

Heat Waves

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Heat Waves

by [tbhyourelame](#)

Summary

Dream has always held a gentle admiration for George, but when their nuanced friendship trickles into his sleeping mind, he awakens to a new world of conflicting emotions and longing. Lost in the midst of a heat wave, he continuously listens to a song that works itself in to the very core of his heartache. Floridian nights, unsent messages, spiraling infatuation, and terrible, terrible weather.

A breath of frustration escapes George's lips. "I don't do that."

"You do. It's okay," Dream says. He feels pinpricks of warmth building in his chest. The words rise up faster than he can temper, laced with soft honey, "you're so cute."

The call falls silent.

They heard it. The affection in the tone of his voice, different than usual, no trace of humor. The way it came from the hearth below his heart, glowing with secrecy and shame—for George, and George only. They had to have heard it.

--

inspired by the song "heat waves" by glass animals

Moon Jelly

Chapter Notes

This is my first time writing a dnf fic, I heard the song "Heat Waves" by Glass Animals for the first time and fell in love. Please take the time to listen to it if you haven't already, it fits them so well I had to write about it.

I'm excited and hope you enjoy! :)

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A gentle glow from the computer screen washes over the dark desk, colors flickering in rapid motion. The monitor whirs in self defense of the growing heat. The ceiling fan lays mockingly silent in the stifling air. Reclined in his seat, Dream's head is tilted back to watch the wooden slats for the slightest tremor.

Betrayal.

Beads of sweat collect near his hairline. He tugs absently on the sticky plastic of his headphones, where they rest around his neck. The small light on the exterior blinks green.

"Dream?" He hears George say faintly.

"Wait, did he leave?" Sapnap asks.

"It says he's on the call, still." George's voice slowly grows closer. Dream begins to detach his eyes from the fan. "Dream?"

The concern in his voice makes Dream sit up. He pushes his headphones back on and wipes his face. "Yes, yes, hello, sorry. I zoned out for a sec." He blinks to register what's on his screen, seeing green grass blocks and Sapnap's avatar crouching in front of him. "Shoot, did you end the stream?" He quickly tabs out just in time to see George laugh.

"No, but I'm about to. Couldn't end it without you saying bye," George says. The small considerate act is enough to bloom a warmth in Dream's chest.

He smiles. "Oh, alright. Bye stream!"

"Bye!" Sapnap yells.

George waves to the camera. "Bye you guys, thank you so much. Also, pray for Dream's air conditioning."

"And my broken fan," Dream adds.

"Bye bye," George repeats, then disappears from Dream's view. *This stream has ended.* A familiar feeling creeps into Dream's chest whenever that message appears post-stream; disappointment clouded with confusion. Today, it is accompanied by trickles of regret.

He frowns. "Sorry I spent so much of your stream complaining about the weather," he says, clicking back to the server. Sapnap has placed an oak sign before him that reads: **wee waa dream can't take the heat**. He rolls his eyes and breaks it.

"It's fine, really. I just feel bad for you," George says. His avatar bounds over and starts placing doors on the ground. "Any idea when it'll be fixed?"

"Soon, I hope," Dream answers with a huff, opening and closing the doors to appease George. "I don't think I can take much more of this." They'd been playing for the past three hours, meaning Dream had been accumulating enough sweat in his boxers to stick to his chair for much longer than any man should. Physical comfort was a key component for him to stay mellow, and not much could distract him from itchy tags and blistering heat. Not much, that is, besides gaming. "Seeing you was nice, though, something about your cheerful face distracts me from my agony," he confesses, words leaving his mouth before he can attempt to filter. He cringes. What was *that*?

"Oh my god, shut up," George says. He sounds embarrassed.

Sapnap coos. "Maybe I should stream with my camera on too."

Dream laughs, running away from the two of them to ease his sudden spike in nervousness. "That would keep my attention."

"Oh yeah, are my streams not interesting enough for you Dream?" George says, flying after him.

"What?" Dream says, feeling a pang of guilt. "What makes you think that? I love your streams."

George continues to act offended. "If you loved them you wouldn't zone out randomly."

"I didn't mean to," Dream whines, which only makes the other two laugh. "I just got distracted by my misery, and tried to airbend a breeze in here."

"Yeah right," Sapnap says, "you couldn't have been doing just that for ten minutes."

"Ten minutes?" Dream repeats, bewildered. He didn't feel it had been that long; he was exploring the map and then clicked onto George's stream to see where he was, and of course George was smiling and yelling, but somehow so full of energy and spirit, and the hot air started to seep into Dream's soul—

"You were AFK for a while," George says, "we were still talking to you though and thought you'd muted yourself or something. Chat thought it was embarrassing."

"Oh," Dream says.

"Hold on, did you mean to mute yourself?" Sapnap asks, laughing as his own words leave his mouth. "Lil too excited watching George?"

Both Dream and George explode in disgusted yells. *Good lord, Sapnap.*

"Sapnap!" George sends a series of hits raining down onto his avatar. "You are so inappropriate off-stream."

"You're gross," Dream says with a laugh, but it's feeble and half-hearted. His pulse is rapidly drumming inside his skull. He is not lost to the strange dilemma of why he faded from their call for so long to stare at his George-less ceiling. Why did George have anything to do with it? Envy, perhaps, of his friend's ability to be wearing a hoodie in the middle of summer. He brushes it off.

"It's true, though. George's face *does* get me excited."

George groans, making Sapnap and Dream laugh. "Now you're just trying to make me uncomfortable."

"Flustered, you mean," Dream inputs quickly.

"Okay, no, I'm sick of you two," George says, immediately exiting their server. "Consider this a rage quit."

GeorgeNotFound has left the game. Dream sends a :(into the chat.

"Noo, Georgie," Sapnap pleads.

"You did a great job today," Dream says, wholeheartedly. "I'm going to re-watch what I missed of it later." George laughs.

"I seriously have to go. I'll talk to you soon," he says, a small sound emitting from Discord signifying he's left the call.

The feeling returns to Dream's chest—it's akin to the cold rush that follows when he removes his hands from a steaming coffee mug. Some nights after their friends have logged off for good, he'll do anything to avoid giving in and going to bed. Twitter, mini-games, coding, creating playlists. His favorite nights, though, are when George wakes up early enough to keep him company. Their conversations radiate with the warmth of both the Florida night and the English sunrise.

So whenever George jokingly becomes angry with him, Dream can't dispel the tiny tremor of worry that maybe he's gone too far. He doesn't like to mull over the thought of them really fighting; it would terrify him like nothing else. He knows George will call again tomorrow, and that he isn't nearly as upset as he lets on. Yet he still finds himself carefully watching the dot next to George's name switch from green to a pale grey.

"I think I'm gonna hop off too," Dream says to Sapnap.

"Alright, seeya."

After disconnecting, he swivels around in his chair to face his bed. The dark comforter has been kicked to the floor, sheets askew. The window above his bed is shut tight to keep out the humid air and insects, but he can see the soft orange streetlights in the distance.

He sighs and wishes for rain.

He remembers running barefoot on his neighborhood streets as a child when storms would roll in from the sea, splashing in gravelly puddles and letting the cool raindrops dampen his hair. That space was always euphoric—a brief temperance from the smoldering air, green palm trees swaying in the wind, the hint of thunder and lightning—but it feels so far from him now. Especially in this dreadful weather.

He turns off his computer and begrudgingly gets in bed. He's nearly grown accustomed to the dark when his phone vibrates, the notification lighting up the room. He squints.

A text from George.

I feel like this song is a good way for me to get back at you, it reads. Dream clicks on the link, opening his Spotify to a new 'Glass Animals' song.

"Heat Waves," he responds, smiling. *Very funny.*

He'll listen to that in the morning. As he sets his phone back on the nightstand, Dream finds himself warmed by the gesture, even though it was an insult on his behalf. George is a thoughtful guy. Nothing wrong with appreciating that. Not that Dream finds it unnerving that interacting with George has a direct correlation with his general contentment and moods; in fact, it isn't worth the overthinking.

Settled by his own logic, he allows his body to focus on sleep. He slips in and out of shadows, occasionally tossing and turning in irritation at the cotton sheets. The fabric clings to his dampened skin up to the moment he sluggishly kicks it away. Something clatters to the floor, but Dream rolls onto his side.

Eventually, the night cools enough for him to sink deeper, and deeper, until he turns his head from his soft, warm pillow to a cold pile of sand.

Confused, he grasps at the foundation beneath him only for the rocky grains to slip through his fingers.

He sits up rapidly, glancing at the beach now surrounding him. Although the image is narrow, he can tell there is a murky-purple lagoon lapping a few feet before him. The moon ripples across its ominous surface. The night is quiet; a taunting breeze brushing the back of his neck and bringing chills down his spine.

He looks down at his hands, seeing his bright sleeves pushed halfway up his forearms. *Bright green.*

A sinking feeling begins to rot in his stomach as the familiarity sets in. He's been here before. He shifts his head cautiously, realizing where the shadows at the edge of his vision are coming from, and raises a hand to gently graze the ceramic covering his face. He doesn't need a mirror to know what the mask looks like.

He pulls up his hood, tensing as he anticipates the next subject he'll recognize. At any moment, behind his right shoulder, a voice will call from the edge of the trees that'll say—

"Dream?"

He freezes. That's—that's not right, it isn't supposed to be—

"George?" He asks quietly, turning around with caution. George stands a few feet behind him, goggles perched atop his head and an axe in his hand. He's looking around their location, dazed. The starry sky reflects itself on his lenses.

He walks across the sand towards Dream slowly. "Where...are we?"

"Um." Dream considers curling in on himself, but can't help fighting the comfort of honesty. "My head, I guess." He knows from experience that this place values integrity more than anything. Facing it head on, so to speak. He just doesn't know why he'd let George in here—it isn't safe.

"It's pretty," George says, sitting on the sand next to him.

Dream's heart aches faintly at his remark. Once, he'd thought it was pretty, too. He can't find the words to tell George that after so many years of frantically slipping on the sand, coughing up lungfuls of the dark water, and running from the woods—it has become a thing of nightmares.

He stares at George. *Can he feel the memories here?*

"So this is..." George gestures around with his axe vaguely. "Florida?"

Dream cracks a smile. "Yeah, you finally made it," he teases softly. George's grin is bright enough to make him look away. "It's a lagoon I used to come to as a kid."

"You make it sound like that was lifetimes ago."

Something foreign and lost weighs on the tension in Dream's features, forgotten behind the ceramic. "Maybe," he says, "I've had multiple lives here."

George says nothing. He lifts a moon-soaked hand to point at the water. "Do you see those?"

Dream turns his head, and small glowing blobs appear near the shore. Their light blue color is stark against the darkness as they float idly.

"They're moon jellies," Dream says in disbelief. He's never seen them here before. The curling darkness steals all hint of life besides him, his beating heart, and occasional whispers in the wind.

George hums in approval. Dream looks at him again, grateful for the mask covering his own features. Pale moonlight makes George's skin glow a soft porcelain, pink lips pressed together in a delicate brush stroke.

The word bubbles up from deep in Dream's chest, winding into his bloodstream and landing gracefully in his head.

Beautiful.

He wants to back away from it, to shove it deep down. But for once, it feels safe here, safe to admit it to himself without needing an air of humor to skate by on. Here, it isn't a joke.

"Why are we here?" George asks in a murmur, gaze lifting to face Dream. The word *here* hangs with a heavy lilt, as if he'd meant to say, *what brought me? Who pulled me?*

Was it you?

In his large brown eyes Dream can see the faded reflection of his sloppy black and white smile.

"I know why I'm here," Dream says carefully, "but I don't know why you are." A brief rustling of leaves and twigs behind them causes him to tense again. "It's dangerous here, George. We should go."

"Why? Don't you want to stay in this memory?"

Dream ignores the comment, and lightly wraps an arm around his shoulders to help him up. George doesn't try to stand. He keeps them rooted to the white shore with a confused frown.

"Nothing is going to hurt us when I'm here," he says.

Dream feels his face grow hot. "Knock it off. This is serious."

George looks at him earnestly. "I'm being serious."

Now that his arm is draped protectively over George's small frame, Dream becomes extremely aware of how close they are. He can sense George's body heat, watch his chest rise and fall, see the

goosebumps on his neck. Dream's heart begins to pound. For how long has he wanted to meet him? To hear his voice in person? The fear inside him slowly begins to ebb away into fondness.

The moon jellies rapidly multiply until the lagoon is dappled blue, and gleaming.

George grins. "I told you it's pretty."

"Because of you," Dream says warmly. Even though George rolls his eyes, he *means* it. They laugh lightly at each other, glowing water and gentle sparks blooming as the moment passes.

George's gaze lingers on Dream for a few heartbeats, before letting go of his axe. He raises his hand to reach for the ceramic mask.

Dream freezes as his eyes follow the motion. His hood falls when George runs his fingers gently through his wavy hair—he can't remember the last time he let someone do this. It feels intimate. It feels terrifying. His eyes shut when George finds the metal clasp on the back of his head, he exhales when he feels the weight of the mask drop from his face.

The breeze is cold on his cheeks. He can smell the nearby saltwater. He opens his eyes, and sees twice as many stars as usual.

"How did you do that? I've never..." He looks at George, who is smiling softly.

"I know honesty is important to you," George says. His hand moves to gently touch Dream's cheekbone.

Dream reaches and delicately takes George's hand in his, slender knuckles and fingers sliding together with timid grace. He feels alive. He leans closer, studying George's eyes until he slips down, further, to his soft lips. His breath is trembling.

"And what if I kissed you right now?" He murmurs, heart racing. "How honest would that be?"

George's eyes grow wide. "I—well, Dream—you—" he stammers, giving Dream exactly what he needs to let go.

Their movements happen nearly all at once—the inclining of George's jaw, the slide of Dream's hand into his hair, the connection of their lips. The kiss is raw with emotion, and gentle. Hot embers rise from Dream's chest to heat his face. The soft presence of George's mouth against his own is surreal, as their senses collectively slip away into the dreamland. His hand rises to softly cup George's jaw. He pulls his face *closer*, breath hot, heart stuttering. Nervous energy quickly ebbs into a strong hearth of longing, as he kisses George again, and again, and again. George emits a soft noise that makes Dream melt. He can feel George's hands in his hair, then on his neck, then on his chest.

Dream pulls away to capture brief puffs of air. His chest rises and falls rapidly, as he looks at George's flushed cheeks and mouth kissed red. *Because of him*. A low feeling stirs in the space just below his ribcage, the first flickering of a dangerously hot flame. All of it, all of George, just for him.

Dream parts his lips to say something, *anything*—and promptly wakes up.

Thank you so much for reading, short chapter but I wanted to put it out there. Criticism, other work suggestions/ideas, just saying hello is all welcome! Also lol I started writing this a few weeks ago and Dream just recently complained about his A/C being broken, such a weird coincidence. I'll try to upload quickly, chapter 2 is ready but I'm kind of convinced no one will see this <3

edit: lol ^

Checkmate

Chapter Summary

Dream has to face the consequences of his "nightmare," and listens to a song.

Chapter Notes

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The grip Dream has locked into his dirty blonde hair is barbaric enough to rip out the roots. Sweat stains drench his collar and lower back, turning his grey shirt a dark black. His chest heaves uneasily. The harsh morning light tears through the blinds with the promise of returning the temperature from yesterday. Sitting up in bed, elbows on his knees, he stares hollow-eyed at the opposite wall.

What the fuck was that dream?

He isn't sure how long he's been petrified into this state; the thought of George's lips and his smile and his sounds overwhelmingly on loop. The fury of panic and confusion flash behind his eyes nearly all at once. What was George doing in his nightmare? Why did it make him feel so safe, and warm, and wanted? Why, good god, did he *kiss* him? He can feel the liberation still coursing through his blood, heart pounding, skin tingling where George's hands had been.

The heat trickles down his back.

He hadn't experienced a dream of that caliber in a very long time. To be touched, and kissed; to feel the deep embrace of lust that leaves a firm afterthought in his boxers. Yet guilt undermines the euphoria he feels. His teasing with George is fun, and lighthearted—but having an erotic fantasy with his subconscious projection of his best friend is crossing a line.

He slowly lets go of his taut hair. The glaring sunlight lays slices of heat across his shoulders, and he can hear faint chirps of birds outside his window. A small nest had been forming for the past week in the nearby rain gutter. He'd caught glimpses of them before; blue-feathered and spry creatures. Sapanap had teased him when he learned Dream spent several hours researching their species: the purple martin. Normally, the birds started fussing early in the morning.

He checks the time, *8:05am*.

"Disgusting," he says.

He looks at the towel hanging on the back of his door, and sighs. A cold shower could refresh his muddled brain and rinse off the thin layer of sweat.

Once in the bathroom, he reluctantly opens his phone. His text chain with George is still waiting patiently on the screen.

Maybe that's why he showed up, Dream bargains, the last person I thought of before going to sleep.

His thumb hovers over the song recommendation for a moment, then presses play before he steps into the shower.

Streams of icy water race down his chest, shocking his skin. His ribs tense and he resists the urge to shiver. He thinks of his mask lying in the cold sand; he thinks of George's breath on his face. He deserves a miserable shower or two.

He attempts to relax into the water as it slowly becomes a refreshing wash. The soft soap lifts the feeling of grime that had settled on his body, his stink finally down the drain. A breath of contentment escapes him. He's grateful to have cold water in the absence of a working air conditioner. Maybe the weather behaved like a fever dream, giving him outlandish thoughts that now fade away with each scrub. Clean hair, clean pits, clean mind. *Right?*

The muffled music begins to grow louder from beyond the clear curtain.

Road shimmer, wiggling the vision, heat heat waves, I'm swimming in a mirror...

He closes his eyes.

Sometimes, all I think about is you

Late nights in the middle of June

Heat waves been faking me out

Can't make you happier now

His eyes fly open. The lyrics crawl into his chest, bass line tangling with his heartbeat. Warmth floods his face despite the goosebumps on his skin.

I just want to know what you're dreaming of, when you sleep and smile so comfortable...

His trembling hand reaches for the shower knob.

I just wish I could give you that

That look that's perfectly unsad

His mind is flooded with memories of George's smile. The water shuts off with a terrible squeak as suds still slide down his skin.

He lets the rest of the song play out as he slumps down in his towel to the bathroom floor. Wet droplets cling to his hair.

The past few months he'd been living in a haze, routinely gaming and eating and sleeping without much else to make him feel awake. After repeating the same days over and over again, new interests and emotions were few and far between.

Yet here he is, stunned by George's recommendation. The last notes of the song gently transition into stark silence, their vibrations fading from Dream's hollowed out soul. He hasn't felt a deep,

meaningful connection to music like this in a long time. He hasn't felt a connection to a *person* like this in a long time.

He scowls, quickly grabbing his phone, and heading to his room. Sour collections of frustration and shame churn in his stomach. Nothing has changed besides him finding a new anxiety to unnecessarily wrap his head into knots over. Sometimes, he feels that his mind will grab onto any spike in emotion, and play with it just to keep him busy.

Not this time. Not with George. Perhaps it will be best if he keeps his distance, until his brain tires itself out.

His phone vibrates while he's getting dressed.

Hop on froggy, Sapnap texted.

How did you know I was up, Dream types back. *Also, why are you awake?* He sits down at his desk while Sapnap's bubble reappears.

George wants to test stuff out before he streams later. You'd never miss that.

Dream is beginning to grow irritated with his friends for no discernible reason.

He puts on his headphones and waits for his computer to hum to life. He drums his fingers on his mouse. A strange feeling tightens in his chest when his screen lights up and the Discord window appears. It takes him a moment to realize—he's nervous. He's never been anxious about joining a call before. He glances at the names under the voice-channel.

It's only Sapnap, Bad, and George.

"Dream! Hi," Bad greets happily once he's connected.

"That was fast," Sapnap says.

Dream's voice is flat when he replies, "Hey."

"Hello," George says, "is your heat wave any better today?" His question is met with silence. "Dream?"

Dream feels his words die in his throat at the sound of George's voice. He really doesn't want to talk about the weather.

"Dream? Hello?" Bad says, exaggerating his vowels.

"It's fine." Dream watches their icons lose their green ring after catching the tone of his voice. He rubs a hand over his face. This isn't how he wanted to start the call. "Sorry, guys, I'm still a little tired."

"No worries," George says, but he sounds cautious. "We're on the test server if you wanna join. Sapnap and I are going to try out the chess board, I think I've got the coding down but you always find something I've missed."

Dream hesitates, a small smile forming on his features. "You're finally doing the chess stream? Sure." He opens Minecraft.

"Might have been a bad idea to let him play," Bad says.

Dream joins the server and bounds over to where they're huddled in an open field. Beyond them is a large chess board, the pieces several stories high made out of dark oak and birch. "No, George normally beats me."

Sapnap laughs. "That might be the first time you've admitted that George is better than you at something."

"That's not true," George says, "Dream is honest with me."

All the air in Dream's lungs rushes out in one breath.

I know honesty is important to you, George's teasing voice echoes in his mind.

He remembers how it felt to kiss him, to touch him. *How honest would that be?* He glances at George's avatar, with his stupid little glasses, how they'd held the whole night sky to him when sitting on that beach. Is it fair always ask for honesty from everyone else, while not being transparent himself? George isn't entitled to know what he dreams about, but keeping it from him feels *wrong*.

Then again, keeping most things from George tends to feel that way. Most.

"But he still hasn't given you a face reveal," Sapnap says, voice proud.

"You're so smug," George hits Sapnap's character. "I can't wait to beat you later." He pauses while BadBoyHalo tosses several flowers on the ground and hops in place. "I'm not going to force Dream to do anything. Though I am waiting for the day I open a Snapchat he's sent me and it's of his face."

Dream laughs nervously. "I'm too pretty. I'd break George's mind."

"Oh please," George says, "didn't we learn from my stream yesterday that it's the other way around?"

Dream's heart skips. "Yes," he mumbles, "we did." He hears laughter in the call, and clears his throat so that he can fine-tune his joking tone. He can't afford to slip up. He says, "George, you are beautiful."

"Oh my god. You're annoying."

Dream grins. "You can dish all you want but the second I turn it around—"

"Yeah, that's so true," Sapnap says, "George gets so uncomfortable."

"I don't," George says, sounding uncomfortable.

"You do. It's okay," Dream says. He feels pinpricks of warmth in his chest. The words rise up faster than he can temper, laced with soft honey, "you're so cute."

The call falls silent.

They heard it. The affection in the tone of his voice, different than usual, no trace of humor. The way it came from the hearth below his heart, glowing with secrecy and shame—for George, and George only. They had to have heard it.

He doesn't move.

"I should really start muting you," George says. He sounds...normal. Embarrassed, but normal.

He didn't hear it.

Dream tilts his head back against his chair in relief.

"Right...so, should we try to use this thing?" Sarnap says. Dream feels a tinge of embarrassment. It's likely that Sarnap can read the inflections of his voice better than anyone from many years of listening, and Dream expects to receive a confused message in his inbox at any moment.

He waits, and nothing comes.

They mess around on the server for a while, shifting pieces and testing out the take-system which involves explosions. Dream lets himself sink into the comforting familiarity of days like these. He discusses a few strategies with George, comparing skill, and plays one game against Bad where he narrowly wins. He can't catch any mistakes George has made in his coding; it is perfect. Dream is surprised when it gives him a wave of admiration. Watching his friends grow and change as the years go by is a humbling and exciting experience; seeing them mature, learn, lose, and keep moving forward. He didn't know when he started seeing himself as older than George, but every once in a while, he is reminded of the truth.

Eventually, Bad disconnects from the call and Dream leaves the server to catch the beginning of George's stream.

"Hey guys! Hi, hi," George says, a large smile on his face. "Welcome to the stream! Today, we're going to..."

As he continues to speak, Dream's eyes are drawn to the corner where George's face beams happily. He takes in the curve of his mouth, his high cheekbones, his eyes. George looked surreal in the moonlight, like it glowed from within him, and shined through his skin and voice. Dream reaches his hand up to his own face, and traces over his lips gently where George had kissed him.

He flushes immediately, clenching his hand and dropping it into his lap. *Way too far.*

He keeps his fingers curled tautly against his palm as the game continues, eyes darting between the board to George's face with enough restlessness to rise him from his chair.

"I'm going to go make some food," he says, and Sarnap groans.

"Right when I need you the most?"

Dream glances at the game, seeing Sarnap is hurting and George is up several pieces. "You'll be fine."

He pulls his wireless headphones down to his neck, and heads downstairs to the kitchen. When he opens the fridge, he lowers his head for a blast of cool air to greet his face. The breeze slips over his brows and down his throat. He hums happily.

He sets a few items on the counter to make a breakfast sandwich, and feels a soft rub against his calf. He looks down to see Patches peering up at him.

"Hi there lil' girl," he says sweetly. "Are you hungry? Let me get you some breakfast."

"Aww," George's voice comes quietly from his headphones, and he half-tugs them back on.

"Dream, you're not muted."

He rolls his eyes. "I don't care. Kitty says hi."

He pours her some food and fills her water, then goes back to his meal. He cracks the eggs into the pan, listening to them sizzle with satisfaction. The smell is nice; Patches takes a break from her bowl to mewl in curiosity. He can hear Sapnap and George talking faintly. He smiles to himself, then pulls out his phone and sends a snap of his meal to George.

"Ooh, Dream sent me something," George says. "Chat, what do you think it is?"

"I don't think that's a good idea to ask," Sapnap says, and after a pause, starts laughing. "Yeah, exactly."

"What are they saying?" Dream asks towards mic in his headset, muttering a small 'ow' while moving his hot sandwich from the skillet to his plate.

"Feet pics, mostly," George replies.

"Mostly," Sapnap says.

"Oh no, people are getting angry with each other. Guys, it's fine. Here, let me see what it is," George says, and Dream watches as the delivered sign changes to opened.

It was a photo of the sandwich, but Dream had added a text that read: *bet you wished it was my face, didn't you?* He's flooded with anticipation instead of the humored confidence he normally feels.

His pulse races. Maybe he shouldn't have sent that.

"George is blushing!" Sapnap calls, cackling.

Dream's heart soars.

"I'm not! You're so dumb," George says, "it was just his breakfast, chat, calm down. Alright, Sapnap. Can you go already?"

Dream thinks that'll be the last of it—George often leaves him on read, anyway—but when he's carrying his plate of food out of the kitchen, he gets a notification.

Goog is typing...

He waits. The typing stops, then starts again.

The sandwich looks good, but I bet you look better, George texts.

Dream's eyes widen and he nearly drops his plate. He yanks the mic on his headset close to his mouth. "George!" he yells.

George's laugh is quiet but still adds to the pink blooming on Dream's face. He can only imagine what the chat must think.

"What—stop texting Dream, okay, we have a serious game going on," Sapnap says.

Dream can't help rereading the text over again while he goes back to his room. He keeps the door open slightly in case Patches wants to slip in to say hi. George doesn't compliment him much, and avoids making comments that Dream considers 'forward' behavior.

The reciprocation brings a feeling of satisfaction and nervous embarrassment—does George really think that, even without knowing what he looks like? Dream tries to ignore the low warmth it gives him, little webs stretching out in his mind, connecting his emotions to George's friendship to his dream. He wants nothing more than to bat them away and break the ties all together.

He munches on his food remorsefully.

"Oh my god, no," Sapnap says. "I didn't see that. What the hell, George."

Dream looks at the screen, sitting down in his chair. In the time he'd been gone, George set up a fork, and recently exploded a rook Sapnap was using to try and break the castle defense. Additional pressure is on Sapnap's queen, possibly a take in the next move, which Dream is sure Sapnap sees.

"George, don't do it, come on. I can see you hovering around your bishop, move the pawn instead, please," Sapnap says. "Dream, help me!"

He laughs. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Distract George, I don't know!"

George rolls his eyes. He seems confident, and bright, and happy. Dream remembers seeing that look up close, feeling his friend's presence next to him. It hits him all of the sudden how badly he wants to meet him—in person. The thought alone makes him lightheaded.

"Do something!" Sapnap pleads.

George scoffs, beginning to move his bishop across the board. "That's not going to work—"

"I had a dream about you," Dream blurts.

George's eyes widen and his head turns sharply to look at the Discord window, letting go of the piece in the wrong square before taking Sapnap's queen.

"Yes! Yes!" Sapnap screams. "You already placed it, you placed it!"

"You what?" George's voice is complicated by confusion and surprise.

Dream's head falls into his hands. *Why*.

"You were in my dream last night," he says slowly, through his teeth.

Sapnap laughs, exploding the misplaced piece with his queen. "Oh god, that was perfect. Thank you."

George's attention is brought back to the game, and he groans. "I don't think we should count that, that's cheating."

"It's so not," Sapnap says happily.

"A cheap trick, shame on both of you," George complains. "Oh my god, that is freaking out right now." He clears his throat, awkwardly. "They want to know what the dream was."

Dream's face burns. It is time for some gentle damage control. "You were in Florida," he says, keeping his voice even, "and it was cool. I normally have a recurring uh, dream, about the beach we were at but you showed up instead. You had your goggles on."

"Oh," George says. He pauses briefly. "Well, did I have a weapon?"

Dream lifts his head quizzically. "Yes, actually. An axe."

"Metal," Sapnap says.

"It's a weird thing people tell me. Whenever I'm in their dreams, I'm always holding a weapon or something," George clarifies.

"That's actually facts," Sapnap inputs, "I once had a dream we went to England and George greeted us at the airport with a bow and arrow."

"What..." Dream begins to laugh. "A *ridiculous* coincidence."

George giggles. "I like to think it's because I'm so threatening."

Dream wheezes. "More like you need to be protected," he says.

"Are you kidding me? You are watching the same game as us, right?" George voices with acute confidence.

Dream watches his stream with a smile, completely lost on how he managed to escape that conversation. He'd been surprised by George's immediate reaction, and feels a faint flicker of hope.

Hope? Hope for what? He wipes the look off of his face. *Nothing*, he assures himself.

He hopes for nothing.

George has a valid point, though. He is, in short, defeating Sapnap by a landslide. They continue playing, George winning the first three games and barely losing the fourth, where Dream and Sapnap combine forces to try and take him down. As time passes by, the clock slowly shifts from early morning to mid-noon; the hottest part of the day. Dream doesn't notice at first when the air around him grows stagnant, and sweat begins to lightly ghost his upper lip. He unknowingly drains his water bottle, and it isn't until he wipes his clammy hand on his shirt absently that he realizes.

"Oh my god," he says. George and Sapnap both ask him what happened. "It's back," he whines, slumping in his chair in defeat, "I was so naive, so ignorant. I thought I was safe."

"Sounds like it's hot again," Sapnap says. "Sorry, dude."

"I might cry," Dream feigns.

"So it really is a heat wave," George says, "I was just kidding about it earlier. I hope I didn't curse you." Dream tries to not look at the small smile on his face, to think of how the song numbed his mind and cut him open.

"That was a good song," he mutters. George says nothing, and they carry on.

Eventually, the stream ends and Sapnap tells them he's going back to sleep, exhausted from carrying so many losses in a row. Once he leaves the call, they are alone.

With no other tabs open on his computer, Dream stares at his keyboard as the room slowly turns into a swamp. George is being rather quiet, like he often is after streaming for a while. Dream thinks he becomes burnt out by talking so much, but it's secretly his favorite time to be on a call with him. George is a little tired, so he speaks softer and more contemplative than usual. Dream finds it very comforting. It's a space where most of their profound conversations have come from

so far.

"The chat kept trying to make me ask you about your dream," George says, breaking the silence. "I feel like that's going to be clipped everywhere."

"There's not much else to know," Dream lies. *I kissed you.* "Nothing really happened." *I wanted you.* He can hear George start and stop typing on his keyboard—and then nothing. Is George idly sitting there, staring at his computer, too?

"You mentioned that...I showed up instead," George says.

"What?"

"You said I showed up 'instead,' in the recurring dream," George pauses. He's speaking carefully. "Instead of who?"

"Oh," Dream says. He wraps his arms around himself subconsciously despite the heat. "Uh, well...me. Instead of me."

"You? But I thought you were already there."

Dream feels his chest grow tight. "I...yeah. There's normally two of me."

The seconds of silence that follow terrify him. He hears George inhale, then speak very softly, "what kind of dream is it normally, Clay?"

He closes his eyes at the sound of his name coming from George's mouth—it is rare, like he only saves it for the moments when Dream feels the most vulnerable.

"A nightmare," he mutters, pinching his eyebrows together. "I've been having it for so long I've memorized every second of it. I wake up on the beach in the middle of the night; a lagoon with the edge of a forest about twenty feet behind me. I always have my mask on and I can't see very well. Out of the trees' shadows comes me—another me, except...his mask is covered in blood. He gives me a few seconds, and then..." His voice dies. He's never told anyone about his nightmares before.

"Then what?" George asks.

Dream grips his arms tightly, fingernails digging into his skin. "I run. As fast as I can, but it's never fast enough. You know, dream logic." He pauses, letting himself take a breath. "We fight. We always fight. Sometimes he stabs me, sometimes we drown, and sometimes I...I don't run. I just stand there, and let him get me."

"Do you...ever win?" George's voice is serious and low.

"Every once in a while," Dream says. "But then the next time I'm back there, I'm the one at the edge of the woods, seeing myself by the water. It's fucked up." He hates those nights the most, because he understands the fear of being chased. Sitting on the sand, waiting for the slightest quiver in the leaves to start sprinting, heart in his ears and terror on his tongue. Yet there's a frenetic burning he feels standing in the woods with a weapon in hand—a sense of raw duty, urgency, survival. It's as if only one of them is supposed to exist in that space, and he's never been able to figure out who.

"Why do you think I was there?" George asks.

Why are we here? His memories echo.

"I don't know, honestly," Dream says, "it took me by surprise. But when you were there, it...wasn't a nightmare anymore." He prays he won't have to explain any further.

"I'm not sure what to say to that," George admits. Dream winces, forever fearing that he's gone too far, until he adds, "I kind of feel like it was a compliment?"

His hands gently let go of his arms. "It was."

"Okay," George says, the smile in his voice audible.

Dream finds himself starting to grin, too, as the quiet space between them grows warm. The dust suspending in the hot air floats idly by, his empty plate radiates a faint smell of bread and eggs, and he reclines into the comfort of his chair. Not speaking for long moments on calls tends to make Dream anxious, and it is only when he and George are alone that he finds solace in it. He wonders if the feeling passes through his microphone and permeates George's world, too.

He wonders if they really could be connected in the way that both frightens and calms him.

"You know," George says finally, "you were once in a dream I had, too."

Chapter End Notes

Wow, first of all, I want to thank you all for your lovely support! I was not expecting that at all. I might be slower to update the next chapter since I'm starting classes soon but tysm for reading so far :) Your comments really motivated me to finish this chapter quickly

Lol also, everytime I type in Sapnap my computer autocorrects it to "subpoena"

Fairness

Chapter Summary

Dream tries to learn about George's dream, and makes a realization.

Chapter Notes

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

“You know,” George says, “you were once in a dream I had, too.”

“Really?” Dream leans forward in his chair, a confident smile creeping onto his face. “What was it about?”

“I can hear your ego inflating right now.”

“No you can’t,” Dream defends quickly. Perhaps midnight visits from platonic friends is a universal experience. Sappnap said he’s dreamt about them too, anyway. He can’t help letting himself feel it—relief, is it? Relieved that George was thinking of him? For a moment, a heat as strong as burning coals begins to smoke inside his skull: he *has* to know what George’s dream was about.

Why hadn’t he told him about it before?

He recoils from the ferocity of his own thoughts.

“Yes, I can. I think you owe me some kindness for how you treated me on my stream today,” George says, voice touched by a playful twinge that Dream knows so well.

“I owe you something?” Dream gently, gently stokes the embers. “What exactly do you want with me?”

“For you to *be nice*, chill,” George laughs, but sounds nervous. “Freak.”

Dream’s heart races. “You love me,” he mutters, “c’mon now.”

“Stop being weird,” George says, “this is exactly why I never told you about it.”

“Well, you dreamt about me first!”

“What? You’re so hypocritical—oh my god. Nevermind, Dream.”

“George, no,” Dream says, trying to regain a serious tone despite being deeply amused by their

turn of conversation. “I didn’t mean to upset you, I promise.”

George definitely doesn’t buy it. “Y’know, I think I won’t tell you. That’s a much better punishment for you being mean to me.”

“Oh, a punishment?” Dream repeats, unable to stop himself from laughing again.

George groans. “That’s it, have a nice rest of your day. I can’t deal with you anymore.”

“Wait, no—” Dream is cut off by George disconnecting from their call.

He raises a hand over his mouth. He wants to fight it off—his grin, the flutters in his stomach, the need to hear George’s voice again—but can’t. His cheeks are warm and flushed red. He feels himself slipping deeper into the place that keeps calling his name. It feels something like desire. It feels something like a challenge. It feels so familiar.

Shame side-steps his rising happiness. He is bound to be taking advantage of George to a minor degree, withholding the truth from him and skating by with loose humor. His remarks used to come absently from his mouth, a way to make George complain or smile. Now, he’s taunted by flurries of emotions and thoughts that come after—the line between a joke and a confession becoming obscurely blurred. It isn’t fair, is it?

He checks the temperature on his phone: *102 degrees*. He groans.

Clicking on Twitter, he begins typing slowly.

Never underestimate the power of a heat wave, he tweets.

He scrolls for a few minutes, liking and replying to followers. He catches a few of his tagged tweets that are about their chaotic chess games, many viewers questioning why George would have made such a simple mistake during an intense match. He responds to one with a *“I’ve been wondering that too.”*

He suddenly gets an influx of likes and mentions. *@GeorgeNootFound has replied to your tweet.*

He clicks on it.

Petition to keep Dream’s AC broken for good, it reads. He votes “no.” He types out a response, but hesitates upon rereading. Perhaps it is better suited for a Snapchat instead.

So you want to keep me sweaty? He texts.

He watches George’s icon appear, lurk, then type: *Yes.*

Dream stares at his phone. Maybe it went over George’s head.

I like you better that way, George adds.

His stomach drops, and he immediately shuts off his phone.

“What?” He says, running a hand through his hair, “what?”

His phone rattles against the dark desk—Sapnap has texted him. He doesn’t bother picking it up. *It was a joke*. He pulls the fabric of his shirt away from his damp chest, leaning back in his chair. If anything wasn’t fair, it was this: he can throw as many sleazy lines at George as he wants, with or without intent to kill, but this, *this*, the low feeling stirring in his stomach, the burning in his face,

his mind rewiring for the fourteenth time today—all because George happens to toss back.

He leaves the room. *Unfair.*

He drinks four glasses of water in two minutes. *Cruel.*

He settles to watch a movie on his couch, spending most of it fighting the urge to go back to his room and grab his phone. *Downright criminal.*

When the credits roll, and the bright screen turns to black, he locks eyes with his reflection. He's silhouetted in the dim room, but can vaguely make out the fluff of his hair; the slope of his shoulders. Patches is curled up gently at his side.

Is this what he looked like when George dreamt of him? A hollowed shape on a monotone screen? In his dreams, George was everything to him. He wonders how much he'd pale in comparison if they were side-by-side in this moment. George would make his couch look even dingier than normal, and his laugh would light up the room. They could be sitting and talking, or watching television, and Dream wouldn't be able to take his eyes away. He could forget about the heat; sit closer, make him blush, pull him in.

He abruptly rises, startling Patches. He feels the relentless urge to release his anger, the disharmony overwhelming. No matter what he does, his thoughts drag him back there: the beach, warm hands pinned into the sand. Where he'd made out with his friend, his *best-friend*, and loved every tantalizing second of touching his skin and feeling him tremble. He's furious with his own mind as much as he's addicted to the idea of returning to it.

He takes in a deep breath. He thinks of the many nights he'd seen himself, masked, bloodied, chest heaving by the shore. To confront himself head-on is the only healing he knows.

I don't just want to go back, he lets the thought surface, and exhales slowly. *I want to kiss him here, and now.*

“So fucking stupid,” he mutters, but the admission alone was enough to settle his heart.

Patches sits in front of his feet, and meows. He bends down to scratch her head, and she follows him on the way back to his bedroom. When he picks up his phone, a few hours worth of notifications blink on his home-screen.

Maybe we should talk about some stuff soon, Sapnap had texted.

He ignores it. Similarly, George hasn't said anything since Dream left him on opened. He switches to their iMessages, and clicks on the link to the song from their previous thread without much forethought.

Hi, he texts George. He shuffles to grab his headphones.

Hello, George responds, almost immediately.

Dream presses play; types, *I missed you.*

He momentarily questions his choices, again.

I thought you were taking a nap or something, George says.

He reigns himself back from making another nightmare or kissing-his-best-friend related joke. *I*

was watching a bird documentary, he sends instead, keeping it civil. His headphones begin whispering a soft melody.

He watches George pause before responding with: *That's cute.*

“Come on, George,” he breathes. He’d just gotten over the last heart attack he was given.

It was actually pretty cool, he replies, now stubbornly keeping it civil.

Was it another evolution of parrots movie? George asks. He’s touched by the knowledge that George cares enough to remember such small tokens of him.

Maybe, he texts, *wbu what are you up to?*

The music swells in his ears, and he takes in a deep breath of contentment as he reads George’s next message: *Nothing really, thinking about hopping on since Bad is streaming. Are u gonna join?*

He glances at his sleeping monitor. *Computer so far away. Bed cold. Chair hot,* he says.

The three dots signifying George is typing appear, then disappear. *Read at 9:07pm.*

Dream waits, resting his phone on his chest as a minute passes. His eyes shut as the lyrics eerily mimic his own descent.

Usually I put somethin’ on TV

So we never think about you and me

But today I see our reflections clearly

In Hollywood, layin’ on the screen—

The song is cut off by his ringtone blasting in his ears as his phone vibrates against his rib cage incessantly. His eyes fly open as he’s shaken from the trance Glass Animals lured him into.

George is calling him.

He looks at the name, the contact picture a cursed selfie George had taken, and the green and red buttons that would change the course of his carefully collected mood. He’s *calling* him; not on Discord, or to make him play Minecraft, or to ask for his mother’s cell.

Dream picks up.

“Hello,” George says again, his tone casual, but soft.

Dream’s heart races. “Hi.”

“I figured this was easier than texting,” George explains, and Dream’s mind passes over each inflection of syllables in his endearing accent. He sounds closer than usual. Dream suddenly remembers the last time they’d been on a phone call, he’d hung up because the change in George’s mic made him uncomfortable. He tries to not let himself over-analyze that memory.

“Okay,” Dream says. “Cool.”

“Why do you sound nervous?”

His cheeks redden. "I'm not. You interrupted my music so I'm still adjusting to being back in the real world."

"Oh, sorry. What were you listening to?"

Dream hesitates, wondering if he shouldn't disclose that information. He worries George will be able to tell how obsessed he is with the song he'd sent him as a gag.

He frowns. What is he thinking? George is as dense as a brick.

"Heat Waves," he says, "I really like it."

"Nice, me too," George carries on. "Though I do think you enjoying it while being a baby about your weather is ironic."

"Isn't that because you have a thing for me being sweaty?" he jokes. It's all a bit overwhelming; George calling him out of nowhere, the strange intimacy of their exchanges, his strained filter breaking under the pressure.

George laughs. "Oh yeah, definitely. My Twitter poll lost, by the way. I guess our followers don't want you to suffer as much as I do."

"You're a dork," Dream says fondly.

"Come on, sending that song was funny, you said it yourself," George teases. Dream can hear him chuckle on the other end. "I remember when I first discovered it I kept listening to it for like, a week straight."

Dream's throat tightens. Do the melodic words sink into George's skin the same way they consume his? Does he think about the song when he feels the lightest grace of sweat trickle down his back? When he's lying in bed, on the phone with his best friend, fighting back the urge to say: "I can't stop thinking about you."

"...What?"

Dream sits up immediately. Fuck. Did he say that out loud? *Fuck.*

"I said I can't stop thinking about it too," he lies quickly. His heart thumps erratically. "I don't normally find songs that I enjoy this much, so thanks for that."

"Yeah...no problem," George says.

Dream can't tell if he bought it or not. Terror drains the color from his face as silence isolates him in the imprisoning walls of his room. He's naturally run into this painful stoicism from George before, when he's made comments that land awkwardly, but he knows this one could be the worst yet. He prays George believes him.

"So," Dream says, "are you going to join Bad's stream?"

"Probably not, I don't really feel like getting up."

He swallows. "Are—are you in bed?"

"Yeah," George says slowly. "Why?"

"Nothing, just...me too." Dream glances at the pillows lying next to him, wondering if they both

could fit on his mattress, or if he'd have to wrap his arms around George's waist and pull him to his chest—he winces. He thought he'd regained more control by accepting he non-platonically wants to kiss George, but is beginning to think it might be the opposite.

He scorns. *Heat waves have been faking me out.*

“Is it still hot there?” George asks.

“Yeah, I called someone to take a look at my AC and stuff but I'm not too hopeful. It's only supposed to get hotter and they might force a brown-out.” He'll die if it comes to that. The last brownout Orlando had was a few summers prior, and he'd attempted to live without electricity for all of twelve hours before giving up and driving a stifling two hours to his family's home. His sister had been delighted.

“I've never had one of those here,” George muses. “What's it like?”

“Well, it's pretty miserable. Dark, terrible heat, I have to cook everything on the stove. I have a collection of candles, just in case.”

“And no Minecraft,” George adds.

Dream rolls his eyes. “Oh yeah, that too.”

“Why don't you just go to the beach to cool off?”

Dream laughs shortly. “I don't really like the beach. Remember?”

The nightmares.

“Oh,” George says quietly. “Of course I do.”

Dream softens at the concern in his tone. “Hey, look, you really don't have to worry about all that stuff I said. I can hear you frowning. I'm fine.”

George sighs. “I don't know, Dream, that's a fairly disturbing experience to be numb to.”

“I—,” his voice falters, “I know. But for the first time ever, I...find myself wanting to return to it.”

“Why?” George asks, exasperated. “I thought it terrifies you.”

“It does.” Dream reclines back into his bed. *Please don't push me, George.*

George pushes. “Then why?”

“Because I want to see you again,” he says, words ghosting past his lips with the remembrance of moon jellies and soft sand. He rests a hand on his chest to feel his heart pound heavily against his palm.

George pauses. His voice is faint, “Do you really mean that?”

“Yeah.” The blinds hanging in Dream's screened window shift slightly, the hint of a breeze trickling into his stuffy room. “I've kind of realized how much I want to meet you.”

“I...know what you mean,” George says, “I felt that after I dreamt about you.”

Dream stifles his sharp inhale. He'd messed this up before; scared George away. He tries to calm

his unsteady nerves, biting back anything that could damage the careful approach needed for his friend's Bambi-like demeanor.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Dream asks, voice successfully mellow.

George hums. "Will you try to mess with me?"

"No, I promise," he says earnestly.

In the quiet moment that follows, he doesn't move.

"Alright." George clears his throat. "I had it about three months ago, so I don't remember everything clearly. Just pieces here and there." The breeze in Dream's room gently picks up. "It started with me in my car, I think, waiting alongside the curb at the airport near my house. I parked and went into the baggage reclaim—I knew I was meant to pick up someone, I couldn't remember who—but it was completely empty. I was just standing there, until one carousel turned on, and a suitcase dropped onto it. I don't know how, but I knew it was bright green. When I went to pick it up, someone else grabbed it before me." George pauses. "*You* grabbed it before me."

"How—how did you know it was me?" Dream asks, unable to bring his voice above a murmur.

"I just knew," George says softly. "You were tall, and polite. But..."

"But?" Dream repeats, knowing what's coming.

"Your face," George speaks quietly, "I couldn't see it."

"Did I...have the..." He can't finish.

"Yes," George says. "From what you described to me, it looked the same."

Dream's heart drops, falling silent. He feels forever haunted by that ghastly thing.

"Clay?" George checks gently.

It floods him again; the comfort of his name passing from George's lips, and the embarrassment that he can tell by the slightest change in Dream's tone when he's feeling unsafe. He loves and hates the way George's voice brings him home.

"Keep going," he grunts.

"Okay," George says, proceeding cautiously. "We walked around the empty terminals for a while. I don't know why we didn't leave. We talked the whole time, and you sounded like yourself—just all close up, if that makes sense." It does. "I was so happy to see you," George's sweet excitement is audible, "I remember that the most, feeling so happy. At some point I told you that, and—and you hugged me."

A small smile forms on Dream's face. He will definitely hold George tight for a frustratingly long period of time when they first meet. He wonders if George's head would fit under his chin, if he would smell the shampoo in his dark hair.

"Then I—I pulled your mask up," George stammers, voice taugth, "just a little bit. Enough to see your mouth."

Dream blushes. He remembers the weight of his mask dropping from his face. His scalp begins to tingle where he'd imagined George stroking his hair. Why would George, in both dreams—

“And you, well, you uhm—” he breathes, “you kissed my forehead.”

Dream freezes.

He did *what*?

“That was it, I woke up,” George says quickly. He huffs, quietly adding, “You’re never going to let me live this down.”

Dream’s chest swells with a torrent of emotions; pride, confusion, ambition. He presses his knuckles to his burning cheek.

George had a dream he kissed him. *He* had a dream he kissed him.

“Wh—” he tries, and fails to still his breathing. He hopes George can’t hear the tremble in his voice. Floating above his body, he finds himself asking, “What was it like?”

He hears George’s breath hitch. “It felt safe,” he whispers, “and warm. So warm.”

Dream screws his eyes shut, chest rising and falling rapidly. He wants to tell him everything—how George had touched his mask in his mind too, how he’d kissed his mouth, and wanted to kiss him everywhere. He knows he could. He’d even blame it on the slip of his unruly tongue. Yet there was a boundary he has to walk upon, teetering from side to side, never choosing to cross in fear of losing George. He knows he won’t.

“...I’ll put that on the list of things to do when I meet you for the first time,” he says instead.

To his surprise, George laughs. The sound alleviates the tension in his muscles. “Shut up.”

Dream smiles. “I’m serious.”

“No, you aren’t,” George says, “I know you’re not actually like that.”

“You have no idea what I’m like in real life.”

George scoffs. “You’re all talk.”

Dream raises his eyebrows. “Oh really?” He opens his phone, navigates to Snapchat.

“Yeah,” George says, confident.

Dream takes a photo. *Send to Goog.*

“Wait,” George says after a moment, “what did you just send to me?”

Dream giggles.

“Dream.” The snap opens. “What—”

It is hardly a selfie, a quick shot aimed close to Dream’s face. It didn’t show anything except part of his jawline, his neck, and tufts of hair sprawled on the pillow beneath his head.

Dream can’t stop laughing at George’s silence, wheezing when he watches him replay the image. He knows where this fit is coming from—it’s surreal that their conversation has made him feel such tidal waves of emotions so far. He is nervous, and exhilarated, and starting to consider that maybe George is, too. Maybe.

“I hate you,” George utters with a breathy warmth that shuts Dream up immediately. “You did the same thing to me already today.”

He remembers what he’d sent during the stream, the power it gave him. His voice drops low, “Why, are you blushing again?”

George’s response is amorous. “Do you want me to be?”

The air is taken from Dream’s lungs. His eyes, wide open, pointlessly search his room to check he’s still awake. George sounds just like he had on the beach, and it burns in Dream, red hot, as he swallows the euphoria whole.

He grips onto his bed sheets. Patches stares at him with judgement.

What the hell is going on?

“Yes,” he professes, deciding to use George’s words against him, “I like you better that way.”

What are we doing?

“You’re too much,” George says, winded. “I—I think I should go to bed.”

Dream feels a pang—he fully expects to feel empty without George’s soft voice in his ear—but sympathizes. In the duration of their call, he’d overheated to the point where he’s concerned for the melting of his brain.

“It was nice talking to you,” Dream says, though he’s still catching up to their last forty seconds.

“Yeah, you too,” George rushes. “Whatever.”

He hangs up.

Dream wrenches his headphones off. He isn’t sure what to make of it, any of it; the friendly flirting that slithers into his gut and coils warmly among the pooling torment he’d already been subject to. He can easily convince himself that George is screwing with him, a revenge so to speak for the years Dream had spent irritating him. But there was something in his voice when he murmured soft replies that Dream desperately wants to believe was raw honesty.

His face falls as he accepts his second terrible truth of the day: *I want George to want me.*

He can’t bring himself to leave bed, or to bother with distractions. All he can think about is carefully taking George’s jaw in one hand, sliding into his dark hair with the other, and pressing his lips gently against his forehead.

He doesn’t sleep at all that night.

Chapter End Notes

Lots of dialogue and texting in this one, I can't say I'm used to writing ships that rely so much on technology lol. Thanks again for being patient and for all your support! Other work prompts or criticism for this one is always welcome.

Mirage

Chapter Summary

Beginning to gain hope after visiting a special place, Dream extends an invitation.

Chapter Notes

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Beneath the purple haze of an early morning sky, traffic lights silently flick from red to green. The road is quiet, and empty, and peppered with loose asphalt. The blue numbers on Dream's stereo read 7:04.

His car frame shudders as he accelerates through the intersection.

He isn't sure how long he's been driving; it was dark when he'd stumbled down his driveway, dropped his keys on the concrete, and clambered into his seat. Now, a hint of sun slowly transforms the clouds above him into faint pink streaks. Stray vehicles begin to join his solemn trek across the barren streets with every passing minute.

Dream clenches his leather steering wheel. He'd been tossing and turning in the black molasses trap that is his room for so long, micro-analyzing every word he's said to George in the entirety of their friendship, that he had to leave. He had to. To go somewhere, anywhere, away from his computer and digital life and his ridiculous madness.

He started driving aimlessly for the first hour or so, but once a location had settled on his shoulders, he knew it was inevitable.

His phone maps the way for him silently.

He tries to ignore the deep-seated embarrassment that gnaws at him every time his car slows. The murmurs and callous language that had fallen from his mouth reattach themselves into his mind—why, *why* hadn't he stopped himself last night? He'd been flooded with hormones that made him feel like he was thirteen again, desperately clearing the browser history on his mother's laptop before she came home.

It's not as if they haven't had close calls before, because they *have*, but the sheer strength of it hasn't existed until now. The way George's words seemed so genuine, the way Dream felt like he could take every slight breath that passed through the phone and run with it until it brought them both to a dangerous place. It was hardly anything, but in Dream's idea of their strange friendship, it was more than enough to warrant a minor meltdown.

His foot presses on the gas pedal forcefully. Self control is what he needs now.

He turns, chest tightening as the sandy horizon comes into view. Does impulsively driving across the state with a dangerously low fuel gage count as self control?

He pulls to a stop, and steps out of the car. The keys jangle faintly in his hand while his hoodie hangs limp in the other. A breeze brushes against the back of his neck, carrying sea salt and nostalgia.

He moves into the sand.

It's been over thirteen years since he's been back here, in person, and the lagoon looks different than he remembers. The murky water is now a dull green, and the shore is cluttered by beach chairs and trash cans. He glances at his shoes, nudging a stray cigarette butt on the ground. A strange feeling creeps down his spine—emptiness? Closure? He can't tell.

He surveys the beach quietly, stepping over small dunes and crab shells, remembering the excited shrieks and playful games he'd been surrounded by here as a child. The feel of a strong warm hand in his, the sound of his mother's gentle voice. Sunscreen, and mason jars, and jelly-fish hunting.

He lowers himself to the ground. When had this place become so ugly; in the waking world, and in his heart?

It's pretty, George had said in his dream.

Because of you.

The early morning sun lifts over the horizon with careful grace. Dream brushes his fingertips over his nose and mouth instinctively. His skin is soft and smooth, yet still untouchable. A dull ache pains beneath his ribcage—how long has he been alone like this?

He lifts his head, and looks back at the line of swaying trees. He finds himself wishing George would emerge from them, as he did in his horrifying dream.

Is this place the last time he felt whole?

His back falls into the sand with a heavy thump. The sky shifts above him, and he blinks blearily. It'd be a rational idea for him to head home, soon. Yet a sinking weight tugs on his limbs, longing to rest for a moment in the dusk light. He's been up for what feels like decades, constantly fighting tooth and nail against every thought that clambers into his brain.

He wants the anger to subside. He wants to feel without it slowly becoming more laced with hurt.

The world darkens as his eyelids flutter shut.

Just for a moment, he thinks, just for now.

He naps for two and a half hours.

The loud ringing of his phone startles him awake, and he sits up immediately. He sees the water before him, feels the sand gripping to his skin, and panic begins to rise in his throat. He grasps at his phone with a shaky hand.

"H-hello?" He glances around rapidly. When he catches sight of the small children splashing in the lagoon, families crowded on the shore, and wary strangers casting him concerned looks, he stills.

He's safe, this is real.

"Dream," Sapnap says. "Hey."

Dream rotates his wrists slowly. He can detect the hint of a sunburn forming from his poor judgement.

"What—uh, why did you call?" The sun beats down on his neck as he gingerly brushes off the sand from his arms.

"I wanted to talk to you. Actually, do you want to switch to Discord? I'm in the middle of a round." He hears the jumbled clicking of Sapnap's keyboard.

Dream rises to his feet, muscles groaning in protest. "I can't."

"Why not?" Sapnap asks.

"Um." Dream shakes off his hoodie. "I'm in Miami."

The clicking stops. "What? Why?"

"It was an accident," he says.

Sapnap falls silent.

"...You drove, like, four hours on *accident*?"

"Three and a half," Dream corrects. He feels ridiculous. "Don't make fun of me."

"I'm not making fun of you," Sapnap says, "this is exactly why I called. You've been weird lately."

He frowns. It hasn't been *that* long. "Lately?"

"Yeah, man. For a while now, but I really...really didn't want to make it anybody's business unless I had to, y'know?" Sapnap clears his throat. "I guess the past few days have changed that. You seem *extra* weird."

Dream passes a family that stares at him as he walks by. "Trust me, I know."

"Okay, well." Sapnap's voice softens, "You know you can talk to me, right? I know you're kind of closer to George these days, but I'm still here."

His heart pangs. "Of course I know that. I love you, dude." He stops at his car, and leans against the driver's side door. "I hope you know that even if we get kind of busy and don't talk as much as we used to, it doesn't mean we're not close anymore. And as for me and George, I...that's the problem. George. I think. I'm not sure."

"George?" Sapnap reiterates, confused.

"George," Dream confesses, laced with isolated warmth and gentle sorrow. He squeezes his keys in his palm, the metal ridges digging into his flesh.

"Oh."

"Yeah," he says. "I—I don't really know what to do."

Sapnap clears his throat, "I mean, I'm glad that you told me. I'm sure that wasn't easy. But...he cares about you a lot, man. Like a lot, a lot."

"Exactly. I feel like a creep." Dream looks out at the water, children building sandcastles where he'd wrestled himself to death once or twice. "It's all because of that stupid dream."

"The beach one you were talking about?" Sapnap asks. "What happened?"

Dream laughs stiffly. "Guess."

"I think I know," Sapnap says.

"Then guess, dude, don't make me say it."

"Well I don't want to say it! What if I'm wrong?"

They both become silent. Dream sighs.

"I kissed him, Sapnap," he mutters, "like, really kissed him. When I woke up I thought that was the end of it, y'know? People have weird dreams like that all the time. But then what I felt just...didn't go away." He kicks a lone piece of gravel with his shoe. "It's still not going away."

"Maybe it's worth more than that to you, then." Sapnap takes a pause, and continues with caution in his voice, "Also, I don't think it all came from nowhere."

He frowns. "What do you mean?"

"I'm saying that you probably, I don't know, had these feelings for him before," Sapnap says.

Feelings. "Um."

"Sorry, was that not—,"

"No, no, don't worry about it." Dream swallows. "Maybe you have a point. Either way, I'm in this shit now. How do I get out?"

"Do you want out?" Sapnap asks.

"I—," Dream falters, not expecting the word *yes* to get caught in his throat. "I want *him*."

Sapnap coughs awkwardly.

Dream turns red. "Sorry."

"It's fine, just something to get used to. Have you...talked to him, about how you feel?"

"I can't do that, he'd freak out. You know how he gets even when I'm joking," Dream says.

"You do get under his skin," Sapnap says, "not in a gross way, though. If he had a real problem with it he'd ask you to stop."

Dream scoffs. "Seriously? This is George. He hates confrontation."

"Dunno. He seems fine confronting you." He hears Sapnap's lips smack a few times.

"That doesn't mean anything—wait." He pauses to listen. "Are you eating?"

Sapnap chews. "Yes."

"In the middle of my super emotional conversation?"

"It's my lunch."

"It's so loud, Sapnap. What is that, taffy?" His nose scrunches in disgust.

"Peanut butter and jelly sandwich," Sapnap corrects. "Have you eaten anything today?"

He rolls his eyes. "No. Don't mom me."

"I will. You're talking to me about boy trouble, so I qualify. Eat something."

"I'm not hungry," Dream says.

Sapnap makes a noise of disbelief. "It's a really sweet peanut-almond mix, with strawberry jam, on rye bread. Toasted."

He feels a grumble in his stomach. "Goddammit."

"Get food," Sapnap says, "and *go home*, Jesus."

Dream begrudgingly leans off the car and opens his door. "George doesn't 'confront' me. It doesn't mean anything," he repeats. Waves of heat radiate from inside the vehicle, making him wince. He should have at least cracked a window or two when he'd parked—this is going to be a nightmare.

"Oh come on, Dream. He calls you out all the time to make you like, piss yourself or something." Sapnap chuckles lightly.

"Yeah, but—oh my *god*, it's too hot right now." He lowers himself into the seat. "But that's just him joking around. He's not serious." He tugs the door shut, immediately rolling down the windows once his keys are in the ignition. The air outside is a few degrees less hellish than inside his portable oven, but not enough to provide relief.

"Don't you think that when you're actually saying stuff, he just thinks you're joking too?" Sapnap questions.

His fingers hastily shove at the air conditioning controls. A small, cool burst is all he needs. "I don't understand what you're trying to say."

"That maybe he's just mimicking you," Sapnap says, "maybe he wants you, too."

A blast of scorching air attacks his face from the dusty vents immediately, flooding the car with suffocating billows of heat. It smells like pain.

"Wh—" Dream coughs, smacking the vents sloppily, mind on fire. "What?"

"He said the other day that—"

The phone beeps twice.

"Sapnap? Sapnap?" Dream takes the phone from his sweaty face to stare at a black screen. Rapidly squeezing the home button, a dead battery signal faintly pops up.

He rests it on his thigh. Of course.

With the back of his hand, he wipes his forehead. He often forgets that Sappnap knows him too well.

He reaches for the cord and silently plugs in his phone. This is exactly why he'd avoided their conversation, knowing full well it would come around to him eventually. His heart races. Why should he believe him, anyway?

The hunger in his stomach prods at him politely. Glancing around the floor of his car, he realizes that when he'd manically left his house in the middle of the night, he hadn't cared to bring his wallet. Or his drivers license.

He cranks the gear shift into drive in preparation of a miserable ride home.

Eventually, when the air conditioning has cooled to a tolerable degree, he sees his phone flash to life. He quickly routes his way home, and sets it down as his music unknowingly begins to shuffle.

From his busted speakers, he hears a few words begin to crackle through.

Road shimmer, wiggling the vision, heat heat waves...

He glares at the watery mirage on the sunny street ahead of him, and slams on the gas.

-

Nearly four hours later, he's five slices deep in a large pepperoni pizza he'd desperately ordered half an hour away from his house. Patches is perched on the counter and waiting for the inevitable moment of weakness where he'll give her a snack.

He'd tried to not think too much about what Sappnap said on his drive. It was easy to ignore, anyway, with the sweat pooling by his armpits and angry tailgating locals. But once he'd rolled into his driveway and peeled himself from the leather seat, a complicated elation set in.

Maybe he wants you too.

What kind of statement was that to say to someone in his situation? He rips up a piece of crust angrily. As if it wasn't already bad enough.

His phone vibrates against his leg, and he sighs. Sappnap had texted him a few times but Dream isn't sure if it'll be a good idea to answer. Still, he wipes off the grease from one hand to check, dangling a piece of pizza in the other.

Hey, George sent, we haven't really talked in like, a day. Is everything okay? Did I do something?

He immediately drops the slice and frantically begins to type back. *No no no, of course not, I've just been—*

He pauses. How can he describe the last eighteen hours of his life?

—doing a lot of driving, so I haven't been on my phone. I actually just got home.

Oh sorry, ignore my other text then, George says. Home from where?

Dream chews hesitantly. *Miami.*

How come?

His thumb hovers over the letters for a while until he responds. *I don't know how to explain it. I just had to clear my head.*

That's worrisome, George says.

Dream huffs. *I have pizza now so it's ok.*

That's good, George responds, *how did you sleep?*

On a beach, Dream types, then deletes it. *I kind of*—he aggressively hits the backspace button.

I didn't, he confesses finally. He tries, and fails, to not think about the clipped breaths he'd heard leave George's mouth the night before.

He picks a piece of pepperoni off the remaining slices and tosses it to Patches. She gently bends her head while chewing over the cold countertop. In the time it takes for George to reply, he's grown antsy enough to give her another.

Why's that? George asks.

Dream smirks. *Why do you think,* he sends too quickly.

Nightmares?

He thinks of the dark heat of his room, his calloused palm on his chest, George's words ringing in his ears as his self-restraint thinned greatly. Resisting the searing force that wanted, more than anything, to drag his hand down across his stomach and disappear in the darkness below.

Something like that, he responds.

Sorry for keeping you up late, then, George says.

He mutters, "You have no idea."

It's fine, Dream texts, *I liked hearing your voice.*

A glowing confidence begins to trickle into his chest again. What is it about talking with George that always gives him a cradle of comfort? *He makes me feel safe,* he thinks. His cheeks flush, and he blames it on the humidity.

You're just lonely, George responds.

Dream grins, raising his cup to his lips. *Come be lonely with me.*

Stop.

You keep giving me the opportunity, he texts happily, *it's almost like you secretly enjoy it.*

It's hot, George says.

Dream chokes on his water.

NOT, George sends frantically, *not not not. It's not. Oh my god.*

A warm laugh escapes his lips. His head spins with flustered surprise and deep amusement. This is too good to be true.

Oh really? He sends.

George quickly answers. *Shut up.*

You think I'm hot?

Typos happen, Dream, George types in a manner Dream imagines is angry. He can picture his pinched brows, his nervous hands rubbing his face in embarrassment.

You didn't deny it, he points out.

Do you not get many compliments? Is that why you're so obsessed with this? George asks.

That's really flattering for you to say especially since you haven't seen me, he continues, setting down his phone to pack up the leftover pizza.

It vibrates against the spotted counter.

I've seen parts of you.

He raises his eyebrows. The words arch, draw back, and snap as he takes his shot: *You wanna see more?*

George says: *yes.*

The arrow lands right in his heart.

What do you want to see, he types slowly, breath becoming uneven. The light swoosh that signifies the text went through makes his skin crawl. He slides his phone away, busily clearing the pizza box and napkins.

He scoops Patches up anxiously. She doesn't protest besides lightly hooking her claws into his shirt.

George texts him back.

You have nice hands, it says.

His breath escapes his body in a warm rush. The low fire within him roars to life. Are they joking anymore? This would be reasonable for George to mess with him about, as he and Sappnap had teased him relentlessly when their viewers ogled over his merch photos.

If only George knows how his hands tremble as he opens Snapchat. He aims the camera at his chest, capturing Patches and his supporting hand buried in her fur.

Here you go, he captions.

He presses send—knuckles, veins, and all. He can't overthink this.

George opens it.

Goog has taken a screenshot.

Dream groans. He swipes into their Snapchat conversation and furiously types: *You bitch.*

I'm gonna leak this to the subs, George says. *And not because of Patches.*

Dream fights a smile. *Yeah right.*

Do you want to test me?

If you tweet that, Dream types, I'll tweet screenshots of you calling me hot.

No one would believe that, George fires back.

Dream sends him a frowny face.

You rly live for validation, George texts.

Yes. Dream is setting Patches down onto the floor when genius strikes. He nervously types: Just admit it, George. I think you're hot, why don't you say it back?

George views the message, and hesitates before replying; *I really dislike you right now.*

I'm telling the truth.

You're not, George replies.

His heart pounds. *Send me a selfie. Prove me wrong.*

When George doesn't immediately begin typing back, Dream's anxiety skyrockets. George and Sappap send dumb photos to him all the time, often from cursed angles or covered with enlarged words. He's never *asked* for it before, because it's not something friends do.

A red square pops up on his screen, and he clicks on it.

His mouth runs dry.

George sent him a partial selfie, showing the lower half of his face beneath his eyes, with his hand near his chest flipping off the camera. Dream would normally crack a smile, or quickly respond—but his gaze rakes over George's lips, the smooth shape of his jaw, the exposed skin on his neck. His cheeks are dusted pink, accompanied by light speckles that Dream knows are there but has hardly seen before.

It explodes in Dream's chest all at once; how badly he wants to grab a fistful of George's hoodie, kiss him senseless, and lower him to his knees. He could stroke his fingers across his ivory jaw. He could tilt his chin, have George look up at him with his dark, gleaming eyes. Run a thumb across his swollen lips. How easily would they part under his touch?

"Fuck." Dream runs a hand through his hair. That is too far, too much. *This is too much.*

You're too much, George had whispered, rosy-cheeked and breath hot.

"*Nope,*" he breathes, pocketing his phone and rushing to his bathroom. "*Nope nope nope.*"

His hands shake as he flicks on the light and grasps the marble sink. In the mirror, his disheveled reflection drips with sweat and shame. Shadows fall over his eyes from the tension in his brow.

How did I get like this?

He turns on the faucet, cursing himself for letting something so small, so innocent, writhe under his skin and possess his mind.

He cups his palms under the cold stream, and splashes his face.

Was it innocent? Does George know what he's doing?

His phone rattles again. Dream lifts the bottom of his shirt to dry his dripping jaw.

Did I prove you wrong, George asks.

Dream lets out a highly exasperated huff. *No*, he types, *you most certainly did not.*

Yeah right.

Always a joke. Never serious, never real, never *honest*.

He steps away from the sink, letting his back press against the cool tile walls. *What can I do to make you believe me*, he asks.

The pale light hovering over the mirror hums quietly. Droplets fall, rhythmically, into the sink drain. Dream's pulse presses against the edges of his skull like clockwork.

Call me.

Dream's eyes widen. Can he bear to hear George's voice without sinking deeper into this tangled mess of warmth and want? His fingers still above the glowing screen, and he contemplates his self control. Their last call had sent him across Florida—what would this one do?

He dials George's number immediately.

"You actually called," George says once he's picked up, and the sound of his words makes Dream melt.

"Of course," he attempts to hide his fondness. "You told me to. I couldn't say no."

"How nice of you," George replies, laughing lightly. "Simp."

Dream's eyes scrape the white ceiling nervously. "I'm the simp? You asked for pics of my hands earlier. That's pretty embarrassing, George."

"You asked for a selfie," George counters. "Which one is worse?"

"Fair enough," Dream says. He slides down to the fuzzy bathroom rug. "You could ask for one too, if you wanted."

"I don't want to force you," George recites easily. "I'm happy with what I've seen so far."

He smiles. "Oh really?"

"Mhm."

"What if I could make you happier?" he presses, a dopey grin hanging off of his features.

George clicks his tongue. "Easy, tiger."

Dream's face grows warm. The air of the bathroom glides over the hum in his cheeks, as he dares to ask, "Is this going to become a nightly thing?"

"What do you mean?" George questions, but the edges are nervous. Knowing.

"These phone calls," he says, unable to keep softness from his tone.

George hums, contemplatively. "Well, yeah. I mean, we're on calls together all the time."

Dream can feel the hot circulation brushing the back of his neck, the hair on his forearms; the exposed skin of his throat. His voice is low, "But this is different—just you and me. Right?"

He hates the way '*you and me*' falls from his lips, sounding like a secret.

He can nearly see it—George in his room, phone held to his ear, stilled by the subtle change in tone. How badly Dream wishes he could be there next to him, to see his face and know if any of their conversations are truly real.

"Yeah," George murmurs. "It is."

Dream's eyes flutter shut in silent relief. The agreement blankets the space between them, words leap to the tip of his tongue, and he clenches his jaw to keep himself at bay.

"You know, you—uhm," George stumbles, and clears his throat. "The way you talk to me is different when it's just us, too."

His grip on his phone tightens slightly. "Really?"

"Your voice is softer," George explains quietly, "and bright. Like you've never been sad before."

Dream's eyes slowly open. He stares at the space between the stark counter and porcelain bowl before him, paralyzed by his nerves. His lips part in response—but for once, he doesn't know what to say.

"And your laugh is so genuine. Even when I've not said anything funny, you still laugh, and the sound is just...infectious," George says. "You have no idea how much it makes me smile."

"I'm glad I can make you feel that way," Dream breathes finally. Through the small window in the shower, he can hear wind swaying the palm trees in his backyard. He wishes, more than anything, that he could see George smile whenever he wanted; listen to him speak his name, face to face. "I should make more excuses to call you, then."

"I'd like that," George mutters.

Dream wraps a hand around his bicep, and squeezes. He can feel his pulse flaring beneath his fingertips. How much more of this can he take, before he combusts into a confetti of red desire? Or drags himself back to the steering wheel? Or, even worse, obtains a *plane* ticket?

"George," he says, throat tight. "Can I ask you something?"

"Oh, sure."

He lets the phone's electronic hum fill their silence, for a moment. Then, he takes a breath.

"Would you want to come to Florida?"

Hey everyone! I apologize for the hiatus, I've been going through a breakup recently, so it was hard for me to get in the mindset of romance writing for a little bit. I wasn't sure where to end this chapter, I kinda just wanted to get it out after not posting for so long! I really love your comments and support, they cheered me up a lot :) Lmk if u have any questions or ideas <3

Plunge

Chapter Summary

Dream is visited by strange weather, yet somehow, the heat keeps rising.

Chapter Notes

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“Would you want to come to Florida?” Dream asks.

It's not as though they've never spoken of it before, because they have—in slow-moving voice calls when no one else is awake, mid-game when Dream's adrenaline is coursing strong, hard nights when he offers George a place of refuge from certain familial problems.

It's existed as a fallback, an inevitable accumulation of their years of friendship. Yet it remains, still, devoid of follow through. Dream hopes George takes him seriously.

“...To Florida?” George echoes in timid surprise. “Like, visit you?”

“Yeah,” Dream responds. “We've always talked about it. Why not do it soon?”

“O-oh. Well, of course I want to, it's just,” George hesitates. “A lot to consider.”

A frown tugs at the corners of Dream's mouth. He didn't expect that answer. “It doesn't have to be soon, if that helps...I have spare bedrooms and plenty of space. Or you could stay in a hotel, I don't know.”

George's voice is quiet. “Thank you for the offer, Dream. I'll think about it.”

His heart sinks. Chills breakout across his skin, and he draws his knees towards his chest.

He remembers sitting in the same spot on his bathroom floor days before, wet droplets slipping down his neck while the haunting song reverberated in his skull. In some way, he feels just as barren and vulnerable in George's silence as he had when wrapped in only his cotton towel.

He's cried here before, laying on the cold ground with silent tears and balled up toilet paper. He's celebrated, too, when he'd first moved into the house and needed a moment away from his visiting mother and sister.

Being confined by the white walls and grey cabinets brings out raw emotions that he either loves, or destroys.

“I’m not trying to overstep. It seems like you’re uncomfortable right now,” Dream begins slowly, “but I have to know. In the past, you’ve been excited about coming to see me. Is...is there a reason you aren’t now?”

The lights overhead dim momentarily, then brighten again. Dream pinches his brows together in confusion.

“Why did you have to ask that,” George says in one breath, but it’s mostly to himself. Dream’s lips part in rebuttal, and he continues, “It’s not personal, Dream. Please drop it.”

Sour pinpricks collect in his stomach. He knows George’s voice too well. “Are you lying to me?”

“I’m not.”

He feels sick. “George.”

“I don’t know if I have enough money, or what my family plans look like—it’s not about you,” George nearly pleads.

“Is that really true?” Dream asks.

George’s presence is stifled by sharp silence.

Dream’s words are small. “Why don’t you want to see me?”

“I *want* to,” George assures fervently, “that’s the problem. I want to see you so much that I’m...” his voice dwindles, “...scared what will happen when I do.”

The wind outside roars past his window, and the air is taken from Dream’s lungs. Into the stuffy room wafts the faint smell of storm.

“Scared,” Dream reiterates in gentle disbelief, “of what?”

“I don’t know how to explain it,” George mutters.

Dream wraps an arm around his knees. “Try. Please.”

George takes a breath. “I’m not good at this—talking about how I feel. Okay?”

Dream’s heart softens. “I know.”

“You say whatever you’re feeling, all of the time, like you don’t know or care about what it’ll make you look like. It’s ridiculous, I mean, who *does* that?”

Gently, he repeats, “I know.”

“I’ve known you for so long, and you’re a great friend and I—,” George pauses. “I care about you, because it’s worked, online. It’s always *been* online. Who’s to say the second we meet in person, we won’t have anything to talk about? Or, we meet and everything goes so well that...it’s over?”

Dream clenches his jaw.

“That anticipated moment is over. Everything we’ve talked about for the last few years just...passes, and the expectations are gone,” George continues, “and you stop talking to me.”

“I wouldn’t,” Dream dictates calmly.

“You don’t know that.”

“I do,” he swears. “I don’t care whatever happens.” *If you somehow want me.* “I’m not going anywhere.” *If you don’t.* “I’m here.”

George sighs. “I appreciate your confidence, but still. Everything is going to be different than what we expect it to be.”

Recognition clicks in Dream’s brain. He’d shared a similar conversation with George years ago, and learned that George considers his life a careful balance between expectations, and reality. When the expectations fall through, and he’s left with sheer disappointment, it’s crippling.

“Are you worried it won’t live up to your expectations?” Dream prods.

“No,” George says. “I’m afraid it will.”

Words in response rise and then die on Dream’s tongue, weighted by loss and confusion. He hopes that George doesn’t expect poorly of *him*; what he looks like, or who he is in real life.

He hears a gentle patter pick up just beyond the clear curtain, and he lifts his head to survey the open window. The sky outside is darkened by tumbling clouds.

“George,” he hushes, slowly rising to his feet as a feeling of child-like wonder swells in his chest. “*George.*”

“What?” George asks, tired.

Once he’s standing, he can see through the misted screen. His words come out in a whisper, “It’s raining.”

“Uh—”

“It’s *raining!*” He clutches his phone to his ear as he scrambles out of the bathroom. “Oh my god, I didn’t even notice—it’s a break, it’s a break!”

His feet carry him down the hall, passing under the skylight that is dappled with water splashes. His socks slide on the wooden floor as he descends down the staircase.

“A break?” George says for clarification, and Dream can hear a faint trace of amusement in his voice.

“In the heat wave,” Dream rasps, grinning when the sliding glass doors to his backyard come into view. The grass is drenched a vibrant green, bushes and palm trees whipping in the wind, and his concrete patio is stained dark grey. “When it’s broken, it’ll go down. The heat will go down.”

He hears George laugh lightly. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard someone this excited about rain.”

“I’ve been miserable here, you don’t even know,” Dream rambles, pressing a palm against the cool glass. “Day in day out, sweating bullets, the AC guy is booked for another week—and god, at the beach today it was horrible, I nearly roasted out there—”

“The beach?” George interrupts.

Dream falters.

“The...one you told me about?”

“Yes.” He hadn’t intended to keep it from George, but for whatever reason, it feels terribly private. “That’s why I was in Miami.”

“But you hate the beach.”

“I—I do,” he says carefully. “Sort of. Lately I’ve just been...lost, I guess.” *Driving. Feeling. Learning.* “That nightmare thing with you really shook me, and brought up a lot of stuff I didn’t know I’d been holding on to.”

“Oh,” George’s voice with concern. “Like what?”

Dream’s hand slowly falls from the transparent door. He stares out into the yard, and watches the rain.

“Like my dad,” he confesses, words coming from a deep hollow in his heart. “He...used to take my family there all the time, when I was little. He called it a ‘lagoon of love,’ or something like that—and it would make my mom laugh. I remember that so clearly. His hand on her shoulder, and her laughing.” Tension rises in his jaw; around his temples. Thunder cracks in the sky outside. “When he left, she didn’t laugh for a while. And—and we never went back.”

He opens the door, and the sound of the drizzling shower doubles in his ears. Temperate air gently graces his frontside. It’s the coldest he’s felt in eons.

“Not too long after, I started having those nightmares. I guess it did something to me,” Dream says. “Tore me in half.”

He remembers the first few times he’d found himself in that dream-space, it was difficult to tell who the man behind the mask truly was. Bringing smiling paper plates home from school, his father holding them over his face, the image staying until Dream didn’t know if he *was* his father, or his own reflection.

After a moment, George speaks. “How come you’ve never mentioned it?”

“I think I’m scared of getting too close to you,” he says. *I think I’ve recently figured out why.*

The rain falls steadily.

“Me too,” George says. His voice is latent with what sounds like relief. Part of Dream’s anguish settles.

“Visit me,” he offers again. “That’s as close as we can get.”

George huffs. “I can’t tell if you’re self destructive or just a really good friend.”

He smiles. “What if I’m both?”

“Then my mum was right about you,” George says. “You’re trouble.”

Dream’s face grows unexpectedly warm. “You talk to your mom about me?”

“Yeah,” George mumbles. “I talk to her about the important stuff.”

His stomach flutters. “I’m important stuff?”

“You are.”

Dream steps outside, protected by the overhang. Splashes of water lightly spritz his socks. “I really don’t think anything will change if we meet in person, you know.” He hopes, faintly, that he doesn’t sound desperate. “Important stuff sticks around.”

“How can you be so sure?”

His heart thumps. “Because I care about you a lot more than you think. Even if things somehow do change, I’m never going to stop wanting to talk to you.”

“I don’t get it,” George breathes, “why you stay stuff like that to me, and not Sapnap, or anyone else.”

“You’re different,” Dream murmurs. *I don’t dream about them. I don’t obsess over them.*

He extends a hand out beyond the awning. Between brief moments of humid air, cold raindrops land on his skin.

From the silence, he catches George softly saying, “I can hear the rain.”

“Can you? Is it loud?”

“No, it’s nice. I haven’t had rain in a while.”

They both calm into quiet comfort, and listen. Dream peers up at the darkening grey clouds in concern of nearby power lines. Perhaps he should step inside, locate his flashlights and prepare Patches for her least favorite time of year.

“Clay,” George timidly speaks up. “Can you describe it to me?”

He blows out a hot, shaky breath. He’d do anything George asked him to with that tenderness in his voice.

“It’s a light downpour at the moment,” he explains in a low tone, “but it’s getting heavier. There’s puddles forming on my lawn...everything is green, and soaked. And beautiful.” He tips his chin skyward. “When I look up, I can see the rain coming down in these small grey dots. Did you ever try to catch them on your tongue, when you were a kid?”

“Yeah,” George whispers.

For some reason, it sends chills down the back of Dream’s neck. “The sky looks different, trying to catch them. The storm above me is moving so quickly; I can see the wind in the clouds.” He inhales. “I can smell the ocean, too.”

“Are you cold?”

“No,” he murmurs, “it’s very humid here. Keeps me warm.” He wipes his hand on his shirt. “Tropical storms are something else. I wish you could see it for yourself.”

It’d be beyond comforting to have George stand and watch the rain with him. *Maybe he’d let me wrap my arms around his waist, he thinks forlornly, and hold him close, for a while.*

“I wish I could too,” George says. After a beat, he adds, “Maybe it’ll rain when I come see you.”

Dream’s eyes widen. “Wh—what? What?” His pulse begins to race. “When you—what?”

“I think I’m going to visit,” George promises. “You’ve convinced me.”

“I have?” Dream repeats, shrill with excitement.

George laughs faintly. “Yes, dummy.”

“Oh my god.” Rattling exhilaration skitters across his skin. “George, oh my god. I’m going to see you?”

“You’re going to see me,” George echoes warmly.

Dream runs a hand through his hair. “In real life, in Florida?”

“Yes, Dream. But I—I sort of have one condition, to make it less stressful,” George says.

“Of course, yes, what is it?” Dream asks, heart hammering in his chest.

“I’d like Sapnap to be there, too.”

-

“Oh hell yeah, dude, I’d love to go,” Sapnap says. “When were you guys thinking?”

Dream adjusts the mic on his headset and shifts in his chair. “Probably in like two months or so? Not sure about dates yet.”

“Yeah, I’m going to be busy for a bit so that’s why we aren’t doing it sooner,” George explains.

Dream had been pulled from his wonder of the refreshing storm at George’s persistence that they join a call with Sapnap. He was warmed by the eagerness George showed after he’d recovered from his initial anxieties about visiting.

“That could work, I’ll have to double check when my—uh—friend is coming in town this fall,” Sapnap replies. “Other than that I think I’m good.”

Dream presses his lips together in suspicion. He tabs out of the server to privately message him: *Friend?*

Yes, Sapnap replies, plain and simple.

He isn’t upset over the addition of Sapnap as he expected himself to be. His presence releases tension from Dream’s gut—it may be easier for him to avoid how George makes him feel if Sapnap can be his buffer. He hopes Sapnap knows what he’s agreeing to.

Dream hums. “Alright. Cool. You guys can stay at my house when you come, so don’t worry about reserving a hotel or anything.”

“Are you going to get your air conditioning fixed?” Sapnap asks.

Dream laughs. “Yes, yes, I promise. I’m not trying to boil you alive.”

“Aw,” George says. “We won’t get to see a sweaty Dream?”

Dream rolls his eyes. “Sorry, sweetie, but no. I can send you pictures right now if you want.”

“Shut the fuck up,” George exasperates immediately.

Sapnap cackles. “I can send some too.”

“Do it, Sapnap. I dare you.”

“It’s a trap,” Dream says hurriedly, “George screenshots things for blackmail. Don’t do it.”

“That’s evil,” Sapnap says. “What did he screenshot?”

Dream blushes. “Nothing—”

“Nothing,” George hurries.

Their call falls silent.

“...I can’t wait to see you idiots interact in person,” Sapnap says.

Dream can’t fully wrap his mind around it. He’s met Sapnap before, and it was an exciting and humorous collection of days—but seeing George, being able to talk to him and laugh with him and *touch* him—

“What kind of stuff is there to do there?” George asks.

Me. “Um, movies, bars, swimming,” Dream says. “I can figure out some plans for us.”

“Clubbing?” Sapnap inputs.

Dream chuckles. “I mean, yeah, if you want to.”

“I’d rather not,” George says.

“Too spicy for George.”

“Whatever, Sapnap,” George scolds. “Really, though, how hot is it going to be?”

“It’ll be starting to cool off,” Dream supplies weakly. “It’s fairly warm year-round, the coldest it gets in the winter is like, mid 60’s. Fahrenheit. But you guys will get some of the stormy season.”

“Cool,” Sapnap says. “Hurricanes.”

“Not cool,” Dream corrects. “People can die.”

Sapnap makes a wincing sound. “Cooler than tornadoes.”

“American weather is terrifying,” George says faintly.

“Uh-meri-cun weath-a is terra-fying,” Sapnap poorly imitates. Dream snickers.

“Don’t worry, Georgie, we can keep you safe,” he coos with a mimicked accent.

“Maybe I shouldn’t buy a ticket.”

“Noo,” Sapnap says through breathy laughs, “we’ll make a pact, okay? Dream and I will make a pact to not bother you.”

Dream raises his eyebrows. “We will?”

“Yes, *Clay*, come on,” Sapnap says. “Verbally sign the pact.”

Dream sighs. “I give you my verbal signature.”

“Good, thank you,” George says, “what happens if you break the pact?”

“Then we give you a smoochie,” Sapnap answers.

Dream grins.

“A smoochie,” George repeats, sounding exhausted.

“I’m okay with that,” Dream says light-heartedly. “A little peck.”

“A kiss wiss,” Sapnap continues.

“Fine,” George mutters in defeat. “Consider the pact sealed, just stop being annoying. Should we tell the subs, or keep it a secret?”

“Maybe once we’ve bought tickets,” Sapnap says. “They’re gonna freak out.”

“Oh yeah, were you able to get a nonstop flight to Florida when you went last time? Or is there somewhere else you went through?” George asks.

Sapnap begins to explain his experience flying to George, and their words slide away from Dream’s attention as he politely tunes them out.

He turns in his chair to gaze out of his window; the blinds have been pulled up so he could watch the rain. It’s falling steadily now, and the wind has subsided, allowing rhythmic drops to descend from the gutter.

He wonders if the bird's nest will survive the storm. The hatchlings are probably old enough to fly by now, so they could relocate to a safe place.

He frowns. Maybe he should do something about that.

“What do you think, Dream?” George asks.

He stares blankly at the storm clouds. “Hm?”

“I asked what you think,” George repeats.

“About what? Sorry, I wasn’t listening.”

“Joining Karl’s stream,” Sapnap clarifies. “He’s live right now and texted me to get on the server.”

Dream sighs, rotating to face his glowing screen. “Alright.”

When they’ve connected onto the game, Karl’s sunny voice brightens their call and pulls Dream's attention from the rain. He and Sapnap bicker, decide to build a treehouse, and begin referring to each other with only architecture-related pseudonyms.

George offers to build a neighboring treehouse with Dream. They wander through the jungle biome until finding a tree tall enough to work on. After a few minutes, George starts a stream too.

At times, Karl and Sapnap’s dynamic reminds Dream of an earlier period in his friendship with George when they’d first been getting to know each other. The warmth, curiosity, and coyness—they’re nearly tangible when learning about a new friend. He recalls being timid to not offend George, navigating his sense of humor and personality with care.

Dream glances across his screen, where George is placing wooden planks to raise the walls.

Even in the beginning, did he hold the gentle admiration for George that he is consumed by now? His memories of George have always been like his dream; soaked in honey and glittering gold.

Maybe it didn't come from nowhere.

“What are you thinking about?” George asks.

Dream refocuses on the game. “When we first met, actually.”

Karl awws. “Tell us, Dream, was it in the Nickelodeon hot tub?”

He chuckles. “I wish.”

“Oh, George just rolled his eyes at you, I saw it on his stream,” Sapnap says.

Dream smirks. “What do you want me to do, ground him?” He hears a faint feedback echo from his mic.

“You went a little robot-y there, what'd you say?” Karl asks.

“Nothing, nevermind,” Dream says, and he hears the others laugh.

“You're cutting out,” George assists.

“Am I?” Dream catches a glimpse of his window; it has grown darker outside, but the wind is ripping bark from nearby palm trees. “It must be the storm.”

“He's really not speaking English right now,” Karl mutters.

Sapnap clears his throat. “Yeah maybe he should leave and rejoin? I don't know.”

“I don't think that will work,” Dream says. If it's an issue due to the weather, he's powerless.

Thunder rumbles overhead.

“I think he said he doesn't think rejoining will work,” George reiterates.

“Dream, maybe you—”

His monitor turns black. He taps on the keys and clicks incessantly, but amounts to nothing.

“Shit,” he mutters, narrowing his eyes in the dark to locate a hefty flashlight he'd placed on his desk earlier. He fumbles over the desk until his fingertips connect with the rubber handle.

Yellow light spills from his hands, illuminating his inactive keyboard and computer setup. Looming shadows draw long across his walls as he quickly glances at the wires beneath his desk—normal.

He swears again. The power is out.

Moving out of his room swiftly, he calls out to Patches, scanning the hallway and open doors with the circular spotlight. She hates the storms, he knows, and the pitch black house. His voice echoes off of the high ceilings.

Curled up by the bathroom entrance, she blinks into the hovering bright beam he's pointed at her.

“Hi, honey,” he says tenderly, scooping her into his arms. She trembles slightly. “You’re okay, come with me.”

He takes her to his bedroom and lets her nest into his pillows and blankets. With the window blinds drawn, the last traces of daylight give her a faded blue wash.

His phone buzzes repetitively on the bed where he’d tossed it earlier. He ignores it for now, and closes Patches in his room while he grabs the box of candles and lanterns in his garage.

Despite the loud gusts of wind and occasional flashes of lightning, this is still better than a brownout.

After lighting a few candles and perching them around his room, he settles. His phone has an influx of notifications from Karl, Sapnap, and George asking where he went.

My power went out, he texts George.

Immediately his phone starts to ring. He picks up.

“Are you okay?” George asks the second his call goes through.

“I’m fine, a powerline must have been knocked over or something,” Dream says, “it’s dark.”

“Do you have any idea when it’ll come back on?”

Dream fights a fond smile—George sounds worried. “These don’t last too long in my neighborhood, so probably tomorrow. Sorry about our treehouse.”

“That’s okay, Karl and Sapnap said they’d help finish it.”

“Are you still talking to them?” Dream asks. Patches curls into his side silently.

“In game, but I left the call so I could talk to you.”

“How sweet,” he says. “I bet those two are happy to have some alone time together.”

George laughs. “I’m still streaming, Dream.”

He connects the call to his headset. “Oops.” Navigating to the Twitch app on his phone, he clicks on George’s live.

George’s perspective in Minecraft loads onto Dream’s screen, and his eyes instinctively drift to the self-camera in the corner while he talks, “So what are you gonna add to the—”

His tongue goes numb.

George is wearing the hoodie that he’d sent a photo in earlier, and his headset has been pulled down around his neck. The navy blue colors bring out the darkness in his hair, and eyes—but his face is beaming bright.

The fantasy returns to Dream’s mind in flashes—George’s jaw in his hands, the beautiful brown eyes, his fingers gently parting George’s lips. *I thought*, he clenches his hand, *that this was over*.

“You cut out for a second,” George voices and Dream watches his mouth move as he tilts the phone in his hand. “What’d you want to say?”

“You look good in that hoodie,” Dream utters suddenly. He clamps his lips shut.

George’s eyes flutter in surprise, and a smile breaks out across his face. “Thank you.”

Dream’s chest blooms with warmth at the sight of his bashfulness. “You’re welcome.” Since he is on speaker, the chat erupts with panic and praise. “What else are you going to do for the treehouse?”

“Um.” George gently bites away his smile. “I’m not sure. Sapnap wants me to make a bridge to their house.”

Karl sends a message into the in-game chat: *Make a hot tub.*

“He’s so obsessed with that,” Dream complains.

After a moment, Karl types: *I’m jealous.*

Dream laughs faintly. “What, are you trying to see me in swim trunks?”

“Hey, hey,” George says quickly. “Keep it PG, or I’ll hang up.”

The chat is instantly flooded with hundreds of protests.

“Don’t upset your viewers,” Dream teases. “Chat *knows* you love me too much.”

George pulls a face. “You’re stupid.”

Sapnap says, *Stop flirting and get back to the treehouse, bitch.*

“I’m not,” George says, exasperated. He begins to collect more jungle wood. “If I actually was flirting I don’t think Dream would know how to handle it.”

His face flushes. “That’s not true.” *So, so true.*

Karl texts: *Best pickup line, go.*

George huffs. “We are not doing that. Do it on your stream, Karl, leave me out of it.”

“Excuse me, George,” Dream says politely, with a grin, “do you have an extra heart? I think mine’s been stolen.”

George makes a noise in protest. “That one is just stupid. Did you look it up or did you have it locked in your brain?”

Dream pauses. “Which one is more cringe?”

“I don’t even know.”

Are you an aspirin? Sapnap contributes, *Cause I’d like to take you every four to six hours.*

“Even worse,” George says.

Dream chuckles. “Four to six hours? That’s kind of a low libido.”

Sapnap shoots, *What’s yours like dreamy?* Dream rolls his eyes at the sense of humor Karl elicits from him.

“Yeah Dream, since you have so many opinions,” George plays along. “Tell us.”

He raises his eyebrows. “You wanna talk about my libido now too?”

“Oh stop, I’m carrying on with the conversation,” George defends. “I’m being *polite*. I’m catering to *charity*.”

“If I’m a charity,” Dream says brazenly, “please donate yourself to me.”

George hesitates. “I can’t tell if that’s a line or just you being you. This is becoming too inappropriate, I’m sorry, stream.”

Dream laughs. “Getting frustrated?”

“I’m getting angry,” George pointedly corrects.

“Aw,” Dream says sympathetically, “take a break, then. Let me calm you down. Let me—let me uh.” He wheezes. “Let me kiss your forehead.”

“Dream!” George yells. “That is it.” He shuffles to press buttons on his phone, and pulls his headphones on. “I’m taking away your talking privileges.”

Goodbye my love :(, Karl sends.

“Darn,” Dream protests feebly as George sets down his phone. “Forgive me.”

“Don’t even,” George says, but Dream sees him cracking a smile.

“So nobody can hear me? Not even chat?”

“Yep.”

Dream hums. “Just us now.”

George narrows his eyes. “I can’t keep talking to just you. It’s rude to those watching.”

“End the stream,” Dream jokes, but his voice falls unexpectedly low. “I don’t want you talking to anybody else.”

George bites his lip, and nervously tugs on the collar of his sweatshirt. “Why—why’s that?”

Dream can’t take his eyes away from the screen. “I don’t know.” When George doesn’t respond, he adds, “Maybe I’m selfish.”

He sees the corners of George’s mouth twitch slightly.

Dream scoffs. “Are you really gonna try to ignore me? I can see your face. You’re like a statue.”

“Mhm,” George mumbles dismissively. Composure on camera is easily one of the first tenets that George lives by, always mindful of what his audience does or doesn’t see.

Dream wonders how much it could take to unravel that.

“So, what if I keep talking to you,” Dream pushes, “and say whatever I want?”

George quickly suppresses a smile—but Dream still catches it.

“I can see you smiling, dummy,” he says, voice softening. “It’s cute.”

George feverishly breaks several blocks on his screen.

Orange shadows dance on his walls from the candles across the room. “I like being able to see it. To see you.”

Dream thinks of the limitless power that he has in this situation—only George can hear him, but finally, he will be able to understand what’s been missing from their texts and calls this whole time. An unexpected hunger stokes the fire in his chest.

He murmurs, “I liked it in that photo you sent earlier, too.”

A light pink bloom brushes across George’s cheeks immediately.

Dream’s eyes widen.

Breathlessly, George asks, “Did you?”

Chapter End Notes

Wow, tons of dialogue in this one lol, I wanted to add more in this chapter but realized how long it was already, so the next one will be quite exciting :). Seriously, you guys sent the nicest stuff and made me laugh and rly reminded me why I'm having so much fun writing this. As always, questions, comments, concerns—totally welcome <3

Darkness

Chapter Summary

The night complicates Dream and George's connection, and day brings future changes.

Chapter Notes

Mini-warning of explicit language (swearing) and more sexual themes in this chapter.

Happy reading!

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

Breathlessly, George asks, “Did you?”

Rain drums heavily on Dream’s roof. His nerves are sheathed now by the comforting mask of darkness, and his faceless confidence grows with every inhale.

Shameful desire creeps from its hiding place in the crevices of his heart.

I can look at you. He sinks deeper. *I can know you.*

“I—I did,” Dream answers. “I don’t get to see you that way, normally.”

George’s voice is careful, lightly tugging on the strings of Dream’s restraint. “What way?”

He can see it all so clearly in his head—the vine of wick curling through his thoughts, winding deeper, waiting to be hit with one spark that ignites a network of gasoline, and burns him and George alive.

He softly heats his words. “Up close,” they hover over the fuel, “so private.” His chest tightens, and the flames tilt threateningly towards doom. “Just for me.”

George’s eyes flutter. “Oh.”

Observations in the chat trickle in slowly, one by one, then become a unified confusion: *is he blushing? George is blushing?*

“Yeah, are you blushing?” Dream mirrors in amusement. Red undertones in his own face are masked by glowing, yellow-orange light. The scent of melting wax settles on his upper lip.

George takes a deep breath of sobriety, and returns to the game. “I’m not red, chat. It’s warm in here.”

A prideful smile sneaks onto Dream’s face. “You seem to do that a lot, when I talk to you.”

George ignores him.

“Why is that, George? Do I make you uncomfortable?” His voice intentionally slows to a gentle rumble, “Or do I make you feel something?”

The movement Dream witnesses is glorious.

George subtly lolls his head to the side as an inhale drags his bottom lip between his teeth, radiating heat and a sudden restlessness Dream has never seen before.

His stomach drops.

“Is that it?” he says quietly. “My voice?”

George nods slightly. A rush of air leaves Dream’s lungs.

Insatiable warmth braids tension into the sinews of his muscles. “But people can see you, now. A lot of them.”

“You think I don’t know that,” George mutters.

Dream touches a hand to the flaring pulse on his throat. “Makes me wonder what you’d be like when the camera isn’t on you.” His skin hums. “Or if I was with you.”

The game on the screen pauses. “Shut up.”

Dream refuses. “Maybe we could do more than just talk.”

George covers his face with a hand, elbow propped on his desk. The chat is tangled by questions and alarm—*what is Dream saying? What’s going on?*

“Are you a physical person? I don’t think I’ve ever asked,” Dream says, trying to bait away George’s shyness. “With friends and stuff—are you affectionate?”

“I don’t know,” George muffles from behind his palm. “Sometimes.”

Dream feels his heart leap unexpectedly. “Would you...with me?”

George shows no hesitation. “Yes.”

A tingling sensation rushes down Dream’s neck and chest with a dangerous thrill.

“Good,” he murmurs, “I like that.”

George sinks back into his chair as a nervous smile peeks out under his fingers. He asks, “What about you?”

“Oh, I’m very touchy,” Dream assures. “I’ve been told plenty of times. I don’t really notice it, unless I—” he wavers, “unless I want it, enough.” His breath hitches. “With you, I’d want it enough.”

A soft noise of surprise escape’s George’s mouth instantly. His hand falls from his face. The warmth in his deep, brown eyes lulls Dream into believing he’s enjoying this—it’s real.

Dream’s tone becomes a quiet rumble, “I wish I could feel you.”

George's breath deepens.

"In my hands." Dream watches George's jaw incline. "Warm, and real."

George glowers at his monitor, gaze lidded with dark shadows against his bright cheeks. His voice trembles. "Stop screwing with me."

Fire drips down Dream's spine. "I'm not."

"You always do this."

"I don't get how you're this stubborn," Dream says, the frustration of hot days and endless nights sharpening his tongue. "After everything—you still don't believe you can be wanted?"

Everyone wants you. I want you. Don't you know that?

"Dream," George warns.

"No. Why not? You're fucking amazing, George."

George scoffs, and turns his head away from the camera.

Dream sits up abruptly. "What do you need to hear? That you're smart—"

"Oh my god—"

"And impressive," he fumes, "and attractive—"

"*Dream.*"

"What?" He exasperates. "Come on. You know I'm an honest person. You know it's true, don't give me that."

George is silent for a moment. Then, he shakes his head, and picks up his phone.

"I'm gonna hang up," he says.

Dream can see the trail of ashes he's already left behind, and the simmering pool of gasoline he's nearly reached. He's torn himself apart enough already.

He's ready to let it burn.

"You need to be kissed, George," he murmurs, throat raw, "so hard that you can't remember your name—maybe then you'll understand what I mean."

The phone slips from George's hand and clatters against his desk. He's stunned to silence; mouth attempting to pass over invisible words.

The fire in Dream's heart roars.

The chat runs rampant.

"Um—I—um, sorry, guys," George stammers finally. "I have to end the stream. Sorry." He sits up, and moves his hands back to his setup. His fingers shake. "So sorry. Bye."

The Twitch app turns black, and the chat freezes indefinitely.

Dream waits in tense quiet for the thin red bar atop his screen to disappear—for George to hangup. That was too far, he knows, and George is surely bound to leave the moment he's officially offline —

“Oh my fucking *god!*” George explodes unexpectedly, voice tattered with fury, “Fuck you, oh my god.”

Taken aback by the sudden shift in demeanor, Dream fights the smile climbing onto his face. “What did I—”

“Fuck off, don't even try,” George says, “you're terrible. You're really, really terrible. I was *streaming*, you asshole, the whole time, and you thought—”

“George, George, calm down,” Dream says, stifling his laughter.

“You thought it'd be so, *so* funny to talk to me like that. You're a psychopath. You're insane. I hate you.”

Dream adjusts the volume on his headset. “You don't.”

“I don't,” George admits, “but you're still awful—why would you say that?” His voice pitches. “Why would you *say* that?”

“I lack a lot of self control.”

“Okay, obviously,” George says, “I knew that—but what the fuck, Dream?”

His eyebrows raise. “You seem angry.”

“Do I?” George shrills. “Do I? You just flirted with me while hundreds of people watched!”

Dream's amusement falters. They don't use that word. “Flirted?”

George scoffs. “Don't act dumb.”

He rests his phone on his chest. “I'm not.”

“You're a genius, Dream, how else would you know exactly what to say to get me—” George cuts himself off sharply.

Dream's breath is hot. “To get you what?”

“You know,” George says, low.

Chills break out on Dream's skin. “Tell me.”

“No.”

His heart hammers. “Say it.”

“Why do you care, Dream?” George presses. “There's no stream on anymore. Your stupid show is over.”

Dream feels gentle flames licking wounds in his chest. “I couldn't give a shit about the stream.”

Dream understands he's pushing George farther than before, crossing the line and torching their

unspoken rules. Rules that George seems to have held up for years, shoving Dream back, not letting him loose.

George is bound to snap. He has to.

“So you just wanted to watch,” George mutters finally, “as you turned me on?”

Dream’s body becomes weightless in seconds. His face burns as his skin becomes a collective map of energy—longing to be touched, to feel warmth, to feel *him*.

He brushes his fingers across his neck. *Oh*.

The concept of sentences fails him. “Yes.”

“That’s cruel,” George says.

“I—” Dream’s breath catches. He thinks of George’s flushed cheeks, the way his chest rose and fell, his chin tilting as he listened attentively. *Fuck*. Was he *really*?

“Can you imagine if I did that to you?” George’s voice flows through Dream’s headphones with titillating gentleness.

Dream’s hands clench his sheets.

“If I told you I wanted to feel you,” George reiterates, “and that you need to be kissed—would that seem fair?”

“No,” Dream manages to say. “You don’t know what I look like.”

“Hearing you is enough.”

Dream sees stars. “How can that be enough?”

How can this be real?

“I don’t think you know yourself, Dream,” George says. After a moment, he quietly adds, “Your voice sounds like fire. It burns.”

His head spins. “I burn you?”

“You melt me,” George murmurs.

It sounds tired. It sounds heavy. Lightning flashes outside of Dream’s window, bright and furious. The walls tremble.

“I saw that,” Dream says. “I saw the way your face turned red and how you—you sank, when I said that...”

“...I need to forget my own name,” George fills in as though the words are seared into his memory.

“I’m—” Dream pinches his brows together. An apology doesn’t feel right. His voice comes out low, “I’m a mess.”

“Oh yeah?” George says, “Prove it.”

Dream lifts his phone from his chest. Unsteady, warm breaths pass by his lips as he inclines the

camera, and places an arm over his eyes.

A flash emits in the darkness. Patches jumps off of his bed.

He uncovers his face.

Even with nearly half of his features hidden, his cheeks are glowing red, and his jaw glimmers with light traces of sweat. The muscled shape of his shoulders and peeking chest hair are captured by his fitted, dark grey shirt. His disheveled locks have clearly been tugged on.

He sends it. George opens it.

“Jesus,” George breathes, “christ.”

“All you ever have to do is ask,” Dream says faintly.

There's a beat of nervous silence. “You look like you could crush me.”

Dream smiles. “Well, you are kind of small.”

“Can I...can I keep this?” George asks.

“Of course,” Dream says immediately. His heart races uncontrollably against his ribcage. “You’re making quite the collection.”

The notification of a screenshot delivers. “I mean, yeah, you’re hot.”

An incorrigible noise of surprise leaves Dream’s throat.

He claps a hand over his mouth.

“What was *that*?” George says, followed by a light chuckle.

“You—that—um, *fuck*,” Dream splutters. “Shut up, shut up.”

“Oh my god,” George laughs, “You’re so soft.”

Dream kicks the stifling covers away. “You can’t just drop that on me.”

“You’re joking, right? You have to be joking.”

Dream huffs stubbornly, but hope flutters in his stomach. Joking. *Aren't you?*

“You send me a photo like that and can’t handle me pointing out the obvious,” George says.

“The obvious,” Dream repeats. He feels as though he could pass out.

“You said it yourself,” George says, amused. “How it’s different to see me up close. And private.”

Dream can hardly believe himself. “And just for me.” He can hardly believe George is tolerating it.

“...That’d be nice, wouldn’t it?”

Dream feels red hot blood drain from his face, failing to fight the dark path it flows to instead. “If you were mine?”

George’s breath hitches. “Maybe.”

“You,” Dream’s voice is barely audible, the air in his lungs stolen by the floating static, “can’t just say that. To me.”

“Why not?” George asks softly.

Dream’s eyes screw shut. *He's not serious. It's not serious.* He clasps desperately for composure—the moldy mug of tea in his kitchen sink, the faint sting of his sunburn, the worry of his powerless house.

The putrid smell of mold. The sink. The smell. Pinning George against his kitchen counter; hands digging into hips, nails crawling up spines, warm mouths on flesh.

Get out of my head.

His sun-torched skin, irritated and pained. He thinks of George’s soft, careful fingers soothing the redness away with cool gel—chills dripping down his neck, tender touches, slow kisses.

Don't go there. Stay here. Come on, idiot.

His broken air conditioning. No electricity. Lightless. Having George in his bedroom, between the cotton sheets and outside rain. He’d devour him whole.

“I—I can’t talk anymore,” Dream voices finally, throat tight. “My—my head is just...”

“Oh,” George says, “...alright.”

Dream lightly runs a hand down his lower abdomen, fingers brushing against a stiffness that makes him wince. *Please don't hate me.*

“It’s been a long day,” George supplies comfortingly.

He stares into the black void of his room. “It has.” How much does George understand of this, of him?

“Goodbye, Dream.”

“Bye,” he breathes.

The call disconnects. He can’t think when he stumbles out of bed, knocks a flashlight over, bumps the door frame on the way out.

Somehow, he makes it back to his holy cathedral of cathartic emotions—the bathroom.

He shines the light from his phone at himself in the mirror.

George texts him, *Sleep well you demon.*

A shaky smile forms on Dream’s face. He snaps a photo of his blurry reflection in the dark bathroom and captions it: *Goodnight.*

George responds with a photo immediately, a quick selfie aimed at his jaw and neck. The loose scoop of his shirt exposes the pale skin of his collarbones. *Goodnight.*

Dream presses two warm fingers against his lips. It feels like danger.

He screenshots it.

George rapidly responds, *Ugh. Go to bed.*

Dream leans against the marbled sink. He sends a photo of his outstretched hand. *Okay.*

Wait, George types after opening it, *hold on.*

Dream bites his lip, amusement tangling with arousal. He'd hung up, was going to grab tissues from the bathroom, and peacefully put himself to sleep—but George sends him another photo.

It's of his own hand this time, grasping his blue and white sheets, wrists slender and fingers long.

Dream wants to bring them to his mouth. He wants to taste them.

Probably smaller than yours, George texts separately.

His chest heaves with recklessness. *Easier to hold down.*

He thinks of the heat wave, he thinks of the song.

You can't fight it

You can't breathe

You say something so loving...

George types, *I think you'd leave bruises.*

Dream clenches his jaw, replying: *They'd look good on you.*

Further, and further, he walks through hell with a hand over his eyes.

...I don't wanna be alone

You know it hurts me too

What would happen, if he looked back? Lost his patience?

You seem like a gentle giant, George replies.

Dream huffs. *Maybe I am.*

George continues, *Some of the things you say make me doubt that.*

When you visit, Dream says, *maybe we can find out.*

George doesn't respond for a long, tense moment. When he finally does, it's a simple: *Okay Dream.* Then, he sends, *Night.*

Dream laughs shortly—none of this makes sense, he's delirious from lack of sleep, and dizzy from emotional whiplash. George is forever an unobtainable enigma, woven with scraps and pieces that he hardly understands. He jokes when Dream jokes. He strikes after Dream does first. It's meaningless, isn't it?

He shuts down his phone and plunges himself into darkness.

Isn't it?

The dead hollow of night carries him back to his bed, whispering in his ears with sweet toxicity, mingling his pulsing want. He kicks off his sweats, and collapses into a puddle of pillows and fabric.

I can't fight it.

He settles a hand atop his boxers. His eyes flutter shut.

Fuck you, George, he thinks, and gives in.

-

Bright, beautiful morning rips Dream from his sleep painfully. White flashes of sun glare at him through the open blinds, heating up his barren chest as though the blue sky has never seen rain.

He rolls onto his stomach in protest. Blearily, he blinks at the lotion and tissues on his nightstand.

A groan escapes his throat as he buries his face in the soft, white pillow. The quiet cotton muffles his shame. He wonders if this should be the place he spends the rest of his life—never returning to the light of day.

Patches meows at him loudly.

He sits up, hair fluffed from the static of his mattress, and looks at her.

“What,” he says.

She peers at him expectantly.

“Hungry?” He asks, and she immediately exits the room. He sighs.

Pulling himself out of bed, he winces at the dried sweat and traces of irresponsibility on his dirty clothes. He hastily sweeps the trash from his nightstand into a nearby bin he'd been too defeated to reach last night.

He changes clothes.

God, he thinks, tugging on a white tank that smells of lavender detergent. *Last night.*

He leaves his room to follow Patches to the kitchen. If he thinks about it too much, he'll worsen the dull ache penetrating his temples.

He runs a hand over the pale paint in his hallway till he reaches the light switch. His feet scuff to a stop. The plastic is cool and slick beneath his fingers.

He flicks the switch.

The dangling bulbs overhead illuminate his tousled state with a fluorescent glow. *At least,* he thinks, *the lights are back on.*

He can make himself some breakfast, finally—lazily microwave a burrito or pizza slice to keep his limbs moving. Once he reaches the kitchen, however, and gives Patches a meal to munch on happily, hunger eludes him.

Maybe this is bad. Not eating, not sleeping.

He runs a hand over his face. No wonder his friends are worried.

Just as his eyes pass over the dishes he has yet to wash in the sink, the landline phone begins to ring from its receiver. The incoming call blinks red.

He frowns, and picks up. “Mom?”

“Nope,” Sapnap says.

“Why.” Dream sits onto the speckled countertop. “Are you calling my *house*?”

“You weren’t picking up.”

“I was asleep,” Dream snaps. “How did you even get this number?”

“Your sister gave it to me for emergencies, jeez. How late were you up with George?” Sapnap asks.

Dream bites back a remark, rubbing his jaw tiredly. “I don’t even know, dude. Time stopped existing after a while.”

“Well, I don’t mean to alarm you,” Sapnap says cautiously, “but Twitter is kind of going nuts right now. The moderators are a little pissed.”

“I don’t have my phone on me. What are they saying?”

“Half of them think you and George hate each other because of last night,” Sapnap explains.

Dream scowls. “And the other?”

“Yeah, they...think some stuff is happening.”

Dream’s heart skips, mumbling, “Why should I care.”

“Because they’re trying to cancel you,” Sapnap says.

He rolls his eyes. *Nearly every week*. “Make George call them off.”

“He—he did,” Sapnap says. “He said everything is fine, but that he also isn’t going to be posting for a while because of personal reasons. I thought you knew and I wanted to check in—”

Dream tenses immediately. “Wait, what?”

“I’m not really sure what he means,” Sapnap continues. “He hasn’t answered me yet.”

He slowly slides off of the frigid marble. “He’s going to stop streaming?”

Sapnap hums slightly. “Like a hiatus, I don’t know—can you just look at the tweet?”

Dream quickly leaves Patches and navigates to fetch his phone. “I—I didn’t think anything that bad had happened that he’d...” Guilt begins to steal air from his lungs. “God, did I do something? Fuck, Sapnap—”

“Don’t freak out, man, it’s fine,” he assures. “Just talk to him first. Don’t be dumb.”

He finds his phone wrapped in the fabric of his sweats from yesterday, tossed onto the floor with disdain. When the screen brightens, it’s flooded with notifications.

He opens George's tweet.

Hey all, Dream and I are fine I promise we didn't fight yesterday lol. Glad I could address that because I'm going to take a break from streaming/being online for personal reasons. Thx for your support :)

"I don't know what to make of this," Dream says. "He doesn't seem upset, or anything."

"Exactly."

"So I should just ask him," Dream reasons.

"Yes."

He hesitates. "But what if you—"

"No," Sapnap says.

Dream sits on his unmade bed. "Fine."

He texts George, *You're stopping streaming?* After a second, he adds, *Also good morning.*

Sapnap says, "I swear to god, if he answers you after hours of ignoring me—"

Dream hurriedly interrupts, "He just did."

Mornin. Let me call and talk to you about it.

"What'd he say?" Sapnap asks.

"Let me call and talk to you about it," Dream repeats. He stares at it. "What do you think that means?"

"Oh my god. You're so stupid," Sapnap says, and promptly hangs up.

Dream mumbles a few self-protective jabs as sets his home phone on his nightstand. What did Sapnap know about feeling this way for a best friend, anyway?

Ready whenever you are, he replies to George, sinking from his mattress to the floor.

George calls.

"Dream," George greets.

Nerves cut his friendliness in half. "Hello."

They fall quiet. Dream's hand locates frizzy grooves in the white carpet beneath him, and begins to thumb over them absently.

"How did you sleep," Dream says slowly.

"Fine," George answers. "How about you?"

He glances at the crumpled pair of boxers several feet from him. "Fine."

"Thats good."

“Yeah.” He pulls tufts from the rug.

“So,” George says, “they think we hate each other.”

A wave of relief rushes through Dream’s bloodstream. “Yeah, okay, what is up with that?”

“I don’t really know—I think I got short with you on stream, but honestly, I don’t really remember,” George admits.

Dream smiles. “They should’ve heard you the moment you logged off. You were a sailor.”

“Yeah yeah,” George dismisses. “They should’ve heard *you*.”

“You’re the one who took me off speaker.”

“Because you started throwing pick up lines at me,” George says with fervor.

“I’d do it again,” Dream says. He chuckles lightly, “God. It really went downhill after that, huh?”

“Yeah,” George agrees, “it did.”

Dream feels his face warm as they grow silent. He’ll forever be at the whim of his unmanageable tongue.

He clears his throat. “I think I make your streams more interesting.”

“I’ll ban you from them,” George warns.

“Yeah right,” Dream says playfully, but it fades as he quietly prods. “So...how come you’re taking a break? If you still want to talk about it.”

“Oh, yeah.” He hears George shuffle. “It’s nothing too serious, really. I mean, it’s sort of sad but I’m fine.” He pauses. “This might be hard to explain.”

“No worries,” Dream says. “Take your time.” Timid fear tangles in his gut.

“My mum told me this morning that we’re visiting my grandparents for a week,” George explains. “They aren’t sick, or anything—but that’s the point. We haven’t been to see them in a while, and she said it might be good to—to go while they’re really, still here.” His voice fades. “I don’t even want to think about when they’re not.”

He's flooded with guilt for thinking it had anything to do with last night. Their *jokes*, from last night, since that's all it really was.

Dream’s voice drops to a worried murmur, “I’m really sorry to hear that, George.”

“There’s nothing to be sorry about, it’s going to be a happy vacation. Really.”

“I’ll still be here if you need anything,” Dream says reflexively.

“Thank you, but—” George hesitates. “That’s the thing. They’re my grandparents who live a few hours north of here.”

“Wait.” Dream furrows his brow. “The ones that live on the...”

“Farm,” George finishes.

A hollow, putrid feeling claws its way into Dream's chest. "With no internet."

"Yeah."

The gravity of his world tilts, and all he can mutter is, "Oh."

George's voice is soft. "I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," he repeats. *This shouldn't matter, so much.* "What...what time?"

"Um, early morning for me, I think."

A week without hearing George's lips pass gently over words on the opposite end of their phone line, not texting him the moment he wakes up and before he falls asleep. Days, and nights, of staring empty at the offline status next to George's name.

Why does it hurt?

"I'll miss you," Dream confesses, and his lungs seize at his own temerity. Is there a chance that somehow, in the quiet strain of George's tone, the threads of pain extend to him, too?

After a moment of shocked silence, George breathes, "I'll miss you, too."

Self-righteous waves of sorrow crash into Dream as he exhales. Vindication, bubbling elation that he's wanted, he's *worthy* to be missed, battles with the sinking stones of despair.

Whatever happened the night before, it had to have meant something. George wouldn't be this way if it hadn't meant something. It teeters on the tip of Dream's tongue, a concept he desperately wants to clutch, but cannot reach. The dark words and subtle slips of frustration brought them close, didn't it? Closer to something that now is being taken away by the harsh morning light.

Dream's lips part, then close. *How the fuck am I supposed to do this?*

"God," George says suddenly. "I don't know why this sucks so much."

Dream's heart pangs. "I know, right?"

"I didn't mean to make this call such a downer," George mutters. "I'm sorry."

"It's fine," Dream tries. "I'll still be here when you get back. It won't be that long."

"Right. It's just a week."

"Just a week," Dream says, and somehow, it makes him feel lighter.

"Okay, yeah." George clears his throat. "Yeah. Not too bad."

"Plus, you'll get to see family," Dream points out.

George huffs. "That's not something I'm normally excited about."

Dream reclines his head to gaze at his dormant ceiling fan. "Well, let's think of something else for you to look forward to, then. Something sunny."

George doesn't miss a beat. "Like you?"

A bashful smile blooms across Dream's features immediately, and a warm laugh escapes his lips.

“Yeah, like me.”

They dive into investigating online, checking travel loads and refreshing pages of scheduled dates. Marking off which days George has booked, when Dream has to celebrate his sister’s birthday, eyeing the weather projection for the month of August, and September.

Dream asks Sapnap to join their call, but he's unable to communicate beyond texts. They resort to putting unsteady faith in his skills to click on links and read their messages.

After an hour and a half of bickering, planning, and giddy excitement—it’s official.

Two plane tickets to Florida are purchased.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the patience!! I'm sure it's been a nuts week. This chapter is a bit of a mess, took me forever to get it right lol. I love love loved all of your comments, hope last chapter's cut off was worth it! I'm here for questions, concerns, anything <3 So grateful for you all.

Feathers

Chapter Summary

In his isolation from George, Dream seeks out the help of a friend.

Chapter Notes

Mini-warning of more explicit sexual themes in this chapter. This work will be taken down/discontinued if cc's find it. Please, keep this within the community :)
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See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The brass handle beneath Dream's fingertips is cool to the touch, gently leaving his hand as the door glides shut. The walls of the spare room shift in the edges of his vision. When he presses the back of his knuckles against the paint, shimmering ripples spread and bounce from corner to corner.

He tilts his head slowly to study it. *Why did I come in here, again?*

"It's cleaner than I expected," a voice emits from the other side of the room.

Dream takes a blind step towards the sound, and his toes connect with a dark, black suitcase lying on the white carpet.

"Well yeah, I'm not a bad host," he finds himself replying, words falling from his mouth without intention.

There's a familiar, gentle laugh. "I'll be the judge of that."

Dream looks up. "Come on, George. Have more faith in me."

George sits on the bed, bending down to untie his shoes. The fabric on the comforter beneath him is a trap of dappled stars and purple sky-dust.

"Did you vacuum before I got here?" George asks.

Dream's lips part to reply, but he's suddenly grasping empty into a dark void where memories escape him. Time folds absently behind his eyelids.

He stares at George. "When did you get here?"

"Hm?" George slips off his sneakers. "I flew in earlier."

Dream carefully steps over the suitcase, moving closer. "You did?"

George peers up at him. His hair is clean and dark, fine bristles so soft Dream wonders if it'd feel like feathers under his touch. The long sleeves pushed up to his forearms expose his pale wrists. In his lap, balancing lightly against his thigh, is a hunting knife braided with leather and iron.

“You didn't,” Dream answers himself softly. He sinks to sit next to George, watching as the knife is tossed to the floor. “This...isn't real, is it?”

George's motions still for a moment, and he turns to face Dream with hesitance.

“It is if you want it to be,” George says quietly.

Dream glances away, and carefully watches the subtly liquifying wall before them. He isn't sure what is paralyzing his limbs—the gap between where they're seated on the bed, his own inclining heart rate, or how he can barely stand to see George's eyes without crumbling.

“I don't think that's how it works,” Dream mutters.

“What do you mean?”

A wry smile works its way onto his face. “I've wanted plenty of things that aren't real, in the past.”

George rests a hand comfortingly on Dream's shoulder. “What about now?”

The touch trickles warmth through his t-shirt, spreading across his skin. “Oh, I've never wanted something like you.”

“Something like me, huh?” George says, and Dream knows by the inflection of his voice that he's grinning.

“Yeah, you're smug,” he teases lightly, hand reaching up to hold George's fingers. “And sneaky.”

George squeezes Dream's palm in amusement. “How am I sneaky?”

Dream finally lifts his eyes to meet George, breath shallowing as he falls into the intimidating brown darkness. The edges of the room fade into absent blur. He can feel his heart beating in the walls.

“No matter what I do,” Dream says, “you find me here.”

George doesn't blink. His voice is slow, and thoughtful, “because you reach for me.”

Dream's brows pinch together. “...Do I?” He lifts George's hand from his shoulder.

“All the time,” George says.

The gravity lulling them into the creaking bed frame sways, for a moment.

“I can't keep bringing you in.” Dream's steady wildfire of impulse raises George's fingers to his lips, and he murmurs a confession against them, “It's eating me alive.”

George's touch brushes across Dream's mouth. In a sensitive symphony, Dream's light grasp relocates to hold George's wrist, as George gingerly cups the rigid tension of Dream's jaw.

“Then let it,” George breathes.

Dream leans into the cool palm pressed to his cheek. “No.”

He feels George's presence tangle into him with baneful beauty. The warm air that flows down his throat, the strange nebulas on the blanket beneath them, the hum between his skin and George's contact.

It is invigorating, and it hurts.

"What are you afraid of?" George asks.

Dream pulls their hands down from his face, letting George's fingers fall to the galaxied duvet. "You know my answer. We've been in my head before."

The smell of seashore and copper floats into the room with remembrance of palm forests. Dream wants to flick his eyes around rapidly, check the shadows for his reflection or their clothes for specks of blood.

George takes Dream's hand, and pulls it towards his chest. With gentle guidance, Dream splays his fingers across the dark fabric until he can know the thumping of George's heart against his palm.

"He's not here," George says softly.

A breath of shock leaves Dream's lungs. George's pulse flows with warm blood and honesty beneath his touch. He feels alive. *He feels real.*

George's fingertips travel down the exposed length of Dream's forearm, leaving a trail of firing nerves, before wrapping at the base of his bicep.

Dream's hand moves slowly across George's chest, thumb tracing his rigid collar bone. The shirt hem is soft where clothes give way to skin. He stops at the nape of George's neck, feeling how his shoulders rise and fall with each deepening inhale.

"No one else is here," Dream reiterates in quiet assurance. Their knees bump together.

George gently pulls Dream closer. "It's just us."

Dream's other hand unconsciously moves to George's waist. His grip tightens.

"Just us," Dream murmurs. George's breath is hot on his face, and his lidded eyes flutter.

George inclines his chin slightly. "Yeah."

"Alone." Dream leans close enough to let their foreheads touch.

George opens his mouth to utter a response, and the skin of his lips accidentally brush against Dream's with an electric tingle.

Dream bites back a sharp inhale. "How—how do I know," he forces out, "that we're safe?"

George brushes a thumb across Dream's forehead, down the bridge of his nose, over his mouth where his mask used to be.

Dream's eyes shut.

"You're free," George says, and kisses him.

Dream's lips move timidly against George's, his brows pinched together in deep strain as he gently savors the passing seconds. It feels so familiar—the tender movements of George's mouth, the

conflicted elation. The way his chest begins to ache because he's wanted this too much, for too long, and doesn't want to let it go.

With careful softness, George separates their lips and pulls centimeters away.

Dream can feel the heat radiating from George's cheeks, and the uneven breaths blowing across his chin. His eyelashes shudder.

His grasp on George's body locks fierce, fingers slowly curling into trembling muscle.

"Again," Dream says. "Do that again."

George does.

The moment their lips reconnect, the stoked furnace of Dream's body roars to life; he kisses back with force, breath heavy, pulling George closer and closer to his chest with each arching motion of their mouths.

His hands dig into George, eliciting soft sounds that let his hunger burn bright.

George's nails leave pink scrapes as his hands slide into Dream's hair.

Dream pushes further, and George opens effortlessly. It tastes of gold honey and liquid fire on Dream's tongue. Wordless touches coax Dream forward, lean George down, communicating with hands on chests and mouths on skin until George is pinned to the pillows and sheets.

George's hands fall to Dream's belt, and a sudden tug pulls their hips and chests flush together.

Dream's lips graze George's neck. He stills.

His cheek tingles with warmth and earnest intimacy where it's pressed against George's face. He can smell his cologne, and feel his ribs breathing. So close, so human.

An unexpected wave of emotion floods his senses, splitting open his heart and rushing through his limbs with numb tranquility. George is here, in his hands, finally fulfilling the hurt he's been drowning in for so long that now he can nearly—

He snakes his hands under George's back, and pulls him into a tight embrace.

He doesn't fight the shame. He doesn't fight the way the hearth in his chest expands with golden warmth at the closeness of George's heart to his own.

He screws his eyes shut, and holds him.

A tentative moment of stunned silence stretches before them. Dream's mind hums with the gentle glow of cyan jellyfish, the soft night sand, the moon in George's throat and the burn on his lips. He's home, for once, clinging to the only person that has made him feel whole in eons.

Carefully, George wraps his arms around Dream's back, and holds him, too.

Dream wakes up devastated.

-

His hands are cold.

Dark shadows fill his room as he stares into nothingness, lying on his stomach, breathing against the mattress with deep-rooted emptiness that bounces off the walls of his skull.

George isn't here. The night is terrible. His hands are cold.

He clutches the pillow above his head as his eyes squeeze shut.

Please, he thinks, please. Take me back.

He pulls the soft bedding in his grip inward, rotating to his side. Maybe if he stumbles out of the covers, and flings open the spare bedroom door, he could prove that it was real—but the bed will be empty.

I just want to go back.

It's the second day, or second night, or third night George has been gone. They'd announced the trip to Florida on Twitter, then spent hours into the late night streaming and calling with friends. Dream had been desperate to play any game—Minecraft, Among Us, even CSGO—to keep George's radiant voice passing between his ears until dawn stole him away for good. Eventually, their voices faded and sleep crept in, and Dream had to let go.

When he woke, George was already on the road with his family. They texted up until the moment Dream's messages began to rebound with red errors and crushing disappointment.

He's been alone.

He tried to not let it consume him at first—cleaning his house, participating actively on social media, negotiating careful sections of his day where he'd allow himself to feel the appropriate amount of heartache for missing a friend.

Then, an accidental trip to his camera roll forced him to rediscover his screenshot of George's deceitful "Goodnight." It didn't take much for him to start slipping.

Checking his phone all hours of the day, bitterly ignoring Sapnap's amicable texts, rereading old messages and letting himself sink. Falling asleep at seven in the afternoon because he no longer felt compelled to stay awake. Succumbing to the destruction of his dreams.

He curls into himself, and the night dries his throat. He'd felt him, he'd kissed him, and it was so close to his heart that he can't consume any emotion but sorrow. Years of wanting, projected in his sleeping mind. He hates himself for creating a trap of wants that may never happen, needs that may never be met.

His jaw clenches. He wants to text George, tell him everything. Tell him anything.

He blindly pulls his phone towards him from its discarded location on his bed. The bright screen makes him wince as he opens their last text thread.

Shoot. I think I'm about to lose service, George sent.

Please no, Dream typed.

Don't miss me too much.

Dream's next messages had never gone through: *Impossible*, and, *I miss u already*, followed by a simple, *Fuck*.

He feels stupid. He swipes away from the messages, and opens his notes app instead.

Against the white and yellow background, he types a black-lettered confession that he knows he can never send.

I had another dream where I got to see you, he writes, I'm beginning to think they're nightmares. I'm beginning to think you're haunting me. A heavy sigh leaves his lungs. *This fucking sucks.*

He shuts off his phone and tosses it to the carpeted floor with a thud.

Unmoving, he gazes into the abyss of his room until rosy dawn lifts the shadows from his walls. Day creeps in through the slats of his blinds. He listens faintly to the breeze, then the rare tires passing on his road, then the neighbors greeting mailmen across the street. His mind is silent, until a gentle chirping picks up outside his window.

His eyes widen.

The chattering grows, and he sits up sharply.

The birds survived the storm.

He scrambles to pull on the strings of the shades, a smile breaking out onto his face as sunshine and flashes of wings flutter through the clear glass. He can't help but feel a flicker of pride—the purple martins were young, and delicate, but bold enough to withstand the downpour.

The scale of hope in Dream's chest gently tips upward.

It's enough to make him leave his room, cook breakfast with something other than eggs and grease, and decide to start a stream.

It has been mildly hectic online since the announcement of Sapnap and George's plane tickets. They've been receiving numerous tags of theories, accusations, distrust, and abundant joy—but it doesn't weigh on Dream like he'd expected it would. He's going to see them, he's going to see George, and that's all that matters.

When he's several minutes into streaming his light-hearted speedrun, Sapnap joins the call.

"What the fuck is up, Dream?" he greets loudly.

A surprised smile leaps onto Dream's face. "I'm streaming, I'm streaming—"

"Oh, what? My bad," Sapnap says. "Let me see it—I didn't think you would be because you *never* do."

"Yeah, okay, what does it look like I'm doing right now?" Dream asks, eyes flitting over the monitor where he's mining blocks.

"Missing iron, apparently," Sapnap says. "Turn around. No, other way."

Dream locates and breaks the ore. "I saw that," he lies.

Sapnap chuckles. "You so did not. I think I'm better at this than you."

Dream glances at the chat. "The subs don't agree with you."

"The subs can kiss my ass."

"Sapnap."

"I'm kidding, I'm kidding," Sapnap says. He pauses, then adds, "So how come you're actually streaming today?"

Dream feels his brain stall at the subtle change in his tone. *Worried*. "I dunno, was bored, I guess."

"Just bored?" Sapnap asks.

Dream's eyes narrow. They aren't going to have this conversation on stream, Sapnap knows, but he always attempts to coax it out of Dream before he retreats to his desolate den of unanswered calls and vague excuses.

Dream opens his mouth, but a donated message saves him from a response.

Hi Dream thank you for streaming you make my day, it reads, are we going to get the whole Dream team today?

Dream digs his way out of gravel and dirt. "Um, no. Just me and Sapnap for now."

After a beat of silence, Sapnap inputs, "George isn't going to be online for a bit, and we'll let you know when he's back. We don't need him anyways."

Dream huffs. "Speak for yourself."

"Love me, Dream," Sapnap pleads. "Play me back in eight-ball."

"No," he says with exasperation, "you take way too long and always lose. It's not even fun to win anymore."

"That is *not* true. You're so competitive."

Dream grins. "I've never been competitive in my life."

"Oh, please," Sapnap says.

When are Sapnap and George going to visit you, also today is my birthday ily, a dono reads into Dream's ears.

"Sarah, thank you for the dono, and happy birthday," Dream answers kindly. "When are they going to visit—um, I don't know, Sapnap, when are you visiting?"

"Never."

"In September," Dream fills in, bounding across a desert biome. "I'm thinking about placing a bet to see how long it takes you to get sunburned."

"I don't burn," Sapnap bites back, "I tan."

Dream giggles. "You never go outside."

Sapnap is quiet. "...I know you did not just say that to me."

Dream kills a rabbit running across the sand before him. He glances at the space where the timer normally resides out of habit—he hadn't included one in the stream today. It's calmer in the absence of ticking numbers to remind him how slow his world is moving.

“When was the last time you left your house?” Dream asks.

“Yesterday, I had dinner with my mom,” Sapnap replies easily. “When was the last time you saw *your* mom, huh?”

“Who’s competitive now,” Dream mumbles. It has been a while. Even though Sapnap is only teasing, guilt slips into his conscience. “I should really go see her, I—I haven’t been very present, lately.”

“Oh,” Sapnap’s voice softens. “Well that’s okay. You’ve had a lot to deal with.”

A weight settles on Dream’s shoulders. “Yeah.”

“With your broken house,” Sapnap covers quickly, “electricity and all. Y’know, the weather.”

The weather. “My A.C man said he’s actually going to stop by tomorrow. I might marry him.”

Sapnap laughs shortly. “Livestream it.”

“Face reveal and a wedding at the same time,” Dream says. “Now *that* would break the internet.”

He skims over the fast-moving messages on his other monitor, and frowns. They won’t stop asking about George.

“George is busy, you guys,” Dream addresses the viewers, carefully keeping his voice even. “I’m sorry he can’t be here.”

God. I wish he was.

“Hey,” Sapnap says suddenly. “Can I be your best man?”

A quizzical smile leads Dream away from his spiraling thoughts. “...What?”

“At your wedding. With the really, really good air conditioning.”

He hums thoughtfully. “No. I’d be missing a flower girl.”

Sapnap laughs. “Please, don’t do this to me—oh my god, they’re spamming ‘dressnap,’ Dream.”

“You wouldn’t be too bad at it.” Dream opens the crafting bench to create another axe. “Can you skip down the aisle?”

“Hey, hey, I’d be great,” Sapnap defends. “I’ll do fucking cartwheels.”

“New sub goal,” Dream says brightly. “If we reach it, Sapnap has to wear a dress I pick out for him —”

“*Stop,*” Sapnap breathes.

They descend into a fit of contagious wheezing and warm laughter that floods Dream’s headphones. The chat erupts with emotes and comments that only push Dream to smile more—and it feels easy, to let refreshing happiness settle on his face, easier than the past few days have allowed.

Sapnap sighs, and huffs softly. Dream blinks the gleam from his eyes.

He's needed this.

After recouping composure, they continue to chat and pass casual remarks as Dream plays. A dono suggests he let Sapnap call the shots once he's reached the Nether. Fatally, it proves to be a mistake, and Dream burns to death after a series of poor directions and forgetting coordinates.

He starts over. The chat throws random seed suggestions, many involving lewd, dress-related jokes, and he cycles through several before Sapnap chooses one for Dream to settle for.

In the middle of exploring a new village, Sapnap asks curiously, "Do you think you will get married, though? When you're older?"

Dream mindlessly breaks grass on his screen, and turns the idea over in his head a few times. "I don't know, to be honest. I'm definitely a romantic person, but..." He frowns. "Marriage has a strange stigma. Like it's unbreakable, which it's not."

He shoves the memory of his mother's laughter deep into his mind.

"I get that," Sapnap says. "But like, a life partner. I could see myself having one of those."

"A life partner," Dream echoes.

You reach for me, George's gentle voice ambushes him without warning.

He bites the inside of his cheek, hard. "No. That's not really my thing."

The second the words leave his lips, his stomach revolts with a painful ache that reeks bile and green. He tastes the acidic gas of his breakfast, and swallows thickly.

It shouldn't mean anything that he'd wanted to hold him more than kiss him senseless. The texts and calls shouldn't live in him; the absence shouldn't curl up and rot.

It shouldn't, but it does.

"I'm getting a little tired," Dream says weakly. Tired of always moving too fast, too heavy; burning out before he can catch up to his own breath.

"How much sleep did you get last night?" Sapnap asks.

Dream winces. "Don't make me answer that."

"Okay."

He clicks around his screen absently. A light nudge presses against his calf, and he pauses the game to look down.

Patches tangles herself between his legs. He smiles softly, leaning his chair away from his desk so she can hop into his lap.

"Hi," he says. She settles on his thighs, and he chuckles. "My cat just got on top of me, guys, one sec." He mutes his mic, and runs a hand over her small spine.

Sapnap begins to speak to his stream, "Okay, while Dream is busy, everybody subscribe to Sapnap..."

Dream lets him ramble while Patches begins to purr contentedly. His heart blooms with fondness,

and she nuzzles into his chest.

“You know something, don’t you,” he says quietly, scratching her chin. “Yeah. You’re smart.”

She mews at him.

He pokes her nose. “Did you see that the birdies are okay?”

“Dream. Dream. I know he can still hear me,” Sapnap says. “Come back.”

He quickly reboots his mic. “Sorry, sorry. She’s distracting.”

“Bad just joined the server and asked me to help out with something.”

He reads several messages in the chat, seeing a chorus of support. “Oh, okay.” He carefully hunches over Patches, opening the search bar on Twitch. “Is he streaming? I might raid.”

“You’re not gonna stay on with me?” Sapnap asks.

Dream glances down at the curious, green eyes staring at him. “I don’t know if I’m up for it. Who’s online?”

“Let me check.” He hears Sapnap’s keyboard navigate to the server. “Looks like...Bad, Wilbur, and oh—Karl. We should go.”

Dream hesitates. “Um, yeah. I don’t—” *want to be around you two right now.* “Want to do something super energetic, so I think I’ll just log off.”

“Oh,” Sapnap says. “Okay. Well, text me, alright?”

“Yeah,” Dream mumbles.

“Dream. I’m serious.”

His face reddens. “Got it. Okay, stream, you know the drill...”

He gives his viewers a few departing messages, squeezing in last-minute donos and questions from the chat before going dark. The second his stream has ended, and BadBoyHalo’s account takes its place, he sinks into his chair with relief.

He scoops Patches up and pulls her towards his chest. She rubs her face against his cheek.

“What are we gonna do, huh?” he murmurs into her soft fur. He knows he misses George, and knows he’s descended far too quickly for it to be meaningless. For it to have come from nowhere; only a dream.

There’s something out there in the aether, tugging at him. Whispering to him. *Eyes open*, it’s saying, *and look*.

His phone vibrates. He’s slow to pick it up from the desk.

It was great to talk to you, Sapnap says. *Sorry things aren’t going so well right now. Can’t even beat the dragon in 3 hours smh.*

Dream huffs. *Not trying to light myself on fire more than I already have. Thx tho.*

He considers ditching the rectangular trap, but hesitates.

I think you were right, he finds himself texting unexpectedly, *about it meaning more to me than just stupid dreams.*

Sapnap responds, *What.*

Him not being here is worse than I thought. Dream chews his lip. *You know how I get.*

Sapnap's bubble appears, then hovers for a while, then blinks away.

Dream quickly types, *Sorry for being weird about this.*

Don't be, Sapnap responds. *There's something that I could bring up but I don't know if it's going to help you or not. It might be bad. Idk.*

Dream frowns. *What do you*—he hits the backspace carefully. *It's up to you if you want to tell me or not.*

Alright, Sapnap says.

Dream doesn't receive another text for several, tense minutes. His heart rate begins to rise and fall on whim. He's never sure what Sapnap knows—he and George have spent plenty of secretive hours on Teamspeak together when Dream's been busy. He wonders if they talk about him. He wonders if he truly is perceived by others as a real person, not just a name or a smile.

Must be nice to know you exist, he thinks absently. He studies the grooves on his desk to avoid wandering back to their call from Miami.

His phone dings, and he grabs it immediately.

Sapnap sent him a paragraph.

Dream carefully passes over the words as they descend down his screen, and his eyes widen. His heart leaps into his throat as he reads, and rereads, and rereads.

His hands begin to shake.

He can't think. He can't breathe. Before he knows what he's doing, the notepad of confessions to George is open beneath his trembling fingers.

Sapnap told me what you said, he writes.

His vision blurs into gleaming light and distorted blobs of color.

I know what you said.

Chapter End Notes

First of all, hello and welcome to all the new readers! So happy to have you here <3 It's been crazy how this work has reached so many people, I barely have the words to express how much I love the art, kind messages, and support you all have given me. A few things I'd like to address: negative comments will be deleted, please do not

contact CC's in reference to this work, I really don't want to delete but if it comes to that I will. My update schedule is a bit loose and slow, I try to post a chapter every 1-2 weeks.

Thank you for everything, I love you all, and the story is going to keep moving along as usual :) kind of a cool-down in this one with more sapanap luv

You

Chapter Summary

Dream's inner world is challenged as he falls deeper.

Chapter Notes

Warning in this chap: angst/depressive behavior

Okay everybody. Let's do this.

I started this fic just for my own fun, not expecting anyone beyond the 15-20 original commenters to see, let alone the CC's involved - but I get it, this is the internet, stuff is spread like wildfire and I should've seen it coming. It's been passed around everywhere I look. I've had my inbox flooded with the kindest, most supportive messages about my writing I think I'll ever receive - I'm beyond grateful that I could reach your lives in this way.

This was my plan. To finish it, all of it, and then decide if I should keep uploading. I love you all.

All I ask now is that you stop spamming stream chats with Heat Waves related things, stop referencing it in donations, stop berating others for liking it or not liking it. You, as a reader, have a responsibility to be respectful not only to creators, the author, and each other - but to the MCYT community as a whole.

The CC's already know, and don't care. So screw it.

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

Dream's shoulders ache.

He sinks into the grass of his backyard under the midday sun. It's humid, and bright, and noiseless. The soil smells like shit.

His sore muscles relax into the cradle of green blades and soft earth, stinging his skin. Tangles of roots and shredded weeds collect beneath his desperate fingers.

He stares up at the white clouds slowly crossing the blue sky.

The repairman had visited two and a half days prior, and ever since the brittle flow of cool air returned to bite at his feet and trace goosebumps down his neck, he's felt empty. He finds himself wandering in blankets and hoodies, or sitting in the shower steam, clinging to the heat that escapes him.

He's grown weary of chasing after that which destroys him until he's left in raw silence, burned to the core.

He sighs into the sunshine.

Only his dreams have offered a double-edged break from the solitude that consumes him. He's swallowed by images of ankle-deep, red water and the numb swinging of his lawless axe. He wakes with fear of bruised hands until he turns on the bedside light, and sees his bare knuckles trembling.

He's been winning. Over, and over, and over.

He woke up in the kitchen this morning, with his cheek pressed to the tile floor and a carton of milk near his chest. He didn't remember falling asleep there. He didn't want to remember sleeping.

You reach for me, George had said between peaceful bedsheets and comforting touches.

Tweets and screenshots flood his life. Questions of where he's gone, endless hours of "I miss Dream"s, hundreds of fans wondering why, for days, his Spotify has been stuck to one song on repeat. Why he sits in his dark room, on his empty couch, in his spare bedroom listening over and over to *heat waves heat waves heat waves*.

I'm reaching, Dream poured into his horrid collection of notes one night when he'd been too tired to eat, *I can't stop reaching*.

His phone hums in his pocket. He lets go of the dirt.

Okay Dream, he reads from Sapnap with his phone held high to block the clouds' glare. *Get back to me when you can*.

He's numb to the guilt by now. Sapnap's relentless concern has slowly ebbed into silence as time passes them by.

He scrolls up, and sees the days-old messages he's poured over with scrutinizing commitment. At first, it was every ten minutes that he'd obey the nauseating pull to reread George's undoing, then every thirty, then once an hour. It's as if he expects the words to change, somehow, for the letters to melt off the screen and reveal new secrets that he missed before. It blurs together too much for him to know.

It's up to you if you want to tell me or not, Dream had typed.

Sapnap's wall of white bubbles begins with: *Alright*.

I didn't want things to get messy, he wrote, *but it seems like you're hurting right now so this is all I have. The night before we did the chess thing I was on call with George, and we were joking around about something you'd said about his facecam earlier that day. He made a comment that he's "glad that stuff doesn't bother him anymore" and when I asked him what that meant, he said he used to have some kind of feelings for you when you guys first became friends. He was very clear with me that it was a short thing that went away completely, and that he's happy it did.*

We haven't talked about it since. A couple days later u told me the stuff that was going on in Miami and I just didn't really know what to do. I thought you might want to know. I'm sorry if this is shitty and I just made matters worse.

Dream had felt his lungs collapse. Traces of hope and horror still linger.

Are u okay? Sapnap had sent after a few minutes of radio silence.

Dream? Did I fuck up

It took Dream four hours to respond with: *okay*.

Okay??

His landline started ringing after twelve. He could hear it through the walls, sometimes, voicemails piling up in flashing groups of red. It hurt him to not reply, but any moment his thumbs hovered over the keys to give a piece of himself up, overwhelming dread dragged him away.

Hey man. I'm sorry to keep texting but you're rly worrying me. Call me back.

This isn't cool. Srsly. Pick up.

He's only been able to write to George, locked away in a place no one would find him, creating a bottomless thread of doubt and guilt and painful aspiration.

You had feelings for me, he remembers writing late in the night after he'd scavenged Sappnap's text for every missing detail, *and they left you. The night I dreamt of you, you told him they were gone. Was it at the same time, George? Did you feel it happen?* Dream had refused to let silent, frustrated tears break his stoic face. *Whatever chance I had, I missed it. I missed it. I missed it.*

I missed you, didn't I?

He shuts off his phone. Exhaustion chips at his skull from the waves of emotion that have encapsulated him in the long, lifeless turns of recent days.

Once the initial shock had subsided, he'd been flooded with arrogant pride that his casual banter and flirtatious language used to make George *feel*. Even if he didn't know, then, why he was saying what he did. Even if it came, and went—Dream felt he'd been proven right, and it dripped down his throat like glory.

Then the bitter taste of timeless greed ushered him into the depths of his curiosity. What exactly was it that George used to want from him? To lace their warm fingers together, to press his lips to Dream's jaw, or unlock cold metal and slide the leather belt from his waistband's hooks? Desperation struck Dream with dark fury, reminiscent of when he'd hungered for what George dreamt about so long ago.

The empty airport, the ceramic mask, George stumbling over his words with enough brevity to make Dream wonder. His mouth connected with George's forehead—but how likely could it be that his kiss lingered, slipped down, softly tugged on George's lips and stole his breath in seconds?

Yet that was in the before—before the nightmare, the games of chess, the late night calls and whistling rain. In a matter of days, hours, minutes apart, George told Sappnap he felt nothing while Dream began to feel everything.

Did George lie then, too? Gentle hints say yes, say *pin me down*, say *make me yours*.

Moisture from the warm ground seeps into the back of Dream's t-shirt. He glances at the dirt underneath his fingernails.

George is a careful construction of boundaries, imaginary weapons, wordless shields. His flirtatious jokes are guarded; few and far between. Dream's insinuations rebound and he's learned through endless trial and error what passes, what doesn't. He pushes, and George fights him—constantly.

He can't make himself believe it wasn't the truth.

Light sweat graces his skin.

He's tired of losing himself in these recursive thoughts, ever since George staggered from the woods and into his heart.

They kept trying to ask me about your dream, he remembers George's voice with painful clarity.

His blatant, hollow, weary-eyed lie withers in his chest: *There's not much else to know. Nothing really happened.*

If only he'd been stronger, he could have pulled George back in. If only he'd been wiser, he could have pulled himself away.

The sun distorts his vision. Palm leaves sway in the distance.

If only he could go back, and observe it all over again—to pinpoint if he truly, really, missed it.

-

“I can see you hovering around your bishop, move the pawn instead, please. Dream, help me!”

The old audio of Sapnap's desperation pitches frantically from the speakers of Dream's monitors. Light bounces off his dark walls.

Hot ceramic stings his palm as he cups a bowl of ramen near his chest, twirling his fork into the steaming broth. He lifts the noodles to his mouth, and lets them burn his tongue.

“What am I supposed to do?” he hears his own voice say distantly.

“Distract George, I don't know! Do something!”

The metal neck of his utensil stills against the side of the bowl.

On his screen, George's face beams. “That's not going to work—”

Dream's nose screws up as he mockingly mouths over himself, listening to the awful confession, “I had a dream about you.”

He watches, closely, the surprise that lifts George's eyebrows and whips his jaw away from the monitor. His dark eyes gleam with confusion. The same embarrassment Dream had felt in that moment tugs on his gut again, until he catches wind of what he hadn't noticed before.

He sees it, recognizes it. The way that George held his breath.

His chest aches.

“Yes! Yes! You already placed it, you placed it...”

The clip fades away.

He hates that he brought himself here, watching the Youtube autoplay mindlessly load, letting the warm smell of salt and oils permeate his closed room. He'd observed the orange of sunset quietly leave the sky through his window panes, and fell inwards. He missed George's voice. The collection of videos on his channel are a goldmine to hear him laugh, yell, tease, and complain—years of memorable jokes and soft moments that define them.

It was a relief, at first, until Dream started to pick up on old patterns in his speech and strange pauses in their conversations that he'd never truly known. Quick compliments scattered here and

there, hysterics that lack full justification, murmurs that indicate a depth he's been blind to.

For a moment, he's convinced he can hear it: the private fondness in George's tone when he says his name.

Then Dream wanders, again, and the clips keep rolling until he's deep in a recent *DNF* playlist he'd been too exhausted to read the fine details of.

He glances at the title of the next video playing— *George and Dream fighting*, followed by a series of question marks—and tenses, hastily sitting up and pressing pause.

The ramen is set onto his desk with slow caution. He wipes the condensation collected on his hands from the bowl's exterior onto his sweats.

Can I do this, he asks himself lightly. The frozen image of George, in his dark hoodie, leaned back in his chair, waits patiently before him.

He's not sure if reliving it is a great idea. The burns have yet to scar. He bites his tongue.

"Stop screwing with me," George's trembling tone saturates Dream's headphones the moment he clicks play.

Dream's eyes flutter. *Fuck.*

"You always do this." He sees irritated fear in George's gaze, and drinks it ardently. "Dream...oh my god—*Dream.*"

His heart races. He leans closer to the monitor.

"I'm gonna hang up," George mutters.

George's thumb reaches for the end-call button, jaw wired with tension, and Dream relishes in the very moment the flames of his own words creep into George's ears and light *something* in his soul.

The phone falls from George's hand, his lips part, his chest rises—and Dream pauses the video.

His fist clenches. After a moment, he brings it down against the desk with a bang.

"Goddammit," he breathes.

He angrily opens his notes.

I saw it, he vents, *in your stupid, pretty face, I saw that for a moment, you wanted it to come true. You wanted it to be me, kissing you. Right?*

He looks up at the image of pure shock and wide-eyes on his screen, chest rising and falling rapidly. His eyes flit over George's expression.

...Right? His head slowly falls. *Or...am I doing this, again? You were never serious about wanting me. Even when I asked. Even when you lied.*

His heart sinks.

Would you lie to me, George?

He stares at the noodles floating in the light brown broth. His appetite is gone.

He scrolls down to escape George's complicated face, and hits a barricade of comments beneath the clip. A hoard of them are strange, capital-lettered confusion, accompanied with various keyboard smashes and concerned observations.

One user wrote: *idk George seemed super upset then dipped completely...like, I feel the tickets were just 2 distract us or something. All three of them have gone super quiet.*

Dream frowns. All three?

He worries his lower lip. Sapnap has been bearing the weight of both Dream's troubled behavior, and George's vulnerable confession. It couldn't have been easy when he was called from Miami—paralyzed by loyalty and loss in a situation that wasn't his to solve, then later asked to buffer two months in advance.

The responding thread below reads: *Nah I think you're looking into it too much. Whatever this convo was seemed weird but the Florida trip is def gonna happen.*

Dream's cursor hovers over closing the tab before his eyes quickly snag onto a posted statement that forces him to freeze.

Am I the only one that thinks George is...y'know, they wrote. He looks like he's melting.

Dream remembers the darkness. He can nearly smell the burning candle wax.

So you just wanted to watch, his mind echoes—

“Stop,” he pleads in a breath to himself.

Is that it? His throat aches. My voice?

I think you'd, “Oh god,” leave bruises.

His head falls into his hands.

That would be nice, wouldn't it?

The images collapse in his mind; bare skin, slender hands, soft lips. Whispered confessions, the tremor over the phone line; sweet, fantasized sounds.

It morphs again into a different pain he is slowly becoming familiar with, beyond wanting forbidden tastes and commanding touches. If he could recreate the gentle moments in his dream, with George's chest beating against his own. If he could get the chance to make George smile. To show him he's loved.

Dream's fingers tangle into his hair.

He feels pathetic that this is all he has.

-

Warm water glides over his wrists, washing suds down the drain and soothing the calluses on his palms. The black sleeves of his hoodie have been pushed up to his elbows. He shuts off the faucet, resting his forearms against the kitchen sink.

The last of his noodles are noisily chewed by the garbage disposal.

He idly sets his dishes on the drying rack, shaking droplets from his hands, and the landline begins to ring.

He stares at the dark box perched on the counter with keypad numbers glowing green. Regret seethes into his chest as he lets it reverberate through the empty kitchen, echo off the high ceilings, and eventually fade into another blinking voice message.

He brings himself closer to the receiver.

Sapnap said he'd stop calling. What if the late-night ring is truly for an emergency?

Dream rubs the scruff gathered on his jaw, and nervously presses the button to listen to the incoming voicemail.

“—honey, Nick left me a message wondering if I'd heard from you and he sounded pretty uptight. I just wanted to check in, and make sure everything is okay. I know you two have had your issues in the past, and just wanted to remind you that these things have a way of working themselves out—”

Dream picks up the phone reflexively, “H-hello? Mom?”

“Oh! Clay, what a nice surprise,” she says. “I thought I'd missed you.”

The room grows colder.

“Mom,” he repeats quietly.

Her voice softens. “What's going on?”

“I—um,” his words catch in his throat, and tearful desperation wells inside him without warning. It rises threateningly close to the brim, until he grips the cold counter, and remembers who he's talking to.

“I'm sorry to worry you,” he says. “You didn't have to call.”

“You didn't need to pick up,” she levies.

He winces.

“Look,” she says, “I get that you can take care of yourself. You don't have to keep proving that to me.” Her tone begins to tiptoe with caution. “But the last time he called me like that, you weren't doing so well. You didn't let me help you then.”

“I didn't need your help,” he assures. He doesn't like to think about his teenage dramatics years ago.

“What about now?” Her question is met with silence. “Don't hurt yourself by lying, Clay.”

“I don't mean to be distant,” he mutters. “It just happens. I feel bad that I push that on Sap so much. It happens too often to him.”

“He sounded worried,” she says, “not tired of you.”

Dream clenches his jaw. “We didn't fight.”

“Okay. So what did happen?”

Tension squeezes his temples as he searches for the right point—the right beginning.

“I went back to Matheson,” he whispers, wide-eyed as his mouth begins to spill. “I started driving in the middle of the night and couldn’t stop, I slept on the sand and I—I hardly had enough gas to get home but I just...I just...” His voice dies.

After a moment, his mother says, “Why would you do that?”

His heart hammers. “Did you love him, Mom?”

“Sweetheart, you—” He hears her sigh. “Of course I did.”

“Does it still hurt?” he asks, voice wrought. “Do you still miss him?”

“Oh,” she murmurs. “...Every once and awhile, I do. But...I’ve let that pain go, and I’m happier now. And it’s been so long, you know.” Timid silence stretches between them. Carefully, she asks, “Where is this coming from?”

He squeezes the slender plastic in his grip, shutting his eyes. He thinks of the beach, George’s smile, the heat, George’s laugh, the rain, George’s voice.

Dream parts his lips, and tells her everything.

She accepts it with gentle solemnity.

He takes a seat at his kitchen table as they talk, for hours, about sunny memories and old photographs and current heartache. She lets him know that she accidentally added his favorite meal from a local restaurant when they’d ordered dinner a few nights prior. He lets her know that Patches keeps bringing feathered toys into a specific corner of his room despite his protests. Apparently, his sister has been thinking of dyeing her hair. Apparently, she’s worried about him, too.

“Tell her I miss her,” Dream says, “Okay? Would you?”

“I promise you, she knows.” A tentative pause passes before his mother slowly voices, “Sometimes, you hold on to people a little tighter than you have to. I know it’s hard. But it’s okay to...to—”

“Lose,” he mutters, “to lose. I’m still...learning how to do that.”

“Give it time.”

“Okay,” he says, “I will. I love you.”

The night weighs on her tone after they’ve finished discussing the next time he’ll come visit, and he lets her put their conversation to an end.

He retreats into the silence of his desolate room, and crawls back to the ever-growing notes.

I talked to my mom about you, he writes. A small smile forms on his face. She still wants you over for dinner, you know.

The bed sighs beneath him as he leans back against the headboard, phone hanging from his limp wrist.

He can almost grasp at the golden threads dangling in the canopy of his mind. If he follows them

out of the dark undergrowth, there's a hopeful future of sun and warmth waiting just above the surface. George holding Patches in his arms, answering his sister's flurry of curious questions, politely complimenting his mother's grilled steak. Passing napkins, pouring water, asking for recipes.

Brushing their cotton socks together under the table, tangling feet and light squeezes on thighs. Quick smiles, sweet laughter, his lips gently pecking George's cheek.

Something domestic. Something loving.

It gnaws at the tense muscles underneath his ribcage terribly.

Sometimes, he types, all I think about is you.

His face sinks with bitter dread. If George truly is happier that whatever he used to feel is gone, then none of it will matter. He won't get to hold him close on holiday evenings, or stay up late to learn stories of their youths, or rest a chin on his head as they stand and watch the rain.

He takes to the keyboard on his phone with steep misery. *Why did you send that song to me, George? Really? I can't get it out of my head.* His breath shallows. *Was it all a joke? Did you know that it would undo me? Did you try to hurt me?*

He reads over the trail of words his frantic-moving fingers created, and exhales in tired sorrow.

That's not fair, I know, he confesses. I'm just angry, all the time, because I—he hesitates—was closer to you than I ever thought I'd be. And it terrified me. It still terrifies me, but...you're not here, anymore. You're not here, and I can't think, and I can't keep doing this.

He wants to be justified in his hatred of George leaving, but can't make the feelings stay. What is it going to be like, when he comes back?

Dream pales rapidly. In all the years they've known each other, any instance where he's been sworn to secrecy against George has fallen to shambles in minutes.

Will he be able to hear his voice, knowing what he knows now, without breaking? To see his eyes in two months time, and lie with every fiber of his being, every slip of his tongue, without fail?

The impossibility garners him weak. They're doomed to break; to fail. If he's not strong enough, their friendship won't be, either.

If it was all for nothing, his fingers shake against the screen, then maybe I should just tell you everything. Maybe I should just fuck everything up.

He drags his touch across the glass, selecting every snippet of text he's accumulated over the past frenzy of days.

He copies it.

He opens their messages.

He pastes it.

Do I have anything left to lose?

He stares at the waiting message for a moment longer, before adrenaline and reality swiftly nail him in the gut.

“What the *fuck* am I doing,” he hisses, running a hand through his hair. He can’t, not in the spur of the moment, not ever—his heart is in those words, his soul is wrapped between the lines and bleeding over each putrid vowel.

He hastily drops his phone. He can’t. He needs to float back down. He needs to calm.

The quiet of his room is broken by a small *ding*.

He looks down at his thread with George, and above the waiting block of notes, a new message has appeared.

Dream’s eyes widen.

A new message from George.

Hi there, it says.

Confusion and elation rise to warm Dream’s cheeks. His brain scrambles to recount the days that slipped behind him—from when he’d been alone, and dreamed, and been alone, and streamed, and then been alone again.

Did a week pass by, already?

He picks up his phone, his trembling hands moving in haste to delete his pasted words, and falters at the sound of a gentle *whoosh*.

The glowing disaster spills across his screen.

He mislicked.

He accidentally pressed send.

The text went through.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is very much inside Dream's head, and also in mine. My hope is it's not too confusing, I'll try to answer questions if I see them - definitely a different format and more exposition in this one.

The reason I locked this fic in the first place was to keep it safely on ao3, where popular content creators with large followings MOST likely couldn't find it. That worry was valid, lol. I just don't want this to become a point of ridicule - I apologize, but I will not be uploading on Wattpad or anywhere else & can ensure that any re-upload (besides translated versions) have been done so without my consent/permission.

If the dream is still reading this...hmu guys lmk what y'all think /j

edit: since many, many people have been reuploading it to wattpad, and the site won't accept my copyright claims unless I have my work there myself, I have uploaded it there. I really didn't want it to come to that, but it was being done without my permission anyway, so the exposure unfortunately was already out of my hands.

Throne

Chapter Summary

Dream makes a phone call.

Chapter Notes

As per usual - please do not reference this work in donations, CC's streams, and chats. I hope you can understand the stress that brings me as an author from the wrong type of exposure. Additionally, all re-uploads besides translated versions have been posted without my consent or permission. AO3 is the only place I have and will post my work. Please do not steal it.

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

White light spills over Dream's terrified features in flashes. His fingers scroll, his eyes flicker, the muscles in his throat and jaw scream with firing tension.

The text went through.

I had another dream where I got to see you, it starts, and Dream lets the horror course through his blood and sting his nerves with helpless shame.

It was an accident. He changed his mind. He didn't *mean* to.

His vision grays as the emboldened confession from his darkest hours rattles in his shaking grip. His breath is quick, and shallow, and labored.

Why the fuck did I do that?

His taut hands shuts off his phone with a mockingly gentle *click*.

He cowers into himself, fingers digging into the flesh of his shoulders, knees pulled towards his chest. The tendons in his forearms and knuckles are stiff with raw adrenaline and shock. His wide-eyes tear into the darkness.

The flat surface of his phone refuses to bend where it's pressed against the curve of his muscle, no matter how tightly he wills it to break. Small crescents deepen where his nails curl into skin.

Notifications remain silent. The screen remains black. Seconds pass, and pass, and the air disappears from his lungs.

His pulse drums with no pause between beats.

He remembers cradling his sister to his chest, just like this, all those years ago, when she'd realized they'd never return to touch the dark-watered sand—his arms over her small frame, locked in his care, letting her tears burn his then thin forearms.

He feels young again. It claws up his throat, scouring his insides. His hands are cold and he may have just lost someone for the second time.

This could be it.

His language, his fury, his disgusting pining all dumped into George's hands without warning. His desire to destroy everything they have, because he felt *lonely*.

This could be it.

Blindly, he rips his phone from his shoulder and dials a number.

The call rings, and rings, then disconnects.

A choked noise escapes his throat.

He calls again.

"Hmph, hello?" The sound slurs through the phone line with half-awake drowsiness.

Relief and terror flood in him.

"Help," Dream says hoarsely, "help me."

Sapnap's voice becomes alert in seconds. "Dream?"

"I fucked up," he rasps.

Nightmares. You're haunting me. Reaching. Stupid, pretty face. Would you lie? Would you lie?

"Wha—dude, what time is it—"

"I don't know what to do," he raves hurriedly. "I don't know what I'm gonna do. I can't—I can't—"

"Where are you?" Sapnap interrupts sharply, "Are you safe?"

Dream's rapid breathing collects clouds of pain in his chest, the sound of Sapnap's words rushing him back to the cigarette-beach and hot car and muddled horizon.

"Answer me."

"Bed," Dream forces out, eyes squeezing shut. "I'm in bed."

"Okay, good. That's good."

"What am I gonna do? What can I fucking do?" His voice laces with the rough air, "What can I—*why* can't I—"

He hears Sapnap shift on the other end. "What did you—"

"It was an accident and I didn't mean to—and I didn't—why the *fuck* did it send—"

"Dream," Sapnap demands. "Tell me what happened."

"I was about to text him something stupid," Dream spits, "and then he popped in out of nowhere. I tried to delete what I was going to say but the fucking message sent, and now I've messed it all up and I'm—" His words sharply cut back when he feels moisture dripping down his cheeks.

His shaky fingers release his arm and gently dab at the unrealized tears. Warm, and sparse. In the darkness, he can make out their faint glistening on his fingertips.

“...What was the message?” Sapnap asks, tinged with a softer tone Dream never hears outside of their wet-eyed moments, and painful confessions.

“Everything,” Dream hollows. “I’ve been writing to myself like a diary for the past week, and pasted it all the second I started to freak out and god, with what is in there, he’s going to *hate* me.”

“Wait, what? Isn’t he still at his grandparents? I thought—”

“I don’t know,” Dream interjects with hysteric tremor. “I don’t know! Maybe he’s home, or—or an older message got sent somehow—I don’t know.”

Sapnap clears the sleep from his chest. “Okay, okay, well, it could just be a glitch. Let me text him and see if it works. Alright?”

Dream sours. “A glitch?”

“Let’s just try.” Silence falls while Sapnap types. “I’ll ask him...when he’s getting back. Yeah.” He pauses, “Uh.”

Dream sits up. “What? What happened?”

“Um, it definitely sent, and he—read it,” Sapnap explains clumsily. “It says he just read it.”

He refuses to pull his phone from his face to check for a similar receipt. “Fuck.”

“So he has service now, I guess,” Sapnap says, then mutters, “that prick.”

“I’m dead,” Dream says.

“It’s probably not as bad as you think.”

“Oh god, yes it is.” His hand finds his hair in anxious grasps. “Sap, it totally is.”

“Maybe send him another message? Explaining you didn’t mean to?”

“Are you *crazy*?” Dream shrills. “He’s never seen me like this, not this bad. It’s—it’s *humiliating*. I can’t believe this is actually happening. I’m so fucking stupid.”

Sharply, Sapnap says, “Hey. Shut the fuck up, okay?”

Defensive shock rises to his flushed cheeks. “Excuse me?”

“Stop beating yourself up for caring, Dream,” Sapnap voices with stern compassion. “It’s not cool.”

Unbridled surprise and comfort rushes Dream into silence. It soothes the ache of his ribs and guides his heart down from its uphill climb. The sheets and blankets pooled at his feet become soft, and inviting.

He takes in a hitched, sobering breath—and recalls when they’d been sixteen and fifteen, cozied in his mom’s basement at two in the morning, bumping elbows and stifling shouts as bright-colored Brawlhalla dried their eyes.

Livid yells had echoed through the floor overhead. The voices of his mother and her boyfriend they'd never liked muffled into an embarrassing, sharp-scaled dragon that disintegrated Dream's blooming feeling of safety.

"Sorry," Dream had mumbled. "This has been happening, lately."

"It's fine," Sapnap assured curtly.

Their remotes had stilled in their hands, avatars on the screen shifting rhythmically in the absence of direction. Three lives and intimidating letters hung by health bars and a meaningless, round-counting timer.

Angry footsteps caused Dream to grimace, and Sapnap to glance up at the ceiling quickly.

"It really sucks," Dream blurted in a whispered confession, as his eyes traced the light-brown carpet and soda stains.

"Oh," Sapnap said.

Their silence was tense, and awkward, until a gentle hand settled on Dream's upper back.

"I wish I could understand," Sapnap muttered slowly. "This shit is tough. But you're...you. And I know you. And I'm here." He carefully swiped a thumb across Dream's 'Johnny Rotten' t-shirt. "Is that enough?"

Dream had smiled, and looked at the sincerity in Sapnap's eyes with warm gratitude.

"Of course." He pressed on the plastic, colored buttons to resume their match. "That's always gonna be enough."

Dream knows they are built on these defining moments of collision, labored with empathy and tough love. Stubborn arguments that dissolve into mumbled apologies days later, Sapnap's bank of memories he chooses to thumb through when Dream expects it the least, the respectful distance they watch each other's lives from as the years go by.

When gravity shifts them close, Dream remembers why he chose this life—why he chose this person.

"You're so harsh on yourself, all the time," Sapnap continues through the phone quietly. "It's just hard to listen to."

Dream sniffs, tugging the sheets up over his ankles. "I'm sorry, I...didn't think about that. I've been so—" He sighs shakily. "It's not easy to snap out of it."

"I know."

The tear-tracks on his face grow cold. He wonders if Sapnap remembers the chilled basement and warm banter, like he does. He wonders if he ever recounted the memory to George, late at night when they'd spoken of old family ruins and present healing.

George.

His breath threatens to quicken again.

"So," Sapnap speaks up, "you did a thing on accident."

“I did,” Dream says in a whisper. The acceptance of it is trembling, and terrifying.

“And you said you don't feel ready to talk to George about it?”

Dream's sleeve dries his cheeks, and stubbled jaw. The mere thought of glancing at the block of text he'd sent threatens to stream more anxious tears from his recovering eyes. “God, no.”

“Then chill, for a bit,” Sapnap says. “Right now, in the next five seconds, what can you do?”

Dream swallows, easing the tension squeezing his tongue. His voice is soft, “N-nothing.”

“That's okay,” Sapnap assures, “nothing is fine.”

“Nothing is fine,” Dream repeats.

“Yeah.”

“Really.” An incredulous, tired chuckle bubbles from his chest. “Nothing is fine.”

Sapnap huffs. “Yep.”

“And I'm an idiot,” Dream says.

“And you're an idiot,” Sapnap affirms, but Dream can hear his smile.

Faint laughter fills the space of their call, exhausted and genuine. Dream wants to apologize for waking Sapnap, apologize for everything—but their erratic, unexpected contentment on the line keeps him at bay.

His fingers knead the back of his neck as their outburst subsides.

“I really told him everything,” Dream says quietly, and relief begins to lift in him. “Is—is it bad that I kind of feel...lighter and heavier at the same time?”

“Dunno,” Sapnap says. “I guess you have to meet yourself somewhere, right?”

“Yeah.” Dream leans back into his pillows with a heavy exhale. “My mom said you called.”

“You talked to her?” Sapnap's voice pitches hopefully.

Dream's heart softens.

“I did,” he recounts. “It was nice to hear her voice, she...knows about George, now.” His hand falls to rest on his propped-up knee. “And she wasn't surprised either. She said I was being shitty to you, though.” He nearly grins. “Not in so many words.”

“Yeah, she might be onto something there,” Sapnap jokes, but lets out an uneasy huff. “I just wanted to know what was up. Sorry if it felt like I was keeping tabs on you, or something. I—I really tried not to call her.”

“It's okay,” Dream says with sincerity, “I'm glad you did. Even...even when I couldn't answer it was nice to know you were there, if that makes sense.” He pauses, gazing out into the quiet night beyond his window. “Nick...I'm glad that you know me.”

“Oh. I'm glad you know me, too.”

Dream's face breaks into a small smile. "Do I?"

"What does *that* mean?" Sapnap asks.

Dream chuckles in amusement. "Nothing, just—I can tell when you're keeping stuff from me, that's all."

"Yeah yeah," Sapnap says quickly, "stay out of it. When you ditch me for days like this it takes away your inner-circle rights."

Valid. "I'll work on it, man, I promise."

"Good."

Icy guilt nips at his anxious heart from the underlying strain in Sapnap's tone—nearly faded, hardly there.

Dream's head spins. *Have I hurt who I love more than I've hurt myself?*

"I don't try to ignore you," he says softly.

Sapnap sighs. "That's why I kept texting."

Silence slips into their phone line. Dream slowly stretches out his taut muscles, and follows the pull that guides him out of his blankets, and to the window's ledge.

He slides open the glass, and says, "I haven't been down here in a long time."

Humid air trickles in through the screen. Orlando always smells like the forest green of tropical leaves, with notes of garbage and suburban cigarettes.

"I can tell," Sapnap says, and his voice slows. "Y'know, it might just be because my brain is still rebooting right now, but...this is how you've always done it, I think. All on the inside." He pauses, letting the words sink between them. "It just makes you miserable."

Dream watches the orange glow from a streetlamp dim. He timidly asks, "What do you think I should do?"

Sapnap falls quiet in what Dream assumes is stunned contemplation. After a moment, he mumbles, "Um...what do *you* think you should do?"

Dream nearly gives his view of the empty street an eye-roll, but lets it pass. He sees a stray, black cat wandering between parked vehicles on the road. A shadowed object hanging from its mouth drops a small, light silhouette that floats down to the asphalt.

"All I know is I can't come back from this," Dream murmurs quietly. The feather begins to tumble idly along the ground as the cat slinks into the night. "This could be it."

"Are you...scared?" Sapnap asks.

"Oh, always," he says, then settles before carefully moving through his winding thoughts. "But I think I'm starting to feel...like this was inevitable. I don't know. Like no matter what I thought, or said, or did in the past few weeks—it was always going to bring me here." His tone softens, "Even when I first met him, I was supposed to end up here, though I didn't know that for a long time."

"Wow," Sapnap mutters. "That's big."

Dream gently shuts the window. “Yeah. Sometimes, it feels a little too big. You know?”

“I get that,” Sapnap says. “Like maybe it’s too much.”

“What are you supposed to do with that, then?” Dream asks, tugging on the cords to lower his blinds. He mumbles, “I should really buy some curtains.”

“Be patient, I guess.” Sapnap then adds, “If you get curtains you’ll probably feel worse.”

Dream frowns. “Why?”

“You need sunlight, you vampire.”

“I get more sun than you,” Dream retaliates.

“Whatever,” Sapnap says. “Just don’t block it out.”

He sits on the edge of his bed with a snarky reply on his tongue, but falters.

Let’s give you something to look forward to, then. Something sunny.

Like you?

“What if I have to?” Dream asks.

“What?”

Dream falls flat on his back, the springs of his mattress carrying the slight bounce to his fluffed hair. “What if he’s done, when he says something back—and I have to shut off everything I’m feeling now?”

“Oh—you’re talking about—okay. That’s not really blocking it out, Dream. That’s letting it go.”

Sometimes, it’s okay to lose.

Dream’s voice grows incredibly small, “I don’t want to.”

“Really?” Sapnap questions.

Dream’s pulse quickens. “What?”

His voice presses on the tendrils in Dream’s heart, “Like, not even part of you wants to?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Dream says.

If it was all for nothing—he stares at his ceiling. His days of solitude creep in heavily—maybe I should just tell you everything.

“I’m not trying to go all psycho-freak on you, but can I just...tell you what I think?” Sapnap waits until Dream offers a noise of permission. “You gave yourself an out, Dream.”

“An out,” he repeats flatly.

“Yeah,” Sapnap says, “I know you didn’t do it on *purpose*, or whatever, but some part of you knew sending that would mean it all could be over. Right?”

Dream grits his teeth. It was pasted there before he’d backed down, that much is true.

Maybe I should just fuck everything up.

“What’s that—that quote you like, the stupid Greek one?” Sapnap asks, and memories of a kinder summer suddenly resurface before them.

Hours in classical literature, visiting bookstores, scrolling through ancient forums—Dream had fallen in love with tragic heroes without ever knowing why. He would fade from calls to hear faintly, “where’s Dream?” and George’s warm voice reply, “rereading the Odyssey, probably,” or Sapnap’s, “close the fucking tab, dude, this is the third time today.”

Eventually, his passion had left him, just like everything else.

His brows furrow as his heart slowly begins to sink with realization. “The one I sent you, like, two years ago?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Sapnap says. “The one about the throne, and the girl who buried that guy.”

His eyes shut.

“You...” Dream’s voice slowly softens as he quotes, “You’ve rushed too far, too fast to the edge of daring. And there, Antigone, you hit upon the throne of justice.”

“That,” Sapnap says, “that’s you.”

His eyes open. He can make out the long arms of his ceiling fan in the faint, escaping light. Small reds from his monitors blink into the black air.

Dream mutters, “Okay, Sapnap.” His heart pounds. With deep hesitance, his words drop low as he asks, “What’s the throne of justice, then?”

“Also you, dumbass.”

Silence cradles him.

“If it’s so big,” Sapnap says carefully, “it makes sense you’d try to destroy it.”

The implied end to his sentence hangs heavy on the tether between them: *before it destroys you.*

-

When the late hours of night turned early for their tired voices, he escaped his dreams. He walked along no beach, he saw no other soul, he merely slept in a void that delivered him great calm when noon rolled around on a fresh day.

He woke with an intention. To not look at his phone, to clean the laundry and filth he’d been lounging in, and try to pick up the pieces of himself he’d scattered through the empty halls and high-ceilinged rooms.

He carefully shaved away the days of scruff collected on his angled jaw, the blades tracing over sturdy bone and leaving softened skin. He’d tilted his head at himself in the mirror, slowly learning to recognize what he saw. His thumb swiped over the bags under his eyes and the dark shape of his brows.

Staring at his empty room and blank computer screen has made its mark, and he’s been weary to return to it.

He hovers in his door frame with contemplation, knuckles gently rapping against the white-painted wood, and gazes at his desk. Bright colors sway on his monitor's screensaver animation, twining together and breaking apart in silent rhythm.

Dream carefully passes over the clean carpet, and lowers himself into his chair. Although he should be bogged by dread and shame after his texting misfortune, his steps have felt easier. His chest can breathe deeper. His hands lost their tremble.

The honeyed edges of truth sing and soothe his tattered heart.

He'd connected with himself, somehow, between the candid night and Sapnap's grounding words. He let the honesty flow through him, instead of spending every waking moment fighting against the current.

He can't undo it. He can't fix it. He has to put himself back together.

Dream clicks his computer into life, and sees a happy invitation waiting for him on Discord.

He scans the abundance of names descending down the list. At any moment in the days prior, he would have been exhausted to even consider hearing a melting pot of laughter, sharp insults, and welcoming attitudes.

Yet he's closer to healing, now, closer to rejoining the world he'd painfully removed himself from—and George isn't online.

Dream joins the call.

Warm greetings lift the corners of his mouth, and he loads the game with trickling excitement. The image of dark grass blocks and oak pathways returning to his screen ushers an unexpected, homely feeling in the low bearings of his chest. Despite his distance, the loving, virtual community he'd built releases him from absence with open arms.

It feels like hope. It feels like family.

Patches enters his room with curiosity at the sound of Dream's laughter, and lounges near him for a long stretch of time.

They build on the SMP for several hours, playing music and bothering Tommy's live audience with any chance they get; which includes bullying him relentlessly for accidentally using the phrase "potty break" in front of several adult men.

Karl and Wilbur had expanded the two, measly treehouses from Dream's blackout memories into a small village on the canopy. It has pulleys, levers, not-so-sufficient waterslides and a birdhouse that is named: *Sapnap's Only Friends*.

"No no no, that's a stupid name, take that down," Sapnap complains while Dream navigates through the jungle-fenced in aviary.

"I think it's fitting," Dream says.

Sapnap scoffs. "If anything, it should be about Dream. Not me."

"Okay, okay, how about I make it 'Dream's guilty pleasure,'" Karl says, breaking the sign over the double-doors.

Dream searches through the chests to locate fruit seeds. “That makes it sound weird.”

“Am I wrong?” Karl questions with a giggle. His character crouches near Dream, shifting repeatedly.

Dream smacks him.

“Hey,” Sapnap says. “Don’t hit him.”

“Do you really like birds, Dream?” Wilbur asks curiously.

Dream leaves Karl and Sapnap behind as he exits the wooden doors, passing by Tommy’s AFK avatar. “Um. I guess.”

Wilbur makes a noise of approval. “Can you give us an interesting fact that you know?”

Dream begins to bound across the green treetops, feeling unexpectedly shy. “Sure. Uh...like what?”

"Anything," Wilbur encourages.

Dream breaks several blocks of tree leaves aimlessly. "Um, parrots evolved around fifty-nine million years ago," he offers. "Or that’s what the earliest evidence shows.”

“That’s brilliant." Wilbur's genuine voice tugs the corners of Dream's mouth upwards with slight gratitude.

A faint sound notifies that someone has joined the channel.

Is he back from his potty break, Callahan tosses into the in-game chat.

“I mean, technically they found an older fossil that makes them around seventy million years old,” Dream continues, clearing his throat. “But it was just a regular dinosaur with a bird-like beak.” He scans the jungle floor for watermelons hidden in the winding vines. “There’s a clear difference in bone structure from parrots to those guys.”

“Do you see what I have to put up with,” Sapnap says.

Karl laughs. “It’s very cool, Dream. You’re not a nerd at all.”

Wilbur appears from Dream’s left and presents several brown seeds he’s collected. “So, do you just have these memorized in that massive brain of yours?”

Dream smiles, selecting the birdseed in his hotbar to click on a nearby parrot. “Well, I—”

“Hello,” a new voice interrupts.

Dream’s hands slide off the dark keys, away from the desk, and land heavily in his lap.

“George!” Karl greets happily.

George.

“Hey man,” Wilbur says. “Welcome back!”

George.

Dream’s eyes stare unblinking into the horrid green and blue biome trapped on his dusty screen.

The untamed parrot flies off into the depths of the jungle.

“Thank you,” George responds, his tone amicable, and guarded. Dream can recognize this shade of politeness from half-a-world away. “How are you all doing?”

“Great, we’re actually working on the treehouses again,” Karl says. “I think you’ll like what we’ve done with the place.”

“Really? That sounds cool.”

Dream can hear the disinterest—the cold, calculating patience.

Wilbur hums. “Yeah, I moved your chest to the second floor earlier. Hope you don’t mind.”

“That’s quite alright,” George dismisses. “I have bigger things to worry about right now.”

A chime pings through the call.

“Lads,” Tommy says. “Is GeorgeNotFound on my stream?”

“Go take another potty break,” Karl orders quickly.

Wilbur’s loud laughter fills Dream’s headphones.

“You’re still on about that, okay,” Tommy grumbles, then asks, “George, George, are you going to be joining us, man?”

“No,” George says, “I’m not here for that.”

An unsettling pause tumbles between the rapid banter that’d been skipping from voice to voice for hours. The silence drags its agonizing claws across the skin of Dream’s chest. He can almost feel the beads of blood drip into his lungs.

Sapnap says nothing.

Dream says nothing.

“Dream,” George directs, his voice unreadable. “Can I talk to you?”

Chapter End Notes

Hi there :) debated posting this today for a while, this one was a lot of fun for me to write, Sapnap and Dream's dynamic has a special place in my heart. uncovering more about each character as the fic progresses has been interesting for me, and I hope for you as well <3

George will be back 100% next chapter.

thank you for reading and all the lovely comments, I would like to point out that spams make it a tad difficult for me to interact with you all on here, light moderation would be greatly appreciated!

I'll most likely be slow to post the next uploads, as I'm spending a lot of time making sure I get the story/themes right :)

Dust

Chapter Summary

With a careful exchange of honesty and words, Dream and George finally bring everything to the surface.

Chapter Notes

This is a long chapter. Take your time, drink some water, and bear with me. I love you all and am very glad I can share this story with you.

As per usual - please do not reference this work in donations, CC's streams, and chats. I hope you can understand the stress that brings me as an author from the wrong type of exposure. Additionally, all re-uploads besides translated versions have been posted without my consent or permission. AO3 is the only place I have and will post my work. Please do not steal it.

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

“Dream,” George says. “Can I talk to you?”

Dream’s heart plummets. He can feel the nerves he’d managed to calm cracking at his throat. The jungle trees on his screen sway with nauseating motion.

He didn’t think it’d hurt so much to hear his name leave George’s tongue. All the moments it’s been spoken with kindness, annoyance, patience, or frustration blink by him in fleeting recollection.

He’s dreamed of this. He’s yearned for this.

He parts his lips in an attempt to mount the enormous hurdle pressed into the silence, where George’s voice reverberates absently.

“Hi,” Dream forces out.

It’s feeble, and shallow—George wastes no time before responding, “Now, please.”

George disconnects from the group call.

Dream’s eyes flutter shut as the other listeners butt in with confused questions and awkward laughter. The noise fills his headphones and he nearly raises a hand to wrench them off; push the anxious chatter away.

A message from Callahan pops into the game chat: *ooooh ur in trouble.*

“Oh man, Dream,” Tommy pitches between scuffling laughter. “Feels like you’ve just been called to the principal's office. What the fuck did you do?”

“Tommy—shut it,” Wilbur says quickly, tipping between subtle warning and playful scolding. “You want your mum coming in and telling you off again?”

“She hasn’t done that in ages, dickhead.”

They tumble into mindless bickering, lifting the attention to another topic that Wilbur pointedly refuses to deviate from.

Dream is numb. His avatar stands unmoving in his lengthening inaction.

You whisper to WilburSoot: thank you.

He eyes the Discord window on his second monitor, the list of names, the locked voice-channel where George’s icon looms patiently.

Trouble. Danger. What did I do?

Sapnap startles him from his muddled thoughts as he orders, “Talk to you later, Dream.”

Dream’s chest tightens.

He exits out of the game, and mutters, “Screw you.”

Their friends join in with stammered, quick goodbyes, and he can’t bring himself to pass any words back before the overlapping of voices is cut off sharply as he disconnects.

His arrowed cursor floats over George’s name.

He knows he can’t run from this. The inevitability returns at once to frighten and calm him, guiding his fingers down against the slick plastic of his mouse to select the channel with a light *click*.

Dream enters the call.

He is greeted with silence, and fidgets with his hoodie strings anxiously. George’s presence alone is deafening.

“You’re back,” Dream says finally, unsure of where else to begin.

Blankly, George responds, “I am.”

“When did you get home—”

“Two hours after I got service,” George interrupts.

Dream’s pulse spikes at the sharpness in his tone.

“You weren’t picking up your phone. I had to join that call so I knew that you’d answer me.”

Dream ties and unties his drawstring into knots. He feels dried up—out of tears, out of luck, out of time. Words die before he can manage to wrap them with the thinnest threads of coherency.

“I need you to explain,” George says, and Dream slowly clenches at the fabric on his chest, “whatever the fuck it is that I’ve been staring at on my phone since this morning.”

Dream’s grip tightens as pain drives needles into his sternum. *It’s happening. It’s happening.*

“It’s—it’s all there, George,” he says softly. “What needs explaining?”

“What—what needs,” George repeats with shrill frustration. “Oh my god.”

After a careful pause, Dream’s voice falls low, and strained, “I really missed you.”

He hears George blow out an unsteady breath. “Dream. Dream. I’m trying to—to do this, don’t make it difficult. Please, just, explain this. I’m not crazy. Explain it.”

His eyes close.

“Can I...can I listen to your voice, for a moment?” Dream asks, and his desperation skitters shock across the phone line. “Please. Tell me about your trip, and then we’ll talk. Is that okay?” He brings his knuckles and bundled cloth towards his mouth. “George?”

His exhales shake against his fingers, as he waits with searing patience for George to reply. Days and nights of aching for this, yet not in this way, mock his anguish.

Please, he begs internally, *please*.

“No,” George says.

Dream’s eyes open. “N-no?”

“I can’t believe you,” he mutters. “I really, really can’t believe you. We don’t talk all week, then the second I’m back you slap me with this—this—confession? Hate letter? I don’t even know.”

Hate letter.

“Look—” Dream tries, but George’s quick words stop him.

“No, no, you think that somehow I’d want to talk about my trip? That you *deserve* that much?” George questions with thorned anger, spitting, “I don’t understand you. ‘*Maybe I should just fuck everything up,*’ fuck you. Fuck you.”

His voice is ugly.

Dream withers. “I just wanted to talk to you.”

“You want a distraction. I’m not gonna give that to you.”

“I don’t,” Dream says, but it tastes like a lie. “I know you’re not happy with me right now, but—”

“Of course,” George interrupts sharply, “of course I’m not *happy*, Dream. You wrote me this bloody mess and then ignored my calls all day. How else do you expect me to be feeling?”

“George—”

“Surely you thought about me, right? About how I’d feel, reading it and having to try and figure it out, *on my own*,” George seethes. “You *had* to have thought about how I feel. How I felt.” His voice suddenly loses its fire, “You...you know how I felt. You know what I told him. So...why?”

Cold corners of selfishness and guilt press into the slats of Dream’s ribs. He thinks of how this would be going if he hadn’t let his destruction get the best of them—exchanging small pieces of their week, catching up, getting close, sharing laughter.

The foreign way with which George speaks to him now is enough to make him wonder if they'll ever get back there.

"I..." Dream smoothes over the wrinkled creases on his chest. "I got lost after he told me that. I don't know. I started writing notes to myself that I didn't mean to send you—and it was an accident." *Sort of.* "I'm sorry."

"It doesn't sound like you were writing to yourself."

"I know." Dream repeats, "I'm sorry."

"Please say something else."

"George, I—" He lets out a frustrated breath, pushing away from his desk. "I'm fucking terrified, right now. I don't even know where to begin."

"Pick somewhere," George snaps.

Dream gets to his feet. "It's not that easy."

"Not that easy? Then why did you send it—"

"It was an *accident*."

"Oh, an accident," George says, dripping with singed sarcasm. "Yeah. Okay. The least you can do is own up to yourself."

Bitterly, Dream growls, "I have. Trust me."

George falls silent.

Dream hates the way it carves into his chest, regret already seeping into him as if every word that drops from his lips pushes them further apart.

The cutting edge in George's voice appears often in their conversations with Sapnap, but Dream has only heard the shards of silver directed at him once alone, years ago.

The three of them had been headfirst in an hours-long call of competitive gaming, tossing toxic words and empty insults bogged by swears. Determined to find a pressure point after being tormented for the night's entirety, Sapnap had fired a series of relationship-related comments about crushes and feelings and George's single-lifestyle that hit the mark unexpectedly.

George got angry.

Sapnap kept pushing and Dream followed, entertained by the reaction they so rarely get to see. After having a piss-poor day, Dream fell into the amusement of teaming up against George until his tongue slipped and fractured the space between them.

Dream said a string of crude words that he can't recall—they'd left his mouth faster than he could snatch them away—and George broke.

He turned on Dream in scathing judgement; unexpected hurt. He suffocated the call with a high-strung, emotional thread about how the opinion Dream holds of him *matters*, what he says *matters*, the concept wringing his throat and pausing their game immediately.

It was enough for Dream to take George from the call, and sit in privacy for forty minutes to undo

his harsh comment and apologize. Dream has been mindful since then to keep his tone gentle and teasing impersonal—to never hear that side of George’s voice again.

Yet now, he’s standing in his room watching the tension in his fists, and George’s anger reveals the shade of fragility underneath as he quietly says, “Just say you hate me.”

Dream’s head snaps up sharply. “I don’t.” His chest tightens at the empty pause that follows. “George. You don’t believe that.”

“What else am I meant to believe? Why would you write such angry things to me?”

The weakness of George’s *angry things* strikes Dream with deep sorrow. His mind mournfully passes over the hot-headed, obsessive words he’d threaded those notes with. *I can't keep doing this. I should fuck everything up. You hurt me, didn't you? On purpose, wouldn't you?* He's pained that he'd ever written them; that George could interpret them in that way. That George thinks he could ever be hated.

Sleepless nights and lonesome fevers cup the tension in his jaw, relaxing where the joints meet his cheeks. His mouth slackens.

“Because,” he spills, “I’ve been thinking about you nonstop, and I can’t remember the last time I felt this way, about anyone.”

His heart pounds. He slowly leans forward to press his palms flat against his desk.

“Felt,” George says, “*what* way.”

“George,” comes Dream’s weightless breath, “some part of me needs you.”

His head hangs between his wired shoulders. Light from his keyboard and screens glows against his sprawled hands. The dark surface beneath them is scratched and worn from years of use.

“But…” George’s words break as he recites, “I haunt you. And hurt you.”

Dream wonders how many ghosts he has collected in his life; how many he has created from dust and unsent letters.

He wants to slither into denial. He wants regret to steal it all back. “Yes.”

The pain swipes low, and deep. “How could you want someone who does that to you?”

“You’re worth it,” Dream says. “Every second of it. You live in me, George.”

He hears George’s breath catch in his throat.

For a moment, he can nearly see it, the rain-spattered silhouette wavering opposite the field of fire that has grown in their distance. The mirage almost brings him to his knees. The flames climb higher.

He pulls his hands off of the desk to wipe the hollows of his cheeks. His feet step him aimlessly away from the monitors.

“When we met,” George says with unexpected, tender caution, “I was so enamored by you.”

Dream stills, his socks falling silent against the soft carpet. His calves and stomach and shoulders tense.

“Everything you said,” George continues. “Everything you did, every time you so much as talked to me or said my name. I wanted to make you laugh. I wanted to be with you, every second, of every day.”

Chilling warmth blooms from Dream’s cheeks down his neck, and collects in his chest with vivid sensation. His lips part helplessly.

The small wobble in George’s voice grows. “And you looked right through me.”

His eyes widen.

George clears his throat, and returns with an even tone, “So I grew up. And we grew close. And I got to know you as, well, you—stupid and bold, extremely loving, kind of a maniac.” He pauses. “But I got over it.”

Terror, and fear, and confusion pool in Dream’s stomach. He grasps blindly for the back of his chair behind him, fingers squeezing the plastic and mesh with force.

“Then we...we started changing,” George says. “I held you at arm’s length, but then you learned how to spin me. And it was fun, a-and exciting, some part of me realized I still...” He trails off, then floods with fierce emotion. “What am I supposed to do with this now, Dream? Why are you doing this to me now?”

The pain in his voice is saturated with disappointment, cold rain, empty nests. Weakness takes the wind from Dream’s body.

“George,” Dream struggles, “I didn’t—”

“What do you expect me to do?” he whispers, sounding utterly defenseless. “To—to let myself go back there?”

Dream hears George snuffle, and the plastic in his grip begins to shake.

“It’s different this time,” Dream pleads.

“How?”

Wounded passion falls from his lips, “Because I see you now, and I *want* this.”

“Do you?” George presses angrily, “What is *this* to you, Clay?”

A thousand and one needs and desires rush forth into his mind with bright furor. It’s early mornings, late nights, tender touches and soft conversations, light and laughter and darkness and depth, “It’s—it’s—”

“Can’t be a ‘life-partner,’ right?” George asks, his trembling voice cutting Dream’s thoughts in half. “Couldn’t be *that*, could it?”

A shuddered breath rips through Dream’s lungs.

A life partner.

No, his naive memories recount with deep misery, *that’s not really my thing.*

“Yeah,” George stings, “yeah. I heard about that. It was when I was starting to feel a bit better, too, not so sick to my stomach anymore. I can’t tell if any of this is serious to you, or just some—some

lonely game.”

George thought the notes were a half-confession, half-hateful goodbye—and now, he thinks Dream wants some casual, self-centered *fling*. The realization pushes Dream further into oblivion; how did he fuck up *this* badly?

His world tilts with steep shame and panic. “I lied,” he begs, “I lied.”

He shoves the chair from his rugged hands and takes staggered steps away.

“You...what?”

“I was scared of how much I want it,” he confesses, carrying himself to the opposite end of his room as it courses through him. “It knocked me down, George, and I lied. I was just trying to get away from it because I’ve seen how it can end. I saw it with my parents.” His movement dies as he lets the weight root him firmly to the ground. “But...*you*. I want you in every way I can have you.”

In the quiet that reverberates in the call, Dream’s chest rises and falls rapidly. His muscles tense and relax. The release stitches his wounds back together.

“You aren’t joking?” George asks slowly.

His eyes flutter as the anger eases itself from George’s words.

“God, no,” Dream breathes. “Really, really—no.”

“How...how long have you not been joking for?”

Dream stares into the mirror hanging above his dresser. His face is flushed, his hair ruffled by the bulky headphones covering his ears, the logo of a flame on his hoodie centered right over his heart.

“A while, without realizing it,” he says. “But I started to let myself around the time of the chess stream.”

“...Oh.”

Whatever chance I had, he thinks. “Did I miss you?”

George sighs. “It’s not that easy, Dream.” After a beat, he mutters, “I’m going to kill Sapnap.”

Dream smiles dryly. “Not if he kills us first.”

George makes a small noise of approval, and Dream’s chest yearns. He wants to take the opportunity and run with it—drag them off of this path and hide in the tranquil underbrush of sly jokes and light normalcy.

The distraction would only delay them further, though, and the past seven days of suspense have been enough for Dream already.

“I was looking forward to talking to you the second I got back, you know,” George says quietly. “All week. Everything I saw that was pretty, or thought of that was funny, I meant to tell you.”

Tell me, Dream wants to say, *take us away from here*. “I’m sorry.”

George’s words carefully drop from his mouth as though they’re made of secrets, “It rained when I was there, Dream. I...wasn’t sleeping well, and it woke me. The grass was all dewy. I laid in it, for

a while.”

Dream remembers how he'd oozed into his lawn in the buzzing heat, carved empty after days of silence from George. Did the same hurt push him to feel the wet farmlands, too?

He pictures George bundled in pajamas and warm clothes, leaving dark footprints in the grass as he wanders beneath the rain. He can see him sinking to the untilled ground, and gently laying in the dirt and green.

He wishes he could have seen the drops collect on George's cheeks. He wishes he could have laid next to him, under a gloomy England sky instead of his blazing Floridian sun. He could have pressed a palm to the water-dappled fabric on George's chest, or brushed away the mist on his skin.

“It kept raining,” George says, “and I kept missing you. I felt *safe*, in missing you. And then...” His softness turns to hail, “And then it's six in the morning, and you've sent me something that's just *dangerous*. You normally know when to stop but this—*this?*”

Dream tries to not think about George holding the notes in his open palm, eyes tearing over the glowing words as the author whispers in his ear.

“I thought you cared more,” George finishes with low inflection, “than to do something like this.”

Dream's shaky fingers pinch the bridge of his nose. “Please let me explain,” he says, “I care so much it's killing me. When I said I've never felt like this before I *meant* it—I can't eat or sleep or think straight when it comes to you.” His fingers crawl over his eyes to squeeze at his temples, his vision trapped in slight shadow. “It's like I have to breathe you in to keep my head on right. I'm obsessed with you. So...so when he told me that I might have missed your feelings, so fucking close to mine, I just...”

He exhales with unease at the lumps forming in his throat.

George silently lets him writhe.

“I hate that I've hurt you,” Dream says. “I hate it so fucking much. I know I felt it even back then—I wish I could go smack some sense into my old self for being such an idiot. I've been such an idiot, George.” He hears George huff quietly. “I'm sorry that it came from such a dark place, I...I wish you didn't have to find out like this.” His brooding melts to a solemn murmur, “I would've done it all so differently.”

The tiredness in his tone mollifies them both.

George hesitates before asking, “How would you have done it differently?”

“I could've sent you a nice letter,” Dream says, his words soft. “Hell, I would've even handwritten something if I knew that—that this...”

“What—what would be in the letter?” George voices with timid pause, then adds, “If I could even read your handwriting.”

The gentle shift comes through Dream's headphones to glow with light between them. His heart picks up its sporadic pattering.

“A daily log of everything Patches does by the hour,” he offers delicately, and George hums. “Or the amount of times I burnt my mouth on food, because I know that makes you happy, for some

reason.”

“Just wait for it to cool,” George says gently. “You’re so impatient.”

Dream grins, and says, “I’d have written about how much I wanted to hear you smile, just like that.” He pauses, tone quieting fondly, “And tell you how much I miss seeing it. How much I—I...want to kiss you, like I have in my dreams.”

His eyes tilt up to the white ceiling and circling fan. It feels beautiful to say it at long last.

“You dream of that?” George breathes.

Dream presses an empty hand to his cheek. “All the time.”

The fire before them crackles with unknown direction, unpredictable intention.

He hears George sigh, and the breeze gently sweeps sparks onto his face.

“What are we supposed to do, Dream,” George asks with tremors of faraway fear, “at this distance, with our different lives?”

His hand falls to link with the other in a nervous grip behind his back. “I don’t know,” he says.

He thinks of their friendship, of the long late nights and hours of calls and close jokes and frustrated bickering. The clumsy workaround of time-zones, schedules, personal grey-matter. The accidental moments when Dream’s overambitious self pushed George into silence, into invisibility.

He thinks of how many times he’d rushed, too far, too fast to the edge of daring.

With his words, Dream bows remorsefully before the gold-plated throne. “Do you?”

He knows there is no room for an apology, anymore. The weapon that rests on the back of his neck has been held in his own grip for too long, and should fall into George’s hands, and his hands only.

“I...” George touches the axe gently to the base of Dream’s skull. With one fatal swing, Sappnap could be right—his destruction is their undoing. Justice is their unmaker.

George’s whisper swings, “I think it’s too much.” His voice breaks, “I think this might be too much.”

The blade cuts to bone.

Dream’s head drops.

Severed, hurting; he feels his blood rush to his ears.

“What do you mean,” he says, staring at the carpet with dead eyes. “What does that mean.”

“Dream, I—”

“Are you—are you over me? Is that it, then, and we’re not even gonna try, you—you’re calling it?”

“No,” George assures feverishly, “no. That’s not what I...I just don’t want to lie to you. I know how important honesty is to you.”

Dream softens in a matter of rapid, tumbling seconds. Throat tight, he forces out, “Then tell me.”

“I have so much,” George says, “for you. I can’t explain it. It’s like it’s—it’s bigger than me, and I taught myself how to deal with it. I was okay, dealing with it.”

Dream sinks to the floor, weakened by the torrents of emotion washing over his tired body. His elbows dig into his knees as he presses his knuckles to his mouth.

“This is just so fast,” George continues shakily. “*So* much just changed and my head is hurting, I—you said it, too, that you’re angry and...and undone. Because of me.” Dream recognizes the strain of tears in his fragile voice. “I don’t think I’m ready for that. For you.”

The words flood his skull with merciless, vulnerable force. Dream’s face falls into his hands.

George whispers, “I’m not ready for you.”

In the cold silence that envelops his plunging world, Dream’s pulse thumps heavily in his ears. The blackness of his palms rebounds his warm breaths against his nose and mouth.

Antigone, his head rings with twisted sorrow, *bury me, too*.

He wants to slide backwards in time, to the moment he crouched under the bending moon on the darkened shore. Had he waded in slower, and brought George waist-deep in the purple water, perhaps they could have sank with grace instead of fury.

Why did I have to burn it all?

“...Are you there?” George asks.

Dream’s hands slip down from his face. “Just...give me a second.”

“Okay.”

He clears his throat, then hesitates.

Not ready for you. Not ready for you. Not ready for you.

“So you still have feelings for me,” Dream says finally.

George’s voice is hollow. “Of course I do.”

A broken huff passes through Dream’s lips. “But you don’t think it’s a good idea to...to...”

“Be anything more than friends,” George finishes with audible strain.

Dream’s heart bleeds. Tears spring into his eyes, and he tries to blink them away, yet the droplets cling to his lashes with warmth. A harsh whisper tears through him, “Fuck.”

“I’m sorry.” George chokes out as he repeats, “I’m so sorry.”

“You’re sorry?” Dream questions in disbelief, and George makes a soft sound in confirmation. “Don’t, George. Don’t apologize. This is all on me.”

“It’s not, I should’ve said something sooner or—or been more honest with you, I—”

“No no no, you didn’t have to.” Hot streaks slide silently down Dream’s tinted cheeks, his breath

threatening to hiccup unsteadily. “You did everything right. You...you’re right.” He sees small splotches hit the dry carpet, heart churning with his dreams, his obsession, his recklessness. “I wasn’t thinking about how any of it made you feel. I got so caught up in everything that I—I lost it. I lost us.”

George sniffs. His words are nasally, but fall with extreme softness, “I really, really like you.”

Dream squeezes his wet eyes shut. “Maybe—maybe don’t say stuff like that.”

“Sorry.” The echo behind George’s whisper tears into Dream’s chest, “Just don’t know when I’ll get the chance to again, after this.”

“Oh,” Dream says. “Oh.”

When they sever their fraying phone line, and he pulls his headphones from his skull, what will become of them? He’ll watch himself fall headfirst into the unfamiliar pit of call-less nights and censored conversations—drawing curtains and ringing his mother and forcing himself to not dream of George.

Where will his words go, then?

“Well—what if we...do this now?” Dream suggests weakly, hoping traces of fear don’t weigh heavily on his plea. “Get it all out, no matter what happens when it’s done.”

After a brief silence, George asks, “R-really?”

Dream nearly smiles at the faint hope in his voice. “Maybe it’ll be good for us. I don’t know.”

“Okay,” George says.

“Okay,” Dream breathes, “okay.” He blinks away the smudges in his vision. “I want to say so much, you don’t even know.”

George huffs. “Write me another note.”

“*Hey.* That is so, wildly unfunny.”

“Give me some slack, asshole,” George mumbles, then pauses. “Can I...ask about that?”

“Sure.” Dream wipes his face with his forearm. “Gonna make me super fucking nervous—but sure.”

“Are...your dreams really nightmares when I’m there?” George asks. Quiet passes over him. “A while ago you said it was the opposite.”

“I don’t know,” Dream admits, tugging his sleeves over his thumbs. “They’re not like my other nightmares at all, but I hate the feeling of waking up without you here so much that they might as well be.”

He nearly misses George’s small voice utter, “Oh.”

Dream anxiously wrings his hands together. “You sure you want to talk about this?”

“Yes,” George says, then adds faintly, “please.”

Dream freezes at the subtle breathlessness that reminds him of fallen power lines and flickering

candles. "...Alright. What else do you want to know?"

"What was the dream you had?"

Dream's stomach flips at the strange intimacy the question carries. He wishes he knew why they inevitably communicate this way—in the raw, unbridled realm of unconscious thought and unspoken heart.

"You were in Florida again," he says. "Except this time it was in my house. In the bedroom across the hall from mine." His teeth sink into his lip momentarily, and it tastes like salt. "You had a suitcase and brown shoes and a hunting knife. I...I didn't know it wasn't real, at first."

He accepts the hours he'd spent sprawled on the guest bed, phone lying on the empty mattress, the strings of his earbuds curling in the space where George had been.

"I wished so badly that it was real," he whispers. "And once I started kissing you I couldn't stop. Or that's what I thought, until I did stop and...held you. Close."

"That sounds really, really nice," George says softly.

"It honestly scared me." Dream fiddles with his sleeves. "I...I realized just how deep this thing I have for you goes. More than just—just—"

"Wanting to melt me?" George supplies with a slight cheek in his voice.

Dream's hands still.

"Yeah," he says, "exactly. When I woke up, I wanted to talk to you. More than anything. I had to reach you somehow."

"To reach me," George says in a tone Dream doesn't recognize. "You repeated that a few times. Why?"

"You said something like that in the dream," he reveals quietly. "That the reason you kept showing up is because I reach for you."

"I don't think reaching is the right word," George muses.

Dream tips his head back playfully, and sniffs away the salty sting from his nose. "Oh yeah? Do you have a better one?"

"You make yourself sound softer than you actually are."

"Maybe you just see the worst in me," Dream says. A smile tugs on the corners of his mouth as the call becomes silent.

George's words are heavy with sharp disappointment. "That's not funny."

"It's sorta true."

"It's not," George says flatly as though they've had this conversation a hundred times before.

Dream expects to hear George's shaded generosity, or baited compliments.

"You're sweet," George says, "but you also like to fight. A lot. I see it when you slip up and forget that you're always trying to coddle me." Dream's lips part in shocked rebuttal, but George quickly

finishes, “That’s why it’s not *reaching*, when you do shit like this. It’s more like...grabbing. Or taking.”

“You fucking let me,” Dream says, taken aback by his tenacity. “Making me think about bruises, and stuff.”

George snorts. “You started it.”

“And you got scared of me,” he presses.

“I didn’t.”

Dream’s heart thumps with tangled emotion. “Then why did you back away?”

“Cause I actually use my brain,” George says, “and didn’t want stuff to go too far.” *Just like now.*

He remembers how he felt standing in his lightless bathroom, phone in hand and dangerous intention in mind. He would’ve done anything for George.

Maybe that’s the problem.

Dream mumbles, “You and your bad habit of leaving me hanging.”

“You’re ridiculous,” George says, but Dream can hear hints of light amusement. “You’re the one with the bad habit of constantly trying to take things, all the time. Like you’re some kind of Greek hero.”

A sharp grin floods Dream’s face with heated satisfaction, and he murmurs, “Can’t take what isn’t mine.”

“Dream,” George warns.

“I know,” he says lightly, and reels himself in.

Comforting quiet cozies them for a few careful heartbeats. Dream is grateful to have what he’s been longing for from the moment George’s failing reception halted their conversations.

He knows parting from this could be a painful goodbye. He wades in the strange gold they’ve created, basking in what may be his last taste of paradise for a long time.

George’s voice comes through his headphones with surprise, words warm and hesitant as he says, “Not yet, maybe.”

“Not yet?” Dream echoes, disoriented brows pinching together in slow-moving motion.

George takes his confusion and guides him, patiently, to the newfound in-between. “Even though it’s not yours now, that doesn’t mean it won’t ever be.”

Hope and pain blend together in a breathless, half-step of his racing heart. They seem like they’re one in the same—made from the same dust, the same love.

“This isn’t a ‘no,’ Dream,” George continues, “it’s a ‘not yet.’”

take some deep breaths, thank you for reading <3 this chapter has been on my mind since day one of writing. my goal was to capture the messiness of this type of love, how destructive and confusing and exciting it can be. sometimes, the right people happen at the wrong time - and that is what I hope to have conveyed here.

spams make it a tad difficult for me to interact with you all on here, light comment moderation is greatly appreciated! i'll be uploading the next chapter(s) (not sure how long yet) sometime in the next couple weeks. ily all and thank you for your support :)

Negotiations

Chapter Summary

Dream and George discuss the meaning of previous revelations, and what the future may hold.

Chapter Notes

Another long chapter :) Happy reading

As per usual - please do not reference this work in donations, CC's streams, and chats. Additionally, all re-uploads besides translated versions have been posted without my consent or permission. AO3 is the only place I have and will post my work. Please do not steal it.

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

“This isn’t a ‘no,’ Dream,” George says. “It’s a ‘not yet.’”

Dream’s heart courses steady blood through the canyons of his chest, his uneasy stomach, his wrought hands and bending knees. Seated on the carpet of his quiet room, he can see the dust that floats in the light above him, swirls on his beat-up desk, and settles beneath his bed frame.

Not yet. Dream has never heard two words that have warmed him with such bittersweet hope than *not yet*.

“What is that for you?” He asks George. “I don’t want to get it wrong.”

“Honestly,” George says, “I’m not really sure.”

Bitter, Dream thinks.

“I just know I don’t want this to be over,” George adds quietly.

—*sweet*. Of course he’d tumbled obsessively for such an enigma.

“And you’re sure you don’t want to...try?” Dream presses gingerly, a last ditch effort of carefully placed longing.

“I can’t,” George says. “Not now.”

Dream can hardly imagine what trying would amount to, with their mercurial friendship and his worrisome dependency. It nearly hurts more, knowing he could have George, and still not being able to. It hurts more than his confusion and loss from the previous weeks.

The strain that’d weigh on their friendship if they swarmed it with long distance affection and endless pining would knock Dream to the ninth circle of hell.

Forgotten fragments of his notes unearth themselves from the soil of his mind, and rise with muddled remembrance. He'd been sitting on the kitchen floor, blinking in and out of sleepless stupor. His thumbs clambered over the keys to George. The landline lay on the counter, mindlessly shoved off the hook in prayer of silence.

Sapnap keeps trying to help me, he'd typed, heavy-chested, but you know me, you know me, please help me know too.

His words blurred with cold tile and drowsy motions and cartoned milk. *I want to know me. I don't think I know me.*

Phone slipping from hand, last letters ringing out in clatter against the ground, falling into blackness and beaches.

How do you know me?

As it resurfaces now, days in the after, he gently adjusts his headphones cozying his ears while the silence of their call carries him to foreign footing.

"I'm going to spend forever rethinking what I'm about to say," Dream slowly treks, eyes searching the foam panels on his walls aimlessly. "But...I don't think I could try, either."

I'm only beginning, he thinks, to really know me.

"That is," George voices in gentle shock, "not what I expected at all."

"Yeah, I...clearly have some stuff I need to deal with," Dream continues.

He thinks of building white pyramids in the sand with his father, as a child.

His words fall to a murmur, "Some things to unlearn."

The dark brows lifted by traveling thought on his face slowly draw together in contemplation. He's grown tired of the sound of his own voice, how easily it purges everything inside him to George. It is terrifying to fall open—to be read, to be seen, to be known.

"Me too," George says. "I feel like...like I don't have the right words to explain it, but seeing my grandparents gave me a lot to think about."

Dream shifts where he's seated on the un-vacuumed carpet as he considers how to approach the opening that has been set before them.

Between purple farm mornings and afternoon rain, did George feel fear?

I felt safe in missing you.

Dream asks softly, "How are they?"

"They're happy," George recounts lightly. "They seem really happy, and—ready. They've always had each other, so they don't really care about much else, now." His voice shifts into absent wandering, "Can you imagine that, Dream? That kind of love?"

Seated under a wooden overhang, rocking in dark-oak chairs, porched and content and passing quiet glances of solidarity. Extending an aged hand to grasp his partner's fingers with warmth in combat of the chill air—feeling like this is all he's ever wanted, where he was bound to be.

Dream's eyes well slightly, and he cannot answer.

George exhales.

"I just...just wonder if holding onto the possibility is a good thing, or not," Dream says. He knows the pain of clinging to that which is meant to leave him.

"Yeah," George mutters. "I'm wondering about that, too."

Dream stretches out his long legs, foot nudging the edge of his bed. "We could talk through it, though. Figure it out."

"Alright," George says stiffly. He clears his throat. "I don't think I've ever had a conversation like this before."

Dream huffs. "Me neither."

They've talked about better; they've not talked about worse.

"So we could settle on this, like, in between or—or a compromise, if that's a good way to refer to it," George begins with quick unease.

Dream nods to himself, leaning back on his hands. *Not yet.* "Which would mean...?"

"Going back to how it was before," George offers, slowing himself down. "Figuring it out as we go, or until we feel it's right to revisit it."

A sharp breath stings Dream's lungs, blunt with acceptance. "What, pretend like this never happened?"

"Not necessarily. It *did* happen, I'm not trying to hide from that."

"Okay," Dream says. He blows out a steady breath. "A compromise."

"Yeah. It's the only other idea I have so far," George mutters.

Dream frowns. "What...what's the other one?" He's greeted with steep silence. "George?"

"We stop," George says quietly. "Like really, really stop."

Dream's fingers curl into the fuzzy carpet, nails scraping the floor.

Almost inaudible, George adds, "I know I can't get over you if we keep talking every day. It'd be too much."

"No," he bares, "not that." His chest aches as the fear rattles through him; *please*. "Please, not that."

He wants to say, *I don't want you to get over me.*

He wants to say, "I can lose whatever the fuck this is now, but I cannot lose you."

His eyes widen as the words leave his lips.

The thread of commonality between the two painful paths settles on Dream's shoulders: he can't make George happier, not in this moment. He wants more than anything to be the right person for

him, to be the place of comfort and trust that they both need—but he isn't there yet.

“I don't want to go anywhere.” George's voice falls to whisper. “I promise.”

“Then don't,” Dream pleads.

He hears George clear the tension from his throat. “Maybe. Maybe it's going to be okay, I *want* it to be okay. But I just have to—we have to...”

Dream's eyes shut. Softly, he says, “Give it time.”

“Are you...is that...” The fear in George's words pushes him to unfinished silence.

Dream knows what he's trying to ask.

He draws in a deep inhale that expands in his chest, air rushing to fill every centimeter of vacant space beneath his rising ribs. The oxygen is clear and pure, enriching his blood, gently sweeping away the ash leftover in his charred brain.

He breathes in the golden hope that he's been given. He breathes in the contentment of knowing that George is waiting on the end of his line, across the immovable ocean, with a patience that is hardly deserved. George may always be waiting, and Dream knows that no matter what, he'll wait too.

“I think,” he says finally, “I'm okay with that.”

“...You are?” George asks with breathless relief.

It warms in Dream's chest that he can hear it, now; that he understands why it's there.

“I am,” he answers with a gentleness he's never known his voice to possess. “It's not going to be easy. I know that much.” He exhales slowly. “I brought it on you too fast—I get that, too.”

“I wouldn't expect anything else from you,” George says warmly.

Dream smiles. “It almost sounds like you're hitting on me.”

“Do you want me to be?” George teases with knowing mirth.

“Oh, god.” Dream laughs. “I definitely, definitely do.”

The giggle that leaves George's lips is carefree, and sunny, and grounds Dream in his growing contentment. It's astonishing how easy it feels to elicit this light from him.

“We're pathetic,” George says.

Dream gives him an airy sigh. “Only a little bit.” After a moment, he pulls his knees towards his chest, and rises from the ground with slow grace. “You know, I...I meant it when I said I'd be here for you, George. That I'd stick around. Even if that means that I have to—to...” His back aches as he straightens his spine, eyes meeting the yellow rays from his window. “To let go.”

He remembers when he'd brought home Patches for the first time, and spent hours explaining to his family the meticulous schedule with which he intended to care for her. He'd rattled on about proper food brands, meal times, training techniques and kittens' boundaries that cluttered his browser history for months before the adoption.

His warm hands had trembled slightly when he cupped her small, mewling body against his chest for the first time.

“Clay,” his mother had said kindly, “I know you know how to do this. You’ll be fine.”

“I *know* how, but what if she just—” He glanced down at Patches’ squinting eyes. “Isn’t happy, or I don’t do it right, or she doesn’t like it here and runs away—”

“Don’t be so nervous,” his older sister drawled lightly, peering at the bundle of fur in his hands with curiosity. “She won’t run away. And if she does, you can just wait for her to come back.” She lightly scratched the top of Patches’ head. “Cause if you love her enough, she’ll always know where home is.”

He’d rolled his eyes and scoffed then, his younger self burdened by the lack of trust and patience needed to nurture such a valuable connection.

Dream hopes the mic on his headset picks up every last ounce of his integrity, as he says, “I can let it go.”

“Are you sure?” George pushes hesitantly. “I don’t want you to just say that for my sake.”

He moves to slowly push his computer chair back to the desk. “I’m done lying to you.” It feels strange to commit himself to a future of subtle pain, while simultaneously being released from the past. “I’m sure.”

“Okay,” George breathes, and the gratitude in his voice is enough to assure Dream he’s chosen the right path. Through the maze of fire and flames, he’d found the right person—the right center.

He hopes it rains again soon.

“So what does this mean, moving forward?” Dream asks, absently making his way towards his bedroom door.

“I’m still working on that.”

Dream reaches for the handle, and hesitates with a palm on the cool metal. “You don’t have to figure it out on your own,” he says, pulling it open. “I haven’t been the most selfless person lately and I know I can’t make up for that...but I want you to know I’m going to hear you, and see you.” He moves through the threshold, and into the hall. “Whatever you want, I’ll do it. Okay?”

“Thank you, Dream,” George says quietly. “You know...it’s kind of scary, how huge your heart is.”

Dream’s eyes pass over the entrance to the spare bedroom across the hall from his. He murmurs, “Isn’t that the point?”

In George’s silence, Dream quietly tugs on his door until the metal latch slides into place.

“This is all still very fresh for me,” George says slowly. “All I know, right now, is that I’m going to need some space. To sort this out. It’s a lot for me to take on at once and—and you know me. I have to—”

“Re-weigh your expectations, yeah.” Dream leans against his door with a hand behind his back. “What does space mean to you, exactly?”

George retreats into noiselessness again.

Dream's heart pangs. He keeps his voice low to hide any strain, "Do you want me to stop talking to you?"

After a tense pause that nearly knocks out Dream's knees, George says, "No."

"Thank god," Dream breathes.

"But," George inputs quickly to snatch Dream's wandering emotions, "we shouldn't keep talking like we have been. That's just not going to get us anywhere."

Dream tsks. "Like what?"

"Like the calls. And the snapchats." After a moment, George adds, "And your stupid mouth."

"Says you," Dream mumbles.

"Stop."

Dream tips the back of his head against the door, letting the urge to smile pass him by as he calculates the weight of their decisions. "Okay, so we—we—can I just talk through this, for a second?"

"Of course," George says with his usual patience, except now, the fondness is more evident than Dream has known before.

He feels his cheeks flush. "Right. So the calls and stuff have to stop, but we can still be in group channels?" George hums in approval. "So I can still talk to you everyday, but maybe just not—not so—" He reaches for the right word. "Forward."

"You have to work on what you say," George agrees.

"What about what *you* say?" Dream counters. "And what you screenshot?"

"Okay, okay, fine," George rushes with tinged embarrassment. "That's a good point. I'll be mindful, too." His voice slips into faint irritability, "Maybe you should stay out of my streams, until you know you can be normal."

Dream winces. "Got it." His pause of shame slowly morphs into unchecked nerves. "What about streaming in general, though? The viewers will know something changed if we start acting differently. And for our Youtube uploads, and SMP events, and Twitter stuff—"

"Hey," George interrupts gently. "It's just a break, okay? If they get too much, then we'll...we'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

Intense calm washes over him. "We'll cross it when we get to it," he repeats, leaning off the door. He silently glides in his socks down his hall.

"We will."

"Okay." Dream slowly makes his way towards the descending stairs, glancing up at the skylight as he passes underneath. "They kind of notice everything, though. You don't even want to know what Twitter has been like since you left."

He'd hardly kept up with the hashtags and indirects himself, knowing it would only bring him to

the very place he was trying to avoid.

“I was on earlier,” George says. “Didn’t think my absence would be such a big deal. Did you know a bunch of them were convinced you had run away with me?”

Dream begins to travel down from the top of the stairs, each jolt of a step jostling through his body. “That—” *would be nice*. “Is just dumb.”

If he were a main character, of sorts, he would have bought that plane ticket and drove on the wrong side of the road all night to reach George. To leap and bound across the damp-fielded farm, hollering at him to come downstairs, and met him by the porch with linking hands and close noses and warm pleas of, *run with me, run with me, run with me*.

Yet he’s alone in his empty house in mourning of June passed, ears full of rejection from the best friend he’s spoken to every day for years. They’re meant to meet someday, at a crowded baggage claim or carpool line—and Dream knows he’ll be no hero. He’s only human.

Sudden realization and fear rush through him, and he stops at the bottom stair. “George.”

“Yes?”

A nervous hand rises to cup the side of his neck. “...What about your visit?”

The silent pause over the phone line is labored with consideration, and lamentation. Dream eyes the sliding door he’d pressed his palm against, subtly mourning the excitement he’d held when George said he wanted to see a tropical storm for himself.

Dream wants to hope and beg for George to stay true, to set foot on that plane; to come home.

“I really do want to see you, and I have for a long time,” Dream says. “But if it’s going to be too soon...you don’t have to come.” He feels his stomach flip at his own betrayal, brows pinching together in deep pain. “Florida will always be here when you’re ready.”

“It’s...it’s really a lot to think about,” George admits. “I know it’s shitty for me to just keep saying that I don’t know, that I need time—but that’s all I have, Clay.”

Dream’s eyes close, briefly.

“God, I just—” George inhales sharply. “I just feel like crap, and I don’t—I don’t mean to make any of this worse for you, I can see that it’s been so hard already and you’ve never written anything like that before.” His voice picks up in urgency as he continues to ramble, “I’ve never wanted to be that, for you. You know? I’ve never wanted to be the—the *person*, the thing that hurts you, that type of ghost—”

“George.”

“I want to go, I really do,” he says with strain. “I know past me would kick myself if I *don’t* go, and Sapnap will be there too, kind of like normal. But I’m just so confused, I’ve been so fucking confused and I’m—”

“It’s *okay*,” Dream assures desperately, stepping off the stairs. “I’m confused, too. I brought up the trip just to see where we’re at—but I think it might be too soon to talk about it. So slow down, catch your breath. It’s okay.”

He waits as George begins to breathe rhythmically. After a shaky exhale, George asks, “Is it alright

if we don't make any big decisions yet?"

"I...can learn to be alright with that." Dream makes his way towards his living room, body coursing with pointless motion. "God, poor Sapnap, though. What are we gonna do about him?"

"I don't know if he'd want to be in the middle of this more than he already is," George mumbles.

"I talked to him last night, for a while," Dream says, and frowns at his feet. "Fuck, I really need to vacuum in here. Sorry—just, thinking out loud."

"It's fine." George nearly sounds relieved at the distraction. "In where?"

"My living room." Dream eyes the layer of cat hair on the carpet, stepping disdainfully towards the leather couch. "Patches is tiny. I don't know how she sheds this much."

George hums. "Do you brush her?"

"Of course I brush her," Dream says defensively. "What kind of shit owner do you take me for?"

"I literally cannot picture you holding a cat brush. Or a hair comb, for that matter."

Dream scoffs, flopping to sit on the brown cushions. "That's incredibly insulting."

"My bad," George says, yet he doesn't sound apologetic at all. "Sometimes it's just difficult to believe you're real, and all."

Dream idly pats his sweats to search for his phone. "What, do I need to send picture proof?"

"Um."

Dream sits up quickly. "Wait. I didn't mean to—that's not—"

"Oh. It's—" George stumbles. "Fine, me neither. Forget about it."

"Right."

They fall into a terse silence.

"So," George says, "Sapnap. Maybe we should talk to him, in a bit. I can't imagine he's feeling all that great right about now."

Dream wonders, faintly, how it must look on Sapnap's end—staring at the locked voice channel with his and George's names inside fearfully for all this time. "That could be a good idea. He's probably concerned about the trip, too."

It squeezes in his chest as he considers the days of loud, dynamic fun the three of them may not get to experience anymore. He almost feels selfish for ripping the opportunity from George and Sapnap to see each other, knowing they've been looking forward to it for years just as he has.

"I really want to meet you," George says unexpectedly, his tone soft.

Dream's heart stutters. "I want to meet you, too."

He sinks back into the sofa with quiet calm.

"I think about when you described the rain to me, all the time," George says, then falls silent.

Dream lets him pause, before he adds, “And I really loved talking to you late at night.”

“I think I loved it a little too much,” Dream says, winded.

George laughs gently. “Maybe.”

Dream ducks his head, glancing down with a small smile. As the moment fades, he studies his sweats, and picks off pieces of lint collected in the grey thread.

“George,” he begins slowly. “Do you...ever feel like you’re not who you’re supposed to be, yet?” He rolls the ball of lint between his thumb and forefinger absently. “Like you’re almost there,” he says, “you can see it, but can’t become it.”

“It’s frustrating,” George agrees in a whisper, “because you feel like if you want it enough, it should be here by now.”

Dream’s head slowly lifts. “Yeah.”

“Yeah.”

The large television mounted on the wall before him hangs blank, and grey, yet beneath the dusty screen is a world of colorful potential. With the correct remote, the most genuine intention, the images and music and life could become whatever he wants it to be.

“I think,” Dream says, “we’re not right for this, yet.”

“Not right,” George repeats, testing the words softly.

“Not yet.”

He remembers sitting here after the short documentary left the screen, forcing himself to accept the first pieces of truth that altered the course of his heart for good. In the brief span of time since then, he feels he’s aged so much—and feels he’s not aged at all.

“You’re the best person I’ve ever had in my life,” Dream confesses. “But you’ve changed me.”

George hesitates, and asks thoughtfully, “Is that a good or bad thing?”

“Neither. Both.” Dream’s voice falls to a low rumble as he contemplates, “I needed change—that’s all I know.”

“I think it’s okay to not have answers,” George whispers.

His eyes squeeze shut. *I’m going to miss this, so so much.*

“This is gonna hurt,” Dream admits.

Softly, George says, “It already does.”

Dream’s everything aches—his heart, his head, his soul. He wants to cry again, but cannot let his private tears disrupt the moment with George that is fleeting between them.

As if he can sense Dream’s wilting stature, George murmurs, “I’m sorry for doing this to you.”

Dream inhales, and exhales. “I know. I’m sorry, too.”

Learning to be grateful that this is where they chose to end up will be difficult, he knows. But it's all they're going to have. *Patience*, he thinks, *is going to suck*.

Their conversation dips into lighter tones, discussing George's scenic drive to the countryside and his days in the quiet cottage. He tells Dream of a frustrated night where he'd spent hours at the kitchen table, scrutinizing over puzzle pieces while his parents stood amused by his colorblind struggle.

Dream chuckles, and asks what the unfinished, shattered image amounted to.

In a gentle tone, George says, "Birds. It was a picture of birds."

Their spoken connection strengthens near the end of recounting their previous days, while their unspoken dances in Dream's mind with curiosity and anxious urge. He wants to bring up the song, but doesn't. George's words stumble when he mentions sleeping and dreams, as if he has a confession to give, but backs away.

Eventually Dream has wandered back into his room, his door ajar and window wafting in the warm, outside breeze. He tells George his air-conditioner is fixed, and absently rambles on the curse that is Floridian weather.

"I'm definitely not going to live here forever," Dream says, briefly replacing the charge in his headset in time to hear George's response.

"—Where would you want to go?"

He sets the old battery-pack on his nightstand. "Somewhere north, maybe. Not sure how I'd deal with the cold."

George laughs. "Doesn't Sapnap get shitty winters, though?"

"Probably," Dream says. "He complains about so much it all just gets mixed up in my head."

They muse with entertainment over the common ground they share, and it almost feels like normal. Almost, until George's tone suddenly shifts into timidity again.

"Maybe," he says suddenly, "maybe we should get Sapnap in here, now. Just to see."

Dream rises off his bed, frowning in confusion. "To see about the trip?"

"Sort of." George clears his throat. "I should catch him up on a couple of things."

Dream bites back a cheeky response. "Alright." He slumps into his gaming chair, wiggling the mouse until the sleeping screen lights up again with Discord still in view. "I'm not sure if anyone is streaming anymore, but it looks like they're still in call."

"Hm." George's keyboard clicks away in his ears.

Seconds later, a small red notification appears in Dream's direct-messages. He opens it.

Sapnap had sent: *George just told me to join the call but there is no way I'm doing that.*

"I don't want to keep the channel unlocked for too long," George mutters.

Dream rolls his eyes, and types back: *it's important. Don't be a pussy.* "He's coming."

“Wonderful,” George says, his voice falling unexpectedly flat.

After another moment, Dream messages Sapnap: *Come on.*

A small ping bounces through the call. With extreme timidity, Sapnap greets, “Hey guys.”

“Nick,” George says immediately.

“Oh god,” Sapnap breathes.

“Dream, could you deafen for a moment?”

Dream’s eyebrows raise at the sharpness of George’s words. “Um, sure.” He drags his cursor over to disable the call’s audio on his end.

As he clicks, he hears George’s voice explode, “I specifically told you *not* to tell—”

It cuts off, and Dream can’t help but smile. He takes the time in silence to lean back in his chair, and turn over the events of their long, long conversation in his mind. The swaying pendulum of emotions he’d experienced, rocking to and fro, comforts him as much as it tears him apart.

He knows he made mistakes. He knows he’s apologized. All that’s left for him to do is wait, and learn, and hope. He wonders how he can become a better person, in the departure from all of his ruin. He could speak softer, listen more—he could seek counsel from someone who could explain his attachment to the past, the beach, his perceptions of love.

He scans his desk for a post-it and pen, then scribbles down a quick reminder to himself. *Call Dr. Lauren.*

Sheer curiosity rises in him as his eyes flit over the call he’s unable to hear. He glances away with innocence and blindly clicks to listen in.

“—Sort of what you meant? Like that thing we talked about when he—”

“Oh yeah,” Sapnap says. “That makes sense—wait. Is he—”

At the same time, both Sapnap and George scold, “Not *now*, Dream!”

He rapidly deafens again with a smile.

A new message from George pops up on his computer a few minutes later. He clicks on it.

Ok, NOW u can come back, it reads.

He takes in a shallow breath, suppressing his amusement and nerves as he reconnects, and unmutes.

Immediately, Sapnap yells, “You told him what I told you?”

“Shut up,” George says, exasperated.

“What else did you expect me to do with that information?” Dream asks in quick defense.

Sapnap makes a frustrated noise. “I don’t know, keep it to yourself? Are you insane?”

“Dude, what do you think was on that text?” he questions, irritation mingling with a smile.

“Okay, well, not you fucking *snitching*, for one—”

“Sapnap. What did we *just* talk about,” George voices tiredly.

Dream fights the urge to laugh at their ridiculous approach to such a private, sensitive topic that he’d cried and panicked over the night before. He’s reminded, fondly, of their immaturity—their youth.

“Okay,” Sapnap grumbles. “Whatever. You guys just put me in a really weird place, back to back. And I mean a really, *really* weird place.” He pauses sharply. “Not like I want you guys shutting me out or not talking to me, cause that also sucks, but *god*. Please don’t do that again.”

Dream winces at the guilt that floods through him. “That’s...actually what we should talk about,” he says. “The trip and all.”

“Shit. Yeah.”

“We’re not trying to jump to any big changes,” Dream explains slowly. “Just sort of feeling out how we’re all doing with this, right now.”

Sapnap hums contemplatively.

“Are you okay with discussing it?”

“Yes, Georgie,” Sapnap says, overly-polite. “Thank you for asking.”

Dream bites back his tongue, censored by the knowledge of when his friend's snarky attitude comes from a place of tension and worry.

“Are you still going?” Sapnap asks, tone softer.

“I don’t know,” George answers, at the same time Dream mutters, “He doesn’t know.”

An awkward silence slams into their call.

“Oh,” Sapnap says, then after a moment he adds, “*oh*. Gotcha. Seriously?” He clears throat. “Well, I’m still going.” The tense silence continues, until he muses, “And I don’t know about you, Dream, but I kinda wanna meet George in person, so—”

Dream groans. “Take this seriously.”

“I am, I am,” he assures light-heartedly. “I know...I know this means a lot to you guys. It means a lot to me, too. In person stuff matters, I get that.” He pauses. “But it’s not like we’re meeting up *tomorrow*. We have time.”

“That is true,” George says quietly.

Dream’s pulse begins to quicken under his ribs. His eyes scrape the ceiling in hurried ignorance.

Sapnap sighs. “I wanna hangout, all three of us. If that’s not gonna be possible, then okay—but I’d be bummed.”

Dream parts his lips to reply, but George beats him to it and leaves blunt surprise.

“You’d still want to visit?” He asks.

Sapnap's answer is fast, "Of course. At this point there's no reason to avoid it."

Carefully, George continues, "...Dream?"

He steadies the nervous racing of his untamed heart. He rubs his chest in an attempt to help soothe it away, softly saying, "Of course."

His eyes catch another direct-message from Sapnap.

It says: *George yelling is always so scary I hate you.*

Dream smiles. Sapnap's presence alone wraps a blanket of warmth around their shoulders, bringing comfort and clarity that they've all been lacking in recent weeks. Normally, he himself is the peacekeeper, the middle-ground of temperance. Yet Sapnap's kind heart and patience oozes honey into the cracks of their foundation, with promise of forever.

There's something to be said, he thinks, about all the different ways the ancient Greeks fell in love.

"I think it's going to be fine, George," Dream murmurs, as he begins to type back. "Like I said—I can learn to be okay."

He sends to Sapnap, *Tell me about it.*

He feels unexpected relief that from here on out, he won't have to hide himself anymore—and can place that energy into being the person he should be; the friend George needs. He can picture the three of them lounging in his living room for late-night movie marathons, or strolling through the vast Orlando malls with bags of ridiculous purchases. Driving through the Everglades with the windows down, ordering shitty food from even shittier restaurants, and laughing despite the music and the heat.

All they've wanted, for years, is to spend time in a place where they can truly act like family.

Dream knows that even if George doesn't see the possibility of that now, he'll visit Florida eventually—when the shifting stars and turning months linking their three, convergent lives finally fall into place.

"Okay," George says finally, "I'll think about it."

Chapter End Notes

There's the end to that long, long conversation. I promise we'll be back to a non-dialogue strict chapter soon, lol. I hope it didn't get tiresome, though it'd be tiring to go through these motions realistically, anyway. The boys need some rest <3

Spams make it a tad difficult for me to interact with you all on here, so light comment moderation is greatly appreciated! I went about uploading this one a bit differently. I have a busy schedule coming up and am not sure when the next chapter will be ready, so thank you all for your patience and support! :)

July

Chapter Summary

Dream begins to heal.

Chapter Notes

Hello! The notes after this chapter are important, so please take a look at them when done! Thank you all, and happy reading :)

As per usual, please do not reference this work in any donations, stream-chats, or uncomfortably shove it into CC's faces.

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

As the days begin to pass, Dream slips into July. It welcomes him with pink sunsets and grilled meals and ice gently tapping the side of tea-filled glasses. Humid nights drag him away from his screens and stuffy room, and onto his mother's back patio for frequent conversations over dinner.

His call had ended with Sapnap and George after they'd grown heavy-eyed, and parted ways with timid goodbyes. The separation felt strange, somewhere between empty and full shared in one space. He'd been too exhausted to cry, too wordless to think. He felt the urge to text George once he'd fallen into his cotton and sheets, but for once, he knew they truly had nothing left to talk about.

He slept for a while. He woke with ease.

The days—quiet, hurting, healing—pass. He spends hours opening letters from his P.O box, in silence. His tears drop onto the pages of a letter when his mind can't lift the sentences from the paper and place them in constructive memory. He breathes, takes the nearby landline in his palm, and makes three phone calls.

One, to the therapist he hadn't seen since he was young and gangly and brooding.

The next, to his mother.

The last, to the local taqueria for an extra-sized steak burrito.

July sets warm, yellow hands on his shoulders as he slides the phone back into the receiver. His chest aches, and his eyes burn.

He lets himself move forward.

During late-afternoon meals at his family's home two hours away, a buzzing sound carries onto the concrete deck from the muddy creek sitting deep in the backyard. Bugs hover in the damp swamp, and occasionally meander in search of food through the light that lowers itself on the crowded horizon.

Seated at the glassy table, Dream swats away curious gnats from his plate with one palm, while the other is outstretched and resting on napkins. His sister peers over his fingers carefully.

She's painting the nails on his left hand purple, to match the bright-colored hair that falls in front of her face, before she hastily tucks it behind her ear.

"I'm really glad to hear that, Clay," his mother says from the head of the table, reclined in her chair with a gentle smile. "Have you scheduled an appointment?"

Dream chews on the remains of his burger, covering his mouth with his free hand as he nods.

"When?" his sister asks curiously.

He swallows, then wipes the grease from his face with a napkin. "Next Sunday."

"You might miss the barbecue," his mother points out.

Dream shrugs with indifference. "I'll try to make it."

His sister carefully nudges away a stray drop of nail polish on the table. "Didn't you used to go on Tuesdays, though?"

He frowns with skepticism, watching as she screws the purple bottle shut and brings out a clear sealant. "How do you remember that?"

He'd been forced to attend weekly sessions with Dr. Lauren several years ago, when his questionably rebellious behavior had raised one too many red flags for his family and local authorities. He'd detested them at first, but found towards the end of their time together, some part of him thrived in expression and guidance.

Too young to admit it was something he needed, he declined the offer to continue as a client, but was told "the door will always be open."

He and his mother hadn't shared much of those terrible months with his siblings, yet his sister smiles at him sharply.

"Cause I'm smart," she says.

He huffs. "Yeah, right. I find that hard to believe."

She pauses in her application of the thin, top-layer of polish. "You hurt my feelings."

"I did not."

"You might want to get going soon," his mother interrupts their exchange. "It's nearly dark enough for the show to start."

"I'm basically done," his sister assures, capping the clear-bottle. "Just don't smudge it before it dries, okay?"

Dream balls up his napkin and begins to stack utensils on his plate, mindful of his purpled hand. "Are they really still doing it? I thought there was a temporary ban cause of the shack that caught fire last year."

His mother extends her plate towards him, and he adds it to the pile in his hands. "I think Roy and his family are still good friends with the sheriff," she says, "so they got the go-ahead."

“Huh.” Dream exits his seat with the last of the dishes, and haphazardly carries them to the screen entrance. “Okay, well, if you wanna wait outside for me I’ll be there in like, five minutes.”

He presses his back to the door to push it open, the metal springs straining audibly with resistance as he steps inside.

“Five minutes?” He sees his sister set down her glass, and wipe her chin. “Slowpoke.”

He rolls his eyes. “You could *help*, y’know.”

They stare at each other through the thinly-netted screen as the ajar door is pulled shut, until his sister glances at the dishes, and looks away dismissively.

He grins.

When washing the ceramic plates, and tossing the red white and blue napkins in the trash, he protects his left hand from water and scrapes dutifully.

He examines the smooth coats with growing fondness as he’s later tugged several blocks down the street, where neighborhood parents have set up a small celebration on the suburban intersection. When his sister tosses a smile back to him, he decides he loves the color purple even more.

He eyes the cylinders and dark boards resting on the asphalt, and they share an excited glance.

“Don’t get too close,” he says, and she rolls her eyes. They stand in the freshly-mowed grass of the neighbor’s lawn, darkness cozying around them while the local kids and parents form a small crowd.

A young woman from two doors down passes by them, kindly extending miniature, hand-held flags and beaded necklaces. They murmur ‘*thank you*’s and tug the plastic jewelry over their heads happily.

Dream spins the cheap flag in his hand, watching the older neighborhood boys approach the dormant fireworks with keen adult supervision. He remembers sparking the fuse for the first time when he was a kid, holding the long lighter in his small grip and intense responsibility in his mind. He’d been fond and scared, even then, of getting burned.

The wicks light, and the boys scatter away.

Dream and his sister wait.

The box crackles, then whistles, and the first rocket shoots into the dark air. Their eyes tilt up to follow as it trails a gleaming jet of light.

It climbs, and climbs, until finally exploding in a flowered spread of red and white sparkle against the stark backdrop of the sky. Heartbeats after, a second one combusts, then a third, and the night is filled with such bright color and noise that Dream’s chest grows warm.

The burning is beautiful.

He reaches for the back pocket of his jeans instinctively, pulling out his phone with a smile.

Another burst glitters into the accumulating smoke above them.

He hesitates.

Blues and greens flash onto his hair, while soft white from his open device washes over his chin and nose. He wants to tell George how wonderful their “petty American holiday” is—but shouldn’t.

It hurts.

The next boom that rattles through the crowd lines up inexplicably with his thumping heartbeat.

His sister catches his sudden stillness, and asks, “You wanna take a video for Mom?”

It hurts, he thinks, *but it’s okay*.

He shakes his head. “No, I’m sure she can see them from the house.” He shuts off his glowing screen and lets the thoughts retreat to his pocket quietly. “More fun to watch, anyway.”

Gold crackles with loud cheers and whoops from the ecstatic crowd they stand in. The dinky, store-bought fireworks grow and cover their little sky with boldness, and fury.

His sister leans into his side.

“It looks like magic,” she says between loud booms.

He wraps an arm around her upper back, and murmurs, “Yeah. It does.”

When he glances at her bright smile again, head tilted up to the ash-raining sky, her eyes are full of color.

He wonders, for a moment, if he were to rise suspended in the air and float among the stars, what colors his exploding heart would leave behind, too.

-

The sun beats on Dream’s neck ruthlessly as he stumbles down the stairs, and floats through the open parking lot. His palm connects warmly to the handle of his car, and he heaves the driver’s door open to collapse into the stuffy seat—with a loud slam of latches complaining about his rush.

He shoves keys into the ignition, hands on the metal and white-blob figurine that dangles from the ring, knuckles pressing to the console as he cannot turn his fist.

He’d done it. He’d really driven himself back to the beige-painted walls and dark red couches and *PhD*’s perched on shelves near the clock. A black clock, where a tin one used to hang, that counted the hour and a half he’d sat with interrogated stress before someone who used to know him.

He wills his hand to move, to start the engine, but his body refuses.

His fingers slip from the waiting keys, and he slumps back into his seat. The stagnant air around him settles under his nose, carrying the smell of a forgotten car freshener he’d tucked in an open compartment somewhere.

A shaky hand runs through his soft hair.

The large windshield in front of him holds hints of palm leaves, orange buildings, white parking lines. Above the blocky shapes and swaying trees, the sky stretches a rich blue.

“It’s okay,” he voices the words with breathy tremor. His chest tightens. “It’s o-okay.”

The crying comes slowly today; beginning with thick pain in his throat, redness rising to his cheeks, rapid blinking of his eyes until his nose pinches, the weight tips, and hot tears begin to slip down his face.

His lungs ache with the weight of his sobs; his hands find their way to grip the leather wheel. As he tightens his hold on the bumpy hide in his wringing fingers, his ribs begin to lighten.

Salt drips from his face to his lap. One hiccup of pain turns into release, and then another, and a smile lifts across his features.

“God,” he breathes nasally.

He wipes away the wet streaks on his jaw while tears still bead and fall from his eyes.

He opens his phone, and texts George: *Hey.*

A moment later, George responds: *Hi.*

Dream sniffs, wiping at his cheeks repetitively.

My first session went really, really well, he says.

It had hardly been much of anything—surface level summaries, recounting of the years Dream hadn’t seen him, careful explanations of why now, after all this time, he’s returning in the midst of summer and seeming success.

It had hardly been much of anything, but to Dream, it is everything. He’d relaxed his wired jaw enough to open himself in the way he wanted, with fear and determination of the terrain yet to come. Between fiddling thumbs and jumping glances, he’d started talking.

He watches George’s bubble type for a minute, before his message comes through.

That’s poggers.

A surprised laugh rushes out of Dream’s mouth. He passes his eyes over the text, while laughing again, and lets himself feel the humor and hope with gentle chuckles.

He lowers his phone to rest in the cupholder.

With a grin, he sighs—and starts his car.

George is right.

Hot air flows from his vents.

It sort of is.

They’d been texting daily, but the topics are light, infrequent—formed out of company and presence more than substance. It’s an adjustment strange as life. The calls where he can speak to George in the light-hearted, entertaining presence of others are as wonderful as they are frustrating. Dream has stayed true to his word, biting back remarks that could slip them down the wrong path and backpedalling when he can tell the air is growing thick. It’s tiring, and some nights he declines invitations to join calls because it weighs on his bones when he least expects it. Yet, even pushed into dark, it’s the recollection of George’s amicable voice that calms him.

Better to have now, than nothing. Better to have not yet, than never.

A week after his first appointment, the urge to type '*I miss you*' is rampant and consuming for hours on end. He tries to find justification for it, argues with himself until he's exhausted all defense.

He takes a photo of Patches in a cute outfit a fan had mailed in, and sends that instead.

Nights later, he's humming along to music and sorting files on his hard-drive when his phone rattles against the desk.

Despite it being four in the morning in England, and George having mentioned in Teamspeak going to bed nearly two hours prior, he's sent Dream a photo.

It's of his young kitten, large eyes peering into the camera with sweet sparkle against gray fluff.

Fondness blooms in Dream's chest as he reacts to the text with a heart.

In an obscure, unspoken way, he knows the image is George's way of saying: *I miss you, too.*

-

"That was the most annoying one yet," Sapnap complains through the faint buzz of Dream's headphones.

Dream minimizes the recording program, and gazes over his screens with a soft chuckle. "Why?"

A message pops up in the server chat that reads: *Badboyhalo has left the game.*

Good, he thinks. *He needs some sleep.*

It wasn't their longest manhunt, but the hours they spend sitting and grappling over keys and digital terrains are becoming increasingly stressful the more practice they have. Bad had been yawning between nearly every sentence before finally disconnecting from the call, minutes prior.

Muscles taut from sitting for the long duration of their fight in the End, Dream links his fingers together and stretches his arms forward, momentarily blocking the glowing monitors from view. He'd sunk days into preparing to destroy his friends' chances of defeating him, and it paid off. Between fortunate maneuvers and clever kills, he slayed the dragon, and gave himself a much needed win.

Sapnap's voice falls low. "You know why."

Void of sympathy, George asks, "Aw, you still mad about your dog?"

"I had a special bond with him," Sapnap says sadly.

"Forgive me," Dream feigns, fighting a smile at the fresh memory of Sapnap's wolf turning to XP before his very eyes.

"I can't forgive a sadist."

"You guys just need to get better," he says airily, logging off the server.

"No," George inputs. "You just have to stop being lucky."

This time, Dream smiles easily. "Oh, I'd hardly call myself that."

“Shut up,” Sapnap says. “That horse trick was bullshit.”

“Or—consider this—I’m *good* at what I do.”

George scoffs, and echoes, “Shut up.”

Dream shifts in his chair, watching the starter screen of green blocks and oak trees rotate in blur before him. He’d been nervous, before—but with traces of guilt and worry that are different than usual. It’s his and George’s first attempt to ease back into participating in each other’s uploads, which proved to be seamless. For a few moments, however, he’d chased after George’s avatar with a splitting grin, calling back and forth with bright shouts, and remembered how it’d been in the beginning. The two of them, for days on end, recording and calling and learning how to turn every small moment into precious laughter.

“I’m gonna need to watch that part back.” Sapnap yawns. “Let me do the analysis video on it.”

“No,” Dream says.

“C’mon, I have to see how many times I was close to killing you.”

“You really weren’t,” he explains clearly, briefly recalling the half-heart and iron-sword that’d flashed across his screen. “George was probably the closest. I’ll have to send that clip when I can.” He takes a sip from his water bottle, and mumbles against it, “It was pretty terrifying.”

“How nice of you to say that, Dream,” George says immediately. He sounds smug.

Dream swirls the water in the plastic container. “You still lost.”

“I never lose.”

He smiles, and considers the minimized recording tab on his second monitor. “I could pull up the proof right now of you dying to the endermen.”

“Drag his ass,” Sapnap says.

“How about you share all the times you killed Sapnap?”

Quickly, Sapnap defends, “Don’t drag *me*.”

“Don’t drag me,” George mimics, voice slipping into amusement. “What, you can’t take it?”

“I’m gonna knock you out.”

Dream rubs his eyes tiredly. “Chill, you guys.”

George ignores him. “Oh, you’re so big and tough, are you?”

“George,” Dream tries.

“I could *step* on you, George.”

Dream tips his head back. “Sapnap—”

“What did I ever do to you?”

“Oh, man,” Sapnap says. “You want a list?”

“Please,” Dream interjects with a half-whine. “You guys have been so bitchy today. I can’t handle one more minute of this.”

George giggles quietly as Sapnap mutters, “Sorry, Dad.”

After a moment, George says, “He started it.”

Dream’s hands open in the empty air as a gesture of disbelief.

“Y’know what, George?” Sapnap retaliates quickly, “The second I see you in person, I’m gonna kill you. I’ve just decided. How about that?”

“Oh *no*,” George drawls sarcastically. “Guess I won’t go to Florida after all.”

Dream’s eyes snap to the open Discord window as he sharply says, “*Hey*.”

They descend into cutting silence.

Any quips or words of wit die on their tongues, now unplaceable in the strained hum of their call.

Dream shakes his head, and sits up. He should take himself away before the low feelings of hurt grip onto anything meaningful.

“I think I’m just gonna hop off,” he says finally. He starts closing tabs. “Thanks for today, and I’ll let you know if I have questions when editing.”

“Dream,” George begins, “I didn’t mean it like—”

“Don’t worry about it, George.” *If it’s not mine to feel, then why feel it.* “Bye.”

“No no no, dude,” Sapnap rushes. “Seriously, hold on—”

“Sap, you don’t have to—” He starts to reply with tinged irritability until George’s voice interrupts him.

“I’m going,” George says firmly. “I’m going to visit you.”

The sound of his words rings between Dream’s ears. In the stunned pause that follows, Dream stares at his computer.

What?

“Or I—I want to,” George continues, slower. “I’ve been thinking about it a lot, and talking to Sapnap about it a lot, and I want to go. I *am* going—if you still...”

Dream feels the tender ache in his chest begin to grow, and he finds himself pinching his features together with careful confusion. He tries to curb any traces of reckless optimism.

What the fuck?

“Are...are you sure?” Dream questions. “It hasn’t been that long since we talked about this last.”

A little under a month, or so.

“I know,” George answers.

Could that really be enough time?

Dream's heart begins to hum. The hope, jumpy and golden, skitters in him.

"It's two whole weeks, George," he presses softly. "Not like a call we can leave. You'll be here, for a while."

"I promise you," George says, "I'm aware of that."

"We've beat this thing to death from every angle, Dream," Sappnap offers. "Kind of annoying, really."

He feels a flicker of affection at that, picturing them hours deep in their secretive calls, debating to the point of exhaustion. Knowing George, Dream wouldn't be surprised if a 'pros and cons' document was involved, as well.

"This is what I want," George assures. "If you still want me to see you."

Dream huffs in surprise. "Of course I do."

His pulse drums erratically beneath the light fabric of his t-shirt. *Of course I do, of course I do, of course I do.*

"Then good," George says.

Dream presses his lips together, then lets himself smile, then cannot stop. His mind floods with excitement, possibilities, plane tickets and rainy conversations from weeks ago.

His grin is insufferable. "Good."

"Cool," Sappnap chimes.

"Cool," George repeats, and Dream can hear with fondness that they're all on the verge of happy laughter.

It's Sappnap who breaks first, his light giggle carrying through the call like white foam washing up on a sandy shore—then seconds later, the waves crash with Dream's wheezing and George's voice.

"This isn't *funny*," he says, but it's clear he's enjoying it too, which only makes them delve deeper into meaningless cackles.

Dream can't wait to see it in person—Sappnap's grin, George's eye rolls, their shared joy and irritation and clamor. And yet he catches a subtle hitching in George's breath as their poorly-timed fit subsides, and has to clear his throat. It won't *be* pure sunshine. He knows that, he's learning that.

After they've calmed enough, Dream slips back into serious patience. "I'm really happy about this, but...you still have a little while to think about it. There's no rush."

"Thanks," George says simply.

Dream smiles again.

"Well," Sappnap muses, "you have like, five weeks."

Dream frowns. "Five?"

"Yep."

George hums with disinterest in the background.

“That sounds wrong,” Dream says.

Sapnap shuffles in his chair at his end of the mic. “No it’s not.”

“Yeah it is.” Dream narrows his eyes at his computer, pulling up a minimized calendar. “It’s six weeks.”

With faint annoyance, George mutters, “Five, six, it doesn’t make a difference—”

“No it’s not, Dream,” Sapnap interjects, blatantly ignoring George’s complaints. “We fly out the first week of September which is *five* weeks from now—”

“The *second*,” Dream spits, then sits up sharply as his eyes widen. “Wait, Sapnap—”

“It doesn’t matter because I’m gonna go either way,” George says sternly. “Can you guys just shut up?”

Dream blinks in the brief silence that follows.

“Hold on, hold on George,” he voices slowly, praying that he isn’t right. “Sapnap, pull up your ticket.”

“Ugh, don't wanna. Too much work—”

“Dude,” Dream interrupts with audible strain, “do it. Right now.”

“Okay, jeez.” He hears Sapnap click around for a few, tense seconds. “Why?”

Dream clenches his jaw. “The date on it—what are the weeks?”

“The first and second week of September,” Sapnap reads. “Like I said earlier.”

A brief silence of disbelief cuts through their conversation, until George says, “Oh my god.”

Dream pinches the bridge of his nose in agreement. “Oh my god.”

“What?” Sapnap asks, transparently lost.

“George,” Dream says helplessly.

“Guys, what happened?”

A shocked exhale leaves George’s mouth. “You bought your tickets a week early, dumbarse. We said the second and *third* week. Not the first and second.”

Dream begins to slide down his chair in disappointment.

“No you didn’t,” Sapnap says. “You’re lying.” They can’t muster the strength to disprove his anxious claims. “Guys?”

“We sent you the links,” Dream says, near-whine.

“You sent me, like, a *hundred*. And you made me do it so fast, I was—”

“It’s fine, Sapnap.” Dream wipes his face to ease the tension from his cheeks. “Let me pay for

these, and you can buy new ones for the *right* weeks this time.”

He hears no response.

He frowns. “Sapnap?”

“Um,” Sapnap says, his voice pitching awkwardly, “no?”

Bluntly, George utters, “What.”

Sapnap exhales. “I have to be home by the fifteenth. I can’t stay any longer than that.”

“Sapnap,” Dream starts, but is quickly cut off by unexpected dismissal.

“No, man,” Sapnap says. “No. I get that this is all...weird and stuff, but I told you I had plans way before this, and I can’t keep babysitting you two.”

Dream’s head lolls to the side, his headphones bumping his shoulder in deep disappointment—for the way he’s treated his closest friends, and for Sapnap’s inept struggle with following directions.

“You can’t reschedule,” Dream says finally.

Sapnap’s voice is firm. “I can’t. I really can’t.”

Dream recognizes the tone, the way his phrases end with a subtle dip that means: *Don’t push, don’t ask. No more.*

He curses.

“I’d only see you for a week, then,” George says to Sapnap, and the hesitance in his words is enough to drive another stake into Dream’s chest.

Sapnap doesn’t respond. Their subtle panic accumulates as seconds pass.

Dream straightens up. “Okay, well—well George, do you think you could change your tickets?”

“To get there earlier?” He can almost picture from George’s voice the contemplative frown that settles across his features. “You know I can’t, Dream. We already went over this when we bought them.”

Through his teeth, he says, “Remind me.”

“My...my mum’s birthday is that week,” George explains carefully, as though his words can cut Dream deep. “And we have family coming to town. Remember?”

His heart sinks low into his gut, while he tries to grab the fraying threads before the trip is unwoven before them. George is unable to arrive earlier; Sapnap is unable to arrive later. He’ll be rooted, for three weeks, in a September of his own making.

“Your mom’s a Virgo?”

“...What the fuck, Sapnap?”

Dream ignores them. “So that,” he starts slowly, “that’d be a week of me and Sapnap. Then...”

“A week of all three of us,” Sapnap assists.

“And a week of just you and me,” George finishes quietly.

Dream’s eyes fall to his dark desk with dread.

George had agreed to visit, the possibility so close Dream could feel it looming over him. They’d made progress, and it was working—until they’d fallen out of sync, yet again.

“It’s okay, George,” Dream says defeatedly. “I get it. It’s not what you signed up for. We can cancel it and I’ll refund your money, you don’t have to—”

Sapnap quickly cuts him off, “No, no, come on, just a week won’t be—”

“*You* need to stop talking—”

“Stop it, both of you,” George orders, and is greeted with wanted silence. “It’s been a really, really long day. And this...this has not helped with that.” He huffs. “But I can't say I'm surprised.”

Dream stares at the days marked on his virtual calendar as “:))))))”—and frowns.

“For now,” George says, “I still want to go. That’s what my gut is telling me, and I’ve been trying to listen to it more, lately. The last thing I want to do is overcommit to something and end up disappointing you guys, so...how I feel about this might change.” He pauses carefully. “Is that okay?”

Unexpected warmth rushes to fill Dream’s chest. Even the slightest chance of seeing George eases his heartache with care. He breathes out, “Yes.”

“That’s perfectly okay with me,” Sapnap says, voice quieting. “And I’m sorry.”

“It’s,” George mutters, “okay, Sapnap.”

“I didn’t mean to,” he assures.

Dream sighs. “We know.”

After a moment, he asks, “Am I grounded?”

George laughs sharply.

“I hate you,” Dream says with a smile, because there could never be a plane of existence in which it would be true.

“No CS:GO for a month,” George jokes with faux authority.

Sapnap huffs. “Aight. Easy.”

“Two months,” Dream levies.

“I don’t even play that much,” Sapnap says.

“We know,” George inputs quickly. “That’s why you’re trash.”

“Play me right now, bitch,” Sapnap challenges, and the insinuation immediately presses a faint headache to Dream’s temples.

“Can we please not do this again,” he asks feebly.

To his surprise, George hums. “Actually, that sounds kind of fun.”

An incredulous smile leaps across his features, alerted by the interest he’d caught wind of.
“What?”

“Just for a bit,” George explains lightly.

“Bet,” Sapnap says, already clicking around with his mouse for what Dream assumes is to boot the game.

“Where did that come from?” Dream questions, unsuccessful in stamping the delight at discovering a new aspect of George.

George laughs. “Dunno. Guess I’m still bitter from losing earlier.”

“Ah,” Dream says. “Just like how I’m tired of winning.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Sapnap’s typing rumbles through the call. “We’ll see about that.”

Dream scoots closer to his desk defensively. “I’m not gonna play.”

“Yes you are,” George says easily.

“Come on,” Sapnap encourages. “Let’s bully some kids.”

Begrudgingly, Dream joins them. They sink into games and pass words that have no significance beyond surface-level quips, and brief shouts. Slipping into their zone of comfort, Dream keeps himself incredibly mindful of what drops from his lips and how he navigates through the veiled tension still nestled between them all. In the small moments of Sapnap and George bickering, light mocking that leads to wheezes ripping from Dream’s lungs—he catches a glimpse of their future. It is not full, nor ruined, but balanced somewhere in between.

Dream knows he is hurting. He knows it will persist, for weeks and nights, until he’s learned to truly be content in not having what he wants the most. As he listens to George’s bright laughter, and smiles—he knows he’s willing to go through it all over again.

The three grow tired and disconnect from gaming after unanimously deciding they’d hassled each other enough, for today. Sapnap gives them his last words of apologies and sincere gratitude, before leaving Dream and George to relax into the absence of his loud voice.

“God,” George says after they’re alone in the call. “That was a lot.”

Dream hums in agreement. “That was.” He falls quiet with all the words he’d love to say, and exhales the impulsivity off his tongue. “Have a good night, George,” he murmurs instead, “I’ll talk to you sometime soon. Okay?”

“Yeah,” George says. “Talk to you soon.”

Dream drags his cursor to hover over the end-call button, preparing himself for the usual conflict of emotions that follows once their conversation dies completely.

“Well—one more thing, and then I’ll say goodbye,” George’s voice quickly stops him from disconnecting.

The light from his monitor glows soft blue in the silence. Tendons in his knuckles still over the sleek mouse and keys; he can feel where the edge of the desk presses into the skin of his wrists.

They haven't lingered in each other's uninterrupted presence, spare a few sentences here and there, since June.

Timidly, Dream asks, "What is it?"

"If I do come and visit you," George says, "that means we'd be on our own for a bit, after Sapnap leaves."

"It would," Dream's tone is slow. Patient. Hoping.

George pauses, then struggles to ask, "Would that...that be weird, even if I'm still..."

"Not ready?" Dream finishes softly.

"Yeah."

His heart aches, as he thinks of the millions of words that could fall from his lips and fracture this moment. George's voice is gentle, and close—but it's not tearing Dream apart like it used to.

"It wouldn't be," he answers with sincerity. "I'm not going to expect something from you, or do anything that would make you uncomfortable."

The chance to see him smile, in person. To admire him from afar. To let him see the life he's built in Florida, the wooden floors he's paced on, the swaying ocean he's longed for. George could live forever, here, and Dream is slowly learning what it takes to keep him.

"You think it'd be okay?" George questions further, his anxiousness present in every careful syllable.

Dream collects as much comfort and honesty as he can in the warmth of his throat. "I do."

George lets out a short breath.

Dream reclines in his seat, and tilts his head back to watch the lazy motions of his fan glide through the air with no resistance. He waits attentively for George to approach him again.

"Then I think...I think I would like to see you and Sapnap," George says. "I think it'd be stupid to not take that opportunity."

Dream's lips part as a gentle wisp of breath escapes him. The clear, decisive lilt to George's words solidifies in his cautious temple of hope. He could build high cities and gold kingdoms to hear George never speak with hesitancy again.

He calms his drumming heart, and says, "It's a good thing you're not stupid."

George laughs, quietly. The privacy feels sweet, and forgiving, like summer rain. "I guess so."

Their last, long silence sounds like the faint crackling of embers buried in ashy soil, after the flames have been snuffed out. The ruin is evident in the charred pieces they've left behind. It stings, and simmers, and all Dream can do is trace his eyes over the wooden slats circling in suspension above him.

Yet inklings of a rebirth slowly bloom in the quiet. Something made of feathers stirs in the remains, some type of hope that will lift them.

"I'll see you in six weeks," George says finally.

Dream readies himself to disconnect, and smiles. "I'll see you then."

Chapter End Notes

The end, sort of. Welcome to a very long authors note :)

I want to start by thanking everyone for your kindness, patience, and support throughout this little journey. I am extremely grateful for each and every one of you, nothing has uplifted my love and motivation for writing like all your words of encouragement. It has meant the world to me. If you've been here since the beginning, thank you. If you're reading this however long after this is published, thank you. I could say it over and over again and never grow tired of it: thank you. I am so glad I could share this story with you.

I was hesitant to commit to a sequel, and I want to preface it with a few key ideas that I feel are important for me to express. I'm going to create a continuation of the story, a part of the "Dreamland" series this fic is under, that is centered around the duration of their visit in Florida. I have purposefully structured the story in this way since the very beginning. It'll be easier for me to change tags under a new work, and continue a little more quietly. "Heat Waves" had its love and success - I am not looking to extend this, I simply want to keep writing the rest of the story for myself, and for those who'd like to stick around for the long haul :) I am not sure when this part-two will begin, or how long it will be, and I'll be taking a break for a little while before then. The new fic is going to be called "Helium."

Thank you for everything, and see you soon <3

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