What Came Before

by tommygirl

Summary

Chris gets hit by an energy blast and suddenly he remembers a completely different life and he’s not sure he belongs in this new, happy future.

Notes

It's been awhile since I've written Chris, so this got a bit away from me. It was nice to revisit my Chris muse. Hopefully this fits the bill and much love to my betas for help in reining it in slightly.

Chris glanced down at his phone, reviewing the text message from his dad, and shot off a quick response. He noticed his brother half-watching him and half-watching the television from his spot on the couch and Chris said, “May 20th plans.”

Wyatt nodded and asked, “You ever gonna ask him again what’s so important about that date?”

“Never again. You know how badly that went the last time. He got weepy and then Mom got weepy and they spent the rest of the day staring at me like I might disappear into thin air. It was really weird.”

Wyatt snorted and said, “The whole thing has always seemed weird to me, but what do I know?”
“Well, you think you know everything,” Melinda said, appearing from the kitchen, finishing off an unfrosted cupcake and brushing the crumbs off her shirt onto the floor. As much badgering as his mother gave him and Wyatt about living in filth, Chris was pretty sure Melinda was a hundred times worse.

Wyatt shot her a look and said, “I thought you were baking the cupcakes for us, not yourself.”

Melinda shrugged and plopped down on the couch next to Wyatt. She said, “You’re an ingrate.” She grinned at Chris and said, “This is why Chris is my favorite big brother.”

Chris laughed and, off the scowl on Wyatt’s face, he replied, “Don’t worry, Wy. You’re still my favorite.”

“I’m the only big brother you’ve got, jackass. See if I save your ass next time you get in a jam,” Wyatt grumbled.

Chris shrugged and responded, “Contrary to popular belief, I am an adult, who can take care of himself. Somewhat good at it too.”

Mel clutched her chest and laughed and Wyatt joined in. Chris glared at both of them and Wyatt replied, “Uh-huh. Sure. The trouble magnet can take care of himself. That’s why I had it practically beaten into my brain since you were born to keep an eye on you all the time.”

“Not true.”

“All the time,” Wyatt repeated.

“Only fair since you were the one usually getting me into situations,” Chris argued. He stood up and tossed a pillow at his brother. “Jerk.” He glanced down at his phone as it lit up with a new text from his dad. He groaned and said, “Our family is out to get me.”

“What happened?” Melinda asked.

“May 20th plans,” Wyatt replied before Chris could.

Melinda nodded and said, “Dad’s been plotting something.”

Chris shook his head and said, “Fishing. He wants to go fishing.”

“Ew,” Mel replied as Wyatt chuckled.

Chris rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I hate fishing.”

“So tell him you’ve got plans.”

“And watch his head explode? No way. Not happening.”

“He just wants to spend time with you, Chris. I’m sure he’d do something else,” Mel offered.

“It’s fine. It’s my fault for saying I was up for whatever he wanted to do.”

“You ever gonna ask why the day is so important to Dad?” Mel asked.

“That’s what I wanted to know,” Wyatt offered.

“I don’t really care. It’s important to Dad and we almost always have a good time, except that year
when those warlocks grabbed us and locked us in an enchanted trunk. That was the opposite of fun."

“Can’t imagine why,” Melinda replied. The buzzer in the kitchen went off and she hopped up. She grabbed Chris’ hand and said, “Since you’re up, you can help me frost the cupcakes now that they should be cooled.”

Wyatt snickered as he turned his attention back to the television. Chris allowed his sister to lead him off to the small kitchen, listening to her ramble about developing her own baking skills without their mother’s interference. He loved his sister, but she could ramble with the best of them, usually about things he didn’t care about, so he just zoned her out, nodding every now and then as she set him up with instructions on proper frosting technique.

“Just ask him about the day if you’re curious,” Melinda said, nudging him in the side.

“What? No…it’s fine.”

Melinda’s bottom lip jutted out and she replied, “But I want to know.”

“So you ask him.”

“I did and mom told me to mind my own business and started going on about how much like Aunt Phoebe I am,” Melinda replied.

Chris shrugged and said, “Guess it sucks to be you, kiddo.”

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“You know I’m really sick of the slime. What is with all the slime?” Chris complained, wiping his hand off on the side of his pants, grimacing as a long, thick bit of slime hung off his fingers.

Wyatt rolled his eyes and pointed at himself and Melinda. He said, “Notice how neither of us are a mess.”

“That’s because I’m always the diversion in your stupid plans,” Chris mumbled.

“Someone’s gotta be,” Wyatt said with a shrug. He glanced around and said, “And no offense to your diversionary skills, but that was way too easy. They only left three demons to guard that amulet?”

“Why do you have to look a gift horse in the mouth?” Chris replied.

“Because things are never that simple and I’d rather we didn’t end up captured,” Wyatt said, in that big brother, I-know-all tone he tended to get when they were dealing with the supernatural. Chris resisted the urge to roll his eyes and argue because his brother did tend to be right about things when it came to vanquishing demons. Not that he would admit that out loud. Wyatt could be enough of a pain in the butt.

Instead, Chris shook out the last of the slime from his hair and asked, “But you’ve got the amulet, right? So let’s just go.”

“Patience grasshopper,” Wyatt responded.

Melinda rolled her eyes and Chris was about to say something when noticed a glimmer in the air. He shouted, “Shit, they’re invisible.”
“What?” Wyatt replied.

Chris didn’t have time to answer though as he noticed another glimmer and then one of the slimy creatures appeared behind Melinda. His hand shot out, sending Melinda flying into Wyatt, just before the thing shot out a beam of red light from its palm. Chris didn’t have time to get out of the way himself and the energy ball hit him right in the chest. He had never been electrocuted but he imagined it felt something like this, every nerve-ending on his skin feeling like it was being burned off at once. He didn’t have much time to focus on it though because the power behind the shot sent him flying through the air into the wall.

He heard hollering, vaguely aware that it was his brother, before he passed out.

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Chris blinked his eyes open and stared up at the ceiling, trying to get his bearings. He felt foggy and confused as he strained to remember what had happened. He vaguely recalled a lot of pain and then there was nothing, but he couldn’t remember how or why it had happened. He rubbed at his eyes, his eyelids still feeling heavy the way they always did when he had gone too long without sleep, and focused on the spot on the ceiling.

Suddenly, the haze started to lift and he remembered what was going on. Gideon had taken Wyatt. Gideon had gotten his hands on Wyatt and, if they didn’t hurry, it would be too late to save his brother. He couldn’t let that happen or it would all have been for nothing. He hadn’t gone back in time and risked everything to fail at the end. He had to fix things. He had justified so much in the name of saving Wyatt – choices he had made, people he had sacrificed – and he wouldn’t fail his family.

Maybe his mother was right about him being stubborn, but as long as he was still breathing, Chris knew he needed to keep fighting.

Chris sat up in the bed, ignoring the lingering burning sensation in his chest, and was about to stand up when two hands were pressing into his shoulders and holding him down. Chris felt the breath catch in his chest as his eyes locked on Wyatt. Except it wasn’t Wyatt as Chris remembered him. Wyatt’s hair was different, the long locks replaced with a short cut, and his eyes…the emptiness was replaced with what appeared to be concern.

Chris could only gape at him, wondering the last time he had seen an expression like that on his brother’s face, as Wyatt said, “Thank God, man. You scared the hell out of us.”

Chris pulled away from Wyatt’s touch, trying hard not to lose his cool and bolt. He glanced around and questioned, “Where am I?”

“Where do you think?” Wyatt replied, motioning around him. It looked like the Manor, but it wasn’t any room he had been in before. Something told him that neither of his aunts had a real love of baseball so none of the memorabilia made any sense.

Chris covered his face with his hands and let out a slow, deliberate breath. He muttered, “This is a dream. A weird dream.”

“What are you talking about?” the not-real Wyatt asked, his eyebrow cocking up like Chris was the problem in this weird scenario.

“I don’t know. Who the hell are you?”

“That’s not funny, Chris,” not-really Wyatt said.
“Nothing about this is funny. One minute I’m being…” Chris’ voice trailed off when he realized that none of the pain he felt earlier was still there. He lifted his shirt and the stab wound from Gideon was completely gone. His breath stuttered momentarily and then he felt the panic swell in his chest. He hopped up and said, “Seriously, where am I?” He pointed at Wyatt and accused, “What did you do? You said you would kill me, but this seems over-the-top even for you-“

“Even for me? What are you talking about?”

“What did you do to me?” Chris asked again.

Wyatt held up his hands like he was dealing with a spooked horse and replied, “-calm down. I’ve got no idea what you’re talking about, little brother.”

“Don’t call me that,” Chris said.

Wyatt sighed and asked, “Do you know who I am?”

“I know who you want me to think you are, but that’s not…he wouldn’t care,” Chris countered.

“What the hell does that mean?” Wyatt asked.

Chris glanced at the door. He wanted to orb, but he felt weak and drained. His head was spinning. Last thing he could clearly recall was telling his father to go find Gideon and Wyatt. Had his dad failed? Were they too late? He covered his face with his hands, knowing it was stupid to show any weakness around his brother, but unsure what else to do. Chris’ eyes shot open when he heard someone running down the hall toward them. Chris lifted his hand in a defensive maneuver and Wyatt slapped his hand down, looking at him like he was insane.

A young woman with long brown hair and brown eyes appeared in the doorway. She flashed him a bright smile before it turned to pure anger. She pointed at him and said, “You idiot! You pushed me out of the way! I thought you were dead!”

“Mel, not now,” Wyatt ordered.

Her expression immediately twisted into one of worry and she reminded Chris so much of his mother. Over the past year, getting to know Piper in a different way than he had growing up, he had seen things she always worked hard to hide from him when he was a kid. And he knew that look. Something was wrong. Something wasn’t right. And he needed to get the hell out of there before it was too late to fix things.

Wyatt was suddenly grabbing him and said, “Don’t even think about it. No orbing.”

“Get off me,” Chris snapped.

Wyatt turned his head and said, “Mel, get Mom and Dad. Right now.” He turned back to Chris and said, “I’m sorry about this, Chris, but I won’t let you hurt yourself.”

Chris was about to respond when he felt a wave of exhaustion overtake him.

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The second time Chris opened his eyes, it was to find Piper and Leo hovering over him. Except Piper wasn’t eight months pregnant and both of them looked a lot older. He muttered, “This is a nightmare.”
“Chris, pal, can you hear me?” Leo replied loudly.

“Leo, he was confused, not deaf,” his mother replied. Her hand came to rest on his forehead and she said, “Chris, honey, you’re okay.”

“I do not belong here,” Chris said. He pushed away his parents’ hands and lifted his legs to his chest. He studied them carefully and said, “Or I’ve lost my mind. Maybe both.”

“Chris, you’re at the Manor.”

“I know that, but when? Where? This is not the manor I know.”

“What does that mean?” Piper questioned.

Chris still hated seeing the worried expression on his mother’s face, even if it wasn’t his mother. He said, “I’m not trying to be difficult, but I should just go.”

“You’re not going anywhere, sport.”

“Where’s Gideon?”

His father’s face twisted with surprise and he replied, “Who?”

Chris huffed and said, “Okay. See. I really don’t belong here. Something screwy happened and I kind of need to deal with it.”

“Phoebe! Paige!” Piper hollered. She pointed at Chris and said, “You make one move to leave that bed and I don’t care how old you are, I will ground you forever.”

“What?”

“Forever,” Piper repeated. She called out, “Paige! Now!”

The familiar blue lights of an orb filled up the space next to Piper and his aunt appeared. It was definitely Paige, except she was older too. He glanced out the window and nothing looked out of sorts. It was a cloudy day, but there were no buildings on fire, and no dragons or observation spheres in the air reporting everything back to Wyatt. Chris reached out hesitantly and touched his mother’s hand. He wanted to wrap his arms around her and hold on, allow her to comfort him in a way that he couldn’t let himself do while he was trying to save Wyatt. She had tried more than few times to get closer to him, to be there to support him, but he couldn’t let those walls down around her. He couldn’t allow himself to get used to having that only to lose it when he got home.

He reminded himself that he had no idea where he was or what was going on. He told himself to hold it together. He shut his eyes, well aware that he was shaking, and he only opened his eyes, when he heard Leo say, “Piper, let me talk to him alone.”

“Leo,” Piper replied, squeezing his hand. She reached out and brushed the hair back off Chris’ face and said, “You’re gonna be okay, honey. We’ll fix this.”

“Piper, I need to talk to Chris,” Leo replied. Piper glared at him, but nodded. She whispered something to Paige, that caused his aunt’s head to snap over to him, as Piper led her out of the room. Leo looked Chris over and said, “I need you to promise me you won’t orb away.”

“What’s going on, Leo? Did you stop Gideon? Where the hell am I?” Chris questioned.

“Calm down, son. No one is going to hurt you here.”
“I don’t know-“

“-Chris, you do know that,” Leo replied.

Chris sighed and said, “Fine. Start talking.”

“What do you know about Gideon? Where did you hear that name?” Leo asked.

Chris rolled his eyes and said, “I do not have time for this.”

“Chris…”

“Are we going to pretend we haven’t been spending months at the Magic School while your old pal, Gideon, sent us on wild goose chases? Not that I blame you. I didn’t see it either and I’m usually not that easy to fool,” Chris replied. He noticed the strange look on Leo’s face and he said, “Seriously, Leo, is Wyatt okay? Did you fix things?”

“Fix things?”

Chris sighed in exasperation and replied, “We had figured out that Gideon was the reason Wyatt likely went bad. We were trying to keep him safe and fix the world and…” Chris paused to pat his side where Gideon had attacked him.

“…and he stabbed you. He left you to die and took Wyatt,” Leo replied, his voice rising slightly as his hand curled into a fist at his side.

Chris hadn’t seen Leo look like that often. Never in his own future – his father wasn’t really around much – and only a few times in the past. It was a mix of pure rage and anguish that left Chris feeling uncomfortable and unsure how to proceed. He and Leo had come a long way in the past few months, but this seemed way out of his comfort zone.

“Chris?” Leo prompted.

Chris said, “I told you to leave me and find Wyatt. You promised to find Wyatt.”

“We did, Chris. You fixed things, son. You were able to make it right,” Leo replied, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

“But…”

“…we saved Wyatt, but I couldn’t save you,” Leo replied, his voice thick with emotion. He pressed his hand into Chris’ chest and said, “I tried, Chris.”

“I know you did.”

“Gideon’s dead.”

Chris shrugged. He understood better than most that things weren’t always as simple as black-and-white choices and he found it really hard to feel bad about the death of a crazy Elder that accidentally brought world destruction on everyone because he knew best. Then again, Chris never had liked the Elders much.

But Chris could see that the whole thing bothered Leo and Chris hated seeing his father look so upset. Chris said, “Leo, I’m sorry.”

“I’m not. He stabbed you. He tried to murder Wyatt.”
“I don’t feel very dead at the moment,” Chris quipped.

“Chris…”

“Seriously, Leo. It’s fine. I’m the last person to judge whatever you had to do in order to save Wyatt. I’m the one who told you to find Wyatt and fix things. He was what mattered.”

“He wasn’t all that mattered,” Leo argued, staring at Chris with that look that he used to get when they were researching things at Magic School. Chris would look up from his book and find Leo watching him with this strange expression, like he was torn between attempting to hug Chris and hollering at him about something.

“Dad, that’s not what I meant,” Chris replied.

“I’m still dad? That’s good,” Leo said.

Chris shrugged and said, “I guess you would know better than me.” He glanced around the room and asked, “So what happened? How did I get here? And where am I exactly?”

Leo rubbed his temples and said, “You’re telling me that the last thing you remember is Gideon stabbing you?”

“I remember Paige showing up and you orbing back in, but everything else is fuzzy…and then I woke up here with some weird, concerned version of Wyatt staring at me.”

“He hasn’t left your side since he orbed you in here. Your brother is blaming himself for what happened to you.”

“Wyatt was a baby-”

“-we defeated Gideon a long time ago, Chris, and Wyatt grew up to be the man he was always meant to be. You were right about your brother. He wasn’t born evil – he was turned in that original timeline. And you saved him.”

A part of Chris hollered not to take anything at face value. His brother wouldn’t be beyond manipulating his memories to torture Chris and get any information he could. But he wanted to believe that he had succeeded. He had spent years making excuses for Wyatt, telling himself that there was a way to stop him without actually killing his only remaining family, and he couldn’t deny that this Wyatt had seemed actually worried about him in a way Chris used to hope for. It seemed like this Wyatt and Chris had a relationship that Chris could never even imagine having with his brother.

“Chris, do you want to talk to him?”


“He’s not evil here.”

“Okay. That’s good.”

“Chris…”

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to do with this information.”

“We talked about this, right? You said you weren’t going to hold him responsible for everything that happened and-“
“Jesus, I get it, Leo. We can’t hurt Wyatt’s feelings. Crystal clear,” Chris snapped.

Leo stood up and turned to look out the window. Chris could see the tension in his father’s shoulders as his father took a deep breath. He kept his gaze focused on the outside as he said, “I really hoped you would never remember that timeline.”

“What happened to me?”

“Chris…”

“Something obviously happened. I was pretty sure that I was dying,” Chris replied. He saw his father shudder and said, “Holy shit. Did I die?”

“I don’t know.”

“What kind of answer is that?” Chris questioned. Leo turned around to look at him and there was that same expression on his father’s face that Chris could recall seeing when Leo realized he couldn’t heal Chris. Chris had spent his whole life wondering why he hadn’t mattered to his father and, in that moment after Gideon had stabbed him, Chris had realized that at least one thing had changed for the better by going back in time. And he had hated himself for being so selfish and needy, so he forced himself to send his dad to find Wyatt and set things straight. Chris prompted, “Dad?”

“You were barely holding on. I begged you to fight, but Gideon had poisoned the blade and I couldn’t save you. There was nothing I could and…” Leo replied. He began pacing the floor and let out a shaky breath. “You died, but then you disappeared.”

Chris patted himself and said, “And what? Just appeared here now?”

“No. That’s not…I think whatever’s going on here was caused by the energy bolt you were hit with while you were fighting demons yesterday.”

“I wasn’t fighting.”

“-Chris, I need you to trust me on this. I watched you grow up into the good man that you are, son.”

“Then why don’t I remember it?”

“I don’t know, but we’ll figure it out,” Leo replied. He stepped over to the bed and reached to squeeze Chris’ shoulder. He added, “I promise to fix this, son.”

Chris tried to take some solace in Leo’s promise, but he had no idea what to think of anything. The good news was the he had apparently succeeded in saving his brother and the world, but he wasn’t really sure he belonged there.

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Chris had tried to hide away in the room they had him in at the manor (“It’s your room. It will always be your room,” his mother had stated in that tone that meant not to argue with her.), but he was starving. There was only so long he could snoop through his own childhood bedroom and not feel completely freaked out and overwhelmed. He had a whole life that he knew nothing about. In all the scenarios he imagined from his time travel, he didn’t expect to wake up randomly one day and not belong.

He noticed cookies in a Tupperware container and grabbed them from the island, shoveling a few into his mouth. He nearly jumped ten feet in the air when he heard the clearing of a throat. He
turned to see Wyatt sitting at the table with a pizza. Chris commented, “Jesus, you scared the hell outta me.”

Wyatt kicked out the chair across from him and said, “Figured you’d be starving.”

“How?”

Wyatt ran his fingers through his hair and said, “Mom and Dad tried to explain a little bit of what was going on so I get that you don’t really know me. But I know you.” He opened the pizza box and the smell compelled Chris’ feet to move of their own volition. Wyatt grinned and asked, “Still like sausage and peppers?”

“Love it,” Chris said, sitting down and grabbing a slice, biting into it. He noticed Wyatt staring at him and had to shut his eyes because it was more than a little disconcerting. He focused his attention on his slice of pizza and, when he opened his eyes again, Wyatt was reading a book.

Wyatt, for his part, didn’t try to force any conversation. They ate in companionable silence until Chris was pretty sure if he tried to eat another slice, he would actually explode. He glanced at Wyatt and said, “Thanks. That hit the spot.”

“It’s what we do,” Wyatt replied.

Chris sighed and said, “Sure. If you say so.”

Wyatt put down his book and stared at Chris. He said, “Mom and Dad wouldn’t get into the specifics, but they said you don’t really remember us.”

“I remember you,” Chris said. He shrugged and added, “Well, sort of.” He waved his hand haphazardly at Wyatt and went on, “Though I think I like this version of you more.”

Wyatt smiled and said, “Okay. Good to know.”

“So we get along?” Chris asked.

“You’re my pain in the ass little brother, but there’s nothing I wouldn’t do for you,” Wyatt responded and Chris believed him. He used to imagine sharing moments like this with his brother, wondered if losing their mother would’ve been easier if they had each other to count on, and it seemed like this version of Chris had that.

Except this wasn’t his life and this wasn’t his brother. He didn’t belong here and he didn’t know how to make all the loss and anger go away long enough to trust this version of Wyatt Halliwell. He knew what he had promised Leo and Piper. He knew what he had sworn to himself and the universe as long as he could fix things…but it was harder to let go of than he had expected.

“Mel is staying at the apartment with me.”

“The apartment?”

“You and I share an apartment.”

“And who is Mel?” Chris asked. Wyatt ducked his head and Chris said, “Seriously, just tell me.”

“Our little sister.”

“I don’t have a little sister-“
“-do I need to explain the Birds and Bees to you again? When a mom and dad really love each other…” Wyatt replied, his voice trailing off into a chuckle.

“Gross, man. I just ate.”

Wyatt stood up and Chris wasn’t expecting him to pull Chris out of his chair. Chris tried not to go on the defensive, but his body tensed up all the same. Wyatt hugged him though and said, “I’m gonna fix this, little brother. I have a theory about the demons that did this and I’ll make it right.”

“I get that you want him back.”

“You are him,” Wyatt replied. He didn’t wait for Chris to respond, simply disappeared into a swirl of blue lights, leaving Chris in the kitchen by himself.

Chris suddenly felt extremely exhausted. He didn’t particularly want to disappear into nothingness or die again, but he didn’t belong in this happy future. He was pretty sure that his family was going to want their Chris back soon and Chris had no idea how to even fake being a part of this world.

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Chris opened his eyes to the young woman from yesterday sitting next to him on the bed, half watching him and half watching something on the television. He groaned as he rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and asked, “Did our family become ninjas when I wasn’t looking? Why is everyone trying to scare the crap out of me?”

The girl rolled her eyes and said, “There is a talk that I’m not supposed to be a part of taking place downstairs so I got put on don’t-let-Chris-orb-away duty.” She turned to face him and said, “You look like hell.”

“Gee, thanks.”

She shrugged and pushed the hair away from her face. She said, “Not as bad as Dad though, considering you’re the one that got hit in the chest with an energy ball of doom. Whatever’s going on, it has him freaked out in a way I haven’t seen in a really long time.”

“Sorry about that.”

“Not your fault. It’s mine.”

“Huh?”

“You pushed me out of the way. You took a hit that was meant for me,” she replied. She hit him in the stomach with her elbow and said, “You need to stop doing that. I’m not five anymore.”

“But you’re my sister.”

She glanced at him with hopeful eyes and replied, “You remember?!”

“No, but you are, right? Why wouldn’t I protect you?”

“Because I can take care of myself.”

Chris sighed and said, “Look...uh...”

“Melinda.”
“Melinda, right. Knew that. Sorry,” Chris replied. He motioned around the room and said, “Don’t take this for granted, alright? You’ve got a family that loves you and tries to protect you because of it. Be grateful for it – going it alone isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.”

She stared at him and asked, “What’s going on?”

“I don’t know.”

Her face was unreadable as she continued to stare at him. After what felt like an eternity, she practically tackled him in a hug, almost causing Chris to fall off the bed. She said, “God, I hate you sometimes.”

He chuckled and returned the hug. He said, “Fair enough.”

She let go of him and stood up. She said, “I’m gonna let the parental units know that you’re awake.”

“Okay.”

She stared at him and said, “We’ll fix this, Chris. We always do.”

“Sure.”

She sighed and said, “I don’t know what’s going on except that you don’t remember us…but…you’re my big brother. You’ve never let me down, not once, and I know you won’t now.”

“I’m not him, Melinda.”

“Of course you are. I know my brother,” She replied before rushing out of the room.

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“We think we’ve figured this out,” Leo said, appearing in the doorway a few minutes later.

“How to send me back?” Chris replied. He wasn’t looking forward to it, but he knew that it had to happen. This family deserved their son and brother back. Maybe his purpose had always been to save Wyatt and then no longer exist? It probably should’ve bothered him more than it did, but seeing this glimpse of a future where his brother was a good man and his parents were both alive and together and he had a little sister…his sacrifice had been worth it. He had insured not only that the world hadn’t been destroyed, but that his family was safe.

He could live…or not live…with that.

Leo sat down in the old chair that was next to the bed. He dropped a potion on the table and Chris started to reach for it. Leo shook his head and said, “That’s not for you.”

“What?”

“That’s for me.”

“Leo, what are you doing?”

“I don’t really think I need it. Everything that happened is pretty much seared into my memory, even after all this time, but I don’t want to leave anything out.”

“What?”
“Both Wyatt and Mel have said that you don’t think you belong here.”

Chris motioned around the room and said, “Look around, Leo. I don’t belong here. And you and I both know why.”

“None of what happened was your fault, Chris.”

“Leo…” Chris warned.

“You’re a good man. You were willing to sacrifice everything for your family, for your brother, even when you had every reason not to.”

“Do not do this to me, Leo. I’m barely holding on here as it is,” Chris confessed.

Leo stood up, swallowed down the potion like it was a shot of whiskey, and moved into Chris’ personal space. He reached out and squeezed Chris’ shoulder as he let out a slow, deliberate breath. He looked emotional in way that Chris had never seen before and Chris wasn’t sure what do about it. He had spent years convinced his father wasn’t even capable of emotions and the man in front of him now looked almost broken.

“I let you down in so many ways, Chris. I told myself that focusing on the future you fought so hard for…” Leo paused and cleared his throat.

Chris could see his hand was shaking and said, “Dad?”

“We never talked about Gideon or what happened with any of you.”

“Figured as much. Don’t really blame you for that.”

“I do.”

“What?”

“We weren’t ashamed of you, Chris. Your mother and I-“

“-I get it, Leo. I wasn’t-“

“-Stop it,” Leo ordered. He reached out and bracketed Chris’ face in his hands. He said, “You are my son. Same as you were yesterday and the day before that. Same as you have always been.”

“Okay,” Chris said.

“Your mother and I missed you. We grieved for you…but you were also still here. Just a baby that needed a chance to enjoy the world you fought so hard for,” he replied. Leo stared at him in a way that left Chris feeling raw and exposed. It hurt to see the loss etched into his father’s expression, but he wasn’t sure what he could do about it. Leo let go of him and said, “Losing you nearly ripped me apart, Chris. I was angry and lost and I didn’t know how to process it.”

“What?”

“I killed an elder.”

“Gideon kind of had it coming.”

Leo snorted and said, “Yeah, but that’s not what I’m talking about.”
“What are you telling me?”

“I blamed myself and the Elders for not seeing what Gideon was until it was too late.”

“But it wasn’t too late. You saved Wyatt. I see that.”

“You’re my son too. You’re my son and I love you and I failed you. I promised you that I would fix things. I promised you that I would get you home safely and I couldn’t keep those promises.”

“But you did.”

“You were still gone,” Leo said. He walked over to the dresser and picked up a picture frame. Chris had stared at the picture plenty in the last twenty-four hours – it was of him, Leo, and Wyatt at a baseball game – and tried to imagine a moment like that. Leo ducked his head and went on, “...it was hard to be around the baby version of you at first...to be around your mother and brother... anyone really. And I felt like I had to be vigilante, make sure no one else was coming after any of you.”

“It’s okay.”

“I made a lot of mistakes during that time. I let your mother down especially. Left her to not only grieve your loss alone, but to deal with a newborn and toddler without my help.”

“But obviously you guys figured it out.”

“You and Wyatt needed me. And I had made a promise to you and myself...I never wanted us to have whatever relationship we did in your original timeline that made you hate me. I never wanted to fail you so badly again.”

“I don’t think you have.”

Leo sat back down in the chair and said, “I need to tell you everything that happened after Gideon stabbed you and you disappeared.”

“I don’t really think that’s necessary.”

“I think it is,” Leo replied and he proceeded to go into a long story about a ghost version of him and working with Avatars on creating a Utopia. Chris didn’t know what to make of any of it, felt weighed down by the enormity of the grief his father had felt over him. Chris had spent years trying to wonder why he never mattered to Leo – what was wrong with him? Why was he not worth his father’s time? – and the man in front of him had nearly spiraled out of control because of how much he loved him.

Chris wasn’t sure he deserved that kind of devotion from his father. And he imagined Leo would’ve given anything to have his Chris back at that moment.

Leo sighed and said, “You’re still my son, Chris.”

“I’m not—“

“Listen to me. The things you went through...I’m beyond grateful that you won’t have to face that again, but you’re still the same man. I’ve seen it so many times that sometimes I had to fight back the urge to tell you.”

“So why not tell me?”
“Because you didn’t deserve to have to carry that burden. You had so much on your shoulders before and it was too late for me to take that load on for you at the time…but I could make sure it didn’t happen again.”

“Dad.”

“I also never wanted to risk ruining the relationship you and I had or the one you shared with Wyatt. Maybe it was selfish, I don’t know.”

“I’m sorry losing me was so hard. I never figured it would matter that much,” Chris replied, in almost wonder.

“You died on May 20th,” Leo said.

Chris’ eyes widened and a series of images flashed through his mind. He said, “May 20th? You always made plans for just you and me on that day every year. I asked about it once and you got so upset that I just stopped asking. Didn’t really matter to me. We always had fun together.” Chris hopped off the bed and asked, “How do I know that?”

Leo turned around to face him and said, “Until you were about five, I would disappear that day and go off by myself. I used to allow myself that one day to mourn for that part of you that we lost that day, but your mother pointed out that there was a better way for me to remember you.”

“So it became our day?”

“You were right in front of me, day-in-and-day-out, and as hard as watching you die that day…we stopped that from happening. You weren’t gone, Chris.”

“But—”

“- you’re the same man that I had the chance to get to know all those years ago. I have no doubts there is nothing you would do for the people you love or the world you help protect. It’s how we ended up here. Because you moved your sister to safety and took that hit.”

Chris staggered back and another flash of moments played out in his head. He could easily recall laughing with his brother, following his sister on her first date only to get yelled at by his mother, and going bowling with his dad.

“Chris?”

“What the hell is happening to me?”

“Don’t fight it. Your memories are coming back.”

“What?”

“Something about the energy those demons possessed…it plays into our darkest fears, blocking everything else out.”

Chris sat down on the edge of the bed and covered his head. He felt like his brain was turning to mush as more and more images inundated his thoughts. He almost couldn’t breathe, but then his father was there, whispering reassurances to him. Chris focused on his father’s voice, using it as an anchor, and shut his eyes against the thrumming pain behind his eyelids.

And then it stopped.
“Chris? You with me, sport?”

Chris opened his eyes and said, “That was weird.” Leo arched his eyebrow and Chris reached out and pulled him into a hug. He said, “I love you, Dad.”

Leo returned the hug, kissing the side of Chris’ head, and said, “I love you too, son.”

Chris said, “You think Wyatt and Mel will forgive me?”

“This wasn’t your fault.”

“I still remember everything from before.”

“There’s a chance it will fade, but it’s more likely that those memories are back permanently. I’m sorry about that.”

“It’s okay,” Chris replied. Leo gave him that look that said he was full of crap and Chris shrugged. “Okay might not be the right word, but I’m better than I was an hour ago. I don’t feel like a complete fraud.”

“You’re still you.”

“With a bunch of weird memories that make no sense, but sure. Still me. Just another unique Halliwell snowflake.”

“You’re not alone with this. Your mother and I are here for you every step of the way. Your aunts would help too. And I think you remember now that there’s nothing your brother and sister wouldn’t do for you.”

“Is Wyatt downstairs?”

“You think he was going anywhere when you were messed up?”

“What does he know?” Chris asked.

“Not much. He just knows his little brother was hurting and he wanted to fix it,” Leo replied.

“Is it okay to tell him?”

Leo sighed and said, “You do what you need to, son. I’ve learned over the years not to get between the two of you.”

“So we really did fix things? We stopped the bad future.”

“You did that and I’ve never been more grateful for anything,” Leo replied. He patted Chris on the back and said, “I need to go let the others know things worked. You ready for the familial onslaught or you want to sneak out for a little while?”

“I’m surprisingly okay right now. Not sure if it’s shock or what, but I’m feeling fine with things,” Chris replied. He motioned to the hallway and asked, “So what’s the plan? What am I supposed to say?”

“Your mother and I have decided to follow your lead with things on this.”

“Huh?”
“All I ask is that you give us a head’s up if you decide to fill your siblings in on things. If you decide we should tell Wyatt and Mel what happened, if it will help you deal with this latest development, we’ll support your call. Neither of us wants you suffering in silence for no reason.”

“I don’t want to put that on Wyatt.”

“Chris…”

“Even when I hated the Wyatt of that original timeline, he was still my brother. I wanted to protect him, to save him…it’s why I came up with the harebrained idea to go to the past in the first place,” Chris replied. He tugged on the sleeves of his shirt and added, “And now I remember all the ways that he would do the same things for me. He would never put something like that on my shoulders and I won’t do it to him.”

“You don’t need to make that decision right now. You’re likely going to be a bit all over the place as you make sense of things with the new additional memories.”

“Dad, it’s okay. I’m okay.”

“And you’ll tell me if-“

“-if that changes, I promise you’ll be the first one I tell. I’ll force you to go someplace so we can talk about our feelings,” Chris said.

“We’ve got that fishing trip in a few days.”

Chris grimaced and said, “Oh right. Fishing. Yay.”

Leo chuckled and said, “Something you wanna tell me, sport?”

“Energy bolt to the chest. Past repressed memories surfacing. I’m just saying that I’ve suffered enough, Dad. If you want to be one with nature, can’t we go hiking like normal people?”

“That’s fine,” Leo replied, his eyes flickering with amusement. He squeezed Chris’ shoulder again and said, “I just like spending time with you.”

“Please tell me we’re not always this mushy,” Chris retorted.

Leo motioned to the door and said, “The others are downstairs. You wanna come down with me? I bet you can con your mother into making you pancakes.”

“I’ll be right there,” Chris said.

Leo nodded and walked out of the room. Chris moved over to the dresser and stared at the pictures that cluttered the top. He thought it should feel strange to have this small part of him that didn’t understand any of this, but he had plenty of good memories to push that niggling voice away. His plan had worked and his life was better than he had ever imagined it might be.

He could learn to deal with the rest of it.

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