

Funny How The Name Can Change

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Funny How The Name Can Change

by [InnogenRenz](#)

Summary

Ben has his hand in an iron grip. Fuck, it's not Ben, he can't afford to think of this apathetic asshole as his snarky asshole of a brother. This one has his face screwed up in a palpable effort to look serious.

"You're not leaving," He orders, like it's the most basic thing in the world.

And Klaus—Klaus who's had the last three years of sobriety go down the drain, Klaus who couldn't save the love of his life from dying in a useless fucking war, Klaus who actually has to mourn his favourite (sorry Diego) brother for the first time since he was seventeen—laughs in his face.

OR

How to process grief and seeing your dead brother alive and well as an alternate reality pawn of your father: Klaus Hargreeves edition.

Notes

I just got really caught up in the feels for this show lately, especially with Ben and Klaus. So have this one shot I cranked out instead of working on my multitudes of WIPs. Here's my [Tumblr](#).

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

"*Shit.*"

Yeah. That about sums it up. That *really* fucking sums it up. He's about two seconds away from losing what's left of his sanity (as if he had any to begin with), because his dead, *passed on* brother is standing in front of them with a scowl and an emo haircut right out of the early 2010s. God—the little girl probably won't care too much if he uses it, it's not like she could hate him *more*—it's *awful*.

Makes him want to torch it off his head with a flamethrower. Along with that mustache. Now *that's* more of a crime against human nature than the eldritch portal Klaus knows is lurking under that shitty blazer.

They've all gone silent. Surprise, surprise. The rest of his siblings are looking on with that ancient grief, except for Vanya, who just looks guilty; like she's seconds away from collapsing and begging for forgiveness from this Indie Punk Band reject version of their brother. And Klaus—Klaus doesn't know how he feels. All he knows is that he's too sober for this shit. It's not like Ben (*Ben*—) is here to tell him off for throwing away what's left of his three years of hard work.

This botched copy-paste version of him doesn't look at them with anything more than annoyance and derision, waiting expectantly for his father—fucking *Reginald*—to answer.

Klaus doesn't want to hear it. He physically cannot stand a single second more of this time travel, apocalyptic, alternate timeline *bullshit*. So, with something new burning in his gut and pulling at his throat, he grabs the whiskey he'd set his sights on and turns to leave.

"Fuck this," He laughs, biting and caustic, as he marches to the foyer one room over, "I'm *out*."

He ignores the shouts from behind him, Five the loudest of them all. Unfortunately, he's had decades of practice ignoring frantic pleas, so they really stand no chance. He's already left the living room, halfway to the door so he can finally *leave*, when something grabs his wrist.

He turns, tightening his hold on the bottle to bring it up and hit whoever grabbed his arm. Immediately he stops, the neck almost slipping through his numb fingers.

Ben has his hand in an iron grip. Fuck, it's not *Ben*, he can't afford to think of this apathetic asshole as his snarky asshole of a brother. This one has his face screwed up in a palpable effort to look serious.

"You're not leaving," He orders, like it's the most basic thing in the world.

And Klaus—Klaus who's had the last three years of sobriety go down the drain, Klaus who couldn't save the love of his life from dying in a *useless* fucking war, Klaus who actually has to *mourn* his favourite (sorry Diego) brother for the first time since he was seventeen—laughs in his face.

"Sorry, knock-off Gerard Way, I don't have to do *shit*." He pulls his hand away with a ferocity that surprises even him.

With that, he sneers to ease the pain burning behind his eyes and goes for the heavy doors that block off the rest of the world. There's no more attempts to get him to stay, and something cracks in him despite the relief it grants. Smothering it all down, something hard to do without the blissful haze he's denied himself for years, he shoves past the doors and out onto the street.

The bottle has long since been drawn from, most of its dregs now curled into a fiery acid that snakes around his torso. It fills that waiting emptiness inside him, that numb brimming with dark possibility. For years he's chased it, that all encompassing void, the blanketing haze that would finally block out *everything*. He's always felt too much, felt too hard, and he's always wanted a way for it to stop. Of course he's only found it *now*.

Still, pushing back against the half-rotted wooden support painted over, Klaus stares up at the interlaced roof with a looming sense of blank nostalgia. The gazebo had always been one of Ben's favorite places. Next to the library, of course. The little nerd.

He remembers first seeing it, those few precious weeks trying to figure out how to live outside the academy. A chipped white beacon of sanctuary in those early winter months. He hadn't the sense to leave sometime reasonable, like spring or summer, no, it had to be right after he'd summoned Ben. In the cold, silent, freezing days of January and February.

The park had been a last resort, really, weeks of couch surfing finally at its end. In the dead of night, empty but for the howling of a merciless wind, it had been the one thing standing that would offer even a single bit of protection. So he'd slept there, despite the cold. It was a miracle he hadn't frozen to death. Or, now that he thinks about it, maybe not.

Either way, it had been a safe haven for a few days, until the police started checking there too. Bastards. Still, it was nice to come back to, every now and then. Enjoy the view. Though it was always more magical when paired with a little extra something.

Still, Ben liked it more than the other places he frequented, the raves, the dingy apartments. The library was the one he favored above all others, but it was much less likely that Klaus would go there. Only in the rarest moments when the true extent of his own guilt caught up, a vicious attack of grief and the roaring need to satiate his own selfish desire to be assuaged of it, would he go and hold open pages of some book for his hesitantly appreciative brother to read.

But the library probably won't let him in like this, drunk off his ass and dressed to go clubbing in a goth/western fusion getup. So. The gazebo it is.

Breath curls out as he sighs, stretching for the sky in streaming wisps. In a jaunty move, he toasts the sky that peeks through the open rafters. Nighttime, long and creeping, settled upon him hours ago, though this is the first time he dares to speak.

"To you," He slurs, head tilting to the side, "you fucking bitch."

As a reflex, he turns, waiting for the scathing retort, a half-serious insult that just barely digs at his layers and barbs under his skin. There's nothing. Right, he nods, looking back up. Ben's gone. That's why he's here. All... sad(?) and stuff.

Ignoring that wonderful, piercing thought, he tilts the bottle up, more bitter whiskey running down his throat. Once he gets more money, maybe he'll get something stronger. What's the fucking point, right?

Ben's gone. He probably never met Dave judging by how *fucked* the timeline is. Realistically, they're never going to be able to get back, no matter how manic little Fivey gets with his calculations. Sobriety has no benefits now. Frankly, he needs that escape from reality, not just for the ghosts this time. Just for, wow, *everything*.

"God, it's just like you to do this," He starts, blinking through filmy eyes to see the stars. "Go and play hero without having to face the consequences. Of course you'd choose to leave right after our first huge fight in—in *years*!"

He shifts, pulling his legs closer, dragging his already ruined pants against the filthy ground.

"Jesus, we never fucking talked about it. About *any* of it. I thought you hated me, I mean, you probably did, actually. Not that I could blame you since I, uh, really put you through some bullshit," He laughs, choking halfway through. "But... we ignored it, you know? Just continued with our miserable little lives—oops, *existences*, sorry—and pretended everything was okay."

The ice in his chest shifts, dangerously close to breaking. Swiftly, he downs another mouthful, waiting for the bitter edge to dull his already glacial emotions.

"We spent years dancing around it, the fact that you stayed. I can't believe you let me think it was *my* fault, you little shit, and then, you had the audacity to lecture me about being a good sibling! Hypocritical, I tell you." He thumps his head against the wooden post. "You were such an asshole, man. With that whole possession thing. I just—you *know* how I am about my space. And yeah, I get it, being dead sucks ass but... but it wasn't okay. And then calling Dave—*Dave*—a fling? Now that was a real dick move."

He signs, pulling a hand down his face, exhaustion creeping in.

"And you can't even argue back! With all your valid points and junk. I should've told them you were there, I shouldn't have said you were like dad—*nobody* deserves that comparison—and... and you were right. About Dave. Kind of. Not about the fling thing, 'cause he was *way* more than that, but... I messed it up. I confused him," He croaks, voice slowly getting softer and more strained. "I fucked it all up. I shouldn't have—*fuck*."

He wipes at his eyes, pain pushing behind them and getting caught in his breath.

"You stayed. Despite all that. And yeah, you were probably scared, and that definitely influenced it, and maybe it was just so you could keep being with our shithead siblings, and maybe it was because only I could see you, but... you still stayed. You were the only one who kept trying, even if it was for, uh, your benefit," He snuffles, almost, eyes shining bright

despite the shadows he's bathed in. "Sorry you couldn't live normally, you know? You—you deserved it. More than me. But you'd probably tell me to cut that self-pitying garbage and *do* something about it, which, again, monumentally unfair but... but it's you."

Finally he lets his head drop, let's it lull as he hunches in.

"I miss you. It's... it's not—I shouldn't, right? I shouldn't miss you, I shouldn't *want* you here in this—this shitty ass timeline, it'd pretty much be another form of psychological torture on top of your already difficult existence, but I do, I *do* want you here. But you're at peace! In the light! With God and her little bike and mean little attitude, and I think you'd like her, man, even if she hates me for whatever reason." He waves his hand dismissively, forcing himself to get on with it. "Ugh, that's not the point. It's just... I know it's unfair, since I'm taking away from your "eternal peace" or whatever garbage they're feeding you, but you were always with me, except for, ah, Vietnam but... I had Dave then, so it wasn't entirely awful."

He stops, finally silent. He can't—he can't process a life where he doesn't have *someone* next to him. When he was younger it didn't matter, cause he had six other siblings to go and talk to, even if some of them did it with a quiet reluctance. Even as he grew up and they all fractured into groups, he could bounce between Diego and Ben and Allison with practiced ease. And then—then it was just Ben. And he never went away. Never left.

Even when he pushed all other ghosts to the brink of his awareness, let them slip away into nothingness, Ben was still there. And Klaus would be lying if he said he hasn't come to rely on it, like it wasn't an integral part to how he lives. He *needs* Ben but it isn't fair to ask him to stay, not now, not after all this time. Besides, he doesn't even know if he can reach beyond that veil, or if *his* Ben even...

"Fuck," He mutters, a poignant prayer inspite of its vulgarity. "I don't—Jesus, I don't even think you can hear this. It's ridiculous to hope. But you know, dead stuff has always been my thing so it's... worth a shot. I just... I wish we'd had time to talk. Actually talk. Work shit out. Sixteen years overdue and all but we shouldn't have ended it like *that*." He pauses, tapping a finger on the neck of the bottle. "You better be happy up there. Something good should come out of this clusterfuck."

With that, he lifts the bottle one last time and downs the last of the whiskey, the burn almost non-existent. Staring at the empty sky, tracking the shifting dots of light like the few times he had before, he lets go. Tomorrow can be another day. For now, he lets himself rest and slip into the cold void waiting in his mind.

There's a hand on his shoulder and a voice calling his name. In a fit of familiarity and panic, he jerks back, bringing up his bottle in a frantic swing.

"Fuck!"

Blinking, Klaus narrows his eyes as the sleep fades from them. Dark hair, almost chin-length, and a wicked scar. Diego.

"Oh, sorry about that." Klaus shrugs.

His brother looks up with scathing accusation in his eyes, holding a jaw that will inevitably bruise. He's squatting in front of him, the same clothes as yesterday. The early morning light tinging the background with a mild pink.

"Oh, I'm sure you're just broken up about it," He says, twisting his face harshly.

"Absolutely shattered," Klaus agrees with an exaggerated pout, bringing up his free hand to form half a heart.

Diego rolls his eyes, but he can't quite stamp out the humor at the edges of his mouth. His brother likes his stupid jokes, much as he might be loathe to admit it.

"Come on, it's time to go," Diego mutters, a little more muted, "We've been looking for you all night."

Klaus has, well, has a hard time believing that. As much progress as they've made into being a functional family unit, not much but still better than before, it's not nearly enough to assuage his well instilled idea of isolation. They've never been concerned about him running off before.

He raises an eyebrow. ""We"?"

Diego pauses, looking away.

Ah. That's much more like it. Diego was in his Top 3 for a reason, still solidly ranked at second.

"It wasn't just me." He still tries to reassure him nonetheless. "Vanya helped, Allison too, for a bit."

Ah, Vanya, still guilty about sending Ben to the great beyond. It's... he doesn't blame her, he never could. She was scared. It was uncontrollable. Still, as much as he loves her, and really, he does, maybe some space is a good idea. Ha, like this is the time for setting boundaries.

Allison doesn't surprise him. They've bonded. Mutual love and loss tends to do that. He wonders where she looked.

He looks up at Diego. "Where are we headed?"

Diego has the decency to look regretful as he says, "The academy."

The rest of his siblings look somewhat relieved to see him alive. Goody goody, he's really feeling the love.

"Nice to see you're done with your temper tantrum," Five snarks as he walks by when Klaus enters the living room, where the rest of the OG Hargreeves currently reside.

"Aww, is someone feeling cranky?" He coos just to see Five teeter on the edge of fratricide.

Diego shoves him forward before Five can say anything more. A spoilsport move but Klaus can understand. No one likes murder so early in the morning.

"Hey." Allison stands up from the couch, dark circles under her eyes as she steps forward to pull him into a hug. "You're okay."

He hums into her shoulder, inhaling warm vanilla, "Okay is relative."

Vanya is next to her, squirming and silent. Any apprehension goes out the window as he sees her face twist and waver in the way that only she can do.

He opens up his arm, gesturing for her to come closer.

"Come here you."

Shyly, she leans in, tentatively wrapping her arms around them. It's been too long. It's the first thing to feel right in the past day or so.

Luther coughs, ruining the moment. Pulling away, Klaus shoots him a glare. The big guy looks shamed at least.

"Sorry," Luther genuinely apologizes, raising a hand, "We just... we have to make a plan."

"Oh, yay. I'm sure it'll work *this* time," Klaus grumbles, making a beeline to the nearest empty seat.

Luther shoots him an almost offended look and he tries his damndest not to roll his eyes. Out of habit, he glances to his side, prepared to make a face. He stops when he realizes he can't see anyone there.

Right. Swallowing, he forces himself to look away and sit down. There are still other ghosts, bathed in blue and blood alike, a few more nannies than usual. They're getting easier to see by the minute. He isn't sure how to feel about that.

"So," He starts as he sprawls across a chair worth more than himself, "what's the dealio here."

Fuck timelines and time travel and butterfly effects. He thinks, sitting in the empty courtyard as the air warms slightly. His fingers itch for something to do and his body screams for every chemical.

The Sparrow Academy. New name, new kids—with one awful exception—new life. Fucking Reginald and his unending ignorance. Of course the solution to your abused kids ending the world is to, instead, buy a new set of kids and abuse them slightly to the left. What a prick.

Eventually his hand goes to his pocket and he finds a half-empty carton of cigarettes rattling around in there. He hasn't had time to grab anything stronger. They'd all been silently blocking off his paths to the liquor cabinet, refusing to let him past. The one time they decide to work together and it's to spite *him* of all people.

He brings the cigarette up to his mouth and hopes the brief rush will be enough to delay the inevitable. It's then, as he pats himself down for a lighter he could've sworn was on him yesterday, that he realizes he has nothing to light it with.

"Dad doesn't allow smoking out here."

The jump is completely involuntary. The cigarette very nearly tumbles out of his hand and onto the dewey ground.

"Fuck!" He curses, turning to the perpetrator. "Watch it—"

He stops, entirely. *Ben*. No, fuck, *not* Ben. He can't afford to lose it here, of all places. So, he schools his face to a moderate annoyance, rolling his shoulders back, and pinching the cigarette between shaking fingers. Not-Ben looks more interested than yesterday, a purely clinical gleam of curiosity in his otherwise flinty glare.

"What do *you* want?" Klaus asks, desperately hoping his tone is less angry than it sounds in his head.

"You ran away," Not-Ben says, narrowing his eyes. "Just wanted to see what I'm dealing with."

"Well, congrats, you've found the weak link, daddy issues version two." Klaus rolls his eyes, resisting the urge to fidget. "Do you have a light or what?"

Not-Ben doesn't seem like that, judging by the way his scowl deepens. "I told you, Dad doesn't allow smoking out here."

"You're telling the wrong person here, Numero—" Klaus pauses, looking up. Not-Ben could very well have a different number, considering his brand new personality. He gestures for Not-Ben to talk.

Not-Ben looks away, crossing his arms as he contemptuously spits out, "Two."

"Ah!" Klaus almost laughs at how *ridiculous* the whole situation is. "Dos. Judging by your face you got a bad case of the Diegos."

He's never seen a person look so offended in their life. "*He's* your Number Two?"

"Oh." Klaus tilts his head. "Did... you not know?"

"They wouldn't tell us," Not-Ben growls. "They said they were 'Team Zero' or whatever."

"Oh, yeah, *that*." Klaus wrinkles his nose. "It's a nice sentiment, don't get me wrong, but the name could use some workshopping."

Not-Ben snorts, "You're telling me."

They're still similar, despite everything. That bemused exasperation is so achingly familiar, so much so that he's tempted to continue cracking jokes about his family. He barely reigns

himself in. He's not Ben, he's not *family*. He doesn't get to hear about Diego's knives and leather suits, or Luther's singular brain cell, or Allison's *weird-ass* past(?) romance with Luther, or Five's mannequin wife—a very lovely woman, Klaus thinks—or Vanya's, well, whatever he can joke about that won't cause her to blow something up. He hasn't grown up with them, lived through their trauma's and antics. He isn't Ben.

Not-Ben cocks his head. "So which one are you?"

Klaus keeps his expression neutral as he sighs, "They didn't give you the whole spiel? I'm assuming you asked."

"I did." Not-Ben nods. "But they didn't say much beyond seeing ghosts."

Klaus shrugs. "That's pretty much it. Useful, I know."

"It could be," Not-Ben retorts. "Can't you conjure them?"

Klaus barks out a sharp laugh, "Oh, Dos-si-do, that's some truly high praise, expecting something like that from the family disappointment."

Not-Ben damn near smirks. "I believe there's some competition for that role, I don't know if you can claim it just yet."

Klaus is stunned into silence for the first time in, well, *years*. Was that a fucking *compliment* from the shitty version of Ben? This is the darkest timeline, fuck the original apocalypse, *this* is weirder than the end of the world.

"Ah, well, as annoying as they are, at least they can be useful." Klaus shrugs. "They don't tell me shit, y'know? I still have no idea half the crap that went down when we were in Dallas—fuck, did they tell you that? Ah, doesn't matter—like there were some blond dudes hunting us apparently? Diego got and lost a girlfriend in like seven days, who is *also* superpowered because of course she is, and then Five was just running around in blood stained clothes for a good while there, and I mean, that's not unusual, but it's still a little concerning since he still looks thirteen, no matter what he tells you—"

Klaus shuts up. He's gone on for too long. He keeps forgetting that he can't just ramble on simply because it's a familiar face.

"I don't know what any of that means," Not-Ben answers honestly after a brief pause. "But it still sounds like the rest of your siblings aren't exactly perfect."

"I'd be the first person to agree with you, but they're still, you know, *my* siblings. I'm kind of contractually obligated to love them," Klaus says, huffing in the cold morning air. "Disasters though we all may be."

"Hmm," Not-Ben humms, before some new spark lights up his dark eyes. "Guess it must be hard with five others."

The question hidden in those words isn't even subtle. Klaus looks up sharply, and sees nothing but a calculating grin in return.

Klaus turns away from him, levelling his stare at the ground. “Used to be six, but I’m sure you already knew that.”

“Touchy subject?” Not-Ben presses, voice a tad more excitable.

“You could say that.” Klaus deflects, shrugging uselessly. “I wouldn’t recommend mentioning it around the others.”

“But not you?”

Klaus finally gives in, tone going steely. “I don’t like it much either.”

Not-Ben fucking *smiles*, satisfied with the answer. “But can’t you see them?”

Klaus can’t let himself feel that sting, so he laughs, loud and bitter and angry, “Oh, I fucking *wish*. Ol’ Sixey would love this mess.”

Probably a lie. Ben would be freaking out. Actually, no, he would be ceaselessly tearing apart his double and Klaus would be unable to speak two words to anybody without breaking down into hysterical laughter.

“So it was your Number Six,” Not-Ben murmurs, filing away the information for presumably nefarious purposes.

Jesus, he really looks like a Saturday morning cartoon villain.

“Again, I wouldn’t mention it to anyone else, they might take your head off,” Klaus mutters, pulling his hat down. “That’s not a joke by the way, they *would* actually kill you for that.”

Not-Ben smirks. “They could try.”

Klaus doesn’t know how to tell him that they all have experience fighting against The Horror, so he doesn’t do anything more than shake his head. He wonders if The Horror would even remember him, since they apparently exist somewhere outside of space and time. The creatures had always been nicer to him during sparring than most of his other siblings, a fact that had been comforting right up until Benny-boy’s untimely demise. Now... now he’s still not sure how they feel since they’ve rarely been let out to play in the past sixteen years. Maybe they don’t even remember him.

“They didn’t give us a name,” Not-Ben says, still looking at Klaus with unbridled interest. “when we asked why there were six instead of seven. Just said one had been gone for thirteen years.”

“Sixteen,” Klaus interrupts, “Time travel’s a bitch.”

“Sixteen, my bad,” Not-Ben apologizes with no real feeling. “So. What was their name, just out of academic curiosity.”

Klaus tries his best to keep still. “What’s it to you?”

“Just wondering.” Not-Ben shrugs, “You can’t tell me you wouldn’t be curious if a bunch of alternate universe siblings fell out of sky.”

“We’re not siblings,” Klaus says sharply.

“Ouch.” Not-Ben clutches a hand to his chest. “That hurt, cowboy.”

God must really hate him to be pulling this shit. It’s unfair, how much like Ben he is, yet still different enough to taint the whole experience. He can see why his siblings have been keeping far away from the Sparrows.

“It’s... complicated,” Klaus finally admits, still refusing to look at Not-Ben. “He... well, he finally moved on. Went into the light and all that jazz.”

“So he isn’t hanging around anymore?” Not-Ben adjusts his crossed arms, eyes focused solely on him and laser focused in.

“Nah, the bastard finally left.” Klaus shakes his head. “He always had the worst timing.”

“Guess so.” Not-Ben goes quiet.

“He—” Klaus starts and stops, taking in a shaky breath. “He’s been with me since I was born. It’s just... weird to be without him. Don’t tell the others, but he was always my favourite. Diego might take it badly.”

Not-Ben crosses his heart. “Hope to die.”

Klaus chokes, briefly. “Y—Yeah. He was always a quiet little dude, he never really wanted to be caught up in the middle of all our shit. The others might not remember it though, but he had a *wicked* sense of humor. The fucker was actually really bitter, he just hid it well. They all think he was some sort of angel, and I’ll admit it, he was probably the nicest one out of the bunch, but he could cut you down to size if he wanted to. Death just made him give less of a shit.”

“Sounds fun,” Not-Ben comments, half-sarcastic.

“He could be, when he wanted to.” Klaus shrugs. “Most of the time he was just trying to make sure I didn’t overdose behind a dumpster.”

Not-Ben finally shuts up and there’s a small victory in that, despite how flayed he feels by his own words.

“He died when we were sixteen, just before our seventeenth birthday. His powers were, uh, *temperamental* to say the least, so it was really no surprise when they ended up killing him.” Klaus pauses, considering something. “Except for dear old dad, he didn’t quite put together that pushing him so far could have bad consequences.”

Not-Ben bristles at that, readying to defend his father. Klaus holds up a hand.

"I don't know how Reggie treated you here, but in our timeline, he was an abusive shithead. So, just, zip it." Klaus motions at his mouth and Not-Ben begrudgingly stays quiet. "Anyways, after that, he pretty much stuck with me. Not that any of our siblings believed it, after all, who wants to trust the attention seeking junkie, even if he *can* see the dead."

Not-Ben doesn't do anything more than narrow his eyes again, probably piecing together bits of information to get a read on him. Klaus lets him try.

"He loved reading, even as a ghostie. Turns out burning books is a good way for the dearly departed to be entertained, though he didn't like me doing it. Some sort of weird nerd principle," Klaus laughs, briefly, when Not-Ben's face twists in silent agreement. "He was such a dick sometimes. We were actually in the middle of a fight when he, uh, *moved on*, so that's fun to deal with."

Not-Ben nods, almost understanding. It's weird, talking about this to someone who looks just like him. Vanya had tried, and he appreciates it, really, but she wasn't there for all those years, hell, she never believed him in the first place. She'd even expressly written that in her book, though he was trying hard not to hold it against her. They'd all done hurtful shit, so there was no use trying to hold onto it. Still, this was the first time in years where someone had taken his word at face value, where they simply *believed* him about Ben.

"I miss him, really, I do, but it's probably for the best that he's not here. I can't imagine how he'd feel seeing all this." Klaus gestures broadly to the academy surrounding the courtyard. "He'd lose his shit."

"It's not *that* bad," Not-Ben grumbles, rolling his eyes.

"Oh, trust me, Benerino would, uh, not be a huge fan." Klaus shakes his head before his words have time to catch up with him.

"...Benerino?" Not-Ben repeats with a strained voice.

Fuck. Klaus freezes, screwing his eyes shut. He messed up.

"Yeah..." He admits, voice soft. "His name was Ben."

Not-Ben stops moving, he just stares without any deeper motivation, the only thing in his eyes is an open sort of shock.

"Oof," Klaus chuckles, ignoring Not-Ben's mounting horror. "If you think this is weird for *you* then you have no idea how I feel."

Not-Ben shakes his head, taking a step back. "You're *lying*."

Klaus looks up, his voice harsh, "I wouldn't lie about *him*."

Not-Ben stops, still vaguely shaking his head in fervent denial. "I'm not—I could *never*—I'm... I'm not him."

Klaus rolls his eyes. "I'm well aware of that. Like someone who thinks emo bangs are a good look could ever replace him. Not that he had much fashion sense either."

Not-Ben opens his mouth, ready to retort, before he stops, forcefully closing his mouth.

"You wanted to know," Klaus reminds him, trying to smother the spark of guilt ready to flare up and eat him from the inside out.

"I did." Not-Ben grits his teeth. "I guess that's why all your siblings seem so jumpy around me."

"I'm surprised none of them tried to talk to you," Klaus admits. "Luther seems like he would. The big 'ol brute isn't exactly the most tactful."

Not-Ben looks down. "I think he tried but I brushed him off for training."

"Ah, good for you." Klaus tilts his head. "But just don't let them know that *I* spilled the beans on this one, they're probably trying to figure out how to deal with it."

"And you?" Not-Ben asks, still slightly off-kilter.

"Oh, I've had years to adjust," Klaus lies, waving him off. "I'm fully aware that you're a different person." That one's not entirely a lie.

"Are you?" Not-Ben questions, almost strained.

Klaus sighs, melancholy in his breath, "Trust me. *My* Bennyboo is up there with the little girl in the sky."

Not-Ben screws up his face in obvious confusion as he mouths his words.

"And if he were here, right now, he'd be roasting the shit out of your dumb mustache." Klaus shrugs with a growing smile.

"Shut up!" Not-Ben hisses, eyes going wide.

"I'm not wrong here, Zwei." Klaus continues as humor undercuts his tone.

"Ugh, you're insufferable!" Not-Ben groans, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"You're not wrong either." Klaus winks before waving a cigarette in front of him. "Now about that light?"

Not-Ben scoffs, refusing to meet his eyes. Klaus waits, wiggling the cigarette with a bit more effort. Eventually, Not-Ben gives in, sighing as he sticks a hand inside his blazer, pulling out a simple silver lighter.

"Ah, danke, mein Freund," Klaus says as it drops into his palm.

"Don't get used to it, cowboy," Not-Ben sneers, adjusting his uniform.

"I won't." Klaus inclines his head to tip his hat.

Sticking the cigarette in his mouth, and bringing up his other hand to light it, the first puff of smoke is strong and warm. Exhaling as some relief finally courses through his veins, the first time in weeks some of the tension in his shoulders eases, Klaus smiles, a bit more relaxed.

It's still a shitty situation; the shitty topper on the shittiest cake in the grand competition of shit kind of shitty. Especially without, well, without Ben. But he still has his siblings, more like a team than ever before. It still sucks ass, but maybe he can get through it. One day at a time.

End Notes

The title is from Chasing it Down by Mother Mother, pretty much the only band I listened to while writing this. I may have cried. Once or twice. Anyways, I hope you enjoyed this little angst fest. See y'all for season three.

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