Please don’t go.”

“Would you, um, would you explain what she was talking about?” Wilhelm tries, letting his hand circle Simon’s wrist loosely. Strokes a thumb over the underside of it, feels the tendons shift, the blood rushing beneath his skin. Simon rubs a hand over the back of his head, and in that moment he looks so terrified — like a caged animal — that Wilhelm almost lets him go completely.

“God— uh.” He breathes in, breathes out again. Swallows and looks at him. “Okay.” Gently pulls his wrist from Wilhelm’s hand and shifts on the couch.

“Mine and Sara’s father, he- he was an asshole. Uh— abusive. You know the deal. Drank, did drugs, smacked us about.” He gestures vaguely, sniffing, and Wilhelm can see him putting a face on but is grateful that he’s speaking at all, so he doesn’t say anything. Just sits, and watches, and listens.

“For a while it was me and Sara against the world. When we were kids. We’d try and make a game out of it — you know, make as little noise as possible, or whatever, hide from Pappa like he was some big scary monster and not our fucking—”

He cuts himself off angrily, pulling a hand down his face. “Anyways, that all changed when I met Marcus. I was, um, fifteen? He was— older. His friends, they weren’t good people, but they quickly became *my* friends, too, and all of it — the drugs, the drinking, the parties, it offered a convenient escape from the shit-storm that was my life.”

He sighs. Shifts. Rolls his shoulders like he’s putting on armour.

“I did some really stupid shit. Stayed out until four in the morning — sometimes I didn’t come home at all. I left Sara to deal with our Dad on her own. Most of the time I couldn’t bear to come home and see her, to see what I’d allowed him to do to her and Mamma by being gone. It was— it was bad. And Marcus made it worse, because he *liked* doing all of that stuff. He wasn’t doing it to escape anything, he just fucking enjoyed it, so I had to enjoy it too. I don’t know.”

Simon sighs shakily. Brings a trembling hand to his mouth and swallows on a sob. “And then —” He breaks off, the words choking out of him. Screws his eyes shut and tries again.

“Our Dad. He, uh— he put Sara in the hospital. By the time I found out what happened she’d been out for hours. I turned up just after she woke up, made Marcus drive me over there even though we were both high out of our minds, almost crashed into a fucking tree, god—” He laughs hollowly, twisting his hands together.

“Sara caught on that I was high straight away. Her and Mamma, *god*, they chewed me out. Rightfully so. And I felt so guilty about it that I went home and I packed my shit, broke up

with Marcus and just left. Didn't leave a note. Eventually I ended up next door to you. That night, at the diner? That was the first time I'd seen Sara in two and a half years."

Silence reigns in the wake of his admission, like all of the energy has been sucked from the room. Simon laughs self-deprecatingly. "So, yeah. That's— *that*."

Wilhelm sits for a second, processing. Then he says, "your Dad, is he...?"

"In prison. Or dead, maybe. I don't know. He's gone, either way."

Wilhelm nods. "Okay. That's good."

He reaches out and takes Simon's hand, stroking a thumb over the downy skin on the back of his knuckles, his chest a gaping hole at the knowledge of what Simon has been through. He squeezes his hand and says, "thank you for telling me."

Simon swallows, his eyes filling with tears again, and his lip quivers before he replies.

"You don't have to do this. Please don't. I'd rather you just get it over with, break up with me, whatever. I'm not worth it," he says, his voice a small, broken thing, and Wilhelm's heart cracks in his chest at the weight of those words. At what they imply about how Simon feels about himself.

"Hey," Wilhelm murmurs. "Would you look at me?"

Simon does, his eyes guarded and his lower lip trembling. Wilhelm takes a breath, trying to think about how to word what he's thinking so that Simon doesn't try to run again.

"I think that you were a kid. I think you were in an impossible situation and you dealt with it the only way you know how. Probably not the healthiest way, sure, and maybe you hurt people as a result, but I don't think any of that makes you a bad person," he settles on, his eyes trained on Simon's face, imploring him to understand. To believe it. "You're a victim, too."

Simon glances at him and then away, and then he chokes on a sob, drawing away as his face screws up and he hides it behind his hands. He slides onto the floor, back against the couch, and he draws his arms up around his knees and just *cries* into them.

Wilhelm follows him down, sitting cross-legged on the floor a little ways away from him, watching with increasing alarm as Simon's shoulders begin to rise and fall quicker and quicker. Simon's fingers dig into his arms in a way that Wilhelm *knows* is painful.

"I don't think she's ever going to forgive me, Wille— I— she said she *hates me*— I just—I'm so *scared*— I—" Simon pants, his shoulders heaving with the force of his panic.

"Baby. Look at me. Can I touch you?" Wilhelm asks, feeling useless, needing to comfort him, desperate to piece him back together.

Simon nods desperately, breath still coming in sharp gasps, and Wilhelm reaches out, drawing him into his arms. He goes easily, limbs folding beneath him like they're too weak to

hold him up, head tucked beneath Wilhelm's chin. Wilhelm feels his tears start to stain his shirt, smooths a hand up his trembling back, and wishes he could go back in time and change things.

"You'll be okay, Simme. You will. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere, okay? I'm here," he murmurs, drawing him closer as he shakes.

"Why don't you hate me?" Simon whimpers against his collarbone. "You should. I'm a horrible person." Wilhelm's chest smarts at the fragility in his voice.

"Are you? Simme, to me it just sounds like you're scared."

Simon just sobs in response, gripping hard onto his shirt as Wilhelm soothes him. Eventually Wilhelm gently tips his head back so that he can look him in the face. "Simme. Sweetheart. You shouldn't blame yourself for what happened."

Simon shakes his head, screwing his eyes up against the words. "But it is my fault. If I'd been there it wouldn't have happened."

"You don't know that, love. Maybe if you'd been there you both would've ended up in the hospital."

Simon sighs, and Wilhelm can tell he doesn't believe him but he doesn't push it. Instead he rubs a thumb under his eye, wiping away the tears that fall and cradling his face. "Do you want to go to bed? We're a little exposed out here."

Simon nods, sniffing, and allows Wilhelm to support him as they stand weakly and make their way into the bedroom. Wilhelm finds their pyjamas and hands Simon's over to him before changing into his own. Simon glances at him furtively once he's settled on the bed and draws his knees up to his chest protectively. And Wilhelm realises that he knows exactly what he's doing — can see Simon beating himself up in his head for being so vulnerable with him. It makes something sharp and painful unfurl in his chest.

He reaches out and strokes Simon's cheek, rubbed red raw from Simon wiping away his tears, and tries to project how grateful he is that Simon opened up to him through his gaze. Simon's eyelashes flutter and he presses his cheek a little closer into Wilhelm's hand.

He yawns suddenly, his shoulders shuddering with the force of it, and Wilhelm cracks a smile.

"Sleep. I'm here."

Sunday dawns bright and cold; Wilhelm wakes as the sun is just beginning to peek above the horizon and decides to take himself on a run before the others get up. He presses an absent-minded kiss to the meat of Simon's shoulder as he pulls himself out of bed, takes a second to

watch as Simon stirs and his nose twitches before he falls back into sleep and then forces himself out of the door before he gives in and climbs back into bed.

He throws on a faded old hoodie he always wears to work out in and tugs on his trainers before quietly padding outside, pulling the lake house door shut behind him. His workout playlist consists mostly of Hip Hop, and he's pleasantly surprised to be greeted by the newest Childish Gambino song when he shuffles it. He takes a second to inhale the crisp air, letting it stretch his lungs, and then he takes off down the path by the lake.

It's a beautiful day; the sun is just beginning to rise above the treeline, burning a sparkling line down the centre of the lake, and the sky is a clear, vibrant blue above him. Wilhelm quickly gets lost in the rhythmic push and pull of his muscles, his thoughts beginning to wander as he rounds the corner of the lake and enters the woods.

Simon and Sara... He didn't know what he expected them to be fighting about, but now that he knows his heart aches for the both of them. He thinks about a fifteen-year-old Simon turning to drugs just to cope with his father's abuse and his chest smarts with anger. He can't believe their Dad put Sara in the hospital. Simon's tear stained face flashes across his mind and he pushes forwards a little harder, a little faster, his feet smacking against the gravelled path and his lungs burning.

The path beneath his feet slowly changes, become more muddy and uneven, and branches snap as he pushes over them, the muscles around his knees bunching as he works his way over the terrain. He ducks under an oncoming branch, just barely avoiding being whipped in the face by the leaves, and rights himself just in time to avoid tripping over a gnarled tree root.

He hasn't gone running in a long time; always too busy with school or work or partying to keep to a consistent schedule, and he feels it in the way his lungs ache, in the way his muscles burn as he pushes onwards. He's coming up to the twenty-minute mark, now, about ready to turn left onto the road and head back to the house.

He thinks of Simon again as he jogs onto the tarmac, keeping close to the treeline to avoid any oncoming cars — though he doubts there will be many, given that it's so early. There's something about the way Simon hides himself that scares Wilhelm. He feels a flicker of emotion and immediately sprints in the opposite direction, like he's afraid that being open about things will kill him, or something. The way he closed up as soon as he calmed down last night, threw his walls up like Wilhelm knowing how he was feeling was somehow *dangerous* — it makes Wilhelm's chest hurt just thinking about it. He wishes he knew how to help, but he suspects it's a long-scarred wound from childhood that can't be healed by anyone other than Simon himself.

He starts to slow his pace, eventually coming to a stop just outside the lake house. He's surprised to find Sara outside the front, smoking a cigarette as she leans against the front door. He lifts a hand in greeting. "Hey."

"Hey." She regards him contemplatively. Then she flicks the ash from the end of her cigarette and asks, "are you and Simon together?"

Wilhelm blinks. “No.”

“But you’re sleeping together.”

Wilhelm falters at her bluntness, then remembers himself and nods awkwardly. “... Yeah.”

“Be careful,” she says. “He’s not good at feelings.”

Wilhelm feels something protective flare up in him and he narrows his eyes. “I think I’ll be fine, thanks.”

Sara looks at him for a second and then softens, sighing. “It’s not... I love him. He’s my brother. But he really hurt me when he left. I had to heal from my injuries and from the trauma completely alone. He’d always been my rock, and then he was just... gone. No explanation. I don’t know how to forgive him for that.”

“Just— let him try?” Wilhelm offers. “You don’t have to forgive him in order to have him in your life. You both obviously need to talk, a lot, to understand each other, but just because that talk needs to happen doesn’t mean that you can’t see each other until it does.”

Sara considers him for a moment, surprise lining her face. Then she smiles. “You’re gonna be good for him,” she says, stepping aside to allow him to enter.

“I’ll think about it,” Sara calls after him as he walks into the living room, taking a drag of her cigarette. Wilhelm nods — he supposes that’s all he can ask for, really.

When he enters their bedroom Simon is already up, looking at something on his phone with his knees drawn up to his chest. He glances up as Wilhelm walks in, his dark eyes following him as Wilhelm tugs off his hoodie and wipes the sweat from his brow. Eventually he says, “you were gone when I woke up.”

There’s something petulant about his tone, like he’s looking for a fight. Wilhelm bites his lip.

“Sorry,” he replies. “I went for a run.”

Simon shakes his head. “No, it’s— fine. It’s not like we’re together, you’re not obliged to look after me, or whatever.”

Wilhelm frowns, his chest splintering at *it’s not like we’re together*. “I like looking after you.”

Simon looks at him for a long moment, and it’s like the fight slowly drains out of him. He swallows and then looks away again, rubbing at his nose. “Sorry. I’m embarrassed about crying, and I’m taking it out on you.”

Relief crests over Wilhelm and he smiles gently. “It’s okay.”

He kicks off his trainers and sits down next to Simon on the bed, surprised when Simon climbs up onto his lap without a second thought. The warm weight of him is a welcome one, and he lets his arms come up around him as Simon presses the sides of their heads together

and just *hugs* him. They stay there for a while, not talking, just basking in each other's presence, and — *god*, why does Simon make it so goddamn *easy* to fall in love with him? Wilhelm doesn't know how to stop himself from feeling this way. Selfishly, he squeezes Simon tighter against him.

"How are you feeling?" he murmurs.

Simon sighs. "Better," he mumbles. "Thanks for being so good to me."

Wilhelm splay his hand over Simon's ribs, feeling them shift beneath his skin. "Of course," he replies.

After a moment he feels Simon nuzzle into his neck, pressing his nose to Wilhelm's skin and inhaling.

"What are you doing?" Wilhelm murmurs, confused. Simon freezes and pulls back. "Uh, nothing."

"No, you were— were you *smelling me*?" Wilhelm asks, laughing.

"No!" Simon exclaims, but the tops of his cheeks are starting to glow a deep red, so Wilhelm knows he's lying.

"You were!"

"I mean, *okay*, sure, I guess I was smelling you. But you smell good! Like, what cologne do you use because I want it."

Wilhelm soberes, smile fading as his eyes flit between Simon's. "...I don't."

Simon's eyebrows twitch inwards. "What?"

"I don't use cologne."

Simon's eyes widen in a way that's almost comical. "Oh."

Wilhelm rolls his lips and tries not to feel smug about Simon apparently liking the way he smells. "Yeah. Actually, I've just been on a run so I should stink."

"Well, you don't."

Wilhelm snorts. "Thanks. I'm gonna go shower anyways."

Simon smirks at him. "Can I join you?"

Wilhelm surges up, picking Simon up as he does so and carrying him towards the en-suite while the other man yelps and clings to him.

"Yes, please."

and you'll let him touch you, because his eyes are full of stars and you've always looked up to the sky in wonder—

“What are you doing?” Simon mumbles, his voice husky from disuse. It’s the evening of their second day at the lake house, and they’ve mostly been co-existing in silence for the past hour or so. Wilhelm shuts his notebook as he feels Simon’s chin come over his shoulder, the bare skin of his chest warm where it presses against his back. Wilhelm leans back into him unthinkingly.

“Writing.”

“Can I see?”

Wilhelm thinks about it; taking his bleeding heart in his palms, handing it over. *Here. This is all I have. This is all I am. It's yours.*

Simon jostles him out of his reverie. “Please?”

Fuck.

“...Fine.”

Simon smiles, slow and real, and then he sits up properly and takes the book from Wilhelm. Wilhelm directs him to one of his older poems; all of the new ones are about him. He watches with baited breath as Simon’s eyes travel over the words.

After a moment Simon looks back up at him, something akin to wonder in his eyes. “...Wow.”

“That bad?”

Simon shakes his head, and his eyes are earnest, wide and sparkling beneath the overhead light. “It’s beautiful.”

Wilhelm looks at him, at his sleepy, sex-ruffled hair, at his pretty doe eyes filled with emotion, at the way he holds Wilhelm’s notebook with such care, and he almost says it. *I love you.*

Instead he asks, “what are you doing for Christmas?”

If Simon is confused by the change in topic he doesn’t show it. “Uh, nothing, probably. I haven’t been back home in over a year, so I don’t even know if I’m welcome there this year.”

“Come home with me for Christmas,” Wilhelm blurts before he can think about it. *Now* Simon looks confused, his brows turning in.

“What? Like I’m your boyfriend?” he asks incredulously. There’s something guarded about his eyes, like he wants Wilhelm to say no. Like he expects it.

Wilhelm shrugs. “However you want. Can't stand the thought of you all alone in that apartment while I’m at home. Just— come with me? Please?” he implores, begging Simon with his eyes.

Simon looks at him like he can’t believe Wilhelm exists, his eyes softer than they have any right to be as they flick between Wilhelm’s own. Eventually he smiles — a tiny, private thing that Wilhelm can’t really make sense of, and he says, “okay.”

Chapter End Notes

woof. big chapter.

i’ve been thinking about writing a lil oneshot of how felice and sara get together once this fic is done, mostly because i feel like i’ve sidelined felice a little bit this chapter, even if it was necessary in order to talk more about simon, sara and wille. it’d allow me to get more into both felice and sara’s heads, i think. would that be something people are interested in?

btw when simon says ‘she said she hates me’ he’s referring to a previous argument he’s had with her, not this one obviously haha

i tried to write sara in a way that was still true to her character but so that (hopefully) people wouldn’t hate her. she just doesn’t forgive easily and simon really hurt her and their mother, so. that isn’t to say that simon is necessarily at fault - he was young and traumatised and definitely being manipulated by marcus, but sara’s feelings about the situation are also valid even if she doesn’t go about things in the best way.

hopefully you can see a little better why simon tries to keep wille at a distance; he sees himself as someone who’s flawed/damaged and as someone who hurts people, and he doesn’t want wilhelm to find out about what happened with sara. in his mind, if he and wille start dating, wilhelm is eventually going to find out and he assumes wille would reject him so he intentionally pushes him away.

pls pls pls pls gimme comments they sustain my life force

also, tentatively: chapter six is being a bitch and probably will take longer to update. i’ll say definitively on my twitter next wednesday.

love y'all!

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

“It’s just past eight and I’m feeling young and reckless // The ribbon on my wrist says
“Do not open before Christmas.”” - Our Lawyer Made Us Change The Name Of This
Song So We Wouldn't Get Sued, Fall Out Boy.

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

VI

“Are you sure they’ll be okay with me staying?” Simon asks, twisting the hem of his jumper between his fingers — the third time in the last two hours that they’ve spent getting ready to leave.

Wilhelm takes his wrists in his hands to stop him fidgeting. “I promise. I asked Erik, and Mamma, and they both said they can’t wait to meet you.”

Simon rolls his lips together, then says, “okay.”

“Come on — I promised that we’d be home before dinner, so we need to head off,” Wilhelm says. “Don’t forget your rucksack.”

Two suitcases; two backpacks; Simon’s guitar. Wilhelm triple-locks the door behind them, stowing the key safely in his trouser pocket, and then they’re cramming into the rickety elevator and spilling out into the snowfall.

It’s been snowing on and off for the past week or so, the kind that doesn’t stick but rather melts and then freezes, creating black ice and ugly-looking slush at the edges of the roads. Wilhelm feels a snowflake touch the end of his nose and smiles; he’s always loved the snow, even when it doesn’t stay around for long. He has hopes that this flurry will stick. Simon shivers next to him, a scowl etched onto his handsome features, and he hurries towards Wilhelm’s car a little faster. Wilhelm tries not to laugh at him — he reminds him of a grumpy cat in weather like this.

They load their bags into the car and slide into the front, Wilhelm quickly turning the heater on with a shiver. “Fuck, it’s cold.”

“How have I never been in your car before?” Simon asks as he plugs in his seatbelt.

“I don’t use it that much because campus isn’t far from where we live. I mostly use it for trips like this one,” Wilhelm replies, peeling out of his parking space and onto the road. He’s a careful driver — has been since Erik got in an accident in his early twenties that left him with a limp. He still has to use a cane sometimes. On icy days like this one Wilhelm’s anxiety cranks itself up to a hundred and he has to force himself to speed up past a literal crawl.

Having Simon by his side gives him something to focus on that isn’t the yawning mouth of darkness that the road is stretching into, and he gestures to the car’s stereo without looking. “There’s bluetooth. Stick on whatever you want.”

“Sure thing.”

He settles on one of Wilhelm’s chiller playlists and Wilhelm allows himself to relax incrementally, tapping along to the beat on the steering wheel.

He tries not to think too hard as he watches the road disappearing beneath the car's wheels. He's excited to bring Simon home with him, but his mother is— perceptive. And since Wilhelm came out she's been trying to set him up with every male friend he's ever made, despite him reminding her that he still likes women, too. He'll never forget the time she tried to get him a date with *Vincent*. Jesus.

Then, there's the complication that he and Simon are... hooking up. All of this, Simon coming home with him, feels far too much like he's bringing his boyfriend home for the first time — his family will certainly behave that way, he knows. He doesn't want it to scare Simon off.

Simon's Christmas present burns a hole in his pocket. He still doesn't know if he'll give it to him — knowing him, he'll chicken out at the last second, fumble for an excuse. More than anything he aches to reach across the seats and take his hand, kiss him openly, let the truth come spilling from behind his tightly sealed lips. *I want you. No, not like that, like this. Let me take you out. Let me love you the way you deserve.*

Still, when his eyes catch on Simon's profile as he gazes wistfully out of the window, bopping his head lightly to the music, he can't help but think that he just *fits*. He stands at Wilhelm's side like his equal, they fit together like puzzle pieces, and everything is perfect except for the fact that it's not real.

Wilhelm chews at the inside of his cheek, eyes darting to Simon and then away again.

Screw that.

After a few minutes and a surge of adrenaline he finally reaches out and drops his hand onto Simon's thigh, only a little clumsily. Simon stiffens briefly beneath it and then lets out an airy giggle that sets Wilhelm's nerves alight.

"Smooth," he comments.

Wilhelm wants to beam; tempers it into a smile instead. "Thanks."

And then Simon's lacing their fingers together and squeezing, and Wilhelm swears his heart takes wings and flutters somewhere in his throat, trying to break its way out of his chest.

Wilhelm squeezes back, and hopes against hope that Simon reads the *I love you* behind the way their hands are knitted together.

The door to his parent's place is a deep mahogany, with a stained glass window that shines blue and purple fragments of light onto the hallway carpet as the setting sun passes through it. When Wilhelm was little he would pretend those little shapes on the doormat were homes for his figurines. When he tells Simon this the other man laughs and calls him cute.

(“Of course you did. I bet you made them all be nice to each other, too, didn’t you?”

“Well I wasn’t gonna make them be mean!”)

Now the glass shines golden from the inside, warm buttery light spilling from within the house — the hallway light is on.

Wilhelm turns to Simon. “You ready?”

Simon tugs at the ends of his coat sleeves nervously. He somehow looks even more beautiful than he usually does in the light emanating from Wilhelm’s childhood home. It strikes him that he wants to remember this, every last detail — the way Simon’s eyelashes frame his cheeks and how his expression shifts subtly from nerves to excitement to wonder and back again. How right he looks standing on Wilhelm’s parents doorstep.

Simon sighs. “As I’ll ever be.”

“You’ll do great. They can’t wait to meet you.” Wilhelm injects as much certainty into his voice as he can, hoping to convince him. Then he raps sharply on the front door.

There’s a shuffle, then Wilhelm can hear someone calling out from inside the house, and then the door swings open to reveal his brother, as tall and well-dressed as ever. He’s holding onto his cane — an ornate old thing with intricate patterns carved into the wood.

“Brother! And Simon!” Erik exclaims, tugging them both into a bear hug. Wilhelm ends up with his face squished between Erik’s collar and the side of Simon’s head, and finds there’s nowhere he’d rather be.

“Hi!” he laughs as they pull back.

“How are you both? Come in, come on, it’s fucking freezing,” Erik asks, gesturing for them to come inside.

“We’re good,” Simon replies as they step over the threshold. “It’s wonderful to meet you.”

“Likewise.” Erik says with a smile, clapping a solid hand on Simon’s shoulder.

“Your leg giving you trouble?” Wilhelm asks, eyeing the cane in Erik’s hand.

Erik waves him off. “Oh, you know me. Nothing a little love from my brother can’t fix. Come on — Pappa is making a roast.”

Coming home always elicits a bizarre concoction of emotions within Wilhelm; nostalgia and apprehension and love and melancholy all whirling beneath his breastbone like a tiny windstorm has made its home between his ribs. He lets Erik lead them into the living room, shooting Simon a furtive glance. He finds him with an open expression, taking in Wilhelm’s childhood home with bright eyes. Wilhelm knocks their elbows together until Simon shoots him a reassuring smile, and then he gets swept swiftly into the round of greetings before he can ask him if he’s okay.

He never realises how much he misses his family until he's home with them again; wrapped up in his brother's joyful laugh as he greets Maria, leaning into a warm, comforting hug with his mother, letting his father joke about how tall he's gotten since he was last home as if he was a child and not a twenty-year-old man. His father ruffles his hair and Wilhelm grins, suddenly sixteen and eager for approval again.

"I was just in the middle of making dinner," his father says. "It'll be ready in... forty minutes?"

His mother turns to them both as Ludvig disappears into the kitchen again. "Why don't you boys get yourselves set up in Wilhelm's room? I'll call you when dinner is ready."

Wilhelm nods.

"It's lovely to have you both home, by the way," she adds, smiling cordially at them both. Wilhelm feels warmth curl around his shoulders at how welcoming she is with Simon — he knew she would be, but thinking it and seeing it are two completely different things. He hasn't said anything to his parents about the two of them, just asked if a new friend could come for Christmas, but by the way his mother's eyes glitter as she watches them, she's already figured him out.

"Thank you so much for having me, Mrs. Bernadotte," Simon says. "It's very kind of you to let me stay."

"Oh, honey, please. Call me Kristina. Any friend of my son's is a friend of mine."

Simon smiles bashfully and graciously accepts a hug from her, meeting Wilhelm's eyes over her shoulder. Wilhelm grins at him, unable to contain the joy he feels at having Simon *here*. When they withdraw there's a faint blush dusting the tops of Simon's cheeks.

"Uh, this way." Wilhelm gestures behind him to the hallway, where his bedroom door is shut tight against the cold.

He watches, shifting his feet nervously, as Simon takes in his childhood bedroom. It hasn't changed much since he was eighteen; his mother has taken down the peeling movie posters he left behind when he moved out and replaced them with framed paintings of plants and birds, but otherwise the pale blue walls hold the same shelves and pictures of old friends as they did when he was in school.

"Oh my god, look at you!" Simon exclaims, leaning down until a picture of teenage Wilhelm is in his eye view.

"Oh, no, no, no, I told Mamma to move these!" Wilhelm cries, trying to reach around Simon to grab the pictures still on his chest of drawers. Simon quickly takes the frame before he can and spins in his arms with a grin.

"Come on, Wille, you were so cute!" he tries, hugging the picture to his chest and giggling as Wilhelm tries to pry it from his grip.

“I was *not*. I didn’t learn how to style my own hair until I was nineteen!” Wilhelm protests. He finally manages to steal the photo back and places it face down on his side table.

“Well, I think you were sweet. I totally would’ve had a crush on you in school,” Simon says. Wilhelm exhales a laugh — he doesn’t know what to do with *that* information — and glances around the room for any more offending items.

Simon gasps suddenly. “*Hello.*”

Wilhelm finds him kneeling before the bed, hands outstretched to the little orange cat curled up in the middle of it. She *mrrps* in surprise at his touch and stretches back to meet him, nuzzling her head into his hand. Simon positively *melts* at this, cooing and scratching behind her ears.

“Ah,” Wilhelm says, perching on the edge of his desk. “That’s Muffin.”

Simon’s eyes are wide as saucers when he replies. “*Muffin?*”

Wilhelm winces. “Er, Erik chose the name?”

Simon snorts in disbelief and levels him with a look. “You’re lying.”

Wilhelm ducks his head. “Yeah. I chose it.”

There’s a little smiley face carved into the wood of his desk by a rebellious teenage version of himself. He runs his nail over the groove and remembers how angry his mother was when she found out, because the desk is an antique. In fact, he should probably stop sitting on it. He jumps off.

“Of course you did,” Simon teases, wandering over to meet him in front of the desk. He leans up on his tippy toes and places a lingering kiss to Wilhelm’s lips. Wilhelm starts in surprise and then kisses him back, relishing in the feeling of Simon’s lips against his own without it being a pretext to sex, for once.

“What was that for?” Wilhelm asks when they part. Simon shrugs, eyes twinkling, and kisses him again.

“Just wanted to. I’m happy to be here.”

Wilhelm can’t stop the smile tugging at his lips. He brushes a stray curl from Simon’s forehead with a finger and nudges their noses together.

“I’m happy you’re here, too.”

Dinner is always a rowdy affair when Erik is involved. He has a remarkable skill for monopolising a conversation in a way that doesn't make people resent him — something Wilhelm has taken advantage of many times growing up. Any time he was uncomfortable during family gatherings: enter Erik stage left. He always seemed to have a sixth sense for when Wilhelm needed saving, and Wilhelm was always more than happy for Erik to take over the conversation and steer it in a lighter direction.

He's a force of nature in social situations; Wilhelm's lighthouse in a stormy sea of unknown questions and judgemental looks. Currently he's gesturing widely and grinning, one arm around Maria, who looks at him with barely-concealed amusement. Her curls are piled messily atop her head, held in place with a rose hair clip that used to belong to Wilhelm's grandmother.

"Maria is my fiancée," Erik tells Simon, thrusting his hand forwards to show off the wedding band glittering on his ring finger. "The wedding is in May. Hey, Simon, you should come! Be Wilhelm's plus-one." He sends a wink and a cheeky smile at the two of them and Wilhelm tries not to blush in response.

"Oh! I'd love to! Are you sure?" Simon stutters out, fumbling in his surprise. Wilhelm unashamedly glares daggers into the side of his brother's head — he knows *exactly* what Erik is trying to do, and he explicitly forbade him from it.

("Oh, come on, Wille. You'll never make a move on him, I know you! You're just going to sit and wallow about how he doesn't like you back. Let me set you guys up a little, be a wingman!")

"Absolutely not. Simon is a friend, and nothing more. PLEASE don't get involved.")

"Absolutely," Erik replies warmly, doing a fantastic job of ignoring the way Wilhelm is staring at him. Finally he turns to him. "Oh, Wille, by the way, August was asking after you the other day."

Wilhelm groans and his mother swats him on the arm. Bizarrely, he feels Simon stiffen beside him. He glances at him, ignoring his mother, but he can't see anything on his face so he lets it go.

"Wilhelm, he's family. Stop that," his mother says.

"Doesn't make him any less annoying," Wilhelm counters. Erik snorts and then sobers as their mother shoots him a glare.

"Anyway, what did he want with me? I haven't spoken to him in like, two years or something ridiculous. Last I heard he was still running around with those idiots he and Gustav used to be friends with," Wilhelm continues.

"He's trying to get out of that life, Wille," Erik explains.

"What, and he wants to use me to do it?"

“No, of course not, he just needs his family right now. It’s hard to ditch your whole group of friends with nothing to fall back on.”

Wilhelm doesn’t buy that for a second, but he just nods acquiescently and takes another bite of potato.

“How are your classes going, darling?” his mother asks.

Wilhelm pauses mid-bite, stiffening instinctively. “They’re fine.”

Oh, here it comes, he thinks.

“Did you give any thought to that brochure I sent you?” she starts, and Wilhelm only barely holds back from groaning out loud. “I know you seem dead set on this poetry thing, but the school Erik went to has a really wonderful foundation program you could transfer onto—“

“Mamma, please. Can we have one dinner where you don’t try to persuade me not to continue with my degree?” Wilhelm pleads. He sets his fork down — he’s suddenly not hungry.

“Oh, come on, Wilhelm. You know I’m just looking after you, there’s no future in what you’re doing!” she protests, gesturing dismissively with her knife. Annoyance rises within him; he thought she’d have the decency not to do this in front of a guest, but obviously he was wrong. He clenches his jaw.

“Excuse me if I’m being rude, ma’am, but have you ever actually read any of his work?” Simon pipes up. Wilhelm looks at him sharply. Kristina does the same, her eyes widening as she tilts her head in surprise.

“I— uh, well no, but—“

“Because I have, and he’s fantastic. I know you love your son, and you want what’s best for him, but sometimes that means supporting him in what he wants to do, even if you disagree with it.”

“I just worry,” his mother tries, her eyebrows screwing up in a way that spells trouble.

“Of course you do. But he’s certainly hard working enough to go far, no matter what he chooses to do in life. I’m doing a music degree, myself, and I know for a fact that I wouldn’t have gotten as far in life as I have without my mother supporting me in doing music.”

Silence reigns in the wake of Simon’s words. Wilhelm winces — his mother looks torn between anger and respect, while his brother and Maria are openly grinning at Simon. His father is as neutral as ever — his mother once remarked that Ludvig was the Switzerland of people. Simon’s cheeks colour as he takes in the rest of the table, but he clears his throat valiantly and continues.

“He’s doing a poetry slam on the fifth, actually. You should come to it.”

Respect seems to win out — his mother nods.

“I... okay.”

After dinner Wilhelm leads Simon into the living room. He shivers a little — the heating doesn't kick in until later, usually, so they just have to suffer until then. Simon shoots him a furtive glance, then bites his lip.

“I'm really sorry if I overstepped. I just couldn't stand seeing her put you down like that.”

The words tumble from between his lips, rushed like he was trying not to say them, and he ducks his head to stare at the floor. Wilhelm steps slowly into his space and tips his chin up so he's looking at him. Simon's eyes flick between his own, twinkling like tiny stars beneath the overhead lights, and the corner of his mouth quirks into a smile.

“You're amazing. Thank you,” Wilhelm says quietly. Simon smiles coyly before turning out of Wilhelm's arms to wander around the room.

“You have a piano,” he remarks, trailing his fingers over the edges of the keys and pressing down on one, a soft *plunk* resonating through the small room.

“We do,” Wilhelm concedes. “Erik had lessons, but Pappa is the only one who really plays it. Maria too, now.”

Simon eyes him, almost as if to say: *and me, if you want*. Wilhelm watches him as he takes a seat at the piano; the elegant, long line of his back, his forearms where he rolls up his sleeves, the curve of his nose in profile. *Wishful thinking*.

Simon plays almost absent-mindedly; eyes somewhere faraway, fingers travelling through trills and grace notes like they're nothing. Enraptured, Wilhelm watches him, takes this little snippet of Simon and stores it safely behind his ribs, wraps it in golden cloth until he's sure it will be with him forever.

“What d'you think?” Simon asks when the last note has faded into silence. His voice is lilted and teasing, as if he sees through Wilhelm completely and finds him endearing.

And when Wilhelm smiles at him, the ache in his heart now familiar, and says, “beautiful,” he's not talking about the music.

Felice calls him after breakfast the next day. Wilhelm smiles and stretches as he answers the phone — sleeping next to Simon was the most peaceful he's felt in a while, and they overslept by like three hours. Wilhelm can still feel the ghost of Simon's fingers in his hair.

“Hey, loverboy,” Felice greets him.

“Hey. I’m glad you called,” Wilhelm replies, standing from the table and wandering into the living room for privacy. “I wanted to talk to you, actually.”

“Yeah? What about?” Felice asks.

“Alex’s lake house. You knew Sara was coming, but you didn’t mention anything. Not even Alex knew.”

“Ah. You want to know why?”

Wilhelm parts one of the wooden blinds with his finger, gazing out into the snow-covered street. There are a group of children racing around in front of the house, throwing snowballs and tackling each other to the ground. He winces as one of them hits the ground especially hard and tries not to laugh.

“Well, yeah. It really blindsided Simon, to be honest,” he says.

“Sara asked me not to. When I invited her I told her Simon was coming, and she insisted that I not tell him anything so she could catch him in a place where he couldn’t run away. I guess, when she actually saw him, it was harder than she thought to talk to him, though,” Felice explains. Wilhelm frowns. “You couldn’t have told me that? It would’ve been nice to be prepared.”

“Oh, come on, Wille. You would’ve told Simon immediately, I know you.”

Wilhelm scoffs. “I wouldn’t have!”

“You love him. You would’ve said something.”

Wilhelm rolls his eyes. “Okay, fine. But can we promise to not have any more secrets between us, please? You didn’t even tell me you and Sara started dating in the first place!”

“I’m sorry. It was kind of a complicated situation, honestly. I’ll tell you about it when you’re home,” Felice says.

“Hm. Okay,” Wilhelm concedes, leaning his shoulder against the wall.

“How is it having him at home?” Felice asks.

Wilhelm smiles. “Really nice. He’s a lot more comfortable than he was, now that I know everything. He called out my Mamma yesterday for the way she’s been about my course.”

Felice gasps. “No way! That boy has balls of steel.”

“Right?” Wilhelm laughs.

“How’d she take it?”

“Surprisingly well. I think she respects him.”

He hears her huff a soft laugh, and then she says, “well, anyway, I’m glad things are going well but I’ve got to go. This essay isn’t going to write itself. Hey, if you see my Mamma say hello for me, okay? She’s been ghosting me lately.”

Wilhelm sighs — Smysan has never been good at taking the high road. “Fuck, she’s so immature. I’m sorry.”

“Eh, she’ll get over it. She just doesn’t want to accept that I’ll never be her,” Felice replies, her voice light — but Wilhelm knows it hurts her inside that she and her mother will never see eye-to-eye.

“Okay, I’ll let you go. Love you, Fel,” he says.

“Love you too, Wille.”

Wilhelm finds Simon in the kitchen on Christmas morning, drinking coffee and chatting easily with his father.

“Hi,” Wilhelm greets them both as he steps past them, flicking on the kettle and grabbing one of his teabags from the jar they keep them in, between Erik’s special coffee pods and his mother’s box of Rooibos tea. “Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas,” Simon and his father echo back. Wilhelm pulls the oat milk out of the fridge and sets about making his tea, smiling at Simon as he sidles closer. His father tactfully excuses himself, pausing to kiss them each on the cheek with a murmured *Merry Christmas* before ambling out into the dining room.

“Wanna make cookies?” Wilhelm asks once he’s gone, pulling Simon in by the waist. He goes easily, placing his mug on the counter and wrapping his arms around Wilhelm’s neck.

“Who do you take me for? Of *course* I want to make cookies,” Simon replies. His fingers are threading absently through the hair at the back of Wilhelm’s head, making him shiver.

“Perfect. You grab the flour, I’ll get the eggs?”

“You know, when we were kids, Mama would make Christmas cookies with us,” Simon remarks as he creams the butter and sugar together with a metal spoon. “She had these little

cookie cutters shaped like reindeers, and me and Sara would always fight to put the red nose on the one that was Rudolf.”

“That’s so cute. I can imagine it. I bet she beat you to it every time,” Wilhelm says.

“Hey!” Simon flicks a bit of butter at him and cackles when it lands on his nose. “I’ll have you know I was extremely feisty. I bit people in nursery.”

“Never really grew out of that one, did you?” Wilhelm jokes, wiping the butter from his nose with a tissue — not before Simon snaps a picture of him and posts it on his story, though.

Simon snorts at him. “No. No, I did not.”

Wilhelm grins.

He reaches over to change the song from Frank Sinatra to Mariah Carey and Simon nods in approval. They made the playlist together, with a mixture of Christmas songs and old jazz, as well as some Spanish Christmas songs Simon remembers from his childhood. Wilhelm has been quietly admiring him as he sings under his breath, trying to commit the silver-sweet sound of his voice to memory.

His mother came in as they were beginning to bake, sporting matching Christmas jumpers in deep blue and white. Wilhelm groaned in faux-annoyance at the fanfare (he has to keep up the appearance of being too cool for his family) but allowed her to shove him into one all the same. Then she dragged them away from their project and forced them to stand in front of the tree with the rest of Wilhelm’s family for pictures. Wilhelm noticed the shine of unshed tears in Simon’s eyes at the gesture and reached out to take his hand without any further thought. He’s immensely glad he did, now — aside from wanting to comfort Simon he now has this tiny piece of evidence that this is all *real*. He and Simon are *something*, and even if it doesn’t work out between them he will always be able to look at that picture and remember the weight of Simon’s hand in his own, the warmth.

Now, Simon’s sleeves are rolled up to avoid getting anything on them. He and Wilhelm work side-by-side on different batches, rolling out the batter and cutting them into different shapes. They fight briefly over the Christmas tree cookie cutters — Wilhelm wins because he digs his fingers into Simon’s sides until the other man shrieks with laughter and twists away from him, shouting about *foul play*.

“Welcome to the real world, baby,” Wilhelm says in a grand voice as he shows off his tree-shaped cookie. Simon rolls his eyes and steals the cutter for himself.

When the cookies are safely in the oven and the timer is on, they pile onto the carpet in the living room, shoving at each other and dissolving into giggles.

“Oh, here! Your present,” Wilhelm says, grabbing the little box from under the tree. He bites his lip nervously as Simon pulls at the paper and opens the box to reveal the present — a silver ring with a deep red garnet inlaid into it.

“I know you wear a lot of rings, so I thought maybe you’d like a new one? It has your birthstone in it.”

“Holy shit, Wille. How much did you spend on this?” Simon asks, sliding it onto his ring finger. “It fits so well!”

“I may have stolen one of your rings to get the right size,” Wilhelm admits, admiring the way the stone glitters in the light. “And don’t worry about the price.”

“Fucking hell. Thank you,” Simon says, flinging his arms around him and pulling him into a hug. Wilhelm breathes him in; coconut shampoo and cologne, a hint of vanilla from the cookies, and swallows.

“Of course,” he manages as they pull out of the hug.

“Here’s yours,” Simon says, grabbing a flat present wrapped in deep green paper from the pile under the tree. Wilhelm takes it from him, excitement sparking in his chest — he wasn’t sure whether Simon would get him anything.

“Okay, so, like— I don’t know if this is the right thing to do, but I annotated it?” Simon says. Wilhelm pulls the book from within the paper and feels his chest ache with love. *Demian*. He flips it open to see Simon’s neat handwriting in the margins, some parts underlined and others highlighted.

“I figured it might be your favourite because you had it on your desk and it looked like you’d read it a bunch, so I thought maybe it would be a nice present? I don’t know, maybe it was stupid.” Simon continues when Wilhelm doesn’t say anything.

Wilhelm drops the book to grab his wrists and stop Simon from curling in on himself. “It’s amazing. You’re amazing. I can’t believe you annotated my favourite book for me. I’ve never known anyone like you in my life.”

Simon’s eyes shine with— something, and he bites his lip. “In a good way?”

Wilhelm squeezes his wrists. “In the best way.”

Later they lounge in bed waiting for the Christmas lunch to finish cooking. Simon stares up at the ceiling, shirtless, his eyes gently unfocused. Wilhelm watches him openly, unafraid for once of what he may see if he chooses to look back. He reaches out, unthinking, and traces a gentle finger over the swell of Simon’s bottom lip. Simon opens his mouth obligingly, a flash of pink tongue wetting the tip of Wilhelm’s finger until he feels desire deep in his bones, pushing him forwards until they’re kissing.

Simon sucks his bottom lip into his mouth, teeth grazing him, and Wilhelm whines against the arousal that kicks through him at the feeling. No matter how many times they do this he

always feels like he did the first time; fumbling, desperate, dizzy with want. He slots between Simon's legs, two puzzle pieces in a quiet room, and licks into his mouth, intoxicated by the soft sounds their tongues make against each other.

Simon pulls back a little, gasping when Wilhelm rolls their hips together, and he murmurs, "Your family."

"They won't hear," Wilhelm replies, intent on getting Simon's mouth back on him as soon as possible. Simon gives in and kisses him, then pulls back again and says, "they might."

Wilhelm smirks down at him. "You'll just have to be quiet then, won't you?"

Then, partially to be an asshole and partially because he just *loves* it, he starts to kiss down Simon's chest. Simon huffs a disbelieving laugh. "Are you fucking serious right now? You expect me to be quiet when you're—"

"Mhm," Wilhelm replies, grazing Simon's nipple with his teeth.

Simon hisses a breath and threads his hands through Wilhelm's hair. "You're such an asshole."

Wilhelm smiles up at him. "You love it. Anyways, you knew what you were doing hanging around without a shirt on. I'm just a man, you know."

Simon huffs a laugh. "Shut up and put your mouth on me already."

"Aye, aye, captain," Wilhelm murmurs.

"Did you speak to Sara, or anything?"

Wilhelm looks up from where he'd been doodling on the edge of his page, trying (and failing) to work on his poem for the poetry slam with his socked feet kicked up on Simon's lap. Simon's frowning down at his phone, one of his thumbs stroking distractingly over Wilhelm's ankle bone.

"Uhm, a little, why?" Wilhelm asks, shifting a little in discomfort — he hasn't told Simon about what he and Sara talked about because he wasn't sure how, exactly, and he didn't know if Sara would take his advice at all.

"She texted me. Asked me what I was doing for Christmas."

Wilhelm raises his eyebrows — so she took his advice, after all. "Oh."

"I said I was staying with you and then she said we should go for coffee when I get back."

Wilhelm smiles encouragingly. “That’s amazing!”

Simon nods, but he’s frowning. “I know, I just feel like I don’t wanna get my hopes up. She’s really angry with me.”

“But she misses you too, you realise that right? She told me at the lake house,” Wilhelm says.

“Did she? How come?”

“She caught me as I was coming back from a run. We ended up talking about you and what happened, and she explained that she misses you and she loves you but she’s still upset. So I said that maybe she doesn’t have to forgive you yet to still have you in her life.”

Simon’s eyebrows twitch inwards, his eyes tracking over Wilhelm’s face in a way he can’t place. Wilhelm winces internally. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. It just didn’t seem right at the time and then afterwards I couldn’t figure out how to bring it up.”

Simon sighs after a moment. “It’s okay, I get it. I’m glad she’s trying with me again.”

Wilhelm sits up and pulls his feet from Simon’s lap before leaning into his side. Simon snakes an arm around his waist and leans his head into Wilhelm’s shoulder. Wilhelm rests his cheek on Simon’s curls. “I’m glad too.”

Snow flurries outside, collecting on the edges of the window and blanketing the garden in smooth, muffled white. The only noise is the faint hum of music coming from Simon’s headphones — if Wilhelm focuses, he can just hear Frank Ocean’s voice drifting tinnily from them. Simon’s fingers card absent-mindedly through Wilhelm’s hair, making his scalp tingle as he tries valiantly to stay awake enough to work on his assignment.

“Wilhelm! Come help me with dinner!” his mother shouts from the kitchen, cutting through the syrupy atmosphere. Wilhelm jerks out of the edges of sleep and whines, shoving his laptop off of his stomach and stretching, dislodging Simon’s hand as he does.

“I’ve been summoned,” Wilhelm remarks, his voice rough with disuse, as he shoves his way out of bed. Simon snorts. “Have fun.”

He pulls the door just to as he leaves, yawning. It leaves a crack of buttery light that stretches into the otherwise dark hallway. Wilhelm hops over it as he makes his way into the kitchen, his socked feet thumping on the carpet.

His mother greets him with a kiss on the cheek and then shoves a carrot and peeler into his hands. They work in silence for a while, peeling and chopping and adding vegetables to the stew, before his mother turns to him, the hints of a smile edging her lips.

“So, Wille darling. Is there anyone special in your life?” she asks, her eyes boring into him in a way that makes him shrug and look away uncomfortably. He feels a prickle on the back of his neck, stares resolutely at the potato in his hand and says, “What? No.”

Wilhelm darts his gaze around, sure for a second that he felt he was being watched — but the hallway is clear and the door to his room is shut tight. He huffs a sigh, finds that the truth is spilling from his lips before he can stop it. “Actually, that’s a lie.”

His Mamma smiles — he’s never been able to lie to her. Then she says, matter-of-fact, “it’s Simon, no?”

Wilhelm jerks his shoulders, the well-trodden urge to run from any conversation surrounding his love life tugging at his navel. He takes a breath. He’s been working on this; being more open with his parents, not humming and shrugging his way out of being honest with them.

“It’s complicated. But, yeah. I, uh— I think I love him, Mamma. I think he might be it for me,” Wilhelm finally manages, glancing at her as if she would be reproachful. His apprehension was unwarranted; she breathes out like a weight has been lifted from her shoulders and drops her knife, tugging him into a hug. Wilhelm sighs, relaxing into her embrace.

“I’m so glad, sweetheart. He seems good for you. And he’s a lovely boy, I can tell.”

“I wanted to say... I’m sorry for how we’ve treated you recently, with regards to your,” she gestures vaguely with the knife, “poetry stuff.”

“I appreciate that.”

After a moment she says. “We’ll come to your poetry slam.”

Wilhelm looks at her, apprehension building in his chest. “Oh, Mamma, you don’t have to do that.”

“I want to support you, Wilhelm. Simon is right,” she insists. “I’m coming and that’s the end of it.”

Wilhelm sighs; he knows his mother, and unfortunately he knows she won’t drop it now. The fear he feels at her hearing his poetry — poetry he’s written about *Simon*, no less — is enormous. Still, there is nothing he can do, now, and maybe she’ll finally agree to him doing his degree if she hears his work. “Okay.”

Simon is uncharacteristically quiet through dinner, not eating much and excusing himself early to go and read. Wilhelm frowns, concern rising in his chest, as he watches Simon’s retreating back, and eventually he excuses himself, too.

He finds him in the living room, sitting on the end of the couch, eyes on his book. Wilhelm watches him for a moment, takes in the slope of his nose and notes the tense line of his jaw, before flopping down on the couch and staring at the ceiling. If Simon isn’t going to speak to him then he’s just going to try and be as normal as possible.

After a moment he feels eyes on him and raises his head, catching Simon as the other man drags his eyes away again. Wilhelm huffs and sits up properly.

“What’s up?” he asks. Simon eyes him.

“Why haven’t you—“ Simon cuts himself off, dragging his eyes away again and staring unseeingly at his book.

“Why haven’t I what?” Wilhelm presses.

“It’s, uh, it’s nothing.” Simon tries to wave him off.

“You can’t just say that and then expect me not to wanna know, Simme,” Wilhelm protests.

“Seriously— it’s not important. Okay?”

Wilhelm frowns. “...Okay.”

They lapse into uncomfortable silence. Simon goes back to his book and Wilhelm watches him for a moment, frowning. He can’t figure out what he was going to say, but the tension lining the other man’s form makes his chest tighten anxiously. Eventually he gives up and grabs his earphones, shoving them in his ears and cranking up one of his playlists. He stretches his feet out until they land in Simon’s lap, and cheers internally when the other man allows it, resting his book on Wilhelm’s ankle.

The rest of the trip passes smoothly, but Wilhelm can’t help but feel like something is... off. Simon is perfectly normal with everyone, himself included, but it’s like he’s- closed off again, or something. There’s a guardedness to his eyes that usually isn’t there — that hasn’t been there since before the lake house. It raises Wilhelm’s hackles, makes him snappier than he wants to be.

The ride back to their apartment is the longest thing he’s ever experienced. Simon puts in his earphones for the ride so it’s just Wilhelm and the empty road, his heart growing heavier with every mile that passes beneath the car. He feels like he’s being stupid, creating something where there’s nothing, but there *is* something different about Simon. A melancholy that he can’t place.

Outside of their apartments Wilhelm places a hand on Simon’s arm, trying to look into his eyes. “Are you okay?”

Simon nods. “Yeah.”

“Okay,” Wilhelm says. Simon turns to open his door and Wilhelm stops him again, pulling him back by his arm. “It’s just- things feel kind of... weird.”

Simon smiles at him, but there’s something forced about it. “I’m fine, Wille. I promise.”

And then he’s gone, disappearing into his apartment and leaving Wilhelm standing on his own.

Chapter End Notes

nooooooooo just when simon was starting to relax and try and suggest you be in a relationship nooooooooo

this was really tough to write. it took me a long ass time to get it to work for me in a way that wasn't complete garbage, so i really hope it's up to standards. i also haven't proofread it prior to posting so i'm praying it actually makes sense and flows well.

thank god my writer's block seems to be on its way out of the door (fingers crossed). i should be able to post the next chapter as usual next wednesday.

love you guys!!!! lemme know what you think, what you think is gonna happen, etc etc <33

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

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Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

* tw this chapter for substance abuse *

Chapter Notes

“What the hell are we? Tell me we weren’t just friends, this doesn’t make much sense.” - Friends, Chase Atlantic.

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

VII

“ your hands, his hands, my hands

they all become one under the strobes, melt into some sick amalgamation and then i can't see where he ends and you begin

just know that the ice in my chest isn't thawing because you're not near me to warm it

and i thought you'd keep me like a promise

but that was never going to happen, was it? “

It's the Saturday after he and Simon got back from his parent's place, and Wilhelm is currently hanging upside down off of the end of his bed, staring despondently at his window and wishing Simon would text him back. Things are— weird. It's his fault, somehow he knows it is, if he'd just pressed a bit more with Simon then maybe things wouldn't be so stilted and uncomfortable between them, but when have either of them prided themselves on their communication skills, really? He can't even tell the guy he wants to take him out — how the fuck is he supposed to ask him what's wrong in a way that doesn't sound accusatory?

He sighs and cranks his headphones up a little bit more. Frank Ocean croons in his ears — *I can never make him love me, never make him love me* — and his chest gets heavier by the second. He can practically hear Felice in his head — *you're wallowing again, Wille. Sitting and staring at the wall isn't going to change anything.*

Wilhelm scowls.

Well, maybe I like wallowing. You ever think of that, imaginary-Felice?

He's startled from his thoughts by a loud bang at the door. It is quite frankly embarrassing how quickly he stands up — so quickly he falls straight off of his bed and lands with a pitiful *thump* on the floor — and scrambles over to the door, imagining Simon standing on the other side, his eyes wide and brown and *things feel weird between us and I want us to be okay again* and—

He tugs open the door.

“Hell— oh, you look like shit. What's happened?”

Wilhelm sighs. “Hi, Stella.”

“Hello, Wille, my dearest friend who I am so happy to see,” Stella replies sarcastically, cocking an eyebrow. She’s dressed for going out, in a glittery pink dress that matches the highlights in her hair. She looks lovely.

Wilhelm narrows his eyes. “What do you want.”

Stella rolls her eyes and then strides past him into his apartment. She boosts herself up onto his desk, swinging her heeled feet back and forth. “Come with me and Freddie to the house party Jackson’s throwing.”

“No way,” Wilhelm replies instantly. “I’m busy. Sorry, Stells.”

“Oh, yeah, you look really busy. I haven’t seen you in, like, *forever*. Come on! Freddie’s in the car.”

“I don’t even have anything to wear!” Wilhelm protests. Stella levels him with a look and, yeah, he really could’ve come up with a better argument than that.

“Do you realise who you’re talking to?” she asks. “Don’t answer that.” She continues before he can reply, hopping off of his desk and striding over to his wardrobe. She spends several minutes digging around through his clothes.

“So, why do you look like someone’s killed your cat?” Stella asks after a moment, voice muffled by his wardrobe. Wilhelm groans, tipping his head back against the wall.

“Me and Simon kind of... fought? I mean it wasn’t a *fight*, but things are really weird and he won’t talk to me now.”

Stella glances back at him. “Groundbreaking idea: have *you* tried talking to *him*?”

“Yes, smartass. He insists that everything is fine but I know there’s something wrong. Usually he would’ve invited me over by now. We haven’t had sex in like a week.”

Stella wrinkles her nose. “Men.”

Finally she reveals a dark blue, silk long sleeve and his tightest pair of pants — the outfit he always wears when he’s trying to get some. When he raises his eyebrows at her she waggles hers back and shoves the clothes into his chest.

Wilhelm catches them reflexively as he laughs. “Oh, come on. I haven’t worn that in *months*, Stells.”

“All the more reason to wear it tonight, no? What’s stopping you?”

She doesn’t give him a chance to respond, just shoves at his shoulders until he backs up into the bathroom. “Get changed, come on! We’re on the clock, here.”

Wilhelm checks himself out in the mirror when he’s dressed and, yeah, he can admit that this outfit looks good on him — always has, hugging him in all of the right places. He’s bound to turn some heads tonight, but the thought doesn’t excite him. There’s only one person he’s

been interested in for the past four months. He still doesn't feel like he actually wants to party right now, the idea of being in the middle of all of that noise and clamour making him wince where usually he'd be excited, but he rolls his shoulders out and strides out of the bathroom anyways.

"Oh, by the way — I saw on August's story that he's there with one of his old friends. Micheal? Mark? I can't remember. But you'll probably be able to avoid them — Jackson's house is fucking *huge*," Stella remarks as they pile into the car idling on the curb in front of his building.

"Seriously? You could have told me that *before* I agreed to come, Stella — hi, Freddie — I'm trying to avoid him," Wilhelm complains as he leans into a brief hug with Fredrika.

"But then you never would've come!" Stella exclaims. Wilhelm rolls his eyes and looks out the window petulantly.

He takes three shots in a row once they enter the house just to get used to the wall of noise around him. Stella whoops, always the party girl, and tugs him onto the dance floor with Fredrika. Wilhelm feels himself starting to loosen up in spite of himself, laughing as he dances easily between the two girls, sweat starting to break on his brow as the music swells around him. His stomach and chest burn from the liquor, but as the song changes into one he actually likes he finds himself grinning, drunk and happy. *This beats sitting around thinking about Simon*, he thinks.

"Bathroom break!" Fredrika shouts over the music, tugging her girlfriend along behind her, leaving Wilhelm standing within the wall of bodies. He tugs a hand through his hair, more than a little drunk, unsteady on his feet, his eyes darting between people; a flash of pink hair, the twinkling of an eye, a sharp smile pressed against someone else's mouth. He spins, wondering if he knows anyone here, catches his eyes on someone across the room. Thinks he recognises them.

And then the floor falls from beneath his feet.

Wilhelm is twenty the second time he gets his heart broken.

This is all he could be feeling as he watches the man press Simon against the wall, towering over him, attached to his neck with his hands roaming up Simon's sides. Initially his chest fills with raw panic, but then his hazy, drunk brain takes Simon's features in properly, catalogues how the other man's eyes are closed in pleasure, how he's pulling him closer. Wilhelm stumbles back a step, feels the shock of it like a punch to the gut. Cruelly, he can see the flash of metal on Simon's finger — the present Wilhelm bought him.

There's the tangy rush of jealousy, like metal in his mouth that says *mine*. There's the immediate thought that follows it. *No. Not yours. Not really.* Wilhelm doesn't know what he expected — Simon wanted to keep things casual, how he didn't see that that meant *seeing other people* he has no idea. How long has he been doing this without Wilhelm knowing?

Simon opens his eyes, then, and they widen when he finds Wilhelm staring at him. It crashes over him, a wave of fire from the crown of his head to his feet, lighting up his nerves in hot anger and fear.

Simon tries to pull away, but the damage is already done — Wilhelm turns so fast he gets dizzy and shoves his way through the crowd, stealing someone's shot as he does. The liquor burns on the way down but he'll take that over the sour, sick jealousy he was feeling any day.

August finds him in the kitchen an indeterminate amount of time later, nursing a bottle of— something. Everything started getting blurry and kind of sideways after that fourth shot.

“Rough night?” he asks, stealing the bottle from him. He's got a pair of sunglasses perched on his head even though it's nighttime.

“Hey!” Wilhelm cries out, making grabby hands for the bottle. “Gimme.”

“You want something stronger?”

August holds out a baggie with a pill in it. Wilhelm stares at it, his eyes unfocusing, and then he looks back up at August. August quirks an eyebrow in challenge. “It'll make all your problems melt away.”

And, *oh*. That sounds promising. Wilhelm watches August, can't make out anything in his expression that would imply he was lying, and asks, “promise?”

August just waves the baggie under his nose until Wilhelm takes it from him.

“How much?” Wilhelm slurs. August waves him off.

“Eh, you're family. On the house.” And then he's gone, and Wilhelm's alone, having a staring contest with a pill. He thinks about the last time he did something like this, in his first year. How he woke up wearing someone else's clothes and with a hangover that convinced him to never, ever touch anything like that again. Thinks about Simon, his head tipped back and his eyes closed in pleasure for someone who isn't *him*. Thinks about how Simon will never feel the same.

He lets the pill dissolve under his tongue, and then he thinks of nothing at all.

Bleary eyes blink open and a heavy *thud* sounds beside him; Wilhelm jolts awake against the harsh sunlight streaming through the curtains and then immediately regrets it. His head pounds. His mouth is rough and gritty, like gravel on his tongue. He can't piece together the

different parts of his brain — feels so scattered he doesn't even recognise the room he's in, what the *hell* did August give him last night?

Sitting up is a Herculean feat, one that he manages after twenty seconds of willing his limbs to move for him. Clumsy and unco-ordinated he finally swings to a seated position and then screws his eyes shut against a wave of nausea.

When he opens them again Felice's angry face swims across his vision. For a second he thinks he's hallucinating, but then she reaches out and cuffs him over the ear — and as strong as whatever he took evidently *was*, he doesn't think it can make hallucinations that *touch* you.

"Gonna hurl." And then there's a bucket in front of his face and Felice is rubbing his back soothingly as he retches into it.

She sighs. "Jesus, Wille."

Wilhelm presses his sweaty forehead to the cool lip of the bucket and tries to just *breathe*. The shakes are setting in. God, this might be the stupidest thing he's ever done.

Eventually Felice takes the bucket from him and goes to dispose of its contents. He winces — but, it's not something the both of them haven't done for each other before. She returns with a glass of water and he forces himself to sip it slowly even though he wants to chug it. Has been here before, knows that if you drink it too quickly you'll just throw it back up all over again. When he finishes he sits back a little and finally meets her eyes.

He feels alarmingly *here*. Present; the scratch of Felice's couch against his fingertips, the unforgiving wood of the floor against his feet. He flinches beneath her gaze — sympathetic and *pissed* in equal measure.

"What the hell did you take last night?" she asks.

He winces. "I... don't know. I just took whatever August gave me. It was stupid."

"You went to *August*? Fucking *why*?" Felice exclaims, her eyes full of fire.

Wilhelm puts his head in his hands. "You're gonna hate me if I tell you why."

"You realise you could've killed yourself, right? I think I deserve to know why considering I could've found you fucking *dead*."

The guilt hits him like a slap to the face and he reels back. He swallows against another wave of nausea, wishes more than anything that he could go back and un-take the pill, wishes he could— fucking, just go back and never meet Simon in the first place, because *what the fuck*.

"Simon... He slept with someone else. I just— I just couldn't stand it, felt like I needed to forget for a while, I don't know. I was already drunk, and August offered me the pill and I just took it. It was *really*, really stupid, Fel."

Felice looks at him for a long moment. Whatever she finds in his face must convince her not to chew him out, thankfully, and she just sighs.

“You’re right, it was stupid,” she replies. “Can you stand?”

Wilhelm nods. “I’m not completely fucked. I *really* need a shower, though.”

The water drums rhythmically against the back of his neck; Wilhelm spends half an hour just standing under the spray, staring at his reddened feet and trying to keep his thoughts from drifting to Simon. Which, of course — pink elephants and all that — sends his thoughts immediately in that direction.

He doesn’t know what he expected — they’re not *together*, they’ve never been together, Simon can, he supposes, sleep with whoever he likes. But, *god*. He thought that maybe they were — something more, now. Wilhelm took him *home*. Simon met his *mother* — more to the point, he met *Erik*. Not even Gustav met Erik. He swallows against the sudden lump in his throat, the knot of betrayal thick and painful.

When he steps out of the shower Felice hands him a set of clothes she must have nabbed from his apartment — what he did in a past life to deserve her, he has no clue — and pours them both tea as he slides onto a seat at her kitchen island. His head still pounds, but he feels marginally better for showering.

“Talk me through it, Wille. I need to know what happened, and I need to know you’re not going to do it again. This isn’t going to become a problem, right?” Her eyes bore into him, imploring him to tell the truth. It makes something panicked and defensive rear its head in him; he forces it down.

“No! No, Feli, I swear,” he replies. He wraps his hands around the mug she’s given him — the one with baby Snoopy on it, his unofficial mug at her place — and brings it up to his nose. Winces when the steam hits his face and makes his headache worse.

“I’d give you painkillers, but I don’t know how safe that is considering you probably took a *really* strong one last night and then washed it down with alcohol. It’s— *god*, Wille, you have to realise how stupid this was. Simon breaks your heart and the first thing you do is try to kill yourself?”

“No! Feli, I *promise* you that wasn’t what I was trying to do. I would never. I was just really, *really* drunk and August made it seem like it would just— make my problems disappear.” Alarmingly Wilhelm finds his eyes starting to smart, his voice thickening with emotion.

Felice’s face softens — they’ve been friends since they were kids, and he’s only ever used nicknames for her when he’s being extremely serious, or when he needs comfort. She stands and makes her way around the table, pulling him into her arms. He pillows his head on her shoulder and breathes her in, lets her comforting scent wrap around him. Felice drops her chin onto his shoulder and sighs. “I swear to you, one day I’m gonna kill August. I know he’s your cousin, but that guy is fucked up.”

Wilhelm snorts. “Ain’t that the truth.”

Outside, the cold takes his breath away. Cruelly, it's a beautiful winter's morning; the sunlight golden and bathing everything with sparkling surety. Wilhelm scowls against the pain in his head and walks with his eyes facing the pavement, staring stubbornly at the cracks beneath his feet.

The ten-minute walk home feels more like twenty with the way he's dragging his feet. The thought of bumping into Simon makes his chest smart, well and truly heartbroken. He fishes his key from his pocket as he enters the building. Thankfully the fresh air has made him feel less hungover. Way less like he's gonna hurl, at least.

He stumbles to a stop, squinting, as he turns the corner to his corridor. There's someone lingering outside of his apartment, dragging his foot back and forth.

Oh my god.

His hair is longer, tied up behind his head, but Wilhelm couldn't mistake his aquiline nose or those fucking *cheekbones* anywhere.

He doesn't think his life could become more of a joke if it *tried*.

"Gustav?"

Gustav's head shoots up and he starts, as if he wasn't expecting Wilhelm to be here which is ridiculous because it's his fucking *apartment*. What the hell.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

Gustav gives him a little wave. "Hey. I got your address off of Vincent."

"That doesn't explain what you're doing here."

Gustav winces. "I was hoping we could... talk."

Wilhelm raises his eyebrows. "You want to talk."

Gustav shrugs. "Sure."

Wilhelm stares at him for a second, folding his arms and leaning his shoulder against the wall. "Do you want to talk or are you hoping I'll let you fuck me?"

Gustav bursts into a surprised chuckle. He shakes his head. "God, I forgot how direct you were."

Wilhelm lets his eyes drag down Gustav's form — he's grown up well, lost the gangly-ness that endeared him to Wilhelm when they were teenagers and filled out in all the ways that

matter. He's not Simon, but, *fuck*. He'll do.

"Well, you're in luck because I just got my heart broken. Come in," Wilhelm says, sauntering forwards and unlocking his apartment door.

Gustav wanders around his apartment, trailing his fingers over the desk, tapping out a beat.

"You look good," he says, leaning back against the desk.

Wilhelm wanders over to him, pushing away the sick feeling stuck in his stomach. "Don't lie. I'm extremely hungover."

Gustav tips his chin up and *deja vu* crashes over Wilhelm like a wave. God, the last time they did this he was eighteen and stupidly in love.

Not much has changed, really, has it? Fool.

He pushes the thought aside and brings their mouths together, and it feels wrong but Wilhelm needs to stop thinking and Gustav has always had a remarkable affinity for getting him out of his head.

He wonders if Simon is home. The cruel, jealous thought flits across his mind like a bird. *I hope he hears us.*

"You're beautiful," Gustav says.

Wilhelm's gut twists. He swallows the dread, the *wrongness* of it all, and kisses Gustav again.

He doesn't see Simon for a *week*. A week of pining, swallowing the guilt and the simmering anger, dragging around a weight heavier than he's ever known as he tries to go about his day. He writes more than he's ever done, pages and pages of chicken scratch littering his desk and tipping onto the floor. Most of it is unusable; too raw and unfiltered for him to form it into anything other than fodder for his shredder, but some of it he keeps, stores it in his bottom drawer for future poem inspiration.

He drafts and then redrafts texts that he never sends, the cursor blinking at the end of messages that range from *what the fuck is wrong with you* to *what the fuck is wrong with ME*. He doesn't go out again, despite Stella's attempts to persuade him. He doesn't text Gustav, though the other man had left him his new number and told him to *call if he ever wants a reminder of why they were together*.

Asshole.

By the time they see each other again the anger has simmered down into a slow, rolling sick feeling so when Wilhelm turns the corner to their corridor and sees Simon at the end of it all he feels is a sudden lurching, like he's missed a step on the stairs, before his chest is filled with a longing so deep it almost scares him. He swallows and stares at him, feet frozen, unable to stop his eyes from tracking over Simon's form. He looks, by Simon's standards, like shit. Which means that he still looks achingly, hauntingly beautiful, just with shadows beneath his eyes and ruffled hair. He's wearing a deep purple hoodie that Wilhelm realises with a sick jolt used to be *his*.

Wilhelm stares at him. They stand at opposite ends of the corridor. Simon's eyes widen when he sees him and he fiddles with the ends of the hoodie's sleeves, pulling them over his knuckles.

"Wille."

Wilhelm swallows. "Hi."

"Can we talk?"

Oh, now he wants to talk.

"I don't know how much there is to talk about," Wilhelm says, forcing his voice to stay impassive. "Why'd you ghost me?"

Simon shrugs.

"You don't know? Are you fucking kidding me?"

Simon flinches at the harshness in his tone and opens his mouth to speak, but Wilhelm barrels on.

"No, what the hell? You can't just ghost me and then not even tell me why! I thought that—"

"It was Marcus, okay!" Simon exclaims suddenly.

Wilhelm frowns in confusion. "*What?*"

Simon swallows visibly, half-shrugging before wrapping his arms around himself protectively. He brings one of his hands up to chew on the thumbnail before speaking. "He's been messaging me, somehow he got my fucking number again. Maybe through August, I don't fucking know. And then, at the party he just turned up! And, I don't know, I can never say no to him and he offered me a drink and I just said yes and then he was kissing me but Wille, I didn't—I didn't sleep with him."

The explanation leaves him breathless with the force of his desperation, his chest rising and falling beneath the purple fabric of his hoodie. Simon looks at Wilhelm, eyes darting across his face, looking for something. Finally, he takes a ragged breath.

"I haven't been able to sleep with anyone else since you."

Oh.

His words are like a punch to the gut, like the floor has fallen from beneath Wilhelm's feet, and he takes in a shuddering breath. The guilt of what he's done — taking the pill, *fucking Gustav* — hits him like a truck and he swallows. *Fuck*. He's an asshole. Then what Simon has said catches up to him fully and he frowns. "Wait— August? How do you know August?"

"I get weed off of him sometimes. He's friends with Marcus."

Oh my god. It all clicks into place: the Marcus that August and Gustav were friends with is *Simon's* Marcus. That's why Simon stiffened when August's name was brought up at dinner. Wilhelm has *met* Marcus — fuck, he might even have met *Simon*, years ago. He has a vague memory of a kid his age hanging off of Marcus' arm one time. It makes his stomach roil with anger; Simon was right, Marcus was *much* older than them. And he was a fucking prick.

That's when it hits him that Simon was *with* Marcus that night.

"Wait. Are you okay?" he asks.

Simon starts in confusion. "What?"

"I mean— you saw Marcus," Wilhelm says.

Simon laughs humourlessly in disbelief. "That's what you're focusing on right now. I did a lot more than just *see* Marcus, Wille."

"Right, but— you drank. You never drink."

"I know."

"So, are you okay?" Wilhelm presses.

"What the fuck is happening right now? Why aren't you angry with me? I *kissed* someone else. My fucking ex! You should be pissed off with me!" Simon exclaims, his brows furrowed in confusion.

Wilhelm falters, guilt clogging up his throat. "...Because I— *shit*, I did some really stupid things. I've been a complete asshole."

"What do you mean?"

Wilhelm bites his lip. "I don't want to tell you."

Simon eyes him with concern. "Wille, what did you do?"

Wilhelm flinches. He wants more than anything to not have to tell Simon what happened, what he did, but, *fuck*. Somewhere along the way he's come to realise that he *knows* Simon. Knows the furrow that comes between his brows when something irritates him, knows the place his mouth goes when he finds something funny but knows he shouldn't. Knows that he overworks himself because he feels guilty, always, always feels guilty.

And it's because of this that he knows Simon won't let it go.

"Come in?" he implores him, staring at Simon in a way that always makes him cave. Simon clenches his jaw but follows him easily enough into his apartment. The *click* of the door shutting feels like a finality and Wilhelm swallows.

"I took... Um, something? I still don't really know what it was, August kinda coerced me into taking it. And then I...slept with my ex."

Simon blinks at him. "You *what*?"

"Simme, I'm sorry."

"You have got to be fucking kidding me."

"I thought you were fucking someone else! What did you expect me to do?"

"I don't know, talk to me?"

"Oh, yeah, and you made that really easy, didn't you?"

"Fuck you, Wille."

Silence stretches in the space between them, harsh and ugly. Wilhelm wants to *leave*. He wants to cry. He wants to cross the short distance between them and kiss Simon so hard he forgets his own name.

Eventually Simon breaks the silence, chewing on the inside of his cheek in a way that betrays his anger. When he speaks his voice is artificially light — Wilhelm is so fucking *sick* of it.

"No, I mean, of course. I guess you're entitled to fuck whoever you want, Wille."

"Simon."

"Your *ex*?" Simon exclaims, so angry his chest is heaving. "Was he at least good?"

Wilhelm shakes his head in warning, flames of anger licking at his heels.

Simon steps forward. "Was he better than me?"

"Simon..."

"Answer the question."

"...No. He wasn't."

Simon steps forward again, and this time it brings him all the way into Wilhelm's space. He swallows and tips his head up until their lips almost brush.

"Tell me to stop," Simon murmurs, and he's so close, the heat of him radiating into Wilhelm and thawing him from the inside out, sparking the fire in his gut that is soon to be an inferno, burning him up.

“Tell me you don’t want me.”

Simon isn’t his — he never will be. But Wilhelm isn’t thinking about that right now.

They crash together, all tongues and sharp teeth and harsh breaths. Simon crowds him up against the wall, canting their hips together and punching a sharp gasp out of them both. A moan rips out of Wilhelm at the hot, hard press of him and he grabs Simon’s hips as the other man licks a harsh line up his throat, laving over his pulse point in a way that turns Wilhelm’s knees weak. It’s filthy and angry and *so fucking hot*, and he presses back, pushing them away from the wall, fumbling with Simon’s hoodie until it’s pushed up over his head. The second Simon is free he pulls him back against him by the waist, licking into his mouth desperately.

Simon bites his lip, *hard*, and Wilhelm gasps as pain blooms in his mouth, the metallic tang of his blood on his tongue. It should be disgusting, probably, but it just hikes his arousal up until he’s panting, pliant beneath Simon’s sure grip. Simon pulls back, chest heaving, eyes wide, and his grip on Wilhelm’s shirt starts to loosen.

“Simon—“ Wilhelm gasps, not even sure what he was planning on saying, but Simon interrupts him before he can finish.

“Shut up.” Simon shoves him, fire in his eyes, and Wilhelm stumbles back a step. “On your knees.”

His knees fold without hesitation, without Wilhelm asking them to, and he lands on the carpet with static buzzing in his ears. Simon stares down at him, his jaw tense, looking beautiful and *so* untouchable, so far away. Wilhelm swallows the pain of it like glass down his throat because — and this is something he’s thought an innumerable amount of times since they started seeing each other — if the choice was between kneeling at Simon’s feet and being anywhere else, he’d take a knee in a second. It’s not often that either of them feel this way; Simon authoritative and in control, Wilhelm decidedly *not*, but when it happens Wilhelm relishes it. He feels *right*, feels worthy, with Simon above him.

A muscle ticks in Simon’s jaw as he watches him, but there’s something pleased in his eyes that makes Wilhelm shiver in pride. Everything between them is so *fucked*, maybe it has been since the start, but Wilhelm knows that this, at least, is sacred. Simon’s hand threads its way through his hair, his nails scratching over Wilhelm’s scalp, and he swallows against his own arousal at the feeling.

The hand travels to his face, thumb brushing over Wilhelm’s cheekbone — a moment of calm in the rushing storm of anger and desire, and Wilhelm’s eyes flutter shut with a whine. Then, without warning, he grips Wilhelm’s chin harshly, bending at the waist until there’s inches between them. Wilhelm looks up into his eyes, dark pools turned almost black with arousal, helpless to do anything but *let* him.

“Tell me what you want,” Simon grinds out, voice low and dangerous. The moment crackles like lightning between them and Wilhelm gasps in a breath, feeling Simon’s thumb digging into his jaw, reading in his eyes the way it wants to inch towards his neck. He moves slowly, gives Simon time to back out because somehow, even when Wilhelm is on his knees, even when Simon is gripping him so fiercely, he feels starkly as if Simon is seconds away from

running out of the door and never looking back. When his hand makes contact with Simon's, the grip on his chin loosens in surprise, so Wilhelm pulls gently until Simon's fingers make a loose collar around his throat. Simon's eyes flutter open wider, wonder sparking in those dark irises, and his hand tightens as Wilhelm breathes out his answer.

"You."

And then Simon's pushing forwards, something animalistic in his eyes as he follows Wilhelm down onto the carpet, slotting himself between Wilhelm's legs and panting into his mouth as they grind together. Wilhelm gives as good as he gets, helping Simon strip them of their shirts, and then there's bare skin against him and Wilhelm didn't even realise how much he'd missed this until he has it again. Simon kisses down his chest, drags his teeth over a nipple, pauses to suck a bruise by his ribs. Wilhelm arches into his touch, unable to stop himself from threading his fingers through Simon's curls, moaning helplessly at the ceiling.

"Simon," he breathes, completely and utterly consumed by the other man, bucking up into his touch as Simon palms him through his jeans.

"You drive me fucking crazy," Simon groans into his collarbone, his deft fingers unbuttoning Wilhelm's jeans. He pulls them, and his underwear, off in one smooth motion, before pulling back to work at his own fly. Wilhelm watches him, grinning when Simon's fingers fumble under his gaze, but then Simon's between his knees again and he sobers quickly at the look on his face. He presses them together and Wilhelm chokes on a moan, throat working as Simon's eyes stare into his own, stare *through* him, stripping away every defensive layer he's ever put up and laying his soul bare. It's almost too much; he turns his head to the side before he comes just from this.

The marks Gustav left have long since faded but Simon finds where they were anyway, dragging his teeth over the sensitive skin and sucking harshly until bruises start to bloom. And Wilhelm lets him, because somehow he knows this is what he needs. This is what they both need.

"Yours, Simme," he breathes and Simon moans lowly, pressing them together more firmly. He gets a hand between them and takes them both in his palm, jerking them in rough strokes, and the pressure builds and builds until Wilhelm is seeing stars behind his eyelids, unable to control how loud he's being because it feels like heaven. Simon leans somehow closer, the weight of him draping over Wilhelm, and murmurs into his ear brokenly.

"Mine."

It's this that tips Wilhelm over the edge, coming with a strangled gasp over Simon's fist, pleasure whiting out his vision. Simon follows soon after, moaning desperately into Wilhelm's neck, before collapsing, boneless, on top of him.

Eventually their breathing starts to even out, and Wilhelm finds the strength to bring a hand up and pet the back of Simon's head, floating happily in that post-orgasm space where everything feels slow and syrupy. He realises abruptly that he's on the edge of sleep and blinks himself awake.

Simon finally moves, drawing back and away, and Wilhelm swallows at the loss of him as Simon tucks himself back into his jeans and reaches behind him to find his shirt. He uses it to clean them both off, but he's back to avoiding Wilhelm's gaze so Wilhelm snatches the fabric from his hands, exasperated.

"Are you okay?" Simon asks. Wilhelm feels his brows draw together. "...Yeah. Are you?"

Simon looks away.

Wilhelm knows it's coming, but it still drives a shard of glass into his chest when it does.

"This," Simon murmurs, "can't happen again."

"Simon, please."

Simon stands, finding his hoodie where it was discarded earlier and tugging it on roughly.

"Wille. We can't keep doing this. It's ruining us."

Wilhelm scrambles into a standing position, tugging his jeans back up. He steps closer.

"Simme, we just had sex. Does that mean nothing to you?"

"It means *everything*," Simon spits angrily, and then he turns heel and leaves. Wilhelm stutters to life before he can get out of the door, tugging him back by the wrist. Simon looks at him, eyes flashing, shining with unshed tears.

"Just— please come to the poetry slam. Please, Simon. It would mean a lot to me if you came," Wilhelm begs, eyes darting across Simon's features. Simon's jaw ticks, but he gives him a brief nod before he leaves. The door shuts behind him with a deafening *click*.

Wilhelm slams his palm against it. "Fuck!"

Chapter End Notes

happy valentine's day! but not to these idiots.

i've decided wille really likes snoopy in this universe. don't ask me why bc i don't know.

please for the love of all things holy do not do what wille has done in this fic EVER. ever. he's a dumb dumb dumb idiot and august is a dumber dumber dumber evil idiot. just don't do it.

also i tripped and fell into the dom/sub dynamics here i don't know what to tell you - i've been reading too much marvey fanfiction LMAO

another note is that aftercare should definitely be more extensive than what they did and also that they haven't actually spoken about the whole d/s thing because it's usually not

a super prevalent thing in their sex life. and they're unbelievably bad at communicating like to a ridiculous degree i hate them (i love them)

also! just to clarify for the last chapter, simon overhears wilhelm denying having a SO but closes the door before he can hear wilhelm cave and admit that he's in love with him. that's why he starts to pull away :(

ANYWAYS i hope you guys had a good week, i love you, let me know what you think !! i love seeing ur comments even though i'm crap at replying to them

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

“I embrace poetry as a subversive force, for once you are split open by a poem you can only become whole again by refashioning yourself with its materials.” - Openings for Encounters with Poetry, Jennifer Horne.

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

VIII

The smoke curls lazily into the burgeoning night, the only light source the glowing cherry of the joint between his fingertips; Wilhelm tips his head back against the wall behind him and tries to quell the aching in his chest. He hasn't done this in a while; the last time was with Simon, after the lake house but before they went home for Christmas. Simon had climbed into his lap, loose and pliant, and they traded kisses between hits of the joint and got each other off with lazy strokes, smiling into each other's mouths. Wilhelm had almost told him then, not for the first time and not for the last, that he loved him.

He glances over at Simon's apartment. It's a futile gesture — the place is eerily dark and silent, and has been for the past twenty-four hours. Wilhelm would know; he's spent most of it out here on his balcony, trying to get a glimpse of the beautiful boy he once called home.

He brushes his thumb over his phone screen until it lights up and unlocks, revealing he and Simon's text thread. The last messages stare up at him mockingly.

simon:

promise me you won't come looking for me

wilhelm:

what?

have you left?

simon:

i have to do something

i'll be back

probably

promise?

wilhelm:

i promise.

[SEEN, 19:34]

Wilhelm swallows against the sick feeling in his chest and turns off the phone. He wants to seek him out, go looking for him, but he promised he wouldn't. Truthfully, he's terrified he'll never see him again. Simon has a tendency to run when things get hard. Wilhelm doesn't know how he'll cope if he has to let him go. He just prays that Simon comes to the poetry slam, so he at least has a proper chance to tell him how he feels. To do it *right*, for the first time in their whole relationship.

Wilhelm takes a drag of the joint, ashes it quietly onto the cement. Thinks back to the night they met, sitting in the September night and staring out at the twinkling lights of the city. How Simon's eyes had sparkled like stars lived in them, how his soft laughter had settled over Wilhelm like a blanket and kept him warm in a way no heater ever could. He was doomed from the start, really. Like Icarus, all he was ever going to do was fall.

His phone lights up again and Wilhelm scrambles to check it, though he knows it won't be Simon. Sure enough, it's Felice.

felice:

how are you holding up?

wilhelm:

okay

felice:

somehow i don't think that's true

wilhelm:

i'm fine, felice

i promise

Wilhelm huffs a humourless breath through his nose. *Promises.*

felice:

okay <3

you wanna come over and get drunk?

wilhelm:

...yeah

but not tonight

rain check?

felice:

of course

love you

wilhelm:

love you too

Wilhelm sighs and stubs out the end of the joint, standing with a quiet groan. He casts one last longing look at Simon's apartment, hoping against hope that the lights will flick on, that he'll be given evidence that Simon is *real*, that he felt for him. If not love, then something else.

The apartment remains silent and dark, as if mocking him.

Wilhelm is in line for his coffee (an oat latte with a shot of vanilla) when someone touches his elbow and exclaims, "Wilhelm? Is that you?"

Wilhelm jumps — he's been skittish since he and Simon slept together, unmoored and lost — and whirls around to be greeted by a girl half a head shorter than him, her wild auburn hair

piled atop her head in a messy bun. Her blue eyes are wide in surprise, twinkling beneath the harsh artificial lights. Gold jewellery flashes around her neck and in her ears, and she's wearing a long, flowy dress much more suited for summer than the depths of winter. Wilhelm's eyes widen in surprise.

"Faith?!"

She just grins in response.

"What is it with me and seeing my exes recently?" Wilhelm murmurs to himself.

"Holy shit, I haven't seen you in years," she says, eyeing him approvingly. "You've filled out."

"In a good way, I hope. Wanna get a coffee, catch up?"

Faith nods eagerly. "Yes, definitely, but I can't stay for long. My wife's waiting for me to bring her an almond croissant."

Wilhelm cocks an eyebrow. "You're *married*? I thought you didn't believe in that stuff."

Faith waves a hand. "Ah, not legally. We jumped the Beltane fire."

Wilhelm smiles; she hasn't changed. "Of course. Well, congratulations!"

"Thanks, Wille."

They get their coffee — Faith's wife's almond croissant carefully wrapped up and placed in her bag — and make their way over to a corner booth. Faith slides in opposite him and pulls one leg up underneath her, taking a long, smooth sip of her coffee. How she drinks piping hot drinks like it's nothing, he has no idea. He pulls the lid off of his takeaway cup to let the steam out before trying his own.

"So, what are you up to?" Wilhelm asks. Faith's eyes glimmer.

"I'm working for a non-profit. It's where I met Sylvia," she explains.

Wilhelm gasps. "An office romance — scandalous."

"Mhm." She sips her coffee. "What about you?"

Wilhelm pauses, fiddling with a serviette. "Oh, you know. Nothing much. I'm doing a poetry degree."

Faith regards him for a moment, her blue eyes disconcertingly understanding. She's always been perceptive — Maddy would say psychic, he thinks, then makes a mental note to introduce them — but Wilhelm thought that somewhere along the line he'd figured out how to hide the way he feels from people. Clearly not her, though — maybe he's losing his edge.

“Okay, I’m not trying to pry but you look like shit,” Faith says after a moment. “Plus, Saturn is transiting your seventh house at the minute so I *know* something’s going on in your relationships.”

Wilhelm gapes at her.

“Oh, come on. You were my first boyfriend. I keep tabs on you.”

Faith’s eyes bore into him with startling clarity, and he finds himself actually wanting to talk about it. So he does; spills every dirty little secret weaved into the mess that is he and Simon. She sits there, face impartial, and sips her latte as he talks her through it. When he’s done, she smirks.

“Well, I’ll be honest, I did *not* peg you for a submissive.”

Wilhelm sputters. “Wha— I’m *not*. That’s what you’re getting from this?”

Faith snorts. “I’m sorry.” Then she sobers, leaning forwards and taking his hands in her own. They’re dainty and soft, the skin smooth and unmarred.

“Wille, you don’t do casual.”

Wilhelm scoffs; he’s pretty sure Gustav *and* Simon could attest to the opposite. “Yes, I do.”

“Sorry, correction: you don’t do casual *well*,” Faith continues.

Wilhelm sighs, chewing on the inside of his cheek, and when she raises a sharp eyebrow at him he concedes her the point.

“When are you going to just be *honest* with him?” Faith asks.

“It’s not that simple,” Wilhelm tries. Faith levels him with a scathing look. Then she takes a deep breath and tucks her hair behind her ears, before steepling her fingers together. Wilhelm allows her the dramatics because he genuinely does want her advice — thinks he would take just about anyone’s advice when it comes to Simon, honestly. Finally, she pulls back and folds her arms across her chest, leaning back in her seat.

“Wilhelm, I knew what you were like when we were sixteen — obviously a lot has changed since then, but your biggest problem was trusting people back then,” she begins. Wilhelm nods, chewing at his lip.

“You lie to people because you’re afraid to give them your heart completely, just in case they break it. You did it with me, too.”

Wilhelm furrows his brows. “I did?”

Faith snorts. “Darling, it took you three weeks to ask me out even though I was flirting with you *constantly*.”

Wilhelm sputters. “Wha— I didn’t want to get rejected!”

She looks at him like, *exactly*. “And I’m willing to bet that that’s what stopped you from talking to Simon, wasn’t it?”

“Well, I mean, I feel like he made it pretty clear that he didn’t want anything serious with me,” Wilhelm protests, darting his gaze away and feeling oddly like a scolded child.

“Yes, *once*, at the very start of your relationship. You told me he opened up to you later, started treating you differently. Doesn’t that mean that maybe something changed?” Faith presses.

“I don’t know,” Wilhelm huffs, crossing his arms and leaning back in his seat.

Faith sips at her coffee. “It sounds to me like you’re missing some key information here, sweets.”

Wilhelm frowns. “And what is that?”

“How Simon *actually* feels. Not what it seems like he feels.”

Wilhelm sighs — as much as he wants to deny it, to keep wallowing, he knows she’s right. He and Simon need to *talk*. That is, if he ever sees him again. The prospect is so bleak that Wilhelm swallows and shifts in his seat, fear creeping into him.

“Well... I’m doing a poetry slam on the fifth. He’s invited, but I’m not sure he’s going to come,” he offers.

Faith smirks at him. “And the poem is about him?”

Wilhelm nods. “Blatantly obvious.”

“Shit, kid. You never did anything by half, did you?”

“Don’t call me kid. I’m older than you by two months.”

She snorts. “Sorry. Wanted to have my cool older mentor moment.”

Wilhelm shakes his head fondly. “Well, you’re certainly cool.”

Wilhelm is halfway through his breakfast when someone knocks on his door. He pauses, cheeks filled with Cheerios, before placing his bowl down and getting up to answer.

Sara stands on the other side, chewing at her lip, her big brown eyes staring up at him worriedly. Wilhelm frowns. “Sara?”

Sara gives him a half-hearted wave. “Hey, can I come in?”

“Uh, sure— yeah, of course.” He steps aside, allowing her to enter his apartment. He has a brief second to be self-conscious about the messiness of his place — he’s going through a pseudo-breakup, sue him for not wanting to do his laundry — before he dismisses it. Sara doesn’t seem like the kind of person who would judge people for things like that.

Sara turns in the middle of the room, fidgeting with her sleeves in a way that reminds him so much of Simon that he has to look away. Finally she darts her gaze to him, squirrel-like.

“Have you seen Simon?” she asks.

Wilhelm shakes his head. “Not in a couple of days, no.”

Sara runs the tips of her fingers back and forth across her bottom lip anxiously. “He won’t answer any of my calls. I’m getting kind of worried.”

“We had a fight, and then he left. He texted me — hold on, where is it — here.” Wilhelm finds his phone on the desk and opens the text thread before handing it over to Sara. Her brows furrow as her eyes dart over the words, and then she clicks the phone off and hands it back with a sigh. “I know where he is.”

“Really? Where?”

“Our father.”

Alarm bells go off somewhere in Wilhelm’s brain. “He’s going to see him? Wh— isn’t that dangerous?”

Sara shakes her head. “Micke is long dead, Wilhelm. Simon just doesn’t know that, yet. He’s probably gone back to Bjärstad to see Mamma and find out about him.”

She wanders over to his desk and leans back against it, fingers drumming on the wood. “Simon’s been out of our lives for a while, and we had no way of reaching him, so we couldn’t tell him when it happened.”

Wilhelm nods, then looks around for his jeans. He’s about to grab them when Sara lands a hand on his arm.

“Uh-uh. You are not coming with.” Sara points at him. “First of all, you look like Winnie the Pooh right now,” (Wilhelm blanches, then realises he’s dressed in only his boxers and a red shirt) “and second of all I know Simon, if you turn up he’s gonna close himself off completely and probably pack up and move to Siberia.”

Wilhelm sighs, his grip on the jeans loosening. Sara smiles at him sympathetically.

“Just let me handle it. I’ll talk some sense into him and try and get him to come back and see your poetry slam, okay?”

“Okay.”

Wilhelm pulls her into a hug — Winnie the Pooh be damned. She pats him on the shoulder and gives him a smile when he lets go.

Once the door shuts behind her Wilhelm pulls out his phone.

wilhelm:

can i cash in on that rain check today pls

i don't wanna stay at my apartment tonight

felice:

ofc!

come over whenever

i'll get the wine out

Wilhelm arrives at Felice's in the early evening, feeling marginally less depressed and wearing his comfiest pair of sweatpants. He hurriedly shoved the cheapest bottle of red wine he owned into his backpack before leaving the house, in the hopes that Felice would honour her offer to get smashed and forget about his problems, even if it's just for an evening. It's still early; the sun has only just begun to dip below the horizon, casting long rays of sunset that stretch far into the night.

He knocks; the door swings open immediately and Felice ambushes him, tugging him into a hug. He yelps before wrapping his arms around her. "Uh— hi?"

"Hi!" she says into his shoulder. "I've missed you."

A stab of guilt feathers at Wilhelm's chest. He's been so caught up with Simon, and then with being heartbroken about Simon, that he's completely neglected his friendship with Felice. Or with anyone else, for that matter.

"I'm sorry, Fel." He strokes up her back.

She pulls away, shaking her head. "It's okay, Wille. I get it. In fact—" She steps aside, and Wilhelm gapes as he takes in the apartment. His whole friendship group is spilled across Felice's place, in various states of couch-potato, all grinning expectantly up at him.

Felice places a hand on his arm. Her brown eyes are earnest when they turn on him. “We all get it.”

Wilhelm opens his mouth to speak, but finds himself choking up. “You guys...”

“Oh, come on Wille! Don’t cry!” Vincent protests, springing up from the couch.

“Or do! We’re here for you,” Maddy adds, appearing at Vincent’s elbow and jostling him when he glares at her.

“Before you say anything else,” Nils starts, slinging an arm over Vincent’s shoulders. “We have weed and chinese food. You can talk about it if you want, or we can get baked. Or both.”

“Oh my god. You guys are officially the best.” Wilhelm dumps his backpack on the doorstep and makes grabby hands for the blunt Vincent has pinched between his finger and thumb. The other man relinquishes it with a laugh and comes to join him on the couch, producing a lighter and flicking it to life. It flickers back and forth in the low light, and Wilhelm feels the heat of it when he leans in to light up.

They settle into a well-trodden rhythm naturally — they’ve been friends for so long that nothing can disturb their peace, not even four new friends or Wilhelm’s ridiculous love drama. Vincent tucks himself under Wilhelm’s arm and sticks his feet in Nils’ lap, demanding that he *massage them like a real boyfriend* and kicking him until he does. Felice rolls her eyes fondly at them but leans into Wilhelm’s other side and steals the blunt from between his fingers. He raises his eyebrows at her — Felice has always been a bit of a goody-two-shoes — but she just smirks and takes a smooth hit. Wilhelm’s eyes widen when she doesn’t cough, just exhales easily and winks at him.

“Goddamn,” he mutters. “Who *are* you?”

“Your best friend.” She smiles at him, before leaning around him to hand the blunt to Nils.

“Hey! No hogging, asshole,” Maddy pipes up from their position on the floor. Their head is in Alex’s lap, where he’s leaning up against the couch and is scrolling through shows on Netflix. It’s a testament to Nils’ good mood that he just passes it to her with a chuckle, instead of fighting over it like he usually would. Wilhelm suspects that has something to do with the whole *boyfriend* thing — definitely a new development where he’s concerned. He smiles to himself and busies himself blowing smoke rings when Felice gives him the blunt again.

And so it goes like this for a while; they pile up like puppies on the couch and the floor, passing the blunt around and digging into the chinese food when the munchies set in. They got him *lo mein*, because they’re the *best*, and Wilhelm actually moans when he takes his first bite. When he’s done eating he turns sideways and lays on Felice’s lap, wiggling his feet underneath Vincent’s legs and letting himself drift in the smoky haze. Felice pets at his hair absently and he sighs, the stress he’s been feeling melting out of him.

It's two hours later, when they're all done eating and smoking and Sex Education is playing quietly on the television, that he realises he hasn't thought about Simon the entire time. The thought is like a hammer against his chest. He swallows uncomfortably, throat tightening like a vice, and sits up. He suddenly feels unbelievably guilty — how could he just *forget* about him like that?

Felice must notice the shift in his energy, because she places a hand on his shoulder and squeezes. “You okay?”

Wilhelm squashes the immediate urge to say *yes, fine* and wave it off like he usually does, and instead shakes his head. He feels a little like a petulant child, because — well, weed, but he's still proud of himself for doing it.

“I think,” Felice says, stroking a hand over the back of his head. “You should talk to us.”

Wilhelm sighs and leans back against the couch. “I know, I just — it feels stupid.”

“Maybe it is stupid,” Vincent pipes up. Wilhelm narrows his eyes at him and opens his mouth.

“*Maybe* it is stupid,” Vincent continues. “But we still love you and are here for you anyways. And even if we tell you you're being an idiot it's out of love, you know that, right?”

“Of course I know that.”

“Good! Then tell us what stupid thing you've done so we can tell you it's not actually that serious.”

Wilhelm snorts, then acquiesces. He gives them the brief rundown — how they met, when they started seeing each other, that they got closer at the lake house. He leaves out anything to do with Simon's family, because it's not his business to tell. When he's done explaining what happened with Gustav on Sunday, and what happened after, they gape at him.

“You *cheated* on him?!” Maddy pipes up.

“Wha— no! Not technically. And, to be fair, I thought he'd cheated on me first,” Wilhelm tries to defend himself, but he knows it sounds flimsy at best.

“Wille, I love you, but that was so dumb. Why didn't you just speak to him?” Felice asks.

“Well I know that *now*. And he didn't exactly make it easy for me to speak to him, you know. Takes two to tango.”

“Well, *yeah*. You best believe I will be having *words* with that boy.” Felice practically growls.

Wilhelm smiles. “You don't need to do that, Fel.”

“No, we all do,” Nils says. “You're our friend, Wille, and he hurt you. Badly. He will feel our wrath.”

“Oh my god, guys, please! No wrath-feeling, okay? I love you guys, and that is so sweet, but it was honestly just a huge miscommunication more than anything. And it’s just as much my fault as it is his,” Wilhelm protests.

Felice pulls him into a hug. “We love you, Wille.”

“I know you do. I love you, too.”

When she releases him, he chews at his lip. *In for a penny*, he thinks. Talking about his feelings this much is giving him hives, he swears. “I’ve... honestly been a major idiot about this whole thing. I was just— scared. Someone I hadn’t seen in a long time made me realise that I’ve spent my whole life being scared, and I’m done with it, so.”

Felice smiles and squeezes his shoulder. “Well, we’re proud of you.”

There’s a chorus of echoes, and Wilhelm huffs a chuckle under his breath.

“Thanks, guys.”

The Jewel is a rickety old bar in town, nestled between a coffee shop and a jazz club. It’s a beautiful, ancient building turned modern with strings of fairy lights and wooden decking spilling out of the back, pride flags tacked to the windows and a stage squished in the corner of the cosy space. It’s owned by a gay couple who are friends with Felice’s parents, and every Sunday they host a poetry slam. Wilhelm has been a couple of times in the past, lingering at the back of the audience and watching other poets share their work, but he’s always been too scared to get up there himself.

He thinks about what Faith said, how he doesn’t want to put his heart in someone else’s hands, just in case they play with it. Thinks that that is exactly what he’s been doing with this, too.

Well, no more of that, Wilhelm thinks, shifting from foot to foot, shaking out his hands, desperately trying to rid his body of the fearful energy it’s currently fraught with.

He’s hiding in the bathroom, wrestling with the idea of squeezing his way through the tiny window high up on the bathroom wall and high-tailing it out of here. Maybe quitting university altogether and running away to the Maldives. He doesn’t get enough sun.

He stares at his palms, his shaking, slender fingers, and curls his hands into fists. The skin stretching across his knuckles turns white with strain. He found that he liked his hands a lot more when they were spread out on Simon’s skin. Shoving his face into his hands with a groan, he thinks about running again.

But, he spotted Simon earlier, lingering by the door to the bar, as achingly handsome as always but with unease lining his face. Like at the first sign of trouble he was ready to escape

into the night. When Wilhelm spotted him initially it was like someone had screwed him to the floor, like he was cursed to stand here and watch the way the light danced off of Simon's curls for all of eternity. Then Simon moved, turned towards him, and the glue holding him in place unstuck. That was how he found himself in the bathroom, fighting off a panic attack.

The thought of Simon hearing his poem, hearing how he really, truly feels, is enough to make his stomach jump into his throat. But still, he wants— no, *needs* him to hear it. Even if he never wants to speak to him again after.

A knock at the door has him jumping clean out of his skin. “Wille! You’re on in five!”

He blows out a shuddering breath. “Shit, okay.”

The walk from the bathroom to the stage is a blur. He sees the moment Simon spots him, dark eyes widening as he takes him in. Wilhelm dressed in his favourite white satin shirt tonight and tucked it into his best pair of dress trousers because if he's going to tell Simon how he feels he's going to do it looking *good*, and he knows he looks good. Knows that the shirt falls open across his collarbones, exposes the soft, vulnerable expanse of his neck. Knows that the trousers hug his ass *perfectly*. The thought gives him the little bit of confidence he needs to force himself up the steps to the stage and stand before the microphone.

Silence settles over the audience like a blanket, anticipation thick in the air. Wilhelm is suddenly immensely grateful that he can't see anyone; the stage lights have blinded him completely to the faces in the audience. He swallows and looks down at the page — not that he needs it, he could probably recite this particular poem in his sleep. The words blur together on the page, so Wilhelm closes his eyes as he starts.

His hands shake and there's terror winding its way around his windpipe, but somehow when he speaks his voice is clear and steady.

“ you are sixteen and crying a thunderstorm in your boyfriend's car because life is cruel and lovely and everything is too big for your body, too large for your skin. you are seventeen when he breaks up with you and you are eighteen before you are over it. you are never really over it. you are nineteen when life begins to take a hold of you, when the fire is lit and begins to burn. you are twenty when you meet him. you are twenty when you lose him.

this is a story about me, and you, and the fire that burned between us. i will try to keep it brief. “

Simon came into his life the way a tornado came into a town. He should've known from the start, really, that he was doomed to end up here; alone on stage, with his shaking hands and his steady voice, spilling his heart for a room full of people while the only one he'll ever want to speak to lingers at the edge of the crowd like a ghost. Still, Wilhelm has never been good at knowing what is bad for him.

“ ACT ONE: THE CIRCLING.

you didn't see me. we were like two ships in the night, at first — no way of knowing we were going to collide, create a burst of light so bright it would take everything else out with it.

somehow i think it's apt that you didn't see me.

you find me anyways; i am content to watch from afar as you blaze a trail through life,

burning, burning, burning boy,

filled with laughter and pain.

your eyes twinkle.

the smoke is thick.

i am high, you make me higher, throw me up into the atmosphere with no parachute.

at first it's just interest; a wondering; a want.

and then your gaze begins to linger on mine and the *i wish* becomes *what if?* becomes *sweetheart* becomes your lips pressed against my neck.

the first time i dream about you i wake up hard and guilty. every night after is a battle with my subconscious — i don't want to admit it, don't make me admit it, please don't let me realise how much he means to me.

i wonder if i enter your dreams the way you dance through mine. “

A series of clicks erupt from the crowd periodically; Wilhelm pauses to laugh his thanks and then presses on. He feels himself growing emboldened by the audience's reaction. Squares his shoulders and speaks from his chest, allows himself to smile into it.

“ ACT TWO: THE COLLISION.

it is almost christmas. i am laying awake in my room and staring at the whorls in the ceiling and trying to read and failing to read which is to say that i am thinking: *is 3:28am too late for you to love me back?*

i've had a taste of you and it's consumed me. like hades you've dripped the pomegranate nectar down my throat and now i'm pinned like a snared rabbit beneath your dark gaze. what a pyrrhic victory your mouth on mine was.

because, here's the thing:

you touch me and every light in my body comes on. every window is thrown open, every curtain pulled back. the sunlight streams in, sweet sunlight, and i am free.

but with the sun comes the burning. with the sun comes you shrugging your shoulders, shutting me out. pulling your shirt on. hiding from me. i forget not to fall in love with you when you look at me like that.

i stare at the curve of your spine in the dark. there is something achingly quiet about you in these moments; you breathe and it is the only way i know you exist.

and, god, maybe we were never meant to be. but i'll hold onto you until my fingers turn to bone, until i'm scrabbling at nothing but the empty walls of my bedroom. i'll eat you alive, sweetheart. this mark you've left on my soul does not go away so easily. “

Wilhelm swallows. Pauses briefly, to let the words sink in. He wishes he could see Simon, suddenly. Wishes he knew what Simon was thinking. He wishes for a lot of things, these days.

“ ACT THREE: THE FALLOUT

you are beautiful. i want to take you apart. you said that to me, stood barefoot in my childhood bedroom, looking like you'd always been there. like you'd grown out of the floorboards and taken root in my heart.

you are beautiful. i want you all over me. you said that.

there is a lot i do not like about myself;

my hips are too wide, my mouth is too crooked, spilling secrets that should never have been told.

sometimes, though, when your hand

meets my hip and your mouth

meets my mouth, i think that i don't have to like these parts of myself.

that you will do it for me.

there's this thing that your mouth does, when you find something funny but are trying not to smile about it. i think about that little twist of your lips in the night and i glow pink and i ache.

so i say: here are my hands. take them, i am nothing without them, i am nothing without you. and you take them, but you say nothing in return.

i look at you holding a virgin cosmopolitan, the redness staining your lips, outlined by firefly light and smiling like the dawn and i think

i love you.

it doesn't surprise me the way i thought it would — i've known your mind, then your body, and now i am learning the contours of your soul. and i love you. and i'm sorry for it.

here's the part where i beg you to stay. to kiss me again. here's the part where you don't.

so say a prayer for me in the dark, love, and i'll try not to choke on the ashes of your name on my lips.

because shit, sweetheart. there's a fire in my heart and you've been putting it out with gasoline. “

Wilhelm steps back from the microphone and the room erupts in applause, whistles and shouts coming from the corner that he knows contains his friends, and he grins shakily, nodding his thanks before stumbling off-stage.

Felice finds him first, barrelling into him with a scream. He catches her, laughing, and spins them in a circle. She pulls back and shouts, “I'm so proud of you!”

“Thank you!” he shouts back, joy and pride filling his chest until he feels like a balloon, like he could float off into the atmosphere at any moment. The rest of his friends press in around him, shouting over each other to congratulate him. Vincent whacks him on the shoulder with a feral grin and says, “fuck, yes, Wille!”

Wilhelm laughs wetly, blinking back tears, so full of love he can hardly breathe.

“Okay! Okay, guys,” Felice pipes up over the din. “We're going to get drinks, 'kay?”

There's a very amusing scramble as everyone (extremely tactfully) realises why she's telling them to leave, and Wilhelm huffs a laugh and wipes at his eyes as he watches them go.

And then there's Simon, eyes red-rimmed and shining in the dim light. He looks beautiful, but then he always does. He swallows thickly. “Hi.”

Wilhelm shifts his weight. “Hey.”

“Can we talk?”

SHE'S FINALLY HEREEEEEE guys i am so sorry this took so long i've been moving house for the past two weeks so i've only got like. half an hour at a time to work on this fic.

actually i'm uploading this ON moving day because i'm crazy like that. currently sat in a mcdonald's, dangerously under-cafeinated.

i'm super proud of the poem so i hope it lives up to the expectations you have in your head! and that you enjoy this chapter - sorry for the cliffhanger but they'll talk in the next one!!

fun fact from your local astrology nerd: saturn transiting your seventh house actually does cause challenges in your relationships!

pls lemme know what you think my honey bunnies <33

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

warnings this chapter for discussions of abuse and brief physical violence, as well as mentions of parental death

Chapter Notes

"Leave me in the glow of you // What good is forever, if I can't have you?" - Ode to Dance Floor, Niki & The Dove.

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

IX

Five days ago, outside apartment 9.

Wilhelm's door slams shut behind him, and only then does he release the breath he's been holding.

Fuck.

Simon's hands shake minutely when he tries to open his door. He fumbles with the keys, missing the lock, and lets out a shout of desperate frustration, levelling a kick with the doorframe. Pain blooms in his toe and he tries so hard not to just *scream*, bending at the waist, his shoulders shaking with the effort. His keys tumble out of his fingers and land on the carpet in front of him.

"Fuck, fuck, *fuck!*" he sobs, dropping his forehead against the door with a depressing *thunk*.

Any pleasure he experienced with Wilhelm was quickly eclipsed by his anger, by his bitterness, by his bone-deep sense of *fear*. The whole thing was— was *tainted*, coloured by the strange disconnect between them, and no matter how right it felt at the time, it was the wrong thing to do. It's just—he was so afraid he was going to lose Wilhelm, and then he *did*, to Wilhelm's fucking *ex*, of all people, and he couldn't stand the thought of Wilhelm with anyone else and he was filled with such sudden possessive *rage* that he just had to—

Well. It doesn't matter why he did it. It matters that it happened, when he swore it wouldn't, when he swore to himself that *this time* he was going to actually fucking *talk* to Wilhelm, not just stonewall him or try to move on or distract him with sex. But that all went out of the window the second Wilhelm brought up Gustav.

He's angry with Wilhelm. He's angry with *himself*.

Simon bends to scoop his keys off of the carpet and finally unlocks his door, slamming it shut behind him and leaning up against it. After a moment all of the fight drains out of him and he slides down it, head in his hands, staring at his knees.

He doesn't know what to do. He doesn't know when things got so fucked up between them. Was it that first night, when he'd thrown caution to the wind and allowed himself to have what he wanted? Was it when he'd pulled away immediately after, terrified of the sheer scale of his wanting? Was it when he started to let Wilhelm in, when he told him about his father, when he realised he was falling harder than he's ever fallen before? Or was it every time he should have said something, taken back his *it doesn't have to be, like, a thing* and let Wilhelm know how he actually feels?

Were they doomed from the start? Did *he* doom them from the start?

He doesn't know. And he doesn't know how to *fix* it, because they've both fucked up so badly and he *knows* he didn't imagine the hurt in Wilhelm's eyes when Simon pulled away from him again.

So, he does what he does best. He runs.

It's all too easy to throw on his leather jacket, legs carrying him out of the apartment and down the stairs. He bursts out of the building and into the night, filled with a grim determination not to cry until he's far from here. Far from Wille.

It's sleeting down outside, as if the weather knows what it feels like inside his mind right now, and he relishes it where he'd usually cringe away because, *fuck*, it feels punishing and he feels like he needs to be punished, right now.

He clutches his motorbike like a lifeline, swinging his leg over it, feeling the harsh rubber of the handles through his leather gloves. The engine roars to life beneath his hands, always eager, and he relishes in the raw power vibrating through the bike.

This was always the one thing he felt he had control over, when he was a teenager. His life was a *mess*, his father was a mean bastard, and he was scared out of his mind the majority of the time, but all of that just—melted away the second he felt the bike respond to him. At home, he was responsible for his mother and sister's safety—he had to be the man of the house because the *actual* man of the house was less of a man and more of a monster. On the bike, speeding down the open road, the moon shining above him like a pale coin, he was responsible in a different way. The bike listened to what *he* wanted it to do, if he wanted to speed up or slow down that was *his* choice. *He* was in control.

In spite of the dread boring a pit in his stomach, he manages a small smile as he feels the bite of the engine beneath him. That thrumming energy is fucking *addictive*—he speeds off into the night without another thought, revving the engine.

The wind rushes through his hair, around his ears, along the column of his throat. Raindrops batter him, numbing his cheeks and his lips and clinging to his eyelashes as he rips through the streets and onto the motorway. The explosion of lights before him always takes his breath away, and tonight is no different. The city really is beautiful—it's a constellation, a mini night sky made up of thousands of people living their lives.

You sound like Wille, he thinks, then revs the engine and drives faster.

Driving along here at night has always filled him with a sense of beautiful freedom that he struggles to find anywhere else. Like he's flying, like he's freefalling. Like he's *free*. Now, it just fuels his pain, because—*fuck*, Wilhelm makes him feel like that, too. Makes him feel like his heart has taken wings and flown itself right out of his chest. It's all he can do to pray that one day, Wilhelm will feel that way about him, too. Knowing Simon's luck, though, he's missed his chance.

He had planned to drive around until he felt ready to go home again, but then he catches sight of the turning that will take him towards Bjärstad and he's suddenly filled with a longing for

his mother so strong that it almost makes him crash. He swerves, swearing, and manages to right himself, heart jackrabbiting in his throat. Thankfully, there are few cars around.

It's the thought of going back to his apartment that does it, in the end. Of being so close to Wilhelm that he could almost touch him, but being stuck on his own anyway.

He changes lanes, and after two and a half years, he finally goes home.

It's only once he's stood facing his mother, on the doorstep of his childhood home, that he realises this might be a mistake. She's staring at him, so utterly shocked that Simon worries for a second that there's something wrong with her. Tears gather in her eyes, her lip wobbling, and then spill over onto her cheeks as she takes him in for the first time in years.

"Mamma? Would you say something?" he tries, shifting uncomfortably.

And then he's reeling back as she smacks him squarely across the face, the sound of it ringing loudly in the quiet street. Simon's mouth drops open in shock as the stinging pain blooms across his cheek — his mother has never hit him, not even when he was sneaking out and coming in high.

Before he can process it she's tugging him into a fierce hug, uncaring of his rain-soaked jacket, her body shaking as she sobs into his shoulder.

"M-Mamma, hey, it's okay," he murmurs, stuttering back into life after a moment and stroking a hand down her back. She clutches him too tight, almost painful, and he sucks in a shuddering breath before hugging her back, breathing in her comforting scent — patchouli and rose, a hint of lavender.

Oh, god, he thinks. It feels like his chest is splitting in two — leaving her behind was the hardest thing he's ever done, and he never really recovered from the loss of her. He's been a Mama's boy his whole life, even when he was hurting her by partying and staying out late. Even when he left for good.

When she pulls out of his embrace a part of him breaks. He swallows, lip trembling, and tries not to cry. She looks tired, lines on her face that Simon doesn't remember. He wonders how many of them were put there because of him.

"Where have you *been*?" she spits, raw pain in her voice like it hurts to speak the words.

"I..." Simon trails off — he doesn't know where to start.

"When Sara said she'd found you, I couldn't quite believe it. Simon, I— I thought you were *gone*. I thought you were dead, or— or *worse*. I thought my baby boy had been— oh, *god*."

Simon opens his mouth, but she carries on before he can speak, beginning to pace back and forth agitatedly on the porch.

“And then— *and then*, she tells me that you left on your *own*, ” she throws out, still pacing, unable to look at him. “You just— you just *ran away*?”

“And I thought- what did I do wrong? I know I should have protected you from your father but I never thought you’d just *leave*—“

“Mamma, you did *nothing* wrong,” Simon exclaims, stepping forwards. The tears begin to fall again, making the wind-chapped skin on his cheeks sting as the sobs stick in his throat. Linda spots this, then softens, still hiccuping on sobs of her own as she comes to a stop in front of him. She cradles his face in her hands, the pain in her eyes too much for him to reconcile with.

“How could you do that to me, Simon? It’s been *two years*, ” she murmurs, her voice a broken, soft thing.

“I’m so, *so* sorry, Mamma. I— I was ashamed, and I felt so fucking *guilty*, and I thought you both hated me so I just left. By the time I’d realised what I did it was too late to come back,” Simon babbles, his pain a vice grip around his chest, like thorns have grown around his heart and are bleeding him dry.

His mother’s thumbs brush across his tear-stained cheeks and the force of how much he’s missed her hits him like a punch to the gut.

“You idiot boy,” she says fondly, brown eyes — the same eyes that stare back at him in the mirror every day — flitting between his own. “It was *never* too late to come back.”

“I’m sorry, Mamma,” Simon manages, voice tear-clogged and broken. He’s exhausted, suddenly — wants nothing more than to crawl into his mother’s bed and sleep like a child, curled against her side like it will protect him from himself.

His mother smiles a little — *fuck*, Simon missed her like a lost limb — and steps back. “Come on, *mijo*. Come inside, it’s raining.”

Simon follows her in, and it’s like walking into a dream. There’s the odd-shaped mark in the rug where he dropped a cigarette on the carpet at fourteen and accidentally set it on fire; over there, his Abuela’s favourite jug; one of Sara’s art pieces from high school hangs on the wall above the kitchen door.

It feels like a lifetime since he last set foot in this house. The last time, he was still coming down from a nasty high, and his hands shook so violently he ended up leaving most of his things behind because he didn’t have enough co-ordination to pick them up. That night is a sickening blur in his mind — getting the call, his mother’s panicked voice on the phone, the anger on both her and Sara’s faces when they realised he was high. He spent a long time trying to forget everything that happened, pushing it down and *away*, so now it’s little more than a vague, nauseating fog in his mind.

Simon trails into the kitchen behind his mother, leaning back against the counter and watching as she potters about, making tea. He would stand exactly like this as a teenager, watching her make dinner and offering his advice on seasoning. She would always swat at him with a tea towel, grumbling that she was *the adult here, Simon. I've been cooking delicious meals since before you could walk.*

Once the tea is made — green for Simon, Earl Grey for his mother — they take a quiet seat at the kitchen table. Simon looks to his mother, then away again, his fingers shifting on the mug. He pushes his soaking curls out of his eyes, blinking away the rain water. His skin feels raw, his eyes gritty.

Linda stands, grabbing a tea towel from one of the drawers and handing it to him. As he towels off his hair she sniffs, then says, “I’m sorry I hit you. I shouldn’t have done that.”

Simon places the towel on the kitchen table and then runs his fingers through his curls, attempting to de-tangle them. He cracks a smile at her. “I deserved it.”

She shakes her head. “I still shouldn’t have done it. I swore to myself, when I had children, that I wouldn’t let anything bad happen to them.” She glances at him, then sighs. “I don’t think I did a very good job of that.”

“Mamma...” Simon trails off, reaching out to take her hands in his own. She squeezes them, her smile not quite reaching her eyes, and then she pulls back again. “Drink your tea, Simme.”

Simon sips at his tea — she remembered he likes honey in it, of course she did — and then he bites his lip as he considers her. She looks tired in the harsh light of the kitchen, shadows beneath her eyes he doesn’t remember being there two years ago.

“We have a lot to talk about, probably,” Simon manages finally, pushing through the stilted silence that’s settled around them.

“Probably,” Linda agrees. “But not tonight.” She gestures at his cup. “Come on.”

Simon tips the rest of his tea back and stands from the table, following his mother up the stairs. She’s put up more pictures since he’s been gone; all the way up to the second floor are framed photos of him and Sara as they were growing up. He pauses in front of one of the two of them playing in the mud together, matching cheesy grins on their faces.

His mother chuckles. “We had to give you three baths before you were clean again, that day.”

“Mhm. I remember,” Simon replies, a little wistful. That was before things got especially bad, when their father would still take them to the park and cook dinners, when he was someone to feel safe around.

His bedroom door still has a surfboard key-ring tacked to it, courtesy of Rosh. He touches his fingers to it lightly. She gave it to him as a Christmas present one year — they were thirteen,

he thinks — and he's kept it up on his door ever since. After a moment's deliberation he snaps a picture of it and sends it to Rosh, captioned: *remember this?*

His room is like a time capsule of his seventeen-year-old self — posters of places he used to dream of visiting one day tacked messily to the walls; his ancient keyboard shoved into the corner by his bed; his *fish tank*, holy *shit*. He rushes over to it, crouching down and peering into the glass. There are four fish now, swimming lazily around each other. He notes with delight and disbelief that there's now a tiny snail sitting on the glass.

His mother wanders up next to him. "Felle, Olle and Oski died about a year ago, but I wanted to keep it going for you, in case you came back."

She gazes at the fish tank with something akin to pride in her eyes. He gets it: it's a way to stay connected to him. There's a reason why he cooks so often, and with such care, why he occasionally buys equestrian magazines even though horses have always terrified him.

He stands and pulls his mother into a fierce hug. "I love you, Mamma."

His eyes sting with tears, a lump forming in his throat so that he has to force the words out. He spent so long believing he was despised by the people he loved most and yet here is the evidence staring him in the face: his mother missed him enough to keep his fish tank going, just in case he returned one day.

"I love you too, Simon. And Sara does too, you know?" Linda replies, her voice a gentle balm against his pain.

Simon smiles into her shoulder and blinks away the tears before they fall. "I know."

Linda rubs her hands up and down his arms and then lets him go. "Shall I let you get to bed? You are staying the night, right?"

Simon nods, taking a seat on his bed and pulling his socked feet up beneath him. "Of course, Mamma. But before you go, I'd actually like some advice, if that's okay."

Linda frowns, sitting next to him. "Of course, *mi amor*. What is it?"

"I met someone."

Linda's eyes light up — she *adores* hearing about his love life. "Oh? Who's the lucky guy?"

"His name is Wilhelm — actually you might already know him, do you remember Kristina?"

"Yes, I think so. I only met her once, right?"

Simon nods. "When she came to pick August up from our house."

Linda narrows her eyes. "Oh, yes, I remember. When he turned up here drunk and wouldn't leave."

Simon winces — that had partially been his fault. He'd broken up with Marcus the week prior (for the fiftieth time) and Marcus and August had gone out drinking together. August had had the bright idea to turn up at Simon's *house* to make him get back together with Marcus — honestly, for twenty-year-olds they were *really* fucking stupid sometimes. "Yeah, sorry about that."

"It wasn't your fault, honey. You were only sixteen, what were you supposed to do?"

Simon cringes internally at the reminder of he and Marcus' age gap — they'd lied to his mother that Marcus was eighteen and Simon sixteen when they started dating, and the whole thing still leaves a bad taste in his mouth (Marcus had actually been nineteen, and Simon fifteen). She'd just accepted it — Marcus being the perfect, doting boyfriend that he made himself out to be — because she was too preoccupied with Simon's father and was happy that her son was getting some kind of a reprieve from the house. It wasn't until Simon finally slipped up in front of her — the first time she caught him sneaking back in from one of August's parties — that she realised that Marcus wasn't actually a good influence at all. By then it was too late — Simon believed he was in love, and he cannot be swayed once he's decided something. He still can't believe it took Sara being hospitalised for him to snap out of it.

"Anyways, Wille is her son," he continues, not wanting to think about that anymore.

Linda nods understandingly, oblivious to his internal turmoil, and grins. "Is he handsome?"

Simon gasps. "Mamma!"

She nudges him. "What? I have to know if he's good enough for my boy."

Simon sighs wistfully. "He— *god*, Mamma, he really is. He's better than me."

"Well then he must be something special."

"He really is. But I— I really think I've fucked it up with him."

"What do you mean?"

Simon huffs a sigh — he doesn't even know where to start. "When we first got together, I suggested that we keep things casual because I was too scared to commit, but now it's been so long and so much has happened that I don't— I don't even know if he wants anything to do with me anymore."

"Have you asked him?"

Simon levels her with a look. "Do you think I'd be asking you for advice if I had?"

Linda holds out her palms. "Sorry! Just wanted to make sure."

"Sorry— it's just, I don't know," Simon groans, flopping back onto the bed. Linda pats his knee sympathetically.

“I went to his parent’s place for Christmas.” He lets the words ring in the room, feels them out in his mouth — this idea that for a brief time he was able to pretend that he was Wille’s boyfriend, meeting his parents for the first time. “And it was *perfect*, Mamma. I think—“

“You love him?” His mother finishes his thought for him and Simon groans emphatically, scrubbing his hands over his face.

“Yeah,” he says. “I love him. And that’s fucking terrifying, because even if he forgives me and takes me back, I’m just going to fuck things up all over again. I always do.”

“Simon.”

Simon sits up, staring petulantly at his mother through tear-stained lashes. She passes a hand over the back of his head, and the warmth of her palm takes him straight back to being five, curled up into her in front of the fire as she tucked his too-long curls behind his ears and kissed his forehead.

She smiles at him and strokes his cheek. “Did I ever tell you about my first boyfriend?”

Simon shakes his head.

“I was sixteen, he was my next door neighbour. We’d been friends since we were young, and one day it just— happened. I fell for him quickly, but I was never sure he felt the same — he was one of those boys who just can’t commit to a relationship. We broke up in the end, if you could even call it a breakup, and for years later I wished I had had the courage to just ask him how he really felt about me.”

She sighs, her eyes somewhere far away, and Simon is struck for the first time by how different her life might have been if she hadn’t met Micke. Would she have tracked down her first boyfriend again, found out how he really felt?

“What I’m trying to say is — it’s a beautiful thing to love someone, Simme,” she continues. “Even when they don’t love you back. Now, to me, it sounds like this boy loves you more than you realise. You would be a fool to let that go.”

Simon looks to her, hope beginning to unfurl in his chest. “You really think so?”

“He invited you to his parent’s for *Christmas*, darling. You don’t do that unless you really love someone, trust me.”

Simon chews at the inside of his lip, mulling it over in his mind. It makes sense — when Wilhelm invited him to his parent’s, it had shocked him, but Wille’s face had been quietly hopeful, and Simon found himself agreeing before he could really think about what it meant. He thinks about the times he’s caught Wilhelm looking at him, his gaze faraway and filled with something Simon could never place. How he’d always dart his eyes away again, like he was embarrassed to have been caught looking. He’d never thought about what might’ve happened if he’d just asked him how he felt. The idea that Wilhelm loves him makes his heart feel too big for his body. And he *wants* it. *God*, he wants it.

He still has to fight the urge to cut and run, though. Start all over again in a different city. The thought exhausts him.

He sighs, heart heavy, and turns to his mother. “Can I just— can I just have a hug?”

Linda smiles sympathetically at him and pulls him into her arms. “Of course, honey.”

They’re silent for a while, and Simon focuses on the rhythmic movement of his mother’s chest and feels the fight start to drain out of him. The last two weeks of his life have been— fucking *stressful*.

More like the last two years, he thinks. Leaving home was the hardest decision he ever made, and he doubted himself everyday for *months* trying to make ends meet, the absence of his family an unbearable ache in his soul that he feared would never fade. Over time it got easier to manage, but the guilt never went away. Maybe now he can make amends with them, and it finally will.

He doesn’t know what’s going to happen, now. He’s at a crossroads; on the precipice of a cliff with no way of seeing what is at the bottom. All he can do is fling himself off of it and hope that he lands on his feet.

His mother presses a kiss to his cheek and then cradles his face, brown eyes flitting between his own. “You’ll figure it out, little bear. You always do.”

Simon sighs. “I hope so, Mamma. I hope so.”

Later, Simon curls himself beneath his blankets and pulls out his phone, intent on distracting himself until he can fall asleep. He realises too late that Rosh has messaged him back and swears under his breath, texting rapidly.

rosh:

you’re home?!?!?!?!?

SIMME

answer me you little shit

motherfucker

SIMON JOSÉ ERIKSSON.

i’m calling sara

simon:

DON'T CALL SARA

i'm fine

i came home but everything's fine

don't worry

rosh:

ur going to give me grey hairs

simon:

SORRY

rosh:

why are you home? i thought u said u were never going back

simon:

me and wille had a really bad fight

i'm trying to figure out what to do

coming to see mamma seemed like a good idea at the time

rosh:

and was it?

simon:

yeah, actually

i mean don't get me wrong it was HORRIBLE initially

but i'm glad i did it

i'm a little worried about running into marcus tho

rosh:

that's understandable

especially after he msgd u

did he try again?

simon:

nah

i blocked him

rosh:

good

if i see that fucker ever again i swear to god

simon:

HAHA ik rosh

love u

rosh:

love you too, loser

look after urself ok

i'm just a call away me and ayub will come get u any time u need

simon:

ohhhhh you guys are the BEST. i don't deserve you

rosh:

[selfie of her flipping off Ayub, who's sat facing away from her, playing a video game.]

uhm yes u do. shut up. love u

Simon snorts, clicking his phone off and placing it face down on his bedside table. He's never been more grateful to have Rosh and Ayub in his corner. He hasn't told either of them about what happened with Marcus — how he'd turned up at that party, brushing Simon's angry protests off like they were nothing as he forced a drink into his hand. Simon doesn't even really know what happened — he hadn't drank in over two years before that night, but Marcus just— caught him off guard. Made him feel like that small, stupid fifteen year old that first got involved with him. So he drank, and he let Marcus kiss him even though he really, *really* didn't want to, even though the thought of kissing anyone but Wille makes nausea curl, thick and cloying, in the pit of his stomach. And then, well— then it all went to shit.

The conversation he had with his mother whirls around his mind — she's right, he realises. He's spent so long running from himself, from his feelings, and he's hurt Wille in the

process.

He can't stop thinking about the shine of Wille's eyes, his open, vulnerable expression as his knees hit the floor, so *good*, so *willing*. Simon loves him so much — the way his eyes crinkle when he smiles, the little scar on his cheekbone, his crooked tooth. His endless, boundless love for everyone in his life — Erik, Felice, his parents, his friends, and somehow Simon too. His battered old copy of *Demian*, his plants with silly names like *Bertha* and *Gerald*, his ancient watch and his scuffed old Vans. How he gazes at Simon like there's nowhere else he'd rather be, how he looks at the world and sees it in rose-gold vision, how he can take those images and weave them into poetry.

The moment he realised he was in love with Wilhelm is seared into his mind. Of course it is — Simon had just spilled his heart out to him about *so* much: his dad, Sara, running away. Simon was convinced that Wille would take one look at him and call him pathetic, a fuck-up, or any of the other names he's called himself in the throes of his guilt. But Wille *didn't*. He looked Simon in the eyes and told him it *wasn't his fault*. That he shouldn't blame himself. That he was a victim, too.

The thing is — he was with Marcus for such a long time, and before that he'd never dated anyone, so when Marcus told him things he *believed* them. When Marcus told him, after one too many beers, that he wasn't good enough, that he couldn't stand up to his father, that he needed Marcus to save him, Simon believed him. Eventually he internalised so many things that he can't seem to distinguish between things he believes and things Marcus *made* him believe — they're so well entangled with one another that he can't parse them apart.

So when Wilhelm looked him in the eyes and refuted *every* vile thing he'd ever thought about himself, when he took him in his arms and held him as he shook, as he sobbed, as he panicked, Simon *knew*. He knew that Wille was it, for him.

Simon swallows against the emotion swelling in his chest, rubbing a hand along his collarbone and tipping his head to the ceiling. All he can do is find Wilhelm at his poetry slam and explain himself, and hope that Wille still feels something for him. Hope that there's still something to salvage.

The thought occurs to him, a blossoming bud beginning to unfurl in the depths of his mind, as he lays in his too-small bed that night and stares at the whorls in the ceiling. He never found out what happened to — to *him*. He's not around anymore, obviously, and Simon knew that Sara ending up in hospital would be the last straw — that was the only reason he felt comfortable leaving home. His mother will be able to tell him where Micke is, if he's even still alive, and maybe Simon can get some kind of — closure, if such a thing is even possible.

The decision made, he grabs his phone from the bedside table and unlocks it.

simon:

promise me you won't come looking for me

The response is immediate.

wilhelm:

what?

have you left?

He chews at his lip and ponders how to answer — he doesn't want to worry Wilhelm by telling him what exactly he's going to do, and he's really not sure he could cope with explaining it if he did tell him.

simon:

i have to do something

i'll be back

probably

promise?

Wilhelm takes a while to answer, this time. He watches those three dots appear and disappear with his heart in his mouth — how Wilhelm responds to this is indicative of how angry he is, Simon reasons. He blows out a relieved breath when Wilhelm's response finally comes through.

wilhelm:

i promise.

Simon clicks his phone off and drops his head back onto the pillow. His mind is filled with buzzing thoughts, jumping from topic to topic, cagey and stressed. He's terrified, he realises — if his father is in prison he's really not sure what he'll do. Equally, if he's *dead*, that leaves him completely lost, with nowhere to put this festering anger. He's not sure which he'd prefer.

He sleeps with the light on, that night, for the first time since he was young.

The gravestone has no message, because Micke had no family outside of Linda. Simon stares at it — it's pretty fucking ugly, actually, he thinks vindictively — for a long time, saying nothing. Finally he kicks at a loose stone, watches as it hits the grave, and says, "hey, asshole."

He breathes in deeply — his heart is going a mile a minute — and glances around the graveyard. It's a clear day, for January, the sky a beautiful, cloudless blue above him. He almost wishes it was raining, so this wouldn't feel as weird.

He looks back at the grave. It's untamed, the faded stone surrounded by unruly grass and weeds.

He chuckles humourlessly. "I've gotta say, I'm glad you're dead and I don't have to say this shit to your face because you still scare the *shit* outta me."

The last bit comes out a little choked. Simon swallows against the hot flare of anger behind his breastbone and clenches his teeth.

"I don't know what fucked up thing happened to you to make you the way you were, and frankly I don't fucking care. You were a terrible person, a worse father, and I'll never forgive you for what you did to us. Because I don't *have* to do that," Simon spits, clenching his hands into fists.

"I fucking— I put myself in the most dangerous fucking situations just to get away from you for a few hours. Just to escape from the fear you made me feel. Sara almost *died* because of you."

Simon laughs meanly, tears welling up behind his eyes, and scuffs his trainer into the dirt again. "You know, for the longest time I thought of you as a monster. But monsters don't die. You're just a man. A pathetic, mean, violent man who took his anger out on the people he was supposed to look after."

"*God.*" Simon shakes his head. "Why did you do this to me? To us? We were *kids*. I was a fucking *kid*. I didn't deserve to shoulder that shit."

It's this realisation that finally does it; Simon falls to his knees in the grass, and the dam breaks.

His broken sobbing echoes in the graveyard for a long, long time.

Sara finds him like that, some time later, still on his knees in the dirt, staring watery-eyed at the grave. She takes a seat beside him, cross-legged and bird-like in her movements. They're silent for a while, both looking at the stone. Eventually her hand finds his, the touch grounding, and he feels himself starting to come back.

"Come on. It's raining," she murmurs.

He hadn't even noticed it starting, too caught up in his own grief. Not for his father, but for the man he could have been. For the childhood they could have had. He shakes his head to clear it, letting her pull him to his feet. Stumbles a little as they start to walk; his legs have

gone numb from sitting on them. His eyes feel heavy and there's a pounding starting up between his temples.

"You wanna talk about it?" Sara asks, squeezing his hand.

Simon shrugs. His head feels hollow, like he's scooped out every nasty, ugly thing his father left in there and now he's— empty. "I don't know what to say."

"I'm sorry we didn't tell you, but—"

"I know."

He slows to a stop and turns to face her. Bites his lip, watching her face. Her eyes are wide and dark, fringed with long lashes. They both look more like their mother, thankfully. Simon isn't sure whether he'd be able to handle looking in the mirror and seeing his father staring back.

Simon shivers; the rain has plastered his curls to his forehead, rainwater dripping into his eyes. There's something vindicating about it, though. Like it's all being washed away. Like he's being washed clean.

He takes a shuddering breath, feels it expand his lungs. Lets it out slowly, controlled. Then he says, "I'm sorry, Sara."

Sara twists her mouth to the side, pulling her hand from his and shifting her weight. "I... Simon, I'm sorry, too. I think I've been- blinkered, in my approach to this. All I've been thinking about is how *he* affected me, about how you leaving affected me, without once considering how all of this might have affected you, too. You were a kid, just like me."

Simon swallows, wide eyes on her, scarcely able to breathe.

"Simon," she takes his hands, her dark eyes boring into his own and shining with unshed tears. "I forgive you."

"*Oh,*" Simon sobs, his own tears falling thick and fast as relief fills him. He throws himself at her, wrapping her in his arms, almost tipping them over in his haste. Her arms come up around him — *god*, he appreciates her allowing him this physical contact because she usually hates it — and she rubs up and down his back as he cries.

"It's okay, Simme. I think— I think it's time we stop letting *him* tear us apart. Right?" Sara murmurs, arms tightening around his back.

Simon nods, pulling away, his breath hitching. "I am so fucking sick of crying." He laughs wetly, wiping at his eyes. Sara laughs with him, and he knows he will take the sound with him everywhere he goes.

"I love you, Sara," he says, finally smiling.

She smiles back, placing a hand on his cheek. "I love you too, Simon."

He gets home the day before Wilhelm's performance. Creeps into a dark, empty apartment, casts his gaze out to the balcony. Wilhelm isn't there, but there's a joint still smouldering in their ashtray.

Simon slides open the screen door and steps out into the cold, his socked feet soaking through with rainwater. The railing is freezing beneath his hands, but it helps to ground him as he breathes in and out again, breath clouding in front of his face, counting the lights on the block of flats opposite so that he doesn't look to Wilhelm's side of the balcony.

In the end, Sara sat him down and told him what he'd already mostly decided; that Wilhelm deserves an explanation for everything, and that Simon has to give him everything for once, instead of hiding parts of himself away for fear that they won't be well received. It's still a terrifying thought; he suspects that he will be challenging the way he feels about himself for a long time before he actually believes that he's a good person.

But, he thinks, sighing into the night; if he can love someone like Wille, then there must be some good there, after all.

The bar is surprisingly crowded; Simon got the impression from the outside that it wasn't well-frequented, but the press of bodies in here has proved him wrong. He can see Wilhelm's parents, off to the side, looking out of place in their expensive dinner clothes and gazing around expectantly. Simon carefully avoids Kristina's shrewd eyes and melts into the shadows at the back of the crowd. Felice and the rest of Wilhelm's friends are right before the stage, excited jitters moving through them in waves of giddy energy. It's sweet, the way they care about him. Simon is glad, above all else, that Wilhelm has support.

Wille isn't here — he's almost glad for it, though his heart aches to catch a glimpse of his dark hair, a flash of his smile. Anything just to prove this was all *real*. He watches, leaning against a wall near the door and clutching the coke he bought like a lifeline, as Felice murmurs something in Maddy's ear and then heads off in the direction of the bathrooms. Wilhelm must be on, soon — currently there's a handsome butch on stage reciting a poem about her wife, but Simon didn't grab a programme on his way in so he has no way of knowing when Wilhelm is up.

A nail-biting minute passes. Simon watches the bathroom door like a hawk, heart rate hiking. The woman on stage finishes her poem, and Simon claps with the others without really thinking about it, too preoccupied. Felice returns, giving the others a nod as she does, and Simon ducks his head so she doesn't see him. He looks up again.

And then it's like his heart is outside his body. Twinkling brown eyes, a rueful smirk on his pretty lips, satin shirt and tight trousers, practically vibrating with nerves.

His Wille.

His heart leaps into his throat, air escaping from his lips, and it takes everything in him not to go to him. Just to be closer. Wilhelm sees him, because of course he does. Simon thinks he'd know him blindfolded, thinks they could seek each other out in a room of a hundred others. His dark eyes widen in recognition, eyelashes fluttering, and Simon watches him get on stage with his feelings kept locked behind tightly sealed lips, lest he let go and shout them for everyone to hear.

Wilhelm starts to recite his poem, his voice clear and loud in the hushed room, backlit by the stage lights like some kind of angel. It's beautiful, and he looks so *right* up there on that stage that Simon knows immediately that he's going to go far, one day. He was born to read poetry — Simon is *so* unbelievably proud of him.

He realises, suddenly — *what if becomes sweetheart becomes your lips* — that this poem is about *him*. His knees go weak, and he's grateful for the wall at his back because without it he's sure he would've collapsed right there. His eyes never leave Wilhelm once, not when he says the word *love*, not even as the tears gather in his eyes and blur his vision before they spill over. Could it be?

The room erupts in applause but he can't move, can hardly breathe as he watches Wille surrounded by his friends, rooted to the floor. He's so *beautiful*, so *brehtaking*, laughing and crying and hugging his friends. And he loves Simon. It's this thought that unsticks him; he puts one foot in front of the other until he's behind the rest of the group. Felice says something about drinks, glancing over her shoulder at him, and they all disperse — he'll have to thank her for that later.

And there he is; Simon's beautiful, broken boy, staring at him like he's not quite sure Simon is real. His hair shines auburn in the overhead light, the cut of his waist visible through the sheer satin shirt he's wearing. He's— *god*, he's perfect. Too good for Simon.

"Can we talk?" Simon says, and it feels a little like he's listening to himself speak from underwater.

"Uh— yeah. Yeah, of course."

Wilhelm leads him around the stage and through a door, to what looks like a decently sized storage room. There's a table, stacked with cleaning supplies, a mop and bucket off to the side.

Simon wanders in behind him, chewing at his lip. He watches, unsure of himself, as Wilhelm leans against the table and crosses his arms.

"I'm sorry," Simon blurts. Wilhelm's eyebrows furrow, but he says nothing.

"I'm sorry for what happened— before. For how I handled it," Simon continues.

“Do you regret it?” Wilhelm asks.

“I—” Simon cuts himself off, unsure. “I don’t regret sleeping with you. I regret the way I went about it, the circumstances. But I could *never* regret sleeping with you, Wille.”

Wilhelm smiles — a small, timid thing. “Okay.”

Wilhelm’s gaze on him is a little unnerving — he has this way of looking at you like he’s seeing through everything, to the core of who you are. Simon doesn’t think he even realises he’s doing it, most of the time.

“Where’d you go?” Wilhelm asks after a moment.

Simon breathes a little easier — this is safer territory than the messiness between them. “Home. I went to see my Mamma.”

“Simon, that’s amazing,” Wilhelm says. “How did it go?”

“Well, she slapped me,” Simon says. Wilhelm’s mouth drops open.

“Then she hugged me,” Simon continues. “And now we’re— we’re not all there, yet, but we’re good.”

“Oh, Simme. I’m so glad.”

Simon nods. “Mhm. I guess I just figured it was time I stopped running from myself.”

Wilhelm smiles, then, a genuine smile, and Simon is struck all of a sudden by how wonderful he is. Simon broke his heart — badly, if the poem is anything to go off of — and yet here Wilhelm is, genuinely happy for him because he reconnected with his mother. He steps forward, brings his hands up to cradle Wilhelm’s face. Wilhelm’s smile fades, his pretty eyes flicking between Simon’s in confusion.

“Wille, I’m so sorry,” Simon says. Wilhelm’s eyes flutter shut and then open again. Simon swallows, strokes his thumbs over Wille’s cheekbones. “I treated you like— like *shit*, and I am just so, *so* sorry.”

“Simon, it’s okay—”

“No, it’s not!” Simon releases Wille’s face but doesn’t go far, letting his hands curl loosely into the silken material of Wille’s shirt. “It’s really not, and if you want, I’d like to explain to you why everything happened the way it did.”

Wilhelm nods, eyes shining. “Of course.”

This is it. No turning back, Simon.

Simon steps back, leans against the wall opposite him and stares down at his Converse, trying to sort through the mess in his head so he can explain himself properly. Wilhelm waits, allows him the space to figure things out — *god*, Simon loves him.

“The first time I saw you I thought *fuck, he’s pretty*, and then I thought, *oh no*,” he starts, sucking in a breath and letting it out in a self-deprecating laugh. Wilhelm stares at him, incredulous.

“I knew if I became friends with you I’d end up with a crush on you, so I tried to keep my distance. And then we became friends, and I got to know you properly. And I thought— I’d better keep him at arm’s length. Because he’s *beautiful*, and *good*, and I ruin everything I touch. So I kept my feelings to myself,” Simon continues.

Wilhelm’s eyes widen, his eyelashes fluttering. “You— Simon— oh my *god*.” He buries his face in his hands, shoulders shaking as he laughs into them.

Simon pauses, watching Wille’s face when it emerges again as he processes what he’s saying. There’s relief, he thinks, in the way his shoulders relax. Curiosity in the sparkle of his eyes.

“So, when you asked to keep things casual...?” Wilhelm trails off.

“I knew that if we started dating I’d eventually have to tell you about my past, what happened with Sara, and I— I thought that you’d *hate* me for it. I thought you’d be disgusted with me,” Simon manages.

“Simon, how could you think that?” Wilhelm asks, eyes flashing with hurt.

“Because that’s what I thought about myself.” Simon laughs hollowly. “Still do, a little bit.”

“You have to know I’d never be like that.”

Simon nods. “I know.”

“But then,” he continues, scuffing his shoe into the ground. “That night in the cabin, you were *so* understanding, and I felt every wall I’d ever tried to put up just— crumbling. So I let myself believe it, just for a while. That we could be together. Going to your parent’s place for Christmas— it was *perfect*, Wille. I’ve never felt as happy as I did for those few days.”

“So what happened?” Wilhelm asks, unfolding his arms. “You closed off, I *know* I didn’t imagine that.”

“I overheard you speaking to your Mamma. You said— you said you didn’t have anyone special in your life. I was so *hurt*, and then I started questioning everything because I was like oh, he must not *actually* like me that much, then, and—“

“Simon,” Wille interrupts him, his eyes shining with bemusement.

“Yeah?”

“You wanna know what I said *after* that?” Wilhelm asks. Simon has a feeling that what he’s about to say is going to make him feel like an idiot.

Wilhelm comes forward, his hands finding Simon’s gently. “I said ‘actually, that’s a lie’ and then I told her how crazy I was about you.”

“...*Oh.*”

Wilhelm grins. “Yeah, ‘oh.’”

Simon chews at his lip as the realisation sinks in. There’s still something, though, niggling in the back of his mind. “Well, what about *Gustav*?”

Wilhelm pulls away again, eyes shifting, closing off a little. Simon almost regrets saying it, but they have to figure things out. He has to know what happened.

“I mean, you kind of stonewalled me, Simme,” Wilhelm says, leaning back against the table and crossing his arms. “And then I saw you at that party, and it looked like you just— didn’t even care that we weren’t speaking properly, and then you *kissed* someone! And I thought— how long has he been seeing other people without me knowing? Obviously I know now that you weren’t, but, *fuck*, it *sucked* to see that.”

He takes in a breath. “I am so, *so* sorry about Gustav, though. You can’t know how much I regret it. I didn’t go looking for him — he was at my apartment when I came back from the party, and it seemed like a good idea at the time. Get out of my head, I don’t know. But I really wish I hadn’t done it. I regretted it as soon as he left again. You have to believe me, Simon.”

Simon nods, the hurt and relief and regret mixing together in his chest, making it smart. “I do. I do believe you. And for what it’s worth, I’m really sorry about kissing Marcus. I didn’t want to, not really, he’s just- bad for me. I shouldn’t even have been at that party, really, I was just looking for a way to escape.”

“I get it.”

Simon steps closer to him, takes his hand. “The poem— it was, *fuck*, Wille. It was beautiful.”

“Thank you.”

“Everything you said up there— did you really mean it?”

Wilhelm’s eyebrows twitch inwards. “Of course I did.”

“You really feel that way about me? All those beautiful things?”

Wilhelm smiles, confused. “I— yeah, Simon, I do.”

Simon closes his eyes, the relief that crashes over him so sweet he almost can’t bear it. *He still has a chance.*

He opens his eyes again, squeezes Wille’s hand, and admits the most honest thing he’s said in a while. “Sometimes I look at you, and it’s like— it’s like I’m about to burst, or something. You make me feel so *much*, Wille, and that’s fucking *terrifying*.”

Wilhelm's mouth falls open, his bottom lip trembling as his eyes shine. Simon lets go of his hand to cup his face, and smiles even as he feels himself starting to tear up. "The truth is, I'm so in love with you I don't know what to do with myself, half the time."

He pulls back again, watching Wilhelm's face. "And, I— I know I fucked everything up, *really* bad. If you never want to see me again, I understand."

"God, you are such a fucking *idiot*." And then Wilhelm's kissing him, pouring every inch of himself into it. Simon arches into the kiss with a surprised noise, pressing their chests together and linking his arms around the back of Wilhelm's neck. Wilhelm's wide palms find his hips and he kisses him sweetly, parting their lips just to lean in again and press another kiss to the corner of Simon's mouth.

He pulls back after a moment, lips splitting into a grin that Simon can't help but answer. He nudges their noses together and Simon's fingers flex on the back of his neck.

"I've been in love with you since that first time you stepped onto my balcony," Wilhelm admits, voice hushed like he's telling Simon a secret.

Simon's heart jumps in his chest. "When I scared the shit out of you?"

"Yep. Then."

Fuck.

"Oh, I *love* you," Simon murmurs, and kisses him again.

Wilhelm makes a little *mmph* noise that Simon immediately commits to his memory before melting into it, holding his face like Simon is precious, thumbs skating over Simon's jaw.

God, I missed this, Simon thinks.

He nips at Wille's bottom lip until he opens up for him, their tongues touching and sending bolts of electricity down his spine. It's like this move flips a switch in Wilhelm because his grip tightens and he groans low in the back of his throat, kissing him with a single-minded focus. His hands find Simon's hips again, crowding him back into the table until Simon's sliding up onto it. He vaguely registers the sound of several things falling to the floor, but he's too preoccupied with getting his hands on as much of Wille as he physically can to care.

Simon opens his legs, gasping when Wilhelm tugs him forwards until their hips connect. Wilhelm bites at his lip, hands slipping beneath Simon's shirt, blunt nails scratching lightly at the skin there in a way that sets Simon alight. Simon keens, certain that if he was standing his knees would have turned to jelly, and presses forwards, chasing the pleasure that every one of Wilhelm's touches brings him.

After a moment Wilhelm parts their lips with a slick sound that makes Simon swallow against a flare of arousal. Simon tries to follow him, desperate for more after being deprived of this for a week. He tilts their foreheads together as they pant, chests heaving. Wilhelm nudges their noses together.

“Let’s go home.”

The journey from the bar to Wilhelm’s apartment goes by in a blur, punctuated by heated glances and lingering touches. They have to stop to talk to Wilhelm’s parents, and Simon is extremely grateful that they had the foresight to tame their appearances before leaving the store room so they look less like they were just making out. Kristina envelops them each in a warm hug — Simon sneaks a picture of her and Wilhelm embracing, knowing Wille will be grateful for it later.

By the time they get home Simon’s already half-hard in his jeans, unable to resist touching Wille in any way he can as they walk together down the hall and unlock the door to Wille’s apartment.

Finally, the door shuts behind them with a deafening *click*, and they watch each other in the dim light of the room.

Wilhelm steps forwards until Simon’s back is against the door, his hands finding light purchase on Simon’s hips.

And then he just *looks*.

Simon tries not to squirm beneath his intense gaze, forcing himself to meet Wilhelm’s eyes even as hot pleasure skitters down his spine. He swallows, shivering as Wille’s dark eyes dart down to track the movement of his throat.

Wilhelm’s hand finds his jaw, and he thumbs at Simon’s bottom lip. “So pretty.”

Simon’s knees go weak. “Kiss me.”

Wilhelm does, crushing their mouths together, the line of his body hot and hard against Simon’s, pressing him against the door. Simon moans into his mouth, scratching his fingernails through the short hair at the base of Wille’s skull. Warm palms push beneath his shirt, hiking it up, Wilhelm’s fingertips tracing up his ribs. He finds his nipples, tweaks one, and Simon gasps into his mouth, moaning when Wilhelm smirks, sharp and dangerous, against him.

Wilhelm dips his head, nosing at Simon’s pulse point, breathing him in. Simon shivers, bares his neck a little more, and inhales sharply when Wilhelm takes the hint and kisses him there. Shifts his hips up and forward as Wille takes his skin into his mouth, sucking harshly while Simon shakes beneath him. *Fuck, he’s good at this.*

“Missed your mouth,” Simon breathes, grinding against him slowly. Wilhelm’s hands are so *big*, gripping his waist, palming his ass as he rolls his hips into him, sparking hot pleasure behind Simon’s navel. He pulls back briefly to push Simon’s shirt up and over his head,

before he's on him again with renewed intensity, kissing at his jaw and down his neck, biting harshly until Simon gasps and squirms beneath him.

Simon drags him back up so that he can lick into his mouth again, getting lost in the heated slide of their tongues, pressing their cocks together through the material of their trousers and whining when the friction isn't enough. They break apart to scrabble at Wilhelm's shirt buttons, stripping the shirt from his shoulders and discarding it on the floor.

Simon dips his head to press a gentle kiss to Wilhelm's right shoulder, skating his fingertips up Wille's ribs as the other man shivers and cards his fingers through the curls on the back of Simon's head, the move tender in the midst of their desperation for each other. They have time, now, Simon realises, and kisses him again, joy swelling beneath his breastbone.

He looks up at Wille, into pretty brown eyes turned almost black with arousal. Murmurs, "I love you."

A kiss to his jaw. "I love you."

His sternum. "I love you."

The smooth plane of his stomach. "I love you."

Simon falls to his knees, pulling Wilhelm's belt from its loops until it falls to the floor. Wilhelm looks down at him, stroking a thumb over his cheek, and says, "I love you, too."

His voice is rough with emotion, raw and low, rumbling out of his chest in a way that makes Simon shiver.

Wilhelm watches intently as Simon takes him into his mouth, his gaze never wavering even as he groans quietly, his hand gently petting at Simon's curls. He's hot and heavy on Simon's tongue, filling his senses, burning him from the inside out. Simon moans desperately, takes him in further, swallows convulsively around his cock.

Wilhelm swears, his thumb finding the edge of Simon's mouth, where his lips are stretched around him, and he slips the tip of it in beside his cock. Simon moans in surprise, eyes fluttering shut.

The stretch makes his jaw ache, but it's so *filthy* that he just takes it. Wants to take everything Wille will give him, and more.

"Fuck, baby," Wilhelm lets out, his pupils blown wide in awe. "So perfect for me."

Simon breathes out through his nose, palming himself through his jeans, unable to resist the heat building between his legs. Wilhelm tilts his hips forward, just a little, hitting the back of Simon's throat and making him swallow, obscene noises escaping from him. It's so—*fuck*, so perfect, to be used like this. It's exactly what he needed, after everything. To prove to himself, to Wille, that he's *his*. In every way possible.

"Shit, Simme," Wilhelm moans, bracing himself against the wall and fucking into his mouth with little circles of his hips, his eyes fluttering shut. "I'm— ah, I'm getting close."

Simon pulls back slightly and Wilhelm cracks his eyes open again, moving back so that Simon can pull off.

“You okay?” he asks, panting, his chest flushed deliciously.

Simon nods, clearing his throat, tasting Wille on his tongue and squirming in place a little. “Want you.”

“Like—?”

“Mhm.”

Wilhelm exhales strongly through his nose and then steps back, offering him a hand up. Simon takes it, wincing as his knees creak in protest, and lets out a giggle when Wilhelm tugs him into him with a strong hand at his waist. Wille kisses him sloppily, groaning when he tastes himself on Simon’s tongue, and stumbles backwards blindly to the bedroom, still placing messy kisses on Simon’s lips. Simon follows him, hands roaming wherever he can reach, relishing in the feel of Wilhelm’s skin against his palms.

They tumble onto the bed, and Simon pushes himself between Wilhelm’s legs, licking into his mouth and groaning when Wille tugs at his hair. Sparks tingle across his scalp, that perfect burn, and his hips kick forward without him asking them to. Wilhelm smiles against his mouth and Simon pinches his thigh, grinning back when Wilhelm yelps and then moans as Simon digs his thumb into the sensitive skin.

“Evil,” Wilhelm breathes, eyes flitting across Simon’s face.

“You love it.”

“I love you.”

Simon just kisses him again.

Together they tug at Simon’s jeans until they’re off his legs, and Wilhelm tosses them into the corner of the room with little preamble, rolling them playfully until Simon’s beneath him. Simon cackles as Wilhelm manhandles him, so full of joy and love he can hardly stand it.

Wille watches him, open adoration on his face, hanging over him and pressing their cocks together. Simon sobers quickly, breath hitching as Wilhelm rolls his hips. He nudges their noses together, then sighs as Wilhelm buries his face in Simon’s shoulder, grinding against him. Simon skates his fingertips over Wilhelm’s shoulder blades, moving with him, scratching his fingers through the short hair at the back of Wilhelm’s head.

“Baby.”

Wilhelm lifts his head to look at him.

“Lube’s in the drawer,” Simon says, nodding to his bedside table.

“I know.” Wilhelm smirks, smug, and reaches over to tug the drawer open, producing the lube bottle and a condom. He sits back on his heels, his cock flushed red against his stomach, staring down at Simon like he’s the most beautiful thing he’s ever set eyes on. Simon squirms, hiding his face. He lets out a quiet yelp when Wilhelm pushes his knees apart, hiking one foot up with gentle, warm palms.

“Missed seeing you like this,” Wilhelm murmurs, his hands leaving burning trails across every inch of skin he can reach. “*Simon.*”

Wilhelm says his name like a prayer; breathless, reverent. Simon buries his face in his arm, hot pleasure flashing through him at the snap of the lube bottle. “Please...” He breathes, heart pounding. He has a brief flash of himself blindfolded, tied to the bed, completely at Wilhelm’s mercy and the thought is so arousing he files it away to be examined later, swallowing thickly.

A gentle hand circles his wrist, pulls his arm away from his face. “Wanna see you, Simon.”

Jesus. “Okay.”

The initial stretch is delicious — really, a week is far too long to go without having him like this — and Simon can’t stop the whine that slips out as Wilhelm scissors his fingers, dark eyes on Simon’s face. He feels his cheeks start to heat, but he can’t draw his gaze away, trapped by him.

“Will you kiss me?” Simon manages, choking on a moan when Wille finds his prostate. Wilhelm obliges him, leaning forwards and taking his mouth in a searing kiss. He pulls Simon’s lip between his teeth as his fingers sink deep into him, and Simon really could stay here forever, wrapped in his arms.

“Mmm, ready, Wille,” he pipes up after a while, when the need gets too much for him to ignore.

“You sure?”

Simon nods, wincing a little as Wilhelm pulls his fingers from him. Wilhelm squeezes his knee in apology before finding the condom packet and going to rip it open. Simon grabs his wrist before he can. “Wait.”

Wilhelm frowns. “What is it?”

Simon carefully pulls the condom packet from between Wilhelm’s fingers and places it on the bedside table. Then he takes Wilhelm’s face in his hands and says, “I want to feel you.”

Wilhelm closes his eyes reflexively. “Are you sure?”

“Mhm,” Simon replies. “I’m clean.”

“I got tested, after Gustav. I’m clean, too.”

Simon smiles. “Good. Now please don’t mention his name again.”

Wilhelm chuckles. “Yes, sir.”

They both gasp at the first contact as Wilhelm pushes in achingly slow, panting out low moans. That slow, aching drag has Simon moaning desperately, circling his hips to push him in deeper. He pushes his head back into the pillows, gripping onto Wilhelm’s shoulders for dear life, feeling the slight shake in his taut muscles as Wille holds himself back.

And then he’s buried to the hilt, forehead pressed to Simon’s shoulder, filling him up, and it’s like the world around them stands still. Wilhelm lifts his head and kisses him, gentle and soft. “Okay?”

He sounds completely wrecked, cheeks flushed, hanging heavenly and beautiful above him. And he’s *Simon’s*.

“More than okay,” Simon whispers back.

Wilhelm takes him like that, wrapping Simon in his arms, face-to-face, kissing him gently as he rocks in and out, drawing sounds Simon didn’t even know he was capable of making out of him. Simon’s mouth hangs open, seeing stars, eyebrows pulling together. It’s not just the feeling — it’s the knowledge that what they’re doing is irreversible. After this, a part of them will always belong to the other. Wilhelm is the only person to have him like this, to look him in the eye and sink into him without anything between them, skin on skin on endless skin. It’s almost too much, overwhelming. Simon feels the rush of it crash through him and moans brokenly, squeezing his eyes shut and turning his face into the pillow.

“Sweetheart,” Wilhelm murmurs, slowing. “You’re crying.”

He hadn’t even realised, too caught up in the sheer love coursing through his body, the feeling of completeness. “I’m okay,” he manages, smiling, and kisses Wille. “I just love you.”

Wilhelm thumbs the tears away from Simon’s face, where they’ve rolled sideways into the pillow. “Oh, *Simon*. I love you too.”

“Don’t stop,” Simon begs, hands tightening on Wille’s shoulders. “Please. Need you.”

Wilhelm pulls back, gently manoeuvring Simon’s legs to rest on his shoulders and lining himself up again. This time when he sinks in the angle is different, and Simon’s eyes roll back at the feeling of him buried so *deep*. He feels so full, completely consumed by everything Wille is, clutching the pillow beneath his head desperately as he starts to fuck into him.

“Baby,” Wilhelm pants breathlessly. “*Simon*.”

“Mmh— ah, fuck, Wille,” Simon pants, hand flying out to grip the headboard, pushing back against him and meeting his thrusts. Wilhelm’s grip on his thighs is bruising, the sound of their skin and their panting breaths deafening in the otherwise silent room.

“Not gonna last,” Wilhelm warns, his pace quickening, thrusts growing sloppy.

“*Fuck*, Wille, please. Inside,” Simon sobs. Wilhelm stutters, hips jerking as he moans brokenly in response.

And then he’s *everywhere*. Grinding deep inside Simon, his length hot and throbbing, filling him up. *So full*. The feeling of it tips Simon over the edge and he comes with a shout, painting his chest and writhing against the sheets, waves of white-hot pleasure crashing over him. Wille’s hips are still fucking into him, chasing the last dregs of his release, and Simon’s cock twitches weakly as he brushes against his prostate, whining against the overstimulation.

Finally he slows to a stop, his grip loosening, and he strokes over Simon’s thighs as he catches his breath before removing Simon’s legs from his shoulders. Simon shakily locks them around his waist, keeping him inside.

When he goes to pull out Simon snags his wrist weakly. “Stay.”

He doesn’t want to let this moment go just yet. Wants to remember how it feels to have Wilhelm inside him, wants to feel where they’re connected even when Wille pulls out. Wilhelm looks down at him, his dark eyes shining with emotion, and he nods.

“I love you, Simon,” Wille murmurs, leaning down to press his lips to Simon’s forehead. It’s so tender that Simon finds himself tearing up again. He reaches up and cups Wilhelm’s face, brushing his thumbs over his heated cheeks.

“I love you.”

Later, freshly showered and wrapped in Wilhelm’s arms, Simon falls asleep to the sound of the heartbeat thrumming beneath the skin of Wille’s chest. He dreams of a pair of honey-brown eyes, the feeling of hands brushing over his skin, a crown glinting golden in the light of the sun, and he wakes with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

hiiiiiiii!!!!!! new chapter!!!!!!

our boys finally figured it out. only took them nine chapters and a hell of a lot of grief for everyone involved. *sighs*

so so so excited about this chapter, when the idea came to me to write from simon's POV i actually screamed hahaha

next chapter will be back to wille's POV though

figuring out how to write linda from simon's perspective was tough, because i have my own opinions on her as a parent (especially in this fic). simon is slowly starting to realise that he isn't the only person who should have to shoulder the blame for things that have happened, and that his mother probably should've protected him more, from

marcus if nothing else. still, i think i got the balance down pretty well, so. simon in this fic is just so guilt-ridden, and i want to give him the biggest hug because he was failed!! in so many ways!! my baby :(

love, hugs and kisses to you all, but especially to willa, veri, chan and everyone else on twitter who've been cheering me on <3

gimme comments like im a little man sitting on ur shoulder pls

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

my advice to you reading this chapter is that you listen to 'you make loving fun' by fleetwood mac from FOUR MONTHS LATER until the end
hope you enjoy <3

Chapter Notes

“You, you make loving fun // And I don't have to tell you but you're the only one.” -
You Make Loving Fun, Fleetwood Mac.

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

X

The light that wakes him is golden and gentle, streaming in through the open curtains. Wilhelm blinks sleepily, confused, his skin just this side of too warm and a weight on his chest he can't place. He shifts, his eyebrows pulling together as he tries to figure out what's stopping him from moving. There's a sigh, this gentle exhalation that skates across his neck, followed by a soft, disgruntled whine.

Finally, he cottons on, and everything comes flooding back.

The fight. The poetry slam. *Simon*.

Simon, who's sleeping soundly against his chest, curls falling prettily over his forehead. His face is smooth and peaceful, fingers curled loosely over Wilhelm's bicep. Wilhelm feels a rush of affection for the man in his arms and shuts his eyes, swallowing. Opens them again to make sure that this is real, and Simon isn't about to slip through his fingers like water. But there he is; the tops of his cheeks glowing a soft pink, eyelashes fluttering against them as he dreams, beautiful and peaceful and *real*.

He hovers his fingertips over Simon's shoulder, down his nose, across his cheek. Never touching, just watching the contrast in their skins, reminiscing on last night. Flashes of memory — Simon, on his knees; the flush that appeared on his cheeks; his voice curling around the words *I love you*; how he'd felt around him, that all encompassing feeling of *completeness* as Wilhelm entered him.

The weight of Simon on his chest is something he thought he'd never feel again. After that last fight, when Simon just— *left*, he was half-certain that that was it. That he'd be left wondering for the rest of his life what could have been. But then he came *back*. Wilhelm thinks that maybe he might be a little lucky after all, if he got a second shot at this.

He thinks about what Simon said last night, about how he kept Wilhelm at arm's length for fear that Wilhelm wouldn't like the real him. Thinks about how Simon keeps trying to push him away, how he's convinced that he's not a good person, how guilty he feels over what happened to Sara when it *wasn't his fault*. Can't help but wonder where Simon's mother was, in all of this. Why she didn't protect him. He knows very little about the woman, only that Simon adores her and that she was abused the same as Simon and Sara, but...

But he also knows that something made Simon the way he is, made him believe he wasn't good enough for love, or even basic respect, and Wilhelm is willing to bet that that thing was Marcus. Linda knew they were dating, Simon told him that, and it just doesn't sit right with him. Either way, he needs to speak to him about it all. Wants to know how Simon feels — about himself, about Marcus, about his mother.

Simon shifts against him, stirring him from his thoughts. Wilhelm watches him wake, like the sun peeking over the horizon, as he sighs and cracks his eyes open. When they land on

Wilhelm he smiles, soft and content, and shifts to place a hand on his cheek. “Hey.”

Wilhelm can’t help it; thinks that Simon looks so beautiful like this, in his bed, in his home, in his heart. He smiles back, tilts his head to place a kiss on Simon’s palm. “Hey.”

“You have no idea how happy I am to wake up in your bed,” Simon rumbles, shifting and stretching, the sheet slipping off of his shoulder and revealing an expanse of tanned skin that Wilhelm can’t wait to map out beneath his tongue.

He slides an arm over Simon’s waist, feeling the lean muscle shift beneath the skin as he draws him closer. “Hmmm, I knew you were only with me for my satin sheets.”

Simon smirks — a joyful, cheeky thing that Wilhelm wants to kiss for the rest of his life. “Ah, you’ve caught me. I’m gonna divorce you just to take the bedframe with me when I leave.”

Wilhelm quirks a brow, stroking across Simon’s waist. “Oh? When did we get married?”

Simon’s eyes widen. “Uh— I— I mean—”

Wilhelm bursts into laughter. “Oh, you’re so cute. I’m just kidding, baby. It’s a little early for marriage, don’t you think, seeing as I haven’t even asked you to be my boyfriend yet?”

Simon sobers, his smile fading a little. “Will you?”

“Hm?”

Simon tilts his head a little, nerves creeping into his expression. “Will you ask me to be yours?”

Oh. He’s worried.

“God, I love you,” Wilhelm murmurs. Then he pushes up onto his knees, the sheets pooling around his waist, and he offers Simon a hand. “Simon José Eriksson, you are the best thing that’s ever happened to me. You’re the best person I will ever know, and you’re the only person I want to be with. Will you do me the absolute honour of being my boyfriend?”

He’d intended for it to come across as lighter than it obviously did — Simon’s eyes start to shine with unshed tears, and he takes his hand until they’re face to face. Simon cups his cheeks, eyes flicking between Wilhelm’s own, full of an emotion Wilhelm can’t place. “Till death do us part.”

Wilhelm swallows thickly. “Perfect.”

Simon presses a sweet kiss to his lips, gentle and easy. When he pulls away Wilhelm can’t help but smile, caressing the skin of his back.

“What do you want for breakfast?” he asks after a moment.

Simon closes his eyes, considering. “Hmmm. Croissants.”

Wilhelm gasps. “Ohhh, *yes*. Croissants.”

“I have to ask. When we fought, after— you know.”

Wilhelm pauses, the memories of that night flooding back. “Mhm?”

Simon leans a little further back into him. “You said you’d taken something. That August coerced you into it?”

Wilhelm stiffens, then forces himself to relax again, stroking a thumb over Simon’s shoulder. “I was wondering whether you were going to bring that up.”

He can see Simon fiddling with the sheet, twisting it around his finger and then releasing it. Finally, he says, “is it— is that something you do a lot?”

Wilhelm shakes his head, though Simon can’t really see it. “*No*, definitely not. Maybe when I first left home. Not anymore.”

Simon relaxes a little. “Okay. I guess I’m just asking— are we gonna have to worry about it, in the future? If we fight?”

Wilhelm mulls it over in his mind, resting his eyes on the middle distance. “I can’t say what’ll happen in the future, but I definitely don’t plan on doing anything like that again. It was really stupid of me. I was just so hurt and super drunk, and then August offered it to me and I just— took it. I didn’t even really think about it at the time, honestly.”

Simon hums. “Okay. I— um, for what it’s worth, I don’t plan on doing anything like that either. And I promise to talk to you in the future, if something’s upsetting me. I can’t promise it’ll go well, because—”

“We’re us.”

“Exactly.” Simon laughs. “I think we miscommunicate more than any couple I’ve ever seen.”

Wilhelm chuckles, leaning his head back against the wall. He squeezes Simon’s shoulder. “I promise not to keep anything from you if you promise not to keep anything from me?”

Simon nods, tilting his head to the side and accepting a kiss. When they part again he smiles, slow and easy, and Wilhelm thinks he’s never going to get used to having him like this, pliant and easy, all for him.

“Sounds good,” Simon murmurs, reaching out to place a hand on his cheek. Wilhelm presses his face into it, drops a kiss on the sensitive skin on the inside of Simon’s wrist. Simon’s smile turns sharp, his eyes darkening. Wilhelm takes a hold of his wrist before he can escalate

anything — though, *god*, he always wants him to — shifting and putting a little distance between them. Simon's eyebrows twitch inwards in confusion.

"Well," Wilhelm says, unsure of how to broach this topic. "In the spirit of that, I wanted to talk to you about something, and I want you to hear me out without, like, freaking out?"

Simon pulls back a little, concern creasing between his brows as he turns to properly face him. "Oh, that doesn't sound good."

Wilhelm sits up a little straighter, fumbling, not wanting to scare Simon. "It's not really *bad*, but I'm worried you're gonna get mad at me for saying it."

Simon opens his mouth, then closes it again. "Well— uh, just say it, I guess," he says, shrugging. "I promise not to react until you're done."

"You know Alex's lake house? When you told me about what happened with your sister?" Wilhelm starts.

"...Yeah."

"I've been thinking about all of it, and— uh, the way you feel about it."

Simon narrows his eyes in confusion. "What do you mean?"

Wilhelm sighs. "You kept saying that you were— *bad*. Like it was all your fault."

Simon's eyes flash with understanding, that guarded look appearing in them. Wilhelm knows he doesn't want to talk about this, but it's been weighing on his mind since that night and now that he finally feels like they're on even ground again he wants to talk about it, even though it's uncomfortable for both of them.

Simon twists his mouth to the side — *god*, he looks like Sara when he does that — fingers twisting in the sheet. Finally, he bites out, "because I was supposed to be there for her. I was supposed to protect her, and I—"

He cuts himself off, huffing a sigh.

Wilhelm reaches out and takes his hand, the palm warm against his own. He squeezes it, smiling encouragingly when Simon squeezes back.

"But shouldn't someone have been there for *you*?" he points out softly. "Shouldn't someone have protected you? Like— uh, like your Mamma?"

Simon frowns. "But she was—"

"Not saying that I'm judging her, Simme, but you were a *child*. Not just that, but you were a child who was acting out, *and* who was in an abusive relationship with a guy *way* older than him. You shouldn't have to shoulder all of the blame for what happened."

Simon sighs, rolling his lips together. He shifts on the bed, drawing his knees up to his chest and breaking their contact to pillow his arms on them. “I have thought, sometimes—” He breaks off, looking pissed at himself. “I’ve thought that maybe— she should’ve been able to see that something wasn’t right with me, you know? I think she was just so preoccupied with trying to survive herself that it slipped her mind, I don’t know.”

He shrugs, and Wilhelm can see the storm-clouds of grief starting to darken his eyes. “And then, when she finally cottoned on that Marcus wasn’t the doting boyfriend she thought he was, it was too late.”

By the end of the sentence he sounds a little choked up, eyes shining. Wilhelm’s heart breaks for him — thinks about sixteen-year-old Simon, out of his depth and unable to get out. He reaches out, gently grasping his ankle and swiping a thumb over the bone.

“I’m really, really sorry you had to go through all of that, Simon,” he murmurs, earnest, ducking to look Simon in the eye. “You didn’t deserve it. Someone should’ve been looking out for you.”

Simon’s eyes well up, and he shakes his head, chuckling.

“Ah, you’re gonna make me cry, stop it,” he commands, wiping at his eyes.

Wilhelm chuckles, squeezing his ankle. “Sorry, sorry.”

He gives him a moment to collect himself, then tentatively asks, “have you thought about going to therapy?”

Simon shrugs. “Yeah, but, I always thought it wasn’t worth it, I don’t know.”

“I went, when I was younger,” Wilhelm admits.

Surprise flashes across Simon’s face. “You did?”

Wilhelm nods. “Yeah. I was going through some shit, figuring out who I was, who I wanted to be, and my therapist helped me do it.”

Simon hums, obviously intrigued — but Wilhelm will tell him about that another time. He jostles his ankle a little until Simon smiles. “Just— think about it, yeah?”

Simon looks at him for a second, chewing at the inside of his cheek. Finally, he says, “okay. Okay, I will.”

“Awesome sauce.” Wilhelm cringes immediately, screwing his face up. “God, why did I say that?”

Simon bursts into laughter, the sun peeking through grey clouds, and pulls himself up off of the bed. “Come on, we have to get dressed at some point.”

Wilhelm chuckles with him, leaning back against the headboard. He watches him turn away, admiring the elegant lines of his body — the smooth plane of his back, down the knobs of his

spine, the supple curve of his—

“Eyes up here, mister.”

Wilhelm drags his eyes up slowly until they meet Simon’s. Simon cocks a brow at him.

Wilhelm shrugs, smiling, cheeky and uncaring. “Can you blame me?”

Simon smirks, his eyes tracking down Wilhelm’s chest to where the blanket is covering him.

“Hmm. No, I suppose I can’t.”

@froggieprince:

him <3

[a picture of simon and wilhelm’s hands intertwined over wilhelm’s bedsheets]

-> **@felehrenchroma:**

OH MY GODDDDDDDDDDD OH MY GOD OH MYGOD

-> **@nilz:**

oh god they’re going to be insufferable

-> **@MILFhuntr:**

we have to break them up

-> **@froggieprince:**

ummmmm?????

-> **@nilz:**

genuinely so happy for u guys tho #slay

-> **@simmesimon:**

thanks.. i think?

the hurricane: KATRINA

wilhelm:

guys

we're all free this weekend correct

nils:

yup

vincent:

yah

felice:

yes :)

sara says she is too

stella:

me and freddie are free!! what are u thinking mr. man

wilhelm:

we should go to the beach

on the train

have drinks around a bonfire like we used to in first year

fredrika:

OMG if i wasn't a lesbian i'd kiss you rn

stella:

?? babe.

simon:

ummmm???? hands off my man

vincent:

oh my god you're already unbearable

i regret getting you two together

wilhelm:

you had nothing to do with it?????

vincent:

...

ok fine maybe i didn't but i'm still regretting it

wilhelm:

Bitch.

rosh:

i am super down for drinks around a bonfire rn

my classes are kicking my ass already

maddy:

babe we've been back two days

rosh:

?? shut up??

ayub says he's in too he's just too lazy to pick his phone up and answer

simon:

are you hanging out without me???

fuckers

rosh:

uhhhh sorry you've been too busy getting fucked down to answer our calls

simon:

ok can we change the subject please.

rosh:

HAHAHAHAHA

wilhelm:

anyways

nils:

HELPPPP

this is too good

wilhelm:

ANYWAYS.

that's a yes from everyone?

meet up outside me and simon's @ 6pm sat?

felice:

sounds good!!

vincent:

if ur not too busy banging to answer the door

wilhelm:

vincent i know where you live.

The night sky is clear, inky black and studded with stars, hanging above them like a blanket. The fire crackles, warmth casting over Wilhelm's face and curling in his chest like a cat. He knocks his shoulder into Simon's, taking a swig of his beer and feeling the cool liquid slide down his throat. They've been here for about an hour now, talking and drinking and laughing, sprawled across logs around the fire, and Wilhelm feels so full of adoration for them all that he's sure his chest is about to burst; his heart coming tumbling out onto the sand. The difference now is that he knows his friends would catch it before it even touched the floor.

"To love!" Wilhelm shouts, hoisting his beer in the air until everyone else clinks their bottles against his own. Vincent makes a gagging noise and Wilhelm gives him the finger, chuckling when he sticks his tongue out at him in response.

Nils' shitty speaker is nestled into the sand next to one of the logs, gentle guitar drifting out of it. Wilhelm lets the sound wrap around him; the chatter from his friends, the crackle of the fire, the soft vocals floating from the speaker, and finds himself starting to tear up. He looks out at them all, wobbly smile in place, and feels Simon's hand find his own. He loves all of them so *much*: Vincent and Nils wrestling over the last beer; Sara pressed close to Felice's side, offering her a rare smile as they murmur at each other; Stella lying on one of the logs, pointing up at the stars and giggling to herself as Fredrika draws patterns on her arm with a

finger; Ayub, Rosh and Maddy attempting to play cards together even though the wind keeps tugging them out of their hands. Wilhelm suppresses a giggle as Ayub flails comically trying to catch one of the cards and ends up accidentally knocking the rest of Maddy's hand out of their grip.

And then there's Simon. Pressed warm against his side, smiling privately into his can of soda, watching them all with the same love in his eyes that Wilhelm feels coursing through his veins. The fire casts him in a gentle glow, turning the edges of his curls a blazing ginger; Wilhelm's burning boy. Wilhelm finds his knee, squeezing until those pretty eyes are turned on him, and then he leans in for a kiss.

Simon cups his cheek, kissing him back. When they part his eyelashes flutter and he tilts his head a little, cheeks starting to glow that delicious pink.

"What was that for?" he murmurs, licking his lips a little and giggling when Wilhelm's eyes track the movement hungrily.

"I just love you," Wilhelm replies, still watching his mouth.

Simon nudges their noses together, kisses him again. "I love you, too."

The sea air is freezing against his back, the sand cold beneath his toes, but with Simon by his side, surrounded by all of their friends, Wilhelm thinks he's never felt warmer.

FOUR MONTHS LATER:

The wind sings through the trees at the edge of the grove, bringing with it the scent of late spring; sweet blossoming trees and heady grass pollen. There's music drifting from a speaker somewhere — a 70s playlist Erik has been listening to since he was fourteen — but Wilhelm isn't really paying attention. He only has eyes for the man in front of him.

If Simon notices him staring he doesn't let on, chatting happily with Felice, a flute of sparkling apple juice balanced carefully between his elegant fingers.

It's warm for late May, feeling more like a mid summer's day, and Simon is breathtaking in a soft linen shirt and dress pants, open at the collar to reveal his sun-warmed skin. His ears sparkle with diamond earrings, the light dancing across his features, his eyes shining a soft honey-gold in the setting sun. Wilhelm might've had a little too much to drink, because all he can think of is dragging his boyfriend off to the nearest hidden area and having his way with him.

He pulls his eyes away from the hollow of Simon's throat to find Stella staring at him, teasing judgement in her green eyes. She snorts when he flushes, ducking his head. "You're

ridiculous.”

“Shut up, Stells. You’re the same with Freddie,” Wilhelm gripes.

“Hmm, but it's not nauseating when I do it,” Stella replies airily, sipping her champagne. Wilhelm sticks his tongue out at her.

He inhales deep, letting the warm air stretch his lungs, a smile lifting his lips. He loves days like this, where happiness bounces from one person to another until the air is light and free. His brother is on the dance floor with Maria, twirling her through the other dancers with all the air of a prince. She’s a force in white lace, joy shining from her. Wilhelm’s grandmother’s pin is fastened in her curly hair, a flash of blue, the only colour present in the whole outfit. Erik is wearing a deep blue tie to match it. Wilhelm is struck then, by how special this moment is; his grandmother wore that pin to her own wedding, and now Maria is too. His fingers itch to write, heart tugging as he watches his brother and his new wife, so wrapped up in their own joy and love that they hardly notice anything but each other.

His mind drifts to the wedding earlier. It was magical; the love Erik and Maria hold for one another came off them both in waves. When the time came for Maria to toss the bouquet, Wilhelm — spurred on by a sudden flash of desire — lurched forward and caught it clean out of the air. He spun to find Simon, shock on his face, laughing. Wilhelm smiled back, stepped forward, and raised an eyebrow.

“What’dyou think?” he asked, heart in his mouth, offering the bouquet shakily. “Wanna get hitched?”

Simon took it, their fingers brushing, and smiled softly. “Sounds good.”

Wilhelm’s heart took flight, right out of the gilded cage he’d had it locked in for so long, soaring to the heavens as he met the sparkle in Simon’s eyes, noting the blush starting to creep up his neck.

He doesn’t care if Simon was joking. Knows, deep in his gut, that he’ll marry him one day.

“What are you thinking about?”

Wilhelm doesn’t have to turn to know it’s him. He brushes his pinky against Simon’s with a soft smile, then says, “I’ve seen Erik spill milkshake over his own head, and now he’s marrying one of the smartest women I know.”

Simon snorts. “How old was he?”

“Too old,” Wilhelm replies solemnly. Simon stares at him until he cracks a smile and they laugh, falling into each other.

“Hey,” Wilhelm touches his hand to Simon’s elbow. Simon raises his eyebrows in acknowledgment. Wilhelm takes Simon’s glass and places them both on the nearest table before holding out his hand. “May I have this dance?”

Simon smiles, a slip of a thing that makes Wilhelm want to kiss him until he forgets his own name, and takes it. As they wander out onto the dancefloor the song changes, and Wilhelm snorts a laugh.

I never did believe in miracles...

“Remember this?” he murmurs, smiling.

Simon pauses to listen, then huffs a laugh. “Oh, god, yeah I do. There was a week where we played it non-stop.”

Wilhelm’s hands finds his waist, Simon’s own smoothing over his shoulders.

But I’ve a feeling it’s time to try...

“We were crazy kids back then,” Wilhelm says.

Simon’s eyebrows twitch inwards in that delicious way they do when he’s laughing at him. “Wille, that was like a month ago.”

Wilhelm chuckles softly, conceding him the point.

“I love this song, though,” he says, pulling Simon a little closer and nudging their noses together. “Reminds me of you.”

“Hmm, me too,” Simon sighs, eyes finding his mouth, and then he leans in to kiss him.

Wilhelm gets lost in him — soft mouth, gentle fingers threading through the hair at the back of his head, firm waist beneath his hands. He sighs into the kiss, happier than he’s ever felt, his surroundings melting until all he can think about is the man in his arms.

After a moment Simon breaks the kiss, his eyes sparkling.

You, you make lovin’ fun...

“I know you were joking, earlier, but—” Simon cuts himself off, biting his lip. He brushes his thumb over Wilhelm’s jaw. “I’d really love to marry you one day.”

And I don't have to tell you but you're the only one.

Wilhelm's heart lurches in his chest, and he can't help but laugh in relief. He pulls Simon closer, hands tightening on his waist.

"Fuck, Simme. I'd love to marry you one day, too."

Chapter End Notes

whoaaaaa we're almost at the end
i swear i had kittens trying to format this fucking chapter jesus
lovely boys are happy again :) told u it was worth it
one more chapter to go! it's already written so i'll probably upload it in a couple days
once it's been edited and then say a prayer is OVER OMG
let me know what you think
love y'all :)

you can listen to the playlist for this fic [here](#)

follow me on [twitter!](#)

epilogue.

Chapter Notes

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

XI

Love On The Balcony is Wilhelm Bernadotte's latest poetry collection: a tender exploration of love, sex and discovery, both of oneself and of others. Known for pushing the boundaries of what poetry can do — scrapbook style collections, deeply personal sonnets and scattered anecdotes of his life — the twenty-five year old poet has taken the literature world by storm in recent years.

Love On The Balcony feels like an allegory to his first collection (*The Boy With Brown Eyes*, for those who aren't familiar), and I tell him as such as we sit in his kitchen, mugs filled to the brim with steaming tea clutched in our hands.

"Oh, absolutely," he replies, nodding. "*The Boy With Brown Eyes* was a love letter to my university years, and to the people that I found there. A lot of it was written when I was going through an..." he laughs, seemingly trying to find the words. "*Interesting* time in my life — lots of confusion, lots of pain, but lots of love, too. *Love On The Balcony* is more of an appreciation of my mid-twenties, you know, how much I've grown, where I've come from, where I'm going."

It's fascinating to read the progression from his first to his latest works — his journey through life is a riveting one, and from one book to another his reactions to events, the way he describes and processes them, changes. We literally witness his growth and evolution, the way his thought processes change and mature.

"Yeah, I mean — poetry is extremely personal, especially for me. I hold nothing back. I've never had that ability to filter my thoughts, not when I'm writing. And I've grown tremendously from when I wrote *The Boy With Brown Eyes*, I mean, seriously." He laughs, then cringes a little, covering his face with his hands. "Some of the choices I made back then were fucking *questionable*, dude."

I laugh along with him — I remember what being twenty was like, I tell him. He smiles, suddenly a little wistful, and nods his head. "Yeah. Sometimes I miss it, I guess — the naivety, the dramatics. Most of the time I'm just glad to not be so bad at, like, relationships anymore."

How do you mean? I ask.

He ponders for a second, gathering his thoughts, his fingers tapping an absent beat against the mug he's holding. (A Snoopy mug that his husband bought him one Christmas — he privately tells me it's his favourite, then asks me not to tell Simon. I suspect Simon already knows, but I keep that to myself).

"I was really, really fuckin' scared, honestly. I fell in love at the drop of a hat, usually with people who didn't exactly treat me well, and then I was always too afraid to speak up about how I felt or stand up for myself. I'd just let people use me, honestly. It was — not good. But that all changed when I met Simme."

His eyes soften at the mention of his husband, a quiet upturning of his lips painting the picture of absolute devotion. I'm almost jealous, but it's hard to be jealous of what they have when they're so obviously perfect for each other. Simon is of course *Simon Eriksson*, the Grammy-winning icon and genius mind behind *Father, Mother, Sister, Son*. I'm a huge fan, I tell Bernadotte — I actually went to one of his first shows, back when he was still playing gigs in basements and giving out albums for free.

"Oh, you'll love this, then." Bernadotte grins. "Believe it or not, but — you know how at the end of *Remember*, there's this voice, and laughter?"

My eyes widen. "That's you?"

He nods, unable to suppress his proud smile. "That's me."

You really are each other's muses, I say, referencing the iconic interview they did together with *Pink Magazine* a couple of months ago that went viral on the internet.

"Always have been," he replies, simple. "I've been writing about him since the moment I laid eyes on him, and I'm not about to stop any time soon."

Speaking of the *Pink Magazine* interview, it's impossible to talk of either Wilhelm or Simon without mentioning how the couple have taken the internet by storm, inspiring many young, queer people to express themselves — declaring that *we are here and we are represented, and we are going nowhere*. When I tell Bernadotte this, he places a hand on his heart, clearly touched.

"I mean, to be told you're a queer icon is — it's wild, you know? Because I honestly don't feel like I should be revered like that. I just write poetry and love a man. But I'm so touched that people feel like I represent them, in some way. To have made a difference, even if it's a minuscule one, is exactly why any of us do this thing."

Have you seen the hashtags? I ask. He chuckles and nods. "Wilmon, right? Yeah, we've seen 'em. It's cute."

I wonder whether their newfound fame as a couple has affected their lives significantly. Bernadotte shakes his head when I ask him. "Not really, actually. I was a little worried, when we came out initially, whether people would be weird about it, but it's not been all that different, to be honest. I mean, we were both famous to some degree — Simon admittedly a lot more than me — before we came out, so not much has changed."

"What would you say to your younger self, if you could speak to him, right now?" I ask. Bernadotte blows out a breath, eyes drifting away as he contemplates.

"I think," he begins. "At the risk of sounding tremendously cheesy, 'everything will be okay.' I know that's what everyone says, but it really is true. The person I was when I was writing *Boy* was just, *so* unsure of himself and his worth. I went through a huge amount of growth in a short spell, and it was *so* worth it in the end. Now that I'm on the other side of everything that happened, I'm glad it happened the way it did, you know?"

This is certainly reflected in both *The Boy With Brown Eyes* — a gritty, angsty exploration of toxic relationships and the foils of youth — and in Bernadotte’s later works. In particular, *Dawn Breaks Over The East Coast* delves into themes such as gratitude, growth and healing from trauma, including some excerpts from Bernadotte’s sessions with his therapist at the time. I ask him what made him include those sections in the book.

“I guess I was just feeling really honest,” he laughs, then shakes his head. “No, I don’t know. It just felt right, I guess. I’ve always been completely transparent in my work, and that’s what I was going through at that point in time. I was learning a lot about myself, about how I see the world, my place in it. If someone was able to get something from those conversations, then I’ve done my job.”

Last question, I tell him. He makes a play of it, saying ‘no, come on, there must be more’, but something about him feels so genuine that I actually believe him when he says he’s enjoyed speaking to me.

What do you think is the most important thing in this world?

The answer comes to him immediately, as if he doesn’t need to think about it.

“Love. And family. It’s— you can’t have anything real in life without love. Money, sure, it’s certainly essential for survival in today’s system, but love? That’s irreplaceable.” He sips at his tea, gesturing easily with the other hand. On his ring finger flashes his wedding band — simple, silver, but with an inscription that he showed me earlier which reads: *say a prayer*.

When I asked him what it meant, he simply smiled and said, “something special.”

— Excerpted from “*Wilhelm Bernadotte On Growth, Married Life and #Wilmon*”, for *Paul Specter*, 2028.

Chapter End Notes

so i guess that’s it.

i’ve had an absolute blast writing this fic and reading all of your reactions to it. i’m completely blown away by the love everyone has for this silly little story and i’m so so grateful that i’ve gotten to share it with you all.

i may write a couple one shots in this universe in the future because inevitably i will miss these characters wayyyy too much but for now i have to say goodbye to them :(

i hope this epilogue is satisfactory — you get to see a little glimpse of wilmon’s future together!

love you all from the bottom of my heart — i hope you look forward to my next fic!!

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