

somebody to love

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somebody to love

by [chasinghours](#)

Summary

In a world where the marks on your soulmate's skin appear on your own, Adora wishes her soulmate would just talk to her for once, while Catra wishes her soulmate would stop trying to talk to her.

Hijinks ensue.

Notes

after binging the entirety of she-ra i became utterly obsessed with this pair and i just had to write something for them! to my knowledge there aren't any soulmate fics for this fandom with this particular soulmate trope so i thought hey, why not. it was originally supposed to be a one-shot but now it's... this

fic title is from the song somebody to love by queen, that and the song that i quoted at the beginning of this chapter are the main inspirations for this

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

gray

*wake up and smell the coffee
is your cup half full or empty?
when we talk, you say it softly
but i love it when you're awfully quiet*

- billie eilish, “come out and play”

*

Fifteen minutes before her alarm goes off, Adora wakes up to the sound of an obnoxiously loud voice on the other side of the wall, tugging her from her slumber. She groans, burying her face into her pillow for a beat, and then halfheartedly slams a weak fist against the wall.

“Bow!” she calls, though her sleep-scratchy voice comes out far quieter than intended. Despite this, her actions seem to have their desired effect, and the voice of her best friend making his way through his self proclaimed favorite song quiets down.

With a sigh, Adora shuts her eyes and rolls back over in a futile attempt to reclaim the next quarter hour of sleep. The rhythmic drumming of the rain outside of her window manages to slowly lull her back to sleep, and just as she begins to feel herself start to fade, her alarm blares like a siren.

(Not for the first time, she regrets taking the bedroom that shares a wall with the bathroom. It has the bigger window, but that wasn't much compared to having to deal with Bow's habit of singing far louder than deemed necessary whenever he showers. It's not like it really bothers her, but it becomes sort of a nuisance when she's trying to sleep.)

Morosely, Adora stares up at the cracks on the ceiling of her room, and then, steeling herself to face the day, slides out from underneath her comforter and reaches for her phone. She shuts off her alarm, ignores Glimmer's seven messages that range from begging to bribing her to stop at the coffee shop she works at on the way over to their sole shared class, and then shuffles out of her room.

On the weekdays, she tends to stick to a routine that includes getting dressed, going on a quick jog around campus, showering, and then getting *properly* dressed. Today, the rogue claps of thunder shaking the building every few moments and the angry droplets of water gathering against their windows tells her that she'll have to do her daily jog this evening instead.

Their bathroom is still slightly fogged with steam when Adora makes her way inside, but the water is moderately lukewarm. She stays underneath it for a while — a treat, considering she

has plenty of extra time this morning since she'll be rescheduling her jog — but speeds along when Bow bangs on the door and asks her if she wants him to make her anything for breakfast.

The smell of bacon intermingles with the smell of her soap by the time she gets out of the bathroom. She gets dressed, pulling on a pair of sweatpants and her favorite hoodie, and then steps back out of her room just in time to see Bow sitting down at their tiny table.

“Good morning,” he greets her, sliding a plate of toast and bacon in her direction. Adora thanks him, sitting down in the opposite chair to pull her socks on, and then rubs any remnants of sleep left from her eyes.

“You're more cheerful than usual this morning,” she comments after taking a bite of toast. Bow smiles, and when Adora's eyes catch sight of his arm, she connects the pieces together. “Talking to Glimmer?”

Predictably, Bow nods his head after swallowing his food, and then glances down at his arm. “She's freaking out about the exam she has today.”

Adora briefly glances at their conversation. Bow's words are obvious to spot: they look more like the actual writing of a pen, while Glimmer's writing takes on the appearance of a tattoo ingrained in his dark skin. For a moment, she gets lost in the wonderance of what it might feel like to have a real conversation with her own soulmate — until Bow's words register in her head, and she groans.

“Oh God, I know what exam she's freaking out about,” she sighs, one hand rubbing against the fabric of her sweatpants. Bow raises a brow, so she clarifies. “It's for our English class. I've been stressing about it all week,” she pauses, making a motion in the direction of Bow's arm, “and I guess she has been, too.”

Bow gives her a wide smile. “Well, I'm sure you two will be fine,” he reassures her, and Adora returns the gesture. It's quiet for a moment, before Bow speaks again. “What about you? Your soulmate responded to you yet?”

As usual, Adora's answer is always the same.

“No,” she sighs, breaking off a small piece of her bacon before she glances down at her own arm. Although there was a sadness that came with never having someone to talk to in the same way almost everyone else did, Adora would admit that even if her soulmate never exactly responded to her, what they did was still beautiful. “But they did leave me with *this* last night.”

Rolling up the sleeve of her hoodie, Adora reveals the intricate painting her soulmate had done sometime around midnight: flowers, painted in a variety of different colors stretched out along her forearm, from her wrist to the crease of her elbow.

“Wow,” Bow exclaims, genuinely astonished. Adora lets him trace the pads of his fingers along the edges of the work, the same thing she had done just hours ago. “Adora, I know I've told you this before, but your soulmate is *super* freaking talented.”

As per usual, Adora isn't able to hide the pride that flashes through her chest at the compliment. She's always shown off her soulmate's flair, which ultimately isn't hard to do, especially with how often it happens. Each piece is always different, and they're not just always on her arm. She'll be grateful for the warmth of spring, she thinks, so she can get back to wearing thin tank tops and shorts to show off every piece of work once again.

"I know right?" she asks, staring at her arm for a moment longer. Even if she doesn't know her soulmate personally — or at all, really — she always feels a connection with them whenever they paint somewhere on their body.

Bow stares at her with a wide smile. Adora furrows her brows together in confusion, watching as his smile impossibly widens. "So *that's* why you're so tired this morning; you were up all night with them again."

Adora shrugs and stares down at her mug of coffee, though is unable to stop a smile from spreading across her face. "I like watching them work," she says, cheeks lightly dusted over in pink. "It's cool to see it all come together, even if they never respond to what I have to say."

Bow's smile falters, and he reaches across the table to rub her arm. "Hey," he starts softly, waiting for her to look up at him before attempting to reassure her. "They'll talk to you when they're ready."

Adora stares at him for a minute, and then eventually takes a deep breath. "Yeah," she agrees, because she does. It's been years of the same thing; she should be fairly used to it by now. "Yeah, I know."

Her soulmate hasn't ever been much of a talker. As a kid, she had been plagued by a series of questions regarding *why*. Why didn't her soulmate want to talk to her? Why did she always have to watch practically everyone else talk to their soulmates, gossiping about who they thought it was and laughing when their soulmate said *this* or *that*, while she could never relate? Why didn't she run out of space on her arm when conversations ran too long and have to resort to writing on her leg or stomach like everyone else did? But eventually, as the years passed, Adora began to appreciate what she *did* have.

No one else had intricate designs and blends of beautiful colors painted or drawn across their body, but she did. Everyone was always so blown away by the work that her soulmate did, that the feeling of sadness Adora used to get when she never got a response from her soulmate had eventually begun to lessen.

There had been one time she had got a worded response, though. She remembers it vividly, despite the fact that it had been years ago, back when she was just starting high school.

Lying in bed in the early hours of the morning, Adora had written *Can you paint something for me?* on the inside of her arm. It was the first anniversary of her mother's death, and despite having just woken up, she knew the day would be horrible. She had never felt so alone before, and she desperately ached for some sort of distraction.

She hadn't even been expecting a response — of course she wasn't, considering her soulmate had never actually talked to her before — but surprisingly, the word *okay* appeared just a few minutes after. A couple of hours later, the entirety of her arm was a beautiful web of life, and the sheer happiness Adora felt was simply indescribable.

That same evening, after getting home from visiting her mother's grave, she had written a simple *Thank you*. There had been no response, but it was from that moment on that Adora had decided that maybe she didn't always need one.

What her soulmate never gave her with words, they gave in the form of art.

“Speaking of soulmates,” Bow starts a few moments later, pulling Adora out of her thoughts. “Do you have anything planned next weekend?”

Adora knits her brows together and shakes her head. “Nothing I can think of. Why?”

A wide grin suddenly splits Bow's face once again. “We're meeting Perfuma's for dinner!”

“Perfuma's... what?” she asks, sticking the rest of her bacon into her mouth.

“Her soulmate,” he clarifies. Adora widens her eyes, although it isn't all that surprising the more she thinks about it. She knows that throughout Perfuma's life, she had always talked to her soulmate, although they'd never interacted in person. Apparently they had found out they were going to the same university a few weeks ago, and Adora supposes they had met up in that period of time.

“Who's we?” she asks out of curiosity, since Bow clearly knows more about this than she does.

“You, me, Glimmer, Mermista, a couple of Perfuma's other friends,” he tells her. “I don't think it'd be unreasonable to assume Perfuma's soulmate will bring some friends, too. You in?”

Adora's mind reels at the idea of seeing yet another person meet their soulmate while she's never even managed to have a full conversation with her own, but the opportunity to make new friends isn't exactly unappealing.

“Yeah,” she smiles. “I'm in.”

At exactly seven fifty-eight, Glimmer sits down in the seat next to her. She looks sort of out of breath, like she had been running to get here on time — Adora figures she was late, *again*, considering there's literally only two minutes until class starts — and her friend immediately huffs.

“*Why* did I let you convince me taking an early class would be a good idea, again?” she asks, pulling her things out of her bag and then fixing Adora with a glare.

Adora raises a brow, unable to stop herself from chuckling. “I still don’t understand why you’re always late when you live in a dorm that’s like a five minute walk from here.”

“Maybe when you’re *tall*,” Glimmer sulks, “but I’m like half a foot shorter than you, so your stride is naturally longer and faster.” Adora opens her mouth to respond, but Glimmer holds a finger up. “Nope. Don’t pick on short people, Adora. Especially when you’re a giant. It’s—“

“But I’m the average height—?”

“—rude.” Glimmer gives her another look over, adding, “and you’re definitely taller than the average height.”

Adora squints her eyes. Not only was Glimmer late, but she seemed a little edgier than usual. “You accidentally put salt in your coffee again, didn’t you?”

Glimmer pauses, before visibly deflating. “Wouldn’t have happened if you had stopped to get coffee,” she grumbles.

Adora laughs just as their professor stands up from his desk, telling them to put their electronics away so they can get started.

“Bow says good luck,” Glimmer whispers into her ear as Adora gathers all of her things and shoves them into her backpack.

Bow and Glimmer are the only two soulmates Adora knows who met each other far earlier on in life. She became friends with both of them her freshman year of college, back when she was just a girl with a soccer scholarship, moving to the big city of Bright Moon to attend a well populated university.

At first, it was a little difficult to fit in with them both. They had known each other since they were in middle school, had known they were soulmates since high school, but they were both open and friendly enough that it was much easier than Adora had initially expected.

Much like their relationship, Adora had fantasized about knowing who her soulmate was earlier on in life. She’d imagined lying underneath the stars or dancing around without any music or watching cheesy movies with the person that fate had chosen for her, and when that person didn’t make their self known in high school, she hadn’t let it bother her too much. A lot of people didn’t even meet their soulmates — at least, not in person — till after high school, or even after college, so what if she had to wait a while?

Logically, she knows that it’s kind of ridiculous to feel smitten with a person she knows almost nothing about. She doesn’t quite know how to explain the feeling, just knows that it’s there, and every time she feels the echo of a brush or pen against her arm, it intensifies. But honestly, can anyone really blame her for it? For wanting someone that the universe has approved of just for her?

Adora’s pulled out of her thoughts by her professor setting the exam down in front of her. She spins her pen around in her hand and glances down at the sheet of paper, before changing her

attention back to the painting along her arm. It's a little smudged in the areas closer to her wrist, and she briefly wonders what her soulmate's done to make it look like that.

Is it raining where they are, too?

Did rolling around in the sheets while they slept just naturally cause it to smudge?

Did they wash their hands and accidentally splash their wrist?

Were they going to wash it off, and then decided against it last minute?

So many questions, and yet, as their professor tells them they can begin, all Adora finds herself wishing is that her soulmate would wish her luck, too.

By the time she finishes up, the lecture hall is fairly empty, with only three of her classmates and the professor still inside. She slides her favorite red jacket back on — the one she had been tempted to leave back in her apartment in favor of showing off her soulmate's work, but had eventually decided against it since it was still raining pretty heavily — and makes her way out of the room.

Glimmer looks up from where she's sitting down with her back against the wall, raising a brow. "Finally. All done?"

Adora elbows her friend's shoulder. "I told you that you didn't have to wait," she says. Glimmer had been one of the earlier ones to turn in her exam, almost twenty minutes ago.

"I figured you'd like to have some company on the way to the café, and since I didn't get to have any coffee this morning, I thought I might as well stop by." Glimmer waves her hands in the air as they make their way outside, where the sky remains angry and rain continues to pour. "Also, I forgot my umbrella, and it's still raining."

Adora playfully rolls her eyes as she pulls out her, luckily, oversized umbrella and holds it at an angle that'll protect them both from the weather. Fortunately, the coffee shop that she works at a few times a week is less than a mile away from campus, which makes it extremely convenient on the days she has work right after class.

They walk in silence for the most part, considering it's kind of difficult to hear each other over the sound of the rain pounding against the pavement around them. It takes them almost twice as long to reach their destination, but their clothes are only slightly damp by the time they do.

"You want your usual?" Adora asks her friend after she's clocked in and pulled on her uniform and an apron.

Glimmer hums her response, leaning her hip against the counter. Adora quickly makes the drink, greeting the other three employees currently working — surprisingly enough, Tuesday

mornings aren't as busy as some of the other days — and reaches across the counter to hand it to Glimmer.

“I added a shot of espresso,” she grins.

Glimmer smiles and shakes her head, before taking a sip of her beverage. “You know me so well.”

-

The bright, neon pink lights of the diner across the road illuminate the growing puddles in the street, the sky overheard a large slate of gray. Catra dejectedly stares out of the window for at least a solid minute, and then sighs. Thunder rattles the building every so often, and the only thing she can think is, *this is all Entrapta's fault.*

On her way home from the library, Entrapta had asked her to stop by a small shop that sold the tools she needed to fix their keurig. Considering that it had finally stopped raining by the time Catra had actually left the library, she figured stopping wouldn't have done her any harm, and yet here she is, trapped inside a small mechanical shop with no umbrella and a raging downpour just outside.

(Catra hadn't even known their keurig was broken in the first place. It had seemed fine when she had used it to make several cups of coffee last night to keep herself up while she painted on her arm, but she had stopped questioning things Entrapta did a while ago.)

i'm stuck in this weird mechanical store with no way to get home bc of u, Catra eventually texts her, since she has nothing better to do than just wait out the rain. Some of the employees and shoppers have been staring at her for a while, but they go about their day every time she looks up and glares at them.

When Entrapta responds ten minutes later, Catra's almost offended. *Why are you stuck there?*

bc it's raining! and i have no umbrella!!! she messages back.

Luckily, Entrapta's next response only takes a few minutes. *Oh. Well the weather app says it should only be about another two hours or so before it clears up.*

Catra huffs and furiously smashes the keyboard on her phone with her thumbs. *only two hours? ONLY two hours???*

By the time Entrapta responds with *That is what I said. Although by now it should only be an hour and fifty minutes*, Catra's pulled the hood of her sweatshirt over her head and squared her shoulders. Before she can change her mind, she forces her feet to start moving forward, walking straight into the torrential downpour.

She almost immediately regrets it, the pressure of the bullets of rain against her head and the wind far stronger than she had originally anticipated. She barely makes it a couple of blocks before she decides to hide her messenger bag underneath her hoodie, suddenly thankful she had worn her oversized one instead of the one that was more fitted.

Less than a few minutes in, Catra begins to feel the water seep into the clothes underneath her hoodie, and decides that she'd rather seek refuge somewhere for two hours than be soaked through to the bone by the time she gets home. Luckily, when she attempts to take in her surroundings without getting water in her eyes, a familiar building quickly catches her attention.

It's a coffee shop that she ends up in, more so to take shelter from the rain than because she wants any caffeine. Of course, her best friend spots her as soon as the *ding-a-ling!* of the bells sound overhead, and immediately waves her over.

"Wildcat!" Scorpia exclaims, leaning across the counter. Catra, as always, has to resist the urge to laugh at the sight of her friend in a ridiculous uniform and apron. "I wasn't expecting to see you in here today! Hazelnut Latte?"

Catra nods, fishing a five dollar bill out of her wallet. "Well, if I'm being honest, I wasn't expecting to be here either," she admits, taking a quick glance around. The place is almost empty, aside from a distressed looking college student making their way through a pastry on one end, and a couple of employees near the back on the other end. She sets her messenger bag down on the counter, briefly thanking whatever deity that might be up there that it isn't wet, and then peels off her soaked hoodie.

"You forgot an umbrella again, huh?" Scorpia asks, handing her the beverage. It warms Catra's hands as soon as she grasps it, and she has to fight the urge to start shivering right then and there like some loser who was caught in the cold rain.

"No, I brought it, and then decided to walk in the cold rain for the fun of it," she sarcastically responds as she tosses the change Scorpia hands her into the tip jar, and then grabs her bag and hoodie. "I'll probably just wait out the storm before I leave."

Scorpia gives her a sympathetic smile. "Well, at least it's not too bad in here," she says as Catra makes her way towards the back in hopes that no one will bother her there. She doesn't argue with Scorpia, because for the most part, she's right — the place smells of baked goods and coffee beans, and is all in all, fairly quiet. It's only a couple of miles from her, Scorpia, and Entrapta's shared apartment, so in light of good weather, she often found herself here. Plus, Scorpia would give her a discount on occasion, even if she wasn't supposed to.

The rain outside of the window she sits by drums against it noisily, like it's seeking out the warmth of the café, too. She lays her hoodie out along the chair she's sitting on so it'll dry

quicker, before pulling her sketchbook and colored pencils out of her bag, and then putting her headphones in and turning on her music in order to pass the time.

The first hour passes by at a reasonable pace. Catra finds that she's fairly relaxed, music playing through her earbuds, the pencil grasped between her fingers smoothly gliding along the paper, though she gets a little tense when anyone passes by the table she's sitting at. It's not like she's ashamed or embarrassed of anything she draws, but everything in her sketchbook is private; not even Scorpius or Entrapta have really seen what she does.

The only thing she really shares is whatever she draws for her art classes, although that's only because she has to. Briefly, she wonders if sharing with whoever got stuck with her as a soulmate counts — it's only when she decides to paint somewhere on herself, typically her arm — and then decides that it probably does.

Catra has never been interested in the concept of having a *soulmate*, or of having a fate in general. It doesn't quite make sense to her; if things are meant to be, then what was the point? If things were meant to be, then why try? If things were meant to be, why worry about the consequences? And besides, who was the universe to tell her who her perfect match was?

Growing up, she had never really had any control over her life, being thrown into the foster care system at the earliest she could remember. She had begun to gain a bit more of a semblance of control after high school, especially when it came to the colleges that she chose to apply to, what she wanted to major in, and whether she wanted to live in an apartment or a dorm. The idea of having someone she's supposed to be the perfect match for, someone who's supposed to be her own perfect match, is *terrifying*.

So of course, the moment she had learned about soulmates — what the markings on her body meant, how she could talk to her own — she hadn't exactly been on board with the idea. What made it even worse was that Catra's soulmate in particular is a little too talkative for her taste.

In their younger years, her soulmate had always written to her, a variety of different words in different colors appearing on Catra's arm. It's not like Catra really knew what to say, considering the idea of having a soulmate isn't something she thinks she'll ever be ready to accept, so she simply hadn't said anything.

It's lasted that way for years. Admittedly, Catra feels a little bad for whoever got stuck with her as a soulmate. It's not like she's *trying* to be a jerk to whoever it is. She didn't ask for any of this. And besides, she knows soulmates can fall in love with people who aren't their soulmates, so it's not like her own soulmate is going to be alone forever. She's seen it happen before, read about it in articles, although it's reported that happy relationships and marriages tend to last longer in a pair of soulmates, as opposed to people who aren't soulmates.

Although, there have been a few times where she's let herself wonder what her soulmate might be like if she ever were to meet them. Whether she likes it or not, there's a constant, lingering connection to her soulmate that she's able to feel. Throughout the years, Catra's managed to bury that feeling to the point where it's barely even noticeable, but whenever her soulmate writes on their skin, the feeling intensifies, and she's unable to ignore it.

By now, the only thing her soulmate really ever does is compliment the drawings or paintings on her body. On occasion, they'll randomly ask Catra if she's having a good day or comment small things about their own day. Most commonly though, they'll leave reminders for themselves, ranging from things like *meet Merm and SH at eight p.m. for dinner* or *stop at the grocery store for milk*. It's become frequent enough that Catra's just thankful that her soulmate's dominant hand is the opposite of her own, so she doesn't have to worry about covering up reminders with her paintings.

Putting all of these things together, Catra's managed to figure out that her soulmate must be fairly talkative, moderately forgetful, and persistent, since they haven't seemed to have given up on talking to her. Again, Catra isn't quite sure what to make of that knowledge, but not doing anything about it just seems like the most simple option.

So she doesn't respond; she never does. She focuses on more important things — her art, for example — like now, as she shades in the curve of a compass on the paper of her sketchbook.

Her cup of coffee has been empty for almost half an hour by now, and yet, the rain still shows no signs of stopping. With a sigh, Catra grabs the cup, shuts her sketchbook, before making her way back to the counter.

Scorpia is no longer there, but a skinny guy with blond hair is. He quickly makes her drink without too much of a hassle, and when he hands it over, Catra eagerly accepts it.

She's barely had her hands wrapped around the steaming cup of coffee for more than a few moments — mind already aroused by the sweet, *sweet* smell of vanilla — when someone runs into her, sending her precious drink *everywhere*.

Naturally, Catra's first instinct should be to protect herself from the burning liquid, but with how close they are to her table, her mind immediately flashes to her sketchbook. Everything after that seems to happen in slow motion, and Catra slams her arm into the book, sending it flying to the opposite end of the table. The coffee sloshes onto her hands and shirt, as well as where her sketchbook had previously been.

“Mother *fucker*,” she immediately hisses as she drops the cup onto the floor when the pain of the hot coffee sinks into her hand — not like much had been left, anyway — before quickly attempting to wipe them on her pants, although it barely helps. “Are you *serious*?” she adds, quickly spinning around to face the person that had ran into her, ready to unleash a myriad of insults—

—and is met with the most *beautiful* face she has quite possibly ever seen.

“Oh my god!” the girl exclaims, her wide gray eyes staring back at Catra with surprise. “Shit, oh my god, I'm— I'm so sorry, I—“ she stutters over herself, quickly scrambling to her feet, hands hovering over Catra's now brown stained shirt.

Catra's brain short circuits.

It's quiet for a moment — even the few other customers in the coffee shop are silent and are probably staring at them — and everything just seems to stop. The girl stares straight back at her, and Catra notes that she's an employee who works here, if the apron covering her uniform is anything to go by. Her own shirt, thankfully, is no longer burning hot, just wet and uncomfortable. The rest of her coffee either litters the table or the floor.

They remain frozen for at least a few more seconds, before eventually, the girl reaches for the napkin dispenser and begins to pull handfuls of them out. Catra still doesn't move, not at first, until Scorpia suddenly appears on the other side of her, looking about as bewildered as Catra feels.

“What happened?” she exclaims. Catra clenches her jaw, flings her hands around in another fruitless attempt to rid of the coffee still on them, and then scowls when she sees the most likely permanent damage done to her clothes.

“This *idiot* wasn't watching where she was going,” she snaps, finally collecting her bearings together and snatching the napkins out of the girl's hands. She still looks mildly terrified, but Catra can't find it in her to feel any sympathy when *she's* the one with her *own* coffee all over her because some dick wasn't watching where they were going.

“I'm really sorry,” the girl repeats, pulling more napkins out of the dispenser and using them to clean the table. By now, another employee has appeared with a mop, and Scorpia wraps her hand around Catra's arm to pull her away from the mess. “I wasn't watching where I was going. Can I— can I get you another coffee? Or—“

“Save it,” Catra hisses, crumpling the napkins she had been holding when it becomes apparent that they won't do much to get the coffee out of her shirt. “You've done enough.”

The girl's face quickly turns sour. “Look, I said I was sorry, it's not like I—“

“Oh, yeah, because *that'll* fix everything. What's next, you claim this was my fault?”

Before Catra knows it, yet *another* person is storming up to them, looking incredibly displeased. She's slightly shorter than Catra, has short, purple hair, and a mean scowl on her face.

“*Hey,*” she snaps, waving her arm in front of Catra's face. “She apologized, what more do you want her to do?”

Catra stares at her with an affronted look. “Are you *serious?* *She* ran into *me!*”

“It's not like she did it on purpose!”

“She should've watched where she was going!”

“Well, you could be less of a *bitch* about it—“

“Glimmer!” the other girl interrupts, widening her eyes. Catra considers making fun of the girl for being named *Glimmer*, when Scorpia pulls her further away from the commotion before she has the chance.

“I’m so sorry about all this,” she says, eyeing Catra’s shirt. “But really, do you want another coffee? Or are you just gonna head home?”

Catra rubs her eyes. “It’s not your fault,” she sighs, and then glances up at the rain *still* coming down outside. “I’ll just head home, I guess.”

The coffee is starting to smell a little *too* sweet, especially coming from Catra’s shirt. At this point, she doesn’t really care if she’s soaked by the time she gets home, as long as she’s able to protect her messenger bag and sketchbook from getting wet.

“Really?” Scorpia asks, moving out of the way of the employee who’s still cleaning up the mess. “Man, you know I’d let you borrow my umbrella if I had one, but it wasn’t raining when I left this morning, so I didn’t think to bring it,” she says, rubbing the back of her neck. “You sure you wanna head home without one?”

Catra opens her mouth to respond with something along the lines of *well, do you have a better idea?*, but is promptly cut off by *the same girl* she had thought would’ve been smart enough to leave already.

“Um, I have an umbrella,” the girl — Adora, her name tag reads as — announces, apparently having been listening to their entire conversation. “If you want to, um, use it.”

Catra rolls her eyes. “What the hell is that going to do?” she asks, sliding her sweatshirt back on over her clothes. It’s still damp and kind of gross, but it’s currently the best protection she has. “I’m already drenched.”

Glimmer stands behind Adora, arms crossed and seemingly irritated with how the conversation is going, but Catra couldn’t really care less. “It’s the least I can do,” Adora tells her, “since I’m kind of the reason you’re leaving. So, uh, I’ll just— I’ll just get my umbrella,” she finishes sort of awkwardly, and then scurries away to somewhere in the back of the store.

Catra, again, fights the urge to roll her eyes. Scorpia stares at her for a moment, and then picks up her messenger bag off the table and hands it over to her. “Well, guess that solves your problem,” she chuckles.

“I wouldn’t be having this problem if she had been watching where she was going in the first place,” Catra points out, pulling the strap over her shoulder. When she turns around, Adora once again appears seemingly out of thin air, holding an incredibly large umbrella in her hands.

“Here,” she offers, holding it out. Catra stares at the object for a few moments, and then looks back up at Adora.

“What?” she questions, suspiciously narrowing her eyes. “You’re just gonna give it to me?” she adds, a little surprised. Adora blinks, looking a little surprised herself, but eventually nods.

“Yes,” she says after a moment of hesitation, holding it out even further so that Catra really has no choice but to accept it. “You could bring it back here later if you want,” she says,

before quickly adding “but you don’t have to,” when Catra raises a brow. “I really am sorry for spilling your coffee, and this umbrella is kind of old, anyway, so.”

Catra stares down at the umbrella in her hands, and considers her options. On one hand, she *is* already drenched, so accepting an umbrella from a stranger who just spilled coffee all over her won’t do much for her; but on the other hand, she doesn’t need everything that’s in her messenger bag to be wet by the time she gets home.

“Alright,” she eventually says, glancing back up at the girl. Her eyes look more blue than gray now, and Catra briefly wonders if they change colors in the lighting. “Uh, thanks, I guess.”

Adora stares at her for a moment, before eventually clearing her throat and stepping out of Catra’s way. Catra takes a deep breath, flashes one last look at both Scorpia and Adora (and Glimmer, but she makes a point to ignore her) before holding the umbrella over her head and exiting the coffee shop.

(Later, when she’s finally standing underneath the warmth of the shower overhead and washing the smell of coffee off of her body, Catra decides that she’s going to keep the umbrella, simply out of spite for her ruined shirt.)

Sometime into the evening, Scorpia gets home from the coffee shop, looking a little tired from the day she’s had. Catra sits on the couch, a bowl full of cereal in her lap as she watches some cheesy horror movie, Entrapta sitting a few feet away from her with a textbook in her own lap.

“Long day?” Catra asks, just to be funny — a clear reference to the mess that had happened earlier — although neither Scorpia nor Entrapta laugh, much to her disappointment.

“Sort of,” Scorpia says, heading straight for her room. Catra turns her attention back on the movie that’s playing, until Scorpia continues. “But guess what?” Before Catra can even respond with *what?*, Scorpia’s hurrying out of her room. “You guys are going to get to meet Perfuma!”

Entrapta finally looks up from her textbook that’s been occupying her attention for the past few hours — something about studying for a big test next week. “Who’s Perfuma?”

“Her soulmate,” Catra fills in for her as Scorpia continues talking.

“We agreed we’d meet next weekend, downtown at the Fright Bar ‘cause they have good food,” she says, sitting down on the coffee table in front of them. “I think she’s bringing some of her friends, too. Gosh, doesn’t this all sound great?”

Catra isn't exactly the best at meeting new people — she quite literally has only two people she considers friends for a reason — but because Scorpia is her friend, and because it's clearly important to her, she gives an enthusiastic smile. Really, she's happy that her friend is finally getting to start an in person relationship with her soulmate.

“Sure!” Entrapta exclaims, although her attention has turned back to her textbook. Scorpia smiles at them both, and then glances down at her arm with an even *wider* smile and a blush. Catra, never one to pass up the opportunity to make fun of her friends, gives a little snicker.

“You've become such a sap ever since you started talking to Perfuma more often,” she teases, bringing a spoonful of Froot Loops to her mouth. Scorpia's blush deepens.

“Yeah, I just... I really like her,” she admits, rubbing the back of her neck. “I mean, of course I like her; she's my *soulmate*. It just— the connection I have with her, it feels... gosh, I don't know how to explain it.” There's a pause, and then Scorpia looks at Entrapta. “Entrapta, you know what I'm talking about, right?”

Entrapta nods her head. “Precisely. The connection you have with your soulmate is like no other.”

Catra snorts. “Yeah, I can't relate.”

Scorpia playfully knocks her ankle against Catra's, and Catra growls when it sloshes her cereal around in her lap. She does *not* want a repeat of earlier. “Why don't you just talk to your soulmate?”

Entrapta tilts her head. “Oh, you two don't talk very often, right?”

“At all, actually,” Catra admits, stirring her soggy Froot Loops around in her bowl. Both Scorpia and Entrapta are silent, staring at her like they're waiting for her to give them a reason as to *why* she still doesn't talk to her soulmate, so Catra sighs. “I just— I don't have anything to say.”

It's only part of the reason, of course. Entrapta continues to stare at her, and Catra averts her gaze. Scorpia seems to realize that Catra's done speaking on the subject, so she pats Catra's knee and then stands up.

“Enough about soulmates. What are you two watching, anyway? And why isn't there any popcorn?”

“Catra put this on, I have no idea what it is,” Entrapta says over the sound of the microwave beeping, followed by popping kernels. A few minutes later, Catra scoots closer to Entrapta to make room for Scorpia on the other side of her. She offers some of her blanket, restarts the movie, and for a while, forgets about the stress of there being someone out there who's supposed to be just for her.

That night, Adora finds herself busy procrastinating her health science paper by scrolling aimlessly through twitter and trying not to think about the events of this afternoon — she's already replayed what happened *at least* ten times, and each time, she becomes more and more enraptured with the heterochromic eyes she had found herself staring into — when her soulmate decides to make a reappearance.

It starts with a familiar tingly sensation lighting up her skin. She looks up from her phone in surprise, before eagerly moving her arm so that it's laying on top of her desk underneath the dim lamplight, watching in fascination as a dark color begins to form at the base of her wrist. Slowly, the color begins to dance down her forearm, slowly changing from a dark purple to a dark blue.

Along with it comes the feeling of emotions that aren't her own. Adora knits her brows together in an attempt to make sense of them, but her soulmate's thoughts must be all over the place. Anxiety is the most prevalent emotion; it fills her chest, so vivid that it almost feels as if *she's* the one who should be feeling anxious. Underneath it is some form of affection, and Adora wonders what could have her soulmate feeling so anxious, yet affectionate.

As the colors on her arm begin to morph into something that looks a lot like a night sky, Adora grabs the pen sitting on her desk and writes out the words ***I hope you had a wonderful day*** on her other arm. Luckily, her soulmate's dominant hand seems to be the opposite of hers, so she doesn't have to worry about disrupting anything.

Almost as soon as Adora finishes, her soulmate suddenly stops painting, and the feeling of a phantom brush disappears. Adora frowns, worried she's scared her soulmate off, only for the tingly feeling to return just a few moments later. The anxiety has dulled, even if it's just a little bit, and even though it's small, Adora's heart swells.

I did that, she thinks, suddenly feeling inexplicably happy. I made them feel less anxious.

Hours later, Adora's lies sprawled across her bed when the connection starts to fade. She had long since given up on completing her paper — from the moment she began to feel her soulmate's presence, she knew she was a goner — and had eventually gotten lost in her own thoughts. Her soulmate's anxiety has significantly reduced, and now, all Adora really feels from them is a sense of composure. She just hopes she's mirroring that feeling, too.

The feeling of their connection dwindling is always strange, the unfamiliar emotions slowly ebbing away like water falling from between her fingers. When Adora glances back down at her arm in the dim lighting of her bedroom and realizes that not a single inch of her skin is able to be seen, she figures her soulmate must be done.

A multitude of blacks, purples, blues, and even hints of pink come together to form a galaxy of stars, unlike any of the other paintings she's seen from her soulmate. It covers the entirety of her arm, almost like a tattoo sleeve. She simply admires it for a few more moments, before peeking through the curtain that covers the window just above her bed.

With her breath catching in the back of her throat, Adora realizes that the colors resemble the night sky as of now. A sudden feeling of warmth fills her chest, and for a moment, she allows herself to imagine that her soulmate is looking at the same star filled sky.

*

purple

Chapter Summary

In which Catra and Adora discover the other might not be as bad as initially expected

Chapter Notes

i am so sorry for the long wait on this. i wrote this chapter, didn't like how it turned out, rewrote it a few more times and then eventually gave up for like. six months. when i finally finished this chapter a couple of hours ago i just felt pure euphoria, and i haven't bothered editing yet akdjfha. writer's block is a bitch.

also pls check out this amazing [art](#) of the last scene last chapter by @KlosOokami, i really appreciate him for this!!

on an unrelated note i did write a [short fake dating au](#) so check that out if you'd like, and i hope to anyone that is still here enjoys chapter two!

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

The window of their apartment looks over a large tree. When it rains in the spring, it often sways this way and that, like the gentle dance of the honeybees on the morning dew. In the summer, it serves as a welcoming protection for the heat of the midday. In the fall, its leaves match the colors of the setting sun, burnt oranges and fiery reds. In the winter, it becomes bare, naked for all to gaze upon. Sometimes, if Adora is feeling particularly overwhelmed or anxious, she often finds herself sitting on a haphazard chair she pulled up to the window facing the tree with a book in hand, going through the breathing exercises Perfuma taught her for safe measure.

In the present, fallen leaves of Adora's self proclaimed favorite tree peek out from beneath the fresh snow, brown and crinkly and dead. They blanket the ground beneath the white, serving as a nice reminder of the raking job the community didn't quite manage to complete before an early winter hit them like an unwelcomed visitor.

"It's so weird," Bow murmurs after coming to stand by Adora's chair. Normally, Adora would be a little annoyed at the idea of anyone bothering her while she's currently in her element, but she feels slightly compelled to forgive her best friend when he hands her a warm mug of hot chocolate. "Didn't it just rain last week?"

“Perks of living up north, I guess,” Adora grumbles after taking a sip of her drink. She’s never really minded the cold weather, but she doesn’t exactly enjoy having to bundle up because of it in *October*. Typically she attempts to stretch out wearing t-shirts and shorts for as long as she can, but it isn’t exactly fun getting caught out in the snow in a pair of denim shorts and a sleeveless hoodie.

“Aw, cheer up,” Bow chuckles, playfully nudging her shoulder. “Winter isn’t *all* bad.”

“I like winter,” Adora defends herself, “I just don’t like having to wear heavy clothing. It’s all constricting and stuff.”

Bow, much to his credit, does a horrible job at hiding his amusement behind his mug of tea. “You sure it’s not just because you don’t like not being able to show off your soulmate’s art?”

Adora stares down at the pages of her book, but is half positive her cheeks are probably flushed in pink. “That— that might be part of the reason,” she admits, not quite sure why she even tries to somewhat hide her infatuation with soulmate’s paintings anymore.

(“I’m sure your soulmate can forgive you for not showing off their art for at least a few months,” Glimmer had told her a couple of days ago during a study session at the library, and Adora didn’t ask how she knew; her best friend has always had a weird ability in which she seems to know exactly what everyone’s thinking. “I mean they’re probably covering up at least a little bit by this time, too.”

“Wait,” Mermista commented, glancing up from the paper she had been focused on since their arrival. “I thought you didn’t even talk to your soulmate.”

Adora frowned. “I do,” she said, not quite sure why she felt the need to get defensive. It’s not a complete lie — she does talk to her soulmate, her soulmate just doesn’t talk to her.

Mermista looked like she wasn’t convinced, but she had gone back to her paper instead of responding.)

She hasn’t heard much from her soulmate in the past few days, not since she had stayed up with them a few nights ago with the a galaxy sleeve to keep her company. Adora’s not quite sure what she expected, but she doesn’t worry being that there’s been times where her soulmate has disappeared for a week or more at a time, so a few days isn’t much to write home about.

“*Part* of the reason?” Bow asks, wiggling his eyebrows playfully. Adora gives a good hearted roll of her eyes and turns her attention back to her book, but doesn’t actually start reading it again. “That’s not the *only* reason?”

The truth:

Adora had only stopped caring for winter after her mother’s death. The beginning of winter is always the hardest, especially because it signifies multiple things: her mother’s birthday, her death date, and how much *she* loved winter herself. Standing behind Adora in the kitchen and

softly instructing her how to whisk cookie dough so there weren't any clumps left, Adora had fallen in love with the season more and more every day.

And then one winter she was, abruptly, gone, and now the anniversary of her death — and the week surrounding it — typically leaves Adora feeling hollow. She *is* proud to say she's gone to therapy since then and successfully moved on from most of it, so she rarely ever lingers on the disheartening thoughts surrounding her mother for any other time outside the week of her death anniversary.

But she doesn't tell Bow all of that because it's honestly quite depressing, and it's not very often that she talks about her dead mother and being thrown around in the foster system for a short period of time before her grandmother was able to legally adopt her.

"It's one of the reasons," Adora eventually settles on after tipping back the rest of her hot chocolate. When she glances back at the bare tree in front of her, her chest aches.

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There are several ways Catra would've preferred to spend Halloween then being dragged along to what she's pretty sure is a frat party. Curling up on the couch with Entrapta and binging a bunch of cheesy horror movies. Locking herself in her room and blasting music in her earbuds while she paints on her arm or colors in her sketchbook. But apparently, part of being a good friend is supporting your best friend, and that means coming to meet said best friend's soulmate when she asks you.

Looking back, Catra supposes this is her own fault. She could've easily declined Scorpia's invitation to accompany her to the Halloween party her soulmate had invited her to, perhaps even said *I'd rather meet her in a more sophisticated setting like we were originally planning*, but alas, she didn't.

The moments leading up to this went something like this:

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. .
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She's sitting in the back of her art history class, but Catra can't focus.

It's not because of the weather outside; not like it's been the past few weeks, especially with how cold it tends to get in this particular lecture hall during this time of year. It's not even because of the subject they're covering, although it's true that Catra has learned about far more interesting things in the past. No, instead of worrying about the fact that she's probably

going to be consistently cold for the next few months, Catra is staring at the words written on her bare skin that have been mockingly staring back at her for the past four minutes.

It has been, for lack of a better description, a crazy week. Her professors have seemed to collectively decide to begin to unload their mid-finals reviews and start preparations, so her stress level has gone up a few notches because of that. Her, Entrapta, and a few of Scorpia's other friends were supposed to meet Perfuma, but those plans got thrown under the bus when everyone got snowed in the night it was supposed to happen. She hasn't had anytime to draw, which as of her teenage years is pretty much what she uses as a *healthy* outlet instead of old unhealthy habits like picking fights with random people.

The last thing she really wants is to start thinking about her soulmate and their inability to get the hint that Catra *doesn't* want to talk and probably won't ever, and yet, that's exactly what she's doing.

Six minutes ago Catra had been idly doodling on the corner of the paper meant for notes while her professor talked in the most boring, monotone voice known to man, when she had felt the feeling of a seemingly imaginative pen on the inside of her forearm. Catra had blinked and rolled up the sleeve of her hoodie, only to, unsurprisingly, find her soulmate's familiar and neat handwriting forming a sentence.

Except after a few moments, the *emotion* behind it began to seep in. Catra had been overwhelmed with something so *sad* and *heartbreaking* and the sentence just kept going that, although Catra would usually either ignore her soulmate or just not bother to look at the message until later, she had felt compelled to roll her sleeve back up and follow the words they were writing.

She knows that her soulmate gets really depressed every year around this same time. It tends to only last for a few days, so Catra has been able to piece together that it probably has something to do with the anniversary of something.

Her suspicions are confirmed when she glances back down at her forearm and sees the words ***I know you don't care, but it's the anniversary of my mother's passing in a couple of days. I've never told anyone, but she really liked hummingbirds. And winter, but everyone knew that.***

Then, in much smaller writing below:

I don't talk about her much, but ig it feels nice to tell someone who I don't have to worry about responding.

The emotions her soulmate are feeling quickly disappear after that, telling Catra that they must be done. Catra reads over the words a few more times, not quite sure why she feels like such an asshole — it's not *her* fault their mother is dead — before nearly jumping out of her seat when someone taps her on her shoulder.

When she looks up to see Double Trouble staring at her questioningly — a good friend of hers who she met when she tried to get into theatre her freshman year of college — she's

about two seconds from snapping at them before realizing that half the class has already gone and everyone else is packing up.

“Oh,” is all Catra mutters. Without another word, she rolls down the sleeve of her hoodie, grabs her messenger bag and notebook, and leaves.

“So?” DT asks after they exit the building. It’s unnervingly cold, and the snow crunches underneath Catra’s boots as she walks along the sidewalk toward where DT claims to have parked their car. Although it’s only about a twenty minute walk from the university to her apartment, Catra doesn’t feel like making the trek in this weather. It’s still *beyond* her that it’s already this cold in October.

“So what?” Catra asks when it becomes increasingly clear DT isn’t going to leave her alone about it. She’s pretty sure she knows what DT is going to say, but she’s also trying to avoid it for as long as possible.

“Don’t play dumb, darling. Are you going to respond?” they smile, all teeth, and Catra rolls her eyes.

DT knows practically everything about her issues with her soulmate and attachment. Catra feels, for some odd reason, compelled to tell them, and they actually do a good job when it comes to not gossiping about it like Catra initially expected they would.

“Probably not,” she grumbles, frowning when she sees her own breath escape her, visible due to the frigid temperatures.

“Wait, seriously?” DT asks, stopping in their tracks. Catra’s frown only deepens when she turns to face them and sees that they genuinely seem a little surprised. “I only saw a bit of what they wrote, but even *I* was convinced you’d have enough of a heart to at least say *something*.”

“What they wrote is *private*,” Catra hisses, “and how I choose to respond to it is private too.”

“Catra,” DT sighs, resuming their walk. They might be a bit of an asshole in the same way she is most of the time, but even she can tell when they know now’s not the time to be a jerk. “They’re probably upset and looking for reassurance, and you still aren’t going to say *anything*?” Catra doesn’t reply, so DT raises a brow. “Jesus. This is just getting ridiculous. I don’t think I know a *single* other person who hasn’t had at least one conversation with their soulmate by now.”

If there’s one thing DT’s good at, it’s making her feel guilty when she probably needs to be. There’s a moment where neither of them say anything as Catra gets comfortable in the passenger side of DT’s car, welcoming the heat it offers when it gets turned on. “What am I

supposed to say?” she eventually questions, grateful for the fact that she doesn’t have to worry about DT looking at her in the eye now that they’re driving.

“*Anything*,” DT tells her. “Let’s be honest, it can’t get much worse than this, so I’m sure *anything* would be plausible at this point.”

Catra stares at her clothed forearm where she knows the words from before would still be there if she looked. She hasn’t told anyone that she paints for her soulmate, but she’s not sure that would really count. Plus, she rarely lets anyone see her paintings or drawings even when they’re on paper — there’s almost no chance of showing anyone the ones she does on her skin.

“I’ll think about it,” Catra eventually murmurs, which is her way of letting DT know that she’s done talking about it. They seem to understand that enough, so they don’t bother bringing it back up again for the rest of the drive.

Hours later Catra is sketching out the delicate curve of the feather of a hummingbird, eyes squinting due to the dark walls of her room and the little light she barely allows in through her curtains, when she hears a loud knock on her door and is given approximately two seconds before it opens.

“Hey!” Scorpia yells, and doesn’t even give Catra any time to remind her that they’re inside and that means Scorpia should use her “inside voice” before adding, “change of plans. You know how you, ‘trap, and everyone else were supposed to meet Perfuma a couple of days ago?” Catra nods, not quite sure where this is going, so Scorpia continues. “Well, she invited me to a party — something one of her friends Sea Hawk is hosting — and she said some of her friends are going to be there. It’s not what we ideally planned, but I’m going and I invited everyone else, so…” her face morphs into one of those pouts she rarely does because she *knows* Catra won’t ever say no to it, and Catra sighs.

She hasn’t been to a college party since Lonnie invited her to one at the beginning of the semester. The next morning she woke up on the floor of the bathroom with a *horrible* hangover, an even worse haircut, stained clothes, and to a classmate she fairly recognized handcuffed to the shower. Since then, she hadn’t touched any form of alcohol.

(Scorpia had also been forced to help her fix her hair, and after a lot of trial and error, they had just cut nearly all of it off. Catra had been disappointed that years of work had gone down the drain just like that, but she has to admit, she enjoys having less hair to worry about.)

But that was nearly three months ago, so Catra supposes that as long as she takes it light on the drinks this time, she’ll be fine.

“Okay, fine,” she says, “I’ll stay for a couple of hours.”

After Scorpia whoops and then shuts the door, Catra turns back to the rough sketch she had been working on for the past half hour. She should've gotten started on studying for midterms so that way she didn't procrastinate and stress herself by leaving everything for the last minute like last semester, but instead, she found herself mindlessly drawing whatever came to mind. She had expected to perhaps finish that, eat a cup of ramen for dinner, and maybe scroll through Twitter for a few hours before going to sleep. However, with the stress of midterms coming up, she also knows she won't have much free time for the next few weeks, so Catra supposes she isn't all that mad about going to a last minute party being hosted by a guy who named himself after a bird.

It doesn't take her long to get dressed, having thrown on a pair of ripped black jeans, a maroon crop top shirt (Catra knows she'll probably end up regretting not at least wearing a long sleeved shirt, but she's hoping that inside it'll at least be warm) and her combat boots that she wears almost everywhere in the winter. Because apparently everyone has seemed to have forgotten *privacy* is a thing, Entrapta opens the door just a few minutes later, immediately making residency on Catra's (neat) bed.

"Why aren't you getting ready?" she asks, despite the fact that Catra is already pretty sure she just spent the past twenty minutes doing exactly that.

"I am ready," she corrects, although she's still in the process of touching up her mascara: the only makeup she ever really bothers with, because she may pretty much ignore her soulmate, but even she's not going to be a dick and apply something like lipstick or eyeliner with the knowledge that it'll appear on them, too. In the corner of the mirror she's staring at, she sees Entrapta knit her brows.

"You're just wearing the same thing you always wear, and this is a Halloween party. I would imagine there would be costumes."

"It's my brand," Catra argues, screwing the lid of her mascara shut, and then turning to face Entrapta. "Look, I don't even really feel like going somewhere with a lot of people I don't know when I should probably start studying instead, so cut me some slack."

Entrapta looks unimpressed. "Knowing you, you wouldn't have even gotten started on studying till the last possible minute anyway."

Sometimes, Catra forgets her friends know her too well to fool them. "That's not the point."

"Then what's the point?"

Catra had sort of realized in that moment that she lost the argument, so she hadn't responded.

At least three different girls dressed in costumes Catra can only describe as incredibly slutty attempt to flirt with Scorpia, who's dressed as a rockstar ("*To go with Perfuma's popstar outfit!!!*" Scorpia had excitedly told them on the drive over), on the walk across campus. The party is a lot more crowded than what Catra expected — it's not what she would classify a *rager* by any means, not like the last party she was at — but it's definitely in full swing by the time they arrive.

Entrapta disappears almost immediately like she usually does at these things — Catra’s learned by now not to question it, especially since the three of them collectively established a rule of checking in with each other every half hour — and Scorpia raises her voice over the loud music. “Hey, I told Perfuma I’d come find her when I got here, but Lonnie is over there —” Catra follows the direction Scorpia is pointing in and sees Lonnie standing next to some extremely tall guy Catra thinks she vaguely recognizes— “and I’ll come find you guys once I’ve got Perfuma, okay?”

After Catra nods, Scorpia scampers off in the opposite direction, and Catra attempts to push through to get to Lonnie, who is dressed as a pirate if the eyepatch is anything to go by. Aside from that, her makeup is a bit heavier, and she’s wearing a shirt with a skull on it, but it’s not like Catra can really critique her costume having not even bothered to wear one herself.

It’s exactly the first thing Lonnie points out to her when Catra finally reaches her. “Didn’t even bother trying to find a costume?” she asks, eyeing Catra up and down. “Or are you dressed as yourself?”

“Listen, I haven’t even been to any parties since the one you decided to drag me to at the beginning of the semester,” Catra defends herself, “and I didn’t really want to be at this one, either. I’m only here because Scorpia really wants me to be.”

Lonnie turns toward her again, and this time, she has a smirk on her face. “See, I *knew* somewhere underneath all of that sarcasm and snark you had a heart down there.”

Catra simply calls Lonnie an *ass*, and then tells her she’ll be right back after going to grab a drink. She’s thankful for the fact that no one actually makes a move on her despite the fact that she has to pass by a multitude of bodies just to reach what looks like a small kitchen and fish for a decent drink in the ice chest.

By the time she turns to head back to where she left Lonnie, she’s able to see that it seems that she’s been joined by Scorpia and who Catra can only assume is Perfuma by the way Scorpia has an arm wrapped around her. Catra can’t really see her from this particular angle, her view being blocked by two people dressed as a strawberry and banana aggressively grinding on the dance floor — much to Catra’s distaste — so she carefully starts making her way back.

She’s spotted just as she arrives. Scorpia turns toward her with a relieved smile and quickly introduces her to Perfuma. “It’s nice to finally meet you,” Perfuma tells her, and the only thing Catra can really think to say is “likewise,” because if nothing else, she is at least a little grateful to finally get to meet the woman Scorpia has been gushing over for the past few *months* at this point.

(Perfuma seems, unsurprisingly, like a calm and collected person. Catra, despite the fact that she’s known Perfuma for all of fifteen seconds, isn’t surprised to see that they’re *destined* to be together.)

(Catra may not be about that whole *fate* and *destiny* life, although she can respect when others are.)

She only has about four more seconds of doing her best to scope out Perfuma while she chats with Lonnie before a couple of new people approach. Turning her attention away from the pair, Catra's eyes settle on a tall, warm skinned and friendly looking guy who's dressed as who Catra assumes as cupid, and—

Catra nearly chokes on her drink in surprise when she recognizes the girl from the coffee shop who had run into her and ruined her shirt not even a full week ago. By the looks of it, the girl is just as shocked as she is, staring at both her and Scorpia with eyes wide.

Adora, she thinks her name is, looks— well, to put it simply, *good*. She's dressed in a superhero costume Catra doesn't recognize the name of, adorning a white and golden thin shirt that, fortunately for Catra, leaves her *incredibly nice* arms bare, muscles taunt and clearly visible. If those are anything to go by, then Catra thinks it's a damn shame that the costume comes with pants and not shorts; she's pretty sure that the girl's legs must be just as muscular as her arms. The fact that they already put a strain on both the material and Catra's self control probably says enough. There's also a gold headpiece atop her head, and her hair is pulled into the same hairstyle Catra had seen at the coffee shop.

Without another way to put it, this girl is gorgeous. Catra had already somewhat known this — she's able to recognize an attractive person when she sees one, and even with everything that was happening at the coffee shop, it was no different — but now, Catra can't quite imagine how she didn't realize how *extremely* attractive Adora is, even with everything else happening at the moment.

Swallowing against the dryness in her throat, Catra averts her eyes back to her drink. It suddenly seems to be a lot hotter in here than it was fifteen seconds ago. She's faintly aware of the fact that someone is speaking, but she can't quite completely process what's being said over this girl's very distracting arms.

(And, yes, okay, Catra is still extremely annoyed with this girl, because not only did they get off on the wrong foot, but she also just *seems* like the type of person Catra wouldn't get along with. The fact that she's unnecessarily attractive only serves to fuel that annoyance even more.)

She tunes back in when Scorpia nudges her hard enough that she nearly stumbles (sometimes, Scorpia seems to forget she is *at least* a foot taller than her, and twice her size, too) before patting her back. “—and I'm sure you recognize Catra, too?”

After regaining her balance, Catra glances back up at Adora, who's watching her with an unreadable expression. She nods, and then says, “uh, yeah, I remember her.”

Perfuma is glancing between all three of them with a look of mild confusion. Lonnie doesn't even seem to care, leaning against the wall and scrolling through her phone, and the guy Catra still doesn't know the name of has disappeared.

There's a few moments of awkward tension between them — Catra still hasn't said a single word, but it's not like she really knows what to say, anyway — before Perfuma eventually clasps her hands together and says something about showing Scorpia one of the decorations down the hall. Just before Catra's supposed best friend abandons her to *die* next to the very

attractive girl she didn't make a good first impression on, she turns toward her and flashes her an apologetic look, mouthing out the words *text me* before disappearing into the crowd.

After another moment of even more awkward silence, Catra spots Entrapta in the crowd near the balcony, and decides that some fresh air is probably exactly what she needs.

-

This is all Bow's fault.

After spending a considerably long amount of time moping around their apartment this morning, Adora had forced herself to clean up and go to the few classes she had today. When she had arrived back home, she had been greeted with the sight of Glimmer (which wasn't surprising, considering she's basically at the apartment more than her own dorm at this point; Adora knows that next year, her and Bow will most likely finally move in together, and Adora will, hopefully, have enough funds to live on her own).

However, what was surprising was seeing them both getting dressed in Halloween costumes despite the fact that Adora was pretty sure the three of them had agreed that they would simply stay in for the night and binge a bunch of shitty horror movies. Before she was even able to accuse them for falling out of their plans, Bow had told her about the party Sea Hawk was hosting, how Perfuma's soulmate would be attending, and how he sort of thought she could use a bit of a pick-me-up event after how she was acting this morning.

Adora hadn't necessarily disagreed with him, and drinking a bit of alcohol and being with some of her friends didn't exactly sound unappealing, so she had agreed.

If she had known she would've been left in this *extremely* awkward situation, Adora's not sure she would have agreed as easily.

The girl in front of her — the one she had knocked coffee all over less than a week ago, making a *horrible* first impression on and pretty much making an utter fool of herself in front of — is, for lack of a better description, totally Adora's Type with a capital T.

It's not something she's just now realizing. She had sort of realized it in the coffee shop after her brain had caught up with everything that had happened in the moments after she had ran into the other girl, her eyes being the first thing she noticed. Adora doesn't think she had ever met anyone with heterochromia before then, which was, in her opinion, fascinating enough, but it didn't help that both of her eyes were gorgeous on their own, one being light blue like the ocean on a hot summer day, and the other being a warm, gentle brown that reminded Adora of a pool of honey.

Her hair is cut short and is sort of unruly and messy, but in a purposeful way. One thing Adora hadn't noticed before was the constellation of freckles decorating her cheeks, probably too enraptured with her eyes for the few moments of silence they had before the girl had promptly gone off on her. Despite the fact that she's shorter than Adora by more than a few inches and is much more lithe and small, she still looks like someone who could kick her ass if she wanted.

You've always liked them bad, Adora can already hear Glimmer saying in the back of her mind like she has so many times before. Adora would simply shake her head and scowl, but wouldn't refute. She hasn't experienced many crushes or anything like that in her lifetime, having always felt at least a *little* guilty every time she's touched a girl and thought about her soulmate in the back of her mind, but the few crushes she has experienced pretty much all fall under the same category.

Somewhere in between Perfuma introducing them and Scorpia talking about how small of a world it must be because of the fact that they already know each other, Adora hears the words, “—and I'm sure you recognize Catra, too?”

Catra, Adora thinks, swallowing heavily when the girl in turn glances up and meets her eyes. She's half tempted to roll the name off her tongue just to see how it fits, before she realizes that everyone is staring at her. With a slight nod, she responds with, “uh, yeah, I remember her.”

There's a few moments of incredible awkwardness. Adora has gained enough awareness of her surroundings to realize that Bow has seemed to disappear, probably flocking off somewhere to find Glimmer. Perfuma says something that Adora doesn't quite manage to catch and then drags Scorpia off with her, and Adora is left standing with the girl she spilt coffee on and another person she doesn't even know the name of.

Fortunately — or, the more Adora thinks about it, unfortunately — Catra flashes one last look at her, and then disappears. Adora half-considers chasing after her and maybe apologizing again for the whole incident — she's about eighty percent sure the girl probably hates her, and okay, Adora was fine with that knowing she probably wouldn't ever see her again, but now that she knows she's a friend of Scorpia's and it'll most likely be inevitable to avoid her, the thought kind of makes her eye twitch.

Nervously biting her lip and watching as Catra disappears within the crowd of partygoers, Adora shakes her head as if to get rid of her thoughts, and then glances around the room in an attempt to find *someone* she knows. It's not hard, and she spots a couple of her teammates and some people she doesn't know playing something near the corner of the room, so she heads over in that direction.

The next time Adora catches sight of Catra is a little bit after they've finished up their fifth round of Cards Against Humanity and Adora is doing her best to help clean up the scattered cards. Things had gotten a little blurry after Mermista showed up with a large tray of brightly

colored shots and then Glimmer had offered her a margarita in apology for sort of just disappearing earlier, only to disappear once again. Adora had absolutely no idea how she managed to acquire one in a place like this.

She knows she's not a lightweight — she has years of working out and the muscle her athleticism has managed to build to thank for that — so she's only *leaning* towards drunk by the time she helps someone she thinks she's only met once in the past finish cleaning up the cards, considering everyone else who had been playing with them seemed to already be drunk, or close.

Sea Hawk insists on borrowing Adora's sword before him and Mermista disappear into the depths of the frat house, and Adora allows herself to mourn it for a few moments since she's pretty sure she's never going to see it again, before wandering to the balcony where Octavia is leaning against the railing and offering Adora whatever it is that she's smoking. Adora, after a bit of internal debate, declines, only because she knows she'll probably end up drinking more and has learned the hard way in the past that it's not exactly a good idea to mix drugs and alcohol.

Later, she's sitting on one of the sofas next to Scorpia as they watch Perfuma destroy one of the frat guys in a game of beer pong, much to his and any onlookers dismay, while Bow stands a few feet away from her, scribbling on his arm in an attempt to figure out where Glimmer is since she doesn't appear to be answering her phone.

There's a weight that lands on the side of her, and Adora almost scrubs her eyes just to make sure she's not imagining Catra having willingly sat down next to her. She's eyeing Bow suspiciously as he uses the only writing utensil he could find — a neon highlighter — and continues to scribble away on his arm.

“Arrow boy worried about his soulmate or what?” Catra questions after taking a sip of her drink, and it takes Adora a moment to realize she's speaking to Scorpia and not her.

“Bow?” she thinks she hears Scorpia reply, but it's kind of hard to hear over the music nearly shaking the frat house in the next room. “He's probably just looking for Glimmer.”

There's a moment of silence between Scorpia and Catra — and Adora, who is trying very hard to pretend not to be listening to their conversation — only for Catra to seemingly come to a realization a few moments later. “Glimmer? The same one who called me a bitch?” she questions, and out of her peripheral vision, Adora thinks she sees the other girl frown. “Bow is soulmates with someone like *her*? That's unbelievable.”

Adora is about to question what *that* means, because the girl sitting next to her may be unfairly pretty and kind of make her heart beat faster every time she looks at her, but that doesn't mean she'll let her get away with insulting her friends. However, Scorpia beats her to the punch with the words, “I thought you didn't believe in soulmates.”

Because Adora is a bit sluggish right now, Catra has already replied with *it's not that I don't believe in them, it's just that the whole idea seems kind of stupid* by the time Adora finds herself stupidly blurting out: “You don't believe in soulmates?”

Both women turn to glance at her in surprise, and Adora immediately feels heat rush to her cheeks upon realizing what she's just done. Catra narrows her gaze while Scorpia awkwardly scratches the back of her head, and Adora tries her best to inconspicuously scan her surroundings for anyone familiar to rescue her from this conversation.

"Why do you care?" Catra questions, fingers visibly tightening against the plastic of her cup.

Adora swallows rather nervously, not very comfortable with the idea of somehow managing to worsen whatever the two of them have going on between them.

"I— I don't," she stutters, already feeling the beginnings of a nervous ramble coming. Catra's heterochromic gaze burning into her really isn't helping things, either. "I just— I guess I was kind of surprised? Most people I meet can't wait to meet their soulmate or talk to them. Not that that means that *everyone* is like that — I mean, clearly not, since you aren't like that," Catra raises a brow, and Adora takes a shaky breath. "Not that that's a bad thing, it's a good thing! Or, not a good thing, it's more of like a neutral thing I guess? It doesn't matter, you can believe in whatever you want—"

"Okay," Catra finally seems to take pity on her, and Adora's chest heaves for air when she stops. When she finds enough courage to glance back at Catra, she finds that Scorpia seems to have disappeared and leaves only her and Catra on the couch, much to her shock. "I get it." There's a moment of silence before Catra adds, seemingly annoyed, "actually, no, I don't really get what the point of all of that was."

Adora is pretty sure her cheeks are on fire, and it's *a lot* hotter than it was in here a few moments ago. "I'm sorry," she eventually mutters, staring down at the palm of her hands. She blames the immense amount of alcohol consumption for her next line, because there's no way she would've admitted that to someone she's pretty sure hates her while sober. "I— uh, I think I tend to ramble when I get nervous."

She's not sure if she regrets or is pleased with herself for mentioning that when she looks back up to find Catra staring at her with a smirk rather than a look of annoyance. "I make you nervous?"

Adora *truly* doesn't understand how she keeps managing to embarrass herself even more. All that comes out is a nervous *um*, and then she's back to staring at the palm of her hands and *really* wishing her soulmate was painting or drawing or *something* right now. Feeling their presence has always managed to calm her down or make her feel safe.

Catra stares at her for a few more moments, and then stands up. Adora is about to apologize again for probably making Catra so uncomfortable that she feels the need to leave, only to widen her eyes in surprise when Catra tells her to wait here and then disappears within a crowd of people.

A few minutes later she reappears, handing Adora a can of beer.

"What's this?" Adora asks after taking it from Catra's hands— their fingers brush, and Adora swears she feels a jolt of electricity in her veins. Catra lifts a brow, so Adora quickly corrects herself. "I mean, I know what it is, I just mean why are you giving it to me?"

“Consider it a peace offering,” Catra tells her, sitting back down on the other side of her. Adora opens it and takes a sip, letting the bitter taste sit on her tongue for a moment before swallowing. “And an apology for kind of acting like an ass last week.”

Adora glances up in surprise. Catra doesn’t exactly strike Adora to be the type to apologize after an incident like that, and after a moment of scanning her face, Adora realizes that she may be right. If the flush in Catra’s cheeks and the slight slur of her words is anything to go by, then she’s probably *somewhat* drunk. Adora isn’t one to judge, considering she has enough self awareness to understand she’s probably already at that same level of intoxication.

“You’re apologizing?” she eventually asks, not sure if she heard that correctly.

Much to Adora’s disappointment, Catra’s face quickly returns to a scowl. She takes another sip of her own drink and averts her eyes. “Don’t push it, princess.”

Princess, Adora thinks, replaying the way the word rolls off of Catra’s tongue at least seven times in the next few seconds. Feeling a sudden push of bravery — from the alcohol or the pet-name, Adora has no clue — she downs a few gulps of the beer Catra gifted her with before standing up and wiping her sweaty palms on her costume.

“Okay, fine,” she says, glancing back down at Catra, who’s watching her with a bit of curiosity. “Then will you let me give you my own apology for knocking your coffee all over you and join me to dance?”

“Sounds like a pretty shitty apology to me,” Catra tells her, but Adora can tell that she’s hiding a grin behind her cup. She genuinely doesn’t know how she went from a stuttering mess to feeling incredibly determined to get a dance with this girl, but if anyone were to ask, she’d blame it on the alcohol finally setting in.

“Just one?” Adora asks, offering a hand. Catra’s gaze flits back and forth between her hand and her eyes before she eventually gives a mockingly dramatic sigh and takes her hand, using it to pull herself from the couch and to her feet.

“Just one,” she repeats cheerfully, but her eyes are alight with a dangerous fire and Adora doesn’t think she ever wants to look away.

As it turns out, one dance doesn’t mean *one* dance.

Adora doesn’t know what she was thinking upon getting to the dance floor and remembering that she can’t exactly dance. She’s tall and clumsy, her body far more equipped for doing things like participating in sports. However, Catra seems to be the exact opposite, and she keeps her hands to herself for a while until she realizes Adora is very obviously struggling.

She figures she may *really* look stupid, because Catra watches her for a moment before throwing her head back and letting out an adorable high-pitched laugh. After a few moments she inches closer, eyes seemingly a bit darker than before.

“Here,” she breathes, reaching for Adora’s hands and bringing them to wrap around her own petite waist. She says something else, but they’re so close that Adora can smell her perfume, and everything else anyone could be saying sort of flies out of her head.

Catra sets a slow tempo with her hips, rolling them gently against Adora in a way that just barely grazes the line of what could be considered *friendly* dancing. She lifts her head to meet Adora’s eyes and wraps her arms around her neck as the song transitions into a heavy-bass type song, seemingly conveying the words *is this okay* just by the way she’s looking at her. Adora nods, having to bite back a sigh at the feeling of Catra’s nails briefly touching the nape of her neck.

There’s a moment where Catra seems particularly smug at the reaction she seems to have provoked from Adora simply by grazing her nails against her neck, which makes Adora feel a surge of competitiveness. She tightens her grip on Catra’s waist and, in an attempt to copy her movements, rocks her hips back into Catra’s, only to smile when she lets out a squeak of surprise. Apparently, Catra takes the movement as encouragement, because a moment later her hands are roaming further along Adora’s shoulders and arms.

(Everything after that sort of becomes a blur as Adora loses track of anything and everything except for the feeling of Catra’s body pressed against her own.)

Adora’s first thought upon waking up the next morning is that whoever is calling her is an *ass*, and should know by now that you never call your friends the morning after a huge party. The second thing she thinks is that her hair must have finally strangled her to death because her head is so *heavy*, weighing her down in the worst way imaginable. There’s a horrible throb coming from directly between her temples, and the shrill noise of her phone isn’t helping matters in any way. She groans and attempts to roll over to maybe silence her phone or just throw it across the room, only to be stopped by a weight across her chest.

There’s a few moments of blissful confusion before Adora finally opens her eyes and finds Catra’s peaceful face resting a few inches away from her, cheek resting on her abdomen, and the next thing she thinks is *oh, shit*.

After that, everything comes flashing back. Or, at least, *mostly* everything. The suggestion of going to Sea Hawk’s party, the awkward reintroduction Perfuma gave of Catra and Scorpia, drinking all of the drinks suggested by her friends, and playing an insane game of Cards Against Humanity. Things get a little blurry after that, but she thinks she remembers dancing with Catra. After that, it’s just blank.

As if on cue, Catra shifts a bit in her sleep — she scrunches her nose in displeasure for a moment and makes a little noise of discontent, before eventually letting out a small sigh and

relaxing again. Adora only finds the entire thing adorable, which only serves to freak her out even more because this was *not* supposed to happen.

Much to her relief, when she slowly attempts to pull the blanket down a bit she finds that Catra seems mostly clothed, wearing what appears to be one of Adora's old sweatshirts. Adora has also seemed to have changed out of her costume and is wearing an old t-shirt, but if the skin-on-skin feeling is anything to go by beneath the blankets, then neither one of them are wearing pants.

Oh god, Adora thinks, rubbing a hand down the side of her face. Please tell me we didn't sleep together.

Catra is insanely gorgeous. Adora won't deny that, and she won't deny being attracted to her. However, the idea of sleeping with someone else when she has a soulmate out there makes her want to vomit, and the idea of doing it while drunk makes that feeling even worse.

Willing herself to stay calm, Adora stares at the ceiling in an attempt to figure out what the hell she's going to do now. She doesn't want to wake Catra just yet — not until she figures out what she's going to say, or at least until she remembers if they *slept* together or not, but that plan goes out the window the moment Bow *bangs* on the door and asks if she's alright. Or, it's probably more of a quiet knock, but Adora's pounding headache and sensitive hearing only serves to make it sound as if he's pounding on the door.

Based off of the way Catra tenses and let's out a low groan, she feels the same way. She briefly shifts so that she's burying herself further into Adora, calls out a half-asleep *go away*, and then relaxes again.

Adora briefly wonders if Catra really just is that heavy of a sleeper, only to watch as her eyes suddenly snap open. She's adorably ruffled as she lifts her head and confusingly glances around the room, dark hair a wild mess. Adora has to chastise herself for thinking that for the second time, only for that thought to fly out of the window the moment Catra's sleepy eyes meet her own and widen in surprise.

"Oh," she mutters, sitting up completely so that the blanket no longer covers either of them. She briefly glances down at their legs — they're both wearing underwear, Adora realizes, and thanks the universe for *that* — and then grabs the sheet to at least somewhat cover herself, whispering a small *fuck*. She runs a hand through her curls and then meets Adora's eyes once again, still seemingly in the process of waking up. "Did we— did we do it?" she asks, voice rough and raspy from sleep.

"Um," Adora swallows, still laying down and not sure if she wants to just go back to sleep and pretend this never happened, or get up and face reality. "Did we do what?"

Catra scowls. "It's morning. I can't remember shit from last night, and I just woke up in bed next to you without any pants on. What the hell do you think I'm asking?"

Adora frowns. "Are you asking if we..."

"Had sex? Fucked? Slept together? Do you want me to call it something else?"

“It’s too early for this,” Adora groans, bringing an arm up to cover her eyes. “I don’t remember.”

Catra watches her for a moment with a look of grogginess, and then rubs her eyes and lies back down, but this time with a bit of distance between them. Adora watches her in surprise as she shuts her eyes as if she’s just going to go back to sleep.

“Um,” Adora starts, “what are you doing?”

“What does it look like I’m doing?” Catra questions. “I’m tired, and you were right. It’s way too early for this.”

“Catra,” Adora hisses, “I meant it’s too early for your attitude. Are we not even going to talk about this?”

“What’s there to talk about?” she mutters, already seemingly on her way to falling back asleep. “I came to your apartment, and we slept in the same bed. Were you planning on braiding my hair while we discussed boys?”

“*Catra*, do *not* go back to sleep,” Adora snaps, beginning to feel a little freaked out by everything. “We don’t even know if we slept together, and you’re not even at least a little freaked out by that?”

“It’s not that big of a deal,” Catra replies, sleepily. “If you’re actually going to freak out about it, could you wait like fifteen minutes, please?”

“Not that big of a deal?” Adora repeats in disbelief. “Are you serious?”

Eventually, Catra’s eyes open, and she narrows them. “Are you single?”

“I— what does that have to do with anything?” Adora asks, a little taken aback.

“Are you?” Catra repeats.

“Yes?”

“Are you talking to anyone?”

“No?”

“Are you gay?”

“Of course—”

“Okay, so who cares if you slept with someone you barely know?” she eventually concludes, eyes falling shut once again. “People do it all of the time.”

“Well I don’t!” Adora points out, and she thinks she hears Catra mutter *clearly* underneath her breath. “I— I have a soulmate. We both have soulmates,” Catra’s growls underneath her breath, but Adora continues, “and the idea of just randomly sleeping with someone makes me

feel... wrong, okay? So I'm sorry if me freaking out is annoying you, but that's just how I am!"

Catra watches her for a few moments, before sitting back up and shoving the sheets off of her, swinging her legs over the side of the bed and standing up. She finds her jeans, which appear to have been strewn across Adora's desk for some odd reason and begins to pull them up over herself, and it's then that it dawns on Adora that she's probably planning on leaving.

"Wait, are you leaving?" she asks, sort of stupidly. Catra glances at her over her shoulder, a brow raised.

"Isn't that what you wanted?" she mockingly questions.

"But shouldn't we talk about this?" Adora continues, watching as Catra hastily pulls on her socks. She doesn't even bother giving her another glance when she speaks again.

"Talk about what? I came to your apartment, and we slept in the same bed. I know we didn't sleep together, because if we did, you definitely would've been marked up, and you're not." That insinuation makes Adora flush. "And I'm sure I definitely would've remembered kissing you. So no, we didn't sleep together, you clearly regretted this, and I'm gonna leave. Is that enough of a talk for you?"

Adora scratches the back of her head, suddenly feeling sort of guilty for briefly freaking out as Catra laces up her combat boots. "I'm sorry," she sighs, swinging her legs over the side of the bed to match Catra, who's still hurriedly tying her other shoe. "I didn't mean to make it seem like I wanted you to leave, because I don't. You actually seem like a cool person if I'm being honest, and I would really like it if we were friends." Catra finally looks at her, and Adora bites her lip, "well, we don't have to be friends if you don't want to, but I would like it if you didn't hate me at least, considering we'll probably see a bit more of each other."

"Seeing more of each other?" Catra repeats, finally slowing down the process of attempting to quickly tie her shoes.

"Uh, yeah," Adora stutters, "b-because of Perfuma and Scorpia?"

"Right," Catra mutters underneath her breath. After that, there's a few moments of quietness between them, before Adora realizes that she's still not wearing pants and should probably fix that. She grabs a pair of sweatpants out of her dresser and then glances back at Catra, who's looking up at her with a bit of an amused grin.

"What?"

"You know, if makes you feel any better, this is all *your* fault," she tells her. Adora blinks.

"Huh?"

"Yeah," Catra continues. "I remember now. You wanted to dance, and that led to... this. So in reality, none of this would have happened if you hadn't suggested that."

After Catra says it, it seems to come rushing back to Adora. Them dancing, Adora being the one to suggest they get out of there and head back to her apartment. She's not sure what she thought would happen, but she's pretty sure they ended up just changing out of their clothes and falling asleep the moment they hit the bed.

"Oh," Adora mutters, and then feels her cheeks get a bit hot when Catra's smile widens. "Oh. Um, shit. I'm sorry."

Catra chuckles, much to Adora's relief. "It's okay."

There's a few more moment of silence, and then Adora's stomach grumbles. She glances at the clock and realizes that it's already eleven and then thanks the universe that it's a Saturday morning, because she doesn't have any classes today and she only works in the afternoon.

"Hey," Adora starts, nervously staring at her feet because she's never really asked out a girl before. Not that that's what this is, she thinks. "As— as an apology for getting us here, how about we go get breakfast? On me?" she asks, only glancing up at Catra when she's finished speaking. Catra laughs again, and Adora pouts. "Why are you laughing at me?"

"Pretty sure you said something similar to me last night to get me to dance," Catra tells her. "Which is, you know, what landed us in this predicament in the first place." Adora gapes at her, but Catra stands up and continues. "I would say no, but I *am* kind of hungry, and getting some food in my stomach might help cure this hangover."

At that, Adora finally smiles. "So is that a yes?"

"Sure, princess. But only because I'm starving."

It suddenly occurs to Adora that Catra just doesn't want to admit that she might actually like Adora. "Yeah, sure. *Totally* not because you're realizing your initial assumption about me was wrong and you might not actually hate me."

Catra bares her teeth in what's probably an attempt to look threatening, but Adora isn't sure if she can take her seriously after waking up to her head on her chest this morning. "I *do* still hate you."

"Whatever you say," Adora chuckles, combing her fingers through her hair and heading to her closet to change into something somewhat presentable.

It's not until after they leave and are already settled into a booth at the diner down the street that Adora realizes that Catra is still wearing her hoodie.

(The thought, for some strange reason, doesn't make her feel as guilty as it probably should.)

Chapter End Notes

did i decide last minute to write them at a halloween party instead of a bar and then blame it on the characters making a last minute change to their plans? yes

i can promise the next update will actually be out in a reasonable amount of time because i'm already about halfway done with that chapter, so!

yellow

Chapter Summary

Soulmate shenanigans

Chapter Notes

apparently after taking ten months to write chapter two it would then take me less than 3 days to write chapter three and less than a week to get it up and posted 😞

on a more important note u may have noticed the chapter count went down to 8 instead of 10! that's not me cutting the fic shorter or anything, that's just how i see the chapter flow playing out right now. it may change back to 10 or even 9 later on tho

Adora takes her to a diner a few blocks down from her apartment that Catra has passed by a hundred times but never actually been in. The bell rings with something close to familiarity when they enter, which only bewilders Catra, considering she's pretty sure she's literally never been inside before.

"Huntara!" Adora calls after entering behind Catra, and a tall woman behind the counter turns to face them, a smile forming on her face the moment her eyes land on Adora.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in today," Huntara teases, eyes sliding from Catra and then back to Adora. "The usual?" she asks, pouring coffee into the mug of the middle-aged man hunched over the newspaper.

"Two, please," Adora responds, before guiding Catra to a booth and sliding into the opposite side of her. "Have you ever been here before? The food's great."

"I don't know," Catra says, and then shrugs at Adora's raised eyebrows. "I mean, I haven't, but everything about this place seems familiar."

Adora lets a little laugh escape her. "Are you sure you're not still drunk?"

Catra rolls her eyes. "God, this is what I get for being honest."

“I’m joking,” Adora chuckles once again, and then glances around the place. “I come here at least once a week, usually with Bow and Glimmer. Huntara... she’s a good friend.”

She says it simply, but her voice holds a tone that lets Catra know there’s something else there. She knows she shouldn’t push, but just because she’s curious, she pulls a couple of sugar packets out to play with at the same time she asks, “friend?”

Adora stares at her for a moment like she’s not sure what Catra is implying. Then, she blinks in realization and awkwardly coughs. “Of course. Huntara’s older than me, and even if she wasn’t, I already told you I don’t really, uh, date or anything like that.”

Remembrance flashes in Catra’s mind. “Because of your soulmate.”

Adora nods and repeats in confirmation: “because of my soulmate.”

Catra takes a bite of the tortilla chips that had been placed in front of them directly after sitting down. “You’re dedicated to them, huh?” Adora nods again. “Wow. Whoever it is must be lucky.”

They make small talk for about five minutes before their food arrives— Huntara must especially be on the ball this afternoon. Catra supposes it’s because of the steady flow of customers. It’s not too busy inside the diner, but there are a few people in, most of whom look like they could be regulars. Catra supposes that’s what Adora is, anyway.

“So,” Adora starts after two plates full of bacon, sausage, pancakes, and eggs are sat in front of them. Catra takes one bite of the pancakes and decides that Adora was right: the food here *is* great. “If you don’t mind me asking, what about you?”

Catra swallows a mouthful of eggs and bacon, and then lifts a brow. “What *about* me?”

“Are you waiting for the perfect person? Or just... going with the flow?”

“Oh,” Catra mutters. She takes a long sip of the water Huntara brought her after deciding coffee probably wouldn’t help her headache and then responds. “Going with the flow, I guess. I’m not interested in soulmates.”

Adora nods, forking a bite of sausage into her mouth. Her eyes are sparkling with curiosity, and as Catra stares at her for a few more moments, she decides that, for some odd reason, this woman probably isn’t likely to judge her, and therefore it would be safe to at least briefly discuss the topic.

Thankfully, although it seems like Adora would like to ask more, she seems to sense that Catra isn’t exactly up to discussing it, so she changes the subject.

They talk about things that don’t matter, their conversations ranging from things like whether or not tomatoes are a fruit to the one time Catra and a couple of friends let dozens of frogs loose in high school and were never caught.

It’s nice, Catra will admit. Adora is a nice change to the people she usually finds herself talking to. She talks *a lot*, quickly and animatedly like she won’t ever be able to completely

get all of her thoughts out before time runs out. Catra, surprisingly enough, doesn't mind it, especially when she says things that make Adora blush and cause her to go into a nervous ramble, something Catra quickly realizes is probably a habit of hers.

The simple conversation is enjoyable, too. Catra considers herself to be a closed off and reserved person, and the idea of going out to eat to talk to someone she barely knows sounds a bit ridiculous and not at all like something she would do often. She didn't know what she expected, but when nothing gets personal or too heavy, she finds that she's grateful.

They talk even after they've finished eating, and when the conversation naturally comes to an end and they begin to gather their things, Adora insists on paying.

Catra, of course, argues the idea.

"I thought I told you breakfast would be on me," Adora points out, pushing the card Catra keeps trying to hand her back to her. Catra pushes it back.

"We ate a lot," she points out, taking into account that they both had full plates of food, and then got dessert after Adora insisted Catra try one of their pies. "I'll feel bad if you pay for it all."

Adora shakes her head and smiles. "Really Catra, it's okay. Huntara gives me a discount. You can pay for the next one."

"The next one?" Catra asks, surprised. She figures Adora must have not meant to have said that out loud, because she looks just as surprised.

"I— I mean, if you want," she starts, and Catra's starting to wonder if Adora is just a ticking time bomb to a meltdown. "There doesn't have to be a next one, obviously, I mean I don't even know if you *enjoyed* this—"

"Adora," Catra chuckles before Adora can really get going. "That's fine. I'll pay for the next one. Take a deep breath."

Adora does, and then smiles when she seems to register what Catra had said. "Yeah, okay. You can pay for the next one."

Just before they part ways, Catra grips Adora's arm to grab her attention. The taller girl turns to face her with a look of curiosity, and Catra clears her throat and shuffles her feet.

"Uh, thanks, for this," she starts, trying to make this as least awkward as possible. "I appreciated it. I... I guess you're not as bad as I thought."

Adora smiles in assurance. "It was no problem. I mean, I guess I was right, too. You are kind of cool to talk to." Then, she seems to remember the rest of Catra's words, and she suddenly looks incredibly pleased with herself. "So you don't hate me anymore?"

Catra clears her throat, and then in a lighthearted manner, says, "no, I still do. Just... not as much as before."

Adora shakes her head in amusement. They stand there for a few moments, before Catra blinks owlishly, glancing down at herself. “I— uh, I realize I’m still wearing your sweatshirt,” she says, and begins to pull it off. However, before she can get far, Adora stops her with a hand to her shoulder.

“You can keep it if you want,” she tells her. “I mean, it’s really cold out right now, and I’m sure you’re not wearing much underneath. You can give it back next time you see me.”

“Oh,” Catra starts, letting it fall back around her. It’s slightly too big on her, but it’s warm and keeps her somewhat protected from the cold. Suddenly, she feels as if her and Adora have switched roles, and *she’s* the one who’s getting nervous. “Okay. Um, thanks.”

Adora flashes her a smile brighter than the sun. “You’re welcome.”

In the days following, Catra’s soulmate seems to be a little absent. Figuring it has to do with the anniversary and their mother, she gets fairly used to not having to deal with feeling someone else’s emotions at random points of the day and therefore, doesn’t at all anticipate what she wakes up to three days after Halloween.

She doesn’t notice the change at first. Instead, she wakes up at seven in the morning to her alarm blaring on her phone, snoozes it a couple of times, and then gets up and out of bed.

She managed to get away with only scheduling one class this semester on Mondays; however, it’s her sole class that starts at eight in the morning because of the fact that she had signed up a little too late for it. All of her other classes start at ten or later — Catra isn’t a morning person in the slightest — so on Mondays, she usually wakes up, brushes her teeth, and doesn’t even bother putting on more than sweatpants and a sweatshirt before heading to class. When she gets back to the apartment at around nine thirty, she doesn’t hesitate to crawl back into bed and go back to sleep for a couple more hours.

Today she only has a presentation she’s been preparing for a few weeks, and although it isn’t the most exciting thing in the world, Catra’s just glad there won’t be much to do today except that.

She groggily heads into the kitchen to grab herself a Pop-Tart before she gets dressed, rubbing the rest of the sleep from her eyes. When she gains enough sense of her surroundings, she realizes that Scorpia and Perfuma are both already sitting on two separate mats and stretching in their small living room, probably doing something healthy like yoga or meditation. Now that they’ve all met, Perfuma has been over at their apartment pretty much every single day since then. Catra gives a quick greeting just as she’s about to take shelter back in her room, only to come to a sudden halt when Scorpia’s eyes go wide when they land on Catra’s face.

“Uh, what—” she starts, eyes still wide. Perfuma turns to look over her shoulder in Catra’s direction, only for her eyes to widen as well. Unlike Scorpia, however, she seems to have to cover her mouth to stop herself from laughing.

“What?” Catra asks, crinkling the wrapper of the Pop-Tart in her hand. She reaches for her head since they appear to be staring in that direction, but doesn’t feel anything out of the ordinary.

“Your forehead,” Scorpia eventually clarifies, and now that a few moments have passed, she looks like she’s trying not to laugh, too. “Why did you draw that?”

“I didn’t draw anything,” Catra mutters, but it doesn’t take rocket science to figure out why Catra could have something on her skin that she didn’t draw. Leaving both Scorpia and Perfuma to continue to attempt to stifle their amusement, Catra scurries into her bedroom, sets her Pop-Tart onto her dresser, and then heads into the bathroom to look at herself in the mirror.

When she sees what’s drawn on her forehead, she’s pretty sure she almost passes out on the spot.

Briefly, Catra wonders what she could have possibly done to deserve this. She knows that she’s never really been a good “soulmate” to the person she’s connected to, but even *she* doesn’t think she deserves this.

Because there, drawn square in the middle of her forehead with permanent marker, is a big, phallic, dick.

Catra swears she promptly blacks out.

With shaky fingers, she quickly pumps far more soap than what’s probably necessary into her hands, before turning on the sink and beginning to wash her forehead. She scrubs and scrubs and *scrubs*, but all she does is make the skin on her forehead red and irritated. The dick on her face is still there, just as it had been before, confirming what she had already known. Someone didn’t draw this on Catra while she was asleep or something; this was her soulmate’s doing.

She hates her soulmate. She *hates* them for this, and she swears in this moment that she’s never hated their connection more than this.

She can’t go out like this, *especially* considering the fact that she has a presentation in a couple of hours. There’s no way. Catra thinks she might actually die of embarrassment, and then come back to find her soulmate and absolutely *murder* them, because who the fuck would do something like this?

(She knows there’s people out there like that. People who will deliberately leave embarrassing marks on their soulmates skin, as if this is all just some stupid game and there’s not an actual human being on the other side of the end. She just never pegged her soulmate to be one of those people.)

After a few more moments of fruitlessly attempting to wash it off despite the fact that Catra knows it isn't going to do anything, she eventually growls in defeat and hardly bothers with drying her face before exiting the bathroom. Scorpia has appeared in the hallway, probably about to have approached Catra in the bathroom, but Catra ignores her and makes a beeline straight for her room and her desk where she knows plenty of markers and pens reside.

She doesn't care or think about the fact that she's never written to her soulmate before. With tears of frustration in her eyes, Catra grabs the closest marker and begins to scribble on her arm.

what the fuck is wrong with you!!! she writes, probably more forceful than intended because the marker sort of digs into her arm. ***wash that off!!!***

There's no immediate reply like she thought there would be, even after a minute of waiting and pacing back and forth. With a growl of impatience, Catra grips the marker between her fingers and continues writing.

if this is your sick way of getting me to talk to you, I hope you're happy you fucking a

She doesn't get the chance to finish writing the word *asshole* like she originally intended. Instead, she's blocked by Perfuma, who gently grabs her hand to stop her and lays another hand on her shoulder, much to Catra's aggravation.

"Catra," she starts, and Catra glances up to see Scorpia staring at her with concern from the door and Perfuma watching her with sympathy. Catra nearly bolts out of the window because of their looks alone. "Did it occur to you that it might not have been them who drew it?"

Almost immediately after Perfuma says the words, Catra deflates. Despite her current frustration with everything that revolves around her soulmate, she thinks about what she *does* know about them: that they're talkative, determined, and forgetful. They're probably not really a mean person either, considering they've been far more patient with Catra than she thinks she would've been had it been the other way around.

"Fuck," she sighs, pulling out of Perfuma's grip and sitting down on her bed. She almost angrily wipes her tears, more upset over the fact that she had almost started crying in front of someone she barely knows more than anything. She's been working on being more vulnerable over the years, and she's *trying*, okay? "It... it *could* have been them. Maybe they finally got fed up with my lack of responses, or something," she eventually says, weakly. The suggestion isn't a very good one.

"But you don't know for sure," Perfuma speaks again, in that annoyingly soothing voice of hers. "Maybe you should give them a chance to explain themselves before you tell them something you might regret?"

Catra groans, burying her face into the palms of her hands, because she *hates* when other people are right. There's a few moments of silence, and then Scorpia approaches, a tentative smile on her face.

“I know you’re freaking out because you have that presentation, but you might be able to at least somewhat cover it up with makeup,” she reminds her, “that’s if your soulmate doesn’t respond soon. They still could before you have to leave.”

After taking a deep breath, Catra nods. She sits up a little bit, feeling better than she had a few minutes ago, and then sighs. “Okay. Yeah, that’s... okay. Thanks,” she eventually mutters, because although she’s still embarrassed, she kind of feels guilty for immediately jumping to conclusions and going off on her soulmate, even if she’s still pissed off at them.

Catra isn’t sure why she’s surprised when Scorpia suddenly pulls her into a bone crushing hug, and then pulls Perfuma into it, too. But for once, she finds that she doesn’t mind it so much.

-

Adora isn’t sure why or when she decided that going along with one of Mermista and Sea Hawk’s chaotic plans would be a good idea, but nevertheless, she did it anyway.

Sunday night — what’s possibly one of the worst nights to attend a party — she had, of course, attended another party. Bow and Glimmer had been worried about her, pointing out the fact that it was rare that she went to so many parties or got trashed multiple times in such a short period of time, but they also knew the most likely cause was the fact that Adora always liked to forget everything around this time, and there wasn’t much anyone could do to stop her.

If it’s even possible, Adora had gotten even more drunk than she had at the Halloween party. It’s the following morning now, and Adora wakes up to a pounding headache, a horrible taste in her mouth, and a feeling so resentful she almost wants to cry. It doesn’t help that the anniversary of her mother’s death is today, which means she’ll most likely just try to get through the day in a haze, and make the drive to her hometown at the end of the day to pay respects to her mother’s grave.

It’s a lot to take in in just a few moments, so Adora settles back down on Mermista’s couch, grateful she woke up in a familiar setting rather than having been left behind in the party house or something. It’s still dark outside, letting her know that it must be early; she usually wakes up around this time, but not when she’s hungover and most likely fell asleep only a few hours ago. Dimly, she wonders what could have woken her up, because the lack of sleep doesn’t really help to lessen her headache or the anger she’s feeling deep in her bones.

Wait, Adora suddenly thinks. She can feel a phantom marker and a tingly sensation against her arm, and the resentment she’s feeling: it’s not her own.

Shit, Adora thinks, *shit, shit, shit*.

She sits up *way* too quickly, so quickly that her stomach seems to start doing flips and Adora has to take a deep breath to stop herself from vomiting right then and there. She's wearing a sweater and a tight, long sleeved shirt underneath, and after making a few desperate attempts to roll her tight sleeved shirt up to her forearm to see what her soulmate is doing, she eventually just gives up and pulls both her sweater and her undershirt off. If Mermista comes out of her room and sees Adora shirtless on her couch, well. She probably wouldn't even look twice.

Once her vision clears enough to see at least a few feet in front of her, Adora's eyes land on the words on her arm, and she thinks she almost blacks out from the waves of different emotions she experiences in the span of four seconds.

The first thing she experiences is pure, unadulterated joy, because her soulmate is actually *writing* to her with *words*. The first time ever, aside from that time in high school, but that wasn't like this. That was just a simple one worded response to a simple question Adora had; this is their own doing, and it's much more than one word.

The second thing she experiences is confusion as she actually begins to read and registers the words. ***What the fuck is wrong with you!***, the first sentence reads, and then right after is ***wash that off!***, both followed by multiple exclamation marks. Underneath it is ***if this is your sick way of getting me to talk to you, I hope you're happy you fucking a***

Well, Adora's not sure what an *a* is, but based on the previous words and the emotion coming from her soulmate that disappeared a minute or so ago, she doesn't imagine it's anything good.

Adora doesn't know what to think. She's so, *so* happy because her soulmate is *finally* writing to her and their handwriting is so pretty even in it's messy state and she just can't believe this is happening. However, another part of her is confused as to what her soulmate is even talking about, and is feeling hurt by the resentment that she is beginning to understand her soulmate felt toward *her*.

And that— that hurts more than anything.

Adora sits there and takes everything in for a few more moments before it occurs to her that this is her soulmate she's talking about, and that she has the ability to write to them just as she's been doing her entire life. Swinging her legs over the side of the couch, Adora quickly stumbles to her feet and spins around to face the small kitchen, because she's sure Mermista has to have *something* to write with in there. It was clearly the wrong move, because Adora nearly lurches over in pain. Her headache pounds against her eyes, and she gags, nearly spilling the contents of her stomach right then and there.

After a few moments of trying to regain a semblance of control and thinking that she couldn't possibly have chosen a worse time to be hungover, Adora stumbles her way to the kitchen. She opens drawer after drawer, only to end up finding things like utensils and kitchen towels, and nothing she can write with.

"Fuck," she groans, and then makes her way toward Mermista's room. She bangs on the door, growing kind of desperate at this point, and winces when she hears a loud groan coming from

inside.

“Sea Hawk, I swear to *God*—”

“It’s Adora!” she calls, squinting her eyes because *wow* her head is really starting to hurt now. “I need something to write with!”

There’s another loud groan, and then Mermista sighs. “You can open the door, dumbass.”

Adora opens the door, pointedly ignoring Mermista in the bed and darting straight toward the mess that is her dresser. Almost immediately she finds a couple of soulmate pens, and a sigh of relief escapes her. She clicks one of them open and then hover’s it against her arm, rereading the words over again.

What is she even supposed to say to something like that? Hi, you’ve basically never talked to me before and I would really like to know what on earth you’re talking about, but I would also really like to get to know you?

No, Adora thinks. That’s probably just asking for them not to respond.

In the end, hands trembling, she writes the words ***I’m really sorry for making you so upset, but could you please explain what you’re talking about?***

She clicks the pen shut after using it, and then takes a deep breath. So much has happened in the span of five minutes, and Adora thinks she deserves to just sit down with a glass of water and ibuprofen and take everything in for a moment.

It’s then that Mermista chooses to remind Adora that she’s still there. “Um, Earth to Adora?” Adora turns around, and finds Mermista staring at her with a look of confusion. “You going to explain what the hell that was?” Adora blinks, and Mermista rolls her eyes. “Why you came barging into my room at seven in the morning for something to *write with* of all things despite the fact that I know you must be really hungover? And why are you shirtless?”

Adora sighs, and then rubs her forehead. “I at least need water and ibuprofen first, and then I’ll explain.”

Mermista gives her a look of understanding. “There’s some in the cabinet in the bathroom, and feel free to get yourself a glass of water.” There’s a pause, and then she smirks and eyes Adora’s forehead. “And while you’re in the bathroom, wash that penis off of your forehead. I can’t take you seriously with it on.”

Adora blinks. “Wash the *what* off my forehead?”

Mermista lifts a brow. “The penis on your forehead,” then, she pauses and adds, “do you not remember anything from last night?”

Adora squints, and then turns around to face Mermista’s dresser to look at herself in the mirror, and— yep. There’s a giant penis drawn on her forehead.

She's about to respond to Mermista with *what the hell* happened *last night* when she suddenly realizes that *this* must have been what her soulmate was talking about.

As if on cue, she feels a jolt up her arm, and when she lifts it to glance at it, she watches as the words ***the giant dick on your forehead? Did you think it wouldn't appear on mine, too?*** form out.

God, she's such a fucking idiot.

Without another word, she hurries to the bathroom and turns on the sink. After splashing a few handfuls of warm water on her face, she grabs a fistful of soap and a wet washcloth and begins to scrub her forehead, determined to get it off.

Her soulmate didn't seem as angry when they wrote back the second time. They seemed more anxious than anything else, and maybe a little upset, but thankfully not as resentful as before. Adora's just glad that she didn't have to feel that again.

It takes a while — whatever marker was used to draw that must've been permanent or something — but after a few minutes of scrubbing her forehead raw, the drawing begins to disappear. A little while longer and it's almost completely gone, so Adora turns off the water and dries her face and then reaches for the pen she brought into the bathroom with her.

I'm so, so sorry she writes, and hopes that her soulmate can feel how remorseful she feels right now. ***I got really drunk last night, and I swear I didn't draw that on myself. I didn't even know it was there until my friend said something a few minutes ago.***

With a small sigh escaping her, Adora quickly locates the bottle of ibuprofen and then heads to the kitchen to find a glass of water to swallow it down with. By the time she's finished, her soulmate still hasn't responded, and her anxiety starts to flare up again. She's sort of running out of room on the inside of her forearm, so she turns her arm to write on the lateral side. ***I tried my best to get it completely off, is that good enough for right now? If not I'll keep washing it, I just think it was done with permanent***

Adora stops writing the moment she feels her soulmate responding, and can't help but feel excited but apprehensive to see what they'll write next. This isn't exactly how she imagined her first actual conversation with her soulmate going.

it's fine they write back. The resentment and anxiousness are gone for the most part, and Adora takes a deep breath and slides down to sit on the kitchen floor.

She really, *really* hopes she didn't completely fuck up any chance she had to eventually be able to get to know her soulmate. They're so distant and wary, and Adora wouldn't be surprised if they just straight up never let her see any more paintings again after this, let alone talked to her. She can't even begin to fathom the idea, and as she pulls her knees to her chest and leans her head against the cabinet door with a groan, she hopes she never has to experience it.

After a few minutes of simply sitting there, she reaches for the marker on top of the counter once again and then, deciding that it's not like this situation can really get any worse, writes ***I***

didn't completely fuck up, right? It's totally fine if you still don't want to talk, but are you gonna stop everything?

As one minute turns into two, and two turns into ten after Mermista emerges from her bedroom and pointedly looks at Adora until she explains what just happened, there's still no response from her soulmate.

Adora decides in that moment that there's just no way this day could get any worse.

-

It's not for a lack of trying, but Catra is unable to go back to sleep after class. It's a bad kind of awake: the sort where even though she's sleepy, she can't seem to actually rest.

Her presentation had gone fine. Although the dick drawn on their forehead wasn't completely gone, her soulmate had gotten it off for the most part, and it was easy to quickly cover the rest with a bit of powdered makeup. She can't stop thinking about the situation; how she knew her soulmate was being honest due to the genuine remorse she felt from them when they wrote back to her, and the fear they felt toward the end. They're probably scared she'll ignore them forever.

And *God*, the entire situation just makes her feel so fucking guilty and she hates it.

After tossing and turning for half an hour, Catra glances at the clock and realizes it's just past ten. With a groan, she crawls out of bed and into the shower; it helps, slightly, but even after turning the knob so the water is a little colder than usual, she still doesn't feel completely alert.

This, Catra decides, is a job for espresso.

Since the cold front that hit last week still won't clear up for another couple of days, Catra pulls her favorite flannel over the thick sweatshirt she's already wearing, and then makes her way toward the kitchen. Much to her disappointment, Entrapta still hasn't seemed to fix their keurig, so Catra searches their fridge for a soda or anything with caffeine, only to come up empty handed.

With a sigh, she heads back to her room, not quite sure what to do. Her eyes land on the papers scattered across her desk, and she knows she *should* work on midterm reviews, but she already knows that without much energy and the thoughts of her soulmate lingering in the back of her mind, she isn't going to get very far with that. Next to the papers is her sketchbook, which is currently open to the page of the hummingbirds sketch she had started on Halloween and hasn't finished yet. Strewn across the chair in front of her desk is Adora's

hoodie, and after seeing both of those objects one after the other, she decides she knows *exactly* where to go.

With a smile tugging at the corner of her lips, Catra grabs her sketchbook and sets it in her messenger bag and then pulls the hoodie over her head. If she's going to take it with her to the coffee shop, she may as well wear it for extra protection on the walk over.

The walk is short and brisk, and it's not until she's about a block away that she realizes she has no idea whether or not Adora is actually working today. When she opens the door to the coffee shop, the thought flies out of her head after seeing Adora is the one taking orders behind the counter.

Her blue eyes look surprised when she spots Catra as she steps inside, but she gives her a warm smile when she joins the line. There's a couple people in front of her and it takes a few minutes for Catra to get to the front of the line, but when she does, Adora is staring at her with an amused grin.

"What?" Catra asks, trying her best to avoid Adora's eyes by pretending to read the chalkboard menu behind her.

"You're wearing my hoodie," Adora points out, smug. Catra blinks, and then glances down.

"Oh. Uh, yeah. That's why I'm here."

"Sure," Adora teases. Catra frowns.

"I'm serious."

"Yeah, okay," Adora tells her; again, she doesn't seem convinced.

"I *am*," Catra repeats through gritted teeth, suddenly grateful that her skin is dark enough that it's not obvious that she's flushed or embarrassed. "You know what? This is horrible service."

Adora snorts, and Catra relaxes when she realizes she's just joking. "Sorry, sorry, I'm just teasing. What would you like?"

"A red eye," Catra blurts out. "That has a lot of caffeine, right?"

With a brow lifted, Adora grabs a cup from somewhere to the left of her. "Long morning?" she asks, typing something into the register in front of her.

Catra groans. "You have no idea."

"Want to tell me about it?" Adora prompts, and after a few moments of tapping the touch screen in front of her, she looks up at Catra with genuine eyes.

Briefly, Catra almost does tell Adora about it. About how she woke up, already not in the best mood due to the fact that she's not a morning person and has never particularly enjoyed waking up at seven, only to find a giant fucking dick on her face because of her connection with her soulmate. Ultimately, she eventually decides against it; Adora probably doesn't care

that much, and if the slightly visible circles underneath her eyes are anything to go by, then she hasn't had the best morning, either.

"Just tired," she mutters, "and cold. I hate this weather."

Adora nods. "The cold front should be gone soon, and then we'll probably have a few more weeks before it actually gets cold. I actually—" she cuts herself off when the sound of someone clearing their throat sounds behind her, and it suddenly occurs to Catra that they're in a public setting, and she's probably holding up the line. "Uh, sorry," Adora politely tells the man behind her, while Catra simply rolls her eyes. "Anything else?"

"I'll take..." Catra scans the display of baked goods. She isn't much of a breakfast person either, but it's already almost noon, and she hasn't eaten. Her appetite was sort of ruined after the events of this morning and she never ate that Pop-Tart. "A banana muffin."

Adora extracts the muffin with a pair of tongs, and then puts it in a small paper bag and hands it over. "That'll be five sixty, and I'll get your coffee out to you in a few minutes."

"Thanks," Catra tells her after paying, muffin in hand.

She chooses the same table as before, nestled into the back and near the fireplace where it's more quiet and warm. The coffee shop is a little busier than it was the last time she came, but as she pulls out her earbuds and sketchbook, she finds that she doesn't really mind.

She flips her sketchbook open to the page with the hummingbirds and then stares at it for a few moments. The sketch itself is done, depicting a mother and young hummingbird sitting together as one on top of a flower. It still needs to be colored, and Catra, although not sure if she actually wants to show her soulmate, is determined to get it finished today.

She's in the process of pulling out her colored pencils when she sees Adora approaching her out of the corner of her eye with her coffee in hand. Catra makes sure to shut her sketchbook and pull one of her headphones out of her ears, greeting the blonde with a smile.

"Personal delivery?" she teases, making a point out of the fact that everyone else has to get up to retrieve their drinks when their names are called out after their drink is finished.

"Just for you," Adora tells her as she sets Catra's drink down, and then sits down across from her. "I didn't know you were an artist," she adds, nodding to the sketchbook.

Catra takes a sip of her coffee, relishing in the taste and the warmth it provides her hands, and then hesitantly nods. Usually, this only results in people asking to see her sketchbook, and then her awkwardly explaining that she doesn't like to show people her personal drawings. "Yeah, I— I mean, I hope I am, considering I'm an art major."

Adora's eyes widen. "You're an art major? That's so cool! I'm majoring in medical science."

Catra's eyebrows raise to her forehead. "Wow. Didn't know you had it in you, princess. Going for your doctorate degree?"

Adora shakes her head. “Master’s. I think I wanna be a personal trainer, but I’m not completely sure yet.”

Personal trainer; Catra thinks, eyes very briefly flashing to Adora’s arms. “So that would explain why you’re so fit.”

There’s a moment where Adora blinks, and then Catra’s word registers and she sort of puffs out her chest.

Catra rolls her eyes, amused. “Don’t let it get to your head, princess. Your ego is already big enough as it is.”

Adora simply grins, and then flashes a look over her shoulder. “I should probably get back to work, but—” she eyes Catra’s apparel again— “feel free to keep the hoodie if you want. It’s kind of old and too small for me now anyway, so.”

“Okay,” Catra nods as Adora stands up. “Uh, thanks,” she tells her, and finds she genuinely means it.

Adora gives her a mock salute, and then heads back to the counter. Catra watches her as she goes, and then eventually opens her sketchbook back up to the hummingbirds. After staring at it for a few minutes, she pulls her pencils out and begins to add the color.

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When her afternoon shift at the coffee shop is done, Adora makes a very large coffee of her own, goes home to change into some more comfortable clothes, and then hops into the car she borrowed from Perfuma to make the four hour drive back to Eternia.

After the mess that was this morning, Adora had eventually curled up and, after tossing and turning for nearly an hour, managed to fall back asleep and get a few more hours of sleep in before work. It was partly because of how sick she felt from her hangover, and partly because of the fact that she knew she would need the strength to get through the day.

Just like they do every year, Bow and Glimmer both offered to make the drive with her, and just like every year, Adora politely declined. Although she appreciates the offer and knows the company may even help, this is always a journey that, for some odd reason, she feels more comfortable doing on her own.

Thankfully, the traffic isn’t as bad as she thought it would be. By the time she makes a quick stop at the grocery store a few blocks away from the graveyard, the temperature has dropped significantly and the sun is setting in the distance. She spends a few minutes buying a bouquet of flowers, and then finishes the drive to the graveyard.

When she parks the car and gets out, she makes sure to tighten her jacket around her shoulders to shield herself from the cold. To her relief, there's no sign of anyone else in the graveyard, and she makes her way through the maze of creepy tombstones and towards her mother. There's a fresh bouquet of flowers — white carnations, Adora thinks — sitting by the gravesite when she reaches it, confirming what Adora already knew; that her grandmother paid her respects earlier today.

Placing the water lilies — her mother's favorite flower, and white for her favorite color — down next to Razz's bouquet, Adora sits down and gets comfortable on the cold and slightly damp grass below her, eyes stuck on the words that read *Mara Grayskull, loving mother, wife, and daughter.*

“Hey, mom,” she starts softly, feeling a different kind of sadness deep in her bones. “Sorry it's been so long since I last visited...”

Adora stops at the local McDonald's on her way to her childhood home — now conveniently, her grandmother's house — due to her stomach protesting the lack of food and her desire to eat something quick. She eats in the car, feeling slightly out of it ever since leaving the graveyard, but glad she got the chance to stop by. Talking to her mother has always helped somewhat fill the empty hole in her chest that comes along with this day.

By the time she arrives at Razz's house, it's almost ten at night. Razz usually goes to sleep early, so Adora isn't surprised that all of the lights except for the dining room one are off when she gets inside, a small backpack with the necessities she'll need to spend the night slung over her shoulder. The place smells of pie, and Adora gets a warm feeling in her chest when she makes her way to the kitchen and sees a freshly cooked pie sitting underneath a glass covering with the note *For Mara and Adora* sitting next to it. They haven't talked in a few days, but they follow the same routine every year, so Razz would've already known she was coming.

She's showered, changed into her pajamas, and sitting at the table with a small slice of pie in front of her — still kind of going through the motions in a daze — when she feels the telltale tingle on her arm. Adora nearly drops her fork in surprise, but then quickly glances at her wrist.

this might be a weird question, her soulmate starts, and Adora feels incredibly anxious yet relieved as she awaits for what her soulmate is going to write. ***but is your stomach covered?***

Well, Adora thinks. She's not quite sure what she expected them to say — well, she didn't really expect *anything* from them after this morning — but it definitely wasn't that.

Yeah? she writes back after locating a marker, a little confused, but intrigued, and definitely happy that she probably didn't completely ruin everything after this morning. Their markings from this morning are still slightly visible, faded from the events of the day.

okay appears right underneath the old words tattooed into Adora's skin. ***I'm going to paint something, but don't look until I tell you to, alright?***

Oh, Adora thinks, not quite sure what to make of the situation. ***Okay. I won't.***

u swear?

Adora isn't sure why, but she feels like this is something important. ***I promise.***

There's a long period of nothing, and then Adora feels the first stroke of a paint brush against her stomach. It's a strange feeling, and almost tickles; Adora doesn't think her soulmate has ever really painted on their stomach, usually sticking to the arms and, on occasion, their legs.

(She can't help the happiness that blossoms in her chest.)

Feeling the presence of her soulmate is always nice, but this is different. Usually when they paint, Adora feels a sort of troubled feeling from them, as if they're painting to calm or distract themselves. Sometimes, Adora will ask if they're okay or remind them that she's here if they need her, even if she knows she won't get a response.

Sometimes, Bow had told her, it's good to just let them know. They may appreciate it even if they don't show it.

This time, they're the ones who seem calm, and all Adora feels is a collected and put together feeling from them. The tranquility they're radiating almost makes her want to just lay down and close her eyes, calming the storm she's been feeling within her all day.

When she's finished eating, she quickly washes her plate, covers the pie back up, and makes her way down the hallway to her room. It's only been about a quarter of an hour since they started, and based on previous experiences, this could take anywhere from an hour to four. Adora doesn't mind waiting; in fact, as she turns off all of the lights except for the bedside lamp and crawls into bed, she wishes that this feeling could last forever.

Closing her eyes, Adora breathes in the familiar smell of her childhood house, focuses on the soothing feeling of the paint brush against her stomach and the presence of the person she desires to talk to the most, and falls asleep.

A little while later, Adora wakes up to a new set of words across her arm. She squints, eyes blurry with sleep, and reads the words ***okay, u can look now*** in black ink, along with a smudge of paint next to it that looks to be accidental.

Eager, Adora sits up and yawns. She glances at the alarm clock on her bedside table and realizes it's just past two in the morning; her soulmate has been gone since nearly ten. She knows they must have just finished because she can still feel their lingering presence, growing weaker by the second and quickly slipping from her hold.

After taking a deep breath, Adora peels off her t-shirt and glances down.

What she sees is *beautiful*.

Pinks, light and dark, like cherry blossoms on a warm summer day, the setting sun on a chilly autumn night. Pastel whites and blues, an ocean of color. Greens and yellows, like the forest after it rains as the sun comes out to warm the earth. Reds and oranges, like a gentle flame in a forest, warming her in even the coldest of weather.

They all move together in a dance of passion, breathing as one and frozen in time. Within it all are two separate hummingbirds, the same colors as the background but easily standing out against it. They're nestled against each other, sitting on top of a large flower, the smaller one being protected by the larger one.

Adora doesn't think she's ever seen anything more beautiful than this.

And when she sees the words ***i know this isn't much, but i really am sorry about your mom, and i hope this helps a little bit. and if it helps prevent you from getting drunk and getting shitty things drawn on your forehead in the future, well then that's just a plus*** written just below the painting and closer to her chest, she starts crying.

She has no idea whether or not it's from immense joy or sadness, but once she starts, she can't stop.

-

It's a few minutes shy from four in the morning now, and Catra's been laying on her bed with dried paint on her stomach and chest for the past couple of hours, staring up at the ceiling.

She doesn't know what she's doing.

Back when her soulmate had first told her about their dead mother and the whole hummingbirds thing, Catra had tried her best not to focus on it, and likes to think that she succeeded for the most part. Later that day when she was searching for inspiration, she had found herself mindlessly beginning the drawing. Even after realizing what she was doing, she hadn't intended to actually show it to her soulmate.

(She feels bad enough about ignoring them all of the time. The paintings she does on her body were always for herself, not for them, but by doing this, she's just going to create a greater attachment, and she knows that's not fair to them.)

But then this morning happened. Catra was, and still is, a little upset at them for being so reckless, but she understands that it wasn't really their fault. After getting home from class,

she reread their conversation, and couldn't take her attention away from the words *I got really drunk last night*.

Catra isn't dumb; she knows it has to do with whatever it is they're going through right now. That, combined with the sadness and fear she felt from them as they wrote that final sentence out to her, and she knew she wouldn't be able to resist trying to at least somewhat comfort them. The entire thing makes Catra feel *stupid*, because why does she feel so guilty all of the time now? Why does she feel so compelled to help someone she doesn't even know, when she's convinced she doesn't even care about them?

It's irrational, and it's stupid, and it's dumb, and for once, Catra realizes that she doesn't really care.

Despite the fact that the light on her desk is still on and the dried paint on her stomach is definitely going to lead to her having to wash her sheets tomorrow if she doesn't wash it off now, Catra shuts her eyes.

Just this once, she tells herself as she feels herself begin to fall asleep. Just this one time, she's not going to run from her soulmate.

Just this once.

*

orange

Chapter Summary

Catra and Adora have some bonding time, and Adora has a bit of an epiphany

Chapter Notes

hoo boy. all i can say is enjoy the softness of this chapter and then strap on ur seatbelts bc we're in for a wild ride

also i genuinely don't know where all this inspiration is coming from but i wrote a little roommates fic a few days ago, check it out if u would like [here](#).

too shy to say, but i hope you stay

Adora wakes up at nine forty-five a.m. on a Tuesday morning, feeling well rested for the first time in nearly a week. There's sunlight pouring in through the windows, and Adora finds herself embracing it, thankful for the warmth it provides her room.

She doesn't feel nearly as bad as she has these past few days. It's almost as if now that the anniversary has passed, a huge weight has been lifted off of her shoulders. This happens every year, so Adora isn't exactly surprised. However, she thinks as she lifts her shirt up and sees the painting from last night — confirming that it was all real and not some self-sufficient dream —, the presence of her soulmate last night probably helped smooth things over, and she really thinks crying it out helped, too.

Part of her still can't believe the entirety of yesterday was real. Too many things happened in one day for her to process it all, and to be quite honest, Adora's just glad she managed to get through it with at least a semblance of her sanity intact. With a yawn, she rolls over to reach for the marker she left on her nightstand last night and scribbles the words ***thank you for last night. I know it may not have seemed like much, but it really helped.***

She thinks back to how she hadn't really thought her soulmate would even care when she told them about her mother. It gives her confidence that maybe they have been reading everything she's written to them this whole time, and maybe they just never knew what to say.

She wants to add something like *I had no idea you were that considerate.*

She wants to add something like *You and your art are beautiful. Please don't ever stop creating it.*

She wants to add something like *I want to get to know you, even though I know you'll break my heart.*

Instead, she closes her marker and sets it back on the nightstand. She doesn't write any of those things, mostly out of fear of scaring her soulmate away, but also because she can hear the clattering of pots and pans coming from the kitchen, telling her that Razz is up and probably about to make breakfast. When she gets out of bed she realizes the baseball-sized knot of anxiety that's made residency in her chest for the past few days is finally gone, and Adora feels like she can breathe again.

Adora leaves that same day at around one; she's going to have missed all of her classes from the day, but she had already notified her professors that she would a few weeks ago so she'd be able to catch up on notes by herself once she got back home. By the time she gets back to Bright Moon it's four in the afternoon.

She hops in the shower while playing music on her phone. Much to her surprise, the painting is still there, and she takes comfort in not having to worry about messing it up as she cleans her body.

When she gets out of the shower she dries herself off, before standing in front of the mirror to admire it again from a different angle. Adora understands she's a little biased, but it really is one of the most gorgeous and detailed paintings she's ever seen. Every time she looks at it she finds something new, and not really wanting to completely cover it up, she takes advantage of the fact that she's home alone and simply puts on a pair of joggers and a sports bra, and then uses the rest of the day to laze around and catch up on her notes.

A few nights later, just after she's gotten home from a rigorous workout session at the gym — she may be off season right now, but she's not about to start slacking — she gets a message from her group chat with Glimmer and Bow.

We're gonna get dinner on campus tonight, the message from Bow reads, followed by, want to join us? Or if you don't feel like leaving, we can bring food back to the apartment!

After a couple of minutes of internal debate, Adora responds with *sure, give me fifteen minutes and I'll be there.* Even though she lives with Bow, he seems to have been a bit busy recently, so she hasn't seen much of him since she got back from Eternia, nor has she really seen Glimmer.

They wait for her to arrive before they all get their food. Adora gets something simple, and when she sits down, Bow and Glimmer are staring at her in concern.

“What?” Adora asks, confused.

Glimmer blinks, like it should be obvious. “How are you doing?” she prompts. She doesn’t have to specify; Adora knows what she’s talking about.

“Fine,” Adora answers, honestly. “It’s fine. I’ve— I’ve come to peace with it, as you both know, and it’s usually just the days leading up to it that are hard. I’m alright now.”

Both Bow and Glimmer watch her for a few moments like they’re trying to figure out whether or not they believe her. It goes like this every year, despite nothing really ever changing.

Except, this year, something might have changed. “Actually, uh,” Adora starts, a little hesitant because she knows that they’ll both react strongly, “my soulmate kind of... we kind of talked.”

Bow’s jaw, predictably, drops to the floor. Glimmer, also predictably, shrieks. “What?!”

(Adora’s just glad that it’s moderately busy here, because no one really pays them any mind.)

“Are you serious? Your soulmate actually talked to you?” Bow asks, and now there’s wide, open mouthed smiles forming on both of their faces. Adora can’t help but laugh a little, too — it hadn’t quite set in until maybe yesterday, when she had been laying down in her bed and it occurred to her that her soulmate hadn’t painted or drawn in a while; that their last interaction had been an actual conversation.

“Yeah,” she breathes. “I still can’t really believe it myself, but yeah, they did.”

Bow and Glimmer share a short glance, and then Glimmer’s speaking. “Tell us everything.”

And so, Adora does. She tells them about how she got completely trashed Sunday night and woke up Monday morning to an unpleasant feeling from her soulmate and them being — understandably — angry with her, and how she pretty much thought she ruined any possible chances she had until that night.

“Wait,” Glimmer interrupts, “this happened on Monday? This happened on Monday and you’re just now telling us?”

“In my defense,” Adora points out, “a lot happened that day, and I think I needed a few days to process it all.” Glimmer seems to relax after that, muttering *fair* underneath her breath. “Plus, I haven’t even really seen you two until today, so.”

“So?” Bow asks, and he’s still smiling and tapping the table nervously as if this is one of those long novels he enjoys reading and can’t wait to find out what happens at the end. “Did you two end up talking more?”

“Yeah,” Adora answers, and she feels happiness bubble in her chest just like every other time she thinks about what happened. “I had already told them about my mom, and that night, they painted something really, *really* special, and it was just... it was amazing, guys. It felt so great.”

Just thinking about it makes Adora want to grab the closest writing utensil and start writing to them just to hopefully feel their presence again, but she had already decided that it would probably be best to wait for them to make the next move.

Both Glimmer and Bow flash her another wide smile, and Adora knows they feel just as happy simply by watching her experience this.

Twenty minutes later, after Adora's finished her food and is waiting for the other two to finish, she's half listening to whatever Bow and Glimmer are saying while scrolling mindlessly through her phone when Glimmer suddenly cuts herself off and says, "oh, God. Look who it is."

Adora turns to look over her shoulder in the direction Glimmer's staring, only to see Catra — who Adora hasn't seen since she visited the coffee shop a few days ago — sitting a few tables down from them. She looks, to put it simply, like she's completely freaking out, holding her head in the palm of her hands and staring at her phone.

"Who?" Bow asks, although Adora doesn't tear her gaze away from Catra, feeling a bit of concern rise in her chest for the other girl.

"Catra," Glimmer hisses. "You know, the girl who was a total bitch after Adora accidentally spilt her coffee on her? We told you about that, right?"

"You mean the one Adora keeps hanging out with?" Bow asks, and Adora winces.

Glimmer's eyebrows just about raise to her hairline. "You're hanging out with her?" she asks Adora, clearly surprised. "After what she did? Didn't you hate her afterwards?"

Adora gives a subtle glare at Bow, and then sighs. "No. I, uh, got to know her at the Halloween party last week, and she's actually pretty cool." She turns to glance back at Catra. "I think we're friends now?"

Glimmer's eyes are wide in disbelief, but Bow is wearing an encouraging smile. "That's great, Adora! Especially because of the fact that she's one of Scorpia's friends, and that means she could also be one of Perfuma's friends now."

Adora nods, still staring at Catra. She doesn't look like she's alright, so Adora makes a spur of the moment decision. "Listen, Glim," she starts, looking back at her friends, "I'll finish explaining later, okay? For right now— just give me a moment."

Adora can still hear Glimmer's saying something that sounds like "you better be explaining later because we are *not* done talking about this," by the time she's a few tables down, approaching Catra and the apple she has in front of her that's only half eaten.

“Hey,” she greets, only to add, “sorry, sorry,” when Catra jolts in surprise in her seat. She doesn’t snap or tell Adora to fuck off or go away — it’s not like Adora expected her to since she’s pretty sure Catra enjoys her company now and doesn’t actually hate her anymore — but considering the state she seems to be in right now, she wouldn’t have been *that* surprised. But, because she doesn’t, Adora takes that as an invitation to sit down, nervously rubbing her hands below the table. Suddenly, she hopes she didn’t read into this too much; she hopes Catra actually sees her as a friend, and wasn’t just talking to her to be nice or something.

“Uh, hey,” Adora repeats, and by the time she realizes that she’s already said that, it’s too late. Catra still doesn’t say anything, so Adora adds, “are you okay?”

It’s a bit of a stupid question. Clearly, Catra’s *not* okay, and she almost wouldn’t blame Catra if she responded with something sarcastic, but instead, the other girl just lets out a small sigh. She turns her phone over, buries her head into her palms, and groans.

“It’s— it’s nothing, really. I just— for my art design class, one of our final projects for the semester is to create something that involves the model of a living person — like, painting, sculpture, whatever — and for that I would need a model, but we’re not allowed to use the same model in that class more than once and I didn’t realize that until, like, ten minutes ago. I had already finished the project using Scorpia, but that won’t work because I’ve already used her before; same with Entrapta.” Adora can only assume Entrapta is her and Scorpia’s other friend. “So now I’m really stressed because it’s literally due tomorrow, and I don’t have anyone, nor do I have the paper and easel with me I have to use, and…” Catra trails off, lifting her head and looking at Adora with a bit of guilt. “Uh— sorry, I realize that was kind of a lot and you probably don’t care—”

“I’ll model for you,” Adora blurts out, and Catra freezes. Adora blinks, and not for the first time, wonders why she doesn’t ever think before she speaks. Catra still hasn’t said anything, so Adora laughs sort of nervously. “I mean, if you want me to, anyway. I don’t know, maybe you had someone else in mind, and that’s totally cool. I’m cool either way. Super cool. Cool as a cucumber.”

Catra bites her lip, and then she laughs that high pitched, squeaky little laugh of hers, head thrown back and teeth exposed. Adora is a bit surprised because she didn’t really think anything about this was funny, until it suddenly occurs to her that she actually said *cool as a cucumber*. Her face flushes, because what the fuck is her problem? Who would even say something like that?

Once Catra seems to get over her initial amusement, she meets Adora’s eyes, but she’s still smiling. “Cool as a cucumber,” she repeats, and Adora groans.

“Listen, I came here to help you, but if you’re just going to be mean to me I guess you don’t *actually* need my help—”

“No, no,” Catra chuckles, reaching for Adora’s wrist when she pretends to pull away. Her expression turns a bit more serious. “Actually, that would be really great, but you realize you would have to be still for like, an hour, right?”

Adora raises a brow. “And?”

“I know we haven’t known each other for long, so feel free to correct me if I’m wrong, but you don’t exactly seem like someone who could sit still for longer than five minutes.”

“I am perfectly capable of sitting still for an hour,” Adora grumbles, before adding, “Does it have to be silent?”

Catra shakes her head. “No. We can talk.”

“Okay, then I should be fine,” Adora tells her. It might be a *bit* of a challenge, but she can manage.

A small smile pulls at the corner of Catra’s lips. “Okay. Okay, yeah. That sounds good.”

Adora returns the smile, and then turns her phone back on. It’s just past eight, and when she glances at her friends, she realizes they look like they’re about to leave. They keep flashing obvious glances over to their table though, and Glimmer looks like she’s debating on whether or not she should march over here and confront them both herself.

Before that can happen, Adora quickly waves her hands in an inconspicuous attempt to tell them they can leave. Glimmer narrows her eyes, but Bow ultimately wraps an arm around her shoulders, flashes a thumbs up at Adora, and they leave.

When she looks back at Catra, she’s finishing her apple and staring at the time on her phone. “So, uh,” she starts after swallowing, “since I don’t have all the materials I need at home, I kind of need to get into the art building, but I’m pretty sure it’s locked right now.”

“Well, that’s okay. Do they have what you need at the store?”

Catra grins. “I was thinking we could just sneak into the building.”

“You have the keys?” Adora questions. When Catra nods, Adora’s brows lift to her hairline. “I thought only security and people like that had the keys. How did you even get them?”

Catra’s grin widens, dark and dangerous and attractive. “Someone owes me. It’s a long story, but I have them for the rest of the semester, so,” she wiggles her brows, a stark contrast to how she was just five minutes ago, and it’s then that Adora realizes that behind all of the sarcasm and sharp edges, Catra really is a fun person to be around. “If you’re up to it, we can go right now.”

Adora watches her for a few moments. “God, you’re so cool.”

Catra rolls her eyes and shakes her head, but there’s an amused smile on her face. “You’re ridiculous.” Then, without another word, she stands and offers her hand to Adora. “You coming?”

Adora takes it.

“So, how is this going to work?”

Sneaking in hadn't been *that* eventful, at least until they just barely managed to avoid running into one of the janitors on the first floor and Adora had nearly blown their cover by tripping and falling onto the floor in their mad dash to get away before they were spotted and inevitably kicked out. Catra, laughing so hard she could barely run herself, had pulled her along to the third floor just to put a bit of distance between them. Now they're in some room that looks more like a small classroom rather than a lecture hall, and Adora glances around as she waits for Catra to finish setting up her easel and materials. It's not very bright here; in order to avoid being caught should someone pass by, they had only turned on a couple of dim lamp lights in the corner of the room instead of turning on the actual lights on the ceiling.

“Well, the project requires us to have a, quote unquote, *creative artistic background*, not just the model,” Catra explains. “For Scorpia, I painted her sitting in a field, but that also took, like, six hours to finish.” Adora blinks in surprise. “Since we're a bit limited on time here, I was thinking I could just put you on a bridge over the ocean or something similar so it won't require as much detail as all that grass or something.”

Adora watches as Catra sets everything up, and then says: “You don't have to feel rushed, you know. I'm good for however long this takes.”

Catra wipes her hands on her jeans after she's finished setting everything up, and then glances up at Adora. There's a look of admiration on her face, before she softly says: “Okay.” Without another word, she disappears into the closet, before reappearing a minute or so later with something that looks like a small gate that's probably used to block off the stairs or classrooms. Adora's not sure why it was in *there* of all places, but assumes they use it for reasons like this when Catra pulls it out and she realizes there's paint all over it.

“Here,” Catra hands her a pair of gloves to put on after slipping on her own, “so you don't have to touch whatever chemicals are probably on this. Now, lean forward like— yeah,” she tells Adora, showing her how she wants her to pose. Then, she goes to stand by her easel, tilting her head in thought, before coming back to stand by Adora. “Cross your wrists like this, and lean your head a bit more forward,” she directs. Adora does what she says, and watches as Catra takes her stance back next to the easel. A smile lights up her face. “Perfect. Okay, let me know if you get uncomfortable or anything or want to stretch, cause we might be here for a while.” Adora nods, and Catra sits down on the stool she pulled behind her easel. “Now try not to move.”

Thankfully, it's not awkward like Adora feared it might be.

For the first ten minutes or so, it kind of is; the heat of Catra's gaze makes Adora fidget as she uses her pencils to sketch everything out, staring silently at Adora. After a while, Adora decides to take advantage of her ability of not knowing when to shut up and starts talking about whatever comes to mind, and Catra hums and nods along, and occasionally gives a worded response.

It's been about twenty minutes, and Catra's just told her that she's done with the rough sketch and can start the actual painting soon when, in the middle of her rant about comic books, it

occurs to Adora that Catra needs this for a class project, and there's a good chance other people are going to see this.

"Wait," Adora says, watching Catra as she sets her paints out on her palette. "This is a class project, right?"

"Yeah?"

"So other people are going to see this?"

"Yeah," Catra nods, dipping her paintbrush in an old cup of water she filled it with, and then glancing at Adora in concern. "Is that alright?"

Adora hums. "No, it's fine, honestly. I'm just a little surprised because you seemed like the type of person to be more private about your art."

"I am," Catra admits as she drags the first stroke of her paintbrush against the easel. "But it's kind of hard to be private with my art when a good amount of it is responsible for my grades."

"True," Adora agrees under her breath, thinking. After a moment, she adds, "you're going to try and make a living out of art, right?" Catra nods, clearly a bit distracted, but she opens her mouth to speak after a few moments.

"I'm—I'm trying," she admits, softly. "I just—it's hard when I'm so private about it, I guess?"

Adora bites her lip, watching as Catra furrows her eyebrows and narrows her eyes in concentration, gaze flicking from her to the easel. She's suddenly struck with how intimate this all is, and she shivers just from the thought, only to freeze when Catra mutters a quiet *stay still* in a gentle, raspy voice. It makes Adora wonder if this is how she sounds at night or even in the morning, when she's still half asleep and the sky becomes aflame with the rising sun.

It's at that moment that Adora decides that she wants to *know* Catra. She wants to know the way Catra likes her coffee in the mornings and whether or not she sleeps with socks to bed; wants to know what her favorite color is and how she ended up at Bright Moon University; wants to know why she's so private about her art.

"Um," Adora starts after a few moments of comfortable silence, feeling like Catra's stare has only grown more intense the longer they stand there. Catra takes her eyes off the easel to meet Adora's eyes, and they're beautiful and gentle and full of concern. Adora bites her lip, before finally asking, "if you don't mind me asking, why are you so private about your art?"

Catra licks her lips. She stares at her easel for a hard moment, almost as if she's spotted an imperfection in the painting. Adora's about to add something like *I'm sorry, you don't have to answer that if you don't want to* when Catra seems to relax, and leans forward to bring her brush back against the easel. "I just... I just think it's too much. It's too personal, and when I

create things like that, I feel like I'd be exposing too much of myself to strangers if I were to just... show it off."

Adora thinks Catra's feelings are valid, and they make sense, but— "isn't that what art is supposed to be like? Showing emotional parts of yourself through it? Conveying how you feel?"

Catra's quiet for another moment, and then, softly, she says, "You're right, and I— I *know* you're right, but it's just—" she stops painting and purses her lips, before letting out a sigh that shakes her shoulders. "It's hard," she eventually whispers, almost seeming defeated, and Adora's hit with the sudden urge to leave this position and go wrap Catra up in her arms and protect her and keep the world from harming her.

(She hates knowing that it must already have.)

"Is there anyone you show your art to?" she eventually asks instead, once Catra has picked up her brush again — a different one, not that Adora knows the difference from the last — a sad attempt to make the conversation a little lighter. She fidgets again underneath Catra's heated gaze, and hopes the flush creeping down her neck isn't obvious.

"Yeah," Catra admits. There's a moment where Catra opens her mouth to add something, like she's going to tell Adora *who* it is, but all that comes out is *my*— before she cuts herself off. Another minute of silence surrounds them, and when Adora sees Catra shift almost uncomfortably, she decides that it'd probably be in their best interest to change the subject. She didn't mean for the conversation to get to this point, and as Catra flashes another hesitant glance at her, she feels a bit of guilt swell in her chest.

"Sorry," Adora eventually apologizes, sort of forgetting that she's not supposed to move at all and wringing her hands together. "I'm sorry, I— I mean, we barely even know each other and here I am asking all of these personal questions when you probably don't even want to talk about it, and that's... that was really inconsiderate of me. I'm sorry."

Catra sort of gives her another hesitant glance. Then, she stares down at the floor for a brief second and surprisingly enough, says, "it's okay, Adora. I— I don't usually like talking about these things, but for some reason..." she trails off and glances back up to meet Adora's eyes, and slowly, a small smile tugs at her lips. "I trust you. I don't know why, because it takes me forever to trust people, and it's probably me just being stupid, but... there's just something about you that makes me feel..." she trails off again, and after seemingly having an internal war with herself, must decide not to finish.

As much as Adora would like to know what she was going to say, she would never want to push her, so she let's it go and changes the subject completely.

The rest of the time Catra spends painting her passes in a similar fashion to the beginning: Adora fills the silence with whatever comes to mind, Catra interrupts on occasion to tell Adora to stop moving whenever she inevitably squirms beneath her gaze, and toward the end, Catra, without prompting, starts talking about how she got into art as a coping mechanism. She even tells Adora which period of art is her favorite, and Adora can't help but agree with her when she discusses all of her favorite aspects about the Romanticism era.

Eventually, she places her paintbrush down, stretches her arms, and tells Adora that she can move now. Adora groans, rolling her neck from side to side and then taking a few moments to stretch. When she pulls her phone out of her pocket she sees that it's just a few minutes shy of ten-thirty, meaning they've been here for a little under two hours; she genuinely doesn't think she's ever been in one position like that for *that* long.

Pocketing her phone, Adora yawns and pulls her arm behind her, glancing over to Catra. She's moving the stool she had been previously sitting on back to where it was, and she pushes the small couch that had previously been there up to the easel. Then, instead of starting to clean up like Adora assumed she would, she grabs another brush and spins it around in her hands before she meets Adora's gaze. "You can leave if you want, I still have to finish this up and it'll probably take a while, but..." she stands there for a moment, before adding, "I know I'm not the best at showing my gratitude, but thank you, Adora. This really means a lot to me."

Adora shuffles her feet, not sure why there's a feeling of warmth growing in her chest and not sure why the way Catra is staring at her is making her feel kind of tingly inside. It almost resembles the same feeling she gets when she feels her soulmate painting or writing on themselves. "It's nothing." Catra is still staring at her with a soft smile, and it makes Adora's mind go blank, until she suddenly seems to process what else Catra said. "Wait, you're not done?"

Catra takes a step back and glances at the easel, shaking her head. Confused, Adora peels the gloves off of her hands and throws them away before she approaches Catra. She really wants to see what it looks like, but after the discussion they just had half an hour ago, she knows that it would be really stupid of her to just assume that she can.

Catra must be able to sense what she's thinking, because she takes a step back and lets out a little noise that sounds like a cross between a snort and a giggle. "You can see it if you want. I'm not going to be upset, especially considering this painting is of you."

Adora searches her face for a moment longer to make sure she's really okay with it, and then makes her way over to examine the painting.

Obviously Catra would have to be at least relatively talented at art to be majoring in it, but even Adora still wasn't expecting *this*. The painting of her almost looks like a photograph upon first glance, and everything from the few pieces of hair that have fallen out of her ponytail to the untied shoelaces of her converse look exactly the same as it had in real life. The shading and highlights are all there, too, and surrounding the painting of Adora herself is the water in the background and the bridge she's standing on, staring intently at something that's out of view. Briefly, Adora wonders if Catra painted her expression to match the one Adora was actually wearing, or if she dramatized it for the painting.

It's not finished, clearly. Catra still has to finish the bridge and the background, but the light marking of the pencil is there, and after staring at it for a minute, Adora can imagine what the finished product might look like.

Wow, Adora thinks, no wonder she didn't want me to move at all.

“This is— Catra, you’re... you’re really good,” Adora breathes in disbelief. “Like, this is... I figured you were a good artist, but *wow*.”

Catra doesn’t say anything, and when Adora turns to look at her, she can’t help but smile in amusement at Catra’s expression. She looks a little flustered, her blush dark enough to be visible.

“Thanks,” she murmurs. It’s clear she’s not used to receiving compliments, probably because she doesn’t really show people her art. Adora glances back at the painting of herself, and just still can’t believe that it’s that good. She’s *also* taken aback by the fact that she knows that this must not be Catra’s best work; that this is just a painting she’s kind of hurrying to complete before a deadline. She wonders what her art must look like when she’s alone, putting herself into it and being driven by the emotions she’s feeling.

“Are you going to finish it here?” Adora eventually asks, taking a step back. Catra nods her head, approaching the easel to look at it herself.

“Probably,” she tells her. “It’ll be easier to finish and let it dry in here so I can just swing by tomorrow morning to get it before class.” There’s a beat of silence, and then Catra nods toward the door. “Um, you can leave, if you want. Not like there’s much for you to do here now.”

Adora lifts a brow. Truthfully, it’s a little enticing; she’s kind of tired, and Catra’s right. There’s not much to do in here and who knows how long it’ll take her to finish, but: “Do you want me to leave?”

Catra stares at her for a moment, like she’s not too sure how to reply. Eventually, she clears her throat and sort of bounces on the tips of her toes. “If I’m being honest, I... I kind of like having someone else be in here, actually? Like, even if we’re not talking, I guess I like having someone else’s presence. Especially because the entire art building is probably empty right now.” Adora must be unable to hide her surprise, so Catra rolls her own eyes and sarcastically mutters, “yeah, I know. Usually I like being alone or unbothered when I’m doing stuff like this, but I guess today is different. Even *I’m* shocked.”

Adora playfully elbows her side. “Then I’ll stay. Besides, I kind of want to see how it turns out.”

Catra flashes her a grateful smile, and then they get settled on the couch. Adora’s glad she moved it back to the easel because it’s far more comfortable than sitting on that stool must have been.

Adora spends a long while scrolling through her phone and occasionally reading funny tweets she sees to Catra or flashing a glance to the painting, enjoying seeing it come together. After about half an hour, she feels the sleepiness from the day begin to set in, and shuts her phone off and lets her head fall back against the couch. Catra’s soft laughter turns Adora’s attention toward her, and she realizes Catra’s staring at her in amusement. “You can lay down if you want. Should’ve known you wouldn’t last that long considering you’re a morning person.”

Adora playfully flicks Catra's shoulder, but eventually, pulls her knees up so she's laying down sideways on the couch. It's not very comfortable; the couch is kind of small and Catra is taking up at least a third of it just by sitting there, and Adora's too tall to even slightly stretch out.

When she opens her eyes, she finds that Catra is still staring at her in amusement. She slips her gloves off for a moment, adjusts them so that Adora is laying with her head in Catra's lap, and then asks, "good?"

"Yeah," Adora whispers, feeling at least a little more comfortable now that she can stretch out a bit more. Her eyes flutter shut and she yawns, then adds, "just don't get any paint on my face." *My soulmate might think I'm doing it on purpose at this point*, she thinks, but doesn't say. At least this time it'll be easier to wash off if it comes down to it.

"I'll try not to, princess," Catra tells her. Adora nods against her thigh, let's herself relax as she listens to the soothing sound of the paint brush against the easel and feel Catra's surprisingly calm presence, and doesn't even realize she actually managed to fall asleep until she's woken back up by a hand gently shaking her shoulder.

Adora blinks, not quite sure where she is for a moment, until she rolls over to lie on her back. It takes a moment to center herself, but then her face presses into something soft, and with a jolt of surprise, she realizes she's practically burying her face into Catra's stomach. Catra, who's lap she's laying on, who painted a beautiful picture of her, who's staring down at her with a gentle smile.

"Welcome back, sleepyhead," she teases, playfully flicking Adora's forehead. Adora scrunches her nose and eyes, but she's not feeling too tired anymore. In fact, she's starting to regret taking that nap, because now she knows she probably won't be able to go back to sleep when she actually gets in bed.

"How long was I asleep for?" she asks after sitting up and rubbing her eyes.

"Long enough that I had time to finish the painting," Catra answers, and when Adora glances at her phone, she sees that it's well past midnight. She frowns, knowing that she's probably fucked up her sleep schedule and will be tired in the morning; usually that only happens on the nights she stays up with her soulmate.

After gathering her bearings, Adora realizes that Catra's already stood up and is starting to clean off the paint brushes and everything else she's used. The paper she painted on is detached from the easel and sitting on a table behind the couch, and Adora gets up to inspect it now that it's done.

It looks, to put it simply, stunning. Now that the rest of the background is there, Adora can see a bit of the ocean, as well as small details such as the wiring in the bridge and the stars twinkling in the night sky up above.

(Adora thinks she only knows one other person who's paintings could match up to this.)

“It looks great, Catra,” Adora tells her as the other girl approaches after having washed the tools and her hands. “You’re definitely gonna get a good grade on this.”

“Yeah,” Catra agrees, and then nudges her. “Wouldn’t have happened without you, though, so...” They stand there for a few more moments, and then Catra tilts her head. “Hey, do you maybe want to go grab a milkshake or something? I know a place right by my apartment, and I’ll pay, as a thanks to you for going through all of this trouble.”

Adora shoves her hands into the pockets of her jeans in an attempt to look *somewhat* cool in front of Catra. “If I remember correctly, you were supposed to be paying for our next...” Adora trails off, not too sure what to call it. “Our next, uh—”

“Date?” Catra interrupts, wagging her brows. Adora swallows sort of nervously because is that really what this is? Is she actually going on a date with Catra?

The knowledge that that’s what this could possibly be only serves to confuse her, because she doesn’t— she doesn’t like Catra like that. She *can’t* like Catra like that, not when they both have soulmates and her own soulmate is finally starting to talk to her.

But here Catra is, standing in front of her with a genuine smile on her face, messy short hair, beautiful mismatched eyes, and all Adora really wants to do *is* go on a date with her.

“Yeah,” Adora agrees, deciding that all of these messy feelings— they’re a problem for future Adora. “You were supposed to be paying for our next date, anyway.”

Catra’s smile impossibly widens, and the knowledge that it’s because of Adora only makes her smile widen, too.

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Talking to Adora, simply *being* and existing around Adora: Catra’s known for a while now that it makes her feel strange, but in the best possible way.

Their conversation just comes so *easily*. Catra’s never had that with someone before, and she thinks that may be the reason why, despite not even really having known her for long, she already feels so comfortable with her.

“Cute,” Catra mutters under her breath as Adora slurps up the rest of her milkshake. Adora looks up from her drink, tilting her head.

“What?”

“I said gross,” Catra says, a bit louder than before. “What are you, twelve? You sound like a horse.”

Adora simply raises a brow, and then slurps even louder for maximum effect. Catra rolls her eyes, but is unable to stop herself from fondly smiling as she turns her attention from Adora's grinning face to her buzzing phone.

There's a few notifications — Scorpia, messaging her *what do you want to watch for movie night???*, followed by *catra you can't bail on us tonight ur on snack duty :((((*, and Double Trouble tagging her on snapchat — but she focuses instead on the time, and widens her eyes upon realizing how late it is. It's already nearing two in the morning, meaning she's been with Adora for nearly six hours.

“Wow, it's late,” Adora says, and Catra glances up to see Adora looking at her own phone. “I should go; I have an early class tomorrow, and I should probably at least attempt to get some more sleep in.”

Catra shrugs her jacket back on; the cold front that unexpectedly hit them a few weeks ago is finally gone, so she's hoping it'll only be slightly chilly outside at least for a few more weeks. “Yeah, I should probably leave, too. Scorpia and Entrapta are going to be mad at me for missing movie night.”

“Wait, uh, before you leave,” Adora starts, pulling her phone out and typing something on it before sliding it across the table. There's a new contact page open, with the name *Catra* and the smiling cat emoji next to it. When Catra looks back up, she finds Adora smiling a bit shyly across from her. “If— if this is okay?”

Adora texts her once Catra puts her phone number in, a single text consisting of the sunglasses emoji and a thumbs up. Catra saves her number too under *adora* with that same sunglasses emoji next to it.

Once they've exited the little milkshake place, Adora seems to falter for a moment before she surges forward and gives Catra a quick hug goodbye, and Catra hopes she doesn't appear as shocked as she feels when Adora pulls back at the sound of her phone ringing. “Okay, I really gotta go now, but... I'll see you soon?”

Catra tightens her jacket around herself in an attempt to delude herself that the shiver she just experienced was from the chill of the air and not at all from Adora hugging her. “Yeah. I'd like that.”

Adora gives her a mock salute, and then turns to walk to where Catra can only assume her apartment is. Catra watches her for a moment after she goes, and then turns to head in the opposite direction where her apartment is only a few blocks down.

A little while after she's gotten home, she's just gotten out of the shower — and explained the situation to Scorpia and Entrapta before apologizing and promising them she wouldn't miss the next movie night — and has just crawled into bed when her phone buzzes.

It's a message from Adora. *Did you get home safe?*

After rolling around for a couple of moments in an attempt to find a comfortable position, Catra responds. *yeah. i'm assuming ur good, too?*

Mhm, Adora responds almost immediately. Then, the gray bubble signifying that someone is typing appears, disappears, and then appears once more. It's clear Adora is hesitant on whatever she's going to say next, and Catra waits almost anxiously until she sees the word *Goodnight, Cat. :)*

goodnight, princess Catra replies. It's near three a.m. now, and Catra *should* be tired, but talking to Adora fills her with a warm buzz, calming and comforting. Feeling like she has to do *something*, Catra grabs the ballpoint pen on her nightstand and stares at her hand for a few moments and, struck with sudden inspiration, starts drawing.

In the end, her entire hand up to about halfway up her forearm is covered in an intricate web of life, full of birds and flowers and leaves. She only has to wait a few seconds after finishing before she feels the old tingle on the back of her other hand, and watches the words ***I'm really glad you're so happy*** form out. For a moment, Catra is confused, and then she thinks: *Right*. Her soulmate can feel whatever it is that she's feeling as she draws, and these past few times she's drawn, it hasn't been because she felt troubled like usual. Instead, she's decided to draw simply because she felt inspired.

And when her soulmate writes those words out, she can feel happiness emitting from them, too. She thinks it may still be the confident and warm feeling Adora gives her, but on the inside of her own arm as to not disturb her drawing, Catra writes, ***i'm glad ur happy, too.***

She falls asleep easily after that.

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"I'm just saying," Bow says as he stands next to Adora, spotting for her as she lifts and ready to step in if necessary. "Based on everything you've told me, it seems like there's something going on there."

Adora groans, lifting the dumbbell onto the rack and then relaxing. They've been at the gym for nearly an hour, and Adora knows she should probably head back to the apartment soon so she can have time to shower before she meets Mermista for their study session before class.

She sighs after sitting up, pushing her hair out of her face before ultimately giving up and just deciding to redo her ponytail all together. Then, she flashes another glance at Bow, which is more of a pleading look. *Please don't tell me what I think you're about to tell me*, it says.

Bow crosses his arms and tells her anyway. "You like her."

Anddddd there it is.

And well, despite not really wanting to hear it, Adora can't help but wonder: *Does* she like Catra?

No, Adora thinks, because she doesn't. She doesn't have a crush on Catra. She *can't* have a crush on Catra.

Adora doesn't reply in an attempt to drop the conversation. It works, at least until Mermista brings it up later on when they're attempting to have a *silent* study session in the library.

"You know, I'm going to have to agree with Bow on this whole you-probably-have-a-crush-on-Catra thing," she tells her from across a table full of scattered papers and textbooks. "Not that I can blame you. She *is* super hot."

Adora splutters in embarrassment for a few moments, and then narrows her eyes. "How do *you* even know about that? Is everyone just gossiping about my romantic life behind my back now?"

Mermista knits her brows together. "Adora, *you* told us all about it during movie night last week," she reminds her, and Adora pauses, and then thinks, *oh, right*. She had gone into further detail about what had happened with Catra the day after they had bonded in the art room — Adora likes to call it bonding, Catra likes to threaten to block her everytime she mentions it over text ("*Stop* calling it that. It makes us sound like losers.") — after the group had started discussing Mermista's on and off relationship with Sea Hawk. Now that Adora thinks about it, Perfuma was there too, and she can only hope it doesn't somehow get back to Catra through her.

Now, it's a week later, and Adora has both gotten lunch with her after they ran into each other on campus and briefly talked to her during a shift at the coffee shop.

After a moment of silence from Adora, Mermista adds, "what's so bad about having a crush on her anyway? You've done—" she pauses when a couple of freshmen glare at them for being loud, rolls her eyes, and then keeps talking— "you've done nothing but talk about her every time we've all hung out together."

"It's not bad," Adora sighs and buries her face into her hands, because that's the thing. It *shouldn't* be bad, but— "I just... I feel like I'm betraying my soulmate or something by having feelings for another person."

Mermista stares at her for a long while. Adora sighs, running her hands along the beginnings of the faded drawing her soulmate had done sometime yesterday afternoon, only serving to make her feel worse. They haven't actually talked since that brief conversation she had the same night she bonded with Catra — aside from Adora complimenting their latest drawing, like usual — but Adora's had years of experience and isn't impatient with them.

"Personally," Mermista finally starts after some time, "I don't think you should let yourself miss out on life experiences just to wait for someone who barely even talks to you." She says it straightforwardly, and Adora frowns, despite knowing it's probably what she needs to hear. "And I don't think you should expect them to wait until they meet you, either. Life is full of

experiences, and you shouldn't miss out on some of those because you're waiting for something that may never happen."

"But what if it *does* happen," Adora protests, and it sounds stupid even to her own ears when she says it. She sounds like a petulant child, whining about something even though she knows that Mermista's right. It's just that the idea that her soulmate may never truly accept her, may never even want to meet her or get to know is just... heartbreaking.

"It's not a guarantee," Mermista points out, twirling her pencil around in her hands. "Before I met Sea Hawk, we didn't really talk, either. I didn't even really get to know him until we met a few months ago, but that didn't mean I was idly sitting by and twiddling my thumbs while I waited."

Adora picks at a hangnail on her finger. "And that... doesn't bother him?"

"Of course not," Mermista answers. "Just like it doesn't bother me that he had previous experiences before me. We only live once. Might as well make the most of it."

Adora sighs, staring on the words on her paper, but not really reading them. Mermista's right, and truly, she understands that. Her soulmate isn't here right now; they may *never* be here with her, but Catra is. Catra may not be her soulmate, but Adora really likes her, and she knows that Catra isn't caught up in her own soulmate like Adora is.

"God," Adora mutters, rubbing her eyes. "Since when are you good at advice?"

Mermista groans, and then lays her head down on the table. "Probably the result of being roommates with Perfuma," she mutters, and then closes her eyes. "Don't ask for anymore though, because now I'm *exhausted*."

Adora gives a light chuckle. "Noted."

She sees Catra again two days later.

They're at a party again, except this time, when Adora finds herself warm and buzzed, it isn't because she's trying to drink her pain away, but simply because she's genuinely happy to have a week off of school in celebration of Thanksgiving. Tomorrow, she'll be driving upstate with Glimmer to spend half of the break with her and her family, and then she'll catch a plane back to Eternia to spend the rest of it with Razz.

The moment she caught sight of Scorpia and Perfuma sitting next to each other as they participated in never-have-I-ever, she immediately sat down and whispered, "do you know if Catra is here?" into Scorpia's ear. Scorpia had flashed her a look of curiosity, but had confirmed that Catra was indeed around here somewhere and had been last seen outside.

Outside the large house the party's being hosted at, there's not too many people except for a decently sized crowd surrounding a bonfire, which she scans over more than a few times because Catra's size would probably make her a bit more difficult to find. When Adora still can't seem to spot her, she shoves her hands into the pockets of her letterman and wanders toward the other side of the house.

There's only a few other people she sees on the way — a couple aggressively making out against the side of the house (*gross*), and a small group of people passing around joint — and in the back, there's a large, fancy pool down a brick path from the house that probably costs more than Adora's entire tuition. Being that they're just over a week away from December, Adora isn't surprised to find that it's unoccupied, and is about to keep walking past it when she notices a dark figure.

Catra's sitting on the edge of the pool, legs stretched out in front of her and leaning back on the palms of her outstretched arms as she stares up at the night sky. She doesn't look back at Adora even as the girl approaches, crouching down next to her before ultimately sitting down and crossing her legs. Catra has her legs hung over the edge, feet just barely dangling over the water. She keeps her eyes on the stars, giving Adora the perfect opportunity to stare at her side profile.

For a moment, she looks inhuman. Adora takes in the slope of her nose and the sharp curve of her jaw, the freckles on her face that resemble the constellations above, and her *eyes*. Adora thinks she could spend forever falling into her eyes.

She's beautiful. She steals Adora's breath in the best way, suffocating her until she's begging for release.

“What are you doing out here?” Catra eventually asks, but she still doesn't turn to look at Adora. Adora turns to follow Catra's gaze, but she doesn't feel nervous. For once, she feels like she can do anything.

“I was looking for you,” Adora answers, frowning when Catra leans up a bit and wraps her arms around herself when a gentle breeze passes through.

Finally, she turns to look over at her. There's a small frown on her face like she doesn't understand something. “Why?”

Why? Adora's not quite sure, so decides to answer honestly. “I don't know.”

Catra takes a deep breath, and then turns back to look up at the sky. Adora follows her lead, and they sit together in a comfortable silence for a long while until another breeze passes by and Catra shivers again.

Shrugging her letterman off herself, Adora sets her jacket on Catra's shoulders. Catra turns to look at her with a grateful smile, but still says, “you can't keep giving me all of your clothes, dummy. You're gonna be cold.”

“I'm okay,” Adora tells her, truthfully. It really isn't that cold, anyway. She thinks that the alcohol might be what's keeping her warm, or maybe— “You keep me warm.”

Catra's still staring at her. "What do you mean?"

"Just by being around me. I feel warm when I'm with you, and it kind of scared me at first, but now it just feels nice," Adora explains, a bit blunt.

"It scared you?" Catra asks, and she sits up straighter so they're at eye level. They're a lot closer now, and Adora's breath hitches somewhere in the back of her throat. "Why?"

"Because you're beautiful," Adora tells her, with as much honesty as she can muster. She knows she's not really making any sense, but she doesn't really care. "And because you're not my soulmate, but I... I've never kissed anyone, and I've never wanted to kiss anyone, but I really think I'd like to kiss you."

Catra's eyes drop to her lips, and she licks her own. Adora wishes so desperately that she could lean in and crush their lips together, wishes that she would get over herself already and just do it.

"You're not waiting for your soulmate anymore?" Catra asks. She's leaning closer and closer, and Adora can smell the alcohol on her breath and the sweet scent of her perfume, and fuck, it's *intoxicating*.

"I... I don't know," Adora stutters. "I don't think so. I want to, but I don't want to at the same time, and— and maybe this is all just really stupid, maybe I'm not making sense, maybe you don't even *want* this—"

"Adora," Catra interrupts, leaning her forehead against Adora's. She brings a hand up to cup the back of Adora's neck, and Adora shudders underneath her touch. "What do you want, Adora?"

"I—" Adora pauses to swallow heavily and then takes a deep breath. "I really want to kiss you." Then, "Catra, can I kiss you?"

Catra's eyes are still closed when she gently scratches at the back of Adora's nape and whispers, "Yes."

Her lips are just as warm and soft as Adora imagined. They start off somewhat awkwardly, but Catra is a quick study, and it quickly morphs into something else, hot and insistent and desperate like Adora's been starving all her life and only Catra can satiate her. Catra kisses her back just as eagerly, moving the hand resting on her neck to cup her cheek, nails grazing deliciously against her jaw.

They keep going, keep moving and working against each other until Adora's lungs scream at her for air and she's forced to pull back to gasp for breath. She doesn't let Catra go, though; she leans into the hand still cupping her cheek, and opens her eyes to find Catra already staring back at her.

Her eyes are stunning. They pull her in and refuse to let go, and Adora thinks that she might be drowning in them.

(She doesn't want to be saved.)

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brown

Chapter Summary

A journey

Chapter Notes

this chapter is. A LOT longer than usual because i apparently don't know when to shut the hell up, so i guess all i can say is the usual chapter count will range from 7k to 12k lmao

tw for vomiting in the beginning, and brief mention of a panic attack toward the end (not graphic at all).

without further ado, welcome to irony: the fic

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

Adora is semi-conscious for all of two seconds before she feels someone move in the bed behind her. She freezes in dread, cracks an eye open, only to let out a sigh of relief when she recognizes Glimmer's dorm room and hears a quiet mumble from the girl in mention behind her.

"Oh my God," Glimmer groans, rolling over onto her back. "I feel like I've been hit by a train."

Adora sits up, pushing her hair out of her face and rubbing her eyes. Although she drank last night, she definitely didn't drink enough to give herself *that* much of a hangover, unlike the Glimmer shaped lump next to her. Adora can't help but chuckle at the sight of only the top half of Glimmer's head exposed, eyes blinking blearily and hair sticking in every direction.

"Can't say the same," Adora yawns as she glances around the room. Glimmer was lucky enough to acquire a roommate who's almost always gone, meaning they don't have to worry about anyone bothering them.

"*How?*" Glimmer grumbles. "I remember seeing you drinking at the beginning of the party. Where'd you even disappear after that?"

Adora's in the process of considering their post-hangover/party breakfast options — Huntara's diner in the lead — when everything from last night suddenly comes flashing back.

Drinking at the beginning, abandoning said drinks to go find Catra, spending the rest of the party outside and holding hands together until someone eventually came to find them and let them know the party was winding down. She's pretty sure Perfuma even drove a few of them home, and her and Catra spent the entire drive cuddling in the backseat as if— as if—

And— oh God, Catra.

She kissed Catra.

She kissed Catra.

She *kissed* Catra.

Breathing in and out in short, ragged breaths, Adora has to grasp the sheets for a bit of an anchor to hold on to as Glimmer leans up on her elbows with a concerned look on her face. “Adora?”

Adora's not sure what pushes her over the edge, but she scrambles out of Glimmer's bed after that, legs caught twisted in the sheets and resulting in her nearly falling onto the floor. She throws her hand out onto Glimmer's bedside table for balance, darts to the bathroom, and doesn't even bother turning on the light before she's emptying the contents of her stomach into the toilet.

She *kissed* Catra. She went outside in search of her, she kissed her, and to make matters even worse, she *liked* it.

Adora feels herself lurch, only to vomit once again.

The light flickers on in the bathroom just as Adora lifts her head to flush the toilet, before groaning and leaning against the wall. Glimmer comes to crouch down next to her, far more concerned than she had been a moment ago. “Adora,” she starts, “are you just a lot more hungover than you originally thought, or did something happen?”

Adora shakes her head, struggling to her feet and wiping her mouth. She grabs the spare toothbrush next to Glimmer's sink, sure that if she can barely process thinking about kisses beneath the stars and beautiful heterochromic eyes, then she's not going to be able to *talk* about it without vomiting again.

She wants to forget about all of this. She wants to go home and curl into a ball and sleep forever, mind taken off of the idea of Catra and her soulmate and the fact that she liked kissing Catra and wouldn't mind doing it again, just when her soulmate has *finally* started talking to her.

She leans over the sink to spit her toothpaste out, and then uses the the cool water to rinse her mouth out and splash onto her face. “Could we just— could you just pretend like this didn't

happen? I don't think I can handle talking about it right now."

"Is this about Catra?" Glimmer asks, voice still quiet. She had seemingly come around recently to the fact that Adora and everyone else was at least somewhat friends with her, even if she still claimed she wouldn't be making friends with Catra anytime soon. "Now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure I saw her wearing your letterman at some point."

Great, now she has my letterman and my hoodie, Adora thinks, and decides she will be permanently ignoring the surge of warmth it gives her.

"Glimmer, please," Adora sighs after drying her face off, sending her a pleading look. Glimmer sighs.

"Fine, I'll drop it," she agrees after rubbing Adora's back. "Anyway, it's only like nine in the morning and I'm *really* hungry, which means Huntara's is still serving breakfast, so..." she trails off to look at Adora hesitantly. "Pancakes?"

It isn't until they've reached Huntara's diner and sat down with an order of a large stack of pancakes and a Reuben sandwich on the way that Adora realizes Glimmer's been uncharacteristically silent.

"Hey," Adora starts, nudging her leg. She wouldn't mind the quiet between them, but that means room for her to think about last night and that's not what she wants. "Did I really freak you out that badly? Or does your hangover hurt too much for you to talk?"

Glimmer chuckles a bit at that. "No, I'm feeling a bit better, actually, but—" she cuts herself off when Huntara appears with two mugs of coffee. "Me and Bow... we had a fight."

Adora tries not to let her surprise become too obvious by hiding it behind her mug of coffee. It doesn't seem to work, because Glimmer sort of grimaces.

She thinks: *see, this is why we should just stop going to parties. They should be illegal. Something bad always happens, like me kissing Catra. What the hell was I even thinking?* But then she thinks about how soft Catra's lips were, and how she couldn't have imagined a better first kiss, and how she wouldn't mind being lost in those eyes for the rest of eternity.

She says: "Oh, wow." Glimmer's grimace worsens, and Adora clears her throat. "Sorry, I just — I definitely wasn't expecting that." Of all of the years she's known Glimmer and Bow, the biggest fight they've ever had was when Glimmer spilt her yoghurt on Bow's project and Bow was mad for about three seconds until Glimmer apologized and said it was an accident. "What about?"

"The party," Glimmer sighs. "I don't know, I just... I guess I was mad because he was hanging around all of these other people that I don't even *know* for like, almost the entire time, and when I confronted him about it he told me he's allowed to have other friends that aren't me or the people in the group, and I... I think I overreacted a bit, and I haven't seen him since."

The fact that her two best friends — her two best friends who are *soulmates* — are fighting leaves Adora, obviously, a little shocked and not quite sure what to say.

“Well, I’ve heard that emotions can be amplified with soulmates,” Adora points out in reference to Glimmer’s overreaction. Although she can’t personally confirm it, she’s read about how when soulmates are in love, it’s pure bliss; how when they fight, it’s *agony*.

“Yeah,” Glimmer pokes at her sandwich. “But that shouldn’t be an excuse.”

“You’re right,” Adora agrees. “When did this happen?”

“Near the end of the party. Right before who I *think* was Perfuma drove us to my dorm.”

Huntara reappears with their food and tells them to enjoy, and Adora waits until she’s finished dousing her pancakes in syrup to keep talking.

“Well,” she starts with a bit of a nervous chuckle, “you know my advice tends to not be very great, so,” that gets Glimmer to laugh, at least. The only advice Adora is good at giving out is when it’s related to physical exertion. “But from your brief description, it sounds like you already know that Bow might’ve been in the right, so. You should probably talk to him, like, soon.”

Glimmer chews thoughtfully. “I know,” she sighs after swallowing. “It was my fault, anyway. I’ll probably talk to him after we finish.” Then, after a moment, she adds, “I don’t know where he is right now, though, because I don’t think he went back to your apartment after. Should I call him? Or write to him?”

Adora has to stop herself from moaning at the taste of the pancakes, ignoring Glimmer when she lifts her brow at the sight of how much syrup Adora has poured on her pancakes. “If you’re going to have the actual conversation in person, then maybe write to him now, so he’ll feel how you’re feeling and know what to expect when you actually talk.”

Glimmer nods in agreement, and then picks up her coffee at the same time Adora does and clanks them together in a *cheers!* motion. “See, and you said you were bad at advice.”

“I am,” Adora laughs. “But this is you and Bow, and we all know you two will be fine.”

A soft smile forms on Glimmer’s face at the mention of her soulmate again, and it almost resembles the one Catra has been looking at her with recently. “Yeah, you’re right. We’ll be fine. We always are.”

Adora can’t help it. “Aw,” she laughs, ignoring Glimmer’s huffed *oh, shush*. “How cute.”

“You’re one to talk,” Glimmer teases her after taking another bite of her sandwich, “you’re basically smitten with someone you don’t even know.”

In the past, when things were less complicated and Adora didn’t have all of these confusing feelings regarding *Catra* and *she’s not my soulmate, but—* and *my soulmate is finally talking to me and I’m going to ruin it*, she would’ve rolled her eyes at the harmless joke. Now, she stiffens, and Glimmer tilts her head.

“Sorry,” she apologizes, straightening up a bit across the table. “Did that have to do with, uh, whatever happened last night?” Adora nods. “Still not gonna tell me about that then?”

“Nothing to talk about,” Adora mutters, deciding to stuff herself with more pancakes instead.

Glimmer nods despite looking like she’s not at all convinced. “Okay. Nothing to talk about.”

It doesn’t come up for the rest of breakfast.

-

Catra wakes up the morning after the party feeling a little sticky and gross, and she doesn’t even have to open her eyes to know she’s asleep on Perfuma and Mermista’s couch. She remembers Perfuma having driven herself, Scorpia, Glimmer, and Adora home since everyone else had at least a *little* bit of alcohol in their system; after they dropped Glimmer and Adora off, Scorpia had insisted she stay with Perfuma for the night, and Catra had been so high off of whatever Adora caused her to feel that she insisted she was fine with sleeping on their couch so Perfuma didn’t have to make the drive back to her apartment just for her.

She blinks her eyes open. The sunlight streaming in from the blinds may not help curve the headache starting to form in between her eyes, but the thought of Adora certainly does.

Right, she thinks, a small smile forming on her face when she starts recalling the events of last night. *Adora. I kissed Adora.*

To make matters even better, *Adora* kissed *her*. *Adora asked* to kiss *her*.

With a yawn, Catra rolls over onto her side. Adora’s letterman is laid out on the coffee table in front of the couch, and Catra can’t help but smile sort of lazily. She knows that if any of her friends saw her right now she’d probably be getting teased, but she can’t really find it in her to care. She’s never really felt like this toward anyone. The only similar things she’s ever really experienced in the past are the few one night stands she’s had along with a short lasting relationship in high school, but even those were nothing compared to this.

Her earlier assumption is proven to be correct when she sees Mermista standing in the doorway of the hallway, staring at her in curiosity. “Why are you smiling like that? I don’t think I’ve ever seen you smile in my entire life.”

Catra squints. “You’ve known me for a month.”

Mermista snorts and says *good point*, before her eyes land on Adora’s letterman. She lifts both brows in a sort of impressed manner, glances back at Catra, and then heads to the kitchen somewhere behind the couch. Catra has no idea what *that* means, but she can’t really

find it in her to feel the need to unpack it. Despite not thinking she would at first, she likes Mermista, having grown a liking for her sarcastic humor and *I don't give a fuck* attitude.

After lying there for a few more minutes, Catra eventually rolls over to reach for her phone on top of the coffee table. It's a little past eleven, and Catra's finger lingers over her messages with Adora. Ever since they exchanged numbers they've been texting daily, usually starting with Catra sending a meme or something that reminds her of Adora, or Adora sending her a good morning text that makes Catra happier than she wants to admit.

There's not one today, which makes Catra frown. It's not like Adora has done it *everyday* since they've exchanged numbers, but she's done it often enough that Catra is surprised to find that there's not one there, especially after last night.

After suffering through an internal debate, Catra types out a simple *good morning* of her own, only to delete it. She repeats the same action at least twice, before ultimately deciding not to send anything until Adora texts first, and is about to delete the third good morning she's typed out when Scorpia suddenly appears in the hallway with a hand clasped in Perfuma's and cheerily shouts "who's up for breakfast?"

Having been accustomed to the quietness between herself and Mermista — who's sipping on a cup of coffee in the kitchen — Catra thinks it's not unreasonable when she jumps in surprise from her place on the couch. Her phone skitters onto the floor and she quickly scrambles to check it, ignoring Scorpia and Mermista's debate about whether or not they'd be eating breakfast or brunch at this point in time.

When she lifts up her phone, the blue message bubble staring back at her makes her regret having not just had Perfuma drive her back to her apartment last night.

She stares at her phone for at least a solid minute before she hears Perfuma go "You okay?" somewhere behind her.

Catra swallows visibly, turning to look over her shoulder. Perfuma is leaning over the side of the couch, staring at her with a gentle smile. "What?"

"I wanted to know if you wanted any brunch, but you didn't respond," Perfuma clarifies over the ongoing debate in the background. Then, she nods to Catra's phone and then the letterman on the coffee table. "Something going on there, I assume?"

Catra sets her phone down. *It's fine*, she thinks. Who cares if she's the one who sent the good morning text? It's been nearly a week and a half since they've exchanged numbers, and Adora's sent multiple already.

"Maybe," is what she settles on answering with. She's not usually one to flaunt her relationships, and she's especially not going to be public about this one when she has no idea where they're even at right now. Maybe she'll tell Scorpia and Entrapta at some point, but definitely not right now.

Perfuma decides to accept that as an answer. "Okay. Well, while we make brunch—" ("*Breakfast!*" Scorpia says somewhere in the background—) "you can shower and borrow

some of my clothes if you'd like. They'll probably be a bit big on you, but feel free to use them."

Catra rolls her eyes just like she does everytime someone mentions her size, but nods. As much as she tries to claim otherwise, she really thinks these people are starting to become her friends. "Okay, thanks. I appreciate it."

By the time she manages to stumble into the shower, she's replayed last night at least a hundred times in her head. Feeling the warm water hit against her back, she can't help but think of honey hair and honey skin and gentle gray eyes that remind her of the ocean just before dawn peeks over the horizon.

The shower turns cold by the end of it, the dull throb in her head keeping her in a state of agitation as she borrows a pair of shorts and what she can only assume is a crop top shirt that ends up fitting her perfectly. When she sees that Adora still hasn't responded after checking her phone, the cynical part of her can't help but think the worst.

There's a good chance she's setting herself up for disappointment here. She *knows* how Adora feels about her soulmate; knows that she's mentioned multiple times that she's not interested in dating or anything related in that manner. Catra *knows* this, and after seeing her at the party last night, she had decided to take refuge outside to get some fresh air because what she also knew was that she was starting to crush on Adora, and that didn't seem like it would do either of them any good.

But then Adora had found her a little while later. Adora had told her she deliberately came to find her and stared at her like she couldn't believe she was real; had called her beautiful and talked about how she loved the way Catra made her feel.

She had said she wanted to kiss her. She *asked* to kiss her, and then she did, and Catra kissed her back.

Catra kissed Adora, and she felt like she could finally *breathe* again afterward. They spent the rest of the night outside holding hands and Adora wrapped an arm around her in the backseat of Perfuma's car and pulled her close, and Catra's never really been a fan of physical affection, but all she really wants right now is more.

And yet, as she stares at her mockingly silent phone, she can't help but feel like maybe everything they did was a mistake.

Catra doesn't feel any better about the situation even after a week.

Thanksgiving Break passes by in a blur of lazing around, inhaling her entire body weight in turkey, mashed potatoes and stuffing, making fun of Scorpia for how in love she is with Perfuma (along with the help of Scorpia's moms), and trying her best to get along with Scorpia's entire extended family on Thanksgiving day.

(She loves Scorpia's moms and really appreciates how they invite her over to their house for basically every holiday and treat her like one of their own, but dealing with copious amounts of people has never been her strong suit unless she's under the influence of at least *some* alcohol.)

(If nothing else, the entire thing *does* serve to distract her from the fact that Adora is obviously ignoring her and probably regretting what happened.)

The Sunday before classes starts back up again, Catra's partaking in movie night with Entrapta and Scorpia (she's in charge of the snacks again in order to make up for when she missed the last one in favor of spending time with Adora) when she suddenly blurts out: "Me and Adora kissed."

Nothing changes for a moment; not until Scorpia reaches forward to pause the movie and Entrapta glances up from her bowl of M&M's with a look of surprise on her face.

"Really? When?" Entrapta asks at the same time Scorpia stares at her with her brows knitted together as if she's connecting something. "I probably could have figured it out myself when you started acting differently, but I haven't seen you in a week."

"It was the party, wasn't it?" Scorpia asks. "She came to ask me if you were there, and then I didn't see either one of you for the rest of the party until Perfuma drove us all home."

"That would make sense," Entrapta nods after stuffing her mouth with another handful of M&M's. "Especially since you had her letterman when you came back the next day."

Catra's not sure what she's doing or *why* she's even telling them this, but she still nods anyway. "Oh, Wildcat, that's great!" Scorpia tells her, shaking her by the shoulders. Entrapta pats her head, but when Catra doesn't do anything except stare at the bowl of popcorn in front of her, Scorpia nudges her again. "Uh... that is great, right?"

"I don't know," Catra clenches her jaw. She doesn't know whether or not it was a good thing anymore, she doesn't know why Adora would ask to kiss her and then ignore her, she doesn't really know how she feels about this anymore, and she doesn't even know why she's telling them about this in the first place. "I don't— fuck, I don't know. She hasn't talked to me at all since it happened, and I just... I'm scared and I don't even know *why* it's affecting me this much."

"Well, in her defense, you haven't been in town for the past week," Scorpia points out, but Catra shakes her head.

"She gave me her number like two weeks ago, and we've basically been texting non-stop up until the night we kissed," Catra explains. "Then, the morning after, I sent her a good morning text and she hasn't responded despite the fact that it's been over a week."

Entrapta lifts a brow. "You sent her a good morning text?"

Of course, Scorpia can't help but build off of that. "Aww, you must *really* like her if that's the case, huh?"

“I don’t *really* like her,” Catra grumbles underneath her breath.

Entrapta hums. “You’re right. If you send someone a good morning text then you probably really, *really* like them.”

Catra rolls her eyes. “That’s— God, fine, I really like her, okay? I really like her, and now I’m pretty sure she’s ignoring me because I’m not her soulmate.”

The previous lightheartedness in the room disappears. Entrapta blinks in surprise. “Her soulmate,” Scorpia repeats, and then winces.

“What, do you know her soulmate or something?” Catra asks, and then can’t help but cringe internally. She sounds like a jealous girlfriend, or one of those people who try to make it work despite not being soulmates, only for the other to end up meeting their soulmate as the relationship comes crumbling down like a castle made of glass.

“Uh, no,” Scorpia quickly tells her. “I’m pretty sure no one even *knows* who Adora’s soulmate is. Uh, Perfuma told me her soulmate doesn’t talk to her. Like, at all. Adora tries to talk to them though, I think.”

Catra’s eyes widen in surprise at that revelation. In the brief times they’ve talked about it — once, the morning they woke up in bed together, twice at the diner, and a very quick third time over text — Adora has made it clear that she’s trying to wait for her soulmate. Catra had sort of figured that would mean they had *some* sort of relationship, but if they don’t, then what is she even waiting for?

“Then... then why is she so...” Catra trails off and buries her hands into her eyes, not really caring that she’s spilling popcorn onto the floor.

Of all people, she thinks, I really chose to crush on someone who’s caught up with someone she doesn’t even know.

“It’s just how some people are,” Scorpia tells her. “I mean, I’m super lucky to have a soulmate who responded to me when I started talking to them, but I feel like...” she trails off a bit, and Catra peers up to look at her in curiosity. “I feel like even if Perfuma had never responded to me, I would’ve kept trying, you know? For however long it took.” There’s a beat of silence, and then: “Everyone’s different.”

Clearly, Catra thinks begrudgingly. As far as she’s concerned, soulmates only ever cause her exasperation. Sometimes she wonders what it’d be like to live in a world without them.

“I guess,” is what she settles on. “I just... I just don’t understand why she would ask to kiss me if she was going to end up ignoring me afterward.”

Both Scorpia and Entrapta lift their brows. “You’re saying she initiated it?” Scorpia questions, and Catra nods.

“That’s strange,” Entrapta says. “She kissed you, but now she’s ignoring you? Maybe she thinks you didn’t like it or something.”

Catra shakes her head. “No, I kissed her back, and it was obvious. Plus, like Scorpia said, we spent the entire rest of the party just sitting outside by ourselves. That’s not it. She probably just... had second thoughts about it, or whatever. It’s fine.”

It’s quiet for a few moments, and then Scorpia scoots closer to her. She lays a hand on her shoulder, and Catra has to try Very Hard not to make eye contact with her because she’s really not good at these conversations. “It’s not fine,” she tells her in determination. “I think that you two should talk. *But—*” she emphasizes when Catra lifts her head to say something, “but right now, it seems like she’s not being fair to you, so just remember that I won’t hesitate to kick her ass if she keeps this up and breaks your heart,” she says firmly.

Catra can’t help but chuckle, because Scorpia *never* curses. Entrapta seems to find it amusing too based on the giggle she lets out. “She’s not going to break my heart. It’s not like I’m in love with her or anything, I just like her more than the average person.”

“I agree with Scorpia on both. You should probably talk to her, because it’s proven that communication is *really* important in any given relationship. But also, kicking ass sounds fun, so I’d definitely be up for that if it comes to it.”

Scorpia leans across from her and high fives Entrapta. “See, Catra? We got you.”

“Yeah,” Catra can’t help but mutter as she fondly rolls her eyes and leans forward to unpause the movie. “I know.”

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About a week and a half after the party, Adora finds herself attempting to subtly avoid Catra.

(At least, she tries being subtle, but she’s about ninety-nine percent sure it’s not subtle at all.)

She sees Catra again the Monday after Thanksgiving Break at the coffee shop, but when Catra makes eye contact with her, she excuses herself to the back until she knows Catra will have left. The entire group gets together again a few days into December for Glimmer’s birthday, along with a few of Glimmer’s other friends (Adora is *slightly* surprised to see Catra there, and even more surprised when she sees Catra actually give Glimmer a small present as they exchange small, awkward smiles), and Adora does her best to avoid Catra for the majority of the time.

The few times they do talk, however: it’s odd, filled with ramblings from Adora and a sort of tightness in the conversation from Catra, like she’s holding back. Adora can only assume she’s holding back on asking about *everything*, and has to keep her head down to pretend not to see the hurt look on Catra’s face for the couple of times that they talk and Adora ends up making an excuse to get out of it.

Their friends watch them strangely, and Adora *hates* it. As far as she knows, no one actually knows about the kiss — at least, that’s what she hopes, but one look at Scorpia and Entrapta tells them that they probably do, and if Scorpia knows, Adora can only assume Perfuma knows, or will know soon.

Each time she runs into any of them, she can’t help but feel guilt and shame rising in her chest because she *knows*. She *knows* that she’s being unfair to Catra, and that she doesn’t deserve any of this. She knows she’s probably being stupid, diverging from the advice that had been handed to her, and she knows that she can’t just keep ignoring her forever. Not only would that be impossible, but the thought physically makes her chest ache, because she— she *likes* Catra, loves how she makes her feel and how she acts hard and cold when she’s really just soft and warm, loves how she feels against Adora’s lips beneath the constellations.

But then she thinks about the hummingbirds painting her soulmate did or the small drawings or paintings they do every so often, thinks about how many nights she’s spent staying up with them and wondering, hoping for the day she finally got to meet them, and thinks about how after years they’ve *finally* decided to talk to her, and she just doesn’t know what to do anymore.

They were friends, Adora thinks. Sure, it would’ve hurt to only remain friends, but it would’ve been better than whatever *this* is now. It would’ve been better if Adora hadn’t actually *sought her out* and ruined everything by actually *kissing* her.

She doesn’t know what to do, and every time she thinks about it her chest hurts and her head hurts and *everything* hurts.

“Are you ever going to tell us what happened between you two?” Glimmer asks as they clean up after the party. Adora picks up a loose piece of streamer.

“I don’t know,” is what she answers with a bit of a helpless shrug.

A few days after Glimmer’s birthday — officially two weeks since their kiss — it’s a Saturday afternoon, and Adora and a couple of other employees are closing up the coffee shop when the little bells attached to the door ring.

“Seriously, Kyle?” one of the only other employees there questions. “We close at five; you’re supposed to lock the door to keep anyone from entering while we’re cleaning. This part always gets awkward because now we’re going to have to ask them to leave...”

Adora decides to ignore what’ll inevitably turn into a bickering match and slips her apron back on before she makes her way out of the back room and to the front counter. They’re closed, yes, but sometimes it’ll be quicker to get the customer to leave if Adora just complies and makes their drink.

When she steps out of the back room, Adora freezes, breath catching in the back of her throat and eyes going wide.

Catra is standing at the front counter, staring at her with the same wide eyes as if she didn’t expect to see Adora despite knowing she works here. There’s a long moment of silence

between them, before eventually, Catra clears her throat and takes a bit of a step forward.

“Hey,” she greets, voice quiet.

Adora’s mouth moves a few times, but it takes at least three tries before she can properly speak. “Hi.”

There’s another few awkward moments where neither of them says anything, the only other sound being the two employees cleaning in the back, but then Catra sighs. “Um, you don’t have to say anything,” she starts, shuffling so that she pulls the backpack she has on to the front. Adora watches her kind of wearily, only to feel her heart drop when she sees Catra pull both her letterman and hoodie out from the bag. “I just came to return these.”

She sets them down on the counter and then takes a few steps back, glancing up at Adora’s face. Adora knits her brows together.

“You don’t— uh, you don’t want them anymore?” she asks kind of dumbly. It’s a stupid question.

Catra seems to agree. “Why would I?” she asks with a bit of a hardness to her voice, swinging her backpack around her back. Adora nervously swallows, because she doesn’t really have an answer to that.

After staring at her clothes for a moment longer, she looks back at Catra when she hears the sound of feet moving against the tile. Catra’s expression is unreadable, but when she gives Adora one last fleeting look, Adora sees the hurt in her eyes. “See you around, Adora.”

Despite the aching in her chest, Adora doesn’t stop her from leaving.

To say she feels awful after the entire thing feels like an understatement.

She gets home that same evening around six, declining Bow’s offer for spaghetti and making a beeline for her room. She strips her clothes, takes a quick shower in an attempt to distract herself from everything, and then curls up alone in her bed.

Why are you doing this to yourself? she can almost hear Glimmer telling her in the back of her head. If she talked to any of her friends about it, she’s sure they would all tell her the same thing, and that’s to go for it with Catra.

But... she just doesn’t *know*.

“I think you should follow your heart,” Bow’s voice suddenly filters in from the doorway. Adora jumps in surprise. It’s dark in her room, but she can see Bow in the doorway due to the light coming from their small living room.

Wiping her eyes, Adora lifts her head. “What?”

“Whatever it is you’re going through,” Bow tells her. He makes his way inside her room, turns the lamplight on, and then sits down on the edge of bed. “Glimmer said you won’t tell us, and if you don’t want to, that’s totally fine because you don’t have to tell us everything. But... it’s not hard to at least relatively guess what this might be about.” Adora snorts, because is she really that predictable? “Whatever it is, just follow your heart.”

“But what if I don’t know where my heart is?” Adora whispers.

Bow watches her for a few moments, and then reaches forward to squeeze her hand. “Just think about it for a while,” he tells her. “You’ll know where it is.”

“And if I don’t figure it out?”

“You will,” Bow tells her. “I promise.”

Adora feels the bristles of a paint brush tickling her skin a couple of hours later.

Before she can even process what it means, she feels a surge of conflict and distress in her chest, except it’s not her own. Her soulmate is going through something, too, and after getting used to the calm and pacific feeling they’d been emitting recently, Adora wonders what it is.

(She doesn’t bother asking, because she knows she won’t get a response to something that personal.)

It’s been a while since they painted — they’ve mostly just resorted to pen drawings recently — and although it usually makes Adora feel better, tonight, it only makes her feel worse.

This time, it takes her a few minutes before she gathers the courage to pull off her pajama pants where she can most prominently feel the paint brush against her thigh. The colors are muted and gray, far more dreary compared to the hummingbird painting they did just a month ago.

(Her chest twists and aches.)

Do you believe in fate? Adora asks a few hours later, shortly after the painting of a skull in a gray setting has been completed on her thigh.

She’s hurting, far more than she thought it would, especially when her eyes landed on the letterman and old hoodie Catra returned back to her and it hit her that that was *it*. She had slipped the hoodie on in an attempt to comfort herself only to realize it smelled more like Catra than it did herself, and all it really did was serve to keep making her feel worse.

She can't stop thinking about the hurt look in Catra's eyes, or the way she sounded when she said *see you around, Adora*.

Adora doesn't understand *why* this is hurting so much. She hasn't even known Catra for much longer than a month, and yet she feels like this could be how it feels to suffer a breakup from a long-term relationship. It's not like Catra is her soulmate or something; the fact that whatever it is that she and Catra briefly had is over shouldn't be affecting her like this.

And yet—

And yet—

depends, her soulmate replies.

What do you mean? Adora writes after a few moments of going back and forth. She understands that there's a very good chance her soulmate will disappear because of the question, but it's not like she hasn't dealt with long bouts of silence from them before.

Soulmates?

i think there's someone out there for everyone. Adora shudders at the feeling of a ghost pen dragging against her skin, and can't help but trace her fingers over the words at the same time they appear on her skin. ***whether or not that person is the one the universe deemed as yours,*** her soulmate stops writing for a moment, and Adora feels a spike of hesitance from them before they continue. ***it depends on you.***

Adora takes a deep breath. ***Do you think it's stupid for me to try to blindly follow what the universe says?***

She's honestly a little surprised when her soulmate keeps writing to her. ***i think you should do what you want, whether it means going with what the universe is saying or going against it.***

Adora reads over the words a few times in her head.

They don't believe in what the universe has set out for them. They probably don't really believe in soulmates; they believe in, as simple as it sounds, doing what *they* want.

She can't help but write, ***Why are you talking to me? Why now?***

Why just when I'm starting to feel something for someone who isn't you?

It's a long, long while before her soulmate responds. Adora has already put her pen down and, having expected them to have ended the conversation there, is surprised when she sees the words ***i can feel how conflicted you've been*** spell out against her arm.

Adora feels a bit of anxiety leave her chest, and she chuckles. ***So you're saying all I had to do to get you to respond was be sad while talking to you?***

well i'm not heartless, they tell her, but Adora can feel a lighthearted feeling from them that lets her know they know she's joking.

After chewing her lip for a moment, Adora takes a deep breath. *Thanks for your help*, she pauses to take a deep breath, *with everything recently*.

If I don't end up with you, whoever does... they're lucky.

There's no response. Adora stares at her arm for a while after, long after the conversation has finished and she can no longer feel anything from them.

Despite the fact that she's just had another conversation with her soulmate — her third one *ever* — she can't stop thinking about Catra.

Life is full of experiences, and you shouldn't miss out on some of those because you're waiting for something that may never happen, Mermista's voice sounds in her head.

Bow's voice echoes right after. *Whatever it is, just follow your heart.*

I think you should do what you want, whether it means going with what the universe is saying or going against it, her soulmate tells her.

She doesn't know exactly what she's going to do, but she knows she's going to do something.

After slipping her pajama pants back on and a pair of shoes, Adora quickly heads to the front door to find her coat. She doesn't even realize Bow and Glimmer are on the couch until Glimmer lifts her head and amusingly asks, "it's nearly midnight, where are you going?"

"To try and fix things with Catra!" Adora shouts probably a little too excitedly as she pulls her coat over her shoulders. She opens the door and is about to leave before she hears Glimmer call *Adora, wait*.

Adora halts in her movements just outside of the door, *really* hoping Glimmer isn't about to try to stop her because it's *Catra* or something—

"What?" she asks, a little impatiently. Glimmer and Bow share an amused glance, and then Bow's speaking.

"Here," he says, pulling his car keys off of the end table by their couch and throwing them. Adora catches it reflexively, and then glances back up at Bow with a smile because now that she thinks about it, it probably wouldn't have been her greatest idea to make the trek to Catra's apartment in the cold of night while only wearing pajamas and a coat. "Go fix things with Catra."

"I love you guys so much," she tells them. "I'll tell you both everything when I get back."

She hears them both laugh and tell her they love her too as she shuts the door.

It takes longer than she initially thought it would to find Catra.

She doesn't know where her apartment is, and it doesn't occur to her until after she gets in the car and is about to start driving that she has no idea where she's going. She almost just texts Catra to ask her to give her the address, but after realizing that probably wouldn't be a good idea after basically saying nothing to her for two weeks, she gets creative and asks Perfuma considering she probably knows where Scorpia — and therefore, Catra — lives.

Then, when she actually manages to get to the right apartment, Catra's not there. Instead, Adora's greeted by Scorpia, and is a little taken aback to see someone who is always smiling and is always nice to everyone stare at her in poorly concealed — but understandable — anger.

Yeah, she thinks. Catra's roommates definitely know.

After a bit of bargaining and pleading, Adora manages to coax Scorpia into telling her Catra's location, and she leaves with a new found sense of determination.

Bright Moon's local animal shelter isn't open past midnight. It's a quarter past twelve by the time Adora arrives, and as expected, the doors are locked. Squaring her shoulders, she knocks on the door, only to see a shorter woman with white dyed hair come to stare at her suspiciously for a moment through the glass window before she eventually opens the door.

“Can we help you?” the woman asks.

“Uh, yeah,” Adora starts, bouncing on the balls of her feet. “Is Catra here?”

The woman gives her another look up and down. “Who's asking?”

“Uh, my name is Adora,” she stutters out, “I'm her—” she pauses at that, because what even is she to Catra? They were friends, but then they kissed, and then everything else happened and Adora doesn't even think Catra would still call them friends at this point. “I... I just *really* need to talk to her.”

The woman doesn't move; if anything, her eyes narrow even further. Adora is seconds away from getting down on her knees and begging this woman to let her in when a taller woman appears from behind, a much softer look on her face.

“Netossa, what are you doing to the poor girl?” she asks good naturedly, resting a hand on the shoulder of who Adora can only assume is Netossa. “What can we do for you, sweetie?”

“I *really* need to talk to Catra,” Adora repeats, a little desperate at this point. “Scorpia told me she was here?”

The taller woman nods, and then opens the door a bit more. Netossa is still staring at her in suspicion, but at the mention of Scorpia, she seems to relax. “Yeah,” the woman Adora still

doesn't know the name of confirms. "She should be somewhere in the back with the cats, just take a left down the hall and keep going straight. You'll find her."

"Okay. Thank you," Adora tells them, and then quickly scurries down the hall.

She finds Catra exactly where they said she'd be.

Behind the large floor-to-ceiling glass windows that open up into the playpen for the cats, Catra is sitting near the middle of the room with her legs crossed. There's plenty of cats, some who are curled up in her lap or pawing at her to get her attention, some that are approaching her in curiosity, and some that are climbing the towers or playing on their own.

And as Adora watches Catra stroke along their backs or pet behind their ears, it occurs to her that she doesn't think she's ever seen her this happy and at ease.

(She wants to do whatever it takes to keep her that way.)

It's not until one of the cats pounces onto Catra and causes her to fall onto her back with a laugh, clutching the cat to her chest and unknowingly causing Adora's heart to skip a beat that Catra notices her. They make eye contact through the glass window and Catra's smile disappears, replaced with a look somewhere between confusion and surprise.

Adora takes a deep breath before stepping around the corner to find the door. When she opens it, Catra is sitting up again, but her attention is back on the cats that surround her.

"Hey," Adora stage-whispers, shoving her hands into her pockets as she approaches. Most of the cats scatter when she sits down adjacent to Catra, but when they don't deem her as a threat, a few of them hesitantly begin to make their way back.

Catra doesn't say anything. Adora reaches a hand out to allow a small tabby sniff her hand, before smiling when it immediately presses into her palm, clearly demanding to be scratched.

"How'd you know I'd be here?" Catra eventually asks, still petting the cats in her lap. Most of them have begun to flock back, but they all clearly trust Catra more than her. Adora doesn't blame them. Catra *does* look pretty soft right now, with her messy hair and the oversized sweater she's currently wearing.

"I uh, had to ask Perfuma for the address, but I went to your apartment," she answers, "but when you weren't there, Scorpia ended up telling me."

Catra doesn't respond. They don't say anything for a while, and surprisingly enough, the silence between them isn't nearly as awkward as Adora thought it'd be.

Eventually, a grayish blue cat begins to slowly stalk over to them. Adora turns her attention from the tortoiseshell cat batting at her ponytail to reach a hand out, only to recoil in surprise when the cat hisses at her.

Catra lets out a quiet laugh, and to Adora's dismay, she watches as the gray cat immediately curls up in her lap.

“This is Melog,” she says, scratching underneath it’s chin. A rumbling purr sounds, and then the cat presses against Catra’s stomach. “He may seem like he’s tough, but he’s really just a big softie. Don’t let him fool you.”

“Reminds me of someone,” Adora teases. Catra looks up at her for a moment, and then rolls her eyes.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she mutters, only to pull the cat up and into her arms, allowing it to nuzzle against her chest.

Adora can’t help the smile that tugs at her lips as she watches them. “Is he yours?”

Catra shakes her head and sets Melog back down, but he simply curls back up in her lap and lays his head down. “Oh, no. I wish he was, though.”

“Why isn’t he?”

“Landlord doesn’t allow pets,” Catra grumbles. “Entrapta thinks I should just sneak him in, though. If I don’t end up moving apartments after this school year ends, I probably will.”

Adora snorts; she wouldn’t put it past her to successfully pull something like that.

They lapse into another relative silence. Adora wasn’t really sure why Catra would be at an animal shelter of all places, but the longer she sits here, watching her interact with all of the cats with a soft and relaxed look on her face, the more she thinks she understands.

“Why are you here, Adora?” Catra eventually asks, minutes later. Her voice has a bit of an edge, and Adora chews her lip.

“I wanted to talk to you.” She’s grateful when one of the cats starts a calming purr against her hand.

“Why now?”

“What?”

“Why *now*?” Catra repeats, and her voice is hard and sharp. “Why now, after avoiding me for two weeks? Why are you choosing now to talk to me?”

“I... I needed some time,” Adora stutters out, voice a bit wet. Catra eventually looks up from Melog, who has since fallen asleep in her lap. “I know you don’t owe me anything, and I’ll leave if you want me to, but... can we talk?”

Catra stares at her for a few moments. Adora swallows nervously, averting her gaze and staring at the two cats playing with each other in the corner of the room. She *really* hopes Catra says yes, because she’s not too sure what she’ll do if she doesn’t.

After a moment, Catra takes a deep breath, and then: “Fine,” she agrees, and Adora lets out a sigh of relief. “Fine, we can talk. Just... not here. I don’t usually come here this late, and Spinnerella and Netossa are probably ready to leave by now.”

Adora probably nods a little too eagerly. “Yeah, okay. I can take us somewhere.”

She stands after managing to coax the cat off her lap, before offering her hand to Catra and pulling her to her feet. She’s still cradling Melog in her arms, and she presses a soft kiss to his forehead before setting him on the ground. “I’ll see you soon, buddy.”

“We could just take him right now if you wanted,” Adora offers. “I’ll sneak him in, and if we get caught, then I could take the blame.”

Catra looks at her for a moment, but then she shakes her head. “No, it’s too late to go through all of that adoption and paper work stuff, plus I’d need to stop at the store to get cat things.” Then, she flashes one of those dangerous smirks that Adora’s incredibly missed about her. “I’ll hold you to that, though. For later.”

Yeah, Adora thinks, shoving her hands back into her pockets with a smile. Later. I can work with that.

“Nice car you got here,” Catra sarcastically tells her after slipping into the passenger’s seat.

The paint is chipped and cracked. Two of the four windows in the car don’t roll down. Catra had tried to open the right backseat door — which is the one door that won’t budge at all — to throw her bag into it, but Adora had grimaced and wearily muttered *other side*. They sit there for a couple of minutes in the cold, Adora having to whisper encouragements to the car before the engine finally roars to life.

“Hey, don’t insult Bow’s car,” Adora rubs the steering wheel in a comforting manner.

She knows her mistake the moment Catra turns to look at her with a lifted brow. “Bow’s car?” Adora nods, so Catra continues. “It’s midnight, and you really bothered Perfuma, Bow, and Scorpia just to track me down?”

Adora unconsciously pouts from her place in the driver’s seat. “I... well, Bow offered me the car, and I didn’t *mean* to bother Scorpia...”

“I’m just messing with you,” Catra tells her. “Guess it’s just kind of funny. I mean, I wasn’t really expecting you to just appear at the animal shelter I volunteer at this late into the night when I know you’re a morning person, and not to mention after two weeks of trying to avoid me, and yet here you are doing exactly that while also bothering three separate people to accomplish it, too.”

Adora swallows past the lump in her throat, but doesn’t respond for a while. They head further out of the city as Catra begins to fiddle with the radio, which only somewhat works. They drive for a while on a busy expressway before Adora gathers the courage to speak again. “I talked to my soulmate.”

Catra turns toward her. She looks a bit surprised to hear that, but Adora continues.

“I... I talked to my soulmate, and... to answer your question about why *now*, after two weeks at midnight on a Saturday... I think they kind of convinced me not to wait for them.”

Catra stares at her for a long moment, and Adora shifts beneath her gaze. “I thought they didn’t talk to you.”

Adora ignores the fact that she has no idea how Catra would even know that. “Uh, not really, but they talked to me today.”

“So... you *just* talked to them?”

“Yeah. Right before I came to talk to you,” Adora confirms. Catra averts her eyes, almost as if she’s trying to piece something together, and Adora flashes her a concerned glance.

“What?”

Eventually, Catra shakes her head as if dismissing the thought. “Nothing,” she says.

“Nothing, I just— I was thinking about something, but there’s... it doesn’t matter.”

They fall into a weighty silence. Adora tries to focus on driving and not on what she’s going to say to Catra when they talk, or even what Catra may say to her. It feels weird to have her here again — as if nothing changed between them and Adora’s shitty decision didn’t lead to both of them getting hurt — but Adora doesn’t regret it. Even if at the end of this Catra turns around and never speaks to her again, Adora still wouldn’t regret having at least tried. She owes it to Catra to at least be honest and give her an explanation.

It takes a while to get where they’re going. They drive in silence for most of the time, save for the soft music pouring in through the radio. The road leading out of Bright Moon is flanked by pine trees and meadows, and briefly, as Adora glances at Catra and sees her staring out of the window, she wonders what she thinks of the landscape. She wonders if it’s similar to where Catra grew up like Eternia is to herself, or if Catra’s always been a city girl and maybe even lived in Bright Moon her whole life. She knows she could ask, but it’ll inevitably turn into a conversation about how or where they grew up and Adora’s not sure if that would be an appropriate conversation to have right now.

The road widens slightly and then forks. Adora steers the car to the left and drives it to an overlook, surrounded by a bit of trees with a gravel road beneath them, and then puts the car in park.

Despite the fact that it’s dark, the half moon and the stars above them (they’re so far out that the stars are far more visible out here than in the city, which is just another perk, Adora thinks) provide more than enough lighting to see clearly. They illuminate the overlook, where it steeply drops down in front of them to enclose around a lake and aged timbers and meadow flowers. There’s a light dust of snow falling; not quite enough to be considered a decent accumulation, but enough that it’s visibly there.

Catra’s face doesn’t give away anything she’s thinking, so Adora can only hope she’s not already regretting this. She’s working up the nerve to say something when Catra says, “this

place is really beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Adora agrees, because truthfully, it really is. “I... I don’t really come here very often unless I’m borrowing someone’s car or something because it’s— well, it’s a little far, as you’ve just seen, but... whenever I get the chance, I’ll come. I thought it would be appropriate for this.”

Catra hums in response. She seems a bit distracted, clearly fascinated by the scenery that surrounds them — an artist’s eye, Adora thinks with a chuckle — and it gives Adora the opportunity to work out what she’s going to say. She thinks about growing up, and a future that possibly doesn’t involve her soulmate, but maybe someone else. Maybe it involves Catra, and maybe it doesn’t, but the point is that there’s a good chance it won’t involve who she always imagined it would. The thought still makes her feel torn, and she thinks it might take her a long while to truly get over something she’s been raised to believe in all of her life.

She decides that if there’s anything she’s learned in these past couple of weeks, it’s that *not* communicating doesn’t solve anything, and so, she starts with, “I’m sorry.”

Catra stares at her for a moment. “For what?”

Adora looks down at her hands. She understands that Catra isn’t asking it in the way that she genuinely doesn’t know what Adora’s sorry for; she’s asking in the sense that she needs to know *what* exactly Adora wants to apologize for.

“For— for kissing you, and then ignoring you,” Adora whispers. She chews on her lip for a moment, and then abandons fiddling with her thumbs to glance up and meet Catra’s eyes. “For dragging you on despite knowing that it could very well play out like this, what with how I feel about my soulmate, and just... just being an asshole. I’m sorry, Catra.”

Catra swallows visibly. “Okay.”

Adora pauses, “I— okay?”

“Did you regret it?” Catra questions.

Adora takes a deep breath. “If... if I’m being honest, I... I think I did, right after. I didn’t know what to do and— okay, I’m not excusing myself, but I’m just gonna explain, okay?” Catra nods, so Adora keeps going. “My whole life I’ve basically been raised to be dedicated to my soulmate, like it was either them or nothing, and I... I guess as you somehow already know, they don’t really talk to me.

“It used to hurt a lot in the beginning, but I eventually accepted I would just have to wait for them, you know? Everyone I know already knows their soulmate or has at least *talked* to them, and everyone just kept telling me that my own soulmate would talk to me eventually and that it would happen one day and that was *fine*, I was fine with waiting. And then... suddenly you were here, and I don’t know why but you just... you make me feel different, Catra, and when I’m with you I want to throw everything about waiting for my soulmate out of the window, but it... it *hurts*, because my soulmate has finally started talking to me too. I

didn't know what to do, and I felt like I had just betrayed someone I promised myself I'd wait for a long time ago after we kissed. So to answer your question, I did regret it afterwards and pretending like nothing ever happened just seemed like the best option in the moment."

When Adora finishes, she tries her best to study Catra's face to gauge what she might be thinking. However, Catra averts her eyes and leaves her face unreadable, and Adora feels her hands start to tremble.

She doesn't say anything for a long time; just stares outside of the window and at the snow gathering on their windshield. After what feels like hours but has most likely only been minutes, Adora feels her hands start to shake so badly that she doesn't know what to do with them because she's pretty sure Catra must hate her and will probably just tell her to drive her home and never speak to her again.

Catra turns toward her, lips parted as if she's going to say something, only for her brows to knit together in concern. She reaches across the gearshift and into Adora's lap, squeezing her hands.

"Adora," she starts, voice soft and gentle. "Calm down. You look like you're literally seconds away from having a panic attack."

Adora nods, taking a deep breath. Catra's hands are warm and soft, and as she stares down at them, she can't help but shakily smile despite the anxiousness still thrumming within her chest. "Your hands are *really* small."

Catra playfully scoffs and shakes her head, but doesn't move her hands. They sit there for another few minutes and, despite the silence, she feels herself beginning to at least slightly calm down.

"I'm sorry, too," Catra eventually whispers. Adora turns toward her in surprise because what the hell is *Catra* sorry for, but she continues before Adora can ask. "I know how you feel about your soulmate, and in retrospect, it was really disrespectful for me to kiss you despite it."

"But I'm the one who asked—"

"I know," Catra cuts her off, "but still, it was dumb for me to think you would've changed something you've followed your entire life in just the few days between the time you told me you were still waiting to the party. Plus, we were both a little drunk."

Adora's face is a bit hot with shame, but she nods. "It's okay."

"Okay," Catra squeezes her eyes shut for a moment, and then continues. "And Adora... if you don't want anything with me because you want to wait for your soulmate, then I'll respect that. Just..." she trails off, her voice growing quieter, "just please tell me now, because I understand where you're coming from, but you can't keep bouncing back and forth between waiting for them and not waiting. It's confusing, and it's not fair to me."

"Yeah," Adora agrees. "I know, I'm sorry."

Catra visibly swallows. “It... it’s probably best if we don’t, anyway. Especially knowing you regretted the kiss—”

“No,” Adora cuts her off, eyes wide. “Cat, I didn’t regret it. I mean, I did right after, but I don’t regret it now.”

“You...” Catra’s voice is barely audible. “You don’t regret it?”

Adora quickly shakes her head. “No, I—” she cuts herself off and feels a bit of heat rush to her cheeks. “I... um, I know I don’t have anything to compare it to because I’ve never kissed anyone else, but... I thought it was good, and I really liked it.”

Catra’s breath hitches, and her eyes fall down to Adora’s lips. Adora finds herself doing the same, and after a moment, she squeezes the hands in her lap.

There’s a beat where Adora almost feels like Catra’s going to lean in, but the squeeze of her hands must snap her back to reality because she immediately clears her throat and pulls her hands out of Adora’s lap, much to her displeasure.

Straightening up a bit, Catra says, “This might be obvious, but just so we’re on the same page, I didn’t... I didn’t regret it, either. I still don’t.”

Adora’s a bit surprised to hear that. Obviously she knew Catra didn’t regret it immediately after, but she figured she may have later on, especially as they moved forward and Adora only continued to ignore her.

“So, neither of us regret it?” Adora asks.

Catra nods her head, and then fiddles with the sleeves of her sweater. She looks so soft and cuddly looking. “Not really sure how to move forward from here, to be honest.”

They sit there for a few moments in a sort of awkward silence, neither of them quite sure how to proceed, before Adora finally straightens up. “Can I ask you a question?” Catra nods once again. “Are you even looking for a relationship?”

Catra looks a little surprised by that question, but she shrugs. “I don’t know. I mean, commitment has always kind of scared me; that’s one of the many reasons I don’t want to get involved with my soulmate, but... I don’t know. You make me feel different, too. The idea doesn’t sound as scary as it usually does, but I still... I don’t know if I’m ready for that.” She looks a bit shy as she admits that, and Adora smiles encouragingly.

“Okay, well...” she feels a bit of her own nerves beginning to rise in her chest again, and she drums her fingers against the wheel. “Since we both liked kissing each other, and since we’re both not really sure about the commitment thing... what if we just stayed friends, but friends who, like, kiss each other and stuff sometimes?”

Catra laughs, and it warms Adora’s soul to finally hear it again. “Should I be concerned that you kiss your friends?”

Adora stares outside of the window for a moment to hide how red she is. “*Catra.*”

“Sorry,” Catra apologizes after a few more moments of laughing, and then she gets a bit more serious. “Sorry, yeah. Are you suggesting we should do something like... no strings attached?”

“Yeah,” Adora confirms. “Just... just while we figure things out. Like, so I have the option to keep waiting for my soulmate if I want, and you don’t have to feel pressured about any commitments.”

Catra agrees. “That sounds okay.”

They’re quiet for a moment, and then— “and we can kiss,” Adora adds again.

“Right,” Catra repeats, “and we can kiss.”

“So we’re on the same page?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay.”

For the second time tonight, Catra’s eyes fall down to Adora’s lips and she leans forward. They’re close, so close that Adora could count Catra’s eyelashes if she wanted, each and every one of her freckles. She reaches up, brushes her fingers along Catra’s cheek and smiles when Catra’s eyes flutter shut beneath her touch.

She cups Catra’s cheek and closes the remaining space between them.

Her lips are softer than Adora remembers, plump against her own. Catra kisses her slow and hesitant like she’s mesmerizing, savoring the way Adora feels. She brings her own hand to Adora’s cheek, so Adora drops her hand to Catra’s hip, squeezing and then smiling into the kiss when Catra lets out a barely audible whine. Adora can’t help but tug her closer until they’re separated only by the middle console, only to feel herself starting to chase Catra’s lips again when Catra pulls away to breathe.

“Adora,” she sighs against her lips, their breaths mingling. The name sounds different, new and beautiful and not at all like Catra has ever said it before. After a moment of gaining their breath, Catra pulls her back in and Adora melts into it. She kisses away all of the regret and doubt that Adora had about any of this; kisses it away so that there’s nothing else except her and Catra and it’s just *them* for a while.

“Adora,” Catra repeats in between kisses. Her voice is more breathy now, and Adora can’t help but keep chasing her every time she pulls away to speak. If the way Catra pulls Adora’s lip between her teeth or grazes her nails against her cheek is anything to go off of, then she’s not exactly upset by being interrupted. “Adora— when you— when you said friends who— who kiss each other,” she pauses again when Adora gains a bit of confidence and copies Catra’s movements by sinking her teeth into her lower lip just to feel Catra squirm. Something in the back of her mind registers that Catra may actually be asking a serious question, so with one last peck, she breaks away to breathe and give Catra the space she needs to talk.

(Adora thinks, as she pulls away, that she's never seen anything as beautiful as Catra staring at her with flushed cheeks and mussed hair and eyes that threaten to completely engulf her if she's not careful.)

"When you said friends that kiss each other and stuff," Catra eventually manages to get out, trailing her finger down Adora's cheek to her neck. It's the most intimate Adora's ever been with someone. "What did you mean by *stuff*?"

Adora's eyes go a bit wide at what Catra's insinuating, because when she left to find Catra tonight, she wasn't at all expecting for *that* to possibly happen. "I— Catra, you know I've never done that, right? Like, I had never even kissed anyone until you."

Catra nods, bringing her hand back up to the top of Adora's head. She pushes her hair back to move some of it out of her face from where it's no doubt escaped what's probably a messy ponytail. "I know, princess. I'm not saying that should happen tonight, or even *ever* if you don't want it." Adora thinks that that last part is crazy because she's already figured out that Catra makes her want to do and try things she's never done before. She doesn't think Catra understands just how much power she holds over her. "I just want to make sure we're completely on the same page before we go."

Adora nods, eyes fluttering shut at the feeling of Catra running her fingers through her hair. After a moment she moves so that she's resting her forehead against Catra's shoulder, sighing in relief when Catra pulls her rubber band out of her hair and lets it loose, before continuing to scrape her nails against her scalp.

"I'm okay with that," she whispers, honestly. That's what they agreed on, right? As long as they don't get too attached, they can do whatever, and it'll be fine. "The... the *stuff*."

Catra laughs above her. "Okay, now you just sound like a twelve-year-old boy who's too scared to call it for what it is."

Adora pokes Catra's ribs and is *delighted* to find that she's ticklish because she's absolutely going to use that later. "Don't tease me."

They sit there for a while, Catra carding her fingers through Adora's hair and Adora letting a loose hand rest on Catra's waist, both of them far too comfortable to move. Eventually, though, Adora yawns, and she hears Catra yawn just a few seconds later.

"Okay, princess," Catra tells her with a pat on the back, "time to move before both of us are too tired to drive home."

Adora blinks and remembers, *oh, right*, they're still miles outside of Bright Moon inside of Bow's car and who *knows* how late it is at this point.

She agrees after a good minute of stretching, before putting the gear shift into drive and pulling out of the overlook. "So... we're okay, right?"

"Yeah," Catra tells her. "We're okay."

The trip back doesn't feel so scary anymore knowing that when she drops Catra off, they're both going to know exactly what's going on; they're both *okay* with what's going on. There's no uncertainty about what'll happen tomorrow, and when Catra tells her see you later, it won't actually mean *goodbye* like it did in the coffee shop. It'll genuinely mean they'll see each other soon, and the prospect of possibly never having to actually say bye to Catra makes her far more happy than she's been in a while.

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Chapter End Notes

the original draft of this chapter was longer and *a lot* more angsty, but i cut it out for flow reasons lol. we're finally abt halfway through the fic!

pink

Chapter Summary

The calm before the storm

Chapter Notes

thank u all for the comments, i look forward to reading them every time i post and do my best to reply to them all and they really do inspire me

****trigger warning spoilers**** tw for the usual shadow weaver fuckery in the beginning, and cw for nsfw related things toward the end, it's vague but easy to tell where it's building so if that's not ur thing then skip to the line 'Although it takes a while...'

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

gold on your fingertips

Catra is only seven, but she thinks she knows what kind of person her soulmate is.

“Again?” Weaver growls when she gets home from school one afternoon. “Catrina, you need to get this under control. Do you understand me?”

“It’s not my fault,” Catra insists as she shuts the door behind her. “They’re the ones who keep writing stuff on themselves. I didn’t ask for it.”

Shaking her head, her foster mother forcefully grabs her arm to position it so that she can read the message left behind by her soulmate. It’s a simple message about how they’ve been trying to figure out why she won’t respond, and how their mother has been suggesting perhaps they talk too much to her. The words aren’t spelt very well, but Catra can’t say much when her own spelling isn’t really the best at the moment, either.

She hasn’t grown very accustomed to the phantom press of a pen against her skin yet; it’s not very often that it happens, but each time it does, Catra finds herself jolting in surprise at the electricity she feels shooting through her veins, the feeling of someone else’s unwarranted emotions within her. One time she had nearly fallen out of her chair during silent study in class because she had been so surprised.

She doesn't think she likes it very much, but the way her foster mother looks at her every time she sees ink along Catra's skin or paint from her soulmate's crafts on her face makes her really, *really* not like it.

"I have an important business gathering I have to attend, and you're supposed to be coming with me," Weaver had told her one morning as she tried her best to scrub some marker off of Catra's hands. All it did was leave her skin red and raw, the marker completely unchanged. Her soulmate is messy whenever they work on art projects. "And this is absolutely unacceptable."

"It's not my fault," Catra had whispered just like she did every time Weaver got mad at her for something her soulmate did.

"It *is*," Weaver grits out to her in the present as Catra remains standing up against the door. "You already don't want to write to them, so why can't you just cooperate for once and tell them to stop? Don't act like it's out of your control."

Catra feels herself shrink against the door. She thinks her soulmate is kind of inconsiderate for always getting messy marks on themselves, but that doesn't mean that she wants to deliberately be mean back. Besides, it's not like she can control what her soulmate does.

(And she may not completely understand how soulmates work yet, but she knows there's a reason Weaver hasn't just written the words on Catra's arm herself.)

"That doesn't sound nice," Catra eventually responds. She sees some of her classmates with marker and ink on themselves, too; it's not like it's abnormal. It's not rare for her friends to bring up their soulmates or how silly they can be. She may not care to talk to her own soulmate, but she thinks telling them to stop would be far meaner than them causing paint splotches to appear on her face.

"It doesn't *have* to be nice," Weaver snaps. "They're clearly irresponsible, going around and pretending like their marks won't appear on you. They deserve it."

Catra stares at the floor by her foster mother's feet and doesn't reply. She's kind of hungry and she has some subtraction homework to do (she's not quite grasping the concept, but Weaver doesn't bother helping any time she asks), and she knows that if she doesn't say anything else then the conversation might end sooner.

Weaver scoffs, but after a moment, she leaves Catra alone. Catra doesn't risk standing there for a second longer; she quickly scurries to the kitchen, throws a bag of goldfish in her backpack, and then retreats upstairs to her bedroom before Weaver can stop her.

When she gets to her room, she quietly shuts the door before looking back at the messy words scrawled on her arm.

My mom saed I mite talk to u to much?

Yeah, Catra begrudgingly thinks. That's probably because you do.

She's only seven, but she knows what kind of person her soulmate is.

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After her disgustingly early Monday morning class, Catra gets home to the soundtrack of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* playing and all sorts of delicious smells coming from the kitchen. She sets her things down and finds herself drifting toward the smell like a cartoon character beholden to whatever goods are being made. Unsurprisingly, a bunch of cookies are exactly what it is.

“Wow,” Catra mutters under her breath, taking in the sight before her. There's Christmas cookies *everywhere*, Scorpia looks a bit frantic, and Entrapta is just happily icing what she can. “Okay, um, stress baking again?”

“You know what finals are like,” Scorpia sighs as she pulls another tray of cookies out of the oven. Catra eyes them all a bit wearily; the three of them may enjoy eating their fair share of cookies every holiday, but this is *far* more than what they need.

Catra doesn't blame her, though. All three of them have their primary way of relieving stress: Scorpia's is baking, Entrapta's is messing around with technology and improving what they have (their Keurig was finally fixed, but Catra still finds herself going to the coffee shop Adora works at just as an excuse to see her), and Catra's is, obviously, expressing herself through art.

And with finals starting next week, Catra isn't exactly surprised to find far more baked goods than usual in their fridge or to come across Entrapta fixing their “broken” microwave only for it to have many more upgrades than it did before she started. Catra's just now getting finished on her own reviews despite the fact that some of her professors gave them to her a month ago.

“Well, no worries,” she says, glancing toward the towering pile of tupperware containers. “We can just give some away like we do every year.” That might actually work out in her favor; Scorpia's insane amount of baked goods could act as gifts for the people Catra doesn't actually know what to get for Christmas.

Scorpia seems to know what she's thinking. “You know, it's not a Christmas gift from your heart if *I* made them,” she points out, and Catra rolls her eyes.

“Do you want help delivering these cookies or not?”

“As long as you don't take the credit for them. Your gifts have to come from the heart!” Scorpia teases, sitting down next to Entrapta to help her ice more cookies.

Catra grabs one of the cookies they have set underneath a glass container — only the *really* well decorated cookies go there and they keep them for the majority of the holidays for

“decoration” — and she snickers when Entrapta tries to bat her hand away. “Hey! Those are the fancy iced ones!”

She bites into the head of a gingerbread man. “I’ll put in my own contribution for the fancy iced ones when I get back, ‘kay?”

They both mumble their agreement, Scorpia tells her to drive safe when Catra declares she’ll be taking Entrapta’s scrappy car so she doesn’t have to walk everywhere, and then Catra takes ahold of as many tupperware containers as she can carry and makes her way to the car.

She stops at Perfuma and Mermista’s apartment first because she knows Scorpia would probably want her soulmate to have some while they’re still fresh, and is gifted with a mug of hot chocolate in thanks before she goes. Then she stops by the dorms to give some to Lonnie and, because she’s already there, decides she may as well give some to Glimmer. (Glimmer is, predictably, just as surprised as she is, but the insults they throw back and forth this time are at least somewhat coated in affection.) Afterwards, she makes a couple more quick stops at a few other friends or coworkers’ apartments before she has only a singular remaining tupperware and pulls out her phone to message Adora.

good morning, she starts in response to Adora’s *Good morning* :) message from about an hour and a half ago. She hadn’t seen it because she had been in her least favorite class of the semester. *send me ur address?*

She’s sitting in park for only a couple of minutes before Adora sends her address, followed by *Are you coming over?*

no, Catra thumbs sarcastically. *i just wanted ur address for no reason. maybe i’ll give it out for ppl to stalk u.*

Hey :(Adora replies. *Maybe you just want to mail me a gift, or something :(*

Catra snorts because, well, good point. *are you home?*

Yes Adora replies along with the smiling sunglasses emoji. Catra rolls her eyes and then, without responding, starts the drive to Adora’s apartment.

By the time Catra arrives, the sleepiness from not having gotten in the extra nap she always does right after her early morning Monday class is starting to set in. She knocks on the door and is greeted by Bow, only to see Adora looking like a kicked puppy a few paces behind him. “I told you I’d get it,” she pouts, probably not even intentionally.

“You were literally still in the shower when she got here,” Bow chuckles, and it’s then that Catra realizes that Adora’s only wearing a towel, and her hair is up in a towel turban.

Adora grumbles something about how she still could have made it as she slinks back to her bedroom to no doubt get dressed. Bow seems to register that she’s holding a container of cookies and looks like he has to physically stop himself from jumping up and down.

She's set them down on the counter and has just finished explaining Scorpio's baking dilemma to Bow when Adora steps out of the hallway, wet hair laying on her shoulders and dressed in a sleeveless hoodie and sweats. Catra's pretty sure her jaw must drop to the floor because well— *arms*.

Adora doesn't seem to notice her crisis. She digs into the container of cookies, and all Catra really registers is her saying something along the lines of how good they are and thanking her for bringing them. She snaps back into reality when she realizes Bow is staring at her from the other side of the kitchen with an amused smile on his face, clearly having seen Catra's entire twelve second internal meltdown.

She scoffs and turns her attention from him back onto the cookies, grateful that Bow doesn't say anything as he disappears somewhere down the hallway.

They haven't told anyone about what happened. Adora had told her, yesterday, when Catra had come by to visit her at the coffee shop during her break, that she had promised Bow and Glimmer she'd tell them after she got back home Saturday night — or, really, early Sunday morning — but they had both been asleep for a long time by the time she got back. She told her that they've probably pieced together what happened based solely off of the fact that she's no longer moping around, and Catra had told her the same. She's sure everyone else will figure it out on their own time, so for now, she's content with not saying much to their friends about it.

“What are you thinking about?” Adora asks in the present. She's clearly just interrupted whatever she was saying to ask that, holding a half eaten cookie to her mouth and staring at Catra in amusement.

“Just about how we haven't told anyone about what's going on between us, and how I'm perfectly content with letting them figure it out on their own.”

Adora finishes the cookie in her hand. “Mm, yeah. Glimmer was teasing me about it after I got home from work yesterday because apparently I couldn't stop smiling.”

She goes back to picking through the cookies, but Catra doesn't let that last part go. “Couldn't stop smiling, huh?” she teases, crossing her arms over her chest.

Adora blinks, and then to Catra's delight, she flushes. “Oh hush.”

Catra chuckles. They make small talk for a few minutes, Catra giving the rundown of how class went and Adora complaining about this obnoxious group of frat boys she and Bow passed by on their run this morning when Catra eventually decides that she should probably go home so she can nap. “Alright, I'm gonna go.”

Adora frowns. “Already?”

A yawn escapes Catra's mouth at the perfect time. “Mm, I want to sleep. You know I have an early class on Monday's.”

“You could just sleep here,” Adora waves her arms around the apartment. “I don't mind.”

That kicked puppy expression returns to Adora's face the longer Catra doesn't respond, and Catra rubs her eyes and lets out a quiet laugh to herself because all Adora is doing is staring at her with wide eyes and a bit of a downward curve to her lips and Catra can't fathom saying no to her. This girl really is going to be the death of her.

"Okay," she eventually agrees, because to be honest, the idea of sleeping while Adora is present actually seems like a great idea the longer she thinks about it. Adora's always managed to make her feel relaxed simply by existing. "But only because the kicked puppy expression you keep wearing is getting on my nerves, so if it gets you to stop, I guess it'll be worth it."

Adora smiles in her victory, but she still looks a little conflicted. They stand there for a few moments, and Catra doesn't realize what it is until she sees Adora's eyes drop to her lips a couple of times. She can't help but smile at how adorable she is. "You can kiss me, Adora. You don't have to ask every time."

After another moment, Adora's smile widens, and she takes a few steps forward to press her lips against Catra's.

It's quieter this time, the kiss gentle and light like an unspoken promise. When they pull back, Catra keeps her eyes closed for a few seconds until Adora giggles. "I can't believe we can just do that now."

"Dork," Catra mumbles despite the fact that she was thinking the same thing, and then follows Adora to the couch.

They end up on opposite ends as Adora puts on some show that Catra's not really interested in. It doesn't take long for Catra to feel the sleepiness start to really sink in, and she shifts around to get more comfortable.

She ends up lying down and stretching out across the couch, smiling to herself when Adora mindlessly pulls her feet into her lap as she continues watching whatever lame documentary she no doubt put on. It's simple, just the right amount of physical contact for Catra to handle.

She falls asleep easily after that.

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Every semester, Adora promises herself she won't procrastinate her final reviews like she did the previous semester, and every semester, Adora fails to act on that exact promise to herself.

This semester is no different, and when the week before finals descends onto campus and Adora starts frequenting the library or coffee shop where she works for caffeine-and-sugar

fueled last minute studying, she doesn't hesitate to invite Catra when Mermista and Glimmer (her usual study-buddies) bail out on her.

It's nice to have her quiet company among the chaos, especially when surrounded by thirty other sleep deprived college students. The only downfall Adora can think of is that when Catra is focused, reading something on her paper or trying to figure out the answer to a question, her brows knit together and she scrunches her nose a bit. Sometimes it distracts Adora from her own work for a few minutes until Catra catches her staring and teasingly tells her to get back to her own work, but sometimes it leads to Catra leaning across the table to give her a quick kiss.

She's a little surprised when, on the Sunday right before finals start, she asks Catra what her plans are for winter break and Catra grumbles something about buying cranberry sauce to put on a turkey sandwich and maybe going to treat herself to hot chocolate on Christmas Eve.

"Wait," Adora asks, leaning forward a bit to make sure she heard that right over the commotion in the coffee shop. It's insanely busy, all of the tables and booths full and the workers hurrying about to make sure everything is in order, so much so that they weren't able to sit at their usual table and had to snag a booth instead. Adora's just glad she doesn't have a shift until tomorrow. "You're just gonna stay here by yourself?"

"Gee, way to make me feel better about it," Catra mutters, scribbling something in the margins of her paper. Adora watches her with a frown.

They've talked about home, but only briefly, and Adora had done most of the talking. Now that she thinks about it she can't recall Catra ever telling her about any possible family, just about things she's done in high school or her old friends. Of course she's curious as to what the reason for this is, but she knows by now how to push down her pathological urge to be nosy and pry.

"Sorry," Adora eventually apologizes, tapping her pencil against the table as Catra mutters *it's fine*. "What about Scorpi?"

"I usually tag along with her, but she's going to go meet Perfuma's family this year," Catra explains, still refusing to take her eyes off of her paper. "She said I could still come with her, but I don't really want to impose on them, especially for the holidays."

That's... *wow*. Naturally the first thing that pops up in Adora's mind is offering to let Catra come home with her, but she's not exactly sure how Catra will respond to that. They agreed to a *no strings attached* setup just last week, and Adora's not sure if that would be crossing some sort of unspoken line.

Catra doesn't seem to care that she hasn't responded, having gone back to the paper she was working on before. Adora stares at her for a while, creating a mental pros and cons list to asking Catra to go to Eternia with her when she eventually decides, *fuck it*, she's going to do it at some point because the idea of Catra being alone for the entire break is the saddest thing she's ever heard.

“Well, I can’t get off work for that long, so I’m only gonna be gone from the twenty-second to the twenty-seventh,” Adora eventually says. “But... if you want, you could come with me.”

Catra jerks her head up to stare at Adora with wide eyes. Adora hands start to feel a little clammy, and she starts to think *what were you thinking why would she want to go with you she’s not even your girlfriend not cool not cool*.

“If you want,” she quickly repeats. “You don’t have to feel pressured. Like, at all. It’s just an option.” She slams her jaw shut before she inevitably goes on one of those long rants that leave her unable to breathe by the end.

Catra remains unblinking, and Adora stares down at her hands on top of the table. She *really* hopes she didn’t just mess everything up by something that could have been so easily avoided

“Your... your family won’t mind?” Catra asks, voice quiet. Adora lifts her head, and when she sees Catra watching her with a vulnerable expression she can’t help but reach across the table to give her hand an encouraging squeeze.

“It’s just my grandma,” Adora explains. “And she makes a *ton* of food every year, so having someone else to help us eat it will probably only make her feel better about not wasting it.” Catra still looks hesitant, gaze focused on the table now, and as Adora watches her, she realizes Catra’s gaze is a bit watery. “Catra, I promise she’ll be completely fine with it; it’s literally just me and her. To be honest, she’d probably kick my ass if she found out you were alone and I didn’t manage to convince you to come.”

That gets Catra to let out a shaky smile at least. “Will *you* be fine with it?”

Adora smiles. “Of course I will. It’ll only be for a few days.” Catra gives a small nod, and Adora doesn’t even attempt to hold back her next question. She knows she doesn’t have to ask to kiss her anymore, but she also knows Catra is a little weary when it comes to a lot of physical contact. “Hey,” she starts, squeezing her hand to get Catra to look back up at her. “Would it be okay if I hugged you?”

Catra lets out a shaky chuckle. “You’re going to ruin my reputation.”

Adora rolls her eyes. “You’ve been hanging out with this loser almost every day this week in a public setting. Your reputation is already ruined.”

A scoff escapes Catra’s mouth. “Loser,” she repeats with a teasing smile as Adora slides into Catra’s side of the booth and opens her arms. Catra stares at her, before slowly slinking forward and pressing her cheek to Adora’s collarbone and wrapping her arms around her waist in a loose embrace. Adora follows her lead, setting her chin on top of her head and wrapping her arms around her back, careful not to squeeze too hard.

Her hair smells rich, and it reminds Adora of the smell of the forest after it rains. She lets her eyes flutter shut for a moment, basking in this feeling that she wouldn’t really mind staying in forever.

Finals week itself is a mess of chaos, stress, and trying her best to memorize a bunch of information Catra's pretty sure she's literally never going to need after this semester. After spending at least an hour every day with Adora the previous week, it feels a little weird to only briefly see her a couple of times during the week finals actually takes place, but they message each other often enough to make up for it.

Scorpia ends up making another shitload of baked goods they're not going to need, but it comes in handy when Catra finds herself up the night before her most stressful final, painting planets and stars along the inside of her arm while snacking on a bunch of muffins instead of drinking coffee like usual. She's going to need to fall asleep at *some* point if she wants to get a good grade, and consuming an unnecessary amount of caffeine definitely isn't the way to accomplish that.

She almost writes *expect to not hear from me for a while* on her arm when she's finished and her soulmate has complimented the painting. She tells herself it's not because she cares about them and doesn't want them to worry, but simply because she doesn't want to be hanging out with Adora only to feel a sudden spike of stress or concern from her soulmate asking if she's okay. That always happens when she disappears for longer than a week.

She also doesn't want to really think about her soulmate in general because of what Adora told her during their conversation in the car.

It's... *weird* that her soulmate never talks to her, but then they happen to talk to her at the same time Catra talks to her own soulmate that she also never talks to.

She had almost thought, *what if Adora is my soulmate?* and then immediately shut that thought down because 1) although she knows the universe intends for her and her soulmate to meet, plenty of people that don't arrange a time and place to meet their soulmate with the intentions of leaving it up to *fate* — Catra internally cringes at the word — don't meet them until later. The chances of them meeting now just doesn't seem very likely to her, and 2) she already doesn't really want anything to do with her soulmate. The idea that she not only knows them, but that she's basically in a relationship with them (even if they've agreed to no commitment) absolutely *horrifies* her.

Plus, although it's not as common, she doubts she's the only person in the world who avoids talking to their soulmate. Adora's just another unlucky one who got paired with someone like that.

So Catra buried the thought, because like she mentioned earlier: there's just no way that's the case. *Adora* and *soulmate* are not two words that belong in the same sentence together.

In the end, she doesn't say anything in regards to her soon to be disappearance at all; just replies with *you too* when her soulmate wishes her a fun time over the holidays. Maybe her soulmate will understand things get busy around the holidays, or maybe they'll be too busy themselves to even think about her.

(There's a moment where she finds herself hoping it's not the latter.)

On Friday, after Catra finishes her last final of the semester, the first thing she does is take a long, well deserved nap.

Scorpia and Entrapta finish a few hours later, and the three of them celebrate by roaming around the streets of Bright Moon that same evening. It's *very* cold out now, and Catra makes a mental note to steal Adora's letterman back because it's a lot warmer than her coat.

Scorpia leaves with Perfuma the next morning, and Entrapta catches a flight home that same afternoon. Catra orders take-out for dinner, taking advantage of the empty apartment by blasting music on her phone and belting out every note in the shower, and keeps herself somewhat busy on Sunday by working on some of the commissions submitted to her. By Monday, it's some time into the evening — Catra curled up within a nest of warm blankets in her room and binging episodes of Bob Ross on her laptop — when her phone buzzes.

It's most likely Scorpia or Entrapta texting her to ask her how she's doing. Catra yawns and reaches over and to turn on her phone, only to see Adora's contact name at the top, which was recently turned to *princess* by Adora herself — “I knew you liked it when I called you that” was Catra's teasing comment — but she's not too surprised to see her messaging her. They talked this morning about something related to a meme Adora had sent her, but as Catra reads the words *Are you home?* shining back at her, she gets the feeling this might be more important than the memes Adora keeps sending her that are only funny because of how hilarious Adora finds them.

yeah, Catra responds. It's seven-eighteen, but it's not completely dark out. It's snowing quite heavily though, and Catra unconsciously curls further into her blankets; she can't even begin to fathom how cold it must be outside.

Do you like Chinese food? Adora replies to her rather quickly.

...yeah?

Okay, Adora responds. *I'm coming over now.*

Catra blinks. She supposes it has something to do with the fact that Catra had told her that she would probably be surviving solely off of ramen and sandwiches for the next few days, because not only is she a horrible cook — Entrapta, surprisingly, is the best cook out of the three of them — but she also doesn't have enough money to eat out often.

It's not even half an hour later that Adora arrives and knocks on the door. The old, ratty cardigan Catra loves is slung on her desk chair, so she pulls it over herself after slinking out of bed, shivering from the cool air. She'll be thankful when the weather starts warming up, she thinks, as she quietly heads to the front door.

When she opens the door to reveal Adora holding a paper brown bag that honestly smells *delicious*, Catra mumbles a shy *thanks*, hoping it conveys all she really means; that she's thankful to Adora for inviting her home with her, for bringing her food unprovoked, and for just being a good friend. Catra's not quite sure what did to deserve all of this to be honest.

Once again taking advantage of the fact that Scorpio isn't here and that means she can eat in the living room without being annoyed with *Catra this food is really messy Catra you're going to spill something and stain the couch again Catra we should all eat dinner together*, she puts on an actual show what's way more interesting than Adora's lame documentaries. She voices as much as they eat their food on the couch, and they spend a good while going back and forth, exchanging playful banter.

It isn't until a little while later that Adora says, "at least you won't have to worry about eating the same thing when we go to my grandma's. She's going to make far more food than we need."

Despite the fact that she tries her best to hide it, Catra feels herself stiffen next to her. Adora frowns.

"Catra," she starts, setting her chopsticks back into the oyster pail. "You know you don't have to come, right? I promise I won't be upset."

"What?" Catra asks in disbelief, "Adora, I want to come. I'm actually really glad you invited me. That's... really nice."

"...oh."

Catra stares down at her food. "I'm just..." her voice gets a little bit quieter because she *hates* admitting things like this. "I'm a little nervous, I guess?"

"Nervous?"

"Yeah. To meet your grandma."

"Wait," Adora pauses, "you're nervous to meet my grandma?"

"Yes?"

Adora looks like she's trying to stifle her amusement, and Catra doesn't quite understand what's funny about this. "Why?"

Catra throws an arm up into the air. "Adora, it's your grandma! Your family! I mean, I'm usually nervous when it comes to meeting my friend's family in general, but you—" she motions to Adora with her arm, "this... it just feels different, and from what I've heard she's important to you and I just... I really want her to like me because of that." Adora is still

sitting with a clenched fist to her mouth in her attempt to stifle her laughter. It doesn't work; she starts laughing a few seconds later, and Catra narrows her eyes. "Adora, this isn't funny."

"I know, I'm sorry, but— Catra," Adora struggles to say over her laughter. "Catra, you're just so cute."

Catra bristles. "I am *not* cute."

"You are!" Adora tells her, but to Catra's relief, her laughter quiets down. "Sorry. You just— Catra, you're nervous about making a good impression on my grandma because she means a lot to me, which— I promise you, she'll like you, okay?" Catra reluctantly nods, so Adora continues. "But also—"

"Adora—"

"—that's *really* sweet."

Catra hardens her glare. "Adora, I'm *not* sweet and I'm not *cute*, and if you keep saying that I'll— I'll—"

"What?" Adora interrupts, wiggling her brows. Catra can't believe she actually likes this idiot. "What are you gonna do? Like, come on. I haven't even been able to take you seriously since I got here because you're bundled up in oversized warm clothes, looking *so freaking cute*—"

Adora squeaks in surprise when Catra suddenly leans in in the middle of her speech and connects their lips together.

It's sort of a weird kiss, Catra thinks, in her quiet apartment, over-processed Chinese food in the back of their throats, Adora smiling into the kiss for whatever reason. It's weird that these simple things, like Adora coming over unprovoked and pressing harder into her to kiss her back, makes her feel this warm inside.

Until Adora snorts into her mouth.

"Sorry," she giggles when Catra pulls back with a look of confusion as Adora again struggles to stifle her laughter. "I was thinking that it's funny that you resorted to kissing me to make me shut up about how undeniably sweet and cute you are."

After a long groan at the mention of *sweet* and *cute* again — she thought they were over that by now — Catra settles back against the couch and continues to fork her food into her mouth. It isn't until a little while later that Adora eventually mumbles a quiet, "Catra?"

"Hm?" Catra hums, eyes still on the TV.

"Can I see your room?"

Catra chuckles. "How long have you been working up the confidence to ask that?"

"I— *Catra*," Adora stutters like she always does when she gets embarrassed.

It isn't until Catra stops laughing at her that it begins to set in that Adora *actually* wants to see her room. To anyone else that would probably be fine, but Catra finds that her room is sort of private in the similar sense that her art is because she uses it to express herself. It's not *as* private as her art, considering she lets Entrapta and Scorpia in there, but she also hasn't cleaned her desk in a few days, so there's probably pieces out in the open right now, and—

She thinks about her foster mother, who she hasn't spoken to in years, and how she taught her that vulnerability meant weakness. She thinks about how she followed those words when she was younger, and how miserable and angry she was all of the time because of it. She thinks about how much happier she's been with herself ever since she's allowed herself to be vulnerable and open, even if it's just a little bit.

She thinks that it probably wouldn't hurt to show someone eventually.

“Okay,” Catra agrees, setting her food container down and standing up from the couch. Adora looks a little surprised, probably having taken Catra's silence as an answer, but she copies Catra's movements. “Come on.”

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Catra's room is, in a way, exactly how Adora imagined it would be.

It's simple, much neater than the mess of organized chaos that Adora's room is. Her bed is up against the far wall and covered in plain grey bed sheets, and her dresser is on the wall adjacent to it with only a bottle of lotion and some books set orderly on top.

Only a few feet away from her bed is her desk, sitting right underneath the window that's currently being covered by black curtains; however, Adora watches as Catra parts them so they can see out into the night city. The top of her desk is really the only messy thing in the room: there's a couple of sketchbooks and papers scattered everywhere, some opened and closed, as well as a few complete and incomplete canvases. There's also bottles of paint and brushes being held in a cup, and the dim, yellow lamp on the corner of the desk bathes everything in a warm glow.

“Can I?” Adora asks, slowly approaching Catra where she stands near her desk. She knows she's already technically seen Catra's art from that project she did on Adora, but that was much different. This is Catra's art — her *private* art that she never lets anyone see because of the fact that it conveys the most vulnerable parts of herself, and she *knows* how Catra feels about this.

Catra remains unmoving, but after a moment she nods.

Adora stays rooted to her spot. “Can you say it?”

Catra blinks. There's no words spoken between them for a minute, and then finally, she lets out a shaky breath. "Yeah. You can look."

Adora searches Catra's eyes for anything that could possibly contradict what she's saying. From that day Catra painted her in the art building, she knows there's someone else — or possibly multiple others — Catra willingly shows her art to, but based on everything else, Adora thinks it'd be reasonable to assume it's not very many other people, if not just one other person. She understands that this is important.

And when she finds nothing but truth shining in sultry, bicolored eyes, Adora slowly approaches the desk.

They've probably all been recently made. There's a messy sketch of two girls sitting on a cliff side, only the backs of them being visible and their heads angled in towards each other in a sweet, intimate way; it exudes warmth in the way that Adora recognizes it must be Perfuma and Scorpia. It makes a smile tug at her lips.

There's a close up painting of a woman with her eyes closed and lips parted, and it's even more detailed and realistic than the project Catra did for her class that Adora genuinely feels like it could very easily be mistaken for a photograph, even after staring at it for a minute. She stares at another messy sketch of a skull for a bit longer than all of the other ones, more so because she knows she's seen it before but she can't quite place where. There's another half-finished painting of Penrose stairs, and a more defined sketch of a woman standing with an umbrella underneath the rain, surrounded by a crowd of people in the city but with a troubled and haunting expression on her face.

Adora can feel the emotion of every piece, every work that she spends a while staring at and taking in, and she thinks she should probably say something like this out loud to Catra because she's still nervously standing to the left of her, but then her eyes fall on a piece of paper that's clearly been torn from a larger sketchbook. Adora recognizes the drawing almost immediately, and she sort of forgets what she was going to say.

It's the overlook she took them to a couple of weeks ago when she wanted to take them somewhere private and calm so she could figure out how to get out all she wanted to say. It's beautifully drawn, detailed enough that Adora almost wonders if Catra went back to the overlook herself to just stare at it while drawing. She stares at it for a long time, consuming every attribute and feature of the piece.

When she finally snaps back to reality, it's because Catra is speaking beside her.

"I wasn't lying," she whispers, "when I said that place is really pretty."

Adora turns over to look at her. She's fiddling nervously with her hands, tense and staring at something behind Adora. Her lips are red from where she must have been biting into them.

Adora still doesn't know what to say. It's just— it's so crazy to her that she's barely even seen a sliver of Catra's work and yet she's already *so* blown away—

“Please,” Catra breathes, voice trembling, “please say something, because I’ve only shown this type of stuff to my soulmate and I’m really nervous and the silence is kind of scaring me.”

Adora lets out her own shaky breath. Catra is staring at her with wide eyes and red lips, and Adora’s brain sort of short circuits when she registers that this— *this* is really the first time Catra’s ever done this, the first time she’s shown some of the most vulnerable parts of herself to someone in person.

A strangled noise escapes Adora’s throat without her permission, then her hands are on Catra’s face, fingertips against her jaw, and she’s crashing their lips together.

It’s incredible how Catra immediately relaxes beneath her touch, the tension and nerves from before seemingly melting away. It’s kind of messy, teeth and tongues colliding, but it’s so, so good. Catra makes a small sound, and then her hands are on Adora’s neck and in her hair, their touch hot and burning. Adora’s hands find her waist and they stumble until Catra’s back is up against the wall, and Adora feels her own breath start to pick up when Catra sucks on her bottom lip and pulls a quiet whimper from her throat.

She can quickly feel the control relinquishing from her grasp, especially when their lips part and she feels cold and bare for the quickest second before Catra’s mouth is suddenly hot against her pulse. Something sharp and tight coils within her, and before she knows it she’s pinning Catra to the wall with a bit more pressure, hands squeezing her waist while simultaneously nudging a thigh between her legs. Catra moans, muffled only by Adora’s neck, and the sound goes straight down her spine until there’s a pool of heat in her stomach.

A moment later Catra lets her head thump back onto the wall, and Adora takes the opportunity to mouth along her neck, teeth scraping over the sensitive skin. Having never done this before she quite literally has *no* idea what she’s doing, but it’s not that hard to figure out she must be doing something right every time Catra makes a soft noise or tugs on her hair.

She rocks her hips against Adora’s, and Adora moans brokenly, her own hips jumping involuntarily. She drops her head to Catra’s shoulder, because *fuck*, everything is happening so quickly and she feels like something is coming alive within her and she doesn’t want it to stop.

And yet— “We should…” Catra starts just as their hips begin to work in tandem. Adora squeezes her waist again, groaning when she feels Catra’s nails dig into her back through her shirt. “We— we should stop now, because— ‘cause if we keep going it’s gonna be harder later.” Her voice is breathy and desperate, and Adora feels an involuntary whine escape her throat at the prospect of stopping.

She slows, though; slows so that she can lift her head up from Catra’s shoulder, slows so that Catra opens her eyes and they meet each other’s gaze.

“Do you want to stop?” Adora asks over her struggles to gain her breath, leaning forward so that their foreheads are pressed together. The hand in her hair releases and comes around to grip the bottom of Adora’s jaw, thumb stroking her cheek.

“Of course not,” Catra chuckles against her like it’s the stupidest question Adora’s ever asked. “But I didn’t know if you were ready,” she murmurs. “And that’s completely fine, baby. Whatever you want.”

Baby, Adora thinks, shuddering underneath Catra’s touch. There’s a part of her that wants to kiss Catra senseless for calling her that until she calls her it again, and another part of her that wants to giggle and tease her for calling her that. She thinks she’ll do the latter, but later.

It takes her a moment to get over the pet name, but when she does, it sets in that Catra doesn’t actually want to stop; that ultimately, it’s up to Adora to decide whether or not they stop or continue.

And while she may not be ready for the intimacy that comes with being naked and having full frontal sexual intercourse — she can almost hear Catra cackling and telling her to *just call it sex, loser* — when she pulls back to the sight of Catra’s sweaty face and her bruised, kiss swollen lips, she decides that she wants to finish what they started.

“Can we…” she clears her throat, eyes fluttering shut. She’s undoubtedly sure the tips of her ears are flaming red. “Could we just keep doing this?”

When she opens her eyes again, she’s met with a soft and reassuring smile. There’s a moment where they seem to just stare at each other, taking each other in against the dim lighting of the room. Adora still can’t believe that Catra’s here; that she has her in her arms, that she’s just bared a part of her soul to her by letting her see those paintings and drawings.

“You’re gorgeous,” Adora tells her, and Catra’s breath hitches. “Inside and out. I look at you and I can’t believe you’re real.”

She looks surprised, almost as if she’s not literally the most beautiful woman in the world, and then she curls her fingers tighter around Adora’s jaw and pulls her back into a searing kiss.

The world tilts, and they tilt with it. Catra’s mouth is hot, and something about it is dizzying and so, so addicting, or maybe it’s the way her hands tangle back in Adora’s hair, or the way her body resumes it’s rocking against Adora’s, or the noises she makes into her mouth. Adora never wants to let go, feels like if she lets go this might all go away, like this is all a dream, like it’s too perfect to be true.

“Catra,” she feels herself choke out when Catra’s thigh moves against her just right. “*God*, you feel so good.”

Catra seems to be having the same thoughts. “Don’t stop,” she whispers against her lips, arching off of the wall, hips grinding, grip unyielding. “Don’t stop Adora, *fuck*—”

Don’t stop touching, don’t stop moving against me, don’t stop—

She can feel herself getting closer at a dangerously fast pace, so she presses another sloppy kiss to Catra’s lips, tightens her grip on her waist, works faster against her, and—

There's lightning in her veins and a fire in her chest that's growing, *growing*, and it desperately needs to be put out—

“‘m so close, ‘dora,” Catra whines, wrapping her arms around Adora's shoulders and burying her face into her neck, biting down on the skin there to muffle herself—

A ragged moan spills from Adora's lips, movements becoming more frantic, more desperate—

“*Please,*” one of them whispers. Adora doesn't know who.

Catra comes first, mouth wide open against Adora's neck with a high-pitched, muffled cry. Her nails dig harder into Adora's back, hips stuttering in their movement.

When Adora follows, it's unlike anything she's ever experienced before. The pressure in her core breaks, snaps in half, and she's coming, hips moving shakily a few more times against Catra's thigh to ride out the aftershocks. Catra holds her close, runs her fingers through Adora's hair, over her shoulders and down her back, whispers *it's okay, I've got you* against Adora's trembling form.

Eventually, Adora's hips come to a halt and she kind of slumps against Catra, who relaxes against the wall. For a while they just stand there on shaky legs without speaking, without moving, catching their breaths and coming down. Adora almost wishes they did this on Catra's bed because she kind of feels like her legs might give out at any moment. What's worse is that they didn't even touch each other, not really; she can't even begin to imagine, as she buries her face into Catra's sweaty hair, how it must feel to go all the way with someone.

She doesn't know how much time passes until she feels Catra start to pull away, leaning her head back against the wall. Adora's heart skips a couple of beats. Her eyes are glazed over, there's bruises littered along the left side of her neck, and her kiss swollen lips are parted as she sucks in deep breaths. Adora figures she doesn't look very far off.

“Stay the night?” Catra whispers.

A quivering breath escapes Adora. “Thought that was kind of a given.”

Catra curls her arms around Adora's back, leans back into her like she just wants a hug, and Adora's heart melts. “Just invited yourself to stay the night then, huh? Was all of this your plan when you brought me that food?”

Adora smiles, moving a hand to curl into the short locks of Catra's hair. It wasn't, of course. She still quite can't believe all of this happened, but she decides to jokingly hum otherwise. “Mhm. All of it.”

Eventually Catra taps her back to get her to move. She does, but then Catra's actually moving away from her, and Adora's pulled out of the lovely haze that had settled over them. “Where are you going?” she asks, a little alarmed.

The corner of Catra's mouth quirks. "Thought we should clean up," she explains. "Both ourselves and the food we left out in the living room."

"Oh," Adora mutters, feeling herself relax again. "Right."

Catra gets her a new pair of clothes — some that are a little too big for her that she pulled out of her dresser — and as Adora changes and brushes her teeth with a spare toothbrush, she hears Catra cleaning up the living room. It's a little while later that they finally settle into bed.

Although it takes a while, Catra eventually curls up against Adora, lies an arm around her abdomen and hums a soft *mhm* when Adora asks if it's alright to wrap an arm around her shoulders. It's funny, Adora thinks, that Catra's confident when it comes to sex, but shy when it comes to cuddling.

Adora's exhausted, but she can't stop running her eyes over Catra's face: her messy hair, her glowing skin, her still slightly swollen lips and her sleepy eyes.

"Hey," she whispers, "earlier..."

"What?" Catra asks, eyes half-lidded.

Adora takes a breath. Shakes her head a little. "Nothing."

Catra's eyes fall shut, but she lightly pinches Adora's side and chuckles when she squawks. "Tell me."

She's thinking about earlier when Catra showed her her art. How she unmasked herself, revealed her emotions in the exact way she admitted to being afraid of nearly a month ago.

"I'm proud of you," Adora whispers. Catra doesn't respond, but Adora can tell she's trying to hide a smile. "And, uh, I guess I just wanted to know," Catra blinks her eyes open, "earlier, when you mentioned having only shown your art to your soulmate... it made me think of what you told me about them a while ago, and... do you really not care about them?"

She fears that Catra might stiffen, might get mad at her for asking about something she probably doesn't like to talk about, but all Catra does is take a deep breath. "That's... that's not what I said. I... I think I do care about them, but I just... I don't really want to know them."

Adora knows that Catra's not interested in soulmates; knows that she's never really talked to her own, but— "Why?"

"A multitude of reasons," Catra yawns. "Not ready for that commitment, I don't like how out of control it makes me feel..." she trails off, fingers dancing along Adora's side. "Afraid they'll hate me."

"What?" Adora asks in disbelief. "Why would you think that?"

It's quiet for a moment. Catra's voice is a mere whisper when she speaks again. "I don't talk to them. I've never really talked to them my entire life, and I knew they were hurting when I didn't even give an explanation. Why would they want to be with me after that?"

Adora's eyes flutter shut. This is very quickly descending into dangerous territory, into *I probably shouldn't have brought this up because now I might start crying* territory, but she can't just *leave* the conversation on that. So, after a while of mustering up the resolve, she whispers: "I still love my soulmate."

She feels Catra shift against her, and when she opens her eyes Adora sees her angling her head so that she's facing her. "Even... even though they don't talk to you?"

"Mm," Adora hums, eyes fluttering shut in a poor attempt to not cry. "Yeah."

The tears fall anyway a moment later, and Adora lets out a shuddering breath when she feels Catra using the pads of her thumbs to wipe them away. She kisses her cheeks in their trail, kisses her nose and her forehead and her eyelids before leaving a soft kiss on her mouth. Then she settles her head on her chest instead of just being tucked into her, thumb still stroking her cheek. "Whoever your soulmate is, they're fucking crazy for not wanting to be with you."

Adora pulls Catra tighter against her. It takes her a while to compose herself to the point where she feels like she won't just burst into tears at any given moment, but she finds that Catra's weight on top of her is grounding. "Maybe they're like you. Maybe they're just... afraid of the commitment, or something."

"Maybe," Catra agrees. "They're still fuckin' dumb, though."

"Wouldn't that be like saying you're dumb for not talking to your own soulmate?" Adora teases.

"My soulmate probably isn't as good as you," Catra mumbles.

Adora can tell she's falling asleep, so she relaxes against her, mindlessly resuming her stroking up and down Catra's back. They don't say anything else after that, but right now, it's enough.

The next morning, Adora wakes up to her alarm for work going off, followed by Catra groaning from somewhere beneath her chin. She yawns, blinking up at the ceiling for a moment, before she attempts to slide out of bed and is quickly stopped by Catra's grip tightening around her.

"Cat, I have to go to work," Adora tiredly chuckles. "I usually snooze it a couple of times, but I have to have time to get back to my apartment and get ready."

“Don’ care,” Catra sleepily slurs into her neck, “call in. Say y’r sick.”

“I can’t.” In all honesty, she would love nothing more than to stay with Catra for the rest of the morning, warm beneath the covers and with Catra half on top of her, but— “Today’s my last day before we leave for Eternia. It would be mean to call in.”

“St’pid coffee shop,” is all Catra mutters. She relaxes her grip enough for Adora to move out from underneath her, but then Adora kneels down on the floor and rests her chin on the mattress a few inches away from Catra’s face.

“You frequent that stupid coffee shop multiple times a week,” she points out. Catra grumbles something only marginally intelligible, and Adora leans forward to brush a few strands of hair out of her face and then press a soft kiss to her lips.

She can tell Catra must still not be fully awake by the way she barely responds, lips only slightly moving against hers before Adora pulls back and Catra mumbles, “can’t believe y’r leavin’ this early.”

“Catra, it’s literally only eight in the morning,” Adora chuckles, glancing at her clock; she *really* has to go now, but talking with a half asleep Catra is kind of amusing. “You know you’re going to have to get up at like five tomorrow morning so we can catch that flight, right?”

“More like f’ve in the midd’e of the night.”

Adora snorts. “Whatever you say.” She pulls away to stand up, only for Catra to reach out from beneath the covers to grip her hand in what’s probably a last ditch attempt to get her to stay. Adora leans back down to press one final kiss to Catra’s lips. “Okay, now I really have to go.”

“Can you leave your lips b’fore you go?” Catra asks, releasing her hand to pull her own back beneath the blankets. She finally opens her eyes to put on her best pleading look.

“Wish I could,” Adora teasingly responds. “I’ll see you soon though, okay?”

“kay,” Catra agrees, eyes fluttering shut again. “See you then, ‘dora.”

“See you then,” Adora echoes.

In the bathroom, she changes back into her own clothes, mostly because she doesn’t think she can bear walking out into the mid-December weather in only a long sleeved shirt and a pair of cotton shorts, no matter how much she tries to brave the cold.

She replays every part of last night in her head again; replays this morning, and doesn’t care about the radiant smile she’s undoubtedly wearing as she heads outside and into the public.

She hears the last part of their conversation this morning, too; hears the part where Catra jokingly asked her to leave her lips behind.

There’s a part of her that remembers whatever it is that they’re doing — it’s not serious.

She's not allowed to feel a little disappointed by the thought, *especially* not when she's the one who suggested the entire thing, and she tells herself that she's not. She's *not* disappointed, and if that's all Catra wants, it doesn't bother her.

(It doesn't work.)

-

Sometime into the afternoon, Catra's in the middle of packing for their trip back to Adora's hometown when her phone starts ringing. It's Scorpia, and Catra puts her phone between her shoulder and her cheek after answering so she can keep folding her clothes.

"Hey Wildcat!" Scorpia greets when Catra answers.

Catra winces and pulls her phone away for a brief moment to turn down the volume. "Hey, Scorp. Having fun with the soulmate?"

"Oh, you bet," Scorpia answers sort of giddily. *"I met her parents and they're great, and I think they really like me too. It's been fun. What have you been up to?"*

Catra smiles to herself. *Nothing much*, she thinks, except for yesterday. Today, she's been going through the day in a bit of a daze, still in a bit of disbelief that everything that happened yesterday actually happened.

She's kissed people before, slept with people before. But, despite the fact that they didn't go far as she usually does, none of it ever felt as intimate as that. It's like everything before that was dull, lackluster, and couldn't compare.

Adora kissed her like the world was ending, held her like she'd disappear the moment she let go, looked at her like she hung the stars and the moon.

"Just... hanging out with Adora," Catra eventually responds. "Right now I'm packing to fly to Eternia with her."

"You're going home with her for the break?" Scorpia asks, but Catra can hear her smile through the phone. She's a little relieved; she knows Scorpia isn't Adora's biggest fan because of what happened after their first kiss, but she also knows Scorpia can't really hold a grudge. *"That's great!"*

"Oh, tell her she's going to love Eternia!" Perfuma's voice suddenly sounds in the background. *"It's a tiny, hidden little town and it's super cute."*

Catra pauses. "Am I on speaker?"

There's a bit of shuffling around, and then Scorpia's voice sounds a bit closer to the phone.
"No?"

"Okay," Catra fondly rolls her eyes.

Eventually, she does end up going into a *slight* amount of detail from yesterday when Scorpia begs her to tell her where she and Adora are at right now. She's in the process of packing her necessities when Scorpia asks, "*so, are you guys dating?*"

Catra blinks. "Uh, no."

"*Oh? So it's like a casual thing?*"

"Yeah."

"*Oh.*"

"...yeah." Catra mutters sort of awkwardly. "We're still just friends." *Who care about each other and kiss sometimes.*

"*And... you're okay with that?*" Scorpia asks.

"Yeah, Scorp. I'm fine with it," she tells her honestly. "I mean, yeah, I like her, but I'm not really looking for anything serious anyway, and neither is she. It works."

"*Well, as long as you're fine with it,*" Scorpia tells her.

Catra's grateful when Scorpia changes the conversation to the cat she and Perfuma have seemingly temporarily adopted because they found it wandering around outside of Perfuma's parents house — "I cannot believe you haven't sent me a picture yet," Catra says in disbelief afterward — and then they say their goodbyes when the conversation naturally comes to a close.

She's just set her phone down when it buzzes *again*, but this time, it's just another text message from Adora.

This is literally the most boring shift of my life, Adora texts her. We've had like four people ever since I got here.

ur punishment for abandoning me

"Abandoning" your so dramatic

*you're**

A text consisting only of angry face emojis comes through just as Catra has finished packing. She smirks sort of devilishly. *wow and here i was going to offer to come visit u*

No wait, Adora quickly texts back. I'm sorry pls come I'll give free coffee

Catra's genuinely not sure what Adora's doing to her that's making her act like this because she kind of feels like the definition of a love struck fool, but she ends up texting *free kiss?*

Guess you'll have to wait and see :) Adora replies.

Catra starts gathering her usual essentials she takes with her to the coffee shop, and then texts back *u r literally the neediest friend i've ever had*

You just implied you would only come if I gave you a free kiss and now I'm the needy one???

yk what if i hear one more ounce of attitude i'm not coming

Nah, you're coming

After slipping on a hoodie and a coat, Catra steps outside. She can't believe she's braving the cold walk to the coffee shop for this woman. *and u know that how?*

Because you love me

Catra stares at that message for far longer than she probably needs to.

In the end, she tries her best not to read into it too much.

*

Chapter End Notes

i made a tumblr recently, so follow me there if you want to shout! and if u have questions about the world building for this universe, remember to feel free to comment or ask on twitter or tumblr! if i keep getting the same/similar questions i may just make a note of it here

red

Chapter Summary

It's Christmas time, there's a lot of falling, and Catra gets both some expected and unexpected exercise

Chapter Notes

so apparently i lied when i said the chapter count would range from 7k-12k

anyway band camp has just started for me and classes will start up soon as well so updates will most likely slow a bit from here on out now that i will have a lot less free time, but luckily we only have a few more chapters to go!

also when i first thought of this au, i played three scenes out in my head that i thought would be cool and then proceeded to write literally the entire fic just to write out those three scenes. one of them is in this chapter, brownie points to whoever guesses which one it is

trigger warning spoilers cw for nsfw toward the end, it's easy to tell where it's building so again if that's not your thing skip to the next line break, and tw for descriptions of a panic attack at the end

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

Adora's five when she first learns about soulmates.

Today had been her second day of Kindergarten, and she had been sitting with one of her new friends at the end of the school day — they had taken a liking to each other among realizing their names were similar — when he suddenly frowned and rolled up his sleeves to reveal a bunch of words written on his skin.

“What's that?” Adora had whispered, and watched as Adam looked up at her with knitted brows.

“Just my soulmate again,” he muttered. “They're a jerk.”

Adora had been confused by that. She knows little of soulmates; she's heard her mother talk of them with her grandmother before, but it had always been at inconvenient times, like when

she had been falling asleep in her mother's lap and heard them start discussing it but had been much too tired to ask. But as far as she knew, soulmates were always a positive thing, not something that could be associated with being a jerk.

So when her mom picks her up after school, she immediately scrambles into the backseat and pulls her seatbelt on before she can be reprimanded for forgetting like usual, and then asks, "Mom, do I have a soulmate?"

Her mother looks surprised to hear the question. She makes eye contact with her through the rear-view mirror, and then an amused smile tugs at the corner of her lips. "Of course. Everyone has a soulmate, including you."

"Oh."

Before Adora can ask what a soulmate even is, Mom continues with, "your soulmate is the person who can understand who you are, good and bad, and will love you through it all. They'll always take care of you."

Adora doesn't know why, but that knowledge really excites her. Having a soulmate sounds nice. "Can I talk to them?"

"Absolutely. You can write to them on your skin." So *that* would explain Adam's behavior earlier. "When we get home I'll get you a soulmate pen, okay?"

"I can't use a regular pen?" Adora frowns. She had seen Adam use a marker from their table.

"You can," her mother offers, "but regular writing pens and markers could harm your skin if you use them too often. Soulmate pens are easier to wash out, and they won't harm your skin no matter how often you use it, so for now I would like it if you only used those pens."

Adora thinks that sounds fair.

When they get home, her mom asks her if she wants to do her homework first, but Adora just pouts and reminds her about the pen. Mom gathers her up in her arms, presses a kiss to her forehead, and says, "alright, alright," before she pulls a pen Adora's never seen before out from one of their drawers.

They sit at the table together for at least a solid minute before Adora nervously shifts and asks, "What should I write?"

Her mother chuckles. "Anything. You can introduce yourself... ask them a question..."

She has to leave the room right after that when she gets a mandatory call from the hospital she works at, but Adora sits at the table for a while longer. What is she supposed to say to someone she's never talked to before?

After staring at her arm with sweaty palms for a few more minutes — she didn't think that doing this would be *this* nerve-racking — she finally writes out a simple ***Hello.***

Adora waits minutes at the table for a response, but there is none. There isn't one when Mom comes back to sit with her at the table or when Adora starts her homework, and there isn't one a few hours later when she's eating dinner. By the time her bedtime arrives, Adora has washed her hands multiple times throughout the rest of the day and taken a bath, so the word previously on her arm is completely gone.

"Why didn't they respond to me?" Adora asks as her mother tucks her into bed. Her excitement about the entire thing had dulled severely in the past few hours, and now she just feels nervous again. Maybe they don't like her, or maybe she was too boring to have been responded to, or maybe she doesn't even *have* a soulmate—

"They might not have anything to write with," her mother supplies helpfully as she crouches down next to Adora's bed. "Or maybe they don't know how to write yet. They might be a lot younger than you."

Oh. Adora hadn't thought of that. "So I have a soulmate? For sure?"

Mom gives her a warm smile and brushes some hair from her face, and repeats her words from earlier. "Of course you do, baby. Everyone does."

Adora frowns, fiddling with her fingers. Mom watches her for a moment, and then she reaches for Adora's hands. "Close your eyes." Adora doesn't really know what the purpose of that is, but she follows her mom's directions. "Take a deep breath. Try your best to clear your mind and completely relax."

She's starting to think that maybe her mom is just trying to help her fall asleep quicker, and that's not what she wants right now, but— "trust me, okay?"

"Okay," Adora agrees. Her mom repeats the directions, and she tries her best to follow them.

They sit there in silence for a few moments, and then, "what do you feel?"

Adora knits her brows together. She feels... what she imagines hearing a distant buzzing noise would feel like, a gentle whisper of the leaves in the wind at night, like hovering your fingers just above something electrical and feeling the hints of the static against your skin. There's a sudden urge to get closer to the feeling, an urge she doesn't want to fight.

"It's... it's hard to explain," Adora eventually answers, voice just barely audible. "It's like... something faint and distant, like— like there's supposed to be something more, and I don't know what it is, but I really want to."

Her mother squeezes her hands, and Adora's eyes flutter open. Now that she's not concentrating on it anymore, the feeling disappears.

"Was that them?" Adora asks, a sharp breath escaping her despite the fact that she already knows. There's something deep within her that just *knows*.

"That's your soulmate, Adora," her mom confirms. "That feeling you just experienced: it's your connection to them."

Slowly, a smile rises to Adora's face, because— it's not that she didn't believe her mom when she told her everyone has a soulmate, but getting to actually experience it herself is completely different, and—

Still. It felt like there was something missing, like there's a key she hasn't discovered. It feels like that one time she tried her best to push two north magnets together and couldn't do it no matter how much she tried. Right now no matter how hard she tries to concentrate and get closer to the feeling, to feel *more*, she can't, and it's frustrating.

When she voices as much to her mom, she only smiles and says, "That incomplete part? It'll feel complete when they open their side of the connection and write back to you, and after you've met and fallen in love. That feeling," she puts a finger to Adora's heart, and Adora giggles, "will be filled. You just have to have patience."

"I'm gonna try again tomorrow," Adora tells her mom, determinedly. "And the next day and the next day and the next day and the next day—"

"Okay," her mother interrupts in amusement, tickling Adora's sides again. "Just remember that they might not respond to you right away, so try not to feel sad if it takes a while." Despite her words, her mother's eyes are filled with light, and Adora can't help but lunge forward and wrap her arms around her mom in a hug.

"Thank you for showing me this," she tells her, still smiling. She lets go soon after, and her mom leans down to finish tucking her in.

"You're welcome," Mom whispers, before standing and shutting the lamp on her nightstand off. "Get some sleep, baby. It's well past your bedtime."

Adora shuts her eyes when her mom leaves her room, rolling over into a comfortable position.

She may not know her soulmate right now, but she wants to.

She's *going* to.

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Despite the fact that Catra looks half-dead when Adora picks her up at five-fifteen the next morning, the actual getting to Eternia goes a lot better than Adora thought it would. The taxi to take them to the airport shows up on time, both of them manage to acquire their boarding passes, and they even have time to look around the overpriced shops before they're due to leave. Catra buys herself an extra large coffee in a sad attempt to keep herself awake, but once they get onto the plane she immediately curls up in her tiny seat and knocks out before they even leave the runway.

Adora admittedly gets a little bored on the flight considering Catra sleeps through take-off, landing, and even the turbulence they experience midway, but she manages to keep herself busy in fear that Catra might fling her out of the window or something if she's purposely woken up. Plus, she's really, *really* cute when she sleeps, and Adora has to try Very Hard not to stare at her for the majority of the flight only because she feels like she might look like a creep to anyone who notices.

It isn't until they're off the plane, Catra looking a bit more fresh faced now that she's slept for two more hours — "I'm glad you got that nap in, because you looked like you were seconds away from falling asleep on your feet" Adora laughs once she begrudgingly wakes up, and Catra can only grumble "Well that's just what happens to some people when they're woken up in the middle of the night" — and collecting their suitcases at baggage claim that Catra says, "hey, Adora?"

Adora grabs ahold of both of their suitcases just as they pass by on the conveyor belt, and then turns to face the other girl. "Hm?"

Catra looks a little shy, and it's Adora's first indication that she's about to admit something that might be a little difficult. "Thanks for inviting me. You didn't have to do that."

Adora slowly sets both of their suitcases down, and then reaches out to pull Catra's arms away from where they're wrapped around herself. She slowly pulls Catra forward, giving her the option to tell her to stop, before engulfing her in her arms when Catra doesn't move away. "I know I didn't *have* to," she tells her as Catra wraps her own arms around Adora's waist, burying her face into her shoulder, "but I wanted to. And it wasn't just out of pity, if you're worried about that. I love my grandma, but it can get kind of boring over here, so you're doing just as much of a favor by keeping me company."

Catra nods into her shoulder, and they stay like that until they start getting a few aggravated looks from the other people still trying to collect their luggage.

"Come on," Catra says softly when she eventually releases her and pulls away. She grabs ahold of her luggage and starts making her way for the exit, and without another word, Adora follows.

Regardless of Adora having a key, when they arrive at her old home, they still knock on the door. It's half past nine in the morning, so Adora's pretty sure Razz should be up, but she also wouldn't be surprised if she wasn't.

Eventually she groans, turning around and reaching into the pockets of the letterman Catra's wearing — which Catra *stole* from her the moment they got into the car, thank you very much — fishing around for her keys as Catra bounces with nervous energy when the door finally opens and she's pulled into a tight hug and can only manage a quiet *oof*. "Welcome back, Adora dearie. I figured you'd get here around this time since you love getting up early, so I've actually just started making a quick breakfast, and—" Razz cuts herself off when her

eyes land on Catra. “Oh, that’s right, you’ve brought a friend. Would you like anything to eat dear?”

Adora doesn’t miss the way Razz watches Catra; she’s smiling genuinely, probably happy to have someone help eat all of the food she’s undoubtedly going to make, but she’s also probably wondering whether or not Adora brought home a friend or a “friend”. Adora chooses not to acknowledge it. “Grandma, this is Catra, the friend I told you about.”

Razz *hms*, giving Catra a quick look over — Adora swears she can almost *feel* Catra’s breathing stop — before she apparently comes to the conclusion that Catra is harmless. There’s a moment of absolute *horror* where Adora thinks she might actually try to hug Catra like she does with all of her other friends, but Razz’s strange ability to be able to gauge what people are thinking at random times must come into play because she simply smiles kindly and cheerfully holds a hand out for Catra to shake. “I can’t wait to get to know you, Catra. Are you hungry? I imagine you are, considering Adora probably forced you out of bed early on in the day.”

Considering Catra looked as if she was going to self combust just a couple of moments ago, she now looks somewhat relaxed in comparison, but she still seems like she’s trying to figure out whether or not it would be okay to playfully chat with Razz. After a moment, she must decide it’s alright, because she steps into the small house after her and says, “Yeah, she made me get up at *five* in the morning.”

Razz laughs from somewhere in the kitchen and says *that sounds like my granddaughter* as Adora struggles to get both her and Catra’s suitcases inside in one go. When she finally does, she shuts the door and leaves the suitcases in the hallway, before making her way into the kitchen.

Catra still looks a little uncomfortable, but Adora can tell she’s slowly relaxing. Razz is asking her what she would like her to make her, and Catra declines and says she’s not hungry, but after Razz insists, Catra tells her that whatever she’s making Adora will be fine.

“Hey,” Adora pulls a chair out for Catra and then sits down directly next to her as Razz bustles around the kitchen. “Are you okay? If this gets to be too much then I can show you to my room and you could just hide out there, or even outside, it’s really nice outside—”

“Okay, first of all,” Catra chuckles, “if you think I’m going to hide outside in five degree weather for *any* reason then you’re insane, and second, I’m fine, Adora. It’s just your grandmother, and from what I can tell,” she pauses to flash a glance at Razz, “she seems cool.”

“Wow,” Adora mutters. “So she’s already cool but I’m still a loser?”

Catra leans forward to peck her lips, and Adora has to restrain herself from chasing her lips when she pulls away. “You’re always gonna be a loser.”

“And you’re always gonna be the person who loves kissing this loser.”

Catra rolls her eyes and shoves her away as Adora laughs. Razz sets two plates of food down in front of them a moment later — *thank you, I appreciate it*, Catra makes to politely tell her — and then let's Adora know that she's going to be outside for a few minutes but Adora is more than welcome to wash the dishes.

Adora gives a mock salute just as Razz leaves through the tiny back door. They eat in silence for a moment, and then: “Okay, I get that you're okay now, but... just promise me you'll tell me if something gets to be too much?”

Through a mouthful of food, Catra nods. “I promise.”

It's all too easy for Catra to settle right in.

There was something so mindless about it, like Catra was just another fixture, another glass in the cupboard that Adora had begun using. She wasn't there, and then one day she was, and Adora couldn't remember how it had been here without her. She couldn't remember how it had been before Catra and lovely eyes staring at her, or her soft and gentle lips against her, or her hands tickling her sides, warm and careful.

Razz clearly likes her, too. They had skittered around the more personal topics like family, and talked about more casual things like school. Adora even found them outside on the porch yesterday evening despite the fact that Catra told her she wouldn't be outside for any reason, two mugs of hot chocolate between them, each bundled up in a large blanket.

“I've never had this before,” Catra mutters on the morning of Christmas Eve; they've only been here for a few days, and Adora can see the massive difference between how fidgety and nervous she was when they first got here to how relaxed and untroubled she is.

“Hm?” Adora hums, mindlessly combing her fingers through Catra's short curls. They're settled in quite comfortably on a lazy morning; it's already past nine, but Adora finds that she doesn't mind staying in bed for longer than usual if Catra's asleep next to or — on occasion — on top of her.

It's been nice. There had been a bit of an awkward moment that first night where they weren't quite sure whether or not they should share the bed; it was a full sized bed, so it wasn't *that* small, but it also wasn't very large either. Adora had suggested she take the air mattress she knew Razz had around here somewhere, but Catra had told her it was fine; they'd already shared a bed before, and Adora found she liked sleeping next to someone anyway.

“Just... this,” Catra elaborates quietly. “There's something about you, and there's something about your family that just... makes me feel so comfortable so quickly, and I've never had that before.”

When Adora opens her eyes, she sees Catra staring at something on the wall, brows a bit furrowed, so she waits until they've made eye contact to earnestly tell her: "You're always welcome here."

Catra lifts herself up a bit so that she's resting her chin on her hand, leaning on her elbow. Adora kind of lets her arm flop uselessly to the side as Catra stares at her a moment, lip caught between her teeth. "Always? Even... even when you meet..." she trails off, voice a bit shaky.

Adora's sure that sentence was going to be finished with *your soulmate*, and it's then that she realizes the heaviness of what Catra asking. And... the thought still scares her, but not nearly as much as it used to, because—

Because she likes Catra. She really, *really* likes her, and as she stares up at her messy bed hair and beautiful eyes and thinks about how well she's managed to fit in with Adora's home life, she thinks she could love her.

(She knows that's *extremely* past the line of what they agreed on, but in this blissful moment, Adora decides that can be a problem for her future self.)

After a moment of Catra waiting for her to answer, Adora brushes her hair back so that it's not falling into her face like it usually does in the mornings, and then follows it by leaning up on her own elbows to press a kiss to her forehead. "Always."

-

Catra loves Adora's childhood bedroom.

She loves the entire house, if she's being honest; loves how cozy and homey it is, loves how it constantly smells like coffee and pastries and pies, loves the warmth she feels bundled up in blankets with Adora sitting next to her as they watch Christmas movies by the fireplace. Since they've gotten here, they haven't really stopped touching: always holding hands, knocking their feet playfully against each other under the table, pressed against each other in bed.

(Razz had stared at them knowingly that first night, after they all ate dinner together and Adora had told her grandmother that she and Catra would be retiring for the night. Catra wasn't really sure what that look meant, but hadn't really felt bothered enough by it to ask.)

The house itself is small. In the foyer, there's plenty of pictures littered across the wall, ranging from pictures of a young Adora next to someone Catra doesn't recognize, as well as some of Adora by herself and some of the woman Catra doesn't recognize by herself. There's a few others with what's probably extended family, and a few of a young Adora with what's

probably her old friends, but it's Adora and the other woman that the pictures usually center on.

"Hey, um..." Catra starts sort of awkwardly on their second day there, while her and Adora's grandmother are sitting outside. They have, again, been avoiding the heavier topics; Catra's been doing it on purpose, but she suspects Razz has been letting her, not particularly caring where the conversation goes as long as she's *getting to know Catra* like she suggested she do when they first got here.

Razz hums behind her mug of hot chocolate. Catra stares down at her own, watching her own breath escape her with every exhale, visible due to the chill.

"That woman in most of the pictures with Adora," she starts, nervously tapping her fingers against the mug. "Who... who is that?"

Razz looks confused for a brief moment, before she seems to realize what Catra's asking. "Oh, my Mara," she whispers sort of longingly, and it's Catra's first clue that this person is probably important. "She was my daughter."

Catra blinks. "Daughter? So... does that mean—"

"Adora's mother," Razz nods knowingly, a fond smile on her face. "She was a great daughter, and an even better mother. Raised Adora as best as she could."

It's clear from the usage of past tense that this person — Mara — is gone, but if the way Razz is speaking about her with an adoring look on her face rather than a one full of grief is anything to base it off of, it must have happened a while ago, and there's a good chance she's moved on. Catra wonders if Adora has moved on yet; wonders if there's a reason she hasn't mentioned her to Catra yet.

"Mara was always a hopeless romantic at heart," Razz tells her, a bit amused. "Always believed wholeheartedly in soulmates, and I think she passed that down to Adora. That girl always talked about her soulmate like they were the best thing in the world, like she couldn't wait for them to show up and sweep her off her feet."

Catra's not too sure what to say. She knows a bit about Adora's problems with her soulmate, but she still doesn't understand how Adora could love someone she's never met, let alone barely even talked to. On the flip side, though, she doubts Adora understands how Catra could *not* love her own soulmate.

After a long while of silence, Razz turns toward her. That fond smile is still on her face when she murmurs, "you kept Adora waiting for a long time, you know."

Catra freezes. Knits her brows together in confusion. "What are you talking about?"

Razz doesn't say anything else. The snow in front of the porch starts falling at a more rapid pace than before, and an owl hoots in the distance. "It's getting too cold out here, and Adora's probably wondering what we're doing. Come on, I'll make us some more hot chocolate."

To be quite frank, Catra thinks it was too cold out here from the start, but talking with Adora or *about* Adora fills her with a warm buzz, so she doesn't say anything else as she follows Razz inside.

Their conversation lingers in the back of her mind for the rest of the night, and when she finally voices what it is that Razz told her to Adora as they're getting ready for bed, Adora simply shrugs.

"She gets confused sometimes," is all she offers in explanation. "Sometimes you just have to go with it."

It's a bit of a weak explanation if Catra's being honest, but as she curls up into Adora's side and squeezes her eyes shut, the only other explanation she can think of is *what if Adora is my*

—

No, she immediately thinks before she can even internally finish the sentence, because how would Razz even know that?

So she buries the thought — and the last part of her and Razz's conversation — deep into the depth of her mind with the intention of *never* bringing it back up. Adora falls asleep soon after, and her peaceful face and warm embrace lulls Catra into a feeling of safety.

She quickly follows.

Adora makes it known that Christmas Eve is when they eat their big dinner, while Christmas is the day they use for simply lazing around. Razz gets started on the meal around four, and Catra pulls out of Adora's hold from the couch to go offer to help when Adora quickly grabs her hand and tells her, "don't bother. It's always been a rule that when Razz is in the kitchen, no one else is allowed to be. We'll definitely just get in the way."

Catra blinks. "She does everything herself?"

Adora shrugs. "She likes it that way, but if it makes you feel any better, we'll definitely be in charge of cleaning up literally everything afterward."

Catra thinks she can live with that. Adora attempts to pull her back down onto the couch so they can get comfortable again, but when Catra remains standing where she is, Adora pouts.

Biting her lip, Catra grins and pulls Adora to her feet, answers *I'm bored* in response to Adora's whiney where are we going question. In their room, she pulls one of Adora's hoodies over herself which seems to clue Adora into where they're going, so she follows suit. Catra grabs the large blanket she used when she was sitting outside with Razz last night, makes Adora hold it in spite of her grumbling, and then grabs her sketchbook and pencils.

They end up back outside on the porch. Catra pushes Adora down into the chair and grabs at her shoulders to maneuver her this way or that until she deems her comfortable enough, and then she sits down in her lap.

“Unbelievable,” Adora laughs. “I really am just your personal pillow, huh? Or in this case a chair.” Despite her words, she drapes the blanket over them once Catra gets comfortable, and then wraps her arms around Catra’s middle to keep her from falling off. “I thought you didn’t even like going outside in this weather. It’s— what did you say? It’s too cold.”

“Well, it is,” Catra defends herself as she pulls her sketchbook and pencils into her own lap. “But that’s why you’re here.”

“So I’m your personal pillow, chair, *and* heater?”

“Yeah,” Catra says without much thought, voice a bit quieter as she focuses her gaze on what’s in front of them. The house is little and quiet, and Catra suspects all of the houses in this area are like that, because there’s not too many around. It almost reminds Catra of a small wooden cabin out in the woods, but with fewer trees surrounding them. In front of them the long driveway leads to the road, where the next house is at least a quarter of a mile away. Past the road is the forest, where pine trees are covered in sheets of white from the snowstorm that hit last night. There’s even a small herd of deer flocking at the edge of it, just at the perfect spot for Catra to incorporate it in her drawing.

“Sorry there’s not much to do around here. We could probably go deeper into town if you actually get bored, but…” Adora mutters.

“Well, I wouldn’t mind you showing me around,” Catra tells her, “But I also like it here. I enjoy the quiet. Probably should’ve brought my paint, this would be the perfect time to work on some things I need to get done.”

Adora presses a quick kiss to the back of her neck. “We could go into town and buy you some things. Razz will let us take her car.”

“That’s okay,” Catra hums. “The pieces I need to finish right now are at home anyway.”

They fall into a comfortable silence after that. Adora rests her chin on Catra’s shoulder, occasionally opening her eyes to glance down at the drawing as it’s being created, telling her things like *you’re so talented* or *your art is almost as beautiful as you*. Catra rolls her eyes at the cheesiness of it all despite how much she loves it, loves the praise she gets now that she’s letting someone she actually knows see her art, loves not feeling like she has to hide it.

Razz comes to get them sometime around six thirty to let them know dinner’s ready, long after Catra has finished, shut her sketchbook, and simply reveled in the quietness as she leaned further back into the warm and comforting weight behind her. When Catra gets inside and sees everything already on the table, she realizes that Adora was definitely *not* exaggerating about the amount of food, because this would definitely be enough to comfortably feed at least *twice* the amount of people in the room.

Catra eats what's possibly the most she has in years, and Adora laughs at her afterwards when she tells her she feels like she can barely walk despite the fact that Adora agrees with that sentiment. They clean up everything afterwards, packaging the leftovers into the fridge, wiping everything down. Catra washes the dishes while Adora dries them and puts them away, and everytime Catra turns toward her to hand her a few more dishes Adora attempts to steal a kiss despite Catra's playful protests, and Catra can't stop smiling because she loves everything about this day— these past few days— *so* much.

On Christmas Day, she reluctantly wakes up to Adora shaking her shoulders in an attempt to rouse her.

“Mm, leave me alone. Still sleep time,” Catra grumbles, pushing Adora away when she starts trying to kiss her face.

“*Catra*,” Adora whines, “it's Christmas! This is the one day you shouldn't sleep in!”

“This is the one day you *should* let me sleep in.”

Before Catra can even finish, the smell of cinnamon rolls invades their room, and even Catra can admit that alone nearly gets her out of bed. Unfortunately Adora seems to smell it as well, because— “But Catra, we have to go open presents and eat cinnamon rolls and watch Christmas movies and be lazy!”

Catra chuckles at Adora's antics, and when she opens her eyes Adora is staring at her with wide eyes and a pout that she *knows* Catra can rarely say no to. But Christmas has never really been a big deal to her anyway— it's sort of just another day in passing. “Sorry princess, but your puppy face isn't going to work on me today.”

Adora's quiet for a moment. Catra relaxes against the sheets, having assumed Adora's given up, before she's speaking again.

“Can I touch you?” she suddenly asks. Without opening her eyes, Catra furrows her brows. She appreciated Adora's need for consent on physical touch near the beginning, but now she's comfortable enough with her that she doesn't have to ask, and based on the way they've been acting this whole time in Eternia, she figured Adora already knew that.

“Of course you can, dummy.” Catra feels fingers on her side. “I thought you already—”

She's cut off when she feels those same fingers dig into her sides, and before she really knows what's happening, she's shrieking in laughter as Adora tickles the life out of her.

“Say you'll get up,” Adora tells her, but she's smiling so wide that it looks like her face might break. Catra can't really speak over her incessant laughter and attempts to push Adora away from her, and when she eventually resorts to trying to use her feet to get her to stop, Adora straddles her hips. Between the deep, belly laughs and the desperation in her flailing limbs, Adora leans closer to her and whispers, “say you'll get up or else—”

“Okay, okay, okay, I'll— I'll get up!” Catra eventually wheezes in her struggle to get actual words out, and when Adora finally lets up, Catra takes in a gasping breath. She intertwines

both of their hands together just to make sure Adora won't start up again, and glares at the girl still sitting on her hips.

Adora's giggles are like music to her ears. "You brought that upon yourself."

Catra is quiet for a few moments in an attempt to gain her breath back. "Gonna get you back," she moans, shutting her eyes tiredly.

"I'm not ticklish," Adora tells her in delight, pulling one of her hands away from Catra's and prodding her side again. Catra whines in objection, quickly taking back hold of her hands. "You're lucky you're cute."

"I'm not cute," Catra mumbles, but she feels too tired to try and object more. "You shouldn't have done that. I'm too tired to get up now."

Adora groans, and then dramatically collapses down next to her. "Fine. We'll lie down until the cinnamon rolls are ready, but after that we're getting up."

Catra has absolutely no objections to that, especially when Adora wraps her arms around her and drags her closer. "Deal."

They lay dozing for a little while longer, but eventually, Razz swings the door open and shouts "Come on you two, it's Christmas!" and doesn't even close the door before she disappears down the hallway.

Adora leans up a bit, and Catra feels a warm hand on her cheek and even warmer lips against her own a few moments later. "Merry Christmas, Catra."

Catra smiles into the kiss. Despite the fact that she's only been awake for about fifteen minutes, she feels like this Christmas might be the best one she's ever had.

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Objectively, Christmas goes well.

They stuff themselves with cinnamon rolls after Catra finally gives up and allows Adora to drag her out of bed. When they open their presents, Catra looks a little surprised to see that she has gifts too, which shatters Adora's heart a bit. Adora gets her a necklace with a painting palette and brush charm, and Catra immediately asks her to help her put it on. Even Razz gives her a gift that consists of an oversized knit sweater with a cat on the front, and Catra looks like she's about five seconds from bursting into tears after she opens it.

Catra gives her a thick flannel button up, and Adora laughs when she sees it because she knows it's because she had told Catra she didn't own any flannel and Catra had asked her

what kind of lesbian she was for not owning any. They spend the rest of Christmas lazing around, eating leftovers and cuddling on the couch with Christmas movies playing in the background.

It isn't until later that evening — Adora warming up some leftover mac and cheese for herself while Catra dozes on the couch — that Razz approaches her in the kitchen.

“That soulmate of yours isn't hungry?” she asks, no doubt eyeing the small portion of food Adora's currently warming up.

Adora shakes her head as she mixes it around, before putting it back in the microwave. “She said she'll probably eat in a little bit.” And then, after it registers what her grandmother has just said, Adora blinks. “Wait, *what?*”

Razz pulls some turkey and mashed potatoes from the fridge, and then glances at her. “What?”

“I— she— we're not—” Adora has to take a deep breath, and then, reminding herself that Catra is not completely asleep in the next room, she quiets down. “She's not my soulmate.”

There's a pause, and then, “well sure she is.”

Adora narrows her eyes. “Grandma, she's... she's not.”

Razz watches her for a long time, almost as if she's trying to figure something out. “But you want her to be.”

“I...” Adora trails off, averting her gaze. She hadn't ever really thought about that before; how much easier this would all be if Catra actually was her soulmate. She wouldn't have to keep thinking about *my soulmate* or *Catra* and *I love my soulmate* and *I think I could love Catra*. “I... I don't know,” she eventually answers. “I guess I do. It would make it a lot easier.”

Despite this, Razz just keeps staring at her knowingly, as if Adora is missing something. After a while, she shakes her head and sort of smiles to herself, and then goes back to preparing her plate. “Whether the universe thinks so or not, my dear... I know two soulmates when I see them.”

Adora stares down at her macaroni for a long time.

I know two soulmates when I see them.

She sighs, gathers her plate, and then because today is the one day Razz lets them eat there, makes her way back to the living room. Catra's eyes are shut when Adora sits down near her head with her bowl of food in hand, but she rests her head back on Adora's thigh as soon as she gets settled.

I know two soulmates when I see them.

I know two soulmates when I see them.

I know two soulmates when I see them.

The thought keeps playing in the back of Adora's mind and she finds herself unable to focus on the movie until Catra leans up and, despite having told Adora she wasn't hungry, takes a bite of her food.

"Cat— *Catra*," Adora objects when Catra forks her food into her own mouth, "Do you want me to warm something up for you? We literally still have everything from yesterday."

Catra grins. "Tastes better when it's being stolen."

"You know, I'm starting to think all I'm getting out of this arrangement is getting things stolen. My letterman, my hoodies, my clothes, and now my food."

"Mm," Catra hums, taking another bite of Adora's food. "But you love it."

Adora stares at her for a moment as she gets settled back against her thigh. Her heart swells in that moment, with the warmth of the fireplace going and Catra's weight against her thigh and Razz sitting over in her rocking chair and eating her own food, and she thinks, despite the guilt that forms in her chest at the thought of holding her soulmate to any sort of expectations, *yeah*. It would definitely be easier if Catra were her soulmate.

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The morning after Christmas, Catra wakes up to the feeling of the bed dipping next to her. It takes her a moment to figure out what's going on, but she realizes that it's still dark outside, which indicates it's still early. Adora is getting back into bed, and she's cold, and that means she was probably outside.

"Sorry," Adora mumbles, probably having realized Catra's eyes are open. "I didn't mean to wake you. Go back to sleep."

"Where'd you go?" Catra rumbles, voice thick with sleep.

Adora's quiet for a moment, and then: "To visit someone."

Considering she's about ninety percent sure what this is about, those words seem to awaken something with her and Catra blinks the rest of her grogginess from her eyes. Adora's staring up at the ceiling, but she doesn't look sad, or even upset.

"You can tell me anything, okay?" Catra tells her, reaching for her hand with her own and intertwining them. Adora turns her head to look at her, and then takes a deep breath.

"I know," she breathes a bit shakily. "And... I will, just... later."

Catra nods. There's still so much for them to talk about, still so much she hasn't told Adora about either, but as she stares into blue-grey eyes, she knows there's absolutely no rush.

-

Mid-afternoon, when they find themselves laying around without much to do, Adora asks Catra if it'd be alright if she showed her around town. Catra agrees, and has just gotten into the shower when Adora realizes Bow and Glimmer are blowing up their group chat.

Merry Christmas!!! Bow had messaged.

Glimmer replied quickly. *merry christmas u guys*

Where's Adora?

she's prolly too busy boning catra

Glimmer!!!

it's true

Adora rolls her eyes. *Merry Christmas guys!!*

so just gonna ignore our boning message huh

Glimmer I'm this close to blocking you, Adora tells her, and then for good measure, and Bow too.

!!!!!! What did I do??? :((((

ok but really how's it going over there?

Adora chews her lip for a few moments. It's going *great*, but she feels like she's on the verge of ruining it with her newfound realization.

I'm pretty sure I like Catra. Like, a lot.

ok? we already knew that

What's big about that? Bow asks. Aren't U guys were dating

No, we're not dating.

Adora what

omfg does that mean ur just now figuring out that u like her oh my go d

next thing u know she's probably gonna be questioning whether or not catra has feelings for her

Well... Adora types sort of nervously.

are you actually serious

There's an incoming call for a group chat facetime from Glimmer a moment later, and Adora makes sure she can still hear the water running in the shower before she answers it.

"Adora, please don't tell me you're being serious," is what Glimmer says as soon as her face pops up. Bow joins the screen a moment later, and Adora can hear his siblings running around in the background.

"Okay, I've known I've had feelings for her for a long time, and I'm not questioning whether she has feelings for me, either," Adora immediately defends herself, because even *she* isn't that oblivious. "That's not really the problem. The problem is that I kind of proposed a no strings attached agreement, and she agreed."

Bow blinks, and Glimmer's brows lift to her hairline. "Like friends with benefits?"

Adora sighs. "Uh, I guess."

"And now you're worried that since you have feelings, it could get in the way of the agreement," Bow connects, nodding thoughtfully. Adora flops onto her bed.

She knows she has feelings for Catra — *strong* feelings — that she probably won't be able to ignore if this goes on much longer. She's had them from the start, and she thinks that she had always kind of known this arrangement wouldn't work between them; that it was just a temporary solution.

"So if you're the one who proposed it, then maybe she wouldn't mind if you wanted to turn it into something more." Glimmer pauses, and then, "that is what you want, right? Not still waiting for...?"

Your soulmate?

Adora screws the palms of her hands into her eyes for a moment and groans.

A part of her hates this, hates how complicated everything got after she met Catra. She has a soulmate. She has a soulmate, who she fell in love with the moment they opened their side of the connection for the first time and left a beautiful painting on her skin, the first time she *felt* their presence like they were there with her.

But another part of her — a much bigger part — is so, *so* grateful to Catra for being a part of her life, for unexpectedly showing up and unknowingly knocking everything upside down and showing her that there's more to life than just *soulmates*. That part of her: it's falling for Catra. It's falling for her and her unruly hair and the freckles that bridge across her nose and

cheeks and how she tries to hold back a laugh every time Adora kisses them. She's falling, and she doesn't think she could stop even if she wanted to.

And her soulmate... her soulmate — who hasn't made an appearance in a *while*, she realizes with a bit of concern — isn't ready, and that thought still hurts, but the thought of not being with Catra hurts far more than that.

"Yeah," Adora murmurs. "It's... it's what I want. I want something more."

"Oh Adora, that's so great," Bow says as Glimmer smiles. "I think you should totally go for it!"

"Yeah," Glimmer agrees, much to both her and Bow's surprise. "She may not be my *favorite* person, but... I think she's good for you."

"Well," Adora starts, "when I suggested that agreement, it was also for her benefit because she's afraid of commitment," she explains. "So... that's what makes it even more complicated. I'm pretty sure she has feelings for me, but she might not be ready for an actual relationship."

Bow and Glimmer are silent for a moment, and Adora swears she can see them exchanging looks through the screen. "I don't mean to be blunt," Glimmer mutters, "but you could just try... talking to her?"

Adora sighs. "I... I will. I want her to be my girlfriend. I'll ask her about it when we get back to Bright Moon, so if she doesn't feel the same way, she won't feel trapped here."

Bow and Glimmer seem relatively pleased with that. Afterwards, the conversation steers toward far less important things, and Adora finds herself letting them do most of the talking while she just listens.

Catra must be taking a long shower, because by the time they hang up Adora can still hear the water running. Taking a deep breath, she goes to grab one of her old soulmate pens from where she knows it is in the kitchen. It hasn't been touched or used in years, and Adora makes sure to give it a little shake before she caps it open.

It's been a few days over a week since her soulmate last made an appearance, and while she understands that it's the holidays and there's a good chance they're just busy, she still worries about them when they disappear for that long. Plus, she hasn't written anything at all to them lately, so she feels a little bad.

She rallies back and forth on what she should write for at least a few minutes until she hears the shower turn off in the bathroom. Adora quickly writes out ***I hope you had a good xmas, and if you don't celebrate it then... hope you had a good Saturday!***

When she's finished, she rolls the sleeve of her sweatshirt back down, hoping that she wasn't anxious enough for her soulmate to actually sense it.

Catra is, strangely enough, in the bathroom for at least another ten minutes before she eventually comes out dressed in jeans and the sweater that Razz knitted for her. She's quiet, and as she packs her dirty clothes into her suitcase, Adora can tell she's a bit nervous by the way she's tapping her fingers against her thigh and flashing glances at Adora from time to time.

Adora swings her legs over the side of the bed so she's sitting down. "What's up?"

Catra eyes her for a few moments, and then she clenches her jaw and averts her eyes. "Nothing."

"Hey," Adora starts, standing up and reaching for Catra's hands. For a moment she fears that maybe Catra somehow heard her conversation with Bow and Glimmer is acting weird because she doesn't want that, but there's no way she could've heard the conversation across the hall with the shower running. Adora pauses for a moment, and then repeats Catra's own words back to her from this morning. "You can tell me anything, okay?"

Catra still isn't looking at her, but she nods after a while and takes a deep breath, and much to Adora's relief, her shoulders relax. "It's... it's really nothing. I'm just overthinking."

Adora's not quite sure how much she buys that, but she trusts Catra will tell her anything she needs to know when she's ready. So she nods in acceptance, and then playfully ruffles Catra's still wet hair. "Might want to finish drying that off before we leave, else it'll freeze."

Catra grumbles something about hating the cold, and once they're deemed protected enough — Catra dressed in her sweater, a coat, and a beanie, and Adora in a hoodie and her furred jean jacket she brought along with her — they borrow Razz's car to make their way into town.

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According to Adora, Eternia has always been a very picturesque sort of town, with its old-school look and things like the abandoned drive-in down the road or the old diner Adora used to frequent often after school, and Catra definitely agrees. Adora parks the car at a place called *The Ruby Rabbit*, a small theatre that looks like it willingly would lend itself to some Instagram-ready photos.

They wander through the streets, Catra taking in the small town charm while Adora takes her role as tour guide very seriously, pointing out various landmarks and providing pieces of history to go along with them.

"The first time I got drunk was here," Adora tells her as they pass by an old apartment complex. "I don't even remember what I drank, but I was a lot less built back then, and it was

my first time trying alcohol, so I imagine it probably wasn't as much as I can handle now. I'm told I threw up and then passed out in the bathtub, and I woke up with the worst hangover of my life at a friend's house."

"Your first time trying alcohol and you immediately got wasted?" Catra laughs. "Wow. Didn't expect that one from you, princess."

"Hey," Adora defends herself, "I was participating in a test to see who could hold the most liquor, and I was young and dumb and surrounded by a bunch of guys who I wanted to win against."

"Well you sure proved them wrong," Catra says sarcastically, and Adora snorts.

They enter a small, cozy looking café to grab something quick before dinner, and emerge soon after with two coffees in pastel purple takeout cups, a piece of banana bread Catra finds herself enjoying the taste of, and Adora inhaling a croissant at an alarmingly fast pace.

Catra finds herself taking some pictures just because of how aesthetically pleasing everything really is, but also because there's some things she wouldn't mind drawing a replica of later on. After a lot of begging and pleading, Adora actually gets her to let her take pictures of the both of them rather than just pictures of the town.

Dinner is nice. Because Adora wants to take her on an actual date before they leave, they make an impromptu decision to go to Pescadou Bistro's — it's one of the only fancy restaurants in the town, apparently — despite the fact that they are severely underdressed. It gathers a few weird looks from some of the patrons, but apparently Adora knows both the owner and a lot of the people working there, so they're still treated well.

When they end up back home, long after the sun has gone down and the moon and stars envelop the sky, Adora tells her she's going to take a quick shower and lets Catra take her room to change into her own pajamas. After Catra strips off all of her layers, she finds herself thinking about the ink that had marked her arm earlier, no longer there from the events of the day.

She wants to write, *Stop talking to me.*

She wants to write, *Stop making me think about you when I don't want to.*

She wants to write, *Stop scaring me*, because that's what's happening. She had been suspicious for a moment, when the ink hurriedly appeared on her arm right after she had gotten out of the shower. She could feel a bit of anxiety from them, too, although that's not really anything new; they could just be feeling like that due to their fear that Catra might not respond.

And she doesn't want to. Not now, when she just wants to be with Adora without the looming idea of them being soulmates over her.

Catra screws her eyes shut, and then chastises herself for thinking about that yet again when she keeps telling herself that she *shouldn't*, that there's no point in wasting her time on it

because it's *not true*.

So she doesn't reply; instead, she slips on her pajamas, only for Adora to knock on the door a moment later. Catra invites her in, and when she turns back to face the other girl, her worries just kind of melt away because Adora has her hair down and she's staring at Catra with her eyes wide and wondering as if she's just seeing Catra for the first time all over again, like she's rediscovering her.

"Where have you been?" Adora quietly whispers, and Catra blinks.

"What?"

Adora finally meets her eyes, and she smiles as she approaches her. "Where have you been all my life? What corner of the world were you hiding in for so long before we met?"

Catra finds it easier to kiss her than to say, because the truth is, she doesn't know. She forgets, in this moment, the time before Adora. It's as if whatever time held before then is irrelevant, and her mind has just discarded it.

Adora tastes like minty fresh toothpaste, tastes like home and perfection and everything else Catra enjoys about her. She kisses Catra back with just as much passion and desire, like she's craving something that only Catra can give to her. Adora nips at her bottom lip, brushes her tongue into her mouth, and Catra can't help but groan quietly into her mouth.

There's a break for air, and then Catra dips her head to press a line of wet kisses along her jaw to her neck. She grins when Adora whines as Catra sucks on her pulse: a weak spot she discovered last time they made out.

Admittedly, Catra is a little caught off guard when Adora suddenly slides her hands beneath her thighs, before pulling her up and causing her to instinctively wrap her legs around her waist. Catra exhales, and pulls away to stare at Adora when she starts walking them over to the bed.

"Bed this time," is all Adora whispers, a little out of breath. Catra stares at her for another few moments, waiting for Adora to finally meet her eyes before she talks.

"This time?" she echoes, voice soft. Adora nods, and Catra strokes her cheek with her thumb. "Are you... are you ready for that?"

Adora's eyes are filled with trust and tenderness, and Catra swears in that moment that she's going to protect those eyes for as long as she possibly can. She sets Catra down on her bed, and then crawls next to her, pressing their foreheads together.

"I want you, Catra," she breathes, "all of you."

Catra's breath hitches. She's not too sure if Adora is referring to just *this*, what's happening in the moment, or more, but she pushes the thought out of head. She's not going to start dissecting three words when they're in the middle of *this*.

“Okay,” she agrees, feeling herself shiver when Adora’s fingers brush against the skin where her sleep shirt has ridden up. “You can have me.”

Fingertips still ghosting along her abdomen, Adora smiles. “You can have me, too.”

Catra brings her hand back up to brush her thumb against Adora’s cheek, and then relaxes when Adora tilts her head down to kiss her. Catra kisses her back feverishly, so hard it almost hurts. Then, her hands skim back and forth along the exposed part of Catra’s waist in an almost teasing manner, before she eventually slips a hand beneath Catra’s shirt. Catra groans when she feels Adora’s fingertips graze the swell of her breasts. She’s not wearing a bra; neither one of them is, considering they were just about to go to sleep.

At some point, Adora pulls back to look Catra in the eyes with a question. Her hands slip out from beneath her shirt and grip the hem, and Catra nods without having to think twice. She’s perfectly okay with letting Adora set the pace; perfectly okay with whatever she wants to do.

So she sits up ever so slightly and helps Adora pull her shirt off before she leans back down.

For a moment, it’s quiet.

It’s weird, she thinks, that she suddenly feels nervous. Or, well, she’s *been* nervous, but she’s been nervous about making this a good time for Adora; not about herself. Now, as Adora’s eyes roam over her bare top, Catra can’t help but feel a little shy. She’s done this before, multiple times, but never with someone she cared about; never with someone who paused to take her in and stare at her with loving eyes.

Eventually, Catra sort of squirms. “You’re um,” she breathes, “you’re kind of making me nervous.”

Adora blinks, and then she shakes her head. “Sorry, you’re just... can’t believe you’re letting me see you like this.” Catra wants to ask her to elaborate, ask her what that means, but then Adora’s hands are on her, slow and sort of nervous along her ribs and her abdomen before a hesitant hand is on her breast, and *oh*, Catra thinks her hands fit so perfectly around her.

Adora palms her for a moment, soft as if she’s just trying to get a feel, but then she suddenly leans forward to take Catra’s left nipple into her mouth, and—

“Fuck,” Catra moans, right hand gripping the sheets, left hand reaching up for Adora’s hair, a little taken aback by it all.

“Want you,” Adora mumbles again, and the vibrations against her skin sends shiver’s down Catra’s spine. “Wanted you for so long—”

“You have me,” Catra responds hastily, shivering when Adora pulls back to take her other nipple into her mouth, her other hand coming up to massage the now unoccupied one. She thinks the more accurate thing would be to say *you’ve always had me, even from the start*, but she’s also not really capable of forming long sentences like that right now, especially not

when Adora shifts so that she's half on top of her, nudging her knee between her legs and then pressing forward.

A low, almost involuntarily moan escapes Catra's lips. "God, Adora, you're killing me here," she breathlessly chuckles.

"Sorry," Adora giggles against her chest, and Catra relaxes her hand in her hair. Then, Adora pulls back up to kiss her, and Catra's eyes fall shut as she relaxes back against the pillows.

After a moment, she feels Adora's hands begin to skate downward. They're quick, brushing hesitantly against the hem of her pajama pants, before they graze against her upper thigh, and Catra can't help but whisper, "you can take them off, if you want."

Adora makes an almost startled noise, and Catra opens her mouth to call her cute, but all that really comes out is a soft breath. She feels Adora's hands grip the hem of her pajamas, before slowly tugging downward, and Catra lifts her hips to help her move.

They come off quickly. Catra hears the sounds of clothes hitting the floor before Adora's fingers return to her, but this time, they're unsure and shaky against her thighs. When Catra opens her eyes, she finds that Adora's own eyes are wide and suddenly looking sort of panic-stricken, and Catra quickly reaches for her hand to squeeze it. "Adora," she starts, "you know we don't have to do this."

Adora swallows, but shakes her head. "I— I know, but I want to. I really, *really* want to do this with you, but I'm scared I'm going to mess it up and—"

"Hey, hey," Catra whispers, leaning up. "You're not going to mess this up, alright?" After a moment, Adora nods, and Catra moves her hand to cup her neck and leans forward to kiss her. It's gentle and soft, and not nearly as rough and eager as before. Catra pulls back after a moment, moving her other hand to comb through Adora's hair. "How about I touch you first?"

Adora nods again, and Catra smiles, nudging Adora so that she rolls over onto her back and allows Catra to follow.

"Just remember," Catra whispers against her lips, "no matter how much we do, or far we get, you can tell me to stop, okay? If you decide you don't want this, I promise I won't be mad, or upset, or disappointed."

"I... okay," Adora takes a moment, but then she nods. "Okay. Thank you, Catra."

Catra blinks. "For what?"

Adora shrugs. She looks so beautiful, hair splayed out beneath her all over the pillow, flushed down to her neck, blue-grey eyes filled with so much passion. "For being so patient, and... sweet."

Catra groans, and her head falls to Adora's shoulder as Adora chuckles.

“Yeah, you heard me,” she can feel Adora’s shoulder’s shaking in laughter. “You’re *so* sweet, and patient, and kind, and understanding...”

“Okay,” Catra tells her, pulling back out from her hiding place. “I get it.”

Adora’s staring at her with that familiar look from earlier when she stepped into the bedroom, from that day in Catra’s room when Catra showed her her art, like she can’t believe she’s real. Catra stares back at her for a moment. There’s a feeling much stronger than before that starts blooming in her chest; something overwhelming and foreign, but so warm and welcoming at the same time.

She leans back in to kiss Adora, trying her best to convey everything she feels through that instead of words, because she’s never been good with words. Although she won’t admit it, again, she’s still a little nervous because although she’s done this multiple times before, she’s never done it like *this*. She’s never done it with someone she cares about, someone she’s afraid she might hurt or someone she wants to constantly be sure is okay the whole way through.

So she sticks above Adora’s sleep shirt, only half aware that she’s almost naked while Adora still lays fully clothed beneath her. *Catra*, Adora whispers into her mouth in some kind of awe, just as Catra pulls away to dip into her neck to stick to what she knows Adora is okay with, mouthing along the skin.

“You— you can take it off,” Adora whispers, reaching for Catra’s wandering hands and guiding them to the edge of her shirt. Catra pulls away to look her in the eyes for a moment, and then nods, slowly pulling Adora’s shirt over her shoulders. Suddenly, she has a half-naked Adora laying below her, and Catra already knows that she’s beautiful, but this is just outrageous.

“Oh my God,” Catra whispers, taking her in for everything: her very prominent abs, her breasts that are just so *perfect*, and everything else about her that couldn’t be seen before. Catra can’t believe that *Adora* couldn’t believe she was real, when really, it should be Catra who can’t believe this—

“What?” Adora asks, and when Catra glances back up at her, she realizes Adora looks sort of nervous again. Catra shakes her head, eyes still wide in disbelief, and then she slowly runs her hands up and down her body.

“You’re just...” she leans down, pressing a kiss to Adora’s abs. “So beautiful,” she kisses her chest then, brushes her lips against her breasts, “so, *so* fucking beautiful Adora,” lays gentle, feathery kisses down her chest and along her stomach, smiles when she sees Adora’s teeth when she pulls her lips back to form a smile of her own, “so gorgeous and amazing and absolutely perfect.”

Adora makes a breathy noise at the praise, hips jumping up ever so slightly. Catra grins, and then leans up from where she’s started laying attention to her (did she mention perfect?) breasts. “What do you want me to do?” she asks, because she thinks she’ll do *anything* for Adora, anything she wants or asks—

“Want you to touch me,” Adora breathes, “please, Catra, I just want you—” and so Catra does, moves back in to kiss her as she skims her hands down her *very nice* abs before they brush against her waistband.

“Where?” Catra asks; not because she wants Adora to admit it, but because she’s genuinely scared of moving too quickly. Sex may not be new to her, but *this* is; she hadn’t thought she’d be this afraid of messing it up until now.

Gently, Adora’s fingers wrap around her own, and she guides Catra’s fingers down between her legs. Catra takes a breath; applies a bit of pressure, palms her slowly, and her breath stutters a bit when Adora whines in pleasure.

“More—Catra, wanna *feel* your hands—”

“Fuck,” Catra whispers, and fumbles when she brings both of her hands to the hem of Adora’s shorts. “Okay?” she checks in, and when Adora lets out a litany of *yes, yes, yes*, she slowly pulls her shorts down, throws them in the general direction of where she saw Adora fling her pajama pants, and then slowly slips a hand beneath her underwear. She takes it much slower than she does for herself, much slower than she’s ever had before, merely stroking her gingerly because her heart is about to punch out of her rib cage.

She almost considers taking her own underwear off first, just so Adora doesn’t feel more exposed than she is, but then Adora sort of chokes out a repeated, “*More, Catra, please—*” and Catra can’t even begin to fathom denying her, so she carefully takes her fingers, leans down a bit, and slowly pulls her underwear down her legs.

When she looks back at Adora, laying completely out and open for her, she almost wonders if this is how Adora felt when Catra showed her art for the first time. Adora’s eyes are shut, and her lips are parted as she sucks in hollow breaths, and Catra leans back down to swear in Adora’s sweat coated neck for a brief moment as she feels around with her fingers. Adora takes in a gasping breath, arm coming around to grip at Catra’s hair so tightly it almost hurts, even when Catra pulls away ever so slightly to watch her own fingers run through Adora’s folds.

“Pretty,” Catra tips her face back to kiss Adora again just because. “You’re so pretty, ‘dora.”

Adora moans weakly against her lips, hips stuttering forward when Catra finds her clit and rubs loosely a few times, trying her best to take note of her reactions to learn what she likes.

She’s not too sure Adora has any lubricant around here, nor does she really see any of them getting up in the near future, so she takes her hand off of Adora for a brief moment to bring it up to her lips despite Adora’s whine of protest. She sucks two of her fingers into her mouth; tastes Adora on the tips, and can’t help but groan.

“Oh, my God,” she hears from her right, and glances back at Adora, who is staring at her with wide eyes that are almost black with arousal. She looks so wrecked and flushed that Catra isn’t even really concerned with her not wanting this anymore, and instead finds herself wanting to put on a show. So she tilts her head, stares at Adora underneath her lashes, hollows out her cheeks as she sucks at her fingers before pulling them out slowly.

“Fuck, Catra,” Adora says lowly, and it sends a jolt of heat straight to Catra’s gut. Before she can even move, Adora leans up to kiss her again, so much power behind it that she kind of forgets what she was doing and just gives into it, Adora’s mouth wet and welcoming and inviting the drag of her tongue against Catra’s own. She remembers soon enough, and without breaking the kiss, reaches back down and drags her fingers back along Adora’s folds, before resuming her rubbing at her clit.

Adora breaks their contact at the lips to whimper her name, and Catra groans at the sound. She leans back forward to rest her cheek against Adora’s collarbone, perfectly content with just rubbing tight, quick circles on and around her, but—

“Inside,” Adora suddenly breathes, and Catra lifts her head to see Adora staring at her with hooded eyes. “Inside, Catra.”

Catra swallows and then nods. “I’m gonna go slow,” she whispers. “Tell me if it hurts, and I’ll pull out.”

Adora gives a quick, eager nod, and a moment later, Catra watches as her mouth drops open when Catra carefully slides a finger inside of her. After a moment of letting her adjust, Catra starts pumping in and out, watching Adora’s face for any signs of displeasure.

There’s nothing— nothing that indicates how she’s feeling, and Catra is kind of freaking out and is about to ask if she’s okay when Adora gasps.

“More,” she pleads, rolling her hips in time with Catra’s thrusts, “add another— *fuck*— add another finger—”

Catra does, pulling out before slowly working a second finger into her, and chuckling when Adora huffs in impatience.

“Catra, you’re not going to hurt me, just—”

“Okay,” Catra interrupts, amused, leaning forward to kiss her again as she moves a bit quicker than before. Adora moans shakily, and Catra can’t help the moan that escapes herself, quickening her pace when she sees Adora moving in the way that signifies nothing but pleasure, suddenly overwhelmed with a feeling of *want*, a desperate need to make her come.

And she is getting close, and there are several tells: her body squirming, her thighs shaking, the desperate, quiet but high pitched noises falling from her mouth. Coming in her underwear from the sight alone is a very sudden and formidable threat to Catra.

There’s a moment where Adora’s silent, body tense, before she arches, a litany of moans spilling from her lips as she comes. Catra leans in close, presses quick kisses to her face in the same way Adora does to her when she’s sleepy, whispers a steady stream of encouragement and praises as she slows her fingers and works her through it.

Afterward, when Adora lies still, Catra copies her movements and lies down next to her, all without moving her fingers. There’s a few passing moments, and then Adora opens her eyes,

turning her head to look at Catra. She blinks at her, eyelashes moving like butterfly wings, and they're so, so pretty.

"Want me to pull out?" Catra asks, watching as Adora nods, eyes fluttering shut. Carefully, she pulls out, turns to wipe her hands against the sheets, and is about to look back to ask Adora if it was *okay*, if it was alright, because she's never cared so much about making sure the other person feels good when she hears movement and suddenly Adora's hands are cupping both of her cheeks and her lips are against her own. It crashes down on her, like being hit with a sudden wave in the ocean or standing in the forest before it starts pouring, and it makes Catra dizzy with every kind of want.

Adora rolls them over, nudges a knee between her legs with much more confidence than she had before, and Catra thinks, *yes, oh my God*, but then she remembers and—

"Wait," she breathes when Adora dips down to suck at her neck, "wait, Adora—"

Immediately, Adora freezes, pulling back up with eyes wide with concern. "What is it?" she asks, "do you want to stop—?"

"No," Catra shakes her head, "just— just want to make sure you're okay? Like, was it good? And you don't have to reciprocate if you don't want to—"

Before she can even finish, Adora's shoulders are shaking, and then she's falling back into Catra's neck as laughter spills from her lips. Catra tightens her grip from where she had grabbed onto Adora's shoulders, brows knitted together. "Why are you laughing? It's a serious question!"

"I know," Adora tells her, but she pulls back to look at Catra and gently strokes her cheek after she gets over her initial amusement. "And Catra, I appreciate the concern, but I'm fine. I'm— way more than fine, I'm freaking amazing—" Catra snorts because only Adora would say *fucking* during sex but then resort back to *freaking* afterward— "and that felt so good, and you... you were great, Catra. The only thing that could make this better is touching you, too, if you'll let me."

"Yeah?" Catra asks, because the euphoria she's feeling right now just from knowing she's the reason Adora felt good would be enough on its own, but she's definitely not about to decline Adora's offer. Adora nods, and Catra grins. "Okay. You can touch me."

Without hesitating, Adora leans back in to lay a quick kiss to her lips before descending along her jaw, neck, and down to her collarbone. She goes a bit faster than she had the first time when she gives attention to Catra's breasts, careful not to dig her fingers too hard into her sides as to not tickle, before she's moving lower, hands gentle and *big* as they wrap around Catra's legs and slowly spread them apart.

"Okay," Adora breathes, cupping Catra through her underwear; Catra whines, throwing her arm over her eyes because she gets that Adora is inexperienced, but *fuck*, she's so worked up after everything that she's pretty sure she'll come even if Adora barely touches her. "I've— you know I've never done this before, so you're gonna have to tell me what you like—"

“I— I will,” Catra whimpers, dignity flying through the window. She rarely begs, never wanting to be that vulnerable with previous people before, but: “just— just please take my underwear off, *please*—”

Without another word, Adora’s fingers grip Catra’s waistband and tug, and Catra blinks her eyes open to see Adora carefully setting them off to the side, before looking back at Catra with a bit of conflict swimming in her eyes. “Um, can I— can I taste you?”

Catra groans, hips twitching. “Adora, I’m giving you the blanket consent here, okay? Literally anything you want to do, just *please* touch me—”

“Okay, okay,” Adora chuckles. Without another word, she gets settled between Catra’s legs, and Catra widens her eyes. She hadn’t thought Adora actually meant that she’s going to *eat her out*, considering it might have been simpler for her to just finger her or rub her clit, but fuck, the thought only turns her on even more—

Before she can perhaps ask Adora if she’s sure she wants to do this, she feels the first swipe of her tongue, and she *swears* she nearly blacks out from the feeling alone. She feels more than hears Adora groan against her, hears her mutter *you taste so good, Catra* and the vibrations make Catra bite her lip to keep from letting out a moan—

Then Adora’s lips wrap around her clit and *suck*, and Catra can’t hold back anymore. “Fuck, *fuck* Adora, oh my God—”

“Shh,” Adora hushes against her, reaching up to intertwine their fingers and give Catra something to hold onto other than the balled up sheets. “Catra, you have to be quieter,” she mumbles, and Catra remembers, oh, right. Despite Adora’s words, she sounds smug, and if Catra were in the right state of mind right now, she’d be rolling her eyes.

“Well—” she whimpers when Adora resumes her movements, “you— you have to— not be so fucking *good* at this,” she has to cut herself off again when she moans as Adora uses her fingers to probe at her entrance, looking up at Catra as if to make sure she’s doing this correctly, and— “I *cannot* believe this is your first time, what the fuck?”

A part of her regrets saying it because Adora’s smug smirk grows even wider, but the other part couldn’t give less of a fuck that this is probably only going to make Adora’s already large ego increase tenfold by the end of it, because Adora’s finger, only slightly unsure and cautious gently pushes into her entrance, and—

“Two fingers, Adora,” Catra pants out, “I can take it.”

Adora makes a soft noise, and then she quickly adds another finger, feeling her out for a moment before pushing in, and it’s a bit clear that she’s inexperienced by the unsteadiness of it all, but her eagerness and the fact that Catra is already worked up *more* than makes up for it —

“Are you okay?” Adora suddenly asks, and Catra’s eyes open to see Adora staring at her with a bit of concern, and Catra wants to *laugh* because what kind of question is that—

“Adora,” she groans, whimpering after a particular hard thrust, “I’m— fuck, *yes* I’m okay, if anything I need more—”

“What do you need?” Adora asks, and Catra tries to speak, but all that really comes out is a strangled noise.

“Curl— curl your fingers,” she eventually pants out, and when Adora quickly follows her instructions, Catra has to throw her arm back across her face in front of her mouth this time to keep herself from swearing too loudly. The familiar feeling of pressure, deep in her core, hot and snaking up to surround her is quickly increasing. “I’m— fuck, Adora if you keep doing that I’m gonna—”

And then suddenly, Adora’s lips are back around her clit, and she gives one hard *suck*—

Catra comes with just a few more fast strokes, a broken chord escaping her, muffled only by her arm. It’s almost violent, like a natural disaster: back arching, thighs clenching around Adora’s head, head tossed back. She’s glad Adora seems to figure it out, given the way she slows, because Catra doesn’t think she could find the strength to tell her to slow down herself.

When the capability to actually be able to process her surroundings return to her, and Catra eyes flutter open, she finds Adora staring up at her with a smile, head pillowed against Catra’s thigh. “Hi.”

All that spills out from Catra’s lips is a quiet groan, and Adora laughs, lifting herself up a bit and crawling next to her. “I take it that was good?”

Catra shuts her eyes once again. “Starting to think that wasn’t really your first time, princess.”

“You’re saying I just have a natural talent for eating pussy?”

“Oh my God,” Catra grumbles, pushing Adora’s laughing face away. “You’re literally so annoying.”

Adora’s laughter fills the room for a while, and Catra can’t help but smile, too. When she leans down to kiss Catra’s lips, Catra kisses her back, lazy like there’s not a single care or worry in the world. “Okay, all jokes aside,” Adora starts when she pulls away, “that was really nice, Catra.”

“Mm,” Catra hums, and Adora reaches over to turn off the lamplight and pull the blankets up to cover them. Catra lies her head on her chest, wraps a tight arm around her stomach. “It was good for me, too.” She thinks that, somehow, it was the best sex she’s ever had; she also thinks that sex with someone you care about definitely beats out having meaningless sex with other people. “I’m... um, glad, though. That you liked it.” She’s *very* relieved, because the fear of Adora not liking it after entrusting Catra like that was constantly lingering on her for a good amount of it.

She feels Adora press a kiss to her forehead, and then hears her yawn. “I loved it.”

They lay there in silence for a long time; Catra feels her eyes flutter shut, head rising and falling with every breath Adora takes, her own breathing slowing as she falls into slumber before Adora whispers, “goodnight.”

That warm, welcoming feeling in Catra’s chest only grows. “G’night, princess.”

-

The sun wakes them up far later than Adora usually sleeps in, but they don’t have to get back to the airport until later this evening, and they have nowhere to go and every reason to sleep in, so she doesn’t make a fuss when she notices the time.

“Good morning,” she hears Catra mumble without even opening her eyes, cuddling herself closer and nuzzling the underside of Adora’s chin. Adora traces her fingers up and down Catra’s spine.

“Beautiful morning,” she whispers.

Catra makes a satisfied noise of agreement, a lot softer than any of the sounds she made last night. She pulls away for a moment, hands wandering and tickling along her rib cage. “So... no regrets?” she asks, no doubt about last night.

Adora smiles and shakes her head. Obviously she has nothing to compare it to considering it was her first time, but everything about it felt amazing. “Not a single one.”

Catra hums, leaning up to press a kiss to Adora’s forehead and then laying back down. “Me either.”

They lay like that for a long while. Adora’s pretty sure Catra’s fallen back asleep, and as she lets her own eyes flutter shut, she finds that for once, she doesn’t mind sleeping in.

-

They say their goodbyes to Razz a few hours later, and Catra makes sure to thank her for letting her stay and making her feel so welcomed, while Adora promises they’ll come back soon.

Catra thanks the universe that Adora actually got the tickets back to Bright Moon at a reasonable time, because she doesn't feel like she's seconds away from collapsing at any given moment this time when they arrive back at the airport. She even gets to watch in amusement at the put out look on Adora's face when she gets patted down after setting the metal detector off in security.

Adora gets them a taxi to take them to Catra's apartment first when they arrive back in Bright Moon. She helps Catra carry her things up to her apartment, and they sort of just stand there for a few moments until Adora shuffles her feet and says, "well, uh, I should probably be going. All that luggage isn't going to unpack itself."

Catra watches her for a moment, and then— "what if... what if when you go back to your apartment, you unpack, and then... come back here?" she asks. "Scorpia and Entrapta won't be back until after New Year's."

There's a pause, and then, "You're not tired of being around me?"

"Nope," Catra tells her, popping the p. She wraps her arms around Adora's waist, and stands on the tips of her toes to kiss her. "Never."

It's how they end up spending the rest of the break together, Adora leaving only for work and Catra to run a few errands. Catra's just gotten back from grocery shopping on New Year's Eve, the pair of them having decided to at least somewhat attempt to cook a lavish dinner when she opens the door and is greeted by the *last* thing she was expecting to see.

"Melog?" she asks in surprise as the cat immediately bounds up to her. Catra quickly sets her groceries down before she scoops him into her arms. From the kitchen, Adora is watching them with a fond look in her eyes. "Holy shit, you actually snuck him in?"

"Uh, yeah. I think he likes me now, because he didn't put up a fight when I stuck him in my backpack," Adora smiles, nervously rubbing the back of her neck. "You still have to sign some papers for legal reasons, but Spinnerella and Netossa must really like you because they let me take him without it as long as you go back at some point this week." She turns to motion to a small bowl of food and water set down in the kitchen. "And I bought him some things."

Catra watches her for a few moments. She stands, Melog still cradled and purring in her arms, and approaches the girl in front of her. "Why would you do all of that?"

"Because... because I knew it'd make you happy, and I really like seeing you happy." Adora looks up at her and smiles. She gets so gentle sometimes, in her smile, in her eyes, in her voice, in the feel of her skin beneath the covers with the lights turned off.

Catra realizes: *I'm falling in love with her.*

She realizes she's falling in love with Adora. With someone who very well might not want all that she wants; with someone who still loves a person she doesn't even know.

She doesn't realize Adora has moved until she feels Melog wiggle against her, nuzzling into Adora's outstretched hand, purr rumbling even louder.

"Wow," Catra murmurs, affectionately watching the interaction. "Usually takes him a long time to warm up to other people."

Adora's smile widens. "Guess I was the exception."

Catra looks back up at her. Their eyes meet, and Catra takes a deep breath. "Guess you were."

A few days into classes starting back up after Winter Break, Catra finds herself sitting in her room and letting the paint on her arm dry. Her most recent work consists of layers upon layers of flowers, wrapping around her bicep and going all the way down to her wrist, a complete sleeve.

She hadn't really known what to say in regards to her random disappearance, and when they complimented the painting, she had felt a bit of familiar guilt rise in her and wrote out the simple words *sorry, was busy*.

It's a little while later now, and Catra's about to start the clean up process when her peaceful evening is cut short by her phone buzzing several times in a row.

It's the group chat — the *very large* group chat Scorpia and Perfuma made back after they decided to combine both of their friend groups after realizing everyone at least somewhat got along — and she's not surprised to see that it's Scorpia and Perfuma themselves who are blowing up her phone.

Before she bothers to check whatever it is they're going on about, she tests that the paint is dry, pulls a shirt and some flannel over herself, and then grabs her brushes to go clean them up in the kitchen.

Entrapta hums from where she's sitting on the couch, reading whatever the messages say out loud without Catra even having to ask. "Scorpia and Perfuma suggested everyone have a movie night at Bow and Adora's apartment, and—" there's a few more dings— "everyone's agreeing."

Catra snorts. The last time everyone was together was for Glimmer's birthday, so she's not surprised that they're trying to plan another get together. "Of course they are."

Entrapta thumbs at her phone for a moment, and then looks up at Catra. "Want me to tell them you're coming?"

Catra nods, for two reasons. The first one is because she hasn't seen Adora at all in the past two days because of how busy they've been and, considering it's her apartment, she'll

probably be there. The second is because she — not that she would ever admit this to anyone — actually enjoys hanging out with those people now. “Sure.”

When they actually get there in Entrapta’s car, Catra’s not really sure what she expected, but it definitely wasn’t Glimmer and Mermista arguing over what movie they’re going to watch, Bow and Sea Hawk trying to defuse the situation, Adora laying sprawled across the couch and watching with poorly concealed laughter, and Perfuma and Scorpia making popcorn in the kitchen unbothered, but she’s not exactly surprised.

She makes eye contact with Adora on the couch a moment later, and watches as her face immediately lights up. Catra winks, and then heads toward the kitchen to help Perfuma and Scorpia with the snacks. Just as she hoped, she doesn’t even have to wait a solid ten seconds before she feels a soft arm curl around her waist, followed quickly by Adora murmuring, “I missed you.”

Catra rolls her eyes despite the fact that she feels the same exact way. “I saw you Wednesday night, and it’s Friday now.”

Adora hums, tightening her grip around her waist and kissing her cheek. “Too long.”

Catra hums her agreement and leans back into her. Perfuma and Scorpia have disappeared, but Bow and a still somewhat aggravated looking Glimmer are in the kitchen now, and they’re watching them sort of expectantly. Catra blinks in confusion and turns to look up at Adora, only to find her already staring at her with a bit of confliction on her face.

“Hey,” she starts, pointingly flashing another glance at Bow and Glimmer that’s clearly telling them to stop staring at them; she waits until they’ve collected their food and left before she continues. “Can we... uh, talk?”

Catra immediately feels herself go rigid in Adora’s hold. These conversations *never* mean anything good, and she can feel her palms starting to sweat, throat suddenly feeling dry. “I— um, yeah, of course.”

Adora smiles, and then brushes a lock of hair out of the way from where it’s fallen in Catra’s face. “It’s nothing bad,” she promises. “Well, at least, I don’t think it is.” Catra doesn’t know what that means, and Adora must sense it, because she continues. “What I mean is, this isn’t like a I met my soulmate conversation and now we need to end this, or anything related to that.” Then, she seems to realize what she’s said, and she inhales sharply. “Not— not that that’s what’s going to happen if I meet them! I mean, I don’t know what’ll happen, but I wouldn’t just— oh my God—”

“Okay,” Catra cuts her off, a bit of a shaky chuckle escaping her. They both relax after a few moments of silence between them, aside from the chatter from everyone else in the living room. “I get what you mean. Not a bad talk.”

Adora shakes her head. “Not a bad talk.”

“Okay,” Catra repeats, taking a deep breath. “Okay, good. I just... I just like, *really* need some water or something because I kind of freaked out for a moment there.”

“Yeah,” Adora chuckles. “I freaked myself out, too.” Catra laughs and mutters *nice going*, and then Adora continues. “I’m... I’m gonna change into some more comfortable clothes for the movie. Do you wanna meet me in my room when you’re ready?”

When Catra nods, Adora presses one last quick kiss to her lips, and then she heads down the hallway toward her room. Catra takes a deep breath, before she grabs a glass of water and fills it up.

In retrospect, she’s not too sure why she imagined Adora would suddenly want to end things considering the way she was treating Catra when she arrived, but her mind sort of just went to the worst possible scenario. But— sue her. She’s falling in love, and the idea of ending things suddenly really scares her.

She thinks, as she takes another sip of her water, that they really *do* need to talk, because their agreement from before isn’t really working for her anymore. For one, she has no idea whether or not Adora’s whole figuring things out in regards to her soulmate thing has passed. Two, she’s still terrified of commitment with her soulmate because, based on what she’s figured out from them, they seemingly blindly want to be with her just because they’re soulmates, and... she doesn’t want that. Not all soulmates have happy endings, and she knows that with them the love will fade away once they get over the whole *we’re soulmates* thing.

But with Adora—

With Adora, commitment doesn’t seem as bad, because... Catra really, *really* likes her, and she knows Adora likes her too, but—

She can’t have a real relationship with her knowing that Adora’s soulmate is still out there; knowing that the moment Adora meets them she’d leave Catra in a heartbeat.

After taking a deep breath, Catra follows Adora down the hall, glass of water still in hand. Glimmer seems to realize where she’s going, and she shouts, most likely for Adora to hear as well, “don’t take long, because we’re about to start the movie whether you two are here or not.”

Catra rolls her eyes. She knocks on Adora’s door and waits until she hears a quiet *come in* before she opens it.

Adora is bent over her bed, looking for God knows what, and from what Catra can see, she’s changed into a pair of shorts. Catra quietly shuts the door, and when she turns back, she sees Adora pull a large blanket most likely for them to share during the movie, and that she’s also wearing a sleeveless hoodie — God, how many of those things does she own? Catra almost hates it when she wears those because they completely expose both her arms and Catra’s lack of self control — before Adora completely turns to face her.

Everything stops.

Distantly, she hears the sound of glass shattering. Her chest is suddenly tight, almost like she can’t breathe, and maybe it’s because her breaths are coming out in short and rapid gasps.

Her hand is numb from where it had been holding her cup of water, and she has no idea whether or not it's even still there.

No, no, no—

There's a ringing noise in her ears, and it's louder than Adora's look of worry and her voice asking her to tell her what's wrong, it's louder than someone in the living room calling to ask if they're okay, it's louder than the voice in her head that tells her *it's okay, it's just Adora* when Adora takes a step closer to her and Catra immediately stumbles backward despite the fact that she's all the way across the room.

No no nonono—

Her mouth is dry despite the fact that she just drank water, and her heart pulses in her throat like it's trying to choke her. The ringing in her ears grows louder, because—

Because—

There are flowers, beautifully and protectively wrapped around Adora's bicep to the edge of her wrist. Warm pinks and yellows and blues and reds, ingrained into her skin like a tattoo, like how it would look after her soulmate has devoted time to paint into their skin.

It's the exact replica of the painting Catra had finished just before she came. It's staring back at her almost mockingly, curled around Adora's arm like a snake — coiled and sneaky in a way that it remained hidden beneath her clothes like a mere whisper, like it *knew*. Like she knew, because she already did, deep down, that this would happen. She knew Adora was her soulmate, she knew all of the signs were pointing to it, she knew she couldn't keep denying it for long, she knew that everything good and pure in her life would never stay that way—

And now Adora is staring at her in concern, still mouthing words that Catra can't quite hear over the blood rushing in her ears, over the thumping of her heart. She's staring at Catra, and Catra suddenly remembers they're supposed to talk, they *were* supposed to talk, and she can't stop thinking that Adora must have known.

She must have known, and now Catra is trapped with no way to escape, and there's water sinking into her shoes and glass on the floor and she still can't *breathe*—

“Catra,” she hears, but it sounds muffled, like she's underwater and *drowning*. Adora tries to take another step, but Catra presses herself further against the door, not sure why her hands aren't working and she can't just *open the door* and leave, and Adora pauses in her spot and seems to get the message that Catra doesn't want her close. “Please, baby— is it— is it the painting? I'm sorry—”

She knew—

“—I didn't think it would effect you like this—”

This whole time—

“—and I can cover it up, I'll cover it up, but I promise—”

She only wanted me because—

“—if you’re freaking out because of the painting—”

Please, no, please please please—

“I would have told you if I met my soulmate, Catra, but even if I *do* meet them— you don’t have to worry about that.”

She doesn’t know.

“That’s actually related to what I wanted to talk about, but—”

Catra forces herself to move.

“—I’m sorry—”

Her fingers find the doorknob.

“—I’m so sorry for not warning you or something—”

It turns—

“Can I— can I come near you— or do I—”

The door opens—

“Catra, *please—*”

Catra runs.

*

Chapter End Notes

lol

black

Chapter Summary

In which the future seems nothing but dark

Chapter Notes

this chapter is going up earlier than i thought it would bc i ended up splitting it in half, bc if i didn't the final word count would have been like 20k so rn it is very, very likely the chapter count will change, but we are nearing the end folks!

trigger warning spoilers tw for the usual shadow weaver fuckery as well as descriptions of a panic attack

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

When Catra is twelve, she willingly opens the connection to her soulmate for the first time.

She's taken a liking to drawing recently, and had begged Weaver to let her buy some sketchbooks and canvases. Weaver had told her that not only would it be a waste of time, but that art is messy, and she could get paint all over the furniture and on herself.

"I promise I'll be careful," Catra had begged. It's all she hears now these days: *Be careful Catra, you wouldn't want your soulmate to have paint all over them because of your actions. Don't draw on yourself Catra, do you want your soulmate to go to school with those markings all over their arms?*

It takes a couple more weeks of begging, and when it finally works, Catra suspects Weaver only gives in because of her incessant nagging.

She's especially careful when she paints; maybe a little too careful. It's inevitable, though, for her to get paint on her hands on occasion. She always makes sure to wash it off afterwards, but at this point, she doubts her soulmate would even care, not when they've added their own fair share of random marks that Catra doesn't want.

Drawing is easier because Catra doesn't have to worry about making a mess, but she still enjoys both activities equally. There's not much to do at home, especially not in the off season (she's recently taken a liking to track because she's actually really good at it, plus it

gives her an excuse to come home later) so when at home, Catra usually finds herself doing homework or filling her empty pages with artwork. It's calming and cathartic, and serves as a much needed distraction from the rest of the world.

It all changes one afternoon. When Catra gets home from school, instead of going straight to her homework, she hurries to finish the painting she had started a couple of days ago. There's an art competition at school, and she had been working up the nerve to actually sign herself up for it for so long that she only gave herself a few days to actually complete it. Now, the deadline is in less than a few days, and Catra knows she needs to finish soon.

She's concentrated, brows knitted together and hand steady as she gently strokes the canvas.

She's so concentrated that she doesn't hear Weaver opening the door until it's too late.

When she does hear it, she freezes in place. The entirety of the second floor of their house is old and creaky, but Catra also likes to think she has above average hearing. Usually, if she had been paying attention, if she had even been paying *half* attention, she'd have caught the sound of Weaver approaching long before she arrived.

"Catrina," Weaver starts, "I have a work meeting I need to attend in an hour, which means you need to start getting ready—" Catra *hates* these meetings because it's the only time Weaver actually acts nice to her, and she knows it's all just for show— "and I expect you to be..."

She trails off as she approaches, and Catra's eyes flutter shut. When Weaver speaks again, her voice is unsettling, and she puts a finger next to the canvas. "This isn't your homework."

"...No," Catra answers, still staring at her canvas, hand trembling from where it grips her paintbrush.

"So instead of working on what's necessary for you to succeed, you've decided to waste your time with something that I've already told you will get you *nowhere*?"

Catra doesn't respond. She's afraid to look up; afraid that she'll find the disappointment or look of regret that she always finds in Weaver's eyes whenever she looks at her. It makes Catra feel hot with shame, and sometimes she doesn't even know *what* it is that gets Weaver to look at her that way.

"Very well," Weaver eventually tells her.

Without another word, she gathers the sketchbook and the few canvases that are laying Catra's desk, and Catra feels dread beginning to pool in her stomach when Weaver heads for the door straight after.

"Wait," she pleads, because she knows that she won't see *any* of it again if she doesn't do something. "I'm sorry, I'll do my homework right now, I swear, I just need that painting—"

"You don't *need* any of it," Weaver snaps. "How many times do I have to tell you that this is all a waste of time? You're lucky that I let you occupy some of your time already with that

stupid sport when you need to focus on your studies.”

Catra doesn't understand because she's *already* an *A plus* student, it's not like she can get much higher, and—

“If I see you painting or drawing again, there *will* be consequences,” Weaver tells her, voice chillingly low.

She leaves without another word.

The house is quiet as Catra curls further into herself a few hours later in a futile attempt at self comfort.

She's spent the past few hours lying in bed, feeling too numb to cry but too upset to do much else. Her stomach rumbles protestingly at her, and with the comfort of knowing that Weaver won't be down there — she must have decided to leave Catra behind, *thankfully* — Catra eventually gets up to make herself something to eat.

A simple microwaveable cup of ramen is what she settles on. She brings it up to her room even though she's not supposed to; a small act of defiance despite knowing it won't do anything.

She's sitting at her desk, leaning her head on her hand and staring at the homework that she knows she's not going to do tonight — not now, especially after that — when she feels a familiar jolt of electricity on her skin.

STUDY HEREDITARY AND GENETICS!!!! is what appears rather quickly; another reminder, Catra can only assume. Her soulmate doesn't seem to have a very strong memory, considering Catra thinks she has a pretty good idea on what's going on in their life *solely* because of the reminders they always write down. They've given up on trying to get her to respond, but they still frequently give little excerpts of their day, or talk about meaningless things like an album they suggest she listen to. The random, probably accidental markings have eased up a lot, though. Catra doesn't have random paint splotches on her hands and certainly not on her face (if it isn't from herself).

She stares at her arm for a moment longer than normal — usually she rolls her eyes when she reads their reminders and ignores it without thinking twice — before she's suddenly struck with an idea.

Weaver only took her sketchbook and canvases. She didn't take her paint, or her brushes, or her pens and certainly not her pencils, and although she knows that if Weaver found out she was thinking of doing this she'd probably get in even *more* trouble, she's angry and upset and she really doesn't care what that old woman thinks anymore.

So, half in protest and half just because she knows it'll calm her down, Catra grabs one of her brushes, dips it into the red from where she still had some of it left out, and then begins to paint along her arm.

What she paints is an intense plethora of flaming reds and oranges, blues and whites, all clashing together. It takes a long while — almost an hour — and when she's finished, she sets her brush down and finds that she feels a lot calmer, certainly satisfied with her work. More than words and numbers, art has been her preferred method of expression for a while now, and she feels that it conveys everything left unsaid.

She doesn't even have to wait more than thirty seconds to feel the echo of a pen against her other arm. Her soulmate is filled with delight and pride when they write ***Wow, you're a really good artist!!! Do you paint a lot??? I wouldn't mind if you did it more!!!***

Catra feels the nerves return to her as she reads the words. She's too afraid that if she responds, her soulmate will take that as a sign that she'll always respond, and yet another expectation will be thrown on her. Not only is that the *last* thing she needs, but her soulmate has done nothing but get her in trouble these past few years and Catra isn't really interested in striking up a conversation with them.

In the end she keeps it quiet, makes sure to wear long sleeves on the days she knows she'll draw or paint on herself or always washes it off a couple of hours later if she's at home. A few weeks later, she ends up buying herself more sketchbooks and canvases from the store on her walk home from school anyway, and hides them beneath her bed behind everything else that's already down there.

Despite this, she doesn't stop marking her skin.

She doesn't show her art to anyone — she couldn't even if she wanted, considering she knows if she showed it to her teacher or even one of her friends it could get back to Weaver — but with her soulmate, they give her the validation she desires while giving Catra the reassurance that they couldn't possibly let it get back to Weaver through them. She gets good at it too, as she gets older and goes through the motions of growing up. By the time she's eighteen and applying for college, with the knowledge that she'll be out of Weaver's house and won't have to worry about constantly looking over her shoulder whenever she draws, she decides she wants to pursue it.

.

.

.

Adora is Catra's *soulmate*.

Adora, who hurts because her soulmate never responds to anything she has to say, who loves her soulmate in spite of it just because they're her soulmate, who Catra might love because she's *her*; who doesn't feel the same way about Catra in real life but feels that way about her behind closed doors and anonymity with *it's my soulmate* being the only reason—

Catra can't breathe.

She doesn't know where to go. She can't go back to her apartment because that'll be an obvious place Adora will look, she can't go to the animal shelter she always goes to when she needs to clear her head because that'll be an even *more* obvious place to look, she can't go to any of her friends apartments because they're either back at Adora and Bow's apartment or Adora knows who they are and will know to check—

(She let Adora get too close, and now she has nowhere to run.)

She doesn't know if it's worse or better that Adora doesn't know. If she did know, Catra would have to deal with the fact that Adora only wanted her because she's her soulmate, not for *her*; and would have to horrifyingly watch as the love in Adora's eyes died out after getting over the whole *we're soulmates* thing and she realized Catra wasn't all she wanted. But because she doesn't know, now she's going to be waiting for a soulmate who will *never* come around like all of her friends tell her they will, and fuck, *who knows* if Adora will ever get over that enough to love somebody else—

Because there's *no way* Catra's telling her. There's absolutely no way, not with the knowledge that Adora will immediately want to jump into something Catra's not ready for as if all soulmates just immediately live happily ever after, not with the knowledge that after Adora finds out she'll suddenly change her mind and want to be with her *solely* because of the fact that Catra is her soulmate—

Catra can't breathe. Her throat is constricting and her chest hurts and she doesn't know what's going on, and she feels her legs nearly give out on her before—

“Hey,” a voice calls. Catra squeezes her eyes shut because she doesn't want some fucking stranger seeing her like this, but— “hey, can you open your eyes? Try and take a deep breath, and— there you go, kitten.”

Oh. Catra blinks, and realizes it's DT who's with her, and while they're definitely not her top choice of friends who she would trust to deal with something like this, it's better than a stranger.

“Tell me some things you can see.”

Her chest aches, her lungs scream for air, and Catra doesn't quite know where she is but she can see DT's face in front of her and the snow in the background.

“You,” she breathes out shakily, breaths still filling the space unevenly, but not nearly as bad as before. “Snow. Lots... lots of snow.”

DT turns to look behind themselves, and smirks. “Yeah, lot's of snow, and you're not even wearing a jacket.”

Catra glances down at herself— she's still only wearing the t-shirt and flannel she had put on earlier, the coat she had worn on the way there back at Adora's apartment. For the first time in possibly *ever*, despite being outside in the winter, she doesn't feel cold. She's not too sure

why, but the more she stands there and begins to calm down, the more the frigid air really begins to set in and she *does* start to feel cold.

DT must know what she's thinking, because they nod to the coffee shop — to *the* coffee shop — behind them. Catra blinks, because she's not too sure where she had been going, but to the coffee shop that Adora works at — the coffee shop they first met at — wasn't really what she was expecting. "Want to head inside? Probably warmer than out here."

For a moment, Catra almost considers it, but then she shakes her head. She can't go in there; it reminds her too much of Adora. Plus, it's another place Adora might think to look, and Catra can't have that right now.

So with an unsteady breath, she shakes her head, and then resumes her fast paced walking down the street despite not knowing where she's even going. DT blinks, and then hurries after her.

"Um, hello?" they question, quickly catching up. "You're out here with barely any protection from the cold, you just had a panic attack and you still look like you could have another at any second, and now you don't want to head into the coffee shop you've been suggesting I try for the past several months? And you're not even going to *explain*?"

Catra halts in her spot, because her thoughts may still be a mess, but she's buzzing with nerves and adrenaline and she needs to say *something*. "Adora's my soulmate."

DT smacks their lips. "Um, sorry to tell you, but I don't know who Adora is."

Catra laughs. There's no amusement behind it. "I know. That's why I'm telling you. All of my other friends know who she is."

DT lifts a brow. "You need a wider circle, babe."

Catra glares at them, and watches as they raise their hands in surrender, before crossing their arms. "So, you met your soulmate who you've been trying your best to avoid all these years? What's the big deal? You do realize the universe intends for all soulmates to meet at some point, right?"

"I think I might love her," Catra tells them, folding her own arms over herself as a form of protection from the cold.

DT looks even more confused. "And that's a problem because..?"

"Because I don't *want* to be in love with my soulmate," Catra eventually snaps, though it's at nobody in particular. She ignores the few pedestrians that pass by — it's snowing rather heavily today, so there's fewer people on sidewalks, and she mindlessly kicks a pile of snow onto the street. "But I... I wouldn't mind being in love with Adora."

"Okay, you know I get that you like, have a stick up your ass and refuse to just talk to your soulmate—" Catra opens her mouth to interrupt, but DT waves her off— "I know, I know, you have your reasons and all that, but still. I'm not quite understanding why this is such a

problem. Shouldn't you be happy that the person you're falling in love with turned out to be your soulmate?"

"No!" Catra growls, turning around to face them with her fists clenched despite the fact that they're just simply standing there with their arms crossed. "Right now I feel like no matter how hard I tried to avoid it, no matter how much I tried to convince myself I was in control of who I fell in love with, the universe still got it's way! And Adora— she doesn't love me, she loves her *soulmate*, and if she finds out that *I'm* her soulmate that'll mean she'll love me only for that reason and— that's not what I want! And she's been waiting so long for her soulmate that I know she'll just want to skip straight to our *happily ever after* as if being soulmates with someone automatically means it'll all work out, and..." Catra trails off, squeezing her eyes shut for a brief moment.

DT is staring at her with narrowed eyes. "You think she deserves someone better than you. Someone who's ready for all of that."

Catra shrugs and chuckles humorlessly. "I always kind of felt bad for the unfortunate person who got me as a soulmate, and Adora's been waiting so long for it already. I don't want her to have to wait on me again."

"Are you serious right now?" they eventually ask, and Catra huffs in frustration, shivers a little, and turns away from them. She ignores the weird looks they get from a couple of passersby. "You do realize that you two met the natural way, right? I know you, and I know that part of the reason you're afraid things won't work out is because maybe you'll end up rushing into it before the universe intended, met on your own time like most people do nowadays, but now you've met at the time the universe intended you to meet, and for fuckssake Catra, it happened like that for a *reason*."

Despite the words, Catra shakes her head, grip tightening along her arms. She just gave a list of multiple reasons as to why she doesn't want this, and DT is *still* trying to fight her on it.

"Just— just do me a favor," she tells them without looking back, "don't tell Scorpia or Entrapta about this. Don't tell anyone you know about any of this."

"I never do," is all Catra hears DT mutter disbelievingly as she walks away from them.

The sun sets in the background, coating the sky in beautiful hues of pastel flames and heathers, and Catra hasn't felt this lost in a long time.

Despite initially thinking she wouldn't, she does end up back at the local animal shelter. Immediately after arriving, she finds Netossa talking to a couple of customers, but she nods to Catra when she steps in as if giving her the go ahead to go hang out with the cats like normal. She pauses and seems to take in her state a moment after though, because she apologizes to the customers, tells Catra to wait right there, and then quickly finishes up with them.

In the back of her pocket, Catra's phone buzzes. She has fifteen missed calls from Adora, six missed calls from Scorpia, two missed calls from Perfuma and a missed call from Entrapta. There's also been a few texts, but they're mostly calls, and after feeling her phone start to buzz once again, Catra takes a deep breath, reaches for her phone, before completely shutting it off and putting it back into her pocket.

She understands that she has people now who are worried about her, but right now she just *can't*.

When Netossa finishes, she quickly comes back to Catra, eyes wide and holding a blanket in her hands. "Catra?" she asks in disbelief, quickly wrapping the blanket around her. "What the hell happened? You're freezing, and you look like you're seconds away from freaking out."

In all honesty, Catra's not sure how she hasn't burst into tears yet.

"I, um," she starts a bit unsteadily, "just... just want to clear my head." Or at least *attempt* to clear her head, despite knowing that that definitely isn't happening anytime soon. "Uh, if anyone comes by, could you just... tell them I'm not here?"

Netossa stares at her for a moment, clearly curious to know more, but she nods. "Yeah. Of course, kid."

Catra gives her a weak smile. "Thank you," she tells her, and without another word, she scurries to the back with the cats, blanket still wrapped securely around her shoulders.

But when she sits down with her back up against the wall, waits for the cats to start approaching her and, after a while, registers that Melog isn't even here, is instead back at her apartment because Adora snuck him in for her—

She leans over and pulls her knees to her chest.

Sobs begin to rack her shoulders.

-

Catra leaves.

She leaves, and Adora's left standing on the other side of her room with wide eyes, confused and surprised and shaking because—

There's no way. There's no way she just messed this all up because of something that stupid, something that could've been so easily avoided, there's *no fucking way*—

But she had seen the fear in Catra's eyes when they landed on the painting on Adora's arm; had seen the shock, had watched the glass of water slip from her fingers and shatter onto the floor, watched as her chest started heaving as she took in shuddering gasps and she pushed herself further away every time Adora tried to get closer, every time Adora wanted to reach out and fold her into her arms and protect her and tell her *it's okay, I'm sorry I didn't warn you, I want to be with you so much it hurts*—

“Fuck,” is all she whispers to herself, digging her hands into her hair and pacing back and forth for a moment. “Fuck, fuck, *fuck*.” Then, she thinks of the fact that she's pretty sure Catra is panicking, who *knows* where she ran to, and she's probably alone and Adora *needs* to find her, needs to explain and tell Catra that she doesn't have to worry about Adora leaving her for her soulmate like she's probably thinking—

The living room is a bit of a mess. Scorpia is gone, Perfuma is up and texting furiously at her phone, Glimmer and Bow are closer to the hallway like they were just about to come to her room, and everyone else is looking around with at least a mild amount of confusion on their faces.

“Adora!” Glimmer nearly yells when they see her; Adora flinches, and Bow rests a hand on Glimmer's shoulder.

“Adora,” he starts with a bit more of a quiet voice as Adora quickly finds her shoes by the door and slips them on. “Adora, what happened?”

“Where's Scorpia?” Adora asks instead, hands trembling as she ties her shoes. Perfuma inhales sharply.

“She went after Catra,” she answers, before asking, “Adora... what *happened*?”

Her eyes fall onto the painting on Adora's arms immediately after asking, and she quiets. Everyone glances toward her, and then at the painting, and Adora has *never* felt like she needs to hide a painting her soulmate has created, having always chosen to show it off, but this—

God, everything is just so messed up and backwards and it's all Adora's fault—

“Catra saw it?” Perfuma asks, voice soft. Glimmer crosses her arms.

“Are you serious?” she asks, much to everyone's disbelief. Adora's honestly glad the attention turns away from her arm to Glimmer. “She ran because she saw *that*? What is she, a child?”

“Glimmer,” Bow warns, but Glimmer doesn't listen.

“No, that's stupid!” Glimmer tells him. “She does know that both of you have soulmates, right? It's the way the world works, it's not anything new, and she needs to *get over* it—”

“Glimmer,” Adora interrupts, standing up. Her voice is dangerously low, and everyone turns to stare at her with wide eyes. “Don't talk about her like that. Don't talk about any of this like

you *know*, because you don't. None of you do," she says, voice a bit louder. Everyone is still staring at her in shock — Adora doesn't really blame them, because *a lot* has happened in the past two minutes — but Entrapta is sitting a little ways away. She's staring at her, brows knitted together like she's trying to connect something, but Adora doesn't have time to figure out what that could possibly be because her eyes have landed on Catra's coat and she has to squeeze her eyes shut and take a deep breath to calm herself from the idea that Catra is probably cold and alone—

And she already knows there's no way Scorpia would catch up to her because Catra is *fast*, and Scorpia may have stamina but she definitely doesn't have speed—

"I'm gonna— I'm gonna find her," Adora tells no one in particular after taking a shaky breath, because she is *not* going to let them end like this. Without another word, she grabs Catra's coat and opens the door.

Before she can leave, however, she feels hands wrap around her wrist. Adora turns back, and finds everyone standing up and staring at her; finds Glimmer holding her wrist, a look of an apology in her eyes.

"Do you want us to help?"

Everyone is still staring at her with wide eyes, but they have a bit of sympathy and understanding behind them now, and Adora understands that they mean well, but—

If she's feeling overwhelmed just by them staring at her like this, she doesn't want to risk causing Catra to feel like that when she's probably panicked enough as it is.

"No," she whispers, voice trembling. "I-I don't want to scare her anymore than she probably already is, but, uh," Adora knows the chances are probably close to nothing, but, "if she comes back... try not to provoke her and just... please call me?"

"Of course," Bow tells her, reaching out and squeezing her arm. Adora takes another breath. This entire situation feels sickeningly familiar.

After flashing another glance at her friends, she leaves.

In the end, Adora doesn't find her.

She checks *everywhere*: Catra's apartment, the coffee shop on the off chance she went there, even texts Catra's friend Lonnie despite the fact that they've only talked a few times before in passing at parties.

Catra won't answer her phone. She knows because she's called multiple times already, and Perfuma has texted her to let her know she's not answering Scorpia's calls, either.

Adora's not too sure when she started crying, but she doesn't realize it until she arrives at the local animal shelter. She's been out for about an hour now, but the incoming snowstorm isn't going to really allow her to search for much longer.

Inside, it's far more warm, and just as welcoming as it had been the last time Adora had come when she came to pick up Melog. Both Netossa and Spinerella are working the front desk as they speak to a few customers, but they leave after a couple of minutes of Adora sort of awkwardly standing around and pretending to take in the decorations and pictures of the animals.

"Can we help you, Adora?" Netossa questions. When Adora turns around, she sees Netossa staring at her with a raised brow, and Spinerella staring at her in concern. One look at her, however, and Netossa's gaze softens ever so slightly. "Jeeze, kid. You look like a mess."

Adora blinks. In the warmth of the building, she feels the tears roll down her cheeks, and quickly wipes them away. "I just... wanted to know if Catra was here."

Netossa says *no* at the same time Spinerella says *she's in the back* — Adora blinks in confusion, watching as they suddenly share a look that she can't quite read, before Netossa clears her throat and looks back at Adora. Adora feels a bit of hope begin to spark in her chest, but then—

"She... um, she *was* in the back, but she's... not here anymore," Netossa corrects her wife.

Her mouth suddenly tastes sour, and she feels a few more tears roll down her face before she can stop them. Clutching Catra's coat tighter to herself, Adora nods sort of jerkily. Neither one of them seem to have a response to that, so Adora awkwardly shuffles her feet, mumbles a quiet, "sorry to bother," and leaves.

She sort of aimlessly wanders around the downtown area she's found herself in for another half hour — stops inside an overpriced store to buy herself a pair of gloves because of how cold it is, going through the motions in a bit of a daze and ignoring all the weird looks she undoubtedly gets because of how much of a mess she must look, and tries calling Catra a few more times afterward — before she eventually gets a call from Bow telling her that the weather is about to get bad and that she probably shouldn't still be out right now.

"Did you find her?" he asks just as Adora sits down on a bench outside of one of the high schools. It's a little hard to hear him over the wind that's very quickly picking up, but Adora manages.

"No," she whispers, wincing when her voice comes out cracked.

There's a bit of commotion on the other line, and then: "We're gonna come pick you up, okay? Where are you?"

"Bow, you don't have to—"

"Adora," Bow tells her firmly.

Adora takes a deep breath. “I’m downtown. By the old high school.”

“Okay, sit tight. We’ll be there in ten minutes.”

They get there in eight. Adora slides into the backseat when she sees Bow and Glimmer sitting in the front; barely even realizes Glimmer’s moved to the back until she hears the door shut again and feels a hand on her shoulder.

And when Adora looks up at her and sees the sympathy in Glimmer’s eyes, a small, choked out sob unwillingly escapes her throat, and Adora unfurls herself to accept the hug Glimmer is offering her.

“I messed up so badly, Glimmer,” Adora chokes out, digging her fingers into Glimmer’s back and burying her face into her shoulder. “I messed everything up.”

“It’s gonna be alright,” Glimmer tells her, but Adora can hear the uncertainty in her voice; knows she’s only saying that as a weak attempt at comfort.

Catra leaves, and she doesn’t come back.

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In spite of Catra insisting she’s okay to walk home, Netossa and Spinerella still insist on driving her. They have this sort of motherly instinct that kicked in when Catra first met them a couple of years ago back when she first moved to Bright Moon, and the animal shelter was the first place she started going to whenever she needed a simple distraction and wanted to clear her head. She found herself going there often; always helping out and volunteering in exchange for being allowed to play with the cats, and eventually, she even found herself telling the two of them a bit about her former foster mother — the biggest cause for an unclear head for the majority of her time freshman year.

They seemed to sort of adopt her after that, and Catra’s even been to their house on the outskirts of the city a few times for dinners on occasion. Now that she’s moved on from everything that tormented her all freshman year, she doesn’t find herself at the shelter as often, but all of her friends know not to bother her when she goes.

All of them except Adora.

In Adora’s defense, however — Catra hadn’t ever told her. She hadn’t really thought to, to be honest; had been too busy falling for her to really let her know that that’s sort of her place she likes to go when she doesn’t want to be bothered.

During the car ride, Spinerella tells her that Adora *did* end up stopping by, just like Catra knew she would, but Netossa stopped her from seeing her. Netossa tells her that she looked

like a bit of a mess, and Catra tries her best not to burst into tears all over again as she leans her head against the window, watching the buildings of downtown Bright Moon blur by.

Netossa does end up trying to ask what happened, but apparently Spinerella gets the memo that she doesn't really want to talk about it, because she subtly changes the subject and turns on the radio. When they arrive at Catra's apartment, she thanks them for the ride, and then quickly heads up, ready to curl up in bed for the rest of the weekend and completely forget about literally everything for a while.

She doesn't get either, because when she gets up to her apartment, despite the fact that it's already past eleven, both Scorpia and Entrapta are still awake.

Catra steps inside the apartment and the first thing she sees is Entrapta sitting on the couch and watching something on TV. As soon as Catra closes the door, Entrapta glances up at her in surprise, and Catra expects her to ask why she just left like that, or maybe even accuse her of worrying and ignoring them, but what she *definitely* doesn't expect is—

“Adora's your soulmate,” Entrapta says matter-of-factly.

Catra freezes.

She supposes she could deny it; could run back out and call Netossa and Spinerella because she knows they'll come back if she asks; could even dart to her room and never come out again.

She doesn't do any of those things, though. What she does is stutter out: “How— How did you—”

Entrapta leans up to pause the TV, and then stares at her with knowing eyes. “There was obviously a reason that you panicked and ran off, and just seeing soulmate markings appear on Adora seemed like it wouldn't have caused enough of a problem for that considering you two have been doing whatever it is that you're doing for a while now and something like that probably would've already happened by now had you not been Adora's soulmate. Plus, you not having any emotional attachment to your soulmate who always tries to talk to you despite it while Adora is waiting for her own soulmate who also doesn't really have any attachment to her... it was obvious.”

Catra clenches her jaw. It *was* obvious. It probably still is, and it's only a matter of time before anyone else figures it out, and Adora *can't* know—

“You can't tell anyone,” Catra begs, voice trembling. “Please— I can't— I can't deal with this right now, and I don't want anyone else to know—”

“Okay,” Entrapta tells her, and Catra stops.

“What?”

“Okay,” Entrapta repeats. She's staring at Catra with wide, earnest eyes, and Catra doesn't know what to think. “I think communication would be the most simple answer to all of this,

but I also know how you feel about your soulmate, and I know it's easier said than done. It's not my secret to tell anyway, so if you don't want me to, I won't."

Catra stares back at her for a moment, heart still racing. "Not even Scorpia?" she asks, because it's not that she doesn't want to tell her other best friend, but Scorpia is absolutely *horrible* at keeping secrets.

Entrapta nods. "No one."

Catra sighs, taking a step back. Now, she hears the shower turn off and realizes it must be Scorpia; she's home, but she wouldn't have heard any of this.

Taking another deep breath, Catra peels off her flannel. She almost wants to ask Entrapta what happened after she left; wants to ask if Adora is okay despite knowing that she most likely *isn't*, but thinking about Adora and the fact that she's Catra's fucking soulmate — that she's been Catra's soulmate this entire time — makes her hands tremble and her heart pound again.

So she doesn't. Instead, she leans her arm over the kitchen, grabs an old rag and a bunch of dish soap, and then starts furiously scrubbing the painting off of her arm.

It comes off slowly; peels off in flakes, like petals of a flower falling to the ground, one by one. Catra grits her teeth while she does it because she knows she's probably scrubbing a little too forcefully, but every second longer she spends staring at it she feels sick and like she can't breathe and she just wants it *gone*—

"Catra," Scorpia calls softly behind her, just as Catra's finished washing it off for the most part. Catra shuts off the water and slides down to the kitchen floor, pulling her knees to her chest. She doesn't cry this time, but she whimpers a little when Scorpia grabs a towel and starts drying her arm. "Catra... I— I don't know what Adora did, but if she hurt you again—"

"It's not her," Catra mutters. She feels so fucking stupid that this is where they've gotten; that the only explanation she can really provide right now is *it's not her, it's me*, but she just *can't* deal with anyone else knowing.

Scorpia stops speaking. No one says anything for a long time, not until Catra takes a deep breath and picks herself up from the floor.

"I'm sorry," she tells Scorpia. She's not even sure what she's apologizing for. For scaring her? For scaring Adora? For her decision to not tell her — or anyone — the truth?

Scorpia looks confused, and definitely still concerned, but for once, she doesn't seem to know what to say. Catra doesn't linger on it.

The snowstorm hits the city in full force a few hours later. Catra lays in bed, blinking with wet eyelashes into the darkness of her room as she replays Spinerella's words from earlier: *Netossa stopped her from seeing you.*

From seeing *her*. Adora, who Catra might love, who's also the both the person she wants to be with the most right now but also the person she wants to be with the least.

When she feels her breathing start to pick back up again at the thought, she curls up in an attempt to comfort herself, only to hear the soft creak of her bedroom door which she apparently didn't close. Catra sighs, because she doesn't want to talk to anyone right now and she's sure both Scorpia and Entrapta know that—

Except it isn't either one of them. A moment later, Catra feels a light weight near her legs, and then feels Melog cuddle up somewhere near her front, sort of forcing his way into a close proximity with her. Catra chuckles, scratching his head as he purrs contently. He always knows what she needs.

After a while, though, he pulls back and sort of paws and nudges repeatedly at her face, which Catra knows is his way of telling her he needs to use the restroom. The perks of having a former stray, Catra supposes as she gets out of bed. Melog prefers going outside and doesn't require a litter box.

She throws back the sheets and slides on a pair of sandals, before pulling on a hoodie. Outside, the cold air and harsh winds nip uncomfortably at her skin, her pajama bottoms doing nothing to prevent the goosebumps rising on her legs as she stands outside with Melog while he hurriedly picks through the snow covered grass. When they get back inside, she uses a small towel to dust the snow off of him, and by the time she gets back to her room, her fingers are freezing, but at least she's no longer crying.

At least until she pulls her hoodie back overhead and smells Adora on it — realizes it's an old one of hers Catra took a few weeks back. Catra squeezes her eyes shut; feels her heart clench as she sets it down on her desk.

It's not like you loved her, she tells herself, despite knowing it's pretty much a lie at this point. *You didn't love her.*

After what feels like an eternity, Catra crawls underneath the sheets and pulls them tight around her body.

She doesn't sleep.

The following afternoon, Catra is well aware of how terrible she looks. Her eyes are red-rimmed and swollen, her hair's a mess — in the non-purposeful way — and her skin is paler than usual. Despite this, she ventures out of her room on Scorpia's fourth attempt to get her

out of bed, which consists of knocking on the door and bribing her by saying she's baked Catra's favorite cookies.

"You don't look very good," is the first thing Entrapta tells her when Catra finally leaves her bedroom.

"Thanks," Catra mumbles sarcastically, taking a cookie from the large array laid out in front of her. Scorpia flashes her a single glance, and then her and Entrapta resume whatever they were talking about before Catra joined them, and for the most part, Catra doesn't really listen. She scratches Melog's head from where he sits beside her chair, and forces herself not to think about anything in relation to Adora being her soulmate.

After she's eaten a few cookies, she washes her hands in the sink, turns to head back to her room, only for Scorpia to call out her name.

"Catra," she starts sort of nervously, "last night... what happened?" Catra doesn't say anything, so Scorpia continues. "I mean you seemed fine when you went in there, two minutes later you just ran out and—"

"Scorpia," Catra sighs.

"—you freaked everyone out, Wildcat—"

Catra clenches her teeth. "Scorpia—"

"Perfuma texted me this morning, said Adora's doing *horrible* and I just don't understand—"

"Scorpia!" Catra shouts. Entrapta sits at the table, watching them with wide eyes, and Scorpia takes a step back in surprise. Catra takes a shaky breath in, willing herself to calm down before she does something stupid like crying again or snapping at one of them. "I... I don't want to talk about it, okay? So just... just drop it."

Scorpia nods. Catra takes a step past, and then glances back at them, wondering if she should try apologizing again.

In the end, she says nothing.

-

Adora calls every night. Monday, she shows up to the apartment — Scorpia answers the door, awkwardly tells her to wait there for a moment, before reappearing and telling Adora that Catra's not home. Adora can tell it's a lie — Scorpia isn't a very good liar — but she understands there's not much she can do if Catra still doesn't want to talk to her.

Glimmer and Bow have apparently personally taken it upon themselves to keep her distracted. They found her crying with a glass of whiskey in her hands on Wednesday night — she had seen Catra very briefly in passing at the university just a few hours before, but Catra had left before Adora could try and talk to her — and they immediately snatched it up before insisting they go out to do healthier things as a form of distraction. It worked, briefly, until Adora got back home again and it set in that this could quite possibly be *it*. That she ruined the best thing to ever happen to her because of something so simple, something that should have never happened.

(She never would have guessed that she would find herself wishing her soulmate had chosen another time to paint or open up their connection to show her their art.)

To make matters even worse, her soulmate has actually been uncharacteristically silent. They've been like that since the start of Christmas Break — only having opened up their side of the connection to paint one thing in the past few weeks; the one thing that may have permanently ruined *everything*.

It's hard to pay attention in class, and Adora just barely manages to scrape by. She takes her frustration on everything out by working out more than usual, adding an extra mile to her morning runs or staying a little later at the gym. Her days start to look like working out in the mornings, attending class or work through the afternoons or evenings, and calling Catra despite knowing she won't answer at night.

In other words, lots of separate decisions land her where she is now. It's late Friday morning — usually she'd already be back home by now, but since she started working out more, she finds herself out a little later than usual — and she's vaguely annoyed, standing at a crosswalk as she stares down at her joggers which she just realized have been inside out this entire time. There's no point in finding somewhere to change now — she's already finished her run and is heading back to her apartment.

When Adora looks up from her pants, it happens.

Across the street on the opposite side, there's a small handful of people waiting to cross. Within the crowd, Adora sees her: short brown hair, ripped gray jeans, bundled up in a warm coat, eyes wide and stunned.

Adora stops breathing. She stares, and Catra stares back. Time seems to slow down for a moment as neither one of them moves, even after the light turns green and people start to flow in between them.

Then the crowd surrounds Catra, and Adora loses sight of her.

No, she thinks, because she *can't* lose her again. *No, no, no*.

She cranes her neck to see over the crowd — just barely sees a flash of Catra's form, moving *away* from Adora. Adora sucks in a deep breath, moves to chase after her, but someone roughly runs into her before she can even get a few steps. Adora loses her balance, falls backwards onto the ground and onto the palms of her hands as papers fly everywhere, before ignoring the man stuttering out an apology in favor of quickly scrambling to her feet.

She's not too sure what's going through her mind right now, just knows that it's something similar to *Catra, Catra*, as she forces her feet to move, crosses the road, and pushes past people. It's hard; she wasn't lying when she said Catra is fast, and being that they're currently in the middle of rush hour, there's far too many people out on the streets to start running without fear of running *into* someone.

"Catra, wait!" Adora calls out after realizing she's never going to catch up to Catra like this. It comes out a little choked.

Surprisingly, Catra halts. Adora does, too, and there's a good few meters between them before Catra slowly and hesitantly turns around, and she looks—

She doesn't look good. She has dark circles beneath her eyes, and she looks tired. Something in Adora dies at the sight of her like this, but she imagines she doesn't look much different.

Catra stares at her like a deer caught in the headlights. Adora stares straight back. She opens her mouth to speak, but her throat is dry and her heart is pounding, and nothing comes out but a small, strangled noise that she doesn't imagine Catra would even hear over the sounds of other pedestrians continuing to pass them or the traffic to their right.

"Adora," is all Catra says. Her voice is quiet and heartbreaking.

"Catra," Adora breathes, "can we talk?"

Catra shakes her head and takes a step back.

"*Please,*" Adora begs, hands trembling. "Catra—"

"I can't be what you want me to be," Catra tells her, and Adora knits her brows together in confusion.

"What are you talking about?"

Catra doesn't say anything. She's crying, and Adora runs a hand through her hair from where it's fallen out of her ponytail during her run. "Catra, just— just let me explain." Again, Catra is silent. Adora takes a step forward, but Catra takes another step back. "Catra, I'm *sorry*—"

"Stop," Catra interrupts, and her voice sounds sort of broken now. Adora makes a noise of exasperation. "*Stop* apologizing. It's not your fault."

"How can you tell me that?" she shouts in frustration over the sound of horns honking in the distance. "This wouldn't have happened if you hadn't seen that painting on my arm—" Catra flinches at that, further proving Adora's point— "and now you just want to tell me it's not my fault without giving an explanation?"

"Adora—"

"You're just gonna leave like that? Just—"

"I can't—"

“—just gonna continue to ignore me forever because— because you saw a random mark my soulmate left on me?”

“It’s not random!” Catra snaps, voice loud and sharp.

Adora is a little caught off guard by the intensity of Catra’s voice, but she quickly straightens up. “Yes, it *is*—”

“It’s *not*,” Catra fights. “You love them. You love someone you don’t even know. Do you realize how stupid that is?”

“It’s not stupid!” Adora defends herself. She’s not even sure where this is coming from; this is *so* not how she wanted the conversation she finally got with Catra to go, but she can quickly feel her frustration from the past week rising in her chest.

“It is!” Catra argues. “How can you love them? You don’t know them! They don’t even talk to you!”

“Because— because they’re my soulmate, Catra! I know you don’t understand, but that’s just how it is for me!”

Catra grits her teeth together. Somehow, they’ve gotten a lot closer than they were before, but Adora thinks it’d only make things worse if she reached out now.

“You can’t love someone you don’t know, Adora,” Catra tells her through her teeth. “What if they don’t turn out to be what you wanted? What are you planning on doing then?”

“It doesn’t matter!” Adora argues, because it *doesn’t*. She loves her soulmate because they’re her soulmate, and she knows, deep down, that it probably is stupid, but it doesn’t matter because her soulmate isn’t even what she *wants* anymore; what she wants is to take Catra by the hand and tell her that she doesn’t ever have to worry about Adora leaving her for her soulmate. “Catra, *please*, just—”

“You know, this would be *more* than understandable if you and your soulmate actually had a connection or relationship,” Catra interrupts, voice hard and dripping with venom. “But Scorpia told me that your soulmate doesn’t even talk to you, and here you are wasting your time still waiting for them.”

Adora clenches her fist. “Don’t talk to me about that like you know,” she hisses, because Catra has no right to judge her for loving her soulmate; has no right to judge her for something that she would never understand. “You don’t know *anything* about it.”

Catra laughs mockingly, and Adora narrows her eyes. “I know how it feels to not want anything to do with your soulmate,” she snarls. “Why can’t you just accept that yours doesn’t want anything to do with you?”

Adora feels her blood turn to ice. Everyone and everything around them seems to hold their breath, and like a tree branch roughly grabbed ahold of, something within her seems to break upon hearing those words.

Neither one of them says anything for a moment after that. Catra stands only a few feet away from her, eyes wide as if she can't believe what she's just said; Adora mirrors her expression, chest heaving from the short lasting argument, eyes wide.

Why can't you just accept that yours doesn't want anything to do with you?

They stand there for at least another minute — people pass by them, occasionally giving them weird looks — before eventually, Catra starts taking more steps back, shaking her head.

“Don't come after me, Adora,” she tells her, and her voice is a bit more firm despite the underlying shakiness of it. Adora doesn't dare move any closer. “I don't want this anymore.”

Adora doesn't say anything. Doesn't do anything. If something broke within her before, something *shatters* after hearing that.

Without looking back at her, Catra turns, walks away, and disappears into the crowd. Adora doesn't follow.

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Adora stops trying after that.

Catra lays awake on Friday night, waiting for the sound of her phone to start ringing or buzzing; knocking on the front door; Scorpia telling her *Adora's here, should I let her in?*, but none of those sounds come.

What does come is the feeling of a pen against her arm, and a crushing sense of sadness and sorrow and misery to accompany it.

Please, appear on Catra's skin a moment later. ***please draw or paint something for me.***
Please.

Catra squeezes her eyes shut; is thankful Melog crawls up to lay on her chest to ground her before she inevitably starts spiraling again.

i can't do this. she writes back. ***i'm sorry.***

She feels Adora's side of the connection closing soon after. It's strange; she's used to *always* being responded to— never the one who writes the last response, but this time, it's Adora who doesn't respond to her.

It's what you wanted, right? Catra tells herself in a weak form of comfort. *You wanted to hurt her so she'd stop trying.*

She wonders where Adora is, what she's doing, and then falls into a dream where there's no such thing as soulmates; falls into a dream where soulmates still exist, but neither one of them ever figure it out; falls into a dream where Adora falls not for the soulmate, fantasized version of her, but for just her instead.

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Chapter End Notes

uhhhh since sum y'all seemed a little flabbergasted by me only dropping an lol last chapter any guesses on what'll happen next?

green

Chapter Summary

A journey part two

Chapter Notes

this chapter is dedicated to one of my best friends, someone who's been supporting the production of this fic and encouraging me from the moment they found it, even during the ten months i didn't update it. the first irl i ever let read my writing. happy birthday, rook :)

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

road to me

It was to make you hurt, Adora tells herself. Make you feel worse than she does. Enough to get you to stop.

It worked.

All weekend, she thinks of nothing but Catra's words. How she told Adora that her soulmate doesn't want anything to do with her. How she told her that *she* didn't want *this* anymore; that she didn't want them. And as much as she wants to deny it, as much as she tries to tell herself that she doesn't care whether or not her soulmate wants anything to do with her— it *hurts*.

It hurts so bad to know that Catra's right; that her soulmate has officially rejected her. That she was wrong when she was younger— when she was young and stupid and in love with her soulmate's paintings and under the delusion that they'd eventually come around and they'd fall in love and everything would be perfect like the ending to a fairytale Mara once read to her, she was *wrong*.

She thinks that it's the worst pain in the world to know that.

And yet, somehow, what hurts even more is what Catra said last to her before she left.

I don't want this anymore.

Catra doesn't want her either. Adora had seen the coldness in her eyes, heard the venom in her voice, and—

Adora loves her. She loves her, and she misses her and just wants her back, but she's so, so *mad* at her for just upping and leaving like that without giving Adora a chance to explain; for judging her for loving her soulmate; for saying those words to her face while *knowing* it would hurt her.

She wants the Catra she kissed beneath the stars, the Catra who taught her that there's more to the world than *soulmates*, the Catra who's patient and loving and sweet with her, the Catra she fell in love with.

(It hurts more than anything in the world to know that she won't ever get it back.)

She lost *everything*, all within a week. Catra, and her soulmate. Her soulmate, and Catra. Sting of a wasp. Drowning in cold, icy water. Fire, greedy flames licking desperately at her skin, warming her at first but then overheating, hot and painful.

Everything burns.

The night her soulmate officially rejects her, Adora curls up in her bed. She doesn't cry— not until she thinks about Catra's words, about how she's lost them both. She cries afterwards; sobs so hard that she shakes; loud enough that Bow knocks on the door with a worried *Adora, what's going on?* and *Adora, I'm gonna open the door, okay?*. Barely even registers that there are arms wrapped around her.

“Adora,” Bow whispers, and he sounds scared. “Tell me what's wrong, please, are— are you hurt?”

Years ago, before she had grasped the idea of loss and was in a world where everything was perfect, she would have never foreseen something like the person she's supposedly destined to be with rejectecting her.

Even more so, she never would have foreseen that the person she isn't destined to be with deciding that they didn't want to be with her would hurt far worse.

“I want her back, Bow,” she sobs, not sure whether Bow even knows what she's talking about, and not really caring, either. “I want to hate her, but I just miss her so much and I love her, and she doesn't want me.”

Bow tightens his arms around her; promises her that it'll be alright in the same way Glimmer did despite the fact that it's all just words, despite the fact that it's not true.

By the time she arrives at the university on Monday for class, she's existing with no sleep, an unhealthy amount of caffeine, and a massive headache. All in all, she accepts the ride Bow offers to her so she doesn't have to make the short trek, and she's been so out of it these past few days that she almost wonders if she's imagining the spectacle in the parking lot.

Two of the students are physically fighting, and there's a group of people surrounding them with their phones out. Adora rolls her eyes because all that serves to do is remind her of premature high school fights, and she plans on walking straight past it and into the main building when she sees her.

She's walking down the steps of the building with someone Adora doesn't know, eyes set on the fight a little ways away from them. Adora stops in her tracks, eyes wide and staring like they always do when she sees her.

Catra's too far away for Adora to *really* see her, and Adora almost thinks she's going to keep walking without seeing her, before Catra eventually turns her head and her heterochromatic eyes land on Adora. They go wide for a split second, but before they can stare at each other for much longer, Adora hardens her jaw and tears her gaze away, forcing herself to keep walking despite the tears that crowd her eyes.

She thinks about how Catra must have just left her one early morning class. Thinks about how the Monday before everything happened, Catra reluctantly woke up and sleepily kissed her before she got ready in her room as Adora remained curled up beneath Catra's sheets, listening as the other girl complained about that exact class.

Sting of a wasp. Drowning in cold, icy water. Fire, greedy flames licking desperately at her skin, warming her at first but then overheating, hot and painful.

Everything burns.

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"I'm going out for food," Lonnie announces, throwing their shared textbook onto the coffee table in front of them. "Do you want anything?"

Catra shakes her head. "No."

"Come on," Lonnie coaxes her friend. "We've been working on this project for hours."

"We're *supposed* to be. That's why you're here."

"Well, this is boring and I'm hungry."

"I'm not," Catra replies, head down and gaze focused on the design of a compass she's doodling. It doesn't have anything to do with the project they're supposed to be working on right now, but Lonnie was right about one thing, and that this is incredibly boring, especially because they're trying to get the entire thing done in two days.

Catra supposes it's her own fault, though. She's spent all of her time since realizing Adora is her soulmate sulking around without much of a motivation to do anything, and had put off the project until the very last minute.

She can practically hear the eye roll Lonnie gives, but she ignores that, along with her saying *we'll just finish this tomorrow*, followed by the sound of the door opening and closing as she leaves.

These past couple of weeks have been rough. Catra's stopped painting and drawing on her body now because she doesn't want Adora to feel any lingering hope about her soulmate eventually coming around; wants her to just *move on* from it all. It's especially hard though, because Catra used to use it to get a little bit of validation back when she was too scared to show her art to anyone else. Then, she started showing it to Adora and got even *more* validation, felt like she was getting closer to eventually mustering up the confidence to truly show her art to the public, but now she just feels fucking stupid because in reality she was showing it to Adora all along.

To make matters worse, she hasn't had much of an inspiration for art, anyway. That's a big problem because both her grades and her source of income relies on that, considering she's currently managing to scrape by on random commissions requested of her — even has a small part time job at a local tattoo shop where she designs some of the tattoos.

She's growing distant with her friends. She feels guilty every time she talks to Scorpia knowing she's hiding such a big secret from her, tries to avoid talking to Entrapta or DT since they're the only two that know, and completely avoids any of Adora's friends she became friends with in the past few months. Catra isn't sure whether or not they'd hate her — isn't sure what all Adora has told them — but even if they didn't, she'd feel just as guilty talking to them, too.

It's horrible. And fuck, Catra *knew* something like this would happen the moment she met her soulmate. She knew what her and Adora had was too good to be true.

Melog chooses that moment to jump onto the couch, nuzzling his way into her lap. Catra strokes down his back for a moment. “Am I doing the right thing, Melog?” she asks, voice quiet. “Letting go of her to save us both pain in the long run?” Melog stares up at her with big blue eyes, and Catra sighs, letting her head fall back against the couch. “I didn't think it would hurt this much.”

She doesn't get a response. Of course she doesn't, Melog's a cat, but as he stares at her and then turns to nuzzle into her stomach, purr kicking up despite the fact that she isn't even petting him anymore, she can't help but feel like he understands her.

Catra's knee jostles up and down with the force of her tapping foot. She sits up in the wooden chair, slouches, and then sits up again. Fiddles with the strings of her hoodie, thrums her fingers against the auburn colored desk, pokes at the edge of the papers almost completely

covering it. Stares at the golden name plate sitting in the corner that reads *George Archer*; and then, right below that, *Art Department*. It's a bit of a messy desk, but it's clearly organized all the same. It reminds her of Adora's room.

Catra frowns at the thought.

There's a little hourglass right by the computer, and the sand slowly trickles down.

She taps her leg quicker.

Then, the door bursts open. Professor Archer speeds in and collapses in his chair, clearly out of breath. He loosens his tie, and looks like he just ran across the entire campus.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Professor Archer finally speaks, taking a breath. "A student spilled a can of paint in the studio, and it was a mess."

Catra nods.

"Do you know why I asked to see you today?"

There's a moment where Catra opens her mouth to speak, but then closes it. She's pretty sure she knows what this is about, but she also doesn't really want to talk about it, nor does she want to be here in general.

Professor Archer stares at her for a moment. "It's about your sketch."

"You didn't like it?" Catra questions, a brow raised.

"Catra," he sighs. "It's not about what I like or dislike, and you know that."

Catra shrugs. "Everyone's different."

Professor Archer looks disappointed. Catra can't handle it. There's a moment of tense silence, and then Professor Archer opens a drawer. He pulls a folder out, searches through the papers for a moment, and then pulls out a piece of paper that holds Catra's sketch she had turned in as her plan for the next project. He puts it in front of Catra, facing her, as if it's supposed to *mean* something.

"What's the point of all of this?" she asks, eyes narrowed. "You think it's shitty?"

"No, I don't think it's *shitty*. Technically speaking, it's a pretty good draft. Not bad at all."

Catra is starting to get impatient. She doesn't understand why he's making her guess instead of just *telling* her why she's here. "Then what's the problem?"

"The problem is that you could have done this with your eyes closed."

Catra stares at him for a long moment. "You don't think I'm trying hard enough," she finally connects.

Professor Archer nods. “You have a lot of potential, Catra,” he tells her, “but you’re not showing it to me.

“For a while, you didn’t stand out to me in the first semester. Your finished works were exactly what it was— just sketches, just pen or pencil drawings, just paintings. But... then something happened, and you started showing the meaning behind your art. It was unique, and it was *really* good. I realized that you had so much more potential than I initially thought, and that you could definitely go places with it.” Professor Archer pauses, and then taps his fingers on the desk. “And then suddenly, it stopped. Your art was back to how it was at the beginning of the first semester. There was nothing special, nothing uniquely *Catra* about it.” He nods to the paper in front of them. “This looks like something you could have done five minutes before you came to my class.”

Catra isn’t about to tell him that that’s exactly what she did. “I don’t know what you want me to do about all of that.”

“Why are you studying art?” Professor Archer asks, voice suddenly quiet and gentle.

Catra feels herself tense. “I like it,” she answers tightly.

Again, Professor Archer looks disappointed. He doesn’t say anything else for a few moments, and then straightens up a bit. “Is that it?”

“I— I don’t—” Catra clenches a hand around her knee to force herself to stop tapping her leg. “I don’t know.” He smiles at her encouragingly. “It’s therapeutic, I guess.”

“When I was younger,” he starts suddenly, “I was troubled, and I didn’t talk much. I got into art as a way to show my feelings to the world. To help myself be vulnerable, and show parts of myself that I couldn’t through words.”

Catra stares down at her feet. Swallows heavily. “Me too.”

Finally, Professor Archer looks pleased with her response. “I figured.”

Catra *really* doesn’t like how personal this conversation is getting. “Can I go now?”

Professor Archer sighs. “I want you to try to redo this sketch. Show me what I saw a few weeks ago. You’re very talented when you’re putting yourself into it, and I know that *you* know that. It’s just that you aren’t actually showing it to me.”

Catra bristles. “It’s private.”

“If you want to go places in life with your art, Catra,” he begins, “you’re going to have to show what you do in your public art that you do in your private art. This—” he nods to the sketch— “things like this won’t get you anywhere. It has to be more than just *good*. It has to have emotion, meaning behind it. And what I saw recently, in these past few months... it had all of that, and I’m telling you right now, the art that I saw *will* get you places.”

Catra clenches her jaw, grip tight against the handles of the chair. She stares back down at her feet.

“Please understand that I’m not trying to attack you. Don’t feel pressured,” Professor Archer says softly, “I just want to talk.”

After tearing her attention from her feet, Catra glances back at her sketch. “Okay,” she eventually breathes, shoulders slumping. “I... I’ll redo it.”

He smiles. “Have fun with it. Life can get pretty dull, and it’s not a crime to have fun with what you’re passionate about. It only becomes one when you let it get in the way of what you really want. When you hurt someone,” Catra eyes him wearily, “even if that someone is yourself.”

Catra wants to leave. She wants to be irritated that she’s getting a sudden life lesson that she didn’t ask for from someone she barely knows, but the words resonate so deep in her chest that she’s not quite sure how to respond.

Professor Archer doesn’t push it. He puts his fingers on the paper of Catra’s sketch, and then slides it toward her. “We’re going to have a few lessons before we actually start the project, which should be in a few weeks. I’d appreciate it if you can show me a new sketch by then. I know it’ll be more work, but you can use it as extra credit if you’d like. I know you’re bothered by the fact that you have a ninety-nine in this class.”

Catra sighs once more. How this man has managed to figure her out so quickly, she doesn’t know. It’s probably because of something stupid, like reading her art, or something.

He nods to her when she flashes another glance at the door, dismissing her, so she slings her messenger bag over her shoulder and leaves. As she walks away, she can’t help but feel like that man reminds her of Bow.

Days pass. Catra stares at the empty piece of paper sitting on her desk where she left it in an attempt to encourage herself to do the sketch like Professor Archer wanted.

She doesn’t. She can barely even find it in her to draw anything in her personal sketchbook, let alone something for class or for work.

Art has always come naturally to her, ever since she was young and first started it as a coping mechanism. Now she doesn’t even want to *look* at her sketchbook, or at the paintings hung up in her room and the large canvases stacked against the wall.

She wants to scream.

It’s rare that she sleeps.

On the nights she can't fall asleep, she thinks about Adora. About a world separating them, about her face soft in the night like it is whenever they sleep only a hair apart, about how she deserves so much more than what Catra can give her.

Catra stares at the ceiling for what feels like hours, hyper aware of every sound and movement around her. She's given up on telling herself she didn't love Adora in an attempt at reassurance; it was a stupid thought from the beginning.

Instead, she tells herself another probably equally stupid thought.

I couldn't do it, she thinks. I couldn't have a relationship with her, not now. I'm saving us both from heartache in the future.

When she was younger and her foster mother would get especially mad at her, she'd get teary eyed and Weaver would mockingly ask, *Catrina, what on Earth are you crying about now?*, and that was all it took to make the tears come. She hated it, hated looking like a baby. She hasn't cried like that in a long time.

But with the thoughts of everything that happened recently — everything she gained in the past few months and everything she lost so quickly, Catra lets herself cry until her throat is hoarse and her head throbs with pain.

A week later, Catra finds herself in the mechanic store Entrapta works at. She isn't exactly sure what possessed her to do this, but as she stares at Entrapta and watches as a large smile forms on her face from across the garage, she decides she doesn't regret it.

“You got a *motorcycle*?” Entrapta asks, all excitement and no judgement. Catra feels herself relax a bit.

“Uh, yeah,” she mutters, rubbing the back of her neck after Entrapta immediately darts toward her, takes the handles from her grip, and then walks the motorcycle deeper into the garage. There's only a few other people working today, and it doesn't look very busy, so Catra's glad she chose now to come. “Impromptu decision, I guess.”

“Where did you get it? *How* did you get it? Do you know what model it is? Oh my God, I'm gonna have a *blast* fixing this up—”

Catra kind of stops listening as Entrapta doesn't wait for her to answer; just starts telling Catra what the model must be as she scopes it out. Catra's glad, because to be honest, she wasn't really sure herself. She sits down on a bench near Entrapta's workstation, spaces out a bit as Entrapta continues rambling on, before she's pulled back when she realizes Entrapta is staring at her. “What?”

Entrapta looks at her strangely. “I asked how you acquired this.” She pauses, and then, “you've been spacing out a lot. Have you talked to Adora yet?”

Catra clenches her jaw at the mention of Adora. She closes her eyes, takes a breath in, and then ignores Entrapta's question. "I got it from Rogelio. He said it used to be his uncle's, but it's kind of messed up now and he doesn't know how to fix it or even ride it, nor does he care to, so he said if I could get it fixed I could have it."

Entrapta asks her to pass her a wrench from where she's now leaning beneath the motorcycle. There's a bunch of misplaced wires that definitely weren't there before, but Catra knows Entrapta will definitely be able to fix whatever's wrong with it, so she's not too worried. "Do you even know how to ride a motorcycle?"

Catra doesn't like to get into her childhood much, but— "yeah. I had one for a while in high school." She drove it around illegally for most of the time, but she was a troubled teen and thought it looked cool, so sue her. "Thought it'd be nice to have one again now."

Entrapta grins. "It'll be *so* cool. This motorcycle is the first interesting vehicle I've gotten to work on in *ages*," Catra can tell, considering Entrapta has been taking apart and reconstructing just about everything in their apartment for the past few weeks, which only happens when she doesn't get much to do at her job. "I can have it done by the end of the week. I have to get this lady's van done and then Bow's car fixed first, but—"

Everything else Entrapta says after that is kind of drowned out when she mentions *Bow*. Catra slouches a bit on the bench and screws the palms of her hands into her eyes, sighing. She *misses* all of them, despite only being friends with them for a short time.

More than anything, she misses Adora, and her loud laughter and kind heart; how she attempted to help morph Catra's sleep schedule into a more healthy one and probably would've succeeded if Catra hadn't ended things; how she's so passionate about everything she does.

"Bow," Catra says, once Entrapta finishes talking. She knows she *shouldn't* ask, but— "did he, uh, say anything about Adora?"

Entrapta grabs a rag to wipe the oil off her arms, mutters something about *my soulmate is going to make fun of me for having black marks all over myself again*, and then looks back at Catra. "Nope. He gave me the rundown on what was wrong with the car, and then we talked about other things you probably wouldn't be interested in."

Catra knows it's true because Entrapta is blunt and honest about everything. She doesn't sugarcoat things and never leaves things open for interpretation, which Catra likes. You know exactly where you stand with her for this reason, and she'll say things that need to be said, even if they don't want to be heard.

However, it's this that also leads to this next conversation. "If you're worried about Adora, why don't you just go talk to her?"

Catra shrugs. Entrapta blinks.

"You're still set on letting her go?"

Catra doesn't respond.

"Catra, I've known you before, during, and after Adora, and the during part was the happiest I've seen you in a long time. But even now— you're not acting like how you were before you met her. Now you're just... sad and closed off, and it's obvious. You two fell in love, and you're clearly mourning the loss, and it wouldn't make sense to let that go just because you two are soulmates."

"You're wrong, about that last part," Catra mutters, because it's really the only defense she has. "I fell in love with her. She doesn't love me, she loves her soulmate just because they're her soulmate."

Entrapta watches her. "You know for sure?"

Catra nods. Entrapta frowns, and then goes back to working on the motorcycle. It's silent for a moment, and Catra sighs. "And— and even if I didn't know that for sure, even if she *did* love me for just me, it still wouldn't matter. It makes me feel like it's not genuine if the universe is destined for us to be like this; like it wasn't our choice. And that— I know she'll fall out of whatever it is that we are soon after she realizes I'm her soulmate. She waited so long for someone amazing and special, and I'm just... not that. There's too many reasons that we shouldn't be together."

"Well, you're going to have to discuss the whole falling out of love thing with her, because I can't help you with that," Entrapta tells her, bluntly. "But the actually falling in love part... isn't it you who always pessimistically talks about how soulmates aren't guaranteed a happy ending just because they're soulmates?"

Catra frowns, because what does that have to do anything?

She doesn't have to wait long to figure it out, apparently. "Because I totally agree with you on that. It's not guaranteed. You choose to have a happy ending. The universe doesn't guarantee happiness, it's a choice. All it does is pair up two of the best possible options, grants you the knowledge that you'll meet at *some* point, and then lets you figure it out on your own. The fact that you two worked together so well and fell in love— that was your own decision. Whether you decide to end it because of this revelation, or talk things out with her in hopes of salvaging it— that'll be your own decision, too. The universe has no say in it. And if you ask me, the fact that you fell in love without even knowing you're soulmates is pretty fascinating. It makes it even more special."

After Entrapta's long speech, Catra takes a breath. She's running out of defenses; she doesn't even know if she *wants* to have a defense, because if Entrapta is right about all of that—

"But isn't there that whole thing about emotions being amplified with soulmates?" Catra mutters, clenching her fists. That would explain how she somehow managed to fall in love with Adora so quickly. "Like, if you meet them, you wouldn't even feel attracted to anyone else because the attraction to your soulmate is just unnaturally increased or whatever."

Entrapta flashes a glance at her as she works, and she looks a little amused. "That's just a popular myth. It's not scientifically proven. It started because people a long time ago used to

talk about how they'd fallen in love so far, so hard, for their soulmates... they thought that it had to be the only explanation.”

Catra feels incredibly stupid now. “Oh.”

And everything Entrapta's saying— it makes *sense*. It's true. It's believable that she really did have a choice in all of this, that maybe Adora does love her just for her, that the universe gave them the choice to decide whether or not they wanted to be together.

But there's still one last thing she rarely thinks about; *never* tells anyone about, because after assuring herself for so long that she wouldn't get involved with her soulmate, she had decided she wouldn't even need to consider it happening to her.

She's read the stories, seen the articles about people's soulmates dying. How some people die of heartbreak soon after, how it feels like you've lost a piece of yourself after they're gone. It changes people. She's not sure what happened to Weaver's soulmate — whether they died, or rejected Weaver because of how horrible of a person she is —, but she knows now that the reason Weaver selfishly didn't want Catra talking to her own soulmate was because she didn't have her own.

Feeling so strongly toward one person, feeling like you can't live without them... it's deadly at its worst, and scary as hell at its best. She can't imagine revolving her life around finding her soulmate like a good amount of people — including Adora — do nowadays, only for it to end like that. For it to end with them leaving, and taking their soulmate's heart with them.

Losing Adora— it's killing her already, and they're not even as deep in as they *could* be. She doesn't want to imagine losing her in the future.

“Feeling like that,” Entrapta tells her, and she's sitting up now and staring at Catra because apparently Catra has voiced all of her thoughts out loud, “that isn't limited to just soulmates. That could happen to anyone. You fall in love with people, and either you're soulmates or you're not. So unless you just plan on leaving every time you fall in love, that'll always be a possibility. It's just something we all risk for happiness.”

Catra sucks in a deep breath.

All of the reasons she had for *not* being with Adora, for not being with her *soulmate*— Entrapta just basically invalidated all of them, and she's not quite sure how to feel.

“I know you're scared Catra,” Entrapta tells her as she goes back to working on the motorcycle, “but I think you'll be happy if you let yourself be with her.”

“God,” Catra mutters, because she already knew Entrapta was smart, but this? “When did you get so fucking wise? I can't even argue with you because I have nothing. You're... you're right, about everything.”

Entrapta grins wide. “I know. I'm glad you see it too.” Catra laughs because Entrapta doesn't even sound smug; just satisfied that Catra finally agrees with her.

She stops laughing after a moment, though. On the other end of the garage, a man tells who Catra can only assume is their boss that he's clocking out, and another follows. The mechanic shop is nearly empty now. "Even... even with all of this," she breathes, "I still don't know if she even loved me. You're right about everything, sure, but I still don't want her to love me simply because I'm her soulmate. That kind of love— it's naive, and it doesn't make sense to me. I don't think it'll end well."

Entrapta shrugs. "You're just going to have to talk to her about that. Which— I do think you should talk to her. Don't you think she deserves to know, even if it doesn't end well, who her soulmate is?"

Catra does, but—

She's *scared*. She's scared of what will happen if she tells her. She knows Adora is probably already mad at her for everything she did, and now she'll probably be even more mad that Catra didn't say anything sooner. She's scared that Adora won't ever want to talk to her again, too upset after everything Catra put her through, but she's also scared the opposite will happen and Adora will still immediately want to jump right into a lifelong commitment. She's scared to realize she was right, when Adora stops seeing her as Catra and sees her instead as her soulmate and decides that she loves her now.

She just wants Adora to love her for her, not just because they're soulmates.

"Yeah," she whispers, because she can't quite believe she's actually saying this. "She deserves to know I'm her soulmate. But..." she trails off, nervously kicking her feet against the cement floor. "I'm not ready yet. I'm not ready to face her after everything, let alone tell her I'm her soulmate, and I don't even know *how* I would do that. I'm not good at those types of conversations."

"It doesn't have to be right now," Entrapta points out. She stands up and dusts her hands off, and then grabs a rag to wipe them clean. "It doesn't have to be soon, either. It's all your decision."

"Just... just at some point in the future," Catra breathes reassuringly to herself. "I... I'll think about it. About telling her." She looks up to meet Entrapta's delighted eyes. "I mean it."

Even a month after finding out Adora is her soulmate, Catra still feels guilty about everything when she picks up a paint brush, but it's not as bad when she picks up a pencil. Slowly, she starts sketching again, first in her sketchbook and for herself, then for the short assignments she needs to complete, and then for the people who commission her as well as the tattoo shop who are a little angry with her for suddenly becoming unavailable. She eventually adds color to it with colored pencils. Apologizes to Scorpia later on for how closed off and distant she's been recently.

“Adora’s my soulmate,” she tells her, a warm cup of tea in her hands. She went out to buy the three of them this exact tea because they all like it: an attempt to apologize before she did it with actual words.

Scorpia stares at her, jaw dropped, for a solid few minutes. Entrapta giggles at the sight, and even Catra has to admit, it’s a little funny. “Are... are you serious?”

Catra nods. Scorpia blinks. She stares at something in the distance, brows furrowed together like she’s trying to make sense of it all, and Catra can’t help but chuckle too. “Wow. This... is making a lot more sense.” Scorpia laughs with them, and then, “so... are you gonna tell her?”

Catra is honestly surprised with herself when she doesn’t tense up. The thought of Adora being her soulmate doesn’t make her feel like she can’t breathe anymore or make her palms sweat, and while the thought of actually *telling* Adora still scares her...

It’s not unfathomable.

“Yeah,” she whispers, and sees both Scorpia and Entrapta smile at her. “I will. Not now, but... I will.”

She picks up a paint brush again less than a week later. Starts with abstract paintings; let’s her mind take her wherever it wants, and then into more defined paintings, depicting a clear meaning. Eventually, she gets around to planning and brainstorming for the sketched out plan Professor Archer asked her to complete.

Entrapta ends up fixing the motorcycle. Catra tells Netossa about it when she starts volunteering at the animal shelter again — she doesn’t play with the cats *as* often as before, mainly because Melog is hers now, but she still enjoys helping out around the place — and Netossa offers to come pick it up in her truck so they can take it out to her and Spinnerella’s house. The roads are empty and quiet there, so it gives Catra time to give the bike a few test runs without having to be worried about any oncoming traffic.

Netossa lectures her for not having a helmet when Catra immediately tries to hop on without it, and then makes Catra get back in the car so they can go buy one from the store. When she finally gets to actually start up the motorcycle, it works, and more importantly, she’s good at it when she rides. Spinnerella kind of freaks out a little bit as both her and her wife watch, but everything Catra does on it comes naturally.

It’s nice. Despite the fact that it’s still cold outside she finds herself using it fairly often, glad she has an actual mode of transportation now, but also because it’s freeing to just simply *drive*, even if she has no set destination. It’s freeing to feel the wind tugging at her clothes and hair, to feel the exhilaration as the ground tilts when she makes turns, of seeing the world fly past at a dizzying pace. It’s not as warm as Catra would like it to be even though they’re halfway through February, but it’s not nearly as cold as it was in January and December, and they’re even starting to have some warm fronts. Catra’s glad, because she’s just about had it with the cold weather.

A couple of days after Valentine’s — she only knew it was that day because all of her friends were disgustingly sappy with the people they’re currently dating — Catra finds herself up

late on a Thursday night.

She can't sleep again. It's been getting slightly better as time goes on, but tonight, her inability to stop her mind from racing seems to return full force. Her fingers itch to *do* something, to draw or paint like she usually does when she needs to calm down, but this time, she feels the urge to do it on herself.

Whether she wants to admit it or not, body art has always been the most calming for her in any situation. It's not permanent, so it doesn't matter if she messes up, and she likes the feeling of the pen or brush against her skin. She hasn't felt it since she permanently — or what she intended to be permanent — closed the connection with Adora nearly a month ago now. Adora hasn't said *anything* — no reminders for herself, no small tidbits about her day, nothing — and the thought kind of unnerves Catra. Now, the only way she can feel her is if she closes her eyes, concentrates, and focuses on the faint underlying of their connection that's always there. It's buzzing, like a small electrical current that never seems to rest.

In the past, she told herself all she wanted was for her soulmate to just get the message and stop trying to talk to her. She liked the compliments on her art, but that was about it.

Now, she misses it all more than anything.

And Catra *knows*, as she finds one of Scorpia's soulmate pens lying around in the living room, that she shouldn't — should probably talk to Adora first, or maybe even write something to her — but fuck, she also knows that she still isn't ready for that, and she *has* to do something.

So she draws.

As she does, she pours her heart out. Tries to convey how apologetic she is for everything through both what she draws, but also through how she feels, knowing Adora will be able to feel whatever it is that she's feeling. She draws nothing specific — just a sprawling sleeve pattern of tattoo-like designs, starting along the back of her hand and slowly flowing down her arm.

It feels... strangely relieving to do so, so she keeps drawing, keeps going until she's tired herself out and the pen is shaky in her grasp, the clock reading as just past four in the morning.

Afterwards, she doesn't get a response. It's the first time that she has *ever* marked her skin and not gotten a response. It's... it's scary, to be honest, but in the end, she doesn't let it deter her.

She makes a point to do *something* every night. Sometimes she'll collapse into bed after a long day and just draw a simple doodle that consists of nothing special, and others she'll spend hours upon hours drawing along her leg or her ribs.

As they get closer to March, it stops snowing. Although it's not exactly hot, it's warm enough that they don't have to wear coats and heavy clothing everywhere they go. One morning,

Catra wakes up to the feeling of someone knocking on her door, followed by a raspy tongue on her face.

Well, is the first thing Catra thinks. *Those two things definitely don't go together.*

When Catra opens her eyes, she realizes it's Melog who's licking at her face for whatever reason — usually he doesn't do that unless Catra sleeps in past noon, which is very rare nowadays considering she knows Melog needs to be fed — and Scorpia knocking on the door. Catra can practically *feel* the excitement radiating from her despite the fact that they're separated by a whole wall.

“*Catraaaa!* You said you'd be up by now! We're gonna go shopping at the mall for Entrapta's presentation, remember?”

Catra groans, rolls over, but is unable to even attempt to go back to sleep because Melog immediately starts licking her face again.

“I know, I know,” she mumbles, pushing him off of her face. “I'm getting up.”

But before she does anything, the first thing she sees is her reflection in the mirror.

The drawing she left from last night is still covering her arm. She still hasn't painted anything on her skin — she tried a couple of nights ago, and immediately felt overwhelmed — but she hasn't given up on drawing.

As of now, there's an array of butterflies swirling along the inside of her forearm. She doesn't know where she got the idea, just knows that she closed her eyes, thought of something, and let her pen start moving.

Catra isn't sure whether or not her decision to keep her art private stems from her irrational fear that someone will see it and she'll get in trouble, or just the idea that she'll be exposing parts of herself to people she doesn't know, or even the worry that she'd be walking with her art out on display and maybe her soulmate would spot her from a distance, but the thought always made her uncomfortable.

Now, as Catra pulls the curtains back and realizes it's bright and sunny outside, probably warm enough to get away with wearing a t-shirt for a while, she decides that she doesn't care about any of that anymore.

The drawing is on the inside of her arm, so it's not like it would really be *showing it off* — Catra wouldn't do *that* — but it's still very obviously visible, and as she steps out of her room to where Scorpia is waiting, she feels strangely happy when Scorpia sees the drawing and tilts her head in wonder.

“Wow! I know you're an art major, but dang. I don't think I've ever really seen your actual art. That's really good! Do you usually draw on your body? Wait, does that mean you're talking to Adora again? Ooh, I'm so happy for you—”

Catra closes her eyes.

She smiles.

As the days continue to pass by, Catra eventually gets around to finishing the sketch plan Professor Archer wanted her to do and even feels pretty good about it afterwards.

She goes to his office willingly this time, project draft in hand. Knocks on the door with a bit of excitement, and nearly bounces to sit in the seat across from his desk when he calls her in.

“I finished my plan,” Catra says, handing over the folder of material. “It, uh, took a while, but I like it.” There’s a moment, and then she adds, “as much as I do my private art.”

Professor Archer’s brows raise to his hairline. He looks through the folder, staring carefully at each and every paper, his face giving away nothing as he does so. Catra starts to fidget a little nervously toward the end when it takes longer than she thought it would, but then he looks up and smiles wide.

“This is amazing, Catra. Exactly what I expected from you after seeing what you’re capable of.”

Catra can’t help the answering grin that splits her cheeks. “Really?”

Professor Archer nods. “It’s going to take you a lot of work to complete this, but I know it’ll be worth it when you’re done.”

“That’s... that’s what I wanted,” Catra admits. “I wanted to make it worthwhile.”

“I’m really glad to hear that, Catra,” he tells her, and Catra can hear the genuine delight in his voice. “I look forward to seeing what you’ll do.”

Catra nods. She stands after he gives her a dismissing nod, hands gripped loosely around the straps of her bag. From this angle, she can see what she recognizes to be soulmate marks along his forearm.

What she expects is to feel nervous at the sight, or pressured, or like the world is closing in. Instead, it makes her feel something she’s never felt before; not in regards to her soulmate, anyway. Almost like... longing?

After a moment, Catra shakes her head, dismissing the thought. She’ll figure that out later.

“Um, thank you,” she murmurs, slinging her bag over her shoulder and giving him one last look. “For the help. I... appreciate it.”

Professor Archer beams.

A week after Catra's started drawing on her body again, she gets to her room directly after going last minute grocery shopping with Entrapta — doing anything with Entrapta is chaotic, but for some reason, grocery shopping is even more so — when she stares at the paint bottles on her desk.

She thinks about how soothing it is to feel a paint brush against her skin. Thinks about how delighted Adora is whenever she paints. Thinks about how she's probably been putting it off for long enough already.

So Catra takes a deep breath, grabs a small brush, dips it into an old glass of water she left sitting out from a few hours ago, and paints.

It's nothing special. What she does is lift her shirt up over her head, sit down in her chair, and paint just below her chest. She paints a constellation of stars that form the classical heart shape, and she makes sure to use purple and blue and white colors to give it a bit of a glow.

It doesn't take her long; maybe twenty minutes at the most. Catra takes another deep breath after finishing, slowly setting her paint brush onto her desk, and then rolling her head back to rest against her chair.

She feels the first draw of a pen a moment later.

I really like this one is what Adora says. Catra stares at the words for a long moment, relief flooding her chest. From Adora, she can feel a bit of... sheepishness? Almost like she's embarrassed, or— ***I'm sorry I haven't said anything recently. I just didn't know what to say after***

Adora doesn't finish. Catra sighs. ***After I tried to cut off our connection?***

you don't need to apologize Catra writes back. ***it was my fault for telling you that. i'm sorry for everything.***

There's a moment where no one says anything. Catra feels a little nervous, but then the feeling of electricity strikes her veins, and the tickle of a pen returns. ***Can you paint something else?***

Catra tugs her lip between her teeth. ***any requests?***

Um, I'm not very creative. Despite her words, Adora must be hopeful, because Catra is starting to get a lighthearted feeling from her. ***What about a sunset? On a beach?***

Catra laughs. ***that's pretty basic, don't u think?***

I said I wasn't creative! Catra can almost imagine Adora pouting right now. ***But it sounds kind of hard to do, especially if you do it on your stomach or chest.***

u think i can't paint a sunset on a beach?

Make it over a city. And upside down, so that when I'm looking in the mirror it'll be right side up. With birds in the distance, and city life in the streets. Think you're good enough to do all of that?

Catra feels a surge of competitiveness swirl within her.

(As it turns out, she *is* good enough to do all of that.)

A couple of days before March, across a plateful of half eaten pizza, Lonnie raises a quizzical brow in Catra's direction. The distinctive chatter of the few other patrons inside the hole-in-the-wall restaurant linger in the background as Catra stares at her friend in an attempt to gauge what she's thinking before she actually voices it.

"Enough talk about my love life," Lonnie says, and Catra thinks, *here we go*. "You found your soulmate after trying so hard to avoid it all. That's gotta be interesting, right? Did you two fix things?"

Catra rolls her eyes. "No. I haven't talked to her since I told her I didn't want what we had anymore."

Lonnie tilts her head. "So was you rejecting your soulmate like a defense mechanism, or do you just straight up not want to be with her?"

Since what's quite possibly the longest conversation she has ever had with her soulmate — she gets she's technically had longer conversations with Adora in person, but she didn't *know* they were soulmates then — they've kept talking. It's still not much, but considering the fact that they very rarely talked before everything happened, in comparison... it's a lot.

Catra feels like she's younger again. Adora tells her small things, like the suggestion of a song, or the fact that her friends are being more annoying today than usual. Catra, for the first time, responds every time she's prompted — tells Adora what she thinks of the song, or that her own friends are the same way. Some nights she'll go to sleep with faded tic-tac-toe games along her arms, and others with many lines of messy handwriting.

It's light conversation, like they're just getting to know each other for the first time. A part of Catra mourns the fact that she could have had this when she was younger. If she hadn't been so scared of the idea of a soulmate, of the prospect of forever, of what Weaver might do to her if she found out she was talking to her soulmate, she could've made everything so much easier.

Another part of her grieves over the knowledge that once she tells Adora the truth — all of it will change. The simple, innocent little messages they've been exchanging these past few days won't continue. Adora will either be even more mad at her than she already is and never talk to her again, or she'll tell Catra that she loves her now because she's her soulmate and she wants forever and Catra will have to tell her that she can't just *do* that—

“I... I want her,” Catra eventually answers softly. “Even though she’s my soulmate, I do. I want to be with her. I just don’t think I can handle the prospect of her loving me simply because I’m her soulmate. And to be honest, who’s to say she’d even want me after everything?”

Lonnie stares at her with squinted eyes. “Sounds like you two need to have a long talk.”

“That’s what Entrapta said,” Catra mutters.

“Okay, and you’re waiting because..?”

Catra wraps her lips around the straw of her soda just to give herself something to do as she ponders over her answer. When she leans up, Lonnie is staring at her expectantly, and Catra deflates. “I just... I don’t know if I’m ready to tell her. So much is going to change.”

Lonnie blinks. “Um, no offense, Catra,” she starts, “but it seems like *everything* has already changed. You two went from like, being attached at the hip, to whatever this is. How long has it been since you last talked to her?”

Catra bites her lip. “Couple of hours?”

Lonnie rolls her eyes. “How long has it been since you last talked to her, with her *knowing* it was you?”

Catra stares down at her hands.

It’s... it’s been a while, but Catra needed time to work things out on her own. She’s not sure she could’ve sanely been able to figure everything out had she pretended like nothing was wrong, and kept falling harder for the girl she knows she *loved* — still loves — in the process.

“Well, it’s... it’s been a little over a month and a half since I saw my art on her arm and figured out we were soulmates. It’s been a week shorter than that since we had that fight out on the street, and... that was the last time.”

Lonnie whistles. “Wow.”

Catra sighs. “Yeah.”

“That’s... a while.”

“...Yeah.”

The waitress chooses that moment to make himself known, appearing with their bill as they decide how much they’re going to owe if they split it. Catra’s just fished her card out of her wallet and set it on the bill when Lonnie speaks again.

“She’s not doing very good,” Lonnie admits. “I mean, I don’t know her well, but we have a class together. But what I mean is, I didn’t even know anything had happened between you

two till like— a few weeks later? But I immediately believed you because prior to you telling me, she looked really messed up.”

Catra squeezes her eyes shut at the words. It hurts far more than anything to know she’s the reason she caused Adora pain, even if it was deliberate in the moment.

“I didn’t think I could handle it,” she whispers. “And I just— I wanted her to stop trying to fix things and just move on.”

“Well, I can tell she’s doing better now, though. Like... it’s not exactly *good*, but it’s... it’s better than what she was at.”

“Time heals all wounds,” Catra mutters under her breath. She’s not sure where she heard the saying from. Probably Perfuma, or something.

Lonnie stares at her for a moment, and then sits up. “Alright, enough of the emotional sad talk. Let’s go do something.”

Catra agrees.

It isn’t until a few mornings later, Catra asleep in bed like she rightfully should be considering it’s five-thirty in the morning and she only went to bed a few hours ago after a night of painting on her arm, when she jolts up in confusion, half asleep and swearing that Adora was *just right there* when she feels a pen against her arm and thinks— oh.

Are you awake?

Catra opens her mouth to let a wide, loud yawn escape her. She screws her eyes shut, groggily wipes at them, then reaches for one of the soulmate pens she recently bought from the convenience store and started keeping on her bedside table for events like this. *now i am, thanks a lot*

Sorry!! Adora writes. Catra feels guilt from her. *I didn’t mean to wake you. Go back to sleep.*

i’m just teasing. Catra writes back. *what’s up?*

Are you not a morning person?

Catra blinks. She doesn’t think *anyone*, morning person or not, should be willing to wake up at five-thirty a.m. *nope. not at all.*

Oh. I am.

I know, Catra thinks, but writes *gross.*

Adora doesn't respond for a long time. Catra runs a hand through her short cropped hair — a bit longer than she's kept it ever since she had to cut it all off back in September, having been debating on whether or not she should grow it out again — and is about to lay back against the pillows when Adora finally starts writing again.

Do you remember that night, she slowly and hesitantly writes, ***when I asked you about soulmates?***

Catra furrows her brows together. She remembers exactly what night Adora's talking about, and she's managed to piece together that it was the same night Adora came to make up with her. It's ironic, Catra thinks, that she unknowingly helped both of them by giving advice to someone she assumed she didn't know. ***yeah, i remember.***

I met someone, Adora keeps writing. ***Someone who was really special to me. Someone who taught me a lot.***

Catra nervously swallows.

But then I messed it up. I tried to fix it. I didn't think something as simple as what caused the downfall could have ended everything, but... There's a pause in the writing, and then, ***In the end, I don't think there was anything I could have done.***

Catra sets her pen down, squeezes her eyes shut.

Adora still feels so pained and hurt, but it's not hysterical and out of control like it had been that night all those weeks ago, the night Catra tried to cut off their connection for good. This is calm and collected; like Adora's resigned herself to feeling this way. Like she's finally accepted what happened couldn't have been avoided.

According to the universe, she wasn't my soulmate, Adora keeps writing, ***but... but I was thinking about what you said. How it depends on me. How it's really up to me to determine whether or not someone is my soulmate, and sometimes, it feels like she could have been my soulmate. Things might have ended badly between us, but I'm glad I got to know her, even if she's gone now.***

Catra stares at the words for a long, long time.

Long enough that she doesn't even realize how much time has passed. Long enough that when Adora writes ***I guess I'm telling you this to thank you***, she barely even registers it. Long enough that she forgets, in this moment, where she is and why she's here, just thinks about the words ***sometimes, it feels like she could have been my soulmate.***

There's a chance Adora loved her. There's a chance Adora *loved* her. And even if it's not true, even if she doesn't love her, never did, and tells Catra to fuck off the moment she shows up and tells Adora that they're soulmates, Catra still has to try. She owes it to Adora, at the very least, to tell her the truth.

She's ready.

As the weeks pass, Adora drowns herself in work, sports, and school to keep herself busy. She barely notices the days change, and has to peer out of the window of the gym to deduce whether it's a.m. or p.m. She buries herself in her studies — she has to have a 3.8 GPA minimum if she wants to get into the grad school she's been looking at — and on top of that, soccer season is finally about to start up, and she's never been more thankful for the distraction.

Late January, only a few of weeks after her breakdown after everything happened with Catra, and even less since her birthday — it was, unsurprisingly, very uneventful, and she had asked Bow and Glimmer to just keep the celebration small because she didn't feel like much celebrating —, Adora finds herself out late on the field to practice. She works herself to the bone, and stumbles into her and Bow's apartment later on that night.

Glimmer and Bow take one look at her, tell her to get in the shower, and then basically force a can of spaghetti's down her throat.

"I think this counts as abuse," Adora grumbles as she sits across from them at the small kitchen table. Glimmer has apparently forbidden her from doing any sort of physical exertion for the rest of the week — considering it's only Thursday, that isn't much — and although Adora wants to argue with her, her sore muscles are screaming at her to just sit down and take a break, and she's really tired anyway.

"This counts as keeping your ass alive," Glimmer bites back from across the table. Bow flashes her a look, but even he seems to agree. "God, Adora. The amount of takeout coffee in the trash is *insane*, and that's not even taking into account the fact that you literally work at a coffee shop and probably inhale unhealthy amounts there. Is that all you've been consuming lately?"

"Why did you go through our trash?" Adora questions. Glimmer narrows her eyes.

"Adora."

"Have you slept?" Bow asks. Adora glowers at them.

"Some," she forces out, picking her now empty bowl up and moving to wash it in the sink. "It's fine."

"It's *not* fine, Adora! This isn't healthy. I'm— I'm glad you're not drinking anymore, but you're going to work yourself into an early grave if you keep going on like this."

“I’m not going to *work myself into an early grave*,” Adora tells them, jaw clenched. “I’ll get over what happened eventually. I appreciate you two worrying about me, but honestly, it’s not needed.”

She pretends not to see Bow and Glimmer’s worried looks when she retreats to her room.

When soccer season actually starts, teammate introductions are kept brief, mostly for the sake of the fact that aside from the incoming freshman, they all already know each other. Adora zones out for the majority of it, but when it actually gets to be her turn, she blinks up at their coach who smiles encouragingly at her.

“It’s great to see you back, Adora,” she says. To Adora’s right, Starla gives her an encouraging nudge. “Care to introduce yourself for those who don’t know you? How have you been?”

I haven’t slept in two days. I haven’t stopped thinking about her for even longer. Everything always hurts. I can’t sleep. I ruined the best thing to ever happen to me and I can’t fix it.

“I’m fine,” Adora says lamely, and then breathes in and out through her nose. “My name is Adora. I’m a senior here at Bright Moon University, my position is Center Forward, and uh... my favorite color is red.”

A few people clap, and others give her teasing looks. “Anything interesting happen to you in the off season?” their coach asks.

Adora shrugs. A few of her teammates flash her weird looks, but Adora ignores it. Like all things in her life, they’ll forget and move on, and she can’t help but wonder whether life itself is simply just a way to pass time.

Time itself passes slower than it did with Catra. Adora still goes to class and work and eventually practice when it starts up again, but she declines all of the invitations to do things like party or hang out with a large group of friends after her one attempt nearly a month after everything has ended with both Catra and her soulmate.

At a club Mermista has invited her to, a girl — the same age as her, by the looks of it — tries to flirt with her. Adora doesn’t take too kindly to the prospect, and when the girl asks her what’s wrong, why she won’t come dance or accept any of the drinks offered to her, Adora frowns and pulls her arm out of the girl’s hold.

“I don’t uh,” Adora flashes her glance back to the couple making out in the corner, “I don’t... do that stuff.”

The girl looks confused, until she follows Adora's gaze. "You're at a club, but you're not interested in anything like that?"

Adora shrugs, swirling her virgin drink around. Mermista and Sea Hawk hadn't wanted her to do that — had said they could call an uber, and Adora could drink as much as she wants — but Adora doesn't really feel like doing any of that. They should be used to it for the most part, anyway. Adora hadn't done any of those things before Catra, and she doesn't really plan on doing it after Catra, either.

(The fact that there's an *after Catra* that exists now still makes the physical wrench of her heart almost fitting.)

"Not really," Adora answers after realizing the girl is still waiting on her to answer.

She stares at her for a moment, and then shrugs. Adora doesn't stop her from leaving.

Visiting her mom still always feels like a slightly altered reality.

It's a damp, foggy morning when she visits for the first time since Christmas. The graveyard is empty when Adora arrives, save for an older couple making their way down a narrow path in the distance. Coming here is always the same.

Soulmates are often buried together, and Mara and Hope were no different. Adora never met her — apparently, she passed on long before Adora was born, before her mom accidentally became pregnant and her father decided he didn't want to be a part of her life — but she had heard all good things about her.

"Hey, mom," she starts like she always does when she comes here. "I, uh, I'm not too sure what I'm doing here." She doesn't usually visit again until spring break. "I'm... I'm doing kind of bad, to be honest."

She squats down on the grass; eyes the two headstones.

"You always told me about how you and Hope met, and how you two fell in love like this cheesy romance novel. I'm sure it wasn't perfect, but... I don't know. I guess I kind of always imagined getting to experience something like that. Something like— like Bow and Glimmer, or even Perfuma and Scorpia."

Adora trails off a bit, and takes a deep breath. "But then I met someone else. Someone who I didn't see myself falling for, because— because how could I, when there's someone else out there who's supposed to be perfect for me?"

She drags her fingers through the grass. "It was so sudden. We were supposed to be friends, and then suddenly I realized that I loved her. I loved her *so much*, mom. I think I still do,

but... she really hurt me. I didn't see any of this playing out like how it did." Adora takes a deep breath. "Is it messed up that I still miss her?"

There's no response. Obviously there isn't — dead mothers don't talk — and Adora sits down despite the fact that the grass is cold and wet, pulling her knees to her chest.

"I wish you could have met her before everything happened," she breathes out. "I wish I told her about you. I wish I did so many things differently."

Adora rests her chin on her knees and keeps talking.

On the nights she can't sleep, she lays awake in bed, staring up at the ceiling. She wonders where Catra is, if she's gone completely unaffected by this entire thing and Adora is just being dramatic — they weren't even *dating* — or if she's doing as bad as Adora is.

She wonders what would've happened if she hadn't ever met Catra. Wonders what would've happened if she hadn't ever decided to fix things after their first kiss. Wonders if it would've been better if she kept her at a distance like she planned on doing with anyone she was attracted to.

(Adora hates herself for knowing that she couldn't have done it. She hates herself for not regretting being with Catra.)

Lonnie stares at her a lot. Adora starts to get a little irritated with it, especially because she knows she's one of Catra's friends. She doesn't see many of Catra's friends anymore — Scorpia, on the days the entire group except for Catra and on occasion, Entrapta, gets together — but it's not the same. Adora tries her best to avoid those hangouts for as long as she can, but on the days where it's inevitable and Bow and Glimmer basically drag her along with them, she tries her best to keep her distance from Perfuma's soulmate.

It's weird, though. In the beginning, Scorpia stares at her with a bit of anger and annoyance as if she's mad at her for whatever Catra's doing, but then she stops. She starts staring at Adora with sympathy and pity, and Adora doesn't understand what any of it means.

It's still cold for the middle of February. It's nowhere near as cold as it's been these past couple of months, but it's enough that as she tightens her jacket around herself as she walks, she hears *her* voice in the back of her head, soft and teasing with just a hint of a smile.

"You're going to run out of things to wear in the winter if you keep giving me all of your warm clothing."

It's not uncommon for her to hear her voice. At first, it was scary. Catra's voice comes to her often enough that she began to wonder if there was something wrong with her. How could there not be, if something as simple as tightening her jacket around herself, or seeing a semi-colon, or hearing her alarm go off in the morning is enough to trigger her voice in Adora's head?

"Adora, you don't need a semi-colon here," Catra would say, tapping her pen against the paper Adora would be working on, or *"Can't believe you choose morning classes. 's taking time away from cuddles,"* she'd sleepily whisper in the early hours.

But now, she thinks that, weirdly, the voice is comforting. It reminds Adora of her when things were okay.

She thinks that she may actually be starting to get better altogether. She eventually stops overworking herself; starts accepting Bow and Glimmer's invitations to hang out. Everything still hurts, but— it's not nearly as much as before. She doesn't think about her at every moment of the day — only does it when she sees things like the sun setting in the distance and thinks about one of Catra's paintings, or sees a couple walking along the street and thinks, *I almost had that.*

It changes when she feels the familiar feeling of a pen on her arm; the feeling she thought she wouldn't ever feel again.

There's a inkling of sadness pooling in from her soulmate, but it's different to Adora's. Her soulmate feels more regretful, and what Adora recognizes to be remorse. She peers down at her dominant hand; sees multiple different things being drawn, with seemingly no pattern as they sprawl down her arm.

She doesn't understand.

The last time she had written to her soulmate had been the day of her fight with Catra over a month ago. She hadn't felt that hurt since the first anniversary of her mother's passing, and like she had done at that time too, Adora had decided to attempt to reach out to ask them to distract her.

They told her they couldn't do this.

And Adora could tell, based on the feeling she got from them, that it wasn't just what Adora was asking. They weren't just busy or something — they couldn't do any of it. They couldn't have a relationship. They rejected her. They didn't want to be with her.

They hadn't drawn after that, and Adora had attempted to respect their decision by not getting anything on her skin. It wasn't as hard as she initially imagined — ever since she started her arrangement with Catra, she hadn't been writing to them *as much*, but to go from that to never was still difficult.

But now they're here, drawing, and Adora *doesn't understand*. It's a beautiful design, too— goes on for hours, far longer than Adora should probably stay up. She doesn't want to sleep; not when her soulmate is emitting a soothing feeling now, not when she still has so many

questions, but it's not surprising when, with the familiar feeling of a pen against her arm, the presence that has always, *always* managed to calm her, and with how exhausted she is, she falls asleep between one heartbeat and the next.

They keep drawing.

Adora hadn't expected it. She hadn't expected them to open the connection at all — not after what they told her — and now here they are, drawing far more than what they did even before they told her they couldn't do this. Whether it's a small doodle of a cat that takes five minutes or a complex ink drawing filled with dance and passion that takes forty-five, they draw every single night.

Adora doesn't respond. She doesn't know how to, or what to say. Should she ask them why they're doing this? Should she ask why they've been drawing, but haven't painted? Should she ask what they meant by *I can't do this* followed by them apologizing right after, only to start drawing again after over a month of silence?

As it turns out, she doesn't get around to asking any of those, because one night, exactly a week after they start drawing again, they paint. Directly just below the middle of her chest, Adora feels the tickling of a paint brush and watches as it forms the shape of a heart, but in the form of a constellation. It's painted blue and purple and white, almost giving it an ethereal glow; Adora runs her fingers along it as it's being painted, feeling a strange pull.

She still doesn't understand what they're doing, and she's still so hurt from what both Catra said to her and the fact that her soulmate outright rejected her, but Adora *knows* she has to say something to them, so—

I really like this one, she writes. Her soulmate doesn't respond, and Adora suddenly feels a little embarrassed. It's ironic, she thinks, that she spent her whole life waiting, *begging* for them to just do something, and now that they've been drawing literally every single day she couldn't find it in her to respond, or even feel excited about it. ***I'm sorry I haven't said anything recently. I just didn't know what to say after***

She stops writing for a moment. What is she supposed to say? *After you rejected me?* That feels too harsh, and it's not like they *owed* something to Adora just because they're soulmates. She definitely doesn't feel like she owes anything to them anymore.

you don't need to apologize. it was my fault for telling you that. i'm sorry for everything.

Adora frowns. Her thoughts are racing, filled with confusion and uncertainty and she has to take a deep breath to calm herself, but she always feels calmer when her soulmate is painting, so she writes ***Can you paint something else?***

There's a moment where Adora fears that her soulmate will suddenly disappear again or tell her *they can't*, before a hesitant, but happy feeling forms from them. ***any requests?***

Adora chuckles. *Um, I'm not very creative.* She taps her pen against her arm for a moment, and then writes *What about a sunset? On a beach?*

Her soulmate has to be smiling. *that's pretty basic, don't u think?*

I said I wasn't creative! Adora pouts despite the fact that no one is there to see her. *But it sounds kind of hard to do, especially if you do it on your stomach or chest.*

u think i can't paint a sunset on a beach?

Make it over a city. And upside down, so that when I'm looking in the mirror it'll be right side up. With birds in the distance, and city life in the streets. Think you're good enough to do all of that?

Her soulmate doesn't say anything after that, but Adora sees at the same time she feels the colors on her stomach start to form. She thinks back to the time they painted the hummingbirds painting for her; thinks back to all of their paintings, how enticed and in love she's always been with them; thinks about how she loves to run her fingers along them and how she used to imagine meeting them and getting to know them and falling in love and having a perfect life.

She thinks about how none of that exists anymore. She thinks about how she still wants it with Catra instead, and how she's not going to get it.

She doesn't write anything else to her soulmate until they're finished, too afraid of them feeling the sudden sadness from her. Adora highly doubts they would even ask about it, but she doesn't want to possibly ruin their good mood by bombarding them with feelings of grief.

(Adora's not surprised when they paint exactly what she asked. They're so good at what they do, just like Catra is. Adora figures she must have a thing for artists, and then laughs quietly to herself at her joke.)

And even after they've finished hours later, long past midnight and in the early hours of the morning, Adora gets up and out of bed to stare at it in the mirror and can't believe that she actually gets to see this. Can't believe she gets to see the colors as they dance along her abdomen, coming like a river and flowing in the sense that it clearly knows where it's going, weaving in the metaphors of something she feels like she'd see only in a dream. She thinks she gets lost, for a moment, as she stares at the piece, before she feels that same pen from before on her chest, just above the heart constellation.

good? they ask.

Are you crazy? Adora writes back. *Of course it is. It's heavenly. It makes me feel so...* Adora doesn't even have a word for it. *I just want to get lost in it, forever. The emotions behind it are beautiful, and I'm not just saying that because I can feel your mind as you paint it, because even without that I can just sense everything you were trying to convey in it despite the fact that I asked you to paint it. add in the fact that you painted it upside down???* *I just don't even know what to say. U must be like a famous artist or something.*

Maybe that's why they've never liked to give private details about their life, she jokingly thinks. *Because this is literally insane.*

thanks her soulmate writes back, and Adora can tell they're embarrassed now. *i don't really know how to respond to compliments, but i appreciate it. i appreciate everything you've done, ever. i don't know if ive ever said it, but thank you.*

Adora watches the words as they're written along her upper thigh now that they've run out of space on their arms and stomach and chest, and she *wants*.

She wants—

She wants something permanent. Something that she knows isn't going to change, or leave. Something to run her fingers over whenever she feels overwhelmed; something she knows will always be there.

She wants a tattoo.

Where and of what, she doesn't know, and she's not even sure of *when* because she wouldn't just do that knowing that it'll permanently mark her soulmate, too, but she wants.

You're welcome.

Things aren't *great*, but they're not... they're not *bad*.

She talks to her soulmate regularly now. It's not the same as what she imagined when she was younger, but it's nice. She doesn't wait religiously for them to respond anymore; doesn't feel like she has to carefully plan out her words in fear of them running away like she used to back when she would give up absolutely anything to be with them. Being with them isn't even on her mind anymore, hasn't been in a long time, and she's sure it's not on theirs, either, considering they've never tried to get to know her and told her they couldn't do this just a month and a half ago, but it doesn't bother her. She's heard of platonic soulmates; heard of people who never fall in love with each other but remain friends, or even people who mutually aren't attracted to anyone and become best friends, and begins to think that she wouldn't mind that.

She's up early one morning, tossing and turning. She's been sleeping off and on for the entire night, even despite the fact that she and her soulmate stopped talking a few hours ago. There's a painting on her right arm of a cherry blossom forest, with a small bridge going over a river in the middle. It's so dreamlike and mystical, and it's not the first time Adora has wished she could be inside one of the paintings her soulmate has created.

The weather's warm enough that it's starting to rain again rather than snow: something a mix between water and ice. Rain throbs noisily against the walls, and Adora knows she should

sleep in because she can't go running right now anyway, but whatever she does, she can't fall back into slumber.

She still misses Catra and thinks about her eyes; still feels like the love for her hasn't gone away. She's not sure it ever will. It still hurts, a lot.

("It's going to hurt," Perfuma had told her. "It's still pretty fresh. A month and a half isn't that long, but the fact that you aren't self-destructing anymore is the first step to moving on.")

Adora thinks that's bullshit. She doesn't *want* to move on. She wants — she wants closure, or something.

She wants to be mad at her.

She wants to be so mad at her, to let that anger from what Catra did to her, to *them*, grow until she thinks of nothing else but just how filled with rage she is. Anger is easier. It's easier than the despair and misery and the longing and the desire she still feels whenever she thinks of her. It's easier, because the anger is all-consuming and detrimental; it blazes like a wildfire, burning out every soft memory or sentimental thought she has of her until all that's left are harsh words and fights and pain.

And she is. Adora *is* angry with her, but not in the way she wants, because the love she feels for her is far stronger than the anger.

It's something that's hard to come to terms with, because she knows Perfuma is right. They're nearing two months now, which apparently isn't enough for all that she felt to just fall away, and it truly terrifies her that the vice grip Catra still has on her heart is strong enough to still affect her like this.

So she writes to her soulmate about Catra.

The rain keeps bouncing down on the walls. It's only somewhat fitting, Adora decides, for the day. The days that it rains are the only days her and Bow don't partake in their daily run, and being that it's been far too cold to actually rain ever since November, those days have been far and few in between.

Being that it's a Saturday, Adora doesn't have class, and she doesn't even have a shift today, either. Being that she woke up hours ago and hasn't been able to really go back to sleep, Adora finds herself thanking the universe for actually working out in her favor for once as she curls up beneath her blankets and shuts her eyes, finally feeling somewhat tired.

Then, because the universe probably really does hate her, there's a knock on the door.

Adora groans, and after a second of contemplating, decides she'll let Bow answer it.

The knock comes again.

Adora ignores it, fully prepared to just keep doing so until it suddenly occurs to her that last night, Bow and Glimmer had gone on a date, and she has no idea whether he came back home or not. Considering she doesn't hear any other noise from inside the apartment, it's probably safe to assume that he didn't.

With a loud, dramaticized groan, Adora shuffles out of bed and slides on a pair of plaid pajama pants. The rain, of course, is still pounding outside; the wind has picked up, too, hurling the water sideways so it bullets against her window. Adora runs a hand through her loose hair before she makes her way to the door.

It's only a little past six in the morning, so the only person Adora can really think it could be is Bow if he forgot his key, but if that were the case, he would text her in advance. Maybe he forgot his phone too, Adora muses as she unlocks the door.

Then the door swings open, and Adora thinks that there wasn't a long list of possibilities of people who could be knocking on her door at six in the morning while it's storming outside, but she certainly wasn't expecting to find Catra, soaked to her skin and staring up at Adora with wide eyes.

Both Adora's chest and her grip on the doorknob tightens. Catra looks different to when she last saw her: her hair is a bit longer, wet and clinging to her forehead, and she doesn't have bags beneath her eyes anymore like she's going to collapse at any moment. She's holding a plastic bag, fingers trembling.

Adora isn't sure if it's the shock of seeing Catra after nearly two months, or the shock of seeing her despite the fact that she made it clear that she didn't want *Adora* anymore, but all that comes out is a barely audible, "Catra?"

Catra opens her mouth to respond; it closes, and then opens again, as if she's not too sure what to say. Her eyes land on the painting on Adora's arm, and Adora nervously swallows, expecting Catra to tense up and run away again at the sight of it.

Instead, she whispers a quiet, "can I come in?"

Adora nods once, and then steps aside so Catra can walk past her. They stand there for a few moments in the kitchen, tension and awkwardness brimming the air, until Catra shivers. Adora blinks as it suddenly seems to set in that Catra's here; she's *here*, in Adora's kitchen, close enough to touch, but she's soaked to the bone and it's still cold and raining outside and she's probably *freezing*.

"You're soaked," Adora says. She takes a step closer, and then takes a step back. Takes a step away. "Let me get you a towel."

"Adora, it's fine," Catra objects, but she's shaking now, more so than she was before, and Adora scoffs.

"Just— just stay here," she mutters, and then heads down the hallway and to their bathroom.

She doesn't know what to make of this. She doesn't know why Catra's here, especially *now* of all times, and she's not sure if she wants to yell at her or burst into tears or pull her close and warm her up.

She doesn't have much time to linger on the question, though, because her fingers curl around a soft, muted gray towel, and she quickly returns to the kitchen to hand it to Catra.

Catra sets down the bag and takes ahold of the towel to use it to first wipe her face, and then a bit of her head. There's really no use in wiping her clothes considering they're completely drenched, and Adora doesn't know whether or not to offer her some of her own clothes. Catra's still shivering, and she looks small and vulnerable like this, wet clothes clinging to her body and staring up at Adora.

"Adora," she finally whispers, still holding onto the towel. Adora stares down at her feet, brows furrowed. "I—I know you don't—I know you're probably mad, or upset, and probably wondering why I'm here—"

"Catra," Adora sighs, shutting her eyes and clenching her fists.

Catra takes a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry for so many things, and I know you don't owe me anything, but I want... I want to explain." Adora opens her eyes to meet Catra's own once again; sees how earnest and honest they are.

"Catra," she repeats, voice quieter and agonizing, because she *wants* to deny her; wants Catra to feel the same way she did, but she already knows she could never find it in herself to do that to her.

"Please, Adora," Catra begs. "I think... I think that even if I don't deserve to tell you what happened, you deserve to know what happened. I think that it'll help to understand."

Adora inhales sharply. "Understand what?" she asks disbelievingly. "That you were reminded of the fact that we all have a soulmate and decided to leave everything we had because of it? That you didn't even give me a chance to tell you what I *wanted* to tell you in my room that day? That you said things to me that you *knew* would hurt me because— because—" Adora has to cut herself off, because she doesn't even know what the reason for that was.

Catra looks hurt at the words, and Adora thought it would help to see Catra in a similar position to how Adora's been in this past month and a half, but it doesn't. If anything, it only makes her feel worse. "I know. I know, and I'm sorry. I'm sorry for leaving without telling you anything, and I'm sorry for saying those things to you. I wish so badly that I could take it back, but I can't, and I'm just so, *so* sorry for hurting you like that."

"You're not sorry for running away the moment you saw the painting?"

Catra reaches for her arm over her wet jacket, almost like she's trying to comfort herself. "Adora," she sighs, "there's a lot of things you don't know—" Adora scoffs and opens her mouth to interrupt again, but Catra stares at her with a pleading look, and Adora shuts her mouth. "—and if you're willing to let me... I think I'd like to explain them to you."

Adora looks at her, and thinks about every part of her that's moving despite the fact that she's not trying to. Catra looks straight back at her, and Adora swears that she can hear the beat of their breaths over the rain outside.

Finally, Adora nods. "Okay."

Catra lets out a staggering sigh of relief, running a hand through her wet hair to move it out of her face. Adora watches the movements wearily, and then adds, "but under one condition."

Catra quickly turns to look back at her. She's obviously trying to remain completely still, but she's still shivering, badly, and—

"What is it?" Catra questions. "Whatever it is, I'll do it—"

"You need to change out of those clothes," Adora firmly tells her. Catra blinks, stares down at her clothes, and then sighs.

"It's fine, Adora, I—"

"I can barely hear you over all of that teeth chattering, Catra," Adora objects. "You're—you're freezing, and you're going to get sick if you stay in those clothes, so *please*."

Catra stares at her for a moment. She's back to looking almost sad; almost like she understands something Adora doesn't, and Adora is *so tired* of everyone staring at her like that recently—

Then, Catra nods.

"Okay."

Adora ends up digging through her drawer. She finds one of Catra's old t-shirts that she had left here a few months ago and a pair of her own tight fitted sweatpants; makes sure to leave the flannel Catra gifted her with in case she's still cold, and then looks back at her from where she's still standing at the door of the room as it suddenly occurs to her that Catra probably walked here.

"Fuck, Catra," she mutters, handing her the clothes. "Did you seriously walk here in this weather?"

Catra doesn't respond, and Adora sighs as Catra takes the clothes and heads to the other side of the room. Out of respect for her privacy, Adora turns around to head back to the kitchen, only to be stopped by Catra's voice.

"I didn't walk," she mutters. "I drove."

Adora isn't sure how much she believes that. "So you're completely drenched in water because of the ten steps it takes to get from the parking lot to the apartment?"

“No,” Catra mumbles. Adora hears her wet clothes hit the ground. “I—uh, a while ago I got a motorcycle, so I— I drove that.”

There’s a *lot* of different things running through Adora’s mind after hearing those words. So much has changed in such a short period of time, and it occurs to her that this Catra is going to be different from the Catra she last saw nearly two months ago.

“That was still stupid,” is all Adora can think to say.

“I wanted to talk to you.”

“So much so that you drove a motorcycle in the freezing rain? That’s— that’s so dangerous, Catra! What was so important that you had to tell me *now*, instead of just waiting for the rain to go away or even— or before all of this happened? Why couldn’t you have just talked to me instead of leaving?”

Adora’s a little out of breath when she finishes, but she’s still facing the door, shoulders shaking. It’s silent, save for the rain and the thunder rattling the apartment every few moments, and Catra doesn’t say anything.

Adora takes a deep breath. “I’ll... I’ll be in the kitchen,” she mutters, and doesn’t give Catra the chance to respond as she quickly leaves the room.

It’s not even a few minutes after she’s sat down at the table, staring at the fridge door and trying to gather her thoughts (and failing) when she hears footsteps behind her, followed by a small inhale and exhale. Adora risks a glance over her shoulder.

Catra is standing only a few steps away from her in her own Guns N’ Roses t-shirt, Adora’s flannel, and a pair of her sweatpants. She’s still shaking slightly, but it’s not as bad as before, and she’s watching Adora with eyes full of regret as she clutches her wet clothes.

A heartbeat.

A blink.

A breath.

A thought.

Finally—

“I... I love you, Adora,” Catra tells her, and her voice is soft but steady. “I’m sorry for so much. God, I— I’m sorry I made you think otherwise. I’m sorry for falling in love with you despite the fact that you made it clear that that’s not what you wanted.” She pauses, and then takes a deep breath. “I was scared, Adora, and I hurt you because of that. It kills me to know that I did that to you. I’m so, *so* sorry.”

Adora stares at her.

She stares, and stares, and—

Catra *loves* her. She reciprocates the love Adora feels for her. She fell in love, too, despite the fact that that's not what they agreed on. There's something in her that hears those words and feels so undeniably happy, like it can *let go*, even with everything they still have to talk about.

But even with all of this: it doesn't make *sense*.

"Why were you so scared?" Adora finally asks, quiet. Catra clutches her clothes tighter. "Why did you leave, if you loved me?" *If you still love me*. "We could've— we could've talked about it. It didn't have to be bad." *I could've told you I wouldn't leave you for my soulmate. I could've told you that I love you too*.

Catra squeezes her eyes shut. She takes a breath, so deep that it rattles her entire body, and then her eyes flutter back open.

"Do you have— do you have a pen I can write with, or something?" she asks. Her voice is shaky now, and vulnerable. Adora blinks, brows knitted because she's not sure what the point of that is, but she nods.

"Yeah," she murmurs, jerking her chin in the direction of the cabinets. "The cabinet to the left of the sink. Should be something in there."

Catra watches her for another few moments, before she slowly walks over to where Adora directed her. Adora reaches for her clothes in a silent question; sets them down on the counter so Catra doesn't have to keep carrying them.

She hears the sound of the drawer opening, of things being moved around as Catra searches for a pen, and she doesn't know what to do. There's so much she wants to tell her, so much she feels like Catra never got to hear because she *left*, but she's not sure how or where to even begin.

Catra sits down in the chair adjacent to her. Her grip on the pen is tight, and Adora watches as she unties the plastic bag to pull out one of her sketchbooks. For a moment, Adora is sucked into a memory from before, in the time during winter break when everything had been perfect; where they had just wanted to feel nothing but each other, where Adora had been sitting at the table in Catra's apartment instead and had paused, spoon of cereal halfway to her mouth as she just sat and *stared* at Catra as she hummed to herself and poured her own bowl of cereal and thought, *I love her so much*.

And she does. She still loves Catra just as much as she did during that time, and she's tired of having kept it in for so long.

"I love you," she whispers. Catra jerks her head up to meet her. She looks dumbstruck, eyes wide and full of shock.

"You—"

"But I'm... I'm mad at you, still," Adora quickly continues. "I don't think you understand how hurt I was by everything you said, but... I do. I love you. I love you so much Catra, so

hard that it hurts. I don't think I've ever loved someone as much as I love you. I was going to ask you, when we were in my room that day, if you wanted to be my girlfriend. Because—'cause... *fuck*, Catra, I love you so much, and I wanted more than anything else to be with you."

Catra's crying. There are countless tears running down her face as she stares back at Adora, and she's trembling again, but this time, it's not from the cold. Adora swallows, feeling her own eyes beginning to well with tears, and she lifts her shirt to wipe her eyes.

The movement sends Catra's gaze down toward her shirt, and then to her arm where the painting still resides. Adora follows her gaze; realizes in that moment that the painting is slightly smudged and messy, like someone had poured water onto it.

"Adora," Catra finally begins, voice so quiet Adora has to strain her ears to hear her. She watches as Catra sets the pen down, slides the sketchbook over in front of Adora, and then slowly and carefully peels the flannel off of her left arm, leaving only her right arm covered. She takes in a slow, deep breath, then another, and then looks up to meet Adora's confused gaze. "I have to show you something."

*

Chapter End Notes

entrapta best friend of the year award

in case u didn't notice the chapter count has gone up to 11! i am now 100% sure it will stay that way

blue

Chapter Summary

The truth is finally revealed, and everything is laid out bare.

Chapter Notes

important - i was rereading a part of this fic and i realized that i accidentally called them juniors in college (which translates to third year of undergrad) when they're meant to be seniors (fourth and typically final year of undergrad). i think i only did it like once, but i don't want to confuse anyone bc it'll come up later, so i went back and changed it ajshdhs.

anyway onto the less important stuff: this is the longest chapter of the entire fic ending with 21.7k words and i just. don't know how that happened? but this is the last real chapter, as the next chapter will mainly be an epilogue that i would like to say is going to be on the shorter side but knowing myself that's Not going to happen. to everyone who's still here and leaves comments on chapters, whether it be every single one or only one, i appreciate u all far more than u know. hope u all enjoy!

trigger warning spoilers tw for mentions of abuse, light mention of car accidents

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

your eyes tell

True to her word, she does.

Hand clasped and closed tightly around a ballpoint pen, paint burned and scorched into her clothed arm, Catra does have something to show her. It takes a moment — Adora's clearly confused, eyes flashing back and forth between Catra, the sketchbook, the pen gripped in Catra's hand, and then her own arm — but she can't stop thinking *I'm ready. No matter what happens, she deserves to know.*

And with the revelation that Adora loved her, *loves* her, fell in love with her despite thinking that they're not soulmates; the fact that she was going to actually ask Catra to be her girlfriend if Catra hadn't been a coward and ran away—

She is.

She doesn't know what's going to happen next. She's never been so terrified, never been in a situation like this, never *wanted* to be in a situation like this, knowing that whatever happens next has the possibility to completely change her life, but—

Adora loves her. She loves Catra for her.

And as Adora slowly opens the first page of the sketchbook filled with old soulmate markings — designs she had recreated after painting on her body, or in some cases, designs she had painted on her body after creating them in this sketchbook — Catra decides that she may not know what's going to happen, but she doesn't *care* that she doesn't know, because Adora loves her. Adora loves her for her.

-

After Catra gives her the nod to go ahead, with slow and careful fingers, Adora lifts the cover off of the sketchbook to reveal the first page.

It's a black swan, colored neatly with the tips of a fine tipped pen, reflected perfectly within a lake. Something tugs at the back of Adora's mind at the sight of the drawing; she gains a strange sense of *deja vu*, almost as if she's seen it before.

Suddenly feeling a bit unsettled, Adora sits up and glances back up to meet Catra's eyes. She's staring at Adora's face as if trying to gauge her reaction, fingers still gripped tight around the pen, flannel still covering her arm. Her lips are red and raw from where she's been biting into them, knuckles white from how tight her grip is.

Adora looks into her eyes. She thinks that those were the first part of her that she fell in love with, that night beneath the stars when they kissed for the first time. She still loves those eyes, even now, as Catra waits patiently for Adora to keep going.

So she does.

The next page is a sunset over a mountain range, done in colored pencil. Again, there's a strange nagging feeling at her, and it feels important. Like this is *more* than just Catra showing Adora her art; more than her letting herself be vulnerable, the swirls and blends of colors that just scream *Catra*.

She flips the page.

A koi fish, colored bright orange and surrounded by beautiful pink and red lotuses, pulling her in like the gentle morning breeze.

Adora recognizes this one.

She knows she's seen it before, a long time ago when she was still living in Eternia. Knows that it appeared on the back of her hand; knows that she couldn't keep it for long due to how quickly her soulmate washed paintings off at the time.

When the page flips again, Adora remembers *everything* about this one.

It's a dragon.

She remembers that this had been a full body painting; that it was — and still is — the lengthiest painting her soulmate has ever done on their body. She remembers being eighteen, having a sleepover with Bow and Glimmer when she felt the first inkling of a paint brush. She remembers that it had taken the entirety of the night, and that by the time dawn was beginning to peek through the horizon, Adora feeling tired from having not slept but *alive* as she stared at herself in the mirror, the tail of a dragon staring at her from her foot and swirling along the entirety of her body, all the way to the tip of its head ending at her neck. She remembers that it was the first time she showed Bow and Glimmer her soulmate, the first time she truly opened up to anyone other than her mother about the person who never talked to her but always covered her body in tattoo like paintings.

It's the same dragon, white and gold and pure as it sits on the page of the sketchbook. It's the same exact one.

Adora doesn't feel herself flipping them, but suddenly the pages are moving anyway.

A person, created out of a tree of life, standing and staring at something out of view. That same person sat on Adora's forearm years ago while she was in the middle of a game, distracting her so much that she nearly fell flat on her face.

A skull, roses and flowers blooming out of it. Life and death, beauty and ill-fated, vitality and vanquish, good and evil. The same skull painted on her bicep, leaving her the option to proudly show it off for the world to see.

A cup of coffee and a teaspoon seen from above, calming and fitting for a quiet evening when Adora was home alone as she paused her favorite movie and told her soulmate about her day as they quietly and gently painted on their arm.

The pages are flying, flipping quickly and rapidly as Adora takes every single one of them in, years worth of memories filling the empty space in the apartment, dreams and wishes and aspirations filtering through.

Flowers and vines, twisting and curling around her—

A galaxy sleeve covering her arm—

Hummingbirds sat next to each other, blending in with the colors in the background on her stomach—

A plain gray skull, somber and depressing on her thigh—

The planets, painted on the inside of her wrist—

Layers upon layers of flowers, wrapping protectively around her bicep and on her forearm, unknowingly hiding in secret before revealing itself in the worst way—

A constellation of stars forming a heart, bleeding just below her sternum—

A sunset over a city, swirling along her stomach—

A cherry blossom forest, transcendental and symbolic and incomplete like there wasn't enough time to finish it before—

That same cherry blossom forest staining her arm, smeared and splattered and messy in comparison to how it was just a few hours ago—

That *same cherry blossom forest*, red and pink and white and brown hues of warmth, seeping into Catra's skin.

Catra is her soulmate.

Catra is her *soulmate*.

Catra is her *soulmate*.

Her soulmate is Catra, who never talked to her throughout their younger years no matter how much she tried. Catra is her soulmate, who has always been scared of commitment, who hates the idea of soulmates because of the lack of control, who's scared her soulmate will hate her because she didn't ever respond to them. Her soulmate is Catra, who creates beautiful paintings on her skin, who she has unconditional love for that only strengthened the moment Catra opened up her side of the connection. Catra is her soulmate, who loves Adora but has told her multiple times that she doesn't want anything to do with her own soulmate.

Realization crashes down on her, and it's fire, bringing blinding light to her soul and her heart, but burning, crying and clawing desperately, screaming, aching within her.

Catra — the soulmate Adora *just* accepted she may never get to really know, the girl she's still *so* in love with — is watching her with cautious eyes, leg tapping rapidly against the floor. Adora's chest heaves as she stares at last filled page of the sketchbook, then at Catra's arm, then at her own arm, then back at the sketchbook—

She doesn't understand everything, but she understands *so much* now at the same time.

“Adora—”

“How long have you known?” she asks, voice trembling. Finally, she lifts her head to meet Catra's gaze, and sees her staring at her with wet eyes. “*Please, Catra—*”

“Since the night I ran away,” Catra eventually pushes out. “I— I saw the painting on your arm, and—”

“You ran because you realized,” Adora finishes for her, chest squeezing tight. “Not because you were scared that I’d leave you for my soulmate, but because you realized that *we’re* soulmates.”

The sentence feels foreign, almost *sour*, on her tongue. The fact that she knows her soulmate — the fact that *her and Catra* are soulmates—

Catra doesn’t do more than give a weak nod. Outside, the storm rages on, but it’s nothing to match the storm in Adora’s heart.

“Why didn’t— why didn’t you tell me?” Adora asks, but it comes out kind of weakly. Catra watches her sadly for a moment, and it’s then that Adora realizes that *everything* has always been Catra, when she told Adora she couldn’t do this after figuring out that they were soulmates at the same time she said that she didn’t want her anymore. When she said “*Why can’t you just accept that yours doesn’t want anything to do with you?*” all while *knowing* she was Adora’s soulmate. Adora hears an agonized, choked out sob from somewhere before she realizes, *oh, that was me*. “You didn’t— you don’t— you could have—”

“I was scared,” Catra whispers, “I’ve always tried so hard to avoid my soulmate, but then suddenly everything happened and I realized I was in *love* with my soulmate, I was in love with you, and I couldn’t handle it. I was *so* fucking scared, Adora, and I hurt you in the process, and I’m sorry—”

“Stop,” Adora interrupts her, and she surprises herself with how sharp and urgent her voice is. Catra seems to sense it too, because her jaw immediately snaps shut. “Fuck, Catra, you— you knew, and you were going to just— you ended things on both sides, and you just let me feel like it was *my* fault. You let me talk to you, tear myself up over *you* all without knowing it was you the whole time, and— *fuck*.”

She remembers a time, months ago, where she thought about the possibility of Catra being her soulmate. Where she let herself fantasize for just a moment; where she imagined a world where Catra was the person the universe deemed as her perfect match. Where she felt like everything would be so much *easier* if that were the case.

Now, she’s not so sure, because now— now everything is just so much more complicated, and Adora feels— she doesn’t *know*. She feels chaos, and she wants to scream and kick and cry because none of this is fair, and she just doesn’t understand how this could be possible, doesn’t understand how Catra was her soulmate all along and she never realized—

And now Catra is staring at her with wide eyes, and they’re glassy and swirling with far too many emotions, and Adora wants to laugh because this entire time it was *Catra’s* emotions she was feeling every time she opened the connection, every time she wondered what Catra was experiencing or whether or not she was doing as badly as Adora was, she could feel her the *entire* time—

“I’m *sorry*,” Catra whispers, voice trembling. Adora moves her hand to run through her still loose hair. Her breathing is ragged and uneven, and she closes her eyes, squeezing the fabric of her pajama pants. Her thoughts are a mess and she can’t really think straight right now, but

“Why are you telling me now?” she asks, and her voice is softer now, emotions slipping through the cracks. Catra’s eyes search hers for a moment, and she breathes deep, shoulders shaking with the movement. “You were scared, and you— you left. You cut off everything, but then you started drawing again, and now you’re here, and— fuck, Catra, I don’t *understand*.”

“Because I had... I had time,” Catra admits quietly. “I was — I still am — scared, but it’s... you deserved to know what happened, and I think... I think that I’m more okay with it now, with the prospect of it all.”

Adora laughs bitterly, standing up from the chair because she can’t keep sitting down; she has to do *something*. “That makes one of us,” she mutters, but immediately regrets it when Catra’s face falls, the hurt clear in her expression.

The rain has stopped. Adora closes her eyes, takes another deep breath, and then opens them.

“I think you should go,” she whispers.

The panic is immediate in Catra’s eyes. “Adora,” she begs, “please— I don’t— *please*— I didn’t mean to make you feel—”

“It doesn’t *matter* what you *meant* or *didn’t* mean to do,” Adora snaps, “you still— fuck, Catra.” She pauses to take a deep breath, fully aware of the fact that her hands and voice are shaking from anger and she needs to stop herself before she says something she’s not going to be able to take back. “I want to hear an explanation from you. A *full* explanation, but... but right now, I need to be alone. I need time to think, so—” her shoulders slump, voice quieting. The bright and angry fire in her chest has cooled, replaced with something cold and empty. “Please, just go.”

Catra’s chest heaves, a breath of defeat falling from parted lips. Those beautiful eyes, once swirling with galaxies and mystery and wonder are instead filled with pain, aching and glassy. There’s a moment where Adora thinks that she isn’t going to leave — that she’s going to sit there, that Adora’s going to stand there, and they’re not going to move as if staying still will make any of this less real, but then Catra stands.

Her arms are wrapped almost protectively around herself, and Adora only glances in her general direction. Everything hurts so much, and she’s so fucking angry but so *sad*, and she’s too scared that if she looks at her again she’ll given in, too scared that she’ll want to reach for her hands and whisper *stay* despite knowing it wouldn’t be a good idea.

It works. Adora doesn’t say anything else, anything to stop her, and over the racing of her heart and the fire in her veins, she hears the door open and close, leaving her in a deafening silence.

Against everything telling her not to, against the dread and the fear and the panic that coils around her windpipe, against the hurt but the want to just have her friend back, to just have *Adora* back, Catra leaves.

-

The world is quiet.

Time doesn't stop.

The clock above the hallway leading to the living room continues to tick. The numbers on her phone change as the minutes change to hours change to days. A notification from Glimmer — *we're going out to try and catch a movie, want to join?* from a few hours ago. The sun rises, and sets, and rises again, and sets again.

She doesn't cry like she did before. Instead, she eventually turns the nozzle that turns on the faucet in the sink, desperate to break the harrowing silence she can never seem to escape, and cups her hands beneath the stream before splashing her face with water. It washes over her, cold and raw, and she welcomes it with open arms in place of the numbness that had settled deep in her bones after the initial anger had lessened.

Nothing makes sense. Everything makes sense. Catra—

Adora closes her eyes; feels the sting from where water has gotten beneath the lids. She doesn't know what she wants, but she knows she doesn't want to think about any of that right now.

Back when she was far more heartbroken than she was now, Perfuma had taught her some breathing exercises. Had sat down with her as they stretched and then went through a bit of meditation. She thinks she's not heartbroken anymore— or maybe she is, but in a different way. Adora doesn't know how many different ways someone can be heartbroken. She doesn't know what to think, doesn't understand any of this but understands *so much* now—

Breathe, a voice sounding like Catra's says in the back of her mind. *It's okay. You're okay.*

No, Adora thinks, because how is *anything* going to be okay after this?

How can *Catra* be her soulmate? How could Adora not have figured it out? She didn't even — she never would have even *guessed*. She hadn't even suspected it.

There's a part of her that hopes, wishes that maybe she was just imagining things. That maybe those drawings she saw in Catra's sketchbook — a foreign black one that she doesn't think she had ever seen before, as opposed to the gray one she uses for classes or the yellow, more personal one she carries with her *everywhere* — maybe they weren't what she was seeing. Maybe a part of her just wanted to see her soulmate's drawings within them, because a part of her wanted her soulmate to be Catra.

And that's the worst part, isn't it? She *wanted* for her soulmate to be Catra. She remembers thinking about it for the first time after Razz asked her during Christmas Break; remembers that, even after she realized that all she wanted was Catra even if they weren't soulmates, she thought it still would've made everything easier.

So why does she feel like this? Why does she feel far more angry than she had before, far less sad and far more *upset* over the hand life has dealt her?

As much as she wants to deny it, deny the fact that Catra is her soulmate because there's just no way that's possible, she had seen it. She had seen drawings that she hadn't even thought about in years on those pages, had seen the painting that had seeped into her skin mere hours before, had listened to Catra confirm the fact that they were soulmates, confirm having known since the day she left.

And Catra—

Catra, who has opened up to Adora about how scared she is, about how she planned on never meeting her soulmate. Catra, who's *afraid* of soulmates, who's the same person that has always been so hesitant and quiet but felt so much through the paintings on their skin. Who doesn't believe in soulmates, who believes in listening to not what the universe suggests, but what you feel is right.

It doesn't make sense, but it makes *so much sense*.

Catra is the person she felt for the first time when she was six years old, when her mom first taught her about soulmates and Adora closed her eyes and tried to feel the person on the other side of the connection. She's the person who, at twelve years old, opened up the connection to paint blue and red flames, licking at her skin and crashing together. She's the person Adora always felt the emotions of, the nights when she was younger and would see so many colors form on her arms and would feel so much anger and sadness from her soulmate and would write that whatever they were going through, it'd be okay, and that Adora would always be there for her.

She's the person who looked so *hurt*, so *devastated* when Adora muttered *that makes one of us*, and then when Adora told her to leave. She's the person who Adora loves more than anyone else, who Adora's missed so much these past two months but also the person she's *so angry* at now, but *still* can't find it in her not to relish in the knowledge that she must have been as hurt as Adora was — *is* — in that moment.

She wants to forget about how Catra had looked at that moment. She wants to forget about it *all* for a while.

She wants—

“Adora?”

Adora nearly jumps in surprise, quickly whirling around to find a smiling Bow standing only a few feet away from her in the hallway. She sighs, rubbing her eyes with her hands.

“What?” she asks, and she almost surprises herself with how scratchy her voice comes out. Bow tilts his head.

“Glimmer texted you earlier about us watching a movie, but you didn’t respond,” he tells her. Adora clenches her fists. “Are you okay? Is it…”

Bow trails off. Adora’s sure he was going to finish with *Catra*, and she wants to laugh because of how ironic it is that he’s right, it *is* Catra, it always *has been* Catra, but definitely not for the reason he’s thinking.

“I’m alright,” she murmurs, despite the ache in her palms and chest. Her voice is hoarse, and she has to clear her throat to speak a bit more clearly. “What makes you think I’m not?”

Bow is quiet. Uncertain. Worried. Adora hates that they’re all still concerned about her. “You — you just look… your hair is down,” he finally settles on. “You seemed like you’d been getting better recently, but now you’re kind of avoiding everything again? I just… wanted to make sure nothing happened.”

He doesn’t have to elaborate any further for Adora to know what he means. The last time she was like this was probably only a few weeks ago, back when everything that had happened was still fresh and she was so *sad* about it all. She *had* been getting better recently, so she doesn’t really blame Bow for worrying now that she’s seemingly taken a few steps backward, but she’s just so *tired* of everyone walking on eggshells around her recently.

She almost opens her mouth to say: *I met my soulmate*. She almost says: *Catra’s my soulmate, and I never would’ve guessed*. She almost says: *I miss her so much. I want her back, but I don’t know where to go from here*. She almost says: *I want to know exactly why she did what she did, but I’m so angry with her that I don’t think I’d be able to logically take in anything she says right now*.

She says: “Everything’s okay.”

Bow says: “It’s not.”

Adora says nothing.

“Is it our friends?” Bow asks, pulling on the strap of his backpack around his shoulder. “Is it the same thing that’s making you avoid everyone?” Adora swallows. “Is it *her*?”

“I’m not avoiding everyone,” Adora argues, almost petulant, despite the fact that she *knows* she is and she knows Bow can see that. “I’ve just been busy.”

It's not a total lie. Having to juggle work, classes, and practice has never really been easy, but she usually takes a heavier class load and work schedule in the fall semester so she can take a lighter one in the spring for this exact reason. She's not busy enough for it to be an excuse to avoid everyone.

"Okay," Bow tells her, slowly. "Well, are you doing anything right now?"

Adora blinks. It's five in the afternoon, she doesn't have practice today, and she had a class this morning followed by a four hour shift. There's nothing for her to really *be* doing right now, she realizes almost begrudgingly.

"I— um," she stutters, and then eventually asks, "I don't know. Why?"

Bow shrugs. "Figured I could snag Glimmer and we could go do something. She's super stressed about a test she has soon, and you look like you could get out of the apartment."

Adora frowns. "I *do* get out of the apartment."

"Only when you have to," Bow calls over his shoulder as he starts making his way to his room, leaving the door open in his wake.

He's not wrong, Adora supposes. It's been three days since Catra came over, and Adora's only left for practice, school, and work. In a couple of days, it'll be two full months since everything changed, since Catra saw the painting on her arm and realized they were soulmates and ran away before Adora could talk to her, ran away and cut everything off on both sides.

Adora runs a hand through her hair, clenches her fists within them. For so long, she's had the idea of Catra and her soulmate, first as the idea that she couldn't fall for Catra because of her soulmate, and then as the idea that she wanted Catra more than her soulmate, and then that her soulmate had unknowingly started a spiral of events that lead to her and Catra's downfall. The knowledge that there's no longer any distinction between *Catra* and *Adora's soulmate*, that they're one person, that they're the same person... it's too much of a juxtaposition. Adora still can't imagine it.

In these three days, she hasn't heard from Catra at all. Adora supposes it would make sense; she told her she needed time alone, that she needed to think. It's not different to what had happened directly after Catra finding out they were soulmates, either, but it is different to what Adora had gotten used to for the past couple of weeks as her soulmate — as Catra — started painting and drawing again, as they started talking innocently to each other at random points of the day.

She's worried, and she *hates* that she's worried, because she should be *mad*, and she is, but— she hadn't even known if Catra had gotten back to her apartment okay after Adora made her leave, and she knows you shouldn't drive when you're upset. It wasn't raining anymore, but Catra was definitely upset, and it was probably still wet outside and—

Adora takes comfort in the fact that when she closes her eyes, focuses, and thinks about her, she can still feel that faint connection. It's comforting, in a way, to know that no matter what

happens, even with the instinctive frustration and discontent and the want for *more* she always feels when she tries to reach out for that underlying connection, it'll always be there. And it is there now, same as it's always been.

“Adora?” Bow asks, and Adora blinks. She's in her room, somehow; she hadn't even realized she had started walking over to it.

“What?” she asks, turning toward Bow, who's standing in the doorway.

“I asked if that was a yes, or a no,” he explains, and when Adora frowns in confusion, he continues. “With the whole getting out of the apartment thing..?”

Adora sighs. It's been three days, and she's not as sad as she was before, but she still *is*. Just... in a different way.

“Sure,” she murmurs, voice quiet. If she doesn't want to think about any of it right now, sulking around the apartment isn't going to accomplish that. Bow smiles. “Just give me a few minutes to get ready.”

Five days after Catra leaves, Adora still hasn't heard anything from her. Catra hasn't attempted to talk to her, Adora hasn't seen her at the university, and there hasn't been a splotch or a clearly accidental mark of paint on her arm. Five days after Catra leaves, Adora can't shake the worry that something might've happened to her anymore, and she snaps.

Hey, she texts Perfuma as she waits for class to start, because she doesn't think she's ready to talk to Catra again. *Could you do a big favor for me?*

Perfuma, luckily, replies right away. *Sure. What is it?*

Could you ask Scorpia if Catra is okay? There's a moment, and then, *Physically, at least?*

Sure Perfuma messages. Adora posts a quick *Thanks*, and then, after class is over and she's walking to a small smoothie store in the student lounge hall, she sees that Perfuma has messaged again. *Scorpia said she's physically fine.*

Physically, Adora reminds herself, because she's sure that aside from physically, Catra probably isn't fine. She hates that the knowledge of that makes her feel so guilty.

we need to talk appears on her phone the next morning, with the contact name *Catra <3* appearing as well. Adora hadn't been able to find it in herself to change it.

She narrows her eyes at the sight of the message. A part of her wants to taunt her; wants to ask why she didn't just write to her on her skin, wants to ask if she's still scared.

And they do. They *really* do need to talk, but Adora doesn't care right now.

No, we don't, she messages after a moment of debating on whether or not she should just ignore it.

i really want to explain everything, Catra replies. *please don't do this. please don't avoid me.*

For some reason, all that does is serve to make her angrier. *Why not?* she asks. *You did.*

But she came around eventually, a voice in the back of Adora's mind tells her. Adora doesn't know what had changed, why Catra suddenly decided to stop avoiding her, and she knows that she could get the answer if she let Catra talk to her, but she's just... she's *not* ready.

(Catra doesn't respond to her afterwards.)

They haven't had an overlapping shift in weeks, but when Adora sees Scorpia at the coffee shop again, she remembers, *oh, right, she works here*, and they awkwardly stare at each other for a moment before they wordlessly agree not to say anything, and move on with their shift.

But it's weird, because Adora knows that Scorpia knows. She knows now that Catra must have told her, and it's why Scorpia probably isn't mad at her anymore; she probably just feels bad. Entrapta probably knows, and Perfuma might know now because of mutual connection, and fuck, if Perfuma knows then the entire group could know and Adora still doesn't want to think about it right now, much less *talk* about it with anyone.

It's so fucking *humiliating* that she didn't notice sooner. It's embarrassing that Catra and her soulmate are the same person and she let herself be torn up over *Catra* and her *soulmate* on so many different occasions, only for them to be the same person. It's almost shameful to know that she opened up to her soulmate about Catra, unknowingly showing her feelings to her soulmate about *Catra*, and have it turn out to be Catra all along. To know that Catra knew for nearly two months, and just let Adora think that it was her fault for what had caused their downfall.

And she wants to be happy about it. She wants to be so happy, that she's in love with her soulmate and that her soulmate loves her too, because it's what she's always wanted, right?

But she's *not*. She's still angry about it. She's still upset about it. She still hasn't cried, but she thinks that she might be getting close. And she hasn't gotten any *answers*, and she knows that's technically her own fault, but she's still just... she doesn't know what to feel. She doesn't know if she's supposed to forgive Catra and let her explain herself, or if she's in the right for wanting to be mad about it first.

None of it is fair.

-

It's out of the blue one night, a TV show that the three of them aren't really paying attention to playing in the background, when Catra mutters a quiet, "am I a bad person?"

Scorpia makes a quiet *mmf* noise that's honestly a little amusing given her half-awake state, and Entrapta lifts her head from where she'd been writing on her arm— she'd been helping her soulmate study, or something like that. Instead of answering, Entrapta tilts her head. "Why would you ask that?"

Catra shrugs, picking at the cotton of her blanket.

Scorpia is a bit more awake now, rubbing her eyes, and Entrapta flashes a glance to the marks on her own arms, and then turns back toward Catra.

"You're not a bad person," she tells her, "at least, from what I can tell. Actually, you might be one of the best people I know."

Scorpia sits up slightly, a loud yawn escaping her, and then nods. "Mhm. What she said," she mumbles sleepily, and then opens her eyes. "What's going on?"

It's soulmates. It's *her* soulmate. It's *always* soulmates.

It had been hard, in the time after she told Adora, to watch her slowly process everything. To watch as she was suddenly filled with hurt and anger and sadness all over again, to hear her tell Catra to leave. It had hurt, far more than everything did even after the initial experience of realizing Adora was her soulmate, but she was well aware of the fact that she deserved it— still does.

So she left without much of a fight, unhappy with herself, but not willing to risk making things worse by trying to get Adora to let her provide the explanation she initially planned on giving after telling Adora that they're soulmates. She had left that morning more than regretting it all, crying so hard that she couldn't see, having to pull over to the side of a street next to a small park. She had cried in the worst way, mouth open and throat strained, but there wasn't enough air to carry any noise.

("Are you alright?" a voice had sounded from somewhere to Catra's left, and she had looked up, still sobbing, to an older black woman staring at her concerningly. She had shook her head, too overwhelmed to think about the fact that she was currently crying in front of a stranger, and the woman came to touch her arm. "What's wrong?")

“I’m lost!” Catra had cried desperately, because even with the few years that she had lived here, she hadn’t ever been to this side of Bright Moon. She hadn’t even known where she was driving after she left and then she had no idea where she even was and it looked like it was going to rain again soon and she was pretty sure she left her phone back at her apartment and Adora— Adora was *so mad* at her—

“Oh, honey, where are you trying to go?” the woman asked, shuffling a little closer. She was wearing a purple uniform, and her name tag read as *Maureen*. “I’m sure you’re not far off!”

Catra had looked around, not even sure *where* she was trying to go, just that she didn’t know where she was. “I don’t— I don’t know…”

The woman had looked at what she was wearing; must have seen the sweatpants that belonged to Adora and the small logo for BMU on the corner. “Would it help if you got directions back to the university?”

Catra had nodded, and the woman smiled, curly hair bobbing in the light breeze. “You’re not too far away! Just follow this road right here, and then make a left at that intersection,” she motioned with her hands, “once you reach the mattress store, make a right, and just follow that road all the way down. You’ll be there in no time!”

After a moment, Catra gave another nod, and the woman patted her arm in sympathy. “You ain’t lost,” she assured her, smiling warmly. “Now you be careful, alright honey?”

Against the lump in her throat, Catra thanked her. The woman simply continued on her way, shuffling down the street and in the direction of a small neighborhood. Catra followed her directions feeling a bit more coherent after that interaction, and like the woman had told her, she had made it to the university only ten minutes later.)

Catra shrugs again. “Soulmates are fucking hard. I don’t know how you both do it.”

Entrapta and Scorpia share a confused glance, and Catra sighs.

“It’s Adora,” she murmurs. “I… I told her.”

That seems to catch Scorpia’s attention. Entrapta on the other hand doesn’t even look surprised, and Catra really doesn’t know why she expected anything different at this point.

“And? How did she take it?” Scorpia asks almost eagerly, sitting up now. Catra grits her teeth.

Although she left regretting it at that moment, regretting everything involving the idea of telling Adora that they were soulmates, after she had a bit of time to calm down… she realized that it was bound to happen. Adora, even if she never forgave Catra, or nothing good ever came out of this… she deserved to know, and it would’ve been worse if Catra went through life never having known what *could* have happened.

And Adora had told her that she wanted a *full* explanation, and that— that had to be good, right? That meant that she was going to talk to Catra at *some* point, even if it wasn’t in the

near future.

“About as bad as I had expected,” Catra shakily sighs, lolling her head onto the couch. “I’m pretty sure she hates me, but— but I deserve it. I hurt her, *so much*, in both ways, and then everything with us being soulmates just piled onto it, and... God, I want her to forgive me, but I don’t think *I* would even forgive me.”

Scorpia frowns, like she’s not quite sure to say. Entrapta hums and goes back to writing on her arm.

“Give her time,” she tells her, voice low and easy, as if this is the most simple thing in the world. “If she cared for you as much as we saw, I’m sure she’ll come around.”

Catra nods reassuringly to herself, because Entrapta might be right. Adora had told her, just before she found out, that she loved Catra. She loved her for her.

She has to believe it’ll be enough.

-

It’s a little ironic, Adora thinks, that a week after finding out Catra is her soulmate, she sees her again for the first time at the place they first met. When the chime of the bell over the coffee shop’s door rings, Adora’s head instinctively snaps up, and she sees her.

She looks about as nervous as Adora feels. She’s adorning a sweater despite the fact that it’s not that cold outside anymore, a pair of denim jeans, and the combat boots Adora knows she loves wearing. Her hair is pulled up into a little ponytail, not long for normal standards, but the longest Adora’s ever seen it. She doesn’t look like she’s doing *amazing*, but she also doesn’t look as bad as Adora had seen her the week after she found out they were soulmates.

Her curious eyes scan the counter, and then toward the back room with the employees. There’s a few people crowding around Adora from her position of taking orders — where she’s *supposed* to be taking orders, but has kind of lost her train of thought from staring at Catra until the man in front of her clears his throat — so Adora isn’t exactly surprised when Catra doesn’t see her.

After putting in the man’s order for a caramel macchiato and banana muffin, Adora lets her eyes drift back toward her. It’s a little early for her to be up, and from the looks of it, Catra agrees: she’s pouting slightly, probably unknowingly, and the tiny ponytail on the back of her head doesn’t serve to make the sight look any less cute. It becomes clear why she’s here a moment later, though: she hands Scorpia a small cloth bag of something when she returns from cleaning some of the tables, and Adora thinks, *of course*.

They don't exchange more than a few words. Scorpia flashes a nervous glance in Adora's direction and looks like she's going to warn Catra or something, but Catra's sliding her earbuds into her ears and joining the line before Scorpia can. Adora feels her hands get clammy at the sight, and she tries her best to focus on what the customers are ordering before she ends up holding up the line again by staring at Catra.

It's a long line, what with the coffee shop being impossibly busy today. It's nearly ten minutes later that Catra steps up to order, pulling an earbud out of her ear, murmuring the words "I'll have a..." before her voice trails off as she glances up from her phone, eyes landing on Adora.

Adora stares. She has no doubt that her cheeks are flushed, and she doesn't even know *why*. *She* shouldn't be the embarrassed one here, *she* shouldn't be feeling guilty when she looks into Catra's eyes and sees the misery that immediately encompasses them when they land on Adora.

"I—" Catra starts, mouth opening, and then closing. She frowns, and then averts her eyes. "I—I didn't know you were here, I didn't see you and I thought you weren't, I—" she takes a step away, and, "I'm sorry, I'll just—"

"Catra," Adora sighs, because staring at her now: she wants her back. She wants *them* back. She wants them to go back to how it was before; wants Catra to come to the coffee shop during Adora's breaks just to keep her company, or even while she's working so Adora can look over from time to time and just *see* her. She doesn't want this: the anger that's boiling in her at the reminder of everything that happened, the way Catra is looking at her like she's trying not to cry. "Do you... do you want your usual?"

Catra tentatively nods after a moment. Adora accepts her card as payment, and then because the line is gone, abandons the register in favor of making the drink.

She's not sure what she's doing. She just... she wants them to go back to how they were, despite knowing that it won't happen. She just wants a bit of normalcy within everything that's happened, and if this is what it takes to get it for a few minutes, then so be it.

Catra stares at her as she makes the drink; Adora doesn't have to turn around to know that. When she's done, she slides the drink over to the pickup counter, hesitates when she hovers the marker over the plastic cup, and then writes *your hair is pretty* where the name is supposed to be written before handing it to Catra.

Catra's still staring at her with wide eyes as if she's expecting Adora to yell at her or something, and Adora rolls her eyes. She goes back to take the order of another customer who has appeared — a simple order of an americano and a glaze donut — and as she makes it, she sees Catra still standing by the counter, eyes set on the cup. When she reads it, her lips curl up into a fragile smile, and then she lifts her head to meet Adora's gaze.

(Adora returns the small smile.)

Afterwards, when Adora serves the coffee and donut to the waiting woman, Catra is still standing at the counter. Adora glances back over at her; sees her fidgeting nervously again.

“Adora,” she whispers, eyes sullen, “can we please talk?”

There’s a beat that passes. Adora closes her eyes, thinks about *everything* that’s happened between them, thinks about how she still feels so angry and upset and how it’s all just so messed up and talking about it probably would help, but then shakes her head.

“I’m not ready to forgive you,” she provides in a weak explanation once Catra furrows her brows together. Catra looks away and nods, grip tightening on her drink. “Not— not yet.”

The promise of *yet* brings a bit of a small, hopeful look in Catra’s eyes, and even though Adora is still mad at her, she can’t exactly blame herself for thinking that the smile that follows only serves to make Catra’s face look really lovely.

“Okay,” Catra murmurs, voice soft. “Okay.”

Adora watches her leave again, but this time, the empty feeling in her chest at the sight isn’t as prominent.

(She misses the small and innocent messages, misses the feeling of getting to talk to Catra on her arm all of the time, even if she didn’t *know* it was her.

She wants to write things to her on her skin, things like *I miss getting to hug you and play with your hair*, or *None of this is fair*, or *Even after everything, I still love you so much*, or *I don’t forgive you*, or *I’m tired of being mad at you*.

She doesn’t write any of those things, though, because she still isn’t ready to talk to her yet, and she doesn’t want to write to her only to immediately tell her to stop when Catra undoubtedly tries to respond. Her body can’t seem to shut down those feelings, however, so Adora turns the page of the notes she’s supposed to be taking and writes out every thought that comes to mind.)

Her earphones blast angry music when she runs; some indie pop band, the singer angrily voicing feelings of betrayal and loneliness. It’s not long before Adora eventually comes to a halt, a little breathless, before changing the song. It hits a little too close to home for her liking.

“So,” Perfuma asks them once Mermista and Sea Hawk — fashionably late, apparently — have finally sat down to start eating. “What are you guys planning on doing for Spring Break?”

Adora shrugs, twirling her noodles along her fork and then forking them into her mouth. “I’ll probably go back to Eternia, like usual.”

Perfuma nods along, and Sea Hawk dives into something about him and Mermista going to the beach down south for the break. Adora doesn’t pay any mind to it, because—

She hadn’t thought about it, before. About going back to Eternia, about seeing Razz again and undoubtedly having to answer a question similar to *How’s Catra doing?* or *Any progress on your soulmate?*

What would she even say to that? That *Catra* is her soulmate, and has been all along? That she broke Adora’s heart months ago, and then unpurposefully broke it again a mere week and a half ago? Wouldn’t Razz hate her?

No, Adora thinks, because she doesn’t want that. She doesn’t hate Catra. She doesn’t think she ever could. And she doesn’t want Razz, or any of her friends to hate Catra, because Catra’s her soulmate. She can be an asshole, and she can be stupid and mean when she’s scared, but she’s also so sweet and patient and she has such a big heart that’s full of so much love, and she’s *her* soulmate.

“How many times can the same thing break your heart?” Adora suddenly asks. When everyone pauses the conversation to look at her — Perfuma, Scorpia, Sea Hawk, and Mermista — Adora deflates in her seat, not quite sure why she decided that *now* of all times was the best time to ask.

Perfuma and Scorpia flash each other a glance, and Adora’s in the process of pushing her empty plate of food away and excusing herself because she still has no idea why she did that, when Perfuma turns back toward her, a gentle look in her eyes.

“As many times as it wants, for as long as you love it,” she answers.

Adora pulls her eyes away, a shaky breath escaping her as the words wash over her. Everyone is still staring — Mermista and Sea Hawk in confusion, Scorpia with a sudden bout of guilt, and Perfuma somewhere in between.

She can’t take it. It’s all too much. *Everything* is always too much.

“Thank you for inviting me over,” she tells them, because truthfully, she is thankful that Perfuma and Mermista hadn’t hesitated to invite her over after hearing that Bow and Glimmer were going to be gone for the weekend due to their anniversary. She stands up, grabs her plate, and moves to put it in the dishwasher. “But I, uh, am kind of tired, so…”

It’s very obviously an excuse to leave, but they don’t push it.

“Thanks for coming,” Perfuma smiles. “Take it easy on yourself, Adora.”

“I will,” she tells them.

Four days later, Adora’s crammed in the coffee shop — *not* working — for a late morning study session by herself, successfully thinking about nothing but her schoolwork, when she hears the sound of someone approaching. At first, she doesn’t pay any mind to it — although it’s not as busy right now, people still pass by every so often — only to see a chair being pulled out beside her, followed by Scorpia taking a seat.

Well, Adora thinks. Of all of the people she knows, she doesn’t think Scorpia sitting next to her is something she can say she expected.

There’s a moment where neither of them says anything. It’s quiet, and there’s that bit of awkwardness that they just have never managed to quite shake, until Scorpia finally murmurs, “I’m sorry.”

If Scorpia sitting down next to her took Adora by surprise, her *apologizing* definitely shocks her to her core.

Adora figures the surprise must be evident on her face, because Scorpia frowns. Adora blinks, and then shakes her head. “I— if Catra sent you, or if you’re apologizing on her behalf—”

“I’m not,” Scorpia assures her, tongue poking the inside of her cheek, fingers tapping against the table. “She doesn’t know I’m here, and I’m not apologizing for her. I’m apologizing for myself.”

Adora stares at her in confusion. She’s very unsure of what to make of this, and even more unsure as to what Scorpia is even talking about.

Scorpia sighs, and then turns her attention back to where she’s begun to fiddle with her thumbs. “Listen... I haven’t ever really had a high opinion of you, ‘cause of what happened after you and Catra kissed for the first time,” she quietly admits. Adora has absolutely *no* idea where this is going. “But... you made her happy when things were good between you two. And from what I saw, it seemed like she made you happy, too. I guess... I just wanted to apologize. She told me that you two were soulmates a few weeks before she told you, and even though she didn’t tell me not to tell anyone... I still didn’t. It wasn’t my secret to tell.”

Adora frowns. “I— I know that,” she breathes, hesitantly lifting her head to meet Scorpia’s eyes. “I know it wasn’t your secret to tell. I’m not... I’m not mad at you, or— or Entrapta, if she knew..?”

“Yeah,” Scorpia confirms, nodding. “Entrapta guessed it on the day Catra realized, and I think a couple of Catra’s other friends you don’t know also know.”

Adora gives a weak nod at the information, because she's not mad. Not really, because logically, she knows Scorpia is right — it wasn't her secret to tell, and she shouldn't be mad at anyone who knew for that same reason. But another part of her is still so embarrassed over the fact that they knew, that Entrapta actually *figured it out* before Adora did, that Scorpia and whoever else knew before Adora, even if they were told. That part is illogically a *little* mad at them, even if it doesn't make sense.

“So, I'm just... I'm just sorry that things turned out like this for you two. I'm not sorry I didn't say anything, but I'm sorry it had to be that way.”

Adora takes a deep breath. “Well, thanks,” she murmurs, because even if she's a little shaken by this sudden interaction, she's still appreciative of it. “I... I appreciate it.”

Scorpia gives her a shaky smile. Adora returns it, and they sit there for a moment before Adora speaks again.

“I just... I'm still mad at her, and I'm still hurt. I know she's scared of soulmates, and I *know* that she's never believed in them, but— I don't know. I thought whatever she felt for me would be stronger than that fear, and— and I still don't even know *why* she was so scared. Like, I get that she's afraid of commitment and all of that, but... it still just doesn't seem like enough of a reason to try and end everything we had because of it. She could've talked to me about it, could've done anything else then what she actually did.”

Scorpia rubs the back of her neck. She doesn't say anything for a while, and Adora doesn't say anything either, because by the looks of it, Scorpia is trying to get her thoughts in order before she speaks again. Adora uses the time to get her own thoughts in order, because she's still a bit of a mess.

She's not surprised that Scorpia had known. She had already kind of figured it out, because Scorpia *really* isn't subtle. She's not surprised Entrapta knows, because although Entrapta definitely didn't give it away herself, Scorpia knowing kind of gave away the fact that Entrapta probably knew, too.

What she *is* surprised about is the fact that Entrapta figured it out herself. She didn't... she didn't think it was obvious. She's not sure, to be honest, but then again, she hasn't really thought about the signs yet. Maybe it was obvious. Maybe she had been too involved in just *Catra* to pay much attention to the possibility of her being her soulmate. The odds just... didn't seem very likely to her, even if she knew that she was going to meet her soulmate at *some* point.

And, oh God. Their first meeting. Adora had always imagined she'd meet her soulmate and she would just *know* that it was her soulmate, that it'd be like one of those meet-cutes in the movies, but instead, Adora had literally spilled *Catra's* coffee all over her, they had a brief argument, and— yes, she was initially attracted to her, but she *definitely* didn't suspect that they were soulmates.

“Why did she keep it a secret?” Adora eventually asks, because she feels like there *has* to be more than just *Catra* being afraid of commitment or wanting to defy whatever the universe suggests.

“I think,” Scorpia begins, quietly, “I think that the main reason was that she was afraid that you would only love her for that. I think that— with the way you’ve always clearly made a point to wait for your soulmate, spent so long waiting for someone that you already loved... She was scared that you’d love her for just that. I think she wanted you to love her as just Catra, not your soulmate, because she didn’t think she measured up to the person you might have spent your whole life waiting for.”

Oh.

And—

Well.

Adora hadn’t thought of that before. She’s a little surprised, to be honest, but at the same time, she’s not, because that makes a lot of sense. Of course Catra would think that, having known Adora’s been waiting for this person for her entire life, while simultaneously being afraid that her soulmate wouldn’t want her in the end.

And the fact that Scorpia had said the *main* reason means that there are probably so many others. There’s probably so many other reasons, and all of them probably make sense, and—

Beneath everything else, she *knows* that Catra had to have had good reasons for being scared, good reasons for not telling her, and it just makes it so much harder to be mad at her.

“Has Catra ever told you about her mother?” Scorpia asks, pulling Adora from her thoughts.

Adora shakes her head. “No. I— uh, she hasn’t really ever told me about any possible family. I kind of figured she didn’t really have any, or if she did, that... that there wasn’t really a relationship.”

Scorpia looks almost disappointed at the words. “Oh.”

Adora frowns. Something about the entire thing makes her feel uneasy, and she doesn’t know how to explain it. “Why? Is— did her mother do something?”

Scorpia opens her mouth to speak, but nothing but a muttered *uh* comes out, followed by her shaking her head. “That’s... that’s just another thing that’s not really for me to tell. I’m sure she’ll tell you when she’s ready, just like...” Scorpia gives a suggestive smile. “Just like I’m sure you’ll talk to her when you’re ready.”

“Yeah,” Adora agrees. “I’m sure she will.” *I’m sure I will.*

Because when she closes her eyes and thinks about it, thinks about everything that happened two weeks ago, thinks about everything that happened two and a half months ago, she isn’t as angry about it anymore.

She still wants an explanation from Catra — still wants to hear *her* talk to Adora, but that anger she felt before, the anger that made her want to scream and cry because of the fact that all she ever wanted was an easy, quiet love story with her soulmate and was instead handed

the messiest thing *ever* — it's not really there. In its place is a sense of longing. A feeling of want... a want to just have Catra back, same as she wanted months ago.

And the more she thinks about it... it was always a little foolish of her to assume anything she could've possibly had with her soulmate would be *easy*, because from what she's seen in life so far, nothing ever is. This isn't any different, but she thinks that if Catra is willing to fight for them, then Adora is, too.

“Well, I should probably get going,” Scorpia tells her, standing up from their tiny table in the back of the coffee shop. “Told Perfuma I'd meet her for brunch, and she's probably wondering where I am.”

Adora nods, drumming her fingers against the table with a newfound sense of energy. She has a test in less than an hour, and she should be stressed, but all she feels is energetic, filled with liveliness.

“Thank you, Scorpia,” Adora murmurs, glancing over at the other woman. “Perfuma... she's really lucky to have you as a soulmate, and Catra's lucky to have you as a best friend.”

The smile she receives from Scorpia is bright. “It was no problem. And Catra — she's lucky to have you as a soulmate, too.”

For the first time in months, Adora feels like there's a chance that everything might play out okay.

She gets home that same late afternoon after her last class. Being that it's the Friday before spring break and she knows they're planning on going on a short vacation further north, she's a little surprised to see Bow and Glimmer eating bowls of cereal at the table rather than packing or getting ready to leave, but it's exactly what she finds when she opens the door to the apartment.

Bow is only wearing a pair of pants, and Glimmer is wearing a pair of shorts and one of his t-shirts. They look relatively surprised to see her, but when Adora doesn't do more than pull out a chair and sit down at the table with them, silent as she does so, they both seem to get the message that she's going to tell them something important.

She takes a long, deep breath, and then—

“Catra is my soulmate.”

And then, when Bow drops his spoon into his cereal and Glimmer's eyes widen comically, she tells them everything.

Afterward, Adora slumps slightly in her chair. They should get new ones, she thinks. These are cheap and a little uncomfortable, and are definitely not made for sitting in for nearly an hour.

Bow had, surprisingly enough, done most of the talking between him and Glimmer, asking questions like “*So this entire time, it was her?*” and Adora’s quiet response is, “*Yeah. It was always her,*” or when he asks, “*And the night she ran away—?*” Adora’s response is, “*It was because she realized we were soulmates, not because she thought I’d leave her for my own,*” and when he says, in a more disbelieving tone, “*wow, she’s a really good artist,*” she fondly says, “*yeah. She is.*”

Glimmer is uncharacteristically silent. Eventually, it starts to unnerve Adora, and she leans over to poke her shoulder.

“Earth to Glimmer?” she asks, only slightly teasing. “Need me to give you a few more minutes to process everything?”

Bow chuckles, and Glimmer rolls her eyes. “Oh, hush,” she mutters, scrubbing a hand over her face. “I just... I guess I really *am* still trying to process everything, holy shit.” She takes a breath, and then, “It’s just... everything just makes so much more sense now.”

“Yeah,” Adora agrees, softly. “It does.”

“And I like, *really* want to go off on her for putting you through all of that, but I can’t even be *that* mad at her because what she experienced with the whole *my soulmate might love me only because we’re soulmates* thing,” Glimmer puts air quotes around the words, “I went through that too with Bow, when we were younger and I found out we were soulmates.”

“But then you found out I had already been in love with you for *years*,” Bow tells her sweetly, and Adora makes a gagging noise when they lean in to kiss each other.

“Still,” Glimmer looks back at her when she finally pulls away from her boyfriend, “it’s... it’s so crazy to me that you even went through that period where you didn’t know whether or not you wanted to keep waiting for your soulmate or try things with Catra, only for them to be the same person.”

“Yeah,” Adora murmurs. Previously, the words would only serve to make her feel angry and so, so upset, and although she still feels embarrassed from the entire thing because seriously, how could she *not* have figured it out, the anger isn’t there anymore. “Imagine how *I* feel.”

“I can’t imagine,” Glimmer mutters. “I mean, you *finally* found your soulmate who you’ve been searching for nearly your entire life, and turns out we’ve already known her for what? Like half a year?”

“Talk about situational irony,” Bow chuckles a little disbelievingly. Then he sits up in his chair. “So... what are you going to do now?”

Adora chews on the inside of her cheek for a moment, narrowing her eyes at the sight of a mark in their table.

“I... I don’t know,” she admits softly.

Bow and Glimmer both look a little surprised to hear that, and Adora shrugs.

“I want to talk to her,” she tells them. “I *do*. I want to let her tell me what she wants to tell me, but I don’t know how to start. And— and what if I waited too long? What if she doesn’t even want to talk to me now? What if I made her mad because I kept shutting down all of her attempts to talk? What if—”

“Adora,” Glimmer sighs, exasperated. “I think if there is *anything* I have learned tonight, it’s that so much of this could’ve been avoided with the right amount of communication.”

Bow eagerly nods, and Adora flushes, because they’re right. It definitely couldn’t have all been avoided being that their views on soulmates are so incredibly different, but a lot of it could have been.

“So stop overthinking everything for once, and just... do what you want to do. If that thing is not going to talk to her because you’re still mad at her, then don’t go talk to her. If that thing *is* going to talk to her, then go do it. If that thing is going to take a nap because, I don’t know about you guys, but this conversation has drained me out—” she gets a chorus of agreement from both Bow and Adora— “then do it.”

Adora sighs.

“I think... I think I’m going to walk around for a bit.”

Bow and Glimmer both look even more surprised than they were before, and Adora shrugs. “Look, I— it’ll help clear my head, plus—” she cocks her head to the window— “it’s *really* nice outside. Right now, I know that you two are set to leave tonight for the break, I have no idea what Catra’s plans are, and I’m pretty sure I just failed the test I spent so long studying for because I hadn’t been able to take my mind off of Catra nearly the entire time.”

The three of them stare at each other, and then suddenly they burst out laughing, chests warm and filled with content. Adora lets herself laugh along with them, head thrown back, teeth exposed.

“Listen,” she starts, softly, “I don’t know if I’ve ever told you guys this, but— thank you for everything. For— for helping me with my soulmate issues this entire time through college. For letting me rant and talk about her on the days I was sad about it, and for letting me gush and brag about her on the days I was happy. For talking me through things, for listening, and... and now for this. I don’t know how I could’ve done it without you.”

Both Bow and Glimmer stare at her with newly renowned smiles. Adora loves them both so much. “Hey, we’re the best friend squad,” Bow declares, “we can get through anything.”

“Yeah,” Adora agrees, because if there’s anything that this entire situation proves, it’s that.
“We can.”

She’s walking in downtown Bright Moon when she sees it.

Despite the fact that it’s well past midday, the breeze is cool and gentle. The weather isn’t too hot, but it also isn’t too cold: Adora only adorns a plain white t-shirt tucked into her denim shorts, her jacket tied around her waist, and the walking serves to at least somewhat calm her.

What she knows for sure right now is several things.

- 1.) Catra is her soulmate.
- 2.) Catra had found out and, having been planning on avoiding her soulmate her entire life, had run away with the intention of cutting off everything she and Adora had without letting Adora in on anything or giving her any options.
- 3.) She hasn’t forgiven her for that.
- 4.) She really, *really* misses her.
- 5.) She was, at one point or another, mad at her.
- 6.) She knows that she’s sorry.
- 7.) She knows that Catra wants to talk.
- 8.) She’s just passed a tattoo parlour that she’s literally never seen before despite having walked on this street multiple times.
- 9.) She very much wants a tattoo.
- 10.) She could *really* go for some ice cream.

Adora isn’t quite sure what a lot of those things have to do with each other, but she also knows that she’s closer to Catra’s apartment than she is her own, she *really* wants to talk to Catra, and she doesn’t know how.

What do you want, Adora? a voice that sounds suspiciously like Catra’s sounds in the back of her head. Adora remembers her having said those exact words to her just before they kissed for the first time, too; she remembers their first kiss, and everything special about it, and how she’s pretty sure she fell in love with Catra in that very moment.

She knows that they need to talk.

She thinks that with the knowledge that Catra loves her, with the knowledge that *her soulmate* loves her—

She's ready.

It takes Catra fourteen seconds to answer the door. Adora knows because she counts it.

For a long, painful moment, she feels as though her brain has completely stopped working when Catra slowly opens the door. She's frowning, clearly a bit confused, and she's wearing a pair of loose shorts and a hoodie that looks far too big to be her own. Adora's heart clenches when she recognizes it to be the one that's been missing from her closet for the past few months.

"Adora?" Catra gasps. "What... what are you doing here?"

Adora knits her brows together, not quite sure how to proceed. She takes a deep breath.

"I want a tattoo."

Now Catra looks really confused. "Um?"

"And I haven't forgiven you," Adora quickly continues. "I don't know if or when that'll happen."

Catra doesn't say anything. Doesn't do anything. She stands there, lips parted in surprise, hand tightly gripping the doorknob.

"But I'm not going to permanently mark your skin without your permission," Adora tells her, "I wouldn't ever do that. I mean, if— if you don't want it, I don't have to get it—"

"You can get the tattoo," Catra finally speaks, quick and a bit rushed. "I don't— I don't mind."

Adora nods, breaths a bit shaky. She doesn't really know what she's doing, or what this *is* between them now, but she does know that she misses her so fucking much.

"Okay," Adora murmurs, half to reassure herself. "Okay. I also just... I guess I wanted to know if you wanted to come with me. To, uh, help me choose it."

Catra looks confused again. "You don't already know?"

Adora shrugs. She has an idea, but— "well... it'll be on you too, and I guess it would really suck if it ended up being something you didn't like."

Catra looks a little conflicted. "I guess you're right, but..." she takes a moment as if to get her words planned out together, and then speaks. "Adora, this is going to be *your* tattoo. I'll

like whatever you like.”

Adora isn't sure about that, but she isn't going to keep fighting Catra on it in the hallway of her apartment complex. “I know this is super last minute and spring break literally just started, so it's totally fine if you're busy right now—”

“I'm free right now,” Catra hurries to tell her. “And... and I know a place we could get it, if you want.”

Adora nods. “Okay. Could you, uh...” she trails off a bit, not quite sure how she wants to word what she's about to ask. “Could you... could you bring your sketchbook? The one with the drawings that you did on your body?”

Catra blinks in surprise, but after letting the words float in the air for a moment, she nods. “Yeah, sure.” Then, she looks down at herself, and it seems to occur to her what she's wearing because her cheeks flush a light shade of pink and her arms come to wrap around herself. “I, uh, need to change. You can come in if you'd like. It'll probably only take me a few minutes.”

Adora steps in just after Catra scurries down the hallway. It's weird, she thinks, to regard the apartment like an outsider: there's a dirty mug forgotten on the coffee table and a few unwashed dishes in the sink, but in the end, she stuffs her hands into her pockets to avoid the urge to take the mug to the sink and wash the dishes.

It's not your place anymore, she thinks to herself.

She sort of awkwardly stands in the kitchen, not sure what to do with herself — by the looks of it, Scorpia and Entrapta either aren't here or are holed up in their rooms — and she's about to wander into the living room when she feels something brush against her leg.

Adora lets out an undignified yelp and nearly falls onto the floor in her attempt to get away, only to realize that the culprit of the scare is Melog, sitting down a few feet in front of her and staring at her as if he's amused with her reaction. His tail twitches almost lazily, as if he's waiting patiently for her to realize what happened.

“Adora?” Catra calls out from her room, sounding a little alarmed. A moment later she reappears in the hallway, clothed in a sweatshirt and jeans with one of her sketchbooks in hand, eyes a bit wide. “What happened? Are you okay?”

Adora takes a breath. “Yeah,” she chuckles, a bit relieved upon realizing that it was just Melog. She crouches in front of him; smiles when he pushes into her outstretched hands and immediately starts purring once she scratches the top of his head. “Melog just scared me.”

“Oh,” Catra murmurs, and when Adora looks up, she finds the other girl staring at them with a wistful look in her eyes. “Yeah. I think... I think he missed you.”

Adora doesn't tear her gaze away from Catra's. She thinks: *I missed you both. I missed you so fucking much.*

She says: “I missed him too.”

-

Catra’s had multiple passengers on the back of her bike before. Mostly people from high school, consisting both of people she was friends with and people who were simply goaded into trying it, and now that she’s had another one for a while, she’s even had Scorpia and Entrapta on the back of it.

Never have any of those times felt like this.

It should be illegal, she thinks, for Adora to still make her feel the same way she always has. Despite the stress and affliction she’s felt due to the fear Adora won’t ever want to talk to her again, despite the shock she felt when she opened the door, despite the fact that Adora is her soulmate and she’s always told herself that she would *never* get involved with her soulmate under any circumstances, she still feels like she’s falling in love all over again. Adora’s touch is soft, warm against her back, tight around her waist in a way that only grows the faster Catra goes, and Catra can’t believe she’s gone so long without having touched her.

The ride is short, but by the time they arrive, Catra feels like they’ve been driving for hours. Regardless of that, she’s almost tempted when, after realizing that they’re only a few blocks away from the tattoo parlour, to turn and perhaps take a detour just so this moment doesn’t have to end. So that this moment, with Adora warm around her and the wind soothing against her skin and the bustle of downtown Bright Moon surrounding them, doesn’t have to end.

When they do arrive and park just a few buildings down from the parlour, Adora clings onto her for a moment even after she kills the engine. Catra has to pretend like she doesn’t immediately miss her arms as soon as they’re unwrapped from around her waist.

It’s a short walk to the doors of the entrance, but Adora suddenly stops when they’re just outside of the doors. She stands there for a moment, brows knitted together like she’s trying to gather what she wants to say, before clearing her throat.

“Thanks,” she murmurs, voice gentle. “I appreciate you coming with me.”

“It’s no problem,” Catra answers, because truthfully, it really isn’t: she hadn’t been lying when she said she wasn’t doing anything tonight, and even if she was — it seems like Adora might be ready to talk to her again. They’re *finally* both ready, with enough knowledge to understand the predicament that they’ve found themselves in. Catra wouldn’t have turned her down for anything.

Inside the shop, it smells fresh and clean. Catra sits down on the waiting room couch while Adora talks to the lady sitting at the front desk, and then Adora comes to join her on the small

couch a moment later, quickly filling out the form she was given. Silence stretches between them as she does so, the only other sound being whatever's going on in the back rooms, and Catra taps her fingers against her sketchbook.

She had admittedly been a little surprised when Adora asked her to bring it. This particular one hasn't been drawn in since she eventually brought herself to finish the cherry blossom drawing she had started a few hours after painting it on her arm, which had gone incomplete in the days after she confessed to Adora, only to be finished less than a week later. She's not too sure what Adora wants with it, though.

Eventually, she glances back at Adora, and then can't help but ask— “So, uh... what are you planning on getting?”

Adora glances up at her, and she suddenly looks sort of nervous. Catra tugs her lip between her teeth, because she knows that she said she'd like whatever Adora liked, but Adora was also right when she said it *would* really suck if she got something Catra didn't like.

“There was— there was a painting you did,” Adora starts, quietly. At first, Catra furrows her brows together as she lolls her head back toward Adora, not quite sure what she's talking about, until she realizes Adora's staring at her sketchbook and thinks, *oh*. “I think it was the first painting you did on your skin after you realized we were soulmates.”

Adora doesn't have to say anything else for Catra to know exactly what she's talking about.

The heart composed of constellations she had done nearly a month ago, back when she was still processing things like *Adora's my soulmate* and *I don't have an inspiration for art anymore* and *I don't know what to do*. The memory rings clear: it had also been the first time Adora had talked to her after Catra had told her she couldn't do this anymore.

Fingers a bit shaky, Catra quickly flips open her sketchbook to the drawing she knows Adora's talking about. It's there, just as she imagines it appeared on her skin the first time: purple and blue and white, a story told with emotion through visual dream languages. Catra stares at it for a moment, a shaky breath escaping her.

“This one?” she asks as she grazes her fingers along it. The paper is scratchy and rough.

Adora's quiet for a moment, and Catra can't resist looking back at her. She looks sad, and Catra's filled with the overwhelming urge to kiss her; reach for her hand and tell her *please give me another chance. I don't know what I'll do if you don't want to know me anymore*.

“Yeah,” Adora eventually says, and her voice is down to a whisper now. “If... if that's okay.”

Catra, at first, doesn't know what to say. There's no handbook for what to do when you've realized you're in love with the same person you've spent your whole life trying to avoid who loves you too but who's also rightfully mad at you who also wants a tattoo that you drew that will also appear on you, but she thinks that that's okay, because—

Because everything from here on out is her own choice. Everything has always been her choice, including this one.

“It’s okay.”

“Are you sure?” Adora asks, and she’s staring at her with gray and blue eyes that are filled with concern. “I don’t want you to be doing this just because you’re sorry, or because you feel like you owe me something.”

Catra lips curl up into the beginnings of a smile. She knows that whatever it is they’ll end up getting is basically going to be permanent, but it’s not too different to the connection they’ll always feel to each other up until the connection breaks when one of them dies. And as much as she tries to deny it, the idea of Adora picking something out she didn’t like *was* a bit of a fear lingering in the back of her mind, but this... this is different. The knowledge that Adora wants something that Catra drew on her forever makes her feel things she can’t explain.

“I’m not,” Catra tells her, and the worried look in Adora’s expression finally falls once she sees the small smile on Catra’s face. “I’m genuinely okay with this, Adora.”

(She wants to tell her *I promise*, but she’s not too sure if it’ll be too much.)

Adora seems to understand anyway, because she smiles soon after, and then goes to hand in the form. A few minutes later, they’re taken to a back room where Catra can only assume one of the tattoo artists currently working is, and she’s just glad the woman — a few years older by the looks of it — doesn’t recognize her. She asks Adora a few questions, including which design she’s chosen and or if she has her own. Catra hands over the sketchbook right after, and when Adora’s asked the question of where, she’s a little surprised to see Adora lift up her cotton shirt and indicate to her sternum, the same place Catra had originally painted it.

Catra sort of bumbles around on the other side of the small room as Adora gets settled into the chair — she’s still trying to process the fact that Adora’s *here*, willingly talking to her again, that they might have a good chance at fixing things, *and* that she’s about to technically have a tattoo — only to turn back around when the woman doing the tattoo turns on the machine. At first, Catra thinks *she already started?* Only to realize that she must’ve been making sure everything was set, because she’s still on the other side of the room getting everything ready and Adora is still fully clothed.

Adora, who’s a little paler in the face than usual, grip suddenly tight around the handles of the chair. From what Catra can see, the tattoo artist is simply busying herself getting the design on stencil, but Adora still looks like she’s going to self combust any second now.

Grabbing a stray plastic chair near the edge of the room, Catra pulls it up next to the leather chair Adora’s in, frowning. “Adora?” Adora jumps slightly at the sound of her voice, and Catra’s frown deepens. “What’s wrong?”

Adora blinks, and then she suddenly looks a little embarrassed. “I— I just— I don’t really like needles,” she admits quietly.

Catra knits her brows together. “You’re afraid of needles, but you want a tattoo?”

“I hadn’t really thought of what the process might entail,” Adora admits, a bit of an embarrassed blush coating her cheeks. “I just... I just knew that I really wanted one.”

Catra can’t help but let out a quiet laugh, because the idea of Adora jumping into something without thinking about the consequences doesn’t really surprise her. Usually she overthinks things, but on occasion, something like this happens instead.

(A part of her wants to ask why Adora even wanted one, what made her want it so much.)

(She doesn’t.)

Instead, she doesn’t say anything, not until the woman asks Adora to take off her shirt so she can get started on tracing the design through the stencil. She goes over the basics — they’ll do this first before the tattoo, if Adora doesn’t like the position they can change it, etcetera — but Catra feels like Adora is barely even paying attention as her gaze remains fixated on the tattoo gun, not even having made a single move to take off her shirt.

“It’s okay, Adora. It’s just the stencil. It won’t hurt.”

Adora blinks, and then shakes her head again. “I know, I just—”

The woman interrupts them by telling them they’re out of alcohol wipes and that she’ll be right back, conveniently giving them the small room to themselves as she disappears. When Catra looks back over, she sees that Adora’s eyes are shut, and her hands are shaking now.

“Adora,” Catra whispers, because this can’t just be a simple phobia of needles.

“I just don’t have a good history with needles, okay?” she snaps, eyes opening. Catra frowns again, and Adora sighs. “Sorry, I shouldn’t— I shouldn’t have snapped at you. It’s just...” she trails off again, swallowing deeply, eyes set on something in front of her. “There was... there was a car crash when I was younger. I don’t remember anything from beforehand, but when I woke up there were needles everywhere and—” she cuts herself off to take a breath. “I made a full recovery, but...”

Catra’s sure that the sentence is going to end with something related to Mara, but when Adora doesn’t continue, Catra doesn’t push. “You don’t have to explain yourself to me, okay?” she tries her best to reassure her. Adora doesn’t react, and Catra wishes so badly that she could reach for her hand; could feel Adora’s larger ones, warm and slightly calloused, in her own again. “We don’t have to do this today. We can always come back at another time.”

Adora frowns, and Catra watches as she tries to blink back tears. “I know, I just— I really want one, and it’s stupid that something that happened a long time ago is going to prevent me from something today.”

“It’s not stupid,” Catra argues quietly, because she has more than enough experience with not doing things because of stuff that happened to her a long time ago, but the tattoo artist comes back before she can elaborate. Catra’s only partially glad, because she doesn’t think in the back of a tattoo parlour would be the best time for them to have that conversation.

She asks Adora if she's ready to start, and when Catra flashes another glance at Adora and sees how *sad* she looks, she makes a snap decision.

"Adora," she starts, "do you want me to get it instead?"

Adora turns to look at her. Her eyes are watery and confused. "What?"

"I'm not afraid of needles," Catra explains, and watches as realization flashes in Adora's eyes. "And if it would look the same, then I don't see why not."

Adora stares at her. "I wouldn't ask you to do that."

Catra smiles. "You're not asking. I'm offering." Adora still looks unsure, so Catra turns to look at the tattoo artist, who's holding the stencil in her hand and measuring it. "Hey, if I got the tattoo instead, would it look the same on her?"

The woman lifts a brow. "You two soulmates?"

Catra feels something change in the air around them in that moment.

She takes a deep breath.

She thinks about the fact that she's so, *so* in love with the girl sitting next to her — with her *soulmate*, who's sitting next to her — and how she's not afraid of it anymore.

She nods.

"Yeah," she breathes, turning to look back at Adora, who's staring at her with a look of wonder. "We are."

The woman looks bored, and she goes back to measuring the stencil. "Right. Well, doesn't matter who gets it then, it'll appear the same on both of you. Just keep in mind that whoever gets it will have to be the one to take it off if it ever comes down to it."

Catra flashes Adora another questioning glance. Adora's still staring at her like she used to months ago, back when they were oblivious to the circumstances they'd found themselves in.

"Why are you doing all of this?" Adora asks, and she almost sounds scared, like Catra's going to tell her it was all a joke.

Catra closes her eyes.

Because I love you. Because I want you back, even though I don't deserve it. Because I would give anything to see you happy again.

When she opens her eyes, Adora is still staring at her as if she's determined to figure her out, but Catra doesn't know how to put all that she's feeling into words. She's *never* been good with words.

But then she sees the pen Adora used to fill out the form on the small tray next to the chair, and she gets an idea.

Catra grabs the pen, clicks it open, and draws a small line down the back of her hand.

She hears Adora inhale sharply when the connection is opened up. Adora closes her eyes, and Catra feels like her heart might beat out of her chest with how fast it's racing, until Adora opens her eyes again and stares at her a soft look.

"I understand," she whispers. "And I trust you."

And for that, Catra doesn't think she's ever been more thankful for their connection.

-

It takes a little bit longer than initially planned — they have to get a new form for Catra to fill out since she'll be getting the tattoo instead — and then they switch places in the chair as the woman asks her if everything will be the same. Catra confirms it will be, and Adora watches with a bit of illogical fear as, after peeling off her sweatshirt and lifting her bra up a bit, the woman draws the design just below Catra's breasts.

"Is that how you want it?" Catra asks once the woman's finished, having told them to let her know if they want it changed before she gets started on the actual tattoo. Adora stares at it for a moment. She feels her hand twitch with the sudden want to graze her the pads of her fingers along Catra's smooth skin, feel the drawing there herself, but she digs her fingers into her shorts to prevent it.

"Yeah," Adora whispers, voice a bit scratchy. She still can't believe Catra is doing all of this for her. "It looks good."

The erratic buzzing of the machine makes Adora more than a little nervous, but she watches Catra's face, sees her stare up at the ceiling until the tattoo gun makes contact, from which she lets out a soft groan and closes her eyes. Her hands curl tighter around the handles of the chair, and Adora takes a breath.

There's a moment where she feels her mind start to race; where she begins to list the pros and cons of acting on her sudden want.

But then she *stops*. Stops overthinking everything, stops hesitating, counts to five, and tries her best to clear her mind.

And then she reaches for Catra's hand.

The second they make contact, Catra opens her eyes. She looks surprised, and Adora stares at her for a moment before turning her own hand palm side up, leaving Catra the option to grab it if she wants.

She does.

She intertwines their fingers, and then sucks in another breath when the gun pierces her skin. The air is heavy around them as the woman works in silence and concentration, and Adora scoots her chair a bit closer to Catra's head so she can focus more on her and not the needle, wincing when Catra squeezes her hand and lets out a quiet noise mixed between a gasp and a whimper.

"Hey," Adora starts, squeezing her hand in response, "are you okay?"

Catra swallows heavily. "Of all places," she breathes out with a bit of a forced chuckle, eyes half lidded as they stare at Adora, "you really choose one of the most painful areas to get it, huh?"

Adora nervously flashes a glance back at the tattoo gun; hears the whirring of the machine as it punctures Catra's skin. "Do you want to stop?"

Catra shakes her head. "No," she whispers, eyes fluttering shut once more. "I can do this."

Adora hesitates for a moment, before eventually pushing her sweaty hair out of her face, smiling when Catra inconspicuously leans into the touch. "You're so brave," she encourages. "Way braver than I am, anyway."

That gets Catra to open her eyes, and although she scoffs disbelievingly, she still smiles weakly. "That's... that's not true."

The shading seems to be worse than the lineart. Opposed to before, it's more clear that Catra's in pain, and she starts sweating more. The woman asks her if she wants to take a break, and when Catra declines the offer, Adora leans a bit closer to her. She just keeps carding her hands through Catra's hair when it undoubtedly falls into her face again because she knows the action calms her; keeps talking to her in a small attempt at distraction. It's a little hard to avoid the heavy topic still surrounding between them, but Adora thinks she manages.

"Are you growing your hair out?" is one of the things she asks, threading her fingers through Catra's curls. It's silky and soft, and the length is at least a few inches longer than how it was when they first met. Back then, it was short cropped and messy, and now it's just long enough to pull into a small ponytail with a few of her bangs falling into her face.

Catra sucks in a deep breath, and then nods. Her voice is a bit shaky when she speaks. "I think I might. It— it used to be really long, but... but I had to cut it all off a couple of months before we met." Adora lifts a brow at the mention, clearly interested in what the reason for that is, and Catra lets out a soft chuckle. "I'll tell you about that later."

Later, Adora thinks, and the word makes her feel so much lighter, knowing that they could very well have a *later* together.

“It looks cute,” Adora compliments, and then giggles when Catra’s cheeks — already a bit flushed from the pain and the heat of the room — darken ever so slightly.

Surprisingly, it only takes a little over an hour, and when the whirring of the machine turns off and the woman leans up, smoothing the wipe over Catra’s skin a few times and setting the gun down on the tray before telling them it’s finished, Adora finally risks a glance over to the tattoo.

It looks almost exactly like Catra had painted it, three dimensional and luminous, like it really was made of pure matter and stars. The skin around it is red and irritated, but the design looks perfect.

She expects to see Catra staring at the tattoo herself, but when she looks back, she finds that Catra is staring at her, instead. She looks almost nervous, eyes searching her own. “Do you like it?”

Adora tightens her grip on Catra’s hand, nodding. “I love it.”

It’s then that Catra finally glances down to look at it herself. She looks pleased, smiling at the sight of it.

The woman applies ointment and a bandage to the skin. She gives them an aftercare pamphlet, as well as a a brief rundown, too. Afterwards she leaves them alone in the back room, telling them to come up to the front whenever they’re ready to pay. When the door swings closed behind her, Catra looks up.

Everything between them that had disappeared while Catra was getting the tattoo is slowly sinking back in, and Adora has no idea what she’s thinking. By the looks of it, Catra looks considerably happier, so that’s probably a good sign, right? But what are they even supposed to do after this now?

She doesn’t get the chance to fall too far into her worries, because Catra smiles, and then squeezes the hand that’s still intertwined with her own. “Have *you* looked at it yet?”

Adora blinks, pulling herself out of her thoughts. “Of course?” she murmurs, but it comes out more like a question, because Catra knows that she already saw it.

Catra’s grins. “I meant on yourself.”

When Adora’s mouth parts and all that comes out is a quiet *oh*, Catra laughs, and then nudges her up from the chair.

“What are you waiting for?” she asks, and her rough, scratchy voice is soothing, just like it’s always been.

Adora doesn’t respond, because truthfully, she doesn’t know. Instead, she finds her way to a mirror, bunching her shirt up just below the top of her breasts, and then gasps at what she

finds staring back at her.

She knew that the tattoo would look the exact same as it does on Catra. She *knew* this. But still, it's otherworldly to see it etched into her herself, and then see it again back on Catra.

The only other time she's seen any form of art on both of their skin was the cherry blossom forest, when Catra was proving to her that they were soulmates, but that was different. Adora had been angry and upset and trying but failing to process the realization of so many things at one time; it had been *so* different.

But now, as she looks at the tattoo staring back at her, only different to Catra's in the sense that the skin around it isn't red and slightly swollen, she can believe that it's true. That the reason it's on her skin is because it's on Catra's; that as she runs her fingers over the delicate ink, she knows that nothing about it will change for a long time.

It feels like it's a part of her, and she's *so* grateful.

Adora glimpses up in the mirror and sees Catra coming to stand behind her. She looks unsure, like she's afraid Adora might not like it and, vibrating with a newfound sense of excitement, Adora thinks that's absolutely ridiculous.

"Thank you," she breathes, turning around to face her. Catra still looks a little nervous, but her shoulders relax when she sees Adora's expression. Adora doesn't know how to express how grateful she is to her for all of this. "Thank you, Catra. I just... thank you."

Despite her inability to find the words to seemingly express how appreciative she really is, Catra seems to understand anyway, and the pure relief and comfort she seems to feel when she takes in the words make Adora's heart skip a beat.

Catra is warm and solid in front of her, and Adora tightens the grip she has on her tiny waist, lower than it was before to avoid touching the tattoo. Every once in a while, Catra will speed up a bit or make a turn, and Adora will tighten her grip even more; will feel Catra lean into her touch when they come to a halt at a stoplight or in traffic.

She's missed this. She's missed this so much, and she knows that they still have so much to talk about; knows that there's still a chance that things might not work out between them.

But as she feels Catra's sides jump beneath her touch at she laughs quietly — from the sound of Adora letting out a squeak of surprise when she revs the engine for a moment, no doubt — feels the wind in her hair, feels nothing but *Catra*, she allows herself to hope.

Rightfully, Adora was worried that the tension from before would return to them as soon as they left the tattoo parlour.

Catra had asked her, once they left, whether she was okay with them talking, or if she wanted Catra to take her home. Adora had said *“I think I want to talk now,”* and watched as Catra made a very poor attempt to hide her relief. Catra had asked her where she wanted to go, and Adora had shrugged, glanced around, and asked, *“You feel like having ice cream?”*

Which is how they end up here, walking in the midst of a park centered near the middle of Bright Moon, a cup full of ice cream in Catra’s hand and a cone in Adora’s. The space between them isn’t wide, but the tension is enough to make it feel like both a hundred feet and a single millimeter at the same time. The sun is setting over the horizon, and Adora tries to calm herself by listening to the sound of kids cheering in the distance; of a dog running after a frisbee someone has thrown.

As they walk, no words are said between them. Catra throws away her cup, and Adora finishes her cone, stuffing her hands into her pockets a moment later. It still feels surreal to know that Catra’s here, a few feet away from her; that she’s close enough to touch; that they have the same tattoo hidden beneath their clothes, just below their breasts; that for the first time in a long time, Adora finally feels clear and level headed in her presence.

During the time they spent apart, Adora has hurt tremendously. When Catra confessed to her that they were soulmates, she hadn’t understood why she had kept it a secret for so long. She still doesn’t completely understand, really, but as she thinks about everything that Catra has told her, from always having planned in avoiding her soulmate to realizing she was in love with said soulmate, to being here with her now, and being able to actually tell the tattoo artist that they’re soulmates, she thinks that maybe Catra did need that time to process everything.

She thinks about how Catra, as her soulmate, never really responded to her; never really wanted to talk to her. Then she thinks about how Catra, after taking some time to realise they were soulmates, started drawing and painting again; how it was then that she was willing to have deep and heavier conversations with her.

It makes sense. It does. And Adora knows that she still has a right to be mad, because it still wasn’t Catra’s place to decide what Adora should or shouldn’t know no matter how many reasons she had, she just... she can’t find it in her to be as mad at her as she was.

“Scorpi mentioned she talked to you earlier,” Catra suddenly says. Adora flashes a quick glance at her and sees her staring straight ahead, lip caught between her teeth.

“Right,” Adora kicks a loose pebble in front of her as they walk in a less busier part of the park, where the noisiest thing is the birds in the trees, making their return now that spring is upon them. “She... she came to apologize to me about how everything played out.”

Catra nods. “I’m sorry. I asked her not to do that a few days ago when she suggested it. I know you wanted space.”

Adora shrugs. “It’s okay. I mean, it— it’s probably a good thing that she did that. For one, it kind of helped me to realize a few things; helped me to realize I was ready to talk to you. But

also, it made me realize she probably doesn't hate me anymore."

A small, squeaky laugh falls from Catra's lips. "You thought Scorpia hated you? Scorpia doesn't hate anyone."

"Listen," Adora starts, a bit of an embarrassed blush coating her cheeks. "The way she looked at me sometimes was kind of scary."

"Scorpia's just protective sometimes," Catra chuckles. "She wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Sure," Adora snorts as she recalls their previous interactions after her and Catra's first kiss. As embarrassing as it is to admit it, Scorpia slightly scared her back then.

They walk for a little while longer, before Adora eventually reaches out to wrap her fingers in a loose hold around Catra's arm. Catra flashes her a questioning glance, but when Adora tilts her head to a nearby tree, Catra follows suit without question.

She unwraps her jacket from where it'd been tied around her waist, and then sets it down on the floor for them to sit on despite the fact that it doesn't provide much room.

"So," Catra quietly starts after they get settled. She crosses her legs, and then peers up to meet Adora's eyes, full of sincerity. "I owe you an explanation."

Adora lets out a quiet chuckle and thinks *understatement*, but Catra must sense what she's thinking.

"A *long* explanation," she corrects herself. "An *overdue* explanation." Adora pulls at the grass; it's green and fresh, blooming beautifully like the rest of the park due to the return of spring.

"Do you remember the night we made up after our first kiss?" Catra quietly asks. Adora slowly nods, because she's not sure how what happened to them all those months ago is going to help them now, but Catra continues. "You... uh, you explained a bit of your history with soulmates that night. I didn't, because... because I didn't feel the need. Our relationship didn't really have anything to do with soulmates — well, at least not for me — and maybe I would've eventually told you, but I didn't plan on it being anytime soon."

Catra takes a breath. Her fists clench in her lap. "I've— I've never really told anyone about my history with it; at least not to the full extent, but... but I'm going to do that now."

Adora nods. Something in her chest feels uneasy about this, and she really doesn't like where it's going.

Catra takes a few minutes before she starts to speak. Adora doesn't rush her. Her brows are knitted as she stares at her hands, and she has to take a few breaths to calm herself every once in a while.

"I never really knew my parents," is what she starts with. "I was told my mother died of cancer a few years after I was born, and my father died due to heartbreak a few months later."

“Were they...?” Adora can’t help but start asking. Catra gives a small, single nod.

“They were soulmates,” she confirms. Adora feels her hands sort of involuntarily tighten around the grass she’s been pulling at. “I ended up in foster care after that; some woman named Sharon Weaver took me in. I think... In the beginning, I kind of figured she took me in because she cared about me, or maybe she wanted to take care of me, but I quickly learned it was just for the money.

“To this day, I still don’t know whether or not her soulmate died, whether they left her because she was a fucking *horrible, insane* person, or— or what,” Catra sighs. “But either way, her soulmate wasn’t around. I think that when you started trying to talk to me, and she started seeing ink and paint on my skin that I swore wasn’t there from me, it just reminded her of that. She didn’t want me talking to you, because it probably reminded her of the fact that she couldn’t talk to her own, and she— she scared me, a lot. She’d do things to make sure I didn’t talk to you, and I was young back then, and she was really manipulative. She’d do things to make me start associating soulmates with being bad, like whenever you’d talk to me, she’d hurt me at the same time, even though it wasn’t your fault.”

“Catra,” Adora whispers, because she can’t believe what she’s hearing. She can’t believe that Catra was going through all of this, that her *soulmate* was going through all of this at that time, and she had absolutely no idea. Catra looks up at her, and Adora’s surprised to see that she’s not crying because Adora’s pretty sure she’s about to burst into tears herself. “Please tell me she didn’t...”

“She never really touched me,” Catra confirms, and Adora feels at least a little bit of relief. “There were a few rare occasions where she slapped me, and she’d push me around sometimes, but it— it never got worse than that. She would mostly just use words to get to me. I think she was especially mad, because even though she was successful at getting me to not talk to you, she could never get me to tell you to stop.”

“Why— why didn’t you?” Adora whimpers. “I mean— *fuck*, it would’ve hurt me, but it would’ve been so much better than you going through all of that.”

Catra shrugs. “I don’t know,” she admits quietly. “I just... I think that I was so miserable and upset all of the time there, I didn’t really want you to stop, because every time you opened the connection I felt your happiness. I kept thinking that everything would be easier if you did stop, because I probably wouldn’t have gotten in as much trouble, but looking back... she got mad at everything I did, even if it had no relation to you. In the end I really don’t think it would’ve changed much.”

Adora swallows heavily. The idea of purposely writing on someone to communicate with their soulmate is heavily looked down upon, but Adora definitely wouldn’t put it past the woman currently being described to her. She genuinely doesn’t think she’s ever hated someone more. “Why didn’t she just... write on you herself?”

“I think she knew that you’d be able to figure out that it wasn’t me,” Catra admits, “and that if you did... someone would figure out something wasn’t right.”

Adora knits her brows together for a moment, and then thinks, *right*. Although the markings other people make on your soulmate's skin will still appear on your own, their emotions won't be felt because there's no connection to them.

“What would she say to you?” Adora asks, even though she's pretty much dreading the answer.

“Just...” Catra has to take a few breaths before she speaks again. “Just things about how I was useless, or how I didn't deserve anything she provided me, or that— or that I shouldn't bother with you, because you'd never love me. It was messed up, because eventually she started turning it around and saying that because I had never responded to you, you'd hate me. As much as I wish I could admit otherwise, sometimes she just... got to me, I guess.”

“I always loved you,” Adora murmurs, throat tight, tears welling in her eyes. “Even when you didn't respond, I always did. I never hated you. And even now, even when I didn't know we were soulmates, I loved you for you. I'm so sorry you went through all of that Catra, I'm so sorry that I caused that—”

“Adora, stop,” Catra interrupts, voice firm. “It wasn't your fault. You couldn't have known. And— and like I said, I didn't tell you to stop because it felt nice sometimes, to feel your happiness. Please believe me when I say that *really*, if you had stopped writing to me, it might've caused more bad than it did good.”

Adora squeezes her eyes shut, and then after a moment, nods.

“Anyway, I guess I can't really put *all* of the blame on her for never having talked to you. I mean, I've always kind of been afraid of the idea of commitment even without being soulmates, and the idea of it being out of my control and up to the universe... that stemmed from both the fact that she made it seem like I wouldn't measure up to the person you deserved, but also just... my own dislike of the fact that nothing has ever really been in my control.” She pauses to wipe an arm across her eyes before the tears fall down. “Maybe... maybe if I had grown up in a healthier environment, I would've talked to you sooner. Maybe I wouldn't have. Maybe everything would be so much different, and it wouldn't be as hard as it is now.” Catra takes a deep breath. “But— but I've been trying not to focus on the maybes, because it's not like we can change anything about it.

“As for all of the shit she'd tell me... I was really messed up when I was younger because of it, and even after I graduated high school and moved out... that obviously doesn't just go away overnight. I met Scorpia because she was in one of my classes freshman year, and for reasons I still can't figure out, she made it her mission to befriend me despite the fact that I always pushed her away. Eventually, toward the end of the year, she convinced me to go to therapy for everything, and I— I did that for about a year, and I'm okay now. I don't have nightmares about her anymore, she doesn't have any way to contact me, I can be vulnerable, and I've accepted everything that happened.”

Adora chews on her lip, trying to control the shakiness in her fingers. She thinks that it's ridiculous that Catra is so much more calm than her as she tells this story; it's not like this happened to *Adora*, but she just... she still can't believe that all of this happened and she had absolutely no idea.

“But the soulmates thing... I guess you already know this, but... I was still scared that you’d hate me for never responding to you, especially when I started painting and you realized that I was probably fully capable of responding; that I just never wanted to. I was scared that even if you didn’t, even if you wanted to be with me — because I knew, deep down, that you did — that you’d love me for only that, and once you realized that I wasn’t the same person you might’ve created in your head, you’d fall out of love with me. I didn’t want any of that, and the fact that it seemed like the universe would make that unavoidable made me not want that even more. I *hated* the fact that I felt like all of this would happen to me, and I couldn’t do anything to stop it.”

There’s a shift in her tone then; the quiet, casual way she’s been trying to tell this story giving way to more emotion.

It makes Adora’s heart ache even more, but she also thinks it might be for the better.

“And then I met you. And you— you made me feel like maybe I could avoid it all. Everything with you always felt so much better, and I fell in love with you because you’re just— you’re perfect, Adora. You’re so sweet, and selfless, and so caring, and I realized that I love you so much. Even though I knew there was a good chance you didn’t love me back the same way, I didn’t care; I wanted to be with you for as long as time would allow us before you met your soulmate and... and eventually left like I thought you would.

“But then when I found out that *we* were soulmates... it made me feel like everything that happened wasn’t true. That for a moment, when I convinced myself that maybe I could have something that was in my control, it was all just a lie. I was so mad at everything; I was mad at the universe for playing things out this way; I was mad at you because I thought that you’d only love me once you realized we were soulmates; and I was mad at myself for falling in love with the one person I didn’t want to and for thinking I’d ever had a semblance of control, so... so I left, and I wanted to get away from everything. And I know it’s messed up and it was unfair to you, but I wanted you to move on, too, so I hurt you on purpose to try and make sure that would happen.”

Adora can’t swallow past the lump in her throat. Everything makes so much sense, even more than it did before. She opens her mouth to speak, but nothing comes out. She doesn’t even know what she *wants* to say.

“Entrapta sort of convinced me to tell you. She made me realize that everything *was* in my control; that the only thing that technically wasn’t was that we’d eventually meet.” Adora makes a mental note to make Entrapta tiny food for the next time she sees her. “I took a long time even after she made me see past all of the bullshit I kept telling myself because I wanted to be ready to be with you again, in the event that you wanted it, when I told you.” Catra snuffles then, and the tears finally spill from her eyes.

“I— I know everything about this is fucked up, and I know it was *so* unfair to you. You— you have every right to be mad at me. The way Weaver raised me isn’t an excuse for how I treated you when I found out, or for how much I hurt you. What I told you was so uncalled for, and— and I didn’t think about the fact that you’d think that it was your fault for it all. I’m so sorry Adora. I wish I could change so many things.”

And Adora knows. She knows how sorry Catra is; she knows she has every right to be mad. Catra hurt her so much, and Adora knows that she doesn't have to forgive her.

"I'm not expecting for it to happen now," Catra continues softly. "Because you have every right to say no, and every right not to, but... do you think... do you think that you could ever forgive me?"

Adora stares at the girl in front of her; sees her fiddling with her sleeves, staring back up at Adora with earnest eyes, and she knows that she isn't mad. She's upset, sure, but it's with their situation more than anything else; with everything that Catra had to go through, and with that evil woman that she was raised by. With how complicated that made their relationship.

Adora takes a deep breath.

Despite everything that's just happened, she smiles. It's shaky, and probably doesn't look much like a smile if she's being honest.

"You really hurt me," she begins, softly, "but... I think that I can."

(But she already has. She's forgiven Catra. She's not mad at her anymore, and while she wishes that it could've been easier for the both of them, they're here now, and they can still try and navigate what happens to them from here on forward.)

And it's all worth it for the answering smile, the quiet, but still audible sigh of relief, that Catra gives her in return.

Afterwards, the sun has set, and violet hues and dark purples cover the sky. The lamps hanging along the walkways of the park cover it all in soft light, and it's still busy enough that Adora can hear people laughing and talking in the distance, a family or two occasionally passing by.

They're both leaning against the tree, which is, surprisingly enough, not as uncomfortable as she imagined it'd be. Their arms are brushing, close enough that Adora can feel every breath Catra takes by the motion of her arms each time they press ever so slightly deeper into her before pulling away.

"What do we do now?" Catra asks, and her voice is low and raspy as if she had been asleep. Adora had figured she had been; they hadn't spoken for a while, simply sitting in each other's presence, and her eyes have been closed for some time.

"What do you *want* to do now?" Adora asks carefully. Her eyes are still closed, too. It a bit colder now, but with the warmth of Catra pressed against her, she find that she doesn't mind. She's been busying herself with trying to process everything. She thinks that she deserves a

medal or something for being able to sanely process everything that's been dropped on her in these past few weeks.

"I... I want to be with you," Catra admits. "But a part of me is still scared."

Adora's eyes flutter open. Catra's staring straight up, gaze focused on the stars and constellations above them.

"I want to be with you, too," Adora whispers. "More than I've ever wanted anything, Catra. I've wanted it for so long, and— and I'm willing to try and figure this out with you. If you're scared, we can take it slow. We don't have to jump into things."

Catra sighs. She crosses her arms over themselves, eyes still focused on the night sky.

"It just... it feels kind of stupid to go slow, when we already love—" Catra cuts herself off, and after an encouraging nod from Adora, continues, "when we already love each other, had sex, gotten as close to *meet the parents* as we can ..."

"Well, is it a label thing?" Adora asks. "Because we don't have to have labels. We could keep doing what we were doing before. Just... being with each other, without calling it a specific thing." As much as she wants Catra to be her girlfriend, after *everything* Catra just told her, she in no way wants to rush her or make her feel uncomfortable with the idea of them being together despite being soulmates.

"No. I— I want more than that. I want to be your girlfriend, and I want you to be mine."

Adora has to temporarily ignore the surge of warmth those words give her. "Then what's the problem?"

"I'm scared," Catra repeats, voice quiet. "You spent your entire life waiting for this person, building them up in your head, and I— I know that you love me for me, that you loved me without knowing I was your soulmate. I *know* that, but I'm still scared that once you realize I'm not all you wanted in someone who's supposed to be your soulmate—"

"Catra," Adora interrupts, "I'm going to stop you right there." Catra's back to staring at her hands; fiddling nervously with them, and Adora eventually reaches forward to clasp her own hand around them, waiting for Catra to look at her before continuing. "When we were in Eternia, Razz asked me if I wanted you to be my soulmate. I said yes, because— because I thought it would make it easier for myself. I wasn't thinking about the fact that it would be so much harder for you, just that I already loved you at that point in time and you— you were then, and you still are now, *everything* I'd ever want in a soulmate."

By the time Adora's finished, Catra's face is sort of scrunched, and she looks like she's trying to hold back more tears.

"I'm sorry," she whispers, voice cracking somewhere in the middle. "I'm so sorry I made you wait for so long. I don't know how I'll ever make it up to you."

Adora squeezes her hand; uses her unoccupied hand to wipe her cheeks with the pad of her thumb. “Catra, it’s *okay*. You weren’t ready, and I know now why you weren’t. And... even when you weren’t, being soulmates with someone doesn’t mean you *have* to be with them. You didn’t owe me anything.” She pauses, and then winks. “Someone very important to me taught me that.”

Thankfully, that gets Catra to let out a weak chuckle, and she tightens her grip on Adora’s hand. “Okay. Can I...” she looks a bit bashful, and Adora tilts her head in question. “Can I have a hug?”

Adora’s lips part, and her mouth opens ever so slightly in a way that gives away her surprise. In all the time they spent together, obviously Catra had opened up to physical contact, but usually it was always Adora asking or initiating it. So for this—

“Okay, it’s not a big deal, weirdo,” Catra tells her, face burning red. “You know what, nevermind—”

“No, no,” Adora laughs, quickly maneuvering herself so that she’s facing Catra rather than sitting side by side with her. She watches her for a moment, before separating their hands in favor of opening her arms.

Catra stares back.

It’s quiet. Even the children in the distance, the birds, and the grasshoppers that have since started their buzzing all seem to hold their breath.

Then—

Catra launches herself forward, so quickly that Adora lets out a quiet *oof*. She wraps her arms around Catra’s frame in a loose hug, not quite sure what she’s okay with right now, but—

“Tighter,” Catra whispers into her shoulder, curling her fingers around the fabric of Adora’s shirt. “please, Adora—”

Adora squeezes her tighter.

They sit like that for a long while. Adora feels something wet against her the side of her neck, and realizes a moment later that Catra’s crying. Adora buries her face into her shoulder, takes a shuddering breath of her own, and then cries.

It feels like everything from these past few weeks — everything from these past few *months* — have come back to surround her, washing over her like a tidal wave. The walls that had prevented her from crying before are finally gone; the anger and the want to be so mad has faded. All that’s left is a mixture of anguish from knowing what Catra went through, from all of the time they lost — both in these past few months, and in the time before they even knew each other — as well as relief from knowing that they’re here in each other’s arms; they’re *okay*.

Their story is nothing like Adora wanted it to be; it isn't anything like she imagined it'd be. It's fragile, and it's messy and it's nowhere near perfect, but it's theirs. It's theirs, and they're here and okay now, and she wouldn't trade that for anything.

"We can make this work, right?" Adora asks, a long while after they've stopped crying and have simply sat in each other's arms, Adora feeling Catra's nails gently scratch up and down her back every so often in a comforting manner. "We're— we're going to be fine."

"Yeah," Catra agrees, her voice rough from crying. She burrows deeper into Adora for a moment, grip tightening, voice muffled. "We can— we can make it work. We shouldn't rush things, but we don't have to go super slow, either. We can just... ease into things at first. Go at a pace comfortable for us both. Take things one day at a time."

"One day at a time. I like that."

"It works."

"There's no rule book for relationships."

"Exactly."

"We're going to be fine. Better than fine."

"Yeah, 'dora," Catra chuckles, pulling away to meet her eyes — far enough to see Adora's face, but not so far that she unwraps her arms from around her torso — and smiles. Her eyes are red and swollen from the tears, but now, she looks like she really believes her next words. "We're going to be better than fine."

Adora shuts her eyes and nods, simply breathing as she takes the moment in for what it is.

They stand a few minutes later; Adora picks her jacket up from the floor, shakes the leaves and twigs of it before retying it around her waist. Catra offers her her hand once they silently agree to start walking back to where Catra parked her motorcycle, and it's nice.

It isn't until a while later, the motorcycle finally in sight, that Catra speaks again. She sounds a little confused when she starts. "Wait a minute."

Adora squeezes Catra's hand, brows furrowed. "What is it?"

There's a beat, then, "Razz knew the whole time, didn't she?"

"What?"

"She knew we were soulmates. Remember what I told you about what she told me on the porch? And then she asked you if you wanted me to be your soulmate, and she kept looking at us as if she was so happy for us..."

"Oh my God," Adora laughs. "Razz knew. She totally knew the entire time."

Catra's shoulders shake with laughter too as they finally arrive at her bike. "Why do you think she didn't tell us?"

Adora shrugs. "I don't think she even knew we *didn't* know until... until she and I talked about wanting you to be my soulmate. But once she realized... she probably just wanted to let us figure it out ourselves, you know?"

"I'm glad she did," Catra grins devilishly. "Kinda weird how someone as lame as you could be related to someone as awesome as her."

Adora playfully narrows her eyes, and then curls her fingers into Catra's sides to tickle; laughs when she lets out a shriek of her own laughter and immediately pushes Adora's hands away. Adora lets up after a few moments, choosing instead to cup Catra's face with her hand, stroking her as gently as she can.

There's a moment where they make eye contact, and then Catra's eyes fall to her lips and she leans close enough that her lips brush Adora's in a featherlight touch.

It's only for a second. Catra draws back as if she's afraid she went too far, but Adora easily follows, and for a moment, their breaths mingle as they both hover as if waiting for something, until they both seemingly lean forward at the exact same time, closing the distance between them.

Adora remembers their first kiss. She remembers their kiss when Catra showed her her private art for the first time. She remembers *their* first time, and how each and every one of those kisses felt electrical, like someone had shocked her heart.

This kiss is nothing like any of those.

This is like the slow, quiet mornings she'd wake up and turn to her side and just think about how peaceful Catra looked, sleeping next to her with a beam of sun painting a diagonal line across her face. This is like those evenings they'd sit in each other's presence, Catra drawing in her sketchbook and Adora working on homework or scrolling through her phone, touching but not speaking in a comfortable silence. This is like that night they spent in the art building as Catra painted a delicate picture of her, still teetering on the lines of getting to know each other with the beginnings of a crush forming.

It feels like everything all at once. Like everything bad that happened in the past few months is simply being washed away; like this is Catra's way of telling her that everything's going to be alright. All she can really think is that she's really fucking happy.

When Catra pulls back, her eyes stay closed for several seconds. Adora watches as they blink open. This close, she could count the sea of freckles on her face, every eyelash, the flecks of brown hidden in her left eye.

"I can't believe I'm kissing my soulmate," Adora whispers. "Is it okay if I call you that? My soulmate?"

Catra smiles, breathless. "Of course you can. That's what I am, right?"

“Yeah, but... I just want to make sure you’re alright with it. If I ever call you something that makes you uncomfortable, I want you to know that you can tell me. Like— like you being my girlfriend.”

Catra’s brows raise, and she looks amused. “Oh? So I’m your girlfriend now?”

Adora freezes. “I— I mean, only— only if you want—” she splutters.

“Of course it’s what I want,” Catra teases her, pushing herself to the tips of her toes and pulling Adora’s head down, pressing a kiss to her forehead and then wrapping her arms around her neck. “I’ve wanted to be your girlfriend for a long time. It’s just... it’s being my soulmate’s girlfriend that set it back. But...” Catra pulls their mouths back together to give her another quick kiss. “I love you so much, and I know now that I’m ready.”

Adora doesn’t think she’s ever felt this much love surging within her. “I love *you*. As Catra, as my girlfriend, and as my soulmate.”

“One day at a time, right?”

“Yeah,” Adora agrees. “One day at a time.”

*

Chapter End Notes

:)

(it’ll be okay)

white

Chapter Summary

The sun sets on the end and rises on the beginning.

Chapter Notes

walks in a year later with the final chapter, tons of stress, a new @, and a coffee hey

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

time take us

It's not the first time Catra is in Adora's bed in Adora's apartment, but it feels like it is.

She'd slept over at Adora's apartment a few times before everything happened — usually, it had been Adora sleeping over at her apartment, and Catra hadn't thought much of it. It had just been a thing, just them wanting to sleep with their bodies pressed close and warm together and it didn't matter where it was, just that they were both there.

They hadn't said much after Catra drove them here, just repeated things like *I love you* and *I've missed you*. They'd ended up showering together, too: washed each other's hair and pressed against one another, the intimacy of seeing the heart constellation tattoo enough to remind Catra that they're here, they're together, and everything is okay. It had been anything other than sexual, and for that, Catra's grateful. She doesn't think they're ready for that kind of emotional discharge just yet.

But now that they're here, inside of Adora's room with only a dim lamp light on, Catra wearing Adora's clothes (baggy sweats, a t-shirt from some high school soccer camp), it feels like the first time. Maybe it's because it's been a while, or maybe it's because it didn't happen much to begin with. Either way, Catra doesn't care; everything right now smells like the best kind of laundry detergent (the subtle kind with a name like Ocean Breeze or whatever) and something that's just *Adora*, and Catra feels warm, wearing Adora's clothes and having Adora's familiar arms wrapped around her in a hug.

They've been sitting on her bed for what feels like hours now, Catra in Adora's lap, chest to chest, arms wrapped around each other. It's similar to how they were hugging just a couple of hours ago, but it's also different. Neither one of them is crying this time, and it's much

quieter. They simply sit in silence for a long time, and as Catra breathes her girlfriend in, she feels okay.

Nothing has ever felt quite as safe in the uncertainty of the night as being in Adora's arms.

(It all feels like coming home.)

"I missed you," Adora breaks the silence after a period of time; her voice is muffled from where she's buried her face into Catra's shoulder. "I missed you, Catra. I don't want to ever go that long without seeing you again."

"Yeah," Catra agrees, and she tightens her hold on the girl in front of her. "I missed you so much. And... if I can help it, I won't let us go that long again."

"Okay," Adora whispers. "I love you."

"I love you," Catra echoes.

All goes silent once more.

It isn't until a long while later that Catra (heavy-eyed and drowsy now) eventually asks, without pulling back, "do you want me to stay?"

"If that's alright with you," Adora answers quietly. She sounds sleepy, too. "Then I'd really like it if you stayed."

I'll always stay, Catra thinks. Always. I'm done running. I'm never going to run from my soulmate again.

"Okay," Catra murmurs into her shoulder. "I'll stay."

(It's not the first time Catra is in Adora's bed in Adora's apartment, and it is certainly not the last.)

When Catra opens her eyes, the room is bright, the rising sun lighting up the room through Adora's white curtains. She sees the clock on the bedside table that reads as 10:52, and then without really thinking about it, she rolls over.

Adora is still asleep, which is a bit unusual because she always wakes up early, but right now... she looks beautiful. She looks peaceful, face relaxed as she sleeps soundly and heavily. Her lips are parted ever so slightly as she sucks in and releases soft breaths, lashes long and dark against her cheekbones. A warm, thick arm is thrown lazily over Catra's waist, and their legs are brushed together underneath the covers.

Adora.

Her girlfriend.

Her *soulmate*. The one who the universe approved of just for her, the one whose soul was intertwined with hers from the moment they were born. The one who has forgiven her for everything she's done, even though Catra didn't expect her to.

It stirs something within her to think about it, something different than what she's typically experiences when she thinks about her soulmate.

She feels light. She feels happy. She feels *calm*.

Laying here with Adora — with her soulmate —, breathing her in, counting her heartbeats... Catra feels at peace.

It's something she's never truly known, something she never really expected to get.

She's... *content*.

She'll be graduating college in a couple of months. About a week ago, a company had reached out to her about possibly exhibiting her art in one of their shows. There are still other things she fears and other things she'll be stressed about, but her soulmate is no longer one of those things.

It feels so, *so* good to finally have the one thing that's been weighing down on her for nearly two decades finally be released. She feels, at this moment, better than she has in years. Better than she has in a long, long time.

Catra finds herself pushing a bit closer to her girlfriend, smiling when Adora grumbles in her sleep and rolls onto her back, pulling Catra with her. Bright blue eyes open for only a couple of seconds before closing again.

"What..." she pauses to yawn, which has Catra yawning after a second, too. "What time is it?"

"Eleven," Catra whispers, nestling closer so she's laying with her head pressed into Adora's neck and an arm wrapped around her waist.

"Oh," Adora mumbles, voice filled with sleep. "I haven't slept that long in years." There's a few beats of silence, and then: "Do you have any plans for today? You're really warm. I don't think I want to get up."

Catra smiles against her skin. "No. No plans."

"Can we just stay here for a while?"

"Yeah," Catra presses a kiss to her neck, and then pushes herself impossibly closer. "We can stay for however long you want."

That's how it goes.

They simply spend time in each other's presence again, slow and gentle at first. They don't push things too far, instead choosing to take the time to relearn and figure each other out all over again.

On Sunday, two days after they've made up and officially declared themselves as *girlfriends*, Adora tells Catra that she's going back to Eternia for a couple of days over the break to visit Razz. She makes sure Catra knows she's welcome to go back with her, but Catra tells her it's okay, really, she has things to work on here at home, and that she'll miss her when she's gone. They end up facetimeing the two nights Adora is there, and when Adora wakes up early in the morning the second night to find that they're still on the call and she can see Catra having fallen asleep through the screen, she can't help but smile and think *I love her. I love her so much.*

When Adora gets back to Bright Moon, she's barely in her own apartment for more than a few minutes before she heads over to Catra's. When she arrives, Catra greets her with a quick kiss, whispers *can I show you something?* and at Adora's nod, she reaches for her hand and leads her to her room.

What Adora finds inside is beautiful.

In the middle of the room lies an abstract painting of a woman's face split in two; one side is gold, the other blue, and a mess of dark colors surrounds one half while bright colors surround the other to form patterns. Kaleidoscope fractals. Multihued marks.

After a moment of staring, Adora realizes that it must be a self-portrait.

This is surprising because she knows Catra has always struggled with being willing to show emotion and parts of herself in her art, and a self portrait is essentially all of that wrapped into one piece. This particular piece is raw, whispered in the space between them.

It is, without a doubt, one of the best works of art Adora thinks she's ever seen.

"About a week and a half ago, I was reached out to about putting some of my art in an exhibit for a charity," Catra starts, and this particular moment feels so similar to the time Catra first showed Adora her art. "I was told I needed to create something new to submit in order to be considered for acceptance, so I uh..." she trails off a bit then. "I thought about what you said about how art is supposed to be showing the most emotional parts of yourself, and some other advice that's been told to me this past year, and then I started working on this."

There's a break, and when Adora finally manages to tear her gaze away from the painting, she finds that Catra is already staring at her, and her eyes are full of so much love and admiration that Adora can hardly believe it.

“I guess I just wanted to thank you,” she softly says.

Adora squeezes her hand. “Thank me for what?”

“For never giving up,” Catra explains, squeezing her hand back just as tight, “when we were younger. For *always* complimenting my paintings and drawings, no matter what they were. You were the only person I showed my art for a long time, because I was too scared to show anyone I knew, but— but the appreciation and the validation you gave me kept me going sometimes, when Weaver told me that my art wouldn’t get me anywhere. I always painted and drew for myself as an outlet, but I’m not sure if it would’ve gone as far without you, so... thank you. Thank you for everything, Adora.”

Adora glances back at the painting, and then back at Catra. Her eyes are wide and open, shining with vulnerability.

“Catra,” Adora begins, turning to fully face her girlfriend, gently cupping her face in between her hands. “Do you understand how fucking talented you are?”

“Adora—” Catra starts, cheeks running warm beneath Adora’s palms. All of the smatterings of Catra’s freckles are visible this close. Adora loves that—her freckles.

“No,” Adora interrupts, “like, seriously. I cannot believe you created this. I can't believe you've created *everything* I've seen, every painting on my arms or legs or chest or neck, every pen drawing. Sure, I was excited to see what you'd do every time — and a partial reason was just because you're my soulmate — but a big reason was because you were, and still are, just so, *so* gifted at this,” she leans forward to press her lips against Catra’s forehead, then her cheeks, then her nose, then her smiling lips. “You’re *going* to get accepted into that exhibit, and I can’t wait to see where your art takes you.”

Catra’s cheeks are still red with embarrassment, but she’s smiling now, too, eyes bright.

Without another word, Catra thumbs at Adora’s shoulder and then leans in, pressing their mouths together.

It’s not their first kiss, not by far. It’s not even their first kiss since realizing they were soulmates, or their second. Something about it still feels just as exciting.

For a moment they don’t even move; for a moment they just stand there, not making any moves to deepen the kiss. Adora marvels at how full and round Catra’s lips are, how her eyelashes feel fluttering against her cheek. It’s so lovely to kiss her like this inside of her room, with the evening sun painting lines of gold on the wall behind them.

One of them finally moves, and then it unfurls into a slow, deep kiss. Adora moves her hands from Catra’s face to her waist, gently tugging her closer. She takes Catra’s lip into her mouth and sucks on it gently before she releases it, wet and swollen. They separate only for a second, but then Catra is pulling Adora back down and they’re falling into each other all over again, firmer and deeper.

They kiss again, and again, and again. They kiss for several long, lazy moments before they part again for breath. In the next moment, Adora sits on the edge of Catra's bed before she looks back up at Catra.

Her mismatched eyes are lidded, cheeks still flushed.

Adora swallows hard, heat pooling in her gut.

"Come here?" she quietly requests.

There's a beat that passes, and then Catra is lowering herself on top of her, straddling her legs. Her knees bracket Adora's hips, and she sits firmly on her thighs. Adora quickly braces her by holding her lithe waist in her hands; feels Catra press a hand to Adora's face.

"Here?" Catra asks, innocent and coy. Her eyes are still lidded, and her skin is soft where her shirt rides up from the top of her shorts.

"Yeah," Adora murmurs, "right here."

She tilts her chin upward so Catra will kiss her again, and she does, trailing her fingers from where they'd been cupping her face to the column of her neck to her arms, uncovered by the t-shirt she's wearing. Catra's hands go there next, rubbing up and down in a soothing manner. Then she changes the angle of the kiss, tilting her head so she can slot their mouths together more firmly, and Adora *melts*. She makes a small noise into the kiss, curling her fingers around the fabric of Catra's t-shirt. Catra's lips pull away after a minute, and Adora wants to protest for a second until Catra's lips find her cheekbones, her jaw, the space behind her jaw. Adora's eyes drift close, and she tilts her head back.

"Love you," Catra whispers into her neck, before making her way back up to find her mouth. Adora squeezes her waist; whispers *love you too* in the seconds they pull away to catch their breath before they're kissing each other again.

They sink into a series of slow, warm kisses, Catra raking her fingers through Adora's hair. They're kissing and kissing and Adora is losing herself in it, losing herself in Catra, losing herself in this girl.

Catra makes a soft, broken noise into her throat that resembles a moan. Adora slips her hands underneath Catra's shirt, and smiles into the kiss when Catra trembles ever so slightly against her because she's ticklish on her sides. Catra nips her bottom lip in reprimand, and Adora makes a quiet noise in response, moving to wrap one arm around Catra's waist and the other around her shoulders instead.

She's missed this; missed everything feeling so right. *Catra* feels right. Catra being her *soulmate* feels right. Everything with Catra has just always felt right. It feels right to touch her again, to be with her, to just simply sit here and kiss her until Adora can't remember anything else but that.

It feels so, *so* good—

There's the sound of shoes hitting the floor repeatedly as someone approaches the room, but neither one of them seems to register it until it's followed by a voice.

“Hey Wildcat, I just came back to grab a few— *Ooooooh* my God.”

They both freeze, immediately pulling away from each other to glance at the doorway. Scorpia is standing there, she hasn't moved, but her hands are covering her eyes and her mouth is wide open.

“Uh, hey, Scorp,” Catra chuckles awkwardly, eyes crinkled slightly.

“I just came to— you guys were— okay, um, shoot, I'm sorry for interrupting—”

“Scorpia,” Catra interrupts, finally moving to sit next to Adora rather than in her lap, much to Adora's displeasure. “You can uncover your eyes. We're not naked. And didn't you say you were staying at Perfuma's?”

Scorpia peeks through her fingers, and when she deems the space as clear, she drops her hands. “I'm sorry, I just came to grab something and I wanted to check in on you, so—” she cuts herself off then, and something seems to click in her mind. “Wait. Adora's here.”

She points at Adora, and Adora feels her lips curve upward into a grin. “It would appear that way, yes,” Catra responds.

“You guys were kissing,” Scorpia adds, like she's trying to connect something together.

“What's your point?”

“Adora's here, and you guys were kissing!” she exclaims excitedly, “does that mean you two are back together? Did I *help*? Aww, this is just so exciting you guys!”

Catra rolls her eyes. “Don't make a big deal out of it.”

“I won't! I won't!” Scorpia loudly says, smile wide. “Just pretend I was never here!” She disappears from the doorway then, and only a few seconds pass before the sound of the front door opening and closing echoes in the small apartment.

“You know she's probably going to make a big deal out of it, right?” Adora asks after a moment of silence, turning back to face her girlfriend. Her soulmate. Her Catra.

(She doesn't think she'll ever stop saying it to herself.)

Catra groans, head falling onto Adora's shoulder. “I know.”

Adora laughs, wrapping an arm around her girlfriends shoulders, and kisses her again.

It's a warm day. One where the sun radiates heat deep in their bones, igniting passion and fire. There's a gentle breeze that offers comfort to those who dislike hot weather like this, and it ruffles Adora's ponytail ever so slightly.

Game days always get her adrenaline going, always get her heart pumping. Even more so today: it's their biggest game of the season because, not only are they going against their main rival team, but it's usually always a neck and neck game too. Today is special for a different reason, though: today, not only have her friends decided to come watch her play, but today, Catra is coming, too.

Tilting her head back to let the sun warm her face, Adora smiles. She always gets to the field early — the game still won't start for another hour — but she needs time to get set up and start warming up.

For the past week, she's felt lighter. Happier. Like a weight has been relieved from her shoulders. The feeling in her chest always swells when she's thinking about her girlfriend.

And then, as if Catra can sense Adora thinking about her, she feels the familiar jolt of their connection opening.

It still feels like lightning burning in her veins, like something deep within her core is being alight with fire, warming her entire being. Like she holds the entire universe, and maybe even more, in the palms of her hands. It feels *stronger* than all the other times the connection has ever been opened, like something within her is finally being fulfilled.

The connection between them opening... it feels different now. It's not like it's the *first* time it's ever opened, but it's the first time since Adora found out that the girl she had already been in love with is her soulmate, and it almost feels stronger now. It feels like the surging fire within her that's always desperately clawed at her and begged for more has finally, *finally*, been settled.

That incomplete part of her, the one she had told her mother about when she was five... it feels complete.

She's never, *ever* been happier.

hey, dummy are the first words that are written on her arm. Accompanying it is the familiar feel of the press of a pen and a feeling of affection she understands is geared toward her. ***you left your jersey at my apartment this morning. don't you need it?***

Adora stretches in the sunlight for a moment, and then heads off the field and down to the locker room toward her bag. She's made a point of trying to keep a soulmate pen on her wherever she goes now, but she's sure that even if she didn't have one, someone around her would.

That's an extra, Adora writes, smiling wide. It's never felt this good to have the connection open. To feel her girlfriend's emotions. To feel her *heart*. ***I left it for you to wear :)***

oh is all Catra responds with, and maybe if they were texting Adora would stop and think, *is this a good oh or a bad oh?* but because she can feel everything Catra is feeling, she can definitely tell that it's a good oh because there's excitement bubbling from Catra. Adora kind of figured Catra would like to wear her jersey, anyway.

And I have a phone, you know she continues to write. *Could've just texted me*

yes but this way is cooler

Adora giggles. Actually *giggles*. *I'm not sure I agree*. She totally, one-hundred percent agrees.

you know i can feel literally everything you're feeling when the connection is open, right? Adora's like, ninety-nine percent sure Catra is laughing right now. *u can't lie to me during this*

Shoot, ur right Adora writes, still giggling. She knows it's futile, but she still adds, *But I'm not lying*.

sure

Im not, Adora writes back, followed with a playful roll of her eyes. She's not even surprised by Catra's next words.

hey, u better not be rolling ur eyes at me

I would never, Adora sarcastically replies. *Now get dressed before you end up being late*

She's going to have an entire conversation on her arms before she goes out to play, and although she knows that she could easily just wash off her part and ask Catra to wash off hers, she doesn't mind. It isn't exactly unusual to see people with writing on their bodies anyway, and now that she's finally getting to really experience it herself, she couldn't be happier. Besides, it's common etiquette not to stare at the words on someone's skin anyway.

About twenty minutes before the game is due to start, Adora feels the jump of the connection opening once again, followed by the words *im here* making their appearance on her arm. This time she gets a feeling of nervousness from Catra rather than the fond and loving feelings from before, so Adora makes sure to let her coach know she'll be right back before quickly heading toward the entrance of the stadium.

Catra is near the first set of bleachers, clad in a pair of jean shorts and a simple white shirt underneath one of Adora's old jerseys. The written words on her arm match that of Adora's, although some of the ones closer to her hands are a bit smudged now, and Adora immediately smiles upon seeing her. When Catra finally sees her, the smile that lights up her face is beautiful.

"Hey, Adora," she greets once Adora gets close enough to hear.

"Hi," Adora leans in to steal a quick kiss after speaking, and then reaches for Catra's hand. "Is Scorpio here?"

“Uh, yeah,” Catra tells her, “she said everyone’s waiting by the concessions. Mermista and Sea Hawk weren’t there yet when she texted me, but they might be now.”

The way she speaks is quiet and hesitant. Adora turns to face her girlfriend, brows furrowed together ever so slightly together in concern.

“Hey,” she starts, “are you okay?”

There’s a few beats that pass before Catra meets her eyes. “I’m just…” she takes a breath. “Are you sure about this? I haven’t… I haven’t seen your friends in months. What if they hate me, or— or they don’t like me, or something else?”

“Catra, they’re not going to hate you,” Adora tells her, squeezing her hand in reassurance. “And even if they did, I wouldn’t care; what matters is that *I* love you. But seriously, they won’t hate you. Plus, Scorpia and Entrapta will be there, right?”

“Right,” Catra repeats. Adora lifts their hands, and then presses a kiss to both of her knuckles.

“Come on,” she tells her, “it’ll be okay.”

“Promise?” Catra asks. Her mismatched eyes, so pretty and warm, are shining back at her.

Adora leans forward to press their lips together. “Promise.”

When they approach the group, who unsurprisingly look like a chaotic mess as they attempt to figure out where they’re going to sit, only a few of them look surprised upon seeing Adora’s arm wrapped around Catra’s shoulders.

(As they approach, Adora can see the way that Catra’s brows dip ever so slightly in the way that she does when she gets nervous. Adora, although she hasn’t admitted it, is a little nervous herself.

But… she thinks of Catra. Of… of just Catra. Of her soulmate. Of how they’re the same, of how they’ve always been the same.

She figures that after everything else they’ve gone through to get here, really telling their friends about it will be a walk in the park.)

“Guys, this is Catra,” Adora introduces her, and before any of them can point out the fact that they all definitely already know who Catra is, she continues with, “my soulmate.”

(It’s for Entrapta, Perfuma, Mermista, and Sea Hawk’s sake more than anything else, because Glimmer and Bow already know about everything that happened due to demanding to be told everything that happened immediately after it happened.)

After a few beats of silence between them all as the words seemingly float in the air, Perfuma is the first to visibly react, cupping her hands over her mouth and gasping in delight. Entrapta smiles, Sea Hawk pumps a fist into the air, and Mermista’s eyebrows raise to her forehead.

“Wait, you mean, like, your *actual* soulmate?” she asks, clearly surprised. “Like, you’re not just saying that in a *I’m in love with her and she’s my soulmate now* way? Like, she’s the person who had to wake up that one morning with a dick on her face when you got drunk?”

Everyone looks a little intrigued at the mention of that, and Adora laughs because in all honesty, she had completely forgotten about that. Catra rolls her eyes, and then elbows Adora’s side. “Yeah, what the hell was up with that?”

Adora shakes her head in her laughter. For some reason, telling them all officially makes it seem more real. “Yep,” she tells Mermista, popping the p. “She’s my actual soulmate.” *She always has been.* Taking a breath, Adora turns more toward the group as a whole for this next part, “and we’re dating now.”

(Many tears are shed. Adora just finds it amusing that it comes from neither her or Catra.)

Adora’s hands slide up Catra’s midriff from where she’s sitting directly behind her on top of her motorcycle, grazing just below her breasts. Catra gives her a short, incredulous look, but Adora sees her expression just long enough to register the grin on her face before the light turns green and the engine revs as they take off once again. The city flies by in shades of light and darkness; sometimes the glare of 24-hour restaurant signs or office buildings will have Adora closing her eyes and pressing her face into Catra’s shoulder. They pass by a fried food place. A Starbucks. A club with the doors wide open, loud music and people pouring out onto the sidewalk.

Adora tightens her grip on Catra’s waist and thinks of today: how her team won the game, and how all of her friends came to the party to celebrate. How everyone still gets along. How she’s never felt better.

They reach the parking garage underneath Catra’s apartment building.

They dismount the bike.

Once inside, they walk mere inches apart from each other on the way to the elevator, passing the mailman and a couple of other people. When they get in, Catra presses the UP button.

Adora shivers, trying not to think about anything as she watches the elevator ascend from the inside. She’s trying her best to keep her mind totally blank, but she’s aware of too many things right now: her inner thighs, still warm from Catra’s hands. Her spine, her neck, her un-kissed mouth.

The elevator doors open, and they walk the short distance from there to the door of Catra’s shared apartment. Catra pulls her keys out of her pocket and calmly unlocks the door.

They step inside.

Adora shuts the door behind her.

They crash into each other at the same time, bodies colliding only a few feet away from the door. Catra drags Adora's face down to meet her in a messy, open-mouthed kiss, and then her hands are on Adora's shoulders and she's being shoved against the door. Adora moans into Catra's mouth the second she feels her back connect with the wood, feels Catra's hands pressed to either side of her face, feels her tongue find her own.

Adora's own hands find Catra's ass and grip hard, hearing Catra swear in the hot way she does when her fingers knead into the firm muscle. Catra's fingers move from Adora's face to her hair, grabbing her ponytail and tugging on it so Adora exposes her neck and Catra can fit her mouth to the column of her throat.

"Beginning to— *oh God*— think you have a thing for my neck," Adora whimpers as Catra sucks a bruise onto the sensitive skin.

"Beginning to think *you* have a thing for me having a thing for your neck," Catra retaliates. She pulls back to admire her handiwork, and her lips are red and wet and her eyes are burning bright.

Adora wants to eat her alive.

"Fuck," is all Adora whispers, and then she's kissing her again, molding their bodies to fit together and closing the small space between them. Everything feels hot. "Wanna be inside you," Adora whispers, before responding with a moan of her own when Catra moans *Adora* at the words. "Can I— tonight, can—"

"Yes," Catra whispers, but she pulls back for a second when Adora tries to guide her to her bedroom. "Okay, fuck, yeah, but..." she trails off, hand finding the side of Adora's face so she'll look at her eyes. "How much have you had to drink?"

"If I'm being honest," Adora says in between trying to catch her breath, "I only had, like, one and a half of a can of beer because I was kind of hoping this would happen."

Catra grins, pressing another kiss to her lips. She hasn't had anything to drink, being the ones who drove them here, and Adora is absolutely thrilled to know that. Toward the beginning of the party, Adora had started drinking just to have fun with the rest of the team, but as time went on and she and Catra got a bit more handsy, she had stopped.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Catra still asks, softer now. "I need you to tell me you're sure."

"I'm sure," Adora reassures her. "I promise. Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Catra tells her, smiling now. "Promise."

It feels, when Adora is kissed again, like there's nothing in the space surrounding them. There's no floor beneath her feet, no walls on every side. There's nothing but Catra and her warm lips and her tiny hands, everywhere all at once.

It's been a while, Catra laughs at herself when she tries to pull Adora's shirt off, only for it to get caught on the chain of her necklace. In turn, Adora's hands fumble clumsily at Catra's belt buckle, but in comparison to the shakiness she got from the nerves during their first time, this time, it's because of how excited she is to do this again. *It's okay*, she tells herself, because even though they're not as practiced as what they were getting at in the months before, she knows that they'll have time to get there again.

After all, they have all of the time in the world.

(Everything about Catra is soft but solid. She feels steady and dependable now. It's what Adora has always associated with *Catra*, but never with her soulmate.

It feels, for the first time, like she finally can.)

In the morning, the first thing she's aware of is the sound of someone showering.

The second is that the space next to her is cold, but it still smells like honey and cinnamon.

The third is that she's sore all over. The space between her legs especially aches, but it's a good kind of ache. A really, really good one.

Adora stretches, trying to gauge the time based on the light streaming in from the window. It can't be that late in the morning, because the light seeping in from the window is the darker grayish kind, unlike the bright gold of pure sunlight.

She's just present of mind enough to know that it's probably Catra in the shower because she's pretty sure the apartment is empty aside from them. Having gotten comfortably used to holding Catra while they sleep, Adora reaches for Catra's empty pillow and pulls it into her arms. She covers herself almost completely with the blankets, cold from the lack of clothes and body once pressed against her, and shoves her face deeper into the pillow. Everything smells like lavender and familiarity, and it's all too easy to fall back asleep.

When she wakes up again, it's to the feeling of someone running their fingers through her hair. The motion feels so calming and relaxing that all Adora really does is slit her eyes open, nudge into the feeling, and then close her eyes again. She hears the resulting sound of Catra chuckling, and then feels her press a kiss to her forehead.

"You're not going to go on your run?" Catra asks. Her voice is soft and soothing; it reminds Adora of warm honey.

"No," Adora responds, still keeping her eyes closed. "Too early. Why 're you even up?"

“It’s seven-thirty. I have to get to class. And while I actually agree that seven-thirty is too early to do anything, *you’re* usually up by now.”

“You tired me out,” Adora murmurs, finally opening her eyes to see Catra sitting on the edge of the bed and facing her. She’s dressed in some sweatpants and an old band t-shirt Adora thinks might be hers, and her hair is still slightly wet from her shower. “You’re a terrible influence.”

Catra’s eyebrows lift. “*I* tired *you* out?”

“Yeah. You’re the one who suggested using the strap. That was hard work.”

“And I didn’t hear any complaints, both when you were using it and when it was being used on you.”

Adora snorts into the pillow. “Don’t you have class to get to?”

“Uh-huh,” Catra laughs, ducking to press a quick kiss to her lips. “Don’t you have work to get to?”

“Shift doesn’t start till ten.”

“Okay,” Catra stands from her previous place of sitting on the bed. “Treat yourself to whatever’s in the fridge. If Scorpia came back last night she might make waffles. I’ll, um, see you soon?”

Adora smiles at her girlfriend, who’s staring at her with a bit of hopefulness in her eyes. *She’s beautiful*, Adora finds herself thinking. *She’s so beautiful, and she’s mine. She’s my love, she’s my soulmate, she’s the one who loves me.*

Catra loves me.

“Yeah,” Adora whispers. And then, when Catra smiles in response and moves toward the door of the room, she calls out a quiet, “I love you.”

“I love you too,” Catra responds just as easily.

For as great as everything is now, it isn’t all sunshine and rainbows.

Finding the things that work for them, for the people they’ve become now, for the relationship that is similar in some ways but different in others is just as challenging as Adora expected it to be.

On a particularly warm morning, she’s late for class because she didn’t expect to have to wait her turn for the shower, being that she and Bow already have a timing system of their own. There’s another night that she’s out late practicing and doesn’t even realize what she’s forgotten until she feels the familiar tingle on her arm and reads the words ***hey, are you home? i thought i was supposed to come over tonight.***

Shit, she thinks, and because she doesn't have a pen on her, she races back to where her phone is in her bag on a bench. There's a couple of missed calls from Catra and a few missed messages from about half an hour ago. They were supposed to start a new show they were looking into binge watching, but Adora didn't realize how late it had gotten.

"I'm so sorry," is the first thing tumbling out of her mouth when Catra answers the phone. "My coach held us for longer than expected, and I completely lost track of the time, and I'm so sorry. Are you outside my apartment? I can see if Bow can run over to get you inside."

She fully expects Catra to be in a huffy mood, perhaps upset that it was Adora's idea for her to come over in the first place only for it to end up like this, but she hears Catra laugh on the other end instead. "It's fine, Adora. You gave me some time to draw," she tells her. "And yeah, I'm outside the door, but I'll wait."

"Okay," Adora responds, relieved, as she heads back to the locker room to quickly grab the rest of her things. And then, because she still feels bad, she says, "I'm on my way right now, and I'll order Thai for us when I get there. I know you've been wanting it."

"Sounds like a deal," Catra tells her easily.

They have their shared bumps in the road, but all of it is solved or worked through easily enough. A few days after the mishap, they end up exchanging keys to their apartments to avoid something like that happening again. And the next time Adora gets back after a run and finds that the shower is being occupied by her girlfriend, instead of waiting, she simply joins her in the shower. It's nothing they haven't done before, and shared showers will help with the water bill anyway, is what she tells Catra when she asks what she's doing, shampoo and water running down her face.

(And if she *still* ends up late to class because they end up getting a little too handsy in the shower, well, that's no one's fault but her own.)

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In April, Catra is finally contacted again by the hosts of the art showcase. She's standing by Adora's desk, wearing nothing but one of her t-shirts and some underwear and reading her emails while Adora studies for her finals. Catra is supposed to be studying too, but she had been told she'd find out whether or not she'd been accepted today, and she hasn't been able to think about anything else since.

"What'd they say?" Adora asks, sitting at her desk and tapping her pencil against the wooden material. On her forearm, there's a mixture of dark colors as wicked thorns and crumpled roses curl around her. It matches the painting on Catra's own arm; actual proof that Catra has been more stressed than usual because of this all.

“I don’t know,” Catra responds, still staring at the screen as she navigates her emails. When she finally finds the one she’s looking for, she clicks on it, and reads the same paragraph over and over again until the words blend together and she can barely make sense of them.

She’s not imagining anything. She must not be.

“I got in,” is what she says, voice trembling. It feels like this isn’t real. “They want to meet with me next week to discuss some stuff, and the actual exhibit won’t be until July, but—”

Before she even knows what’s happening, she’s crushed in a hug that only lasts for a few seconds before she’s being lifted up and spun around.

“Adora!”

Adora’s laughter is audible, and after a second, so is Catra’s as they twirl around the room. “You got in!”

“I did!” Catra smiles breathlessly once Adora sets her down and presses a long, loud kiss to her lips. “Fuck, I can’t believe this. I’m actually going to have my art in a real exhibit. Like, people are going to see it. And be able to purchase it. What the fuck. What the *fuck*.”

“I can,” Adora tells her sweetly, and Catra can’t even find it in her to roll her eyes at Adora’s cheesiness like usual because she’s buzzing with a newfound sense of energy. She feels like she can do anything. “I can one-hundred percent believe it. *One-hundred percent*. Like, one and double o.”

Catra looks at her girlfriend with a fond smile. Adora looks straight back at her with pride and love and so much more in her eyes. Her usual hair poof is sort flat from the events of the day, and her left cheek is a bit red from when she accidentally fell asleep sitting up with her head on her desk while she was supposed to be studying. Catra feels a surge of warmth spread all the way down to her toes. What an idiot.

She kisses her girlfriend just because she can. When they pull back, foreheads pressed together, nothing but quiet breaths surround them until Adora whispers, “I’ve always believed in you. You know that, right? And I’ll always continue to believe in you. *Always*.”

Catra does. She really, really does.

“I know,” is all she says, and keeps their foreheads pressed together.

A lot of things happen in the several weeks that follow. Adora talks about possibly getting a dog and naming it Swift Wind, to which Catra promptly screws her nose in disgust, points to Melog, and claims, *Melog doesn't agree* as the gray cat simply stares at them from his place on the couch. Bright Moon University’s girl’s soccer team wins almost all of their games. Perfuma and Scorpia get engaged, which is admittedly a pretty big deal.

(Adora had secretly whispered to Catra, the night they found out, “don’t you think it’s too fast?”)

“Not really,” Catra disagreed. “I mean, they’ve been dating for the better part of a year. Plus, they were the type of soulmates to talk since the moment they knew how to write. I’m just surprised one of them didn’t immediately propose the moment they met.”

Adora hummed her agreement. “Yeah, you’re right. When you put it like that, it makes me surprised Glimmer and Bow aren’t engaged. They’ve been together since high school.”

“Everyone’s different,” Catra had added while cuddling up warmly next to her girlfriend, and Adora hummed again.)

The other big thing that happens is that Catra kind of realizes that she’s in love with Adora.

“I mean, I’ve known for months that I’m in love with her,” Catra attempts to fix after she admits those previous words to Entrapta, “it’s just that, I don’t know. It just set in that *I love her.*”

“I still don’t understand what you’re trying to say,” Entrapta says on the other end of the line. Catra sighs.

“Like, I’m in love with someone,” she tries to amend, a small smile creeping up on her face. “Someone who’s not going to leave me. Someone who loves me back.”

“Oh, I think I understand. Like you’re finally accepting that nothing bad will happen. Most likely.”

“Yeah,” Catra flops onto her bed.

“You trust her now.”

“I mean, yeah? Like, I trusted her already, but—”

“You trust her *completely* now.”

“...Yeah.”

“This has all just set in for you?” Entrapta sounds almost fascinated. Catra rolls her eyes.

“I guess so, yeah.”

When does Catra realize it?

Circle one.

a) They’re taking a drive. Well — Adora is driving Bow’s old car, and Catra is just sitting in the passenger seat, the budding spring season world passing by. They’re not driving anywhere in particular — Bow had asked Adora if she could go pick some things up for him at the grocery store, and Catra had come along. Now they’re just driving along the backroads

far out from Bright Moon with no destination in mind. Adora's wearing a simple pink t-shirt that still allows Catra to openly stare at her arms, the sky is blue, everything around them is green, and it's all very nice.

They drive for hours with very little words spoken between them before they return to the city, and when Adora finally drops Catra off at her apartment that night (she nearly just asks to stay with Adora again until it occurs to her she hasn't been to her own apartment in almost a week), she finds it very hard to leave.

b) It's the first of May. Catra is at the local animal shelter because she had felt a bit stressed due to her upcoming finals. Talking to Adora through their connection has become something familiar now—something that feels like any other thing she's been doing for years, so she's almost surprised that when Spinerella sees the words on her arms, she lifts her brows in surprise, and then gently asks her if something has happened with the soulmate she's always clearly tried to avoid mentioning before.

Catra tells her all about Adora, about how they're soulmates. How they didn't know for a while, but they're good now. They're *really* good now. And it's so easy to tell Spinerella — and Netossa, when she walks into the cat pen they're cleaning — that Catra doesn't even remember how hard this would have been in the past until Spinerella pulls her into a hug and tells her how proud she is of her.

c) Catra's last final of university happens to be the class she shares with DT, so naturally, Catra ends up at a party in celebration that same night. It's Thursday, it's late, and Adora still has a final tomorrow, so she doesn't come with her. The result: it's two a.m. and DT has gotten an uber to take them back to their separate apartments due to the fact that they're both really, *really* drunk. Her last messages with Adora consisted of her letting her girlfriend know she's going home now, and that she promises she's safe. Her hands are only slightly shaky when she pulls her key out of her pocket to open the apartment, but what surprises her foggy brain is that Adora is there, Adora is sitting on the couch, and she looks surprised.

“Hi,” Catra says, smiling wide because Adora is *here*. “Hi, why— why are you at my apartment?” Not that she's complaining.

“Um, this is *my* apartment,” Adora laughs, looking slightly less surprised as she sets down her textbook and papers just as Catra tries to sit down on the couch like a functional person but sort of falls into Adora's lap instead.

“Oh,” Catra says, pressing her nose into Adora's neck when she sort of just curls into a ball in her lap. Then, her eyes widen, and she slurs, “oh, I must've given the uber driver your address. Oh fuck, I'm *really* drunk.”

“Yeah, you are,” Adora tells her, laughing softly, pressing a kiss to the side of Catra's hair. Her voice is so pretty and her arms are nice and warm around her. She lifts Catra off of her lap to get up a minute later — says she's gonna get Catra a glass of water when she whines in objection — and Catra sort of flops down onto the couch and thinks about how soft and warm and floaty she feels until she sees the textbook Adora set down on the coffee table and frowns.

“Oh,” she murmurs in realization, “oh shit, you’re studying. I’m sorry, it’s late and I interrupted and—”

“Baby, hey, it’s okay,” Adora tells her, sitting down on the edge of the couch and guiding her to sit up. She presses the glass cup against Catra’s lips for her to drink, and Catra eagerly accepts. “I was about to stop anyway. It’s my last final tomorrow, and it isn’t even scheduled until four. I’ll have time to study more if I feel like I need it, which I probably won’t.”

“Oh,” Catra repeats for what is probably the millionth time. And then, after gathering her thoughts together, she says: “yeah, you won’t even need to. You’re so fuckin’ smart. Like, the smartest person I know. *Like*, holy shit type of smart.”

And Adora simply brushes her hair away from her face and kisses her forehead, whispers *thank you*. It’s settled quickly after that that she’ll stay here at Adora’s apartment tonight, and Adora carries her to bed.

d) Two days before they’re all due to graduate, Adora and Catra are lying on Catra’s couch. It’s sometime close to midnight, and Scorpia had put on some animated fantasy show for the three of them to watch only to end up retreating to her room to go to sleep. Adora is lying between Catra’s legs with her head just below Catra’s chest, arms circled tight around her waist. Catra is slowly falling asleep, Adora’s weight warm and heavy and comforting on top of her, when Adora suddenly speaks.

“Catra?” she asks, voice merely a whisper in the quiet of the room. If it weren’t for how low the TV was, Catra doesn’t think she would have heard her.

“Mm,” Catra hums, arms coming up to wrap around her girlfriend’s shoulders.

“After we graduate and stuff,” she starts, “do you want to go back to Eternia with me? Just—just for a couple of days? I want...” she trails off a bit, and Catra finally opens her eyes, feeling the sleepiness quickly drain from her bones. “I want you to meet my mom.”

Adora is still lying with her head facing the TV, but her grip on Catra has tightened. Her voice is quiet. Catra moves her arms so one of her hands is in Adora’s hair, fingernails running through the golden strands.

Her mom. Adora, her soulmate, wants her to meet *her mom*. The one she wasn’t ready for her to meet back in December, the one she’s asking her to meet now.

Wow.

“Yeah, princess,” Catra whispers, staring up at the ceiling. She can’t believe Adora trusts her enough to do this. “Of course. I’d really, *really* love to meet your mom.”

“Okay,” is all Adora says.

Then she is scooting forward, nose nudging into Catra’s neck, twisting her fingers into Catra’s cotton t-shirt, burrowing as far as possible. Catra lets her; she simply breathes in, filling her lungs with Adora Grayskull, and pulls her even closer.

e) All of the above.

Although it's the beginning of June now, the Eternia early morning air is cool, coating the grass with fresh morning dew. The sun is just beginning to peak over the horizon, lighting the sky with the first bright red-gold rays of pure sunlight. Adora's hand is warm in Catra's in the midst of it all as Catra carefully follows her through the cemetery.

"It's, um... been a while since I've been here," Adora whispers while they walk. Catra fully expects her to say that she hasn't been here since Christmas, or even March during Spring Break, but what she says instead is: "since the beginning of February, I think? I mean, I came to put fresh flowers in March, but I didn't really talk to her like I usually do."

Although she tries not to, Catra feels herself stiffen. The beginning of February would have been only a few weeks after Catra had broken everything off. She wonders, and is almost scared for what Adora would have talked about then.

"Hey," Adora nudges her, "I didn't start spewing shit about you or anything. I'm pretty sure I just... told her things about falling in love with you, and how I regretted not bringing you to meet her before everything happened. But—" Adora takes a breath, and Catra squeezes her hand, watching her— "I'm glad I waited, now. I'm glad I waited because everything is so good between us, and I'm ready."

Catra stares. Adora doesn't really seem to notice that she's sort of at a loss for words—her brows are furrowed in concentration, and her skin looks like honey in the sunlight.

(f) This moment, right now.

g) And the next one.

h) And every other moment after that.)

"Okay," Catra eventually murmurs, hand grip tight in Adora's. "I'm really proud of you, you know. And I'll try my best to make a good first impression."

Adora chuckles shakily. "You'll do great."

They reach the graves less than a minute later. Mara's is next to a large willow tree, limbs outstretched and swaying gently with the breeze. Directly next to Mara's gravestone is another one, and the person's name reads as *Hope*. Underneath the date of birth and passing and other words, it reads *soulmate to Mara Grayskull*. There's dried up flowers in front of it as if someone came to pay their respects recently. Catra's lips curl up into a small smile at the sight of it all.

She gives Adora's hand one last squeeze before she takes a step back to give Adora the space she needs to talk. Adora's gone very still and silent, and they stand there without any words

between them for several moments before she finally speaks.

“Hey, mom. I’m, uh... doing a lot better than the last time I came to see you. I graduated and finally got my bachelor’s degree, but I’m going to have to go through *more* schooling to get my master’s,” Adora huffs at that last part, annoyed. Catra chuckles underneath her breath. “Razz is doing good. She’s getting older, but she can still cook really well. Nothing about her ever changes, really.”

She takes a deep breath and crouches down to place the water lilies they stopped to buy at the store on the way over. When she stands back up she looks over her shoulder and stretches her hand out for Catra.

Catra takes it.

“I brought someone to meet you,” Adora continues, “Her name is Catra, and... and she’s my soulmate.” Her voice cracks on the word *soulmate*, and Catra squeezes her hand again in an attempt to reassure her she’s not going anywhere. “I finally found her, mom. It— it took a while, and it wasn’t an *easy* while, but I wouldn’t change a thing about it because everything is okay. *We’re* okay, and I’m so happy now.”

She lets out a shuddering breath, and then reaches up to wipe her eyes before any tears can escape. Catra clears her throat and straightens up a bit.

“Uh, hi. My name is Catra, and it’s nice to meet you Mrs. Grayskull,” she begins, voice soft. Next to her, Adora tightens her grip on her hand. “You did a good job raising Adora. Like, a *really* good job. She’s so amazing, and sometimes I still can’t believe that she’s the one who the universe thinks should be mine. She’s really smart, and she’s gonna do great things with her life. She already is, considering she somehow manages to put up with me.”

Adora turns toward her then, a watery smile on her face. Catra returns the small smile, and then reaches up to brush her knuckles against Adora’s cheekbone. Her smile grows, and then she snuffles again and shuffles forward, reaching out in question for a hug. Catra quickly circles her own arms around her and holds her tight. Adora’s head drops to Catra’s shoulder.

“You don’t have to worry about her anymore,” Catra continues, eyes returning to what she can see of the grave over Adora’s tall stature. “I may have really messed up in the past, but I’m going to do my best to take care of her now. I’m not letting her go again. I promise.”

Adora’s grip on her shirt tightens at the words, and Catra makes sure to hold her close in promise.

The best moment of Catra’s life is pretty simple.

It’s them, after the lights in the house have been turned off except for the small lamp on Adora’s childhood dresser. It’s them when the rest of the small town is sleeping, and Catra is

curled up beneath the covers, watching her girlfriend change into softer clothes. It's them, together.

"I've been thinking about it," Adora suddenly whispers, breaking the silence between them as she pulls a shirt on over herself and Catra lifts her eyes. "I bet Weaver was just trying to get you to ruin your future with your soulmate. Like... like she did with hers."

Catra takes a breath. The mention of her former adoptive mother hasn't come up at all since Catra's explanation in the park a few months ago. It hasn't been something she had thought would come up now.

Still she says, with her voice quiet and slightly ashamed: "She almost succeeded."

(The best moment of Catra's life is Adora shutting off the light. It's her crawling into bed and wrapping an arm around her, brushing her lips over her forehead and saying *hey* in a soft manner before she speaks again.)

"But she didn't," Adora continues in a hushed tone, arms wrapped around Catra, a single hand combing through her hair. "She didn't. You're here. I'm here. We're good."

"We're good," Catra repeats, smiling against Adora's chest. "We're good."

(The best moment of Catra's life is the two of them curled around each other. It's how safe and warm Catra always feels in Adora's presence, but especially in Adora's arms. It's how she can feel Adora's breath on her skin, their hearts beating, everything slow and soft with sleep.

It's them. It's good. It's hers.)

"Hey, Adora?" Catra asks, minutes after they've spoken and all has gone quiet.

"Hey, Catra," Adora mumbles into Catra's hair, voice low with sleep.

"I'm glad it's you," Catra tells her.

She hears the sharp inhale Adora makes, feels the way her body tenses ever so slightly. There's a few beats that pass, and then Adora pulls Catra impossibly tighter against her.

"I'm glad it's you too," she whispers.

The best moment of Catra's life is the morning after. And the next, and the next.

Really, it's all of the afters that follow.

Chapter End Notes

it's over! we made it!!

ahhh this next part is going to be long, but,

i think i can now confidently say chapter two and chapter eleven were the hardest to write. similar to how chapter two went, i wrote this chapter, didn't like it, started over, wrote the entire thing, still didn't like it, and then in my attempt to rewrite it again life got busy and i was hit with writers block and then months ended up passing (and in the case of this chapter, a year). i thought about giving up on it a lot, especially as this fandom has begun to lose traction, but the fact that there was only one incomplete fic on my profile (and that i've put so much time into it already) were the main two things keeping me going.

i finally settled on this, as i think it is a good end to this story. i'm happy with it now. and i'm especially happy that the fic (it being my first multi chaptered fic as well) i started writing and posting over two years ago is finally complete. i feel like i've definitely grown as a writer over these past two years, and im so thankful for this fic having given me the opportunity to do that. im also thankful for all of you, whether you just discovered this fic, you've been reading since the first chapter, or you joined somewhere along the way. comments, kudos, bookmarks— any interaction w a fic really do help writers more than you know, and i appreciate every single one i receive.

shout out to michael-rook, one of my best friends in the entire world. rook, thank you for all of your help with this fic, for letting me complain about the writers block and loss of inspiration at times, encouraging me, doing the occasional proof read, and hyping me up. i love you <3

(fun facts, cause i like to do these now: the scene where catra finds out they're soulmates, the scene where adora finds out they're soulmates, and the scene where catra paints adora were the three scenes i had in mind and knew i wanted to have in the fic before i had even actually begun writing the first chapter. pretty much everything else changed/was added along the way. and also, the idea of each chapter being named after a color based on the meaning of the color stemmed from the fact that this fic has a lot to do w art. i've never written that much imagery in my life. my english teachers would be so proud.)

for the future, i have a few fics lined up that should see the light of day soon, that being modern one-shots with one having the premise of adora asking catra to teach her how to kiss, and a meet-cute where adora sort of hits catra with her car. in between writing the

penultimate chapter and the final chapter of this fic, i also wrote a ghost adora au you can find [here](#) and an adora and catra get handcuffed together au you can find [here](#).

again, thank you to everyone who is still here. this fic means so much to me, and i truly appreciate everyone who has taken the time to read it.

End Notes

comments inspire me greatly, and you can find me on [twitter](#) and [tumblr](#)

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