I don't blame you for being you (but you can't blame me for hating it)

by ThatsWildPatrick

Summary

Patrick Stumph belongs to a very rich and prestigious family. He's a talented violinist and his parents have a wonderful future planned out for him.

Pete Wentz is a grungy, poor, emo kid. The kind of kid Patrick is not allowed to hang out with under any circumstances.

Pete doesn't seem to understand that last part.

Notes
So, I published this yesterday but it got deleted in a freak computer accident so I'm trying again.
Ben and Jerry's

Patrick Stumph was perfect: polite, studious, and an extremely talented musician.

He didn’t personally agree with that description, but whenever he did try to argue, his parents or some elderly, distant family member would quickly criticize his ‘low self-esteem’.

But despite what his family said, Patrick didn’t consider himself to have a low self-esteem, he just thought he was an average kid.

Okay, maybe slightly grumpier and anxious than an average kid, but he was still average.

And Patrick was grumpiest on Monday mornings.

His alarm clock had been beeping steadily from his bedside table for around five minutes, and Patrick was already seriously considering throwing it out of the window.

He blinked groggily, his brain still half-asleep, before turning to the clock, and glaring at the word ‘Monday’ flashing at him from the digital screen. With a growl, he slammed the snooze button with his fist, a little too harshly, because, seriously, *fuck Mondays*.

Patrick was also not a morning person.

Pushing himself out of bed with a heavy, pained sigh, and he made his way to the bathroom with heavy footsteps. After an arctic-cold shower Patrick was definitely going to be mad about all day, he focused on making himself look more human.

Patrick glanced at himself in the mirror with a slight grimace; dark circles under his eyes, eyelids threatening to droop any moment, and paler than Caspar-the-**fucking**-friendly-ghost. He huffed, shuffling to his room and grabbing his uniform from his dresser.

He stared at the garish green-and-black uniform in his hands and he found himself wondering what going to a normal school would be like- what having a normal life, would be like. Patrick attended a very prestigious school, giving him an excellent (and extremely boring) education that would ‘last for the rest of your life’, as the banners all over the halls insisted.

A small wave of guilt washed over him, he knew some people would kill to be in his place, but sometimes he couldn’t help wishing and wondering, some part of him yearned for a normal, down-to-earth life.

Dressing himself quickly, Patrick trudged down the stairs and stumbled into the kitchen. His mom was engrossed in a heated phone call, his dad was staring at his newspaper with a furrowed brow and his siblings were eating their breakfast, grinning at him like Cheshire cats when they noticed just how sleepy Patrick still was. *Damn them*, Patrick scowled while nursing a glass of orange juice, No one should be that happy before noon.

“What time d’you call this, *Pat*?” His younger brother grinned, Patrick grimaced at the awful nickname. “Shut up *Kev*.” He growled back.

“*Patrick*, be nice to your brother.” Their dad said firmly, staring up at his eldest son from his newspaper. Patrick opened his mouth to argue, but quickly decided against it. As an unspoken rule, nobody talked back to mom and dad. Patrick and siblings argued and messed with each other but they drew the line at sassing their parents. In the past, there had been terrible consequences.
Soon enough, it was time for school. The three kids grabbed their bags and headed to school on foot. They would usually start the walk together, packed into a line, before separating to find their own friends. Kevin and Megan had already found their friends, and Patrick had been left daydreaming and walking along at a slow pace by himself.

He let his mind wander, flitting wildly from ideas, to memories, to wishes and then suddenly back to ideas, like a very confused and overwhelmed moth in a light-bulb store.

He let a relaxed smile form on his face, he always enjoyed the walk to school, he liked watching the leaves falling from the trees, watching the clouds drift across the sky...and luckily, it gave him time to think, time away from very annoying brothers and sisters and slightly scary parents.

Then, Patrick was viciously attacked.

Or that’s what he considered it anyway.

He may have over-exaggerated, but he’s allowed to over-exaggerate because that scared the shit out of him.

He felt someone grab his back, jumping up on him, using him like some piece of fucking gym equipment.

“What the-”

“Patrick!” he heard a familiar voice behind him, “Don’t fucking swear!”

He turned, with the legendary ‘Stumph Scowl™’ etched onto his features to see Sarah Orzechowski, one of his best friends, much to his crushing disappointment. Patrick tilted his head slightly to see his other best friend, Ashley Frangipane (or Halsey, as she preferred), and her hair was dyed bright lime-green this week.

Ashley smiled at Patrick apologetically, “I’m sorry dude, I told her not not to.” she shoved Sarah
lightly, who grabbed her arm, fake-crying and acting like she was in severe pain. “That hurt so much, you’re so mean, why am I not allowed to jump on my friends?”

Patrick huffed jokingly, and turned to continue the walk to school, ignoring Sarah’s rambling while rolling his eyes fondly.

“So,” Sarah glided up next to him, “What are you doing tonight?” She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively.

With a masterful deadpan look and voice, Patrick responded “Practicing violin obsessively for ten hours before passing out from exhaustion.” He sighed dramatically, “Wake up, eat three tubs of Ben and Jerry’s and then cry myself to sleep.” He added, dripping with sarcasm.

Sarah rolled her eyes with a smile, “How about going out with your bestest friends ever?” She grinned at him excitedly while motioning wildly to herself and Ashley. Patrick stared. “Do I need to remind you what happened last time?”

Previously on: Patrick gives in to Sarah’s whining:

- Sarah got a fake ID.
- Sarah got them into a nightclub using the fake ID.
- Sarah got very drunk using said fake ID.
- Sarah got busted for having said fake ID.
- Sarah got mad.
- Patrick and Ashley had to drag Sarah away from what would have been a bar fight.
- Patrick, Ashley and Sarah had to run away from nightclub security.
- Patrick, Ashley and Sarah had to hide in a bush for an hour before being in the clear.
- Sarah threw up a lot.
- Sarah cried a lot.
- Ashley had to carry her home.
- Patrick had to break into his own fucking house because he forgot his fucking keys.

Sarah winced quickly at the memory before clearing her throat, “Well, as the old saying goes: you learn from your mistakes!” She lightly punched his arm.

Ashley scoffed, “Which is exactly why he’s refusing.”

The dark haired girl furrowed her brows, and pouted with disappointment for a moment before sighing very loudly. “Come on, Ashley. A little help here.”

Ashley sighed with a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. “She just wants an excuse to go out to see her boyfriend.” Patrick’s eyebrows shot up and Sarah made a noise of protest, “H-he’s not my-oh fuck you Ashley.” Growling at Ashley’s laughter.

“So...a boyfriend huh?”

“Shut up Patrick.”

Ashley sighed as she saw their proud school building getting closer and closer, “She’s just crushing on some guy. But, look, seriously, this club is amazing.” Patrick looked at her with a raised eyebrow, “...And your definition of amazing is...?” The green haired girl let out a short laugh, “The same as yours! Look, just trust me Patrick, you’ll enjoy it! Besides, I’m planning the adventure this time.” She glared pointedly at Sarah, “So no drinking, and no fake IDs.”
They arrived at the school gate just as Sarah started protesting, and Patrick tried to stifle an irritated sigh at the sight of the school. Ashley smiled at him, sympathetic yet strained, “You’ll get through it.” Patrick gave a her tight-lipped smile back.

The girl shook her head, “We’re going to the club Patrick, you need a break. And that’s final.” Patrick started to object as Ashley hurried towards the school doors, Sarah darting behind her. “We’re picking you up at seven! Don’t forget!”

Patrick sighed, the ‘Ben and Jerry’s’ plan was sounding better and better by the minute.
Cherry Red Eyes

Pete Wentz woke to the sound of dogs barking outside, he sighed, making a helpless noise as he stumbled out of bed, he couldn’t have actually slept more than six hours. He never did sleep well in this house, yeah, he was pretty bitter about that. He lent over, snatching his black, wrinkled band t-shirt, his dark hoodie and his pair of distressed skinny jeans he’d been wearing for four days straight from the scuffed floor. He yawned loudly, tripping over his second-hand pair of sneakers with a grunt as he tried to get dressed.

Pete sat on the bottom step of the splintered wooden stairs, pulling on his shoes as he lazily glanced at the gaping hole in the plaster wall he and a few friends made during a party. They had been punching it out, trying to shove their heads through, and, well, *Pete was drunk* and thought it’d be a good idea to jump through. His mom hadn’t been happy, to say the least.

Roughly pulling a worn black backpack onto his shoulder, he jogged out of the house, locking it behind him.

The street was cracked, and the road was covered with potholes, trash cans were overflowing, walls were covered in spray paintings—wait, was that Pete’s handiwork over there?

Pete looked away from his signature on the wall and looked up at the fading sunrise instead, it was still too early for school, but Pete didn’t like spending much time at home. It wasn’t that his parents were the problem...they usually weren’t home either. Neither were his brother and sister, now that he thought about it, he idly wondered where they would go.

Thankfully, he had a close group of friends who’d usually let him crash at their houses, so Pete rarely slept at his own house. He’d only made the journey home yesterday because his sister, Hillary, had texted him, begging him to come home. She’d been hearing, what she called, ‘*scary noises*’ in their house. Pete had thought she meant something like ‘Paranormal Activity’, but when he arrived, it had been more like ‘*Crackheads hanging out in the alley outside*’. And although Pete was sure she’d be safe, he had a big-brother responsibility damn it, so he’d stayed in the house with her until morning.

Although Pete did have a ‘big brother’ responsibility, Pete had other obligations too, besides just going to school, and a part-time cleaning job at some fancy school from 4 to 6 pm (which may or may not have a really embarrassing uniform).

But by far, Pete’s favorite responsibility was the club. Pete and his friends frequented a club called ‘The Cobra’ and they played there weekday nights, 7pm to 11pm, all split into different bands...which didn’t leave much time for homework, but Pete wasn’t too bothered about that. And they were actually popular, and actually got paid, which had been a nice surprise.

The club manager always expected them on Monday mornings with their instruments. They’d usually tune and check them, practice a little while and mess around before heading to school, leaving their instruments ready for their performances.

Pete darted across the street making his way to the club, narrowly missing getting hit by a dirty, blue car.

His friends Brendon, Ryan, Dallon and Spencer were one group, and they called themselves Panic!
At The Disco, and Pete actually really liked their music, and Brendon was one hell of a singer, not that he’d ever admit that to him of course, the singer would probably spend the whole week- no probably the whole year, knowing Brendon, teasing Pete about it and singing at the most inappropriate times just to show off.

Gerard, Frank, Mikey and Ray were another group called ‘My Chemical Romance’ and Tyler and Josh were their own duo, ‘twenty one pilots’. Pete had to admit they were great too, and they were a lot more humble about it, so Pete was much more willing to praise them than he was Brendon.

Last but not least, Pete himself was a bassist, and played with his friends Andy and Joe. A drummer and guitarist, respectively. They were still unnamed and were missing an official singer (Joe was a provisional lead singer), but despite those facts, Pete considered his group to be the best, and that usually sparked playful arguments and mock fights with Brendon and Mikey – the only guys who were really bothered by Pete’s confident declarations of superiority.

He arrived at the club, pushing through the metal doors, covered in old, ripped band posters. Pete had to admit the club was a little on the ‘grungy’ side, but the manager was great and they were allowed to play as loud as they wanted to, so he couldn’t really bring himself to care, and it wasn’t like he was used to palaces anyway.

Walking in to the dimly lit building, he was hit by a strong smell of weed, Pete laughed quietly and guessed that Brendon must be close.

A man looked up at Pete from behind a long bar to his right, a cloth in his hand and cleaning spray in the other. The bartender stared darkly, motioning his head to the left, “Just follow the smell.” Pete nodded with a smirk and walked off, hearing the man grumble behind him, “Better hope no cops come in here, damn stoners”.

Pete pushed through the tight hallways to the small and grimy backstage rooms, he sniffed the air like a bloodhound; The smell was coming from behind a door which had a piece of paper stuck on it with the words ‘Panic! At The Disco’ scrawled in Brendon’s messy handwriting. He pushed the door open slowly, peeking his head around to see the squad™ sitting around on various mismatched pieces of furniture, fiddling with their instruments and passing a blunt back and forth.

“Pete the Treat!” Brendon grinned at him from his chair, Pete laughed silently at the nickname, “Hey Brandon.” Pete smiled back, putting emphasis on the ‘a’. The younger boy leaned forwards, frowning and furrowing his brow as some of the others laughed lightly.

Everyone tended to be quieter in the morning, everyone was still groggy from waking up and saving their energy for their part-time jobs after school and for their shows in the evening.

Pete strode into the room, taking a seat on a worn leather couch next to Joe and Andy, who both greeted him with an oddly synchronized nod, reminding Pete of those creepy twins from the Shining.

“You guys know that you can smell that shit from the front door, right?” Pete laughed and nodded towards the blunt, currently pinched in Spencer’s hand. Everyone’s eyes widened slightly, with a kind of ‘Oh shit’ moment of realization.

Well, everyone’s except Brendon’s, who just stared back nonchalantly, “Chill, dude. I’m sure the cops are busy tracking down all the, like, murderers and thieves, I dunno. I don’t think they’re gonna want to deal with a couple of stoners.” He winked confidently, but Pete wasn’t really convinced, he knew how petty the police could be especially with people like them.

Josh and Tyler glanced at each other, having a silent discussion, before Josh cleared his throat slightly, looking at Spencer. “Maybe we should put it out, dude.”

Spencer nodded eagerly in agreement, moving quickly to put it out in an ash tray, before Brendon made a loud noise of protest, “HEY, HEY, HEY,” he raised his voice, grabbing at the blunt and
holding it protectively as if he was holding his firstborn. “Fuck you guys, this is good shit! Do you have any idea how much this cost?!” He scowled as everyone stared back indifferently, he grumbled and hunched over, “Fine, whatever, I’m never giving you guys weed again.”

Brendon brought the blunt to his mouth and smoked greedily, trying to finish the blunt as quickly as he could.

Some guys watched in shock, with jaws hanging open, but others shook their heads and rolled their eyes, acting like they’d just seen a little kid throwing a tantrum in a grocery store.

Joe looked at his watch intently, “Hey guys.” He called, “We’re gonna be late if we don’t get going soon.” Everyone- with the exception of Brendon who was smoking with his face scrunched up uncomfortably, started grabbing their bags and putting their instruments away tenderly.

Dallon rolled his eyes fondly, shoving at Brendon’s shoulder, “We’re gonna be late, c’mon.”

Brendon growled, putting out his blunt lazily and standing up, before everyone started staring at him, some guys were laughing and others just looked concerned.

“What? What the fuck are you guys-” Brendon glanced at the broken mirror hanging on the wall and his jaw dropped as he saw his eyes: the whites were almost totally red and his eyelids were drooping-he, basically, looked incredibly high, “Oh shit.”

Gerard let a smile tug at the corners of his mouth as Mikey laughed loudly, “And that, boys and girls, is why you puff, puff, pass.” He said using his actually pretty convincing ‘condescending school-teacher’ voice.

Andy shook his head with a quiet laugh, “And that’s exactly why I don’t ‘partake’” he mumbled. Frank clapped his hand on Brendon’s shoulder, laughing wildly. “Oh my god, you are SO fucked when we get to school.” Brendon scowledshrugging Frank’s hand away with a miserable whine before trudging out of the room, mumbling swear-words like they were prayers. Dallon, Ryan and Spencer, laughed quietly, calling after Brendon, trying to catch up to him.

Tyler and Josh left after them, chatting quietly.

Pete, Joe and Andy followed, as Gerard, Frank, Mikey and Ray tagged along behind them, engrossed in their own conversation, mainly discussing Brendon’s eyes, making jokes about them and comparing them to all kinds of red objects.

And so, they all made their way to their old, concrete, school, covered immature graffiti and busted windows.
A Goddamn Angel

Pete was entranced.

Body stiff, slack-jawed, brown eyes locked in place.

He only remembered feeling that way a handful of times.

The first time he remembered being captivated by something was when he was four years old, his mom was running errands at the mall. She had been rushing around from place to place, but had suddenly stopped and sat on a bench to read over her to-do list carefully. Pete, being the hyperactive four-year old he was, decided to wander away from her and look for something fun to do, and his mom hadn’t even noticed.

He had bounced down the mall when something made him stop abruptly, as though he’d turned to concrete.
A young woman was playing a violin, it’s open case next to her containing a few coins. The little boy had watched her, slack-jawed for around twenty minutes, but what felt like five minutes to him. It was the best thing he had ever seen, and he was overwhelmed by it. Amazed by the sound, the movements, the instrument- by everything.

His mother had pulled him out of his trance, pulling him away to the dry-cleaners by his wrist, scolding him for running away and irritably reminding him about the dangers of strangers with an exasperated look on her face.
Pete remembered being slightly crestfallen at being dragged away from the beautiful sight, and although that was the first and last time he’d ever seen or heard a violin in person, he never forgot how it had stirred something in him.

And here Pete was once again, with an unbearable, yet familiar, tightness in the pit of his stomach and his chest.
He was four years old again, standing in a mall, and completely overwhelmed.

When Pete had arrived at his rundown school with his friends, the group he’d walked with stopped to watch Brendon being dragged into the building by Mrs Jackson, their chemistry teacher. She had a reputation for being incredibly strict and for dishing out the worst punishments out of all the teachers in the school.
The group laughed silently at Brendon’s helpless muttering and begging, and Ray let out a low whistle when he heard Mrs Jackson’s ranting getting even louder as she dragged the boy down the hall to the principal’s office.
Brendon had eventually been allowed to return to class, but not without an hour-long detention after school and a very ‘concerned’ phone call to his parents. When he finally shuffled into English class, he had dropped his head onto his desk with a loud thud.

Needless to say, his friends had to spend the day cheering him up with really bad puns, and Spencer even sacrificed his muffin for Brendon during lunch.

When the final bell rang, they all left the school- with Brendon watching them sadly through the window of the detention room.

They had all separated, going away to their part-time jobs or just going home. Pete had been slightly
annoyed- okay, maybe very annoyed, that Brendon had stuffed himself with weed and bagged a detention.
Pete and Brendon worked their part-time job together, cleaning some fancy school in Glenview. In truth, they were supposed to be the janitor’s assistants, and although that’s what it had said on the job description, they had ended up actually being the fucking janitors. The guy they were supposed to be assisting wasn’t strict and he didn’t yell at them constantly, he didn’t really do anything...and that was the problem. During their first working week, he’d thoroughly taught Pete and Brendon how to clean, where to clean, and what to use. In the second week, he had worked half-heartedly and he’d started leaving the boys alone for long periods of time, letting them do all the work. Third week, he was complaining about back pain, using ‘I’m an old man’ as an excuse and had stopped trying altogether, instead just ‘supervising’ them. And by the end of the month, Pete and Brendon were cleaning the entire school by themselves.

So as Pete trudged over to Glenview, he bitterly cursed Brendon and the old janitor, and contemplated if he could actually finish the whole work load by himself. He’d arrived at the old, proud school, decorated with old, medieval-looking carvings. Pete sighed lightly and headed inside, being greeted by the smiling receptionist. As he walked to the janitor closet to get changed into his extremely unflattering uniform, Pete wondered what this school was like during school hours and what it would be like to study here.

His school in Wilmette was more like a zoo during the school day; Filled with screaming kids, people running, crashing and bumping into everything and everyone, the loud, obnoxious digital bell buzzing in his ears, and the very tasteful dicks, swastikas and love hearts containing two initials carved onto every desk by very bored students. Pete had been in and had cleaned every room in this Glenview school, and he hadn’t seen anything like it before. Everything was immaculate, no carvings, no graffiti, and everything was, what Pete considered to be, clean. The principal didn’t seem to agree with Pete’s standard of cleanliness however, and had felt the need to employ him and Brendon.

As he pulled on his one-piece janitor uniform that was way too big for him, he idly wondered if the kids at Glenview were actually any different than the ones at Wilmette, or if the school was just stricter and kept them under heavier control, and Pete wondered what they would actually be like. He’d heard stories of encounters from schoolmates, but he imagined a bunch of quiet, nerdy kids who carried around antibacterial gel and lived in manors with perfect and loving nuclear families or something. And although Pete hadn’t really met any, he couldn’t help but dislike them on principal, because while he hadn’t actually spoken to any, he had seen them. He had seen the disgusted looks they gave people like him, and it pissed him off.

Pete had almost finished cleaning and he was feeling pretty rough, soaked in sweat and still feeling nauseous from cleaning the girl’s toilets, he made his way to the backstage of the school’s theater, weakly pulling his mop and bucket behind him. He comforted himself, telling himself he would be free after finishing the theater, and he could get to The Cobra to be reunited with his beloved bass guitar- and maybe give Brendon a piece of his mind, or fist, depending on how he felt or on how much Brendon apologized.

He was about to pull back the black curtain that hid the actual theater stage from him and get to work before he heard chattering and froze, black curtain firmly bunched up in his fist. He released the fabric carefully and peeked out from behind it, being careful to remain undetected. Pete had to admit he felt slightly dumb, he had completely forgotten the school’s orchestra practiced on weekday evenings. He sighed quietly, and began to turn away to make his way back to the
janitor’s closet when he heard it.

An angel.

Pete heard a fucking angel.

More specifically an angel playing a violin.

He stared with wide eyed browns, completely captivated. There was a kid- he couldn’t have been any older than Pete, standing in the center of the room, surrounded by other orchestra kids sat in their chairs, and he was playing an old, yet expensive looking violin.

Pete watched in awe.

He watched the boy’s fingers flitting along it’s neck, fingers deftly pressing down in different places, he watched the boy’s arm gracefully sliding the bow along the instrument’s metal strings, he watched the boy’s chest, rising and falling, practically in time with the music, oddly enough Pete found himself staring at the boy more than the violin.

His eyes moved from the kid’s strawberry blonde hair, to his baby blue eyes, which were narrowed in a kind of relaxed concentration, to his unbelievably pale skin, to his goddamn perfect mouth, which was pulled into a tight line...to his questionable uniform.

And another thing, the music.

Pete was completely sure he had never heard anything more beautiful and Pete was also fairly sure he could have started crying right then and there.

He could have actually believed that he had died and gone to heaven.

He was pretty sure this kid was proof that some benevolent deity existed.

The sound rang in his ears and Pete felt himself practically melt.

But soon enough, it stopped.

He felt himself almost protest out loud, before quickly controlling himself, slapping a hand over his mouth.

Pete watched, what he assumed was the teacher, or conductor, whatever it was called, sigh in exasperation.

“You haven’t been practicing have you, Mr. Stumph?”

Pete made a quiet strangled groan, his eyes wide. What the fuck did that guy mean? Hadn’t he just seen the fucking definition of perfection that Pete just had?

The boy lowered his head quickly in shame as the other kids laughed at him and chatted to each other quietly. Pete really wanted to slap every one of those kids in the face. “I-I’m sorry, sir, I-I just haven’t had m-much time-” The teacher cut him off with a shushing noise.

Pete’s eye twitched, he really wanted to beat that guy up.

He watched the teacher motion for the ‘Stumph’ kid to sit down and started giving the group a lecture on “discipline” and the “virtues of practice”. Pete watched the redhead slump further and further down into his chair, staring at the floor, hiding his face and wincing with every one of the teacher’s sharp words, as though they actually hurt him.

Pete had to fight the very strong urge to march up to the boy and hug him until he felt better, not before giving the motherfucking teacher and all those brats a talking to.
The teacher dismissed the group and Pete panicked slightly as he watched them all move around, he quickly ducked his head and crept away, just missing the redheaded boy looking up in his direction.

Out of his janitor clothes and dressed again, Pete darted out of the school, quickly waving to the receptionist.
He had been staring at that kid for so long he had completely forgot about his plans at The Cobra, and if he was late, he just knew Joe was never gonna let it go.

Pete burst through the doors of the club, panting heavily and red-faced as he stumbled through the hordes of customers to the backstage rooms.

Pushing open the door that had a sticky note on it, reading ‘Pete, Joe and Andy’, he found Joe hunched over on a chair, bouncing his leg nervously, and he saw Andy nonchalantly tapping out a drum beat, with his hands on his thighs.

“Dude, where the fuck were you?”

Joe whispered angrily, and got up dragging Pete over to his bass guitar by the shoulder. “Tyler and Josh JUST finished their set-” Pete rolled his eyes lightly, sensing an oncoming rant.

“We’ve been stalling until you got here.” Andy chimed in, Joe swallowed thickly and nodded, looking mildly annoyed at Andy cutting his lecture short.

“What happened? Why are you so late?” Joe kept insisting.

Pete huffed and gave Joe a wolfish grin, pulling his bass strap over his head and idly swiping his fingers along the fretboard. “Look, just drop it Joe, we’re already late, aren’t we?”
He turned and bounced out of the room. Joe scowled “I want answers, Wentz!” he shouted after Pete, only hearing a muffled “LATER” in response.
The guitarist and drummer decided to quickly follow their idiot friend out onto the small stage.

They all assumed their positions and started the first song on their set list, Pete took a moment from focusing his eyes on his bass to look at the crowd, it was the usual audience: kids who were there for the music, adults who were there for the cheap booze.

And then something caught Pete’s eye.

A familiar mop of strawberry blonde hair, which was quickly covered by a trucker hat.
Patrick hadn’t had a fantastic day...no, it had been a pretty shitty day actually.

Firstly, he’d spent the whole morning half-asleep, and had been pretty much forced into going out with Sarah and Ashley.

But even worse than that death sentence, for some unknown reason, all the teachers had been pissed off that day. This meant whole classes receiving inhumane amounts of homework, detentions being passed out left and right, and some unlucky individuals being savagely humiliated in front everyone.

However, even after school had finished, the torture wasn’t over, because Patrick’s parents were seemingly dedicated to make him die of exhaustion or of embarrassment.

So naturally they had forced him to join the school’s (annoyingly renowned) orchestra, they loved they idea of their son playing in an orchestra with such a high reputation, and Patrick suspected it was because it gave them something to brag about to their neighbors at church or at PTA meetings, or something.

And much to Patrick’s despair, his mother had personally talked to the principal and to the orchestra teacher, Mr. Nathans, to make sure her son would be given special treatment.

While Patrick assumed she had good intentions (whether they were more for his benefit or for hers), he also was pretty sure she’d actually made the whole situation 10x worse, because Mr. Nathans now seemed to have a personal vendetta against Patrick.

The teacher would always put him in the spotlight, and perhaps not in the way Patrick’s mother intended. Patrick wasn’t very confident or social at the best of times, he tended to be overly grumpy, sarcastic, or just awkward, but when he was made to stand front and center, in front of everybody, with an adult picking on him like a grade school bully, he would always start trembling uncontrollably, like jello.

And that little impediment would usually make him mess up notes and timings, and it was even worse when Mr. Nathans decided to turn on the ol’ metronome, whose clicking made Patrick’s heart jolt painfully with every click.

In truth, he actually needed an entire day of mental preparation and giving himself impromptu pep talks to not pass out right then and there (Which had happened in the past. People saw. And people hadn’t forgotten yet.).

So, needless to say, Patrick hadn’t been in the best mood all day, he’d been nervous, jumpy and overwhelmed with anxiety thinking about his impending doom, and when the final school bell rang, announcing freedom throughout the building, Patrick had sluggishly made his way towards the school’s large theater, trudging along slowly like he was a prisoner on death row.
The orchestra practice had been going fine in the beginning. They’d all played through some complex, classical pieces, and even though the teacher had a stony, pissed off look on his face, he hadn’t yelled at anyone yet. The most the guy would do was glare with murder in his eyes at anyone who fucked up.

Patrick had actually been feeling pretty optimistic.

Much to his surprise, he was actually looking forward to hanging out with his friends later, and although he was actively pushing the memories of failed outings to the back of his mind, it was a pretty big thing for him to feel truly excited. Because for Patrick, excitement usually took a back seat to anxiety.

Things like birthday presents or vacations usually made him sick to the stomach, as his mind raced through all the, he had to admit, unlikely, things that could go wrong.

Patrick had actually let a relaxed smile weave it’s way onto his features, he was so fucking zen right now. His eyes softly gazed at the sheet music, and his brain, kind of entering musical-genius-autopilot mode, quickly read and performed each one.

And the boy was so at peace and dazed, that he didn’t notice a certain stone-faced teacher occasionally glaring at him for the rest of the piece.

“Danse macabre. Camille Saint-Saëns.” Grumbled the teacher, moving over to a table covered in papers and cups of coffee.

All students understood the order, some nodding. They all quickly retrieved their music sheets, placing them on the stands, readying their instruments, and looking up expectantly at Mr. Nathans, who had his back turned to them.

Turning, the man sighed heavily, stern eyes locking onto them almost automatically.

“I have some doubts about certain individuals...abilities...” He began, eyebrows raised, sweeping the students with his eyes, and face plastered with faux concern. “So, we’ll have some people perform solo at the front, just to clear up my worries.” He gave, what was probably supposed to be, a comforting smile. Mr. Nathans looked around at the, now, very nervous students, “I’m sure you all understand we have a historic reputation to uphold, but I’m sure you’ll all do wonderfully.” And with a final, painfully fake grin.

“Let’s see...Mr. Stumph.” He practically hissed out, as he motioned to his lonely music stand at the center of the room.

Patrick felt his ears, face and neck get uncomfortably warm, he grimaced slightly, realizing they were probably going incredibly red, but still stood and walked over to the stand with hunched shoulders.

The redheaded boy set his violin on his shoulder with one hand, his other held the bow over the
strings expectantly, and his eyes stared nervously at Mr. Nathans, waiting for the order to start playing. He stood there awkwardly, waiting for a sign, until:

“We don’t have all day, Mr. Stumph.”

Patrick went completely red, watching some classmates laughing at his misfortune out of the corner of his eye.

He breathed out heavily, forcing his face to look relaxed, trying to make himself look like an expert, who wasn’t totally super nervous and wasn’t going to mess up in any possible way and make himself look like an idiot in front of all of his peers.

Then Patrick began to play.

He usually found playing his instrument very relaxing, he could get lost in the sweet-sounding melodies and in the smell of the wood. Since he was little, he’d always loved it.

But moments like this, made him hate everything.

He hated his stupid parents for getting him lessons and for making him join the orchestra. He hated his mother for acting like one of those crazy moms on those weird dance reality shows. He hated his brother and sister for always making fun of him while he was practicing. And most of all he despised his great-great-great-great-., how ever many fucking greats there were,- grandfather for buying this goddamned violin. Why couldn’t he have been a shoe-maker or something? Would it have killed him to just go work on a fucking farm?

Patrick’s nose scrunched up in irritation as he felt several eyes on him, some of sympathy, some of amusement, and- just maybe, one of...awe? His face softened, but he mentally scolded himself and it returned to it’s professional state. No, everyone in this room was a fucking asshole who found his mental breakdowns downright hilarious.

Patrick felt himself getting angrier and angrier with each passing note, and while his face stayed composed, he didn’t even noticed his knuckles going white around the bow, and he definitely hadn’t noticed his fingertips painfully digging into the metal strings. His notes were getting sloppier as his fingers thrashed around and slammed down in different places.

Patrick was playing himself into a frenzy, as his teacher watched with an amused look on his face. Mr. Nathans cleared his throat, and Patrick’s hands stuttered as he stopped playing, with a small, quiet, and out of tune whine coming from the instrument.
“You haven’t been practicing have you Mr. Stumph?”

Patrick felt an enraged fire in the pit of his stomach.

He just wanted to fucking leave.

He wanted to leave this stupid school, the city, the state, the whole fucking country.

...But Patrick wasn’t that reckless, unfortunately.

Patrick blinked sharply and swallowed, feeling a ball of suppressed anger lodged in his throat. He was used to suppressing his feelings by this point in his life. He opened his mouth to answer:

“I-I’m sorry, sir, I-I just haven’t had m-much time-”

Internally, he growled furiously at himself. His fucking voice, of all things, had fucking betrayed him.

Patrick felt his anger slowly fade into shame as he looked around at the other students, who were laughing at him with varying degrees of amused shock on their faces.

_Fucking traitor larynx._

He felt anger-fueled confidence slip away and his nervous trembling returned. He blinked and ducked his head as the teacher ordered him to sit down.

Patrick felt himself slip lower and lower into his chair, eyes trained on his feet which were bent inwards, one resting on the other. He swallowed thickly, tears brimming his blue eyes, as he raised them slightly, looking around subtly.

Nobody was looking at him anymore...but he still felt an intense gaze fixed onto him, unwavering. Patrick desperately wanted to swivel his head around to find whoever was staring, but he didn’t want to be singled out again, so he lowered his head with the burning stare boring into him.

Mr. Nathans dismissed the class, and Patrick had realized that he hadn’t made anyone else play a solo, and he hadn’t brought up the ‘concern about some people’s abilities’ bullshit again. No, it had just been an excuse to make Patrick suffer- _brilliant._

Patrick suddenly felt the mysterious gaze leave him, so he quickly looked up in the direction he had felt it coming from: behind him, towards the back of the room, near the backstage curtains.
His brow furrowed in confusion as he saw the curtains moving slightly but nobody was there, there was no draft in the room, and with Patrick’s overactive and, currently very skittish, mind, he was thoroughly spooked.

When he had enrolled at this school, no-one had informed him that the place was fucking haunted. He probably wouldn’t have agreed to attend so willingly- he could have put up a fight, at the very least. Patrick groaned quietly, now, ghosts were another thing he was totally going to be way-too-tense about.

The redhead placed his violin into it’s case carefully, he may have wanted to snap it over his knee and burn it at the stake a few minutes earlier, but he could never stay mad at it or bring himself to actually hurt it.

It had so much history: one of his ancestors had saved up money to buy it through working arduous, menial jobs- it had been that guy’s dream to just play it, it was a goddamned heirloom, that violin had crossed oceans, it had been handed down through his father’s family to every firstborn son for countless generations, it had always been alongside a Stumph since it’s creation, it had brought comfort and joy to his kinsmen in dark times, it had been the best, or only, friend of so many of his forefathers, he could never just-

His eyes widened suddenly.

Wait, he was personifying a fucking violin? Was he telling it’s life story right now? Was he losing it? Was this a red flag?

He scowled and crammed his music sheets away into his backpack, slinging it over his shoulder and tenderly picking up the violin case.

Patrick looked down at his watch, it was currently 5:34 pm. He’d been at orchestra for two hours since school had ended, he groaned slightly, because his plans with Ashley and Sarah meant he only had an hour and a half to finish his mountain of homework. That would probably take up an entire hour by itself, leaving him with 30 minutes to clean himself up, eat something and make up a suitable excuse for his parents.

It was 7:00 pm sharp, and Patrick was waiting for his friends sat on a bench just outside his gated house, looking up at the sunset and the darkening sky.

He’d eventually told his mother and father that he had a math project due the next day and he’d been assigned a group, and they had all planned to meet up at Johnathon Horner’s house (a guy that Patrick had completely made up). His parents had begrudgingly agreed to let him leave after he assured them that he’d return in a few hours.

They didn’t really trust him enough to let him stay anywhere overnight- and while that insulted
Patrick a little, he was currently deceiving them to go out to a bar with his friends, so he couldn’t blame them much.

Patrick looked down at his clothes, he’d decided to dress in the most casual clothing he had, but he used the word *casual* lightly. Because of their wealth, his parents never let their three children wear anything from places like Target or Walmart. They would imply that things from those places were *beneath* people like them, and this meant Patrick and his siblings ended up constantly over-dressed, wearing clothes from really expensive, family-legacy owned type places, where they gave out champagne and stuff.

So, without many real options, Patrick had decided to wear an argyle sweater, which his sister teased him about but he loved. It was just so soft, and Patrick wanted to be comfy damn it, he had earned it after putting up with so much shit in just one day. He’d also pulled on black jeans - the only pair he owned because his parents had not been happy with his choice, and a pair of squeaky clean, brand sneakers, which had taken a lot of convincing to his mother.

And hidden behind his back, he’d smuggled out his favorite red-and-white trucker hat, which his uncle had bought for him when he was 7 years old: he’d taken the kids out to ‘the park’ for a day - they had actually gone to the mall.

His uncle was a lot more down-to-earth than his parents were. And whenever he visited, he would bring Patrick and his siblings all the cheap stuff that made kids go wild: Little cheap toys, sweets, junk food, t-shirts emblazoned with their favorite cartoon characters.

Patrick had seen the hat hanging on a rack outside of a store, and had wanted it with a passion. When his uncle gifted it to him, Patrick had chanted ‘Thank you, thank you’ for ten whole minutes, hugging him tightly. He had always had to keep it hidden in the back of his dresser though, his parents would have thrown it away, he was sure.

Then, Patrick was shaken from his thoughts by a very loud:

“HEY PATRICK!”

His head shot up to see Sarah practically skipping, pulling Ashley along with a linked arm. Patrick shushed her quickly, standing and walking towards the two girls. “Jesus Christ, my parents could’ve heard you,” He whispered angrily, “do you want me to get caught or something?”

“Sorry, Patrick.” She whispered, head ducked. “Let’s go before they try anything.” Ashley stared up at the colonial house, standing proudly behind thick, green bushes and a white metal gate.

Sarah nodded eagerly, humming the ‘Mission Impossible’ theme song as they crept away.
Patrick was getting pretty nervous, despite Ashley telling him to calm down, as she kept insisting she knew this place. Sarah shoved him fondly and linked her arm with Patrick’s happily.

They had left their own wealthy, orderly neighborhood and had crossed the boundary into a dirty and rundown looking-one instead.

The amount of graffiti, broken windows, trash, homeless people and what, Patrick suspected were drug addicts, was steadily increasing as Ashley led them across blocks and winding streets. He felt as though his heart beating rapidly and his stomach felt tight, so he quickly moved his gaze downwards to his hands, which were holding and fiddling with his trucker hat.

“Here we are!”

Patrick pulled his head up at Ashley’s happy chirp, he saw a building with metal doors covered in faded, tacky band posters.

The windows looked tinted, making Patrick’s anxious thoughts flare up suddenly, but they were suddenly calmed as he heard music start playing from the club. He looked up to the neon words reading ‘The Cobra’ with a neon snake coiled up and hissing to its right.

Sarah pulled Patrick inside as Ashley swiveled around to face them with a gigantic grin, “It’s awesome right?!?” She half-shouted over the blaring music.

The atmosphere of the club was actually great; the music thrummed pleasantly in his ears, there were a lot of easy-going looking people in the crowd, either cheering, dancing, or chatting to each other in small groups with drinks in their hands. He had to admit that it was a was a pleasant surprise and Patrick felt himself relax, this could be the silver-lining of his whole day, it really was:

“AWESOME!” Yelled Sarah, nodding furiously, and efficiently ending Patrick’s thought.

“I’ll get us drinks!” Ashley smiled joyfully, “Nothing alcoholic.” She scolded with a fond glare and small smile at Sarah. Patrick started fishing around in his pockets for money before Ashley cut him off with a shake of her head and a serious look, before smiling largely again and mouthing ‘I’ll be right back.’ over the loud guitar.

Sarah bounced around on the balls of her feet, bobbing up-and-down and looking around with a furrowed brow and searching look around the club. Patrick assumed she must be looking around for the so-called ‘boyfriend’, Ashley had mentioned. She bit her lip and turned to Patrick, “I’m gonna go to the...bathroom- Yeah! To the bathroom! I’ll be back in a sec!” Sarah grinned, completely convinced Patrick had believed her very obvious lie as he nodded to her.

She darted off- in the completely opposite direction of the bathroom, Patrick noted, laughing to himself quietly.

Deciding to entertain himself for a while, Patrick looked up, opting to analyze the talented band that was currently on-stage. There was a tattooed guitarist who was also the lead singer by the looks of it, with a mass of curly, mousey-brown hair hiding his face and that was bouncing up and down with each beat as he sang into the microphone, reminding Patrick of a lion’s mane.
There was, what Patrick assumed was a bassist by the sound of it, who was hiding away in the shadows under a broken spotlight. Patrick squinted, but couldn’t make him out at all.

Patrick shoved his glasses up to the bridge of his nose, and turned his gaze to the drummer: long hair-curlly too, but straighter than the singer’s, arms covered in tattoos, glasses, and wearing, what looked like a CrossFit shirt.

Then, as though on cue, the previously hidden bassist, moved under a working spotlight, looking out into the crowd with a goofy, yet actually pretty charming, smile and sparkling, searching eyes, he was looking in Patrick’s direction- wait was the guy looking at him? Patrick stared back for a moment, taking in the bassist’s appearance. The guy had black choppy hair, falling across his face in a fringe, he had tanned skin, and once again, tattooed arms.

Slowly, Patrick’s gaze moved up to his face, he was grinning, bearing impossibly white teeth and the smile caused the corners of his eyes to crinkle lightly, and yep, the guy was definitely staring at him. He looked up into his eyes, squinting to try and see the color, but due to the dim, tinted lights and his terrible eyesight, Patrick couldn’t tell.

Now, Patrick had always considered himself to be straight, of course, it was what everyone took for granted. In the future, he would marry a girl and have a few kids with her, etc, etc.

But for some insane reason, this bassist was making his stomach and chest constrict. Between the, somehow familiar, gaze, the hair, the general face, and that damn smile (and the fact that guitar/bass players always made Patrick’s heart flutter), Patrick was blushing all over, and found himself nervously looking away from the eye-contact he had been mortified to realize had been going on.

Patrick may not be a Casanova, with a string of fulfilling and passionate romances and lovers, but he wasn’t stupid. He knew what a crush felt like- And this was definitely a crush.

A really fucking big one.

The redhead cleared his throat nervously, tugging his hat down to hide his eyes, and occasionally glancing up at the stage (the bassist now had a smugly satisfied glint in his eyes). He was so caught up in this routine, he didn’t notice Ashley bounce back towards him, balancing three drinks in her hands, she passed one to him quickly and started looking around the room for Sarah, before giving a knowing smile and sipping her drink.

Patrick took a tentative sip of his drink, and relaxed when he only tasted a mixture of fruit juices and no alcohol.

They watched the band play (Patrick made sure to keep his eyes off the bassist – who was still staring intently), and chatted quietly to each other.

Eventually the band finished their set, and the crowd applauded wildly as they moved off stage. Although things had been slightly weird with the bassist’s eye-contact, Patrick had really enjoyed the band’s music- although he had enjoyed the words more than the melodies.
Four new people replaced the old ones, and the dark-haired singer introduced themselves as ‘Panic! At The Disco’, receiving loud cheers and screams from the audience. They started their set, and Patrick was once again surprised by the band’s talent. Patrick wondered why none of these bands been signed to giant record labels yet, and, were instead having to play in a dive bar.

Just as the song had started, Sarah had stumbled back over to her friends with mussed hair, a dazed smile, and a suspicious red mark on her neck.

Ashley smiled smugly, “Did you enjoy yourself with lover-boy?” Sarah suddenly snapped out of her dreamy daze, eyes widening “I-I wasn’t-”

“Yes you weren’t.” Ashley grinned sarcastically, arm stretched to pass a drink to her. Sarah opened her mouth to argue before she was cut off by her friends laughing in unison. She furrowed her brow, snatching her drink and downing it.

Soon enough, Panic! At The Disco had finished their performance, but were quickly replaced by a group proclaiming themselves as ‘My Chemical Romance’. Patrick glanced to his friends to see their empty glasses, and he quickly offered to get another round. The girls nodded happily as Patrick took their empty drinks, and refused Ashley’s money, insisting on paying this time.

Brushing past several people and awkwardly shuffling past a couple that was making out, Patrick stepped over to the bar, where a balding man was polishing a glass with a rag, he looked up with a raised eyebrow.

“Uh, three more of, w-whatever these things were.” Patrick put the empty drinks down and idly pushed his glasses up from the tip of his nose to the bridge. The bald man nodded, taking the three glasses, and moving away. Patrick tapped out the currently-playing song’s beat on the bar’s surface, humming along with the tune quietly before he felt a quick tap on his shoulder.

Patrick turned around to see the- oh fuck. The bassist that had made Patrick’s knees go weak was standing in front of him, and kind of close. A little too close for comfort right now as Patrick felt his face and neck flush red, he really hoped the guy couldn’t see it.

Now being able to examine him much more closely, Patrick had deduced that the bassist was even hotter up close, if that was possible and Patrick was pretty sure that looking like that should be illegal.

A face like that should be considered a weapon.

A class-A weapon, in his opinion.

And, through thorough further inspection, Patrick had also deduced that his eyes were brown. Beautiful, sparkling, whiskey brown with crinkles at the corners- and yep, his heart rate was going dangerously high again.
The bassist gave a charismatic, and *seriously* attractive, half-grin.

“Hi.”

Chapter End Notes

I may or may not have taken some inspiration from Freaky Friday.

You'll get what I mean later on.
You'll Never Walk Alone

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

So, it turns out Glenview kids weren’t that bad.

Or at least, this kid wasn’t.

The kid had introduced himself as “Patrick Stumph”, stressing the importance of the silent ‘h’ and with a lot of stuttering- but that was besides the point.

He was actually pretty cool.

And the two girls he was with seemed cool too- and much to his relief, Pete had found out neither one was Patrick’s girlfriend.

Pete had noticed the redhead almost immediately, and he may or may not have been staring at him for the whole performance, and after he’d finished his set with Joe and Andy, Pete had hidden in a shady corner of the club, watching the boy.

Feeling slightly creepy and like a giant stalker, he had decided to stop being so weird and go and talk to him. But Pete hadn’t wanted to just approach him, that would have been strange.

So Pete did the most rational thing he could think of: Watch and wait- like a cat watching a mouse before it brutally murdered it.

The kid had been watching Brendon’s band play with his friends for a while now, and Pete was getting worried he would never be able to talk to him alone.

Then, Pete’s patience was rewarded. As Panic! moved off-stage and Gerard and his friends took their place, Pete watched the boy motioning to the empty glass in his and his friends’ hands, saying something Pete couldn't hear over the noise in the club.

He watched the girls nod, and the redhead took their glasses and stiffly shuffled past some patrons, before stopping in front of the bar. The boy said something to the bartender, and the old man moved away, nodding.

This was it.

He was alone, and drumming his hands on the bar in time to the music, which made Pete idly wonder if he played any other instruments.

Pete stared for a moment before sighing nervously.

Now, Pete considered himself to be pretty confident and he was pretty popular- very well known in
his neighborhood (good or bad, depending on who you asked). He’d had a great deal of conquests in his time, he approached girls- and guys, in bars on a regular basis.

So he was very disturbed when he noticed just how nauseous he felt right now, like he was some socially-inept nerd who was asking out a cheerleader or something.

Pete definitely wasn’t a ‘socially-inept nerd’. And that kid obviously wasn’t a cheerleader, so he was pretty confused about the way his body was reacting to this situation.

He swallowed thickly, no- this was probably just some freaky, teenage hormones acting up, he was Pete- fucking- Wentz for God’s sake, and Pete Wentz was no coward...and he definitely did not feel like he was going to throw up any second.

He was going to march up to that guy and charm his pants off- just like he’d done a million times to a million different people.

_It’s now or never_, exhaling deeply to calm the twisting knots in his stomach, and putting on the most aloof, yet charming face he could, Pete walked over to the boy.

Stopping just behind him, he tapped the shoulder of the... _interesting_, argyle sweater.

The boy twisted around, and Pete’s façade slipped away for a split second.

That goddamned face.

Pete was so fucked _already._

...But, Pete wasn’t infamous for nothing, he had become a goddamn expert at this type thing over many years of...what could be called- _‘practice’. _

The younger boy blinked, jaw hanging open slightly and wide blue eyes scanning for- well, Pete wasn’t sure what the kid was looking for.

Pete gave a half-smile, hoping it looked charming because he really wanted to knock this kid’s socks off, he had to prove to himself that there was no reason to be nervous- this was just another pretty kid with another pretty face.

“Hi.”
“U-uh, h-hi. H-hello?”

“I’m-ah, Pete. Pete Wentz.”

“Oh, h-hi Pete…? N-nice to me-meet you. H-how are y-you...?”

“I’ll be better when I know your name.”

The redhead blushed profusely. Pete could totally see it, even with the dim lighting, and for some reason, seeing the kid get worked up made Pete feel much calmer.

“Oh, o-oh...w-well, my name’s Patrick s-Stumph...”

Patrick Stumph.

Pete liked the way that sounded. The name really fit him.

He’d been wondering what the kid’s first name was, but, Patrick. It sounded wholesome to Pete. Warm and it reminded him of autumn and fuckin’ cookies or something, for some weird reason.

It kinda sounded like home, and Pete found himself wondering if 'Patrick Wentz' would actually sound better.

“...Stumph with an ’h’, it’s a l-little weird- but, um, everyone calls me ‘Pat’, but I don’t really like ‘Pat’, reminds me of m-my mom, she’s called ‘Pat’, uh- her name isn’t Patrick though, that’d be weird right? N-no, her-her name i-is Patricia, and, uh-”

“Whoa, hold on there dude.” The corners of Pete’s eyes crinkled in amusement at Patrick’s steadily volume-increasing rant, “I just wanted your name, not your life story.”

“O-oh. I’m sorry, I jus-just g-get- I’m not great at-” He sighed shakily, taking a deep breath. “I’m not really, um, an extrovert? I m-mean, it’s not like I don’t go out, o-or anything, I’m j-just not, used, to stuff, or, uh, p-places like-”

Pete grinned, “Hey don’t stress it man.” He looked to his left absently as Patrick gave him a strained smile. “So, uh, you enjoying the music?”
“Oh, yea-yeah.” Patrick nodded earnestly with wide eyes, “You were- I mean, everyone I’ve seen, so far, is, uh- yeah, really amazing.” He gave a more relaxed smile as he saw Pete’s grin starting to resemble a five-year-old’s who had been promised ice cream after dinner.

“That’s awesome, thanks man. Yeah, uh, all the dudes here are like super-talented.” Patrick nodded with conviction once again at Pete’s words, and he noticed Patrick’s disposition and posture relax. “So, uh, do you come here often?”

Patrick couldn’t help but scoff quietly, “Was that supposed to be a pick-up line?” Pete’s eyes widened slightly at Patrick’s very sudden shift in attitude, but he couldn’t help the laugh that escaped him.

“It is if you want it to be,” Pete said with a grin and overly-exaggerated, cartoon-like wink. Patrick grinned, despite the small blush on his face. “Uh, no, I’ve just, uh- no, I’ve never just see you around here before.” The older boy said, watching the younger curiously.

“Uh, no, no. I’ve never been here before, actually. Uh, my friends over there have though.” He gestured towards two girls: one with black hair, who had obviously dolled herself up. And the other with bright lime-green hair and more boyish clothes.

Pete nodded thoughtfully, before deciding to tease Patrick a little, just to see if he could coax out another blush from the redhead.

“Not your girlfriends, then?”

And sure enough, a red glow flushed his face, neck and ears once again.

“Uh, no. NO. Definitely not.”

Pete grinned, “Ah, methinks the lady doth protest too much.” He said in his best fancy accent, and soon enough, the stuttering made an encore. “N-no! Re-really. T-they’re not-”

Pete laughed good-naturedly, “Just kidding dude, chill out.”

Patrick smiled and rolled his eyes jokingly, with his blush still present.
The bartender returned and Patrick clumsily handed over a dollar bill and a few cents. The bartender’s eyes bulged slightly, “Uh, this is a $50, kid.” He said nervously, handing it back to Patrick. “Might wanna put that away.” He whispered, looking around the room.

Patrick gulped and nodded quickly, stuffing the bill into his pocket and fishing out another. The bill must have been an appropriate amount this time, because the bartender nodded.

Patrick looked distracted for a minute before saying, “Uh...you can, um, keep the change.” he smiled nervously. The bartender quirked an eyebrow, but nodded again and said nothing.

Patrick cautiously picked up two drinks, leaving a third on the bar, and he turned to Pete slowly.

“Hey, um, I was wondering if you’d, uh, if you’d like to…talk, a little more?”

Pete smiled, and nodded with raised eyebrows. The younger boy smiled back in relief, “Uh, cool. I’m just gonna hand these over to my friends and, uh, we can, um, continue our, uh, discussion.”

Patrick grinned nervously and shuffled over to his friends, glancing back at Pete a few times.

Pete couldn’t believe how lucky he’d gotten. He’d managed to keep the twisted-up ball of nerves in his stomach under control and had been totally smooth.

He smiled to himself smugly: Pete was a natural at this shit.

After a few minutes, Pete spotted Patrick walking back over to him, stumbling past a couple who looked like they were intent on eating each other.

Patrick beamed at him, taking a seat on a rickety bar stool. Pete grinned back and settled on an equally-shaky chair next to him. They started talking, and soon enough the conversation was flowing effortlessly and Pete felt like he’d known Patrick for years.

And it was a nice surprise when the confident- slightly sarcastic (which Pete actually found severely endearing) boy, that Pete had only seen a split second of- had returned.

They’d gone through many topics, from school to friends, from vacations to misadventures, and they had even talked about gun control at one point, in which Patrick had equated guns to some freaky experiment with monkey orgasms.

Eventually though, the topic turned to music, and Patrick had really let loose; Reeling off his unconditional love for several artists, like Prince, Elvis Costello, Michael Jackson, David Bowie, enthusing about them, adding little known facts and spouting opinions on their discographies between every name. Occasionally saying something like, “That album was the definition of genius.” every now and then.

Pete had hardly talked, which was very unlike him. He had just listened intently, soaking up all the
information he could, staring at Patrick’s mouth for most of the conversation, once again captivated.

However, ultimately, Patrick had suddenly stopped talking and had started looking slightly embarrassed instead. “Oh my god, I’m so sorry, I’ve just been talking like crazy. I haven’t even asked you anything, I’m so sorry. God, I suck at this-”

Pete shook his head, “No, no, don’t you dare apologize. It was really interesting.” He smiled at Patrick reassuringly, before it became a grin, “I liked your enthusiasm.”


Patrick was about to question the nickname when Ashley appeared at his side, looking nervous. “Hey, Patrick, I-uh- Shit, my dad just called me and he is furious. Turns out it was, like, family-game night, or something stupid like that.” She gave a short, nervous, and very fake laugh. “So, I have to go, like now. Shit, I’m gonna have to run.” The girl looked around behind her, “But, um, Sarah told me she wanted to stay for a while, and I totally get if you want to go home right now too- cause I was your like, guide, or whatever...But I can’t just leave Sarah alone, in this kind of...” She trailed off, glancing at Pete nervously with a tight smile, “um...neighborhood.”

Patrick exhaled anxiously and looked around the room, before stopping in one place, furrowing his brow, and frowning.

Pete looked up in the same direction and saw the black-haired girl from earlier clinging to Brendon dreamily at the other side of the room. Brendon looked just as dazed as she did, and Pete suspected the worst.

He suddenly turned his head when he heard Patrick huff in annoyance and saw him shrug, “Well, actually, I’m good here. I can keep an eye on Sarah.” His confident look melted slightly, “I’m sure it’s not that dangerous to walk home from here...right?”

Pete frowned at the anxiousness Patrick’s eyes, “Uh, I can, like, make sure you guys get home safe.” He spoke up, “I know this neighborhood, no-one would ah- mess with you guys if I was with you.”

Patrick’s eyes widened and opened his mouth before the lime-haired girl cut him off, sounding overwhelmingly relieved and grateful. “Oh my god, thank you so much.” She gave Patrick a quick hug and kiss on the cheek, “I’ll see you tomorrow.” backing away, she glanced back at Sarah, “And make sure she gets home.” Patrick nodded and waved as she darted towards the doors, “See you tomorrow, Halsey.” The girl grinned back, and finally disappeared.

Pete cleared his throat, and decided to let Patrick know the worst-case scenario.

“Oh, so, there’s a pretty high chance that your friend, over there,” nodding towards Sarah, “is probably really high.”

Patrick’s eyes widened, and Pete explained who exactly Brendon Urie, the notorious stoner, was.
“Shit.”

“Shit indeed.”

Eventually, Patrick had managed to pry Sarah away from Brendon (with Pete helping distract the brown-haired boy), and the unlikely trio had left building, neon snake hissing behind them as they walked down the dark streets.

Patrick hadn’t said much, instead focusing on pulling the easily-distracted Sarah in the right direction, and although Pete understood the pains of taking care of an extremely stoned friend, he was really missing the conversation with Patrick. But Pete decided to put that out of his mind and busy himself with staring warningly at any suspicious-looking people who crossed their path.

Soon enough, they had crossed the neighborhood boundaries, the darkness, chain-link fences and condemned buildings melting away into large, pristine houses guarded by tall, imposing, yet pretty, gates, white picket fences, and pleasantly glowing streetlights. Patrick had quickly taken on the role of tour guide as soon as he began recognizing the streets, dragging his friend along by the arm.

The trio stopped in front of a white, traditional, Georgian house with an impossibly green lawn, and a shiny, red mailbox.

The windows looked dark and no sound could be heard from the interior, Pete saw Patrick mumbling something to Sarah, it sounded like he was explaining the situation and convincing her to go inside.

She turned to Patrick with a giant grin and red, lidded eyes, giving him a seemingly bone-crushing hug and a sloppy kiss on the cheek. “Thanks, Lunchbox.” Pete made a mental note to ask about that ingenious nickname as she laughed and fished a small metal key from her pocket and clumsily unlocked the red front door, before stumbling inside.

Patrick turned to Pete with a slightly embarrassed smile, “Uh, sorry about all that.” Pete shook his head, “It’s okay dude, it was my friend’s fault, remember.” Patrick nodded quickly, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips. Pete grinned, “Besides, it gave me an excuse to walk you home.” He added with a wink. Patrick blushed and rolled his eyes, mumbling “Smooth talker, huh?” before motioning to his left and starting to walk.

Pete followed, and they resumed their conversation, albeit, more relaxed this time.

Patrick had decided to make up for talking Pete’s ear off earlier, and opted to viciously interrogate him instead.

Pete had mainly told him about his band with Joe and Andy, choosing to leave out the depressing details of his home life because he really didn’t want to make Patrick think he was ‘damaged’, or whatever. He had also subtly moved the topic back to Patrick, asking him about his musical tendencies (also resolving to leave out the ‘I watched you play violin from behind a curtain like a
Patrick had admitted that he played three instruments—although insisting he ‘sucked’—which Pete didn’t believe at all. He explained that his parents knew about, and were supportive of him playing violin and piano. But they had no idea—and would definitely not be supportive about, him playing guitar. Patrick told him that his friend, ‘Halsey’, had been teaching him guitar since they’d met in middle school. They would hide out behind the bike shed during recess and practice with a ‘borrowed’ guitar from the music room.

Then Pete asked if Patrick could sing,

“No. Not at all. Literally, never outside of the shower.” Pete smiled to himself, imaging Patrick belting out Smooth Criminal in the shower and using a bar of soap as a microphone.

“Once again, I think you’re protesting too much.”

Patrick groaned, “Ugh, I just—no I’m not. I just can’t sing! Alright?!”

They eventually arrived at an even more impressive house than the last one, and Pete’s eyes widened considerably, causing Patrick to duck his head in, Pete’s opinion-misplaced, embarrassment—Pete would never be ashamed to have such an impressive home.

They turned towards each other, both boys smiling pleasantly.

“So, uh, I, uh...really, enjoyed myself, actually.” Patrick began, “I had fun talking to you, you’re a...cool guy.” He ended in a really bad ‘California surfer-dude’ accent, while lightly punching Pete’s shoulder.

Pete laughed, eyes reduced to slits, “I enjoyed it too dude, you’re an amazing lil’ guy.” He ended with a similar lilt to his voice.

“Um, we should do this again, some time, if you want, only if you want, like, don’t feel pressured or—”

Pete rolled his eyes fondly with a grin, “Yeah, we should.”

Patrick smiled up at Pete, blue eyes bright and glittering under the gleaming streetlights, pale, lightly freckled skin practically glowing, pink lips slightly parted, and soft, fair hair sticking out from under his hat.

God, Pete just wanted to lean in and kiss him.
He wanted feel those soft, plump lips against his own, knock that damn cap off and run his fingers through those reddish-blonde locks, to run his thumb over the pale skin covering that ridiculously sharp cheekbone.

Pete wanted end this night like some really cliché, yet sentimental, rom-com.

...But he didn’t want to risk it.

Pete was usually very impulsive, never thinking twice before acting, and if this was any other person, he’d probably grab them by the waist and get to work.

-But, there was something about Patrick. Something special and beautiful and amazing.

Pete knew he was a fuck-up, and while some part of him wanted to tell Patrick to ‘run for the hills’...another part of Pete wanted to get closer to him, and if there was even the slightest possibility that kissing him right now could ruin any chance he had of becoming Patrick’s friend (or possibly more than just ‘friend’- he could dream), then that was a chance he was not going to take.

So with a very heavy heart, Pete cleared his throat. “Well, I should get back to, my side of town.” He ended with a plastered grin. Something Pete couldn’t recognize flashed through Patrick’s eyes and he nodded with a smile. “Yeah...so, I’ll see you around?” Pete nodded eagerly, “Oh definitely, you couldn’t get rid of me now even if you tried, Pattycakes.” Patrick’s nose scrunched up slightly at the nickname, and Pete smiled, finding the lines adorable.

“Well, uh, goodbye.” Patrick said, with something that sounded like reluctance lacing his words. Pete nodded goodbye, and opened his mouth to add a final thought, just as Patrick was stepping through his house’s white gates.

“You should play with us at the bar sometime!”

And Pete felt his heart flutter wildly as he saw the most incredible smile he’d ever seen light up Patrick’s face.

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to say, from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much to everyone who’s reading, left kudos, bookmarked or commented! I really hope you enjoy this story, I've
been toying with this rich/poor idea for a really long time. So thanks again! All of you guys are awesome!
We Haven't Met Since Then, But It's Nice To See You Again

Chapter Notes

Usernames in this chapter (Some people who weren't in the chat this time will be there later, but for now it's just):

Patrick Stumph: Patrick Stumph (Shocking i know)
FrangipanesTheName: Ashley Frangipane/Halsey
Que-Sarah-Sarah: Sarah Orzechowski
MilkyWay: Mikey Way
WetzelsPretzels: Pete Wentz
TheRealSatan(TM): Brendon Urie
DillonWeed: Dallon Weekes
2bFrank: Frank Iero
SmokedTroham: Joe Trohman
GeraldWee: Gerard Way

Patrick’s parents were going to dinner.

A very prestigious dinner, apparently, being held at some fancy restaurant with an unpronounceable name.

His mother had spent the day preparing, and spent the evening getting herself ready, while his father had been finishing some last minute-paperwork.

Half an hour before they were due to leave, they had announced a ‘family meeting’ - which was actually code for ‘Patrick, Kevin and Megan get lectured and locked in one room so that they don’t sneak out’.

So there the three Stumph children were, sat on a large, white sofa in the living room with their parents stood before them, staring sternly.

“Now,” Their father began, “This evening is very important for your mother and I, so when we return home, we expect the house to be exactly the way we left it.” He moved his glare over to Kevin intently, who just hunched his shoulders a little in response. Their parents exchanged an unreadable glance, and their mother smiled, “Well, we should be on our way, we don’t want to be late, do we David?” Patrick’s father gave a short hum in return, and they both made their way out of the room,
shutting the heavy wooden doors behind them.

The three youngsters exchanged worried glances, before Megan jumped to her feet and headed over to the window. She pulled back the curtain slightly, peeking out at their parents getting into their car. Once she was certain they’d gone, she turned to her brothers, “We’re good. They’ve gone.”

Kevin nodded gratefully, “See you losers tomorrow.” He mumbled, walking over to the wooden doors and pushing down on the door handle, before a loud thud came from the lock, stopping it.

Kevin furrowed his brow and tried again, and again, and again.

The door wouldn’t open.

“Shit.”

Panic flooded all three of them.

“What the fuck!?”

“Are they insane?! Are they actually crazy?!”

“This is fucking cHILD ABUSE, I WON’T STAND FOR IT.”

They sat on the sofa, burned out, yet still pissed off.

At first, they had sat in silence, staring at the floor and feeling sorry for themselves, but after boredom got the better of them, the siblings had decided to entertain themselves, because their parents weren’t going to ruin their day, goddammit.

So, they had busted out the Monopoly board.

And in the process, almost ruined their friendship, so they decided to stop playing Monopoly and try Uno instead- yes, Uno was a reliable, friendly game.

Two hours slipped away, and the Stumph offspring had spent their time lazily chatting, telling each other urban legends and horror stories, and had ended up playing a very unenthusiastic round of
Cluedo before they had decided enough was enough... And had started watching the TV instead—
which during their freak-outs, had forgotten existed.

They were sprawled out lazily on the couch, watching an absolutely terrible Hallmark movie, when
Patrick felt a buzz in his pocket, making him jump slightly.

He fished around before pulling out his phone and squinting at the brightness, he read the notification
on his screen.

*Patrick Stumph has been added to The Sin Tin*

Patrick quirked an eyebrow, before his phone started emitting quick, constant buzzes. He sat up,
staring down at the group chat.

*FrangipanesTheName: Hey Patrick!*

Patrick furrowed his brow, before quickly typing a response.

*Patrick Stumph: ...Halsey?*

*Patrick Stumph: What is this???

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: It’s a group chat Lunchbox!*

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: W/ all the gays from the club.*

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: *guys oops*

*MilkyWay: Gays lol*

*WetzelsPretzels: lol*

*TheRealSatan™: lol*

*Patrick Stumph: Okay, so why am I here?*
Que-Sarah-Sarah: Halsey wanted to add u

Patrick Stumph: Why?

FrangipanesTheName: cause you need more friends than just me and Sarah

Patrick Stumph: You don’t have to set up play-dates for me, Ashley
Patrick Stumph: You’re not my mom

DillonWeed: Me-ow

2bFrank: Feisty lol

Patrick Stumph: Sorry,
Patrick Stumph: My parents locked me in and I've been playing board games for way too long

FrangipanesTheName: Wait what
FrangipanesTheName: R you srs

Patrick Stumph: Yeah

FrangipanesTheName: I'm breaking u out

Patrick Stumph: Ashley no

FrangipanesTheName: Ashley yes

Patrick Stumph: You literally can’t anyway
Patrick Stumph: Door and windows are locked

FrangipanesTheName: I’ll find a way, Ricky boi
FrangipanesTheName: I always do
FrangipanesTheName: Sarah meet me @ Patricks

Que-Sarah-Sarah: Aye-Aye Cap’n!

Que-Sarah-Sarah has gone offline

SmokedTroham: Whoa this is some Shawshank Redemption shit

GeraldWee: ikr

Patrick Stumph: Jesus Christ, Ashley just don’t

FrangipanesTheName: Be there in a few minutes sweetie <3

FrangipanesTheName has gone offline

A few minutes later, Patrick heard a ruckus outside of his house. It sounded like metal gates shaking and clanging. Patrick glanced at his lightly-sleeping brother and sister, heads leaning on each other, before quietly moving to the window. He peered through, seeing two figures hanging on the metal bars clumsily.

Patrick squinted and leaned forward, making out the figures to be- surprise, surprise- Ashley and Sarah.

Sarah had successfully swung her legs over and had dropped down on the other side with a cat-like landing. Then she turned around to the other girl who was nervously straddling the top of the gate, reaching an arm up to coax her down. Ashley glanced down, took Sarah’s outstretched hand and unceremoniously fell to the ground with a loud thump and groan.

“Brother...Scar...help me.” She groaned, lifting an arm crookedly, making Sarah start guffawing, helped Ashley up and growled in her best Scar impression, “Long live the king.”
Patrick sighed heavily, but smiled slightly at the exchange. He watched the two girls stand and look over at him from the dark lawn, waving with bright grins on their faces before quickly darting off behind the house to search for openings. Patrick wasn’t ecstatic that they were trying to break in to his house, and he was definitely have to give them a lecture on ‘breaking-and-entering’ later-

“Why are they here?”

Patrick jumped at the voice speaking directly into his ear, he turned to see his brother and sister stood behind him- now completely awake.

“Uh, no reason-”

“...They're breaking him out.”

“What?! No fucking way!”

Patrick cleared his throat, “...So what if they are?”

Megan’s eyes lit up, “Then we want out too!”

The elder sibling shook his head lightly, mind racing, “I don’t know, I’m not even sure I should leave.” Kevin scoffed, “You’ve got a fucking team breaking you out! What do you mean you shouldn’t leave?”

Patrick narrowed his eyes, “Look, mom and dad said to stay. They locked us in for a reason- because they don’t trust us- And if we do break out, we’ll just be proving that to them, again.”

The younger two scowled, “Look,” began Megan, “It was super fucked up of them to lock us in, that’s incarceration for God’s sake-” Patrick rolled his eyes at the long word, “So if your friends are trying to break you out, I’m gonna take that opportunity.”

Patrick stared, “So what, mom and dad come home and find all of us gone-” He began, counting on his fingers, “We get punished- probably get sent to bible camp for the rest of our lives, or something.”

Suddenly, the bickering was interrupted by the clicking of a lock, and the wooden living-room doors pushed open to reveal the two girls. Ashley was crouched, holding an improvised lock-pick and Sarah stood behind her, a proud grin settled on her face.

“What’s up, Lunchbox?”
Megan and Kevin grinned, running out of the doors and pushing past the girls, yelling “BYE PATRICK.” and “SEE YA LATER.” simultaneously, just as Patrick started to protest. He heard the front door and unlock and slam shut a second later, the sound of hurried footsteps and giggling getting fainter.

Patrick sighed, looking at his friends. “So what do you want?” He groaned. Sarah pouted, “We just Jason-Bourned our way in here and that’s the thanks we get?”

Ashley rolled her eyes, tugging Patrick out of the house, “We want to hang out with our best buddy” She ended with a note of sarcasm.

“We’re gonna show you a fun night, Pattycakes.”

The trio had trudged along, eventually arriving at a very illicit-looking rusty, beat-up chain-link fence. Ashley grabbed a loose piece, lifting it high and motioning the other two through. Sarah went happily, followed by a suspicious Patrick. “You guys didn’t bring me out here to like, harvest and sell my organs, right?”

Ashley barked out a laugh, “Damn it, he figured it out, Sarah.”

Eventually, they saw a hoodie-clad group, with all kinds of bags full of beer and spray paint cans at their feet. A few were puffing out smoke, passing- what looked like a weird kind of cigarette?- to each other.

Patrick stopped, hesitant and a little intimidated, but the girls kept walking towards them, carefree.

“Hey, you made it!”

One boy wearing a burgundy sweater and sitting cross-legged on the stony floor, grinning up at the girls. Patrick immediately recognized him, as he had a very distinctive face- it was the singer from the second band last night!

Sarah took a seat next to him, while Ashley took a moment to fully introduce the group to Patrick.

“Patrick, stop looking so nervous.” She pulled him closer by the arm, “These are the guys that play at the bar. I’ve known ‘em for while, they’re cool- don’t worry.”

“We’re the ones in the chat too.” Another boy with slicked dyed-blonde hair added, “...If you hadn’t made that connection, for some reason.” he finished with a shrug. Patrick nodded slowly as Ashley reeled off all of their names, “-and finally, Andy, Joe and Pete.” She pointed to the last three boys.
Patrick felt his heart jolt for two main reasons:

One, *Pete*.

Two, Patrick noticed ‘Joe’ squinting at him carefully.

Patrick stared back, now being able slightly make out his face, and noticing that something was *very familiar*.

“Your name’s Patrick?”

The redhead nodded, squinting thoughtfully at the- somehow *familiar*, voice.

“...Patrick Stumph?”

So it turns out that ‘Joe’ was actually *Joseph Trohman-* one of Patrick’s best (and only) friends in grade-school.

He’d used to live in the nice side of town because of his dad’s *very financially*-successful job. Joe's father was a pilot, and had started an affair with a young, pretty, blonde air-hostess on the job, Joe’s mother had found out and, needless to say, they had gotten divorced.

His parents divorcing had been bad *enough*, but just to rub salt in the wound, Joe’s mom had been left penniless because she’d left her job when her son had been born, and instead of being stuck in an office, she had spent her years dedicated to raising her child.

And while she was happy with her choice, grateful for the fantastic relationship with her son, she had nothing to fall back on, because Joe’s father had hunted down the best lawyers in the whole state and had somehow (something about a loophole and a prenuptial agreement that Joe hadn’t understood at the time) managed to keep *most* of his money, only paying out a tiny alimony and dodging child support.

So, Joe and his mom had moved to the bad part of town, not being able to afford much else, and Joe had left the private grade-school to go to a public one instead.

His mom had taken a menial, minimum-wage job, and Joe had actually taken one too, as soon as he’d been old enough.

Now, once Joe had no longer been in the upper-class, Patrick had never been allowed to see him again. He had been told that Joe had never asked to see him again, and while it broke his heart, after
a few years, Patrick had to accept that was that.

...But it turns out Joe had been told something very different.

It turns out that Joe and his mother had tried- and exhausted, every method of contacting Patrick. They’d turned up at his house, they had talked to his parents, they had even sent fucking letters, but Patrick had never answered. His parents had always made up some excuse, and Patrick had always been kept away from the other neighborhood and the public school. Patrick’s parents had seemed intent on keeping the friends apart.

And despite all their efforts, here they were.

-Sat on railroad tracks in the middle of the night, eagerly talking to each other like the old friends they were. At first, Patrick had been excited, but Joe had been angry, however after a very genuine explanation, and vehement denials of knowing anything about it, the duo had flowed into an easy conversation. They caught up, shared memories, and discussed their interests- which had stayed very similar to each other’s, besides the actual interests themselves, changing. Patrick felt happiness swell in his chest as he talked with Joe, but there was also a small bubble of resentment towards his parents there-how fucking dare they stop Patrick seeing Joe just because he’d fallen from grace?

And Joe had also introduced his new friends, Andy and Pete, to Patrick with a lot more vigor, explaining how they’d met and describing them in mocking, yet fond, ways. Pete had pretended to re-meet Patrick (or at least, Patrick hoped he had pretended, praying he hadn’t forgotten him entirely). Patrick had also been introduced to the very quiet- yet very friendly, Andy Hurley, who’s intimidating appearance had not prepared Patrick for the soft voice that had greeted him a second later.

Eventually, the whole group began an easy conversation, weaving in and out of different topics, and occasionally somebody would make a joke that would make Patrick laugh until his sides ached. All in all, he was having a brilliant time.

“Hey, try this out dude!” A kid named Frank Iero tossed Patrick a white, cheap-looking spray-paint can and gestured towards a painted, but chipped, brick wall which was already covered in various scrawled initials.
Patrick gulped, stumbling away from Joe and his friends, towards the wall.

“Uh, what should I…?”

“Just hold down the thing on top, like you’re spraying deodorant.”

Patrick nodded, but jumped slightly when the nozzle let out an angry spray of red paint all over his sweater. “Oh shit.”

Everyone started laughing, albeit, good-naturedly and another boy named Ryan, jogged over with a bottle of water and a damp tissue. Patrick scrubbed at his sweater furiously as the laughs died down, “Try again…” Frank turned the nozzle correctly, “It’s really fun, I promise.”

Patrick took the can once again, with a lot more care this time, and stared at the wall.

“Just try your initials, dude.”

He nodded, before shakily spraying $P M V S$ onto the wall. He stared at it, smiling slightly at the bright red letters among an angry crowd of black scribbles and chipped white paint.

A couple of guys cheered, one- Mikey, clapping him on the shoulder.

“And thus begins your life of debauchery.” Announced Frank, a grin lighting his features.

Patrick found himself laughing along with the others, and lifted his hand to spray a smiley face beside his letters when:

“HEY. WHAT DO YOU LITTLE SHITS THINK YOU’RE DOING?”

Everyone whirled around in shock to see three police officers and a security guard on the other side of the fence, quickly lifting the loose piece and ducking under it.

Some guys quickly grabbed the bags, and everybody starting sprinting away, with shouts of “HEY.” and “STOP.” ringing behind them.

Patrick could feel his heart pounding in his chest and he could hear it in his ears. His stomach constricted and his chest started to feel tight.

They group ran through the rail-yard’s exit, heavy footsteps falling in unison.

He was really fucking scared. And, God, he regretted not just staying home watching shitty movies with his brother and sister.
They were running through the streets now, darting past houses, causing dogs to bark angrily and jump up against rickety fences.

*Oh god.* If he got caught. If he got *arrested* and the *police* brought him home. He’d get a criminal record. His parents would murder him. They’d straight up murder him.

Everyone had darted off in small groups, in different directions. Patrick was alone.

Patrick suddenly realized he didn’t recognize anything. He didn’t fucking recognize anything and it was dark. It was dark and he was in a shitty neighborhood. A shitty neighborhood filled with murderers and rapists and thugs, and, *oh fuck.*

He could feel himself start hyperventilating, between the running and the *fear,* his asthma had started acting up, but he forced his legs to keep moving. Oh god, he couldn’t get caught. Don’t get caught, don’t get caught, don’t get-

Patrick could feel tears spilling out of his eyes and sobs escaping his mouth involuntarily, his chest was heaving painfully, letting out ragged, desperate breaths. He kept running, despite his burning lungs begging him to stop.

And suddenly, Patrick felt someone grab his arm.
Shitty Nights Always Have Highlights

The redhead flailed, swearing and begging in panic for the hand to release him. He stumbled wildly and fell forward onto his knees, one hand grabbing at the rough, filthy road to drag himself away and the other being pulled at by the unknown person.

Patrick’s heart thundered, making his ribs ache. He could hear a faint voice behind him buzzing in his ears, and he assumed it was one of the cops, trying to take him away- but he couldn’t actually see them in the darkness.

Patrick hadn’t looked at the person because he had been trying to hide his face, if he could just get away- no one would know it was him and nobody would know what he’d done. No cops would suspect a rich kid from the complete other side of town of vandalism at a railway-yard in the dead of night.

Patrick had to get away. A sudden burst of bravery washed over him and he clenched his free hand into a fist, twisting around and swinging it into the figure’s head- hoping it was strong enough to make the stranger release him.

The figure toppled to the floor with a loud groan, and Patrick pushed himself up with his hands, legs starting to pick up speed again. Patrick was panting again, heartbeat thundering in his ears, and he heard moans of pain from behind him before one ringing yell cut through all of the noise:

“PATRICK.”

The younger boy whirled around, chest heaving and face tomato-red, and whimpering lightly.

It was Pete.

It was Pete who had grabbed him.

And it was Pete who Patrick had punched in the face.

Patrick felt a sharp sting of guilt as he saw the other boy, hands on his knees and hunched over. His head was pulled up, staring at Patrick with a confused and tired look on his face, Patrick’s eyes wondered to Pete’s jaw, where a shiny red mark was quickly swelling up.

Pete straightened and grabbed at his jaw with his hand, whining at the pain. Goddamn, that kid had a serious right hook, Pete would be sure to never get on his bad side.
“Dude, ah- fuck.” He groaned stumbling forward, “You’re- You are...stronger than you look.” He laughed lightly.

Pete watched Patrick breathe painfully for a few moments before tears spilled out of his eyes, and he began openly sobbing, one hand pressed over his face and the other grabbing at his hair. “Oh god, o-oh god. I- I’ve n-never-”

Pete jogged towards him, grabbed his shoulders, and started speaking to him softly to try to calm him down.

Patrick leaned forwards, head hovering over Pete’s shoulder. Pete rubbed the younger boy’s back slightly as it began to rise and fall calmly, and he heard Patrick’s stuttered breathing in his ear. They stood like that for a while, Pete had just let his eyes fall shut and Patrick had almost completely calmed down before they were interrupted by loud shouting cutting through the air.

The boys eyes snapped open and they both turned towards the noise.

Now holding flashlights and the leashes of fiercely barking police dogs, some cops- not the same ones from before, oddly enough (although, Pete guessed they must have the same motivation), started cantering towards them from the other side of the block.

Pete heard Patrick’s breathing speeding up again behind him, and with a grimace of determination and a severe anger towards those relentless cops, he grabbed Patrick’s arm once again and pulled him through a dark alley.

Pete’s heart was thumping again, only worsened by hearing Patrick’s desperate and panicked sobbing. Forcing himself to stay calm, he darted and weaved between houses, gardens and alleyways, but no matter how many shortcuts he took, Pete could still hear the dogs’ barking ringing in his ears.

He felt the boy behind him stop completely, and Pete turned to see Patrick leaning against a broken wooden fence, panting. Pete wondered if Patrick was really that out of shape, he didn’t seem- then he saw Patrick’s lips turning blue.

Pete watched slack-jawed as the blue spread across Patrick’s red, sweaty face, merging into a deep, unnerving purple. Tears were streaming down his cheeks and Patrick’s blue eyes- whites covered in a web of red blood vessels, started shifting around wildly, jumping from the wall opposite them to Pete’s face, to Pete’s hands, to his own shoes.

“What’s wr-wrong?” Pete cried, grabbing Patrick’s shoulder tightly. Patrick’s eyes widened, burning into Pete’s as his mouth tried to form a shape, and his closing throat struggled to produce noise. Patrick tried to speak, but only released scratchy choking sounds and frantic pants.

The younger boy clamped his eyes shut, chest aching and lungs burning, and he calmed himself enough to strain a quiet whisper.

“A-asth- asthma-”
He started choking on his words and dry-heaving again, hearing Pete cursing above him. Patrick slid down to the floor sitting with his back up against the wooden fence, he pulled his mouth into a tight line and tried to take deep breaths, trying to remember what the doctor had told him to do if he was caught without his inhaler.

Pete watched helplessly as Patrick’s panting became wheezing, and after a few moments, he crouched down in front of Patrick.

“A-Are you okay?”

Patrick trembled and nodded shakily, letting out a long exhaling breath. He opened his eyes, staring into Pete’s that were filled with fear and worry. “Ca-Can you help me up?” Patrick wheezed, and Pete nodded eagerly, jumping to his feet and tenderly helping Patrick onto his feet. Pete rubbed his back softly, and watched him nervously.

Suddenly, Pete’s ears pricked up at the sound yelling.

He tensed for a moment, before two figures rounded the corner, falling over each other and breathing heavily.

Pete narrowed his eyebrows, staring at them as they pushed themselves up to their feet with their palms. One threw their head back, hood falling back and uncovering a mass of long and bushy brown hair. The other remained covered, and began leaning backwards and forwards in a steady rhythm, trying to calm their panting.

“Andy, is that you?!”

The long-haired boy looked up, and his hooded companion yelled, “Pete! Patrick!” and walked towards them with laboured breathing and Andy followed with hunched shoulders.

Pete recognized the hooded boy as Joe by his voice. Andy clapped Pete into a hug, and Joe turned to Patrick, putting an arm over his shoulders with concern and shaking him slightly. “Are you okay, Patrick?” The redhead shuddered, “Asthma a-attack.” he groaned slightly as he tried to stand up straight, “St-Still a little r-rough.”

Joe nodded quickly, “Right, follow me.” He declared, pulling Patrick along next to him, arm firmly planted over him.

“Where are you going?” Pete frowned.
“Jus’- Just c’mon guys.”

They eventually arrived at a diner that looked like it had seen better days, and Joe had led the group inside, sitting in a booth and pulling Patrick next to him softly. Andy and Pete sat opposite them, as a disapproving waitress with large eye-bags stopped in front of them. “Welcome to Macy’s,” She reeled off nonchalantly.

Joe ordered a hot chocolate, refusing the $50 bill a very dazed Patrick waved in front of him (and Pete was certain flashing cash like that in a place like this, wasn’t a great idea), instead, opting to pay himself.

The booth was quiet: Patrick was hunched over, head pressed against the wall, Joe was bouncing his leg like he always did when he was nervous and Pete and Andy were exchanging confused glances every now and then.

Then, the waitress walked over to them again a few minutes later, placing a steaming cup on the table and leaving them, with a raised eyebrow and curious glance at Patrick.

Joe pushed the cup over to Patrick, shaking his friend lightly. “Here, this’ll help buddy.” Patrick blinked his eyes open groggily, sniffing and taking the cup with a trembling hand. He eventually brought it to his lips, sipping with little content noises that made a small smile appear on Pete’s face.

Patrick lowered the cup, running his now, much steadier hands, over his face. “That sucked. That really fucking sucked.” Joe nodded, hair bouncing slightly. “You used to get ‘em all the time,” He reminisced, “Remember that really bad one during gym?” Patrick nodded, and Joe cocked his head, “Have you had a lot lately?”

The redhead ducked his head, suddenly very interested in the brown liquid in his cup. Joe scowled, “Patrick...” he said, with the tone of a stern mother. Patrick gulped, and nodded, admitting “Yeah. They cleared up a little in middle-school, but-” he sighed quietly, “They’ve uh- made a reappearance lately.”

Andy leaned back in his seat, “You guys have known each other that long?” Patrick and Joe nodded, “Yeah, used to be best buddies, right ‘Trick?’” the redhead nodded again with a smile. “Hoping we still are.”

Joe laughed, “Of course! You’re joining the gang whether you like it or not.” Patrick’s eyes flashed nervously, but the smile remained.

Pete grinned, “We are gonna have to induct you, of course. There’s a whole ceremony.” Patrick scoffed with no real anger and happy eyes, “Really? Well, what does this- ceremony, entail?”
“Well, first, you have to murder a small child-”

Patrick’s face dropped and Joe and Andy burst with laughter, eyes squeezing shut and covering their mouths when they saw the dirty look the waitress gave them. Pete’s grin remained intact and he watched Patrick glare lightly (albeit, still smiling) at the- now only snickering, other two.

“You guys are dicks.”

The four boys had safely arrived at Patrick’s house, and as they came to a stop, Joe looked up at the building, letting out a low whistle. “Oh I remember this place.” He impishly grinned at Patrick, “Remember the Tinkerbell incident?” Patrick scowled, “Yes, I do. Thanks a lot for that Joe.”

“Wait, what was the ‘Tinkerbell incident’?” Pete chimed in, imitating Joe’s voice at the end.

Joe grinned guiltily at Patrick’s disapproving stare.

“I may or may not have thrown Patrick’s cat out of the window.”

Surprised and raucous laughter filled the air, but quickly died down at Patrick’s shushing- who despite himself, was grinning and small hiccups of laughter were escaping him too.

The redhead exhaled contently, “So,” he began, looking down at the floor, “I can’t exactly say I had a great time tonight,” He looked up to see the other three’s slightly disheartened faces and Pete was sure the next words out his mouth would be- And, I never want to see any of you again.

“But the end of it was pretty good.”

Patrick beamed at them brightly, with a hint of cheekiness. Joe made an exaggerated sigh of relief, and they all grinned back.

“Well, I have to go.” Patrick breathed, motioning towards the gate. The other three nodded, and Pete offered, “We should do this again sometime.” Joe and Andy nodded in agreement with quiet ‘yeah’s. Patrick smiled at Pete, “I’d- I’d like that.”

“OH,” Joe shattered the quiet conversation- and the slightly dreamy eye-contact going on between Pete and Patrick, “You should play with us!” He grinned, and turned to Pete and Andy, “Patrick’s a
damn good singer.”

Pete quirked an eyebrow, remembering Patrick’s angry outburst when Pete had asked if he could sing, and he suddenly made a mental note to make Patrick sing, whatever it took.

Patrick started protesting, “Oh-oh, no-no I’m really not-”

“Don’t lie to me, Patrick Martin Stump.” Emphasizing the middle name, “You were the best singer in the church choir.”

Andy giggled, “You were in choir, Joe?” causing Joe’s ears to flush red, “U-uh, I-I just-”

“Yes, yes he was. Wore the black robes and everything.” Patrick expertly deflected the conversation and grinned at Andy’s quiet laughter and Pete’s impression of a choir boy.

They eventually said their goodbyes, but not without a shout from Joe, vehemently insisting Patrick’s singing skills were heavenly “Sounds like a fuckin’ angel, I swear.”

Patrick quietly entered his house, and his siblings called to him from the kitchen. “Patrick! Come here!”

He walked through the kitchen arch to see Megan and Kevin sat at the table, which was covered in Taco Bell wrappers. “Where have you been, young man?” Kevin imitated their mother’s voice with a pitchy falsetto.

“Wait, you’re- you- you didn’t-”

“Yes! We are here.” Megan announced grandly.

“I-I thought you- left…”

Kevin shrugged, “We just wanted Taco Bell, Pat. We weren’t gonna go sleep on the street.” Then a malicious grin crept onto his face, “So, imagine our terrible surprise when we come home to realize our big brother has gone! Leaving his little brother and little sister unattended and alone in a house full of safety hazards!”

Patrick scowled and mumbled, “Fuck you guys, you aren’t toddlers.”

Megan laughed, sweeping up all the wrappers up in her arms and running outside, returning a few minutes later. “Why didn’t you just bin ‘em here?” Kevin stared at her like she was an idiot. The girl rolled her eyes jokingly and crossed her arms, “Oh, I’m sorry Kevin, did you want mom and dad to find a bunch of Taco Bell wrappers in the trash? We weren’t allowed to leave the house, remember?”

The boy gave a tense nod, “Good point.”

“Speaking of mom and dad,” The girl began, “Let’s go to the living-room.” Patrick furrowed his brow in confusion and Megan sighed, “...They locked us in.” She said slowly, as though she was talking to a toddler. Patrick’s eyes widened, both in realization and panic. “Wait, they have the key. We don’t have a key, how are we going to-”
He was promptly silenced by Megan holding up the living-room key.

The boys fell silent.

“How-?”

“I have my ways alright? Now come on!”

Pete and Joe waved goodbye to Andy as he jogged into his house. Sighing into the cold night air, the duo started walking to Joe’s house (Pete was staying over), chatting lightly, exchanging jokes and reminiscing, their walk home ringing with laughter.

Pete yawned silently and flipped over on the blow-up mattress, which was currently lying (a little under-inflated) on Joe’s bedroom floor. He felt his dog, Hemingway (who followed him faithfully from house to house) nuzzle into his chest with a quiet whine, Pete smiled and hand petting the dog’s head as his ears pricked up at a sudden, loud snore, courtesy of Joe Trohman.

Pete’s smile slowly became a bemused grin as he started drifting asleep, and he remembered a certain pair of baby-blue eyes and a mop of reddish-blonde hair.

So it turns out Megan had a copy of all their house keys in her room- because of course she did, Patrick wouldn’t expect anything less of his sly sister.

Patrick sat on the couch once again and the TV was buzzing quietly with another, absolutely terrible Hallmark movie- some awful cross between Christmas and Cinderella. They had re-locked the front door and the living-room door, and it looked like they had never even left. His brother and sister were fast asleep, leaning on each other and snoring lightly, Patrick smiled to himself and stood, walking over to a wicker chest filled with blankets and cushions. He retrieved two light, patterned cream-colored blankets and carefully threw one over his younger siblings, retaking his seat beside them. He covered himself with the other, and slowly let sleep overtake him.

A small, tired and amused smile eased onto his features as he thought about the most...interesting night he’d had in a long time- actually, it was probably the most interesting in his entire lifetime. And, although some parts had been really shitty, he felt a gigantic bubble of excitement and satisfaction in his chest. He’d gotten away with it, Patrick could hardly believe it.

And as everything faded into black, the last thing on Patrick’s mind was a wolfish, joyful grin that always, without fail, made his heart skip a beat.
Joe Trohman always got what he wanted.

Joe Trohman also happened to be a very persistent person.

He had usually found that if you just kept pressing, people would eventually bend to your evil, evil will.

Well, Joe didn’t consider his will evil, but unfortunately, the guy who he was trying to convince did.

Joe had been trying (fruitlessly) to get Patrick to come back to The Cobra to sing with him, Pete and Andy for an entire week.

He’d tried everything, and Pete had jokingly commented that he was going through the five stages of grief- or, four, because he still hadn’t reached ‘Acceptance’:

1. Denial

“Patrick-”

“No.”

“Patrick, you are going to-”

“Nope.”

“You’re gonna be our lead sing-”

“Never.”

“Yes you are.”

“No I’m not.”

“Yes-”

“No-”

“...Yes.”

“No.”
“Yes, you fucking are, Patrick!”

“No, I’m fucking not, Joe!”

“...”

“Patrick~”

“JUST FUCK OFF, JOE.”

2. Anger

“He’s being such an asshole!”

Andy and Pete glanced at each other for the umpteenth time, completely exhausted of Joe’s whining at this point.

“Joe, dude, this guy’s your long-lost best friend, you haven’t seen each other for years because of his shitty parents.” Andy said quietly, “You finally see him again and you’re really gonna drive him away because of this?”

Pete nodded in agreement, “Yeah, it’s not worth it, dude.” he shrugged, “I have to admit, it would’ve been cool to finally have a full band but, we don’t wanna scare the guy off, right? He’s cool to hang out wit-”

Joe furrowed his brow and scowled, raising his voice “YOU GUYS~” He pointed at both his friends harshly, before pressing a finger into his chest, “Are sup’osed t’be on MY SIDE.”

“MR. TROHMAN.” The chemistry teacher glared at the three boys at the back of the classroom, hand frozen over the board holding a marker. The trio sunk into their seats guiltily and the man gave them one last glare before turning back to his diagram of some complicated molecular formula, “As I was saying-”

“I’m not giving up.”

Pete and Andy groaned.

3. Bargaining
“I’ll buy you a hat.”

Joe squinted, studying his friend’s face. He noted Patrick’s slight consideration, before his face contorted into annoyance again. “No.”

Joe stared again, blue eyes filled with concentration.

“I’ll buy you another ‘shake.” He motioned at Patrick’s empty McDonald’s cup.

Patrick glared, “Joe, I swear to God-”

“Please,” Joe whined, “You’re so good, and I fuckin’ remember, so you can’t lie.”

Patrick closed his eyes and exhaled heavily.

“Joe, I’m sorry, but I really-”

“I’ll buy you a David Bowie CD, please Patrick!”

Pete furrowed his brow at Patrick’s real look of consideration from across the table, “Doesn’t he own ‘em all already?” Joe shook his head somberly, and Patrick looked down-trodden, fiddling with the plastic tray in the middle of the table.

“But you’re rich…?” Andy raised his eyebrows, and the redhead frowned, “My parents don’t let me have ‘em, alright?” Pete scoffed, “What? Why not?”

“They only let me have classical CDs, they say anything else will just ‘distract’ me,” Patrick shrugged, eyes down-cast, “I mean, they’re okay, but…”

Joe huffed, “I actually had to introduce him to modern music, he was literally—like, an Amish farmer or somethin’ before that.” Patrick nodded, “Yeah, your mom was cool, she let you have everything.” Joe nodded sadly, and he gave a weak laugh, “I- ah, actually, I had to sell ‘em all...in the end.”

Patrick looked up, mouth agape and eyes wide, “Oh, dude, I’m sorry.” Joe shrugged, “Hey, money for food was more important than a few vinyls, am I right?” Patrick nodded his head, “Yeah...but, still...” and Joe nodded in weak understanding.

Patrick suddenly narrowed his eyebrows in confusion.

“So, you’re offering to buy me a CD, but you have like, no money...?” He raised an eyebrow at Joe, before giving him an impish grin.

“Looks like you can’t afford me, Trohman.”

4. Depression
“He hates me.”

Joe buried his face into a pillow with a whine, as Andy awkwardly patted his curly head and Hemingway licked his face with a wagging tail.

Gerard sighed with exasperation from across the room, looking up from his notepad, “Jesus Christ, if you act like this all the time, I’m sure he does.”

“HEY.”

“What?! You’ve been whining for a whole hour.”

“No I haven’t!” Joe lifted his head with indignation and glared at Gerard. He sat up and turned to look at Andy, “Andy, I haven’t been ‘whining’ for an hour, right? Back me up here, Hurley.”

Andy shrugged lightly and shifted his eyes to the clock on the wall, nodding towards it, “…I mean…”

“Ah-hah!” Gerard pointed at the clock with his pencil, “And hour and twenty minutes.”

“…Fuck you, Gerry.”

Andy sighed, looking at his friend sternly, “Look, I get that you really wanted to convince Patrick, but-”

“…Um, are you…okay there, Joe…?”

5. Joe Trohman always gets what he wants

“Speak of the devil and he shall appear.” Mumbled Gerard, focusing his eyes back on his sketchbook.

“Patrick!” Joe stood up from the couch, “What are you doing here, man?” Patrick stared, mouth slightly open and brows furrowed. “You’ve been annoying me, non-stop for an entire week to come here and now you ask.”
“You’re gonna be our singer?!”

Patrick gave a strangled sigh, and threw his hands up. “Yeah, whatever...maybe, I haven’t decided yet. I just...like hanging out with you guys, but...I just kinda...wanted to, just, play guitar and chill for a while, actually.” He suddenly gave a wide-eyed look, “I am not performing though, don’t get the wrong idea.”

Joe opened his mouth to protest, but Andy swiftly cut him off, “That’s cool with us, Patrick!” He quickly stood and tugged Patrick from the room, heading for the stage, Hemingway running after them with a bark, “Let’s go!”

Joe stood on the spot, scowling, before he was called by a loud:

“C’mon Joe!”

The trio stood on the empty stage, Andy was behind the drum set, Joe was pacing and strumming his guitar lightly and Patrick bounced nervously on the balls of his feet, fiddling with the tuning pegs of the black and white guitar (which read ‘PANSY’ in large, shiny letters), that he’d borrowed from Frank.

“...So,” Andy cleared his throat, “You guys wanna wait for Pete...or?” Joe shrugged his shoulders, “I’m good to go if you guys are.” Patrick nodded shakily, wondering where the bassist might be. “Cool,” Joe stopped pacing and grinned, “Bass players aren’t that important anyway.”

“I HEARD THAT, JOSEPH!” Mikey’s indignant shout rang from backstage.

The three had started playing, and had decided on doing a few different covers. Patrick was still refusing to sing, and so, the responsibility of lead singer had fallen to Joe.

They’d played a few songs- mainly Green Day, Ramones, and a few Misfits songs, when they had decided to take a break and had hopped off the stage, heading over to the bar. The bartender looked up at them with a quirked eyebrow, and begrudgingly handed them each a lukewarm, but free, water bottle.

If he was honest, Joe hadn’t given up yet.
And he had a very cunning plan.

Then Joe took a swig from his bottle, and quickly began coughing, clutching his chest and doubling-over, making his body shake with each cough. “Joe?”, “Dude, are you okay?” His friends began chorusing, patting his back and looking concerned. “Are you choking? What’s up?” Patrick asked, eyes alight with worry.

Joe choked for a little while, before wheezing slightly, straightening up and breathing deeply. He tried to speak and clutched his throat, groaning in pain and clenching his eyes shut. “Ah- shit, m-my throat.” He said, in a strained voice, “Shit, the s-show, tonight.” Joe shook his head, “I-I can’t...” he coughed again. “P-Patrick, plea-please. You g-gotta...”

Patrick shook his head in irritation, but his eyes held concern. He swallowed thickly, and stared at Joe with a hard, suspicious look for a few minutes, searching for any signs of a trick- but Joe was a damn good actor, and showed no weakness in his façade. And soon enough, the baby-blues softened, and Patrick sighed shakily.

“Fine. Just for you guys.”

Joe had to stop himself cheering and he stopped a grin reaching his face, instead giving Patrick a strained, grateful smile.

“Are you sure, Patrick?”

Joe’s smile dropped.

“We don’t want you to feel forced or anything, we could- I mean, we can cancel, I’m sure Brendon or Gerard, or even Tyler and Josh, wouldn’t mind playing a longer set-”

Joe glared.

_Fucking Andy Hurley, Joe had this in the bag and Andy was trying to ruin an entire week’s worth of work._

But much to Joe’s relief, Patrick shook his head lightly, “I-It’s okay. But, thank you, Andy. I just wanna help you guys out.” He smiled weakly at the tattooed kid, who gave a grateful smile in return.

Joe had suggested they should practice a little more to prepare for their performance- just to make
sure Patrick knew what to do on stage, of course. He totally didn’t just want Patrick to sing so he could rub it in Andy’s face.

At Joe’s suggestion, they had decided to play Michael Jackson and cover ‘Beat It’. Joe had smiled smugly when Patrick’s eyes had lit up at the song’s name, despite his protests of ‘never being able to live up to Michael Jackson’s voice’.

Joe grinned: *Once a nerd, always a nerd.*

As they had played the song’s intro, Joe had started doubting if Patrick was actually gonna sing. He watched the redhead looking around with paranoia in his eyes and he bouncing up onto his toes, gulping every now and then. And when it was time for the vocals, Joe had looked up from his guitar, fingers still playing the song’s riff. He was convinced Patrick would stay silent, that he’d get nervous and stop and apologize, and Joe would feel *so fucking guilty* about making his friend worry and for tricking him-

Then, a smooth, soul voice cut through the instruments.

Joe grinned slowly, and watched Patrick sing the words perfectly with eyes closed tightly, fingers playing Frank’s guitar, and a concentrated, yet *pretty goofy* look on his face.

Joe turned to look at Andy, who was also playing perfectly, his arms- almost automatically, playing the drum set expertly, but his face was entirely different. It was in an awed-daze; His eyebrows were raised, and his mouth was hanging open slightly.

Andy turned to stare at Joe, blue eyes impossibly wide and Joe grinned back smugly, mouthing ‘*I told you so*’.

They finally finished, and Patrick finally opened his eyes slowly, and nervously turned to look at the guitarist and the drummer. He was about to apologize for his shitty voice, and ask if someone else could fill in for Joe, when a single, steady sound of clapping came from the club’s doors.

Pete was trudging over to The Cobra, he had just finished his shift at Glenview and had quickly stopped at a store to buy something he’d been saving up for. He’d stuffed the plastic bag into his distressed backpack and had been making the journey home- no, to The Cobra.

Funnily enough- or maybe it was a little more ‘*sad*’ than ‘*funny*’, the shitty dive bar felt a lot like home to Pete. All his friends were there, it was the only place he could be loud and be himself (and drink, drinking was fun too...and illegal for him, but still fun), and it just felt comforting to him, he couldn’t really explain why, it just felt *right*. He also wasn’t sure whether it was the place itself, or if it was the company, but he’d contemplate that another day.
He blew out a breath, watching it steam up in front of him in the cold air and he pulled his ratty, grey scarf tighter around his neck, nuzzling into it. Pete’s brown eyes darted up to the building across the road, the currently, turned-off, grey sign, declaring the bar’s name.

Pete jogged across the road, looking both ways quickly checking no cars were gonna run him over and stopped in front of the entrance. He pushed on the metal doors with both gloved hands and stumbled inside, stopping when he heard Joe’s telltale guitar riff, Andy’s distinct rhythmic drumming and a powerful, melodic voice-

Wait.

Pete looked up and his eyes bulged. He couldn’t believe it.

*Patrick Stumph was singing.*

Pete watched in awe, hands quietly pulling off his scarf and gloves, but his eyes totally frozen on Patrick.

They hadn’t noticed him yet, as all the lights over the dance floor were switched off during the day, so Pete hid in the shadows, watching. He occasionally saw Joe give a smug smile or a smug glance at Andy, mouthing something Pete couldn’t read.

They eventually came to a stop, and Pete couldn’t help his lips curving into a grin and he couldn’t help his hands start applauding loudly.

Patrick, Joe and Andy looked over at the shady area the clapping was ringing from, watching Pete walk forward into the clarity of the stage lights. “Holy shit.” Pete said breathlessly, eyes blown wide.

“I told you it was worth it! But, no, what did you guys say? ‘Aw, leave him be, Joe. It doesn’t matter, Joe. You’re being silly, Joe. Well, who was right?! ME. JOE, FUCKIN’, TROHMAN. I told you so! I fuckin’ told you so-”

Joe stopped his gloating suddenly to look over at Patrick’s face, red with anger.

“...Your throat feel better, Joe?”

Joe smiled nervously at Patrick’s hiss, “U-uh, y-yeah! T-thanks, dude. Th-That- uh, that vo-vocal rest re-really helped.”
Andy looked between the two, “Patrick, I get that you’re mad.” Patrick glared, “I-I didn’t know he was lying, I swear!”

Damn that kid was scary when he was mad, between the death glare and the right hook that Pete had experienced first-hand, Patrick Martin Vaughn Stump was not someone to be messed with lightly.

“So, lemme guess what happened,” Pete began, squinting thoughtfully, reminiscent of a detective at a bloody crime scene, “So, Joe, like- lied, about something, and that convinced Patrick to sing…?”

Patrick’s glare faltered as he glanced over at Pete, “Yeah, something like that.”

Pete nodded slowly, “Well, on Joe’s behalf, sorry about that, dude.” Pete watched Patrick with a small smile, “...But, like, you are, an amazing singer.” Patrick blushed lightly- and involuntarily, at the comment, and the red tinge on his cheeks made Pete grin and continue his flattery, “Like, seriously, fuckin’ incredible. And, like, I know you’re pissed, but, dude, you have to be our singer, you just have to. A voice like that needs to be shown to the whole-fucking-world, man. You’re my- OUR, golden ticket out of this place.”

Joe nodded eagerly, and Andy did too, only, slowly and thoughtfully.

Patrick looked between the three, brow furrowed in concentration and eyes filled with emotions Pete couldn’t pinpoint. After a few minutes of silence, pacing and sighing, a quiet ‘Fuck it’ came from Patrick and he lifted his head, a determined glare burning into Pete.

“Fine.”

The other three smiled in varying degrees of relief, but all equally joyful.

“But,”

_Uh-oh._

Pete didn’t like the sound of that.

“I have some demands.”

Pete glanced between Joe and Andy, before settling his gaze on Patrick’s adorably-serious face. It reminded Pete of a house cat trying to be a lion.

“Oh, sure...What are they?”
“I am not going to be the ‘frontman’.” He glanced at the other three in turn, “One of you can do that.”

Andy and Joe looked up at Pete automatically, “Well, I’m sure you can do that, eh Wentz?” Joe grinned, and Pete nodded slowly, eyebrows lifted in slight concern, he considered himself a bit too...immature…? And, if this really took off (And now with a voice like Patrick’s, he was sure it would), he wasn’t sure he’d be the best face/image for them...But despite the worries bouncing around in his head, and a small voice insulting him and telling him he would drag the others down- Pete Wentz nodded.

“Yeah, that’s fine.” He plastered a grin onto his face, “I don’t mind the attention.”

Patrick swallowed, and nodded, satisfied. However, soon enough, his eyes were widening again, “Wait, your show tonight, I-I don’t know any of your songs, I don’t-”

“What? What show? We don’t have a show tonight…?” Pete’s face contorted into confusion, and Patrick suddenly turned to glare at Joe again. “Oh yeah!” Andy grinned from his seat, “It’s like, Saturday, right?” Pete nodded.

“You don’t play on…Saturdays?” Andy shook his head and Patrick stared, dumbfounded, “Really? You open on week nights but not weekend nights? What kind of bar is this?”

Pete laughed lightly, “The bar opens on weekends too. But, weekends, are for the old, grumpy alcoholics. Not for the kids who want to listen to music.”

Joe nodded, “We’d probably get, like- bottles thrown at us.”

“...Right…” Patrick looked a little dazed, “So, no show- today…?” Joe shook his head in confirmation.

The four stood quietly for a moment, before Andy’s cheery voice cut through the silence, “Hey, you guys wanna come over to my house and play Mario Kart?”

“GO FUCK YOURSELF, WENTZ.”

Pete laughed wildly, leaning back into the sofa, watching the small DS screen as he sailed past Joe,
claiming 1st place, for the fifth time in a row. Joe tossed the small console at Andy, “Your turn, whatever.” He grumbled, crossing his arms. Pete looked over at him, struggling to speak through the giggles escaping him, and he offered the cracked black DS to Patrick, who only yawned in response.

“No thanks man, I think I should get home.”

Pete nodded, placing the console on the coffee table instead. “You okay to walk home from here?” Andy asked with slight concern. Patrick gulped and shrugged with an unsure nod, “U-uh, yea-yeah. I’ll be okay.” Pete stared at Patrick with a thoughtful look, “That’s it,” he shook his head, jumping to his feet abruptly, “I’m walking you home.”

“Oh- no, Pete, it’s okay, really-”

“Do you want to get mugged, Patrick?”

The redhead’s eyes widened and he shook his head silently.

“Then let me walk you home.” Patrick nodded and got to his feet with a small murmur of ‘Thanks, Pete’. “No problem.” Pete pulled his hoodie over his head, hooked his backpack over his shoulders, and stuffed his hands into his pockets, walking towards the door. Patrick followed, waving goodbye to Andy and, a now calmed-down, Joe.

The two walked casually down the street, “Thanks again, Pete.” Pete just shrugged and shook his head, “S’fine.” He gazed ahead, and glanced at Patrick briefly, “Walks tire me out anyway, help me sleep.” Patrick nodded with a slightly questioning look, and a comfortable silence fell over the two.

They stopped in front of the white, colonial house that was now becoming quite familiar to Pete from the amount of times he’d walked Patrick home. His brown eyes widened slightly and he made a quiet ‘oh!’, before shaking his bag from his back and into his hands. Patrick curiously watched Pete root around in the beaten-up bag for a little while, before retrieving a white plastic bag, holding it up in triumph with a grin and small, happy sound.

“This, is for you.” He held it out to Patrick, who’s brow furrowed in confusion as he took it. Patrick opened the bag, peering in, and his jaw dropped. He stared up at Pete, and then back down into the bag, then back at Pete, then back at the bag. This continued for a worryingly long amount of time.

“...Is it, okay...?” Pete looked increasingly nervous with each one of Patrick’s glances, “I-I mean, I can return it-”

He was cut off by Patrick jumping towards him, arms squeezing Pete in a tight embrace. Pete’s face relaxed instantly- despite his eyes bulging slightly, and Pete lightly placed his arms around the younger boy, who was muttering words of thanks in his ear. Pete placed his head in the crook of Patrick’s neck, smiling pleasantly and with a tight, burning happiness rising in his chest. Patrick smelt of coffee, lilacs- although, Pete was pretty sure that was just thanks to his laundry detergent, and of some, unidentifiable smell that was just, unmistakably, Patrick Stump. Pete was pretty sure he could die happy right now, having lived a long, fulfilling life. Pete was also pretty sure he could have stayed like that forever. Right there, in a dim street on a really fucking cold night, with Patrick’s soft body pressed into his, and with Patrick’s warm arms encircling him.
...But, all good things must come to an end, and eventually, Patrick pulled back, and goddammit he was beautiful and Pete was super-fucked. He was completely covered in a warm, red blush, making his faint freckles stand out, his sea-blue eyes were slightly watery, pink lips breathing heavily and making the air steam, glasses crooked and falling to the tip of his nose, trucker hat sitting on his head unevenly, allowing soft-looking strand of reddish-blonde hair to poke out, and finally, his red nose tip was sniffing softly at the cold air.

Pete seriously had to stop himself from wrapping the boy in his arms again, but he did lean forward slightly, subconsciously chasing the warmth.

Patrick looked up at into Pete’s whiskey-brown eyes, “Thank you, Pete.”

Pete grinned dreamily, staring at Patrick and letting his imagination run away with dirty thoughts, “No problem, ‘Trick.” He cleared his throat, and Patrick gave him a small, timid smile, “Well, I’ll-uh...I’ll see you soon.” Pete nodded, eyes widening slightly and he watched Patrick scurry through the metal gates and into the large house.

Pete let a shaky breath pass his lips, before a smile invaded them, and as he made his way back to Andy’s house (where he would be crashing on the couch tonight), the only thing he could think about was Patrick looking up at him, perfectly disheveled, eyes bright, and just stunning. And as Pete quietly moaned Patrick’s name with his hands in his boxers and under the comforter that night, that goddamned face was the only thing behind his eyelids.

Patrick crept into his house, the plastic bag from Pete hidden under his thick parka. He started glancing around the house, before tiptoeing up the white stairs quietly. His ears pricked at his father’s firm voice, before he realized it was coming from his office, which was thankfully sealed shut. Quickly slithering into his room, Patrick closed the door behind him silently.

Patrick shook off his sneakers and moved over to the bed, sitting down with a slight bounce from the mattress. He tenderly removed the two items from the bag and placed them in front of him, eyes studying them intently:

One was a white and green box, the words ‘WALKMAN’ printed across the surface and a Sony logo hidden in the corner.

The second was an orange CD case, David Bowie’s profile staring off to the right, and letters spelling his idol’s name and the word ‘Low’ were plastered across the album cover. It was covered in fresh, clear plastic paper, completely new.

Patrick could hardly believe it, he couldn’t believe someone had done something so- so, amazingly thoughtful for, well, him. Patrick knew he could be a pain in the ass, he was grumpy and sarcastic, and although he tried to be kind and polite, Patrick was pretty sure he wasn’t the most...likeable person.

But someone- but, Pete Wentz, had actually paid attention to the tiny snippets of information that had
unknowingly slipped from Patrick's mouth.

And, Pete, who didn’t have the greatest...financial situation, had done this for him.

Patrick suddenly felt his jaw clench.

Shit.

No, Pete wasn’t in the greatest financial situation. He suddenly felt overwhelmingly guilty, for making Pete Wentz, a poor kid, spend money on Patrick Stumph, a rich kid. Patrick buried his face in his hands, it should be the other way around. Patrick should be the one fucking showering Pete with all the expensive shit he wanted.

Patrick had half a mind to make him return the Walkman and the CD and go get a refund.

...But Patrick could just see Pete’s grin die and the light in his eyes go out if he returned the gifts. Patrick groaned quietly, in two minds about what to do.

After a long period of thoughtful, thorough consideration, Patrick was now burrowed in his blankets with only his face sticking out from under the soft heap, the stuffed bear he’d had since birth was cuddled into his chest, the Walkman hidden under his pillow, playing the CD, and his ears stuffed with plastic earbuds.

Patrick smiled giddily at the music coursing through his ears and his heart swelled gratefully, thanking Pete.

Patrick had ultimately decided that he never wanted to see those bright brown eyes filled with sadness or disappointment because of him- or because of anybody else, for that matter. And while he would definitely lecture Pete on being wise with his money next time they met, right now, Patrick was going to enjoy what Pete had given him and let David Bowie’s voice carry him into sleep.

Chapter End Notes

There might be a Drunk History reference in here oops.
And From The Rain Comes A River Running Wild

Patrick looked down at this fingertips.

They were red, swollen and deep white lines were pressed into them, and they hurt like hell. Patrick had always hated the lines in his fingers after playing violin, and that was mainly because, when Patrick had been five, a girl in his violin class had once told them a, so-called ‘true’ story, about a cellist who had sliced their fingers open trying to play Paganini’s Caprice No. 24- the hardest piece ever written, allegedly.

And although Patrick had some doubts about the genuineness of that story now, 5 year old Patrick had completely believed it and had been thoroughly shaken. He remembered staring at his violin as though it was going to grow fangs and try to eat him alive, and he also remembered having an irrational fear of any piece that had Paganini’s name attached to it, and that irrational fear actually remained to this day- albeit, it was now more subconscious.

Patrick had just finished orchestra on a Monday afternoon, and he had told his parents he was going over to a friend’s house to work on a history presentation...but in reality, he was going to an illicit bar on the bad side of the city. He felt slightly guilty, but he always did when he lied, no matter who he was lying to. He could have lied to Hitler, or someone like that, and he still would have felt bad. Okay so maybe his parents weren’t Hitler, but they weren’t angels, either.

And technically, through their strictness and lying, they were the ones driving Patrick away and making him disobey them...right? Was that how it worked…? Could he blame this on them?

Yes! Yes he could, he decided, pushing any thoughts of guilt to the back of his mind and instead, considered the evening ahead of him. Patrick had eventually agreed to sing in Joe’s band, his steel resolve eventually melting away in the fiery furnace that was: Joe Trohman’s skills of persuasion, and Pete Wentz’s flattery.

Patrick had to admit he was kind of excited. He actually really liked singing...but hated everything that came with it. He hated being center-stage, he hated having to entertain a crowd, and he really hated having to memorize ridiculous amounts of song lyrics.

And unfortunately, his Sunday night had been full of texting back and forth with Joe in the group chat (which was now called ‘The Cool Kids’ rather than ‘The Sin Tin’), trying to learn and perfectly type out all of the song lyrics- that Patrick had been surprised, and actually impressed, to learn that Pete had written.

Joe hadn’t stopped his ‘lesson’ until two am, at which point Patrick had shut off his phone, and had had to restrain himself from throwing it against the wall.

However, he had really been enjoying his time with the other three guys, and these past few weeks had been the best, happiest and most fun of his life. Sure, they could be a little callous, and had filthy senses of humor...but Patrick loved them all already.
He had been ecstatic to re-connect, and re-build his old friendship with Joe. Patrick might not have shown it, but he had really missed Joe, and he had never fully recovered from losing his best friend—until now, of course.

Andy was the friendliest guy Patrick had ever met. They had gotten along really well, mainly because of their shared love of Star Wars and the fact that they were both very quiet and understood each other’s ‘noise’ boundaries. Extroverts like Brendon or Pete were cool, but when they jumped up on your shoulders and yelled a greeting in your ear, you couldn’t help but wince.

Andy had also offered to teach Patrick to drum, after the redhead had shown a keen interest in the drum kit, and Patrick had eagerly accepted. The lessons were going amazingly and Patrick and Andy would often be found sharing the drum stool and practicing during the weekends at The Cobra. Patrick was really grateful to Andy for teaching him what he knew.

And finally, there was Pete.

Well, what could he say about Pete…Some would call him a mindless party-animal, some would call him a depressing ‘emo’ kid, but Patrick thought he was a little more complex than that. Sure, he often acted like a little kid, bouncing around and beaming that distinctive smile, but sometimes, just sometimes, Patrick could see something deep and profound in those honeyed-brown eyes, especially during quiet, intimate moments—when Pete walked him home, for example.

That mysterious look, and the obvious talent and depth that shone through in Pete’s song lyrics, had Patrick convinced that there was more to Pete Wentz than met the eye.

Patrick found himself marching away from his neighborhood, mind swimming and stomach twisting with anxiety about the performance that night.

But soon enough, his anxiety was re-directed.

Patrick was still wearing his Glenview uniform, and he hadn’t totally considered the risks of that.

He was definitely considering them right now though.

As he walked deeper into the bad neighborhood, he noticed more and more gazes following him, from people scoffing, some even spitting, as he passed them, to hooded men watching him from street corners, and Patrick was feeling more and more anxious with every step.

He rounded a corner and walked through an almost-deserted street when four men stopped abruptly in front of him. They looked fairly normal, Patrick thought, sure they were a little disheveled and smelled quite bad, but they didn’t look that-

“That’s a nice lookin’ bag.”
Nope, they were dicks.

And they were probably going to steal from him.

...This night wasn’t off to a great start.

Patrick started taking a tentative step back, his reptilian brain taking its sweet time deciding between ‘fight’ or ‘flight’. He knew he wasn’t strong...but he also knew he wasn’t a very fast runner. And these guys looked to be everything that Patrick wasn’t.

Gradually freezing with fear, Patrick was pretty sure he was going to simply end up handing all his possessions over without a fight, and then, Patrick heard a choir of angels singing ‘Hallelujah’.

Or, it might as well have been.

But the choir came in the form of Pete Wentz, striding over with his hands in his pockets and whistling quickly at the four men to get their attention.

Patrick watched the men’s faces break into smiles at the sight of Pete, and they all started patting each other on the back and shoulder fondly, talking animatedly.

Patrick was pretty sure he could see a fucking halo around Pete’s head right now.

They had moved down the street towards Pete, and between the distance and the blood coursing in his ears, Patrick couldn’t hear what they were saying very well. Pete made a face, shook his head and began explaining something to them, gesturing with his hands. The men glanced over at Patrick, then back at Pete, brows furrowed and looking confused, Pete raised his eyebrows in response, looking more insistent this time.

The men's faces softened and they smiled, before, oh shit- they were walking back towards Patrick.

Had Pete just given them the fucking-go-ahead to steal from him? Why was he doing this? Had he suddenly decided he hated Patrick?

Patrick squinted nervously, and hunched his shoulders in anticipation. The men came closer, eyes lidded and smiling, with Pete grinning, standing further down the sidewalk.

Patrick shut his eyes, waiting for the impact of a punch or the feel of his things being ripped away from him, he exhaled heavily with a slight whimper and then…

Patrick felt a hand clap on his shoulder. His eyes snapped open and he stared at the hand before his eyes flicked to its owner. One of the men- the one Patrick assumed was the leader, grinned at him
genuinely.

“Sorry about that, little man.” He lifted his hand, patting Patrick’s shoulder once, before sailing past him with the other three following him, each giving Patrick a friendly smile.

“Bye Pete!” One of the smaller ones yelled, and Pete simply grinned and gave him a wave.

Patrick stood still, rooted to the ground, eyes wide and hands clutching his bag’s strap. Suddenly Pete was inches away from him, smiling sympathetically and his eyes shining with silent mirth. Patrick’s blank face dropped, and it turned into one of anger instead.

“Ow!” Patrick punched him the in arm, “What was that for?” Pete whined, hand wrapped around his bicep. “You scared me, you motherfucker...” Patrick growled, words trailing off, and stalking away from Pete and towards the club.

Patrick heard giggling as Pete glided up next to him. “Technically,” A charming crooked smile was present on his darker features, “Those guys scared you. Not me.”

Patrick glared without any real venom and huffed, as he pushed open the metal doors with his forearm.

“Well, you- you definitely told them to do that.”

“Do what?”

“COME UP TO ME!” Patrick turned with wide eyes, gesturing wildly to himself, “And, like...smile, and stuff...” He trailed off quietly, suddenly realizing how silly it sounded.

“...So you’re mad, cause I told a guy to smile at you...?”

Patrick gave a stifled whine, and threw his hands up shallowly. “I just-” He stopped, eyebrows falling again, “So you did tell him to do that!”

Pete shook with a few silent laughs, “Dude-”

“Fuck you! I thought they were gonna rob me!”

Pete shrugged, “Well, they were-”

“WHAT.”

“-at first.”

The darker boy quirked a black eyebrow and smiled, “But, thankfully for you, I have connections.”

Patrick squinted, unsure by what Pete meant by ‘connections’, but he wasn’t totally sure if he should press for more information or just stay out of it. He was about to respond when-

“HEY GUYS!”
Brendon bounded out from behind a curtain like an excited puppy, leaping off of the stage and bouncing towards them. “Patrick, my man!” Pete grinned and moved away, just as Brendon threw an arm around Patrick’s shoulders. “You excited for your first show?” Patrick gave him an unsure look and shrugged, “What? Come on dude-” And, cue, a twenty minute rant about why performing on stage is fuckin’ awesome, dude.

When Patrick had been finally escaped from Brendon, he had made his way backstage, and had stopped in front of a door reading ‘Pete, Joe, Andy’ on sticky note, with ‘and Patrick’ scribbled next to it in blue ink.

He opened the door to reveal Andy clasping a hand over his mouth, shaking with laughter and eyes wide with amused shock locked onto a bitterly scowling Joe, who’s head was covered with a bobble hat and a hood. Patrick narrowed his eyes, as Andy removed his hand to wheeze, “He-Hey, Patrick.” before erupting into giggles again and throwing his head back, chest stuttering with each laugh.

Patrick looked over at Joe with raised eyebrows, who just scrunched his nose up at the laughter and nodded a ‘hello’ at Patrick.

“Hey guys...” The redhead stepped forward and took a seat on a lone, ratty armchair, “...so, what’s up?” He looked over at Andy pointedly, who in return, just laughed harder and pointed at Joe.

Patrick’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully, “…Does it have anything to do with that...hat?”

Joe glared with murder in his eyes, and Patrick assumed he had struck a nerve.

After some heavy inhaling and exhaling from Andy, he finally cleared his throat.

“Joe-”

“Don’t you fucking dare, Hurley.”

Patrick looked between the two, before resting his eyes on Joe. “Okay, if you’re not going to tell me, then let me make an educated guess.” He leaned back in the armchair, clasping his hands together and pressing both index fingers to his lips, thoughtfully.

Patrick squinted slightly, “…Did you cut your hair?”

Andy grinned, nodding with silent laughter, and he stood, marching over to Joe and wrestling the layers off of his head, revealing a small mass of short brown curls.

Patrick said nothing, squinting.

“You kinda look like Augustus Caesar.”
Pete bounced up onto his toes, and watched the filling dance floor, with more and more people pouring in from the doors, each one being checked by an intimidating bouncer before being allowed inside.

He looked down, fiddling with his bass guitar’s tuning pegs. My Chemical Romance would be the openers tonight, but despite his group’s number in the list, Pete was always found wandering around backstage on a show night.

Walking was one of Pete’s favorite things, in a way.

Sure, he was kinda lazy, and would probably prefer to teleport everywhere, but walking always eased his mind and calmed him down- especially when it was raining. Pete loved the rain. Most nights, Pete would wake up panting and sweating from a vivid nightmare and when he did, he’d usually pull on a coat and shoes and take to the streets.

Pete could walk around aimlessly for what felt like centuries, and sometimes, he’d stay out so late, he’d be greeted by a sunrise.

But, Pete had many responsibilities that came in many forms, so he couldn’t always just run away and go for a walk. Like that time both his brother and sister had gotten sick at the SAME time, and his parents were working late, leaving- at that time, six year old Pete completely alone with two screaming toddlers.

Eventually, the first band finished their set, Gerard, Mikey, Frank and Ray had stumbled away, sweaty and smiling brightly, and being cheered off-stage with thunderous applause.

Pete, Joe, Andy, and Patrick stood on the side lines, watching the crowd briefly before taking the other band’s place.

Joe was still scowling over his ‘monk’ haircut- as he had called it, and Andy was still very amused by said haircut.

Pete watched Patrick timidly walk up to the mic, hands clutching a spare red guitar from the music room, that the manager had let him borrow. He watched Patrick’s throat swallow, tugging his hat brim over his eyes with a shaky hand. The baby-blues flitted over to him momentarily, before Pete turned to introduce themselves to the audience.

Joe was so proud of himself, because it was because of him- and only, him (cause he’d had no help from Andy and Pete) that Patrick was singing at the top of his lungs like an angel on the stage right now. And he really couldn’t stop the smug expression that crept onto his face. He felt kinda like a proud mom watching her kid win a spelling bee, or sing the national anthem at a baseball game, or something.
He’d glance over at Pete occasionally, raising his eyebrows with an insufferable ‘I-told-you-so’ look, swamping his face.

Andy had noticed a few people in the audience bristle with annoyed confusion as Patrick had stepped forwards at first, but those malicious expressions had melted away the moment Patrick had started singing. Andy had to admit- the guy was amazing. And Pete may have been right about the whole ‘golden-ticket’ thing, and Andy decided to entertain the thought for a little while.

He imagined what it would be like for this band to get popular and successful, playing music with his best friends all around the would be his dream job. Sure, things might change, and change can be really fucking scary, but change could also bring better things. Better things than they could have ever even imagined.

Andy let a small smile settle on his mouth as he watched his friend sing with all his heart, Maybe, just maybe.

Pete was in love.

Okay, he wasn’t sure if he was over-exaggerating, but oh god, if Patrick wasn’t the most majestic thing he’d ever seen.

The goofy expressions the redhead pulled while singing were adorable, his glasses would occasionally slip to the tip of his nose, and when he sang a high note, he’d lean back and stand up on his tiptoes, pouring his heart and soul into the mic.

When Pete had been writing his lyrics on scrap pieces of paper, receipts and tissues, he could have never imagined how beautiful they would sound pouring out of those damn lips that he hadn’t been able to get out of his mind since the first time he’d seen them.

Pete was, once again, entranced. Patrick had a way of doing that to him.

But it wasn’t just him who was captivated, the audience, for once, hadn’t been shouting along with the words. That had worried Pete at first, but as soon as they had ended their first song, the building had shaken with the loudest cheering Pete had ever heard, and all his worries had been put to rest.

The group had finished their third song and were quickly checking their tuning when a very drunk and uneven shout came from the bar. “DON’T YOU GUYS HAVE A NAME?” The band and the crowd all laughed at the voice, and Pete grinned and leaned into the microphone, responding simply, “No.”

There was a pause. “ANY SUGGESTIONS?” the voice rang out, and was followed by laughter again.

Some audience members started yelling out suggestions, some were serious, some were- not so serious. Pete had found ‘Call yourselves ‘Child Porn’ ‘cause no one will be able to google you and they won’t be able to say it on MTV!’ quite funny and found himself having a laughing fit on stage.

Eventually though, his ears had pricked up at a pretty cool suggestion, ‘FALL OUT BOY- like the guy
from The Simpsons!’ and he heard Joe say, “Hey, good suggestion dude.” from the other side of the stage.

Fall Out Boy

Pete really liked the sound of that.

They had finished their set and walked off-stage when Patrick had looked down at his watch and started panicking.

“Oh shit, it’s late. Real late. I need to get home, I gotta-”

Pete nodded but pulled Patrick over to a small closet backstage, knowing that Patrick would probably forget about his stuff and just run home. Pete swung the door open and the duo were greeted with an...unexpected sight:

Gerard and Frank.

Hidden in the dark closet, mouths pressed together feverishly, a few pieces of clothing scattered on the floor and hands roaming freely over each other, grabbing at and pulling on skin, hair, shirts- anything they could reach.

The two suddenly pulled away from each other and stared at the two boys in the door way.

Pete slammed the door shut, pressing his back against it, looking like he’d just see a ghost in the closet instead of two horny teenagers making out. His tanned skin-tone made it tricky for blushes to stand out, but Pete could feel he was pretty red right now. His eyes were wide, his eyebrows were raised and his mouth was hanging open, all in shock.

He looked at Patrick, who also looked exactly how Pete felt- although the redness on his face was probably much brighter.

Pete gave a nervous smile, and cleared his throat after a long, quiet pause before a timid voice came from the closet.

“...Hey Pete?” Definitely Frank, Pete thought.
“...U-uh, y-yeah?”

“...Can you pretend you never saw that?”

“S-sure.”

A few quiet moments passed, and a much more confident voice rang out from behind the door.

“Pete, could you let us out of here, please?” Definitely Gerard, Pete thought.

Pete smirked, seeing an opportunity to annoy his friends, and he definitely planning on taking it.

“Are you decent?” He said in a pitchy falsetto.

"Pete-

"I guess you guys really are in 'the closet', huh?"

“Pete just open the fucking door.”

Pete turned and fulfilled the request, pulling open door, and now revealing a fully-clothed Gerard and Frank, who were standing far apart, both blushing furiously, despite Gerard's glaring. They stepped out, and Frank noticed Patrick, and suddenly seemed back to his old self, “Oh hey Patrick!”

Patrick gulped nervously, “H-hey, Frank.”

“Patrick, you don’t tell anyone either.” Gerard said with a slight growl, to which Patrick shook his head quickly.

“See you around guys!” Frank grinned and walked away with a still- only slightly embarrassed, Gerard.

Pete raised his eyebrows at Patrick with an open grin and a stuttered laugh, before leaning into the closet and retrieving Patrick’s bag and parka, and his own backpack. He handed over Patrick’s possessions and insisted on walking him home again.

Patrick had agreed, because he had to admit he was still slightly jumpy from that earlier encounter.
They had walked out of the doors together, quickly pulling on their coats and hats as heavy rain poured from the sky in buckets and pounded down over the city. They jogged over to the other side of town, the loud rain forcing their conversation to end, much to Patrick’s dismay.

Skidding to a halt in front of Patrick’s house, Pete grabbed his shoulder, motioning for him to wait by holding up a finger. He shook his bag from his shoulders, catching it before it hit the water-logged sidewalk swiftly. Patrick watched him root around, with a sneaking suspicion that was confirmed when Pete shoved a white, plastic bag into Patrick’s chest.

Patrick gaped, and shook his head, yelling, “Pete, wait, no, I can’t-” but Pete was already running away down the street, kicking up water with each step. He turned, still jogging backwards, his brown eyes were hidden under his coat hood, with only his nose tip and mouth poking out. Patrick watched Pete give him a wolfish smile before cupping his hands around his mouth.

“Enjoy it, Pattycakes!” He shouted over the loud pattering of the heavy rain, before turning, running, tipping his head back and laughing loudly.

Patrick dried his hair with a white fluffy towel and flopped onto his bed, fresh out of a hot shower to get rid of the cold that had seeped into his bones from the rain. He yawned lightly, and peeked into the plastic bag, jaw dropping slightly. He picked up the plastic-wrapped album delicately, ‘Thriller’ and ‘Michael Jackson’ were printed across the surface, along with an image of the artist, and Patrick felt his heart speed up excitedly. He turned the album over in his hands, reading the track-list with his brow furrowed in concentration, making little appreciative noises as the read over the song titles.

He walked over to his dresser and pulled out the bottom draw, where Pete’s last offering was hidden under neatly folded clothes, it was just to be on the safe side and to make sure his parents weren’t any the wiser about the ‘offending’ objects.

Patrick retrieved the Walkman and shut the draw, moving back over to his bed. He’d been listening to David Bowie each night since Pete had bought the first CD for him, and although he could never get tired of that album, he was excited to listen this new one.

Patrick curled up in his blankets, grinning and bobbing his head along with the music, and by the fourth run-through of the album, Patrick had fallen soundly asleep.

Pete went to Andy’s house to retrieve his dog, before jogging to his own house with Hemingway running joyfully alongside him. He decided to make a quick stop at the corner store for a bottle of cough medicine his brother, Andrew, had asked him for via a very hard-to-read text message. Andrew had been sick for a few days, but he was stubborn and hated asking for help from anyone, so Pete had naturally been very worried when he’d received the request. He knew his brother must be at death's door if he was asking Pete for help.

He stumbled to a stop at the door, quickly pointing at Hemingway and telling him to ‘Sit’ and ‘Stay’, firmly as he tied the dog’s lead around an empty bike rack.

He quickly entered the store, shoving his hood off with a hand and looking around- only seeing two cops looking absently at the magazines, before heading to the medicine aisle. Pete browsed carefully, with narrowed eyes and a slight, confused pout. Why were there so many types of this stuff? God,
how many types of ’coughs’ are there?

Pete got fed up eventually and grabbed the most generic bottle. He reached in his pocket to find something to pay with. One, two, three, four, five- shit. He was fifty cents under. Pete glanced at the guy behind the counter, he looked half-asleep, hunched over and eyelids drooping, shutting fully occasionally- and in this neighborhood, that was pretty much asking to get robbed.

Pete gulped, his brother really needed this...and it was like Pete hadn’t stolen before, anyway. He did this all the time, he was a bonafide master at this shit. Keeping his eyes on the store owner, Pete slipped the bottle under his jacket and started towards the exit, when:

“HEY,” Pete’s eyes widened, he had forgotten about the cops. How could he have forgotten about the fucking cops?

Pete turned, trying his best to look innocent, but his entire appearance practically screamed ‘degenerate delinquent’, and he instantly knew he wasn’t going to get away with it.

Pete ran.

He bolted out through the door which was left swinging violently behind him, the store-owner was now fully awake and was jumping to his feet, and the police officers were chasing him outside. One cop stopped and stayed to reassure the owner, and to make a call into the radio, while the other chased Pete, yelling for him to freeze.

Pete could hear Hemingway barking for him, panicking about his owner abandoning him, and in a moment of hesitation about deserting his dog, Pete stumbled. He felt a heavy weight crash onto him, and he felt the cop holding him down. Pete started breathing heavily, wriggling, grunting and kicking his legs. He tried to free his arms from the man’s grasp, oh god, he couldn’t get arrested. The struggle continued and Pete could sense the cop getting more and more frustrated, swearing and insulting him with shorter intervals.

Pete threw his head back with a frustrated growl, feeling the back of his head collide with the cop’s mouth. The older man groaned and loosened his grip just enough for Pete to get to his feet and lurch forwards, his heart leapt in relief, he was going to get away, he was-

Pete’s face hit the ground with a crunch and he let out a pained moan.

The cop had pulled him back by the leg and crawled on top of him, holding him down by the neck tightly, choking him, and pinning his arms behind his back roughly, and Pete was pretty sure the grips were turning his skin as pale as Patrick's, and he was also sure this guy would leave marks.

Pete started panting fearfully, he hated getting held down, he hated being restrained, he hated feeling trapped. He started growling, instinct overtaking him. Pete started fighting the man off, struggling under him, and he had gotten in a solid kick to the cop's thigh- then Pete’s vision went white as he felt a sharp blow to the back of his head, face slamming into the concrete. And then another flash, and another blow. And another. And another. And another. Peté heard angry grunts from above him, and he felt something warm trickling from his nose, and his eyes fell shut weakly, Hemingway’s now- frantic barking ringing in his ears.
Time felt like it had slowed down, and Pete’s eyes shifted behind his eyelids towards a new sound.

It was yelling, and he felt the weight of the cop move away from him. The guy was gone, he could escape. Pete tried to move, but his body didn't respond. Pete growled, trying to move again, but to no avail. He let out a strangled groan, mentally yelling at his body to move. He tried again, and again, and again, but nothing happened. Pete screamed in frustration, but it only escaped as a miserable whine. He was panicking. Oh god, why couldn't he move? Why couldn't he fucking move?! Pete felt hot tears falling from his eyes and dropping away from his skin to the ground, and he felt something-sharp, pressing into his chest, and his shirt felt wet too.

He heard arguing that sounded distant, but somehow felt close. Pete felt someone flip him over gently, and he opened his eyes with a gurgling, pained whine, tasting iron in his mouth. He saw the other cop that had stayed behind above him, eyes full of concern, this guy had kind eyes. Definitely kinder than the other guy's, anyway. The man turned his head, yelling something that sounded very faint to Pete, he could only make out the word ‘ambulance’. He heard even more arguing, and the police officer gave him a mournful, sympathetic look. Pete’s face had started hurting, hell- his whole body had started hurting, and it was getting more and more painful as his heartbeat calmed down.

Pete shifted his eyes around, trying to tilt his vision to look around, shuddering in relief when he managed to move his head. He leaned just enough to see his dog, barking wildly and jumping up against the lead that restrained him. Pete wanted to stop him, to tell him to 'sit', to make sure he didn’t hurt himself. Then his eyes moved again, looking at the bright store sign and the flashing blue lights of the police car, painfully bright in the darkness. Pete also spotted the other- angrier, cop pacing nervously, holding a radio to his ear, his knuckles were bloody. Why were his knuckles bloody...? Did he hurt-?

Pete's eyes suddenly snapped to the store owner yelling from behind him, shaking his head and looking incredibly pissed-off.

Everything was going blurry, and the tears threaded through his eyelashes made it even harder to see.

Pete was tired.

Really tired.

He really wanted to go to sleep.

So, Pete let his head drop back onto the wet concrete. He gave a labored breath, and his eyes fluttered closed with a final whine.

Pete could feel heavy, cold raindrops hitting his face.
Pete loved the rain.
Patrick yawned slightly, pressing a hand to his mouth as he walked away from his school building. He was tired from staying up listening to his new CD, and school didn’t do anything but drain his energy even more.

Yawning again, and not quite managing to cover it up this time, Patrick followed the route to the bar, and the journey was getting more and more familiar every day.

As Patrick was only two blocks away from The Cobra, his steps stuttered nervously as his eyes locked onto the same four men from yesterday, leaning against a wall and watching him. Patrick wasn’t sure if Pete would come to his rescue a second time, and his heart sped up, before-

Patrick saw them smile brightly and genuinely, the shortest one giving a happy wave. Patrick smiled back nervously, and lifted a hand in a small wave.

Patrick idly wondered what Pete had said to them, but he shrugged the thought away and pushed his way into the bar.

“Hey Patrick!”

Gerard, Ray and Frank were sat at the bar, idly drinking from clear water bottles, and Patrick assumed they had just finished practice. Frank grinned at him from a bar stool, Gerard nodded, and Ray just smiled. Frank patted the empty stool to his left, and Patrick took it with a strained smile.

“How are you guys doing?” He attempted to start an amicable conversation, and tried to ignore the mental image of Gerard and Frank pressed up against each other in the closet.

Frank and Ray nodded, with varied amounts of enthusiasm, and Gerard just stared down into his notebook, “Kinda pissed off that Mikey disappeared.”, he shrugged.

“Oh?” Patrick furrowed his brow, “I thought you guys would...” Gerard looked up with a questioning look, making Patrick shrug lightly, “Well, you are brothers.”

“Unfortunately.” He cleared his throat, and hastily adding “Just kidding, I love him.” at Patrick’s worried expression. “Any ideas ‘bout where he might be?” Frank looked around at the others, and settled on Patrick, who just shrugged, “I- I don’t really know him that well...”

Frank made a little noise of understanding, and Ray squinted his eyes, staring ahead at nothing in particular. “…Could he be with Pete...?”

Gerard looked up, cocking his head and Frank raised his eyebrows with a small smile. “Yeah! Maybe!”
Patrick narrowed his eyes slightly, and bristled with curiosity. Gerard must have noticed Patrick’s questioning expression, because he quickly explained. “Oh, Mikey has a gigantic crush on Pete.” He shrugged lightly, “And Pete’s a fuckin’ tease, y’know how it is.”

Frank nodded, “Yeah, so Mikey makes up some bullshit excuses to get him ‘alone’.” raising his eyebrows suggestively on the last word. “Like, ‘Oh Petey’.” He grinned, imitating Mikey’s voice, and earning a half-hearted glare from Gerard, ‘Where did you buy your bass? It’s amazing, I’ve been saving up for a new one and I need some...recommendations”

Patrick tried to ignore the burning jealousy in the pit of his stomach.

He really did.

It was half past six, and Pete and Mikey were still missing.

Patrick had a lump in his throat and he had been tense the whole afternoon. Pete and Mikey, that thought made him burn with envy- not that he’d admit that to anyone, especially not to himself.

Ray and Tyler had been soothing Gerard, who was now getting more worried about his little brother, he had been pacing and beginning to come up with ridiculous reasons as to why Mikey was missing. Some gems had included: Mikey decided to run away to Australia, Mikey had been abducted by aliens, and even- Pete had murdered Mikey. And for some reason, the older Way brother had seemed stuck on that last idea and had been seething at every mention of Pete’s name.

Eventually, all the buzz about the younger brother had died down, as Mikey stumbled through the club’s doors, rubbing his hands together- trying to warm them up in a vain effort.

“MICHAEL JAMES WAY.”

Mikey groaned as his brother marched up to him, shoving his way through the crowd, grabbing his brother by the coat lapel and pulling him over to the backstage rooms.

Patrick heard the arguing from behind the door reading ‘My Chemical Romance’, but he was more worried about what Joe was ranting about, pacing around in their room.

Joe was pacing in circles, scolding a Pete Wentz that wasn’t there.

“Joe, look, just calm down.” Andy leaned back on the couch with a heavy sigh, “We’ll ask someone to stand in for Pete tonight, it’s no big deal.”
“No. No. It is a big deal.” Joe huffed and crossed his arms, “Pete is always here. Always. Pete could be fucking- I dunno, dying of the Bubonic plague, and he’d still be here.”

Andy opened his mouth to brush him off, shrugging and throwing his arms up, but he was quickly cut off again.

“So, there are two possibilities here.” Joe said firmly, holding up two fingers. “One: He suddenly doesn’t care about this band.” He counted off one finger, “-And I really doubt that, by the way.”

He frowned deeply.

“Or two: He’s dead.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Joe.”

“I’m serious, Andy. Pete is always here. I’ve known him forever. Something’s wrong. I just know it-”

“I’ve known him for longer, Joe, and look, don’t be stupid. Pete’s not-”

“Look, guys,” Patrick decided to step in, he hadn’t know Pete very long, but they were still friends, dammit.

“Do you guys know where he lives?”

The other two nodded, looking as though Patrick had just asked if the sky was blue.

“Well, why don’t we go check on him after the show?” Patrick suggested, “I mean, we’re opening tonight, so we’ll be done pretty early.”

Joe sighed and threw up a hand, “Pete’s never at home. He sleeps somewhere different every night.” Andy nodded in agreement, and Patrick just looked between them.

“W-well, if something is wrong, then he’ll be at home, right?” The other two looked skeptical, Pete had been known to sleep on park bench rather than go home to his parents- only going home when one of his siblings asked him to.

“O-okay,” Patrick stared at the floor in heavy thought, before his head snapped up and a light bulb shone above it. “You guys are his only friends right?” He pointed at the duo, who shook their heads, “No, he’s great friends with everybody here. Brendon, and Josh, and Mike-”

“Yeah- Yeah, that’s what I meant. Only you guys right?”

“Correct.” Andy nodded, before looking a little unsure, “Well, he has other friends, but he doesn’t sleep at their houses unless he’s desperate.

“Okay-Okay, whatever,” Patrick waved his hands dismissively, “But no one here has seen Pete- And I’m guessing he doesn’t just break into your houses whenever he feels like it.”

The trio’s eyes widened in realization, and they released a chorus of “Oh yeah.” and “Oh shit.”

The three finally decided to go check on Pete after the show, but the problem remained: They didn’t have a bassist.
Dallon had been slightly confused when the newly-dubbed ‘Fall Out Boy’ had approached him, asking him to stand in for Pete.

“...But, Pete’s always here.”

“Yeah, we know-”

“Like, he could be like- dying of, like- I dunno, ebola, and he’d still-”

“Yes, we know.”

The trio stared down at him, and Dallon had nodded his head with a confused expression. “I mean, sure, that’s fine.”

And so, there was Dallon. Standing on stage with his nervous friends, who all kept glancing around at each other...And then there was Patrick, who just kept his eyes locked on the club’s doors.

Patrick, Joe and Andy walked down the street hurriedly, they had all darted out of the club as soon as their set (that they had cut actually short by one song) had finished, and they had all felt and made an unspoken agreement to get to Pete’s house as quickly as possible.

At first, they hadn’t been too nervous, but by the end of the show, fear for their friend had set into their bones, and they had all been eager to leave.

Joe stared down at his phone, fingers moving at lightning speed over the keyboard.

SmokedTroham: Pete

SmokedTroham: Pete r u ok

SmokedTroham: Pete where r u

SmokedTroham: We’re coming ovr
His spelling got worse with each message, and he let out a loud sigh every few minutes when he received no response.

Patrick bit at his inner nervously, jaw clenched and fingers picking at loose strings inside his pockets.

Andy was doing his best to stay calm, having three hysterical boys showing up at Pete’s door wouldn’t help anyone...but although he wasn’t showing it, he was just as nervous as Joe and Patrick.

Andy and Pete had known each other a long time, since pre-school, actually.

It had been Andy's first day, and he was trying to keep to himself- he was never one for making friends.

Andy had been a pretty scrawny kid when he was little, and he had been even more quiet and shy back then. He had been minding his own business, playing with a plastic train in the corner, when another kid had decided that he was tired of coloring and wanted Andy’s train instead. Pre-schoolers generally weren’t very polite, and they just tended to take what they wanted, so the kid had marched over, and snatched the train away.

Now, Andy was a very sensitive two-year old and had started crying openly, burying his face in his knees- as sensitive two-year olds tend to do.

Then, he’d heard another distant cry and had felt somebody tap him on the shoulder quickly. Andy had looked up to see the kid crying, being fussed over by an exasperated teacher, and he’d seen another little boy with dark hair and eyes, holding the plastic train out to him.

It turns out the dark-haired boy had witnessed the robbery, and had decided to play ‘Robin Hood’, hitting the other kid and pushing him over, before returning the train to its rightful owner. Andy had learned the little boy’s name was ‘Pete’, before he’d been dragged away for a time-out.

They had been best friends ever since.

Joe and Andy had stopped in front of a run down, Patrick stuttering to a stop behind them, in slight disbelief with a slack jaw.

They looked up at the derelict house.

It almost looked stereotypical.

Shattered windows, stained walls, overgrown grass poking out from under cracked concrete slabs, plastered with graffiti, rotten newspapers spilling out of a rusty trash can- the whole, depressing deal.
Andy took the lead, hopping up the front steps to the chipped door, knocking on it urgently. Joe and Patrick followed in that order, just as the door opened slightly, revealing a mass of messy black hair in the thin gap, and a tanned hand gripped the door’s side as a pair of honey brown eyes stared up, nervously at first before quickly relaxing.

The door swung open fully, revealing a young girl.

Patrick was thoroughly confused. Had they gotten the wrong address? Had Joe and Andy not known-?

“Hey Joe, Andy...”

She nodded at the boys individually, before freezing her gaze on Patrick, and giving a polite, friendly- and very familiar, smile, “…Patrick? Right?”

Patrick nodded, and the girl’s smile widened slightly, and her eyes flashed knowingly. “Come in, guys.”

The house was, to put it lightly, awful.

And Patrick couldn’t help the grimace that sunk into his face as they entered.

He really couldn’t.

But he could hide it, just before anybody noticed.

They stood in the dim living room, walls covered with torn wallpaper, floors covered in stained carpet, and distressed, furniture- that definitely didn’t match, tossed around the room haphazardly.

“...Is Pete here, Hillary?”

The girl nodded, and Patrick suddenly noticed just how much she looked like Pete, it was almost scary. Her tired eyes filled with sadness, “He’s- uh, not too...well...” She swallowed at the boys’ horrified expressions.

“What happened?” Andy tried, as Joe pressed his hands to his face and muttered to himself, Patrick could only make out, ‘Oh god, he’s dead.’.

“He was at the hospital.”

Patrick’s eyes widened, Andy visibly tensed, and Joe stopped pacing, looking up from his hands.
Andy put a comforting hand on the girl’s shoulder, but the urgency remained in his eyes.

“Hillary. What happened?”

The girl took a deep breath, exhaling and shutting her eyes tightly.

“He, um...Pete-”

She sighed shakily, not knowing how to continue.

“Andrew got sick. Like, really sick, he’s been in bed for days- but, but, y’know what h-he’s like. Stubborn as hell.” She gave a half-hearted laugh, trying to inject some humour into the somber room.

“But, he-uh, he asked P-Pete for some- some...cough medicine. And we got- we got real worried, y’know…?” Her familiar brown eyes started watering slightly, and her voice got even shakier, downright trembling when it spoke Pete’s name.

“So, P-Pete, he- he went to the store, and, uh- w-was short, a few cents...So he, he tried to s-steal it.”

Joe let out a heavy, trembling breath, Andy rubbed a hand over his face, and Patrick felt his heart speed up again.

“But, there were some cops there...A-And, one of them was Officer Covert.”

Joe and Andy groaned, and dropped their heads, hunching their backs. Patrick didn’t understand, but he guessed ‘Officer Covert’ was bad news.

A small tear ran down from her eyes, and she wiped it away with frustration. “H-he’s here, now, though.” She glared down at the floor, “I went, t-to the h-hospital, and I called mom and dad, but t-they didn’t want to pay the f-fee, so I-I had to sneak him out. I-I don't even k-know what's wro-wrong with h-him, I don't know i-if any-anything's b-broken o-or-” She trembled slightly, “I-I tried m-my best.” Hillary pressed her hands to her face, shaking and silently crying as she leaned into Andy’s offer of a hug.

They all stayed like that for a while. Andy was rubbing the girl’s back soothingly, repeating murmurs of ‘It’s not your fault.’, Joe was just staring ahead, face completely unreadable, and Patrick was burning with anxiety, his mind racing.
Eventually, Hillary pulled away, wiping her eyes with her sleeve and standing up straighter, “I’ll take you to him.”

They stopped in front of a worn wooden door, just before the sounds of violent coughing rang out from the other side of the hall. “Oh, shit, Andrew-” She quickly turned to the trio, “He’s in here.” The girl motioned at the door beside her before speeding off down the hall, darting through a white bedroom door.

Joe took the handle, twisting the knob and opening it.

A crumpled figure lay in an old-looking bed, swaddled with blankets and an English Bulldog whining, with its head on the figure’s chest. The bedside table was filthy, but covered with several empty mugs, tissues and scissors.

The dog pricked its ears up at the sound of the door opening, but remained faithfully at its owner’s side, eyes closed.

Joe crept forwards, hovering above the figure, whose face was covered in wet, stained wash cloths, and, glancing over at Andy and Patrick (who had entered and shut the door behind them), Joe sat down lightly beside the dog, keeping his eyes on the hidden face.

A heavy silence hung in the room, before it was shattered by Hillary entering, holding a bowl of steaming water and with a fistful of clean wash rags. She smiled sadly at the boys, before settling next to the figure’s pillow and hovering above his face. With tender and careful hands, the girl started removing the sticky, red-stained cloths, and the trio’s jaws dropped as the face was slowly revealed.

Patrick was sure Pete's own mother couldn’t have recognized him.

His face was swollen up, covered in shiny red, purple and black splotches, and with strands of clotted blood trailing across his skin. Pete’s lips were split open and they were delicately parted, taking ragged breaths and emitting quiet, pained moans. There was a dark bruise around his neck, shaped like a hand, and two uneven bruises covered his wrists. One hand was bunched up in his thin blanket, and the other was resting beside Hemingway’s nose, and the dog nuzzled into it with a whine.

Pete’s chest was rising and falling shallowly, and was covered with a large band-aid which had brown blood seeping through it.

As his sister removed the band-aid, flinching at the noise of glue ripping away from skin, and it made
Pete’s swollen eyelids snap open, revealing his bloodshot, dilated eyes in tiny slits.

“Pete?” Both Joe and Hillary leaned towards him, as Andy and Patrick stepped forwards to lean over their friend. His sister rubbed his bruised shoulder, eyes full of concern, “Pete, are you okay? Can you speak?”

Her brother opened his mouth wider, trying to form words which only escaped as painful gurgles and whines. Pete turned his head, eyes flitting from Hillary, to Joe, to Andy, before stopping on Patrick.

Patrick felt like he could cry.

The redhead stared, stomach twisting in pain and anxiety. He knew stealing was wrong, but this seemed a little like excessive force. Patrick was also pretty sure this Officer Covert was an asshole- who needed to lose his job.

The group sat like that for a while, trying to coax words from Pete, when loud, thunderous coughing came from down the hall, and Hillary was gone again, rushing to her other brother’s aid.

Patrick had taken her place at Pete’s pillow after she’d left, and Andy stood above them, face blank, but eyes filled with fire.

“...Hey guys...” Pete gave a toothy grin, revealing bruised teeth. “Hey Pete.” Patrick gave him a strained smile back, his eyes dangerously watery at this point. Joe grimaced and lowered his head, “...Pete,” He shook his head, “I can’t- I mean, I’m so sorry-”

“I know, Joe.” Pete croaked out with a ghost of a laugh behind it.

“I know.”

The trio had spent two hours helping Hillary around the house, between tending to the two sick brothers, the laundry and the dirt had been piling up, and she hadn’t been eating or sleeping either.

Joe- being a neat freak and germaphobe who actually enjoyed chores, for some horrific reason Patrick couldn’t understand- was put on cleaning duty.

Andy was taking care of Andrew, since they knew each other well from old times. The old times when Pete would show up at Andy’s house at 3 am because the Wentz parents had been gone for too long or had yelled at or hit their children. Pete would always stand there, trembling with fear or cold, and full of excuses, with both toddlers starving and sobbing behind him, clinging to his
legs...Well, the 'shared history' had been Joe's reasoning anyways, Pete had insisted it was because Andy and Andrew 'had the same name'.

And finally, Patrick was put on Hillary duty. He had to make sure she ate and then went to go sleep, because, between caring for both of her brothers by herself, she had neglected her needs entirely, and was extremely hungry and sleep-deprived.

So he was stood in the kitchen, boiling old pasta, and struggling to open tuna cans. The girl was sat on a stool, talking to him excitedly, once she had realized he was from the other side of town, and while Patrick hated talking about Glenview, he had indulged her, and was rewarded with the familiar grin all of the Wentz children seemed to share.

When Patrick placed a bowl of make-shift tuna pasta in front of her, she had attacked it, sighing happily with each mouthful and smiling up gratefully at Patrick. He smiled back, but when she ducked her head again, it died on his lips, because Patrick was pretty sure he’d seen a faint, purple mark under her eye.

“Don’t look at me like that, Pattycakes.”

Pete pouted mockingly at Patrick’s grim expression. The redhead glared back without any real venom, before shifting in his seat and turning his face away- he really didn’t know what to say to Pete.

“...Did it- I mean, does it...hurt...?” He asked rather pathetically, and Patrick heard Pete make a noise that was probably supposed to be a scoff. “What does it look like, dude? Look at me, I’m hideous.” Pete gave an exaggerated sigh and grinned.

Patrick gave a small, dreamy half-smile, “Really? I thought it was an improvement...”

Pete shoved him lightly before they both dissolved into quiet giggles, before Pete grabbed at his abdomen with a slight groan.

“Don’t make me laugh.” Pete gave Patrick a dazed smile, “S’painful.” Patrick nodded lightly, just as Pete yawned, but forced his eyes to stay open, despite his body begging them to close.

Patrick noticed Pete’s reluctance to sleep and furrowed his brow slightly, “Go to sleep, Pete. You need it.” Pete shook his head like a petulant child, jutting out his lower lip. He suddenly cracked a brown, bloodshot eye open and grinned, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

“Not unless you cuddle with me.”

Patrick stared back blankly, “You know that, like, all of your ribs are probably broken, right? And
that I'll just mess 'em up even more?” Pete shrugged with a smile, tugging on Patrick’s jumper and
whining, “Pattycakes, pleeease…?”

Patrick stared into thin air for a little while as Pete kept up his annoying tugs, and he finally relented.

“Alright!” He yelled a little too loudly and threw his hands up, “Just stop, with the- tugging.”

Pete wiggled over to give Patrick room, and the redhead shuffled down next to him awkwardly,
making Hemingway wag his tail and re-position himself so he was lying over Patrick’s legs, resting
his head on Pete’s grazed hip.

Sighing happily, Pete nuzzled into Patrick’s chest, breathing in the smell of lilac flower laundry
detergent, and smiling lightly. He finally threw a tattooed arm around Patrick’s waist, making the
redhead inhale quickly.

Patrick shifted his eyes down to look at Pete’s mussed up black hair- that was getting a little long-
and he couldn’t help the small smile that settled on his features. Patrick placed his arms around Pete
tenderly, and gingerly pressed his lips to Pete’s forehead.

Pete’s heart fluttered at the light touch, and he started letting himself ease into sleep, feeling safe and
relaxed in Patrick’s embrace.

“Sorry if I bleed on you.”

The quiet rasped joke caused Patrick to shake with loud laughter, coaxing a dazed grin from Pete.
The laughter settled once again after a while, and Patrick buried his face into Pete’s hair, nuzzling it
lightly.

“Sing to me, ‘Trick.”

This request sounded heartfelt, and on the verge of tears, so Patrick didn’t have the heart to argue. He
paused, mind racing, trying to think of a song that could lull the man-child clinging to him asleep.
Patrick suddenly stopped, and with a hand carding through Pete’s wiry hair, he started singing...and
sure enough, he felt Pete slowly fall asleep, hand balled-up tightly in Patrick’s jumper.

Patrick felt his own eyelids going heavy, drooping of their own accord, and as they shut softly, all
Patrick could feel was Pete: body rising and falling gently in his arms, nuzzling into his chest, and
emitting quiet, content whines.
And despite everything: *Patrick was happy.*
Pete groaned for the twentieth time that morning, and it wasn’t even 6am yet.

“Pete, come on.”

“No.”

“Pete-”

“Noooo.”

“Peter Lewis King-”

“You do realize that I’m older than you here?”

Hillary glared and crossed her arms, “Well, you’re not acting like it.” Pete rolled his eyes and smiled, before sighing dramatically. “Fine, fine, whatever.” He pushed himself up from the bed with his forearms, sitting on the edge and nervously staring at his feet which were flat on the floor.

“Do you need me to-”

“No.” He responded, wincing when he realized it sounded a little too harsh, so he softened and gave his sister a smile. “N-no, it’s okay, Hillary.” Pete stood slowly, putting his hand on the wall beside him for support, while his sister watched him nervously, as though she was watching a toddler take its first steps.
Pete slid through the bathroom door, shutting it behind him and heard his sister’s worried ranting, he rolled his eyes and shushed her, telling her to go check on their brother. He heard her grumble on the other side of the door, before her muttering moved away with light footsteps.

Pete had been stuck in his house for five days- and practically, bedridden for four. He had only been moving around since yesterday- and that had only been forced by his sister because his back had been covered in small pressure sores from lying still for so long. When he’d gotten out of bed the first time, he’d felt like Bambi in that cute ice-skating scene, but Pete was pretty sure he hadn’t been very cute, because a beaten-up teenager bumping into and falling over every piece of furniture in a bedroom wasn’t as adorable as a baby deer learning to walk on a frozen lake. Eventually, to stop him hurting himself further, Hillary had had to supervise him, and Pete couldn’t help making sarcastic remarks the entire time.

By the second day, things were looking up. Pete could walk successfully again, only needing one hand pressed against a wall to not stumble. He didn’t actually know why he had lost the use of his legs, albeit for a short time, because he hadn’t been seen by a doctor and had been snuck out of ER before anyone had even put a wristband on him. Pete was kind of annoyed at his parents about that, but it was what he had expected from them at this point- they weren’t the most...sympathetic...or...loving.

Like on Monday night, when Hillary had brought Pete home, supporting and half-carrying him the whole- very long, journey. They had barely stepped inside when Pete’s parents had marched up to them, their mom slamming the door and their dad pinning Pete against a wall.

Pete could barely open his eyes, but had heard Hillary begging and reasoning with them, her calm, yet trembling, voice was louder against the angry hisses of their parents. He’d flinched when he heard a raised voice and a loud slap.

His father’s hands had moved to Pete’s neck then to his shoulders, and had began shaking him furiously and yelling, mere inches away from his face. Pete was still a little fuzzy and dazed from the drugs that had been pumped into his bloodstream in the ambulance, and he could only stare back with squinting eyes, trying his best to strain his ears and make out his dad’s words.

The only ones that really stood out to Pete were the loud yells of ‘Bastard’, ‘Idiot’ and ‘Faggot’, that flowed from his dad’s mouth- that last one being the most frequent, but Pete didn’t find those slurs very original- he was sure he could have come up with something much better.

Pete had been left with another fist directly into his face, crashing down on the bridge of his nose with an audible crack. Pete had slid down the wall, hands scrambling at his face, but he had raised his eyes, seeing his mom, standing behind her husband, pulling him back by the shoulder. She had stared at Pete in an odd mixture of contempt, disgust, and a minuscule amount of disappointment- not even sadness, but disappointment.

When the adults had decided to leave him be, thundering away upstairs, Hillary had rushed to Pete’s side, crouching down and moving his hands away from his face to assess the damage.
Pete groaned slightly at the memory, gingerly pressing his index fingertip to the split bridge of his nose- it hadn’t healed yet, Pete’s dad could pack a hefty punch. He pushed himself away from the door, hands immediately moving to the counter as he leaned forwards over the sink, staring into the grimy mirror.

His eyes brightened slightly at the improvement; The swelling had almost gone down completely, and only a few hard lumps remained on his cheekbones and forehead, his cuts were getting shallower, and were filled with black clotted blood, instead of the runny red that had stained everything he owned.

The whites of his eyes were only faintly bloodshot...but the bruising covering his entire body had changed from red and pink to blue and purple- and he knew that meant that they were healing, but he looked freaky, freakier than before- like a...corpse, or something.

He rolled his shoulders sluggishly, before getting undressed clumsily and stumbling into the shower. Pete simply stood under the water, feeling the water hitting his head and watching it turn reddish brown as it hit the shower floor. He was still really tired, but he knew that was a result of the amount of painkillers his sister had been shoving down his throat, and all he could do about that was shake his head to try to clear the dizziness, because there was no way on Earth, Hillary would stop with the pills until Pete was back to his old self again.

As Pete dressed himself and dried his hair roughly with a worn, blue towel, he let everything sink in. Due to the pain, the panic, and the pure exhaustion, Pete had always been high on painkillers, high on adrenaline, or sleeping- and he hadn’t actually sat down to think about what had happened to him, so he decided to do just that.

After a few minutes of quiet contemplation, Pete had come to the following conclusions:

- Officer Covert was a dick.
- Pete was an idiot for forgetting about the police two feet away from him when he had tried to shoplift.
- Getting beaten up had hurt- a lot.
- His parents were assholes.
- His sister really cared about him.
- His friends really cared about him.
- Patrick Stumph was really soft and was designed to be an actual teddy-bear.
- Pete needed to get out of this house.

It wasn’t that he was deprived of social interaction, Hillary was usually at home, and when she was at school, Andrew had made a habit of wandering over to Pete’s room and staying there until she returned, wrapped in blankets and holding a packet of tissues. Pete wasn’t too sure if Andrew was keeping an eye on him, or if Pete was supposed to be keeping an eye on Andrew- but he was thankful for the company, nevertheless.

All his friends from The Cobra had also been relentless, whether it was showing up at his house or blowing up his phone in the group chat.
But Pete hated feeling vulnerable. That was partially why he hated being sick or injured- he was defenseless. So, Pete had made up his mind- he was going to sneak out.

He had tried ordering his little sister to let him leave, but she could be just as stubborn and firm as their father could- and she had the exact same glare, so Pete had quickly discarded that idea.

The next best idea that crossed his- slightly twisted ‘Wentz mind’- as their mother referred to it, was to run away...from his little sister...

Yes, he was aware how pathetic that sounded.

Pete lay in bed, hiding his coat, jeans, shoes and backpack under his blanket, one hand typing out messages on his phone, and the other idly petting Hemingway’s head, and he smiled lightly. This had to be one of the most disobedient dogs on the planet, but he was fucking loyal, and honestly, that mattered more to Pete.

What felt like an hour later, Hillary stepped through his bedroom door, wearing a coat, hat and scarf, and holding a beige, Kanken backpack. Pete had also noticed she had covered up the purple bruise under her eye, and he felt a lump of anger in his throat towards his father, someone as kind as her didn’t deserve that- nobody deserved that.

“Well, I’m heading to Jane’s house now.” She smiled, but there was sadness behind it as her eyes drifted over her brother’s bruises, “Take care- and rest.” She ended firmly, turning and leaving.

Pete strained his ears to hear her footsteps rush out of the house, closing the front door softly. He waited a few minutes, just to make sure she was long gone, and finally pulled himself upright.

Pete stumbled down the hall to Andrew’s room, Hemingway trotting by his side. He opened the door, and poked his head inside to see his little brother curled up and soundly asleep- as evidenced by the snoring. Smiling lightly, Pete crept back down the hall and down the stairs, expertly avoiding the creakiest floorboards.

He finally rooted around in his backpack for his house key, and unlocked the door nervously. Pete had snuck out a lot in the past- like, really, a lot- but in those cases, he’d usually been deceiving his parents, but this time he was deceiving his sister instead, and it made him feel a little guilty- if he was honest.

Pushing it from his mind, Pete locked the door once again and set an alarm on his phone for 2 pm, he needed to get home and get back in bed before Hillary returned, if he wanted to avoid getting told off and locked inside the house for another week.

Pete looked up from his phone, and set off down the street with a content grin, occasionally glancing down at Hemingway, who was cantering happily alongside him.
Pete inhaled and exhaled deeply, and reveled in not smelling a dank, musty, bloody room for the first time in- what had felt like, a very long time.

Patrick grunted at the sudden tightness of the tie around his neck. His mother fastened it into place, and fixed his collar, blue eyes narrowed in concentration.

“There we go...much better!” She smiled brightly at her eldest son, “Now, I’m going to find the prodigal son...” Her muttering trailed off as she moved up the stairs towards her younger son’s room, and a few moments later, Patrick heard a persistent pounding on the door, followed by the sound of arguing. Kevin was the most willing to talk back to their parents, and Patrick had warned him before, but his brother always brushed him off with a ‘You’re just a goody two shoes, Patrick.’

‘Well, Kevin, guess who’s playing at a dive bar in the bad side of town? That’s right, this guy! Who’s the goody two shoes now?!” Patrick thought to himself smugly, before realizing just how childish he sounded and rolled his eyes at himself, exhaling sharply through his nose.

The prodigal son finally trudged down the stairs, being followed by their stone-faced mother, to join Patrick, Megan and their- also stone-faced, father.

The adults had lead their children out of the house, ordering them to pile into the car and chatting idly to each other as they made the drive to church.

Patrick leaned on his hand, staring out of the window, while listening to his brother and sister bickering about something pointless beside him.

Patrick squinted up at the white church, with its spire standing proudly against the blue sky and white clouds. He had to admit it was pretty, although he didn’t like the idea of church itself too much- well, it was a little deeper than that.

Patrick saw church as an hour of communal singing, and listening to some old guy read from the bible with a cracker and a sip of wine in-between, he didn’t not like it, he was just kinda apathetic to the whole thing.

Patrick just didn’t see the point, and could think of several other things he’d rather be doing on a beautiful Sunday morning- such as sleeping. Sleeping was good.
The service went as expected: prayers, hymns and looking solemn, bowing your head and putting your hands together at the correct times, every now and then.

No, the thing Patrick really despised about church was the after-party.

Yes, there was an after-party.

Patrick wouldn’t really consider it a ‘party’ as such, more like a chance for everyone to show off and to make passive aggressive comments to each other. The three Stumph children stood beside their parents awkwardly, holding cups of coffee and staring into thin air. Patrick watched a dark-haired man and a blonde woman with a little girl at their heels approach them, weaving themselves into the already ongoing conversation between Mr and Mrs Stumph and the priest.

The new couple greeted the other adults, introducing themselves as the Woodman family, and their young daughter looked up, smiling politely.

Kevin rolled his eyes, scowling and mocking the girl with a goofy expression, making Megan stifle a laugh, placing her hand over her mouth, and earning a loud slap over the head from Patrick. Kevin glared at his older brother and Patrick glared back, before a polite cough came from opposite them.

They looked up from their spat to see their parents glowering at them, the priest looking at them disapprovingly and Mr and Mrs Woodman faking tight smiles. The three Stumph children smiled nervously and began to shrink back as the adults returned to their conversation. Patrick leaned over to his brother, his voice a low whisper.

“Nice going, Kevin.”

Patrick, Megan and Kevin had been abandoned by their parents after that little fiasco, but not without a stern ‘We’ll talk about this later.’ from their mom, and of course, a glare from their dad.

Kevin and Megan were helping themselves to the biscuits on a pristine white cloth-covered table, when an old lady Patrick recognized as Mrs. Huntley approached them.

“Patrick, dear,” She smiled, before her eyes moved over to the younger siblings who were shoving biscuits into their mouths and shoving each other, laughing loudly, the sight made her glare at them sternly. “How are you?” Her mouth curved into a smile again, “I’m very well, thank you, m’am.” Patrick smiled back politely, hands held behind his back. “Good, good...” She trailed off, before raising her eyebrows, “And, have you grown at all?” Patrick was taken aback, and he heard Kevin and Megan snickering from behind him.
“U-uh...m’am...?”

“Well, you’re very short for...oh, how old were you again?...Was it thirteen?”

Patrick could hear his brother and sister dying behind him.

“Uh- no, Mrs Huntley, I’m sixteen...just turned sixteen...” He drifted off, feeling slightly insecure about his height now, and he had a feeling it would get worse as the old woman widened her eyes and gasped, far too dramatically for Patrick’s liking.

“Sixteen?! And still so small...? How unfortunate- and odd!” The old lady suddenly patted Patrick on the shoulder and shuffled away with a small “Goodbye dear, do behave.”

Patrick closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, before turning around quickly to glare pointedly at his siblings, whose faces were red, and whose mouths were hanging open in silent laughter.

“Just shut up.”

Patrick had distanced himself from his brother and sister, who had been annoying him by imitating Mrs Huntley voice and calling him all sorts of colorful things: ‘Oompa loompa’, ‘hobbit’ and ‘gremlin’, had really stood out to Patrick...so, that had been fun.

Really fun.

But now Patrick had decided to try and ignore everybody, he had tried to tune out and instead opted to think about nicer things. He lazily drifted from thoughts about his new friends, to his drumming lessons, to...Pete.

Patrick would be lying if he said he didn’t think about Pete...a lot- like, a slightly unhealthy amount,
actually. Patrick had also been slightly disappointed to learn that his crush on the other boy had not
gone away, and it was really starting to...distract him...in the way crushes tended to...'distract'
 teenage boys. But all in all, Patrick was just glad nobody in his family had heard him moaning Pete's
name late at night- and if they ever did, he'd probably get sent to a bible camp to 'cure him of his
disease'.

He'd also thought about Pete's health, and he wondered how his friend was feeling today, if any
bruises had cleared up, or if any pains had stopped. Patrick's thoughts suddenly snapped onto the
asshole that had caused everything: Officer Covert, and it worried and angered Patrick that he hadn't
heard anything about that guy losing his job. Sure, stealing was wrong, but beating a teenage boy
unconscious was overkill- and, not to mention, a giant overreaction.

Covert.

Officer Covert.

"-Officer Covert-"

Patrick's head shot up, focusing his hearing in the direction of the man's name, and he figured out it
was coming from a huddle of middle-aged wives, gossiping animatedly.

"-No, I didn't hear. What happened?"

"Well, I heard he attacked a boy-"

"Really?"

"Unbelievable-"

"Yes! That's what I heard!"

"Well, what happened? Was he provoked or-"

"Oh yes, of course! You know what those people are like."

Patrick narrowed his eyes, what did she mean by 'those' people?

"I heard he was caught robbing a store, he was stealing from the cash register, and the owner was at
knife-point!"

Patrick felt his eye twitch. How misinformed was it possible for a person to be?
“My god-”

“What is the world coming to?”

“Well, it’s no surprise, everyone knows what those little gutter rats are like.”

“Oh well, yes-”

“That’s true.”

“Well, I’m just thankful the children in our neighborhood are so well behaved.”

“Yes-”

“Oh, I agree-”

“I’m also glad Covert is out of our neighborhood. He was always a little...off.”

Patrick tuned out then, feeling his blood boil and a lump of anger in his throat. Fuck these people. Fuck them all.

Pete swung backwards and forwards on the rusty swing lightly, staring up at the sky and watching the clouds drift along.

He had come to Junction Park, a little park that sat between Glenview and Wilmette; It was designed and built to be a bridge between the two neighborhoods and the two economic classes. At the time, the newspapers hailed it as ‘a step forward’, and it really felt like it back then. It used to be beautiful, but it had suffered after years of wear and tear- mainly from bored Glenview kids, but of course, the Wilmette kids had gotten the blame.

And now, it was shitty, run-down and forgotten, just like everything else this side of the city. ‘Wow, depressing’, Pete raised his eyebrows, laughing at himself.

Pete grinned and tipped his head back, breathing deeply. His thoughts gradually drifted to his friends, and how he had decided to avoid them today, because he knew they would give him a talking to and march him straight home- he knew they would mean well, but Pete just wanted some freedom, for a little while at least.

He closed his eyes, and smiled, nuzzling into his scarf and drifting lightly on the swing.
Patrick pulled on his parka, gloves and hat, and pulled his bag over his shoulder, leaving his house quietly.

His blood was still boiling from what he'd heard in the church earlier that morning, it was beyond him how anyone could twist a story that way, just to fit their bullshit ideologies and agendas.

Patrick decided to go to the park to calm down, because Patrick + Anger = Sass (and ranting), and he really couldn’t afford to sass his parents right now, because after the...eventful...morning at church, Patrick hadn't exactly been in their good books.

He pushed open the small, rusty gate and looked around at the park. It was rusty and old now, but he remembered what it had been like when he was young; Patrick and his siblings would come here together and they'd sit on the swings for hours. Kevin would beg Patrick to push him as hard as he could, laughing wildly whenever the swing flew upwards, and Megan would start screaming bloody murder if Patrick made a move to push her- she'd always hated heights.

Patrick would often find himself coming to this park whenever he felt sad, or was having a panic attack. It was so derelict now that people rarely came to it, but in some weird way- Patrick thought it was beautiful. In some strange poetic way, it reminded him of decay: how time passes and things change, falling away and never really returning to what they once were.

-And the park was most beautiful on cold, frosty winter mornings, and Patrick would often find himself there on those days too- watching the sun rise from behind misty clouds and seeing the frost glitter on every surface. Watching that, sat on his usual park swing would put a spring in his step, no matter how shitty his day had been.

Today was a normal day however, with no novelty weather- but Patrick knew the park would cheer him up all the same.

Patrick stopped when he noticed someone sat on his favorite swing. The figure was bundled up in a cheap coat with the hood up, grey sweatpants, untied sneakers and a grey scarf covering the bottom half of their face. They looked at peace, Patrick thought; Head leaning back, swinging gently and looking at the sky.

Then Patrick noticed a very familiar white and brown English bulldog lying at their feet. Patrick cocked his head curiously and stepped forwards. Yes, it was definitely him- But why was he here-?
He should be at home, he should be resting. Patrick decided to call out his name.

Pete’s eyes snapped open, looking ahead, and seeing Patrick stood a few meters away from him. He grinned, momentarily forgetting why he was avoiding his friends today, “Patrick!” He made a move to stand before Patrick shifted over to the swing next to him, taking a tentative seat. “Shouldn’t you be resting?” The redhead gave him a parental glare, and Pete rolled his eyes with a grin still set on his face. “What does it look like I’m doing?” Patrick’s stare remained, but it was half-hearted and had no real anger behind it, and because of that, Pete faltered a little.

“Y-yeah, I know. I jus’—,” He leaned his head against the swing’s chain, “I needed to breathe.” Pete finished with a nod, waiting for Patrick’s argument...but to his surprise, none came.

“Yeah, me too.”

Pete stared at the other boy, smiling lightly, and Patrick smiled back. “I-uh, I didn’t think anyone else still came to this place.”

Pete shrugged lightly, “I’ve been coming here since I was little, it’s just a habit now, I guess.” Patrick nodded, “So have I, actually.” His blue eyes moved up to the darkening clouds, he watched them with a slight frown, “...Since I was four.” The other boy grinned, and nodded deeply.

They sat like that for a long time, staring up at the sky in silence, and just quietly enjoying each other’s company.

“Hey, thanks for...uh- for, um-” Pete found himself getting a little nervous, “-For the o-other day, y’know...?”

Patrick stared back, eyes much more confident than Pete’s voice.

“For singing to you, or for cuddling with you?”

Pete laughed in response, “F-for both, I guess.”

Patrick smiled softly, and looked up at a tree, watching a few red leaves falling away. “My pleasure.”

Pete felt himself almost choke, his stomach was twisting and his chest was moving a little more erratically.

“Hey Pete?”

“Yeah Patrick?”
“...Why did you buy me that stuff?”

Pete went silent, had Patrick not liked them? Shit, he’d saved up so much money—

“D-don’t get me wrong, I love them. A-and I am so grateful,” The blue eyes had locked onto him and were full of sincerity. Pete gave a half-smile as his heart-beat sped up a little.

“I just, I dunno, I feel a little bad—”

“Why do you feel bad?”

Patrick stared and shrugged lightly, turning his head away as he started speaking again.

“I mean, I have money to burn, and you- y’know, you don’t, but you’re still buying stuff for me. And I don’t know, I don’t think I deserve—”

“Patrick.”

Pete’s eyes were suddenly serious and held nothing but blunt honesty and raw adoration.

“You deserve it.”

They didn’t speak anymore after that, well, not until Pete’s alarm went off and he stood, ready to rush back home before Patrick stopped him.

“I just, I never really said...” The redhead looked up at him, before lowering his gaze and throwing himself into Pete’s arms. Pete groaned at the sudden weight and pressure on his injured abdomen, and Patrick began pulling away with hurried, frantic apologies, before Pete had grabbed his forearms and pulled Patrick flush against him again.

Patrick gingerly wrapped his arms around Pete’s neck and shoulders, closing his eyes and settling into the crook of his neck, breathing in softly. “Thank you Pete.”

Pete put his arms across Patrick’s lower back, pulling him impossibly close. Patrick was so warm and soft, and just so... perfect. He didn’t seem real to Pete, he was sure Patrick was just put here as a lesson, as a really fucked-up, sadistic lesson to teach him that he couldn’t always have what he wanted.

Patrick was so close, yet so far, in every aspect of his life.

They lived in the same city, but came from two different worlds.

And the only bridge between their worlds was the park.
Patrick didn’t belong in grimy, dark Wilmette, just as Pete didn’t belong in shiny, pristine Glenview.

They had different futures laid out for them; Patrick would have a perfect wife, smart and beautiful children, a well-paying job, and a white, colonial house, guarded by tall, flowery bushes and a white, metal fence.

Pete would have an ex-wife, children who he would dote on, but ultimately be forgotten by, three shitty jobs, and a run-down, derelict house- that he’d do anything to get out of.

And one day, Patrick would forget all about Pete, he'd forget all about Joe, and Andy- he’d forget everyone. And the time he spent with them now, would just be a bad, faded memory.

*So close, yet, so far.*

Then, Patrick pulled away, staring at Pete with dilated pupils only leaving a few faint rings of blue, green, and hazel snug against the blackness in the center. His cheeks, ears and nose tip were blushed pink and red with cold, but the rest of his skin was smooth and porcelain-white. His hair was hidden under his wool bobble hat, but a few stubborn strands refused to be silenced, and poked out from under its brim.

Patrick was beautiful.

Patrick was the most beautiful thing Pete had ever seen in his entire life.

And, even though, they might as well be at different ends of the Earth- Patrick was inches away right now. Real, and solid and here.

So, if Patrick would, one day, forget everything that had happened between them- between everybody, Pete was going to give Patrick a reason to remember him. To remember him. To look back on this day and smile that beautiful smile of his. And, if by some miracle, it led to something...that was a 'what if' Pete wasn't going to let slip away. But Pete's heart was thundering, as though he was playing a blood sport and not just standing in front of someone he was pretty sure he-

Patrick exhaled softly, and stared into Pete’s eyes, his teeth subconsciously grazing his plump lower lip.

And Pete’s mind went blank.
His lips were on Patrick’s in a second, and he was in heaven.

All noise that reached his ears had been reduced to buzzing, his eyes were screwed closed, and all he could feel was Patrick.

His hands moved upwards and gently settled on Patrick’s face, and his fingertips holding it still, with all the gentleness and pure adoration in the world.

Pete moved his chapped lips against Patrick’s tenderly, but he was struggling to keep it that way. Pete burned with a deep, longing desperation. He had done since he’d first seen Patrick- standing in the middle of the school theater, eyes focused, slender, pale, delicate fingers moving deftly, and his plump, pink mouth pulled tight.

Patrick’s mouth wasn’t pulled tight anymore.

It was soft and yielding instead, and Pete was struggling to keep the kiss chaste.

Pete knew himself far too well, and he knew that in a few seconds, his hot tongue would be licking at Patrick’s lips, trying to deepen the kiss, and if Patrick let him- Pete would definitely take it too far.

Well, Patrick had to let him first, and he hadn’t made a move yet.

He hadn’t moved at all actually-

Wait, Patrick hadn’t responded.

He’d just stood there, he was just standing there, completely frozen, and his lips weren’t moving either-

Shit.

Pete hadn’t even considered that Patrick might not be gay.

Oh fuck.

Pete had ruined everything.

He was a fuck-up.
He had always been and would always be- a fuck-up.

As much as it pained him, Pete pulled away sharply, not stopping to look Patrick in the eyes as he ducked past him and started a brisk walk, making Hemingway run to catch up.

He shoved his hands into his pockets, trying to hide the slight tent that had formed in his sweat pants. Firstly, *damn Pete* for not wearing extremely restrictive skinny jeans, and secondly, *damn Patrick* for having this insane effect on him.

As he got further and further away from the park, Pete had honestly half-expected Patrick to shout his name, run up to him and kiss him again, with all the fervor and passion Pete had held back...but no shout came, and Pete only heard silence.

Agonizing silence.
I'm Not As Think As You Stoned I Am

Chapter Notes

Ryro: Ryan Ross
RayOfSunshine: Ray Toro
Andy: Andy Hurley
SoDunWithYou: Josh Dun
SpencerSmith: Spencer Smith
TylerBrokeseph: Tyler Joseph

Pete had a concussion- Patrick was sure of it.

It was what made the most logical sense.

You don’t get your head bashed into concrete twenty times and come away perfectly fine.

Pete was acting oddly because of his concussion.

Yes, that was definitely it.

There was no way someone like Pete would kiss someone like Patrick, if they were completely sane.

Patrick was pretty sure there was nothing spectacularly attractive about himself- he wasn’t like, hideously deformed or anything, but he wasn’t like Pete.

Pete looked like Adonis and had the charisma of Don Juan, while Patrick was just average and...weird.

Average, lumpy and awkward Patrick Stumph. That was him, had always and would always be him.
He wasn’t good or pretty enough for someone like Pete, and while that kind of made him _ridiculously sad_- he had accepted it over several years of being rejected.

So, in order to avoid stressing Pete out about his _condition_, and to help him realize his mistake: Patrick said nothing.

And because Patrick said nothing, Pete said nothing.

...But even though Patrick was happy (well, he actually felt pretty bad about it) to ignore it, whenever Pete and Patrick would be left alone in a room, you could practically cut the tension with a knife. And while Patrick would avert his eyes and pretend to busy himself, he could always feel a somber gaze burning into him.

_Fuck_, Patrick didn’t know what to do.

He’d made so many friends, he felt cool and accepted for the first time in his life, and he was enjoying the band more than anything...but Pete- _god_, just _looking_ at Pete was enough to kill a little piece of his very soul. It was something he couldn’t have- Pete was the embodiment of everything he wanted and everything that was forbidden at the same time...and it was really fucking irritating to have a constant, walking-and-talking reminder.

Patrick was questioning so many things for the first time, the largest question being- was he actually straight?

When Pete had _kissed him_, Patrick had just frozen in shock, it had been completely out of the blue and Patrick’s brain didn’t have enough time to even _process_ what was going on- and it had still been trying to process when Pete had pulled away and left without a word.

Patrick had been _so_ angry at himself for not kissing back, or for not chasing after him...because it had felt _really_ good- and weirdly..._right._

Patrick had noticed subtle looks, flattery and a few dirty comments from Pete over the time they'd known each other, but he had resolved that- ‘_Pete was a tease_’, as Gerard had said. He was probably like that with everyone, that was just how Pete was!

Right…?

The kiss had felt so _real_ to Patrick...but he was very inexperienced, so he may have just read too much into it. And quite pathetically- if you asked him, that had actually been his _first kiss_.

Well, it had been if you didn’t count the peck on the mouth from his neighbor's daughter when they were three years old- and Patrick didn’t count that one at all.

So, needless to say, Patrick was all over the place.

He had been trying to bring everything back to a sense normality, and had been ignoring all awkwardness with fake smiles. He had also made the habit of avoiding Pete and leaving for home after their set finished (different people had offered to walk him home every night).

It had only been a week when Patrick’s phone started buzzing like a pissed-off wasp.

TheRealSatan™: Pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls, pls

Ryro: No

TheRealSatan™: yeeeeeaa

SmokedTroham: I mean...y not tho????

RayOfSunshine: Cause its Brendon??

SmokedTroham: ???????

WetzelsPretzels: im w/ u tbh

WetzelsPretzels: y not????

MilkyWay: tbh ????

Andy: just for the record, I think this is a bad idea

Andy: but if you insist, ill go to make sure you dont get into trouble
WetzelsPretzels: thanks daddy

MilkyWay: lol

SoDunWithYou: lol

TheRealSatan™: lmao

Que-Sarah-Sarah: omg lol

SmokedTroham: lol

Andy: ew
Andy: never call me daddy again

WetzelsPretzels: ok papi

Patrick stared down at the short messages of ‘lol’ and other colorful terms that followed in quick succession, and gingerly held his thumbs over the keyboard, unsure whether or not he should join the conversation.

FrangipanesTheName: Patrick, u there??
FrangipanesTheName: ur online??

Shit.

Patrick Stumph: Yeah, I'm here.

TheRealSatan™: ur welcome 2 come my man
SmokedTroham: y r u trying to corrupt my baby?????

Patrick Stumph: A- not your baby

SmokedTroham: aw :((((

Patrick Stumph: B- what are you inviting me to exactly?

GeraldWee: to get stoned

Patrick Stumph: Wow, no thanks

2bFrank: It’s not like that, Patrick

RayOfSunshine: its exactly like that Patrick

2bFrank: s’just a hangout

2bFrank: shut up ray

Patrick Stumph: Will marijuana be involved? Yes or no?

TheRealSatan™: yea

TheRealSatan™: also lol at ‘maurajinasuf’

TheRealSatan™: autocorrect sorry

Patrick Stumph: Autocorrect is supposed to correct your spellings, not mess them up

TheRealSatan™: ye
SpencerSmith: ...are you already high??

TheRealSatan™: ye

WetzelsPretzels: omg 420

SoDunWithYou: omg blaze it

SmokedTroham: dont smoke it all u dick

TheRealSatan™: cant promise that sorry

Que-Sarah-Sarah: u should come lunchbox

Que-Sarah-Sarah: its really fun

DillonWeed: are u high too??

Que-Sarah-Sarah: ye

TheRealSatan™: shes here already lol

TheRealSatan™: if any1 wants 2 come, go to cobra, well mve fro ther

WetzelsPretzels: on my way tbh

WetzelsPretzels has gone offline

SmokedTroham: same
SmokedTroham has gone offline

Andy: fine whatever I hate you guys

Andy has gone offline

SoDunWithYou: Are you going, Tyler?

TylerBrokeseph: yeah

SoDunWithYou: I'll b at ur house in 5

TylerBrokeseph: yay cool

TylerBrokeseph has gone offline

SoDunWithYou has gone offline

FrangipanesTheName: u still there patrick??

Patrick Stumph: yes

TheRealSatan™: I kno u dont want any mariahjina in ur good christian neighborhud but come anywa ur cool ricky boi

Patrick Stumph: Thanks very much

Patrick exhaled sharply, staring down at the white screen.

He considered his options.
The pros were: he got to hang out with his friends, he could get out of the house for a while, and he would probably enjoy himself.

The cons were: weed.

-But, while he guessed some people would consider that a pro...Patrick was a fairly sober guy, he had never done drugs or gotten drunk- he was pretty innocent in that respect. And if his parents ever found out he’d be grounded for the rest of his life.

His brow furrowed and he felt a burst of determination.

No, just because some of his friends would be smoking weed didn’t mean he had to. They were all very understanding and they wouldn’t force him into anything, he was sure of that. And some of his friends, like Andy for example, didn’t smoke, so it wasn’t like he’d be responsible for everyone.

Patrick nodded with a determined smile, jumping to his feet and getting dressed.

He was going to go out with his friends like a normal teenager.

He was going to enjoy himself.

And he definitely wasn’t going to get high.

“...Guys- guys, hey...hey...guys, don’t freak out but...d’you think the sea is salty cause the land never waves back...?”

Patrick got high.
Patrick got really high.

He had arrived at The Cobra- awkward, but excited to see his friends. Brendon, Sarah, Joe and Pete already had red eyes and large grins by the time everyone had finished arriving, and soon enough, they had been ordered outside by the manager, who didn’t want her bar smelling of weed- just to be on the safe side.

Since news of Pete’s beating had spread through Wilmette (and Glenview), everyone in the neighborhood was being much more cautious towards the cops.

Patrick had also learned that Covert was infamous there, just as he was in Glenview- ...and for a similar reason.

The officer had actually attacked a Glenview kid in the same way he had attacked Pete once- but instead for stealing, it had been for carrying cocaine. Everyone in Glenview had made a fuss and it had become an enormous scandal- leading Covert to get kicked out of the Glenview force, and after his track record, the only force willing to accept him was- Wilmette.

Apparently, Pete hadn’t been the first kid to get beaten senseless by Covert, and he wasn’t going to be the last. The guy had temper issues and a lot of bottled-up rage, making everyone in the neighborhood watch themselves and do nothing to provoke him, and Patrick had learned that everyone would always be more skittish after someone had been attacked.

So, against their better judgement, the group of kids had made their way to the park. To Junction Park, to be exact, and Patrick felt his heart jolting every time he looked at the swings.

Thankfully though, Brendon had begged everyone to sit on the jungle gym instead.

Patrick had sat next to Andy and Frank, tangling his feet in the rope ladder and half-heartedly listening to the conversation, his mind had decided to haunt him with the memory of Pete’s kiss instead- no matter how hard he tried to distract himself.

At some point, Frank must had noticed his very depressing expression and had offered him the blunt.

Patrick had stared.

Was this a good idea?

No probably not.

Was Patrick considering it?

Yes, he was.

Why?
Patrick felt like shit and couldn’t stop thinking about the kiss, and he really wanted to just kick back and enjoy himself tonight.

Patrick gulped, and took the blunt with a shaking hand, raising it to his face and staring at it hard, as some of the others cheered and some shouted words of encouragement and instruction.

He looked at Andy nervously, who just gave him a kind, knowing smile that screamed, ‘I don’t agree with what you’re doing, but I understand, and I’ll make sure you don’t do anything stupid.’

Patrick shakily brought the blunt to his lips.

Anything to get his mind off of Pete, right?

His friends guffawed at the ridiculous question, while Brendon stared ahead in deep thought, before looking Patrick in the eye very seriously.

“If you were born deaf what language would you think in?”

A chorus of ‘Oh’’s and ‘Holy shit’’s rose immediately, and Patrick was feeling pretty good; It turns out all the weird weed-induced thoughts were a fantastic distraction, he wasn’t thinking about Pete at all.

Well, he hadn’t been until Pete chimed in with another outstanding idea.

“If tomatoes are fruits, isn’t ketchup a smoothie?”

As everyone fell into a chorus of questioning and laughter once again, and Patrick’s attention was firmly back on the dark-haired boy, and he could feel himself getting sadder by the minute.

Since it was his first time high, it was also getting hard to control his emotions and thoughts, and stupid shit just seemed to slip out of his mouth, unasked for, so naturally he had to subtly wipe a few tears away with his sleeve.

Suddenly, Pete’s eyes shifted over to Patrick’s, and his satisfied grin had withered away into a frown.

Pete hated him- Patrick was sure of it.

He had realized just how gross Patrick was and felt totally disgusted at what had happened- that had to be it.
Patrick lowered his gaze towards his sneakers— that were now thoroughly tangled in the rope and he heard Sarah make a suggestion. “Hey, let’s play ‘Never have I ever’!”

Some people groaned and some cheered, vehemently agreeing before Ashley spoke up, gesturing seriously, “We don’t have shots, how are we gonna do- do the thing?”

Ray spoke up, raising his hand and nodding towards a large, brown rucksack on his back, “I have beer.”

“What?”

“Really?”

“Cool!”

“You’ve had beer this whole time, you asshole?”

So, with everyone but Ryan, Spencer and Andy (who had drawn their lines at getting drunk in a kid’s park) holding a can of cheap beer, and everyone had agreed on one swig in the place of one shot. Frank boldly took the lead.

“Okay, on your marks, get set, go!”

“It’s not a race, Frank.”

“It’s not?”

“Jesus Christ, someone else- please.”

Eventually, Ashley had stepped up to the plate and had asked the first question, playing it ridiculously safe.

“Never have I ever smoked weed.”

Five cans later and Patrick was feeling pretty good.

He felt happy, he was laughing, he had thrown up on the rope ladder, he was making jokes, he had gotten some on his shoes, he was having a great time.

Patrick giggled contentedly, resting his head on Frank’s shoulder with a tired smile, listening as it was Dallon’s turn.

“Never have I ever been to church and a gay bar on the same day.”

“Why were you in a gay bar?”

“It was an honest mistake, Josh.”
“Why were you in a church?”

“I’m Mormon. Didn’t you know?”

“...Then why were you in a gay bar?”

“It was AN HONEST MISTAKE, PETE.”

Sarah looked thoughtful, before grinning evilly and saying, “Never have I ever had sex this week.”

Patrick felt his heart drop as he watched Pete drink, but it turns out everyone was focusing on something else.

Tyler and Josh took an eerily synchronized swig, and everyone had started asking questions.

“Oh shit, really?”

“With who?”

“With each other, I bet you five dollars.”

“No way!”

“Yeah, with each other.” Tyler said blankly, staring at his friends like it was obvious and shaking his head, while Josh sat next to him with a dazed grin.

“Wait, what the fuck?!?”

“You guys are together?”

“Uh, yeah.” Tyler raised an eyebrow and Josh snapped out of his daze, “You guys didn’t know?”

“No!”

“No- but really?”

“I mean, now that you mention it...”

“Yeah, I know right? Like, I can see that-”

Tyler looked around at his friends as though they were idiots, “You seriously didn’t know?” He was answered by shaking heads, and Josh could only roll his eyes with a small grin, before reaching over and grabbing Tyler to kiss him quickly. There were cheers, wolf-whistles and sounds of coupled disbelief and realization.

It seems Brendon had noticed Pete’s swig as well, and promptly asked the question Patrick was dreading. “Who’d you fuck, Pete?”

Pete shrugged lazily, “Some girl.”
Joe squinted, “Literally when?”

“Ew, dude, I’m not giving you details.”

“Whatever, but I have not seen you with a girl in a long time.”

Patrick felt his heart flutter gratefully, just before it was pummeled again just as Josh opened his mouth, with a wobbly pointing finger in Pete’s general direction.

“-Oh wait, no, I can vouch for Pete. I saw him with a girl on Thursday.”

And Patrick’s heart was crushed once again.

Patrick sat at a McDonald’s booth, miserably squashed against the window.

Apparently weed makes everyone hungry, so they had made the joint decision to go get some shitty food before parting ways.

Against their better judgement, Mikey had been entrusted with the money and had been told to order ‘whatever’, making Patrick slightly nervous he was going to return with thirty milkshakes.

He actually returned with thirty boxes of chicken nuggets instead.

Actually, it might have been more than thirty, but Patrick was high and he was not in the mood to count.

Mikey dumped the boxes on the table with a loud clatter, smiling and looking very proud of himself. Suddenly, his grin died and he clapped a hand to his forehead, “SHIT,” Causing several of the dazed kids to jump, “I forgot the fries.” Before running off towards the queue once again.

The group had started opening boxes and eating the- very dry, nuggets when Mikey returned with a box of french fries, before screaming another obscenity and darting away again with another desperate shout of, “I FORGOT THE MILKSHAKE.”

Ryan blankly stared at Gerard, “Your brother’s an idiot.”

Gerard only nodded, not fully understanding his words right now (but in about two hours, he’d
vehemently defending his little brother’s intelligence to his empty bedroom).

Much to the horror of the other patrons and staff- who all watched in morbid curiosity (in the same way you would watch a car crash), the group finished all thirty boxes of chicken nuggets, the one box of fries, and the one banana milkshake- that Patrick had gagged and almost thrown up at, but Dallon and Ray had no problem with.

The group stood outside of the building warming their hands, hugging their goodbyes and splitting off into small groups to head home.

Andy had successfully shepherded Joe, Pete and Patrick for most of the journey to their first stop of Joe’s house. He led Joe inside, making sure he showered and went to bed- instead of passing out on the floor and smelling like weed, McDonald’s and sick for the next three days, leaving Pete and Patrick standing outside in the cold night.

Patrick glanced at Pete, quickly taking in his appearance. It had been two weeks since Pete’s ordeal, and his bruises were almost healed- what were once large, black, blue and purple marks, were now only faint yellow and brown splotches marring his skin.

It turns out he probably had some cracked ribs, so they were still taking their toll on his well being- but Patrick was glad Pete was getting better, nonetheless.

He saw Pete’s head swivel in his direction and Patrick quickly flushed red, looking in the complete opposite direction, craning his neck to hide his face as best as possible.

Patrick shut his eyes, ignoring the twisting feeling in his stomach and the rapid beating in his chest.

Then his eyes snapped open when he felt a pull on his hand, and he felt himself being dragged away from Joe’s house with remarkable speed.

Pete was pulling him along, legs speeding down the sidewalk with his head set forwards.

“P-Pete, w-what are y-yo-”

“Be quiet.”

Patrick felt his heart thundering in his chest and he felt blood coursing through his veins, when Pete suddenly pulled him into a dim lane- lit only by a buzzing, fluorescent pharmacy sign, and Patrick felt himself being shoved against a wall.

Patrick watched with raised eyebrows as Pete put his hands on the wall beside Patrick’s head, and stared into his eyes with dilated pupils, and an emotion Patrick couldn’t quite read.
“You’ve been avoiding me.” Pete croaked out, voice sounding much less sure that he looked. Patrick could only swallow thickly, trying to control the now- furious twisting in the pit of his stomach. “I-I haven’-”

“Yes, you have.”

Patrick could feel his knees weakening under his burning, accusing stare, and all he could see, hear, smell, feel- was Pete. Patrick shuddered, completely drained and staring at Pete with blown pupils. All he could whine was,

“Pete.”

-Before he felt a bruising force on his lips.

Patrick felt himself shiver and gave an involuntary guttural moan, shutting his eyes and moving his hands to grip Pete’s black hair tightly- satisfied when he felt Pete whine in response.

Patrick had been scolding himself all week for not kissing back the first time, and now that the opportunity had presented itself again- he wasn’t going to let it pass.

Suddenly, his mind went blank as he felt Pete lap at the join of his lips. Patrick could only whine and tilt his head as Pete took a fistful of strawberry-blonde hair, and kissed again with renewed fervor, his wet tongue pushing through Patrick’s lips.

Patrick could feel himself unraveling under Pete’s mouth and hands, before it all moved away and he groggily blinked his eyes open.

Pete stared down at him: strands of hair sticking up, tanned skin flushed dark red, and that mouth- that mouth that made Patrick see stars, hanging open and giving quick, uneven pants...And Patrick felt himself fall in love. And while that was really scary, he’d have to ponder it some other time, because everything slipped from his mind as Pete ducked his head, pressing his rough lips Patrick’s again.

Patrick could only moan and tighten his fists around the black strands as he felt Pete’s tongue rubbing against and licking softly at his own. Soon enough, the soft movements became faster and rougher as Pete’s hands drifted down to Patrick’s hips, grabbing at them and pulling them flush against his own, grinding lightly.

Patrick could feel his head swim as he felt the large, hard lump between Pete’s groin push against his own- that was steadily hardening under Pete’s touches. Patrick’s hips bucked forwards of their own accord, and was rewarded with a deep groan from Pete, who pulled away from his now, saliva-slick lips in favor of pressing his face into Patrick’s pale neck.

Patrick mewled, whined and bucked his hips desperately as he felt Pete’s lips trail down his neck, trailing the tip of his tongue over Patrick’s sweet spot- that sat along a prominent vein, before moving
to kiss and nip the younger boy’s Adam's apple.

“P-Pete,” Patrick moaned breathlessly and he rested his head against the brick wall behind him, eyes rolled back into their sockets, and jaw hanging open, as Pete began biting at the delicate skin of Patrick’s neck. Patrick’s slender fingers released the tufts of hair and he threw his arms over Pete’s shoulders instead, pulling himself upright and standing on his tiptoes to make his neck more accessible for the older boy.

Patrick felt soft tufts of hair brushing under his chin as Pete’s mouth settled over Patrick’s collarbone, sucking roughly and sharp teeth grazing the skin. The redhead gave a guttural whine and rested his cheek on the crown of Pete’s head, panting, with his wide eyes staring blankly at the wall opposite them and hips rolling frantically, desperate for friction.

Pete lifted his head- being very careful not to knock Patrick’s chin, and stared at him for a moment, mouth curving into a grin at him for the first time since their first kiss ‘gone wrong’ at the park.

He pressed his lips to Patrick’s again- but it was different this time. Pete’s lips slanted across Patrick’s and they slotted together like pieces of a tailor-made puzzle, moving tenderly and slowly. Patrick’s hands moved back into the short mass of messy black hair- only, not gripping this time, instead, he opted to run them through softly, feeling the strands shift under his fingers.

Pete’s bruising hold on Patrick’s hips loosened, and while one hand remained there, the other moved to Patrick’s face, tenderly holding his cheek- just as he had done the first time.

The deja-vu reminded Patrick of stupid indecision the first time, and his mouth became more demanding, hands tightening, hips rolling and chest panting again. He was going to make it right. He was gonna make Pete *understand* how he felt.

Just as he moved a hand to the back of Pete’s neck, gripping and scratching the skin there, he felt Pete pull away, and he couldn’t help the deep groan of frustration that escaped him.

“Easy there, ‘Trick.” Pete grinned tiredly, face only inches away from Patrick’s. Patrick swallowed thickly, gazing at Pete and face turning serious again as his mind began seeing reason again, “P-Pete, I need to ask you-”

“What’s wrong?” Pete frowned at Patrick’s grim expression, anxiety flooding his eyes. Patrick glanced up at Pete, heart tightening at the loving gaze, and he could only drop his eyes to Pete’s chest.

“So, so it *wasn’t* a mistake?”

Patrick looked up to see Pete’s face twist into horrified shock, “Patrick-”

“I mean, I’m not- I’m not...and you’re- you. You-”

“What the fuck are you talking about? You’re perfect.”

Patrick felt his body tense in disbelief. He’d never thought someone would use a word as strong as ‘perfect’ to describe him. Especially not Pete. Patrick didn’t get that lucky- ever. His crushes would always wrinkle their noses in disgust, scoff or just plain walk away. There was no way Pete thought that highly of him. Maybe he *did* have a concussion, after all.
“I-I’m not-”

Pete kissed him again, lips moving desperately, tongue licking slowly and every piece of him trying to prove his words to Patrick.

When they broke apart, Patrick could feel the arousal surging through his veins, and he knew Pete could see it from the longing stare he gave him.

“Patrick-” Pete looked down, eyes trying to avoid staring at their hips- that were still pressed together. “I-I can’t.”

Patrick felt a lump in his throat. Order had seemed to return to the world, because Patrick never got-

“...I-I like you.”

Blue eyes widened slightly.

“I-I like you too...?”

“As more than a friend?”

Patrick could only nod.

Pete nodded too- more in determined understanding than as a response. Pete pulled back, straightening his back, fixing his clothes and flattening his hair.

“I’ll walk you home.”

As they had walked, Patrick had suddenly realized that their phones had been buzzing insistently the whole time and Pete had seemingly realized it too, as he was already staring down at his cracked screen.

“Andy’s going crazy.” He laughed lightly before silencing his phone, shoving it back in his coat pocket and lacing his fingers with Patrick’s gently- and almost...timidly.
Patrick felt his face heat up again, and he pressed his hand further into Pete’s, turning to give him a long glance with an overjoyed smile—on the verge of becoming a grin.

Pete pulled him a little closer, coaxing a surprised laugh from Patrick, and they continued walking, resuming their journey to Glenview with their fingers tangled together the whole time.
“...Fuck...”

Patrick groaned for the fiftieth time. He shifted, jolting his body desperately with another frantic whine. He clamped his watering eyes shut, frustrated tears at their brims and Patrick threw his head back with a long, guttural moan. He gasped sharply and dug his fingers into the supple arms at his sides- scratching them lightly. Letting out a long, tearful whine, Patrick felt his blood boiling in his veins and a tight knot in his stomach.

“Fuck...I can’t...I’m gonna-”

“Oh my god, Patrick- Fuck.” He heard Pete groan from above him.

“What’s wrong?”

Pete stared down at the younger boy from his phone, brow furrowed and mouth twisted into a frown.

Patrick sniffed, and sunk back down into the armchair.

“I can’t play this. I suck.” He held up a music sheet reading the name Shostakovich and some words in like- Mexican or something that Pete didn’t understand. He watched Patrick gesturing at it with his other hand, “It’s Russian, Pete.” He said blankly, staring with concern at Pete’s confusion.

Pete shrugged and Patrick sniffed again as the older boy rolled his eyes fondly, moving over to the couch and dropping down onto it lazily.

“You don’t suck, lunchbox.”
“Since when did you call me that?”

“Since I asked Sarah why she calls you that.”

Patrick groaned again when he saw Pete’s knowing grin, burying his face in his hands and hoping Sarah left out the excessive details of Patrick’s-

“-Pink, glittery Barbie lunchbox!”

Pete stared at Sarah in disbelief before they began laughing raucously. “Oh my god...why?”

Sarah shrugged and grinned, “Kevin switched them. Megan ended up with Patrick’s Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles lunchbox- oh, and I heard she actually cried! She thought it had transformed, or something. She thought God was punishing her.”

“Oh my god, that’s priceless.” Pete swiped a tear from his eyes, “Can I steal that from you?”

“Dude, go ahead!” Sarah grinned.

So Pete had stolen the nickname. And he was very fond of it- much to Patrick’s dismay.

“So what’s the big deal? You’ve been whining for three hours ‘cause you can’t play that?”

Patrick glared, “Yes, Pete. That is the big deal.” The redhead huffed, and stared down at the paper, eyes flitting over the complex notes before whining again. “I have to play this tonight. Tonight. TONIGHT PETE-”

“Yeah, yeah, okay” Pete winced at the loud voice, before smiling fondly at Patrick’s dramatic sigh. Pete rolled his eyes with a smile and focused his gaze on Patrick. “How can I help?”

“Are you a master violinist that looks exactly like me? And that can take my place at the concert tonight?”

“No.”

“Then no, you can’t.”

Pete sighed and jumped to his feet, walking over to Patrick and motioning for him to stand.

“Get up loser, I’m coaching you.”
Patrick stood in the small backstage room, violin poised on his shoulder and he stared at Pete doubtfully. “Look, I don’t need to know how to play that—” He gestured wildly at the wooden instrument, “—To tell you if you suck.”

“Yes you do, that’s the whole poin—”
“Shush lunchbox.” Pete grinned pressing a hand to Patrick’s mouth, before releasing him, sitting down and nodding, “Go on.”

Patrick glared lightly, exhaled and began playing.

Since their... *escapade*, in the alley last week, Pete and Patrick had been spending a lot more time together. They hadn’t told anyone yet, instead preferring to steal kisses in dark hallways or on their walks to Patrick's house in Glenview. And even though they hadn’t progressed much, and nothing had been ‘officially’ agreed- Patrick was the happiest he’d ever been in his whole life.

To have someone he’d fawned and swooned after for so long *actually* return his affections, was almost unthinkable to Patrick, and he was completely sure he was falling deeper in love with each day that passed. He’d also accepted the fact that he might not be straight as an arrow- but he had decided to leave it at that, and not question it any further until it was actually necessary.

So as Patrick played his notes, he focused his eyes on the complicated paper and smiled slightly under Pete’s stare.

It was perfect.

It was fucking *perfect*, and Pete couldn’t understand Patrick’s whining and hesitation *at all*.

Sure, Pete wasn’t a virtuoso, but he did know what a badly-played violin sounded like- and it sounded like a dying cat in a tumble dryer, in his experience, and Patrick’s playing was the furthest thing from *that*.

Pete honestly found himself staring more at the player, than intently listening to the music, and he noticed his eyes pretty much, refused to move from Patrick’s slender, pale fingers, moving quickly and gracefully along the strings. Pete found himself wondering if Patrick’s fingers would be just as graceful when performing...*other...tasks*, and his mind decided to picture Patrick on his *knees*—tongue sticking out and pupils blown, then Patrick on his *back*—panting and flushed all over, then Patrick bent over a *table*, then Patrick pressed against a *wall*, then Patrick- but he was quickly shaken from his increasingly perverted thoughts as Patrick’s sarcastic voice rang loudly through the room.

“Well?”
“Fucking perfect dude.”

“Thank you! That’s great constructive criticism.”

“What?”

Patrick narrowed his eyes as he watched Pete’s dazed stare moving south, “My eyes are up here, Pete.”

The brown eyes snapped upwards, with a sheepish, “Sorry.”

The younger boy exhaled sharply through his nose, placing the bow on a table, holding his violin by the neck and taking a seat next to Pete on the worn couch. “Look, Patrick,” Pete turned his head to Patrick’s, squeezing his free hand firmly. “I know you’re scared-”

“No shit, Sherlock.”

“Patrick.”

“Sorry.”

Pete exhaled but gave a fond half-smile. “You’re amazing, Patrick, you’re so talented- I wish you’d see that. You’re a natural.” Patrick tinged red, gave a shy smile and squeezed Pete’s hand in response. Pete leaned in, lips brushing Patrick’s and the redhead could feel himself practically melting just as Pete joined their mouths with a hum. Patrick tilted his head, tongue licking between their lips- making Pete groan and move his hands to the red-blonde hair before-

“OH MY GOD, NO WAY.”

They jolted apart just as the door swung open forcefully, allowing Joe, Andy and Mikey to stumble in.

“Then, what did he say?!” Joe laughed heartily, almost doubling over. “He said, ‘I’ll beat the shit out of you if you ever come here again.’” He said in a gruff, mocking imitation and Mikey laughed wildly, causing Andy to smile lightly and take a seat in the worn armchair, raising a suspicious eyebrow at Pete and Patrick- who were now sat at complete opposite ends of the couch, trying to hide red blushes.
Pete glanced at Patrick.

Patrick glanced at Pete.

That was close.

Patrick bounced on the balls of his feet, wishing he could loosen his damn tie. They had to dress smartly of course, it was proper etiquette and it was really getting on Patrick’s nerves.

The performance was for some charity thing at their school, and it usually required some form of entertainment, followed by a dinner and a really depressing slideshow about starving children afterwards- just to really hammer in the guilt.

The group stood backstage, listening to Mr. Nathans lecture them about ‘reputation’ and ‘performance’, but in truth Patrick had zoned out a while ago, and was thinking of much more important things- like Fall Out Boy...and Pete. The older boy was all Patrick could think about lately, and while it kind of scared him- it was pretty nice at the same time.

Unfortunately though, his mind had a habit of running away with itself and going down some roads Patrick was not ready for- for example, Pete standing above him- fly open, Pete leaning over him- panting heavily with each thrust, Pete pressed against his back, Pete pressed against his thigh, Pete pressed against his mouth-

“Mr. Stumph.”

Patrick’s eyes snapped upwards, to see his glowering teacher and snickering classmates.

“Am I boring you?”

Patrick shook his head furiously, “N-no, sir, I-I’m sorry, sir.”

Mr. Nathans narrowed his stony-grey eyes, “Let’s go.” He said in a low, warning voice, before walking out onto the stage and faking a grin.
The group of students followed, taking their seats and resting their instruments: violins on thighs, cellos on shoulders, flutes on. Wait, was that- No it couldn’t be-

A familiar, distinctive grin peeked out from behind a curtain, followed by three others which were just as large.

Patrick felt his eyes widen, and he moved his gaze to the audience- spotting his parents and siblings, along with Ashley and Sarah- and their respective families.

Then he moved back over to the four heads peeking out from behind a curtain, seeing masses of unkempt, messy hair from behind the fabric.

Patrick’s eyes moved back to his parents, who looked stern- but proud (was ‘sternly-pround’ a thing? Patrick wasn’t sure, maybe his mom and dad had invented it).

Then back to the four, hidden figures, now waving excitedly.

Oh goddammit, Pete.

The performance had gone well.

Really well, apparently, according to the crowds of elated adults who would approach Patrick and vehemently express their admiration.

His dad had even managed a small smile and a pat on the back, and his mother had hugged him tightly with an ecstatic, “We’re so proud of you, Patrick.”.

Patrick had eventually managed to break away from them however, and had stalked over to the curtain. He stood by it awkwardly, hoping he didn’t seem weird- until a hand reached out and pulled him through- making him stumble and flail slightly with a surprised, protesting noise.

He looked up to see four smiling faces, beaming with pride.

Pete, Joe, Andy and Brendon.
Great.

Absolutely great.

Patrick was quickly set upon with praise and hugs and awe-struck rants about how good he was. The redhead could only smile tightly, and do his best not to starting yelling at them, because what the fuck were they thinking?

“How did you get in here, exactly?”

Joe and Andy looked sheepish, but Pete and Brendon only beamed as a tanned and a pale hand simultaneously held up two ID badges.

“We’re members of staff.”

Patrick gaped, mouth opening and closing like a suffocating fish. He pointed at them, then at the badges, at them again, at the badges again-

“We’re just the janitors dude, chill. We haven’t been wearing old-guy masks and teaching you like- physics, this whole time.” Brendon rolled his eyes jokingly as Patrick’s jaw dropped even further.

“You- You- You’re-”

“...Are you okay?”

“...What the hell...?” Patrick’s eyes widened and he ran a hand over his mouth thoughtfully. “Yeah okay whatever...” He turned to his friends again, who had been whispering to each other and were now smiling in a way that made Patrick very nervous.

“Let’s ditch this place.”

“Hey, Halsey, psst.”

“...Pete? Is that you…?” She furrowed her brow, pushed a loose strand of- currently bright blue hair
and stared at the curtain hard.

“Yeah, it is. Patrick, Brendon, Joe and Andy are here too- but listen.” He ended, quickly cutting off Ashley’s question.

“We’re ditching, you in?”

Ashley nodded, “Yeah of course, I don’t wanna see the slideshow again.”

Brendon’s voice chimed in, “Cool, get Sarah, and meet us outside.”

Ashley rushed away, quickly spotting her friend giving a painfully fake smile to a pair of two old couples who were firmly warning her about the dangers of teenage boys, and the ‘one thing’ they want from teenage girls.

The blue-haired girl swiftly moved over to her friend, making excuses to their elders and pulling her away with a nervous mumble of ‘Come on, quickly before your mom notices’.

The group laughed loudly, doubling over the table and earning some glares from a few disapproving adults. Patrick pinched the bridge of his nose, still shaking with quiet laughter, and he felt Sarah’s head tip onto his shoulder- she was still trembling with laughter too.

They had decided to ditch the fancy French-themed dinner for KFC- And Patrick was pretty sure they had made the right choice.

“Holy shit, am I glad to be out of there.” Sarah breathed with a grin, “Why’d you guys sneak in anyway?”

“I told the guys about how nervous Patrick was,” Pete motioned his head towards Andy, Joe and Brendon, “And we decided to go see how he did.”

Ashley nodded, “He was great right?” Making Patrick scoff, “Are you kidding me? I was shaking through the whole solo, but fucking- Mr. Nathans loves giving me solos.”

Ashley shook her head with a laugh, “He only hates you ‘cause of your dad.”

“What do you mean?”

The girl exhaled with a smile and leaned in over the table, making the rest of the kids do the same.

“Let me tell you what my dad told me.”
So it turns out Mr. Nathans was in love with Patrick’s mom- ‘Gross’, Patrick had thought, and he was still grimacing at the revelation.

“Uh-huh, he was a nerd and your mom didn’t like him at all.” Ashley explained, “So he probably just hates you ‘cause he hates your dad.”

Brendon tilted his head, “Wait, how’d your dad know that?”

“Patrick’s dad and my dad were best friends back in high school.” She nodded towards Joe, “Joe’s dad too.”

Patrick leaned back, processing the new information.

“That’s like a really fucked-up reason to mess with you though.” Pete frowned, eyes staring at Patrick’s with concern. Patrick only shrugged in response, “Nothing I can do about it, I guess.” He looked at Ashley gratefully and nodded thoughtfully, “At least I know why, that helps a little.”

Patrick zoned out a little as the others moved on, talking animatedly. He wondered how he would act in Mr. Nathans situation- if Pete had a kid one day, how would Patrick treat them? The younger boy couldn’t help but smile at the thought of a mini-Pete, with the same distinct grin as his father. Patrick didn’t think he would act the way his teacher had, no- he’d probably treat the kid better, if anything- but he supposed he and Mr. Nathans were very different people, and he was quickly shaken from his thoughts by the sounds of the group sliding out of the booth.

The group had gone back to The Cobra, and had quickly split away- with Brendon pulling a giggling Sarah towards a backstage room. Pete had drifted away too, although glancing back at Patrick occasionally. He was chatting with Joe and Andy as they made their way to the bar and Patrick’s nose wrinkled- he didn’t really want to drink tonight, but he knew if he went over to the bar with his friends, one thing would lead to another and he’d end up a drunk, hiccuping mess that would probably throw himself at Pete and start molesting him.

So, he opted to head backstage instead.

As he passed some open doors, he saw Ashley, Tyler and Josh sharing a blunt and Patrick couldn’t help but roll his eyes.

His hand moved to open his band’s door but it stopped suddenly, hovering over the handle when he heard giggling followed by a deep moan coming from inside.

He knew that giggle, it was definitely Sarah.

Sarah and Brendon were probably fucking...in Fall Out Boy’s room.

Patrick glowered and decided to move away before the noises coming from the room made him throw up, and he stalked away, muttering something about ‘having the decency to fuck in your own room.’.
Patrick eventually took refuge in My Chemical Romance’s room, sitting on a couch beside Gerard, who was engrossed in his sketchbook, pencil scribbling away skillfully.

The redhead sighed quietly, putting his head in his hand and trying to zone out again.

“So how’s it going with you and Pete?”

Patrick froze.

His jaw fell open and he turned slowly to stare at Gerard, who was still nonchalantly drawing.

“W-what d’you m-mean?”

Gerard scoffed lightly and smiled, “It’s pretty obvious, dude.”

“Is it?” Patrick whined, ducking his head before snapping it back up and flushing red, “N-no, wait, no-no, there- there’s n-nothing-”

Gerard stopped Patrick’s rambling by staring him in the eye, doubtfully, and raising an eyebrow.

Patrick gulped and sunk back into his seat, “…It’s going fine.”

The other boy nodded, satisfied, and dropped his gaze to his sketchbook again.

“Have you had sex yet?”

Patrick choked on his own spit, turning red with loud coughing and doubling over. He felt a hand awkwardly rubbing his back, “Calm down, Patrick.”

The redhead’s coughing fit ceased, and he looked up with shocked, wide eyes.

“So have you?”

“N-no!”

“Why not?”

“I-I-”

“Changed your mind?”

“No-”

“Then why not?”

“I-I don-”

“Are you a virgin?”

“G-Gerard, I s-swear-”
“Yep, definitely a virgin.”

“.Oh god.”

The older boy stopped and stared at Patrick—trembling with wide eyes and rubbing his face in his hands. “Look,” He shut the sketchbook, tucking it to his side and turned to Patrick with honest eyes. “It’s obvious to me, because I recognize ‘the look’.”

“What do you mean?” Patrick whined, trying to avert his eyes and avoid any eye-contact.

“The I’m scared shitless, but I love the guy’ look.” Gerard shrugged, “I wasn’t sure either, at first. With Frank, you remember right?”

Patrick’s mind was invaded by the image of the closet again, and he nodded shakily, gulping.

“Well, I’m not religious or anything- my mom has...‘traditional’...views, but I mean, I was still nervous, y’know?”

Patrick stared back, and Gerard raised his eyebrows.

“About being gay.”

“Yep, yeah- I got it.”

The older boy exhaled lightly, and looked reminiscent. “I just- look, I know we haven’t talked much, you and I-” He gestured between them, “But, I know what it’s like. And I just wanted to let you know that...if you ever need to talk, or if you need to just- I dunno, vent. My door is always open.”

He smiled lightly, “Figuratively. I like closing doors, feels safer-”

Patrick nodded, and considered the offer.

Patrick really wanted to talk- No, he needed to talk.

Gerard stared at the younger, red-faced boy, who had just come to the end of a 30 minute long venting session and Gerard was starting to feel like a therapist...or, maybe more like Dr. Phil, or someone like that.

“So, just to clarify,” He stared into thin air with wide eyes and raised hands, “You’re in love with Pete.”

Patrick nodded sheepishly, and Gerard nodded, trying to follow as best he could.

“But you don’t wanna fuck him...?”
Patrick groaned, shoving his face into his hands, and Gerard quickly started correcting himself.

“Oh no, wait, you DO wanna fuck him, but you’re scared…? Was that it?”

Patrick only whined in response.

Gerard sighed, looking down at the muttering redhead. “I was scared too. I get it.”

The younger boy looked up, “Then how’d you...uh...get past it…?”

Gerard blinked slowly, staring at the floor in contemplation, “I knew Frank loved me. And I knew I loved Frank.” He shrugged lightly and a tiny, fond smile settled on his lips. “It just felt right, y’know…?”

Patrick nodded in thought, but couldn’t help the small frustrated groan that escaped him. “It makes me so nervous.” He grasped his hair with his hands tightly, “But it’s all I fucking think about. I can’t stop thinking about it-”


Gerard put his hands together and inhaled slowly, “I know it’s hard- no pun intended-” Patrick groaned. “But, when the time comes, it’ll come- no pun intended...again.”

For the first time during their conversation, Patrick looked calm, and he nodded understandingly. “But...” He looked down into his lap, “How do I...um...s-start it...?”

“Well you could suck his dick, that would work.”

“GERARD-”

“Just kidding, Jesus Christ.”

Gerard’s face contorted into thought under Patrick’s glare.

“Just- I dunno, Christ, just- just make a move.” He shrugged, “Pete’s not that stupid, he’ll pick up on it.”
Patrick could only give a dazed nod.

“Thanks, Gerard. Really, I-I appreciate it.”

“Anytime, Patrick.”

“Hang on a sec, ‘Trick!’”

Patrick watched Pete root around in his backpack and by now, he knew what was coming.

Pete stepped forwards, and he leaned in to kiss Patrick softly, pressing a white, plastic bag into the younger boy’s chest. Patrick mewled from under Pete and moved to tilt his head before Pete was pulling away. The redhead whined slightly as Pete gave him a charming wink, and sped away with a “See you soon, lunchbox!”

Inside the colonial house, Patrick’s parents had been waiting for an explanation as to his disappearance.

“Where did you go, young man?”

“Where were you, Patrick?”

“We were worried sick.”

Shit.

So...Patrick was a really bad liar under pressure.

And...he was definitely going to fuck up right now, and get grounded for eighty years.

He winced, accepting his fate, before-

“He was with the orchestra.”
A nonchalant voice called from the white sofa. Megan kept her eyes on her phone, fingers tapping the screen quickly, and Patrick gaped for a second, but quickly closed his jaw and nodded with a strained smile at his parents.

“And what were you doing with them, Patrick?”

Patrick had to stop himself shrinking under his father’s stern voice, “Mr. Nathans was telling us about the new pieces we’re going to play next week, dad.” Patrick tried to nod convincingly, “That was all.”

“S’true, it was really boring.”

Megan’s voice rang out again, and Patrick was really confused as to why his little sister was backing him up right now- she and Kevin usually opted to call him out and get him in trouble.

The Stumph parents squinted at Patrick, before his father straightened up and smiled lightly, “Mr. Nathans...Henry Nathans...?”

Patrick nodded, “I-I think so.”

His father’s smile broadened slightly, and Patrick wondered who this impostor was. The man turned to his wife, “I think Chris and I...once...do you remember...?” Patrick’s mother gave a grin and a short laugh, before gently putting a hand over her mouth and nodding. “Yes, I do...”

Patrick felt as though something had been left unsaid, but ignored it, and asked to be excused.

He rushed upstairs to his room, removing the bag from under his blazer and flopping down onto his bed.

That had been really close.

Patrick sat up after a few minutes to look inside the bag, seeing a pristine, completely new copy of Elvis Costello’s ‘This Year’s Model’. Pete had made a habit of giving Patrick a plastic bag every time he walked him home, and Patrick now had quite a collection- all of which were hidden in his dresser’s bottom drawer. That made him a little sad, if it were up to him, he’d display them like they were ancient, priceless artifacts in a museum. Partly because they were amazing albums, and partly because they were proof that Pete really cared about him.

Patrick suddenly heard his bedroom door creak open and he moved wildly to hide the album with his
comforter, head snapping towards the noise.

Megan waltzed inside, shutting the door and grinning.

“Have fun with your boyfriend?”

Patrick choked for the second time that night.

“I-I don’t know w-what you mean.”

“Really? ‘Cause we both know you weren’t with your orchestra, and you’re telling me your disappearance had nothing to with that guy…?”

“W-what guy?”

Megan cocked her head, “Black hair, tanned, tattoos, nice smile, really hot-”

“-Yes, okay, thank you, Megan, I get the picture.”

She sighed with a smile, “I won’t tell mom and dad. I promise.” Megan held out a pinky finger with honest eyes.

Patrick stared at the offer and narrowed his eyes, “Or Kevin?”

She laughed and shook her head, “Or Kevin. You have my word.”

Patrick linked his little finger with his sister’s and nodded.

“Thanks Megan.”
She smiled and nodded, and made to leave the room, but stopped at the door frame.

“Hey, Patrick?”

“Yeah Meg?”

“Nice job. That guy is *ridiculously* h-”

Patrick pushed the door closed, and wished he could lock it. He sighed and went to get changed out of the really uncomfortable suit he’d been wearing all night.

Ears stuffed with plastic headphones and hands bunched up in his blanket- Patrick smiled, with a strong sense of determination growing in his chest. He’d make his move soon enough, he just had to wait until the time was right, until Pete was defenseless and alone-

Wow, it *really* sounded like Patrick was plotting to murder him.

Patrick shook his head, eyebrows furrowing slightly, and he started drifting into sleep, the very last thought on his mind before everything went black being:

‘I’m gonna fuck Pete.’

Chapter End Notes

Classy note to end it on, I know.
Patrick had a plan.

He was a man on a mission.

...And that mission was taking longer than expected, because apparently- Pete was the most oblivious human being on Earth.

Patrick had been suffering for an entire week.

He had started things off subtly, giving Pete longing stares, batting his eyelashes, and just being a little extra clingy.

Pete hadn’t noticed.

Whenever Patrick stared, Pete would start a staring contest.

Whenever Patrick batted his eyelashes, Pete would ask him if he needed eyedrops.

And as for Patrick’s clinginess, Pete hadn’t complained or commented on it at all.

So, understandably, Patrick had gotten a little frustrated and had kicked up the signals.

He tried putting his hand on Pete’s thigh every now and then, he tried to get him alone as much as possible, and, Jesus Christ- he was still failing.

Patrick was actually slightly concerned. Pete showed no response to anything he did.

Was Pete changing his mind, but felt too guilty to dump Patrick?

And was it possible for Patrick to be any more obvious? He wasn’t actually sure. Patrick wasn’t a master at seduction, or anything, he had tried reading about it and doing research at the library (that had gotten some weird looks from the librarians), but it wasn’t like Patrick had any real experience.

...but he couldn’t just go ask for help, he had nobody to ask…
Then he remembered the offer that had been made to him last week.

“...Hey, Gerard...?”

Patrick poked his head around the door, and much to his dismay, Gerard wasn’t alone. Frank, Mikey, Ray, Josh and Tyler were all there too, they looked half-immersed in their conversation, half-immersed in their phones.

Gerard looked up from his screen, seeing the younger boy standing at the doorway nervously. Patrick had decided to excuse himself because he was not going to ask how to seduce Pete in front of all these people.

He gave a strained smile and started to back away, opening his mouth to make a swift excuse when Gerard jumped to his feet and walked out, subtly pulling Patrick along beside him by his sweater.

They ended up in twenty one pilot’s room- that was blissfully empty, and sat opposite each other on mismatched chairs.

“So, what did you want?” Gerard said nonchalantly, but with a slightly intrigued expression.

Patrick gulped slightly, not being able to help the redness flushing his neck, face and ears, and he shrugged lightly. “I-I’ve been trying to-uh... ‘get through’...to Pete.” Gerard raised his eyebrows with a hint of pride and the shadow of a smile, gesturing for Patrick to continue.

The younger boy only sighed with exasperation.

“He’s totally oblivious.”

Gerard narrowed his eyebrows, before raising them and staring into thin air, “...So he is that stupid...”

Patrick opened his mouth to defend Pete’s intelligence before Gerard cut him off.

“You know what?” His face looked as though he’d just had a ‘Eureka’ moment. “Maybe he does know.”

Patrick looked confused.

“But if he knows, and hasn’t like...done...anything...does that mean he doesn’t want...to?”
Gerard shrugged, “Maybe.”

Patrick felt his heart drop.

“-Or he may just be taking it slow.”

“...Taking it slow...?” Patrick furrowed his brow, “It’s been like, two weeks. We’ve known each other for like, a whole month.”

Gerard gave a small smirk. “Exactly.” Patrick frowned, and he heard the other boy sigh. “Look, Pete’s got a bit of a reputation for being a ‘hit-it-and-quit-it’ type of guy.” He looked at the redhead earnestly, “I honestly think he’s just trying to play it differently this time- you should be flattered.”

Patrick exhaled softly- yes that did make more sense, hopefully. “Thanks Gerard.”

“No problem, just think of me as your therapist for all Pete-related problems, okay?”

“...Not my sassy, gay friend then?”

The room split into laughter and Patrick left feeling better than he had in weeks.

Pete was having a pretty good day.

School hadn’t been too taxing and he and Brendon had finished cleaning at Glenview pretty quickly.

They walked back to The Cobra, smelling of bleach and sweat and cracking jokes the whole time- so much so that by the time they pushed through the familiar metal doors, Pete’s cracked ribs were aching with laughter.

Brendon had jogged backstage with an excuse of ‘Needing to talk to Ry- Spencer, I mean Spencer.’ And Pete had only nodded accommodatingly, but it wasn’t long before the love of his life, unbeknownst to him- the only and only Patrick Stumph, was walking towards him.

Patrick’s shoulders were hunched slightly, blue eyes locked onto the floor’s patterns and hands fidgeting nervously...And oddly enough, Pete had noticed Gerard sitting in one of the club’s booths, head buried in a math book, but was caught glancing up interestedly every now and then.

“P-Pete,” Patrick raised his head slightly, sea blue eyes under light, thick eyelashes, “Can we...talk?” Pete nodded quickly, with a small bubble of insecurity and anxiety in his chest. Why was Patrick so...serious? Pete was the happiest he’d ever been in the past few weeks- despite the whole ‘getting beaten-up’ thing...but...was Patrick not...happy?

Oh fuck, was Pete getting dumped right now?
Patrick only stayed silent and turned with a subtle motion of his head, asking Pete to follow. The younger boy walked across the room, with a quick glance at Gerard oddly enough (And Pete absently wondered if Patrick was leaving him for Gerard—he really fucking hoped not), before ducking through the backstage hallways and darting into the men’s bathroom, but not without a nervous glance to his side.

Pete followed, slightly suspicious and wary, and he looked down at the redhead, who was biting his lip, had his head ducked and whose feet were shifting awkwardly.

“...So...” Pete gave him a tight smile before Patrick threw himself at him.

Pete yelped in surprise and stayed frozen for a beat, before eagerly kissing back against the fervent lips. Well, this was a little...unexpected, but it's better than getting broken-up with, Pete shrugged mentally before focusing all his attention on Patrick.

He placed his hands on Patrick’s hips, gripping them slightly, and tilted his head to press against Patrick even further...but Pete was still trying to keep it as...chaste...as possible, even though it was getting more and more difficult with each whine that Patrick made.

Pete really liked Patrick, and he wanted him to know that he was more than just a casual fling- so Pete had been trying to take it slow. But, sure, he wouldn’t refuse Patrick in a situation like this one, but he still didn’t want to burn him out or scare him by moving too fast either.

Pete had gotten himself into quite a predicament.

Suddenly, Pete felt himself being pulled forcefully, and then shoved against a hard surface. His eyes snapped open with a slight groan, moving a hand to the back of his head before freezing with raised eyebrows.

Patrick had been going to talk to Pete. Just talk- he was going to lay all his cards on the table, they were going to discuss their feelings and everything was going to get out in the open.

...But it hadn't really gone to plan, because he was currently stood in a bathroom stall, having just shoved Pete against the wall.

He had really tried to control himself, but a crazy amount of hormones + Pete Wentz, did not make that an easy feat.
With a slight pang of guilt from Pete’s pained groan, Patrick pushed his lips against his again-slopping them against the older boy’s easily. Patrick groaned quietly as he pressed his tongue to Pete’s lips, caressing them gently. For some reason Patrick was feeling really confident, and he was going to make the most of it while it lasted.

Pete jolted in surprise, subconsciously bucking his hips forwards and eliciting a louder moan from Patrick. He whined slightly, running his hands up to Patrick’s back and grabbing at the softness before swiping his tongue against Patrick’s. The redhead tensed and mewled slightly, before suddenly biting down on Pete’s lower lip.

The older boy’s eyes snapped open for a split second, before drooping once again with a deep, guttural moan.

Pete had to admit he was enjoying Patrick’s newfound boldness, it also made Pete feel slightly less guilty about ‘corrupting’ him.

He pulled his lips away from Patrick slowly, before quickly darting his head to the redhead’s ear, lapping and nipping at the shell. Encouraged by Patrick’s whines and hips rolling into his own, Pete moved his hands back down- strongly resisting the temptation to grab Patrick’s ass- and instead, settling for gripping his hips.

Pete moved his lips further south, opting to lick long, wet stripes along Patrick’s neck and revelling in increasingly frantic whines that escaped the smaller boy. He eventually settled at the crook of Patrick’s neck, sucking on the skin lightly to leave a small red mark. Pete glanced at his handiwork briefly before biting down on Patrick’s shoulder, lapping at the shallow indents he had left when he heard a faint zipping noise.

Pete moved to investigate before he felt fingertips gingerly running over his cock, the only barrier being Pete’s boxers. He could only give a choked, surprised moan and tip his head further onto Patrick’s shoulder, one hand moving to tangle itself in the strawberry blonde hair.

Pete was losing his sanity at this point, and as the touches only became more confident under his noises of approval, his hips started rolling involuntarily. Pete’s pupils were blown, and his eyes remained sluggishly open, staring down past Patrick’s shoulder.

Then he felt a finger hook itself around the hem of his boxers and reality snapped back into place.

Patrick was feeling pretty bold, and he only got bolder with each moan, whine or pant that came from Pete’s mouth. His own chest was getting more erratic and Patrick could feel his own cock beginning to strain against his jeans. He had to admit he was slightly nervous, but he’d come this far, dammit- he wasn’t going to chicken out now.

Patrick hooked a slender finger around the dark underwear and moved to pull them down before-

“-Patrick.”
Pete had grabbed his wrists, holding them tightly and making his skin even paler—if that was physically possible.

Patrick was confused at the action, and whined quietly, tilting his head and staring at Pete’s lips, that now seemed miles away. The older boy’s grip seemed to weaken slightly under Patrick’s gaze, but he quickly pulled himself together, shaking his head quickly and trying to clear his fuzzy mind.

“...You’re a...virgin...right?”

Patrick gulped, he was a virgin, but, he didn’t know that it mattered so much to Pete...And if he, hypothetically, wasn’t a virgin, would Pete just walk out on him? Did he have some, weird virgin fetish that Patrick was only finding out about now? Was that the only reason he was even with Patrick?-

No. No. Patrick tried to calm himself down, he was sure the question had a perfectly logical reason behind-

“Patrick.”

He looked up, shuddering slightly at the firm, commanding voice.

Patrick nodded.

Pete exhaled, and shook his head, disappointment flooding his eyes.

Okay...so Pete didn’t like virgins...? Patrick felt his stomach clench at Pete’s expression, and felt himself almost ready to run away and chicken out, when-

“Yes your first time,” Pete’s face was plastered with determination and a copious amount of self control, “-Is not going to be in a bathroom stall.”

Patrick raised his eyebrows. Pete actually cared about that…?

Patrick suddenly felt a little stupid for forgetting that losing your virginity is supposed to be...respectful…?

...Well, he wasn’t sure what it was supposed to be like, nobody had ever given him any details.

He had assumed- from the big deal he’d heard some people make about it, that it was supposed to be
like a ritual... or like... surgery.

Patrick grimaced a little, before raising his eyes to Pete’s, who were still burning into him intensely.

He didn’t know what to say. How did he respond to that?

Patrick tried to urge some confidence to show itself, inhaling and exhaling slowly.

Patrick bit his lip gently, before releasing it and feeling a blush break out on his pale features. Giving Pete a coy smile, Patrick stared up at him from under his eyelashes.

“So where is it going to be?”

Pete growled.

Like actually growled, like a dog, and Patrick was a little surprised, a little scared, and a little aroused.

Scaroused, he might call it.

Pete’s eyes were dark. Darker than Patrick had ever seen them before. They were almost completely black, and all that remained of his iris was a thin, whiskey-brown outer ring.

He swallowed thickly as he felt Pete lean towards him, turning his head to brush his lips against Patrick’s ear. Patrick felt his knees go weak.

Patrick felt Pete press a kiss to the shell, and then nip it gently, before a low, husky and strangled voice spoke softly into his ear.

“My house. Tomorrow. Eight o’clock.”

Patrick had never been so excited to see his alarm clock read ‘Wednesday’.

He shot out of bed at 7am, showering and changing into his uniform before racing down the stairs and cheerily bouncing into the kitchen.
His family shot him concerned and shocked glances as they watched him eat a bowl of cereal and completely ignore his usual cup of coffee—while beaming the entire time.

“Who are you?” Kevin furrowed his eyebrows, “And what have you done with my brother?”

Patrick laughed cheerfully, only intensifying the worried feeling in the room. His mother cleared her throat, “…Are you feeling well, Patrick? Would you like to…stay home today…get some sleep, perhaps?”

Patrick’s eyes snapped to his mother’s, suddenly completely serious. “No. I’m feeling fine.” He returned to his bowl, a small giddy smile working its way onto his lips again, “By the way, I have an orchestra thing—so I’ll be home late.”

Patrick’s mother was too surprised to argue, only nodding with wide eyes—what kind of teenager refused a day off?

They finished breakfast and left the house, but not before Patrick downed his entire cup of coffee in one, before rushing out of the house with a shout of farewell to his dumbfounded parents.

Patrick’s legs sped along the sidewalk, and he could feel the tight excitement filling in his chest and stomach. He really hadn’t been this excited in a long time, and he let his mind wander as he walked the familiar path to school.

…So it turns out his mind was pretty obsessed with Pete, but he was quickly shaken from his obscene thoughts by—

“Why are you so happy?”

Patrick snapped his head around to see Megan, with a both smug and knowing smile on her face. “You can tell me, Patrick. I already know about ‘the guy’.”

He gulped lightly, before feeling a surge of confidence in his veins. “None of your business.”

“Patrick, come on—”

“I am not giving you details.”

Megan laughed lightly, spotting her friends standing further away, motioning for her to join them. She glanced at her brother and a sly smile crossed her lips.

“Enjoy yourself.”

Patrick glared and flushed red as he watched his sister’s smile and she sped away towards her friends, laughing the whole time.
Patrick had been squirming the whole day, and he couldn’t really focus in any classes, so he had opted to just scribble down everything the teacher’s said, and try to make sense of it later. When it was time for orchestra practice, and he had been smiling the whole time- and that had clearly been annoying Mr. Nathans.

But Patrick felt high, high on anticipation, on excitement, and he really couldn’t bring himself to care when the man made his first jab of the day at Patrick...No, Patrick didn’t care.

He really didn’t care anymore.

“You know, Henry-”

Mr. Nathans tensed, and all the students stared between the him and Patrick, slack-jawed and eyes wide open.

“You don’t have to be such a dick to me just because my dad beat you up once, in like, highschool. That’s pretty pathetic.”

The teacher choked slightly, before quickly emitting a few quick coughs with his fist thumping against his chest to clear himself. He looked up, eyes full of venom, “Excuse me-”

“You know, because you loved my mom.”

The man flushed red, jaw falling open, and Patrick’s classmates had started mumbling amongst themselves, staring in shock and awe at the redhead.

“’Cause, that’s not my fault.” Patrick shrugged, staring at his red-faced teacher nonchalantly, “You were probably really creepy, and she didn’t like you- so I’m sorry, I guess.”

What Patrick had said had only really sunk in on his walk to The Cobra.

He’d frozen in the middle of the sidewalk, gripping his hair and burying his face in his hands with a
loud, ‘what the fuck did I just do’ groan- earning odd and sympathetic looks from passers-by.

-But he had also realized that Mr. Nathans hadn’t punished him, he’d just carried on the lesson silently, and then dismissed them without another word.

...So, maybe Patrick hadn’t fucked up too much...and he really hoped he wasn’t going to get kicked out...oh goddammit he was gonna get kicked out.

However, all worries fled from his mind as soon as he’d opened the bar’s metals doors and he saw Pete: Legs dangling off the edge of the stage and his bass guitar perched on his knee. And all the excitement returned- and only increased tenfold as Pete grinned up at him, happy, as always, but with a hidden promise.

Patrick barely managed to get through the set, legs rubbing together and body shifting erratically every time his mind wandered. But it was finally over, he had done it, and as Tyler and Josh took their place on the stage, the group went to their backstage room to put their instruments away.

Patrick glanced up at the clock every few minutes, 7:56, then 7:57, 7:58...7:58- shit, time was moving unbearably slowly. He decided to go grab his bag and coat, and stepped out of the club to catch Pete on his way out- but, Pete was already there.

His back was to Patrick, black rucksack hanging loosely off of shoulders, hands buried in his pockets, and that warm grey scarf- that Patrick had tried to steal so many times, was wrapped around his neck loosely. Patrick wondered if Pete had some kind of ‘spidey-sense’, because he instantly turned around to face Patrick and a large grin broke out on his face.

They arrived at Pete’s house- which, thankfully, was deserted, and the older boy lead him upstairs, and Pete seemed to be taking his time to look around. Patrick frowned slightly, trying to stifle the burning want in the pit of his stomach, and while a part of him hoped Pete wouldn’t be this...meticulous later on, another part of him wanted Pete to take his sweet time and make it last.

Patrick stepped into Pete’s room which had obviously been thoroughly cleaned since last time he was here. Patrick smiled slightly- Pete had actually made an effort.

Pete shrugged the backpack from his shoulders, throwing it next to his bed stand lightly, before pulling off his scarf with one hand and undoing his coat with the other. Patrick watched his hands expertly undo the buttons and he idly wondered where Pete had gotten that bit of experience.

The older boy placed his things on a nearby chair, and moved past Patrick to the wooden door. Patrick heard a lock click, and that made a spark of anticipation rush through his entire body.

Pete gave Patrick a half-smile as he walked to his front, watching him with steadily darkening eyes. He nodded towards Patrick’s blazer and bag, and the younger boy obliged clumsily- although he was
much less graceful in his movements than Pete had been.

“So,” Pete couldn’t help the grin that flourished on his face, and his eyes filled with a sudden kindness. “Are you sure?” Patrick could only nod desperately, eyes lidded and face flushing with the prettiest blush Pete had ever seen.

The redhead pushed himself forwards into Pete, taking two fistfuls of his shirt and hovering his lips inches away.

“I want you Pete.”

And that was all he needed to hear.

Pete attacked Patrick’s lips feverishly- feeling fully free to do so for the first time, and the younger boy gave a high pitched moan, burying his hands in Pete’s black hair and pressing his chest impossibly closer. Pete moaned into the kiss, tongue flicking over Patrick’s lower lip, and he moved his hands south to grip Patrick’s ass- making the redhead whine again.

Pete tightened his hands, smiling into Patrick’s lips- god he’d been wanting to do that forever. Patrick moved his hands down from Pete’s hair and they started tugging at the hem of his shirt instead, and Patrick hoped that Pete would get the message.

Pete wasn’t that oblivious, and understood completely, removing his hands from Patrick with a slight discontented whine before shoving his shirt up over his head, and tossing it to the floor. Patrick trailed his calloused fingertips down the hard planes and ridges of Pete’s chest, eyes wide and cheeks red. Patrick let out a quiet, breathy mewl of appreciation, fingers splaying over the caramel-browned skin, before his brow furrowed in concern as his digits reached the still grazed, burgundy skin over Pete’s ribs.

Pete noticed the expression, and moved to distract Patrick, to assure him that it was okay, before he felt Patrick kiss his breastbone gently. Then his collarbones, then his neck, his cheek and finally, his mouth once again. Pete was so fucking happy right now.

Pete slid his hands to Patrick’s lower back, sliding his hands under the black school sweater and crisp, white shirt, feeling the soft, creamy skin beneath. He whined slightly, and felt an overwhelming urge to see it, to kiss every inch of it and mark it.

Patrick wasn’t ecstatic at the idea of taking his shirt off, but Pete’s insistent and increasingly annoying tugging was getting on his nerves- so, with a quiet sigh, he pushed away slightly, and tried to pull his shirt and sweater off in one fell swoop.

…but he forgot about his tie.
The collar and tie hooked around his neck, he tried tugging, but it didn’t seem to work and he found himself completely stuck. He sighed, and asked in an exasperated and muffled voice, “Pete, can you help me out here?” Patrick stood, stomach and chest on show, shirt and sweater stuck around his head, and arms raised.

Pete started laughing- because of course he did, and Patrick was getting a little bitter. Pete struggled to answer through his hiccuping, and instead just moved over to the redhead, carefully helping him out of the prison of clothes.

When the shirt and sweater were finally discarded on the floor, Pete stopped for a moment, laughter stopping and face dropping into a longing stare. It was better than Pete could have ever imagined.

Patrick was flushed all over, arms crossed and trying his best to look grumpy- which Pete found endearingly adorable. His milky pale skin was spattered with light brown freckles, he was practically hairless with only a smattering of light reddish-blond hair on his chest and above his crotch, and he looked so fucking soft- *Pete was losing his goddamned mind.*

“Pete, s-stop staring.”

Patrick avoided eye-contact, opting to glance around the room nervously, and Pete decided to oblige. The older boy pulled Patrick towards him by the hips, smiling down at him gently and pressing a kiss to the tip of his nose. Patrick flushed darker, and Pete had to stop a growl that had threatened to rise in his throat. He ducked his head, pressing his lips against Patrick’s again, both boys moaning in unison.

Patrick rolled his hips, making Pete groan deeply and reciprocate by bucking forwards roughly.

Pete felt Patrick’s movements getting more frantic, he heard his breathing getting more erratic, and soon enough, he heard Patrick start emitting high-pitched, desperate mewls that sent sparks of arousal straight to his cock.

Pete gulped slightly, trying to control himself, and gently fell back onto his comforter with a slight bounce, pulling Patrick towards him to sit on his lap. The younger boy flushed for a second, ducking his head, before looking up at Pete with a look that would forever be burned into his mind: Lidded blue eyes blown wide- almost totally black, and staring up at him through fair eyelashes, a light red blush covering everything from the chest up, pink and swollen damp lips parted in steady pants, slowly curving into a predatory grin.

Pete’s hips rolled involuntarily, and they both groaned at the contact, despite being separated by several barriers of clothing. Pete’s eyelids fluttered closed for a second, and he exhaled deeply. He was really struggling to not just throw Patrick onto the bed and fuck him ’til he couldn’t walk- And the redhead only kept making it harder- literally.
Pete opened his eyes, grabbed Patrick’s hips and sat up, pressing their lips together again and beginning to roll his hips at a steady, *unbearably* slow pace. Soon enough, Patrick was panting desperately as though he’d just ran a marathon, arms dangling over Pete’s shoulders as the older boy kissed, lapped and bit at his creamy neck.

Pete dragged his hands over Patrick’s back, kneading the skin with his hands fervently, and moaning quietly with each roll of Patrick’s hips.

Taking it slow was really hard.

Patrick’s mind was thrumming and buzzing, only wanting *more, more, more*. He somehow managed to keep himself grounded and cleared his mind just enough to push Pete down into the mattress, straddling his hips and rejoining their lips in a sloppy kiss, intertwined with gasps and moans. Patrick managed to slip his hands between them, roughly, yet, clumsily tugging down Pete’s zipper, and tugging on the fabric, begging Pete to remove them wordlessly.

They were getting pretty good at communicating without speaking. Pete lifted his hips and shimmied them, managing to swiftly remove the jeans, and tugging his socks along with them in one swift movement. The older boy’s eyes narrowed in concentration as he returned the favour, and soon enough, they were both left only in boxers.

The loss of a barrier was turning Patrick into a moaning mess with each roll of Pete’s hips and every squeeze of his hands, and the older boy had to remind himself that this was Patrick’s *first time* and if given half the chance, the redhead would come far too quickly for his liking. Pete smirked into Patrick’s neck- he was going to drag this out. He was gonna make Patrick *beg* for it.

Holding onto Patrick’s hips, Pete flipped them over, and pushed Patrick further up the bed, giving him a hungry smile the whole time. Patrick’s heart was in his throat, and all he could do was stare up into those dark eyes and pant.

Pete’s smile dropped slightly, becoming more serious, but filled with adoration, “You’re *beautiful,* Patrick.” The younger boy flushed red, and managed to pull himself out of his daze long enough to roll his eyes and answer, “*Yeah rig-”*

Pete cut him off with a kiss, rolling his eyes fondly and holding back quiet laughter at Patrick. How he could switch from *‘panting, horny mess’* to *‘sarcastic, grumpy old man’*, in a split second, Pete would *never* understand.

Patrick felt Pete pull back and watched him run his hands over the pale skin of his thighs gently, feeling the calloused fingertips- which Patrick assumed were the result of years of manual labour and playing a bass guitar.

Pete swallowed the lump in his throat as he watched Patrick’s tentative hands hover over the hem of his boxers. His blue eyes flitted up to Pete’s and the older boy could only give a shaky nod.
This was his fucking dream come true, he wasn’t gonna refuse.

Patrick hooked his index fingers around the hem, leaning up slightly, and pulled them down to Pete’s lean thighs.

He had whined.

He wasn’t proud of it.

His eyes stayed fixed on Pete’s painfully hard, dark red cock, despite his embarrassment-flooded mind begging him to avert his eyes, or to make awkward small talk, or to cough and excuse himself. But no, Patrick told his own mind to ‘go fuck itself’ and just stared, not being able to help the soft whines that escaped him.

Jesus Christ, Pete was big. Like, bigger than Patrick had expected. Patrick had only ever seen his own dick before, so he didn’t have much reference for comparison, but...well, Patrick wasn’t really sure what he had expected exactly, but he was sure this was better than anything he could have imagined.

Patrick’s tongue shot out subconsciously to lick his lower lip and Pete lost it entirely. He shoved Patrick down again, kissing him desperately and grinding his erection into Patrick’s- whose, he suddenly realized, was still covered.

With no hesitation or pre-amble, Pete shoved the boxers off of the milky legs, instantly wrapping a hand around Patrick’s cock. The redhead moaned deeply, eyes rolling slightly and hands gripping Pete’s hair as though it were his only lifeline. Pete opened his eyes and straightened his back, towering over Patrick. He stared down at the smaller cock in his hand- pale, smooth and flushed pink just like the rest of Patrick, and slowly twisted his hand, moving it upwards simultaneously.

Patrick arched his back, pressing a hand to his mouth with a shuddering cry, “P-Pete, ah- god, P-Pete, p-please.”

The dark-haired boy stared down into the watering, lidded blue eyes, and he slowed the movements of his hand to an intolerable speed. Patrick groaned and screwed his eyes shut. Could this be considered torture? Could he sue?

“What? What do you want Patrick?” Pete rasped, he had meant to sound more nonchalant, but that was way too difficult in this situation.

Patrick bucked his hips desperately, whining and mewling all the while. “Y-you, p-please, P-Pete.”

Pete furrowed his brow with a small smile, “You want me-?” He held back a laugh at Patrick’s furious nodding.

“Well that’s a little vague.” Pete leaned down and breathed, blowing hot air over the tip of Patrick’s throbbing cock, making the redhead cry out, arch his back and bury his hands in the comforter at the
“What do you want me to do, Patrick?”

Patrick took shuddering breaths, trying to calm himself down to answer the question- before everything went white again as Pete licked a hot, wet stripe along the underside of Patrick’s shaft. The younger boy threw his head back, crying out Pete’s name again. “What do you do want, Patrick?” Pete asked, more insistent and demanding this time.

“FUCK ME, GOD, just, f-fuck me, please, god, P-Pete,-”

Pete jumped a little at Patrick’s shout, before smiling fondly at his dazed and stuttered muttering. Pete considered dragging it out further by asking ‘You want God to fuck you?’ but decided against it when he saw just how desperate Patrick was.

The redhead cried out again as he felt Pete press a kiss to the slit of his cock, moving away with a quick swipe of his tongue. Patrick tried to calm his breathing- hands still bunched up by the sides of his head, when he felt something- he moaned again, chest heaving and eyes clamping shut again.

Pete ran a finger over Patrick’s hole, using a single finger to circle the tight ring of muscle. He pulled his hand back momentarily, and ran his tongue along it instead, swirling it and circling, whilst listening to Patrick’s overwhelmed moaning.

Patrick didn’t know what was happening, there was a sneaking suspicion in the back of his mind that really grossed him out, but he really couldn’t bring himself to care right now.

Pete lapped broad stripes across him before Patrick felt him move away. He tried to open his drowsy eyes, but failed, instead dropping his head to its side and listening to something that sounded like the click of a bottle’s lid. And then, he felt something ease inside him.

Pete felt Patrick tense around his finger, and he moved his lips to Patrick’s cock- now beaded with pre-come, mouthing it lightly- and giving a satisfied smirk when Patrick relaxed with a breathy moan. Pete worked his finger in and out slowly, taking Patrick into his mouth as he added another long finger. Patrick’s mouth opened in a silent cry at the mix of heavy pleasure and the sharp sting of pain, before his lips were parting in desperate shudders and moving his hands to tangle themselves in Pete’s hair. Pete swirled his tongue around the head, adding in a third finger- Patrick hardly even noticed it.

Pete pulled his mouth off of Patrick’s cock with a downright obscene noise, and crooked his fingers, searching slightly. Patrick furrowed his brow with an unhappy whine, only making Pete grin. The redhead was slowly understanding the situation- that Pete was three fingers deep in his ass, and felt a sharp swirl of embarrassment before-

“OH MY- FUCK. FUCK-”
Patrick barked out before clamping his teeth down onto his swollen lips and hands grabbing at the comforter at his sides, writhing as Pete’s fingers languidly stroked his prostate. He was so close, he was so goddamn close, god, he was-

Then there was nothing, and Patrick snapped his eyes open to see Pete grinning above him.

“Fuck you.” Patrick growled with a hoarse voice, Pete only shook with silent laughter, leaning over Patrick and pressing a chaste kiss to his lips as he reached over to his bedside table. Patrick saw the bottle he assumed he’d heard earlier- turns out it was lube. The younger boy sniffed slightly and fidgeted his hips as he watched Pete stroke himself with a gel-covered hand.

Patrick swallowed the lump in his throat, glancing away from Pete’s cock and up to his dilated eyes. “...Aren’t you like, supposed to use a...condom, or something?” Pete stared back and shrugged, “We can, if you want.” Patrick bit the inside of his cheek, “Well...what’s it for?”

“To stop you getting pregnant, Patrick. We don’t want you to become a teen mom, do we?”

“Very funny.”

Patrick lowered his eyebrows, and Pete sighed with a smile, “I’m assuming you’re clean...?”

“Y-Yeah, I mean, kinda, I took a shower this morning, but, you know through the day you kinda get-”

Pete burst out laughing, supporting himself with a hand on the bed as he trembled. Patrick only scowled.

“You meant STDs didn’t you?”

Pete could only nod breathlessly, still grinning.

“Then yes, I’m clean.”

Pete nodded and Patrick furrowed his brow, hoping Pete wouldn’t be offended by his question, “...Are you?” Pete nodded again simply, “Clean as a whistle.”

Patrick gave a light, dazed smirk, staring at Pete with lidded eyes, “Whistles are actually really unhygienic-”

He was cut off by the sound of Pete’s laughter, and he couldn’t help but dissolve into giggles too- Pete just had one of those infectious laughs.

After a little while, Pete exhaled, puffing out his cheeks and gazing at Patrick tenderly. “Still sure?” Patrick widened his eyes and rolled them, “Really? Look at me. Look at the situation I'm in.” Pete
grinned, eyes crinkled and shrugged, “Consent’s important, ‘Trick.”

Patrick stared at him, he had to admit, that had made him feel impossibly safer. He smiled, taking Pete’s face between his hands and pulling him down into a searing, but tender, kiss, and Patrick felt a pinching twist in the pit of his stomach when he felt the head of Pete’s wet cock resting against his thigh. He pulled back, biting down on Pete’s lower lip and earning a gratified moan. “I’m sure, Pete.”

Patrick felt Pete brushing against his entrance, and in a second, he was pushing inside, further and further until his hips touched Patrick’s. The redhead froze, clamping his eyes shut and wrapping his arms around Pete’s neck, his hands grabbing tight fistfuls of the soft, black hair on his head. “Just breathe, Patrick, you’re amazing-” Pete paused to pepper soft kisses to Patrick’s face and neck, mumbling praise and adoration between each one.

The largest spike of pain passed, and Patrick exhaled shakily next to Pete’s ear, “M-move.”

Pete furrowed his eyebrows- still unsure, he really didn’t want to hurt Patrick-

"Just fucking move, Pete!"

Pete had to stop himself from laughing and started rolling his hips in shallow thrusts that made both of them shudder and moan. “Y-yep, k-keep moving, P-Pete.” One of Patrick’s hands grabbed at Pete’s bicep and the other stayed buried in his hair, pulling him down into a burning, wet kiss, and the lewd sound of moaning and skin slapping against skin began to fill the room.

Pete pulled away and leaned up, gripping Patrick’s thighs with bruising force as he watched him trail a pale hand along the tattoo of thorns that were inked into Pete’s skin, and Patrick made a mental note to ask him about them. Patrick marvelled at the difference between them, a white, ghostly hand against a warm, caramel chest, but once again, the thoughts were wiped blank as he felt Pete almost pull out, only to thrust back in with a vengeance.

Patrick tipped his head back in a hoarse, desperate cry and he squeezed his eyes shut, panting as Pete watched him through lidded brown eyes and only dug his fingers further into the soft, creamy thighs. He buried his face into Patrick’s neck and bit down, squeezing his teeth down, and being spurred on by Patrick’s moans- that were increasing in volume with each snap of Pete’s hips.

Pete let out a ragged breath, lifting his head to stare into Patrick’s lidded, watering eyes. Picking up the pace of his hips, Pete moved a hand to the pale neck- that was now littered with bites and bruises, and he tightened his hand a fraction, feeling Patrick’s Adam’s apple buzz against his palm as the redhead moaned.

Patrick looked up at Pete, then leaned his head to look at where their bodies joined- it was really obscene, but only resolved to make him whine and make his cock strain, getting impossibly harder.

“Look at me.” Pete growled, making Patrick’s eyes snap upwards again as his mouth widened even further, falling open in stuttered, desperate gasps- he was so close, so close. He felt a hand close around his cock, jerking it upwards and Patrick saw white. With a slow, sinful moan, he came in ropes over his own stomach and over Pete’s knuckles and chest- still staring into the brown eyes.
The thrusts kept coming, each one shoving against his prostate, and Patrick was starting to feel really oversensitive. Pete released his neck, panting raggedly and slotting his lips against Patrick’s as he went impossibly faster.

Patrick was going to come again- was that even possible? Well, he hadn’t been sure at first, but with Pete’s wet mouth pressed against his ear, groaning and panting words of praise: you’re so perfect, God, Trick, so tight, you’re amazing, perfect- And with a bruising grip on his thigh and a hand twisting his- already once again, hardening cock, he was entirely sure it was possible.

Pete moved his head to suck on the skin of Patrick’s collarbone when his hips started stuttering, his breathing and his thrusts getting more and more erratic. He panted against Patrick’s neck, dropping Patrick’s thigh with a thud and resting on his hands, splayed on the comforter at either side of Patrick’s head.

Patrick’s whines got louder, scratching lines down Pete’s back. Pete's groaning got even louder and louder until he shuddered violently, convulsing and arching his back, pressing as deeply as he could into Patrick before coming with a desperate, stuttered cry.

Patrick’s vision went white for the second time, coming in thick ribbons over their chests once again, as he let out a silent scream, eyes rolling into his head, and he felt like he was going to shatter. He felt Pete’s warmth inside him, and he felt the older boy’s hips slow down, until they stuttered to a stop. Patrick felt his eyelids drop like they weighed a hundred pounds, feeling Pete press a kiss to his cheek with a mumbled phrase Patrick couldn't make any sense of- and then everything went black.

Patrick’s ear twitched, followed by his nose as he groggily blinked his eyes open, squinting at the offendingly-bright light hanging from the ceiling, and finding that his face was lying on Pete’s bare chest. He pulled his head up, grimacing at the drool he’d left on Pete’s chest, as Pete grinned at him tiredly, and carded a hand through the reddish-blonde hair softly.

“How are you feeling?” Patrick swallowed and leaned into the touch, “F-fine.” He leaned his head down again, nuzzling into the skin slightly.

“...Did I pass out…?”

Pete’s chest rumbled with loud laughter, “Yeah, I should get a medal or something...no- a parade-” Patrick rolled his eyes with a small smile, “-And you came twice.” Pete stared down at Patrick with raised eyebrows, remembering the amount of come he’d had to clean up.

Patrick’s eyes widened, “I didn’t think that was possible...” He glanced up at Pete, “Y’know, biologically, men don’t have-”

“Well you can spare me the biology lesson, ‘Trick- ‘cause you definitely did.”

Patrick raised his head, crawling up Pete’s chest and smiling at him fondly, “You’re not just showing off then?” Pete grinned and shrugged, “I think if anyone’s the show off here, it’s you.”

Patrick laughed quietly and pressed a chaste kiss to Pete’s lips, resisting the urge to say ‘I love you’-
he didn’t want to freak Pete out too much, and he wasn’t sure if it was too soon...or if Pete felt the same.

They lay in Pete's bed, completely naked, and covered by the comforter, listening to each other’s breathing- and with Patrick's head pressed into Pete's chest listening to his rhythmic heartbeat, he felt peaceful, and he slowly started drifting asleep.

A quiet whisper cut through the air.

“I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

The long awaited smut. Also, it's my first time writing smut, so please don't judge me too hard lol- I really tried.
Chapter Notes

I just wanted to say thank you for the support and the all the comments! They make me so happy and really make me want to keep writing! So thanks again!

“I’M SETTING THEM UP.”

“What? No-”

“IT’S ADORABLE. I HAVE TO-”

“No, no, no, you don’t under-”

Gerard watched with wide eyes as Sarah stomped out of the club, phone in hand and looking scarily determined, shoving past a very confused-looking Joe.

So...Gerard might have fucked up a little…

Okay, Gerard might have fucked up a lot.

He’d been sitting at the bar, nursing a bottle of lukewarm water and had been absently lost in his thoughts, when Sarah had bounced into the bar with her usual happy demeanour. It was Saturday, and while Sarah spending her weekends at The Cobra had confused Gerard at first, he’d understood once he had seen the enchanted stares she gave Brendon. 'The stupid shit we do for love', he’d thought with a wry smile.

The dark-haired girl had taken a seat next to him, cheerily starting a conversation and completely ignoring Gerard’s small scowl at being disturbed from his thoughts.

“What’s up, Gee?”
He had stared blankly for a moment, trying to show Sarah he wasn't in the mood for chatting one last time- her grin didn't falter, so he exhaled quietly, resigning to his fate.

“I’m fine, thanks. You?”

The girl had nodded with a smile, and had deemed the action an appropriate response before- “Hey, do you know where Patrick is?”

Gerard shook his head, “Haven’t seen him today.”

“When did you last see him?”

“When Wednesday.”

The girl turned a little somber, eyes squinting thoughtfully and staring at the boy.

“...Did you talk to him about something?”

Gerard furrowed his eyebrows and gazed at Sarah with suspicion.

“I did.”

“What about?” She beamed, seemingly back to her old self, but Gerard only scoffed lightly.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

“...It kinda is though.”

"Why do you care, exactly?”

She chewed on her lip, casting her eyes down and fingertips drumming on the bar’s surface. “He’s
been...different, lately."

“Different how?”

“...Happy...?”

“Then why are you worried? That’s a good thing.”

Sarah looked up eyes wild, and shaking her head. “No, no. Like TOO happy.”

Gerard scoffed again, “Don’t be ridiculous.”

The girl gaped, “I’m serious.” She started counting off on her fingers, “I jumped up on him- like I do every morning, and he just laughed- didn’t complain- or- or scowl at me.”

Gerard could only stare at her nonchalantly with a raised eyebrow.

“I stole his coffee- and he just smiled, and got another. Coffee’s usually like, fucking- liquid gold, to him.” Her voice got more frantic with each reason, “He smiles in every lesson, he actually laughs at the lame puns the teachers make, and when we leave school he’s just...”

Sarah looked down again, before narrowing her eyebrows and sighing. “I don’t know...he’s just...different.” She shrugged “I mean, I’m really happy for him- and it means I get free coffee-”

Gerard scoffed again, “-But...I wanna know why, y’know...?”

“Then why don’t you just ask him?”

“He just says ‘no reason’.” She groaned, with a bad imitation of Patrick’s voice.

Sarah suddenly leaned forwards seriously, as though she were a detective interrogating a suspect. “So, I need to know.” She was actually pretty intimidating, and Gerard found himself shrinking back a little.


“Why do you think it’s my fault?”
“HE’S BEEN LIKE THAT SINCE WEDNESDAY.”

Gerard sighed, he wasn’t getting out of this one.

“We talked about Pete.”

Sarah’s eyes widened and she leaned back, confusion rampant on her features.

“Pete…? Like Pete Wentz?”

“No, we were talking about ‘Pete’ Parker.”

“…What…?”

“Y’know…like…Spiderman- his name’s ‘Peter’, so like, ‘Pete’ Parker…no? Okay, so, comedy is lost on y-”

“Why were you talking about Pete?”

Gerard didn’t know what to say, he couldn’t very well answer ‘Oh, he was just asking me why Pete didn’t want to fuck him.’.

He swallowed for a moment, racking his brains and trying to think up an excuse, when Sarah jumped to a shocking conclusion.

“Oh my god,” Her eyes were wide and her mouth was hanging open, a slow, open grin spread onto her face, and her blue eyes turned watery. “He has a crush on Pete.”

Good guess, but not 100% correct. Gerard didn’t to know whether to correct her or deny the accusation, before-

“He has A CRUSH on PETE.”
“Not so loud.” Gerard hissed, pressing a hand to her mouth and glaring. “It’s not what you think-”

She shoved his hand away, beaming again, “OH, it’s EXACTLY WHAT I THINK.” She raised a stern, accusing finger at him, “YOU’RE JUST COVERING FOR HIM.”

Sarah stood, leaned back and let out a loud laugh.

“I’M SETTING THEM UP.”

Gerard stared in disbelief and horror as the girl stalked out of the club.

Patrick was going to lose his shit.

Brendon watched Sarah pace up and down his tiny living room, giggling like a maniac and staring down at her phone. He cleared his throat, and she ignored him. He sighed, furrowed his brow, and cleared his throat once more, but once again- no response.

Brendon scowled, leaning back into his couch with a pout, he hadn’t invited Sarah over to his house just to watch her text all day- And who was she texting anyway?!?

“Sarah.”

He only heard a small hum and more terrifying giggling.

“Sarah.”

No response.
Brendon growled, standing and marching over to her, before snatching the phone away and trying to look at the screen. Sarah was yelling and desperately trying to retrieve it, “BRENDON. GIVE IT BACK. IT’S NOT FUNNY.”

The boy squinted at the screen, not being able to make out the words very well as he felt Sarah trying to climb on him, limbs poking and flailing into his sides and fists thumping on his shoulders and back. By the time Brendon was practically giving her a piggy-back ride, he had gasped in indignation as he read the name of who she had been texting.

He turned, making sure his back was towards the couch and shoved Sarah off. She landed with a groan, clutching her head, before her hand reached out weakly for the phone, before being slapped away by a red-faced and slightly pissed-off Brendon.

“What were you texting Pete?!”

“I—”

“And why were you giggling so much?!”

“Brendon—”

“Do you like him?!”

“BRENDON BOYD URIE.”

He froze. Sarah only used his full name when she was seriously angry. The girl leaned forwards and snatched her phone away, holding it protectively in her hands, and cleared her throat.

“I was texting Pete because I am trying to set him up with Patrick.”

Sarah spoke slowly, eyes wide- in the same way you’d speak to a child throwing a tantrum. Brendon cocked his head like a confused puppy, and Sarah couldn’t help but smile.

“With Patrick?” He looked even more adorably confused, “Why Patrick?”
“Patrick has a crush on Pete.” She then dropped the voice and shrugged with a grin, “I also think they’d look really cute together- but that’s besides the point.”

Brendon took a seat next to the girl, resting his head on his hands and squinting in concentration. He hummed slightly and started nodding, he raised his head as the nods became larger and more enthusiastic. Brendon turned to look at Sarah with a smile and a determined glint in his eyes.

“I’m in.”

“A whole day.” Sarah gaped, looking down-cast and shocked. “We tried for a whole day and we couldn’t...”

Brendon nodded dazedly, looking just as disappointed and full of disbelief as he leaned against Sarah’s shoulder. “I know.” He raised his head, squinting for a second, “Do we suck that much?”

Sarah shook her head in confusion with a hunch of her shoulders, she couldn’t believe it.

They had tried all day.

They had left Brendon’s house determined, and on a mission: Get Pete and Patrick to go on a date.

...The plan was decent, but the execution was a little...creepy.

Firstly, the duo had returned to the bar, walking past a protesting and nervous Gerard- ignoring him completely as they stalked towards the backstage rooms.

They’d burst into Fall Out Boy’s room without knocking- as Joe had pointed out, and had asked to speak to Pete. The dark-haired boy had followed them out, looking confused the whole time.

“Hey, what are you doing tonight, dude?” Brendon had started, squinting his eyes, and clapping a hand on Pete’s right shoulder. Pete had stared at the hand for a second before he had started shifting his surprised gaze from boy to girl, from girl to boy. “Uh, nothing much...why?”

“Maybe you should...go out...to like...Dairy Queen...or something?...At seven o’clock.” Sarah
placed her hand on Pete’s left shoulder gently, and smiled- and while it was probably supposed to be convincing, it just looked kind of chilling.

Pete had nodded awkwardly, before excusing himself and darting away with worried glances back at the duo.

Needless to say, Pete was 99% sure they were planning to murder him...but the whole 'Dairy Queen’ thing had given him an idea.

Secondly, Brendon and Sarah had left to find Patrick, who had been hiding away at Junction park.

He had been sitting on the small, metal park merry-go-round, strumming an acoustic guitar he’d borrowed from Ashley and occasionally scribbling notes in a small notebook that was resting on his thigh.

Patrick had felt pretty peaceful.

Just him and an instrument, writing down any interesting or good-sounding chords while listening to the birds chirping and breathing the fresh air.

And then everything had gone blurry and he felt his stomach flip. His head shot up to notice he was spinning, but he suddenly stopped with a jolt, and saw Brendon and Sarah holding two of the merry-go-round handles and grinning maliciously- like Cheshire cats.

“-What the fuck was that for?” Patrick stumbled to his feet, holding his guitar and stuffing the notebook into his pocket- still a little dizzy.

“Hey! Patrick, buddy-” Brendon started but was quickly cut off by Sarah, “What are you doing tonight?”

Patrick stared back, right eye twitching slightly. “You came here-” He exhaled sharply, pinching the bridge of his nose, “-To ask me what I was doing tonight?”

The duo nodded cheerily, not picking up on Patrick’s strong urge to beat the shit out of them.

“Nothing. I’m doing nothing.” He glared at Sarah accusingly, “By the way, Sarah, you KNOW I’m doing nothing. I do nothing on weekends, okay?!?”

The girl couldn’t bring herself to frown, she only grinned- there was the old, grumpy Patrick she knew and loved. Happy Patrick had been freaking her out a little, if she was honest.

“Okay...Maybe you should go get some...ice cream.” Brendon grinned alarmingly, and Patrick gulped in slight fear. “I don’t really wanna get-”
“Get some ice cream, lunchbox. Dairy Queen. At seven.” Sarah said tightly, thumping a hand onto Brendon’s shoulder, “Just trust me.”

Patrick stared in horrified disbelief, and nodded. He wasn’t actually gonna go to Dairy Queen, but he’d say just about anything to make them go away right now.

The nod worked, thankfully, and the duo sped away giggling maniacally, and with a synchronised shout of ‘BYE PATRICK’.

Finally, Sarah and Brendon had flopped down into Brendon’s couch- breathless and giggling, Sarah raised her eyes to Brendon’s with a small smile, and a blush had spread across her face. Brendon had smiled back, eyes gazing at her peacefully. They’d sat like that for a few moments before Sarah jolted- successfully destroying the peace.

She fished her phone out of her pocket, and started grinning and giggling as she held up the lock screen to Brendon.

7:00

Sarah unlocked the phone and her fingers started darting over the keyboard deftly- making Brendon idly wonder if she’d be good at playing an instrument...piano, maybe- he thought that would suit her for some reason.

“I just texted Pete.” Sarah grinned up at Brendon, practically bouncing with excitement, and he quickly sat up, looking over her shoulder. “What’d you say?”

She cleared her throat and read out the message, “‘Hey Pete, just wondering if you’re at DQ right now’ smiley face.” Brendon nodded, “Good, that’s good.” His eyes flashed quickly, “Text Patrick.” Sarah nodded eagerly before the phone buzzed, and Pete’s answer flashed on the screen.

Their faces dropped as they saw the message.

WetzelsPretzels: sorry, cant. got a date 2night.
“Oh shit, Patrick’s gonna get stood up.”

“TEXT HIM.”

“OKAY.” She nodded with panicky determination, fingers typing out a shaky message.

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: hwey luicnhbox. U at dq rn?*

They jumped and scrambled to read Patrick’s answer that made the phone buzz, after a short pause.

*Patrick Stumph: First, what is wrong with your spelling? Are you have a stroke, or something?*

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: paTRICK R U A DQ*

*Patrick Stumph: No, I’m not a dairy queen, thank you very much.*

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: UGH R U AT DAIRY QUEEN*

*Patrick Stumph: No.*

Brendon and Sarah gaped.

*Que-Sarah-Sarah: BUT U SAID U WERE GOIN*

*Patrick Stumph: Do you know how creepy you and Brendon were? It sounded like you were going to murder me, I wasn’t going to walk into such an obvious trap.*

*Patrick Stumph: Besides, I have homework to do.*

*Patrick Stumph: Night, Sarah.*
The duo stared down at the phone with shock and horror plastered all over their faces. They had collapsed backwards, staring into thin air.

“A whole day.”

After complaining on the couch for about two hours, Brendon had glanced over at Sarah, nudging her with his elbow lightly and smiling. “Hey.”

She only sniffed, “They would be so cute together-”

Brendon rolled his eyes with a groan, and spoke up again to cut off Sarah’s oncoming rant. “I know. I know.” She sniffed again, but smiled back shyly.

“Wanna go to Dairy Queen?”

So they did.

The duo walked down the sidewalk, tightening their scarves and coats, and shuddering at the cold air. They talked to each other happily and Brendon tried to keep the conversation topic away from Pete and Patrick- or ‘Peterick’ as Sarah had insisted he call them.

Brendon gave a short, happy whistle as they saw the bright sign that promised ice cream, and Brendon had started an argument with himself about what to order. He was extremely immersed in his internal arguing, when he heard Sarah stop walking with a gasp and grab his arm, making him stumble slightly.

“Hey, what’s-” He turned to look to where her wide blue eyes were staring, and saw-

Holy shit.

Pete and Patrick.
Walking out of the building, hand in hand.

Pete pressed a quick kiss to Patrick’s flushed cheek and Sarah actually squealed—hopping up and down.

“Well, shove a bow up my ass and call me Cupid.”

Patrick stood in his room, face set in stony determination—that he was told, much to his dismay, very much resembled his father.

He stood, back straight and violin on shoulder, bow arm dangling at his side. Patrick swallowed, glowing at the music sheet as though it had murdered his children. Thankfully, his little ‘outburst’ hadn’t caused him to get kicked out of orchestra—but it had earned him a very difficult solo piece.

He stared at the name ‘Bartok’ written at the top of the page and cursed it, before moving his gaze to the first, black note and lifting his arm, poising his bow above the strings and setting his fingers in one, swift movement.

Patrick started playing.

He exhaled deeply, letting go of the tension in his chest and shoulders as his brain quickly—and almost automatically, read and played each note perfectly. People told him he was talented, and although he vehemently disagreed, he had to admit that he felt kind of...unstoppable, when playing the shiny, wooden instrument.

Patrick had actually become a lot less self-deprecating since...Pete.

Patrick had been very happy the last few weeks, and that happiness had only increased to impossible levels after the uh...events...at Pete’s house a few days before.

He’d fallen asleep, lying on Pete’s chest, but had heard Pete whisper something quietly just before he’d drifted away. Patrick had made a note to ask Pete about it, but it had kept slipping his mind.

But, regardless, Patrick was happy.
Really happy.

A sudden, loud knocking rang through the bedroom.

Patrick jumped, yelping and almost dropping the violin on the carpeted floor- just managing to toss it carefully onto his bed before swivelling around towards the noise.

His eyes widened.

Pete Wentz.

Pete- fucking- Wentz.

Pete- fucking- Wentz was beaming at him from behind his bedroom window, hand curled up into a fist and resting against the glass. His hand unfurled, and he waved cheerily instead.

Patrick’s right eye twitched.

He stalked over to the window, opening it with a slight grunt and glaring at Pete- who shrank back a little. Patrick’s eyes softened and widened as he looked out, and gasped, realizing that Pete was currently on his house’s roof. He moved back quickly, words not being able to escape him because of the shock to his system, and gesturing wildly for Pete to get off the goddamn roof, Jesus Christ, are you trying to kill yourself?

Pete clambered inside on all fours, dropping down to the floor with a grunt, and Patrick quickly moved to help him up, grabbing his hand.

“Pete-? What are you doing?” Patrick asked, face contorted with confusion. After a pause, and Pete’s smug grin only intensified.

“I’m takin’ you out on a date, Pattycakes.”
“Wha-? Pete, I-”

“No buts- c’mon.” Pete lowered his voice, pulling Patrick towards the window, making the redhead flail to free his hand. “THE FUCKING WINDOW. I’M NOT CLIMBING OUT OF THE WINDOW.” He lowered his voice in a furious whisper, Pete only shrugged.

“It’s easy, ‘Trick.” Pete grinned, drawing out the ‘easy’ for emphasis.

“How did you- How did you even-?”

“I climbed.”

“Motherfucker- You just ‘climbed’?”

The corners of Pete's eyes crinkled- Patrick really sounded like a wife nagging her- okay, slightly childish, husband.

“Yeah.”

“HOW?”

“I used the trash can.” Pete shrugged, “I stood on it, jumped up to the garage roof- then just climbed up here.”

“THIS IS THE TOP FLOOR OF A THREE-STORY HOUSE.”

“I’m a good climber.”

Patrick stared, and Pete sighed. He was obviously going to need some convincing.
Pete released the pale hand and moved over to the younger boy, placing his hands on his hips gently. He gave Patrick a grin before ducking his head to press his lips against Patrick’s. The redhead exhaled, and Pete smiled as he felt a familiar pair of hands carding through his hair. Pete wrapped his arms around Patrick’s waist, leaning forwards and ducking him back a little, before tilting his head and running his tongue over Patrick’s bottom lip.

He pulled away to see the blue eyes still glaring—but with no real dedication or venom behind them. Patrick sighed dramatically, thumping his head onto Pete’s chest, and straightening themselves up in the process.

“Fine.”

Pete grinned, lightly bouncing with pure joy.

“So, where are you taking me?”

“...Do you like ice cream?”

Pete grinned, watching Patrick dig his spoon into a hot fudge sundae and bring it to his mouth with a small, appreciative moan.

He smiled, rolling his eyes slightly. “I can taste the diabetes.” He shoved the spoon back in, “By the way, what kind of question was that? Who the fuck doesn’t like ice cream?” Pete shrugged lightly, poking at his own bowl. “I dunno. I’ve heard rumours of people who don’t. Never met one, though.” Patrick laughed silently, looking up at the older boy, before moving his hand across the table to lace his fingers with Pete’s free hand.

“Thank you Pete.” Pete felt himself melt under Patrick’s happy gaze. “For everything...And for this sundae, it’s fucking awesome.” The redhead shoved another spoon of ice cream into his mouth, leaning backwards, and eyes twinkling happily.

Pete shook his head, “Hey, anytime, lunchbox.” Patrick rolled his eyes with no real anger, “I wish you wouldn’t call me that.”

Pete squinted, tilting his head and a mischievous smile crossing his lips. “Okay…but, if can’t use lunchbox, then I get to call you something else.”
“Pete, no-”

“What about ‘Ricky’?”

“Pete-”

“Rickmeister.”

“Peter.”

Pete laughed, hunching over the table and resting his head on a his fist. Patrick broke out into soft laughter too, before remembering what he’d been meaning to ask for a long while.

“Hey Pete?”

“Yeah, ‘Trick?”

Patrick averted his gaze from Pete’s eyes and back to his ice cream instead, staring down and twisting his spoon with a gulp.

“Did, uh- did you, say something...after we uh-...” He motioned with his head, “Y-Y’know, before, I fell, uh- asleep?”

Pete chewed on his lip, moving his eyes down.

He had said something.
He’d told Patrick he loved him.

And, Patrick hadn’t said anything back, so Pete had assumed he didn’t feel the same or that he just hadn’t heard it. He preferred to believe the latter, but the former had haunted him constantly.

Pete looked up to see Patrick’s eyes, earnest and expectant, and full of acceptance and kindness.

Goddammit, Pete was screwed.

He nodded.

Patrick bit the inside of his cheek and opened his mouth to ask exactly what Pete had said, before he was cut off swiftly by-

“I said ‘I love you’.”

Pete’s eyes bored into Patrick’s, and his whole frame shook with nervous intensity, hands rolled into fists and knuckles going white.

Patrick’s jaw went slack. Pete loved him. Pete Wentz, loved him. He felt his heartbeat quicken and he gave a breathy gasp, before it all came tumbling out without a second thought.

“I love you too.”
Pete’s eyes widened and his mouth gaped slightly. Patrick Stumpf loved him…? This had to be the best day of his life...Or, at least, a close second to Wednesday.

His face split into a grin and he laughed, overjoyed and eyes watering. Patrick mirrored his laughter, and wiped at his eyes with his sleeve. Pete took Patrick’s hand again, squeezing it tightly.

“I love you, Patrick. I love you so fucking much.”

Patrick nodded with a grin and sniffed. “I love you too Pete. So much...it’s kind of scary, actually...”

Pete could only laugh, running his thumb over Patrick’s knuckles softly. “How’s it ‘kinda scary’?”

The younger boy only shrugged, the happy, bright and gorgeous grin still set on his face.

“I-I don’t know, I just- I just think about you...like a lot, probably an unhealthy amount actually.”

Patrick trailed off, words getting quieter as he flushed red with embarrassment and gazed down at the table.

Pete only grinned harder, having to fight the urge to kiss Patrick and beg him to run away together, to- to Mexico or something- Actually, maybe Canada, Patrick seemed to like cold weather.

A moment of silence passed before Pete spoke up again.

“I would probably die for you.”

Patrick looked up, sputtering a nervous laugh. “What?-”

“Yeah, like, I think I’d be okay dying for you, y’know...? Don’t think I’d be too mad about it. Probably wouldn’t come back as a pissed-off ghost, or anything.”

They both dissolved into genuine laughter again, hands still linked together firmly. Pete smiled, tilting his head and placing a hand on Patrick’s cheek- tenderly tracing his thumb along the prominent cheekbone that was covered by soft, pale skin. Patrick leaned into the touch, and gently stared into Pete’s eyes, with a small, content smile.

Pete leaned over the table until he was inches from Patrick’s face, tilted his head and softly slotted their lips together. Patrick’s smile only grew wider, and his heart only fluttered harder as he placed a gentle hand on Pete’s cheek, caressing it with his fingertips gently.
When Pete pulled away, he settled a few inches away, holding himself up with his forearms on the plastic table. They stared at each other, eyes full of adoration and tenderness, when Pete broke the silence.

“You taste like ice cream. S’pretty good, I should bring you here more often.”

They left the building, hand in hand and laughing, with Patrick leaning against Pete. Pete grimaced a little at the cold air, but Patrick only hummed happily. The younger boy straightened up as they began walking away when he felt Pete lay a soft kiss on his cheek, making him grin and turn to the dark-haired boy. Patrick pulled Pete down, locking their lips together again and humming contently, and then he heard two loud- very enthusiastic cheers.

They pulled away from each other, heads snapping in the direction of the noise.

The boys faces twisted into confusion as they saw Sarah and Brendon celebrating, arms raised in triumph and cheering wildly, hugging each other and jumping up and down excitedly. Patrick heard a few shouts of ‘We did it!’ and ‘I’m so fucking happy!’ before he felt Pete tugging on his hand, leading him on the well worn path to Glenview.

Patrick stopped with a stuttered step in front of his house, and turned to face Pete with a sheepish smile. The older boy leaned in almost immediately, and Patrick threw his arms around his neck, tilting his head and sighing into the kiss.

He felt something being pressed into his chest, and as Pete pulled away, Patrick looked down to see- another white bag.

“Pete-”

Another kiss, hard and more insistent this time. Patrick felt Pete’s fingertips on his cheeks and they remained, even after Pete had pulled away with a grin.

“You deserve it, Patrick.”
Patrick sighed happily, gazing at Pete for a moment before he realized where they were, and that his parents were inside the house, only a few feet away, and could look out of a window at any moment.

Pete smiled, understanding Patrick’s unspoken worry, and pecked his forehead, whispering “I love you.” before darting away, with a shout of-

“BYE RICKMEISTER.”

Patrick sighed and rolled his eyes fondly, before smiling softly and whispering “I love you too.” into the night air.

Brendon and Sarah threw their heads back in laughter, before taking heaped spoonfuls from their large, shared- and ridiculously sweet, ice cream.

“I can’t believe it!” Sarah bounced in her seat, “WE DID IT. WE ACTUALLY DID IT.” She yelled, before being ‘shushed’ by an old woman sat at the next table. “Sorry...”

Brendon only dropped his head to the table, shaking with laughter. He looked up at Sarah with watery brown eyes, “I know, oh my god- We’re amazing.” He held out a hand to Sarah, who smacked it in a loud, painful high five.

They both clutched their now- red hands, bursting into unbridled laughter again.

“We make a good team, Sarah.”

Brendon stared up fondly, smiling. Sarah smiled softly, eyes blinking slowly.
“We sure do, Brendon.”
Oops I wrote smut again, sorry lol. Also, this is half inspired by Patrick singing Immortals in Italian (look it up, it's amazing), and by Pete's awful Spanish in 'The Mexican Flip-off' video. Also, sorry if this is a little short or unfocused, but I'm leading up to something, just you wait lol.

“Focus. You can do it.”

Pete rolled his eyes, and fell backwards onto the mattress with a groan. “I really can’t, ‘Trick.”

Patrick narrowed his eyes and exhaled sharply, “Yes, you can.” He shoved the sheet of paper towards Pete, who just stared at it with disdain.

Patrick sighed and stared, “You asked me to help you.” Pete shrugged weakly, and Patrick shook his head in disbelief with a loud, purposeful scoff. “Well I’m not doing it for you.”

Pete whined and pulled Patrick down to lie next to him, the redhead scowled but the older boy only grinned and tried to look pitiful.

“...Please?”

“No.”

Patrick sat up again, pulling Pete up by his shirt, and ignoring the whine, and instead flooded with determination. “Look, just repeat after me, okay?”

Pete groaned again, but nodded.

“La biblioteca-”

“Lah bib-liu-teka-”
“Pete-”

“I’m trying, dude, I swear. I just really suck at this.”

A heavy exhale cut through the room and Patrick’s eyes softened slightly.

“-Esta en la ciudad.”

“-Estah em lah siu-dad.”

Patrick sighed again, but a small half-grin worked its way onto Pete’s face. “You sound really good, y’know. Like, you’re really good- you don’t even have an accent.” Patrick shook his head, but Pete kept pressing.

“How’d you learn to speak Spanish? You’re not secretly Mexican or something, right?”

The redhead laughed, rubbing his hand over his face tiredly. “No, I’m not.” He looked over at Pete with a relaxed smile, and shrugged lightly. “My mom and dad put me in language classes as soon as I started speaking. They thought it would important for my ‘career.’” Patrick made inverted commas with his fingers at the last word, "Y’know, if I had to go to an orchestra in Europe, or something.”

Pete nodded, looking thoughtful and was slightly surprised at how long Patrick’s parents had been planning his entire life. He grimaced a little at that- absently hoping Patrick wouldn’t leave to go to Europe. His thoughts suddenly moved away from the somber possibilities and he stared up at Patrick, grinning widely.

“You should speak Spanish more often.”

Patrick smirked lightly, “Oh yeah? You like it?”

Pete nodded again with raised eyebrows, and Patrick felt himself get a little bolder. He leaned over to Pete, settling inches away from his face and smiling with lidded eyes.

“Bueno, si te gusta tanto...crees que debería seguir?”
Patrick laughed, nose wrinkling, clapping his hands, and doubling over. Pete laughed with him quietly, until the younger boy pulled his head up again- blushing slightly, but grinning brightly. The smile turned mischievous as he moved over to Pete again, and placed soft kisses on his jaw.

The older boy moaned quietly, leaning into the touch as Patrick bit the shell of his ear, before settling with a sly grin, and whispering in the most sultry voice he could muster.

“Bésame.”

“...What?”

Pete stared into Patrick's eyes, completely dazed, and the vacant expression made Patrick shake with silent laughter. He rolled his eyes fondly and slotted his lips against Pete’s with a tilt of his head. Pete moaned moving his hands to Patrick’s face and flicking his tongue against the other boy’s lips. Patrick groaned slightly, before a spark of confidence went through him.

Patrick buried his teeth into Pete’s bottom lip, and kept them there as he pulled back a few inches. He stared into Pete’s dilated eyes, and then let the lip go, with a grin.

Pete whined slightly, hips shifting uncomfortably and made a move to shove Patrick down onto the mattress before-

“Patrick? Sweetheart, are you in there?”

The boys eyes widened and Patrick jumped to his feet, wildly swivelling his head to stare at the white, bedroom door. “U-uh- Y-yeah, mom! I-I’m here.”

The door handle started turning.

“Can I come in, dear? I just—”

“NO. NO, No no- just hang on- one sec.”

Patrick turned to Pete, and motioned wildly, and whispered in a tiny, fearful voice, “Hide.”
Pete jolted to his feet, looking around the room frantically, while Mrs. Stumph’s voice just got louder.

“Patrick?”

“I’M GETTING DRESSED MOM, HANG ON- Pete, fucking hide!”

Pete’s gaze flicked away and a brilliant idea burst into his mind...okay, maybe it wasn't that brilliant, but he was desperate, and right now, it seemed like the most flawless plan ever conceived. Quickly shuffling over to the bed, Pete slid under it, pulling Patrick’s comforter down over the sides to successfully hide himself from view.

Patrick gulped nervously, and jogged over to the door, as the shouts of “Patrick?”, got more and more insistent. He opened the door, pulling the best innocent smile he could manage.

“-H- Hey, mom!”

His mother stared at him, half in confusion, half in suspicion. She crossed her arms when she noticed Patrick was blocking the entrance to his room. “Can I come in?”

Nerves flashed through Patrick’s eyes, but he moved backwards quickly, gesturing for his mother to enter with a shaky hand.

She walked in, glancing around suspiciously- familiar blue eyes watchful. Patrick stared at her with a tight smile, “W-was there anything you needed, mom?”

His mother’s eyes flashed in realization and she looked at him with a smile, “Oh, yes! Sweetie- I just wanted to let you know that we’re leaving now.”

Patrick furrowed his brow, looking extraordinarily confused. “Leaving…?”

She nodded slowly, and stared at her son obviously. “Yes, to buy the dog.”

The boy looked even more confused- if that was possible, and his mother sighed.

“We promised Kevin and Megan a dog if they did well in school this year...remember?” She stared with wide eyes, “We asked you if you wanted to come yesterday, but you refused…? Something about your orchestra…?”

The memory suddenly flooded Patrick’s mind and he nodded quickly, feeling slightly cheery at the
thought of a new pet— but he felt a slight pang of worry as he hoped that his younger siblings wouldn’t pick the most annoying dog they could find.

His mother’s skeptical expression returned at her son’s vacant stare, “Well, anyway... It’s quite a journey— and you know how indecisive Kevin is, so we’ll probably be home at around eight, is that okay?”

Patrick suspected that even if he had said ‘no’— she wouldn’t care, so he opted to nod instead— feeling relief at being left home alone.

“Yeah, uh... that’s fine, I have homework, and I have to practice and stuff, so— yeah, that’s fine!”

She nodded, uncrossing her arms, and stepping forwards to give her eldest son a quick hug. “Alright, take care, Patrick.” His mother pulled away and stared for a moment, before adding “And behave.” And leaving the room, with one last doubtful glance.

Patrick ran over to the door, closing it with a soft click, before leaning his forehead against the wood with a heavy, relieved sigh.

He heard shuffling and turned to watch Pete crawl out from under his bed, still grinning.

“Under the bed? Really? Are you five years old, or something?”

Pete rolled his eyes jokingly, “It worked, didn’t it?”

Patrick couldn’t argue, and instead glanced towards his door again. He held up a finger to Pete, “Wait here a sec.” before ducking out into the hall.

He crept to the top of the stairs with silent footsteps, kneeling and hiding behind the banisters— hands wrapped around two wooden poles.

Patrick watched his family: Kevin and Megan looked positively ecstatic, bouncing on the balls of their feet and grinning, whilst quietly muttering to each other and occasionally bursting into manic giggles.

Their father looked unamused, distracting himself by tying his scarf around his neck neatly, and pulling on a pair of black, leather gloves with a quiet sigh— Patrick assumed he wasn’t too happy about the promise he’d made to his younger children.

Their mother still had a suspicious glint in her eye, that made Patrick’s stomach flip nervously, but she also looked quite happy... which was a little odd, in Patrick’s opinion.
As soon as they had left the house- locking the door behind them, Patrick had stood and walked back
to his room, finding Pete staring at his Spanish homework angrily.

Patrick huffed a silent laugh, leaning against the closed door with crossed arms. “Crisis averted.
They’re gone.”

Pete’s head flicked up to look at Patrick, eyes lidding slightly and mouth curving into a grin once
again. He made a move to stand, eyes dark before he was cut off by a displeased and shocked
Patrick.

“Dude, I almost had a heart attack, I am not.”

Pete looked pitiful, pouting and eyes wide, making Patrick bite the inside of his cheek. He had felt
pretty confident, before his mother had unknowingly ruined the moment. And he could still feel a
sensitive tightness in his jeans- so, he considered it for a moment, before nodding decisively.

A long exhale rang through the room and a determined glint flooded the baby blue eyes: Patrick
Stumph had made up his mind.

With a glance at the floor, a slow step forward and pink lips curving into a predatory half-smile,
Patrick moved to stand in front of Pete, leaning down to his eye level.

“Que quieres?”

Pete whined again, hips jolting of their own accord- he really didn’t know why Patrick speaking
another language had such an insane effect on him- but, hey, he wasn’t complaining.

Patrick felt his pulse quicken, and bit his lip. Then, Patrick sunk to his knees between Pete’s spread
legs, and the older boy’s eyes widened to an impossible size and his Adam’s apple bobbed
expectantly. Pete chewed on his lip as he watched the redhead smile hungrily from between his legs.

Patrick raised a hand to run gingerly along Pete’s clothed thigh, before settling over the zipper of his
jeans. “Esto?” Pete’s teeth bit down into his lip further, and his eyelids drooped a little more. He had
no idea what Patrick was saying, but could only nod and bury his fingers in Patrick’s comforter.

The younger boy grinned sweetly, but with eyes full of mischief as he pulled down the zip slowly-
and Pete could swear he could hear every individual metal tooth click and he felt himself going more
insane with each one.

Patrick stared down at the bulge in Pete’s boxers with a light smirk, before shifting his eyes upwards
to stare into Pete’s. A small pink tongue darted out of Patrick’s soft mouth and he lapped a long
stripe over the clothed cock. Pete bucked his hips roughly and pressed a hand to his mouth, biting
into his palm. It was the worst kind of tease, and Patrick seemed to know it, because he only made it more insufferable as he moved his head closer, blue eyes still boring into Pete’s.

Patrick placed gentle, open kisses over the length, and hooked his fingers around the boxers, sliding them down and flushing pink when Pete’s cock sprang free—dark with blood and throbbing. Pete gave a strangled, muffled moan as Patrick feathered his pale fingers along the slit and down his shaft.

The look in Pete’s eyes, coupled with his very prominent desperation, only made Patrick even more confident. He wrapped a hand around the base tightly, and slowly twisted his hand upwards—trying to mimic what Pete had done to him weeks ago. “Te gusta eso?” He looked up at Pete with lidded eyes, “O quieres algo mas?”

Pete gave a stuttered groan, chest heaving with each sound that escaped him. Patrick grinned, and placed his mouth over the tip gingerly, tongue flicking when he heard Pete’s loud, and appreciative moan.

Patrick swirled his tongue, hand moving slowly around the shaft—but in truth, he was having a hard time staying coordinated and was struggling to be deft with his mouth. He gagged slightly, removing his lips and smirking lightly at Pete’s whine, before opting to lick hot stripes across the whole length. Pete cursed, leaning back on his forearms but tilting his head forwards to watch Patrick’s mouth at work.

After a short while, Patrick exhaled—inaudently blowing warm air over Pete’s cock and making the older boy groan. He smiled again, staring up at Pete, before his brow furrowed with pure determination as he sank his head down, taking half of Pete’s twitching length into his mouth. Patrick heard desperate noises from above him, but exhaled through his nose, choosing to focus on his task instead.

He started suckling lightly, his own cock twitching at the noises that escaped Pete’s slack-jawed mouth. Patrick screwed his eyes shut for a brief moment, twisting his hand and jerking it upwards along the base of Pete’s cock.

“Oh f-fuck, Patrick.”

The redhead opened his eyes, looking up at Pete innocently, lips still wrapped around the older boy’s cock. Pete groaned deeply at the sight, taking a fistful of reddish hair and biting down on his lip. “Y-your fucking m-mouth- ah-” Brown eyes clamped shut and his shoulders shook momentarily, before his eyes blinked open weakly. “F-fuckin’- shit, made to s-su-” His words were cut off by the loud moan that fell from his mouth, as Patrick hummed knowingly and contentedly from around his length, sending small, electric vibrations through Pete’s system.

Relaxing his throat as best he could, Patrick stopped sucking and instead pushed his head down further, squeezing his fingers around Pete’s thigh, and nuzzling the base of Pete’s cock. The older boy fell backwards, hands covering his face and fingernails digging into his own face desperately, leaving small, but deep crescent marks peppered all over the skin there.
Calmly shutting his eyes, Patrick exhaled, staying completely still and feeling Pete’s pulse on his tongue. He moaned around the length in his mouth, before slowly bobbing his head, purposefully dragging his lips across the velvety skin as he pulled back. Patrick could feel a dull ache in his jaw and he felt drool covering his chin as he flicked, swirled and circled his tongue frantically— and he had to admit he felt filthy like this, on his knees with a cock in his mouth... but god, if it didn’t turn him on.

Patrick’s ministrations got stronger, more demanding and more intense, and he slipped his hand into his own boxers, rutting his hips forwards into his own fist. He opened his eyes as he felt a hand in his hair again, he was only squinting but he could clearly see Pete— now sat up again, one hand in Patrick’s hair and the other buried in the comforter, both hands gripping tightly. He was flushed, red clearly visible on his tanned cheeks, frame shaking slightly, eyes wide, dazed and blown— staring into Patrick’s, and finally, mouth hanging open, wet, panting and inviting.

Patrick powered through his gag reflex as he felt Pete’s hips snapping upwards roughly, in uneven, frantic thrusts. He held his mouth open, tongue flicking as he let Pete fuck his mouth, moaning around the length as his deft hand sped up around his own cock.

He felt two hands buried in his hair now, and blinked slowly, watching Pete’s mouth make loud, sinful noises. Patrick could feel himself getting close, he could feel the tip of his own cock getting damp with precome, only making him moan louder— and that was the final straw for Pete.

Pete cried out, hips stuttering, eyes struggling to stay open and chest rising and falling dramatically. Patrick felt Pete’s cock shudder and twitch as he grazed his teeth along the shaft, hearing a deep groan and feeling his mouth flooding with come, tasting the saltiness and swallowing deeply— blue eyes boring into Pete’s.

“Ah- babe, Patrick-”

The redhead gave a stuttered breath at the lustful words, body tensing, eyes rolling and head bobbing as he came— hot ribbons coating his knuckles and the inside of his boxers.

Patrick pulled away, wiping his hand on his sleeve with a wrinkled nose, making Pete laugh breathlessly. “Have- have you, ever-?” Pete shuddered, running a shaky hand over his face and trying to calm his thundering heartbeat, “Have you ever done that before?”

The redhead shook his head, stumbling to his feet and wincing at the stings of pain in his knees. He watched Pete’s eyes widen as he fixed his boxers, zipping them shut again. “W-well, you were...I mean, holy shit.”

Patrick gave a silent, nervous laugh, shrugging, “I just tried to copy you- What you did, the- the first time...”

He smiled shyly and made a move towards the bathroom, intent on cleaning himself up— when he felt himself being dragged towards the bed.

Pete pulled Patrick onto his lap, grinning and peppering his face with soft kisses, “You’re fucking
amazing, “Trick. Full of surprises.” Patrick rolled his eyes with a sly smile and bent towards Pete’s ear.

“Tu también me sorprendes a mí.”

He felt Pete tense under him.

“No sabía que te gustaba el Español tanto así.”

He heard a strangled breath from Pete, and the strained and warning growl of, “Patrick.”, that followed.

Patrick pulled his head back to stare Pete in the eyes, smiling and tilting his head with mock surprise, and innocent curiosity.

“Ou préférez-vous le français, monsieur?”

Another warning groan of his name spilled from Pete’s mouth, but Patrick only grinned wider, nipping Pete’s lip before moving his head down to kiss and bite at Pete’s neck, “Peut-être pas français, alors...”

Patrick felt a rough buck from beneath him, and his grin only got more wicked. “...Je me demande-”

He gave a surprised yelp as he felt himself being pushed down into the mattress, he shook the dizziness from his head and looked up. Pete was caging him with his arms and glowering down with aroused, dilated and- very dark eyes.

Even with the serious gaze burning into him, Patrick couldn’t stop grinning and could only laugh as Pete kissed his neck feverishly, hands gripping at his thighs. He squeezed his eyes shut, still shaking with laughter and a few words escaped through the hiccuping giggles.

“O ti piace meglio l’italiano?”
Patrick was going to be walking funny for a few days after that.

Pete had been gone for an hour and Patrick was lying on his bed- still a little dazed, naked and covered in come. He yawned slightly, stretching and sitting up- wincing at the pain in his backside. Patrick smirked as he noticed the dark bruises shaped like Pete's fingerprints littering his thighs and hips.

Sure, it was his own fault- maybe he shouldn’t have provoked Pete with his- apparently, very arousing linguistic skills...but he’d be lying if he said that he hadn't enjoyed the consequences. He bit his lip, his mind vividly replaying the events from an hour ago- he could just see Pete towering above him, shoulders tense, eyes dark, and hips thrusting forwards viciously. He could feel the tight grip, the bony hips ramming into him, and the downright glorious way he stretched around Pete. Patrick gulped with a blush, quickly taking his mind off of that subject and opting to go shower instead, before blood started rushing to somewhere that had already been overworked today.

He was wrapped in a fluffy, white, warm towel and had no real motivation to dry himself off- instead, he just stood on the soft bathmat, bundled up and eyes closed. But suddenly, his ears pricked up at a noise from downstairs. Patrick heard the unmistakeable sound of the front door opening, and it was quickly followed by excited chattering ringing faintly throughout the house.

It took Patrick ten minutes to dry himself and get dressed, heading downstairs and trying to walk as naturally as possible, ignoring the burning pains littered around his lower half, but smiling slightly at the ache in his jaw.

He stepped into the living room, his father staring at him as he moved past his son and headed upstairs with a grimace- most likely to his office. Patrick spotted his siblings crouched in front of a small cage with their mother stood behind them, leaning to see inside and grinning brightly- she looked genuinely happy, and that made Patrick smile a little.

Patrick rounded the couch, peering into the cage and seeing a small, shaking puppy, staring at the people in front of him intently with quiet, high-pitched barks. The puppy raised a paw, stepping forwards shakily with a quiet whine- and Patrick had to admit, it was fucking adorable. It might have been the most adorable thing he’d ever seen, but it was completely beaten by the pinnicle of cuteness- a sleeping Pete. Patrick smiled at the memory, and shook his head subtly.

“You chose this one, then?”
Megan nodded, looking up at Patrick with squinting joyful eyes and a bright grin on her face. Kevin looked up from her side with an expression to match. “This was totally worth doing my homework for.”

“Kevin!”

Their mother’s stern voice rang out, before they all dissolved into giggles, and all attention moved back to the puppy- who Megan was now carefully cuddling to her chest, as she slowly stood on shaky legs. “It’s a golden retriever, Pat. Isn’t he so cute?!” She cooed at the puppy, softly petting its head with two fingers. Patrick had to admit- once again, that the dog was very cute, but he couldn’t help but squint a little at the breed.

“...Aren’t golden retrievers like, really dumb?”

Megan gave an exaggerated gasp and something mischievous flashed through Kevin’s eyes- Patrick frowned, that motherfucker had totally done it on purpose.

“Don’t be mean to Steve, Patrick!”

Patrick froze.

He was dreading the next question, but he just had to ask.

“...Steve?...”

“Yes, Steve.”

Megan grinned and giggled as Steve licked her face, and Patrick stared, eyes wide and blank- his brow furrowed, as Kevin’s grin widened. Patrick turned to his mother, who just looked at him sympathetically sighed, “I thought the same thing as you Patrick, but, your brother and sister get to choose the name.”

Patrick nodded, still in disbelief, before his eyes suddenly cleared, and he glared.
“If that dog escapes, I am not running down the street yelling ‘Steve’.”

Pete lay on the couch in Fall Out Boy’s room, playing some stupid, free- yet scarily addictive game on his phone, when suddenly, notifications started invading the screen, each one buzzing angrily.

He exhaled sharply, closed the game and opened the group chat- which was now named ‘Hell’- and which Pete thought was very appropriate.

_TheRealSatanTM_: Evry1 attention pls

_DillonWeed_: wtf u want

_Ryro_: Kind busy rn

_TheRealSatanTM_: Any1 wanna get drunk???

_GeraldWee_: Yes, constantly

_RayOfSunshine_: is it free

_TheRealSatanTM_: cool, any1 meet me at junkyard, 15 min

_MilkyWay_: y does this sound like the start of a snuff film

_WetzelsPretzels_: thats fucked up

_WetzelsPretzels_: but v true lol
Patrick Stumph: Do none of you learn from your mistakes?

WetzelsPretzels: hi rick

Patrick Stumph: Hi PETER

Que-Sarah-Sarah: @Satan, ill go tbh
Que-Sarah-Sarah: Is hals here????

FrangipanesTheName: Cant
FrangipanesTheName: Family game night

MilkyWay: lol that sucks

GeraldWee: excuse u

Andy: What's the occasion Brendon??

TheRealSatanTM: I stole some crazy shit
TheRealSatanTM: need help drinkin it

Patrick Stumph: So, essentially, you want us to help you get rid of evidence?

TheRealSatanTM: yea
TheRealSatanTM: u type v well rick boi

Patrick Stumph: Thank.
WetzelsPretzels: lol nice meme

WetzelsPretzels: im up for free beer tbh

TheRealSatanTM: got more whiskey and tequila, vodka

TheRealSatanTM: but sure, I got some beer 2

SmokedTroham: u going Pete?

WetzelsPretzels: yeah, round up the posse, pardner

SmokedTroham: ill get Andy, u get Patrick

WetzelsPretzels: kk


Patrick Stumph: I didn’t agree to this.

WetzelsPretzels: im agreeing 4 u

WetzelsPretzels: ill make sure u dont drink if u dont wanna,

Patrick Stumph: Why does that not assure me at all?

Andy: I’ll look out for u buddy

Patrick Stumph: Fucking hell

Patrick Stumph: Fine.

WetzelsPretzels: b at ur house in 10 mins
“I'm gonna fucking fall!”

Pete stood, coaxing Patrick down from the roof. “You’ll be fine, dude. I’ll catch you.”

Patrick growled, but said nothing, and Pete assumed he was too scared shitless to sass him right now- but, no, lo and behold- Patrick Stumph can always sass you, rain or shine.

“Oh thanks a lot, that makes me feel so much better.”

Patrick exhaled at Pete’s laughter, his fingers were tight around the garage roof ledge. He braced himself for the pain and let go, falling a short distance before landing on a trash can- still on his feet.

“Great job, lunchbox!” Pete cheered from behind him, and Patrick smiled with relief- which immediately curled up and died when Pete pointed to the white metal gate.

“We just gotta climb that, and we’re home free.”

Patrick was gonna bruise, he was sure of it.

He'd landed with a heavy thump on the sidewalk outside his house, and had been aching for the entire, long walk. Patrick had no idea where they were going, but he trusted the older boy, and eventually, Pete led him to the junkyard, pushing open a chained, rusted gate- just wide enough for someone to crawl through. The older boy motioned at the gap with his head, and Patrick couldn’t help but glare a little as he crawled through, groaning at the dirt that covered his hands and jeans.

He stood up straight on the other side, linking his fingers through the rusty gate and holding it open for Pete to scramble through quickly, before letting it fall shut with a loud, metallic clang.

Pete waltzed forwards, leading the way and Patrick’s eyes widened as he took in the junkyard clearly, for the first time.
Admittedly, he had been expecting piles of trash, rats, flies and all that comes with the word ‘junkyard’—maybe a few dead bodies...but this place wasn't like that at all.

It was actually really cool.

Patrick assumed it was on the outskirts of Wilmette—judging from the long journey, and the rust clearly showed that it had been forgotten.

There were stacked cars, their bright colours peeking out from under the red rust, struggling to cling to the metal. Miscellaneous pieces of furniture—mostly things like bathtubs, sofas and tables, were strewn around, and large metal barrels were stacked or leaning against each other.

The whole place was surrounded by thick, towering pine trees, and Patrick spotted a pleasant-looking path that led out of the rusted graveyard, instead fading into trees and a dirt path. Patrick stared up at the trees, before almost tripping over a rusty ladder and being shaken out of his thoughts. Pete turned at the noise—eyes clouded with concern, but Patrick only smiled embarrassedly and gingerly stepped over the obstacle.

He also saw a railroad ahead of them, with a small cabin sat on top of a hill surrounded by more trees—Patrick assumed that was the control room, and he absently wondered which trains made the journey through this place.

Patrick heard chattering as Pete turned to the right, ducking around three stacked cars, and he led them further into the junkyard, expertly bobbing and weaving past obstacles and debris. Patrick's eyes were trained downwards, being cautious to not trip over anything and trying to keep up with Pete. He looked up at the last minute and saw a giant, yellow, and rusted classic school bus and there was a warm glow coming from behind its windows.

Pete stepped up into the decrepit bus, holding out a hand to Patrick with a grin—Patrick took the hand gratefully and pulled himself up. The bus was tilted, creating a steep hill and the boys had to pull themselves along the walkway by grabbing the worn black seats— as though they were scaling a mountain.

The back of the bus had been completely torn off, making Patrick idly wonder how that had happened, if it had been an accident, and if anyone had gotten hurt, as he jumped down from the bus, stepping onto a metal barrel and gingerly dropping to the floor. Pete skipped the barrel and just leaped off, landing on his knees with a thud and cloud of dry, dusty dirt, before quickly standing and grinning up at a very anxious looking Patrick.

The duo walked a few meters ahead, towards the glowing light, that turned out to be a fire pit, circled by mismatched, ratty chairs and love-seats. And it was actually really cosy, making Patrick’s eyes widened lightly. They were tucked away, guarded by piles of cars and barrels, and there was a sizeable, wooden shack to the right. He also noticed that the group seemed to have made it their own, as his eyes drifted over the carvings in the wood and the—actually pretty good, graffiti murals.

It seems Brendon had coerced just about everyone to come along, because the whole group—excluding Ashley, was sat around the fire. Some were warming their hands, and others were passing
bottles back and forth whilst chatting quietly. They greeted Pete and Patrick as they approached, some with waves, others with nods. The duo took a seat on an empty couch, next to Joe and Andy-who smiled at them in greeting.

Everyone was tired from a long, arduous week and the atmosphere was relaxed, dazed and peaceful. Patrick hadn’t gotten drunk, thankfully- although he had spluttered and coughed violently when he had been convinced into taking a swig from a vodka bottle. Pete had rubbed his back, chuckling along with the rest of the group.

When the sunset had finally lit up the sky, everyone had fallen silent, staring up at the horizon- just past the tall, proud tips of the pine trees. The junkyard had been bathed in a soft pink-orange light, and time felt as though it had slowed down. And as Patrick gazed at the colored light shining through orphaned car windows, he glanced around at his friends- all of whom where leaning back, content smiles painting their faces and the few couples in the group were cuddled together:

Frank had an arm around Gerard’s shoulders, and Gerard was resting his head against Frank’s- both pairs of eyes staring up over the trees.

Josh and Tyler had thrown their arms around each other, Tyler’s face was also buried in Josh’s shoulder, and Josh’s cheek was pressed against Tyler’s hair- with dazed smiles on both their lips.

And then Patrick noticed Brendon, who was sat between Sarah and Ryan- with a very indecisive and worried look firmly settled on his face. Patrick furrowed his brow in confusion, but was shaken away from the sight when he felt a hand timidly lacing its fingers with his own.

He looked to his side, seeing Pete smiling at him tiredly and eyes full of adoration. Patrick matched the expression, fully tangling their fingers together.

With a content sigh, Patrick raised his head to stare at the dying sunset. He blinked slowly, realizing he felt no anxiety, no embarrassment, no fear- and Patrick smiled, as he felt truly at peace for the first time for as long as he could remember.
This is literally just about a dog, it's literally just fluff, but I promise things are gonna pick up really soon.

“STEVE!”

Patrick sprinted down the sidewalk, feet landing with heavy thuds and whole body lurching forwards as his pulse skyrocketed. His eyes were firmly locked on the small, golden dog that was darting along the street with a thunderously wagging tail.

“STEVE GET BACK HERE!”

Patrick felt his face going red from overexertion, and cursed his brother and sister.

After a week, the novelty of owning a dog had worn off, and the realities of getting your shoes chewed, getting dog hair all over your clothes, cleaning shit up every five minutes, and of course- the constant barking, had set in.

Kevin and Megan hadn’t wanted to get rid of Steve though, but they made no effort to care for him. So, to make sure Steve didn’t die from hunger, or something, their parents had passed the responsibility of care to- Patrick. Because being the oldest silbing really sucks.

So there he was, running down the street, screaming ‘STEVE’ from the top of his lungs, and earning horrified looks from passers-by.

At one of Patrick’s louder, more terrifying screams- that had sounded more like a war cry, Steve had stumbled, tripping over his own paws with a loud yelp, and followed by a miserable whine as Patrick caught up to him and scooped him up in an instant, before turning and stalking home with a face like thunder.

He placed Steve down in the hall, before he made a move to go up to his room and he was half way up the stairs before pitiful, sad whines came from behind him.

Patrick turned to see Steve- standing with front paws on the first step and giving short, sad yelps and
barks that practically screamed ‘Don’t leave me’.

...Why did puppies have to be so cute?

Patrick exhaled heavily, and picked up the dog, carrying him upstairs.

Steve cantered at his heels and followed him into his room- much to Patrick’s dismay. Sure, the dog was cute, but he couldn’t help hate it a little.

Whenever Patrick tried to leave the house- Steve started barking, and that made sneaking out impossible. And, what was even worse, whenever Pete tried to sneak in- Steve would freak out at the ‘stranger who was breaking in’ and the whole family would come rushing.

And one more thing, the dog downright refused to sleep in his own bed downstairs, and instead wanted to sleep with Patrick- and would bark all night if he didn’t.

Patrick squinted as he watched the puppy sniff around his room. If he ever wanted to leave the house in secret again, he was gonna have to train this dog, so he decided to go to someone who had some experience.

“I’m taking the dog for a walk.” Patrick announced loudly, pulling on his jacket and hearing a faint noise of understanding from his mother. He tugged on Steve’s lead, pulling him out of the house and texting a message on his phone with the other.

Patrick Stumph: Meet me at J Park, it’s urgent.

Pete leaned against the metal frame of the swings, phone in hand and yawning. He’d been missing Patrick recently- after the set would finish, the younger boy would rush home, and Pete didn’t know why exactly. He’d tried asking but Patrick would leave no time for conversation before rushing back to Glenview- he hadn’t even let Pete walk him home. So, when Pete had gotten a text from Patrick telling him to go to Junction Park- and that it was ‘urgent’, he’d been happy to oblige.
He raised his head and saw Patrick walking towards him, hunched shoulders, bundled up in a parka, and with a... *dog?*

Pete raised an eyebrow and grinned, calling to Patrick. The younger boy looked up and gave a tired smile, trudging towards Pete and greeting him a chaste kiss.

Pete laughed quietly, nodding at the puppy that was tangling himself up in his lead.

“...Uh, is that why you’ve been avoiding me?”

“I haven’t been avoiding you!”

“You kinda have.”

Patrick looked indignant, but eventually sighed and shrugged. “Okay, yeah, maybe- I’m sorry...he’s just really needy.” He glowered down at the puppy- who was now whining because he was stuck. “I hate this fucking dog.”

Pete gave a mock surprised gasp and crouched down to free the animal. He laughed cheerily, eyes crinkling as he petted the dog’s head and looked up at Patrick. “But he’s so cute though.”

“And annoying, and dumb, and loud... *and literally satan* in the form of a *puppy.*”

Pete shook his head with a grin and rolled his eyes jokingly, “*Sure. I totally believe you.”*

He picked up the dog, and stood, still scratching behind Steve’s ears. The puppy yelped happily and nuzzled into Pete's neck.

Patrick squinted.

First, the dog had destroyed everything he owned, then it had kept him awake every night by whining and barking, then it had invaded his bed, and now it was trying to steal his boyfriend.

“What did they name him?”

“Steve.”
“Really?”

Patrick sighed, but Pete only looked amused. The redhead stared again with a furrowed brow, just as Pete cocked his head. “What was so urgent?”

A wave of realization crashed over Patrick and he remembered why he’d come here in the first place.

“I need your help to train him.”

Pete squinted, looking a little confused. “...To do tricks or something? Like 'sit' or-”

Patrick shook his head, “No.” The redhead sighed dramatically, "He starts freaking out every time I leave him, so, if you could help with that-”

Pete shrugged, “I mean, I can definitely try.” Patrick sighed in relief, nodding a small ‘thank you’, before chewing the inside of his cheek. “Any ideas?”

Pete looked thoughtful, before staring up at the younger boy.

“...I’m gonna be honest here,”

Patrick didn’t like the sound of that.

“I mean, even Hemingway isn’t really trained, per se-”

“Seriously?”

Pete rolled his eyes, “No, he’s the most disobedient-”

“Are you it’s not cause you suck at training?”

“I’ll have you know I’m an awesome teacher!” Pete gave Patrick a fake-insulted look, before his face split into a grin again. “...But I guess I can try and get-” He let out a laugh as the puppy licked his face, “‘Steve’, less...attached, to you.”
Patrick sat on his favorite swing, rocking backwards and forwards lightly and watching the scene in front of him with a furrowed brow.

Pete had reached the conclusion that the way to stop Steve being so damn clingy- was to play with him. Yes- that was the master plan.

Patrick watched his boyfriend playing with the dog, laughing loudly and bouncing around energetically...And while Patrick had to admit it was one of the most adorable things he’d ever seen- he wasn’t happy.

For some, inexplicable and insane reason- Patrick was jealous.

Jealous of a dog. Yes, he knew how ridiculous that was, and while he felt like a complete idiot- he couldn’t help it.

He hadn’t spent much time with Pete in the past week, and had missed him dearly, and at the first opportunity they actually got to meet- Pete had decided to play with a puppy instead.

Patrick frowned at himself, staring down at his sneakers- Okay, now he was just being plain unfair. He’d been the one to drag Pete here anyway.

Patrick scolded himself, and chewed his lip, staring up again- hoping Pete’s plan would work.

The plan worked.

It actually worked.

...But it actually worked a little too well.

Steve had totally fallen in love with Pete, and would constantly whine when he wasn’t near- which, unfortunately, was most of the time. And while Patrick could relate, empathise, and now had something in common with his dog- he was still jealous.
He squeezed his eyes shut, pinching the bridge of his nose as he heard another loud miserable whine come from under his bed. Patrick shifted to the left side of the mattress, switched on his beside lamp, and leaned over, squinting to see Steve in the dim light.

The puppy was curled up- whining softly and bundled up in old blankets that Patrick set up into a makeshift bed. Steve opened his eyes, barking quietly making Patrick ‘shush’ him immediately. If he didn’t want this goddamn dog to wake the whole house up, he’d have to take matters into his own hands.

It was an hour later, and Patrick tried everything: He'd tried letting Steve sleep in his bed, he'd tried feeding him, he'd tried more blankets, he'd even tried music- but the puppy was still miserable.

Patrick wrinkled his nose. There was only one thing for it.

Pete was sleeping at Ryan’s house today- well, not actually sleeping, more like tossing and turning while thinking about all the horrible possibilities of life.

He stared up at the living room ceiling, and sighed heavily. Swinging his legs over the couch, he trudged over to his bag and bundled himself up in a coat and scarf before leaving the house.

Pete had a weird relationship with winter- he loved rain, snow, thunderstorms and everything that came with the season (such as gingerbread, or presents- those were pretty cool), but he hated the biting cold that chilled his bones, the way the streets would glaze over with ice, and he really hated having to wear a sweater all the time.

Pete looked up at the tacky fluorescent signs lining the street’s stores, and yawned slightly. He was really tired, but that’s the thing about insomnia- no matter how tired you are, your brain just won’t shut the fuck up and let you sleep.

He had almost had enough of the weather and was ready to go back to a sleepless night on Ryan’s lumpy couch when he felt his phone buzz.

*Patrick Stumph: Come over, it’s urgent.*
Pete raised his eyebrows and grinned suggestively, before typing out a quick response.

_WetzelsPretzels: ;)_

_Patrick Stumph: Not funny Pete_

He huffed a laugh and exhaled happily, before making his way over to Glenview, quickly shooting Ryan a text just to let him know that he hadn’t been kidnapped, or murdered, or something like that.

Patrick sat on the edge of his bed, doubled over and staring under the bed, watching Steve with concern. He sighed. Sure, Pete was really loveable- but this was an over exaggeration, in his opinion.

A soft knocking cut through the room, making Patrick’s ears twitch and making his head shoot up.

Pete was crouched behind the window, and Patrick moved over to let him in. The older boy ungracefully thumped to the floor before standing and dusting himself off. He grinned at Patrick, and the redhead could only tilt his head and give a soft smile back. God he loved Pete. Like way too much...literally enough to be jealous of a dog.

Pete slotted his lips against Patrick's softly, fingers stroking his soft, pale neck. He pulled back after a few moments, and grinned. “So,” Pete began, raising his eyebrows suggestively, “What was so...urgent?”

Patrick smacked his shoulder lightly, “It’s not like _that_, you pervert.” Pete feigned pain and hiccuped a laugh, as loud barking and impossibly fast footsteps rang throughout the room. The boys turned and barely had time to register what was going on, before Steve leaped up to Pete- tail wagging furiously and barking joyfully.

Pete laughed as the dog tried to lick his face, and Patrick only scowled, trying to shush them both.

The shushing worked, and Patrick thanked as many deities as he could, before his gaze settled on Pete, who was holding Steve, pressing a kiss to his head and grinning at Patrick.

“What-?”
“-I don’t know, he was like, crying and stuff.” Patrick threw his hands up and looked exasperated at Pete’s skeptical expression. “He, likes you for some reason, so, I- I thought you could calm him down.”

“...You do realize,” Pete began slowly, trying to look as serious as possible, “-that we’re talking about a dog, here?”

Patrick glared, and hissed, “Yes, Pete. I’m aware.”

“Okay, good, ‘cause you sounded a little crazy-”

“Excuse you.”

“-Like a cat lady, but, with a dog...and not a lady...so, like- a dog boy…? Nah, that doesn’t-”

“PETE.”

Pete’s rambling was cut to a swift end by Patrick’s angry whisper, and finally, Pete grinned. “So, you need me to stay here-”

“-So that Steve doesn’t keep me awake all night, yes, that’d be great.”

Pete shook with silent laughter, rolling his eyes fondly and sighing. “Okay, just for you, pumpkin.” Patrick groaned at the nickname, but quickly gave a small, but involuntary, smile, as he watched Pete walk over to his bed, lying down with Steve settled on his chest.

Patrick’s nose wrinkled- for two reasons, but he would only address one right now:

“Aren’t you gonna take your shoes off?”

“Do you want me here or not?”
Patrick groaned at Pete’s impish grin and trudged over to the bed, lying next to the older boy and throwing his comforter over them both. Pete’s eyes closed, and Patrick glared at Steve, lip curling in pure jealousy. Okay, yes, he felt really stupid, but that dog was stealing his fucking boyfriend and it pissed him off.

“...What’s wrong?”

Patrick’s eyes flicked upwards at the sigh, and he felt himself flush red with embarrassment pooling in his stomach, as he saw that Pete had opened his eyes, and was staring down at him with a tiny smile.

“N-nothing.” Patrick averted his eyes nervously, instead opting to study Pete’s shoulder.

“Well something’s wrong,” Pete rolled his eyes, nudging the smaller boy gently. “I know that look.”

Patrick furrowed his brow, staring up at Pete again, “...What ‘look’?”

The older boy laughed quietly, “The ‘I’m super jealous’ look.”

“...I do not have a ‘super jealous’ look-”

“Yes you totally do!”

“Shut up.”

Patrick lowered his gaze again and crossed his arms, eyebrows still furrowed. He tucked his legs up and was about to sigh when he felt an arm around him. He opened his eyes, squinting up and seeing Pete grinning down at him. The older boy pressed a kiss to his hair, and rested his cheek there.

“I love you, Patrick.”
“...I love you too, Pete.”

“...More than Steve, I promise.”

Patrick punched his chest lightly as Pete only tipped his head back and laughed, but Patrick couldn’t help smiling and he quickly nuzzled his face into the crook of Pete’s neck. “Just shut up and let me sleep.”

Patrick felt a hand carding through his hair, and he drifted asleep, making small, content whines. Pete grinned softly, letting his eyes droop shut as well- and much to his surprise come morning, he would sleep like a baby the whole night- a Patrick Stumph in his arms was no match for his insomnia, apparently.

Patrick awoke, eyes closed, and his hand instinctively searched the mattress next to him for warmth. When he found none, his eyes blinked open groggily and he realized Pete had gone. He frowned slightly, but sighed when he remembered that it was for the best- it would have been disastrous for his mother or- god forbid, his father, to walk in and find them in bed together.

Patrick heard fabric rustling and looked down to see Steve pawing and nuzzling against his chest. The puppy suddenly stopped, yawned, and looked up at Patrick with wide eyes, and the boy couldn’t help but smile. Patrick turned his head, glancing at his alarm clock, which read ‘6:40’ and the word, ‘Monday’. He gave a wry smile- another long week was ahead of him...but he was grateful that he’d beaten the alarm, because he really hated waking up to the vicious buzzing- it was not a nice way to start the day.

He sat up, slumping out of bed and gingerly placing Steve on the floor, before he spotted something in corner of his eye. Patrick turned his head, squinting at a small, folded piece of paper on his bedside table, and he walked over to it. He unfolded it clumsily and a grin blossomed on his face at the words.

your adorable when you sleep, i love you trick.
Patrick read over the note again and again as he leaned on a kitchen counter, cup of coffee in hand, and occasionally glancing up to watch Steve eat from his bowl nosily in the corner of the room. He knew the note was simple, and might not have meant much to Pete, but it still gave him a warm, overjoyed feeling in the pit of his stomach and he loved it. He loved the grammar mistakes, he loved the lower cases, he loved the messy, chicken scratch, he just loved Pete-

“Good morning, Patrick!”

With a jump, Patrick stuffed the note into his blazer pocket wildly, grinning up nervously at his mom. “Hi mom! How’d you sleep?” She smiled, but eyed Patrick’s pocket suspiciously. “I slept very well, thank you- oh, but apart from Steve’s barking in the middle of the night- honestly, that dog!” His mother stared over at the puppy- who was now enthusiastically lapping up water.

“Oh yeah, sorry about that.” Patrick’s mind worked to fabricate an excuse. “A-A pigeon, landed on the roof, like- right o-outside my window, and he- uh, freaked out a little.” His mother raised an eyebrow, but nodded and moved to make breakfast, just before Patrick’s father stalked into the room.

“Good morning-” His gaze stopped on his son, “You’re up early, Patrick. Dressed and ready for school.”

Patrick nodded nervously, straightening up from the counter and giving a small smile. “Y-yes, dad.”

His father gave him a blank stare, before he fixed his terrifying gaze on Steve- who didn’t seem at all intimidated and just barked happily, making Patrick stifle a laugh.

The man turned back to stare at Patrick, “Keep that dog under control, or we’re giving it away.” Patrick’s face dropped to a blank slate, but his eyes held worry.

Okay, so, yesterday, he may have been jumping for joy at those words but- but goddammit puppies are cute, and truthfully, even with all the irritating shit Steve did, he was still growing fond of the little golden retriever.

Patrick lowered his eyes, “Yes dad. I’ll try-”

“We do not try in this house Patrick. We do.”
Patrick bit the inside of his cheek, stifling another laugh and stopping himself from making a Star Wars reference- despite his mind screaming, ‘Do. Or do not. There is no try’.

His dad glared slightly, before moving over to greet Patrick’s mom, but his gaze would periodically return to Patrick over the morning- full of suspicion.

Breakfast was over, and it was time to head to school. Kevin and Megan darted out of the door, yelling farewells to their parents, and Patrick made a move to follow, before he noticed Steve in the living room- standing on the arm of the couch with his front paws against the window.

Patrick glanced back at his parents- spotting them buried in newspapers and phones, and silently crept over to the dog, whose head instantly snapped in his direction and he jumped down from the couch, landing with a loud thud and a whine. The boy winced and moved to help before Steve’s tail started wagging and he ran towards his owner, trying to jump up to him.

Patrick crouched down, petting the dog behind the ears with a smile and exhaling softly.

“I guess you’re not too bad.”

The dog barked happily, and a voice rang out from the kitchen. “Patrick! Get to school!-”

The redhead winced at being found out and quickly leaned towards the dog with a grin and a low whisper.

"But Pete's my man, get your own."

He stood quickly, laughing quietly at Steve's confused look, and he hurried over to the door. He glanced at Steve again, smiling proudly when he realized the dog wasn’t following him. One step forward, Patrick thought as he left the house, pulling his bag and violin case over his shoulders, with his mom’s scolding still ringing in his ears.
Pete had been testing Patrick all day, and he was not letting up.

Another week had passed, and due to Patrick’s ever increasing busy schedule- Pete hadn’t gotten laid at all, and it was definitely showing.

At every opportunity, Pete would hover over Patrick’s ear and whisper something obscene- or just plain sinful, and it would make Patrick would flush red every time.

By what Patrick assumed must have been the eight hundredth time, he was fed up and had decided to beat Pete at his own game.

It was Sunday, and Patrick’s parents were at a charity event at Church- Patrick had only been spared from going because he insisted he had to do an American History project with Ashley. And they had believed him, and Patrick was very proud that his lying skills were improving.

Patrick squinted, watching Pete quickly scribbling in a notebook at the bar. The redhead bit the inside of his cheek and crept forwards- being careful not to make a noise. He smirked and moved his mouth to Pete’s ear, he whispered the filthiest thing he could think of, and triumphantly watched a dark red blush spread over Pete’s face. Patrick laughed lightly, but as Pete turned to stare at him with dark eyes, his face dropped into complete seriousness.

The older boy stood, subtly pulling Patrick along behind him. He glanced around, checking the coast was clear, before ducking into the bathroom.

Patrick was shoved into a stall, pressed against a wall, and rough, demanding lips were on his neck immediately. He moaned quietly as he felt Pete’s tongue flick over his sweet spot as he pressed a thigh between his legs, moving to grip Patrick’s hips before-

“Oh god, o-oh god, okay- okay, you’ve g-got this, you can do this, don’t get- don’t get yourself down. Pace yourself, pace yourself-”

Pete and Patrick stared at each other- brows furrowed in confusion. They untangled their limbs and stood up straight, peeking through the thin gaps in the stall door.

The pairs of brown and blue eyes widened as they saw a hooded figure hunched over, supporting themselves on one of the bathroom sinks. They glanced at each other, and silently crept out of the stall, approaching the figure.
Pete took the lead, stepping forwards with a glance at Patrick. “...Uh, hey dude, are you okay?”

The figure’s head shot up, hood slipping away and revealing- Brendon.

“...Brendon?” Patrick stepped forwards, face covered in concern. “What’s wrong?” Brendon’s wide eyes flicked between them both, with a pained grimace, and suddenly his chest started moving erratically. A sob escaped him, followed by another, and then another, and Brendon stumbled forwards, crashing into Pete.

The older boy caught him instinctively, arms tightening around him, Patrick could only rub Brendon’s back with concern. Both boys starting asking strings of ‘Are you okay?’, ‘What’s wrong, man?’ and ‘Tell us what’s wrong’.

After a few moments of Brendon sobbing into Pete’s shoulder, a stressed whine escaped him, and he raised his head with a stutter. “I-I don’t k-know what to do-” Before dropping his head and resuming his heart-wrenching sobs.

Pete and Patrick had led Brendon out to the park for some fresh air- hoping it would help calm him down.

Pete leaned on the metal frame and Patrick shuffled his shoes, as they watched Brendon rocking lightly on a swing- chest heaving and head in his hands. Patrick chewed his lip, and crouched down, putting a comforting hand on Brendon’s shoulder.

Brendon looked up, eyes red and nose twitching with sniffles.

“Whenever you’re ready, you can talk to us- if you want.”

Brendon nodded, and exhaled heavily, puffing out his cheeks. He wiped at his eyes with his sleeves, and laughed sadly. “I-I’m sorry, I feel like an idiot.”

Pete shook his head instantly, eyes full of understanding. “Don’t say that, dude.”

Brendon only gave a strained smile and nodded, exhaling once again.

“...Can you be in love with two people…? At the same time…?”
Brendon explained the whole situation in detail, and Patrick listened with wide eyes—while Pete had only looked thoughtful.

Brendon was in a ‘friends-with-benefits’ situation with Ryan, but, over time, he’d grown feelings for him, and on the day he was going to confess everything—he’d met Sarah.

They had become fast friends, and while Brendon was smitten with her—his feelings for Ryan had remained.

And on this frosty, Sunday morning, he’d come to the shocking realization that he loved both Sarah and Ryan—and he didn’t know what to do.

Patrick gaped slightly, mind working to understand and words failing to escape him. Pete’s face was unreadable, his eyes were fixed on one spot ahead of him and he looked to be in deep concentration.

“You can be in love with two people, Brendon.” Pete began staring down at the younger boy, “But how do you think they would feel? If you really love them, that has to be your first question.”

Patrick glanced over at Pete, he was really surprised at how serious...and helpful Pete was being. Gone was the loud, goofball teenager who made jokes out of anything, and in his place was, well—a man.

Brendon looked thoughtful, before his lips twitched downwards. He shook his head weakly, “I don’t know if Ryan would even care.” Brendon’s brown eyes became teary again, “I d-don’t think he, uh...I don’t think he likes me, as more than a friend.” He gave a miserable laugh and looked up at the sky, on the verge of tears again. “Guess I’m in ‘The Friendzone’, huh?”

Pete only shifted, softly kicking the metal pole absently, while Patrick was deep in thought—brow furrowed.

“Sarah likes you.”

Brendon looked up at Patrick—brown eyes flooded with hope and a grin full of joyous disbelief. “S-she does?”
The redhead nodded, “She texts me every night and rants about how amazing you are. It’s really annoying.” Patrick chuckled softly, trying to inject some form of humour into an otherwise, somber atmosphere. It seemed to work as Brendon laughed genuinely, and Pete gave a small smile, huffing with amusement.

Brown hair flopped down as Brendon bowed his head, foot tapping against the dirt floor nervously. His long fingers were laced tightly into the swing’s chains, and he was chewing his lip.

The wide chocolate browns glanced up at both older boys, and he exhaled silently with a nod. Brendon smiled, and croaked out a few genuine words with a heartfelt voice.

“Thank you guys.”

The older boys nodded eagerly with wide eyes. “Anytime, Brendon.”

Patrick sat in a dim booth, watching the exchange from across the bar. It was inaudible, but he could put two and two together to work out exactly what was going on.

He watched Brendon speaking to Sarah earnestly- eyes wide and truthful. Patrick heard Sarah’s overjoyed laugh and Brendon grinned, putting his arms around her waist and pulling her towards him, kissing her nose softly and grinning. Sarah took his face in her hands and whispered something that made the boy laugh loudly, before their lips slotted together.

Patrick smiled softly, he was happy for them both...but deep down, he felt anxiety writhing in the pit of his stomach- he was worried that Brendon’s feelings for Ryan might cause problems.

He so ingrossed in his thoughts, that he didn’t notice Pete slip into the booth, taking a seat opposite him. The older boy coughed dramatically to grab his attention, and Patrick jolted with surprise in his seat. “Jesus-!” He glared slightly as Pete tipped his head back and laughed loudly.

“Hilarious. Well done. Are you proud of yourself?”

Pete grinned broadly, putting his arms behind his head lazily. “I am.” Patrick exhaled with a small roll of his eyes, and looked back at the new couple- who were now sat at the bar together with linked hands.
“Do you think they’ll be okay?”

Pete’s face plunged into a blank slate, and he turned to look at Brendon and Sarah. “Yeah.” He glanced back at his worried boyfriend with a furrowed brow and a pout.

“Why?”

Patrick shrugged lightly, tearing his gaze away and staring down at the wooden table between them. He shrugged lightly, and mumbled, “I don’t know, it’s dumb I guess.”

Pete leaned forwards, fingers sliding and splaying on the cold wooden surface and he stared at Patrick with wide, inquisitive eyes. “You’re worried about something?”

Patrick chewed on his lip and nodded, glancing back at Sarah. “...She’s one of my best friends, and I just-” He sighed, shrugging again. “...I hope he doesn’t hurt her.” There was a silent pause, before Pete quickly decided he’d dispel Patrick’s fears.

“Brendon’s a good guy,” Pete shook his head softly, hand reaching for Patrick’s to try and comfort him. “Sure, he’s a little *dumb* sometimes, and he can be seriously cocky, but- but, he won’t *hurt* her.”

Patrick nodded, gently joining his hand with Pete’s. “I know, but that’s not really what- it's not what I mean.” Patrick decided to explain at Pete’s confused expression.

He sighed, and began, hoping he’d make sense. “I know Brendon’s not gonna hurt her on purpose, but- but, if he still has feelings for Ryan- then, well...what if they...interfere? Sarah doesn’t deserve to get cheated on.”

Pete bit the inside of his cheek. Patrick had a point, the situation wasn’t as simple as it seemed.

“...Brendon won’t cheat on her.”

Patrick’s eyes cleared with a small amount of relief at Pete’s sincere words.

“He’s an honest guy- if he really couldn't stand it, he'd break up with her, and sure, that might hurt a little, but- but he wouldn’t *cheat.*” Pete ran a calloused thumb over Patrick’s pale knuckles, “And, maybe...maybe his feelings for Ryan will- I dunno...*go away*...? Over time?”

Patrick nodded softly, and Pete continued- intent on clearing his boyfriend’s mind of worry. “...And as he spends more time with Sarah, his feelings might...*change,* and anyway, he said it himself- Ryan probably doesn’t even like him in that way.”

Patrick looked serious again.
“He liked him enough to sleep with him.”

And Pete didn’t know how, or what, to answer. He could only tighten his grip on Patrick’s hand and nervously glance at Brendon and Sarah one last time, as they went backstage hand in hand.

“Hey, speaking of complicated situations,” Patrick began with a grin, and a slow blink. “I heard a rumour.”

The two boys had been sat in the booth for about an hour, and soon enough, the conversation had lightened up again...with the help of a can of beer Pete had stolen from behind the bar- when the bartender hadn’t been looking of course, he’d never make that stupid mistake again.

Pete wiggled his eyebrows and grinned, taking a swig from the can. “Oh yeah?”

“Yeah,” Patrick squinted at his boyfriend dramatically. “Mikey likes you.”

Pete laughed, eyes crinkling, and he looked over at the redhead. “Oh come on, that’s not even a rumour, that’s just- like, common knowledge.” Patrick trembled with laughter, “Oh yeah? They should make it a trivial pursuit question.”

“Why is everything about board games with you?”

“There are a lot of board games in my house.”

“So?”
“...You get bored sometimes, and-”

Pete spluttered out a laugh again, head dropping to the table. He looked up again, eyes still full of mirth. “-And all you can do is play board games, okay- okay, I get it.”

Patrick faked anger- scrunching his face up in a way Pete found adorable. The older boy leaned over the table, pressing a quick kiss to Patrick’s cheek, before pulling back and instantly watching the pale skin go red.

“You always do that!”

“Do what?”

“Blush, go red, I dunno, but it’s so cute, and I love it.” Pete pinched Patrick’s cheek, “You still get all flustered. After all this time!”

Patrick glared lightly, before hiding a smirk and muttering, “I must have an allergic reaction to you, after all.”

Pete laughed lightly, “Hey! C’mon-”

“No, I’m serious.” Patrick tried his best to look and sound firm, “I’m gonna have to quarantine myself from you-” Pete whined desperately and Patrick burst out with laughter.

He suddenly tilted his head, eyes squinting again. “But, seriously, did you know about Mikey?”

Pete nodded, “Of course, he’s been like that forever.” Patrick raised an eyebrow, and Pete quickly began explaining.

“We met when he was like, seven...Or was it eight? I forget, but anyway- Gerard introduced me when I was crashing at his house one day, and Mikey just went like, totally red and ran to his bedroom.” Pete’s eyes crinkled as he dissolved into laughter again, making Patrick smile fondly.

“I thought he hated me for the longest time, until Gee started bringing him here. Mikey wanted to learn bass, and I was willing to teach him for free, so...” Pete shrugged and grinned, eyes squinting happily as he reminisced.

“So how’d you find out?” Patrick cocked his head, and Pete nodded, smile widening as the memory flooded his mind.
“Oh, Mikey had this diary- but he gets mad if you call it a diary, so you have to call it a ‘journal’.” Pete quickly made inverted commas with his fingers and smiled, “He’d write in it like, all the time, and everyone got really curious, but y’know, obviously, he wouldn’t let anyone see it.” He paused, taking another swig and offering the can to Patrick.

“So one day, Frank and Brendon made a plan. They were like ‘okay, we’re gonna steal the diary’, so they distract Mikey, find the diary and try to read it, but Mikey comes back and freaks the fuck out.”

“Oh shit,” Patrick was immersed in the story, listening with wide eyes. “What did they do?”

“They ran- like really fucking fast, and Mikey chased ‘em the whole time. So, they made it Frank’s house, locked all the doors and just read the whole thing, and when they came back, Jesus Christ- Gerard actually punched Frank. He tried to punch Brendon too, but Ray and Andy held him back.”

Patrick looked shocked, but thoughtful. “So they just told everyone what it said?” Pete nodded, eyes full of sympathy, “Yeah, I felt really bad for Mikey. Things got kinda awkward, but, I just told him I’d forget about it.”

“And that worked?”

“Yeah, I never brought it up again.” Pete grinned again, “Sure, I notice stares and the excuses and stuff, but- Oh wait, I think he still has that diary- he guards it with his fucking life though.”

Patrick chuckled softly, “I feel sorry for him, stuff like that really sucks. I know how it feels.”

Pete cocked his head, and Patrick gave a stifled sigh. “I had a crush on a girl in like, third grade,” He shrugged, “One of the other kids found out and told everyone.” Pete held back his laughter and tried to look sympathetic. “What happened?”

Patrick only shrugged.

“I cried, she laughed at me.” Patrick shrugged again, a small smile tugging at his lips. “It’s pretty funny looking back on it now, though.” Pete nodded and Patrick squinted up at him, grinning mischievously.

“Anything like that ever happen to you?”

Pete’s skin tinged red, but he shook his head furiously, “N-No. I’m really cool. I’ve never done anything lame like that. I’m perfect, dude.”
“And very humble.”

The two laughed, eyes squeezing shut with fingers pinching bridges. Patrick opened his eyes with a grin, but faltered when he saw the small scar on Pete’s nose. He was wondering whether he should ask him if it hurt, or something, but they were swiftly interrupted by a dazed, cheerful voice.

“Hey guys!” The boys looked up at the drawl to see Frank- eyes red. “Brendon and Sarah got together, and we’re celebrating with weed, wanna join?” Pete looked eager, but Patrick bit the inside of his cheek, unsure...However, his resolve melted away as the puppy-dog brown eyes gazed at him, and Patrick could only sigh dramatically as Pete pulled him along, following Frank backstage.

The thick, drug-laced air was making Patrick’s head spin. He shifted in his seat, planted firmly between Pete and Joe. The group was making small talk, reminiscing, some people were strumming at their instruments and everyone was just really chilled out- well, everyone with the exception of Ryan, who was fanning the scent of weed out of the window with a newspaper, muttering curses as each wave hit him, “Do you guys want to get kicked out again?”

Brendon sighed theatrically, finishing off the blunt and moving over to the window, throwing the small stub away.

“Happy?”

“Very.”

Patrick felt a faint, uncomfortable tension grow as time passed. Every time Brendon or Sarah would show some sort of affection to one another, Patrick couldn’t help but notice Ryan shifting uncomfortably, eyes set in a blank- but somehow irritated stare.

As the clock ticked 9:30, it was decided that it was getting late, and people started leaving for home, hugging and waving farewells as they moved away in small groups. He watched Ashley practically drag Sarah away from Brendon and bid farewell tiredly, before marching her stoned, lovestruck friend home.

Patrick felt a knee nudge him, and he turned to Pete, seeing him smile gently. “Walk you home?” Patrick nodded at Pete’s whisper, and the duo stood, saying their goodbyes and bundling up in their coats as they walked home in the newly-December night, sneakers crunching in the shallow layers of frost.
They stopped in front of Patrick’s house, noting the lights shining from the windows and they decided to make their farewell quick. Pete kissed Patrick, struggling to keep it tender and chaste, because he was a hormonal teenager dammit- no, even worse, he was a hormonal teenager who hadn’t gotten laid for an entire week. Patrick noticed Pete’s roughness, and smirked lightly, moving to embrace him and whisper in his ear. “Easy boy—” Pete whined, nuzzling his face into Patrick’s shoulder. Suddenly, Pete jolted a little, straightening up and fishing something out of his large coat pocket. It was another white bag- and while Patrick felt his heart flutter with excitement, he did his best to look stern.

“Pete—”

But, the older boy had already shoved the bag into his chest and was running away, waving energetically.

Patrick sighed, but couldn’t help smiling as he hid the bag in his jacket. The sound of a door opening made his head turn, and he looked up to see his mother- stood at the front door, the hall behind her bathed in light.

“Patrick? You’re going to freeze, come inside!”

Patrick glanced down the street one last time, before quickly darting past the metal gate and into the warm house. His mother shook her head at him, gliding to the living room. “You’re going to get a cold if you keep—”

Patrick tried not to roll his eyes and headed upstairs to his room. He opened the door to his room, exhaling with a smile as he saw Steve curled up in his bed, snoring softly. He gulped, if his mother had opened the door a few seconds earlier- he felt nauseous, and tried to put it out of his mind.

Patrick slowly moved over to his dresser, opening the last draw and peering inside.

It was full of CDs, that were now starting to get covered in a thin layer of small, paper notes- that Pete had made a habit of writing for him. Some were cute, some were song lyrics, and some were downright filthy- but each one made Patrick’s heart flutter, so he’d made a conscious effort to keep them all. He carefully picked up his Walkman, shutting the drawer again and moving to his bed while shrugging off his parka. Taking a seat next to the small dog, he opened the bag and grinned—Buddha, Blink 182.

With a happy sigh, Patrick placed the items on his beside table- not trusting Steve's appetite for a second. He stood, and walked over to his bathroom. Stepping into a warm shower, he peeled off cold, heavy clothes and then changed into a soft and sweatpants, before shuffling back to bed, and lying next to Steve. The puppy scrambled, trying to lie on Patrick’s chest with a wagging tail,
making Patrick giggle loudly.

Patrick opened the new album, and put the CD into the Walkman, and stuffed the plastic earbuds into his ears.

He wrapped his arms around his dog, nuzzling into his fur and falling asleep, ears flooded with guitars, basses and voices, and mouth curved into a happy smile.
Christmas was a big deal in the Stumph household.

It meant preparation, planning, and of course- a family reunion.

It was a frosty, december morning, and Patrick was awoken by loud buzzing. He blinked his eyes open groggily to see his dog inches away from his face, staring and whining. Patrick groaned, pulling his pillow over his face and sighing into it as the buzzing became more frantic. He shoved the pillow away, throwing a hand over to the bedside table to grab his phone- and strongly resisting the urge to throw it against a wall.

He squinted at the screen as notifications covered the screen. With a sigh, he opened the group chat and was overwhelmed by quick colorful text bubbles.

FranigpanesTheName: Merry Christmas everyone!

Que-Sarah-Sarah: I can’t wait for the presents h o l y f u c k

2bFrank: Same tbh

TheRealSanta™: HAPPY XMAS BITCHES

WetzelsPretzels: therealsanta lol

WetzelsPretzels: r u a good christian now

TheRealSanta™: a good mormon

TheRealSanta™: like dallon

DillonWeed: I’m glad I inspire u
Patrick couldn’t help laugh at the group chat, he moved one thumb over the keyboard, scratching behind Steve’s ear with the other.

*Patrick Stumph: Merry Christmas*

*Patrick Stumph: Happy Hanukkah Joe*

*SmokedTroham: Thank you Patrick*

*SmokedTroham: Everyone always forgets about the jew*

*FrangipanesTheName: Shit sorry Joe*

*SmokedTroham: np*

*MilkyWay: Do you guys really get eight days of presents??*

*MilkyWay: Cause if you do im converting*

*GerardSleigh: no you’re not mister*

*SmokedTroham: I guess so*

*SmokedTroham: My family’s not v religious tho, so we just have 1 day*

*SmokedTroham: also great name gee*

*GerardSleigh: ty*

*GerardSleigh: Tried to be festive*
Patrick Stumph: No it’s my dog

Patrick Stumph: He’s fine, but Meg bought him a Christmas sweater so that’ll be interesting

TylerBrokeseph: Don’t let anyone bully ur dog

Patrick Stumph: I’ll try not to, Tyler

Patrick heard his mother’s voice ring from downstairs, calling his name, so with an exasperated sigh, Patrick typed out a farewell and got out of bed.

Patrick hated Christmas sweaters.

He hated them so much.

At his mother’s behest, he was wearing a red and green sweater covered with white reindeer.

He sighed and looked down to the floor, watching Steve bite at his own blue, snowflake-patterned sweater, whining and growling.

Looks like Steve hated them too. Good to know.

The puppy looked up at Patrick with wide eyes and whined sadly for help. Patrick could only shrug, “Sorry man, Megan’ll kill me.”

Steve whined and lay down, resting his head on his paws and looking pitiful.

Patrick laughed quietly, and leaned back on the couch, watching the blinking lights that were tangled
in the branches of a proud, large, decorated Christmas tree. Soon enough, family members would start arriving and the house would be filled with noise, so Patrick made an effort to enjoy the silence now (that was only marred by the sound of a hoover, and by faint chatting). Patrick would have to deal with overexcited, clingy kid cousins, grandparents asking if he’d gotten a girlfriend yet, and of course, the distant aunts and uncles that would get drunk halfway through the night.

Patrick could just about deal with all of that, but what really killed him was the thought of the family dinner. Spending the day with your estranged family was awkward enough, but sitting around a table with them for about two hours was infinitely worse.

As Patrick resigned himself to a shitty day, he watched his mother dart around the living room- cleaning things that were already spotless, in fact, Patrick was pretty sure he could have seen his reflection in them.

“Aren’t you supposed to be practising?”

Patrick jumped at the firm voice behind him, and he turned in his seat to see his father stood at the living room doorway, towering and intimidating. “The Christmas concert, Patrick. Have you forgotten? Or are you just lazy?”

The boy jumped to his feet, ducking his head and stuttering, “I f-forgot, sorry dad.” Before speeding away upstairs, with Steve running and barking at his heels.

As he closed the bedroom door behind him, Patrick was actually quite glad he was getting some time away from his family with the ‘I have to practice’ excuse. He moved over to his violin case (that he’d put on top of the dresser, because Steve was a damn good climber when he was hungry), and carefully opened it, swiftly retrieving the wooden instrument and then fishing out some sheet music from a large folder.

The Glenview Christmas concert wasn’t that bad, he supposed. The season made people a lot more generous so Patrick would often find adults giving him small bundles of dollar bills as they complimented him on his skills. Patrick didn’t think he was good enough to warrant money, but hey, he wasn’t complaining.

So the plan had been this: awkward family reunion with a lot of fake smiling, then the whole family would go to the concert at Glenview town hall, then back home for a dinner filled with inappropriate questions and answers, opening presents and then, only then, would Patrick be free.

He placed a few sheets on his music stand and started playing, watching Steve roll around on the floor while trying to reach his squeaky toy that only lay a few inches away, all with a wagging tail. The dog was really stupid, but through sheer determination and some help from the fucking dog whisperer himself- Pete Wentz, Patrick had just about managed to train him.

That meant many things, but most importantly- no more barking in the middle of the night, and that had meant Patrick’s father was satisfied and Steve was allowed to stay.
Patrick played the piece seamlessly, it was actually easier than what he was used to- whereas he was used to old, European concertos and capricci, these pieces were just Christmas carols- sure, they had a little extra flair, and Patrick assumed that was Mr. Nathans fault, but they were still pretty easy.

He wouldn’t have had to practice at all to play them well tonight, but it was a good excuse to busy himself with, he supposed. ‘Oh, what’s that mom? You need me to mop the floor? Sorry, I’m practising, big performance tonight, can’t help right now.’

Patrick stood at the front door with his brother and sister- who were both sporting equally terrible sweaters, and they were being lectured by their parents. As Patrick stifled a yawn at the seventieth mention of ‘behaviour’ and ‘respect’, the crisp door bell rang through the house.

Both parents turned to the door, looking at each other anxiously; Pulling off a successful Christmas family reunion was a challenge, and they were determined to succeed.

Patricia opened the door, plastering a wide, joyful and, well-faked grin, onto her features as she greeted the first visitors that stood outside the door. Her in-laws.

Patrick’s father warmly greeted his parents and invited them inside.

Patrick’s grandfather was a tall, broad man, who had the same stony glare that all Stumphs seemed to inherit, but his wife couldn’t be more different. Patrick’s grandmother was the sweetest woman alive, and looked like the stereotypical, kind, old lady- short, white hair, and a heartfelt smile.

He actually liked his paternal grandparents, oddly enough. His grandmother’s sweetness was just enough to offset his grandfather’s bitterness, they came well balanced, and Patrick supposed that that’s what all couples should be like- well balanced. He also assumed that was were the whole ‘opposites attract’ thing came from, and Patrick idly wondered if he and Pete balanced each other well.

- Patrick also happened to be their grandparent's favourite, so that made things a lot better.

“Oh, you’ve all grown so much!” Their grandma stepped forwards, beaming at all three grandchildren and embracing each one tightly.

A firm voice rang through the commotion as their grandfather stepped forwards. “You still playing the violin, Patrick?” Patrick nodded with a tight smile, and the old man clapped a hand on his shoulder and nodded, “Good, and you’ll pass it on to your son one day, understand?” Patrick gulped slightly and nodded again.
The old man moved over to Kevin and Megan, frowning slightly. “You two look more and more like your mother every time I see you.” Both siblings grinned tightly before their grandfather continued.

“What a shame.”

Patrick watched his mother’s right eye twitch in a familiar way, and she started leading the guests to the living room, but Patrick’s grandfather departed with one last shout.

“It’s a shame you three got her colouring. Nobody likes gingers, I’m afraid.”

So, Patrick hadn’t wanted to admit he was right.

He was making an effort to be optimistic, but…

Fuck it, Patrick had been 100% right- Christmas family reunions suck.

As more and more family members arrived- each one more distant than the last, Patrick had slowly started losing his sanity.

“-Patrick! Patrick!” His younger cousin tugged on his arm roughly, and the older boy exhaled sharply through his nose and gave a tight smile. “Yeah, Will?”

“...Hi!”

The boy giggled manically and darted away, and Patrick had to stifle a miserable groan- because that had been the twelfth fucking time Will had done that. He stood, and decided to walk around to try and look busy.

...But it seems that family members don’t care if you’re busy or not, because every few feet, Patrick was getting stopped with questions, and he was losing more and more politeness with each strained answer he gave.
“Patrick, darling! Got a girlfriend yet?”
“No, aunt Jane. Merry Christmas.”

“Patrick, my man! Are you still playing the cello? You should get into sports, build some muscle—”
“-It’s a violin, and I’m not good at sports. Happy Christmas, Jamie.”

“Patrick have you grown…at all…? Since I last saw you?”
“No, I’m probably gonna stay 5’4, aunt Liza.”

“Hey Patrick! What color is this?”
“Yes, I’m color-blind, well done, Alice.”

“…Can I ask you a question, dear?”
“Just one, and you just did.”

“So what’s it like down there, buddy?”
“Yes, Michael, I’m short, I get it.”

“How’s school, dear?”
“Probably gonna drop out and become a stripper.”
“What?!”
“It’s going fine, thank you aunt Clara.”

Patrick manoeuvred his way to the kitchen, when he started hearing whines from the laundry room. With a furrowed brow, he crept forwards, and pushing open the door to see-

Steve getting tortured.
Okay so not tortured, but you’d think he was by the sounds he was making.

Patrick’s younger cousins had been chasing the dog around the house, not getting the hint that Steve didn’t want to be manhandled by rough toddlers and kids. They’d finally managed to corner him in the laundry room and were taking turns petting him carelessly and passing him to each other roughly. Patrick froze for a beat before noticing Steve’s growls getting louder and more vicious, and the redhead decided to step in before Christmas ended with kids at the hospital covered in dog bites, and a trip to the vet for a lethal injection.

“Hey! Hey- here give him to me. NOW.”

The small cousin that was holding the puppy let it go with no argumentation, staring up at Patrick with wide fearful eyes. Patrick found that odd, but he motioned for them to leave and watched them all scurry away. He left the laundry room, calming Steve- who was now whining gratefully in his arms, and Patrick stood in the corner of the kitchen, petting the small animal before-

“It’s time to go! Everyone get your coats, it’s snowing!”

It turns out it was really tricky to lead so many kids down a sidewalk and successfully keep them away from snow, but even with all the stops, yelling, and arguing- they had arrived just in time.

Patrick kicked at the floor lazily, listening to Mr. Nathans’ very familiar lecture on ‘The Holiday season’ and ‘Expectations’ again. He leaned his head to watch the already large, and still filling audience, eyes darting to spot his family.

He didn’t understand the point of such a large reunion. No one really knew, or really liked each other, so why not just spend the day with your nearest and dearest, instead of making a huge fuss and inviting anybody with a drop of Stumph blood?

Patrick shook his head lightly as the orchestra took their seats, they all readied their instruments and waited for the mayor of Glenview’s, very boring, speech to end, before they started playing.

The performance had gone very well, and Patrick had been congratulated and complimented by endless streams of family members and neighbours. He’d managed to break away and was bitterly drinking a cup of coffee, glaring at the crowd, before he felt someone hug him from behind.

Patrick jumped and turned to see Sarah- beaming at him with Ashley jogging up behind her.
“-God, you scared me.” Patrick frowned, but Sarah only grinned as Ashley apologized. “Sorry dude, I keep telling her not to-”

“It’s a tradition Ashley, and Christmas is the perfect time for tradition.”

“Sure, whatever.”

The three friends stood in a corner, chatting, complaining about the holidays, and sharing all the awkward stories that had happened during their respective reunions. And then the conversation had moved over to their Wilmette friends, all because Sarah had started giving a little too much information about how it was going with Brendon, and the mention of the bar had sparked a memory in Ashley’s mind.

“...They’re throwing a party?”

“Well, it’s not a party- it’s more like a ‘get drunk, get stoned and give each other presents’ kinda thing. You’re coming right?”

“Well with that description how could I not?” Patrick rolled his eyes, voice dripping with sarcasm. Sarah sighed dramatically.

“Christmas doesn’t have to totally suck y’know.”

Patrick bit the inside of his cheek. It was really tempting, but he didn’t know if it was the best idea-

“You’ve never said no before.” Ashley reminded him, eyes full of truth.

Sarah grinned mischievously and nudged Patrick in the ribs, “And Pete’ll be there.” Patrick opened his mouth to protest before- “Why would he care about Pete being there?”

Sarah looked over at Ashley, grin still present through her shocked expression. “Oh yeah! You guys don’t know- Patrick’s dating Pete.”

“What?!” Ashley beamed over at Sarah, then at Patrick, “Really?!”
“Yep! Me and Brendon set them up-”

“No, that’s totally fucking wrong: first of all, it’s ‘Brendon and I’, and secondly, Pete and I were already together- you just misread the situation.”

“What? That’s not-”

“Oh my god that’s adorable!”

“I know right!”

“How didn’t I realize?”

“I dunno, everyone’s like really clueless.”

“Who else knows?”

“Uh, it’s...me, Brendon, Gerard...and I think that’s it-”

“Okay, okay,” Patrick stared at his friends with furrowed eyebrows, “Thanks for taking such a large, uh- interest, in my relationships, and as for the party-thing-” He exhaled and a look of determination crossed his face.

“I’ll try and sneak out tonight. What time is it?”

“Ten o’clock sharp, everyone’s meeting at The Cobra, and then we’re going out to the junkyard.”

Patrick nodded, spotting one of his aunts rushing towards him through the crowd, and he excused himself from his friends as he begrudgingly walked towards her- fake smiling through yet another string of compliments.
Patrick stared down at his plate quietly, fork subtly poking at a piece of turkey. He idly listened to the mundane conversation taking place between a few different adults, and he glanced to his sides. Yep, Kevin and Megan looked just as bored. He stifled a sigh, and leaned back in his chair, he really wasn’t hungry.

There was a moment of silence before the conversation changed again, just as Patrick was idly drinking water.

“Alice,” Their aunt Liza asked their cousin, “Do you like the food?”

The girl nodded eagerly, swallowing and grinning. “Yeah, it’s great- it’s almost as juicy as my ass.”

There was a burst in volume as all of the teenagers started laughing wildly, clapping and thumping on the table. Patrick choked, water coming out of his nose, Megan burst out laughing before clapping her hand over her mouth, and Kevin thumped his head down onto the table, laughing silently with watering eyes.

Patrick started laughing through the sting of pain in his nose, teary eyes squinting as he watched the adults reprimanding and scolding their children. The three siblings suddenly stopped at their mother’s stern glare, but Patrick’s eyes flitted over to his father, watching his lips twitch upwards into a smile, just before frowning again.

The noise died again, and Patrick was sure Alice was going to face some heavy consequences- if the way her parents were glaring at her was any indication.

The rest of the dinner had, surprisingly, gone off without a hitch, after that little hiccup. And afterwards they’d given out the presents, the adults had gotten slightly tipsy with the vintage ‘good’ whiskey- as his grandfather called it, and all the children had fallen asleep by the fire, watching classic black-and-white Christmas movies.

By the time everyone had cleared out, the alcohol in their parents’ systems was working wonders. Their father had actually been smiling- sure it was a really small smile, and it was really ‘dazed-drunk’, but it was still a smile, and Patrick considered taking a picture to use as blackmail in the future.

Their mom and dad had ushered them to their rooms, and had finally retired to their own bedroom, drunk laughter ringing through the hallway and getting fainter every second.

Of course, as Patrick would find out, none of the Stumph children actually had any intentions of sleep.
Patrick pulled on his sneakers and grabbed his parka, and backpack—yes, he was still wearing the awful Christmas sweater because it was really warm, and winter in Illinois was really cold.

He glanced at Steve, who was curled up in his bed, rising and falling with soft snores. Patrick grabbed his phone, leaving the room and shutting the door behind him with a soft click. Patrick’s ear twitched as he heard faint video game noises coming from Kevin’s room, and he craned his neck to see the lights under his door. Patrick huffed in amusement, and crept down the stairs, going to the kitchen and stealing half finished packets of junk food that he assumed his friends would enjoy. He moved to the front door and fumbled with his keys.

“So, when am I gonna meet my future brother-in-law?”

Patrick jumped and turned, seeing his sister and glaring at her. “How about never? Does never sound good?” He pushed the key into the lock and turned it, pulling on the handle and grimacing at the cold night air. Patrick turned again, brow furrowed, “What are you even doing awake?”

“I have a social life too, Patrick.” The boy suddenly noticed that she was dressed in a similar fashion to him—parka, hat, scarf, gloves, and bag—although hers was a rich leather satchel. She glided past him, hopping down the snow covered front steps and quickly unlocking the metal gate, motioning with her head.

Patrick frowned, locked the front door behind him and followed her.

“See you later, Patrick.” She started walking away down the road, before turning with a grin—still walking backwards. “And Merry Christmas!”

Patrick nodded and smiled, before making his way to Wilmette, taking the road that he’d walked a thousand times in the past year.

Pushing through the metal doors, Patrick blinked his eyes quickly at the bright lights inside the building, and he warmed his hands by rubbing them together, pressing them to his mouth and breathing hot air between them. He heard calls of his name and words of greeting as he looked up to see the whole group, who were all dotted around the bar, acknowledging his arrival in some way.

Sarah left Brendon’s side and bounded up to Patrick, hugging him tightly. “Awesome! You actually came! I totally thought you were gonna chicken out!” Patrick furrowed his brow with a smile, and went to argue before-
“Is that everyone?”

Patrick looked up to see Tyler doing a head count, before Ray chimed in. “Nah, Gerard and Frank aren’t here.”

Brendon grinned, “Probably fuckin’ in a stall again.” Mikey retched, “Ugh, that’s so gross, don’t even—”

“No we’re not, you total fucking liar.”

Gerard waltzed in from backstage, bag slung firmly over his shoulder, and just to make his claim even more convincing, Frank entered through the metal doors, carrying a large, lumpy bag and dusted with snowflakes. “Hey guys! Sorry if I’m late, fuckin’ snow is crazy.”

Patrick huffed with a silent laugh, “Yeah, sure it is.”

Just as Frank grinned, Pete shuffled out of a dim booth and stood, “Alright, let’s go.”

Everyone started moving to the door, but Pete swiftly grabbed Patrick’s arm, pulling him to the back of the group.

He grinned down at the younger boy, leaning down to whisper in his ear, “Nice sweater, ‘Trick.” Patrick froze for a moment, before scowling at the wolfish grin and pulling his coat zipper up roughly- making Pete whine, “I was serious, you look adorable!”

“Just shut up, Pete.” Patrick couldn’t help but laugh at Pete’s pout, and Pete laughed too, subtly lacing his fingers with Patrick’s and looking upwards, staring up at the falling snow against the black, starry sky.

Everyone sat at the edges of the wooden shack- that actually had working lightbulbs, much to Patrick’s surprise.

Backs were pressed against walls, some people were hunched under tables, and others, with excuses like ‘I don’t wanna get my jeans dirty’ or ‘I have a dust allergy’, had opted to sit (or lie) on couches.

The conversation had flowed easily, and it had gotten much more amusing as soon as the beer and weed had started getting passed around.

Pete and Patrick were sat on the floor, sandwiched between Joe and Andy. Patrick felt high, drunk, and just purely happy, giggling along with the group’s raucous laughter, as everyone watched Sarah and Frank insisting on decorating the small shack with tinsel, fairy lights, and all different kinds of shiny stuff.
Sarah laughed drunkenly, passing a very obviously, Halloween decoration, to Frank, who was precariously stood on an old plastic chair.

“You’re gonna fucking fall, and break your fucking leg.” Gerard started slowly with a drunk slur, “And when you do, I am NOT carrying your fat-ass home.”

Frank laughed wildly, shaking the chair as he carelessly and half-assedly taped the string of pumpkins to the wall. “You’re too weak to carry me home, Gee- you fuckin’ spaghetti, noodle- fuck. If I break a leg I’m totally asking Andy for help.”

Andy laughed quietly- he was the only one who was still sober. “And I will refuse, and you’ll have to drag yourself home.”

Laughter burst through the shack again, muffling Frank’s pleads of ‘Come on man, help a brother out’.

Patrick assumed the sun must be rising soon, and his theory was proven correct as he blinked his eyes open, beams of light making him squint.

He looked out of a filthy window- that had immature words scrawled on it, and looked out at the pink, and golden sunrise. Patrick glanced at the snow covered stacked cars, school bus and fire pit, and he felt himself shiver in the cold air.

After several rounds of truth or dare, never have I ever, and after more beer cans that Patrick could even count- or remember, for that matter, everyone had fallen asleep or just plain passed out.

Patrick assumed he must have fallen asleep on Pete's shoulder, as he awoke drooling in the crook of Pete's neck. He raised his head and glanced around, grinning fondly at the half-assed decorations, and discarded wrapping paper. His own backpack was full of presents others had bought him- and not so surprisingly, they were all really thoughtful, and they made Patrick want to cry a little. The thoughtful gifts had also made him feel really guilty about only giving out junk food- but nobody had complained, in fact, everyone had been overjoyed at the brand name foods, and by the end of the night, all of it had disappeared.

He felt a tug at his hand, and looked down to see long, tanned fingers tangling with his own. Patrick glanced up, seeing Pete- head tipped back against the wooden wall, smiling tiredly and drunkenly, with black bags starting to show under his eyes.

Patrick had meant to ask about how Pete’s Christmas had been, but from what he’d seen and heard of Pete’s home life, he was pretty sure it would kill the cheery mood.

Pete leaned in suddenly, but his aim was a little off from the alcohol and weed clouding his brain, and instead of Patrick's lips, his mouth ended up on Patrick's cheek. He shook his head at the dizziness, and Patrick’s soft laugh rang between them, as he tenderly put his pale hand on Pete’s jaw, guiding their lips together successfully.

Both boys sighed happily, smiling at each other with eyes full of shining adoration as they pulled
away, settling inches from each other. Patrick’s smile broadened into a grin, and he patted Pete’s cheek softly, tipping his head back again. Pete did the same, smiling softly.

“I love you ‘Trick.’

“I love you too Pete.”

There was a beat of silence again, before Pete shifted to his side, looking at Patrick kindly. “So, how was your Christmas?”

Patrick grinned, “The end of it was pretty good.”

He tilted his head over to Pete, heart fluttering as he stared into those brown eyes he’d completely fallen in love with, but then his brow furrowed for a moment, remembering something that had slightly irked him earlier that day.

“...Do you mind that I’m ginger?”

Pete had to stifle a loud laugh, biting his fist as he trembled with silent laughter. Patrick shoved his shoulder lightly, “Well, do you?”

Pete inhaled and exhaled, fighting off giggles that threatened to escape. “I love you so fucking much Trick.”

“Pete-”

“Ginger and all, I promise. You're so cute.”

“...Thanks.”

“...Where did you even-”

“-Something my stupid grandpa said, don’t worry about it.”

Pete nodded seriously, laughter still threatening to escape, and Patrick stared into the teary eyes again, beaming fully.

He glanced around and couldn’t believe how lucky he had been: He had made amazing friends, he’d joined an amazing band, he was happy and confident for the first time in his life, and best of all- he had Pete.
It had been the best year of his life.
What You Don't Know Won't Hurt You

Patricia Stumph worked hard—actually was an understatement.

She worked really damn hard, and had no help around the house.

It was the last day of July, 3:30pm, and her three children would soon be leaving school; Kevin and Megan would return starving, raiding the pantry for junk food, while Patrick would go to another long orchestra practice, and be home very late.

Her husband, David, was upstairs in his office—making stern phone calls and doing mountains paperwork.

She exhaled heavily, unclipping the—now dry clothes from the washing line and tossing them into a basket. Looking up at the bright blue sky one last time, she headed inside, and began ironing and folding the laundry, making five small piles, one for each family member.

She let a small smile drift over her face, remembering when Patrick was two years old and always insisted on helping her fold the laundry. He’d try his best, but there’s only so much uncoordinated toddler hands can do, but nevertheless, she’d thank him, and put them away, forgetting about them entirely. When her husband would find them he wouldn’t be best pleased, and she’d have to rush to apologize every time.

Patricia’s smile withered into a tight line.

David meant well, he really did. He worked so hard to keep the family going, to make sure that his wife and their children would want for nothing, he’d actually promised that to her—twice in fact. The first, when he had proposed, and then the second, on their wedding day. Sure, he had a temper, but he provided for the family, and that was worth a lot to Patricia.

Patricia stopped herself from smiling again, furrowing her brow, and folding the last shirt—a blue graphic t-shirt that her brother Simon had bought Kevin on one of his visits to Illinois.

She allowed herself to reminisce a little; When Patrick had been born, it had hurt so much that she had practically been begging for death, or for drugs, or for, just about, anything that could take the pain away— but it had all faded away the moment a nurse had placed her son in her arms, and she had never seen anything more beautiful in her entire life. David insisted they name him Patrick, after her, saying that he looked just like his mother— red hair, blue eyes and pale as a sheet of paper.

Patricia climbed up the stairs, entering Megan’s room and moving over to her dresser. With meticulous precision, she put her daughter’s clothes away, and stifled a smile once again, remembering Megan’s first words.

Their daughter had been a 'daddy’s girl' through and through, and her father would dote on her in return. Her first word was ‘dada’, and she would cling to David like a monkey, but, after a few months of domestic bliss with three healthy and happy children, the couple had come to the realization that having three children wasn’t going to be cheap as they grew, and her husband had
started getting stressed.

He’d work late, come home tense and quiet, and soldier upstairs to shower and to bed- not saying a word. Megan would sit outside their bedroom door and cry at night, wanting her dad to read her a story, or to play shadow puppets with her- like he used to, and one night, David had enough of the crying.

Patricia had been washing dishes when she’d heard her daughter screaming, and she’d dropped everything and ran upstairs, screaming Megan’s name.

David had yelled at the girl, roughly dragging her back to her own room by the arm and throwing her inside, slamming the door, before turning to return to bed. He’d faltered when he saw his wife’s look of horror as she panted at the top of the stairs, but the man had only gulped and stalked off to bed- leaving their daughter screaming and crying in her room, hiding under the bed in the fetal position.

Patricia had tried her best to calm the girl down, she’d tried every trick in the book, from hot chocolate, to hordes of stuffed toys, to singing, and eventually her daughter had relaxed.

As Patricia had been tucking her in, the little girl had hugged her tightly, and had whispered ‘I love you mommy’ for the first time in her life. Patricia had been on the verge of tears, but had held it together, bid her daughter goodnight, and had given David the cold shoulder for two whole weeks.

Megan and her dad had never really been close after that, and instead, the girl tended to stick to her mom when she needed help.

David still blamed himself.

Patricia glided over to Kevin’s room, scowling at the objects and mess littering the floor. She stepped over a coat gingerly, and made a mental note tell Kevin to clean up, as she put away her younger son’s clothes.

Kevin had always been a little scamp. Always hyperactive, climbing, yelling, running around, pranking everyone, and everything little kids like him did. He’d calmed down considerably as he’d aged, but that mischievous grin and the sly twinkle in his eye had always remained.

She remembered when Kevin limped home one day, bruised and leg bent at an odd angle, she had rushed out to him as soon as she’d spotted him through the window. The boy hadn’t spoken, and had only shuffled inside after his mother, sitting on a barstool as she searched for a first aid kit, sniffing the whole time.

Patricia had been terrified that someone had done this to him- if it had been a bully, or, some older kids, but when questioned, Kevin had sheepishly admitted that he’d gone to the park, and had fallen from the monkey bars.

It turns out his leg was broken, and he’d have to spend the whole summer with a cast on his leg. That summer had really been a learning experience for the young boy, he’d really learned how to stay still, and just relax- on account of not being able to do much else.

While it had been heartbreaking to see her son in pain, Patricia was pretty sure that without that broken leg, and that boring summer, Kevin would be an insane handful nowadays.
She left her younger son’s room, and entered Patrick’s room instead.

Ah Patrick- calm, adorable and downright angelic when he was young. That wasn’t to say there hadn’t been problems; Patrick was born a little premature and was prone to illness when he was a baby. There were so many nights of pacing up and down, checking his temperature constantly, and panicked trips in the small hours to the doctor whenever the fever got dangerously high.

Patrick had been their firstborn, their bouncing baby boy and the apple of both his parents’ eyes. David had been ecstatic that he had someone to pass the violin heirloom too, and Patricia knew it was mostly because her father-in-law had been annoying his son about it, warning him that if he ‘only had girls, I’ll give it to your brother instead’.

The desire to carry on tradition had worked David into a frenzy: he’d put Patrick in violin lessons, piano lessons, even in language lessons- his excuse being that Patrick may have to immigrate in the future, if he wanted to be a successful musician, and it didn't hurt to be prepared.

Patricia had been a little apprehensive, she’d felt as though they were forcing Patrick into something unnatural, and writing his life for him, but all of those worries had melted away when they had taken Patrick to his first violin lesson.

He had only been three, and the moment the teacher had placed a violin in his hands- the smile on his face was indescribable.

It sounded awful at first, of course, but it made Patrick so happy that Patricia could put up with the screeching sounds all day, and with practice and time, screeches had become flawless melodies, and every time she heard her son play, her heart swelled with pride.

She furrowed her brow at Steve, who was curled up under Patrick’s bed, the ‘puppy’ was now nine months old, but looked like an adult dog, despite the age.

Patricia moved over to Patrick’s dresser, and was about to open the top drawer when her hands stopped, hovering over the handles and eyes locked onto a white plastic bag sat on the floor at the foot of the dresser. She tilted her head, Patrick wasn’t the neatest person in the world, but it was odd of him to just leave something lying around.

The woman crouched down to her knees, grabbing the bag, opening the bottom drawer and she went to shove the bag inside- when she froze.

The drawer was full to the brim of white plastic bags, and Patricia felt a tight pinch in the pit of her stomach.

This was...odd. What on earth were all these bags for? Or...was Patrick hiding something under here?

Her hands started digging through, and it only took a few seconds when she stopped with a loud gasp.

Albums, albums upon albums.

They were all different but, they ranged from pop music, to punk, to heavy metal.

Patrick was definitely not allowed to have these.
She exhaled heavily, and went to examine one before her eyes locked onto something.

Small white paper notes, folded up into little squares. She could see the ink through the paper.

Patricia picked one up, gingerly opening it and eyes widening with another quiet gasp at the messy, scrawled words.

*your adorable when you sleep, i love you trick.*

Patricia felt sick. Had Patrick been hiding this the whole time…? Why was he being so secretive? And who had written this note?

She snatched up another one, reading the words in disbelief.

*i miss you babe ;)*

*How* had Patrick done this? Had he been sneaking out or...wait, *the orchestra*. He’d been using the orchestra as an excuse, *oh god*.

She picked up more, and more, reading each one with tearing eyes.

*you’re my favourite thing to do*

*i can't forget your style or your cynicism*

*i love ya lunchbox*

*nice legs what time do they open?*

*i wanna wake up next to you every day patrick*
She was in shock.

Patricia was frozen, inhaling and exhaling deeply. What should she do? Should she tell David?...Or should she just...stay quiet?

...She wanted her son to be happy, and whoever wrote these things...if they- if they made him happy...

Maybe- maybe she should just put everything away and talk to Patrick later. Make him understand, that, it was okay to tell her these things.

Yes, yes, that seemed like the best option. After all, she couldn’t just, jump to conclusions or anything.

With a quick nod to herself, she moved to stuff everything back into the drawer with shaky hands, before-

“What is that?”

Patricia turned, eyes wide.

Her husband was stood at the door, eyes locked on the bottom drawer.

It was the last day of July, and Patrick was making the walk to The Cobra, feeling content while he watched the clouds drift by.

It was a warm summer day, and while Patrick wasn’t one for hot weather (he usually preferred to hide himself away by bundling up in coats), he had become a lot more confident over this past year.

His birthday had came and gone, and he was now seventeen years old- although, quite regrettably,
he had remained 5’4. It felt a little dumb, but, Patrick really felt a lot more positive and self-assured because of his new age.

Pete’s birthday had passed too, and he’d turned eighteen, and due to him now being a legal adult- he’d moved out of his parents house immediately, taking his brother and sister with him.

The three Wentz siblings now lived in a small apartment near the bar, which was rented out to them by the bartender- Patrick had been surprised to learn. Apparently, the guy had a lot of small properties all over Chicago, and he was happy to rent one out to Pete- knowing he was trustworthy, and could pay, knowing he had saved up a lot of money. However, due to now having to support two sixteen year olds, Pete had taken another job.

Andy had turned eighteen along with Pete, but his home life was actually pretty good, so he had decided to remain with his parents and considered higher education, while getting another job to contribute to the household.

Joe however had remained sixteen, and although his birthday was only around the corner in September- no one missed the opportunities to tease him about his age constantly.

As Patrick arrived at the club, he pushed the metal doors open, and stepped inside. He smiled at the bartender, who only nodded in response, as he made his way backstage. Patrick stared down at the sticky-note reading ‘Fall Out Boy’, and twisted the handle, opening the door.

He stepped inside to see Pete, Andy and Joe sat on different chairs and a couch that had been moved to make a circle, they were all hunched over the small table in the centre of the room, looking thoughtful.

The three heads snapped up at the door opening, and three grins greeted Patrick. Pete made to stand, but Patrick quickly moved next to his boyfriend on the couch. Apart from those who already knew, nobody else had found out about Pete and Patrick.

“So...why do you look so serious?”

Joe motioned to the table with a smile, and Patrick looked down to see a small list of- what he assumed were song titles (and they must have been new, because Patrick hadn’t heard of them before), and under the songs were a few different phrases that looked to be album titles. They were almost all scribbled out, bar one- which was circled and underlined instead.
Pete wanted to get serious: He wanted to make an album.

He actually wanted to start a whole label, but he had decided to surprise the others. Pete wanted to sign everyone at the club, and he just knew they would be successful- he had a hunch.

They had taken Patrick’s melodies, and combined them with Pete’s lyrics, they had all the sheet music, and all they had to do was record.

"Are you guys... sure?"

Patrick was a little apprehensive, he really didn’t think his melodies or voice were that great- but his three friends insisted, pouring on the flattery and trying their best to convince him.

Patrick already knew what it was like to be on the receiving end of Joe Trohman’s convincing, so he decided to cut their words short, and agreed.

When they had finished their set, Patrick was buzzing. A beaming grin was set on his face and he just couldn’t stop smiling. He wasn’t exactly sure why, but as Pete grabbed his hand and walked him home, Patrick knew he had several reasons to be happy, and his feelings were 100% justified.

The duo stopped at Patrick’s house, and Pete stood in front of Patrick with a familiar grin. His black hair was damp from sweat and strands were sticking up all over the place, making Patrick laugh quietly and move his hands to flatten it down. "How do you get it this messy, Pete? Honestly-"

Pete’s lips crashed into his with a broad smile and it made Patrick hum happily, wrapping his arms around the man’s neck, hands smoothing through his hair- most likely messing it up even more.

Pete pulled away with a content sigh, kissing Patrick’s nose lightly, making Patrick blush and grin. They stood for a moment as Pete began to say his goodbyes, and-

“PATRICK STUMPH.”
Patrick felt his blood run cold.

He jolted away from Pete—whose eyes were wide as he stood frozen in place, staring at the house.

Patrick stared.

His parents were at the front door, and they were walking towards him quickly—shoving through doors and gates.

Patrick turned to Pete, now panting and whimpering. He shoved the man, “Run.” Pete was frozen, he pushed Pete as hard as he could, making the man stumble.

“RUN.”

That seemed to snap him out of his daze, and he darted down the street, glancing back desperately and slowing to a stop as he watched Patrick being dragged past the metal gates by his father, and the boy shouted one last time.

“-JUST FUCKING RUN!”

“INSIDE THE HOUSE. NOW.”

Patrick’s dad shoved him into the hall, eyes full of murder. Patrick glanced behind him, spotting his siblings hiding behind the banister—faces plastered in fear.

He looked over at his mother pleadingly, but she only inhaled, biting the inside of her cheek. The man raised a finger, pointing it at his son.

“Who was that?”

His voice was quiet, but full of venom. Patrick felt like he was on the verge of tears.

“I-I-I-”

“WHO WAS THAT?”

Patrick breathing was getting more uneven, and he could only whimper.
“Did he write these?”

His dad shoved a handful of small, white notes at his son, only a few caught by his hands and the rest falling to the floor. Patrick could only whimper, feeling heavy tears falling from his eyes and trailing down his cheeks.

Suddenly, a hand clasped around his neck, shoving him into a wall with a loud thud.

Patrick could hear Steve’s frantic barking from his bedroom, and he was glad the door was shut, he really didn’t want his dog to get hurt for trying to defend him.

“You.” His father exhaled shakily and angrily, it reminded Patrick of a bull.

“Are not.” His hand tightened around his neck.

“Gay.”

Patrick was struggling to breathing, and instinctively, his pale fingers moved to the large hand around his neck, pulling at the digits as his face went blue.

His pulse was thumping in his ears, but he could hear vague pleas of ‘David. Let him go.’, and ‘Dad, please don’t hurt him!’.

The fearsome, infuriated eyes were burning into his own- his own, that were red, tearful, and begging for mercy.

The hand left his neck, but his father remained, tensing his wife’s hand on his shoudler as she tried to calm him down.

The man lurched forwards, pinning Patrick to the wall again- by the shoulders this time.

“It’s a sin. It’s immoral. It’s unnatural. Patrick, please-”

“I love him”

Patrick gave a choked sob. Face red, and his eyes freely letting streams of tears fall.

His father looked physically pained, and his collected, blank eyes moved to his son’s.

“No. You don’t. Men do not love other men-”
Patrick growled, sounding more insistent this time, his strong expression was only let down by the tears streaming down his cheeks. His shoulders shook, and he struggled for breath. In the corner of his eye he saw his mother- hand over her mouth and looking away, Patrick couldn’t read the emotion in her eyes. He didn’t know if it was disgust or sympathy.

He saw white for a moment, and felt a burning pain all over his face. He sobbed, hands scrambling to shield himself as he heard yelling, both his mother’s voice and his father’s voice were at full force. Patrick opened his eyes, hands over his face, and eyes squinting. He saw Megan at the top of the stairs, looking terrified and as she made a move towards him, but their father’s voice rang out again.

“Don’t you dare- Go to your room, Megan.”

The girl visibly flinched, eyes trained on her older brother as she darted back up the stairs and to her room, Kevin following suit.

David exhaled and looked down at his firstborn son- lip curled and eyes full of disappointment.

He leaned down, grasping the boy’s arm and pulling him up the stairs. Patrick was too dazed to fight back, and allowed himself to be dragged to his room.

Patrick could hear his mom follow with quick, light footsteps.

He stumbled to the floor as his father shoved him into the room, slamming the door. There was only silence, before he heard something click in the door’s lock.

Patrick's eyes snapped wide in realization, and he stood with a determined growl, hands balled into fists and started punching at the door. He kicked, he scratched, he shoved, he screamed, but the barrier stood.

Patrick felt adrenaline fade away into a desperate sadness, and he pressed his forehead to the door, frustrated tears spilling from his eyes.

“I love him.”

He heard Steve whining from behind him, and he slid down to the floor, feeling the dog trying to lick his face. Patrick’s head and shoulders fell in defeat, and he pulled the dog close, sobbing painfully into his fur.
He managed to calm himself down after a few moments, and he glanced around the room with blurry eyes, before his gaze froze on his dresser.

The bottom drawer was open, and it was completely empty.

He felt a burst of rage, sadness and desperation.

All the albums Pete had given him were gone, all the notes were gone, even all the fucking white plastic bags were gone. Patrick pressed his hands to his face and shook with anger, rubbing them over his face, and he felt Steve nuzzling against his side, trying to comfort his owner.

Patrick stood, stumbling over to his bathroom and staring into the mirror. He whimpered again- his dad had hit him. Patrick could see the steadily reddening marks, and he just knew they were going to bruise. He looked down at his knuckles, they were red- and Patrick was pretty sure they were going to bruise too.

He showered, wiping away tears, the blood and trying to calm himself with the sound of the pattering water.

Some time later, Patrick crawled into bed. Curling up and hugging Steve tightly, letting himself cry again.

There was no music to help him drift to sleep.

There was only silence.

Patricia stared at her husband sombrely, chewing on her lip. He was on his laptop, eyes narrowed under a pair of glasses, face set in concentration. It looked so much like Patrick.

Her heart stung at the thought of her oldest son, and she felt like she was drowning in an ocean of pure guilt.

She shouldn’t have opened the drawer.

She should have hid everything from her husband.

She should have made a better excuse.
She shouldn’t have let David hurt Patrick.
She should have defended her son.

...But she hadn’t. And now, it was too late.

Patricia blinked slowly, and sat on the foot of the bed, not being able to bring herself to look at her husband.

“What are you doing, David?”

She asked him calmly, in a quiet, tired voice, and the man glanced up at her from the screen.

“I have some connections. We’re sending him away this year.”

The woman turned to stare at her husband with wide, panicked eyes. “Away?” She exhaled Shakily, furrowing her brow. She hadn’t stood up for Patrick before, but she was going to now.

“What do you mean, 'away'?”

“To Juilliard. We’ve talked about this, Patricia.”

The woman froze. “He’s too young, he hasn’t finished high school, he hasn’t even passed an entry-”

“I have connections.” The man stared up at her, his eyes were much calmer. “He can finish them in New York, before the semester starts.”

The woman shook her head slowly, shock filling her eyes. “David, think about this-”

“He is not going to ruin everything.” The voice was tight, and deadly serious.

“Everything I have worked for, everything I’ve sacrificed for this family- he’s not going to ruin it.”

“David.”

“He’s not going to disgrace our name. My name.” His determined stare melted away, and he suddenly looked thoughtful.

“...Martin Callaghan’s business is doing well, isn’t it? And I believe he has a daughter, around Patrick's age...what was her name...? Anna...?”

“David. No.” She glowered at her husband. “I will not let you do that to Patrick.”
The man froze, staring at his wife with slightly squinting eyes. His mouth twitched into a smile. “Then let’s make a deal.”

Patricia frowned, her glare faltering under her husband's gaze. “What kind of deal?”

David removed his glasses, polishing them with his shirt and setting them on the beside table. “I won’t...arrange, things with Callaghan-” Patricia exhaled sharply, relief flooding her immediately.

“-And Patrick goes to Juilliard.”

The man stopped, staring at his wife seriously, eyebrows raised.

“Next week.”

The woman froze.

Letting her son be shipped away pained her, but...an arrangement was so much worse. She dropped her head, running her hands over her face, and sighing shakily.

“Deal.”
Pete awoke to short pulses of electronic buzzing, and his blinked his eyes open slowly. With a groan, he sat up, rubbing at his eyes, and hand reaching over to switch off the alarm clock. He yawned heavily as he pulled himself out of bed, and he sat on the edge of the mattress, chewing on his lip and staring at the floor.

Pete hadn’t seen Patrick for almost a week, and naturally, he was getting worried- as a good boyfriend should. Fall Out Boy had actually stopped playing sets because of Patrick’s absence, Joe hadn’t felt right taking his place as the singer, so thankfully, the other three bands had lengthened their sets, to cover their time slot.

Pete stumbled into the small bathroom, opting to take an ice cold shower to wake him up, but the water didn’t soothe his worries.

Pete just couldn’t get the picture out of his mind: Patrick being dragged into his house by his father, screaming at Pete for him to ‘Just fucking run’.

Pete got dressed, drying his hair with a small towel and trying to think calmly, to successfully organize his thoughts. Due to his anxiety about the whole situation, Pete had spent a good portion of last night wandering aimlessly around the streets of Wilmette, before deciding to spend some time at Junction Park. He’d only sped home when he saw the sunrise, and he realized he didn’t want his siblings to wake up alone and panic at his disappearance.

Pete entered the kitchen, stomach rumbling impatiently, and he found Hillary and Andrew, eating cereal and chatting with bright grins. They looked up at him with large smiles, greeting him as he moved over to grab a bowl of the cheap, sugary cereal too.

The best thing about turning eighteen was being able to tell his parents where to stick it- taking his little brother and sister, taking his dog, and getting the hell out of the shithole that had once been their home.

Pete still had a hard time keeping his parents away from Andrew and Hillary- they weren’t best pleased about Pete taking them away, but he had connections, after all, and he had just about managed. A few scary looking guys covered in tattoos and piercings, combined with a little intimidation could work wonders for keeping your family safe.

His siblings were much happier now. Not having to live in fear, tread carefully or always wonder if you’d get yelled at or hit when you came home from school, definitely helped.

They had freedom. A lot of it. And Pete tried to give them as many luxuries as he could, they really deserved it after so many years of pure bullshit.

It wasn’t easy- supporting himself and two teenagers, but whenever Pete came home to find them having a movie marathon- nitpicking the film or just plain making fun of it, or when he’d find them sharing a takeaway pizza- seeing who could get a whole slice in their mouth, or even when they destroyed the living room by building a pillow fort- Pete still knew he’d done the right thing.

“Didn’t sleep very well?” Andrew asked mid-chew, staring at his brother with wide, inquisitive eyes,
and nodding at his eyebags. Pete smiled tiredly and shook his head, “Nah, but, it’s okay, don’t worry about it.”

The younger boy nodded slowly, and Hillary tilted her head—she still felt the need to be ‘mom’ in these situations. “Are you sure? I mean, if it helps, you could talk—”

“Don’t worry.” Pete smiled at his sister, a look of steeled determination crossing his face with a confident smile.

“I’m gonna fix it.”

Patrick Stumph wasn’t a coward.

And he definitely wasn’t going to sit back and be trapped in this room for a moment longer.

A whole week had passed, and Patrick’s father had told the school his son had pneumonia. But in truth, Patrick had been a prisoner in his own house—no, his own bedroom, for seven entire days.

His mom would bring him food, water and just about anything he needed—but he was completely locked in.

The first few days had been desperate, he had been in a fighting mood, and he’d tried everything to break down the door—he was sure he must have sounded insane, between the grunting, the screaming and the loud thuds of furniture being thrown at the door.

However, by Thursday, Patrick had gone quiet, and all he would do was sleep, play with his dog, or just think. His mom and dad had panicked at the sudden silence, and by midday, they had opened the door yelling his name.

Patrick assumed that they thought he’d killed himself.

But instead of finding their son hanging from the ceiling with a belt around his neck, they’d found Patrick lying in bed, cuddled up with Steve, and eyes shut—and soon enough, they’d left, locking the door again.

By Saturday, Patrick was still quiet. His parents assumed he was sleeping, that he’d resigned himself to his fate.
But Patrick wasn’t sleeping.

Patrick was planning.

It was Sunday evening, and Patrick was sat on the floor, back leaning against his bed, Steve asleep on his lap, and eyes trained on the window.

He had a plan.

Step one: It had to be dark and really late.

Patrick’s parents had made a habit of leaving the curtains wide open, watching the front gates for any signs of someone coming in, or going out.

So step two was: Patrick had to wait until they went to sleep- and that step was easy, because his mother always came to bid him goodnight before she went to bed.

He sat crossed legged, eyes trained, and face covered in determination, when his ear twitched as he heard a soft knock at the door.

The lock clicked, and the door opened gently. Gingerly, his mom stepped inside, closing the door behind her. Her eyes were full of reservation, but Patrick could tell something was on her mind. She opened her mouth to speak, but her voice was laced with hesitation.

“Patrick, I need to- I need to tell, or...or, talk to you, about something. Something very important.”

Patrick flicked his eyes away from the glass, and he did his best to stare at his mother blankly, but in truth he was struggling to hold back the look betrayal and pain that begged to be released.

“What is it?”

Patrick’s voice was unrecognisable. Tight, strained and quiet. He sounded exactly like his father, and coupled with the blank expression- he really looked like him too. Patrick noticed his mother flinch a little at the realization, but she cleared her throat and continued.

“There’s a reason, your dad- there’s a reason we’ve been keeping you here, Patrick.”

He struggled to keep his eyes blank, and he bit the inside of his cheek in frustration at the stilted exchange.

“So, are you going to tell me? Or are you just gonna keep making small talk?”
Patricia visibly tensed, she was losing her son. This wasn’t her baby, he didn’t act, or look, or sound, like...*that*. But she supposed rage can change you, she just hoped it wasn’t permanent.

“Y-Your father has some connections, and-” Patrick watched his mother exhale shakily, nails biting into her palms.

“You’re going to Juilliard. To New York. Tomorrow.”

Patrick felt like he was going to throw up.

His chest heaved for a second, a retch getting stuck in his throat.

He tried with every fibre of his being to keep himself collected, to keep himself unreadable, but his eyes released streams of tears, betraying his facade.

“Oh, *Patrick*—” His mom clamped her eyes shut, inhaling and exhaling. She was struggling to stay calm too. “*I’m sorry*, but you have to believe me-

“*Why tomorrow*?”

She swallowed thickly, trying to avoid her son’s burning, mournful stare. “The semester starts on the tenth of August.” Patrick gave a shuddering sigh, eyes widening further. He felt his chest jolt with a sob, and he shook his head. “*Patrick, listen to me-*”

“I don’t want to.”

He stared up at her. “Please. Mom. Don’t, d-don’t, please-” As his sobs got louder, and his begging got more heart-wrenching, she stepped forwards, dropped to her knees and let her son cry into her shoulder, hands tenderly holding his head. “P-Please, please, I-I c-can’t-”

Patrick’s mother grabbed her sons face, staring into his eyes with assurance and strength. “*You can.*” She ran a hand through his hair fondly. “*You have to.*”

“P-please-”

“Patrick, the alternative was worse. *So much worse-*”

“W-what *alternative? Pl-Please, I’m b-begging you-*”
“Getting married to Anna Callaghan when you both turn eighteen.”

Her eyes became teary, but serious and enraged. “That’s the alternative, but I made a deal with your dad. No marriage, if you go to New York.”

Patrick’s shuddered, eyes dropping and breathing deeply and frantically. Patricia's heart broke, and she embraced her son again.

“No marriage, if you go to New York.”

Patrick’s shuddered, eyes dropping and breathing deeply and frantically. Patricia's heart broke, and she embraced her son again.

“Do it Patrick. Go to Juilliard. Work hard, and-”

“-Help me escape.”

Patrick stared up at his mom, pleading with her through pained sobs. “Please-”

“I can’t, Patrick. If you run away, the deal’s off.” Her lips twitched into a deep frown and she gazed at her son sympathetically. “If you escape, and you’re found- And believe me, dear- You will be found. You’ll have to go to Juilliard, AND, get married.” Patrick pressed his face into his hands, trying to calm himself with shuddering breaths.

“You’re strong, Patrick. Stronger than you think. And, I know the circumstances aren’t...ideal, but, it’s a one in a lifetime opportunity. Juilliard is an amazing school- with a degree from there, you could do anything.”

There was a long, tense silence.

Patrick looked up from his hands, eyes red, and nose sniffing.

“Oh-Okay-I-I’ll go.”

Patrick sat next to the door, ear pressed against the wood.
Fine, he’d go- because he was NOT going to get married- but he’d sure as hell go down swinging. He’d fight back every step of the way, because, fuck, he wasn’t a coward, and he wasn’t going to just put his head down and do what everyone told him to.

He waited, and waited, until there was no sound in the house.

Musterling all the finesse and dexterity he could, he stood and got dressed- being overly cautious not to make a sound.

As he tied his shoelace, he ordered Steve to be ‘quiet’, and ‘stay’, and the dog followed the orders immediately, not making a sound as Patrick slinked over to the window.

He jimmed the window open, cringing at every loud scrape or squeak it made, before the gap was wide enough for him to fit through. Patrick shoved his legs through and pulled himself outside, so that he was stood on the tiled roof.

He shuddered, feeling nauseous at the height, before he furrowed his brow, and exhaled sharply, stepping forwards shakily.

It was 11pm, and Pete stared at the familiar white, colonial house from down the sidewalk. His hood was up, and he had a scarf wrapped around the lower half of his face.

Trying to stay out of sight, Pete crept forwards and crouched behind the tall bushes, poking his head around the corner. His eyes flitted to the windows, and he sighed in relief as he noticed they were all dark.

Pete was going to get to the bottom of this, he’d heard nothing from Patrick- nobody had heard anything from Patrick, not even Ashley and Sarah. With Pete’s overactive imagination, the last week hadn’t been easy for him, as his brain insisted on inventing all sorts of horrific scenarios for Patrick’s disappearance.

He’d tried this before- coming to Patrick’s house.

Pete had crept up to Glenview on Wednesday evening, noticing the lights, but too determined to care. Of course, he had been hanging on the gate, ready to pull himself over when Patrick’s father had ran out of the house, yelling at him and threatening to call the cops. Pete had jumped down, and had bolted away, and he’d decided that if he wanted to see Patrick again- he’d have to be much more careful, almost surgical about it.

As Pete made a move to stand, he noticed something glint under the streetlights, and his eyes flicked towards it. There were a few garbage bags in front of the house, sat in a row awaiting collection in the morning, and Pete could see something...shiny, inside one of them. Half of him told him to ignore it, he had to get to Patrick, but the other half was curious, and wondered if it had anything to do with
the whole situation.

He crept over, prodding at the bag, and feeling sharp edges. He winced and squinted his eyes, seeing more and more items sparkling under the dim street lights. Pete split the bag open with his fingers, made a small hole, and he froze as he saw what had been shining.

CDs.

A mass of CDs- all broken into pieces.

He rummaged through a little. It wasn't only CDs.

White notes and a Walkman.

Pete’s eyes widened and he felt an uncomfortable clench in his chest.

Patrick...Patrick wouldn’t do this...right? He, he knew- he knew just how much money Pete had saved, and, how long he’d worked to...

Pete swallowed, standing and moving away from the bag, although his eyes refused to shift from the shards.

It was okay. Patrick wasn’t that type of person. He’d told Pete he was grateful, why would he lie? He wouldn’t, because he was honest. He was an honest person, and Pete sure it was all a big misunderstanding. He’d ask Patrick, and there would be a perfectly logical excuse. He was sure of it.

Pete stared up at the metal gate, exhaled and puffed out his cheeks as he climbed, hands gripping and feet slotting into any bumps to give him some leverage.

He swung his legs over, hands holding him up, before preparing himself to fall, and he landed on the lawn quietly, eyes glancing around skittishly. Pete was going to start making his way over to the back of the house, he was going to find some trash cans and climb up to Patrick’s room and rescue him- like Rapunzel. Pete was pretty sure it was a good plan, it had worked in the story. Sure, maybe Patrick didn't have really long hair he could use as a rope- but hey, he'd find a way.

He pushed himself up and stood, straightening his back. He wiped the soil and grass from his hands on his jeans, when he heard a thud followed by a faint groan.

That fucking hurt.

That really fucking hurt- shit, motherfucker, fuck. Patrick groaned as he slowly stumbled to his feet, hoping that the thud hadn’t alerted his parents. He rolled his eyes at himself, of course he’d fallen. He had no finesse. He had the grace of a baby elephant.

Suddenly, Patrick heard hurried footsteps from around the corner and he panicked, moving to hide before-
It was Pete.

“Patrick?” Pete’s eyebrows raised and he jogged towards the redhead. Patrick felt overwhelmed, just the sight of the man was enough to give him a feeling of safety. He rushed towards Pete, meeting him in the middle, and as he stared into the concerned and confused brown eyes, he didn’t even notice the tears streaming down his own pale cheeks.

“Patrick- You’re, you’re hurt, oh, dude, you’re crying-” Pete moved his hands to graze the murky green mark on Patrick’s face and the one around his neck- they were definitely bruises, and Pete felt his blood boil.

“Did your dad do this, Patrick?”

His voice was firm, commanding, and strained as he held back a tidal wave of pure rage. The redhead looked up at him, breathing deeply and eyes watering, “Let’s go. Just get me out of here, Pete.” Pete nodded immediately, firm and determined as he took Patrick’s hand- noting the bruised and grazed knuckles, and led him over to the gate.

Pete watched Patrick speed ahead in front of him, pulling the man by the hand. He wasn’t actually sure the redhead knew where he was going, but the determined and frantic stride along with the tight grip on his hand made him not want to question it.

He was curious, however. About what had happened after he’d gone inside a week ago, about the bruises, about the CDs in the trash, about the silent week- but he didn’t want to overwhelm or stress the kid out, so he just exhaled deeply, consoling himself and telling himself that he’d get his chance to ask.

As Patrick’s breathing began to calm down, he stuttered to a stop, looking around in confusion. He’d wanted to get as far away from his house as fast he could, so much so that he hadn’t even noticed where he was going. He glanced down at the hand tangled with his own, and looked up behind him to see Pete, looking mildly confused but also very accepting.

Patrick bit the inside of his cheek, and stared into the kind brown eyes sheepishly. “I-I’m gonna be totally honest- I have no idea where we are right now.”

Pete laughed quietly, gliding up next to Patrick and setting a relaxed walking pace, leading him gently by the hand. “Don’t stress it dude, I do.”

Patrick nodded, a smile reaching his lips for the first time in a whole week.
Pete led Patrick to the railway yard, and the redhead gave a sad smile as he saw the now faded, red scrawl reading ‘P M V S’ on one of the brick walls. Pete smiled fondly, amused voice cutting through the silence. “Remember that night?”

Patrick nodded, walking over the wall and trailing a hand over the mark. “Yeah, running from the cops, asthma attack—how could I not?”

Pete nodded, half-smile painting his features. “Uh-huh, really...eventful night.” He joined Patrick at the wall, glancing at him with a broad smile, leaning into his ear with the ghost of a laugh behind his words.

“Remember when you punched me?”

Patrick groaned at the words, laughing quietly and pinching the bridge of his nose, “Yeah—Shit, I’m sorry.” Pete grinned at the quiet laughter, and couldn’t help his own laughs escaping him. “You’ve got a really good right hook, dude.”

Patrick glared a little, and Pete’s eyes shone with adoration as he saw a glimpse of the Patrick he knew and loved.

“...Well, it’s not like you didn’t deserve it.”

“Excuse me?!”

Pete faked dramatic shock, making Patrick smile and roll his eyes just as theatrically. The two dissolved into giggles and Patrick kicked at the gravel with the tip of his sneaker, a small cloud of dust rising into the air.

“...You grabbed me, almost gave me a heart attack.”

Pete smiled guiltily at the memory and nodded in acceptance. “Yeah, sorry about that.” He sighed lightly and shrugged, “I had to though, you’re a fast runner when you’re scared.”

Patrick huffed in amusement. “Who isn’t?” Pete grinned, but deep down longed to hear Patrick burst into loud, joyful laughter, or to see him smile fully. He hated seeing Patrick this somber.

“Pete, I have to talk to you.” The redhead glanced up at the whiskey-brown eyes nervously, “It’s important.”

Pete gulped, hoping it wasn’t as bad as it sounded. But from the miserable tone, god, it could have
been anything from, 'I'm breaking up with you', to, 'I have cancer'. And if those were his options, Pete really hoped it would be more like the former.

“What is it, ‘Trick?’” Pete didn’t want to stress Patrick out, all he wanted was for the boy to be happy. The redhead exhaled, chewing on his lip with a frustrated stare at the ground.

“I’m leaving tomorrow.”

Pete felt everything inside him freeze.

*Patrick...leaving…?* He couldn’t…Were his parents sending him away? To where? To some fucking *bible camp*, or- or to a *straight camp*? Pete felt his breathing become deeper and faster, but Patrick’s collected blue eyes gazing into his calmed him down, although his voice remained strained.

“To where?”

The redhead faltered a little, eyes flicking away for a second, before his brow furrowed and Pete saw him struggle to keep his composure.

“New York. My dad got me into Juilliard.”

Pete’s jaw went slack, and his eyes widened of their own accord. “B-But, you’re- you’re *seventeen*. Juilliard’s a-”

“I know.” The boy’s eyes twitched, becoming watery. “I know...but, my dad has...*connections*, and-”

Pete exhaled heavily, running a hand over his face as he stared at the ground with wide eyes. He looked up at Patrick- as fucking beautiful as the day they’d met.

The boy fiddled with the buttons on his parka, shoes shuffling. Pete couldn’t let him go. Pete was not going to let him go.
“Run away with me.”

Patrick choked, eyes impossibly wide as he stared up at Pete—expecting his expression to tell him he was only joking, but there was nothing but sincerity and conviction in those shining brown eyes.

“-Pete, I—”

“I love you Patrick.”

Pete looked desperate, taking Patrick’s face in his hands and holding the boy close. He closed the gap, slotting his lips against Patrick’s, and kissing him softly—yet, behind it, there was a mountain of desperation.

Pete felt arms around his neck, and as they pulled away from each other’s lips, Patrick embraced him, burying his face into the crook of Pete’s neck and breathing deeply. The man tightened his arms around Patrick, face buried into his shoulder.

Pete felt Patrick’s hands fisted into his shirt, and he heard the boy shudder. Pete was going to make a plan. They were going to run away, everyone—him, Patrick, Joe and Andy—and they were going to record their fucking album. They were going to record ‘Take This to Your Grave’ and it was gonna be a hit. His brother and sister could come with them, and they’d all go to another state, far, far away from Illinois. Far away from Glenview and Wilmette, far away from their parents, far away from every asshole who had ever stood between them.

Pete wasn’t going to let Patrick go.

Pete loved Patrick.

They were going to be together for the rest of their lives.

“A soft voice cut through his thoughts like a butcher’s knife through a bone. He pulled back, eyes incredulous, mouth open wordlessly and brow furrowed in pure confusion.
“...W-what-”

“I can’t, Pete.” Tears were streaming from Patrick’s eyes and he looked physically hurt by what he was saying.

“...I don’t understand-” Pete shook his head lightly, eyes squinted at Patrick, before his mouth contorted into a frown. “...Why not...?”

Patrick looked indecisive, and he chewed on his lip, with burning, frustrated tears still blurring his vision.

“J-Juilliard’s a good school, Pete-”

“Are you kidding me right now?”

Pete felt his pulse quicken, along with his blood boiling. “Patrick-” He didn’t know what to say. His parents were forcing him into this- that much was obvious, why didn’t he want to escape? Why was he refusing? What was wrong with him?...What was wrong with Pete...?

Patrick inhaled sharply, a silent sob wracking his body.

“...I can’t- It’s complicated-”

Pete wanted to scream.

Pete also knew that screaming was not the way to convince Patrick. He pulled the boy to his chest again, arms circling him tightly and face buried into his hair, shaking and breathing in.

Patrick’s hands fisted the fabric over Pete’s chest, sobbing quietly into his shirt. Pete could feel the wetness of Patrick’s tears soaking through his t-shirt, but said nothing. He just had to calm Patrick down enough, if he was calm, he would listen and understand Pete’s offer, and there was no way he’d refuse it-
“You don’t understand Pete.” The small muffled whimper came from the trembling boy, and Pete nodded idly, mind focused on more important matters- like how he was going to convince-

“People like you don’t understand.”

Pete tensed.

He felt indignation burn in the pit of his stomach, and he pulled away again, staring down at Patrick with a shocked and angry glare.

“‘People like you’…?” His lip curled, “What do you mean- ‘People like you’?”

Patrick eyes widened as he realized what he’d said. After years of hearing things like that repeated over and over again- he’d said them himself- and to Pete no less, to the fucking love of his life. He felt disgusted with himself, and he stared up at Pete with shocked eyes.

“T-That’s not- I-I didn’t mean-”

“People like me? Poor people? Is that it?”

Pete’s voice was louder, angrier.

“Do I disgust you? Am I not good enough for you? -”

“Pete, p-please, just listen-”

Pete paused, eyes filling with realization. “Did you throw away all the albums I gave you?”

“Pete- No. I would never- just let me-”
“NO. FUCK YOU PATRICK.” Pete’s eyes were burning and watering up with enraged tears. “FUCK YOU, HOW DARE YOU-”

“PETE JUST SHUT UP-” Patrick stood firmly, glaring with tearful eyes. “I just- I just meant that- People like you-”

Pete scoffed again, and Patrick could only glower.

“YOU DON’T HAVE A NICE FUCKING FAMILY, OKAY?”

Pete’s face contorted into heavier shock, he couldn’t believe his fucking ears.

“-OH, AND YOU DO? THEY BEAT YOU UP, CHOKED YOU AND KEPT YOU HOSTAGE, YEAH, REAL NICE-”

“They’ve supported me for years, Pete. They raised me. They love me. Sure, my dad’s an asshole, but- but goddammit, he tries. I love him. I love my mom. I love Megan. I love Kevin- they’re my fucking family-”

“DO YOU HAVE FUCKING STOCKHOLM SYNDROME? ARE YOU FUCKING KIDDING ME PATRICK?-”

“No, no I’m fucking not.” Patrick shuddered, sobbing again and trying to keep his composure.

“I can’t let them down.”

Pete was crying.

Angry, hot tears streamed down his cheeks and he scowled at Patrick, feeling his heart shatter. The redhead looked up at him with teary blue eyes full of willpower, and Pete saw him make a move to step forwards. Pete instantly stepped back, making Patrick shake his head with wide eyes as his resolve melted into despair.
“Pete please-”

“No, fuck you, Patrick.”

Pete felt a lump of anger in his throat. “If you wanna go to your fancy-fucking school, then go.” Pete could practically see Patrick’s heart break. “Fucking go, and don’t come back.”

The man turned, pulling his hood up and stalking away, leaving the redhead frozen in place.

Patrick shuddered, pressing his hands to his face- nails digging into his flesh, then they were gripping his hair, clamping down on the soft strands painfully.

Patrick screamed.

Loud, blood-curdling, desperate.

He screamed again, and again, and again.

He kept screaming until he could taste iron. And when his throat was red raw, and his vocal cords refused to make any further sounds- his voice only escaping in a quiet, strained whisper- he sobbed.

Almost falling to his knees in the gravel, leaning on the graffitied wall, head in his hands as he sobbed loudly and painfully. "Don't leave me."
Patrick climbed back through his window, watching Steve’s head prick up from under the bed at his owner’s arrival. The redhead stumbled into the bathroom, staring at himself in the mirror with shame and disgust. His eyes were puffy, red and watery, his nose was red, and he felt like shit.

Patrick couldn’t believe what he’d said.

‘People like you’

Patrick was just as bad as those middle-aged women at church- twisting everything and everyone to fit their own agendas.

He really was just another vapid, spoilt little rich kid.

Over the past week he’d lost everything that had made him happy: his friends, the band, fuck- he was even missing school.

...And now he’d lost Pete.

All because Patrick was a fucking idiot.

He felt a burst of anger, and he slammed his fist into the mirror with a furious, animalistic grunt, right over his own reflection’s face.

Patrick had wanted it to explode, shoot shards everywhere and make an awful, satisfying noise.

But instead, the glass had only crunched under his fist, and a shining spiderweb had coated the mirror. It shattered into shards- that stubbornly remained on the frame, and the reflection was gone, only distorted colours remained.

Patrick looked down at his shaking hand, glass lacing small cuts in his knuckles and fingers. He shuddered, turned on the sink and ran the trembling hand under the water, roughly clearing the slices of mirror shards.

Patrick went back to his bed, pulling off his clothes and hiding them, before dressing into a shirt and
sweatpants again. He shuffled into bed, patting the mattress next to him and ordering Steve, with an ‘up’.

The dog jumped up into the bed, whining and nuzzling into his owner. Patrick bit his lip, wrapped his arms around Steve and cried, Pete’s last words to him buzzing in his ears.

‘F*cking go, and don’t come back.’
Patrick watched his dad packing his suitcase into the car with somber eyes. His shoulders were hunched, and he could feel his mother, brother and sister glancing at him every now and then. He really wished they wouldn’t, their pity made him feel like he was drowning.

His father gave him a look that read ‘say your goodbyes’, and Patrick trudged over to each family member.

He hugged his mother, who had a blank facade on her face and who was trying, with every fiber of her being, to control her emotions.

Then he went to Kevin, who’s eyes were flooded with teary sadness as he wrapped his arms around his older brother tightly.

And finally, Patrick stopped in front of Megan. The girl smiled sadly, circling her arms around her brother, whispering subtly, and impossibly quietly in his ear.

“I’ll tell him. I promise.”

Patrick stared at her with confusion as they separated, but Megan’s smile was all-knowing, and Patrick felt a pinch in his stomach.

“Get in, Patrick.”

His dad nodded towards the car and Patrick stepped towards the it, opening the door, sitting and pulling his seatbelt on without a word. His father bid the family farewell, slid into the driver’s seat and started the car, as Patrick gave a quick, sad wave at his family.

The car pulled away, and Patrick’s eyes stayed trained on the window, staring out at the buildings, sky, trees, and passers-by.

He’d been to scared to go with Pete. Too scared to leave the only life he’d ever known to go live in a shitty apartment- penniless and being persecuted by his parents.

Turns out he was a coward after all.

And while he was regretting saying no, he knew if Pete asked him again- he just couldn’t.

Patrick decided that the best thing to do was grit his teeth and bear it.
Bear the school, bear his family, bear his future wife, bear his future kids, and bear never being with Pete- He was going to bear it, and he was going to survive it.

“So, Patrick,” His dad tried to start a conversation, glancing at his son before clearing his throat and continuing. “Are you looking forward to attending Juilliard?”

Patrick felt his throat constrict, and he wanted to answer: No, I bet it’s a piece of shit.

“Yes I am dad.”

The man nodded. “I’m sure you’ll do well,” He glanced both ways before turning on his indicators. “You’re very talented, Patrick.”

*Of course I am. You’ve forced me to do this my entire life. I’ve had about seventeen years of practice.*

“No, I bet it’s a piece of shit.”

“Thank you dad.”

His father nodded again, glancing at his son. “I, um-” He sighed deeply, biting the inside of his cheek. “I wanted to- I wanted to *apologize*, Patrick.” He looked over at his son, eyes heartfelt. “I shouldn’t have hurt you.” He motioned to the green-yellowy bruises on Patrick’s face and neck.

*Yeah no shit, asshole.*

“...Thank you dad.”

“...I love you Patrick, I just-” His knuckles whitened around the steering wheel. “I don’t want you to make...*mistakes*- I just want you to have a good life. And to be happy.”

*Pete made me happy. Pete would have made my life good. Pete wouldn’t have been a mistake.*

Despite all the vicious words some dark part of his brain was hissing, Patrick felt a little amazed. His father had very rarely- if ever, apologized to him- or told Patrick that he loved him. Patrick swallowed thickly, his once again-watering eyes staring up at his dad.

*I hurt the only person I’ll ever love for you and mom. I hurt him for this family.*

“...I love you too dad.”
The rest of the drive was silent. Patrick didn’t want to talk anymore, his throat still hurt from last night.

Patrick watched as the car stopped at O’Hare international airport, and his dad struggled to find a parking space- quiet muttering and cursing rang from the driver’s seat.

Eventually, Patrick stepped out of the car, and his dad rushed to carry his suitcase, giving him a smile.

That had caught Patrick way off guard- his dad didn’t smile much (or offer to carry suitcases, for that matter), but as they walked, he noticed his father’s posture was hunched, and he was very pale.

He felt bad about this.

As they sat at the terminal for the New York flight, Patrick could see the doubt in his father’s eyes.

Patrick had resigned himself to his fate, but seeing his dad looking so somber made him feel even worse about it.

“...Dad.?”

“Yes son?” His father looked up at him, trying to mask the sadness in his eyes with a smile.

“Thanks for getting me a place- y’know, at Juilliard, that’s really amazing.”

His father smiled again, it was small but bright, and his wide eyes flooded with relief.

“Oh really? - I, yes, I, um- well, it’s a ‘friend of a friend’ situation but, I’m- I’m glad you’re excited.”

Patrick forced a tired smile and nodded. “I am, thank you dad.”

His father nodded, leaning back in his chair with a glad sigh, and Patrick felt better. He knew he shouldn’t. The hissing, vengeful part of his brain yelled at him to punch his dad, steal the car and just drive. The darkest part of his mind told him to kill his father.

But it was funny actually, Patrick had only ever seen his father get flustered a few times- and it always happened when he was nervous, he’d turn into a stuttering, smiling mess. Patrick huffed quietly in amusement, and turned to gaze out of the large window, watching planes taking off and landing in the distance.
The flight had been around two hours long, and Patrick and his dad had finally arrived in New York.

They left the airport and got a cab, headed straight for the music school. “I haven’t been here in a long time.” His dad mused, gazing out of the window. Patrick didn’t really know what to say.

“When was the last time?” The man shook his head at the question with a small smile, looking thoughtful and reminiscent. “I met your mom here. The trip was business related I think, but I saw her wandering around monument island- looking completely lost.”

The corners of Patrick’s lips twitched upwards, his mother had told him that story before, many times.

As they stepped out of the cab, Patrick’s nose wrinkled involuntarily at the heavy smell of smog in the air, but his face dropped- somewhere between fear and awe, as his eyes locked onto the angular, sleek building. There was blue tinted glass reading the words ‘The Juilliard School’- engraved and white.

A few hours later and Patrick was stood in the centre of his new room, suitcase in hand. He’d be sharing with a roommate that hadn’t arrived yet, but he didn’t think it’d be any bother, or that he’d even notice the other guy- because the place was huge.

Patrick gazed out of the large, clear, floor-to-ceiling windows, and the New York skyline stared back at him.

This wasn’t a tiny, cramped dorm room- no, this was literally bigger than Pete or Andy’s houses. There was a living room, a kitchen, a study, two bathrooms and two bedrooms- and all of them were big.

“Not all of them are like this.” His father glanced around, before settling his gaze and smiling at his son, as he glided up beside him with a small shrug. “I pulled some strings.”

Patrick nodded, jaw still slack. “I-It’s amazing.”

The man nodded, knowing the time to leave his son completely alone in this gigantic city was near. And, god, it scared him. He'd be lying if he said half of his mind wasn't telling him to grab his son and take him back home to Glenview- where he belonged...But the other half told him that this was the best musical education Patrick could hope to get, and his future would be completely sorted with a Juilliard degree.

“Well, I hope you’ll enjoy yourself here.” He turned to the boy, placing a firm hand on his shoulder. “...You’re so talented, Patrick. I wish you’d see that.” The man’s smile flickered wider, and his eyes filled with sadness. “You’ll do so well, Patrick. I know you will.” Patrick noticed his dad’s eyes getting a little damp.

“I’m proud of you son. I always have been, always will be.”

Patrick knew he was an asshole.
Patrick knew he’d hit him, choked him and forced him into a specific lifestyle. He knew he was homophobic, he knew he was irrational, but- goddammit, he was Patrick’s dad. And Patrick really loved his dad.

Patrick’s eyes watered slightly, and he smiled sadly, as he noted the shame and doubt in his father’s eyes- directed at himself, no doubt. The boy stepped forwards, embracing his father tightly, and giving a quiet, involuntary sob. “Oh, Patrick-” Patrick felt his chest jolt with each soft sob, and he felt his father’s arms wrapped around him tightly, hand rubbing his back comfortingly.

They stayed like that for a few moments, before Patrick felt two firm hands on his face, and he saw his father smiling at him, with fondness and love, but miserable and anxious. “You’re going to be okay, Patrick.” Patrick laughed sadly, wiping his eyes with his sleeve, before nodding. “I know dad.”

One more tight hug and Patrick watched his father leave, stood at the main entrance of the school, waving back at his dad as the yellow cab pulled away.

Patrick sat on the couch- which he had to admit was ridiculously comfortable, and he read over his timetable. He only had an orientation today, his lessons would start tomorrow- that was a huge relief, he was still exhausted from the journey, and he didn't think he'd be able to apply himself that well feeling so tired...And Patrick really wanted to apply himself. He wanted to do well. Then, suddenly, Patrick’s ears pricked up at the sound of the door opening, and his head shot up to see a nervous looking boy enter the room.

“H-Hey.” The boy was thin, had black, neat hair, and was almost as pale as Patrick. He stared at Patrick with wide, cautious dark brown eyes, and Patrick awkwardly smiled back.

“Hello.”

The boy stepped forwards gingerly, shrugging his satchel from his shoulders.

“Uh- My name’s Sebastian. Sebastian Cheng.”

Patrick nodded, standing and offering a hand, the boy took it, shaking it. “I’m Patrick Stumph.”

Sebastian nodded, “So, I guess we’re- uh, room mates, huh?” Patrick smiled tightly, “Yeah, I guess we are.” Sebastian nodded, eyes flitting to the window behind the other boy. “Hey, uh...weird question, but- do you like Green Day?”

Sebastian Cheng was really cool, and the pair had a lot in common. Patrick had instantly felt happier-
at least he wasn’t going to be a total social recluse.

His roommate was studying dance, so they wouldn’t have any classes together, but he’d still helped Patrick find his way to orientation, before darting away to his own lesson.

The school was beautiful- Patrick couldn’t deny it. Everything was pristine, and new, and of the highest quality- from the instruments to the damn wallpaper. It was infinitely better than his high school in Glenview.

He’d spent the whole orientation, slack jawed and wide eyed- earning a few sideways looks from other students. However, when they’d entered the string instrument store, Patrick's 'impressed levels’ had increased tenfold, and he tried to stop himself from bouncing on his heels, and when they had been allowed to look around- Patrick had made a beeline straight to the violins.

Stradivari, Amati, Guarneri- Patrick couldn’t believe his eyes. Some looked new, some looked ancient- but they all looked expensive as hell.

Eventually, the music students had split away into smaller groups- being seperated out depending on what they played, and Patrick was shepherded along with the other violin students.

They looked older than Patrick, and... normal...he supposed...? Sure, a few stood out because of their confident stances, aloof eyes and mean smirks- but the majority seem normal, and even pretty nice. Some smiles were shot his way as he almost tripped over his own feet after staring at a statue sat in a lake- right in the centre of campus (and if you asked Patrick, it was only built to be a huge, impressive distraction), and the group finally arrived at their main teacher’s room.

Sylvia Pierce.

The biggest bitch Patrick had ever met- he was sure of it.

Patrick had no luck with music teachers it seemed, and as the woman stared at them- judgemental and aloof, Patrick found himself longing for teh days of Mr. Nathans' childish jabs. The woman was sharp- that was the only way to describe her. Sharp cheekbones, right down to a sharp voice.

Sharp, thin and dangerous.

- Like a knife, Patrick mused bitterly.

“Well,” She began moving over to the centre of the room, after she’d taken her time to make intimidating eye-contact with each one of her new students. “My name is Sylvia Pierce. You will all address me as ‘m’am’ or ‘Miss. Pierce’- nothing else.”
She wasn’t married, *what a surprise* - she seemed like such a catch.

The class stayed silent, some people nodding.

“Well done on passing your entry exams-” Her gaze froze on Patrick. “Well, *most of you*, anyway.”

Patrick felt mortified, his eyes widened and his jaw fell open, and he could *feel* the judging stares from other students.

The woman’s gaze snapped away as quickly as it had came, and she stood, pacing the front of the room with long, slow strides, her heels clacking against the floor with each step.

“You may be thinking something along the lines of, ‘*Oh, I got into Juilliard, surely I’m the next Mozart*’- And I am delighted to inform you-” She stopped in the centre again, grin on her face and staring at the expectant students with fake-bright eyes.

“You are *gravely mistaken.*”

Brows furrowed, some eyes widened and heads swivelled to catch agreeing glances from peers.

“None of you are good musicians. I’d wager you're not even satisfactory.” The woman looked dismissive, and began pacing again, ignoring the indignant looks from some of the more self-assured students. “But *that*, is exactly where my job begins.”

She stared at the students again, eyes burning and still pacing.

“As my students, you will work harder than you’ve ever worked before in your pathetic lives.”

Her voice became more intense, and Patrick felt himself shrink under every gaze.

“Every night, you will go to sleep with headaches from reading music. You will memorize any and every piece I give you, and you will recite it as though it were your name. Your back will ache from sitting. Your feet will ache from standing. You will play until your fingers bleed.”

...Okay so, Patrick was pretty sure this woman was insane.

“And *if* you graduate,” She smirked, stressing the ‘*if*’. “You’ll run home to your mothers skirts, crying like infants...And if I’ve done my job of turning you into professional musicians- you *will feel sick* every time you look at a violin.”
...Patrick was also pretty sure that was counter-productive.

Miss Pierce smirked, eyes dark and malicious. She moved over to his desk, picking up a neat stack of papers and giving one to each student.

“Locatelli’s Caprice in D major Op. 3 No. 23.”

Patrick froze staring down at the paper.

...It was really fucking difficult.

The most difficult piece he’d ever physically laid eyes on, Jesus Christ, was that even a real note?

“Memorize the notes- You’ll each be playing it solo. Due Friday.”

He’d left the classroom, eyes wide and full to the brim with anxiety.

Some classmates shoved past him, giving him glances full of contempt, and others had only crept past him gingerly- as though he would explode, and only had glances of sympathy for him.

Patrick assumed he must look like a nervous wreck- he definitely felt like one anyway, and he stepped outside, squinting at the sunlight. He’d decided to sit outside, and had taken a seat on the large grass-covered roof nervously, sheepishly avoiding looking down over the edge. Patrick tried his best to read the notes, brow furrowed in deep concentration, but after only five minutes, his brain had started aching as it struggled to make sense of the notes, and it all became illegible to him.

Patrick groaned, lying back on the grass and pressing his face into his hands. He felt useless. He didn’t feel good enough. He hadn’t even passed a fucking entry exam (as all of his peers had been made painfully aware)- yet here he was.

His bedroom was dark, illuminated only by the lights of the skyline, and through his window, Patrick could see the bright, twinkling lights of the city.

He’d just stepped out of a blissfully warm shower, and had dressed for bed, but his hair was still
dripping. Snatching up a towel, Patrick moved over to the wooden window nook, and sat down cross-legged, staring out at the skyscrapers and dark sky with captivated, wide blue eyes.

As Patrick dried his hair, he wondered about home. He’d wondered if anyone missed him- his brother and sister, Steve, or even his parents. He wondered about his friends, and he felt a stab of guilt at leaving the band so abruptly- just as it had a chance to get serious.

He wondered about Pete.

With a deep gulp, he quickly stopped that train of thought, and actively thought about the view instead. Thinking about Pete broke his heart, it actually made his chest physically hurt (and he was pretty sure that wasn’t very healthy), and his eyes already stung from all the crying he’d done in the past week- the last thing he wanted to do was make the pain worse.

He stayed there for a while, staring out, and absently gaping at the lights.

He’d always liked city lights since he was really little- despite not really liking the cities themselves.

Patrick yawned, and blinked groggily- his exhaustion just becoming fully obvious to him. He stumbled over to his bed, climbing in and wrapping himself up in his comforter- curled into the fetal position. He missed having Steve next to him.

...And it turns out that having no body heat next to him made it really tricky to sleep, and Patrick found himself tossing and turning for close to thirty minutes.

He groaned, pressing his hands to his face. Between the loneliness, and the homesickness- well, let’s just say, he was going to have a shitty first day.

Patrick rubbed his face with his hands, before climbing out of bed and rooting around in his backpack for- "Ah-hah!" He grinned in triumph, phone firmly in hand.

His phone had been temporarily confiscated during the whole- ‘locked in a bedroom’ situation, but his father had returned it on the flight, along with another stuttered apology. He got just as nervous as Patrick did when ashamed, or embarrassed- It made Patrick smile a little, if he was honest.

Patrick moved over to the bed, sitting down, and pulling the comforter over his legs. He was far too ashamed to even open the group chat, his gaze completely ignoring the hundreds of notifications as he muted the chat.

He felt bad, but...he really didn’t want to talk to Pete.

He’d cried enough today.
So, instead, he texted Megan- eager to get to the bottom of a question that had been plaguing him all day.

*Patrick Stumph: Are you awake?*

*Megan: Yes! How are you?? Are you ok??*

*Patrick Stumph: Yeah, I’m good. How are you?*

*Megan: I’m fine, I miss you already tbh.*

*Patrick Stumph: Somehow, I don’t believe you.*

*Megan: Heeyyyyy, >:(
Megan: jk, ilu*

*Patrick Stumph: Thanks*

*Megan: Kevin asks what the school’s like
Megan: he’s here w/me*

*Patrick Stumph: Fancy, big, pretty cool
Patrick Stumph: The teacher’s awful though*

*Megan: Kevin says ur a nerd and that teachers suck*

*Patrick Stumph: Of course he did*

*Megan: but hey, u dealt with Nathans for years*
Megan: This one will be nothing in comparison, i’m sure

Patrick smiled down at the screen. He hoped she was right.

Patrick Stumph: Is Kevin still there?

Megan: Yeah, why?

Patrick Stumph: No reason, it’s fine

Megan: i’ll tell him to go away, hang on
Megan: He’s gone, shoot

Patrick swallowed thickly. He really hadn’t wanted to think about Pete, but—...but he needed to know.

Patrick Stumph: What did you mean, when I left?

Megan:?????

Patrick Stumph: You said ‘I’ll tell him’
Patrick Stumph: What did you mean?

Megan: Oh
Megan: I’m telling my future brother in law why you had to leave
Megan: about the Anna Callaghan thing

Patrick Stumph: I’m not sure it matters, Megan.
Patrick Stumph: I don’t think he cares anymore.
Megan:…

Megan: Well that’s a total fucking lie

Megan: Anyway, nothing you can do to stop me lol

Megan: I’m tracking him down tomorrow after school

Patrick Stumph: Yeah, good luck with that. I don’t think you’ll have much success, he's from Wilmette, remember?

Megan: :)))

Megan: I’m pretty sure Sarah and Ashley might know

Megan: Megan-the-relationship-fixer 2 the rescue

Patrick Stumph: Please don’t

Megan: Whatever lol :)))

Megan: I love you <3 get some sleep, Pat

Patrick Stumph:…I, unfortunately, love you too.

Patrick Stumph: Night Meg

Megan: Night Patrick

The redhead lay back, head resting on his pillows and groaning as he felt sleep elude him again-when, a bright idea popped into his head.

Patrick rearranged the pillows, making a lump on the mattress next to him, and throwing his arms around it, nuzzling his face into the fabric.

He had tried to imagine Steve.
He really did.

But instead, all his mind wanted to imagine was Pete.

Patrick closed his eyes, drifting asleep as his hyperactive imagination fabricated Pete’s warmth next to him.

Patrick could feel Pete’s pulse, he could smell the coffee, sweat and bleach, he could feel the always-cold skin- seeing and tracing the tattoos in his mind, he could feel the choppy black hair, the rough fingertips...those crinkling, whiskey-brown eyes, and Patrick's heart jolted as he realized just how much he missed Pete.

And in the back of his mind, he really hoped Megan could fix things.

He smiled lightly.

Megan had her ways.

Chapter End Notes

Just as a warning: Things are gonna get REALLY angsty soon, so prepare yourselves.
Megan poked her head around the corner, eyes squinting in focus.

She watched Ashley and Sarah walk at a relaxed pace, while they chatted absently.

So, it turns out stalking people isn't that easy, but Megan seemed to have a natural flair for it- maybe she should take it up as a career.

Sure, the girls had turned around suspiciously every now and then, but Megan was quick, just ducking out of view, before grinning smugly and feeling like James Bond every time.

After a few more minutes of follow and hide, came and went, and the girls eventually stopped in front of some kind of bar.

Megan squinted up at the place- it looked a little...illicit, if she was honest, and she really could not picture Patrick ever setting foot in the place. As a rule, he tended to avoid risky scenarios- as far as she knew.

She waited a few moments- just to make sure the girls hadn’t been mistaken, and with one last, tentative glance at the switched-off neon snake, she headed inside.

Megan pulled up the hood of her baggy hoodie- which thankfully hid her school uniform very well, and tried to look as inconspicuous as possible. The bartender stared at her with a mix of irritation and curiosity that practically shouted ‘You shouldn’t be here’.

Megan gulped a little, but smiled, she couldn’t chicken out, she was on a goddamn mission- A mission to make sure her brother had a shot at happiness.

Stepping forwards, and glancing around, Megan wondered over to the backstage- trying to pretend that she knew exactly what she was doing.

The hallways were pretty small, and soon enough she started seeing doors, far apart and covered in sticky notes. She glanced around, reading a few of them: 'twenty one pilots', 'My Chemical Romance', 'Panic! At The Disco', 'Fall Out Boy'...Okay, so, she had no idea what any of them meant.

Megan decided she was going to have to try each one, and poised a fist over 'My Chemical Romance”s door, when-

“Are you okay?”

Megan turned, eyes wide before she quickly tried to compose her expression, clearing her throat and smiling tightly.
A boy stood in front of her—she couldn’t have been much older than Megan, but she thought he looked familiar; Black hair, tanned skin, brown eyes, nice smile...but no tattoos...

She squinted a little, before remembering the guy had asked her a question. “O-oh, uh- yeah! Yeah I’m okay!”

He looked unconvinced.

“Uh...well, okay...? Sure you don’t need any help? I just- I mean, you look a little lost.”

Megan bit the inside of her cheek, exhaling quietly. “Um, well- yeah, actually, I’m looking for someone.”

He nodded slowly, eyes wide, as though he were coaxing information from a little kid about in which aisle they had lost their mom. “And their name is...?”

Shit.

She didn’t know his name.

She was such a bad future sister-in-law.

“Uh...I don’t know his name...per se...” The boy furrowed his brow slightly, but his eyes remained kind and helpful. “Um, okay, so...could you- I dunno, describe them...maybe?”

Yep, they look exactly like you!

“Um...black hair, quite...tan, uh- brown eyes, a little on the short side, tattoos-”

“Hey, what was your name, again?”

Megan’s eyes snapped upwards, the boy was studying her, just as much as she had been studying him- eyes squinted and expression thoughtful.

“Uh...Megan.”

“What’s your last name?”
Megan wasn’t sure she liked where this was going.

She considered making up a fake name.

Maybe something like ‘Lockwood’ or ‘Pattinson’- or, or maybe something cooler like ‘Axel’ or, maybe ‘Targaryen’ that would be so awesome, but maybe he wouldn’t believe-

“- Is it Stumph?”

Okay, that was a little creepy.

It’s crazy how someone can turn from ‘really cute totes bf material’ to ‘really fucking scary serial killer holy shit get away from me’ with only three words.

...But Megan supposed she had just been stalking Ashley and Sarah- she was in no place to criticize.

“...Yeah, it is...How did you-”

“Oh, yeah, sorry that was probably a little weird-”

“-Yeah it was a little-”

“-I’m really sorry-”

“-Oh, it’s totally okay-”

There was a moment of silence before the boy spoke again.

“...Is your brother’s name Patrick?”
And back to the creepy we go.

She considered making a joke at Kevin’s expense, but ultimately decided against it.

“...Yeah.”

The boy looked thoughtful again, and nodded, before mumbling and walking towards the ‘Fall Out Boy’ room, pulling the girl behind him gently. “I think you're looking for Pete.”

The guy opened the door, still holding Megan’s forearm- while the girl tried to ignore the giddy feeling in her gut, Jesus Christ you might be about to get murdered Megan, pull yourself together.

The door swung open to reveal a small room full of mismatched furniture, clothes, bags, instruments and one large, very water-stained mirror.

Megan looked around, there were only two guys, and neither of them matched the one she remembered.

One was covered in tattoos, had glasses and quite long, brown hair- currently tied up into a bun. His head had been buried in an old comic book, but had shot up as soon as the door had opened. The other guy had short, curly brown hair, and he was lying on the couch, staring up at his phone screen disinterestedly- only making the tiny effort to lean his head to see who was at the door, he squinted thoughtfully at Megan.

Two chimes of greetings sounded and Megan quickly found out the boy’s name- Andrew.

She wouldn’t have personally chosen that name, but whatever.

“Do you guys know where Pete is?”

Pete- Patrick’s-probably-boyfriend.

She didn’t think that name fit either.

She’d always imagined kids from the other neighbourhood to have cool, scary names, but, Pete and Andrew- it was just so tame, she had expected better.

“He left a little while ago- said he needed his bass back. She was with Dallon.”
Andrew nodded, and left with a word of thanks, leading Megan down the hall again, with a brief explanation. “-Oh, my sister’s learning bass so she, uh- steals his guitar- like a lot.” Megan nodded, and made a small noise of understanding.

As they approached the door, Pete stepped out on cue, holding his instrument by the neck. “Oh, hey Pete!” Andrew smiled, and his older brother only looked confused in response.

He looked tired, Megan thought. He had eyebags, a five o’clock shadow, and his eyes were seriously bloodshot.

The tired, familiar eyes drifted over to the girl, then snapped back to his little brother, raising an eyebrow with a light, questioning shake of his head. “Oh, this girl needed to talk to you.”

He motioned at Megan, before giving her a broad, charming smile and making a move to leave- and Megan had to stop herself from saying- ‘Please don’t leave me with your pissed-off-looking, hungover-looking brother’.

“Okay, then...” Pete watched his brother leave, before turning to the girl. “What did you need?”

She looked familiar.

Really familiar.

The same soft strands of the same reddish-blonde hair.

The same milky pale skin, the same naive baby-blue eyes.

It hurt to look at her.

He regretted everything he’d said to Patrick.

He wished he could take it all back.

“Um, well, first things first, I guess an introduction would, uh...would, be appropriate-” She stuck out a hand cheerily, “-I’m Megan, nice to meet you!”

Pete took the hand and shook it, face still covered in worried curiosity, “...Pete Wentz.”

The girl nodded again, grinning slightly- Wentz...yeah that didn’t fit either, Megan had been really let down by these names.

Megan wasn’t sure how to approach the situation. Although she just wanted to say- ‘I’m Patrick’s sister, why are you guys fighting? I'm here to fix your relationship’ and then deal with the whole situation- like a quirky marriage counselor in a romcom, she thought she had to be more...delicate about this, since it was such a...delicate situation.

If she could believe Patrick, then she could safely assume their last meeting hadn't ended on good terms.
“Can, uh...we...talk?”

“...Aren’t we talking right now?”

“No, like, properly- like, sat down.”

The man stared for a moment, before sighing and motioning with his head. He led her into the ‘twenty one pilots’ room, that was completely empty- and, Megan noted, a little more coordinated than ‘Fall Out Boy’’s.

Pete took a seat in an armchair, resting his bass guitar over his thighs, and motioning at the girl to sit on a couch. Megan gingerly moved over to the blue couch, taking a seat and smiling tightly.

She was going to have to be blunt.

“...I, really need to talk to you.”

“What about?”

Pete sounded exasperated, and she hoped he wouldn’t walk out on her.

“My brother...Patrick.”

The brown eyes widened and became attentive at the name, and his face dropped into a mixture of shock, despair and hope.

“Y-Your brother...?”

“Yeah. My name’s Megan Stumph. I’m his sister.”
Pete nodded slowly, jaw slack, as though he were putting the pieces of a puzzle together, when he suddenly leaned forwards, eyes wide.

“Is he okay?”

Megan couldn’t help but smile—See? She knew Patrick was a total fucking liar! She nodded slightly and shrugged lightly with a small smile.

“He’s only been gone for a day, but, he says it’s great—Shitty teacher, but great.”

Pete leaned back, relief clouding his eyes. He suddenly shuddered, and exhaled sharply, before his brow furrowed again. “So, what did you need to talk about?”

The girl chewed on his lip for a moment, before looking up.

“...You guys didn’t...end...on good terms...right?”

Pete’s face contorted at ‘end’, but he shook his head wordlessly, and Megan could see him holding back anger.

“-Well, that’s what Patrick said anyway...Or, ‘implied’, I guess, he never tells me anything.” She laughed lightly, but Pete’s eyes only darkened further. Her laughter faded away awkwardly, and she wracked her brain for what to say.

“...Does he have his phone?”

Megan nodded eagerly.

“...You’re sure?”

She nodded again, “Y-yeah, totally.”
Pete's eyes got darker, and his jaw clenched.

Patrick hadn’t answered them last night.

Or this morning.

He hadn’t answered Pete.

And if Patrick had ‘implied’ that things had ended...well, there was nothing Pete could do.

“...Was that it?”

Megan looked a little nervous at the firm voice, and gaped like a fish, trying to make words while shrugging and shaking her head. “U-Uh, well, no, I-I kinda-”

“Look, I have stuff to do.” Pete stood, voice exasperated, and he looked as though he was holding something back. “Can you get back home from here?”

Megan shrugged a little, “I- I mean, I can try-”

Pete felt his heart clench as he remembered Patrick’s very similar protests.

He exhaled sharply, and left the room with a roll of his eyes.

Megan wasn’t completely sure what she was supposed to do. She sat- frozen and awkward, before Pete ducked back in with a girl behind him.

Megan’s eyes widened a little- wow, they looked really similar.

It was almost creepy.

Almost.

The girl’s kind smile was kinda hard to find creepy- if she was honest. It was a condensed form of puppies, sunshine and rainbows- and she was certain all three siblings seemed to share it.

“She’ll get you home safe.” Pete muttered, before turning and leaving the room again- frustrated footsteps getting fainter and further away. Shit. She hadn't even been able to tell him about the whole marriage thing. Megan considered running after him when-

“Hi, I’m Hillary.”

The girl smiled and offered a hand.

Megan stood awkwardly, almost tripping over her own shoelaces- which she stubbornly always refused to tie. She took the hand, and shook it firmly- just like dad had taught her. She beamed with confidence. “I’m Megan.”
The walk home was filled with laughter, making fun of siblings and vehement rants about how gross they were.

“-I mean, honestly, you’d think-” Megan burst into laughter again, eyes squinting. The girls’ gazes snapped towards old, rusted Junction park as they made their way over the border, right into Glenview.

Both girls smiled fondly, remembering their trips there when they were young.

“My brother-”

“My brother-”

They glanced at each other, laughing again at their joint words. Megan grinned and nudged the other girl in the ribs. “Ah, our brothers.”

Hillary smiled and shook her head. “Our stupid, stupid brothers.”

Megan gave a laugh and nodded, before her expression turned a little somber. “...Patrick’s giving up. I can tell.”

Hillary gave her an empathetic smile, “Pete’s stubborn as a mule.”

Megan laughed quietly, glancing up at the girl, before opting to stare up at the sky.

There was a moment of silence- the air only filled by birdsong, leaves rustling, and a few distant cars.

“I want him to be happy.”

Megan’s gaze snapped to Hillary- the girl had taken the words out of her mouth.

Hillary stared down at the sidewalk, eyes full of worry. Megan nodded, head drooping too, as she kicked at the small pebbles on the concrete, clearing them away.

“...He saved us.” Hillary glanced at Megan’s wide eyes with a smile and a light shrug. “Took us away from mom and dad.” The dark-haired girl exhaled for a moment. “I’ll always be grateful for that.” She looked sad, in a way that made Megan’s chest hurt. “He deserves to happy-” Hillary looked at Megan seriously, gaze burning into her eyes. “-And I bet your brother does too.”

Megan nodded thoughtfully, before both stares dropped ahead, staring down the sidewalk absently.

“He really does.”
Patrick’s eyes were closed in concentration, he was focused, he was zen, he was chill- “Are you sure you don’t mind?”

Sebastian rolled his eyes lightly, “Jesus, just get on with it.”

Patrick opened his eyes, but keeping them squinty in thought.


“Nope, it’s a B.”

“Are you fucking kidding me?!?”

“N-No...?”

Patrick dropped back into the couch, shaky hands pressed against his face. Sebastian chewed his lip, eyes full of concern for his roommate.

“I’m sorry, dude.”

Patrick shook his head, leaning forwards again. “No, it’s fine. I just have to keep trying.”

Sebastian’s brow furrowed, “I don’t get it, how does this help...? Exactly...?”

Patrick shrugged, but his eyes widened as his nose wrinkled, shaking his head lightly. “It doesn’t. Pierce is just a huge bitch.”

Patrick and Sebastian had become...acquaintances, and Patrick had discovered that Sebastian was in a, kind of vaguely similar boat to him. He was eighteen, but looked fifteen, and that didn’t earn him any favours with his classmates.

Sebastian nodded slowly, with wide absent eyes. “I’m real glad my teacher isn’t like her.”

Patrick huffed in amusement, “Yeah, you’re lucky.” He groaned again, pressing his hands to his face. “Maybe I should have been a ballerina instead.”
The room rang with laughter, but behind the happy facade, Patrick ached with fear. He hadn’t even learned the first stanza, and it was like- a four minute piece, and that meant a lot of pages.

Sebastian handed him the page, watching the boy read over it with a furrowed brow for a moment, before passing it back.

"Okay, let's go again."

It was 6am, and Patrick was hunched over his desk. He'd fallen into a steady rhythm over the hours he’d been there- Read, flip the page, write it out, check. Read, flip the page, write it out, check. Read, flip the page, write it out, check.

He’d learnt two pages so far, and Patrick felt quite proud of himself- not bad for Tuesday, he glanced at his alarm clock, okay- not bad for Wednesday.

Only four to go.

He’d learnt another half-page when his alarm clock started buzzing, and he pulled himself away from the desk to switch it off-

Oh shit.

8:00am

It was 8am already?

Really?

For fuck's sake.

Patrick groaned and got dressed, grabbing his bag and leaving the dorm, locking the door behind him.

Class was due to start in ten minutes, but as he was heading to the music building, he'd realized that he was really, way-too tired, and desperately needed a coffee.

He trudged into the canteen- that of course was gigantic, shiny and perfect (Really what wasn’t in this school? Even the damn trash cans were works of art), and ordered a black coffee- extra large.

As he was paying, his eye caught the drinks machine, and a bright idea popped into his head.

Okay, maybe it wasn’t so ‘bright’, but Patrick felt inches away from death- he needed this.
So, with an extra large, black coffee and a can of Red Bull, Patrick sat down at an empty table. He opened the coffee lid, and then he opened the can, wincing slightly at the fizzing.

Some students watched in horror as he poured the contents of the can into the coffee, and then downed it in one, eyes squeezed shut and Adam’s apple bobbing frantically with each gulp.

When Patrick finished, slamming the cup on the table, he shook his head, groaning and wincing at the amount of liquid he’d ingested in such a short time. He blinked his eyes open groggily to see Sebastian had joined him at the table, staring at him with an open jaw, sandwich in hand, frozen inches away from his mouth.

“Sorry, was that weird?” Patrick groaned, pressing a hand to his forehead- that had really fucking hurt, oh god - why had he thought that was a good idea?

Sebastian nodded idly, before suddenly, his eyes filled with realization and he started tearing his sandwich into two hastily, holding one half out to Patrick.

Patrick looked up, brow furrowed. “Oh, I can’t-”

“You need it, or you’re gonna die. Like, I’m no pre-med student, but that was fucking- insane.”

Patrick smiled lightly and took the food, eating it with content noises, and hoping the caffeine kicked in soon, because he felt even more like shit now than he had before.

The caffeine kicked in about fifteen minutes later, just as he was sat in Miss Pierce’s lesson.

She had been explaining hand positions, and although, at first, Patrick had found it a little patronizing- soon enough, she’d taught them a so-called ‘secret’ technique, and had drawn a full diagram on a blackboard, telling the class to copy it down. As Patrick drew the hands, complete with veins, bones, and...ligaments- which he’d wrinkled his nose at, he supposed it wasn’t all bad.

Sure, this teacher was probably insane, but he was sure she’d been hired for a reason.

Miss Pierce led the class out of the room, and took them to the string instrument storeroom instead, opening the door and sending them in to pick one out, with warnings of being ‘careful’ and ‘respecting the instruments', letting them know 'they're not toys'.

Patrick had made a beeline and snatched up a Stradivari, not noticing a tall, sharp-looking girl wearing a black turtle-neck glaring at him from across the room.

So, it turns out the new hand position technique thing- yeah, it really hurt.

Sure, it made the instruments sound even more amazing- so much so that Patrick had been wondering if he'd been doing it wrong his whole life, but, fuck, the bones in his hands shook and ached with every note.
Miss Pierce had made them play Bach, or more specifically- Partita No. 2, Chaconne. Patrick had almost been trembling as he saw the sheet music, swiftly placed on the music stand in front of him, but with a lot of focus, his brain had done what it did best, and the notes fell into place perfectly.

Patrick wondered if the teacher was really going to push them to the extremes- by the mad look in her eyes as she conducted, he didn’t doubt her at all, he was only twenty minutes into his first day and his hand already felt like it was going to fall off.

...And although he couldn’t doubt Miss Pierce’s strictness (or skill, for that matter), he really hoped his fingers wouldn’t bleed- that was his legitimate nightmare, and no. I fear for as long as he could remember.

As Patrick tenderly placed the Stradivari back in its place, the students were dismissed with an announcement.

“Tomorrow, I want you to bring your own violins from home- if you have one of course.” Her smirk and gaze settled on Patrick momentarily, and he’d really wanted to correct her.

“I’ll examine them all, and we'll see if they’re good enough for my students, everyone understand?”

There were nods, and quiet whispered words of ‘Yes m’am’, and then they were all released from her clutches.

Patrick was making his way to Music Theory, mind completely absent, when he felt someone stop him, and grab him by the arm. He flicked around, eyes wide and he saw the turtle-neck girl again- and he had to really stop himself from calling her 'turtle-girl', and then promptly making a TMNT joke. She glared, and Patrick wondered if she had read his mind, as she began to speak.

“What did you think you were doing?”

Her voice was a sharp hiss, and Patrick noted an accent, before staring up into her hazel eyes- pretty, but full of contempt.

Patrick furrowed his brow in confusion. “What do you-?”

“Never touch a Stradivari again, defiler.”

Okay, so this was pretty weird.

Was she like an obsessive violin-girlfriend or something? Why did she care-?
“They’re too good for the likes of you.”

Okay, not obsessive. Just a huge *bitch*.

“...What’s that supposed to mean?”

Patrick felt defensive. Who the fuck was *this girl* to tell him to-?

“You are unworthy.” She hissed, and Patrick was coming to the conclusion that this girl was- also, completely insane. Wow, so far this school had no shortage of crazy people- good to know.

He huffed, concerned disbelief on his face, and a mocking smile as he went to turn away. “Yeah, *whatever*.”

She grabbed him by the arm, thumping him against a wall.

Patrick groaned, grabbing at the back of his head and watching the sideways looks from other students. “What the fuck-”

“Do not touch a Stradivari ever again.”

Her voice was a low, threatening whisper, and Patrick decided that arguing back wasn’t worth it.

“-Y-yeah, okay, I-I won’t.”

Her eyes narrowed to slits, pale skin that had turned red with anger was now clearing again, and she gave him an amused smirk. “Good.” Before turning on her heel and practically prancing away.

Patrick stayed frozen for a moment, before shaking his head and glancing up at a clock- *oh shit*, he was gonna be late for music theory.

Patrick fell back onto his bed with a groan, just wanting sleep to come to him- or death, whichever got here first.
A timid knock sounded at his door, ringing loud and clear. He threw an arm over his eyes, but the knock came again, more insistent this time. He sighed dramatically. “Come in.”

Sebastian poked his head around the door, smiling nervously at his- probably quite volatile roommate. “H-Hey, sorry to bother you.” Patrick sat up, staring at the man with a furrowed brow. “I just, uh, my friend ordered pizza and she let me bring some back- but, like, I’m really full, y’know, so-”

His words died with a stutter at Patrick’s confused stare.

“...I just- I noticed you didn’t eat today.”

Patrick blinked, staring down at the floor. Sebastian was right. He hadn’t. During lunch break he’d just been studying, and he’d completely neglected his hunger.

Patrick nodded slowly, realizing just how ravenous he was. “Thanks, Sebastian.”

The man smiled, relieved but tentative. “Yeah, no problem, Patrick.”

Patrick sat at the breakfast bar, looking out at the dark sky and the bright city as he chewed a piece of cold pepperoni pizza. It wasn’t ideal, but it was all he had, because he was not going to cook right now.

Patrick swallowed, and yawned loudly, pressing a fist to his mouth. It was probably a good idea to go to sleep now, music sheets be damned. He got up, washed his plate and put away the rest of the pizza in the fridge with a frown.

He'd only managed two pieces.

Everything hurt.

Patrick stared up, a monstrous shocked and amused audience stared back at him.

Patrick groaned in pain, everything hurt. His hands most of all.

As he noticed some crowd members pointing at his hands, and his eyes darted downwards, lifting his arms and staring with wide eyes.

His fingertips were sliced. Blood was pouring out of the wounds, the cuts were so deep that Patrick could see hints of white bone under ragged flesh. There were pieces of wood and metal tangled and laced through them.
He looked up at the ceiling. The spotlight was firmly on him.

His fingertips were gone.

His hands were a gory mess, covered in blood as chunks of flesh fell away, and he could see his white bones sticking out of red, wet, torn flesh. It hurt so much.

Patrick’s eyes moved to the audience again.

They were laughing.

His entire fingers were gone, only splintered white bones connected to his knuckles remained. It burned. It hurt so much.

Patrick looked up again.

They were still laughing. Harder now. Louder now. It hurt his ears.

Patrick’s hands were gone, nothing but painful, bloody stumps.

The laughter got louder and louder.

Patrick was scared. He was crying. What was happening? Why did it hurt so much?

He shut his eyes, squeezing them as tears pushed through them.

He didn't want to hear them anymore.

He didn’t want to see them anymore.

Patrick’s eyes jolted open, and he was panting.

He couldn't move.

Okay. Sleep paralysis. Fantastic.

Patrick closed his eyes, trying to calm himself down, and trying to move his fingers and toes to wake his body up.

After what felt like an hour, but was closer to twenty minutes, Patrick sat up groggily, wrinkling his nose when he'd realized he was covered in sweat-shirt soaked through and beads on his forehead.

He remembered the nightmare, and his eyes widened as he jolted, pulse rocketing, and he desperately held his hands up to his face.

They were still there.

Pale, and calloused as ever.

Patrick tried to calm himself again, pressing a hand to his chest and lying back down: He was in bed, he was at school, there was nothing to be afraid of. His hands weren’t going to magically amputate themselves- it was going to be okay.
Patrick tried to sleep again. He really did, but his skittish mind and thundering heart didn’t want to let him, and instead, they haunted him with thoughts of paralysis and night terrors. With a heavy groan, Patrick swung his legs over, placing them gingerly on the cold floor with a wince. He nodded with conviction, stood and started making his way to the kitchen, he really needed a cup of tea or something.

As his hand went to grab the door handle, Patrick stopped, eyes flicking over to his desk and chewing his lip.

Three pages left.

Patrick made himself a cup of coffee instead. Black.

He sat down at his desk, tucking his chair in and taking a sip of the bitter drink.

Read, flip the page, write it out, check.
Blood Runs Red, But It Feels So Cold

Patrick stared down at his hands, frame shaking.

The steady force of the water against the back of his head soothed him, but his lower lip trembled of its own accord, and he inhaled and exhaled deeply.

They hurt so much.

He watched the blood from his fingertips pour away under the water, turning the bottom of the shower light red.

Miss Pierce had pushed them hard today.

‘You will play until your fingers bleed’

…Well, she definitely kept her promises.

Patrick shuddered under the water pouring from the shower-head, he felt the prickling of tears in his eyes, but none came. They must have ran out, or, dried up or something...or maybe Patrick had just toughened up.

It was now late November, and Patrick had been attending Juilliard for four months. Patrick had only been back at school for two weeks since the Thanksgiving recess at the start of the month.

He hadn’t gone back to Illinois though, he’d gone to Montana instead, to spend Thanksgiving with his maternal grandparents. He’d met his own family there and there had been another big family reunion, just like at Christmas.

Patrick smiled sadly, remembering how last Christmas had been the best of his life.

And then grimaced, when he remembered that this Christmas would probably be the worst.

His mother had cried when she saw him, his family and grandparents had gone to pick him up at the airport. She’d hugged him tightly for ten whole minutes, tears spilling and frame trembling. His father had wanted to do the same, but restrained himself to five minutes instead.

Kevin and Megan had talked to him the whole way back, and back at the house, Steve was waiting for him, ready to pounce and bark with overwhelmed, pure joy the moment Patrick had stepped through the door. Patrick was so grateful his parents had brought him.

The dog had refused to leave his side for his whole stay.

Patrick had missed his family, they’d fallen out of contact, because between days of classes and nights of studying- Patrick had completely neglected his phone, it had ran out of charge during the
first week, and he hadn’t bothered to plug it in the four subsequent months.

The place had been beautiful, a huge log house in a small, comfy town in the middle of nowhere, all rural and wooden. It had been a nice contrast from New York, and it had been a breath of fresh air. Patrick would spend hours on the porch, huddled up in a chair with a homemade blanket (made by his grandma, most likely) and cup of hot chocolate, just watching the deer, birds- even a bear or two, wander around their backyard (that was more like a forest, if you asked him).

Patrick’s paternal grandparents had been there too, his grandfather had been overjoyed to see him and had interrogated him about his studies at Juilliard for an entire day, every snippet of information putting a spring in his step. He was really proud of Patrick.

Patrick had really enjoyed Thanksgiving- more than he had ever before anyway- Absence makes the heart grow fonder, he supposed.

...He still wished he could have gone home to Glenview, but he had only shrugged as he boarded the flight back to New York, consoling himself- there was always winter recess.

Soon enough, classes had started again, and Patrick had fallen back into his old routine:

- Wake up
- Coffee
- Say hi to Sebastian
- Violin
- Music Theory
- Music Production
- Lunch break- study at library
- Scoring to picture
- Interactive Music Technology
- Independent study
- Violin
- Dorm
- Say hi to Sebastian
- Coffee
- Study
- Cereal at 2am
- Study
- Pass out on desk
- Repeat

Patrick was used to his fingers bleeding by now. Patrick was also used to a sharp, constant migraine, which thumped alongside his pulse in his temples.

Patrick turned slowly and angled his face up into the water, clenching his eyes shut and holding his breath as he ran his hands through his hair.
He felt a few strands come away with his fingers.

His eyes snapped open and he looked down at his hands- his fingers were tangled with masses of reddish-blonde hairs. He gulped slightly, this had been happening for a while now, so he was used to it- but it was never pleasant. They washed away with the water, and Patrick watched them swirl around in the current, before disappearing down the drain.

Stepping out of the shower, Patrick grabbed a towel- once white, but now stained with old brown splotches of blood.

Turns out blood was hard to get out of fabric.

Good to know.

He pulled it around his shoulders and stared at his reflection in the large mirror.

Jesus Christ.

He looked awful.

Patrick opened the towel, seeing his flat stomach- throat constricting.

His ribs jutted out under his skin, each individual one visible. His hipbones stuck out, bony and sharp. He could see his shoulders sockets too, the joints poked out, and it made him grimace every time he saw them. His bones cast large, dark shadows all over his body.

Patrick ran a bony hand over his cheek, face falling at how gaunt it looked. He hadn’t looked this awful at Thanksgiving, had he…? His eyes widened as he remembered waves of concerned glances- at introductions, at dinner, at 'goodnight'...all the time.

People had noticed, but he was sure it was even worse now.

Only two weeks and he looked even worse.

He hoped he’d stop deteriorating so quickly.

He hoped he'd stop deteriorating at all.

It scared him.

He stared into the mirror.

Dark, hollow eye sockets, purple and black eye bags standing out all the more against his ghostly skin- that had somehow gotten even paler.

His cheekbones stuck out, casting shadows on his cheeks, and his eyes were almost always bloodshot.

Patrick was tired all the time, his bones ached and he supposed it was because they no longer had any protection from all the sharp corners and edges Patrick clumsily bumped into every day.
Lack of sleep made him clumsy, but so did caffeine, for that matter.

His eyes flitted over the bruises lining his protruding bones.

Patrick wagered that this was the result of months of neglecting himself- but he couldn’t just stop. He’d had worked too hard to catch up to the other students, and now, he’d surpassed them all- even turtle-girl (who had not been happy when Miss Pierce had announced the rankings).

He wasn’t just going to give that up.

He couldn’t stop now.

He was going to graduate with honours, he’d prove himself to everyone.

Patrick took one last glance at his haggard appearance, eyes flicking to his hair. One strand was hanging a little too long, and he frowned. He easily tugged out the loose piece with a grimace, and tossed it in the trash, that was full of old band aids and hair, before moving to his bedroom.

He didn’t like looking this way.

His violin lay on his bed, sitting in its case expectantly.

It turns out it had been suitable after all- Miss Pierce had gaped at it, her eyes had been wide, and she’d been at a loss for words for the first time since Patrick had met her.

She knew a lot about the maker- apparently he was very famous. She’d made a few wild assumptions about Patrick’s family, and she’d begged him to tell him the story of how it came into their possession.

Patrick remembered her words on his first day.

‘...you’ll feel sick every time you look at a violin’

Well, she was doing her job pretty well, because Patrick sure felt nauseous every time he saw one.

He moved over to his bed, shut the case, and shoved it under with a queasy look in his eyes, before longingly staring at the warm, inviting bed for a moment.

He never wanted to get out of that bed. He could spend the rest of his life in there, he was pretty sure about that. But in some sense of ironic tragedy, he couldn’t fall asleep in bed.

He just couldn’t- and he didn’t know why.

So, regrettably, the desk had become his preferred sleeping place, and it was definitely taking its toll
on Patrick’s spine- which, much like the rest of his bones, now stuck out way too much, so much so that it disgusted him to look at it.

Patrick sighed heavily, sitting down, drying his hands and grimacing at the still-leaking blood from his wounds. He reached over into his beside table, feeling his shoulder blades shift under his skin. He knew they stuck out too. He hated it.

Patrick grabbed his last box of band aids, staring down into the empty drawer. They had become his no.1 necessity- that hadn’t been in any ‘school tips’ leaflets, he mused bitterly- it would have been really nice to have a heads up on just how much he was going to spend on fucking band-aids. He made a mental note to buy some more after his classes finished.

He pressed his fingers into the towel to clean them, before hastily wrapping band aids around each fingertip on his left hand. He held his hand up in front of him, examining his work- he’d gotten pretty good with band aids after so much practice.

Patrick glanced down at his right hand before standing- it was only covered in reddish-purple indents from pressing down against his bow, and Patrick suddenly felt very glad he wasn't studying guitar- or anything that required two hands on metal strings.

With his fingers safely hidden away, Patrick stood, moving over to his closet and getting dressed. As he moved to grab his bag and leave the bedroom, Patrick’s gaze froze on a few papers sticking out from under a huge, messy pile of sheet music and class notes, tucked away into the corner of his desk.

Locatelli

He’d managed to learn it all in that first week- he still hadn't forgotten it actually, and he doubted he ever would. It had cost him sleep, brainpower, and it had scared him to the point that he’d thrown up several times- his throat had ached as he’d walked into class that Friday morning.

He smiled fondly.

Had he only known it would only get worse.

So much worse.

Patrick stepped out into the living room, slinging his bag over his shoulder and moving to leave, with a tired, strained smile at Sebastian- who was sat at the breakfast bar in the kitchen, eagerly eating a plate of eggs and bacon. Patrick knew Sebastian was a good cook, and that the food was probably great- but the smell made him gag, and the sight of it made him want to throw up. He felt bad, but, it wasn’t personal- all food did that to him.

Patrick stepped into the classroom, thankful that he hadn’t arrived late. Miss Pierce gave him a tight
smile, and Patrick gave one back. Since he’d risen to the top of the class, and they’d had a detailed conversation about Patrick’s and his violin’s Saxon origins, the teacher had been almost...amicable to him- and, in turn, that had made him a social pariah.

His whole class had started resenting him, and he guessed that they felt indignation that a seventeen year old had waltzed in with his daddy’s connections, not even passed an entry exam, and was now teacher’s pet.

He understood completely.

He’d feel the same.

At every turn, sabotage and trickery awaited him. He was a true outcast.

People would be kind to his face, and then spread rumours behind his back.

Slander about him would be spread around the whole school, ruining any semblance of a good reputation he may have had.

Classmates would steal his music sheets- tearing them up to hold his progress back.

He’d had his homework stolen more times than he could count.

They’d even tried to steal his violin once- but Patrick had fought back viciously, and it had ended in a black eye for both him, and the perpetrator- but not without a trip to the chancellor’s office, of course.

Unfortunately for Patrick, the hate had spread even further than the music building, and just about everyone seemed to give him disgusted glances in the corridors now- no matter where he went. Sebastian would often arrive home, ranting about how cruel people were, and telling him some ridiculous rumor that had been spread around the dance building. Patrick would be lying if he said he didn’t care anymore- it really hurt. And because it hurt, they kept doing it.

People would shove past him, or just ignore him completely- and it was definitely having an effect. The frequency of his panic attacks and asthma attacks had increased tenfold, and that wasn’t doing his mental stability any favours.

Patrick didn’t know what he’d done so wrong. He understood, and could sympathise with their situations, but- wasn’t this a little too far?


He was colder.

His once happy, trusting- albeit, sarcastic self had melted away to be replaced by a bitter hermit.

He didn’t like being this way.
Patrick took an isolated seat when he arrived, trying his best to ignore the nausea he felt in his stomach when the felt hateful glares of the other students on him. A few more minutes passed, a few more students arrived- red-faced and huffing, eyes wild and fearful at being late- he knew that fear all too well. Miss Pierce eventually began the lesson with an announcement.

“Well, I’m pleased to inform you that you’ll all be performing in the Winter concert this year.” There were excited mutters and the woman’s eyes narrowed. “You’re all the only violinists this year, you were chosen by default. Don’t get too proud of yourselves.”

The mutters died and Miss Pierce smiled.

“There will be no ‘Christmas carols’. This concert is serious. Talent scouts from orchestras all over the world come to see the performance, and if you stand out-” She moved over to her desk, fetching a binder and flicking through the sheets, before smirking up at the group. “You may just get an offer.”

“Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Bach, Vivaldi, and-” She smiled, eyes dark, ears making out the excited chattering of her students. She smirked. Too much excitement was a bad thing. They needed to be brought back down to earth.

“-Paganini.”

All voices fell silent, and tongues, cheeks and lips were all bitten in anxiety as she passed each student a small folder of sheet music. Her eyes gazed over the worried faces.

“There are contemporary composers too.”

The faces relaxed somewhat, and she frowned, deciding to list a few examples to bring the tension back up.

“Vaughan Williams, David Rakowski, Georg Friedrich Haas, Esa Pekka Salonen-”

They jittered again, and a smile crossed her face, as she continued passing out papers.
“-Learn them all. Memorize them all. I expect nothing but perfection-”

She trailed off, reciting some rich piece about the prestigious history of Juilliard and the Winter concert. Patrick didn’t care. He’d heard too many speeches like that to last him a lifetime.

He opted to flick through the pieces instead.

Tchaikovsky – Violin Concerto in D Major Op. 35.
Beethoven – Concerto in D Major OP. 61.
Mendelssohn – Violin Concerto E Minor OP. 64.
Bach – Chaconne Partita N- wait.

No fucking way.

There at the bottom of the classical list.

Paganini – Caprice No. 24.

Patrick stared at the name, eyes wide, and all memories of that story that had traumatized him when he was five, had flooded back.

He felt his heart thundering in his chest.

He couldn’t play that- it was the hardest piece ever written for god’s sake.

Patrick suddenly looked up, as he heard Miss Pierce come to a stop in front of her class again, with a loud, sharp click of her heels.

“There will be a solo for Paganini’s caprice.”

There was low muttering and Patrick felt glares burning into him again.

“There are...” She looked to be counting, deep in thought, before smiling again. “-six, people here who I think are capable enough, and who I believe deserve it- for working hard.”
She smiled, and her eyes lingered on Patrick for a little too long.

He knew people noticed.

Miss Pierce began reeling off names, and each person she called out sat a little taller, smiling, or looking determined and fiercely competitive.

“Millet, Brötzmann, Rahman, Takuya, Di Cello—” Patrick saw the turtle-neck girl smile and straighten up—he assumed she was ‘Di Cello’. That name paired with her accent made sense.

“-And, Stumph.”

Patrick’s eyes widened, and he slumped down a little. No, this wasn’t right. He couldn’t do it. He wasn’t good enough.

The room was filled with tension, and Patrick could feel burning stares of pure resentment as Miss Pierce began teaching. He tried to focus on the lesson, busying himself with taking notes, but his mind was swimming with exhaustion, fear, panic, and music notes.

As the lesson came to an end, she spoke up again.

“You’ll have three days to practice, then, you’ll each perform, and I will pick the best out of six.”

Patrick was petrified at first, but as he felt the disgusted glares from other students, he felt rage boil his blood. Feeling the twisting, writhing anger in his stomach, he furrowed his brow, nodding down at the sheet music.

He was going to get that fucking solo.

His lessons had finished, and Patrick had left the school grounds, in search of somewhere that might sell what he needed. He trailed the nearby streets, eyes scanning each store name.

His gaze stopped on a small, corner store— with a sign reading ‘pharmacy’. Perfect.
He entered the small pharmacy, looking around with gaunt eyes and smiling tiredly at the little old lady behind the counter.

Patrick strode over to the band-aids, snatching up six boxes, he kept running out. He felt a little silly, but he remembered his mother’s words of wisdom.

‘Better to have, and not need, than to need, and not have.’

That was good advice- he’d always tried to follow it.

Patrick decided that some disinfectant would do him good too, he should really clean the cuts if he wanted them to heal quicker.

He shuffled over, grabbing a bottle, before glancing around to see if anything else might be useful. He noted some bandages, and he wondered if binding his hands might be a good idea. Patrick decided better safe than sorry, and picked up two, walking over to the counter. He noticed some paracetamol and ibuprofen, and grabbed five boxes of each. Getting your fingers sliced open weekly wasn’t painless, unfortunately.

Six boxes of band-aids, one bottle of disinfectant, two bandages, five paracetamol, five ibuprofen, and a red bull.

Fifteen dollars, thirty-six cents.

Not bad, he supposed.

As Patrick shoved the pharmacy bag into his rucksack, he started walking back to Juilliard. He chewed on his lip nervously.

He’d caught himself staring at the razors more than once.

That scared him.

Patrick glanced at himself in the mirror, as he put his new supplies away in the medicine cabinet. His clothes were so baggy on his frame now, he was pretty sure he’d dropped a few sizes. Patrick hooked his fingers into the hem of his jeans, pulling them out as far as they went, and eyes widening as he saw just how loose they were, and he was pretty sure the only thing keeping them up was his belt- that he’d made a few extra notches in with a knife.

Patrick looked at his appearance somberly, before trudging back to his room.

With a heavy sigh, Patrick pulled the violin case back up onto his bed, tenderly lifting the instrument out, and ignoring the squirming in his gut.
He pulled Paganini’s sheet music from the small binder, before setting it on a music stand in the corner of his room. Carefully picking up his bow, Patrick stood—back straight, head up and eyes poised.

He was going to get that solo.

He was going to graduate with honours.

He was going to be the best.

Patrick hadn’t slept for three days.

And as he sat in front of Miss Pierce, he didn’t feel it.

He didn’t feel his exhaustion, or his hunger, or his migraine, or his fingers— he felt numb.

Numb with determination.

He idly wondered if he’d start hallucinating soon. Weren’t you clinically insane after 72 of no sleep?

He wasn’t sure— he’d have to look it up.

Di Cello had just finished, moving to take her seat again— there had been no applause, professionals don’t applaud.

All the performances had been flawless, but something was missing. It was too... *blank*. He’d really have to pull it out of the bag if he wanted to win.

Patrick watched Miss Pierce scribbled something down in her sleek, leather notebook, before clearing her throat and looking upwards. She gave Patrick a small smile.
“And, finally- Stumph. Your turn.”

She motioned to the spot Di Cello had just left, and he walked over, poising the instrument on his shoulder before-

His fingers were still covered in band-aids. They would hold him back. They’d make him sloppy.

Patrick cleared his throat a little, quickly and gingerly placing the violin on the desk, before ripping off the band-aids, shoving them into his pocket.

Some people grimaced, others looked shocked- Miss Pierce looked proud.

*Overcome the pain for success.* That’s what she’d told him- and he’d really took it to heart.

Patrick poised the instrument again. There was no sheet music. Here, you had to learn it- brand it into your mind and your heart, never forget it.

Patrick started playing.

It was perfect.

It was always perfect.

His fingers glided over the strings, and he watched the flesh of his fingertips redden and bleed as the clots of blood were disturbed, rubbing against the strings- he couldn’t feel it.

Patrick’s back was straight as an arrow, bow arm drifting the hairs over the strings, producing a beautiful, flawless, smooth melody, full of passion and despair- Patrick couldn’t hear it. It only buzzed somewhere distant in his mind.

The new hand position didn’t hurt anymore, his bones had gotten used to it- they’d cracked loudly one day during practice, and he’d collapsed to the floor, screaming in pain- he’d almost given Sebastian a heart attack...But after that day, it had never bothered him again.

Patrick shut his eyes, letting his brain do the work. He’d practiced this so many times. He could have played it blind. He poured his heart and soul into it. All his misery, all his exhaustion, all his despair.

The piece ended, and there was no applause.

But the look in their eyes said it all.
There was blood on the fingerboard.

His fingers were bleeding again.

It was so cold.

Patrick had gotten the solo.

It was dark, and Patrick stared out at the city lights as he entered his room, placing his bag down on the floor, and shrugging his parka off. He removed his winter layers- hat, gloves, sweater, the whole deal, before moving over to his bathroom.

Showers helped him wash everything away. They helped calm him down.

Patrick was exhausted, and he sighed heavily as he felt the warm water pelting his skin. He ran his hands through his hair, grimacing as he felt a few strands coming away. He hoped he wouldn’t start losing teeth soon.

Patrick’s legs failed him soon enough, causing him to collapse, sliding down the wall, and crumpling into a heap at the bottom of the shower. He’d grunted a little at the impact, trying to stand again, but he’d grown quiet and still as he stared at his legs.

He could see his thigh bones, and the way his kneecaps jutted out of his skin was horrifying. Patrick leaned his head into his knees, feeling the water pelting the back of his head and his spine gently.

It felt like rain.

Heavy rain.

Like the really heavy rain that night Pete had gotten attacked.

He remembered Pete leaving him with a plastic bag, running away and turning- still moving backwards, and grinning brightly. Only his grin and nose had been visible under his hood.

He remembered the flooded sidewalk, the dim streetlights.

He remembered Pete’s last words to him that night- 'Enjoy it, Pattycakes!'

Patrick felt his chest jolt, feeling a heavy sob wrack his body. Then another, and another.

He was sobbing for the first time in a long time, actual burning tears escaping his eyes, but being washed away as quickly as they came.
Patrick dug his fingers into his knees angrily. He wanted it to hurt. He wanted it to really hurt. He needed to feel something strong. And real. He was sick of this mellow existence. Drifting by with nothing solid, or concrete.

His nails scratched at his face, legs and shoulders, leaving long red streaks in their wake.

Patrick was angry.

*So fucking angry.*
Pete stared down at his phone, idly playing a game, but his mind was somewhere else.

It had been four months and three weeks since Megan had first come to the bar, and now she’d made a habit of it. Her presence hurt him a little, why did siblings have to look so alike?

Megan had also told him about why Patrick had left; She’d explained everything: Anna Callaghan, the deal their parents made, and she’d even told him about how Patrick was at Thanksgiving.

Pete had been horrified when he’d found out about the marriage- and the guilt he felt for yelling at Patrick was now unbearable, it physically writhed in his stomach like a mountain of snakes, and he felt sick whenever he thought about it. He'd thrown up a few times to the memory. He'd always thought time healed wounds, but it only seemed to be making his fester.

But he was mad too.

Why hadn’t Patrick just told him? He would have understood.

...However, after further contemplation, and replaying the events in his head over and over again...maybe he hadn’t let Patrick talk, and god, that killed him.

Pete glanced up to see Megan and Hillary messing around with electric guitars, and a slightly exasperated, but still helpful, Ray trying to teach them as best he could- with Mikey watching them from the corner, sat on on an amplifier, and laughing wildly every time something went wrong.

Pete’s gaze flitted over to his brother, sat on the stage, scribbling down notes into a cheap notepad, and wincing every time one of the guitars screeched.

Four months, three weeks, and despite Megan’s insisting that Patrick had his phone, nobody had heard anything, and god, that scared Pete.

He hoped Patrick had friends in New York, that he wasn’t isolating himself. He knew Patrick was more of an introvert, but regardless, introvert or extrovert- isolation was still a bad thing.

The thoughts about Patrick’s wellbeing were so painful to him, so painful in fact that it was getting hard to sleep, and he’d often wander around his neighbourhood in the small hours- making up brilliant reasons as to why Patrick didn’t answer anyone. Without even realizing it, Pete tended to drift to Junction park, and whenever he did, his heart would ache as he looked at the swings- their first kiss, the jungle gym- the night of their confessions, and the merry-go-round- Pete would often find Patrick sat there, writing melodies with a borrowed guitar.

It hurt to be there, it hurt way too much. So he’d leave, and wander around again- and his mind, being left on autopilot, would then decide to take him to the railway yard. The red mark of Patrick’s initials reminded him of the early days- of their first misadventure, but it also reminded him of how it all ended- hateful words, and screaming. When he’d been stalking away after the fight, he’d heard
Patrick screaming, he’d idly wondered if some murderer had shown up and had tried to chase him—but deep down, he knew that wasn’t the case. He’d kept walking. He’d heard those awful screams, and he’d just kept walking—he hadn’t cared back then, he’d been hopped up on adrenaline and anger, but now, now that things had calmed down, and realizations had set in—it made him feel like the worst person in the whole world.

Pete gulped, trying to stop his train of thought.

He’d broken up with people before but, Jesus Christ, this one hurt like hell.

He still loved Patrick, and some part of his brain screamed at him to just go steal a car and just drive. Just fucking drive—12 hours straight to New York, march into that fucking school, grab his boyf—grab Patrick, and bring him home, no matter how much he protested or fought.

...But Pete could no longer afford to be reckless.

His eyes drifted over to his siblings and a small smile twitched at his lips. He had mouths to feed, two kids to take care of, he couldn’t very well just walk out on them to chase his own selfish fantasies.

And besides, when he arrived at Juilliard, Patrick would probably perfectly fine—more than perfectly fine: straight A student with a mountain of kind, caring friends, and a hundred different job offers.

Patrick wouldn’t want to see him.

Patrick was hunched over in his seat, eyes trained on a notepad as he wrote out each note of the caprice that had scared him since childhood—the hardest piece ever written.

He finished the notes, and flipped his music sheet. There was only one sheet left to learn and he was praying he’d finally done it after two hours on it.

He read over both sets of notes, index fingers trailing under each line, and head flicking back and forth, quickly reading and checking.

Patrick came to the end of the sheet.

He shuddered, and a relived smile flashed on his face for a moment, before he leaned back in his
desk chair, and pressed his hands to his face.

He’d done it.

He’d written it out perfectly.

Patrick exhaled shakily, standing from his desk and stumbling slightly, realizing just how much eight hours of study had taken its toll on his legs. He walked slowly, careful not to trip, and moved over to check his alarm clock.

8:00

It was Saturday, thankfully, and Patrick had to practice. The concert was in a week, and it was almost Christmas. Most people were bobbing around with bags full of Christmas presents they hadn’t wrapped yet - but Patrick wasn’t.

He wouldn’t be going home. His parents had offered but he’d refused. He needed to practice, he couldn’t slip up now. He was so close to victory.

Patrick decided that he’d force himself to eat something. Since his realization of how sick, he was after seeing himself in the mirror a few weeks ago, he’d been actively trying to take care of himself - but it didn’t come easy.

Sleep eluded him, and the only way he could rest was by passing out. Food disgusted him, the smell of it, the sight of it - everything made him gag.

Patrick moved into the kitchen, and he found Sebastian at the breakfast bar again - with a plate of pancakes this time. Patrick greeted him with a tight smile, but Sebastian only looked shocked.

"...A-Are you okay, Patrick?"

Patrick poured cereal and milk into a bowl, nose wrinkling at the sight, and not really caring about the few spills on the worktop as he opened the cutlery drawer and fished out a spoon. "Yeah, I’m fine-" He yawned loudly, and Sebastian seemed even less convinced. "Why’d you ask?"

The man stared at him, eyes full of concern. "I dunno, you just- you look, kinda..." Sebastian chewed on his lip, "...Patrick, you don’t have like...anorexia, or like, bulimia, right...?"

Patrick furrowed his brow. He knew he had gotten really skinny, but wasn’t that a little much?

"No. I’m really okay, I promise."

"-'Cause if you were, I’d have to tell someone, dude-"

"-I’m fine, Sebastian. Really."
He looked unconvinced, but the firm tone of Patrick's voice made him stop his insistence. Patrick could only avert his eyes from his suspicious stare, but he didn’t want to be analysed or judged anymore, so he quickly wolfed down three meagre spoonfuls of cereal, trying his best to swallow and not gag, before putting the rest of it in the sink, and moving away to his bedroom with quick strides.

Patrick got dressed, and grabbed his bag, tying his sneakers messily before making his way out of the dorm.

Patrick had never been an early bird, he’d always hated mornings, but with his new routine of no bedtime- *just random intervals of passing out*, it all felt like one, long day.

As Patrick came to the front door of the Juilliard library, he stopped, and glanced around. His eyes froze on the few tips of the skyscrapers he could see, proud and sharp against the blue sky, and he suddenly remembered he was in New York.

Yeah, okay, he may have... *forgotten slightly-* but he couldn’t be judged *too* harshly. He really only saw the inside of the music building and his bedroom, and even then, his gaze was usually firmly planted on the floor.

Patrick decided to make the walk to the New York public library instead- If he had to study, he may as well do it somewhere cool.

He stepped through the large doors, narrowly avoiding a group of tired students who passed him with strained, sleepy smiles. He didn’t recognize them, but their exhaustion and the amount of books they carried suggested law students.

Patrick looked up at the ceiling and gazing at the renaissance-styled paintings there, lined with intricate black and golden edges. It was really beautiful.

Patrick decided that a good way to learn was through observation, so he trudged over to the computers, and pulled on a pair of headphones that were on the desk.

Patrick spent hours watching videos of musicians play Paganini’s 24th, and he grew more nervous with each one. He spent a few more hours with his eyes clamped shut, just listening to the notes and matching them in his head. He'd also tried writing them down as he heard them, and was overjoyed when he realized he’d written it out perfectly once again- but he did notice fearful stares from other patrons, and he assumed they must think he was possessed, with the way his hand moved impossibly quickly as he scribbled- what to them must have been random letters, down frantically.

After he’d watched almost every video that really mattered on the subject, Patrick stood, pulled off the headphones, and grabbed his bag, making his way over to the main attraction of a library- its books.

Patrick made a beeline to the music section, and as he came to the violin area, he ran his fingers along the book spines, eyes squinted as he made out the titles. There weren’t many that seemed as though they’d help him too much, but eventually, he picked out two ‘Violin Playing As I Teach It’
by Leopold Auer, and ‘Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule’ by Leopold Mozart— and only because they were renowned, and usually, very hard to find.

As he watched the skeptical librarian check them out for him, pressing the stamp down loudly, and with concerned, skeptical glances at the boy in front of her, Patrick idly gazed up at the ceiling again, before a clearing throat snapped his eyes forwards and he saw the woman handing him the two books— with a generic line of ‘have a nice day, take care of the books’.

Patrick sat on his bed, back arched, and head buried in the first book by Auer. It was teaching him a lot, and he had been surprised to find the new hand technique Miss Pierce had enforced in there...but it also said that if you hadn’t been playing that way since you started (and if you hadn’t started at a young age)- it could cause injuries, and to stop them escalating- you should bind your hands.

Patrick was suddenly very glad he’d bought bandages a few days ago.

As he wrapped the tight, white bandages around his hands, Patrick read over the symptoms list—completely horrified with wide, fearful eyes: Arthritis, carpal tunnel syndrome, repetitive strain injury, mallet finger, trigger finger— Jesus christ, Patrick hoped it wasn’t too late for him.

He looked down at his bound hands, gulping slightly. Well, he’d come this far, might as well go all the way right? There was no point in running away now.

Patrick picked up his book again, pushing his back straight against the wall in an effort to soothe his spine, and he kept reading. After a little while he yawned, it was getting a little boring as Auer was prattling on about how to hold your bow, and Patrick decided he needed a change of pace. He quickly glanced down at Mozart's book, lying next to him on the comforter, and he mentally thanked his dad for the German lessons, as he decided to read that one instead, smiling contently as he effortlessly read the foreign words.

Patrick played, and his fingers hurt so goddamn much. He’d gotten a few odd, or annoyed glances because of the bandages wrapped around his hands, but he’d ignored them- those assholes didn’t know about the symptoms, and who’d be laughing in ten years when they couldn’t even bend their fingers?! That’s right- Patrick would.

He grimaced a little, feeling bad, and he’d considered warning them, but the first person he’d approached had just scoffed, and turned their back on him, not even trying to hear him out. So
Patrick had decided- ‘No, fuck these people’, and hadn’t tried again.

As the piece ended, Miss Pierce was beaming, and it was the happiest he’d ever seen her, and for once there was no darkness or mischief behind it.

“Excellent, Patrick. I certainly made the right choice.”

Patrick noticed the other five, and a few of their friends bristle at the words, but he nodded at the teacher with a tight smile, and took his seat again.

Patrick was packing his things away when he heard a throat clear behind him. He turned instantly, and saw a skinny girl; Glasses, hair tied back and a nervous smile on her face. Patrick hitched his bag over his shoulder, and managed to give her a smile.

“H-Hi, I’m Georgia.” She held out a hand for him to shake, and Patrick glanced around the classroom, noticing glares being shot her way.

Patrick didn’t really want her life ruined too, he preferred to keep his misery to himself, and he didn’t want to be responsible for messing up someone else’s life.

He leaned in a little, lowering his voice to a whisper. “...I’m not sure that’s a good idea.” He motioned his head to a group of scowling students near the door, glancing back and forth with furious eyes.

She huffed in amusement, “They’ve never liked me.” Georgia offered the hand again, and Patrick reluctantly took it. “I’m Patrick.”

She nodded as though it were obvious, and Patrick mentally facepalmed because yes- the teacher had just said his name, many, many times. She smiled again.

“I’m seventeen too, my grandfather’s connections got me in.” A flash of sadness crossed her eyes, “I-uh, I just wanted to say...I get it.” She nodded towards Patrick’s hands, and he noticed her eyes linger on her own, hidden wrist before she made a move to leave, smiling sadly up at Patrick.

“Wait,” Patrick felt compelled to warn her. She was too nice. “You should do it too.” She looked confused, and Patrick tugged at the bandages. “T-The new, hand position thing, I read a book about it, and uh- it has some serious side effects.” The girl looked panicked and stared down at her hands- which had become shaky. She looked up again, nodding gratefully. “Thank you Patrick.”

He nodded, before picking up his violin case, and leaving the room with a sigh. At least one other person wouldn’t have deformed hands in a few years- that made him feel a little better.

Patrick’s fingers ached, and the violin drooped on his shoulder at another sharp stab of pain. He exhaled sharply, and hissed at the smears of blood on the A string. Patrick put the violin down
gently, moving to the bathroom to clean his hand. He peeled off the bandage clumsily, and then the band-aids, before letting the tepid water run over his hands—wincing as it stung. It had been unbearable at first, but he’d gotten used to it.

Patrick felt tired, dazed, nauseous, exhausted...every shitty way it was possible to feel?—That was how Patrick felt.

His head swam and everything went black.

His jolted, hands shooting forwards to stop his head from hitting the ceramic sink. He panted, eyes wide. What the fuck was that?

It happened again, and when Patrick awoke, his face was pressed against the drain, hair getting soaked and hands slack on the sides.

What was happening? God, he was-

Black again.

Patrick’s vision shot back and he found himself crumpled on the floor. He groaned, crawling up and trying to stand with his hands and knees, before feeling something acidic at the base of his throat, and he retched. He felt sick fill his mouth—burning, acid, hot, disgusting, and he jumped, dragging himself over to the toilet quickly and spitting it out.

Patrick tried to stumble back to his feet, but everything went black again, and Patrick awoke with his head on the rim, another blackout, then more sick dribbling out from his mouth. He coughed, choking slightly and spit again, wiping his cheek and mouth with his sleeve.

Patrick coughed again, going into a fit, and retching into the toilet again. He was panting and sweaty, shivering and shuddering with a freezing cold he knew wasn’t real. He was also pretty sure he was throwing up all the cereal he’d eaten today.

Patrick didn’t know what to do. Every time he tried to stand, he’d just black out and fall, making his knees and hands ache with each hard impact with the floor. He didn’t want to hit his head and get seriously injured.

Patrick couldn’t speak either, the sick had irritated his throat, and to speak felt as though someone was carving out his vocal cords with a rusty pair of scissors.

He stayed there for what felt like hours, retching, blacking out, waking up, wiping sick away, throwing up, coughing until his lungs ached, but he was determined to get through it, it would come to an end—it had to, everything did.

Patrick’s ears twitched at a noise of a door clicking, and he heard a voice calling his name. It was Sebastian. Patrick tried to call out, but his throat refused, and he glanced around desperately. He had to make himself known, he needed help. Managing to pull himself up to a counter, Patrick swiped everything off with an arm, and the objects made a loud clatter as they fell to the floor. Patrick heard his name shouted in panic, and the bathroom door opened with a slam.

It was Sebastian, and the nice girl from class...Georgia, Patrick thought, just as everything went black again.
Patrick blinked his eyes open groggily, coughing slightly and pressing hand around his throat. He heard chattering, but it sounded faint. Everything was white, and bright, and he was in a bed. He turned his head, noticing what looked like a nurse peering at him from behind a clipboard. Patrick opened his mouth to ask what was going on, but only a strained, raspy whine escaped. The woman seemed to understand and began to explain.

“You’re at Juilliard’s student hospital,” She began, trying a smile. “Your roommate and classmate found you passed out, and they rang us.” Patrick nodded weakly, yeah, that sounded familiar.

“You’re parents paid for full health insurance for you, so that’s one less thing to worry about.” She laughed quietly, and Patrick gave her a strained smile, not wanting her to feel bad about her awful try at humor.

Suddenly, a man wearing a crisp, white coat entered, and the nurse passed him the clipboard. He glanced it over, nodding and moving over to stand next to Patrick.

“Good morning, Patrick. I’m Dr. Mata, and, I assume the nurse has explained the situation?” Patrick could only nod weakly. “Good,” He pulled up a chair, and Patrick winced at the way it scraped against the floor. Taking a seat, Dr. Mata clicked his pen, flipping to another page on the clipboard. “So, it looks like unexplained fainting-”

Yeah no shit Sherlock. Patrick wanted to roll his eyes, but he was too tired to be sarcastic right now.

“.There are a few common causes, the usual suspects- uh, stress, for example. Are you stressed Patrick?”

What the fuck does it look like, dude?

Patrick stared blankly, and the doctor nodded, pouring a glass of water and passing it to him. “Drink this, it’ll soothe your throat.”

Patrick complied, taking small sips and wincing at the sting in his neck. After a few moments, Patrick had drank the whole glass, and could just about speak- although it was very strained, and very quiet, making Dr. Mata have to strain to hear him.

“Right, I’m going to read out a few causes, and you’ll tell me if you think you’re experiencing them, okay?”
Patrick nodded, wanting to save his voice for the questions. Dr. Mata nodded too, looking down at his page, and trailing the pen down, gently, before stopping abruptly with a loud tap, and poising his hand to draw a tick, or an X.

“Abnormal heart rhythms. You know, like, uneven, frantic beating, quickly changing-”

He stopped at Patrick’s raised eyebrow and obvious stare. “...Well, yes, you know what it is. So, have you been...experiencing...that?”

Patrick remembered his frantic heart that would thunder and make his ribs ache whenever he was scared or nervous, he remembered that would then drop into slow, uneven beats, at a moment’s notice with no warning.

“Yes, I have.” It hurt to speak, and his voice was only a quiet, low rasp, but the doctor poured him more water, and he drank again, wincing at the pain, but staying strong, knowing it would help.

The doctor mumbled for a moment, “Yes, we’ll have to test you for anaemia- Right, Patrick, what about disorders; Do you have any lung, or, metabolic problems?”

Patrick sniffed, “I have asthma, does that…?”

Dr. Mata nodded quickly, “Yes, yes, that counts.” He looked questioning, “Do you have an inhaler?” Patrick nodded, and the doctor’s brow furrowed. “Well, be sure to carry it with you at all times. It’s a serious condition, Patrick.”

Patrick didn’t nod that time, he’d only looked disgruntled. He’d always hated toting around his inhaler, people would look at him funny, and call him ‘a freak’ because of it, all the way from gradeschool to highschool.

“...Um, ah-hah!- Emotional stress!” The doctor chirped, a cheery beam on his face, before it melted away as he realized the tone didn’t match the subject. Patrick wheezed a laugh at his horrified expression, and could only nod.

Dr. Mata cleared his throat and smiled nervously, drawing a small tick on the paper.

“Right, what about...exhaustion?”

Patrick nodded again, with a sad laugh, motioning at his eyebags. The man looked concerned, and
nodded, drawing another tick.

“Pain?”

Another nod, as he held up his sliced fingertips. The doctor grimaced, and drew another tick, muttering to himself quietly. “I’m sure glad I went to med school.” Before clearing his throat and speaking up again, “Right, let’s move onto symptoms.” Patrick could only nod.

“Frequent lightheadedness?”

Tick.

“Frequent migraines?”

Tick.

“Nausea?”

Tick.

“Frequently fading vision?”

Tick.

“Legs giving out? Like, falling for no reason, or-”
The doctor gulped a little, eyes widening and brow furrowing as he stared down at the paper. He glanced up at Patrick with a raised eyebrow, before clearing his throat and leaning back in his chair. “We’ll do a few blood tests, see if there’s anything wrong, but-” He chewed on his lip. “I can’t really prescribe you anything.”

Patrick bit the inside of his cheek— not good.

“I suggest that you take it easy, you need to take care of yourself, sleep, eat, rest your mind, try to keep your heartbeat calm, and regular- and you should be okay. These types of fainting spells only really happen when the causes reach their peak levels, so just, go easy.” His eyebrows were raised, and he talked to Patrick slowly. “And rest.” The man froze for a second, but then nodded slowly, “We’ll discharge you, but come back in about two days and we’ll see your blood test results, and we’ll, uh- move from there.”

Patrick nodded quietly as the man gave him a concerned smile, motioning for the nurses and explaining the procedure. He sat through the needles, wincing at the stinging and not bringing himself to watch the nurses carry the vials of his blood away.

Patrick trudged out of the Juilliard hospital at 3pm on a Sunday, heading back to his dorm room. He was kinda mad he’d lost an entire day of practice, but it couldn’t be helped, he supposed.

As Patrick entered, he found Sebastian and the girl... Georgia, if he remembered correctly, sat on the couch drinking coffee, and chatting quietly.

Their heads flicked up at the sound of the door clicking open, and they stood as soon as they saw Patrick.

“Patrick, holy shit, dude, are you okay? Did they let you leave?” The girl chimed in. “What happened? You passed out-”

“I’m fine. Really.” Patrick shrugged lightly. “It’s called literally ‘unexplained fainting’, it’s random.” They looked unconvinced, and Patrick glanced between the duo. “So...was there any reason-?”

The girl’s eyes lit up with realization, “Oh! Yes, hang on!” She grabbed her satchel from the coffee table and rooted around, pulling out a neat piece of paper. “Miss Pierce gave us another piece,” She groaned with a tired smile, handing it to Patrick. “It’s not too bad though, it’s only a sonata.”

Patrick nodded at the sheet and read the name- Claude Debussy- Violin Sonata in G minor. He looked up again and noted the girl’s nervous eyes, he furrowed his brow. “What?”

She chewed on her lip. “There’s a solo again, and, she gave it to you.”

Patrick froze for a beat, before exhaling heavily. “But, I’ve already got a solo. Why didn’t she give it
“The other five she likes already have two each. She wants things even, I guess.”

Patrick shut his eyes for a moment. Fantastic, another three days of memorizing notes. He shook his head as Georgia started giving him—what he knew, was false hope, advising him to talk to Miss Pierce and to ask her to give the solo to someone else.

“-S’fine. This one’s easy.” He looked at her again, eyes full of assurance, and she relaxed a little, smiling kindly, before glancing around. “W-Well, I-uh, I should get going, but,” Georgia clapped her hand onto his shoulder, but it was very gentle despite the noise. “Best of luck, Patrick.”

He nodded, mustering a smile as she walked out, bidding farewell to both roommates.

Sebastian looked worried. “Are you sure you’re okay? Are you sure you can do it?” Patrick nodded, trying to be convincing, before shuffling back into his room—desperate to escape the analysing stare.

Patrick stared at his violin, calling to him from the bed.

He had to practice—Dr. Mata be damned.

Patrick had to be ready.

Chapter End Notes

By the way, I suggest anyone look up Paganini's Caprice no. 24—just so you can really understand how fucking insane it is, might help add another dimension to the story I think. And also, once again, thank you so much to everyone who's reading, or who's commented, or left kudos, bookmarked— all of you are awesome!
I Don't Know Where I'm Going, But I Don't Think I'm Coming Home

At least one thing hadn’t changed: Suits were still uncomfortable.

Patrick felt his Adam’s apple bob against his tie, and he worried his bottom lip between his teeth. It was the night of the winter concert, and a lot of his family would be out in the audience, and after the performance, they were going out for dinner to celebrate. He hoped they wouldn’t notice how haggard he looked, but somehow, he knew it was inevitable.

He was currently backstage of Carnegie Hall- *THE* Carnegie Hall- He’d been amazed to discover that they would actually be playing there, and he was pretty sure that must have been some people's lifelong dream, and here he was, completing that dream at the tender age of seventeen.

Miss Pierce was talking to them, going over the technical details before delving into a compelling, motivational speech- that Patrick had ignored entirely.

He was so tired, the new solo had really exhausted what was left of his brainpower over the past week. The speech must have concluded, because everyone began moving, and the whole Juilliard orchestra marched out and took their places.

Patrick was with the first violinists, so he was on the left and closest to the audience. His gaze drifted over the crowd as they waited for the rest of the seats to fill in, as people had their tickets checked at the door.

Patrick saw his mom and dad, smiling proudly when he made eye contact with them, he tried a smile, but he knew it looked strained. He looked over to Kevin and Megan, looking around the hall in amazement and giggling at some old lady’s ridiculous hat. Patrick’s lips twitched into a small smile- they never changed.

He also saw his grandparents- both sets; Maternal and paternal. Patrick’s smile broadened a little at his mom’s parents kind, proud, and yet, concerned smiles, and Patrick knew that the spotlights weren’t doing him any favours in the ‘hide how messed up you look’ department.

Patrick also saw his dad’s parents, looking incredibly proud with puffed out chests and smiles. He was glad he’d made them proud. He was glad they were happy.

He also noted a few aunts, uncles and cousins, but ultimately he looked away, glancing up at Georgia- sat in the second violins, who was giving him an assuring smile. Patrick gave a strained one back, and she mouthed the words ‘You’ll be amazing’.

He hoped she was right.

The performance had been three hours long- not counting the twenty interval and the long periods of
applause.

It was almost over, and Patrick’s fingers were aching, however, every piece had been exalted with thunderous applause, so he had decided the pain was worth it. There was only one song left- one song to really shake the audience and blow their expectations to shreds- in a good way, of course.

Paganini’s Caprice, no. 24.

And, Patrick’s hardest solo.

Debussy’s piece had been easy, a piece of cake, but had received such loud applause that it had shaken Patrick’s bones.

But Paganini’s...he was worried. Sure, he’d been practising like nobody’s business, but...he had an ingrained, subconscious fear. He couldn’t help it.

They had just finished Vivaldi’s four seasons, and, after a solid five minutes of raucous applause, the conductor (who was actually the conducting teacher) turned to the audience with a bow, before announcing the final song with a loud, booming, yet dynamic voice.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, thank you so much for joining us this evening!” The audience cheered and Patrick heard a few disappointed chatters- vehemently hoping that hadn’t been the end.

The man motioned at the students, “But we do have one more piece for you tonight.” Chatters and cheers rose throughout the room.

“Some call it ‘the most difficult piece ever written’.” Some chatters rose, some fell silent, and Patrick could feel his heart beating in his throat.

“Composed in 1817,” Those who were more knowledgeable about music began chattering, eyes widening and faces painted in disbelieving grins.

The conductor glanced, and smiled, and Patrick felt like he was going to be sick.

“-by Italian violinist,”
More shocked faces, more excited chattering. Patrick was breathing heavily, his breathing audible and worrying to those next to him.

“Niccolò Paganini.”

There were loud cheers and maddening applause, and the conductor beamed, raising his voice above all the sound and turning back towards the orchestra.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I present to you- Caprice Number 24!”

With a flourish of his hands and of his conductor’s baton- they played.

The time for the solo was near, Patrick knew this piece off by heart. The conductor and Miss Pierce had explained the solos beforehand: “The conductor will nod to you when the stanza is due to start, you will stand, play, when he nods again, you will sit.” Those were rules.

Patrick felt writhing anxiety in his stomach, it twisted and turned and hurt. He could feel his pulse everywhere in his body, and his fingers ached. Thankfully, they had healed closed before the concert, but he was sure that the solo would tear them open again.

He felt his heart lurch up to his throat and time slowed down.

The conductor turned his head, stared into Patrick’s eyes, and nodded.

Patrick stood, and he played.

It was perfect.

*It was always perfect.*

Everything was a blur, everything was numb, everything hurt and didn’t at the same time, he wasn’t himself anymore, this was just his brain taking over for him. Patrick felt as though he were falling into depersonalization, everything was blurry. The shapes were vague, everything was dream-like,
faces morphed, the colours were saturated and desaturated at the same time.

He was coming to the end of the solo, he could feel it. The end of the solo was the end of the piece, and after that final hand position, that final bow stripe- it’d be over.

Until after winter recess, of course.

And something in Patrick snapped.

The final vibrato, the final, long swipe of the bow, the final sound, and it was over.

The hall erupted into thundering cheers, he heard a few loud shouts of ‘bravo’, and Patrick sat back down. There was a standing ovation, but Patrick didn’t care anymore. He didn’t want to do it anymore. Nothing mattered. Nothing had any significance. How could it? He’d just seen the world how it really was- a dream. All fake. All mellow. All half-empty. Patrick looked down at the wooden floor, there were red dots everywhere.

The orchestra stood, bowed deeply, more applause, more standing ovation, another bow, Patrick’s back hurt, and he didn’t want to do it anymore.

They moved off stage and Patrick hissed with pain, jumping slightly and looking down at his violin. His left hand fingers were curled around its neck, and they were covered in blood. The fingerboard was soaked too, the metal strings gleamed with the red liquid clinging to them. He shivered, before looking up and moving away.

His violin case was in his hand, and he carefully manoeuvred through crowds of people, but was stopped and slowed down when he was recognized. Patrick’s ears rang with praise and compliments, but all he could do was nod and give tired smiles, but he didn’t want to do it anymore.

“Patrick!”

Patrick turned, eyes scanning the crowd and seeing Megan running towards him. She jumped at him wrapping her arms around his neck and burying her face in his shoulder. Patrick hugged back with one arm, right hand splaying on her back, and the other’s injured fingers were wrapped around his violin case- and they remained unseen.

Megan pulled back, and Patrick saw her eyes; They were tearful, but overjoyed and filled with pride.
Her beaming smile was the same: proud and overjoyed.

The rest of the family soon emerged, following her, and they all had the same tearful, happy expressions. His mother went over to him next, and he noticed her concerned gaze as she felt his bones under the suit, but she was cut short by his grandfather’s proud speech. He said that Megan and Kevin should aspire to be so talented, it made Patrick feel like shit.

His grandmother hugged him too, then his maternal grandparents, a few cousins, aunts, uncles. Patrick was tired.

“Uh, look, I-uh, need to go put this-” He gave a tight smile and lifted his violin case, still hiding his bleeding fingers. “-back in my room, so uh...can you guys just...?”

“Of course, sweetheart.” His mother began, pressing a hand to his cheek and smiling fondly before wrapping her arms around him again. It was warm, but brief, and Patrick was pretty sure he could have fallen asleep right then. He was so tired.

“We’ll meet you at the main entrance, alright?” Patrick nodded tiredly at his dad’s words, and gave them all a strained smile before heading away to the dormitories.

Patrick entered his dark room, placing his violin case down on the bed. He made his way to the bathroom, he was so tired, he stared in the mirror, he didn’t want to do it anymore, he tilted his head. He looked down at his hands. He stared at his fingertips. They were so deep. Deeper than ever before. It hurt so much. Everything buzzed in his mind- unbearably loudly. The applause, the praise, the bravos, the breathing, the echo, the strings, the patter of the blood droplets when they hit wooden floor, the booming voice, the fabric rustling, the footsteps.

It was unbearable. Too loud. He grabbed at his ears with his hands, trying to block it out. He was freezing. It was so loud.

He stared at himself in the mirror. His eyes were teary.

Patrick had a bright idea.

And while he usually doubted his bright ideas, he thought this one seemed fantastic.

The solution to all his problems.
Suicide.

There wasn’t any point.

Patrick opened his medicine cabinet.

He couldn’t do this anymore.

He searched around, shoving things out of the way and leaving bloody smears on all the boxes and bottles.

They might be a little let down, but, they’d get over it eventually.

He found a manual razor, he wasn’t actually sure why he had it, he couldn’t grow much facial hair, it took weeks for any stubble to poke out.

He wondered if it would hurt.

He smashed the razor open with the blunt end of a hairbrush.

What was the best way?

He wasn’t sure why he had a hairbrush either.

Could he cut deep enough?
He didn’t really ever brush his hair.

Or would he stop when he felt the pain?

Patrick fished out one of three razors from the plastic debris lying on the counter.

Lengthways?

Patrick squinted at it, holding it up to the light watching it shine, and pressing it between his uninjured fingers.

Or across?

He supposed as deep and long as possible, cut through as many veins and arteries as possible, he didn’t want to mess around, he just wanted to get it over with.

Do it.

Patrick held the razor over the inside of his forearm, right at the top, where his elbow bent.

What are you waiting for?

He lengthened his arm, straightening it and relaxing the muscle.

Just do it.

He held the tip of the razor blade at the top, pressing in slightly.

Just fucking do it.
Patrick froze.

Why are you stopping?

...You’re really supposed to leave a note.

You fucking coward.

Patrick placed the razor down and trudged into his bedroom.

No, go back.

He clicked on his desk lamp, grabbing a notepad and a pen.

They don’t care what you have to say.

He wrote a letter. He confessed everything. Explained everything. Half of it was only emotional dribble, and he knew it. The other half was pure, cold, hard fact.

To whoever finds my body,

I should explain, I guess.

Okay. Short form.

My name is Patrick Stumph. I’m seventeen years old. I was born 27th of April 1984. I was born in Evanston, and I grew up in Glenview. All in Illinois, Chicago.

I’m sorry about the inconvenience here, I know blood is hard to clean up, and the rumours about this room being haunted will never end.

Juilliard might get some bad publicity, but hey, it’s fucking Juilliard, people are still going to apply.

I wasn’t ready for this school. I wasn’t good enough. Plain and simple.
I was stressed. I tried to catch up. I neglected myself.

I lost a lot of weight, my hair started falling out, a few of my teeth hurt, I got paler, I couldn’t sleep. I couldn’t eat, all I did was study. I know, I’m a loser.

I’m probably depressed. I hallucinate a lot, but I think that’s just lack of sleep.

I performed in the Winter concert, and I played the Paganini solo. And just as I played the last note, something broke. Something inside me broke. I don’t know what it is. I don’t really care. I just want it to end.

I guess, regardless of whoever you are, this will eventually end up with my parents.

Mom- I love you. Thanks for letting me fold the laundry, even though I sucked at it. Thanks for the kickass hot chocolate when I had a nightmare. Thanks for singing to me when I was sick. I remember it all. Thank you, for everything. From, giving birth to me, to letting me steal Kevin’s cookies that one time. Thank you. Please stop worrying about what other people think. The neighbours don’t matter. The people at church don’t matter. The people at the PTA meetings don’t matter. You know who does matter? Your family. Your friends- the real ones. Just live your life, do things that make you happy. Spend time with your loved ones. With dad. With Kevin and Megan. With your mom and dad. Your siblings. I love you mommy. Don’t blame yourself.

Dad- I love you. I know you are stressed. I know you have been for a long time. So please, maybe this will shake you awake- spend time with your wife. Spend time with your kids. Your parents. Your brothers. Your sisters. Because when everything ends, you’re not buried with money, or how many storeys your house had, or how many degrees your children had, and everything just rots away. We turn to mush in the soil. I know you don’t agree with what I am, but I can’t change it, and I forgive you for it- I know you can’t change it either. Thanks for building a pillow fort with me on my sixth birthday. Thanks for sneaking me to McDonald’s after I had a shitty day at preschool. Thank you for providing for me- you’ve kept the promise you made to mom. You can rest now. Thank you for everything, dad. I love you. Don’t blame yourself, please don’t.

Kevin- I love you. You’re my little, irritating brother. I always have, since mom and dad brought you home from the hospital, and I always will, until I become worm food. You asked me once if you could have my playstation when I died, well, you’re welcome to it. I know it’s a little morbid, but enjoy it. I’d leave it in a will, but, hey, this is the best I can do. I’m sorry I stole your cookies that one time. And I have to admit- I love your stupid jokes. They always made me laugh. Thank you for cheering me up, without even knowing it. Thanks for helping me prank Megan so many times. Thanks for watching cartoons with me on Sunday mornings when we were kids. Thanks for taking the blame for the kool aid stain on the carpet. I love you little brother. Take care of Steve for me.

Megan- I love you. My only sister, it must have sucked having two annoying brothers, so I’m sorry for that. But you are the youngest, and the youngest always gets their way, so you can’t complain too much. You’re smart Meg, so smart. Don’t let anyone tell you you’re not, especially your asshole teachers, or the motherfucking bitches at your school. You can do whatever you want. I know you can. Thanks for always having my back. Thanks for making me teach you piano, it was pretty funny to watch you complain. Thanks for watching and making fun of shitty movies with me. Thanks for letting me borrow your crayons when I was seven. I love you, so much. Always have, always will.
Also, to Sarah and Halsey, I love you guys. You stuck with me all the way. You guys were way too cool to hang out with me, but you did anyway. You accepted me, and actually included me, for the first time in my life. I love you both. I know I always acted like you annoyed me, but you didn’t. I love you both, please be happy. Go have good lives, do whatever you want. Also, tell Joe Trohman this part is for him too. It goes for him too. Actually, tell everyone- it goes for all of them. Joe, Andy, Gerard, Frank, Mikey, Ray, Tyler, Josh, Brendon, Dallon, Ryan, Spencer. Tell them. I’m sorry I never got to really hang out with some of you, I would have liked to. You’re all amazing people. I was lucky to have known you.

I guess that’s everyone, but please, and I’m begging you- don’t just ignore this line or I’ll come back and haunt you forever. I’ll go Amityville horrors on your asses, I swear. I’m writing another letter. Give it to Pete Wentz. Peter Lewis Kingston Wentz III. Don’t get the wrong guy, please. Megan knows what he looks like. Sarah and Halsey Ashley know him. He lives in Wilmette. I know this might piss you off but please, I’m dead. Respect the dead, okay? I can’t disobey anymore, so it doesn’t really matter, right?

P.S. Sebastian, I’m really sorry if you find my body. I hope it doesn’t traumatize you. You were a good friend. You and Georgia- the only people who were nice to me.

Patrick tore the page, folding it and writing ‘To my family’ on it. He started writing another letter on the blank sheet.

Hey Pete.

I know you’re probably still mad at me, or you don’t care anymore- I get it, I would be too/I wouldn’t either. I was an asshole. I’m so sorry, I wish I could take everything I said back. I was scared. I’ve been living a certain way my whole life, and, I wasn’t ready to just leave it all behind. I’m sorry. For what it’s worth, I wish I would have said yes.

You made me happier than I’ve ever been before.

That year was the best of my life, and I love you. I still love you. I always have. I always will.

I remember when we met, I was so nervous, and I didn’t notice it back then, but I think you were too. Every walk home was so peaceful. I’d never felt that kind of peace before. Only with you. I’m sorry I didn’t kiss back the first time. I was pissed at myself for weeks, lemme tell you.

I lost so many first-times with you. First kiss, first time vandalising, first time high, first time drunk, THE ‘first-time’. And I loved it all. I loved every moment.

I’m sorry things were left they way they were. There’s so much I wanted to say, but I was all out of breath. The words wouldn’t come. No matter how hard I tried.

I love you. I love you so much. You’re one of the best people I know. You’re strong, you’re kind, you’re better than you think you are. You don’t give yourself enough credit.

I’m sorry Fall Out Boy’s gonna lose their singer, but I’m sure you’ll find someone better. Please don’t blame yourself Pete. I love you. I never stopped loving you. Be happy. Please. For me.
Patrick folded the letter, writing ‘To Pete Wentz’ on the cover.

He strode back over to the bathroom. He felt light. He felt ready. His mind was clear.

Patrick picked up the razor again, repositioning his arm and pressing the blade against his elbow join. With a gasp, Patrick pressed it in as far as he could, then painstakingly dragged it downwards, cutting through flesh, he could feel bumps and uneven parts. He got to his wrist and dropped the razor in the sink, staring at his trembling arm.

It didn’t hurt.

There was a knock at the door. Patrick was getting paler. He walked over to the door, opening it just enough to show himself in the doorway, but closing it enough just to hide his bleeding arm.

He felt regret.

It was his family. Beaming. Proud. Happy. Loving.

“You were takin’ so long we decided to come to you!” Kevin punched his shoulder playfully. Patrick said nothing.

His face was blank, shock.

His mouth hung open slightly.

Tears started streaming from his wide, unblinking eyes.

“Patrick?” His father’s brow furrowed. He looked worried.

Patrick’s chest jolted.

Dying felt weird.

Like everything was shutting down and speeding up.

Shutting down to death, but speeding up to try and save him.

“Patrick?” His mother’s eyes widened. She looked afraid.

They all looked afraid.
His hand was bloody.

They were all looking at it.

It was clasped around the door, leaving a handprint blood smear on the wood.

Patrick opened the rest of the door. Helplessly showing his parents his arm, as though he were a child, who’d just fallen from his bike and wanted a band-aid on his grazed knee.

He never wanted to see that look in their eyes again.

He was pretty sure he wouldn’t.

Patrick fell forwards, collapsing, and toppling into his father’s arms. His father was crying. He could feel it. He could hear it.

Patrick’s eyes went glassy, and he heard screaming. His mother. His sister. His grandma. He heard words that were slurred, slow and blurry to him.

Patrick was dying.

And he wished he wasn’t.

Everything’s supposed to go white, right?

Like you see a dead pet, leading you up the pearly white gates to Heaven. You meet god, he tells you why humans suck, then lets you into Heaven.

Everything didn’t go white.

Everything went black.
Oh I Miss The Comfort Of This House

Patrick’s eyes blinked open.

Everything was white.

Was he dead?

He half expected his dead cat Tinkerbell to show up any second, start talking to him, and to lead him to the pearly gates.

But instead, he heard beeping.

It got louder and clearer, and soon more sounds started flooding into his ears.

He heard chattering, footsteps, breathing, yelling.

“My baby tried to kill himself, and you’re telling me to calm down?!”

His mom.

Was his mom dead too?

...Or was Patrick alive?

He turned his head, feeling a plastic pillow that smelled like hospital against his cheek.

Kevin.
Megan.

They were sat at his bedside. Two chairs. Two ducked heads. They were asleep, their heads and hands resting on the mattress.

Patrick leaned his head a little.

A window, thin blinds.

He could make out a few silhouettes. They were familiar, somehow.

“M’am, I’m going to ask you to calm down, alright? Now, let me tell you about the options here-”

Patrick was alive.

And he was so happy he was alive.

He looked down at his right arm, it was numb and pale, and he assumed he was high on painkillers right now.

There was a blood drip in arm, probably to keep him from bleeding out.

He noticed a cotton ball on Kevin’s arm.

They had the same blood type.

Patrick looked down at his other arm, the left arm, the cut arm. It was wrapped tightly in a white, thick bandage, whoever had tied it had done a fantastic job- Patrick couldn’t even see any blood.

He coughed involuntarily, feeling a sudden dryness in his throat. He pressed his face into his shoulder, trying to muffle the sound to avoid waking his siblings, but-
“Patrick?”

Patrick glanced back and saw Kevin, staring up with wide, teary blue eyes. Patrick swallowed, and tried to speak before Kevin leapt at him, burying his face in his brother’s shoulder and wrapping his arms around him tightly. He was shaking. Patrick felt and heard the sobbing in his shoulder, and he felt a stab of painful guilt in his heart.

He’d been so selfish. He hadn’t really thought how it would affect them. He'd remembered one of his thoughts from that night.

_They might be a little let down, but, they’d get over it eventually._

He was such an asshole.

Patrick ran a hand through Kevin’s hair, letting his little brother sob heart wrenchingly into his shoulder, and after a few moments he pulled back. His eyes were red and tears were streaming from them, his breathing was laboured, and small hiccups and sobs still escaped him.

“You- W-Why Patrick? Why did you- you tried to-”

“I’m sorry-”

The boy buried his face again, and Patrick watched his back jolt with every uneven breath, sob and whine. Soon enough he pulled away again, sitting back in his chair as Patrick tried to calm his sobbing, gripping his hand tightly. He was about to explain, to apologize when- the commotion woke Megan.

Her head shot up, and she started panting with laboured breaths, tears escaping her immediately, but she didn’t look sad like Kevin did- she looked angry.

She punched Patrick in the shoulder. It was hard, but Patrick didn’t really feel it. Painkillers were a wonderful thing. Megan’s face was contorted into fury at the lack of a response as Kevin moved to restrain her, but she fought and shoved him off and screamed. “NO. NO. LET ME GO, KEVIN.”
Megan stalked over to Patrick again. She slapped him, it rang loudly, and he wagered it had left a red handprint on his cheek. Another slap, another punch in the arm, another slap, and her fist was balled up again when Patrick’s hand shot up and caught her wrist, eyes serious and narrowed.

There was a moment of silence. The room was filled with anger, tension and worry.

She broke down, collapsing- and she would have fallen to her knees, had she not thrown herself over Patrick.

“You asshole-” She wailed into his shoulder, frame trembling with every gasp and sob. Patrick hugged her back, and she slipped down, curling against his chest instead. Patrick felt his shirt getting wet with her tears, but he didn’t care. He ran a hand through her hair comfortingly, smoothing her back with the other. Megan kept bawling, face red, eyes scrunched up, hair a mess, panting and sobbing.

“You tried to leave me.” She wailed again and Patrick felt another stab of guilt. “You tried to leave us.” Her face was pressed against Patrick’s chest and she felt Kevin’s weight dip into the other side of mattress. Patrick now had both younger siblings pressed against him, trying to comfort two very different ways of dealing with grief.

“You’re my brother, you can’t- you can’t just-” She burst into tears with a renewed fervour, “I need you. We need you- Patrick-” Megan looked up at him, and her face was covered in a blend of pure anger, grief, sorrow, desperation, and despair. “I love you.” She whined sadly and desperately, before pressing her face into his bony shoulder again.

Patrick’s eyes fluttered closed, and he listened to both siblings sniffling against him, hearing their breathing slowly get calmer.

The door opened, and three pairs of head snapped up.

Their parents stood at the door.

There was an odd mixture of emotions in their eyes:

There was fondness, relief, joy, love- Their eldest son was alive, and the sight of their three children huddled up together warmed the heart.

...But, there was also sorrow, betrayal, guilt, anger- Their son had tried to kill himself. And it was their fault.

Kevin and Megan refused to move from their brother’s side, and Patrick could only give them a tired smile, motioning towards the two- now empty, chairs.

Patricia moved immediately, taking the seat closest the Patrick, but David looked hesitant.

The guilt was unbearable.

It was eating away at him, chunks at a time.
When his son had opened the door, when he’d saw the blood, when he’d saw the cut- when Patrick had collapsed into his arms.

His son.

His first child, dying in his arms.

He had frozen entirely, and Patricia’s brother, Simon, had led the charge- calling an ambulance immediately, and sending cousins to fetch the school doctors. They’d ran to the school’s student hospital, and had come back, red-faced and panting with two doctors.

Without them, Patrick would have died.

David couldn’t even bear to look at Patrick. David couldn’t believe what he’d done- what he’d led his son to do. He was disgusted with himself. And if Patrick had died-

...If Patrick had died, well, David couldn’t have lived with himself.

They would have been reunited pretty quickly.

Patricia had watched them cart Patrick into an ambulance, a gaggle of doctors and nurses yelling medical terms she didn’t understand, but that frightened her anyway.

Her baby boy, the red-faced, squalling baby that had been placed in her arms seventeen years ago- was dying. She’d held onto David as though he were a buoy in a dark, vicious, stormy sea, and he’d let her cry. He hadn’t told her to be brave, or to control herself- he’d let her cry, what’s more, he’d cried with her.

She’d felt like she drowning when she saw them rushing Patrick away, needles and machines beeping all around him.

Four hours.

Four, arduous hours.

Four hours- waiting for the news, waiting to be told if their child was alive, or dead.

Four hours, and a doctor had emerged.

He’d pulled off bloody, plastic disposable gloves, tossing them in the trash, and Patricia’s heart had stopped.

He’d walked over to them, eyes tired and face blank.

‘Your son is alive.’

They were the most beautiful words she’d ever heard.
While they were waiting to be able to see Patrick, a police officer had arrived. She’d given them two folded pieces of paper, with her condolences. One read ‘To my family’ and the other, ‘To Pete Wentz’.

They were suicide notes.

Patricia had sobbed at them. She couldn't help it.

David and Patricia had huddled over the first letter, and soon enough, tears blotted the ink on the page. David’s guilt had increased tenfold, reaching monstrous levels, after he’d read that letter. Patricia had just cried.

The words had stuck in their minds.

They were reluctant to read the second- it wasn't addressed to them after all, and the last few lines of their letter made it clear that Patrick would be back to haunt them if they mistreated 'Pete Wentz's letter. Megan had insisted on taking it. She hadn’t read it though, she'd only put it in her bag carefully, and a determined look had flashed through her eyes.

“...Patrick, I-”

“I’m sorry mom.” Patrick sniffed, tears threatening to escape his eyes too. “I’m so sorry.” The younger siblings scampered away, standing with their father, and they let their mom hold her eldest son, sobbing with despair and gasping with relief. “Don’t- Patrick, it’s not- it’s not your fault.” She looked at him seriously, eyes burning into his and hands on both sides of his head. “It’s not your fault, sweetheart.” She pulled him in again, shaking her head, and Patrick cried into her shoulder quietly, trembling with silent sobs. Patricia had pulled away after a small while, moving over to comfort Megan and Kevin- who were both still sobbing quietly.

David had moved over to his son.

He was finding eye contact difficult.

He felt so ashamed.

He’d almost killed his son.

The letter had told him not to blame himself, but he did. He knew it was his fault.

If he hadn't forced Patrick.
If he hadn’t yelled at him.

If he hadn’t pushed Patrick into that school.

If he’d taken him home- the way his mind had screamed at him too.

All those ifs, but well, it couldn’t be changed now.

But Patrick was alive, and he’d always be thankful for that.

Patrick motioned at his mattress, and David complied, sitting down as he worried his bottom lip. He glanced at Patrick, he was struggling not to burst into tears, he could feel the sobs trying to escape up through his throat. He felt Patrick’s tired smile, and his own lips flicked up into a tiny, strained smile in response.

David had to make small talk. The kind, accepting silence was killing him. He didn't deserve it. Not from Patrick.

“They-uh, had- to, um, s-stitch you up.” Wow, nice job. Tell your son how he’s been mutilated-great plan David.

He'd expected a horrified gasp, but there was only a tired laugh, and he looked up. Patrick’s smile was tired too, and his eyes looked guilty, sad, but relieved and calm at the same time. The boy’s mouth twisted into a sly half-smile and he raised his eyebrows.

“Am I gonna have a cool scar?”

David laughed, actually laughed. Loud, spontaneous, but laced with faint horror. He nodded breathlessly, and he wiped his eyes. “I’m sure you will.”

Patrick laughed too, and reached out a hand to his dad’s shoulder.

David’s eyes grazed over the bandage, and the guilt writhed in his stomach again.

“...I’m sorry dad.”

That’s when David lost it.

He sobbed suddenly, body shaking and he clapped a hand over his mouth in shock. His eyes
scrunched close and he kept sobbing as he felt Patrick embrace him. David tightened his arms around his son in return, sobbing painfully into his shoulder. He didn't deserve this. He deserved to be yelled at. He deserved anger, hatred, resentment, contempt. Not love. Not acceptance.

Not from Patrick.

He heard whispers in his ear. “I’m so sorry, I’m so selfish, I shouldn’t have done it, I’m sorry dad, I’m so stupid, I’m an idiot—”

David pulled back, still sniffing and trying to control his cries. He pressed a hand to the side of his son’s head, staring at him seriously with raised eyebrows. “No. No. You are not stupid Patrick. It’s not your fault- please, please—” He shuddered again, head drooping for a second, before steeling himself and looking up once again.

“Stop apologizing.”

Patrick only nodded, he felt tears prickling his eyes again.

He loved his family.

“Oh, you’re such a fucking cheater!”

“Kevin, language!”

Patrick almost spat out his water, instead pressing his forearm to his mouth and trying to calm himself, doing everything not to laugh. He didn’t really want to spit water all over Kevin. He noticed his dad was struggling to hold back laughter too, pretending to run a hand over his face. And despite herself, Patricia’s lips twitched upwards too.

Of course, Megan had come to New York prepared- Patrick expected nothing less of her.

She’d made the effort to bring at least six different travel board games.

Six.

Yes, Patrick had been horrified.
The two younger siblings were now engaged in a heated battle of mini chess. There were cutting insults, heated glares, and loud accusations, and Patrick’s ribs ached from laughing so much.

“FUCK. YOU.” Kevin growled as Megan moved a tower into the range of his king. Their mom reprimanded him quickly, but Megan only smiled sweetly. “Check.”

The boy clenched his jaw and glared, before Patrick motioned him closer, whispering something into his ear. Kevin’s face lit up and Megan looked worried.

“What? What are you doing? What are you saying to him? That’s CHEATING!” She turned to her parents desperately, eyes pleading for help against her conspiring brothers. They only shrugged, and David pinched the bridge of his nose before answering her. “We’re only spectators, Megan.”

The girl huffed and turned back to her brothers.

Patrick was leaning back again, smiling mischievously, and Kevin looked unbearably smug. “You guys are cheaters...always cheating...” She grumbled, straightening up a little. Kevin scoffed, “Oh, and you asking mom for help while I was in the bathroom wasn’t?”

“PATRICK YOU ASSHOLE.”

Patrick only laughed again, as he listened to their parents' half-hearted scolding for her cursing.

Kevin smirked. “That’s not Patrick’s fault- I could hear you, y’know, loudmouth.” He calmly moved his knight, cornering Megan’s king. “Checkmate.”

Megan gaped, looked at her parents- who only shrugged with smiles, and then back at her sneaky, scheming brothers, who were only laughing and high-fiving each other.

She shook her head, face contorting into contempt. “Fine whatever, fuck you guys, I’m never bringing the mini-chess again.” Her brothers burst into laughter, and she really tried to resist the giggle bubbling in her throat. She really did. But she'd started laughed too, not being able to hold it in any longer.

Megan’s thoughts suddenly darkened as she reset the board.

If Patrick had died, what would they be doing right now? Preparing a funeral? Calling the family? She gulped, and looked up at her older brother- whose eyes were full of knowing and understanding.

Megan was 99% sure he was psychic or something, and she just smiled. He smiled back, and she felt better.

“Right, rematch motherfucker.”

“-Megan, honestly!”
The door opened suddenly, and a doctor walked in, looking exasperated, exhausted, and serious. “Patrick Stumph.” He muttered the name, checking the clipboard at the foot of the bed. Patrick sat cross legged on the mattress, with a few blankets covering him, because he’d been inexplicably cold.

“My name is Dr. Huan, I’m the one who treated you when you arrived.” He motioned idly at Patrick’s wrist, and the whole family bristled. “…uh, thank you, doctor.” Patrick nodded, before receiving a blank stare from the man. “It’s my job.” Patrick gulped a little, but stayed attentive anyway.

“It’s important for you to consider the next step.”

“...The next step? What do you mean?” Patrick furrowed his brow and tilted his head a little.

“Well, this was no accidental injury. You attempted to commit suicide, didn’t you?” Patrick’s shoulders hunched a little at that, and the whole atmosphere morphed into something heavy, mournful, and tense. Patrick nodded a little, and he watched his mother exhale shakily from the corner of his eye.

The doctor looked exasperated, and began explaining as though Patrick were a toddler.

“If you attempt to commit suicide, you aren’t in a good state of mind- meaning, you’ll probably try again.”

Patrick shook his head furiously, “N-no, I-I won’t, I’m glad I’m alive-”

“They all say that.” Dr. Huan waved a hand dismissively, eyes down and flipping through his own clipboard instead. “So, three options: Therapy, medication, or rehab.”

Patrick tensed. He didn’t want any of those.

“I need a decision.”

Patrick gaped a little, mind whizzing to process everything, before his father stepped in.

“-Could he possibly have some time to think about it?” His father’s eyes were wide, insistent and annoyed, and Patrick felt his chest swell gratefully at his dad standing up for him.

“How long?” The doctor sighed heavily, pinching his watch between his fingers and staring at David blankly. David bristled a little, straightening up and going into full defensive mode. He answered through a clenched jaw and gritted teeth. “As long as he needs.”

The doctor glared slightly, but nodded and left the room.
“What a dick.”

“Kevin, I swear to god-”

Patrick considered his options. His parents had fetched all the leaflets they could find around the hospital, and everyone had helped him read through them, discussing them with him.

They all seemed shitty. And Patrick didn’t think he really needed them.

There was no way in hell he’d ever try again. Not after seeing the effect it would have had.

Patrick had people who loved him. People who he loved. He had to carry on for them. Always.

It was okay to get tired, it was okay to want to quit- but death, death is so finite, whereas life is full of possibility.

He looked down at the pile of leaflets. His options didn't exactly...excite, him.

- Therapy- Cost a bomb, and therapists were known for only asking one, annoying question: “And how does that make you feel?” Patrick would basically be doing most of the work-pouring his fucking soul out and telling his life’s story, just to be answered with that bullshit question. He didn’t want his parents to get conned.

- Medication- Risky, and a lot of fucked up side effects like: nausea, fatigue, anxiety, agitation, irritability, insomnia, dry mouth, fucking erectile dysfunction- fuck that. Medication could go choke.

- Rehab- Taken away from his family, surrounded by hippies, probably given medication, and once again- erectile dysfunction, fuck that.
Patrick ran his hands through his hair, wincing at the few strands that followed as his fingers pulled away. His parents noticed the strands too, and their faces were painted with guilt and worry.

He looked at them, and he shuddered.

He had to be brave.

He had to admit *something really hard* to himself.

He had to tell himself the truth.

*So he did.*

He couldn't go back to Juilliard.

“Mom, dad-” He gulped, and felt guilty as their eyes widened- attentive and accepting. Patrick exhaled shakily, feeling tears prickling his sore eyes as he held back a sob.

“Just take me home. Please.”

His dad moved forwards, and Patrick accepted, pressing his cheek against his dad’s shoulder, letting the man embrace him tightly. Patrick cried quietly, shuddering and shivering. He had three years and seven months left to finish his Juilliard degree. He couldn’t stand that. He really couldn't. He wouldn't survive, and one way or another, something would kill him. Exhaustion, insanity, starvation- something. Anything.

He'd die.

“Just take me home.”

“You cannot leave, it’s-”

“We’re thankful for your input, but we’ll be taking our son home now-”
“-If you do that, you will be irresponsible parents. And when your son tries to kill himself again, it will be on your heads.”

“He won’t. Thank you for your advice. It’s very useful.”

David had become excellent at deadpan sarcasm over years of business dealings. And it was definitely coming in handy right now.

The family strode down the hospital hallways, Dr. Huan following them with loud protests.

David led them, with his wife next to him. Patricia was staring ahead blankly, avoiding talking to the doctor, and she had an arm around Patrick’s shoulder. Kevin tagged along at his dad’s side, face stony in a carbon copy of his dad, and Megan followed behind her older brother, glaring at Dr. Huan every chance she got. They were all quite good at the deadpan stare. Patricia had always joked that it was a ’Stumph’ trait.

The exit was in view, and David quickly moved to check out at the receptionist’s desk, motioning for his family to continue outside. Dr. Huan moved up next to him, face set in a twisted scowl, and his face was contorted into a mixture of anger and disgust.

“I hope you know a lot of funeral planners.”

David’s eye twitched, and he turned slowly to the other man, glaring something fierce. He tilted his head up, looking down on the doctor, and huffing quietly.

“Thank you for your input, doctor. But I’m taking my son home. Goodbye.”

With the last low hiss, he left the hospital, following his family through the doors.

Patrick breathed in heavily, squinting up at the tall buildings and ears ringing with car horns coming from distant traffic. He looked up at the blue sky, trailing with fluffy, white clouds, and he grinned—he was happy to be alive.

Patrick’s mom squeezed his shoulders with a smile, and Patrick smiled at her. They all turned as David’s footsteps rang behind them, and Patrick noticed a faint anger in his eyes, that all but melted away completely-only to be replaced with love, as he looked up at his family.
One cab journey later- that had been filled with chattering and good-natured arguing, mostly from the three children, and they arrived at the airport.

As they stepped inside, David and Patrick both bristled, remembering when they’d first arrived, with the intention to leave Patrick at Juilliard- that was five months ago now.

The two smiled at each other- it was sad, remorseful, but, still hopeful.

David laughed, wrapping an arm around Patrick’s shoulder and shaking him lightly, making Patrick grin and laugh, before they both followed the rest of the family- laughing at Megan and Kevin, who were wildly gesturing at the Dunkin Donuts stall with desperate pleading.

Patrick got out of the car slowly, staring up at the white, colonial house.

It felt like a lifetime ago. Glenview felt like a lifetime ago.

So much had changed in so little time.

Patrick had changed.

Whether it was for better or for worse? - He couldn’t be sure yet.

His mom unlocked the door as everyone else stood behind her on the steps, his dad and Kevin holding all the luggage up with whispered curses and strained grunts. Patrick had wanted to help, but both of them had vehemently refused, calling for Megan to drag him away.

The door swung open and everyone hurried inside- between the cold air and the need to be at home again. Patrick looked around, before he was viciously attacked.

Well, maybe not viciously attacked.

Maybe more like 'pounced on by a- now, almost fully grown Steve'.
The dog had completely floored him, and he’d landed against the hard floor with a heavy thud. Megan had to pull Steve back by the collar, and Patricia had instantly helped Patrick up, checking him all over and making sure he was okay. Eventually, Steve’s whining was so pitiful that Patrick had steadied himself, preparing for the impact. The golden retriever had jumped at him, whining and barking desperately, nuzzling and cuddling into his owner. Patrick had to stumble to his knees eventually, arms still wrapped around the dog.

He’d missed Steve a lot.

Patrick tried not to cry, he’d been crying a lot recently, and it was really starting to hurt his eyes, but as he pulled away, the dog had put a paw on his shoulder and had stared at him with wide eyes and a whine.

Patrick had cried. A lot.

Face buried into the soft, warm fur and with his mother’s hand brushing through his own hair.

Patrick was home.

They’d ordered pizza that night, and had picked the shittiest Hallmark movies possible.

“Are you fucking serious?” Kevin motioned at the screen, as he took another savage bite of his piece. “I know,” Megan scoffed, “A garage sale-detective-Cinderella crossover, someone kill me now.” Everyone laughed, and Patrick grinned. Tearing movies to shreds was one of his favourite pastimes- if you didn’t include the mountains of board games.

Speaking of board games.

“Oh!” Kevin’s eyes widened, “We should play Cluedo tomorrow!” Patrick scoffed, and rolled his eyes jokingly. “Detective Janine Smith got you in the mood?” Kevin elbowed his brother in the ribs, “No, you dick.”

“-Kevin, language.”

“-Kevin, language.”

Their parents synchronized voices rang out, and everyone laughed again. “That was really scary.” Kevin’s eyes were wide, and his bottom lip was jutting out. Patrick only laughed harder, pinching the bridge of his nose. “What, did you-”

“Now that sounds like a really shitty movie.”

“David, language.”

“Sorry, Pat.”

Patrick fell asleep with his head on his mom’s shoulder, and with Kevin sprawled across him. He’d drifted asleep with a smile. He'd slept like a baby for the first time in months.

Patrick was home.

For good.
Megan had refused to leave her brother’s side for an entire week. She’d and Steve would both trail behind him anywhere he went, and Patrick was starting to feel like the ringleader of a really non-intimidating gang.

Patrick was sat on the couch in the living room, reading some old book that had been tucked away in the bookcase for ages, but that had looked interesting to him today.

He glanced up at Megan from his page, she looked pretty blank- staring straight ahead in thought, head resting on her hand, leaning back into the couch, and Steve’s head on her lap.

Patrick yawned a little, scratching an itch on his bandaged arm. He scratched a little too hard, because he yelped in sudden pain as he must have tugged on a stitch. Megan’s head shot up.

“Are you okay!!”

“-Megan, I’m-”

“Do you need painkillers?”

“I’m fi-”

“Do you want soup?”

“We don’t even have-”

“I can make soup, Patrick-”

“MEGAN.” He stared at her with insistent eyes that yelled at her to calm down. She swallowed and nodded, retaking her lazy position, and Patrick huffed in amusement. He read for a moment before pausing, looking up at her. “By the way, you really can’t.”

“What? Make soup?”

Patrick nodded.

“I totally can!”

“No, you really can’t.”

“Yes, I-”

“Do I have to remind you when you actually burnt chicken soup? Most of it was fucking water, I still don’t know how you did it.”

Megan grumbled, but smiled good-naturedly. “Well, it’s not my fault really.”

“It’s not?”
“No, you’re just a really bad cooking teacher.”

Patrick laughed quietly, eyes drifting back to his book.

A few moments of silence passed, and suddenly, Megan jumped to her feet, looking around desperately. Patrick jumped, and stared up at her with wide, questioning eyes and a furrowed brow.

“What-”

“I HAVE TO GO. RIGHT NOW.”

“O-Okay…?”

Patrick watched her grab her satchel, shrug her parka on, and then run outside. He tilted his head towards the window, and he watched her run through the metal gates speedily. He furrowed his brow suspiciously, but Steve nuzzled his head into his leg, and he smiled, scratching the dog behind the ears and going back to his book- putting Megan's shenanigans out of his mind.

Megan pelted down the street, footsteps fluid but heavy against the concrete. Her legs moved as fast as they could, and she glided and ducked past passers-by, making sure not to crash into them.

She was so stupid, how could she have forgotten?

Her frantic stare moved up from the pavement, and- there he was.

Pete.

Pete: black coat, black hair, tanned neck, and walking away from her. She exhaled heavily, and her eyes filled with determination as she made one last sprint before pouncing on the man. Megan heard a yelp, and Pete turned to face her- oh shit it wasn’t Pete.

“Andrew. Hi. I’m sorry. I was looking for Pete. It’s urgent.”

The boy looked somewhere between starstruck and confused, but he just gaped, shook his head and pointed over to The Cobra. She nodded with determination, moved to run again, but not before
clapping a hand on Andrew’s shoulder. “Sorry about that. You guys look alike.”

He shrugged with a smile and yelled after her as she sped away again. “It’s okay! He’s with Joe and Andy I think!”

Megan held out a thumbs up, but didn’t stop running.

The metal doors clanged against the walls as she burst them open, before jogging inside and pulling off her hood. The bartender’s eyes were wide and questioning but she only shook her head, stalking over to him and slamming her hands on the bar with an audible thud.

“Where’s Pete?”

The bartender pointed backstage, and Megan nodded with a furrowed brow and a pout. “Thank you.”

Bursting into Fall Out Boy’s room with a thud, she looked around wildly for a moment when-

“PETE.”

Pete stared at her in confusion, but she stepped forwards- ignoring Joe’s complaints of ‘not knocking’.

“I need to talk to you, right now.”

Pete scowled slightly, he’d been engrossed in a few interesting chords he’d been trying out. He sighed, “Look, Megan, I’m kinda busy, I’m sure Hillary or Andrew can-”

“It’s about Patrick, please-”

Pete’s eyes were wide now.

“What about him?”
With a loud rummage and a grunt, she pulled Patrick’s letter out of her bag, holding it up. Turns out Pete Wentz had scarcely quick reflexes. He pulled the letter out of Megan’s hand, before standing and shepherding her out, while she was protesting and fighting the whole way.

Pete shut the door with a slam, and leaned his back against it, hearing Megan thump her fists into it, yelling frantically, and kicking at the wood.

‘To Pete Wentz’

He opened the letter, and he read it.

Pete’s eyes were wide.

That was a suicide note- no doubt about it.

He found a lot, he’d written a lot, they were unmistakeable.

Everything inside Pete froze as he realized Patrick might be-

Patrick-

His breathing was laboured and Joe and Andy were about to move over to him, their faces covered with concern and worry for their friend. They hadn't even stood before Pete opened the door, ducked through and slammed it again.

He came face to face with Megan. She was red, panting and pissed-off from trying to break down the door, but Pete only sped past her- swiftly grabbing his bag and his coat.

Oh no. Fucking miscommunication, the bane of her life.

“Pete. PETE. PETE WAIT.”

Megan sped after him, legs begging her to just stop.

Pete started running too.
“PETE NO. PETE WAIT.”

The bartender jumped and shook his head with a daze as they both raced past him- only a blur of black and strawberry red.

Megan winced at the sudden bright sunlight, and shook her head, dazed for a moment. Why did The Cobra insist on having such dim lights? She turned her head- Pete was turning down an alleyway. Megan whined, and darted after him.

“PETE YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND.”

No, he never did fucking understand did he?

Pete needed to get to Glenview- to Patrick’s house, as much as he needed to breathe.

He was dead. Something inside him screamed that it was Pete's fault.

‘Fucking go, and don’t come back’

Pete had killed Patrick.

He'd obeyed Pete's order.

He hadn’t come back.

Pete decided to take the shortcut, ducking through dark alleys and past corner shops, and soon enough, all the grime started melting away into beauty and cleanliness instead. Wilmette had melted into Glenview, just like Pete had melted into Patrick. Their worlds had crossed over.

He could still hear Megan’s shouts, but they were faint. He didn’t know if it was because she was far away, or because the pulse thundering in his ears hindered his hearing. It could be both, he supposed.

Pete darted down the familiar road, skidding to a stop at the white, colonial, three-storey house, guarded by a white metal gate, and surrounded by flowery bushes.

He felt sick.

He felt like he was going to throw up.

Pete narrowed his eyes, and made a move to climb over the fence. Sure, it was daytime, the sidewalk was covered in passers-by, he might get arrested for breaking-and-entering- but he didn’t fucking care. He needed to know. And if Patrick was dead, he had to see him one last time. He’d fucking kill Patrick’s parents if they didn’t let him see Patrick, he didn’t fucking care anymore.

Suddenly, he toppled to the ground, feeling a weight in his side push him over instantly. He groaned, and started struggling, he blinked his eyes open to see- Megan.
She’d managed to keep up through the alleys?

She had potential.

Megan struggled to pin Pete down, he just had to fucking stay still, he just had to listen, he didn’t understand. She managed to pin him onto his back, straddling him awkwardly and fighting his hands and arms down into the concrete.

The scene was getting odd, horrified stares from neighbours and from people who knew her. She imagined what gossip would be spread at church. ‘Megan Stumph was fucking a guy in the middle of the street’? ‘Megan Stumph had a fight with a drug dealer’? ‘Megan Stumph murdered someone in broad daylight’?

She really didn’t care anymore. She welcomed them. She’d find them hilarious on Sunday.

“LET ME GO MEGAN.”

“NO PETE JUST FUCKING WAIT YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND-”

“HE’S DEAD WHAT IS THERE TO UNDERSTAND?”

Pete was sobbing now, he couldn’t control it. He’d wanted to sob since Patrick had left, but he’d tried to be strong.

“-He’s dead.” Pete whimpered again, voice losing its volume and Pete losing his conviction.

Megan smiled, she was teary too. She shook her head, and from her lips came the most beautiful words Pete had ever heard.

“Patrick’s alive.”

Pete felt everything inside him stop for a beat, before it all returned to its usual rhythm- everything was faster, every cell in his body was thrumming with hope and determination.

“Megan, what is going on?”

Both Megan and Pete looked up. Patricia was stood at the metal gate, eyes wide at the clear view she had of the scuffle in front of her. Pete looked up at Megan again and growled in a low voice. “Where is he?”
“Inside-”

“Are you talking about Patrick?”

Both Megan and Pete tried not to roll their eyes and looked up again, before responding with a synchronized, “Yeah.”

“Oh, he, uh- he went to the park.”

“When?” Pete’s head lifted from the ground fully, eyes wide and hopeful. Patricia assessed him for a moment. She assumed this was 'Pete'. She held back a small smile. He seemed nice.

“Just a few minutes ago, dear.”

Pete went to shove Megan off of him, but she jumped away just in time. He darted away- if he hadn’t taken the shortcut he would have seen Patrick, he felt so stupid.

Megan grinned, watching him dart away, she cupped her hands around her mouth and did her best southern drawl.

“Run Forrest, run!”

A “Fuck you!” laced with hopeful laughter was Pete's faint response, and she giggled turning towards the house and- oh, shit- Face to face with her mom.

Megan grimaced, before grinning nervously.

“I can explain.”
Patrick swung backwards and forwards lightly, tiptoes of his sneakers scraping the dirt slightly, and head resting against the swing’s chain. It was frosty today, cold nipped at his nose and cheeks, making them cherry red. He sniffed, and smiled sadly, trying to hold back the tears pricking at his eyes. Patrick stared out at the park, beautiful and glittering all over in the sunlight- and he was glad he was alive.

Suddenly, his head snapped towards the sound of a squeaky gate opening, and clanging against its hinges.

It was Pete.

Patrick felt everything inside him stop, before he exhaled shakily, noting the way his breath steamed in the air.

Pete looked around frantically for a second before his gaze snapped to a stop on Patrick.

Neither moved.

They stood there, almost frozen by the frost, just staring at each other.

Patrick broke first.

He jumped to his feet from the swing, wincing at the way it slammed into the backs of his knees, before stumbling towards Pete. He’d suddenly lost competent use of his legs, but Pete was on him in a second, closing the distance between them in a heartbeat.

Pete wound his arms around Patrick like a vice, sobbing desperately and painfully into his neck. Patrick felt a stab of guilt right through his heart, and he pulled Pete impossibly closer, arms winding around his neck- back where they belonged.

Patrick’s face was buried in Pete’s shoulder, he was taller, after all, not by much but still harder to reach.
They stood there, sobbing into each other, arms wrapped around each other, and everything felt complete, as though it were meant to be.

Patrick found the heart to pull away after a long while, his hands moved to Pete’s cheeks, band-aid covered fingertips drifting down them. Pete just stared into his eyes, that burning gaze filled with so much, so many swimming, twisting emotions. Joy, guilt, hope, remorse, fear, love, sadness, adoration, desperation- all buzzing around in Pete’s head and chest like a nest of hornets.

Pete swiftly moved his hands to Patrick’s head, fingers wrapping around the back, sliding through his hair, and thumbs caressing the skin beside Patrick’s ears. He slotted his lips against Patrick’s, and they both saw white. Patrick felt sobs wracking his chest again, and Pete made a move to pull away, but the boy stopped him, gripping his black hair with his tired, beaten hands.

Their lips moved tenderly, carefully, and lovingly, and Pete kissed Patrick as though he were made of glass. Patrick’s tongue flicked at the seam between them, coaxing an involuntary whine from Pete, and he pulled away, hands still firm on Patrick. Patrick's hands moved over Pete's, thumbs rubbing over the man's knuckles.

Between the pants, hiccups and sobs, Pete managed to speak.

“I love you.”

Patrick sobbed again, although a smile painted his face. He trailed his hands down Pete’s neck, then they rested on his chest, and he looked into the whiskey-brown eyes, smiling fondly. “I love you too.”

They both laughed sadly, breathlessly and heads fell back onto shoulders as they embraced again.

Pete tightened his arms and swayed them slightly, making Patrick laugh into his shoulder.

Pete sniffed, pressed a light kiss to Patrick’s neck and settled next to his ear. “I’m sorry. For everything.”

Patrick nodded and angled his head up to Pete’s ear, “I’m sorry too. I’m such an asshole.” Pete laughed but shook his head, resuming the light, feathery kisses on the pale neck that made Patrick sigh under him. Pete felt worry clench his heart as he noticed how much smaller Patrick was in his arms, he exhaled shakily, pressing one last kiss to the base of the boy’s neck, before he felt violent, involuntary sobs in his chest again. Patrick tried to comfort him, one hand carding softly through his hair, and the other tracing small circles on his back.

“I-I t-thought I- I thought I killed you.”
The sobs grew loud and violent again, and Patrick froze at the words. He exhaled shakily, pressing his cheek to the crown of Pete’s head. “You didn’t, please.”

“I told you to never c-come back.” Pete sobbed into his neck again, whimpering and hiccuping in the intervals. “Wh-What if you hadn’t co-come back, Patrick? Wh-What if you h-had d-died-?” Patrick shut his eyes and opened his mouth to answer, to calm him down, but the miserable confession continued.

“Th-That would have been the last thing I ever said to you. My last w-words to you would have been-” He shuddered and Patrick tensed before the words even came.

“F-Fucking go, and don’t come b-back.” Pete shuddered at the words, harder this time, and his hands moved to grip Patrick’s arms as his face slipped into the boy’s collarbone instead, knees weak. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry-”

“Pete.”

Patrick cupped Pete’s red, miserable, dishevelled face in his hands. He looked like an angel to Pete. “I’m sorry too. I love you, Pete. I love you so much.” Patrick was proud of himself for staying so collected, he really didn’t know where it was coming from. When he’d imagined, and day-dreamed this scenario in his first few weeks in New York, he’d usually picture this the other way around; He’d be in Pete’s place- a sobbing wreck, slipping to the ground and hiccuping along with every cry, and Pete would be in his place- calm, collected, smiling, and the voice of reason.

Pete managed to straighten up, and he kissed Patrick again. The fireworks exploded behind Patrick’s eyelids again, and he smiled, fingertips trailing over the stubbled cheeks. Pete hadn’t had stubble before. Patrick hoped Pete had been okay while he was gone.

Another long, tight, warm embrace, and Pete pressed a kiss to Patrick’s forehead, taking his hand and leading him away from the park.

Patrick watched Pete fiddle with his keys, before slotting the right one in and twisting- the door unlocked with a pleasant click.

Patrick had only ever seen Pete’s new apartment once, but it had been brief, and in passing. He stepped inside, looking around. It was smaller than his old house, but nicer, and the atmosphere was calm, happy, and relaxed, rather than tense, dark and nerve-wracking.

Pete pulled him into his bedroom, and Patrick felt his heart swell with something between joy,
anticipation and desire. But, much to his surprise, Pete didn’t lock the door and press him against a wall- instead, he just shrugged his jacket off, kicked his shoes away and motioned for Patrick to do the same. Patrick was confused but obliged, and soon enough, things became clear.

Pete pulled him into his bed, and pulled the comforter over them snugly, huddled together under the warm cover. They were pressed together, legs tangled with each other's, faces inches apart on the same pillow, and there was only a small gap between their chests and stomachs, where their hands were linked together gently, fingers lacing together.

Patrick was glad he’d worn a sweater, he wasn’t sure Pete would react very well to the bandage. Pete flicked the tip of Patrick’s nose with his own, and the boy smiled, shifting slightly to press their lips together, Pete had to stop a moan rising in his throat.

They lay in silence, and Pete had unlinked one of his hands in favour of tracing light shapes on Patrick’s cheek and neck, and each touch made Patrick shudder in the best way.

He’d missed lying next to Pete.

“Seriously? Holy shit!”

After a long while of just enjoying each other's presence, the duo decided to enjoy each other's company instead.

“Yeah, I know! But, I mean, I see it. Ray’s a sweet guy.”

Patrick looked contemplative, before nodding softly with a grin. “Yeah, I think he’ll balance Mikey out pretty well.” His blue eyes flicked up to Pete’s with sudden mirth. “How’d Gerard react?”

Pete threw his head back, eyes crinkling with laughter.

God Patrick had missed that. The sound. The crinkles. Pete. He’d missed Pete.

“Oh my god, okay- When Mikey and Ray told everyone, they decided to kinda,” He bit his lip, trying to figure out how to word the situation. “Exclude, Gerard.”

“Oh shit.”

“Yeah, that's what I thought!”

“But why?”

Pete shrugged, and gave a reminiscent half-smile. “I dunno, I think they thought he’d freak out.”

“Well, they weren’t wrong I guess...” Pete laughed again, moving a hand to wipe his eyes with his sleeve. “Yeah, they judged it pretty well.”
“So what happened? How’d he find out?”

“Oh, yeah! Well-” Pete wiggled slightly, setting into his ‘story time’ voice.

“So, like, the distraction didn’t work and he shows up just as Mikey says ‘Me and Ray are together’, and oh. My. God.” Pete pressed his face into the pillow laughing again, and Patrick couldn’t help but laugh at the sight, and at the story, as he pictured the scene. Pete had a way of telling stories that just made them a hundred times better.

“Gerard loses it, and he fuckin’, chases Ray across half of Wilmette.”

“Holy shit, did he catch him?”

Pete nodded, doing his best Gerard impression. “Pins him against a wall and says ‘If you ever hurt my little brother, I’ll cut your balls off’.” Patrick choked on his laughter, coughing and pressing his face into the pillow with a grin.

God he’d missed Pete’s stories. The ‘like’s, ‘fuckin’s and ‘so’s that he threaded through every tale. He’d missed Pete laughing at his own awful imitations. He’d missed Pete so fucking much.

The room was filled with little sighs and quiet moans. Pete’s face was buried in his neck, touches soft and tender. Patrick’s confidence had skyrocketed since his ordeal, and he tugged off Pete’s shirt with no hesitation. He’d ran his fingers down the familiar ridges and planes. They were the same, yet different. Patrick couldn’t describe it, but he supposed age, and stress, changes people.

Soon enough, Pete was free from all his clothes, and as he fervently kissed Patrick’s mouth- that soft, pink mouth he’d missed so goddamn much, he became painfully aware that Patrick was still clothed.

Patrick was nervous about Pete’s reaction as his sweater and shirt left his body, and were pushed to the side. Patrick hadn’t gained much weight back, and he still kind of looked like a skeleton covered in skin. Every bone, every joint, every tendon was visible.

Pete had stared. Eyes wide, jaw slack, and breathing shaky. He looked up at Patrick. Eyes teary, jaw clenched, and breathing deeply.

“I’m sorry, I know it’s gross-”

Pete’s mouth was on his again, and Patrick’s words died as Pete’s tongue flicked against his own.

Pete didn’t care. Patrick was beautiful. He always had been, always would be. It had worried him though, and he made a note to get to the bottom of it.

Patrick’s toes curled, shivers ran up his spine, and his mouth opened in steady, desperate moans.
Pete’s hips rolled into his own, carefully, slowly. Pete was still cautious. He didn’t want to hurt Patrick. Not at all.

Patrick could guess why Pete was treating him like glass—between the pale skin and the bones, he certainly looked like glass anyway. He also knew Pete wanted to take his time, to make it last.

He appreciated the thought, but the knot in his stomach was getting unbearable.

Using any strength he could muster, Patrick flipped them over, pulled Pete up to sit. Straddling his lap, and burying his face into Pete’s neck with a heavy groan as his hips moved downwards. Patrick set a faster pace, hips rolling deeply and quickly. He understood Pete had wanted it to last, but they had their whole lives to do this now.

Patrick had settled his face inches from Pete’s, eyes burning into each other’s the whole time, and as Patrick bit his lip and groaned when he felt Pete’s grip on his hips becoming bruising, Pete slotted their mouths together. Patrick could feel Pete’s stubble scraping his skin, in the best way possible. He’d have to start hiding Pete’s razors.

The sound of skin slapping against skin echoed in Patrick’s ears, and he tilted his head backwards, hands running through Pete’s hair, fingers grabbing at his shoulders roughly. Pete pressed sloppy kisses to his exposed Adam’s apple, nipping, lapping and sucking on the skin there, spurred on by Patrick’s moans. Patrick lamented not being able to scratch. His left fingertips were still covered with band aids. Pete began thrusting upwards roughly, deeply, while guiding Patrick’s hips down with a bruising grip, and Patrick’s moans rang through the room.

Pete had turned into a moaning, panting and whining mess, and Patrick’s groans and mewls against his ear didn’t help his self-control— at all. He was impressed at how calm he’d remained, managing to restrain himself after five months of not even seeing Patrick. He should get a medal. Not just shoving Patrick face down into the mattress had been a gigantic feat.

They’d collapsed against each other, gasping and shaking with the aftershocks. There were mumbled ‘I love you’s against skin, and Patrick’s teeth had left a deep, purple bite mark on Pete’s shoulder. Pete’s fingers had left bruises all over Patrick’s legs, arms, hips, ribs. Patrick didn’t care, he was glad about it. He’d really missed this. He’d missed the glorious sounds that came from Pete’s mouth. He’d missed the feeling of Pete buried inside him. He’d missed the bruises. He’d missed the warmth. He’d missed Pete.

“I haven’t looked at it yet.”

They lay together under the comforter again, the sweat had dried and their hands were linked. Patrick was staring down at his bandaged arm. Pete had dried tear streaks on his cheeks. His eyes were red and they stung.

Pete had sobbed, and he’d felt stupid about it too. Patrick was the one supposed to be crying, he was the one who had suffered, Pete hadn’t even known about it—what right did he have to cry? But Patrick had embraced him, pulled him into his chest and had let him cry, and the redhead had assured him that he definitely wasn’t stupid for it. Patrick assured him he had a right to his feelings.

They’d shared kisses, murmured promises and sweet nothings, all cuddled together under covers, in the warm bed. Patrick could feel the springs digging into his ribs, he didn’t mind it though, and he only hoped it wouldn’t slowly injure Pete’s spine over time.

“Haven’t you had to like, clean it...?”

Patrick nodded, “Yeah, but my mom or dad do that, I just look away.” Pete grinned, but there was a sadness behind it. “Squeamish?” Patrick scoffed jokingly, rolling his wide eyes. “At metal staples in my flesh, uh- yeah?”

Pete looked horrified. “Staples?”

Patrick spluttered a laugh, wheezing and punching the man’s shoulder. “It’s just suture.”

“What the fuck is that?”

Patrick laughed again at Pete’s even more horrified face. “It’s just string, you idiot.”

Pete looked unamused for a moment before giving into his laughter. Pete laughed, eyes squinting closed, and Patrick joined him again wholeheartedly.

After the laughter faded away, Patrick had worried his bottom lip between his teeth, staring at the band-aids on his fingers. “...I guess I can start with these...Work up to the big one, right?”

Pete furrowed his brow, catching Patrick’s uninjured wrist softly. “Patrick...are you sure? You don’t have to—you shouldn’t feel forced, or...”

Pete’s words trailed away at Patrick’s amused and stern stare. “They need air, Pete, otherwise they’ll just be pale, wrinkly and gross forever.”

Patrick started picking at the band-aids, pulling the seams apart and watching the glue pull into thin, white strands.

“I don’t wanna look like fucking— I dunno, Gollum, or something.” Pete laughed quietly, but the concern remained.

His jaw had dropped as soon as the fingertips were revealed. Pete felt his heart jolt painfully. They were cracked, dark red and black with dried blood, blood clots were dotted around the edges of the cuts, desperately trying to heal them.

Pete had left.

Pete had returned with a washcloth and a bowl of water. Patrick had cleaned them, Pete was wincing every time he dabbed them, but Patrick was unreactive.

“Doesn’t it hurt?” Pete’s brow was furrowed in concern, and Patrick only smiled calmly and shook his head. “I got used to it.”
Pete’s heart ached.
He’d kissed the fingertips, he’d kissed the forearm, and he’d cried again.

“Are you sure?”

Patrick rolled his eyes with a smile, and pecked his boyfriend’s lips, undoing the seam of the thick, white bandage. His throat constricted at the sight.

Neat stitches across impossibly pale, damp skin. The seam of the cut was visible, red and angry. It had been deep. Patrick was lucky to be alive.

Pete had shuddered at the sight, but he couldn’t move his eyes away.

“...Does it hurt?”

Patrick smirked, remembering Pete’s answer when he’d asked the same question- back when Pete lay in bed, swollen and bruised. It had only been last year, but it felt a lifetime ago. He grinned, doing his best ‘Pete Wentz’ imitation- that was actually pretty solid.

“‘What does it look like, dude? Look at me, I’m hideous.’”

He burst into laughter at Pete’s deadpan glare, but the man couldn’t help his lips twitching upwards at the boy’s raucous laughter.

“You’ve got a...fantastic memory, Trick.”

Patrick hummed happily and pressed his lips to Pete’s, pulling back inches with a sly grin, and looking up at Pete from under his eyelashes. “Hmm, yeah- My fantastic memory is gonna be the bane of your fucking life.”

Pete laughed loudly, wrapping his arms around Patrick and pulling him down so that the redhead was smiling down at him. Pete kissed his nose, then pecked his mouth.

“Wouldn’t have it any other way, lunchbox.”

Patrick groaned at the nickname.
They collapsed again, writhing, panting, and sweating. Bodies pressed together and chests heaving, panting against each other’s ears. Pete kissed Patrick sweetly, before moving his lips over a red-flushed ear.


Patrick leaned into the pleading whisper, eyes falling shut as he still trembled from aftershocks. The convincing words continued in his ear, low and soft.

“We can get serious with the band, we’ll be fucking rich I know we will. You’re amazing, ‘Trick. We’ll just drive, buy a van and just fuckin’ drive. I’ll leave Hillary and Andrew with Dallon, or Ray, or whoever has their own house. We’ll be fine. We’ll be so happy-”

“Yes.”

Pete shuddered, his words died in his throat.

He couldn’t believe his ears.

Pete moved his head, staring down at the redhead, jaw slack, eyes wide, mouth open.

Patrick smiled up at him. Fondly, lovingly, full of adoration.

The blue eyes were watery, trusting and truthful.

The pale skin was flushed red-pink, making his faint freckles stand out against the mist of color.

Pete kissed Patrick. Sweetly, lovingly, desperately.

He wasn’t going to let Patrick go again.
They were going to be together. For as long as they lived.

Patrick was easing into sleep, spooned into Pete’s chest. Pete’s arm was wrapped around him, and his oddly always-cold skin pressed against him. Patrick felt the soft rise and fall of Pete’s chest against his cheek, and he felt Pete inhaling and exhaling, cheek pressed against his neck, just below his ear.

His hand was woven into Pete’s, and he smiled softly remembering the soft kisses Pete had placed to his maimed fingertips, and to his injured arm. They’d been so soft. They hadn’t hurt at all. Full of love, admiration, and tenderness.

Patrick had fallen in love with Pete all over again, in the space of six hours.

As Patrick shut his eyes, feeling Pete all around him and warm and cozy under the soft comforter, Patrick felt Pete shift slightly. His face nuzzled into the pale, slender neck for a second, before moving up over his ear. Pete breathed for a second, before speaking softly and honestly.

“I’m gonna marry you one day.”

Patrick sat on the bench outside his house, shuffling his sneakers. It was pouring rain, and Patrick kept his hood up, bracing against the heavy, icy raindrops and shivering at the wind. He heard rumbles of distant thunder, and he smiled, looking up at the dark, cloudy sky, and noticing a few stubborn, bright stars that insisted on shining through.
He looked down at his rucksacks, clamped between his legs. He had three, he’d borrowed one from Megan. One held clothes, one held valuables, and the other held supplies. Patrick wished he could have brought Steve, he wished that the dog was still small enough to fit in a bag.

Patrick coughed, pressing a fist to his mouth. He sighed heavily, head bowing and bracing against the wind, when a van drove up in front of him. Patrick’s head snapped up and he smiled, as he watched the door slide open and Pete grinned at him from the inside.

Pete jumped out, gracefully avoiding the flooding stream of water, despite Patrick’s protests, and he’d quickly grabbed Patrick’s luggage, carefully placing them inside the van. Patrick clambered in with a hand from Pete, and he grinned as the door slammed behind them. Joe and Andy grinned and greeted him from the front seats, and Patrick hugged them both from behind as best he could.

Andy was driving, as he was the only other adult. He glanced back, making sure Patrick and Pete were sat down, before he accelerated again.

“By the way, assholes-” Joe started, glaring dramatically at his friends. “I’m seventeen now, so no more kid jokes.” Pete bit back a laugh, and grinned at Joe, patting him on the shoulder. “Now, now, don’t get mad.” He grinned at Joe like a Cheshire cat. “We’ll stop at Chuck-E-Cheese’s on the way, how about that?”

Laughter rang through the van, even Joe’s.

Patrick watched Glenview disappear through the window, smiling contently. And eventually, a sign on the highway let them know that they had left Illinois.

He felt a hand tangle with his, he turned and saw Pete beaming at him, chest puffed up with pure joy. Patrick smiled back, squeezing his hand. They were going to be happy.

So fucking happy.

Patrick sat on the hood of the van, gazing out at the sunrise. It was pink, orange and golden, and the clouds were lined with coloured light. Blue sky would peek through sometimes, when the clouds parted and shifted in just the right way. Patrick breathed in fresh air, and exhaled through his mouth along with a happy sigh. The place was deserted, nothing but a dirt road on the far outskirts of the highway. It was blissfully quiet. They'd been driving for three days, and pulled over to sleep in random places at night just to make sure no one crashed. Andy and Pete would take turns driving, but the van always rang with chattering, laughter and music from the radio. Patrick had never been happier.
He’d left his parents a note. Nothing somber, nothing worrying, and it had been short.

He told them he was going to be happy. That he was sorry if he had disappointed them, and that he was sorry for leaving the violin- he didn’t want to risk damaging it, and there was no place for it where he was going. He told them to be happy. To spend time with Kevin and Megan- he assured them that they were great kids, that deserved the world. He hadn’t written it down, but he hoped Patrick’s experience would teach them something. Teach them to let their children find their own way- he had written that part down. He’d told them he loved them, and he’d thanked them for everything. He’d signed off with his full name, and he’d left it on the pillow of his neatly made bed.

Patrick felt the hood shift under him, feeling it bounce slightly, and he turned to see that Pete had joined him.

The man was looking out at the sunrise, and Patrick was sure he’d never looked more beautiful. Wide, happy eyes, lips parted slightly in awe, nose breathing steadily, posture relaxed, hands buried in his pockets, and strands of dark hair moving and ruffling under the morning breeze.

Pete turned away from the sunrise to look at Patrick- he was much more beautiful, and he was sure Patrick had read his mind, because the redhead had huffed in amusement and turned back to the view.

Just in case Patrick hadn’t read his mind, he decided to make his thoughts known anyway.

“You’re a lot prettier than the sunrise.”

Patrick scoffed fondly, shaking in silent mirth. His eyes flicked over to Pete’s, and a half-smile was present on his features. Patrick was so fucking beautiful, and the dim, coloured light only made him more angelic. Pete was pretty sure he could see a halo around his rumpled strawberry-blond hair.

“How long d’you think it’ll take Joe and Andy to figure us out?”

Pete laughed, tipping his head back and looking up at the sky. He grinned, and his gaze snapped back down to Patrick. “I dunno...” He looked mischievous. “Let’s make a bet.”

Patrick grinned, and raised his eyebrows, “Go on.”

“I bet that...they’ll figure it out in a month.”

Patrick looked thoughtful, and his head tilted from side to side with concentration, Pete found it unbearably adorable.

“...I think three.”

“Three? You have that little faith?”

Patrick laughed sharply. “Oh come on, give me a break- they’re oblivious.”
Pete grinned. “Okay, ten dollars.” Patrick nodded and held out a hand for Pete to shake.

Pete moved to spit in his hand, and he laughed wildly when Patrick flinched his hand away with a disgusted scowl.

“That is fucking disgusting, don’t you dare.”

“You’re supposed to spit though.”

“No, no, you are not.”

“Yes you are! And besides,” Pete wiggled his eyebrows and grinned suggestively. “You’ve had worse stuff on your hands before.” Patrick punched him in the shoulder, and Pete collapsed into giggles, before yelping as he slipped off the hood and onto the dirt ground with a loud thud.

Patrick was laughing now, loud and unbridled, trying to check if Pete was okay through the desperate hiccups and giggles. Pete scowled, scrunching his face up and jutting his bottom lip out childishly. He jumped to his feet with a groan and retook his place on the hood beside Patrick.

He held out a hand, and Patrick grasped it.

“Also,” Pete began, “If they don’t figure us out after three months, we up the gay shit.”

Patrick laughed, and nodded. “How much do we ‘up it’?”

Pete shrugged and looked thoughtful. “Every month, until they figure it out.”

Patrick nodded, and they shook on it, both laughing and managing to stutter out ‘deal’, through their hiccuping.

Pete and Patrick stared out at the sunrise again, it was clearing away now, and soon, only a blue sky with strains of white, cottony clouds would be left behind.

Pete wrapped an arm around Patrick’s shoulder, and the boy nuzzled into it with a content hum.

There was a moment of blissful silence before Pete’s voice shattered it all.

“Y’know lunchbox,” He tilted his head up, resting his chin on Patrick’s hair. “If you don’t spit, you should really use blood.”

He felt Patrick tense and then groan exasperatedly. Pete laughed silently, shaking as he heard the boy huff, before he sighed dramatically.
“What have I gotten myself into?”

Pete laughed loudly this time, eyes crinkling shut, and he felt Patrick laugh too, his smaller frame shook with loud laughter.

Pete sighed dramatically too, leaning back a little and grinning.

“I love you Patrick.”

“I love you too Pete.”

"Forever?"

There was a quiet laugh, and Pete grinned.

"Forever."

Chapter End Notes

Just to let you guys know, this isn't the end. There's one more chapter after this!
Patrick blinked his eyes open slowly, squinting at the beam of light that hit him straight in the face. He groaned and buried his face in his arm, groaning at the blissful darkness. His voice was muffled against his skin.

“Pete?”

He heard a whine behind him, and he turned his head to see Pete, face scrunched up and scowling at the light. “You were supposed to fix the blinds, you asshole.”

Pete made a small noise of indignation, before burying his face in Patrick’s shoulder again. Patrick smiled fondly and stifled a sigh, awkwardly shifting to turn his whole body away from the offending sunbeam.

He rubbed at his eyes for a moment, before gazing at the man in front of him.

Pete was still scowling, face pressed into the mattress, and whining periodically at the sleep that eluded him.

Patrick smiled.

He reached out a hand and ran it through Pete’s dark hair, his smile broadening at the sight of the golden, shiny ring on his pale finger, glinting in the sunlight. He heard Pete moan appreciatively, and he grinned, huffing in amusement.

Pete had kept his promise. He’d married Patrick.

They’d been married for five whole years, and their lives had changed in ways Patrick would never have believed possible.

The band had worked.

It had really worked.

Fall Out Boy had produced six studio albums, and they were currently finishing up to release no.7 - M A N I A.

They were in their thirties now, and they’d changed so much from the two teenagers they’d once been. They were kinder, had more empathy, and Patrick had even been cutting back on the swearing- well, he’d been trying to anyway. Training yourself to yell ‘holy smokes’ instead of ‘holy shit’ when you stubbed your toe was really hard

Patrick had had to actually drop the ‘h’ from Stumph, to end the confusion about pronunciation during interviews or award ceremonies. He didn't mind too much.
Pete had kept his promise about the band too. They were rich. They were successful. They were famous.

He played all around the world in a band with his three best friends.

Patrick could still hardly believe it.

It hadn’t all been smooth sailing, though.

There had been a hiatus- 2010, and it had been a pretty shitty time for Patrick.

He’d tried to see it as a good thing, and forced himself the make it into a good thing. He’d tried stuff on his own, he’d made a separate name for himself, away from Fall Out Boy- but fuck, he’d missed Pete.

Many things led to the break, but Patrick was sure one contributing factor was the pretty nasty arguments Pete and Patrick had had in the months running up to the temporary split. He didn’t even remember what the first one was about anymore- something about Patrick being a prissy little bitch in the recording studio, but- well, it had almost ruined everything.

Another big fight had happened after Pete’s suicide attempt.

Best Buy parking lot, Ativan overdose.

He’d called Patrick, but his phone had been turned off.

That still hurt Patrick every time he thought about it.

He’d always wondered what Pete would have said to him if he’d picked up.

Would he have told Patrick he loved him? Would he have apologized for everything? Or would he have just broken down? Beg for help? Die on the line?

Patrick had to admit it haunted him a little.

The hospital had called him, Patrick had rushed there immediately.

Joe and Andy had met him there.

Pete had his stomach pumped and he looked so tired. Patrick knew what it was like to be that tired.

He’d tried to empathise, to hide his anger- but it turns out he reacted to grief the same way as Megan did.

He was doing well though, keeping a straight face, swallowing the anger, ignoring the lump lodged in his throat.

Then Pete had made a stupid joke about trying again, and getting it right next time.

He’d punched Pete in the face.

They’d screamed at each other, yelled, insulted, confessed, it had been so loud five doctors had rushed in.

He’d left the hospital.
...But they hadn’t come through hard times just to give up at the first few fights.

Pete had shown up at his house in 2012, looking dishevelled, tired, and remorseful. The moment Patrick had let him inside, Pete had practically collapsed into him, pleading with him. Pleading for things to go back to the way they were.

Patrick had agreed.

Pete had asked Patrick to marry him.

Patrick had cried, and Patrick had said yes.

They’d spent the rest of the hiatus together, hidden away and trying to elude their fans and the media. And when they had come back, they had come back strong.

Save Rock And Roll. And everything had changed again.

Pete had also created a label, and he’d offered to sign all the bands at The Cobra- they'd all accepted obviously, and, just as Patrick had suspected the first time he heard them play- they had been way too good for that dive bar, and with the chance Pete had given them, and a little funding- they’d skyrocketed in fame, and wealth.

Andy and Joe hadn't noticed their relationship for so long- neither Pete nor Patrick had won the bet they’d made in the parking lot on that beautiful morning. Pete had been determined to 'up the gay shit', and he'd often kiss Patrick on stage, he’d write songs that were obviously about him, he’d even confess to having crushes on him in interviews- the other two band members hadn't noticed. Patrick had honestly been concerned about their mental capacities, when Pete and Patrick had announced their engagement to their friends- Andy and Joe hadn't even believed it, they had been convinced it was a prank, and only truly believed it when they had watched Pete and Patrick take their vows, and slide golden rings onto each other's fingers. They were also amazed at themselves for being so oblivious.

Joe had gotten married too, he'd married a woman called Marie, and they had a daughter, Ruby, together. His wife and daughter made Joe really happy, and Patrick was glad his friend had found someone, and that they'd built such a strong family together. Andy, however, had remained stubbornly single- and that had become the new running joke among the four friends.

The only thing that saddened Patrick a little was Panic! At The Disco’s...situation. Over several years, all the band members had left, leaving Brendon the sole member, and only Dallon would return to play for him on his tours. Patrick wasn’t sure why it had happened, but he admired Brendon in a way- he kept making music, he didn’t let anything stop him, and he was good at it.

Brendon and Sarah had also gotten married, everyone had been invited to the wedding- Although, Patrick was never completely sure if Brendon’s feelings for Ryan had ever faded.

Ashley had gone on to become a singer, using her old nickname ‘Halsey’, as her stage name. She rose to fame and success too, and Patrick was immensely proud of her.

Gerard and Frank got married too- both refused to change their last names, however, and they had a daughter- Bandit. Although their band had broken up after a few years, they’d remained close. Ray and Mikey were still together, not married yet, and Patrick wasn’t sure they had any intention too- but they were happy together, and Patrick supposed that was all that really mattered.
Tyler and Josh were still going strong, both musically and in their relationship. They had won a Grammy, made amazing albums, and were amazingly successful. They had come on tour with Fall Out Boy, along with Panic! At The Disco, and it had been like old times. They had pranked each other during each other's shows, and there were many early mornings of getting high and eating way too much fast food. It had been great.

Everyone had stayed close, everyone was in contact, and the group chat was still firmly active in everyone’s phones- although Brendon insisted on changing the name constantly. The things he'd come up with were fucking hilarious, Patrick had to admit it. Currently, the chat was called 'The Plastics'.

Patrick looked up at his arm- the...incident, arm. His dad was right, it had left a pretty wicked scar.

He'd always tried to hide it at first, wearing hoodies, and sweaters- even in the dead of summer. Then, one day, he'd been taking out the trash and some, lone paparazzi had snapped a picture of him- it had been pretty unflattering; He'd just rolled out of bed and it really showed. Messy hair, dark eye bags, oversized t-shirt and Batman pajama pants, along with a giant scar on his arm- And that had been the end of that little secret.

Magazines had ran the picture and milked it for all it was worth. Some people made fun of it, some people loved him for it even more- they felt he could relate to them. And he guessed he could.

Their family had gotten bigger over the years. They’d had kids. And no, it hadn’t been some weird 'miracle of nature’ type situation, it had just involved three surrogates, and science.

They had three kids. The eldest and middle were Pete’s, and the youngest was Patrick’s- Although, the two youngest were only half a year apart.

Three boys: Bronx, Saint, and Declan.

Bronx and Saint were spitting images of their father already, the only exception being Bronx’s blonde hair. They had the same Wentz grins, the same crinkles in the corners of their eyes, and they were already trying to copy their father's traits- much to Pete's pride and Patrick's dismay.

Declan was identical to Patrick too, Pete had been shocked at first. He'd held the newborn Declan for the first time, and he'd just stared, completely amazed. ‘I mean, dude- Newborn babies usually just look like, I dunno- aliens. But- but holy shit, Trick. That's literally your face. That's so crazy.’

Oddly enough though, Declan had Pete’s smile. Patrick was pretty sure it was just his mind playing tricks on him, but- goddamn it was identical. He’d ended up deciding that he’d just picked it up from his dad and his brothers.

Patrick had let Pete name the eldest two whatever he wanted- although, he had drawn the line at his suggestions of 'Megatron' and 'Rhaegar'.

Patrick had been sly when naming his son, he'd subtly named him after one of his favourite artists, Declan Patrick MacManus- aka Elvis Costello.

...and Pete had been oblivious. Of course he had. But then again, Pete was the most oblivious human
being on earth...maybe third only to Joe and Andy.

On the subject of his favorite artists, as soon as they'd made money- Pete had taken up old habits again, and had started giving Patrick white, plastic bags, each one containing a CD he'd bought once before. Patrick had soon regained his collection, and it only grew larger as Pete still brought him bags every now and then. Always grinning with mirth, eyes crinkled fondly, with a word of: 'Enjoy it, Trick.'

Patrick grinned, and huffed at the memory, his mind fuzzy with reminiscing. He moved his hand away from Pete's hair, and moved it to his hand instead, linking their fingers together. He grinned again when he felt Pete's hand squeeze his own.

After a few years, and a few albums, Patrick had gone home to Illinois, to Glenview- just to visit. He'd seen his parents, his brother and sister- who were studying subjects of their own choosing at the University of Chicago. Patrick had been overjoyed his parents had learned their lessons. And, he'd seen Steve too, he was still alive but was very old, white, silvery hairs smattered all through his golden fur.

He'd seen his family many times since. Visiting them was nice.

Patrick had made the trip after he'd gotten married, and at his mother's insistence- he'd brought Pete.

David and Patricia had met their son-in-law properly for the first time. Megan was ecstatic that her 'future-brother-in-law' had become her 'actual-brother-in-law', and Kevin had just been amazed by the amount of tattoos he had, and to gain some parental approval, Pete had dissuaded him from ever wanting one with a lot of horror stories about the 'unbearable' pain.

Patrick had helped his mom wash the dishes, and she'd hugged him tightly. She'd told him she was proud, very proud, and that she hoped they had a long happy marriage.

His dad had said the same, but he'd said it to Pete, during in the typical, intimidating, ‘so, you married my daughter’ conversation.

Only, much to Patrick's surprise, Pete had left with a smile on his face, and he'd told Patrick what his dad had said. It was something along the lines of: be happy together, treat my son well, and, if you do that, you'll always be welcome in this house. He'd also apologized for their terrible- actual, first meeting. Patrick had been so relieved, if his husband and his parents got along, it would make his life a hell of a lot easier.

The other notable visit was a few weeks after Declan had been born. They'd started visiting frequently, and Patrick's family loved their kids.

Patricia had been pacing back and forth, bouncing Declan in her arms, and Megan was playing peek-a-boo with a truly amazed Saint, while Kevin and Pete distracted Bronx outside with a soccer ball.

David had taken Patrick upstairs to his study, and he'd shown him the violin. His dad had cleaned it,
taken care of it, and while he knew it held a lot of bad memories, he felt as though he should offer it to Patrick- it belonged to him by right, after all.

Patrick had stared, and thought about it. Sure, it had caused him pain, and violins still made him wince, but- but it was his. It was his family’s, it was an heirloom, and he’d accepted it.

While in Chicago, they’d visited Pete’s family too. His parents were still a little hesitant at first, and were not best pleased about the whole ‘gay marriage’ thing, but they had loved their grandchildren fiercely. And if Pete’s parents treated their children well, Patrick could stand and smile through all the passive aggressive insults.

They’d also gone to see Hillary and Andrew- living separately, with their own partners. At the very start of Fall Out Boy, Pete had marched back down to Illinois as soon as he’d had enough money, and he’d bought his brother and sister two apartments in the much better neighbourhood of Evanston- at Patrick’s suggestion.

Their trips their grandparents’ house had made their children beg their dads for a dog.

Steve was still kicking, but he was an elder now- he’d actually lived a pretty long life. The golden retriever was still so friendly that their children begged more after every visit.

As their kids' pleading got more insistent, Pete had started liking the idea more and more, and soon enough- Four children had been begging Patrick for a dog.

And goddamnit, he couldn't say no to one Wentz grin, let alone four. The odds had really been against him.

They’d bought a dog. They’d let the kids pick it, and they’d come back with a white, fluffy husky puppy. And Patrick, once again, had to admit, that puppies were really fucking cute.

To appease his husband a little, Pete had suggested the name ‘Bowie’, and the kids had loved it.

Their lives were perfect, and Patrick could scarcely believe he deserved it. Joy would constantly swell in his chest every time he looked at his family; At every tiny, adorable mannerism, at every loud laugh, at every grin- Patrick loved them all so much.

Pete turned his head, shifting his body slightly and he cracked one eye open to stare at Patrick. He groaned again, nuzzling into the mattress. Patrick laughed and rolled his eyes. He was pretty sure Patrick was supposed to be the lazy one.

Patrick leaned up, kissing Pete’s ear and huffing at the happy whine that came from his husband.

He kissed Pete’s neck, and the whine sounded a little different. Patrick only smirked, and kept pressing kisses to the sweet spot under Pete’s jaw, grazing it with his teeth and flicking his tongue over it, listening to the whines and watching Pete stir fully awake.
Suddenly, Patrick felt himself slammed down into the mattress, and he yelped slightly, as Pete stared down at him with a grin and joyful eyes. The redhead grinned up at him.

“Good morning, Mr. Wentz.”

Pete exhaled fondly, and his grin broadened in response.

“Good morning to you too, Mr. Wentz.”

Pete leaned down softly, nuzzling his face against Patrick’s neck and returning the favour. Patrick smiled, a hand carding through Pete’s hair, and holding back laughter at the way Pete’s stubble tickled his neck. “Very funny, Pete.”

The older man laughed, pulling down the hem of Patrick’s shirt with a finger, and moving to his mouth over the pale collarbone, making the redhead bite his lip. Pete looked up for a second, a bright half-grin on his face. “For what it’s worth, lunchbox, I still think ‘Patrick Wentz’ sounds better than ‘Patrick Stumph’.” Patrick laughed again, tipping his head back. “Of course you do, dear.”

Pete moved up to Patrick's face, pressing quick kisses to his stretched neck, just before slotting his lips against those plump pink ones- that still drove him insane after all this time. Not to mention the language skills. Or the lip bite. Or the singing voice. Or just- Patrick, in general.

Pete pulled back and smiled down at Patrick softly, pecking the tip of his nose, and rolling off of him, sighing dramatically and dropping his arms with a heavy thud. Pete gazed over at Patrick with an impish grin, and mischievous eyes.

“...Do we have to get up today?”

Patrick laughed, and sat up, stretching, before looking down at his ever-childish husband. “Yes, yes we do.”

Pete huffed, "That sucks."

Patrick leaned over to his husband, smiling lovingly at him. He slotted his lips against Pete's with a content hum, grinning at the older man's quiet moan. Pete sat up, wrapping his arms around Patrick's waist, and tilting his head with a muttered groan and shudder. Patrick bit down on Pete's bottom lip, smirking at the exhale from the other man. Patrick could tell Pete was getting tired of the teasing. He felt a pair of hands on his hips, ready to shove him into the mattress again, when-

“Dad! Daddy!”

Pete whined at the knocking at their door, and Patrick punched him into the shoulder lightly, grinning and pecking him on the cheek. The knocking got more insistent and Patrick stood, walking over to the door and opening it. Three little faces grinned up at him.
A five year old, and two three year olds. He loved his kids so much, he'd been so shocked at the overwhelming love, and at the same time- the fear, when he'd held Bronx for the first time. Patrick crouched down at Saint’s outstretched arms and pout. The little boy quickly shuffled against him, and Patrick rubbed his back. “What’s up buddy?”

“We need pancakes.” Bronx said, very matter-of-factly. Patrick couldn’t help but grin, “Any particular reason...?”

They looked challenged, three faces scrunching up thoughtfully in a familiar way. Finally, Saint hazarded a guess.

“Uh- uh, today is Thursday.”

Patrick nodded- that was correct.

“And, and- Thursday is pancake day.”

Okay, so that wasn’t correct, but he sounded pretty confident in his logic.

Patrick grinned again, holding back a laugh. “Oh, you know what? You’re totally right! I'm so silly, I totally forgot.” He stood, lifting Saint into his arms.

“Pancakes it is then?”

Patrick looked at Saint with a furrowed brow, then at Bronx, then at Declan- awaiting confirmation. Three furious, eager nods, and Patrick grinned, moving to the kitchen, but not before glancing back at his husband- who had fallen asleep in a burrow of comforters once again.

Three, ridiculously tall stacks of pancakes later, and the kids were satisfied. They were now playing in the living room; Bronx was playing a videogame, and Saint watched the screen with dynamic, impressed expressions. Declan sat between them, but he looked a little distracted. Bowie sat on the floor in front of the couch, head resting on the coffee table, and eyes glued on the screen just as intently.

"Bronx, buddy?” Patrick put the plates away. A shout from the living room rang through the kitchen. "Yeah dad?"

"Keep an eye on your brothers okay? I'll be right back."

"Kay dad!"

Patrick dried his hands, and then headed back to his bedroom, finding Pete in the process of getting dressed; Jeans on, one sock on one foot and the other between his teeth, and struggling to untangle is arms from his sleeves. Patrick laughed as he watched Pete finally rip the shirt away with a triumphant noise, and he pecked him on the cheek, moving over to the dresser. Patrick fished out his clothes from the dresser, and was about to get dressed when a pair of arms wrapped around him and a face pressed into his neck. Patrick smiled, leaning his head into Pete's. Pete kissed his cheek, and grinned. "I love you "Trick." Patrick turned his head, kissing Pete fully on the mouth. "I love you too Pete." The older man kissed the redhead's shoulder, and he pulled away with a sigh, "Better go check on the kids, make sure they haven't- burnt the house down or something.” Patrick laughed, and watched his husband leave the room, hearing his footsteps getting fainter down the stairs.
A few minutes later, Patrick had finally gotten dressed, but he froze at a sudden noise from downstairs- The distinct bounce of a soccer ball.

Patrick’s eyes widened, having flashbacks of the last time Pete had played soccer with the kids- inside the house. Patrick had arrived home late from the studio one night, and he’d heard raucous laughter from inside the house. He’d grinned, coming home to a happy family was always amazing.

Then he’d heard the soccer ball.

Followed by a loud crash.

He’d burst through the door, and his jaw had fallen open, and his face had contorted into shock.

The situation had set in, and his eye had twitched.

A lot of broken lights, a broken TV, a broken table, a lot of glass, kids laughing wildly as Pete carried them all, standing them on the kitchen counter- away from the glass. Pete and Patrick had been cleaning up into the small hours, and Pete had just about managed to charm himself out of a night on the couch.

Patrick flashed back to the present, ears straining nervously.

He heard a door open, and then close, followed by barking. The chatting and Bowie's barking got fainter.

-They’d gone outside, thank god.

Patrick was sat in the study- well, it was actually more of a music room in truth, but Pete insisted on 'the study', usually saying the word with a heavy, snobby accent.

He had his violin on his knee, and he was carefully cleaning it with a cloth, and shining it with wood polish. The sight of the instrument still made his stomach squirm and it made him nauseous, but he tried to ignore it as best he could. After the performance at Carnegie hall, he'd gotten mountains of letters- from orchestras all around the world, offering him work. The salaries had made Patrick’s eyes bulge in shock, but he hadn't even wanted to look at a violin back then, let alone play one.

Patrick hadn’t been fond of violins since his ordeal, but this was a family heirloom- he had to respect it and take care of it, no matter how he felt. He still wasn’t sure if he should pass it on. When his grandfather had met three-month-old Declan for the first time, he'd been overjoyed. 'Another firstborn son to pass the violin to- you will pass it on, won't you Patrick?'

Patrick wasn’t so sure. It seemed more like a curse than a blessing. He’d been told about so many stories of tragedies involving that violin and the Stumph family, and Patrick was 99.9% sure it was
probably haunted. And whichever ghosts were stuck to it were his pissed-off ancestors- He wasn’t eager to pass it onto Declan, truth be told.

Patrick heard the door click open, and his head shot up, instantly snapping out of his thoughts.

He saw a mop of familiar strawberry-blonde hair poke around the corner. Patrick smiled, as he watched Declan trudge in, making his way over to his dad and smiling up at him, asking to sit on his knee. Patrick lifted him to sit, and Declan leaned back against his dad’s shoulder. Patrick noticed his dirty grass-stained clothes and he couldn’t help but roll his eyes fondly. Pete Wentz and his shenanigans cost a fortune in laundry detergent.

“Are you okay, Dec?” Patrick had noticed his son was a little quieter recently. The little boy tilted his head, eyes fixed on the instrument that rested on his father’s other knee.

“I heard something really pretty on the radio yesterday, but I dunno what it was.” He looked thoughtful, and quite sad- in a way that made Patrick’s heart hurt. Patrick stared at his son in contemplation. He had to do something to cheer him up.

"Was it an instrument or a song, Dec?"

"An instrulent."

"That’s instruMENT."

"InstruMENT." Declan replied with a grin, his little chest puffing out with pride at his mastery of the word. Patrick smiled, and placed the violin on the desk in front of him. He fished his phone out of his pocket, and quickly opened youtube, looking up a few videos of different types of instrument.

“Okay, Declan, here’s what we’ll do-” The little boy stared up hopefully and tilted his head. “I’ll play you some different things, and you’ll tell me if it sounds like what you heard, okay?” Declan’s face split into a bright grin, nodding eagerly and Patrick nodded back, eyes flitting back down to his phone screen.

_Guitar_

“Nome.”

_Bass_

“Uh-uh.”

_Drums_

“No.”

_Piano_
"Hmm...no."

**Flute**

"No way."

**Trumpet**

"Nope, not that."

**Cello**

"No."

Patrick looked down at his son, eyes full of anxiety. Dear god, please don’t let it be-

**Violin**

"Yes! That was it!"

Declan’s face brightened and he beamed, completely overjoyed. He looked so excited. So unbelievably happy. Patrick was terrified. "Thanks dad!" His face suddenly turned inquisitive and he tilted his head. "What is it?"

Patrick's eyes were wide, and slightly glazed over. "I-It's a, it's a-" He exhaled heavily. "It's a...violin, Dec."

"What's a v-eye-o-lin?"

The boy's brow was furrowed as he repeated the word, and Patrick was actually surprised he didn't know about them. Had Patrick- out of subconscious fear, been keeping classical music away from his kids? That was a real possibility, and Patrick chewed his lip. Patrick's gaze involuntarily moved over the the wooden instrument on the desk, and Declan picked up on it. He reached out, making subconscious grabby hands, and Patrick obliged. He picked up the violin by the neck with a shaky hand, and passed it to Declan. The little boy held the violin in both hands, staring at it with wide eyes, and mouth open- struck with complete awe. His blue eyes drifted over the strings, and he ran his fingers over them, before moving down to trace the gaps in the violin, trying to peer inside. He read out the maker's label, which was antique and emblazoned inside the body of the instrument. "S-Saxo-ny. Fifteen-eight-three." He squinted and Patrick felt his stomach writhe with every syllable. "A-Athelwald L-Lis-ter. Fi-Fischús a-et E-Einhard Stumph." The boy struggled to read out the foreign words, before looking up at his stone-faced father with a bright, excited grin.
"Can you play it, daddy?"

Goddamnit.

Why couldn't he say no to his kids?

"Yeah, I can, buddy." Patrick gave his son a strained smile, and the boy held it up to him, blue eyes sparkling with admiration. Patrick took the instrument, and Declan slipped off of his knee, hurrying to stand in front of him, eyes widened with expectant awe. He watched his dad holding the violin on his shoulder, poised and graceful- and it was the best thing he'd ever seen.

Patrick clenched his eyes shut for a minute, before picking up the bow, and pressing his fingers to the strings. A faint pain spiked his fingertips- he knew it didn't hurt right now, it was just an associated memory. An associated feeling. He felt a twinge in his forearm. It felt like a pointed, sharp stab where his elbow creased.

Patrick clenched his eyes shut, exhaling heavily and pushing through the trauma. He played a scale, nothing fancy, but Declan gasped and his face fell open into pure inspiration.

It was so cute, but goddamnit why violin? Why couldn't he have been obsessed with the French Horn, or- or the harp, or something?

Patrick gave his son a strained, queasy smile, and the little boy beamed, chest puffed up with pride, admiration, and joy. His eyes were almost watering, and they were as wide as full moons.

"Will you teach me dad?"

Patrick smiled, strained and anxious, and he started laughing nervously.

Declan did his best puppy-dog eyes and jutted out his lower lip, hands together as though he were praying. "Pleeeeeease...?"
Patrick could only clear his throat nervously, mind rushing to make up an excuse to disuade Declan.

Suddenly, Patrick felt a tug on his sweater. Another, another, and another, another, another...they kept coming at a steady pace, with even intervals.

"Pretty please?" Declan grinned up, eyelashes fluttering and eyes widening even further with narrowed eyebrows. Patrick exhaled shakily, shutting his eyes. Declan had learnt the 'tug-on-Patrick's-shirt-until-he-can't-stand-it-anymore' trick from Pete, he was sure of it.

Another tug.

Patrick's right eye twitched.

For fuck’s sake.

"Sure, Declan. I'll teach you."

Chapter End Notes

And...Fin!
I just wanted to say thank you, from the bottom of my heart. Thank you to everyone who read, commented, left kudos, bookmarked- all of you are incredible, and all your feedback and comments have made me so ridiculously happy- I literally spend hours just re-reading them all.
Also, shoutout to Equifish for beta reading- she gave me so many good ideas, it's insane. I really enjoyed writing this fic, and I'm really happy to see the idea finally come together, because I had been tossing around the rich violinst/poor rock player, for AGES, literally for such a long time.
If you enjoyed this fic, I really hope you'll give any future fics a read, and I hope they can live up to this one.
I legitimately have so many ideas for more fics and I'm really excited to try them out- I seriously cannot wait, the next fic is literally gonna be up, either today, or tomorrow.
Also, there's a tiny Drunk History reference in here see if u can find it lol. I really can't help myself- that video is just iconic.
So, thank you once again! I can't thank you all enough, and I still can't believe the amazing reception! And I hope this ending is satisfactory lol.
Thank you, you're all awesome. And btw, I will reply to every comment, so I'm sorry about that lmao. Every one makes me so goddamn happy, you don't even know.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!