Unexpected Proximity!

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by elo

Summary

On an otherwise routine trip through the Hall of Mirrors, an unseen student pushes Riddle into a coffin — along with Floyd Leech.

Riddle is about to discover just how far his work-in-progress patience can possibly take him.

Notes

02-11-2026 NOTE: This is not the perfect version of this fic, the AO3 version has some typo fixes that I don't think I copied over, but that will be fixed once the archive is accessible again. :)

I started working on this fic before the official English version came out, so the title is an imitation of the Japanese style of TWST chapter titles. I'd have imitated the English version once it came out, but they do not have an imitable structure for them, unfortunately for me personally.

The scuffle happened so quickly that even in its immediate aftermath Riddle cannot break it down into parts.

He understands the beforehand perfectly. He was on his way to the Scarabia dorms to deliver a pile of forms that Kalim forgot at the last housewarden meeting, hoping to run into Jamil before Kalim so he could get on with his day without a Kalim-style welcome. He was then walking through the mirror hall, taking a shortcut through the field of floating coffins, when he heard a familiar voice and spun around to see who Floyd Leech was menacing this time, because if they were a Heartslabyul student he had some stern words for the both of them.

Even more unfortunately for Riddle however, Floyd was speaking with Jamil. Neither of them seemed annoyed at least, Riddle wouldn't be walking into a brewing fight, but they were deep in conversation and there was no way Riddle could get Jamil's attention without getting Floyd's too.

At that point Riddle had sighed, braced himself, and approached the two of them from the side.

“Excuse me Jamil —”

“Oooh, Goldfish is here!”

“— I have some papers Kalim forgot at the last housewarden meeting.”

Ignoring Floyd for the moment, Riddle held the pile of forms out to Jamil and watched as he took them with a sigh.

“Thank you Riddle,” Jamil flipped through the papers' headers quickly. “I had the feeling Kalim's plans for winter required more paperwork than he brought to me. Do you know if there's anything especially time-consuming in here?”

Floyd must have moved closer to Riddle at this point, though at the time Riddle was still resolutely ignoring him, “They're mostly permission forms for the other students, so as long as you can distribute them in an efficient way you should be fine.”

“Goldfishie you're so cold today... No reaction at all.”

Meanwhile Jamil nodded, “Sounds good to me. Thank you again Riddle, you've saved me a lot of trouble.”

“Seriously, this is annoying. At least look at me, don't you have a reputation for perfect manners to keep up?”

That was the first thing Floyd said that Riddle really couldn't ignore, considering they were in fact standing near another dorm's vice-housewarden.

“One part of having perfect manners is knowing when it matters to use them,” Riddle looked up at Floyd with a glare that made Floyd grin back at him. “I know that with you it makes no

difference whatsoever.”

In the corner of his eye Riddle could see that Jamil was amused by his words, though Floyd didn't seem to care either way, evidently taking the reply as a new step in his game.

“I think it does. If you were polite to me don't you think I'd be nicer?”

“I really, truly, do not.”

“How can you know for sure without trying though?”

“I have tried many times and you bother me anyways.”

Floyd paused to think, tilting his head to stare into space for a moment and think about it. If Riddle were truly an impolite man, he would have taken the moment to leave and spared himself a good deal of trouble.

“I guess that's true...”

Jamil took the brief slowdown in conversation to do what Riddle longed to, which is to say he took a step back from the nascent argument.

“Well, I'll go get these to Kalim and leave the two of you to it. Thank you again Riddle, and please keep our captain's words in mind Floyd.”

Floyd didn't seem to even hear Jamil, much less think about whatever it was Jamil was relaying to him from the basketball club captain. He gave Jamil a lazy wave and turned back to Riddle, fully standing in front of him.

“Was that all you came here to do, Goldfishie? Seems boring.”

Riddle had sighed, mistakenly committing to the conversation, “It's administrative housewarden business, of course it's boring. I'm going to go do more of it back in Heartslabyul. Will you leave me alone now?”

“No, no, housewardens shouldn't be bored. Come play with us at the lounge, I know that Azul has fun!”

“I assure you that Azul's idea of fun is considerably different fro—”

That was when Riddle was first pushed.

Completely off-guard, Riddle tumbled towards Floyd. Floyd caught his shoulders easily, keeping them from colliding, but Riddle was still far too close to him for comfort and reeling from the surprise.

There was a moment of complete silence. As what had just happened caught up to him, Riddle's heart started to race with the dread of an impending fight. He needed to see who had pushed him, but his stance wasn't quite stable and Floyd's hands were keeping him upright.

Floyd's cheerfulness had an edge to it when he next spoke.

“Who the hell are yo—”

Then the second push hit, incorporeal and strong in a way that only magic could be, and Riddle lost track of events completely.

Since Floyd still had a grip on Riddle's shoulders he must have been pushed along with him. There was an open coffin somewhere behind them (pre-prepared by the culprit in all likelihood) and the spell pushed both of them right into it. Adrenaline was starting to hit Riddle and he was sitting up, drawing his magical pen, when the coffin's lid came down on him. He'd yelled, he knew he must have because his throat hurt, and somehow he was pushed down. Everything was dark. There were footsteps, spells exchanged, a pounding noise near his head, Jamil's voice, and even more footsteps outside of the coffin.

Riddle's head hurt enough that he didn't understand anything that was said. He assumed that Jamil left to find a teacher, or the headmage, or anyone at all who could get two students out of a magic coffin, but he doesn't know for sure and he doesn't want to ask about it.

Riddle doesn't want to say anything because despite the lingering head pain, he understands his present situation perfectly.

Floyd Leech is trapped under him. Riddle cannot move up and away from him without hitting his head again. His face is planted directly above Floyd's stomach, his feet are tangled up in Floyd's, and there is no direction in which he can shift that makes the situation less awkward.

At the very least Floyd isn't doing anything either. Being so close to him Riddle can feel that he's tense, coiled to strike and clearly waiting for a good opportunity to move, but Riddle doesn't know if that opportunity will come soon. If their assailant has already left it might be better for both of them if Floyd relaxes.

Riddle should probably ask Floyd what happened and plan from there but what should he say to begin? This is a situation with no rulebook, no socially acceptable way to proceed. In fact the situation itself is unacceptable. Riddle dislikes physical contact at the best of times, even Che'nya knows not to surprise him with it, and to be stuck borderline intimate with Floyd Leech makes Riddle want to slap Floyd and lock himself in his room until he's taken enough deep breaths to stop feeling the heart-pounding *embarrassment* he can feel taking hold of him as he assesses the situation.

Being so close to Floyd means Riddle can feel Floyd's chest rise and fall against him, can tell Floyd is still holding his shoulders, can realize one of his legs is trapped under one of Floyd's. Terrible. Utterly horrific. If Riddle were acting on instinct and at his full capacity he'd have pushed him away instantly, but Riddle's head hurts so much he doesn't want to move at all.

Faced with two bad options Riddle has to think them through, and when Riddle thinks about the situation he realizes instantly that pushing Floyd while stuck in a box with him is a horrible idea. A physical conflict is the last thing he wants in this scenario. The part of his aching brain telling him “Floyd softer than coffin” is sounding more sensible by the second.

He needs to talk to Floyd, he realizes as he continues to assess. He'll never get a full rundown of the situation if he doesn't. As much as talking to Floyd is irritating, being stuck in silence with Floyd without knowing how long they're going to be stuck sounds worse.

Riddle clears his throat, and immediately he feels Floyd perk up.

“Goldfishie you're awa—”

Floyd tries to sit up and hits his own head. Riddle is momentarily grateful he thought not to do that himself.

After groaning for a second Floyd tries again, “Goldfishie. You're not passed out. Can you talk?”

“Yes, I can talk.”

“Oh good,” Floyd relaxes further. Riddle is fairly certain his head hit the bottom of the coffin this time. “Being stuck with a corpse would be no fun at all.”

Riddle wants to ask what the hell is wrong with him and why he would say that when it could easily make the person he is trapped with panic, but Riddle takes a deep breath and moves on. He has to be civil with Floyd right now and he would never get answers to those questions anyways.

“Don't move around though, my head hurts enough without jostling.”

“I'm not gonna move, there's nowhere to go. I've tried hitting the coffin already and it just hurt my hands...”

Riddle did not even register that noise or movement in his haze from earlier, probably taking it as a continuation of the fight, “What else have you tried?”

“Not much, I am stuck under you... If you have room to roll over you might be able to feel around the keyhole?”

Now that Floyd's mentioned the keyhole, Riddle realizes that they aren't in pitch darkness: he certainly can't see clearly but when Riddle turns his head to the side and waits for his eyes to adjust he can make out Floyd's arm and the place where the coffin's lid meets the bottom half. The hole must be letting light in and therefore there's air circulation. That's one concern off the list, though when Riddle experimentally lifts his back he hits the top of the coffin right away.

“I don't think there's enough room for me to change positions.”

“That's too bad. We'll have to wait for Sea Snake to get back.”

Right, Riddle heard Jamil's voice after being pushed into the coffin, “Did he tell you where he's going?”

“Sea Snake didn't tell me anything,” although Riddle cannot see Floyd he can clearly picture how he must be pouting. “He was trying to talk to the little bastard that pushed us then chased after him. So with any luck I'll be able to squeeze that guy later but I don't know any more than you, Goldfishie.”

Floyd referring to the person who pushed them reminds Riddle of a moment in the beforehand, right before the second push.

“You saw the culprit, didn't you?”

“And had no idea who he was, yeah,” he sounds annoyed. Riddle tenses up in spite of himself. “Some shrimp in a Scarabia uniform, pale skin and boring eyes. He's not gonna be a challenge at all.”

Although Riddle told him not to shift Floyd seemingly can't keep himself from moving entirely; when he describes the culprit he feels around for Riddle and ends up patting his thigh. Riddle freezes up.

“I'll leave some fun for you though, don't worry.”

Was that... Floyd trying to reassure him? He must have noticed Riddle tensing up, which is horrible. Completely dreadful. Anyone noticing nerves coming from Riddle Rosehearts would be bad but for Floyd to notice them is dreadful. No matter how well he's cooperating right now, he could go back to teasing at any moment.

Riddle lets a deep breath out regardless, and reminds himself that Floyd is in fact cooperating right now, so the sooner he calms down the sooner Floyd won't have anything on him.

“I understand what you are saying, but could you refrain from touching me further.”

Immediately Floyd moves both his hands to the sides of the coffin, “Done and done.”

Riddle frowns. Backing off right away is suspiciously cooperative for Floyd, he's usually planning something for later when he actually listens to Riddle, but then again they aren't usually aligned against the same person like they are right now. His behaviour may very well be genuine.

There would be no use in asking him about it, so Riddle presses on.

“Do you think Jamil will be back soon?”

“No idea. It's been a little while already, that's why I thought Goldfishie might have passed out.”

Riddle doesn't have any more immediate questions so he pauses to consider his situation so far.

The most important order of business is that he doesn't appear to be in any immediate danger. There's air circulation in the coffin, he's conscious, and though his head hurts he can already

feel the pain fading. Floyd hasn't mentioned any bleeding so he's probably fine on that front as well.

The next set of information to consider is that nobody seems to know who pushed him, and furthermore the only person who saw what happened didn't update Floyd on where he was going. That's hardly anything to go on and Riddle's already annoyed with it.

“The only thing we can do is wait, isn't it.”

Floyd sighs, a noise that in his case is half a whine, “I hoped a smart kid like you would have another idea...”

“Well I don't,” Riddle says firmly, “so sit still and be quiet.”

“That's so boring though...”

Riddle wants to tell him to suck it up, there are worse things than being bored and they include being stuck between a hard surface and Floyd Leech, but in the interest of keeping things civil he lets out a sigh of his own and keeps quiet.

With his headache diminishing and no conversation to keep track of Riddle can register the small noises around him more clearly. There's absolutely no noise outside the coffin beyond the muted thrumming of the mirrors, they are quite a ways off the main paths of the mirror chamber, and inside there's only Floyd's shifting.

He really is incapable of keeping still. Riddle can tell he's trying not to move in ways that will shift Riddle, but he can hear him tapping his fingers against the cushioned bottom of the coffin, can hear his breath and feel the rise and fall of his chest that goes along with it. A few moments in Floyd moves his free foot further away from Riddle's and Riddle can feel Floyd's thigh shift against his.

Riddle wishes he had literally anything else to think about.

“Goldfishie, do you even know any Scarabia students that aren't Sea Snake or Otter?”

Riddle wants to be annoyed at Floyd for not staying quiet like he asked, but the question gives him something to focus on other than their physical situation and it's actually a good one.

“There are three Scarabia students in 2-E,” they tend to stick together and keep to themselves, though Riddle knows their names and has the vague idea that they're middling students, “but I don't speak to them much.”

“Mmm, they could still hate you though. Are you sure you haven't had to punish them ever?”

“It is decidedly inadvisable for me to discipline students outside of my house in regular circumstances and you know that,” the only times Riddle's been tempted for petty reasons has been with Floyd himself, and he's never done it because taking Floyd's magic away would bring Azul to Heartslabyul's doorstep in a matter of minutes. “They slack off on occasion but that's not my problem, I leave them to it.”

“Whoa, the tyrant housewarden has mercy after all.”

Riddle frowns but holds his tongue.

“Oooh Goldfishie didn't like that, I could feel your eyebrows go down!”

Riddle doesn't like that Floyd pointed that out either.

“Listen Floyd,” Riddle would make eye contact if he could, but he figures Floyd can pick up on his seriousness from his voice, “the less you make fun of me, the quicker this whole incident will pass us by.”

“I thought you weren't liking the quiet though.”

That point gives Riddle pause. Given that Floyd could tell when Riddle was tense before he was probably noticing it again and this conversation was more of what Floyd thought was being considerate.

“I appreciate the thought, but please refrain from teasing me.”

“I don't think I can do that though,” Floyd sounds properly whiny this time. “Goldfishie thinks I'm teasing him no matter what I say.”

The sheer audacity of Floyd complaining that Riddle doesn't trust him shocks Riddle still for a good few seconds.

“You didn't pass out just now, did you?...”

Riddle huffs so Floyd can hear him moving, ignores Floyd's subsequent sigh of relief, and in the midst of formulating a civil way to say “literally every time I have taken you on good faith before you have toyed with me later in the conversation”, Riddle is distracted by new noises outside.

Footsteps, and quick ones too.

“They should be right ahead, professor.”

“Thank you Viper, I can see the coffin that isn't floating now.”

That's Professor Crewel's voice along with Jamil's. Riddle feels genuine relief for the first time since the push.

“Professor Crewel!” he exclaims, at the same time Floyd says “Professor Beakfish's here.”

The footsteps stop just outside the coffin and Riddle can hear Crewel sigh deeply.

“My deepest apologies to you Rosehearts. I'd been hoping Viper's report was a strange joke for your sake, but you're really in there with the nippy Leech aren't you.”

“Why are you calling me 'nippy'?” Floyd sounds genuinely irritated. “I've never bitten a student at NRC, not even once.”

Crewel sighs again, then raps the top of the coffin with his ever-present pointer, “That you fail to understand my metaphor is not of concern here, Leech. Are either of you injured?”

“I hit my head, but the pain is fading and I don't appear to be bleeding.”

“Goldfishie isn't bleeding,” Floyd confirms. “I’d smell it if he did.”

“Then my next question is whether either of you have used magic to attempt an escape.”

The question strikes Riddle as absurd at first. Even children without formal magic training would know not to cast a spell *inside* of a magical device, but then he remembers that if anyone in the school was going to disobey the most basic of common sense safety measures within minutes of being trapped it would be Floyd.

“Haven't touched my pen even once!”

“Then the two of you aren't in any immediate danger and I don't have to resort to drastic measures,” Crewel continues. He audibly takes a step back from the coffin and Riddle can imagine the thoughtful frown on his face. “Though I almost wish you were endangered, considering there's not much I can do for you in this present situation...”

Riddle frowns. Floyd stops fiddling.

“What do you mean there isn't much you can do?” Riddle asks.

“I mean that these are tamper-proof devices, employed in the service of Night Raven College for centuries, and the headmaster is the only being in the world with access to their keys. I cannot free you without them.”

Riddle doesn't want to be frustrated, but he hears his voice raising as he asks: “Don't the coffins open on their own after a time?”

“In ideal circumstances they do,” Crewel is shifting into his teaching voice and Riddle can already feel his hopes plummeting, “but the trigger is tied to the movement of the horseless carriages and those carriages have even more specific conditions in which they work. I have never in my life seen them move on a day that isn't move-in day specifically.”

There is total silence for a few seconds as Riddle and Floyd process the new information.

“Wooooow that's bad,” Floyd's exclamation is quiet enough that Riddle supposes it's only for him. “We're really in it now.”

Riddle doesn't want to believe that Floyd is correct, “Then is the headmaster on his way with the keys?...”

“That's our most pressing problem,” Crewel does not sound happy to be talking about the problem either. “Headmage Crowley is off campus and won't take work calls until six pm at

least.”

Riddle's anger spikes immediately. He braces both hands on the bottom of the coffin, pushes himself the slightest bit up so he has room to breathe, takes in a deep breath, and—

“Professor Beakfish, Goldfishie really didn't like hearing about that.”

Riddle is not going to yell because Floyd is beneath him and awkwardly maneuvering his arm to pat Riddle's hand.

“Don't worry Goldfishie, that can't be more than three hours away.”

Also Riddle is a reasonable student who does not yell at teachers for situations beyond their control, of course. He forgot himself in the stress of the moment and would have regretted yelling even if Floyd weren't there. His physical presence was merely a reminder that Riddle causes problems when he yells, and in this case the problem could have been irritating his teacher and hurting the ears of his physically imposing classmate.

Though maybe Floyd would have found it fun to hear Riddle yell from up close. It was impossible to tell what Floyd Leech would ever do next.

In any case, Riddle should not yell at Crewel when it's the headmage drawing his ire. He shouldn't yell at Crewel, period.

Riddle forces a deep breath out and lowers himself down. He relaxes his arms and Floyd stops patting him.

He hates that Floyd's approach worked, but there will be time to stew over that later.

“Is it not the headmage's job to be present in order to smooth over difficult situations?...”

“Believe me Rosehearts, I have some stern words for him too,” Crewel snaps his pointer on his hand and Riddle is relieved that at least Crewel agrees with him. “However, I cannot contact him at the moment.”

“If it helps at all,” that's Jamil, speaking for the first time since he arrived, “I've contacted Trey and Azul with everything I know about the situation so far, so both of you have been excused from your dorm duties.”

That is a genuine relief. Riddle hasn't even had time to think about all the work he's missing and it's good to know in advance that Trey will be covering for him. It's a shame he'll have to break some of the Queen of Hearts' rules regarding timing, but those are rules he's been trying to ignore more often anyways. Today will be the sixth day in a row he hasn't drank lemon tea at four o' clock, and even though he had no choice over the matter today that's still progress.

“That's too bad, I was gonna be head chef today and my menu was fire. Did Azul seem angry when you told him?”

“Not that I could tell, though he asked a lot of questions about the culprit.”

“Shouldn't you know who the culprit is already?” Floyd sounds innocently curious, but Riddle knows the smile that usually accompanies Floyd's questions even if he can't see it. “That shrimp was from Scarabia after all.”

Jamil sighs, clearly frustrated, “I wish it were that simple, but I didn't recognize that student at all. He must have taken the uniform from someone else.”

That surprises Riddle, but it makes sense once he thinks about it for more than a second. The culprit planned far enough ahead to prepare the open coffin and keep out of Riddle's sight after all. Wearing another dorm's uniform to throw off witnesses would fit right in with that kind of strategy.

Stupid of them to go ahead with it while Floyd was present though, not to mention Jamil the vice-housewarden of the dorm they were trying to pass themself off as. The shoddy execution of the plan offends Riddle almost as much as the plan itself.

Though admittedly he wouldn't be half as annoyed if he weren't stuck with Floyd, so maybe the culprit's stupid risk paid off in that respect.

“I've sent word along to Scarabia to tell me if anyone's missing a dorm uniform,” Jamil continues. “I'm headed there to follow up for myself now that a professor knows where you two are.”

Riddle had been concerned when Jamil disappeared, but it is a relief to know that at least one competent student is actively trying to find the culprit.

“Thank you Jamil,” he says before Floyd can take charge of the conversation again. “I really appreciate your efforts so far.”

“You don't have to thank me. This is the bare minimum a vice-housewarden should do if an incident occurs in front of him, not to mention the culprit attempted to blame my dorm for the whole thing.”

Still, considering the other dorms' vice housewarden options, two third years Riddle hardly knows and one Jade Leech, Riddle is glad Jamil is tending to it.

Crewel hits the coffin with his pointer again, this time near Riddle's head.

“Are you two clear on the situation then?”

“I understand it well,” Riddle says.

“Clear as sea,” Floyd chimes in.

“Following that understanding, you realize that there is nothing more I can do for you at the moment?”

Riddle knows what's coming next, “You're returning to your office then, I assume.”

“As much as I'd like to make sure Leech isn't causing one of our top students any trouble in there,” Crewel hits the coffin closer to Floyd's head this time and Riddle feels him flinch from the noise, “there simply isn't anything I can accomplish by supervising an unopenable coffin for three hours.”

Crewel is right, but Riddle can feel himself deflating. Having other people around was heartening, but making them stick around would keep them from making progress on the core problem: the two of them being stuck. He'll have to put up with lying on top of Floyd with no one to distract him from that situation for a while longer.

“Rest assured that Viper, your dormmates, and I will be doing our utmost to find the culprit in the meantime however.”

At that point Jamil interjects, “Do either of you have your phone on you? I don't see why that wouldn't work to let you know what's going on.”

Jamil's suggestion would work well for anyone else, but unfortunately Riddle doesn't carry his phone until he's eaten dinner. His mother let him have a phone on the condition that he wouldn't use it during the day and old habits die hard.

“I've left my phone in my room.”

“Mine's in a pocket I can't reach like this,” Floyd complains. “Goldfishie would have to get it and —”

“I am most certainly not doing that.”

Jamil says something Riddle can't quite make out and then, “You might not have a choice in that matter Riddle, but even if you can't manage to get the phone in anyone's hands I'll text Floyd if we've found the culprit. Will you hear the tone at least?”

“Definitely!”

“Then you'll hear from me later,” Jamil confirms. “I'll be on my way now.”

He leaves immediately after saying so, his footsteps brisk as he walks away. Riddle doesn't blame him; he'd want to get back to his own work as quickly as possible if he were Jamil.

“Thank you again for your cooperation Viper,” Crewel calls out after him, then takes a couple of steps away of his own while addressing the coffin. “I'm going to re-examine the records for the coffins and carriages to see if we can exploit the opening trigger at all, though I'm sure anything helpful would be confined to our benevolent headmage's own collection.”

“Good luck Professor Beakfish!”

Crewel ignores Floyd in favour of tapping the coffin near Riddle's head, “Discipline the nippy one if you must, Rosehearts. I won't say a word about it to anyone else if you need him to behave.”

Riddle doesn't quite know what to say to that. Floyd mumbles something about fairness while Crewel's shoes tap along the floor.

“You'll be hearing more from me later, I assure you. Get along in the meantime.”

With that, Crewel walks away. He keeps a pace just as brisk as Jamil's and before Riddle knows it he's gone. Once again there is only the sound of the mirrors, vague stirrings from Floyd, and the muted pain in Riddle's head.

Beneath Riddle, Floyd sounds like he's pouting, “I don't think professors are allowed to play favourites like that.”

Riddle would laugh if the situation were less serious, acknowledging that Floyd likes to cause trouble is hardly what Riddle would call favouritism, but he sighs instead.

“I don't think professors are allowed to call their students “puppies” either, but Professor Crewel rarely refers to us as anything else.”

“Mmm, that sounds like something they wouldn't make a specific rule about.”

Riddle would if he were headmage and one of his teachers were doing it, but Headmage Crowley does not have the same attitude towards careful regulation that Riddle does, “I'm positive the general precepts of the school demand that teachers give the students basic respect at least.”

“Sounds like something that you can ignore with no consequences to me!”

Floyd isn't necessarily wrong there, unfortunately, and that is exactly why Riddle would make a specific rule about the “puppy” thing.

That line of conversation ends there, though, and the two of them fall silent again.

Riddle's headache has near-entirely dissipated, which is good, but with increased clarity comes increased awareness of Floyd, which is bad. He no longer seems coiled to strike, his breath is audible and steady, but he is fidgeting again. He's twisting his neck around this time, probably stretching it. Riddle wishes he could do the same, but he's at such risk of hitting his head again he doesn't want to move at all.

If Riddle forgets that the boy beneath him is Floyd Leech, possibly the most notorious selfish and fight-y student in a school full of them, the situation is almost relaxing. Riddle is free of his obligations, Floyd is warm at least, and the part of Riddle's brain reminding him again that Floyd is softer than the coffin is right.

Were it not for Riddle's awareness that Floyd could start bugging him at any moment, Riddle might not even mind being stuck at all.

“Goldfish, you're getting tense again,” which is a terrible reminder that Floyd can, in fact, deduce Riddle's feelings due to their current closeness. Riddle would swear if he were the type. “Want to chat again?”

“I don't have anything to chat about with you.”

“Sure you do,” Floyd hums while he thinks of what that might be. “We're in this together so we should stick together. Me the big ol' shark and Goldfishie the suckerfish sticking to me.”

Riddle doesn't know enough about marine life to know exactly what Floyd is implying but he doesn't like the sound of it, “I'm not sticking to you by choice, you know.”

“Of course not, but that doesn't mean you can't make the choice to be a suckerfish and get something out of it,” Riddle can imagine Floyd's grin here clearly. “Let's do our best to get along!”

With nothing else to think about and Floyd being so deliberately friendly, Riddle's suspicions about Floyd's behaviour come back in full force.

If Floyd is actively trying to cooperate though, maybe Riddle should just go ahead and ask the question.

“Say Floyd, why are you making an effort not to irritate me?”

“Cause we're stuck, duh.”

Riddle frowns, “You've never missed an opportunity to tease me before and I don't see why proximity would change that.”

Floyd is silent a few seconds. They are gratifying seconds.

“You haven't realized what your position means?”

Riddle flushes at the mention of “position”, which is precisely why he hasn't been thinking about it much, “No Floyd, I would much rather forget I have a physical presence at all for now.”

“You gotta think about positioning though, 'cause if we fight Goldfishie has the advantage.”

“What do you mean I have the—”

Newly aware of his physical situation, it dawns on Riddle in the middle of the question that his knee is not far from the most vulnerable part of Floyd's body.

Surely it's not that simple.

“Floyd.”

“Mm?”

“Are you cooperating with me because you don't want me to knee you in the crotch?”

Floyd is silent again.

“Well,” he eventually says, not sounding happy to be saying it, “that's one human experience I don't really want to know about.”

Riddle can't help it; at that admission he laughs.

“Hey, don't hit your head again Goldfish.”

Floyd moves his hand between Riddle's head and the coffin lid to make sure he doesn't, but Riddle has already moved his head to the side so he can properly laugh.

He hadn't needed to worry about Floyd's motives at all if the answer was that simple. Of course someone who fights regularly would pay attention to his positioning, of course the potential moves would occur to him, and of course he would want to avoid that particular move. There wasn't a scheme here, just childishness.

Riddle had forgotten the most important thing in dealing with Floyd: he is a person that lives entirely on his in-the-moment impulses, and as baffling and irritating as those impulses can be a lot of them are not that complex.

“Waaah, Goldfishie's sense of humour was like this the whole time?”

Floyd sounds kind of amused himself. Riddle coughs a couple of times, regaining his composure, and Floyd finally takes his hand away from Riddle's head.

“Not necessarily,” he coughs again to rid himself of a lingering laugh, “you have to admit it's a little absurd that you fear low blows when you're surrounded by student wizards capable of much worse.”

This time Floyd sounds like he's pouting again, “It's just that I don't know what it feels like. Merfolk don't have their bits just hanging out there you know, feels bad that it's vulnerable all the time.”

Riddle did not need to know that and now that Floyd's motives are settled it might be best to end the conversation.

“In any case, I still don't have anything to discuss with you. We know everything we can about the situation for now and I don't think more speculation will lead us anywhere.”

“Don't be like that, it'll be way too boring if we don't talk,” Floyd replies. Of course his insistence on talking is about avoiding boredom, when does Floyd act for any other reason. “If you can't think of anything, how about we play a game?”

Riddle doesn't like the sound of that at all, “I refuse.”

“Come on, you already know I'm trying not to bother you while we're in here,” Floyd sounds almost offended, “and there's no other way to pass the time. What's the harm?”

Riddle remembers the earlier moment that made him nearly yell at Floyd and sighs.

“The harm is that, as you've said before, I tend to take offense to things you don't even intend as teasing.”

Riddle will admit to that fault if it will keep Floyd from playing a game with him, though he's still unconvinced of Floyd ever speaking in good faith.

“A game's not fun if there's no risk to it,” Riddle can imagine the grin that accompanies Floyd saying so, “and I'll let you stop the game if you want. Goldfishie has the power here, not me, remember? Professor Beakfish even said you can punish me and get away with it.”

Even though he is dealing with a student he's longed to discipline before, Riddle would rather avoid being so irritated that he takes up Crewel's offer. It hardly matters that he would get to keep his clean record after doing it, Riddle doesn't want to give into his baser anger anymore and if he can avoid becoming angry in the first place he'd prefer that.

On the other hand, Floyd is irritatingly right that time will pass faster if they talk and that at the moment, Riddle has the power to stop Floyd if he takes things too far. He's even agreed to stop without resorting to argument, which is an offer from Floyd Leech that Riddle finds he doesn't want to refuse.

Floyd might be alright if he listens to the word “no” for once, and it feels like a worthwhile experiment to see if that's true. Maybe it will make Floyd more tolerable in the long run.

“Tell me what kind of game you have in mind.”

Riddle can feel Floyd's excitement once he hears that answer, and clearly hears the way he draws in an eager breath. He pictures a glint in his eyes to go along with the noises.

“Does Goldfish know 'two truths and a lie'?”

Riddle frowns, “No, I don't.”

“The rules are really simple. I'll tell you three things about me, and you have to figure out which one is a lie! If you guess right then it's your turn to make me guess, and if you guess wrong I get to tell you another three things.”

It's the kind of party-adjacent game that Riddle has little experience with, but it also sounds like a game that depends heavily on logic, which is a quality Riddle possesses in spades. He might not be entirely bad at it.

“Is there a win state for this game?”

“Ooh, I don't think so but you're right there should be one,” Floyd hums thoughtfully. “What about... Whoever guesses wrong five times loses?”

Riddle almost wants to cut that shorter, but the longer he lets this game run the less time will be on the other side of it, “I agree to those terms.”

“Perfect!” Floyd sounds so pleased with himself that Riddle regrets agreeing to this for a moment. Maybe it's part of a scheme after all. “Then how about these: I'm the older twin, I

hate shiitake mushrooms, and I've never broken a bone!”

Those are very mundane potential facts, though. Riddle can't see what Floyd could possibly be planning if this is the way the game is played.

Moving on to the game itself, Riddle knows one of the truths because he's walked by Floyd in the cafeteria often enough to hear him complain about shiitake. That leaves the questions of whether Floyd has ever broken a bone and who's the older twin. It seems unlikely that a student notorious not only for fighting but also his occasional parkour has never broken a bone, but on the other hand he's lived most of his life underwater and he's fit enough that it's possible...

When Riddle tries to guess who's older between Floyd and Jade though he immediately comes up short. There's no way to know that one, and given that they're merfolk whose exact biology Riddle doesn't know, there might not even be an older twin.

Once he remembers that tidbit however it becomes clear to him that “I'm the older twin” is the lie. Floyd is trying to lead him to think there's a fifty-fifty chance of that being true, while really the chances are considerably smaller.

“I don't think you're older than Jade.”

“That's riiiiight. Jade and I hatched at the same time actually,” oh gods they *hatched*, Riddle is going to try to forget that, “so don't think I'm the younger one either. That makes it you turn, Goldfishie, try to trick me!”

Floyd seems eager to be tricked so Riddle takes a couple of minutes to think about his approach.

“I've never broken a bone either, I didn't taste processed sugar until I was eight, and I've known Trey since before I could talk.”

“Well, obviously Goldfish is too careful to break a bone so I think that one's true.”

For a second Riddle is tempted to confirm that but he keeps quiet for the sake of the game.

“I know you and Sea Turtle are childhood friends so that last one makes sense... And it's way too weird not to have eaten sugar until you were eight? Human kids love that stuff. You definitely had sugar earlier than that.”

Maybe Riddle should have picked a less mildly sad truth but at least the trap worked, “No, my mother was very strict about nutrition and it was a long time before I ate anything sweetened with regular sugar.”

“Eeeh, that's stingy of her,” stingy is certainly one word for it, but Riddle is not going to comment. “My parents could never limit what I ate, there are snacks everywhere in the sea if you know how to get at them.”

That's actually fairly interesting as far as cultural differences go, and maybe explains why Jade eats entire meals between classes on occasion. Then again, neither Floyd nor Azul ever

do that, so maybe Jade's eating habits are wholly inexplicable.

Riddle could ask, could try to keep this actually normal conversation going, but he knows better than to expect a straight answer about anything pertaining to Jade and he feels it's time to move on with the game.

“I believe since you guessed wrong it's my turn again?”

“That's right,” Floyd seems pleased that Riddle's got the hang of it. “Do your worst.”

Riddle stuck with Floyd's pattern of “one obvious truth & two more ambiguous options” for his first attempt, so he takes a moment to think of something different for his second.

“I was an accomplished horseback rider before coming to Night Raven College, I have a Magicam account but no other social media, and when I dueled the previous dorm leader I won within a minute.”

“Oooh, Goldfish is picking things that all sound like the truth now. I'm pretty sure you do have a Magicam, I've heard that you don't use it much so no other accounts makes sense... You do good at your club so you probably were good at it before school... I don't think you beat that guy that quickly, I'd remember that.”

Riddle really expected Floyd to be better at this considering he picked the game himself.

“You're smiling so I must be wrong.”

Riddle quickly corrects his face to neutrality, “That's right, the lie was that I was an “accomplished” horseback rider. I knew how to ride a horse competently but I wasn't in competitions or anything.”

“Ooooh, even Goldfishie's lies are detailed. Give me another one!”

Floyd is bouncing his free leg in anticipation, but at least he's not being a sore loser or declaring that he's suddenly lost interest. Riddle is closer to enjoying Floyd's company than he ever has been before, so he tries to think of a suitably difficult puzzle to keep things going.

“I like putting honey in my tea, I named all the current Heartslabyul hedgehogs, and of all the sweets in the world, I like macarons the best.”

“I don't think macarons are your favourite.”

Okay, so Floyd got that one right. He was going to do it eventually.

“Might I ask why?...”

Floyd hums, clearly proud of himself, “Since it's your third question I thought you'd probably make the lie the third option.”

Riddle did not even realize he did that. It feels like a cheap win but fair's fair he supposes. Lie placement is clearly part of the strategy as well and Riddle neglected to consider it as much

as he should have.

“Very well then,” since Floyd's behaving himself Riddle refuses to be a sore loser either. “Tell me your next three things.”

There are a few seconds of nothing as Floyd thinks. His breath is audible and Riddle can feel his own hackles raising in the silence.

“Can I do one that Goldfishie isn't going to like?”

Riddle can only think that this had to come to a head sometime. But Floyd's been behaving himself so far, and technically Riddle shouldn't “like” his questions anyways. Maybe this won't be so bad.

“So long as you're abiding by the rules of the game, you can say what you like.”

“Then which one is a lie: I like Goldfishie, Goldfishie likes me, or Goldfishie hates me?”

Riddle draws in a sharp, impatient breath.

“Floyd.”

He doesn't exactly seem phased by Riddle's tone, continuing on by himself, “I can tell you that me liking Goldfishie is true.”

“This is exactly the kind of thing you say that I find irritating and take as teasing.”

“I'm serious though,” horrifically enough it sounds like he is. “I want to know what Goldfishie thinks.”

There are many things Riddle thinks, among them that if Floyd had just continued the game normally the scales might be in “like” right now, which is an infuriating thought in itself. If he's capable of cooperation and he truthfully enjoys Riddle's company, then why turn the conversation to this embarrassing and frustrating direction so suddenly? He was almost making sense for the past few rounds, but apparently Floyd Leech is just unfathomable.

Riddle's not even sure he could pick the true answer out of his options if he tried. Certainly not in this moment.

“I think,” he pushes his knee slightly forward to prove his unhappiness, “we should play a different game.”

Floyd doesn't respond right away. Riddle wonders if he's managed to irritate him in return and the situation's about to come to a head in physical way, but instead Floyd pats Riddle's hand in the exact way he did the other time he wanted to calm Riddle down.

“I'll stop, I'll stop. Azul's always telling me I can't just ask things like that anyways.”

Riddle sighs out his frustration. Clearly Floyd doesn't intend to continue overstepping, and that's what matters, “Then Azul would be right in this case.”

Riddle tries to swat Floyd's hand away, though the motion is awkward since he can really only pat the bottom of the coffin. Floyd seems to understand it as swatting anyways and takes his hand back.

“Does Goldfishie wanna choose a game, then?”

“Do I want to... Floyd, I don't want to talk to you at all if you're just going to irritate me.”

“I was trying to say that Goldfish can choose this time,” Floyd sounds... Apologetic? Regretful? Somewhere in that region. Bizarre. “I still want to pass the time... I want to make sure you're not bored either. Pick something I could never tease you through and I promise I'll follow its rules.”

Something Floyd can't tease him through... Riddle isn't sure such a game exists. Then again, he doesn't know many of them. If he had access to his phone maybe he could find a list, but...

Riddle casts his mind back and remembers a game he'd play with Trey and Che'nya. The two of them didn't like it very much because Riddle always won, but maybe that's just what he needs.

“What about we do a simple word chain? Use the last letter of the word I say as the first letter of your word, then I use the last letter of yours, and so on. First person to repeat a word that's been said earlier loses.”

“Eeh, that's a bit too easy...”

“Floyd, it's this or I stop talking.”

“Fine then!” He sounds like he's pouting yet again, but that's what he deserves as far as Riddle is concerned.

“Thank you for your cooperation,” this will be soothingly brainless, at the very least. “That will be my first word then, cooperation.”

“Nacho.”

“Oblivious.”

“Sea snake.”

“First of all that's two words, and second of all he'll text eventually, reminding us of him will just make you more impatient.”

“Guess I lose then... Goldfishie starts again?”

“I suppose so. Indigo.”

“Octopus.”

“Sterling.”

Riddle plays the game near-automatically from that point on, and surprisingly so does Floyd.

He perks up as the game goes on, even. The longer it goes the more attention Floyd pays, so he starts throwing out long aquatic terms and extremely specific foods. Riddle keeps up, Riddle likes to think he more than keeps up, but it's undeniable that Floyd's playing along as best he can and he seems to be happy to do it.

Riddle is at that point of almost having fun again, trying to come up with a word to rival Floyd's “bathypelagic”, when a single pair of footsteps come close to the coffin.

“My my Floyd, you've convinced Riddle to play with you. That's wonderful.”

Floyd tangibly relaxes at his brother's voice. Riddle hadn't even realized he was tense.

“Jade! Where've you been?”

“Azul was in quite a hurry to locate the student who pushed you and has left the lounge entirely to me this evening,” Jade himself does not sound hurried despite what sounds like a chaotic day at Mostro. “I was not able to get away from my tasks until now.”

“What's Azul hurrying for? It's not like we're gonna let that shrimp get away.”

Jade chuckles, “Indeed, he'd do just as well to wait, but I believe Azul smells a potential contract in this situation and you know how he feels about business opportunities.”

“Mmm, can't let those get away either.”

“Exactly.”

At this point Riddle can hear Jade moving, and after a couple of seconds he hears a soft noise on top of the coffin. It sounds like he's sat down.

“I also wanted to speak with you, Riddle,” Jade continues from above them. Definitely sitting on the coffin then. “I wished to let you know there's a student investigating on your behalf as well. I believe his name is Cater Diamond? Azul was skeptical at first, but it seems Diamond's propensity for Magicam is quite helpful in the present case.”

Riddle isn't going to say that Azul had no reason to be skeptical, but to Riddle it's a relief to hear that Cater's investigating. He's clever and knows a good many people; Riddle has faith he'll both be helpful and keep Azul from completely pushing Heartslabyul's interests out of the picture, “Thank you for that, Jade. Is there any progress being made?”

“Last I heard Jamil has found the Scarabia student whose dorm uniform was taken but he appears to be lying about the circumstances in which it went missing. Azul and Diamond were headed over there to check in on his story.”

“Wish I could question him, that sounds fun,” Floyd pauses, presumably to fantasize about shaking down the wayward Scarabia student. “Wanna switch places, Jade?”

“I cannot do that, and with all due respect to our classmate Riddle, I would not want to.”

Riddle is oddly relieved by Jade's answer. Between the two of them Floyd is at least upfront most of the time, even if his words and motives make no sense.

“Boo, that’s no fun,” Floyd sounds like he's pouting again but quickly moves on. “Dinner rush hasn't started at the lounge yet, right?”

“Not at all, it is only four thirty. I do hope the headmaster arrives to free you before six, but I suspect you will be arriving in the thick of things... Speaking of dinner, that's the other reason I came here. I'm going to put something aside for you so I would like to know what you want to eat.”

“Baked macaroni & cheese, lots of caramelized onions and bacon in it.”

Jade is silent for a second at Floyd's extremely specific request. Riddle can imagine him bringing a hand up to his chin to think through the process of cooking it.

After he thinks, he sighs.

“Could you not pick something that Azul will eat?”

Riddle can feel Floyd attempting to shrug, “You're the one who asked.”

“Yes, yes, I suppose so. I also suppose you deserve your requested dinner after this ordeal of yours.”

“Damn right I do.”

Jade chuckles, and for a moment seems to have nothing more to say.

“Business aside, Floyd, are you truly doing alright in there? Not that I don't have complete and total faith in your ability to act under pressure, but I know how you feel about—”

“Jade,” Floyd has tensed up again, “Goldfishie’s here too.”

... What?

“Oh dear, how careless of me,” Jade pats near where he must figure Riddle's head is. “My sincerest apologies for neglecting your presence, Riddle.”

Riddle is not by any means an expert in reading Jade, but he knows him well enough to know that Jade is never actually careless. He's letting Riddle know that there's something Floyd wouldn't like about the situation on purpose.

He wonders about Jade's plan for only a second before he realizes it's probably straightforward. Jade has told him more than once that he prefers Floyd to be happy as often as he can be so that's probably what the slip was about: letting Riddle know what Floyd might be less alright with bring stuck than he seems and implying that Riddle should be nice to him while Jade is busy.

That doesn't mean Riddle will cooperate with Jade's suggestion, of course. Though he'll admit it's nice to know Floyd might switch to displeasure for a reason even if the reason remains a mystery. At least there's a logic to Floyd occasionally.

“Apology accepted,” Riddle replies after a moment, “and I'm fine just listening, really.”

“Don't be like that Goldfish, games are even funner with three people!”

“Indeed Floyd, it would be no good of us to neglect a guest.”

Riddle can imagine both of them grinning at him and almost feels his headache coming back.

“I suspect I will not be able to keep you company for long however,” it sounds like Jade's retrieving something from a pocket while he says this. “Azul made Kimura my second-in-command and though he is a wonderful cook, you know how he is otherwise.”

Riddle does not but Floyd hums in understanding, “It's not like your choice would be any better.”

“I assure you that anyone I placed in charge of the lounge would fulfill their purpose to their utmost extent.”

“You keep putting that first year Mussel in charge of things?”

“And come his second year he will be a wonderful asset to us Floyd, you and Azul simply need to be patient.”

Despite their earlier banter about needing to keep Riddle involved Floyd and Jade talk shop, mostly about Octavinelle students Riddle doesn't know, for a few more moments. It's almost surprising how normal the conversation is other than a few references to contract terms, but Riddle supposes they do actually run a school business in the end. They can't always be focused on whatever else it is they do.

It's also fully possible that Jade is focusing on mundane conversation on purpose. Riddle continues to feel Floyd loosen up throughout the twins' conversation, to the point that even the pace of his fidgeting relaxes. He's beginning to think that if Floyd's physical cues were this obvious the whole time he's been missing out on a lot of cues that may have been helpful, but there's no use dwelling on that and Riddle continues to listen attentively.

Riddle is getting a little bored and feeling tempted to interject on Floyd and Jade's current topic of the lounge's dessert selection when Jade's phone loudly vibrates against the coffin. Jade must have placed it beside him. Riddle can hear him pick it up and sigh exaggeratedly at what he reads.

“As expected, the pace of the lounge is picking up and I must tend to my duties,” Jade audibly stands up in one smooth motion. “I trust I will find the two of you intact at six?”

Riddle can't help bristling at the implication, “Of course you will. We don't need supervision.”

“I'm not gonna squeeze Goldfishie. It's not his fault we're in here after all.”

“I apologize for the apparent offense. You have been remarkably patient thus far,” Riddle cannot tell if Jade was addressing him or Floyd with that. “Farewell for now then, both of you.”

Jade walks away, his footsteps steady and measured, and Floyd heaves a large sigh.

“Jade should worry about himself more, doncha' think? He's the one in charge of the lounge and we're doing fine out here.”

Riddle would not call Jade's check-in “worrying” so much as he'd call it “ensuring matters are proceeding according to plan”, but he's not going to disagree with Floyd's assessment when it comes to his brother.

“I'm sure he can be concerned with more than one issue at once.”

Floyd hums in vague agreement, then the two of them fall silent.

Up to this point, Riddle has been trying not to pay too much attention to the physicality of being stuck with Floyd. The whole situation was simply too embarrassing to think about and Riddle felt he had to ignore Floyd's physical signals to get through the situation at all, but now that he's realized he's been missing signals this whole time Riddle is able to put his embarrassment aside and reassess.

Floyd has become tense again, to the level that he was before Jade made his appearance. His legs are stiff, his chest barely moves when he breathes, and he's gone back to fidgeting by absent-mindedly drumming his fingers. They hardly make noise against the cushioned bottom of the coffin but the noise is there nonetheless, a constant reminder that Floyd is tense even if Riddle tries to focus on something else.

It's strange for Riddle to consider that Floyd has also been unhappy with being stuck this whole time. Not that he thought Floyd was pleased with it, he heard Floyd's tone when describing the student that pushed them over, but he thought that was more about being surprised in a fight than anything. The revelation that he's been tense because of something other than battle-readiness this whole time has Riddle feeling like an insensitive ass.

Of course Floyd doesn't like this any more than Riddle does, and of course while stuck with him he's genuinely trying not to tease Riddle. He's not scheming anything, he just wants to get through this the same as anyone would.

This is a bad situation for both of them, and Riddle's been treating it like he's the only one that needs attention paid to his needs. At this point it really is a miracle that Floyd's been trying to get along with him this whole time. Riddle would have given up on himself in a matter of minutes.

They are stuck for nearly another hour and a half however, and it's not too late for Riddle to try and make an effort of his own.

“Would you like to get back to the game we were playing before Jade arrived?”

Floyd stops fidgeting once Riddle talks, humming thoughtfully for only a second before answering.

“Nah, would take too long to get back in the rhythm.”

Riddle tries not to be frustrated at Floyd for choosing this exact moment to become arbitrarily bored, “Then is there anything you'd like to talk about?”

“I can't think of anything,” Floyd sighs as if greatly put-upon. “Can't you come up with something?”

Riddle now remembers why he wasn't making an effort before; Floyd Leech is, to the end, annoyingly uncooperative.

Riddle is making an effort now though, and he isn't going to let one rebuff stop him.

“Actually, I have a question I'd like to ask you.”

Floyd perks up at that, “Ooh, that's rare from Goldfishie. What do you wanna know?”

“It's not anything that interesting...” Riddle rather thinks that Floyd won't be interested in answering it. “I've just noticed you've been quite tense, and I'm wondering what that's about.”

For a moment Floyd doesn't respond at all. Riddle wonders if he's unknowingly stepped on a minefield.

“Aww, are you worried about me?”

Riddle should not have done that because Floyd's tone sounds entirely teasing and he's patting Riddle's hand again.

“You don't have to listen to Jade. I don't need especial looking after.”

Despite his words, Floyd is still tense. Riddle is fairly certain his breathing has become even shallower, his chest even more stiff.

“This isn't because of... Well, maybe that's a factor, but I assure you this is my own effort.”

“It really is cute that you're trying,” Floyd's voice pitches down a little, “but I'm not gonna tell anyone a weakness of mine so easily, not even Goldfishie.”

Riddle's face burns from being called cute, Floyd should know by now that Riddle does not think that's a compliment, but he's not going to be deterred by a second rebuff either. Riddle is making an effort, and giving up on a task within the first five minutes is hardly an effort at all.

“Then you're telling me there is a 'weakness' at play here.”

“Maaaaaaaybe.”

“You used the word 'weakness' exactly in reference to my asking why you're tense.”

“Maybe there's no reason at all and I'm trying to throw you off.”

Riddle would glare at Floyd if he could. He actually hopes Floyd feels him furrow his brow this time, “I have spoken to you enough times to know that if there were no reason at all you would simply say so.”

“Then how about this: the reason I don't wanna tell Goldfishie is that I just don't wanna.”

Infuriating, senseless, and irritating. How Floyd reached seventeen years of age without any sense of shame about his childishness is something Riddle will never understand.

“You were making an effort to cooperate with me before. Why not now?”

“It's not that I'm not trying,” strangely Floyd sounds offended, “but Goldfishie is asking something I don't wanna answer, and you're not even offering something in return.”

That... Makes sense. Cooperation is a give and take, and though Riddle is trying to make an effort now he hasn't conceded anything to Floyd in return. That was the whole problem to begin with and now Riddle's just repeating it. Foolish of him, and exactly what he wanted to avoid.

He'll have to think of a trade for something Floyd considers a “weakness” though, and that is going to be a frustrating exercise in itself.

“Would you tell me what's bothering you if I tell you something I consider to be my own weakness?”

Immediately Floyd feels less jittery and more interested.

“Depends on what it is Goldfishie tells me. I don't make bad trades, y'know.”

Riddle takes a moment to think about what to say. It sounds like he'll have to go beyond foods he doesn't like or Queen of Hearts rules he's ambivalent about, but at the same time he doesn't want to expose anything too serious. Floyd is just about the last person in existence Riddle wants to talk to about his mother, for instance.

There aren't many weaknesses in any person that fall between “petty” and “heavily emotional” though. Riddle's blood pressure is a serious weakness in the traditional sense but he's sure Floyd will find that boring, saying something about severity will get him an “I knew that already” response, and Floyd is surely aware that he's often inflexible as well. Neither physical nor personality flaws are going to work.

Riddle thinks to the point that he feels Floyd getting antsy again, then takes a page out of Floyd's own book and blurts out the first thing that comes to mind.

“I'm terrible at dealing with the cold.”

“Eeeh, that's not muc—”

Riddle brings his knee forward to signal that he shouldn't be interrupted, “I know that shouldn't be a noteworthy weakness of mine, I rather wish it wasn't, but I can't stand it at all. When I feel myself getting colder the medical dangers of that come to mind and I want to get warm right away. I can tolerate a briskness, same as anyone, but a fuller cold almost scares me.”

Floyd seems to consider Riddle's words for a moment.

Riddle tries to tell himself that he's not embarrassed. He can lie here on top of the person to whom he has just confessed his most irrational fear without shame whatsoever.

“That is a good one, thank you Goldfishie!” Floyd's tone is genuinely appreciative and he's patting Riddle's hand soothingly again, though when Riddles swats him away he stops. “You don't have to worry about getting cold in here though, we're real snug.”

“I am perfectly aware of our proximity, you don't have to remind me.”

Floyd ignores that rebuke and hums thoughtfully, “I guess it's my turn now, huh.”

“That would be the deal we struck, yes.”

“And I never go back on my deals...”

Floyd seems lost in thought a moment, like he's regretting that particular principle of his. Riddle lets him think, trying to focus more on the fact of Floyd's breathing getting more steady than the feel of his chest rising and falling.

“See Goldfishie... I really, really, hate being trapped.”

That's such a common fear it actually surprises Riddle.

“You're claustrophobic?”

Floyd laughs, “No no, tight spaces are fine, I can wriggle in and out of any old tunnel, they're fun! Being trapped is... Different.”

He sounds less amused at the end of that sentence, irritated even, and before Riddle can come up with a response he can feel and hear Floyd tensing up, curling his fingers, and striking at the side of the coffin.

“Hear that, how it doesn't give at all? How you can tell right away hitting it doesn't do anything? I hate it.”

Floyd's hands are still curled into fists and Riddle's beginning to think he might have made a mistake by drawing attention to the problem at hand.

“I can't do anything and that's the worst. I'm gonna wring that not-Scarabia kid for all he's got and then some,” there's a real frustration in Floyd's voice that feels rare to hear from him.

“Shrimpy bastard, screwing over me and Goldfish in one swoop. Prolly thinks he's won out there but we're gonna get him real good.”

Riddle can't work out exactly where Floyd's frustration is coming from, it feels disproportionate for what is ultimately more of an inconvenience than a true disaster, but maybe deeper motives don't matter when the problem itself is straightforward: Floyd doesn't like being stuck and powerless to get out of it.

What Riddle can do to mitigate that problem and make up for being selfish earlier, he doesn't know.

Floyd goes on while Riddle thinks, so many complaints at the tip of his tongue that he must have been thinking of them the whole time, “It's so annoying that he was aiming for Goldfishie, too. Didn't even realize he was gonna have to trap me, now he's on the even wronger side of things. 'Snot like I'm scared or anything, I know I'm gonna get out, but I just hate hate hate being stuck. I need to squeeze someone for this or I'm gonna explode.”

Riddle doesn't know what to say to that, but when he thinks back to how Floyd has tried to calm him down while they've been stuck, there's something he can do without speaking.

It's too embarrassing to think about for too long but it's not like he's feeling perfectly fine already. Riddle can deal with a little more embarrassment if it attains his goal of getting Floyd to calm down, surely.

He reaches up, ignoring what Floyd's actually saying in the moment, and pats Floyd on the cheek.

Floyd completely freezes.

“There, there?...”

Silence for a few seconds. Riddle's hand hovers in the air near Floyd's head.

Then Floyd laughs, a full-bodied laugh that squishes Riddle against the top of the coffin, and Riddle draws his hand back in full regret of his actions.

“Clearly my efforts are always going to be wasted on you,” he mutters, not entirely intending Floyd to hear.

“You're wrong there Goldfishie! I feel much better after a good joke.”

Riddle grits his teeth, willing the embarrassment away yet again, “That was a genuine effort you cretin.”

“Oh.”

Floyd pauses, seemingly to think about that statement.

For the first time since they've been trapped, and possibly ever, Riddle wishes he could see Floyd's face. His pulse and movements belie nothing, and though Riddle can never know

what Floyd's thinking, in this case he'd like to be able to guess.

They're stuck together after all, and at the very bottom of his heart Riddle has found that he wants to make this easier for both of them.

“Well, if Goldfishie really wants me to feel better, you'll let me do this.”

Before Riddle can ask, Floyd winds his arms around him and hugs Riddle to his chest.

Riddle freezes, fighting his instant urge to push Floyd away since that would hurt both of them, while thinking that there's no way he can accept this, it's far beyond any sense of decorum, but while he's thinking in circles he can feel Floyd relax again and hear him let out a deep, relieved breath.

It appears, somehow, that cuddling actually helps.

He has to get a better handle on this, “You... Feel better?”

“Much better, this is nice now,” he can practically hear the grin in Floyd's voice. “It's an old human instinct. Just feels good right?”

Riddle doesn't know how to respond to that. He doesn't want to register how being held feels. This is an entirely new level of inappropriate, regardless of his own feelings about dignity if anyone knew about—

“If you gotta, just pretend it's not me for a minute. Really focus on the feeling. You're even a full-on human, you should get something outta it too.”

Riddle isn't sure that's how comfort through touch works, surely you must need to like the person you're being comforted by to be truly affected by it, but for both their sakes if this is working Riddle wants to continue doing it, so he closes his eyes and does as Floyd says: Riddle ceases to think about who exactly is there and focuses on the sensations he's been steadfastly ignoring.

It's unsettling for a moment, to be sure. Arms around him feel like he's about to be constricted or smothered, breath near his head reads as a threat, and being this near to someone else at all feels like they've breached his defenses, but Floyd hardly moves. He lays there breathing quietly, arms loose enough around Riddle that they aren't an actual threat, and Riddle is able to accept that this touch is as much as is going to happen.

All he has to do is lie down and let Floyd loosely hold him. He's warm and comfortable and nobody's going to see.

Riddle decides to relax into it, and immediately his brow unfurrows and his legs relax. Apparently he was tenser than he realized as well.

Floyd sighs contentedly and though Riddle can't see it, he's sure the bastard is smiling.

“See? Better.”

Riddle's not going to admit Floyd was right, but that doesn't make a difference. Floyd hugs him the littlest bit tighter and Riddle, not wanting to jeopardize the moment, doesn't protest.

They lie there together in near silence, breaths falling almost in sync, and for as long as that lasts Riddle is able to accept there's nothing he can do, and think about nothing of consequence at all.

When Floyd's phone rumbling interrupts the silence it feels to Riddle like being woken from a dream.

Floyd must take it as an awakening too, since he groans in frustration. Riddle feels the rumbling of that beneath his head and immediately lifts himself off of Floyd, as much as he can in such an enclosed space. Floyd's arms fall to the side once he does and that's it - the peace is gone and whatever force allowed Riddle to let Floyd cuddle him has left with it.

Riddle knows it's gone because he feels his cheeks heating up at the very thought of it. For the past mystery amount of minutes he's been *cuddling* with *Floyd Leech*, how absurd. If he spoke a word of it to anyone else they'd wonder how he was alive.

"You don't have to leave that fast Goldfishie," Floyd says from underneath him, sounding a little groggy. He must have gone beyond 'getting comfortable' to actually falling asleep while they weren't talking. "Rescue team's still gonna take a minute."

"That doesn't matter, you're clearly calm now and I no longer have to—"

Riddle cuts himself short because Floyd was wrong about the timing of their rescue: he hears the sound of many footsteps headed their way.

"Now now everyone, calm down and walk in an orderly manner PLEASE."

That's the ever-fluctuating voice of Dire Crowley himself, and Riddle almost collapses back onto Floyd's chest out of relief.

"Took him long enough," Floyd mutters.

Riddle refuses to say it out loud, but he wholeheartedly agrees.

"There will be NO gawkers for this and within the barrier I'm about to erect absolutely NO photographs. This is for the scho— or rather our students' dignity's sake, understood?"

Crowley audibly casts a spell as a chorus of voices answers "understood" but Riddle's unconcerned with the headmaster because now that he can hear the gathered party, he can hear his actual rescuers: Trey and Cater.

FLoyd seems to be unable to help himself and comments, "Goldfishie's real happy to be out, huh?"

Riddle didn't need that observation, he can feel his own heart pounding, but at this distance he can also feel Floyd's hopeful heartbeat, "Of course I am, and so are you."

"Pact over then, huh?"

Did they have a pact? Riddle's unsure, but he can hear something of disappointment in Floyd's voice and finds that he'll be disappointed when their agreement dissolves too.

"Well, we'll see how everything go—"

"ROSEHEARTS! FLOYD LEECH! ARE THE TWO OF YOU SAFE?"

Crowley again, so Riddle gives a quick "yes" as Floyd answers "duh".

"Thank goodness then, both of you hold still!"

He doesn't tell them to prepare or close their eyes or anything. There's an audible twinkle, a number of clicks, and then the lid of the coffin is open.

It's too much light at once — Riddle had started to push himself up when the noises began but as he gets up onto his knees, very strongly feeling for himself how long they've been still and cramped — he has to close his eyes and can't actually get himself to his feet.

"Riddle! I've got you!"

That's Trey, to Riddle's immediate right, and he does firmly grab Riddle's arm.

"Cater, come and get the other one," Trey commands, which prompts hurried footsteps and a solid grip on Riddle's other arm. "Are you hurt at all?"

"No," Riddle would say more, but with Trey so close by he knows he's in good hands. "It was a push, nothing more."

Nonetheless, Riddle is glad he isn't wearing his dorm uniform as Trey and Cater help him to his feet. His legs would be far too stiff for heels at this exact moment. Trey and Cater help him step out of the coffin as well, Trey giving instructions since Riddle's still squinting, and in a matter of seconds Riddle is standing upright for the first time in hours, able to look down at the coffin and check if Floyd's getting up alright.

In the light, it's even more obvious that Floyd is still groggy. He's lazily sitting up, his hair and uniform are both more ruffled than usual, and though Jade is steadfastly offering his hand Floyd is trying to wave him off.

"I'm fiiiiine Jade, give me a second to find my land legs again."

"Take your brother's hand Floyd," Azul is standing at the foot of the coffin now, more fatigue evident on his face than he usually likes to show. Riddle would be tempted to needle him if he wasn't absolutely certain that he himself must look worse. "The longer you take the longer we're all away from Mostro, and I assume I don't have to—"

"Very good, very good," Crowley butts in before Azul can even finish his scolding. "It is so beautiful to see such touching reunions between my ever-so-friendly students, yes yes." Having commandeered everyone's attention Crowley then looks to Riddle and Floyd. "Did either of you hit your head?"

Riddle attempts to start an assessment of his condition as Floyd simply says "Golfishie did". Trey looks down at Riddle in alarm and Riddle sighs.

"There was a mild pain when I originally fell, the coffin lid bumped me on my way down but I feel fine now," he glares up at Trey before he can say anything, anticipating his friend's continued worry. "I will get checked at the nurse's office when I am able, as is proper medical procedure."

That mostly relaxes Trey, and prompts a "good, good" from Crowley.

"Since you are standing and talking I will assume all is well enough," Crowley tells him. "Floyd Leech, I take it you are entirely unharmed?"

Floyd starts to complain that Crowley's nagging him, and as Riddle opens his eyes more fully to see Floyd finally taking Jade's hand to stand up, he's able to shrug off Trey and Cater to look around at everyone that's been gathered.

Professor Crewel came through a second time, and gives Riddle a nod as their eyes meet. Jamil is waiting on the sidelines as well, one hand firmly grasping the arm of a Scarabia student Riddle doesn't recognize. There are also a couple of Octavinelle students Riddle knows are frequent Azul aides even if he doesn't know their names, and beside them are a couple of the more loyal Heartslabyul third years, holding between the two of them a decidedly un-loyal third year who Riddle recognizes instantly.

"Trey, Cater. Please tell me the culprit wasn't—"

"Ah, Housewarden Rosehearts, I was getting to that!" Crowley apparently has a third ear for the most important thing being said in a room and can't bear to be left out of it. "Yes, it is a great shame the perpetrator was in your very own house! And the previous vice-housewarden as well! Oh, how I am distraught that the culprit would be well-known Heartslabyul third year Grant Honeysuckle!!!"

Riddle has tried not to be too condescending to Grant since taking over as housewarden. He was the more diligent of the two students who were in charge of Heartslabyul before Riddle came to it, so if he had accepted Riddle as housewarden and kept up his previous standard of work Riddle would even have been happy to let Grant keep his position.

However, the lesser often told story of Riddle's ascension is that the former vice-housewarden completely rejected the idea that his upperslassman lost, challenged Riddle to a duel immediately, and lost even more quickly than his admired upperclassman did. Grant has been nursing an obvious grudge ever since. In Riddle's first year hardly a day went by without a snippy comment from him, and Riddle had let him continue only because Grant never actually broke any rules or obstructed Riddle or Trey from their duties. He'd been

relieved when Grant stopped however, and hoped for both of their sakes that he was putting his time to more productive use.

Evidently, considering the amount of planning put into this plot, Riddle's hopes had been in vain.

He casts a glare at Grant while beside him, Cater starts to explain how the ex-vice-housewarden ended up getting caught.

"Yeah Housewarden Riddle, sorry I didn't get to that part before the headmage did. When Trey gave me investigation duties I started by meeting up with Jamil and Azul over in Scarabia, where we were able to sit down and find out whose dorm uniform was missing. I checked if anything on Magicam was out of order, Azul checked... something else, and Jamil just asked his students until Azul and I got a hit - a Scarabia first year who'd been messing around with the Heartslabyul makeup not too long ago."

Riddle casts his eye to the student whose arm is being held by Jamil, who looks thoroughly miserable. He bows his head apologetically to Riddle while Jamil sighs.

"Yes, Ilan here was the student who leant Honeysuckle his Scarabia uniform," Jamil squeezes the despondent first year's arm a little tighter to prompt him, "please tell Housewarden Riddle why, exactly, you did this?"

Ilan's head droops even further down, "I thought swapping clothes for a day was Grant flirting with me..."

Riddle wonders for a second why Grant was a romantic prospect anyone would be excited about, before remembering Cater sighing about his wasted potential once and saying that someone as 'stupidly handsome' as Grant should be moving on and making use of his looks instead of finding new ways to insult Riddle all the time.

In any case, looking at Ilan once makes it clear that he was also a victim in this scheme and that he's probably experienced enough consequences for his actions just by learning Grant had an ulterior motive.

Jamil continues on with his narrative, "So as you can see, that was the extent of Scarabia's involvement. Once we told Ilan what his uniform had been used for he told us Honeysuckle had borrowed it, and from there Azul and Cater went back to Heartslabyul."

"It was a rather simple 'mystery' really," Azul takes over speaking, while looking over at Grant with clear disapproval. "Not even a go-between or two, he simply swapped uniforms with a first year who had a crush on him and once the deed was done he went back to his dorm, where Cater produced a couple of his Unique Magic clones and caught him."

"He confessed to the whole thing right away," Cater says to Riddle.

Now knowing the whole story, Riddle only has Grant to look at. Being caught between two other Heartslabyul students he should feel quite ashamed of himself, but compared to Ilan he looks positively smug, and his eyes are clearly noting the places where Riddle is disheveled.

His scheme was hardly qualified to be called one but it seemed it accomplished what he wanted — the tiniest bit of revenge against his one-sided rival.

Riddle wants to be angry with him. Riddle wants to turn red and collar him painfully and assign him as many plodding, time-consuming chores as he can but the truth is that after everything that happened today looking at Grant Honeysuckle just makes Riddle tired, and Riddle doesn't want to deal with him at all.

"You know, Goldfishie, we in Octavinelle could take over punishing him if you want."

It appears that while Riddle wasn't paying attention Floyd had come up beside him, and was now smiling down at him.

"He got me too after all, didn't he? I'd looooooove to show him a little something in return, if you'll let me."

Floyd's gaze moves to Grant, and though his smile doesn't change at all the look in his eyes certainly does.

Grant pales immediately. Riddle can't pretend it isn't satisfying to see.

Azul comes up to Floyd's side at that moment and starts a sales pitch for the idea, "What a lovely idea Floyd. I think it rather makes sense for an outside influence to assign him a punishment and we are the perfect candidates, especially given how both your and my absences together had a catastrophic effect on the Mostro Lounge's sales for the day and —"

Riddle has no interest in the rest of Azul's spiel. He instead looks up at Floyd, who makes eye contact with a big, dopey-looking grin.

Riddle knows better than to trust that look, but it does seem like a genuine gesture of goodwill on Floyd's part. He's continuing to cooperate, even outside of the coffin, and Riddle has to admit Floyd has been consistently been able to read his moods since they got trapped together. He probably knows Riddle is quite tired at this point.

"Back in the coffin," Floyd says, interrupting Azul and ignoring his indignant huff, "when I said 'we' were gonna get the culprit real good I didn't mean me and Azul and Jade y'know. I meant you and me, Goldfishie."

Despite everything, Riddle is kind of touched. Floyd truly, genuinely, intended to work along with Riddle until the end.

The only thing Riddle can do is meet that cooperation with his own and oh, he has the *perfect* idea for a punishment now. He can even go right back to his room after dispensing it.

"Thank you Floyd," he says, stunning Azul into silence, then turns to Grant, who is looking decidedly less smug after Riddle and Floyd's exchange.

"First of all, before anything else," Riddle says, taking his magical pen into his hand and pointing it directly at the now-grimacing Grant. "OFF WITH YOUR HEAD!!!!!!"

Off With Your Head is of course an immaculate spell whose magic-limiting effects are never dampened, but the pain aspect is less effective over repeated use on the same person as a simple matter of psychology, and this is far from Grant's first time deserving Riddle's punishment so he only winces in response.

Riddle doesn't necessarily like the vindictiveness he feels in this moment, but he simply can't wait to get to the rest of his plan.

"Second of all, for the next three weeks you will be recieving tasks from Trey in the morning. While I will allow leeway in the timing of these tasks so that you can fit them into your schedule, they must be done before Trey goes to bed for the day. If you perform your assigned tasks and the results are satisfactory, at the end of three weeks I will remove the collar and you can continue on with your school life as usual."

He feels a little bad about foisting this off on Trey, but he heard Trey's concern and when he looks to Trey now, Trey nods seriously. He can count on Trey to uphold punishment for potentially putting him in danger, and this way Riddle won't have to look at Grant or really think about him any more than usual. He knows what the ex-vicewarden really wants is attention from him, and Riddle's punishment guarantees Grant certainly won't be getting any.

"However," Riddle says, excited a little bit in spite of himself, "if you do not perform your assigned tasks, or I receive word that you have not performed them to Trey's satisfaction..."

Riddle smiles up at Floyd, hoping he takes the next part as the gesture of goodwill it's meant to be.

"I will be handing all responsibility for your punishment over to Class 2-D's Floyd Leech, for as long as he deems necessary."

Floyd's eyebrows raise, "Aaaaaaall responsibility? Really?"

Riddle nods, satisfaction growing by the second as he seems to be taking it well, "Yes 'really', and I am serious about 'for as long as you deem necessary' as well. Those are my terms."

"Goldfishie," Floyd held out his hand with a genuine smile on his face and a sparkle in his eye, "I'm more than happy with those! Let's shake on it."

Riddle smiles back and takes Floyd's hand, shaking it formally.

Riddle half-expected someone to intervene; for Grant to say that was too harsh, for the Headmage to declare that actually he was taking over the discipline here, for Azul to object to being cut out of the proceedings, or for Professor Crewel to scold him for leaving a serious task to a problem student.

When Riddle looks away from Floyd to the rest of their audience however, all of them look to be struck speechless.

Riddle tilts his head at them, hoping they understand his confusion, "Are these terms satisfactory to the rest of you?"

"Oh Rosehearts," Crowley is the first to speak as he clasps his hands together in delight, "those are *more* than satisfactory! I am so moved that the two of you have become closer through your adversity this afternoon. Why, you have demonstrated the very essence of youth!"

"I wasn't quick enough to get a picture..." Cater bemoans as he stares at the two of them. "It'd be viral on NRC Magicam in seconds..."

Riddle looks to Trey for a more sensible reaction, but he looks shocked too. Once he sees Riddle's expectant look, he adjusts his glasses and says, "Well, I'm fine with taking charge of Honeysuckle for you, and an extra pair of hands never hurts."

"Then our business here is settled, and we can all return to the rest of our day, yes?"

Riddle looks over everyone else, and though Crewel, Azul, and Jamil are clearly still surprised they nod along. Out of everyone, Jade has managed to look as calm as his usual self, and he nods at Riddle's question with one of his smiles that Riddle can't quite read.

"That does seem to be the appropriate course of action," Jade says, walking up and seemingly happily taking his place beside Azul. "Thank you for your consideration towards my dearest brother, Riddle."

Floyd says "I'm your only brother" at the same time Riddle says "I wasn't cooperating with him for your sake" and Jade smiles even wider.

"No matter whose sake it was for, thank you regardless."

Riddle thinks that it was for his own sake, but there's no way he's going to admit that out loud, much less in front of the three Octavinelle students before him.

"Let us return to the lounge, Azul," Jade says to Azul, dragging him away as he starts to recover from his surprise. "Floyd's macaroni is waiting and so is the dinner rush, we must get to it."

Crowley dispells his barrier at that point and the rest of the gathered teachers and students disperse as well. Crowley leaves in good spirits, Crewel leaves with a frown at Riddle that suggests they're going to talk later, Jamil leaves with his unfortunate charge before Riddle can even notice, and Riddle starts to gesture for his entourage to bring Grant back to Heartslabyul.

Floyd grins at the still-in-shock Grant before the other students really start dragging him along and tells him: "Don't worry about me, shrimpy bastard! I'll wait as looooooong as it takes for you to stumble, then we'll be able to have some fun."

Grant somehow pales further, and as the students holding him head towards the Heartslabyul mirror he doesn't even put up a fight.

Riddle never wants to see him again after this, but he does watch Grant's defeated trek back to the dorm with some satisfaction.

Trey and Cater stay behind, clearly waiting for Riddle to move, though strangely Floyd does as well. Riddle raises an eyebrow at him, having thought he'd leave with Azul and Jade, but he just continues to smile down at Riddle.

He looks genuinely pleased to be doing so, unlike his threatening smile at Grant.

"Aren't you going to go get your dinner?" Riddle asks.

"Wanted to see if I could catch a tired Goldfishie, but you seem to be alright."

Riddle frowns at his wording, trying to interpret it in a non-threatening way since he's been so cooperative up to this point, "Is that... Are you concerned about me?"

"No no, Goldfishie's strong," Floyd responds, which answers Riddle's question but doesn't explain Floyd's previous response. "I just couldn't see ya in there, and wanted to get a look before leaving."

"What does that even mean? I've been trying to understand you since it was the only way to make being trapped with you tolerable, but I'm going to give up for now if you don't make sense the next time you speak."

Instead of speaking, Floyd does something even more incomprehensible: he steps forward and hugs Riddle.

This felt nice earlier, but out in the open and with Riddle's friends nearby, any of the pleasure in the gesture is lost and Riddle flushes with embarrassment all the way to his ears.

"UNHAND ME, FLOYD LEECH!!! THIS INCIDENT IS OVER AND YOU WILL RETURN TO YOUR DORM OR I WILL USE MY RECENTLY GAINED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT TO CHOP OFF YOUR HEAD!!!"

Floyd just laughs, delighted. "There, now Goldfishie's back to normal! See you around!"

He lets Riddle go and walks off towards the Octavinelle mirror. There's a skip to his step, and Riddle regrets ever thinking he was sensible, for even a minute.

This leaves Riddle with Trey and Cater, who only start to move when Riddle turns around to the direction of the Heartslabyul mirror and they hurry to follow him.

"Wow," Cater comments as they walk. This is apparently all he has to say.

Trey has an eyebrow raised and a frown that says he finds Floyd deeply suspicious, "I hope he didn't do anything too strange while you were in there, Riddle. Are you sure you're alright?"

"I'm fine," Riddle insisted, letting out some of his frustration with a huff. "The only strange thing was that he genuinely tried to cooperate with me, and that was hardly the worst part of the experience."

If Riddle were being honest with himself and his friends he'd say it was the best part of his ordeals today, but for now he pushes that thought far, far back from the front of his mind, and wishes he could push any positive thought about Floyd Leech out of his mind forever.

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