

## So Faux Strong

Tamanna Amin

Something's wrong with William.

Luca thinks this on a Sunday, after maybe two term's worth of time being his roommate, peering over his book at the boy on the couch. *'Is he angry? What did I do this time? Was it the duck? I thought that was funny-'* He's snapped out of his thoughts as William puts his mug down a little too hard on the coffee table.

"I can feel you staring at me. Stop." William grits out, ears red and glaring daggers at Luca. Luca grins sheepishly.

"Dude, how'd you know? I was being super stealthy!"

"That book is upside down." William rolls his eyes, smirking when Luca flushes red, his eyebrows furrowing as he looks at the book's cover in his hands. "Just leave me alone, you creep." William grumbles, smile dropping. His eyes are trained on his phone, scrolling aimlessly. Luca straightens up, looking deeply offended.

"How dare you! I'm not creepy!" he exclaims, gaining no response from his taciturn roommate. Huffing a big, dramatic sigh, he waggles a finger at William. "I'm just worried for my bro, bro! You've been all shifty and avoiding me, I don't know what I did!"

William avoids eye contact, but mumbles something under his breath.

"What was that?" Luca asks, leaning precariously over the back of the kitchen chair, towards William.

Getting up from the couch with his face blotchy and red, William shoots an angry look at Luca and storms into his bedroom.

"Hey!" Luca calls. He gets a loud slamming of the door as a response, and promptly falls off the back of his chair. "Ow, man..." he says, shaking his head in disbelief from where he sits on the floor.

Something is *definitely* wrong with William.

Being roommates and sharing a campus means that William can't avoid Luca for too long, right? Wrong.

Anytime Luca catches a glimpse of William, it's either of the boy slipping quickly into his room, or out of their dorm, or that one time where William simply turned heel and walked briskly back into whichever lecture hall he just came out of, upon seeing Luca.

Luca throws his hands up, exasperated. "You just came out of there!" Luca says, as a gaggle of girls giggle, walking past. "This guy..." he trails off, rubbing the crease between his brows. Luca needs to find a way to get them back to normal, two weeks of playing cat and mouse has him frustrated beyond end – he can't concentrate on anything else.

It's not until a Tuesday afternoon, when Luca knows William hasn't got any classes, that he cuts his film lecture early and gets home before William can slink away. He closes the door behind him as he enters their dorm and finds himself face-to-face with William. His usual stern expression looks different, if Luca squints, he could maybe make out surprise in William's gaze. Luca doesn't get to appreciate it for long, as quickly William's face fills with color and he scowls and turns away toward his room.

"Wait!" Luca says, his hand shooting out to latch around William's wrist. He flinches as if he's been burnt, and Luca lets go. "Sorry, I just... What are we doing, man?" he says, laughing a little. He rubs the back of his neck and looks at William again. William doesn't look at Luca, instead his eyes burning holes into the patch of wall slightly behind him.

"I don't know what you're talking about." he says stiffly, trying to step away from Luca's space, but Luca takes a step towards him again.

"What did I do? How can I make it fine again, man? I know you're always pissed off with me but this time it's different! You haven't been in the same room as me longer than a minute!" Luca exclaims -- his tone light, but his eyes sad and pleading. His really, very green eyes.

William flushes again, and Luca braces himself for an onslaught of insults and curses but then -- "It's not you. It's me. I can't... forget it," William mumbles, and he drags a hand over his face.

Luca brightens up a little, making an affirmative noise. "No, no, that's good! Tell me, we're friends, aren't we? Well, y'know, I think so," he laughs.

William peeks one eye out between his fingers, and it almost feels... fond?

"What're you...?" Luca starts, but he's cut off by William groaning loudly and dropping to crouch on the floor. "Woah! You good?" Luca crouches next to him as well, and William covers his face with both hands now.

"You're way too much."

Luca immediately falters a little bit. “Oh.”

“Not in a bad way, you’re just,” William says quickly, muffled from behind his mask. “You... I think. Shit,” he strings together cohesively.

Luca might not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but he’s trying to put together what message William might want to send. “Uh, Will, you’re going to have to just... I need things spelled out for me, you know how I am,” he says, not unkindly.

William drops his hands and looks at Luca with a somewhat subdued expression, save for his red face.

*‘That’s a new one,’* Luca thinks.

“I think I like you.”