

Scratch

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Scratch

by [boltedfruit](#)

Summary

Day 7 Prompt: Scratching/Insects

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They chant *King Steve*, and Eddie falls a little in love.

But first, another hit.

Notes

Happy day 6 of spooky month!

**The end chapter note includes specific content warnings.

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

The day Eddie's dad shaves his head, he runs out of the house, teary-eyed and betrayed. He goes to Jonathan's house, because Jon's always been kind and doesn't object when Eddie asks for help creating a new character for D&D.

He shows up, and Jon's the one who answers the door. He mutters a soft *sorry*, and Eddie only needs to step inside before he hears the yelling. He hums in understanding. He hates when his own parents fight too.

They go to his room and listen to records. Eddie snuffles as he lies back on Jonathan's bed, letting the music drown everything else out.

"It doesn't look that bad."

"Yeah, it does."

"I don't think so." Jonathan joins him, their shoulders pressing together. "Grow it back out."

"If I do, he'll just shave it again."

He feels the shrug. "Don't let him. When my dad gets mean, I fight back. He does it a lot less now."

And, huh.

He's fourteen and when he turns his head, Jonathan is rolling what will become Eddie's first ever joint.

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He's nineteen, and it goes against every natural instinct in him to lean down and inhale a line of powder. Can't imagine it will feel like anything other than a chalky nose and dry throat.

But he's at one of the many parties thrown down at the quarry, put on by this year's popular kids. Only hours earlier, he found out he'll have to repeat senior year for a third time.

He promised himself he'd go out and celebrate, because otherwise it hurt too much to seriously think about. He doesn't want to be a failure, but always *is*.

So he takes the girl's offered wrist and sniffs, her skin smelling like coconut, and the coke hitting him like a freight train. His head whips back, blood on fire, eyes wide up at the stars. When he looks back at her, she's grinning, eyes big and black and hooded up at him.

When she purses her lips and tries to kiss him, he giggles and spins away.

He does another line not too long after the first. He's buzzing. He is the personification of the speed of light. Faster than.

Cheers rise. He gathers around with the rest of the crowd and sees Steve Harrington tipped upside down as everyone yells *chug, chug, chug*. When he's finished and back on steady feet, Eddie's practically knocked sideways. The guy is so *pretty*; cheeks flushed, eyes hazy as he scans the crowd and crows to the skies in victory.

They chant *King Steve*, and Eddie falls a little in love.

But first, another hit.

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At twenty-four, he's in the ER for what he thinks is a big bite. He just can't seem to find the evidence.

He's never been a liar. He likes to be honest. He values it.

So when he tells the nurse his habits—sex, drugs, rock and roll—he doesn't expect her little frown. The judgment flaring behind a quickly schooled expression. She writes her notes fast and leaves the room.

The doctor arrives, and Eddie spends ten minutes learning why coke is making him scratch. Why he's sometimes itchy. Why he sometimes thinks he sees a little bug crawling around out of the corner of his eye.

He gets lectured about why drugs are bad. He promises to lay off.

And he does. For a while.

It feels good. And what else is he supposed to do when his coworkers from the bar invite him out?

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At twenty-six, he's cleaning a glass out when he looks up and locks eyes with Steve Harrington. All grown up and wearing glasses, sitting at his bar.

He immediately flushes, sputters, and drops the glass. It shatters, but it's worth it to hear the surprised little back of laughter from Steve.

He makes him a drink on the house, and Steve stays after his friends go home.

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At twenty-seven, Steve says he can't watch Eddie do this to himself anymore. He stays in his parents' old house for a few days until he succumbs to Eddie's pleading.

He stops again. Lays off the coke and the weed and even the cigarettes. Goes full-on cold turkey.

But it feels wrong when Steve holds him tight, says he's proud.

Why?

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At thirty, he expects the ants. The lingering, lazy march beneath his skin. They're almost always there these days.

He lets the white tablet sit on his tongue for a few seconds before letting it slide down his throat. He takes a swig of his beer and rolls his neck, his shoulders, dances to the music. He blinks, but he's sitting. He scratches, but doesn't feel it when he picks a scab. He sighs when he notices the bloody streaks, the red under his nails.

He thinks he gets up to go clean up. Tells himself no more dust. No more *hard* stuff. Because Steve is away again, has been for a few days, and he misses him. And when he gets back, he'll recognize the pattern. He leaves, Eddie parties. He comes back, he frets, he nags, he loves Eddie too much.

And it will be fine, normal even for a few months. Then Eddie will fuck up, will get mad, and Steve will give as good as he gets and then he'll leave and then Eddie will party and then the cycle goes on and on and on and—

He realizes he never stood up off the couch. He's not even dancing. It's been a few hours.

Goddamn, it itches.

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He's always had a rule about needles.

No needles. That's it. Easy enough to remember and follow.

But Steve's left for good, and Eddie is officially on his own. He has nowhere to go. And he's tired, and he's so *sick* of fucking everything good in his life up to such an impossible standard, that success isn't even an option for him. Steve is everything good and bright, and he's just some fucking guy with a habit.

And if Steve says *you're just a coward, all you ever do is run*, then Eddie will fucking run with it.

He's thirty-two, and after so long in the scene, he knows who to go to to find what he wants.

He watches as the dealer holds the spoon, watches the heroin bubble, and lets the man tourniquet his arm with a rubber band.

"I thought it would smell," he muses.

"Meth sure, but this? Nah, but I've sold you plenty of speed, maybe your nose is just fucked."

He feels empty. He shrugs. The dealer positions the needle.

And when it hits a second after the sting, Eddie forgets failure exists.

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Steve finds him on the third day of searching.

He holds back the tears because he's cried enough over Eddie, and if he survives this, he can cry later.

He finds Eddie bone-thin and covered in bloody scabs, filthy, in a piece of shit house in one of the worst neighborhoods in Indy.

He looks dead.

Eddie's sandwiched between a coffee table and a couch with a naked woman passed out on it. There are people passed out everywhere. A few slumped in the corner, watching him with disinterest. He kicks the table away and kneels, making sure when he grips Eddie and turns him, he's not risking him lying flat.

Eddie's birthday was a week ago. They both turned thirty-four this year. He'd called and said a lot of things that were just as devastating as they'd always been, even after moving to Chicago and not talking for two years.

Steve told himself it wasn't worth it. That he wasn't his responsibility anymore. That it didn't matter if the man who broke his heart a thousand times would live or die.

But it *did*.

He tried calling back, got a payphone and a dial tone, so he slammed the phone back in its cradle and seethed in his resentment for all of five minutes. Then he called the best PI he knew.

And maybe he's too late, because Eddie flops in his arms. He's nothing but deadweight.

His face is gaunt, eyes little more than dark circles. His hair is thin, the curls dry and lackluster. There's needle marks spread around in clusters across both arms, his neck. His veins are dark purple.

Steve bites his goddamn tongue and gets his arms under Eddie to haul him out of this fucked up house.

When the ambulance arrives, they take over in a whirlwind Steve's never witnessed before.

He's thirty-four and in love with a man he should have washed his hands of so many times over the years they've known each other. If someone asked him at eighteen if the weird guy with the rocker hair would become everything to him in a matter of years, he'd have laughed. Would have called it impossible.

Steve breaks when he hears Eddie gasp. He sobs.

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Eddie deftly flips the coin between his fingers. He's been quiet up at the podium for long seconds, and Steve wonders if something is wrong.

He sits and waits.

"But anyway, enough about all that. It's in the past, right? Though, like we all know, sometimes it feels like it's right here," Eddie says into the microphone, pointing at his forehead. "Sometimes it feels like it was just yesterday that my—my friend pulled me from the most cliché crackhouse I could find. I would have died feeling sorry for myself, never knowing how close I was to actual happiness. It's taken a lot of years, and a lot of pain and heartache. Most of it my fault," he laughs and Steve sniffs quietly where he sits in the second row. "I ask myself all the time, why did I do it? And for so long? I didn't even really want to, but it was the easiest way to feel happy. To tune everything and everyone else out. To pretend I didn't have to face my failures, or even *try* to reconcile with them. But he helped me see that I could. Time and again, he never gave up on me. Not really. Not when it mattered, and I needed him most. I deserved to be left in that dump to die with all the hurt I caused, but no. He came to my rescue. Saved my sorry, ugly life. Because he still believed in me. I'm happy because of him. He's not the only reason, don't get me wrong. But I'm happier than I ever was when I was using. So when it feels like it's *right here*, I think of him. I think of how I feel *now*. I don't focus on the past and I try my damndest not to blame myself for any of it. I know it's my choice to stay sober. Nobody else can make that choice for me and it's the best choice I ever made, second only to whatever voice in my head told me to take a chance on him. And I talk a mean ear off of anyone who will listen, because I know that for someone, it might help."

Eddie stops flipping the coin. He holds it up, for the room to see. A little bronze coin Steve has studied almost as much as Eddie has over the last six months.

"Five and a half years clean."

The people gathered clap, say their praises. Some don't react much at all, preferring just to listen.

Eddie's eyes meet his across the room, and he gives him that same shy smile that made Steve fall for him that night in the bar.

And Steve loves him, will never stop loving him. No matter how hard or easy it gets.

End Notes

Content warning: Eddie's drug addiction grows heavier through the years, description of the use of weed, PCP pills, heroin, and implied meth/crack use. Description of insects crawling under skin. Temporary breaking up before getting back together. Description of needles and the results of years of drug use.

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