

Life was like hide and seek.

At least that's what Marlo was trying to prove that his joke of a love life was.

For years Marlo had been crushing on his best friend.

And for years he'd been chickening out of actually telling said friend.

He could never really pinpoint when he first started catching feelings for Rowan. Maybe it was when he kissed his cheek when Marlo had found a dandelion on the side of the road for Rowan in 2nd grade. Maybe it was in 8th grade when they were both dateless for the school dance and ditched to go get fast food and hang out at the skatepark. Maybe it was sophomore year when they'd both revealed that they weren't exactly straight, nor really on the other side of the fence.

Neither of them cared enough to shove themselves into a box with labels if they hadn't even had their first kisses yet. Neither of them cared to try dating anyone either. Marlo was secretly hoping that Rowan would give him a chance. Rowan on the other hand, was a mystery.

Plenty of people liked him, a lot of people had confessed to him. He turned them down, which Marlo didn't understand since one of the prettiest girls in their grade had asked him out several times. He kept thinking that Rowan would someday give him a hint that he wanted to be more than friends, and the constant rejection of eligible bachelors and bachelorettes didn't help him kill his unobtainable fantasy.

Even if Marlo was trying to shove the idea of them together to the back of his mind it kept popping up. With every small smile of reassurance Rowan gave to him, everytime he laughed, when he chewed his pens, when he was particularly focused on something he liked, and even when he was ranting about something that Marlo had never heard of.

Marlo was constantly seeking for a reason to tell Rowan how he felt. Everytime he came close he would feel a pang of shame in his chest and went right back into hiding.

Today wasn't any different.

The two teens were sitting on Marlo's bedroom floor, notes and homework assignments laid everywhere that their bodies weren't. Rowan had his legs sprawled onto the other's lap and he had his laptop balanced on his knees as he typed away at his English essay. Marlo was leaned back against the wall with his notebook on the latter's shins and his chin sat in his freehand as he scribbled down a self-made study guide.

His focus was broken by the sound of Rowan yawning. He glanced up and was immediately staring at the light freckles that were splattered across the other teen's nose. It was starting to become summer, and with summer came Rowan's freckles.

Marlo loved summer for that reason.

"You good there 'Mar?"

"Yeah ,yeah- sorry just zoned out a bit,"

"It's chill. Did ya get all your stuff done?"

"Yep, you?"

"Nah, I still have like three more pages of that essay to go."

"Then get it done, idiot."

"But it's so boring." Rowan groaned dramatically, flipping around and laying his head where his legs previously sat. Marlo gave him a look, mainly as an excuse to stare into Rowan's hazel eyes for a few moments. The plan worked, the other teen took the staring as a challenge and started death glaring at his friend.

"Stop being a bum and get your work done." Marlo responded, shoving Rowan off his lap.

"Oof-"

"C'mon," Marlo said, setting Rowan's laptop on his stomach then getting off the floor. He went to go get a snack from the kitchen then Rowan called from behind him as he turned to go down the stairs,

"Fruit gummies please!" Marlo half laughed and rolled his eyes even if the other couldn't see him at the moment.

A few minutes later Marlo walked back into the room and saw his friend laying out across his bed, laptop discarded on the floor once again.

"Ro I swear-"

"It's due tomorrow chill and come lay with me 'Mar-Mar,"

Marlo loved that nickname.

He obliged and squished himself onto the other side of his twin bed.

He stared at Rowan's face, his chest started to get a warm fuzzy feeling.

It was bubbling up to the back of his throat.

Those three little words were swirling in his mind.

Echoing over and over again in a horrifying yet beautiful symphony.

*I love you, I love you, I love you-*

"You okay Marlo? You look a bit ill-"

Suddenly all that courage was ripped away. Leaving a gaping black hole in his stomach.

“Mhm-”

Rowan frowned and sat up, “You never tell me anything anymore.”

“I’m sorry-”

“I’m not asking for an apology, I’m asking what’s on your mind.”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“This is what I’m talking about Marlo, we’re supposed to be best friends and now you’re keeping secrets from me and it isn’t fair.” Rowan sighed.

“I can’t tell you- you’ll hate me if I do.”

“You really think that-?” The dark haired boy responded, visibly upset.

“No it’s- I just can’t tell you because it’ll be weird after and we’ll drift apart- I can’t lose you Rowan.”

“I won’t let that happen Marlo. Please, just tell me-”

Marlo tried to pry the words off his tongue. They wouldn’t come loose and he turned into an illiterate idiot.

“Hey, breath.” Rowan cut in, setting a warm hand on his shoulder.

The warmth spread across his entire body, making his chest feel like TV static again. He took a breath then pulled the words off his tongue. Slowly, one by one he said them.

“I love you...”

The TV static rose further in his body, sending hot tears running down his cheeks.

The room was silent. Then there was laughter. The fuzziness was gone, the black hole was back.

“I-”

“I’m sorry for laughing, but that’s it? That’s all you wanted to tell me-?”

Marlo nodded, ashamed.

“Oh “Mar-mar I love you too, I’ve been trying to tell you for weeks but you always seemed to fold into yourself when I got close to-”

Now they were both laughing.

Neither of the knew what exactly they were laughing about, but there was something about how they had been barely missing each other that was comedic.