

Seventeen-year-old, Dougie Wheeler, was unaware of the silhouette outside his bedroom window as he slept peacefully on his full-size mattress. His resting mind had thoughts only for the new band he was joining and how famous they were all going to be in a couple of years. He dreamt of being the next Mark Hoppus; the bassist from one of Dougie's all-time favorite bands – even if they were on an indefinite hiatus!

The teenager was dressed comfortably in his plaid faux-University pajama bottoms, chest bare, and slumbering face down on his disheveled bed of blue jersey sheets. Music played softly to help him snooze the night away; mainly Blink-182 and Green Day. The room was still, aside from the window to the left of his bed slowly rising, letting the cool summer air seep through and flood the room. A shadow stealthily entered the moonlit space, holding the thick curtains away from the window.

The young lad stirred but didn't face the window as his body twisted to reposition.

A girl about the age of sixteen looked down at the figure in the bed with panic before turning to the window, slowly closing it. The adolescent was still in her apparel from the day: dark denim jeans, hunter green V-neck shirt, brown converse, her auburn hair was straightened and worn down as her fringed bangs fell over one of her jade irises.

Turning back towards Dougie, still sleeping comfortably in the mess of his bed, the teenaged girl leaned over the bed slightly and distinctly whispered, "Dougie." She briefly waited for any coherent response, but none came. "Hey, you up still?" Her silky voice asked as the limp body lazily turned on its side.

Dougie slowly shook his head, fighting against the pillow that smothered his face when he turned into it. He turned his head until the tip of his nose resembled a rubber substance as it was released from the confines of the pillow and bounced into place on his face. Finally, he rolled onto his back, "Errr...no." he mumbled incoherently. "I'm sleepin'." Came another low grumble from the teenager's thin lips. He didn't open his eyes as he continued, "Dreamin' 'bout bein' on the red carpet of some award show, where I am winnin' Best Pop Mop. And all the girls are swoonin' at the sight of me," a grin spread across his lips, "...and want me ta sign their knickers."

The teenage girl, still standing at the side of his bed, rolled her eyes as she realized her friend was quite lucid.

“Oh!” Dougie swooned, “One of ’em is a hot surfer babe!” He added before giving a seductive growl, pawing at the air lazily.

The tawny-haired girl playfully scoffed as she glanced down at the boy on the bed. The moon shone, almost unnaturally, through the two windows in the room giving more than enough light for her to see Dougie’s face.

Dougie smirked before popping his eyes open and glimpsing around as if he’d just been startled awake. “Oh,” he muttered with distraught. “Oh, no.” He hung his head low, his frown deepening. “Well. Now I’m awake,” he stated plainly, wiping the sleep from the corners of his ocean blue orbs. “I suppose.” He added as he looked up at the intruder, “What’s up?”

The small smile once spread across the female’s face vanished at his question. She bent one of her knees into the mattress and began to fiddle her fingers, “Well, I uh…” she started to falter, “I just wanted to apologize for earlier.” Her voice was even as she made her apology. Recognizing her nervous habit with her hands, she dropped them to her side.

Meanwhile, Dougie sat up in his bed and leaned against his pillow and plush headboard.

“I shouldn’t have snapped at you.”

Dougie arched a brow in disbelief, “Zooney, you’re losin’ sleep over that?” he asked, slightly teasing, as he turned to his other side and switched the light sitting on his nightstand.

Zooney stood with her mouth gaped open. She quickly blinked out of her reverie and snapped, “Shut up!” She then slouched into the bed. “Doug, you’re my best mate and it’s just…” She couldn’t bring herself to look at Dougie and she didn’t know where she was going with her next statement, “I should have been more supportive.” She finally gave in to her apology.

Dougie nodded slowly. “Hmm, yes, Zoes,” his voice was soft but firm. Childishly, he finished, “You should’ve.” By his tone alone, it was obvious that he didn’t mean anything by his words and would rather think nothing of the situation. When Zooney didn’t say anything, Dougie shrugged, “Eh, I’m over it.”

His friend continued to frown, though. It was clear she was losing sleep over an argument she’d had with him earlier in the day, and there he was mocking her restless behavior.

He sighed, then playfully rolled his eyes. “C’mon,” he cleared an area on his bed from the pile of blankets and pillows. “Get in!”

Zooley stood back from the mattress, watching him clear the space before she complied and climbed into the bed.

“Just keep ya hands ta ya’self.” Dougie’s eyes flicked to his friend’s face as he slid himself closer to the opposite edge, making room for her.

Zooley rolled her eyes as she settled in.

“No, I’m serious.” Dougie informed, catching her expression. “I don’t want any funny-business from und’a’neath. Any movement what-so-ev’a shall result in severe punishment.”

Zooley furrowed her brows in confusion as she grumbled, “Severe punishment?” She threw her arms over the comforter and turned to the young lad. “What, so I can’t breathe?” She inquired sarcastically as Dougie continued to stare with a serious gaze.

Dougie shook his head foolishly, sticking his nose in the air for a full effect of ridiculousness. “Nope.” He replied simply, folding his arms over his chest. He continued articulately, “You must hold your breath or at least come out from under the sheets if you insist on breathing.” His nose remained high in the air as if he really planned on sticking to his illogical rule.

Zooley shook her head, scoffing, as Dougie snickered to himself. He relaxed as his friend slouched into the plush headboard. Zooley knew he was only teasing, but the room fell silent as the two sat in the bed, neither looking to the other. She tilted her head, but still refused to meet Dougie’s soft expression. “Dougs?”

His eyes fell to the space over his lap. “Zoes?” He mocked her tone.

“My parents want to move back to the States.” She nearly choked, failing her usual ability to state a fact as if it were unimportant.

Dougie’s ocean irises found her face. “States?” He stared with confusion. “What are those?” He inquired, as if he truly didn’t know. Zooley frowned, giving him an expression of disapproval. He shrugged, looking away. “Well, that’s jus’ too bad, isn’t it?” He proclaimed.

“Dougie.” A reprimanding tone escaped her lips.

The young bassist lazily stretched his back by reaching for his toes. “Listen, there’s only room for one of us ta walk out on this town.” He smoothed his hands over the comforter across his lap, as if laying actual cards out on a table, and continued, “An’ I don’t really think the world can ’andle both of us goin’ off, doin’ our thing all at once.” He shrugged, “It wouldn’t know what ta do with itself.”

Zooley sighed and leaned further into the headboard as she allowed Dougie the privilege of being immature. He looked over his shoulder at her. “Which one of us will it follow?” His voice lowered with every sentence, becoming a comforting velvet tone to Zooley’s ears. “Seriously. It’s like...” Dougie pondered, “it’s like askin’ Mum ta part with both children.” He explained. Dougie slid a hand through his sandy mop of hair as he referred to his own mother and the fact that once he’s gone, all his mother will have is his younger sister, Jazzie. He gave a mocking frown, and added, “Jus’ not cool.”

Zooley recognized her best friend’s anxious habit of making light of a serious situation. Allowing him a moment, she said, “You’re such a dork.” But the room filled with silence once again as neither really wanted to say what was on their mind. She finally took a deep breath, and frowned as she stated, “I, seriously, don’t want to go back to America.”

Realizing the genuine fret in her tone, Dougie grimaced before admitting, “I seriously don’t wan’ch’ya to, either.”

Zooley glanced around the room as she shrugged. “Not like it should matter to you.” She said in a low voice, “Not if you’re planning to move in with your new bandmates.” Dougie’s mouth dropped at the comment as she added, “We won’t see much of each other.”

The sandy-haired boy blinked. “I’m movin’ an hour away.” He argued. “You’re talkin’ ’bout placin’ a whole ocean between us.” He spread his arms apart dramatically, as if to show the difference in distance. “And, of course, we’ll see each other!” He pouted slightly.

Although Dougie planned to drop out of school to join a pop band—and this meant living with the lads and writing music 24/7—that didn’t mean he planned on ceasing communication and visiting with his friends...Zooley in particular.

The teenage girl gave a halfhearted smile. “We’ve had an ocean between us before.” She claimed, trying her best to keep positive.

Dougie made a skewed expression. “Yeah, but tha’ was before I knew ya!”

From his point of view, Zooley didn’t have the best defense. Yes, they have had the Atlantic Ocean separating them before but, for him, it didn’t count because they hadn’t known one another yet. If she moved back to America now, he’d know all the good times he’d be missing out on. And he didn’t want that.

Zooley’s concerned expression fell to the comforter, where her hands fiddled with the fabric. “Okay,” she mumbled. She shook her head, seemingly fighting some internal monologue,

and she glanced back up at Dougie. “I still don’t see what’s changed.” She admitted. “Other than we know each other now. You talk to Raven and Katherine loads on the internet.” She reminded him of their friends; two sisters, whose family moved back to America a few years ago. “It’s not like we’ll stop talking.” At some point in her argument, she had stiffened. Realizing this, she released the tension in her shoulders and continued, “And who knows, maybe I’ll come back for Uni.”

Dougie scoffed, shaking his head stubbornly. “Not the same.”

“I don’t see how not.” The two glared at each other for a moment.

How could he convince her to stay? Of course, it wasn’t Zooley who needed convincing – it was her parents.

What did he have to do to keep Zooley in England? He could see in his friend’s eyed that she didn’t really want to leave, and he began wondering who Zooley was really trying to convince. Was she trying to assure Dougie that, even if she did move, it’d be all right? Or was it that, she was desperately trying to believe the lie herself?

“Maybe...you should just...move in here.” He hesitantly suggested.

Zooley blinked in confusion. “Quoi?”

“Well, it’s not exactly like I’ll be occupyin’ the room.” He spat with a low chuckle. “It’s just Mum an’ Jazzie here.” His eyes shifted to two, large, glass containers on one side of the bedroom. “An’ someone’s gotta take care of Lewis an’ Sukie.” He rationalized, pointing over to two terrariums: each containing a different lizard.

Zooley playfully scoffed. “Oh, so now you’re turning me into your house maid?”

“No!” Dougie defensively assured, shaking his head. “Not a house maid...just my room...maid.” He wittily remarked; making a face at his own comment and how ridiculous it sounded. He shook his head at his own stupidity before carrying on, “Couldn’t care less about the rest of the house. Can’t really expect anyone living here ta feed ’em. Change their water bowls. Clean their tanks.” He started listing things, counting them on his fingers. “Make sure they get out for a walk. Make sure they grow up with the finest education. Listen to ’em when they have problems...” he trailed on.

“Education?” Zooley repeated incredulously. “Dougie, they’re lizards.” She half-turned to him; he’d stopped and blinked at her. “In a fish tank,” she continued, “with everything they could possibly need to survive in a house; as domestic reptiles.” She enlightened the young lad,

as if she were talking down to a toddler. “I don’t think they’ll have many woes, so long as they continue to be taken care of.”

Dougie’s mouth dropped, acting as though he were outraged with her proclamation. “Well, how would you know?” He narrowed his eyes. “Have you ev’ a listened ta what they’ve got ta say?”

Zoocy was losing her patients. “No Dougie. They’re lizards. They shouldn’t be *saying* anything.”

Dougie huffed, throwing the comforter off his lap and jumping out of the bed. He grabbed a small container of live crickets and dropped a couple in each terrarium. “Don’t listen ta the mean girl.” He bent over and cooed at them. “She’s jus’ a girl. She doesn’t understand.” he went on as if Zoocy hadn’t even been in the room.

She glared at the back of his head. “Honestly, how old are you?”

He glanced over his shoulder at her. “You’re jus’ jealous.” He sneered, placing the food back down beside one of the tanks. He turned completely and stared at her.

“Of what?” She questioned, folding her arms over her chest.

The young bassist slowly made his way towards the bed. “Of me givin’ my lizards more attention than I give you.”

Zoocy tossed her hands in the air in mock defeat, “Oh, you’ve caught me!”

“Damn straight I caught you.” Dougie smugly stated. “Know why?” He asked, a small smirk on his face.

Feigning interest Zoocy asked, “Why’s that?” Her eyes followed his movement as he crossed the room, stopping at the edge of the mattress.

Without warning, Dougie beat down on the bed with his hands and stared Zoocy straight in the eyes. Zoocy gasped from the surprise before going silent with the realization of how close they were. “Because I’m Dougie Wheeler,” he beamed. “*Privates* Inspector.” He added, quite smitten with himself. Leave it to him to provide some perverted comment. He did always have a way with his words.

Zoocy choked back the laughter as she surveyed the room. “Business has been slow, I see.” She teased.

The young lad shrugged. “I do okay.” He muttered, scuffing his feet on the floor before climbing back onto the bed.

“Okay? Ri-i-i-ight.” Zooey remarked in disbelief.

Dougie caught her sarcasm and frowned. “What? I do.”

She cocked her head to one side. “Right, Dougie?” She leaned in, keeping her voice down, “Your porn...” she began, shaking her head slowly at her friend, “...doesn’t count.”

His mouth dropped as he glanced over Zooey’s shoulder at the few boxes on the floor, marked: Doug’s Porn. “Hey! Sod off.” He softly cried. “I’m researchin’ my field.”

Zooey arched a fine brow. “Field?”

He gave her a cheeky smile. “Yeah.” He confirmed, smugly adding, “I’m the next Hugh Hefner, ya know?”

Feigning interested, she replied, “Oh, no...I didn’t know.” She crossed her arms over her chest, leaned back once again, awaiting more of Dougie’s explanation to his ‘research’.

The young bassist nodded. “Yeah, and if you behave, I might make ya Play-Mate of the Month.” He gave another cheeky smile, mocking Zooey’s crossed arms as he settled back onto the bed and leaned back into his pillow and headboard.

“Oh, please.”

He shrugged with slight approval. “Begging’s a start. Though, ya might wanna try bribing; has more of a promising outcome.”

Zooey’s jaw dropped. “Dougie!” She cried, elbowing him playfully. As their laughter slowly died, she began wondering how they even got onto the topic and how she was going to get out of it.

Dougie was quite amusing, and she loved him for it. She needed a good laugh, but...the weight of moving was still pressing on her mind. The more she laughed with her friend, the tighter she pulled her arms over her chest. Zooey was terrified of leaving Dougie behind. Finally, she sighed and turned to him. “What are you thinking about?” She was genuinely interested to know what was going on in the his mind.

With a deep breath and audible sigh, he truthfully replied, “You.”

“Seriously?”

“Yeah.”

Out of pure curiosity she asked, “What about me?”

Any time she'd ever asked anyone about what was on their mind, not once had she ever been the subject. To hear Dougie state that she was what he was thinking about, not only interested her but somehow made her feel a bit more special.

Dougie hummed with consideration. Deeply wondering if he should admit his truth or continue with his playfulness. Deciding he was terrified of sharing honest feelings, he voted for the latter and said, "I'm thinkin'...red polka dotted bikini, instead of yellow for you." He grinned. "It'll bring the color out in ya eyes. Whereas the yellow'd jus' drown 'em in gray."

Zooey gasped, grabbing a pillow from behind Dougie and smacked him with it. It wasn't as if she weren't used to such comments, but generally they were made when the two were surrounded by their group of friends and they could all weigh in and jeer at one another.

The young bassist laughed as he lifted his arms up to shield the blows of the cushion.

Zooey began wondering what he was really thinking. He stated that the subject of his thoughts had been her, and she had felt the truth behind the claim. There'd been something in his eyes that told her that Dougie had meant it. What is going on with her friend? Why was he acting so strange? Well, stranger than usual.

Dougie choked back on his laughter, finally stifling himself. "Okay. Alright," he cleared his throat. "Fine! What're you thinkin' 'bout, then?" Before Zooey could even open her mouth to respond, he added, "And don't say hookin' up with me, cos that's nothin' new."

Zooey's green orbs rolled in their sockets. "Don't you wish?" She stuck her tongue out before smiling at an indignant Dougie. While that had been her initial reaction, she couldn't help pondering why her best friend felt the need to make such a statement. The idea of them getting together...being more than friends...had crossed her mind. Evidently, the thought had also crossed Dougie's.

Sure, their friends had all teased them about being a couple. But Zooey figured Dougie had never seen them in that way. She had only considered it briefly, herself! Sure he was attractive, amusing to no end, and he was always there for her when she needed him the most. But, at the end of the day, he was Dougie.

"Honestly," Zooey frowned, "I don't want to get into it." She let out a sigh.

Dougie knew exactly what was pressing in his friend's mind. And he hated that the subject of moving back to the States had subtly worked its way back into their conversation. He'd been trying so hard to keep the conversation lighthearted. He didn't want Zooey to move,

any more than she wanted to leave. Why did she have to let it eat away at her when he was trying desperately to wash all the worrisome thoughts away?

“Maybe you can convince your parents to let you stay ’til the end of the school year.” He finally recommended.

Zoey gave him a sideways glance. “Oh yeah, sure. Whatever Dougs.”

Dougie’s mouth dropped slightly. “What’s that s’posed ta mean?”

“You know my parents! There’s no compromising with them.” She choked. Her face shifted from near tears to stone. “Besides, you’re running away already. Some band. Trying to get noticed by loads of fan girls.” She stated, as if he needed reminding. Just the thought of all the girls who’d start swooning over Dougie suddenly made Zoey sick to her stomach.

The young bassist smirked. “Oooh, fan girls. Forgot about them.” He mused only a moment, and then shook the thoughts from his mind. He glanced sideways at his companion. “And I’m not runnin’ away!” He gave a low grumble in his defense, “Thirty minutes. Maybe less than, depending on speed. You don’t listen very well do ya? Seriously.”

Zoey ignored his last few comments. “You know what though, it’s not like you’re graduating with me.” She crossed her arms over her chest once again.

The thought of an absent Dougie only ate away at her insides. A feeling she couldn’t quite explain. The more she thought about it, the more uncomfortable the subject grew for her. Just one more year; why couldn’t Dougie wait just one more year and then they both could go their separate ways; much like life pretty much had planned out for them anyways.

Dougie arched a brow. “With you?” He inquired. He wasn’t certain he heard his friend correctly, but the more they got into this particular subject, the more he was realizing it wasn’t about the rest of the world.

It was about him and Zoes.

Slightly stunned by his confusion, she blinked. “Well...yeah.” She mumbled, “Well, I mean...the gang and me.” She tried rephrasing but felt as though the attempt had been made too late. “Then again, Harry’s running off with you to join the band.” She realized, “I mean...it’s just us since Raven and Katherine left. Owen and James graduated last year. And Lindsay transferred.”

“Wha’ about Matt and Izzy...oh, and that Sara gal who moved here mid-year.”

“Ok, so there are a few others. But they don’t matter.” Zoey noted, “Not really.”

Teasingly, he asked, "And you do?"

"I better." She softly shrieked, remembering the slumbering family members below them. He smirked to himself and muttered, "You do."

Zoey gave a small smirk, indicating she'd heard him. Dougie froze. He hadn't meant for his statement to be loud enough for her ears. Or had, at least, hoped he hadn't actually spoken out loud.

Before the moment had the chance to grow more awkward, Zoey stuck her tongue out at him. In response, Dougie poked her side before proceeding to tickle her.

"No, Dougs!" she laughed, "Not fair! Not fair...I demand a rematch!" She tried to keep her voice down, as not to wake the rest of the house, but she couldn't help her laughter as she fought to wiggle free of his grasp. He had one arm around her waist while the other continued to tickle her side.

Zoey fell back, but not before snatching Dougie and bringing him down with her at the foot of the bed. Their laughter ceased immediately as their noses brushed; before Dougie could catch himself.

There was a long moment where they just stared at each other. Both wondered what was on the other one's mind. Zoey blinked, finally breaking the connection between them. Dougie cleared his throat and backed off, sitting back up on the bed.

The girl sighed as she propped herself back up. "So...enough of this rubbish." She offered him a small smile as she tucked a few pieces of hair behind her ear. "Tell me about this band of yours. Have you lot thought up a name?"

Dougie blinked as he ran a hand through his tangled mess of hair. "Uh, yeah. That blond guitarist guy...he said somethin' 'bout Marty...or Delorian or somethin'." Dougie replied. He recalled the name the front-runner came up with, but the band wasn't on his mind now. Dougie shrugged with indifference. "I dunno. Wasn't really paying attention."

Zoey playfully rolled her eyes. "Well, did you suggest anything?"

Dougie flashed another one of his cheeky smiles. "Yeah!" he gleamed, "I was thinkin'...Blink-183!"

Zoey chuckled, "Oh, how original." Sarcasm dripped like venom from her lips. She crawled back to where she'd originally been seated, tucking herself into the bed sheets.

Dougie shrugged smugly. “I thought so.” His friend chuckled beside him. “Better than Harry’s suggestion anyways.” He ridiculed, “I mean, what kind of name is Harry James & the Band?” He quickly added, “He’s only the bloody drummer.”

Zoey chuckled. “Oh, is that all he is?” She continued, teasingly, “Anyone tell Jess that?”

Jess was a close friend to Dougie and Zoey, and since the beginning of the last school year, had been dating Harry.

“Oh, do you think she should know?”

“I think it’s only fair. After all, they *are* dating.”

Dougie scoffed. “Oh, is that all?”

“Yeah.” She stated, playfully raising her shoulders. “And who’d want to date someone who’s a *bloody drummer*?” She mocked, giving quotation marks with her index and middle fingers as she quoted Dougie.

The young lad giggled. “A bloody drummer! He may want to consider seeking medical attention for that!”

Zoey looked at him for a moment as if what he’d said hadn’t made much sense, but then the two fell into a light chuckle before quieting down. She pushed the conversation along, asking, “So, have you worked on any songs?”

As much as she didn’t want Dougie to drop out of school before his last year, Zoey knew how much being in a band meant to her friend. This was Dougie’s dream on a platter. His one chance to show the world his talent, so she figured it was best if she were supportive.

Dougie shifted uncomfortably. “Well, the two guitarists wrote a few songs already.” He enlightened. “I don’t think Harry knows how to read, much less write.” He briefly pondered before jokingly inserting, “Oh wait, that’s me.”

“But you write.” She nudged him.

Dougie’s brows furrowed. “Yeah, ’bout destructions of the world. And hoping people choke and die.” He mocked a few of his own lyrics.

Zoey shrugged and gave a small pout. “I like your Scary Silence song.” She noted, not quite remembering the title of the song her friend wrote. She liked it, regardless of the title.

Dougie gave another low grumble. “*Stillness Is A Daunting Sound.*” and then shook his head from the thought. “Anyways, Harry’s already moved in, ya know? They were settin’ his kit up in the Bolton Boy’s room.”

“Why are they in his room and not Harry’s?”

Dougie considered her question. It was a fair inquiry. Harry will have his own room and from the sounds of it, each room seemed pretty spacey, so why shouldn’t Harry have his own belongings in his bedroom? He shouldn’t bring so much into the new house...take what you need. Leave the rest behind. He needed his drums, so...

Dougie shrugged, finally replying, “I dunno. The Bolton Boy’s got the master bedroom. More space, I s’pose. Harry’s barely got enough space for his full in the room he’s chosen. Oh, you’ve got ta see his room!” His oceanic eyes lit up with excitement. “It’s got this wall of mirrors surroundin’ a nook in the wall, where the head of his bed will go.”

A bit drowsy, Zooley stated, “Hrm...that’s Harry. Vain as he likes.” And then she gave a small yawn and leaned back on the plush headboard, melting into the cushion.

“Harry’s not vain!” Dougie contemplated the idea. “Okay, so maybe he is.” He agreed, quickly adding, “A little.”

Even drowsier than before, the word, “Dork.” barely escaped Zooley’s mouth as she grabbed one of Dougie’s pillows and found herself lying down, hardly fighting to keep awake.

Dougie wasn’t paying much attention as she did this and he continued, “An’ of course, I’m jus’ down the hall from him. Next room, actually! It’ll be just like this room, only a queen-size instead of this lousy double.” He indicated his mattress. “An’ of course the lizards will have ta stay here until further notice.” He glanced over at his lizards before sighing, “I’m wonderin’ if we’re allowed ta have people over. I mean, we’ll be livin’ there an’ all. So, it stands ta reason.” He thought aloud to himself. “Oh...that blond guitarist! He’s got a balcony outside his room.” He stated, not looking back at Zooley once, who was now peacefully sleeping. “Then again, it’s on the third floor and well...that’s jus’ too much exercise.”

The young bassist finally turned to catch his friend’s expression; only to find that she had fallen asleep. With a sigh of hopelessly, he went back to looking straight at the empty space of his bedroom. There were many filled and labeled boxes. Hardly any posters decorated the once photo-plastered walls. It felt empty.

“Yeah, so ya know how you’ve been goin’ on about how my say on your move to the States doesn’t count or anythin’?” He rhetorically asked, fidgeting with his comforter. “Yes, well. I rather think it does.” He nodded aggressively before changing the direction of his bobbing head, so it was shaking left to right. “Now, don’t go arguin’ with me! Hear me out.” He took a

deep breath and calmly began to state his argument to his slumbering companion. “See, I believe you shouldn’t move cos it’ll be easier for me ta come an’ visit you on breaks. Not ta mention cheaper.” Dougie gave a weak smile. “Now, if you’re wonderin’ why I’d come and visit you instead of goin’ ta Australia or Barbados or somethin’; the answer’s quite simple!”

He paused, leaning back on one arm, and looking down at his friend; reassuring himself that Zooney was truly and deeply asleep.

There was another minute as he stared down at her pale, peaceful face. His ocean blue eyes observed the placement of Zooney in his bed beside him. Her breathing was steady and warm as it reached the back of his hand.

His dark eyebrows melted in slight frustration as Zooney’s fringed bangs fell over her closed eyes. He leaned in closer, bringing his free arm around, and gently brushed the stray hairs from his friend’s composed features. So many thoughts ran through the young bassist’s mind as he sat there staring down at his best friend. His calloused fingers brushed down her temple to her cheek, outlining her jawline.

Zooney whimpered in her sleep, startling Dougie. He quickly sat straight up and kept a watchful eye on his friend as she yawned and repositioned, to face the middle of the small bed.

He sighed. “Yeah. Ya see, I think...” he hesitated. “I think I really rather like you.” Dougie finally admitted as he turned and hung his head low. “I mean, I know we’re best mates an’ all...but I don’t think I can really help it. An’ I was really hopin’ we could work on that a bit.” He offered a small shrug. “Just sorta see where it takes us.” He glanced back down at Zooney. She took a deep breath and scrunched up into a ball. “Yeah. I’m glad you feel the same way.” Dougie sighed in defeat and turned to his lamp.

He switched the lamp off and slid beneath his sheets, tucking himself in as he faced Zooney. One of her hands lay just in front of her face, palm side up. Dougie gave a weak smile, took a deep breath, and slid his hand into hers. He lay awake, watching her until sleep, eventually, won over. Tomorrow would be another day.

The End