The Fade
by spaze_cat

Summary

He's spent eons alone, completely content in his lonely existence. But then you come along, and show him that he isn't the only one of his kind left, after all.

Now he just has to show you what you can become.

(Now with cover art in chapter 1!)
On your way home from work one night, you feel it for the first time.

A pull, a force, strong enough to stop you mid-stride, to turn you around, make you stare into the dark bushes by your house for some kind of source. There’s nothing there. Nothing you can see, at least.
You gulp, but quickly push the fear down, just as you taught yourself to do all those years ago.

*Don’t get scared. Get angry.*

Pushing the worry from your mind, you resume your casual stride. You think you hear soft footsteps behind you, but you refuse to look. No one’s there, you already checked. And if there was someone there, you’d beat their face in before they even tried—

“What a funny creature you are.”

For just a moment your anger slips, and fear takes back its hold once more. You spin around to face the raspy, male voice that had come from right behind you, directly into your ear.

There’s no one there.

Don’t be scared. Be angry. Be angry be angry—

“So unusual…”

Your fist almost connects with his jaw, but in a blur of white and red he ducks out of the way, and before you can even wonder about the colors he somehow pops from one spot to the next. One second he’s in front of you, the next he’s to your side.

You adjust fairly easily. It’s been years since your last karate class, but certain moves still haven’t left your system. You shift your weight and drop low to the floor, sweeping your leg out to slam against his legs in an effort to knock him down.

Except before you can make contact, he’s gone again. How in the hell…?

“So *unique*,” he decides, now several feet behind you. This is the first time you get a good look at him. You freeze, taking nearly ten whole seconds just to let his appearance sink into your mind, to convince yourself you’re not losing it.

“There are you fucking kidding me?” you ask, throwing your hands into the air in exasperation. “I’m being attacked by a creep in a clown suit?”

“A creep?” he echoes, mocking offense by crossing his arms and huffing, completely over the top just like a real clown might act. “How rude! This is my favorite form, you know. Who doesn’t love a good clown?”

“Me,” you say. “Now walk away and I won’t kick your ass.”

The wicked smile he gives you is menacing, but there’s something about it that catches you off guard. It’s almost as if he’s actually happy about what you just said.

“Fiery,” he says in a lower, more gravely voice than the one he was using before. “I like that. Means the transformation will be easier on you.”

As if the clown getup wasn’t enough of an indicator, his words are enough to convince you that this guy’s fucking insane.

“I’m warning you,” you say seriously. Maybe this is really just some loony escaped from his bin. You don’t want to hurt the guy just for being crazy. “Go back to wherever you came from and leave me alone.”

“I can do one of those things,” he tells you. “But only if I don’t do the other.”
You clench your jaw muscles and curl your hands into fists, fully prepared to split your knuckles. He seems to notice, but he only smiles even wider. It’s creepy as all hell but you turn your uncertainty into irritation with practiced ease. You stride forward, showing him you’re not on the defensive and hopefully intimidating him with your confidence.

“Oh, you silly, silly creature,” he says as you walk closer. He looks amused at your performance. “You can’t hurt me as you are now. Though I sure do like your spunk!”

Just before your fist can land on his painted white jaw, your forearm is caught in his hand. Not skipping a beat, you bring your knee up to slam against his side. This time you don’t miss, but the clown doesn’t even flinch at the blow. Not one to give up, you stomp on his toes, punch him in his solar plexus, and even knee him in the groin, but not one of your attacks seems to hurt him.

All the while, your right arm is held firmly in his grip, and he smiles down at you almost giddily, snickering mockingly behind his teeth.

Something is wrong. Something is very wrong. A human man, even one who had a high pain tolerance, couldn’t take a knee to the groin and not even blink. You try yanking your hand out of his grip but he holds tight with inhuman strength.

Inhuman strength. Inhuman endurance. Inhuman speed.

What the hell is this… thing?

“There it is,” he says, his voice low and gravely again. “Your tasty, tasty fear…”

His eyes stare deeply into yours, and you only just notice the color of them. You hadn’t really cared before, thought maybe they were just really light in color or, hell, maybe even contacts. But now you can see the glow in them. His irises are fire incarnate.

“But your fear smells different,” the clown says, whispering it to you like he’s telling you a secret. Those bright yellow eyes begin to drift askew, but you know he’s still looking directly at you. “Do you want to know why?”

“Let go of me,” you demand, your resolve slipping. Training temporarily forgotten in your panic, you begin pushing at his chest desperately, trying to free yourself from his firm grip.

“Not until I show you what you are,” he says.

You notice a thick dribble of spit drooling from the end of his large bottom lip. He’s so close to your face now that you can smell his breath. Rusty, like blood, and meat that’s been sitting out for a little too long.

To your horror, you find yourself drawn to the smell. Never in your life had you considered the smell of blood enticing, but on this demonic clown’s breath it’s almost like a musk.

“That’s right,” he says, as if he’s trying to soothe you. His free hand cups your face, gripping your jaw when you try to flinch out of it. “Don’t I smell so good?”

“N-no,” you force out through clenched teeth. “Get away from me, you freak!”

“Who’s the freak?” he asks gleefully, using that childlike voice again. He’s so excited, his words jumbling together like he’s about to show you something amazing. “Do you know any other humans who like the smell of blood and rotting flesh? I sure don’t. But then, you’re not entirely human, are you?”
“W-what the hell are you talking about?” You’ve given up on thinking this guy was just a random crazy person. Clearly, he’s no person at all. Which means that maybe there is some sense to his words. “Of course I’m fucking human!”

He starts to giggle, like he can’t contain himself because what you said was so fucking funny.

“Ha ha! Hoo hoo, no, no, no, you’re not!” he says through his chuckles. “Oh no, not you, nope! Hee-hee, here, I’ll show you!”

You can do nothing but watch in horror as his eyes roll back into his head and his mouth open so wide that his jaw actually unhinges. He has rows and rows of needle-sharp teeth, like a lamprey eel or a goblin shark. They just keep going and going, his mouth opening further and further, until light peaks over his massive tongue like a rising sun.

Your eyes squint to adjust to the hypnotizing glow, and three balls of light beam at you from within this beast’s wide, toothy maw. They’re… beautiful. You stare in awe as the lights dance in front of you, the urge to reach out and cup them in childlike wonder gripping your very soul.

Slowly, almost gently, this wonderful creature’s mouth begins to close, and you actually whimper at the loss of the lights. You want nothing more than to see them again.

You are now completely drained of fear. You know, somehow, that you should be terrified. What you just witnessed is not something of this world, or perhaps even of this universe. It is not meant for human eyes to comprehend, and yet to you they are the most amazing things you’d ever seen.

“What are they?” you ask, breathless. The clown slowly releases his grip on your arm, and you don’t even try to run. Why would you, after seeing something like that?

“Deadlights,” says the clown, his face strangely blank now. His head tilts slightly to the side, as if he’s studying you. “You like them?”

“They’re beautiful,” you admit. Your cheeks are burning and your heart is racing, and suddenly there’s very little about this clown that scares you anymore. “Can I see them again?”

“If you come with me,” he says, his eyes trained on your lips. He starts to drool again, and the scent of blood once again washes through you. “If you be mine.”

“Your what?” you ask, warning bells going off in your head.

“Mine.” He growls out the word, and it rumbles through your whole body. Your toes curl in their shoes.

It’s completely insane, and yet it feels so right. After seeing his “deadlights” your entire worldview has changed. It is as though something has awoken inside you; primal desires and instincts that you know are not meant for this human life.

You need to go with him. You need to see his lights again.

“Okay,” you say softly, and his lips stretch into that menacing smile once again. Only now this time, it’s not so menacing. Now, it’s devious.

And you find yourself wanting to smile just like that, too.
The Sound

Chapter Notes

Thanks for all the positive feedback, everyone!

“<recording>“You’re obviously not human,” you tell him as you walk ankle-deep in filthy sewer water. “So what are you?”</recording>

“Ancient,” he rasps. He turns his head to look at you. “Hungry.”

“I’m not talking adjectives, here, smartass.”

“Hoo-hoo, you really are quite feisty, aren’t you?”

You roll your eyes and sigh. “Do you at least have a name? Something I can call you other than ‘clown’?”

He stops walking, and you stop, too. His eyes are unfocused again, drifting apart slightly before he suddenly snaps them back together with a full-body jolt. He fixes his gaze on you, those flaming orbs shifting to blue.

“Me? Oh, I’m Pennywise the Dancing Clown!”

“But you’re not an actual clown,” you point out.

“What do I look like a clown?”

“Yes, but—”

“What do I act like a clown?”

“For the most part—”

“What do I sound like a clown?”

“Honestly, I don’t really spend a lot of time around clowns, so I don’t have a point of comparison—”

“Then how would you know I’m not a clown?”

You raise an eyebrow. “I’m gonna go out on a limb here and say most clowns don’t have flashlights inside of them.”

“Not flashlights,” he says with a pout. “Deadlights. And I don’t go around showing those off to just anyone, you know.”

“You don’t?” He shakes his head no, and continues sloshing through the filthy water. You follow him, trying not to think about your freezing, soaked feet. “Then why’d you show them to me?”

“I wanted to see if you’d float.” He says this with a tone like it’s obvious. You wonder if he’s talking about that feeling in your chest when you’d witnessed them.
“Did I?” you ask. He frowns, glancing at you like you just said something very stupid.

“You can’t float,” he says.

“Why not?”

“Because you can’t.”

“I don’t understand.”

He makes a sound somewhere in between a snarl and a scoff. “So much to learn…”

You decide to drop the subject. Clearly you’re getting nowhere with this guy.

Eventually the tunnel you’re traversing empties into a large drainage pit. A vast sewage cavern stands before you, much of the space empty save for the gigantic mass of refuse piled in the center of the pit. Embedded in the pillar is an old train cart, its only visible side painted with a vintage circus act design. You instantly recognize the name you’d been given earlier.

Pennywise the Dancing Clown.

“Huh,” you say. “So you really are a clown.”


“What…?” you begin to ask, but stop when a movement catches your eye. Your gaze travel upwards, towards what could be called the ceiling of this pit.

Hundreds of human body parts slowly orbit the massive pile, like planets around the sun. Torsos, limbs, heads, all detached from each other, all entangled and scattered so that it’s impossible to tell which parts belong to which bodies. Even from so far away, you know most of them were children.

Your stomach churns, but it’s not with nausea, like you’d expect. Instead, you wonder at this defiance of gravity. There’s something morbidly fascinating with the display. It calls to something inside of you that you hadn’t known existed. Yet your body rejects this way of thinking. Why aren’t you horrified? Why aren’t you upset? You should be, and so your body makes you.

Suddenly your head is full of cotton, your limbs made of lead. You stagger forward, attempting to grab hold of something on your way down, but you find nothing. Thankfully, before your body can strike the cold, damp, hard ground of the sewer, you lose consciousness completely.

You wake up surrounded by warmth and soft, silky fabric.

“Too much,” he whispers against your ear. His arms cradle your form carefully, almost reverently.

“Too fast…”

“Pen…?” you mumble, not bothering to finish the name because right now more syllables means
more pain.

“Pen,” he echoes against you. You feel his lips against your forehead, his hot, bloody breath exhaling against your nose. He giggles suddenly, jerking both of your bodies with the sudden movement. “Pen-Pen. Pennywise! Pen-Pen-Penny! Ha!”

He seems to like the nickname.

You blearily blink your eyes open, trying to stretch out your aching body, but he hardly lets you move. Almost all of him is attached to you, but you can’t bring yourself to shove him away. Something about the way he’s holding you is comforting. And you can feel, somehow, that it’s more for himself than it is for you.

When you fell, he was… afraid.

“I’m okay, Pen,” you assure him, hoping to calm him down enough so he’ll release his death grip on you. “I just fainted, but I’m fine now.”

“It was too much,” he says again, not loosening his grip at all. “Too fast. So much of you still thinks you’re human. You need to learn, but slower, much slower…”

There he goes again about that not-human thing. You wish he was coherent enough to explain what he means, but right now he seems too far gone. So you relax and try to get comfortable in your position halfway buried underneath him. You might be here for a while.

“Is this your home?” you ask, trying to keep your voice soothing even while his teeth migrate downward and begin nibbling at your neck. “I have a home, too, you know. I also have work in the morning, which means I need rest.”

“You’ve rested enough,” he says, his words muffled against your throat. “No more resting.”

“You sound like my boss.”

You feel his hands snake along your flesh, gloved hands teasing the skin along your sides. You stifle the laughter that threatens to bubble out of you. You can’t remember the last time you’ve been tickled. Or for that matter, the last time you were held like this at all…

Why does it feel so right?

“Bossy, bossy…” he mutters absently, exploring your body. You begin to lose yourself a bit, sighing as his hands tenderly cup and grab at handfuls of your flesh. He’s so gentle that you forget about the floating children, and the whole bit about him being some kind of non-human serial killer.

“I really do have work tomorrow,” you say, but your hand runs through his strange, fluffy hair and he makes this wonderful sound. It’s familiar, but distant, like a song your parents used to play for you all the time when you were little. A calm, humming purr that you can feel rumbling through your bones.

“What is that?” you ask. “That noise you’re making?”

“Happy,” he practically groans against you. “Contentment. Affection…”

“I know,” you say. “I know what it means, but what is it?”

Instead of answering, he shifts his body to curl up against you even tighter, one hand finding its way
to your breast. Here he pauses, watching with childlike awe as his hand squeezes your supple flesh. You exhale a soft, happy sigh, and he stares intensely at you, those fire eyes burning into your own.

You glance at his mouth, which is hanging open just slightly, hungry drool collecting along his larger bottom lip. Something inside of you is screaming that this is wrong, but something louder pushes you forward.

You capture his lips with your own, all earthly inhibitions forgotten in the wake of this new feeling. You don’t even know this man, if he’s even a man at all, and yet you feel connected to him on some basic level. His lights, his sound, it’s all for you. You know it is. It’s a song only you can hear, can understand, can appreciate. It would be a crime not to reciprocate it with one of your own.

You don’t do it consciously. Wherever the noise originates is not something you can identify. Your mouth simply moves against his, and it’s like your body knows. You start to sing just like he does, the inhuman trilling a foreign sound to your own ears, even if you’re the one producing it.

He was right. You aren’t human at all.

He breaks away first, much to your irritation. For a moment you almost don’t let him; you grab hold of his fluffy collar and drag him closer. But he’s much stronger, and with a soft, airy chuckle he resists easily.

“I told you,” he says, wagging his finger. “Slower.”

“What are you talking about?” Now you’re just getting frustrated.

“Your form is human,” he tells you. His coherence seems to have returned somewhat. He’s now capable of more than babbling. “Your body thinks you’re human. Trying to teach it that you’re not is going to be… hard.”

“And not kissing me will somehow make it easier?”

“It’ll be less painful.”

“Maybe I don’t care about pain.”

“You will when your teeth come in,” he says. He pulls your bottom lip down with his finger, eyeing your pearly whites. “When your lights materialize. But the worst will be the hunger.”

You gulp, gaze dancing beyond Pennywise’s head to watch the floating human limbs slowly circle above you.

“Slower,” you agree, to which he gives a stiff nod. “So, in that case, I should get rest. My human form still needs to go to work tomorrow.”

He gives you that pout again, the one that’s quickly growing on you, and it takes several more hours before you convince him to let you go. When he finally does, it’s not without the promise that he can see you at any time, and that after work, you’ll come right back here.

Not really fond of the sewer, but still quite partial to his strange little abode, you give him your word.
Three cups of coffee deep, and you’re still yawning every five minutes.

The work is easy. You can do most of it in your sleep. But staying awake is hard, especially when you’re sitting at a desk, staring at a computer, and you’re surrounded by the sounds of clacking keyboards and ringing phones.

Maybe you should have called out today, spent the day with a killer clown creature in the sewers instead. Seems pretty preferable right now.

But you need this job. Not only just for the money, but for the normalcy of it. If what happened last night was real, then you need to take this whole not-human thing sitting down. Behind a desk. While pretending you’re not some kind of monster in a human body suit.

“You must’ve been up late,” says John. He’s a coworker who inhabits the adjacent desk, and for some reason he seems to think this makes your business his.

You roll your eyes and pray today is the day this bastard takes the hint. Completely ignoring him, you continue keying in the data from the stack of paperwork in front of you.

“Come on, I know you can hear me."

Don’t punch him in the face. Don’t punch him in the face.

“Sorry, I’m a bit busy. Maybe you can bother Clarissa today, instead.” You don’t bother to hold back any venom. Self-restraint has never been one of your strong points.

“Ouch!” he says, but you hear the smile in his voice. It’s like this is a sport to him. He really thinks this is how flirtation works. “I think I’d rather talk to you today. How about over lunch? I’m buying.”

“For the forty-seventh time, I’m not interested.”

“Aw, you’ve been counting!”

“Leave her alone, already,” Diana snaps from her desk. “She might be taking it easy on your sorry ass, but if you keep messing with her, I’ll file a sexual harassment complaint on her behalf.”

That shuts John right up. He slinks off back to his work and you’re left in peace. Saved by Wonder.
Woman yet again. You really should get her a gift basket or something.

When lunch comes around, you decide to take a nap. There’s a secret spot in one of the back rooms of the building you like to use. It’s a small room now used as a closet; chairs, desks, cabinets, and more are all piled in to gather dust. But in the very back, tucked right up against the corner of the room and hidden from view unless one were to walk further inside, is a wonderful old couch, soft as your bed back home, and it’s all yours.

You set your alarm on your phone and curl up, ready to catch about an hour of Z’s. It’s not much, but hopefully it’ll get you past the last four hours before you can go home and crash.

You sense his presence about a second before he makes himself known. Appearing right behind you, he spoons your body and hums that soothing, alien sound against your ear.

“I’m trying to sleep,” you tell him, but you don’t move to push him away.

“Then sleep,” he says, “I’ll keep watch.”

“You don’t need to do that,” you say. “It’s just a harmless nap, Pen.”

“I’ll keep watch,” he repeats firmly, and you decide not to argue. When you wake up, he’s gone.

After work, you head further into town for some groceries and supplies. You wonder if Pennywise eats anything other than human flesh, or if he ever needs any supplies himself. You can’t imagine he does, but it wouldn’t hurt to ask. Of course, you can’t exactly shoot him a text. You decide to ask him later if there’s any way to contact him when you need to.

You pass the police station on your way home, and can’t help but glance at the massive news board in the front lawn. It’s riddled with missing persons posters, and you swallow, knowing exactly where most of those people are now.

A man stands beside the board, staring with such a hardened expression at the posters that you pause to watch him. When you do, he notices you and turns. Something about him feels threatening, and your eyes jump between his glare and the missing persons posters before darting away. You hurry home.

You have a strong need for a warm, relaxing bath, but you know there’s no point if you’re going to the sewers right after. So you settle for dinner, making some spaghetti with meat sauce.

And then… you just sit there. Staring at your plate.

Someday, you’re going to stop thinking spaghetti is delicious. You’re going to crave a different kind of meat, and it’s not going to be cooked and prepared like this. You try to imagine yourself crouched over a dead child, gnawing on their arm like an animal. Blood covering your front like a toddler who doesn’t know how to eat their food properly.

And for the first time, you ask yourself if you want this. Do you even have a choice?

You swallow the lump in your throat, glance down at your untouched spaghetti. You’re not very hungry anymore.

Your tennis shoes are ruined from walking through about a mile of sewage last night, so you grab your rain boots instead. It’s a cold fall night and the air is damp and heavy, so even if you weren’t about to hike through the sewers, they’re useful for keeping dry.
Later, down in the tunnels, you feel a presence behind you. Footsteps slosh in the water, out of sync with your own; you know he’s there. You don’t stop to acknowledge him because you know, in that weird new way you’re slowly getting used to, that he senses you’ve noticed him.

“What did you mean earlier, about keeping watch?” you ask, your voice echoing. “What would you have to watch for?”

“Not much here to worry about in lovely, lovely Derry,” he says. He’s using the clown voice again. “I’ve had this town under my thumb for a long, long time. But you can never be too careful. Sometimes, if I get distracted, that hold goes a little wobbly, and then people start to notice things…”

“What do you mean by ‘hold’?”


“You’re saying you control the entire town?”

“For the most part,” he says. “There are those out there resistant to it. Kids, for one. They’re harder to fool, but easier to scare.”

“So you eat them.”

“Keeps them quiet,” he says. “Keeps me full.”

“And no one notices?”

“They do,” he says. “But then they don’t. Forgetful, forgetful, are the people of Derry. Human memory can be so fickle. They cover the posters with the faces of my newest meals, and the old get left behind. No one is remembered, and no one is found. I make sure of that.”

“So if you can just make everyone forget, why would you ever need to ‘keep watch’?” you ask. “No one can hunt you if they don’t even know you exist.”

“Like I said, there are those resistant few.”

“Children,” you supply. “That you can… silence.”

“And occasionally, an adult. A pesky, pesky nuisance of a human. They come to town asking questions, and they don’t stop asking even if no one here will answer. Whenever one of them comes snooping, I get a real challenge.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have to find a way to kill them without raising further suspicion,” he explains. “An even bigger challenge is when they have people back home who will miss them. People who will ask even more questions.”

“How many of these people have you encountered?”

“Enough,” he says. “A handful, maybe ten, over the centuries. Even one is far too many.”

“So you’re always looking over your shoulder? Expecting someone to try and hurt you?”

“The last time I didn’t,” he says, “I was nearly destroyed. I underestimated them. I won’t make that mistake again.”
You wonder who ‘they’ are, but you can tell the subject is souring his mood, so you drop it. When you reach his lair, Pen finally passes you, headed directly for his train cart. You guess it’s the closest thing to a bedroom he has. When he notices you’re not following, he waves you over.

“Come,” he urges.

You do, but not before taking another look at the floating corpses overhead. You wonder why he put them up there instead of just eating them immediately. And then you realize.

It’s a pantry.
The Hum

“I save them,” he explains to you, “because the hunger is always there. Devourers like us don’t get the privilege of satisfaction.”

“A devourer,” you say quietly. “Is that what I am?”

“Not yet,” he admits. “But it’s what you’ll become.”

You tear your eyes from those who float to meet his golden ones. He’s watching you carefully. You join him in his train cart bedroom, taking a seat on an old chair he’s stuffed into a corner.

“Can I see your lights again?”

“Why?”

“They’d make me feel like less of a monster.”

He quirks an eyebrow, but doesn’t question it. You gesture for him to kneel in front of your chair, and pull him as close as you can.

He sits there for a moment, just staring at you, until he finally mutters, “For you.”

They’re like three little suns, dancing in perpetual orbit about one another. When you look into them, you don’t see the dead children, presumed missing and soon forgotten. Instead, you see life. His life. You feel that strange, almost manic desire to touch them again.

His mouth, and by extension all those rows of needle-sharp teeth, very slowly clamp down on your reaching hand. You can feel a few of them pop into your skin, hot blood trickling from the wounds. But it doesn’t hurt too bad, and he doesn’t bite down. He simply holds you there in warning, your limb at the mercy of this creature’s gaping maw as he morphs back into a semblance of a human in a clown costume.

“Not yet,” he says once he’s back. “You can’t do that yet.”

“Because I’m still human,” you guess. When he nods, you look down at your hand. There are hundreds of indentations in your skin, a few of them open, beads of blood coagulating over the wounds. “So show me.”

“Show you what?”

“How not to be human.”

His pupils contract, and his grin stretches from ear to ear.

“I’d be happy to.”

You stand in the middle of one of the tunnels, surrounded by complete and total darkness. You could easily banish it with your phone’s light, but then that would ruin the point of this exercise.
You can hear the water beneath you flowing past your rain boots, trickling behind you, dripping from the walls. But right now, all of that is just white noise. What you’re trying to listen for is a different type of sound. You can’t hear it with your ears, but rather from somewhere in your chest.

At least, that’s what Pennywise told you.

You’ve been sitting here for about twenty minutes with no results. You’re just about to call out to him to make sure he didn’t ditch you when you hear it.

A hum.

It’s like a swarm of bees in your lungs, rattlesnakes in your heart. They pulse and throb like deadlights, and you hear them as much as you feel them.

Instinct takes over, and you immediately snap it into focus, tune it like a frequency, until you know the exact direction it’s coming from. Ahead, but moving closer, closer, until—

“You’re right in front of me,” you tell the darkness. A low chuckle answers you.

“That’s right,” says Pennywise. He places a hand on the top of your head. “You’re a fast learner.”

“Thanks,” you say. And then it hits you. “This is how you found me, isn’t it?”

“Avery fast learner.”

“Is it like… echolocation or something?”

“The hum is our version of a heartbeat,” he says. “You still have one of those, of course, but you also have a hum. Before I heard you, I was alone.”

Alone. You try to imagine his life down here. Down in this dark, damp nightmare. The only heartbeat for light years.

Otherwise, total silence.

“For how long?”

Pennywise doesn’t answer, which is itself an answer, though you don’t know what to make of it.

“Pen,” you whisper, your hand drifting to grip the fabric of his costume, “are we the only ones left?”

“If we aren’t, the others are far, far away.”

“And if we are…”

He’s quiet for a moment, and if it weren’t for the steady hum buzzing within you, you might have thought he left you alone in this darkness.

“If we are, then we are.”

He’s gathered a mess of blankets into a pile in the corner of his room. He stands above them, gesturing for you to lay down. They smell like a homeless man pissed in them.
“I am not sleeping on that,” you tell him.

“And why not?”

“Because it’s filthy,” you say, “and I have a nice, warm, clean bed waiting for me at home.”

“Then I’m going with you.”

“Absolutely not,” you tell him. “What if someone sees you?”

“They won’t,” he says. You pout stubbornly, but he only smiles and runs his thumb along your lips, studying them. You have a feeling he’ll follow you home regardless of your consent, unless you can convince him not to.

But… do you really want him not to?

Leaving him is more difficult now than it was last night. With every passing hour you feel less and less human, and though you’d never admit it, you’re terrified. Yet when you’re with Pennywise, his deadlights just a question away, you don’t feel like such an abomination.

“Fine,” you say, “But you’re taking a shower before getting in my bed.”

He makes a groaning sound, like he’s dying at the thought of getting clean. You roll your eyes. What a child.

A giant, man-eating child.

---

Pennywise trails behind you as you make your way out of the sewers and back home. You find comfort in this new connection with him. All you have to do is focus your attention slightly to know exactly where he is.

You’re just about to say something when you notice how quiet it’s gotten. The footsteps still splash behind you, slightly out of sync with your own, but the hum is gone. Which has to mean that Pennywise is, too.

You stop walking, and whoever’s behind you stops, too. You turn to look over your shoulder. Nothing. Nothing that you can see.

*Don’t get scared. Get angry.*

“Whoever you are,” you tell the darkness, your voice lowered threateningly, “you’d better make yourself known. I’m not someone you want to fuck with.”

“Alright, alright, calm down.” It’s a man’s voice, but it’s not Pen. A figure steps out from behind one of the sewer tunnels, his hands raised. Clenched in his right one is an FBI badge with his picture on it. You recognize the man from earlier today, the one staring at those missing persons posters. “Mind telling me what you’re doing in the sewers at ten o’clock at night, ma’am?”

“Mind telling me why you’re following me?”

“I’ll be asking the questions here, thank you.”
“I’m looking for my dog,” you lie, not holding back an ounce of your annoyance. “I let him off the leash and he came bounding in here like an idiot. Your turn.”

“I’m investigating a series of child abductions, particularly those that have flared up within the past year.” He pockets his badge, and you get a flash of his holstered gun. “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

“Who doesn’t? It’s a small town, and word gets around easy.”

“Right,” he says. You get the distinct feeling he sees right through you. You don’t like it. “How about I help you look for your dog?”

“I’ll pass,” you say. “I can do this by myself.”

“You can’t tell me it’s a good idea for a young woman like yourself to go wandering through the sewage system at night alone.”

“You’re right,” you say. “I might get followed by some sketchy FBI agent.”

To your satisfaction, this irritates the man. His smile twitches, threatens to pull into a frown, but eventually it holds.

“I hope you find your dog,” he says as though admitting defeat. Then, he turns and trudges back out the way you came.

*I hope you get lost in these tunnels,* you think.
The Visit

Now that you know how to hear it, the hum follows you everywhere.

You feel it above you when you work, coming from the ventilation shaft above your desk. When you’re in the restroom, the hum is right outside the door. When you’re in the break room eating lunch, the hum comes from the sink. No one else seems to notice the gurgling sound that accompanies it, either.

“What happened to your hand?”

You don’t spare John a glance in greeting. Instead, you adjust the bandages he’s asking about. The marks Pen left weren’t deep at all, but you didn’t want anyone to question their strange arrangement. Unfortunately, the bandages only seem to have gathered more attention. In addition to the hum, you’ve been hearing concerned whispers about you all day.

“Got bitten,” you say.

“Really?” he asks, sounding genuinely concerned. “By what?”

“A raccoon,” you say. “He popped out of the trash last night, went right for my hand.”

“That’s terrible,” he says. “Did it hurt?”

“No,” you say. “I was mostly just worried about it having rabies.”

“D-does it?”

“The doctor said most likely,” you tell him, “but we won’t know for sure until the results come in this afternoon. You should probably stay at least a few feet away from me, just in case.”

“O-oh, right,” he says, backing away. He mumbles some quick excuse and leaves you alone in the break room.

You sip your tea, smiling against the lip of your cup as Pen’s laughter echoes from the drain.

When you’re making dinner that night, the hum buzzes from the cabinet under your sink.

“You don’t have to hide here,” you tell him. “It’s just you and me.”

The cabinet squeaks open slowly, and when you peek inside, you see him stuffed in there, contorted into an impossibly small position. Your eyebrows shoot up. You’re surprised, but also genuinely impressed.

“That doesn’t look too comfortable,” you say. Somehow, even though his limbs are all entangled and his body looks like it’s been through one of those car compactors, he manages a shrug. “Well, come on out of there.”

“Not yet,” he says, wagging one of his nearly crushed fingers. “Someone’s here.”
Before you can say anything, there’s a knock at your front door. Pen presses a finger to his lips and gestures to the cabinet door. You close it, and pad over to your entryway to peek through the peephole.

A growl starts from the back of your throat, inhuman and unwarranted. You cough it away, and open the door.

“Evening, ma’am.”

“Hey, do you know if there’s some way one can file a harassment charge against an FBI agent? Asking for a friend.”

“No need for the attitude, miss,” says the man. “I’ve been going door to door tonight.”


“Agent,” he corrects. His foot prevents you from closing your door in his face. “Agent Miller. It occurred to me I never introduced myself last night. And please, all I ask is a few minutes of your time. Another child has gone missing, and… to be frank, I’m getting desperate for a lead.”

I can tell, you think. But you decide maybe it’s best not to say that out loud.

You let him in, gesturing for him to come sit at the bar in your kitchen. When he takes a seat, you turn back to stir the sauce in your pot, waiting for him to say his piece.

“His name’s Thomas Morose,” says the agent. “Your neighbors have all said he’s a good kid. Smart, too. He wouldn’t have wandered off on his own, especially not after curfew.”

“Chubby red-head, right? I didn’t know him very well, but I saw him around.”

“You don’t know him very well,” says Agent Miller. “He’s missing, not dead.”

You sigh and turn around to face him, crossing your arms.

“You’re right,” you tell him, “I don’t know the kid is dead, but I’m making an educated guess. Not one of these children has been found. Not one. My guess is whoever this sick bastard is who’s taking them, he isn’t keeping them alive.”

“You keep saying he,” says the agent.

“An assumption.” You say this nonchalantly, but he’s really starting to really piss you off. “It’s usually guys who do these kinds of messed up things, right?”

“I suppose.”

He begins to look around, probably checking out your place. You go back to stirring your food, hoping he’ll get disinterested and leave. Of course, you’re not so fortunate.

“Where’s your dog?”
“Excuse me?”

“You dog,” he repeats. “The one you were chasing in the sewers last night.”

“I… never found him.”

“So you gave up?” he asks. “Just like that?”

“This isn’t the first time he’s taken off,” you say. “He always finds his way back home.”

“So you stop looking for him after one night?”

You slam the wooden spoon on the countertop, splattering sauce everywhere. You spin around to face Agent Miller, your hands landing firmly on the bar in front of him.

“Look,” you say, your voice dangerously close to a growl, “I let you into my home because you seem to think I can help you find this kid. Not so you could throw thinly veiled accusations in my face.”

“I’m not accusing you,” he says. “I asked you about the sewers because I believe that’s where the perpetrator is hiding.”

All of your anger goes down the drain. You stare at him, and slowly pull away. Your fear is for Pennywise, but you play it off as fear for something else.

“You mean…” you say slowly. “Last night, I could have… I could have run into—”

“I don’t know it for sure,” says Agent Miller, “but after studying the case files, I’ve been able to map out where the kidnappings have taken place. Everywhere a child has gone missing, an opening to the sewage system was nearby.”

“So, what?” you ask. “You think he’s hiding in the sewers?”

“Or just using them as a means to take these children,” he confirms.

“That’s awful,” you say. “I mean, what kind of creep would target kids from the friggin’ sewers?”

A scuffle comes from the cabinet under your sink. Agent Miller notices.

“Did you hear that?”

“The thud? Yeah, I’ve got a raccoon problem.”

“A… raccoon problem? Under your sink?”

“All around the house, actually,” you say. You hold up your bandaged hand. “One of them jumped out of the trash this morning and bit me.”

“You’re telling me there’s a raccoon under there,” says Agent Miller. “Right now?”

“Probably.” To your horror, Agent Miller stands up and walks around your bar. “What are you doing?”

“Helping you out,” he says.

“Wait, don’t—”
He opens the cabinet under the sink. It’s empty, or at least, there’s no child-eating clown inside.

“Huh…” you say slowly. “No raccoon. I guess this house is just haunted.”

Agent Miller seems unnerved. *Good.*

“Well, I suppose it’s time for me to get going,” he says, standing and backing away from the cabinet. He doesn’t shut the door, and he doesn’t stop staring at your cleaning supplies like he’s expecting a rabid raccoon to come jumping out from it.

When he finally leaves, he pauses in the walkway and turns back to look at you.

“You stay away from those sewers, now,” he tells you. “If I’m right about this, they’re a very dangerous place to be.”

You wait for him to get out of earshot before you respond.

“Yes,” you say quietly, “they are.”
The Teeth

The moment you turn away from your closed front door, you see Pen sitting on your living room couch.


“Easier prey,” he says simply. “Adults tend to be smarter, faster.”

“No, I mean… Why not animals? Wouldn’t it be so much easier to get away with eating deer than people?”

“It’s not the same,” he says. “Human fear is… different.”

“What does fear have to do with anything?”

“Their flesh sustains my form,” he explains as you walk closer, “but it’s the energy of my prey that keeps me alive. Bad energy, in particular. Fear is loud, powerful. Filling.”

You take a seat next to him on the couch, and he immediately pulls you against him, curling around you protectively. His version of a purr rumbles against your ear, and his hum rattles in your chest.

“What does fear taste like?” you ask.

“I can’t describe it with human words,” he says. “You have to taste it to know.”

You suddenly get a good, long whiff of your nearly cooked food, and your stomach growls in anticipation. You’re hungrier than you thought you were.

*Maybe that’s what fear tastes like,* you think. *The banishment of hunger.*

The next day you’re down in the sewers because it’s a weekend and, let’s face it, you have no social life. In your defense, it’s kind of impossible when you live in Derry. Everyone tends to keep to themselves unless they want something from you, and no one here really wants anything from anyone.

Besides, you’ve never had a problem with being alone. And even if you did, you’re not really alone anymore. Now, you’ve got a wonderful clown companion to hang with.

Also, Thomas Morose. He’s here, too.

Of course, not in the way you might have preferred, but you’re not exactly shocked to see his small
yet chubby body slowly being devoured by Pennywise. All bloodied and broken, flesh shredded and hanging loosely off his mangled bones. He’s hardly even human remains anymore.

Thomas isn’t having a good time, but at least Pen’s in high spirits.

You watch him eat in fascination. It’s a bit disturbing, but you’re pretty sure if you were an actual human, you wouldn’t be able to stomach this at all.

“If you want to know so bad what fear tastes like,” Pen says, his voice raspy and not of this world, “here’s your chance. Your first bite’s on me, but after that you’ll have to learn to hunt on your own.”

“I’ll take a rain check.”

“Are you sure?” he asks. “This one’s quite tasty. He was so terrified he passed out twice before I finally killed him.”

“While that sounds incredibly appetizing,” you say sardonically, “I think I’m gonna have to pass.”

He shrugs, and turns back to his meal.

“You’ll want it soon,” he promises.

You know he’s right because even though you’re not exactly craving dead kid, the stench of death in the air doesn’t gross you out at all, and the blood running down Pen’s chin drips and pools around his lips so enticingly.

You find yourself moving towards him. When he notices you, he growls low in his throat but you know he won’t attack you.

He did offer, after all.

You don’t know about the mass of meat. You can still see and even recognize some of Thomas’s bones. The ulna and radius of his left arm, several ribs, a broken half of what was once his skull. You’re not sure if you’re ready to eat human flesh yet, but the scent rolling off of Pen is intoxicating. You wonder if vampires are real, and if they are, if this is how blood smells to them.

Like food.

You kneel before him, your hand slowly reaching for his face. When your hand lands on his cheek, his growl ceases completely. His bright yellow eyes watch you carefully, but you only sense curiosity on his part. He wants to know what’s going on in your head. You wish you knew.

You don’t really think before the kiss; you just do it. Blood dribbles obscenely down your chin but you are no longer thinking of it as the result of death. Instead, it’s liquid life. You can taste the warmth in it, feel the pulse that once moved it, and it tastes even better on Pen’s soft lips.

A growl rumbles low from the back of his throat, but your growl is louder. Your arms wrap tightly around his torso and he holds you just as close, just as desperately. But what you’re both so desperate for is unclear.

His claws dig into your shoulder, and even though they don’t break your skin it hurts. His aggression fuels your own, and you scratch your fingernails down his back. Fabric tears, but you’re so focused on the intoxicating taste of him that you don’t really register it.

Then he bites the tip of your tongue with his impossibly sharp teeth. You’re about to bite him right
back when there’s a sudden explosion of pain.

You scream, both hands scrambling to cover your mouth; an instinct to protect and shield the area from further damage, further pain. But the pain wasn’t caused by Pennywise, or any other outside force. This pain originated from inside of your mouth. It only takes a second to put two and two together.

Your teeth are coming in.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Hours later, you’re covered in your own blood and saliva, heaving wet breaths from your raw throat. You feel like someone stuck a chainsaw into your mouth and turned it on.

Pen’s doing that thing where he just wraps around you completely. He’s trembling slightly, and now you know for a fact that he’s afraid, because you can smell it. He was right about it not being easy to describe. Cold, maybe. Heavy, but strangely sweet. And there’s a hint of something like the bite of peppermint.

You can’t talk (or, at least, you’re sure as hell not going to try), so to comfort him you gently stroke his arm. It’s the only place you can reach in his tight grip. As the minutes turn to hours, and the pain begins to ebb, so does Pennywise’s fear. He eases up on you just enough for you to shift to face him.

You know by looking at him what he needs from you, and you provide it. The rumble comes from somewhere inside you, like an amplified version of your hum. It lets him know you’re okay, but it’s also helping you, too. You can feel the wounds in your mouth slowly closing, healing under the direction of this frequency.

Once again, your body knows what to do before you do.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

It takes several more hours before you can move your mouth without feeling a thousand tiny knives cut into your tongue and the insides of your cheeks. Even more before you can close your mouth all the way.

Sunlight streams through the sewer grate that serves as a skylight far above your heads. You’ve spent the night with Pennywise, suffering and fearing together. But the worst is over, and now you’re one giant step further away from humanity.

You’re not sure if you want to cry or celebrate after this taxing experience, so you just curl up against him even tighter, hiding your face against the ruffles in his costume. You’ve spent so long in silence that you decide to test out your voice.

“P-Pen—” You pause. Your voice sounds muffled and broken. At least one or two rows of teeth still stick out of your gums.

“Yes?”
“D-did it…” You pause again, swallowing about a gallon of your own blood and spit. “Did it happen because of the kiss?”

“I showed you mine,” he rasps against your hair, “and you showed me yours.”

You’d thought as much. “I had nothing to show you until now, though,” you say.

“They were always there,” he says. “They were only hiding.”

“What else is still hiding inside of me?”

This time, Pen doesn’t say anything. He just holds you tighter.
The Dream

Chapter Notes

Sorry it’s so short, everyone.

Pennywise lets you lean on him as you make your way out of the sewers. It’s broad daylight, and you’re still covered with your own blood, but you’re at least twenty different kinds of fucked up. You’re not staying here another minute more than you absolutely have to.

Pen doesn’t like it, and makes his opinion known the entire way.

“You’re weak,” he growls, “and you’re in pain. My lair is safer.”

“You lair doesn’t have clean, running water,” you argue. “You’re not worried someone’s gonna see us, are you? Because you told me you could make it so people forget.”

“People of Derry,” he hisses. “Not outsiders.”

“You mean like Agent Miller?” You wipe some more blood and drool from your chin. Your teeth have retracted, but a few spots continue to bleed. “You’re not scared of him, are you?”

“I don’t feel fear,” Pen snaps incredulously, “I consume it.”

“Right,” you say, unable to hide your smile. Pen pushes you off of him and growls, lips frowning into a pout. “Not scared, then. Concerned?”

“He’s human,” Pen says. “He’s nothing.”

“Alone, maybe,” you say. “I’ve seen you bite clean through an arm with those teeth of yours. But he’s with the FBI. If he goes missing, they’ll send even more people.”

“They won’t,” Pen says. “They don’t even know he’s gone.”

“What do you mean?”

“No one believed him when he said there was something wrong with Derry. They couldn’t see like he could. So he told them he was taking a vacation, and came here all by himself.”

“That was a poor decision,” you say quietly. “It’s going to get him killed.”

“Perhaps,” says Pen. “If I can find out how to kill his wife, too. She’s the only person who knows where he is, and why he came here. She’s the only reason he’s still alive.”

“How do you know so much about Agent Miller?” you ask. “Do you read minds, too?”

“Something like that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You ask a lot of questions,” he growls. “It’s annoying.”
“Call it human curiosity.”

“You’re not human.”

“But I was raised to be,” you say. He ignores you, and you let out a low growl, stepping in front of him and stopping him in his tracks. “My whole life I was human. Just another girl, ten a penny. Then you came along and showed me something from another universe, and promised me you’d show me more if I came with you. Well, I came with you. I’m here, and I’m asking for more.”

At first, Pen expresses surprise at your sudden monologue, but it quickly melts into a scowl.

“Fine,” he practically spits at you. “What is it exactly that you want to know?”

You open your mouth to answer, but snap it shut when you realize you have none. You’re not exactly sure what you want to know. Everything, really. The how and why, mostly, but you’re not sure how to narrow that down into an actual question. And even if you could, you’re not sure Pen has all the answers himself.

After a few moments, you finally decide on something small, to start.

“Will it hurt every time my teeth come out?” you ask.

“No,” Pen says.

“Can other people see them?”

“You haven’t learned how to shift your form yet,” he says. “If they emerge again, you won’t be able to hide them.”

“What sort of things would make them emerge?”

“Hunger, rage, heat.”

“Heat?”

“Desire,” Pen says, yellow eyes landing pointedly on your lips.

“Oh.” You run your tongue along your gums, and spit out even more blood.

“Any more questions?”

You glare up at him. “No.” Not yet.

Without another word, Pen walks around you and keeps moving.

“Are you coming?” he asks without turning around. “Or did you decide to listen to reason and stay where it’s safe?”

“Fuck reason,” you say. “I need booze.”

That night, you dream of endless space. Countless stars and galaxies too large for even you to comprehend.
You dream of a Turtle, vast and wise and kind. The Turtle creates, gives existence as women give life, and every movement the Turtle makes brings forth even more stars and even more galaxies. With a sneeze, the Turtle births a universe.

You dream of resentment, of desire, of a loneliness so vast that in some ways, it’s greater than all universes. The loneliness is familiar, it’s home, but it’s empty, and you want – no, you need more.

Yet where the Turtle creates, you destroy.

Therefore, you dream of a choice.

And regardless of the consequences, you make it.

When you wake up, Pen is holding you in his arms, yellow eyes ever-watchful.

“Don’t you ever sleep?”

“Yes.”

“When?”

“When the time comes.”

You’re tired and grumpy and in no mood for his cryptic nonsense.

“Speaking of time…” you mumble, trying to stretch out your sore body. You manage to get a glance at your bedside clock. It’s five in the morning. “Ugh, I’m going back to bed.”

You tuck your head under his chin and get comfortable, but sleep doesn’t come. After a while, you start to think about what you just saw in your dream.

“Pen?” He hums in acknowledgment. “Do you have dreams?”

“No.”

“Really? Nothing like them, either?”

“No.”

“You’re not lying to me, are you?”

“… No.”

You smile against his ruffles. Yeah, right.

“What do you dream about?” you ask. Pen growls at you, annoyed, but you’re persistent. “Please? I’ll tell you about mine if you tell me about yours.”

“Nothing you would understand,” he snaps.

“Try me.”
“No.”

“Fine,” you say with a sigh. “Well, goodnight, then.”

It’s not five minutes until Pen breaks the silence.

“Tell me your dream,” he demands.

“You first,” you say. He snarls again, but gives in.

“Lights, mostly,” he says. “Deadlights. Other beings like me, feeding on stars, destroying planets, ravaging galaxies. Sometimes, I dream of fullness, or rather, what I imagine it to feel like. Now tell me yours. The human brain can be incredibly creative.”

When you tell him about your dream, he goes rigid against you. When you mention the Turtle, he growls.

When you recall something about making a choice, he stops you altogether.

“That’s enough,” he says. It’s that dark, raspy voice again. His yellow eyes are burning. “I don’t want to hear any more.”

“Why not?”

“I know that Turtle,” he says. “We don’t get along. Now go back to sleep.”

“The Turtle is real?”

“Yes.”

“Was all of it real?”

“… I don’t know.”

He’s lying again. Maybe you’ll ask about it someday, but right now, you’re too tired, and Pen’s too agitated. You tuck this into your memory and fall back into a restful sleep.
The Shift

The hum is fainter today.

You can tell Pen’s still in Derry, but he’s not shadowing you like he was on Friday. When you get off work, you decide to track him down using his hum like it’s some kind of sonar. To your surprise, it actually works. Your hunt leads you to the Barrens.

“HEEEEEP!!!!”

The scream is a sudden, stark change from the gentle breeze running through the tall grass on the other side of the creek.

“SOMEBODY HELP ME!!!”

There’s a boy, sloshing through the rocky water, running for his life from what looks to be a huge black bear. To your dismay, the boy spots you.

“Please!” he screams. “It’s gonna eat me!”

It will. Even if you couldn’t hear his hum, you recognize Pennywise. No bear has teeth and claws like that. They’re almost cartoon in their exaggeration. Blood runs from its open, drooling maw, and you swear you can see the yellow glow in his eyes even from this distance.

You don’t move, and you’re not sure if it’s because you know it’s no use, or because some part of you really doesn’t care about saving this boy’s life. The fact that you don’t even know, can’t even tell, wrenches a twist of guilt in your chest. Guilt, and pity for the boy, and self-hatred at what you’ve already become.

Pen catches up to the boy, and tackles him to the ground. In his bear form, he’s easily ten times the kid’s size. The child screams, his voice filled with terror so raw and pure that it cuts through you like a physical pain. For a split second, you feel every ounce of this little boy’s fear, and it nearly knocks you to your knees.

You don’t look away in time to miss the bear latch its jaws onto the boy’s face. Pen crushes the kid’s tiny skull with a single, powerful bite. You hear it crunch, horrible and wet, from a hundred feet away. The gentle rush of the creek, the wind through the grass, and distant birdsongs all fall silent. The air becomes charged, electric. You forget to breathe.

As the bear once again becomes Pennywise the clown, he looks up at you, wild eyes simply staring in that unnerving, yet hypnotizing way you’re still not entirely used to. His yellow eyes look darker, almost orange.

Get angry, you tell yourself.

Pen finally breaks eye contact with you in order to bite another chunk of flesh from the now dead child. As he chews, he stands to his full height, bringing the body with him. He tosses it over his shoulder and heads back into one of the runoff tunnels.

You follow quietly behind.
When Thomas Morose died, you didn’t witness it. You didn’t try to imagine what his final moments were like, dying in pain and terror. You didn’t want to.

When Thomas Morose died, you didn’t see how Pennywise took his body through the sewers, back to his lair, and tore him into pieces before making them float. How he lets them flutter away from his fingers as delicately as letting go of a balloon’s string.

When Thomas Morose died, you pretended you didn’t care. This time, it’s a lot harder to.

But you do it, because this is what you are. This is what you’re meant to be. A bringer of death, of fear and pain. A desecrator of innocence. You’re a monster, just like Pennywise.

And someday, you’ll make them float, too.

“Teach me,” you say. Pen actually jumps a little. You’ve both been sitting in mind-numbing quiet for about an hour, now. Your words are the first to break the silence.

“Teach you what?” he asks.

“How to turn into something else. Like your bear.”

His stares at you again, and just when you’re about to ask him why he’s always doing that, he looks away.

“Okay,” he agrees.

He walks into the center of his lair, so there’s plenty of space around you both. You’re not sure if that’s necessary; it’s not like you’re going to form into a dragon. Yet, at least. A dragon sounds awesome.

“Most of the work is done by those who see you,” Pen explains, “not yourself. Your performance sells the act.”

“What should I try first?” you ask. “Is there something easier to start with?”

“The shift is always the same,” says Pen. “It’s not the form that’s difficult, it’s how well you fit into the mold.”

You’re not entirely sure what that means, but you don’t bother asking for clarification. You’re eager to try this out. Maybe if you manage to do this right, you can forget about what you saw in the Barrens.

At least until the last of your humanity goes, and you stop caring altogether about who gets hurt to keep your kind alive.

“So how do I do it?” you ask. “Is it like the hum, where you just focus on one thing?”

“Your drive is hunger,” he says. “The shift is what feeds you, keeps you alive. If you can’t shift, you can’t scare, and then you can’t eat.”
So you focus on hunger. You didn’t eat lunch today, so it’s not hard to do. You feel the empty hole in your stomach where food should be, the desperate gurgling as your insides cry out for sustenance. You try to imagine a scenario in which the only way to fill that void is to shape-shift into a terrifying creature.

As expected, your imagination isn’t enough.


“I don’t have any prey,” you say, crossing your arms at his childish teasing. “And don’t be a brat.”

He giggles, and the tiny bells attached to his neck ruffles jingle in delight. Suddenly, though, they stop. His face goes blank; his mouth falls slack.

“I want to try something,” he says, “but you have to close your eyes.”

“Will it hurt?”

“No.”

“Will I like it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then why do I have to close my eyes?”

“It’s a surprise,” says Pennywise. “Don’t you like surprises?”

“Not really, no.”

“Party pooper.”

“Ugh, fine, I’ll close my eyes.”

You wait impatiently for him to go and get something before bringing it back. He says nothing, and you don’t hear him move closer to you, but a sudden smell hits you like a car. It’s bad, but it’s wonderful, and it’s horrible because you recognize that smell.

He’s offering you food. His food.

Human.

And you begin to salivate.

When you can’t see it, there’s no psychological barrier preventing you from enjoying it. Even knowing what it is, who it is, and having seen him die in front of you not an hour ago, the not seeing helps dissipate that fog of guilt, of confusion, of horror. Now, all you can think about is the thought of filling your tragically empty stomach.

Something gathers within you, something you have no words for, because humans, for all of their experiences, and all their phrases for strange occurrences, they have never experienced this. You know it, somehow, like it’s been buried inside you since before you were born.

And the sound that bubbles up from the back of your throat… It makes you feel dangerous, deadly. You feel the stirring in your gums that you know must be your teeth itching to take a bite, and you let
“Shift,” Pen says. It’s not a command, but not a suggestion, either. You understand what he’s telling you, though, and you try to listen.

“I can’t,” you say, frustrated. It’s like standing on the edge of a cliff. You can feel the instincts trying to push past your stubborn brain, trying to show you how, but you’re just—stuck.


You growl again, and there’s a wave of energy that pulses out of you. It’s not enough, though, not nearly enough—

“Perhaps you need more incentive,” Pen says, his voice closer to you than it had been moments ago. You feel his hot breath on your lips, and half a second after you realize what he’s going to do, he does it.

This kiss is different than the others you’ve shared before. You’ve had desperate, and hungry, but this, with your teeth out like this… It’s otherworldly. He growls, but his is a different kind of hunger. Almost. You think. Actually, maybe they’re not so different.

This time, he doesn’t stop. Doesn’t pull away and remind you that things are moving too fast, that your still mostly-human body can’t take it. Instead, he pushes you further.

His hands wander along your sides, gripping handfuls of your flesh in his clawed hands. You think he’s losing it, that he’s simply forgotten that you were in the middle of something important. You’re not sure you’re right until he lifts your body into his arms, easily supporting your weight as if it’s nothing. He pulls you against him even harder, soft trills and coos slipping into his rough groans of desire.

You have absolutely zero idea what kind of equipment he’s got, but you go for familiarity anyways. Your hand finds the juncture between his legs, where his cock would be if he were human, and you’re pleased to find something long and hard greeting your hand. He pulls away from your mouth to gasp at your touch, eyes rolling at the sensation you’re sure he’s never felt. You wonder briefly if he’s ever touched himself, and a surge of heat runs through you at that mental image.

When you give his organ an experimental squeeze, he practically whines, the color in his eyes shifting, for the briefest moment, to a deep ocean blue, before flickering back to yellow. Beautiful. Alien. Yours.

“Shift,” he breathes against you, and this time, you do.

The heat he helped build within you pulses like a heartbeat, like a hum, and you find yourself looking down at that cliff again. This time, you know how to get down.

You jump.

You’re not… you, anymore. Well, you are. But you don’t feel like you. You don’t look like you.

You’re covered in fur. Your spine extends out longer than you’re used to, and you can move the end
of it at will. A tail. You have a tail.

You’re breathing hard, panting with exertion. You’re feverishly hot; you didn’t know it’d be this taxing. When you’re in this form, it’s hard enough to hold onto you, as you are, and not get lost in this new mold.


You look up at him – he’s so much taller now, and you feel your hackles raise, a growl hanging low in your throat. Your lips peel back to show him your teeth, to show him how sharp they are, and that if he tries anything, how easily you’ll relieve him of his hand.

The Hunger

Your mind is frenzied. You’re ravenous, and the smell of the fresh meat is almost too much to stand. “Here,” Pen says, offering your first bite, just like he promised. “Take it.”

You shudder at the voice, your fur bristling at the tone. Should you trust him? You feel like you have to, if you want that food. Your teeth bared, eyes trained on his own, you slowly inch forward. He makes no move to grab at you, staying still.

“Eat,” he says, whispering the word like it’s something to be revered. “I know you’re hungry—”

You suddenly lurch forward and sink your teeth into the meat, growling and yanking and tearing the flesh until a chunk peels back from the bone. You swallow greedily, barely even registering the taste. Bloody, and perfect; all you need to know.

Yet there’s something else there, something that takes you a moment to recognize. Cold, heavy, strangely sweet, and something like the bite of peppermint…

Fear. Tasty, tasty, beautiful fear.

The boy hadn’t been afraid specifically of bears, like you’d originally thought. He’d been afraid of all wild animals. Predators, specifically. His mother used to tell him not to go out into the forest alone or he’d get eaten by them, and she was right; he did. Not because the boy didn’t listen to his mother, but because from the second Pennywise set his eyes on him, the kid was doomed to die experiencing his greatest fear.

You know all of this now from the taste of his fear alone.

“Come back now,” Pen tells you, and he almost sounds like he’s pleading. “Come back.”

And you suddenly remember this isn’t you; you’re no wolf. You’re human – or at least you look like one, to everyone else. That’s your form, the one you like the best, the one you’re used to. It’s the form that houses your true self, and you need to get back to it.

But it’s so far away – you’re so far away. The cliff is higher now, the jump more difficult. You close your eyes and pant with exertion, the energy within you pulsing in time with your hum. You push past it, and come out on the other side as you.

To be honest, you’d half been expecting your clothes to be torn to shreds after your transformation, like a werewolf in a horror movie. But your clothes are as you left them; intact. And thankfully, so is your mind.

The exhaustion is mostly mental. You’re tired, and a lot of you wants to sleep, maybe cry. What you were as a wolf, what you felt… it wasn’t what you’d been expecting. You’d been under the impression that the only thing that would change was your body. But when you were there, you had been stuck in a way of thinking you weren’t used to. Animalistic, primal. You only cared about yourself, and how you would get rid of your hunger—

Your… your hunger. You’d… you’d actually eaten human flesh. And it was delicious.

You want more.
“Oh god,” you say, your voice breaking and so, so small.

Pen joins you on the filthy floor when you crumble. He sets you in between his long, lanky legs and pulls you to him until your back is pressed to his chest. He holds you there, his chin resting on the top of your head and his ruffles cushioning your head like a pillow.

“It can be difficult sometimes,” Pen rumbles quietly above you, “to separate yourself from the form.”

“Tell me about it,” you say weakly.

“You see now, yes?” he asks. “How the shift is more than an illusion. More than a shift in appearance.”

“It’s a shift in perspective,” you say. “As a wolf, I didn’t care that I was eating a… a kid. But now that I’m back, I…”

You trail off, not really knowing where you were going with that sentence. You think of the boy, whose name you still don’t know and whose name you’d rather never find out. You think of how he looked in that final moment, the realization that he was going to die dawning on his young face.

You’re not disgusted that you ate him. He was delicious. What you are is…

“I’m sad,” you say, even knowing Pen won’t understand, will probably judge you for it. “I can’t help it, Pen, I’m… I was raised human, it’s…”

“Human emotions are volatile,” Pen murmurs softly, “dangerous things. It will pass. Eventually, everything does.”

That sounds good, the passing thing. For the most part. Of course, there’s still that part of you — that tiny, nagging part you’ve been fighting since the beginning — that doesn’t want that kind of loss.

But you have no choice, you remind yourself. You never had a choice.

After that day, you seem to be hungry on a near constant basis.

You are still able to feel full, satisfied, but it’s frustratingly temporary. About an hour after eating enough food for three people, you’re hungry again. You learn rather quickly to just ignore the feeling, because it’s not like you’re actually going to die if you don’t inhale your whole fridge every day.

The knowing doesn’t stop the hunger from feeling torturous, though.

“Is this how you feel all the time?” you ask Pen one night. You’re curled up on your couch, hunched around your too-empty stomach and feeling like you haven’t eaten in days.

“Not after a hunt,” Pen says above you. Your head is in his lap, and he’s playing with your hair like it’s fascinating to him. You wish he’d rub your sore stomach instead, but you know he’s no creature of empathy. “Negative energy is the only thing that can truly feed us. You may never feel full again, but your hunger will fade if you consume fear.”

“Which I can only get by eating scared children,” you say, shuddering against him.

“Because they’re easier to scare."

“They also taste better,” he says. “It’s not only the flavor of their fear, but the amount of it. Adults are more trouble than they’re worth.”

“So it’s time to hunt,” you say quietly.

“Yes.”

You close your eyes, listening to the gentle rhythmic pulsing of his hum. It’s familiar, now. More familiar than your own humanity.

And really, how much of that do you have left, anyway?

“Why can’t you come with me, again?”

“Our kind aren’t as social as humans,” Pen tells you, “especially during a hunt. I’ll only interfere with your instincts.”

“So what happens if something goes wrong?”

“Take care of it.”

“Gee, thanks,” you say, nerves on fire. “Okay, so what do I even do? Just… show up, shift, scare? That easy?”

“For the most part,” Pen says with a shrug. When he notices your glare, he sighs. “You will know what to do when the time comes. Telling you more will only distract you. You still think too much like a human; far too much and still so little.”

“I’ll take that as a complement.”

“It wasn’t.”

“Don’t care,” you say.

He sends you off into the night, shooing at you like you’re a stray animal. You stuff your hands in your sweater pockets to ward off the chilly fall air. When you look back at Pen, he’s gone.

It might be easier to catch a kid during the day, especially given the curfew, but you’re starving, inexperienced, and the cover of night should help immensely if something does go wrong.

It’s late, around ten again, which means the streets are almost completely empty. The center of town has a few convenience stores open all night, though, and you see a few people popping in and out to grab random necessities. Someone leaves chewing on a packaged sandwich, and you feel a pang of loss; you’ll never again be able to quell your hunger so easily.

You eventually end up in the park on Main. You come here on occasion to read under the shade of your favorite tree during your days off, but you’ve never actually been here at night. It might be
peaceful, if you didn’t know you’re being watched.

Thinking at first that it’s a police officer walking up to ask you what you’re up to, you pull out your phone. You’ll just say you’re waiting for a date to show up. The curfew’s just for kids, after all.

Two teenage boys suddenly jump out from behind trees and leap at you. Your first reaction is to fight the way humans fight – with punches and kicks. But then you realize an opportunity has presented itself. Of course, you’d only been looking for one, so maybe this isn’t so ideal after all…

The kids are strong; puberty did a number on them. One of them is built like the fucking Hulk. Instead of trying to fight this moving brick wall, you try to take out his friend first. You deliver a roundhouse kick to his face and he goes down hard. Unfortunately, it’s not enough to knock him out cold.

The Hulk manages to grab hold of your arms and pin them behind your back. He holds you as his much smaller friend gathers his crumpled self from the ground. He spits out some blood and pulls out a knife.

“You gonna cut me up, little boy?” you taunt, fury burning through you. “Gonna gut me right in the middle of the fucking park?”

“Don’t tempt me,” he growls, slowly getting closer.

“Why shouldn’t I?” you ask, feeling your true teeth protract within your mouth. “Now, at least, you’ve got a fighting chance.”

It takes the kid a moment to see your distinctly inhuman teeth, and when he does, his eyes go wide in horror. The scent of his fear is faint in the cool night air, but it’s enough to set your nerves alight, to make your stomach ache for more—

“What the hell is going on here?”

Without another word, the boys take off into the night. You would have run right after them had Hulk boy not pushed you into the dirt before splitting. You have just enough time to retract your teeth before your interruptor rushes over to you.

“Are you alright?”

No. No! Not now! Come the fuck on, you were so close! You could have taken both of those fuckers out and terrified the shit out of them and actually gotten to eat tonight, but then this asshole has to show up and play hero!

“Agent Miller,” you say, forcing yourself to sound relieved. “I can’t tell you how glad I am to see you.”
Agent Miller brings you back to the police station to take your statement. You’d much rather he drop dead, but to keep up pretenses, you need to at least act like you’re scared that you just got attacked.

You press the ice pack he offers you against your swollen jaw, even though it stopped hurting a while ago. The cold burn distracts you from your hunger. After you explain your story for the second time, one of the cops in the room pipes up.

“Sounds like the Dawson boys,” he says. “They get up to all kinds of trouble.”

“Aggravated assault is more than just trouble,” says Agent Miller. In another situation, another life, you’d be just as incredulous as he is. But you know better; that’s a Derry cop, and he can’t see like Agent Miller can.

“They’re just kids,” you say. The cop nods in agreement.

“One of them had a knife,” Agent Miller says.

“A pocket knife,” you argue. That’s a lie, but you’re in a hurry to get out of here, and waving this off seems to be your best bet. “It couldn’t have pierced half an inch into my skin past my clothes.”

“What I still don’t understand,” says Agent Miller, “is why these kids even jumped you in the first place. Why didn’t they demand your wallet or phone?”

“They hadn’t gotten that far,” you say. “They didn’t get the chance.”

“Because you fought them off,” he says. “What were you doing out there so late, anyway?”

“Just taking a walk,” you say with a shrug. “Can I go home now? I already told you I’m not pressing charges against a couple kids. I gave you my statement, twice, and all I’d like now is to take a shower and sleep for the next decade.”

Agent Miller sighs, rubbing one of his eyes as if influenced by your mention of sleep. It’s almost midnight, now.

“Alright, I’ll take you home.”

“Excuse me?”

“What? I’m not letting you walk home by yourself. Not after what happened tonight.”

“I told you, they’re just kids. They’re probably asleep in bed by now.”

“I’m not taking that chance,” Agent Miller says, putting on his coat. “Kids aren’t the only ones who go missing in Derry.”

“Oh, come on. You know these boys aren’t behind the kidnappings.”

“Probably not,” Agent Miller agrees. “But someone certainly is, and they’re still at large. I won’t take no for an answer.”
You bite back a snarky comment about how this could be considered kidnapping. Maybe if you humor him, it’ll get you home quicker. Then, you can sneak out and hunt down the skinny fucker who thought he could hurt you with a flimsy little blade and devour him whole.

But of course, Agent Miller doesn’t cut you a break. On the way home, he begins drilling you again.

“Did you find your dog, yet?” he asks, trying his best to sound like he’s just making casual conversation.

“No.”

“Maybe that’s because you never had one to begin with.”

You glance up at him. Because he’s stopped at a red light, he’s staring right back at you, watching carefully for your reaction. You don’t have to fake the bored, annoyed look you shoot back at him.

“You’re not even going to ask me how I know?” he asks.

“No, I’m not,” you say dryly. “A ten year old could have figured out that I was lying.”

“Then why’d you do it?” he asks. “What were you really doing in those sewers?”

Your stomach churns, though it’s not due to any kind of nervousness at his impromptu interrogation. Right now, you’re pretty sure your fear levels are somewhere in the negatives, whereas your hunger levels are causing your stomach to start digesting itself. At least, that’s what it feels like it’s trying to do.

You’d bite Agent Miller’s head clean off right now if he smelled even the tiniest bit scared. But he’s relaxed, and it makes him smell so bland. You could eat him, but you know your hunger won’t go away if you do.

You need to scare the absolute shit out of him, first.

“Fine,” you say quietly, acting as though he’s caught you red-handed. “It’s not like you’ll believe me, anyway.

“I knew something was wrong with Derry from the moment I got here. I only found out about the kids through the posters. No one here talks about it, or if they do, they quickly move on to something else. It’s like everyone here is involved in some huge, terrible secret. And being the idiot that I am, I had to know what that secret is. And why so many kids are dying for it.”

“You went into the sewers to investigate,” says Agent Miller. “Instead of going to the police.”

“The police are in on it, too,” you say. “Haven’t you noticed? It’s like everyone here is hypnotized. You could throw physical evidence in front of any cop in Derry and they’d find a way to brush it off. But that’s another problem; no physical evidence.

“I know it was dangerous, but I didn’t know what else to do. As far as I could tell, no one, even outside this town, seemed to notice just how many victims we’re talking about here. I thought that if I found something, I could take it to someone not affected by this… spell. Someone like you. But at the time, I didn’t think I could trust you, which is why I lied. It’s far too easy to get a fake badge these days.”

Agent Miller pulls up at your house. He turns off the car, and makes no move to get out. He stares at his steering wheel, and you’re not sure how to read the expression on his face. Finally, he sighs, and
begins to tell his own side of the story.

“Back at the Bureau,” Agent Miller says, “all of Derry’s missing persons case files are tucked away in a file cabinet in the basement. I noticed, about a month ago, that we were still getting reports coming in. They’d all be reviewed in under a week and then sent back to that damned cabinet, to gather dust with the rest of the cold cases. I brought it to the director’s attention, but as soon as I started talking about it, his eyes glazed over. He told me I was seeing patterns where there were none, and suggested I take some time off.”

“So you came here,” you finish for him. “For the same reason I was down in those sewers.”

“I had to know,” Agent Miller agrees, “and I couldn’t let the memories of those people fade away.”

The voice of the boy from the Barrens suddenly echoes in your memory.

*Help! Somebody help me! Please!*

You work your jaw muscles side to side, hating the twinge in your gut. You’ve never heard anyone sound so terrified before. You remember what Pen told you about human emotions. They’re volatile, dangerous, but—

“It will pass,” you mutter, the words barely ghosting past your lips.

“What was that?”

“I said maybe we should go inside,” you answer. “It’s getting kinda chilly in this car. Besides, I have more to tell you.”

“Other than the fact that this whole town is under some kind of supernatural mind-control?” Agent Miller asks.

“Yes,” you tell him seriously.

He considers you for a moment, then sighs, nodding.

Inside, you offer him a cup of hot chocolate, but he refuses. Because you offered, though, you know he’s let his guard down just a bit more.

“I guess I’ll just have to say it,” you start. “You can think I’m crazy all you like, but please, just hear me out.”

Agent Miller raises a brow, but nods for you to continue.

“I saw something in the sewers,” you admit. “Something terrible, and definitely not human.”

“What did you see?”

You take a deep breath, which to him must look like you’re trying to calm yourself before your explanation. In reality, you’re scenting the air.

Like with most of these things, you aren’t exactly sure how you do it, but you somehow… *dig into*
Agent Miller’s head. Pen was right; it’s not like mind reading, exactly. It’s more like taking a peek behind the curtains. You get a glimpse, and suddenly you know exactly what Agent Miller fears the most: alligators. He grew up in Florida, and was attacked when he was very young.

“It was reptilian,” you say quietly. “Humanoid in shape, but it was covered in scales. Long tail, raptor-like claws… I only caught the tiniest glimpse of it before I hightailed it out of there, so that’s really all the detail I picked up. Well, actually, there was one more thing: it was… eating.”

To your satisfaction, Agent Miller’s fear spikes. The smell floods the room, and you struggle not to flat out drool all over your kitchen counter. To hide it, you take sips from a cup of water.

“What it was eating?” Agent Miller asks, trying so hard not to show his fear.


“What you’re telling me,” Agent Miller says slowly, “is that there’s a reptilian creature living in the sewers of Derry. It kidnaps and eats children, and somehow controls everyone’s perceptions of the crime to keep itself from being investigated.”

“I told you it sounds crazy,” you say with a light shrug. “But I know what I saw.”

Agent Miller looks down at his hands resting on the bar’s countertop. You can almost feel his mind working, trying to decide if he should believe you.

“Do you want to know what it looked like?” you ask, setting down your glass of water.

“Huh?”

You allow your hunger to fuel the shift. Agent Miller backs away from the bar, knocking his chair over in his haste to get away. He doesn’t think to run, or fight. The fear paralyzes him, keeps him rooted to your hardwood floor as he stares at you in terror.

You’ve become the creature you described in your lie. A mix between a human and an alligator, all teeth and claws and rough, green scales. You blink, and your narrowed pupils focus on his terrified expression, the pure, unfiltered fear in his eyes.

You smile, though you’re not sure if he can even tell through your mass of deadly teeth. You roar, and hiss, and like a velociraptor you begin stalking towards him.

He finally decides to act; he pulls out his gun and fires. Pain sears through a hole he’s made in your shoulder, but your focus is elsewhere. You know the only reason he didn’t aim for your head is because he’s just too terrified to even shoot straight.

You whip your massive lizard tail at him, knocking the gun from his hands. Before he can even think to dodge for it, you tackle him to the ground. He’s whimpering like a child, trembling like a leaf. He smells like thanksgiving dinner.

“You should have never come to Derry, Agent,” you whisper to him. Your voice is completely different; this form’s mouth and vocal cords are not as suited for speech. “I’m going to eat you now. No one will find your body. No one will come looking for you. They won’t even know you’re gone.”

You slowly inch towards him, your teeth flaring outward in preparation to get a solid grip on his flesh before tearing it off. Before you make contact, Agent Miller manages to say something.
“M-my w-w-wife w-will c-come,” Agent Miller says through sobbing gasps.

“Then I’ll eat her, too.”

“Y-you w-won’t g-g-get that f-far,” Agent Miller hisses, his teeth clenched. He’s as scared as you can possibly get him in this form; his phobia runs too deep for him to calm down now. But there’s a fierceness behind his eyes that catches you off-guard. Anger, perhaps? No, not anger.

_Hatred._

You snarl, and a mad laughter bubbles out from the back of your throat. Agent Miller’s fear spikes even further at your strange behavior, and you begin to understand why Pen laughs like this. It helps marinate his meals.

“Goodbye, Agent Miller.”

With a vicious snarl, you bite your prey’s left arm completely off. As you tear into the well-seasoned flesh, Agent Miller’s screams bounce off your living room walls. The pain only floods even more delicious fear into his meat. You take a bit more time when you tear his other arm off. He stops screaming, then, and goes quiet in shock.

After scarfing that down, you bite into one of his legs, mangling his flesh to shreds before you even detach it from his body. By the time you start working on his remaining limb, he’s dead from blood loss.

And finally, _finally_, your hunger is gone.

Chapter End Notes

_Bye-bye, Agent Miller. :)_
You’re surrounded by blood. It pools on your floorboards and soaks into your human form’s clothing. With a contented sigh, you close your eyes and will the mess away. When you open your eyes again, everything is back to how it was before you killed Agent Miller and ate his corpse.

The hole he left in your shoulder is mostly closed already. It doesn’t even bleed through your shirt. You produce that sound that allows you to heal faster, and pick yourself up off the floor. You don’t feel tired even though it’s a few hours past midnight, so instead of crashing on your bed, you decide to head back to Pen’s place.

By the time you enter the massive chamber that he calls his home, you feel him following behind you. You stop at the edge of the tunnel you used to get here. He wraps his arms around you from behind and sniffs you.

“How did it feel?” he breathes against your ear. You lean into his touch and watch the severed human body parts float gracefully above you, like planets orbiting the sun.

“Satisfying,” you tell him. You smirk, tilting your head back to meet his eyes. “I guess some of us do have the privilege.”

“What was your prey afraid of?”

“Alligators,” you say, looking back to the corpses like it’s a pretty sunset. He was right about you not feeling entirely full, but the lack of ravenous hunger for the first time in days has put you in a wonderful mood.

Pen is quiet for a moment. Then, “The Miller human is afraid of alligators.”

“Yes,” you say, “he was.”

You feel Pen stiffen behind you.

“Relax,” you tell him, “I remembered what you said about the wife. If she tries anything, I’ll kill her too.”

“Your first kill was an adult,” Pen says above you, “and you were successful. I don’t doubt your natural talent. But in certain things, humans can be stronger than us.”

“It took me about two seconds to separate Agent Miller’s arm from his body with my teeth.”

“This is a different kind of strength,” Pen says lowly. “I’ve witnessed it. When those they love are threatened, it burns like a sun within them. A sun that even we cannot consume. It’s hideous.”

“Her husband is no longer threatened,” you say. “He’s dead. She’s more likely to be heartbroken, if she ever even finds out. We don’t even know if she can ‘see’.”
You’re doing your best to sound confident in front of Pennywise, but in reality, you’re well aware of the possible repercussions of what you’ve done. By eating Agent Miller you’ve risked exposing you and Pen both. You try to tell yourself that even if you hadn’t, Agent Miller would have found out. He wouldn’t have stopped looking; he was going to have to die eventually. But it’s done, and all you can do now is be cautious. Keep watch, just like Pen taught you.

After all, you shouldn’t underestimate humans. You would know, having once been one yourself.

The next morning, you wake up feverish, irritated, and unbearably horny.

You’re not sure what the hell is going on, but you know it must have something to do with your recent transformation. You think about heading down to the sewers in search of some much needed answers, but all you can seem to do is writhe against your own bedsheets.

Your panties are soaked through, and you’re leaking copious amounts of your body’s natural lubricant. There’s so much that your thighs are painted with it, and there’s an uncomfortably wet spot on the bed.

Just when you’re really starting to worry, you notice Pen is in the room with you.

He’s crouched in the corner, his golden irises are rimmed with a bright blood red and staring at you with such intent that your body goes very still. You watch him with unblinking eyes, as if afraid he’ll move closer if you look away—

But no, you’re not afraid. Not you, never. You’re angry, you’re enraged, you’re—

You sit up abruptly, finding a second wind, and roar at Pennywise. You don’t know why but you feel cornered, defensive. Your teeth extend and the tips of your fingers solidify and darken into razor sharp claws. The low growl in the back of your throat is a warning.

He returns your growl with a low noise that rolls and skips in your chest, in the same place you sense his hum. It soothes you, for some reason, and you consider him.

Slowly, very slowly, he opens his mouth to show you his deadlights. He lays himself bare for you, completely vulnerable, and you relax. You realize now that the reason you growled at Pen was because you felt vulnerable, too. He’s evened the trust back out, again, and so you allow him to approach.

Once he’s close enough, he pounces on you in bed. His scent is nearly overwhelming, and your mind begins to fizzle at the edges.

“What’s happen—?”


That’s all you get to ask him before he practically tears your clothes off, kissing and licking at your neck. You clench your teeth and hiss in a lungful of air. Your entire body aches, over-sensitive like when you get sick, but the pain dissipates wherever he touches you.

Pen ruts against you, shuddering in pleasure as he continues to sniff and lick at you.
“You smell better than fear,” he groans out, and you know exactly how much of a compliment that is, having tasted the stuff yourself. You feel the same about his scent, too. It’s burning dust, stale candy, and something you can’t even name.

“Do something about it,” you sigh, and he growls in response.

He leans in to kiss you. You can feel how hot you are on his tongue, which feels like ice against yours. When you pull away for air, he grips your sides in his powerful hands and flips you onto your stomach with almost no effort. He yanks your abdomen to his, and you can feel how desperately hard he is through his costume. After a few seconds and a symphony of fabric being torn, his clothing is gone, too. You want to get a good look at his body, but he’s pinned you faced down.

“I’m going to take you,” he growls. “Right here, right now. Nothing in this universe can stop me, not even you. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” you breathe.

“Good,” he says, and thrusts his entire dick into you at once.

You cry out at the sudden intrusion, but it’s not quite as painful as you’d think. The waterfall of slick coming out of you certainly helps. You’re more soaked than you’ve ever been, than you even think is possible. Maybe for a human, it’s not.

Pen has no mercy; he fucks you with abandon and completely without restraint. All you can do is bite into your pillow and let him. With each thrust, he makes a sound that’s somewhere between a grunt and a sigh.

You almost scream into your pillow; the feeling of him filling you so completely is the perfect cure to the soreness and irritation you felt earlier. It feels so right, like he belongs inside of you. Belongs to you.

He leans down suddenly and bites into your shoulder, breaking your skin enough to make you bleed. It doesn’t hurt nearly as much as you expect it to. In fact, it feels almost as intimate as a kiss. There’s definitely something significant about that bite, but you’re not quite sure what it means.

His thrusts become faster and harder, and you can feel something… changing inside of you. The tip of his dick begins to flare out, spreading your walls even wider for him. The sensation is enough to make you come.

He follows immediately after you, digging his teeth even further into your skin. The end of his dick nudges itself into your cervix and locks itself into place there. For a full minute, he continues ejaculating inside of you, trembling and groaning as the pleasure overwhelms him. Not a drop of his cum leaks out of you; it’s all held in by the flared tip.

When he’s done, he doesn’t let you go. You collapse onto your mattress, covered in sweat and your slick soaking into the sheets, and the entire time he keeps himself attached to you like a leech.

“Pen?”

He doesn’t answer. His teeth slowly pull out of your skin, and he begins lapping up the blood with his tongue, purring in contentment. You let out a soft laugh, and turn your head to see the damage on your shoulder.

Surprisingly, you’re not bleeding that much. Already the wounds he left are closing, a hundred tiny teeth marks healing before your eyes. Unlike the bite he gave to your hand, these marks don’t scab
over and fade. Instead, they darken, and over the next half hour of him holding you down (his dick remaining locked inside of you the whole time) they begin to resemble a dark, blood-red tattoo.

He’s marked you.

“Mine,” he growls against you, nose nuzzling at your ear.

It’s almost… affectionate. You weren’t sure he was capable of that. He’s cuddled and touched you before, sure, but you’d figured that was all because he’d been alone for so long. He just wanted companionship. Now, you’re not so sure that’s all it is for him.

Is that all it is for you?

You spend the entire day in bed with Pennywise, and somewhere around hour five you lose count of how many rounds you’ve gone. You’re completely exhausted, and you can tell Pen is, too, but neither of you want to stop. Or maybe it’s that you can’t.

You’re tempted to switch positions just to change it up, but he won’t let you move from your spot pinned beneath him. Every time you wiggle too much, he bites that spot on your neck again and growls in warning.

The bites don’t even hurt, though. It actually feels good, and strangely comforting, to have his teeth buried into you like that. It’s like a caress, and you can feel far more than the physical bite whenever it happens. There’s such a sense of possessiveness, of belonging, of a promise that sounds like I will always protect you.

That’s his spot, now; each of those teeth marks on your skin, and that entire area of your shoulder and neck. It will always be there.

Just like you will always belong to him.
The Turtle

When the heat finally subsides, Pen gently releases his death grip on you and pulls himself out. You try your best to hold in the mess he’s left inside of you before rushing to the bathroom to clean up. Some leaks out, but your bed is already way beyond ruined, and you can’t find the energy to care.

When you’re done, you emerge from the restroom just in time to see him tuck his spent dick back into his clothing, the fabric repairing itself perfectly. The glimpse you get of him isn’t enough, but you know it’s by far the last chance you’ll have to see it.

You’re tempted to curl up next to him on your bed, but it’s filthy and horribly wet from the literal hours of sex you just had, so you head for your couch instead. He follows you, and you both manage to fit, curled up around each other and listening to each other’s hum.

Something about him is different, now. Maybe something about you, too. You’re not sure what it is, but there’s a closeness that wasn’t there before. An attachment. And for once in your life, it doesn’t scare you, because you know this one isn’t capable of falling apart.

“Pen?”

“Mm.”

“You called it heat,” you say, “but you didn’t really explain.”

“What more do you want to know?”

“How often it happens, for one,” you say. “I’d like to be able to prepare. You know, so I don’t have to buy a new mattress each time.”

“It’s infrequent,” Pen answers. “Years can pass between each cycle. You get to know the signs, once they’re regular.”

“Do you get them?” you ask.

“Yes,” he says. He pauses. “Though they’ve never been like this.”

“Intense?”

“Yes,” he says. “Perhaps it’s different for you. Or because of you.”

“Because of me?”

“Because of us,” he clarifies. “Because you chose to be mine.”

“I didn’t really have much of a choice though, did I?” you say, only partially joking.

When he doesn’t answer, you look up at his face. He’s frowning, but there’s a playful spark in his eyes.


“I didn’t mean it as an insult,” you say quickly, but he’s already pulling away. He flops dramatically off of the couch and rolls over to bury his face into your shag carpet. “Oh come on, don’t be like that.”
“It’s not good enough for you?” He whines, spread eagle and voice muffled. “I’m not good enough for you?”

“Stop that,” you say, nudging his side with your toes. “Ugh, Pen, you’re such a drama queen.”

“Is it the clown thing?” he continues. “It’s the clown thing, isn’t it?”

You run your hand down your face and try to hold back your laughter.

“Or maybe it’s that I eat kids,” he says.

“It’s far too late for that to bother me,” you say.

He rolls over onto his back and rests his hands on his tummy. “Very true.”

You slide off the couch and onto his lap. The puffy fabric around his thighs is soft and silky against your bare legs. You rest one hand on his chest, and the other against his cheek. Your thumb traces the line of his makeup, and he stares at the ‘tattoo’ he left on your shoulder. He purrs low in his throat, clearly happy with himself.

“I didn’t know I could do that,” he says.

“Guess I’ve taught you a few things, too,” you say.

“Yes,” he says thoughtfully, “I suppose you have.”

“Do you think I could give you one?” you ask. He blinks, surprised at the idea for some reason.

“Do you want to?”

“You marked me. I’m damn well going to mark you, too.”

“I’ll think about it.”

You lean forward, pressing your lips against his ear. His breath hitches, and you know it’s not with arousal because you’re both way beyond spent, but because he can sense the intimacy of your act.

“Oh my dear sweet Pennywise,” you whisper with a devilish grin, “I wasn’t asking for your permission.”

The next day at work, you get an earful from your boss for not showing up or even bothering to call yesterday. You tell him you fell down your stairs and sprained your ankle; a lie you’d actually prepared for with a fake splint and everything.

Also, without the splint, people would wonder why you’re walking funny all day…

“Did you really fall down your stairs?” John asks once you’re seated back at your desk.

“Can you not see the splint?”

“I just meant... it’s not like you,” he says, sounding hesitant. You fight hard not to tear him to shreds.
Instead, you just say, “John, you don’t know the first thing about me.”

"Why do you make yourself look like a clown?"

"Hm?"

"For your disguise,” you say. “Why not a regular human? Wouldn’t it allow you to get closer to the prey?"

“This form fulfills two purposes at once,” he tells you. “Children associate clowns with tasty food and celebration. Yet at the same time, many fear them. It makes for interesting hunts, and interesting flavor.”

“I’m not afraid of clowns,” you say. When he smirks, you roll your eyes. “Even before I met you, Pen. I never understood why people found them scary.”

“You’re not like most people,” Pen says. “What they fear in clowns are their masks.”

“Clowns don’t wear masks.”

“We all wear masks.”

“You mean like emotions?”

“More like lies. Deceit. Trickery. The less trust you have in someone, the more you fear them.”

“And people don’t trust you if you’ve got a giant exaggerated smile painted on your face.”

“Easier to lie,” he says quietly. Then, he looks up to meet your eyes. “Which is why your fear smells so different, even when you were human.”

“Why’s that?”

“You have much more control over your fear,” he says. “It’s not nearly so potent as human fear simply because you can force yourself not to feel it.”

“I do feel it,” you tell him, “I just know how to… change it, I guess.”

“Into rage, yes,” he says, yellow eyes flickering like embers. “That’s why I knew it had to be you. I could smell your potential…”

“And hear my hum,” you add.

“Of course,” he says. “Yes, the hum. But your smell is what convinced me.”

That statement strikes you as strange. You’ve been able to locate Pen’s exact location from the sound of his hum, so why would Pen have needed any more proof that you were one of his kind? He must’ve just meant your smell captivated him more than your hum.

“What did I smell like?”

“Fire,” he says automatically.
“Like a campfire?” you ask. “Smoke?”

“No,” he says. “Like the flames.”

You try to imagine the smell of fire itself. Charged air, pure energy, molecules rearranging… You’re not sure what any of that’s supposed to smell like.

“How do I smell different now?” you ask. “I mean, now that I’ve changed?”

“Yes,” he says. “Now, you smell like fire and blood.”

About a week passes by before you feel the hunger again.

Being around people is now an exercise in patience. Sensing their individual fear now happens automatically, if they get close enough, and it’s incredibly distracting. As you walk past people on the street, you sense spiders, drowning, darkness, shadow people, werewolves— and you have to teach yourself how to ignore them.

Every human that gets within a few feet of you is at risk of becoming your next meal, and you know that even though Pen controls Derry, he couldn’t control the collateral if you decided to grab a snack in public.

You have to fight to keep your teeth retracted, and your fingers itch to reveal your claws. You tuck your hands deep into your pockets and clench your fists. You’re determined to control yourself, to keep your form.

You enter the grocery store, knowing you won’t be able to eat much, if anything, that they sell here. You don’t particularly care about keeping up appearances. Things would be far easier if you just came to live with Pen in his lair, only coming out to feed, but you like living in your clean, warm house.

Besides, he’s taken to spending more time there just to be with you. You feel like you’re slowly convincing him it’s better than living ankle-deep in sewage.

When you casually stroll into the deli section, a different kind of fear scent spikes your curiosity. It only takes you a second to find the source; the packaged meat lining the aisle-long refrigerators.

Some of these animals died in pain and suffering, and the fear has leeched into their flesh. Animal fear smells more subdued, but still delicious to your growling stomach. It’s like putting just salt on your food, instead of complex combinations of spices.

You reach for a particularly terrified chop of lamb, and get a brief flash of a slaughterhouse, loud machinery, and frantic baying. You put the meat in your basket and turn to check out.

And then you see her; a blonde woman in her mid to late thirties. She’s lean and fit, clearly athletic. You instantly know she’s not from around here, and it puts you on edge. You study her from afar, trying not to be too obvious.

Her expression is distant as she grabs groceries and places them numbly into her cart. Her brows are furrowed, her frown small but tight. You’re not sure, but you think she’s biting the inside of her
cheek. She looks like she’s deep in thought, not really seeing anything but whatever it is that she’s working out in her head.

You’re tempted to go up to her and ask her if she’s alright. Maybe you can get her to talk, and figure out if she is who you think she is. But you decide not to draw any attention to yourself. If you start asking questions, she might start drawing conclusions.

Part of you, distant yet loud, wants to take no chances. You don’t even have to know who she is to kill her. She could be your lunch, and if she’s not who you think she is, then another worthless human is dead, and you’ll have satisfied your hunger.

But you manage to shove that urge down. One of the few things you miss about being human is your ability to think clearly, without instinctual urges jumping in to ruin the day.

Just in case, though, you glance into her head. A brief scene of her being swarmed and hunted by a horde of undead flashes before you, and you tuck the information away for later.

Now, at least, you are both armed and protected by her fear.

---

Slowly, sensation comes to you. You realize you’re floating, gravity nonexistent in this bizarre realm. No, not bizarre; home. When you open your eyes, you’re surrounded by billions of celestial bodies, all shimmering in a vast darkness.

The universe. And you are at its core.

In the far, far distance, you see a gigantic creature. It swims in the cosmos like it’s the ocean – effortless, perfect. You can’t make out much detail from here, but you know that it’s dodging every planet and star with practiced ease.

“The Turtle,” you mutter.

You feel a tug on something inside of you, like you’re being pulled by an invisible string towards this being. You’re not scared; in fact, you sense absolutely zero harmful intent from this creature.

“Greetings,” he says in return. You hear his voice as if he’s only feet away from you. Perhaps in this realm, distance means nothing to beings like you. “How I have longed to finally meet you. I am called Maturin.”

“Pennywise said you two don’t get along,” you say warily. “Why is that?”

“You are not asking the right question,” says Maturin. “Though of course, this matter is none of my business…”

“Then what’s the right question?” you ask, already getting frustrated. “And what kind of business are you talking about?”

“I really ought not to get involved,” Maturin insists, “though I feel as though I must tell you that you’ve been deceived for quite some time.”

There’s another tug, but this time it’s away from the Turtle. Something is pulling you backwards, away.
“My brother has kept much from you, child,” he says, “though I must admit I understand why he has.”

“Why is that?”

“You still do not ask the right question,” Maturin says. “Perhaps you have been made incapable… Truly deviant of him, but then, that was always his way. I suppose some things never change.”

“For fuck’s sake, will you just tell me what the hell you’re talking about?”

“You need not mind me, child,” he tells you, turning his great head to ‘swim’ away from you. “I am not the one you must ask. Perhaps, now that you are no longer human, he will answer the question.”

You practically scream in frustration. Are you really the only one of your kind who knows how to cut to the chase and not speak in goddamn riddles?

“What question?”

“Why you have not questioned thus far.”
You’re leaning against your kitchen counter, staring at Pen’s back as he watches infomercials with what he insists is ‘morbid curiosity.’ Now’s as good a time as any to say it, you suppose.

“I met Maturin last night.”

Pen’s head whips around so fast it’s comical. He doesn’t even need to turn his torso to stare directly at you.

“He’s kind of a dick,” you add. Pen seems to relax a little at that.

“What did he say to you?” Pen asks.

“That he’s happy to meet me,” you say. “He seemed like he wanted to tell me something, but kept saying he ‘shouldn’t intervene.’ And everything he said was so vague, I could barely understand him.”

“He thinks he’s better than everyone else,” Pen grumbles, the rest of his body spinning around to match his head. “He doesn’t really do anything but sleep, unless he’s guarding. Lazy, stupid creature…”

“Guarding?” you ask. “Guarding what?”

“One of the pillars of the Dark Tower, the nexus of all universes,” Pen says, waving his hand like that’s incredibly boring. “He likes to look like he’s serious, but he’s really just swimming about it like a senile old man.”

“Why do you hate him so much?”

“I’m everything he’s not,” Pen says, frowning and staring hard at the floor. “By our very nature we’re fated to despise one another for all eternity. Where he creates, I destroy.”

That phrase reminds you of the dream you had, the one where you first saw Maturin. You feel like that’s significant somehow, but it’s such a distant and foggy memory that you can’t see why.

“So do I,” you point out. “He didn’t seem to hate me.”

“You are very difficult to hate.”

“Aw, was that a compliment?” you ask teasingly. “Was the big bad monster being nice to me just now?”

Pen very slightly tilts his head, considering you. “Do you not like it when I’m nice to you?”

“Of course I do,” you say. “It’s just not something you go out of your way to do very often. Though
I guess not eating me is pretty nice.”

“I could never eat you,” he says seriously.

“Yeah, I probably wouldn’t taste very good,” you say with a chuckle, “what with the whole no fear thing.”

Pen growls, sounding frustrated, and he gets off the couch to storm over to you.

“It has nothing to do with flavor,” he insists, staring intensely into your eyes. “If you were the only thing in this universe left to eat, I would rather starve.”

You blink, unsure what to say to that. One of his hands rests on your shoulder, right over his mark. When he runs his thumb over it, you feel the promise he made when he bit you there.

*I will always protect you.*

And the concept of always finally begins to sink in.

“Oh,” you say softly, just as he leans down to kiss you.

This kiss is different from the other ones he’s given you. He cups your face in his hands almost reverently. The very tips of his claws ghosting along your cheeks convey a sense of possessive desperation.

This kiss is not rough and full of teeth and tongues, but is instead soft, and gentle, and you’re surprised to find he’s actually capable of that.

Your arms reach up to drape over his shoulders, one of your hands playing with his hair. He seems to really like that, so you grab a handful in your fist and pull—*hard.*

He lets out a delicious groan of approval, and you smirk against his now more insistent lips. His hands drop from your cheeks to your lower back. He pushes you closer to him, and you can feel his eagerness through his clothes.

“We’re going to go slower this time,” you mutter against his lips. He continues pressing light kisses against you even as you talk. “You showed me how you like to do it. Now, it’s my turn.”

You pull away and take his hand, leading him back to your bedroom. His eyes are half-lidded, his already full lips swollen further from the kiss, his hair disheveled and messy.

It’s a good look on him.

You direct him to lay back on your bed (complete with a brand new mattress, of course), then climb on top of him. He rests his hands on the tops of your thighs, eying you like he’s pleasantly surprised at this change of position.

You waste no time in palming his dick through his costume, which gets him writhing and squirming in seconds. His claws dig into your thighs, but draw no blood. It gives you an idea, though, and you materialize the claw on your index finger to cut through his clothing.

He looks down at what you’re doing when he hears fabric ripping. You keep your eyes on his face as you reach between your legs to take him into your hand. He lets out a choked gasp that ends with a sort of rolling growl, fingers clenching on your thighs again.

For the most part, he’s shaped like a human. A nice size, burning hot against your palm. Except the
head is more tapered, coming to more of a narrow point at its tip. You briefly wonder if this is really what he looks like, or if he’s simply chosen this as part of this form. What if he could shape it into anything?

“You look delicious, Penny-boy,” you say, sliding yourself down his form until your mouth is next to his dick. “I wonder what you taste like?”

“You—” he gasps when you take him into your mouth, his hands flying to grasp fistfuls of your hair and his hips bucking. You can’t help but smile around his cock, humming a little to further tease him. When you flick the tip of your tongue against the little slit at his tip, he lets out a loud moan, unafraid to show his enthusiasm.

When you take his dick out of your mouth, he actually whines.

“Did you like that, Pen?” you ask, running your fingertips along his shaft.

His eyes meet yours, and the beautiful liquid gold is long gone. Now, those red rims are back, making him look like he’s completely insane. You feel like sometimes he actually is.

When you don’t go back to sucking, he grunts in frustration, bucking his hips up to try and convey what it is he wants. Every breath he takes has an undercurrent of a continuous growl, low and warning. You don’t move, though, challenging him with a cocky smirk.

“Put it in,” he chokes out, fighting hard to sound intimidating through his desperation. “I want more. Do it again.”

“Only if you say please,” you say.

You notice the spark in his eyes less than a second before he moves. In a movement so swift and sudden that you’re actually impressed and really turned on, he pushes you off of the bed and lifts you into his arms, slamming your back against the wall. He grinds his cock against your lower belly, taking what he wants rather than playing along.

You’re not surprised, though; he has no patience for human games.

He presses a hand against your throat, putting just enough pressure to cut off your air flow, but not enough to really hurt. He’s half an inch from your face, his crazed eyes glaring into your own.

“I don’t ask,” he growls, and you’re kind of super proud of yourself because he actually sounds angry. “I don’t beg.”

“N-not yet,” you choke out, smiling when he shoves his hand harder against your throat.

You wrap your legs tight around his waist, pressing him even more against you. His expression softens just a bit, and his hand falls away from your neck. He presses his forehead against yours and closes his eyes.

“What you do to me…” he sighs in a single, huffed breath.

You’re soaking wet; not nearly as much as when you were in heat, but still way more than you’ve ever been as a human. You shift your hips against him, and he thankfully takes the hint. He tears your clothes out of the way, and wastes no more time in sliding his aching cock into your warm, welcoming body.

He fucks you against the wall, his face buried against your neck, cheek resting on his mark on your
shoulder. When he bites into it again, you sigh at the warmth that floods through your chest. Every time he touches that mark, it’s like he’s touching something inside of you, a place you didn’t even know existed.

You want him to know what that feels like, too.

“P-Pen,” you say through another gasping breath. He doesn’t slow his pace at all, but pulls his teeth out of your skin to meet your eyes. Your blood stains his teeth, slowly dribbles from his bottom lip.

“What?” he asks, his voice so low and dark it sounds almost nothing like him.

Your hand runs through his hair, gripping the back of his skull and tilting it so you can better access his neck. You easily tear away the fabric of his ruffles and the poofy shoulder frills. Pale skin greets you, and you take a moment to admire the detail he put into his form. He has a few, scattered freckles along his collarbone and shoulder.

Why he would need those at all is beyond you, but you’re definitely not complaining; it’s adorable.

You glance up at him, and allow yourself a confident smirk. He’s stopped thrusting now, too curious as to what you’re planning to do with him. You show off your teeth, running your tongue along the razor sharp points.

“My turn.”

Without further warning you sink your teeth into his shoulder. His blood floods your mouth and he lets out a choked noise, his hips once again slamming upward and into you. His arms wrap tightly around your waist, and he begins to pick up speed at the cost of his rhythm.

As you get closer and closer to coming undone, your teeth stay latched onto his shoulder, and you don’t think you could pull away even if you wanted to. With a final, trembling thrust, his dick locks itself inside of you, his flared tip making it impossible for him to pull out as he comes inside of you. The flood of warmth pushes you over that edge, and you follow him in that free fall joyously.

When you’re both left trembling messes, you pull your teeth out from his skin, eyeing your work. Blood oozes from the hundreds of tiny marks you left in him, and you feel an instinct to lick the wounds. Affection floods your system and soft, soothing noises rumble from the back of your throat. Pen’s arms don’t loosen their hold around you, but he gently lowers both of you to the ground, his chest heaving as he leans against your shoulder.

“My,” you growl at him, and he echos with a soft, affirmative growl of his own.

And now the connection goes both ways. Unbreakable, indestructible; a mutual promise of everlasting protection and togetherness.

You wonder if this is the closest you and Pennywise can come to love.
You jolt awake, sitting up in bed as if you’d just had a nightmare. Pen immediately wraps around you, glancing around frantically. It takes you a moment to realize he’s looking for a threat, a source of your panic.

“S-sorry Pen,” you say, trying to calm your heart rate. “Nightmare.”

But that’s not exactly the truth, is it? Because you didn’t really dream. It was more like a pull in a single direction, only this time you could translate it like it was simply another form of language.

Something buried deep, deep within the cobwebs of your scattered mind are fragments of who you used to be, screaming at you to ask, question, challenge. Remember. But you don’t know what to do with that information. Not until you remember what Maturin told you. To ask Pennywise the question.

Why you have not questioned thus far.

“Pen,” you say slowly, “I, um…”

“What is it?” he asks softly. So softly that it makes you pause, consider.

Should you really trust that Maturin is telling you the truth? What if he’s trying to trick you? Would he even care enough to do that? He doesn’t seem like the type, but then, you don’t exactly know him very well.

And what did that question even mean? The question is why you haven’t questioned? As in, why haven’t you asked anything about being a devourer? That couldn’t be right, because you’ve asked quite a bit about that. And Pen has answered every one of those questions with as much honesty as a creature like him can.

Hasn’t he?

“Would you lie to me?” you ask, unable to meet his eyes. His grip on you tightens a fraction.

“…No,” he says, but it’s shaky, and tentative, like he’s waiting for you to see through it. Which, of course, you do.

You have the chance to ignore it, because he hasn’t actually harmed you so far, and he’s promised he never will. And you know he’s not lying about that because of the marks you’ve left on each other. He’s not capable of harming you anymore, even if he wanted to. Just like you are incapable of hurting him.

But you need to know. It can’t really change anything, right? Whatever he’s lied about, it must’ve been because he had a good reason.

“Are you sure?” you ask, looking directly at him. Now he’s the one who can’t meet your gaze.
“Even if you think it would protect me?”

“If it would keep you safe,” he says, the gold in his irises shimmering. “I would do anything.”

“Even lie to me? Keep secrets?”

Pen’s silent. He bites the bottom of his lip, looking incredible guilty.

“What haven’t you been telling me, Pen?” you ask, doing your best to sound patient. “I can take care of myself, and I know you won’t let anything happen to me. You can tell me.”

For a minute, he says nothing. He shifts, pulling you closer to him and wrapping his legs around you, too. His whole body is encasing yours like a warm, fluffy cocoon, and his hum is buzzing so insistently right against you, with such a fierceness that you begin to worry.

He holds you so tight, like he’s afraid if he lets go that you’ll disappear, be gone to him forever.

“I’m sorry,” he says softly, and you actually freeze in shock. Apologizing. Yet another thing you didn’t think he could do.

“F-for what?”

He takes a deep breath, and you can hear the tremble in it. When he lets it out, it’s cold as ice. Your whole body trembles, and you feel something in your mind snap like a rubber band. A hold you hadn’t even known was there releases.

And all at once, you remember.

You have a family. A huge family, with cousins and aunts and nephews and you all gather for the holidays. You love them, even though they drive you crazy.

When’s the last time you talked to them?

And why has none of this bothered you before? How could you forget about them, forget to call them and ask about your past? Maybe you were adopted, or crash landed on an asteroid like Superman. How could you go your entire life without knowing you weren’t human?

Why didn’t you ask Pen about any of this? Why didn’t…

Why have you not questioned thus far?

More memories flood your brain, coming at you relentlessly, as your freed mind finally connects the dots.

You think of when you saw him tear that boy to shreds, the one afraid of wild animals. You’d watched as Pennywise made him float, and you felt like the scum of the earth just for watching that little boy die, for doing nothing about it. But then you’d had a sudden rush of resolve.

When Thomas Morose died, you pretended you didn’t care. This time, it’s a lot harder to.

But you do it, because this is what you are. This is what you’re meant to be. A bringer of death, of fear and pain. A desecrator of innocence. You’re a monster, just like Pennywise.

And someday, you’ll make them float, too.

Resolve that came from nowhere. Except it did, didn’t it? It came from—
“P-Pen…” you murmur, struggling to pull out of his grasp. He only holds you tighter.

And the dream you had. The first one. He was so irritated when you brought it up, when you described it to him.

*Yet where the Turtle creates, you destroy.*

*Therefore, you dream of a choice.*

*And regardless of the consequences, you make it.*

He had stopped you, and immediately you were tired, and complacent, and you never brought it up again.

“We all wear masks.”

“That’s why I knew it had to be you. I could smell your potential…”

“You still do not ask the right question. Perhaps you have been made incapable…”

“Forgetful, forgetful, are the people of Derry. Human memory can be so fickle.”

“Pennywise,” you say, your voice breaking and your stomach sinking. “What did you do?”

“I made a choice,” he says, still refusing to let go. His face is hidden against your shoulder. He’s nuzzling his mark insistently, trying to make you understand, but all you can see right now is red, because he made a choice—

He made the choice. The choice to turn you into something like him.

“Let go of me,” you say firmly, but your voice is too broken to sound threatening. This whole time, you’d thought you were different, that this was your destiny—

“You weren’t like any other human I’ve ever come across,” Pen says, sounding frantic but still refusing to let you squirm away from him. You would bite and scratch at him if it weren’t for the mark on his shoulder. *Your* mark, that says he belongs to you, that prevents you from ever hurting him ever again.

“But I was human,” you choke out, tears making your vision blurry. “I was always human and you… you made me into this—”

But he didn’t, did he? Not really. Because Pennywise doesn’t make, doesn’t create.

He destroys.

“My memories…” you say weakly, horrible realization dawning on you. “My empathy, you… you took them away…”

And in doing so, he created you. Like carving wood; shaving off pieces until you’ve made something new.

Creation via destruction.

He made the choice to mold you into something you were never meant to be, and to ensure you didn’t protest, he controlled you like he controls all of Derry. He made it so that you couldn’t question, would glance over plot holes and convenient lies, would let him manipulate you until you
were exactly what he wanted you to be.

Until you had no choice but to accept the life he’s forced you into.

“Let go of me!” you scream, thrashing now in his arms. He sinks his teeth into your shoulder, and the affection that floods your system feels artificial, and bittersweet. You break into sobs, loud and ugly and full of all the emotions he’s taken from you. He may have given them back, but it’s too late now.

You’ll never be human again.

You hate him. You never want to see him again. But you care about him, you really do. He’s probably the only one you can care about now.

You curl up against his chest and your screams are muffled against his stupid little orange puff balls. And then you just cry, because you still care about him, even knowing this. You can almost understand.

You cry until you can’t anymore, until no more tears will come. And then you just shudder with little sobbing breaths, mourning everything you’ve lost.

Everything he’s taken from you.

Chapter End Notes

Fun Fact: When I told my best friend the big reveal for this chapter, she started hitting me. xD
The Woman

Chapter Notes

Sorry the aftermath of the big reveal isn’t very loud or anything, but trust me, we’ll get to the acceptance (and Pen’s punishment) soon enough...

He follows you everywhere you go, refusing to follow your instructions to leave you the fuck alone.

You’re angry, and hurt, and upset. Pen doesn’t like the taste of those emotions, which helps keep some distance between you two, but sometimes it doesn’t feel like enough.

And along with feeling his presence everywhere, you can also feel his fear. He’s terrified, thinks you’re going to leave him forever. It breaks your heart, and makes you want to hold him and assure him that you’re not going anywhere, that you just need some space right now, but—

But part of you likes that he’s in pain, because maybe now he’ll understand how you feel.

You still haven’t called your mom. Now that you’ve been aware enough to check your answering machine and voicemails, you’ve seen that she’s called you quite a bit.

What would you even say to her if you returned her calls? It’s not like you could tell her the truth. And maybe, considering your new diet, it’s best to keep her and the rest of your family distant anyway.

You haven’t eaten since the lamb you bought at the supermarket, and your stomach won’t let you forget it. Pen was right about it not being the same, and it’s not nearly as filling as… well.

It will satisfy your hunger for hours at best, and then you’ll starve until your next meal. So despite your extreme reluctance, you know you need to hunt again tonight.

Your next victim is a teenager. Her five year old brother is sleeping upstairs, but even though he’d be far easier to scare, you can’t bring yourself to attack him. Pen chipped away at your human empathy, but he hadn’t yet gotten rid of all of it. Now that he’s not controlling you anymore, all of that guilt and self-disgust is back.

Sixteen is eleven more than five, you tell yourself. She’s had eleven extra years. Better her than him.

She’s afraid of drowning, and so you feed her visions of water flooding her bedroom. Her parents are in the next room over, but you will them not to hear her screams. Just before you step closer to end her life, she calls for her mommy and daddy to save her, and suddenly sixteen years of life doesn’t seem nearly enough.

You kill her quickly. She’s filled with terror, but she doesn’t need to die in agony, too.

“I’m sorry,” you whisper to her flesh, her blood staining your teeth. “I’m so sorry…”
The next day, you head to the grocery store after you get off of work. You aren’t planning to buy any food, of course, but you still need toiletries. The shampoo aisle isn’t too far from the entrance, so when she walks in, you notice her immediately.

You’re suspicious of her right away, because just the other day she left with a cart full of groceries. Which means she’s not just here to shop. So what is she here to do?

No, calm down. Maybe she just forgot something on her last run.

But just as you’re trying to reassure yourself, she turns and heads directly for the manager’s office. To your surprise, when she knocks, the door opens quickly, and she hurries inside.

“Fuck,” you hiss under your breath. Something is really off about this lady, and you need to find out before she can get to you and Pen.

Because despite everything he’s done, he’s still yours, and you’ll tear this bitch to pieces before she can lay a finger on him.

You casually stride to the restroom in the back of the store, locking the door behind you. You close your eyes, focus on your hunger, and shift. You make yourself a fruit fly, tiny and inconspicuous. You crawl through the crack under the bathroom door and head right for the manager’s office.

Passing by the produce section is near torture, because as it turns out, the humble fruit fly isn’t that different from you. Always hungry, never satisfied. The form’s hunger actually seems to add to your own, and you have to actually fight your foreign instincts to get where you need to go.

The manager’s office is dark and unoccupied. There’s another room to the right with a closed door. Lights flicker and dance behind it, and two people converse in low, careful tones. You fly closer.

“—him. I think I can find some clues in these tapes.” A female voice, likely the blond.

“You think,” says a man, sounding doubtful. “Ma’am, I don’t mean any offense, but have you considered that checking a grocery store’s surveillance tapes for hints about your husband’s whereabouts is perhaps… a little bit of a stretch?”

“I’m aware,” the woman says, her voice cold and unyielding.

“I-I just mean, it’s hours of footage you’ll have to comb through,” the man insists. “A-and your money will pay for my silence, but I can’t just let you sit back here unsupervised—”

“If you want, have your security guy sit back here with me,” the woman says, sounding impatient. “Or you yourself. Just don’t get in my way.”

Her assertiveness convinces the manager. He mumbles something in the affirmative and scuffles towards the door. Just before he opens it to make his hasty retreat, the woman pipes up again.

“Oh, and Mr. Reynolds,” she says. Her voice is still, unwavering. “Remember; I was never here.”

“O-of course, Mrs. Miller.”

That’s it; the confirmation you were waiting for. Now there’s no doubt who this woman is. Your stomach sinks, and your wings flutter in agitation. You pretty much guessed it before, but knowing is so much worse.
Mrs. Miller takes a small notepad out of an inner coat pocket and clicks a pen to life. You hover over her shoulder and see pages and pages of numbers alongside some kind of shorthand. She’s putting together a timeline.

Now that you’re able to get this close, you can study her more carefully. This woman is no weepy housewife. She’s paranoid, with a hard look in her eyes like she’s haunted by things she’ll never unsee. Her jaw is tight as she scans through the tapes, her fingers tapping steadily, with such determination—

You suddenly understand why she’s afraid of zombies; she’s afraid of those she’s killed coming back for her. When you glance into her head again, a flash of pale, tan uniforms and heavy guns slung over shoulders confirms your guess.

Mrs. Miller is a veteran; a fighter, which is bad for you because—

Well, because you have no idea whether she thinks her husband is still alive. But if she’s as pessimistic as she seems, she’s certainly not showing her grief. And if she does believe her husband is dead, then she didn’t come here just to find him.

She came here to avenge him.

You can’t decipher her shorthand; it might as well be a different language. It might even be some kind of code. You wouldn’t put it past her, since she’s just paid off the manager of a damn grocery store to not tell anyone she was looking through his tapes for her husband.

Mrs. Miller taps the tip of her pen on one of the entries in her notes. Then, she looks up at the monitor and keys in the numbers to bring up the footage of that exact date and time. She finds him just before you do.

There, on the top right camera, is Agent Miller. At first it looks like he’s actually shopping; every now and then he’ll grab something from a shelf and place it in his cart. But then you notice that he keeps turning his head in a certain direction.

“What do you see?” Mrs. Miller murmurs to herself, her brow furrowed in concentration.

When Agent Miller steps into another camera’s view, you recognize someone else.

You.

He’s following you. And you don’t even appear to notice.

That fucking bastard! He’d been following you since before you even knew his name. You know when this footage was taken because of the outfit you’re wearing. It’s the day you paused by the missing persons posters, and made the mistake of meeting his gaze.

How he locked in on you like a shark scenting blood in the water is beyond you, but he must’ve sensed something was off, because immediately following that, he was stalking you as you went fucking shopping.

And this is really not good, because if his wife finds out her husband was suspicious of you, then she’ll be suspicious of you, too. And then you’ll have someone else trying to nose their way into your business.

But this will be nothing like Agent Miller, with his annoying questions and thinly veiled accusations. You have a feeling that this woman will watch you from afar, tracking your every step. If she
suspects you had something to do with her husband’s disappearance, there will be no tricking her. If she finds out you killed her husband, she’ll do everything she can to kill you, too.
The Promise

That darker part of you suggests that you could kill her right now. It would take zero effort to shift, slash her throat, and eat all the evidence.

But something’s different about this woman. Her mind feels hardened, like there’s not only a protective wall but an entire labyrinth around it. With your glance, you saw the thing that would make her feel the most fear, but you don’t know if that would be enough to take her down.

What if she knows how to turn her fear into anger, too?

It’s too dangerous. You shouldn’t risk any action without these answers, and the only person who might know them is Pennywise. You haven’t talked to him in three days.

“Hm…”

Her grunt jars you from your thoughts. You look back at the monitor to see she’s paused the video, and is now squinting at the screen. In the footage, her husband is frozen in place, writing something down in a tiny notebook in his palm.


You aren’t sure what she means at first, but then it occurs to you that she’s looking at his notebook. The same notebook that has every bit of information he’d discovered about his case before he died. And apparently, it doesn’t matter that you’d gotten rid of the physical copy.

“Okay, love,” she says to herself, jotting down a quick shorthand note of her own. “I’m coming for you.”

Please, you think, feel free to take your time.

How the hell Pennywise lives so comfortably practically swimming in the feces of his prey is beyond you.

Before you knew what he did to you, you might’ve suggested he come live with you at your much, much nicer house. Now, you find you’re not terribly upset that he’s constantly ankle-deep in shit.

Except that right now, you’re the one wading through the entirety of Derry’s filth, and that you’re pretty upset about. Why should you come to him?

“Pen, get your stupid clown ass over here!”

You feel him slither through the tunnels, his form intangible. He pops into appearance behind you, but not too close. His yellow eyes glow in the darkness, watching you carefully. He knows you’re still mad at him, can taste it in the air.

“It appears fear is not the only thing you can turn into anger,” he says softly.

“I’m not turning anything into anger,” you snap. “I’m angry because you tricked me and ruined my
"Ruined," he says. "Is that what you call it?"

"What else would I call it?"

He doesn’t answer, and you huff out the rest of your frustration. Right now, there’s something more important to talk about.

"Mrs. Miller is here," you tell him, "in Derry."

Pen tenses in the shadows, his hum thrumming in your chest wildly.

"I know," you say. "Me, too. We need to come up with a plan. She can see just like her husband, and she won’t ever stop looking for him. When she finds out he’s dead, she’ll never stop hunting us."

Pen’s lips pull into a tight frown, his brows knitting together. It’s an angrier version of his familiar pout.

"I’ll kill her before she touches you," he growls. "I’ll tear her to tiny little pieces and let her rot for all eternity. She’ll float forever and ever…"

He doesn’t even need to add any malice to his voice because it’s so clear this is no empty threat. It’s as real as he is.

He slowly comes closer, and you let him. You’re feeling too much dread to think about your anger right now. His arms slip around you, and you let yourself relax into his soft, fluffy costume. The little jingles of his tiny bells are just silly enough to make you smile. So silly. All of him is so silly. You can’t believe how often you forget that he’s a fucking clown.

When you hug him back, he presses his blood red lips to the top of your head, relieved that you’re not pushing him away.

"I have to admit," you say. "You’re kind of adorable when you talk about how you’ll vanquish our enemies."

"All of them," he mumbles into your hair. "Every last one of them. I’ll kill this entire planet if I have to."

"You don’t," you say quickly, pulling away to look at him. "You don’t have to do that. Please don’t destroy Earth."

He smiles at your reaction, mischief dancing in his eyes.

"Joking," he says, tapping the tip of your nose with his finger. You relax, but then you see his smirk. "…maybe."

"Pen!" you say, but you’re laughing, and his eyes light up like he’s just won the lottery.

"Are you still mad at me?" he asks, blue eyes looking surprisingly vulnerable.

You don’t want to hurt him, but you won’t lie to him, either. For all your faults, at least you’ve always been honest with people, even if they didn’t want to hear the truth. You aren’t about to change that now.
“Yes,” you say softly, but you’re still hugging him. The conflicting emotions make your head spin. “But it comes and goes.”

“I don’t like that…” he whines. “I don’t like when you’re mad at me.”

You notice the emphasis. “Only when I’m mad at other people?”

“That’s always good,” he says. There’s a smile in his voice, a giggle he’s trying not to let out. “I like when you get fiery.”

“Fiery. I like that. Means the transformation will be easier on you.”

You pull away from him, and he reluctantly lets you go. This kind of thing has been happening constantly for the last three days, ever since he told you the truth. Things he’s told you keep coming back, and with this new context, they seem like such obvious hints. It pisses you off all over again, because you should have seen it.

Never mind that Pen has ancient powers that alter human perception and memory. You should have seen through it. You’re not like everyone else—

But you know that’s not true. You’re not special. The only thing that sets you apart from everyone else is your temper. It’s the only reason Pen chose you.

Right?

You want to ask him if there was something else he saw in you, but you’re afraid of the answer. Because what if you’re right, and all he was really looking for was someone hardy enough to survive the change from human to monster?

“How’d you do it?” you ask him instead. “How did you change me?”

For a moment he doesn’t answer, just watching you with that pout on his face, fingers twitching as he suppresses the urge to reach out for you again. His eyes are a bright, crystal blue.

“The lights,” he says finally. “I don’t know how, but it’s the lights. The fact that you survived them still confounds me.”

“Why wouldn’t I survive them?”

“They are… strange, to humans,” he says. “Foreign. So much so that most cannot fathom their very existence. The lights change them, empty their minds. When there’s nothing left inside, they’re like balloons, and they float up, up, away…”

“But I didn’t,” you say softly, “and you don’t know why?”

“Perhaps I never will,” he says. “There are things in distant universes, even some in this one, that I still do not understand. I don’t care to. Unlike humans, my curiosity is limited. I am, however, capable of appreciating the existence of these anomalies.”

He pauses, blue eyes staring intensely into yours. “As I do with you. Of every anomaly I’ve witnessed, you are by far my favorite.”

Pennywise has lied to you from the beginning, but you know that this time he’s absolutely telling the truth. After a moment of careful thought, you make a decision.

“Pen,” you say quietly, staring hard at his vulnerable blue eyes. “If I’m going to forgive you, I need
you to promise me that you’ll never try to control me ever again. You won’t keep secrets, or influence my thoughts, or lie to me.”

“No more secrets,” he agrees. “No more lies.”

“Good,” you tell him. “Now promise me with more than just your words.”

At first, he’s confused. You tap your lips with your index finger, smiling as realization dawns on his face.

He hesitates for just a second before closing in on you. His kisses you fiercely, a low growl rumbling out of his chest. His hum pulses rapidly in your chest, and you sense his desperation, his eagerness to please you.

Maybe this time, you can get him to beg.
The Penance

You’re not sure how you make it home. One second you’re making out with Pen in his sewer lair, and the next you’re being shoved up against your bathroom sink.

It’s the pipes, you realize. He really does use the sewers to travel.

Your thoughts are interrupted when his claws sink into your sides, and his crotch ruts against yours eagerly. He obviously has no idea of the plans you have for him today. You quickly turn the tables, using every ounce of your strength to push him off of you and up against the wall. He breaks the kiss with a gasp, looking down at you in shock.

“What’s the matter, Pen?” you say with a smirk. “I thought you liked surprises.”

Before he has a chance to respond, you step away and leave the bathroom. His wide blue eyes follow you out of the room, staying on you as you sit down on your mattress.

“Come here, Penny-boy,” you say. “I’ve got a few other surprises in mind.”

“I won’t beg,” he says quickly, finally understanding where this evening is headed.

“I don’t think you get to make that decision,” you tell him, a low growl in your voice. “If you want it badly enough, you’ll beg for it. And trust me when I say I’m gonna make you want it bad.”

He sneers at you, but follows you to bed. You take a moment to appreciate his gait. Low, a bit lumbering. Like he’s completely in his element, not nervous at all.

You wonder how quickly you can get that to change.

“Sit,” you tell him, and he obeys, but not after a snarl that lets you know he’s only doing it because he wants to. “Good boy.”

“Stop that.”

“Stop what, boy?”

“That,” he says, getting frustrated. “I am not a dog.”

“Oh, but you could be,” you tell him, your finger tracing his jawline. You imagine a blood red collar around his neck. “You could be such a good doggy for me… But not today. Today, I want to try something else. Tell me, Pen, can you change only part of your form without changing the whole thing?”

“I don’t understand.”

“Could you make what I have—” You gesture to your sex. “—on you?”

“You want me to change down there?” he asks, sounding more confused than nervous. “Only down there?”

“Can you do it?”

“Of course I can!” he snaps indignantly. “I can shift into anything.”
“Show me,” you breathe.

“Why?”

“Because it will make me very happy,” you tell him. “Don’t you want me to be happy? Don’t you want me to stop being angry with you?”

You’re playing dirty now, but then, he manipulated you, too. As far as you’re concerned, this is an even trade.

“Yes,” he says. “I do want that.”

Without further argument, he lays back on your small mountain of pillows. He closes his eyes for a moment, then lets out a small breath. Unfortunately, his clothes are still on, so you don’t get to see him change, but your newfound immortality means you have plenty of time to see it later.

You climb on top of him, hands wandering along his still-flat chest. You hadn’t specifically asked him to make breasts too, so you let that one slide. Another time, perhaps.

Your fingers trace invisible patterns on his upper chest as you slowly gyrate your hips against his. It takes you a moment to find what you’re looking for, but then he lets out a soft moan and bucks up against you, and you know you’ve found the clit he’s made for himself.

Excellent. That means he hasn’t skimped out on the details.

You pop off the first orange button of his costume, exposing his pale chest. You dip your hand under the fabric and caress his skin, making sure to keep eye contact the whole time. The tip of one of your fingers brushes against his nipple, and he tenses briefly beneath you. He’s fighting hard not to show just how much he’s enjoying this already.

Good. You didn’t want this to be too easy.

“You remember when I used my mouth on you, Pen?”

“Y-yes…”

“I can do that again,” you tell him. You lean down and whisper into his ear. “Would you like that?”

“Yes,” he says breathlessly, sounding very eager. “Again…”

“What’s the magic word?” you whisper with a smirk. You hear him growl in warning beneath you, but you’re not fazed. You refuse to let him weasel out of it this time.

“I will not say it,” he says stubbornly. “I won’t beg.”

“Why?” you ask innocently. “It’s just one little word.”

“It’s degrading,” he snarls. “Why should I have to ask when I already know you’ll do it?”

“Because I want to be sure you really want it,” you say. “How will I know you want it if you won’t even bother to ask?”

“You can know things without having to use words,” he says.

“But words can be so fun,” you insist. Your right hand slips down his chest and cups his mound. His legs twitch when you press the palm of your hand against his hidden clit. When you rub the area in
slow circles, he bites his plump bottom lip and inhales deeply. “All you have to do is say it, Pen. Then I’ll give you what you want.”

“I-I won’t,” he manages, letting out a light groan when you press even harder. “I-it’s…”

“Just a word,” you cut in, your circles getting faster. He whines, begins to push back against your hand for more friction. “Just one little word…”

“D-do it…” he whimpers.

“Do what?”

“U-use your m-ah!-mouth…”

“‘Use your mouth’ what?” you prompt. Faster circles now, the tips of your fingers pressing against where you know his opening to be beneath his clothes.

“Ngh!” He moans, thrashing his head against the pillow, messing up his hair even more. A tiny bead of sweat rolls down his forehead, flattening a lock of hair against his skin. “I won’t!”

You smile, removing your hand. He sighs in frustration, but as expected, stubbornly refuses to ask for more.

“That’s okay,” you say cheerfully. “You’re right. I’ll do it anyways.”

He narrows his eyes at you suspiciously, but you ignore him and make your way down his body. You tear his clothes away, leaving his torso, pelvis, and upper thighs exposed. You greedily take in the sight of the cute little pussy he’s made for himself, licking your lips in anticipation.

“I told you I could do it,” he says, not even trying to hide his pride. “Though I don’t understand why this would make you happy.”

“The reason it makes me happy, Pen,” you say as you lean in closer to his pussy, “is because I can shift, too.”

The moment he realizes the implications of what you’re saying, you run the tip of your tongue along his slit. He gasps and arches his back, clawed hands punching little holes in your sheets. You delve deeper into him, admiring the sweet taste he’s given himself. His thighs twitch when you rim his entrance, and he cries out when you breach him.

You stare up at him, watching him come undone from your tongue alone. You wonder why he didn’t react this strongly when you sucked his cock, whether it’s the change in equipment or a change in him.

He gets more frantic, grabbing at your head and shoving your face harder against him. You smirk against his flesh, lapping eagerly at his clit and massaging his folds with your lips. You wait patiently for the right moment.

Just when he’s about to come, you pull out of his grasp. He growls so loud it’s almost a roar, and angry, red-rimmed eyes glare down at you.

“What’s the magic word?” you ask him again.

“Fuck you!” he snaps, baring his needle-sharp teeth at you.

You cheer in silent victory. He’s never said anything like that to you before, which means he’s
fighting a losing battle. It’s only a matter of time before you get what you want. You tear your
clothes off, ready for the next step in your plan.

“Don’t be like that, Pen,” you tease him, climbing back on top of him. “It’s not really that difficult, is
it? Just one word. Pretty, pretty, pretty…?”

He snarls in your face, mouth stretched into a menacing grimace in a poor attempt at intimidation.
You’re probably the only person he’s ever met who isn’t afraid of him. It’s not just because you
know he can’t hurt you, but because even if he could, you have the power to fight back.

You’re equipped with the same weapons he has, for one. Claws and teeth and the ability to shape-
shift. You’re also the kind of person willing to fight to the death, whereas Pennywise’s entire
existence is based on his instincts to survive above all else.

Which means you’re stronger than him.

“Please,” he practically spits, sounding not at all like he’s asking you for anything.

Regardless, he’s said it, and you reward him by clamping down on your mark, digging your teeth
into the skin of his shoulder. At the same time, you push two fingers inside of him. He cries out in
both surprise and the flood of soothing affection you feed him, overwhelmed.

Then, you focus on the shift. Your vagina fades away and is replaced with a penis. It feels incredibly
strange, but it’s nothing compared to the other forms you’ve taken before.

“I want to take you, Pen. I want to make you mine.” You caress the imprint of your teeth on his skin,
and he shivers beneath you, eyes glazed over. “Not just here, but everywhere.”

“Correct the balance,” he mumbles, understanding. “Make us even.”

“That’s right,” you say, nipping at his jaw affectionately. “Do you want that? For us to be whole
again?”

“Yes,” he breathes. “No more lies. I promise.”

And you push yourself into him.

It’s different on so many levels, but you try to shift your focus from the weird aspects of it to the
more pleasurable. Namely, seeing Pen’s reaction to being filled with you.

His legs wrap around your waist, drawing you as deep into him as you’ll go. His claws rake across
your back, and even though he’s unable to break your skin, it hurts just enough to spike your senses
further.

You settle into a rhythm, loving the way his whole body rocks with yours. How each thrust you give
him shoves him roughly against the headboard of your bed. The tiny, whimpering noises he
produces in time with your thrusts, like a song to echo yours. You lean over him, pushing his thighs
up until his knees are lined up with his shoulders.

“Do you like it when I fuck you, Pen?” you snarl at him. He’s too gone, you think, to even process
what you’re saying to him, so you let your mouth run. “You did this to me. You lied to me, turned
me into a monster just like you.”

His chest heaves and his eyes are screwed shut and you fuck him even harder.
“It’s your fault,” you continue, because it feels so good to say it, to hurt him when he can’t hear you.
“Your fault that I’m fucking you like the filthy creature you are. You’re dirty. Disgusting, I hate you—”

You stop when you see the moisture gathering in the corners of his clenched eyes. He’s still panting, still groaning with pleasure, but he’s biting the bottom of his lip hard. He’s trembling, shoulders shaking, and it’s only when you slow to a stop that you realize why.

He’s crying.

Your chest feels heavy, rotten, and you know he’s not forcing you to feel this way. It’s real. You don’t want to hurt him, even though you thought you did. Even though he stole so much from you.

You don’t hate him, either; you never could. And it’s not because of anything he’s done to you. You’re no longer under any kind of spell or manipulation, and you still want to be with him. You have to make sure he knows that.

“Pen…” you say gently. He opens his eyes, which are wet with unshed tears. But he says nothing, makes no effort to stop you. You pull yourself out of him, run your hand along his jawline. “Show me your lights, baby.”

He hesitates, eyes watching you carefully. But he knows you can’t hurt him, at least not physically, and ultimately relents.

When you see the sunrise that are his deadlights, a sense of pure warmth settles over you. You feel far away and closer all at once, and the desire to touch them comes back full force. You begin to reach into his mouth, but then pull back when you get an idea.

You close your eyes and let instinct come to you. An instinct that didn’t originally belong to you; one that was given.

You… blossom. It’s the only word you can think of to describe what you feel when your deadlights come into being. Atoms split apart, leaving a void of space that fills with black light, like pouring water into a cup. The light comes from all around you, little pieces of you that are everywhere, and nowhere at the same time.

You can no longer open your physical eyes, but you can still see. Everything around you is pitch black except for him and his three beautiful lights. You don’t even think as you move closer to them, embracing them furiously, holding them tight to you. Around you. In you.

And when you’re entwined with his very being, you feel everything he is. So much of him is hunger, is rage, is insanity. But even worse is the loneliness. It runs so deep in him, tainting every one of his deadlights, echoing endless isolation. A slow, torturous loss of self. A question.

A choice.

It isn’t much of a choice, though. He needs change as all beings do. Adaptation comes only with evolution, and in order to evolve, he needs—

You. He needs you.

You’re staring down at him again, with your human form’s eyes. The moisture in his eyes is there for a different reason now. He’s staring at you, unblinking, and his desperation is so raw that you feel tears of your own stream down your cheeks. He’s holding his breath.
And all at once you realize this ritual that you’re performing isn’t about your own satisfaction. It’s about showing him that you understand. That you forgive him.

You shift back into your original self, cover your form with clothes. You don’t break eye contact with him as you scoot down to his hips, still open for you, still ready. Your fingers gather the slick that’s soaking his folds before you press into him again. This time slower. This time better.

“That’s it, Pen,” you tell him gently, watching his hips grind back against your fingers. “Take it, baby. Just like that…”

“Aahh,” he whines, lifting his hips clear off the bed to hump you even faster.

“You’re so good,” you say. You curl the tips of your fingers and press hard, and he lets out a choked sob. “You’re so beautiful like this. I could watch you fuck yourself on my fingers for years.”

“P-P…” he stutters, his whole body trembling. “P-please…”

“Please what, Pen?”

“Please forgive me.”

You freeze, unsure how to react. You’d fully expected his first time begging to be for something sex-related, especially when your fingers are in his pussy and he’s inches away from climax. Yet here he is, begging your forgiveness instead.

“I do,” you tell him, still somewhat stunned. He doesn’t say anything, just watches you with those rich blue eyes. You smile, and he does too. “Now, let me make you come.”

You scoot backward on the bed and lean down, nuzzling your cheek against the inside of his thigh. His breath skips and he watches you with wide, impatient eyes. You delve into him again, and he lets out a happy sigh, throwing his head back against the pillows. His hands grip fistfuls of your sheets, and you stop for a moment to gently place one of them into your hair, instead.

“I won’t pull away this time,” you promise. “You did say please.”

It doesn’t take him long to reach the edge again. He’s quickly gotten the hang of directing your mouth and tongue. He alternates between having you play with his clit and tongue-fuck him, and you finally decide to give him both at once.

Your fingers slide easily back into his soaked hole while you kiss and suck on his clit. His thighs start twitching wildly, and his cries grow to loud, desperate growls. Finally, his legs clamp down on your head, holding you against his quivering pussy as he comes hard.

Once he stops shuddering with release, you gently separate his legs to free yourself, kissing his inner thighs and watching him glow in contentment. He peeks one eye open, and he gives you a look that has you climbing back up the bed to lay next to him.

You curl around each other, feeling safe, and warm, and together.

“I understand why you did it,” you say softly, running your fingers through his hair. He purrs, holding you closer against him. “And I promise you won’t ever be alone again.”
“You have a wonderful color,” he tells you.

“Color?”


“Oh,” you say softly, remembering flashes of a dark void, filled only with unearthly balls of light dancing in unison. “That did happen, didn’t it?”

Pen nuzzles his cheek against yours, pressing light kisses to your jaw. You stroke your mark beneath his costume. The sound he emits is pure contentment, and you share the feeling.

Ultraviolet. Isn’t that what blacklight is? You picture a crime scene lighting up with bright white blotches of blood and gore splattered over the walls, soaked into the carpet. It’s upsetting that you’d associate your deadlight color with murder, but given what you are, it’s also very fitting.

Of course, you wouldn’t leave any evidence behind.

“Do you have any rules?” you ask Pen. “For who you kill, I mean. Is there anyone you won’t eat?”

“Besides you?”

“Besides me.”

“No,” he answers. “I have a feeling you knew that already.”

“Yeah,” you say softly. You think of your first child victim, the one who was terrified of drowning. “I wonder if that’ll go away for me without your influence.”

“The empathy?”


“I don’t know,” he says. “I have always been what I am. When I was… influencing you, I didn’t… well, I suppose the main reason I took that away from you was to spare you the pain. Most humans don’t enjoy killing other humans.”

“I guess not.”

He’s quiet for a moment. Then, in a voice so soft you almost miss it, “I could take it from you again, if it’s painful.”

You tense, immediately rejecting the idea of him influencing your thoughts again. But the fact that he’s offering you a choice this time helps calm you down enough to consider his offer.

Part of you wants to keep something, a reminder of who you used to be. But is that something worth suffering for?

“I’ll think about it.”
On your lunch break that same day, you make a trip to the bathroom to gag for a good twenty minutes. Of course, since it’s been a while since you’ve eaten, nothing really comes up.

“You alright?”

It’s Diana, your coworker. She’s washing her hands, but her eyes meet yours in the mirror.

“Yeah,” you say weakly. “Probably something I ate.”

“You sure about that?” she asks. You pick yourself up off the floor and regain some of your dignity.

“What else would it be?”

Her eyes flick down to her hands, and the corner of her mouth twitches.

“Are you seeing anyone?”

You stare at her for a moment, mulling over her insinuation.

“There’s no way,” you say confidently. “He’s… uh…”

“Sterile?” she asks.

“You could say that.”

She chuckles bitterly and rolls her eyes. “Yeah, that’s what my ex said. I’m pretty sure that’s the same stall I was throwing up in a few weeks after that.”

“You have a kid?”

She tenses for a moment, and shuts the water off.

“No,” she says quietly.

“Oh,” you say. “Um, sorry—”

“Don’t worry about it,” she says. “Anyways, is it a possibility?”

“That I’m…? That I have a…?”

“Bun in the oven, yeah.”

Is there a possibility? You’re not exactly having sex with a member of your own species. Or at least, not exactly. Are you fully a devourer yet, or is there still human in you? Is the line blurry enough that it doesn’t matter?

“I don’t know.”

“Well if you are,” she says, “you can come to me for anything you need, okay?”

“Uh, yeah…”

You decide Diana’s earned a spot on the “Don’t-Eat” list.

Your eyes follow her as she quietly leaves the restroom. She pauses in the doorway to shoot you a
warm smile before leaving you to your thoughts.

After work, you take a walk to clear your head. The cold air might be distracting enough to keep your thoughts from staying focused on your newest worries.

Pregnant. You could be pregnant. Well, you don’t know it’s even a possibility, but that just means you can’t rule it out.

And you don’t know you are because you’ve never had morning sickness before. Is it any different from just… throwing up in the morning?

And okay, what if you are? What does that even mean? Would they look like a human? Would it tear it’s way out of your stomach or explode out of you like in Alien?

God damn it, this walk in the cold was supposed to clear your head, not terrorize you.

Terrorize; because it is fear you feel. Fear of the unknown, mostly, but also that general fear of responsibility, of change.

You’ve never wanted kids, always thought they were more trouble than they were worth. At least until they’re old enough to think for themselves, as opposed to being a mass of screaming biohazard that eats your money and steals your sleep.

“Man, you look like shit.”

You look up at John, who’s standing above you. You hadn’t even realized that at some point your walk had turned into a sit on a park bench.

“Thanks, I try,” you respond. “What are you doing here?”

“Just passing through,” he says with a shrug. “Needed some groceries, thought I’d cut through the park. Saw you sitting here looking like you’d seen a ghost, thought I’d see if you had.”

“I haven’t,” you say. “I’m fine, just tired.”

“Famous last words,” he says, raising an eyebrow.

“Not mine,” you tell him. You decide you’ve had enough of this awkwardness and stand. “I should get going now.”

“So soon? I haven’t even had a chance to ask you out for the forty-eighth time.”

“That’s the idea,” you say, brushing past him. When you do, though, you see something that stops you in your tracks.

Miller’s wife in about ten feet in front of you, studying missing persons posters that are stapled to one of the park’s trees.

Talk about déjà vu.

“Okay, now I know something’s wrong,” John says behind you. He sees what you’re looking at, and
pauses. “Isn’t that the Miller guy?”

“What?” You take a closer look, and notice that Agent Miller’s face has been added to the tree. “Oh, shit.”

And then Mrs. Miller turns.

“Excuse me?” she asks John. “Do you know this man?”

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck.

“Yes,” John says. “You remember him, too, right?”

It takes you a few seconds to realize he’s talking to you. Mrs. Miller’s staring at you, and you work hard to ignore the sinking feeling in your gut.

“Yes,” you say. “I wondered why I haven’t been seeing him around for a while.”

“I thought he left town,” John adds.

Mrs. Miller’s eyes snap to John. “Everyone else around here seems to think so, too. How did you two know him?”

“He told me he’s been working these cases,” says John. “He came around to ask me a few questions. I can’t believe he’s gone missing, too.”

“And you?”

“Same,” you say. “What about you?”

“I’m his wife,” she says. “My name is Sara.”

Sara Miller. Your newest enemy, although you’re the only one who knows it.

“I’m so sorry,” John says, sounding genuine.

“Why?” Sara asks.

“Well,” John starts, looking uncomfortable. You don’t blame him; that glare of hers is lethal. “I-I just meant none of these kids have been found. You know? So, it, uh—”

“Means there’s a possibility they’re still alive,” Sara finishes for him.

“Yeah, sure, of course,” John says in a rush, looking properly intimidated. Enemy or not, you envy Sara her ability to shut up John.

“The reason he’s been targeted is because he got too close to finding the truth,” Sara says firmly, glancing between you and John. “Which means if I’m going to find him, I have to get even closer. So. When is the last time you both saw him?”

You look Sara in the eye and think about how the last time you saw her husband was the night you killed him and ate his fear-riddled corpse.

You were seen that night leaving the police station with him. If questioned, Derry police might remember just enough to tell Sara that. You don’t want her anywhere near that night, so you tell her about the time before that.
“He came by my place to ask me some question a few weeks ago,” you say. “He told me he was going door to door in an effort to pick up any clues the local police might’ve missed.”

“Did he ask you any strange questions?” she asks.

“Strange how?”

“Questions about paranormal activity, unnatural phenomena, monsters…” Her eyes narrow, and you can tell she’s studying your every reaction intensely. Good thing you’ve always been good at lying at lying through your teeth.

“Not that I can recall,” you say easily. “I feel I’d remember something like that.”

You want to ask her what she knows, but you don’t want to seem suspicious. You also don’t want to seem too dismissive of Miller’s disappearance.

“I have to get going now,” you tell her. “If there’s anything I can do to help, feel free to ask.”

“Thanks,” she says. “I will.”

It’s only when you’re several blocks away from her that you realize you didn’t actually give her a way to contact you. Nor did you give her your home address.

She didn’t bother to ask for either.
The Blue

Chapter Notes

I think I’ve come to accept that I will always be sorry for how long it takes me to update fanfiction.

Paranoia follows you home. You keep looking over your shoulder, expecting Sara Miller to be speed-walking after you, eyes blown wide with excitement at the prospect of ending your life.

She knows where you live. She must, if she didn’t ask you. Or maybe she’s just confident that she can hunt you down if she needs to. And if her mention of monsters is any indication, she might be pretty close to figuring out that she does, in fact, need to.

A snowflake lands on the tip of your nose, pulling you out of your thoughts. You look up to see a cloudy night sky. The first snowfall of the year. You shiver, zipping up your jacket. Another con of being a devourer is that your body gets cold more easily, a fact you’ve only just recently learned the hard way. But at least you have Pen to keep you warm.

Oh, right. Pen.

Shit, what the hell are you going to tell him? How would he react? Maybe you should be sure before you take that risk. Are there pee sticks for eldritch horrors?

You stop walking for a moment to gently place the palm of your hand on your abdomen. You’re not sure what you’re doing, maybe looking for some sign of life? At first there’s nothing, but once the cold digs its way into your bones, you calm down enough to focus.

You begin to feel… something. It’s not a hum. At least, it’s not like what you’re used to. Much smaller, quieter. Tame, and fragile. Like the weak flight of a single, tired bee compared to the swarm of you and Pen.

There’s something else, too. A feeling, a glimpse… the color blue. Like the color of Pen’s eyes in his softest moments.

But… you don’t know. It could all be in your head, right? Maybe it’s psychosomatic.

At any rate, it’s definitely not as reliable as a pee stick.

You head for the sewers again, feeling drawn to the relative safety of Pen’s lair. When you’re there, you don’t see him. He’s probably out hunting. You decide to wait for him to come back.

You climb over the pile of broken toys and once cherished possessions to sit at the base of Pen’s train cart. From there you look up at those who float, and think about how far you’ve come since you first saw them.

But the staring soon turns into something else. No longer just a curious thought, now a desire. Your hunger drives the instinct to drag one of the dead children’s limbs down to you. When you have it in your grasp, you feel your eyes burn violet, and sink your teeth into the flesh.
You eat with fervor. Once that limb is reduced to nothing but a few bones stuck between your teeth, you pull down another. And another, feeling the endless hunger drive you on. All you know is the need to feed, to consume, to devour until nothing is left—

You feel a hand brush against your lower back, and it’s just enough to snap you out of it. You look up to see Pen eyeing the mess of flesh and bone in your hands. His eyes flick back to meet yours.

“Hungry, are we?”

“Sorry,” you mumble, wiping your mouth with the back of your hand, “for taking your food.”

“I can get more,” he says dismissively. Which is odd, you think, because he’s not exactly into sharing.

Your hand falls to your abdomen again.

“That’s probably a good idea,” you say. He stares blankly at you, confused.

Alright, no more stalling. You take his hand and place it on your stomach. He’s confused for a moment, but then realization dawns on his face. You’re not sure if he feels what you feel, or if he simply understands the gesture.

“Another,” he says in his language. “There is another.”

“Our other,” you say.

He doesn’t look overly happy, like a human father-to-be might. He’s not laughing, or jumping for joy, or showing any sign of pride. But you’re not discouraged, because he doesn’t look upset, either. Mostly shocked, and confused.

And really, you probably shouldn’t be surprised that Pennywise wouldn’t react like a human.

“But I can’t,” he says, now in English. “I devour, I destroy. I don’t… create. I am incapable. This is why, with you, I had to… bend rules, find loopholes…”

“Creation via destruction,” you respond. “I know how you created me. But this kind of creation usually takes more than one person, and this time you weren’t alone.”

He glances down at your abdomen again. His brows furrowed, he slowly reaches to place his palm on your stomach. It’s surprisingly tentative, hesitant. You think you see his face soften for a moment, but it’s probably a trick of the light. Or him. He’s good at tricks.

Pen turns away and heads for his room. He begins fussing with the hobo piss blanket still tucked away in the corner. It doesn’t take you long to realize he’s trying to make a bed out of it.

“You really should just set that thing on fire,” you tell him hastily. “Put it out of its misery.”

“You must nest here from now on,” Pen tells you, ignoring your attempt to derail him. “Where it is safe.”

“Not happening,” you say. “I still have a life to live up there, you know.”

“A human life,” he says, narrowing his eyes. “You have just proved you are no longer human. You don’t belong with them.”

“I don’t belong with anyone,” you say, not missing the emphasis on his last word. “I don’t belong to
“You… said you forgive me,” Pen says, looking both frustrated and hurt. He doesn’t understand.

“I do,” you assure him, “but that doesn’t mean I’m okay with just giving up everything I still have left.”

He pauses, tilting his head down but keeping his yellow eyes trained on you. The rims of his irises flare red. You can tell he’s trying very hard to stay calm.

“You are between two worlds,” he says. “But they are worlds that cannot coexist.”

“Yes, they can,” you insist. “I’ve been doing it this whole time.”

“And in that time, you’ve killed a federal agent and inspired his wife to seek vengeance.”

“She doesn’t know it’s vengeance,” you mutter quietly, heat blooming in your cheeks.

“Even though you were once one of them,” says Pennywise, “you still do not understand what human beings are capable of.”

“Then tell me!” you snap at him. “If you’re such an expert, tell me what they can do. What they did. They must’ve done something to scare you so damned bad.”

Pen looks away stubbornly, his lips pressed firmly closed. He looks absolutely livid, but in favor of keeping yet another secret, he refrains from opening his mouth to show you just how pissed he is.

“Yeah,” you say, turning your back on him to get the fuck out of here, “that’s what I thought.”
The Perspective

So. That could’ve gone better.

You let out an entire lung’s worth of air in a sigh. Sometimes you wish your temper wasn’t so vicious. Especially now, when you actually care about what the other person thinks of you.

But he’s keeping secrets again, and you’re too damned curious for your own good. He’s allowed to keep some things to himself, but you feel like this thing is important. Like it affects you, somehow.

Your home is quiet, but you don’t feel like turning on any background noise, either. You’re just about to snap and break something when you suddenly remember someone who might have the answers you’re looking for.

Of course, whether or not Maturin will give you those answers is up in the air.

You’re not sure if you can talk to the Turtle when you’re awake, but you’re too angry to sleep, so you might as well try.

You get comfortable on your couch, close your eyes, and reach.

You open your eyes again, and you are far from your home.

“Welcome back,” says Maturin.

He is much closer than he was the last time you were here. Size, just like distance, does not seem to present itself the same in this dimension. Looking directly at him feels like looking at an optical illusion. It’s like he’s two sizes at once.

“You have come with another question,” the Turtle continues.

“I hope you’ll answer it this time,” you say.

“Perhaps,” he says noncommittally. “Perhaps not.”

“I want to know what happened to Pennywise,” you say. “He’d die before admitting it, but he’s scared of humans. I know he is. And I want to know why.”

“You are partially correct,” says the Turtle. “It is not them, but their potential he fears. He has seen first hand the power they can wield, under the right circumstances. He has seen how fierce this power is compared to his own. It was a hard lesson he was taught, and it still haunts him.”


“I’m afraid I am going to have to disappoint you once again,” says Maturin. “This is another truth that must come from Pennywise himself.”

“Seriously?”
“It is not my story to tell,” Maturin insists.

“Why did I even fucking bother?” you say, mostly to yourself.

“Because you care for him,” says the Turtle. “You want to keep him safe.”

“I will keep him safe,” you say fiercely.

“Then you must come to understand the power humans can wield,” says Maturin. “You will not know as he does until he tells you, or until you see it for yourself.”

“You mean with Sara,” you say.

“I have no doubt you can feel her power,” says Maturin, “but it is one thing to sense, and another entirely to witness. I… am not one to give advice. But for the sake of your child, you would do well to stay far away from that woman.”

At work the next day, you can barely concentrate on anything. You’re too busy digesting Maturin’s warning, as well as deciphering everything he told you about Pennywise learning some kind of lesson.

And on top of that, you can smell the clown’s frustration in the very air of Derry. He’s still mad at you, which in turn keeps you mad at him.

A hand falls gently on your shoulder. You jump a little in surprise, but it’s just Diana. She must’ve noticed your mind was far, far away from the computer screen in front of you.

“How bad?” she asks, voice soft enough for only you to hear.

“How?”

“The fight,” she clarifies, wheeling her computer chair to sit by you at your desk. “You’ve been stuck in your head all day. The asshole must’ve said some pretty nasty things to you.”

“Oh,” you say. “Not really.”

Your brain is already working on a way to twist the truth into something you can tell Diana. You know you can’t tell her everything, but you need to get this anger out somehow.

“Was it the pregnancy?” she asks. For some reason, the prodding isn’t annoying coming from her. Maybe it’s because you can sense that she actually cares. “Did he not take the news well?”

You’re about to say that wasn’t it either, but the words get stuck in your throat. He didn’t exactly take it well. You know you shouldn’t have expected a human reaction, but that doesn’t mean you didn’t want one.

“That’s… part of it,” you admit. “He seemed more controlling than ecstatic. He wants me to stay—um, at home. For the whole thing.”

“He sounds like a creep,” she says with distaste. “What kind of man does that?”
“He isn’t really normal,” you say.

“Did he tell you that?” she asks with a smirk. You can’t help the chuckle that bubbles out of you.

“No, he’s just…” you trail off, choosing your words carefully, “he’s got issues, I guess. He wasn’t raised very well—or at all, “—and he’s spent most of his life alone. He’s… clingy.” Obsessive.

“Still,” she says. “Trying to control your freedom… that’s a red flag, hon.”

If you were in a relationship with a human, that would definitely be the case. But you really do understand how a lonely, desperate entity like Pennywise would want to keep his pregnant mate safe. Especially with Sara in town.

You also understand how it could be hard for him to see things from your perspective. To him, his lair is home base. It’s the one place he knows he’s safe, and it’s been that way since long before you came around.

He doesn’t see the cage he’s asking you to confine yourself to. He’s never had what you have; the freedom to breathe fresh air, to go out to eat at a restaurant, to see a movie, to travel.

The sewers are his freedom, and maybe he thinks they can be yours, too.

Your boss keeps looking over at you and Diana, and you nudge her to clue her in. Before he can come stomping over here, Diana hurries back to her desk. Thankfully, he decides to spare you both a lecture.

The rest of your shift is spent in silent contemplation. Even though you didn’t really tell Diana anything, you still feel like you took away something important from your conversation. Her being angry for you helped siphon it out of your system, allowed you to think more clearly.

Now you just have to figure out how to fix this mess.
The Calm

You’re two blocks away from your house when you realize you’re being followed.

You’re not concerned at all. In fact, you’ll be happy for the snack. You walk a bit slower to allow them to catch up to you. As they draw nearer, you scent the air, reaching for their mind to glimpse their fears. You look past the everyday, general fears to find the truest one.

The tastiest one.

You see flashes of a lost world, a shattered future. Undead plague the streets, searching for any sign of life with the intent to snuff it out. Rotting corpses, shambling through buildings, in every conceivable hiding spot, endlessly seeking their next meal. The one they know is out there, somewhere, still alive when they are not.

Her.

“Hey.”

You knew she was there, but you don’t have to fake the surprised jump when Sara Miller suddenly appears at your side. She walks beside you, an easy smile on her face, and you do your best not to show your hate.

“Thanks for the heart attack,” you choke out, gripping at your chest for effect.

“Didn’t you see me coming?” she asks innocently. “You even slowed down so I could catch up.”

Your skin crawls at her level of perception.

“I did?” you ask, playing dumb. “I guess I just got lost in thought or something. I had no idea you were behind me.”

“Alright,” she says with a playful giggle that turns your stomach. “Well in that case I’m sorry for the scare.”

“What are you doing out here?” you ask.

“Looking for answers,” she says. “Same as before.”

To hopefully expel some of your nerves, you continue walking. Sara follows.

“Ask away,” you say.

“Ryan left me a few breadcrumbs,” she says. You assume Ryan was Agent Miller’s first name.

“You’re featured in a few of them.”

“He seemed to think I had something to do with the disappearances,” you admit. If she knows that much, trying to hide things will only make you more suspicious in her eyes.

“He had a gut feeling you were involved somehow,” Sara says, keeping her eyes focused straight ahead. “I’m assuming you can convince me that this is the first time in his entire career that his gut feeling was wrong.”

You don’t know how to respond to that. Is she directly accusing you, or simply trying to intimidate
you into confessing? You stop walking to make direct eye contact.

“I’m not kidnapping children,” you say seriously. Even with her level of perception, she won’t find any deceit in your words. You’re not technically lying. You’re not kidnapping kids.

You’re just eating them.

“Never said you were,” she says. One corner of her lips twitches. “But I think you know more than you’re letting on. Maybe you don’t even know it.”

“I’ll tell you the same thing I told your husband,” you say. “I’m willing to help however I can.”

“How about you start by telling me where you were on the night my husband went missing.”

“I wouldn’t know,” you say. “I don’t know the exact date he went missing.”

She raises an eyebrow. Is she seriously surprised you didn’t fall for her trick?

“He was last seen two weeks ago,” she says. “An officer told me Ryan gave you a ride home after you were attacked by a couple kids.”

“I remember that,” you say, quashing down your nerves. “I told him I could take care of myself, but he insisted. He’s a good man.”

Sara glances sideways at you. You can’t read her expression. “He is. So how about you tell me everything that happened that night?”

“Well, I guess it’s like this officer of yours said,” you tell her. “I was jumped by two teenage boys. Agent Miller saw what was happening and stepped in. The boys got away, and he took me to the station to take my statement. I kept telling him I wasn’t going to press charges and just wanted to go home and sleep. He offered me a ride, and I refused at first—”

“Why did you refuse?” Sara asks. “You were just attacked. Weren’t you afraid of walking home alone at night?”

“I walk home by myself every night,” you say. “Sure, I was a bit shaken up this time, but like I said, it was only a couple kids, and—”

“This time,” she interrupts again.

“Huh?”

“It was only kids this time,” Sara repeats. “Not much to worry about, but there’s also a serial kidnapper on the loose in Derry. You weren’t worried about being their next victim?”

“They only kidnap kids,” you say. You can feel her dissecting every word you say, every inflection of your voice. “Those two boys who jumped me were in more danger walking home than I was. And I’m not completely helpless. I know how to defend myself.”

“Hm.” Sara says dismissively. “Go on, then. What happened next? He offered you a ride home, and…”

“And when he insisted, I took him up on his offer,” you say.

“Why?”
“Why what?”

“If you were so sure you could handle yourself, why would you accept a ride home?”

“I don’t know,” you say, beginning to get frustrated. Apparently Ryan and Sara have relentless interrogation in common. “It was convenient, and he just kept insisting. I was too worn out to argue about something stupid like that, so I just let him give me a ride.”

“He kept insisting,” Sara echoes, clearly finding some significance in that statement. “I see. So he gave you a ride. Did he say anything in the car?”

You take a moment to think about that car ride. He caught you in your lie about why you were in the sewers. When you pretended to let your guard down, he let down his own. You invited him inside…

How much of that is incriminating? How much does Sara already know?

“He told me why he came to Derry,” you admit. “He said no one back home believed him, even when he showed them the sheer amount of case files that came out of this place. He said he’d do anything to keep these kids’ memories from fading away.”

“He said that?” Sara asks, brow furrowed in concentration. “Those exact words? He didn’t want their memories to fade?”

“Y-yeah,” you say. You can’t help feeling like Sara’s piecing together some puzzle you can’t see. It’s incredibly unnerving, but you can’t do anything about it.

Or can you?

It’s a new moon tonight, which means these streets are even darker than usual. Sure, there are streetlights, but their bulbs are old and flickering. Maybe if you act quickly enough, you can catch her off guard and take her out right here.

A surprise attack wouldn’t be enough time to season her with fear, but it would be worth it to end her life, to keep her paws away from you and Pen. You take a few seconds to gather your energy in preparation to strike, but just before you make your move you notice something glimmering in the dark.

There, twirling menacingly in Sara’s hands, is a large folding knife.

“Call me paranoid,” Sara says, her voice as cold and unyielding as the steel blade in her expert hands, “but I like to be prepared for anything.”

You swallow. Your instincts are screaming at you to flee, not fight. You don’t understand them; why should you fear a tiny blade when you can do far more damage with your claws alone?

But there’s something about the hardness in her eyes, her too-calm stride. You don’t know how, or why, but you get the feeling she could do more damage to you with that blade than she should be able to.

Is it the blade itself? Or is it her?

You think about what Maturin told you, about the power that humans can wield. You think you’re beginning to understand what he’s talking about.

“What happened next?” she asks, her voice calm and measured. You want to chase away your fear
with anger like you normally do, but you don’t think it would help in this case. Fighting fire with fire won’t help you here. You imagine what a scared human would do in your place, instead.

“Are you going to kill me?” you ask, your voice trembling.

“Are you going to give me a reason to?” she asks, her eyes burning into yours.

“N-no,” you say quickly, allowing her to see your fear even though it goes against everything you are. You hate exposing yourself like this, but it might convince her you’re not a threat.

“Answer the question,” she tells you. “Keep walking. We’re almost at your house.”

Of course this fucking psycho knows where you live. You do as she says; you keep walking. You can only hope she doesn’t know anything about Pennywise or his lair. You’re sure as hell not going to clue her in.

“I-I told him I agreed,” you tell her, your voice trembling. Scared human, you tell yourself. Submissive human. “A-about wanting to solve these cases. He gave me his card and told me to call him if I see anything, or think of anything that could help.”

“And then he drove off?” she asks.

“Yes,” you say.

“Which direction?”

“Um, North, I think,” you say. “I assumed he was headed back to town, to his hotel.”

“And then?”

“A-and then I went to sleep,” you say. She twirls the knife in her hand, her dexterous fingers showing off exactly how capable she is with the weapon. You can feel some kind of energy radiating from her, burning like a sun.

“Except none of that happened,” she says calmly. “Did it?”

“W-what?”

In one swift movement she shoves you against a sturdy tree growing up partially from beneath the sidewalk. You reflexively put up your hands in a block, but the tree’s hungry roots have destroyed the chunk of cement beneath your feet, and you almost lose your balance. It’s that momentary slip that allows her to pin you to the rough bark.

“A witness swears she saw you and my husband enter your home that night,” Sara breathes against you. Her face is a mask of control, but her eyes almost shine with their level of intensity as they stare bravely into yours. It takes every ounce of strength you have to not shift out of your human form.

“Tell me why you were the last person he was seen with.”

You don’t know how to answer her, but then, you don’t have to. Her hold momentarily loosens as her eyes travel downwards. She stares at your midsection for a second before flicking her eyes back up to study your face.

“You’re pregnant,” she says, slowly releasing you from her hold. She backs away slowly, the knife in her hand hanging limply by her side. It is only then that you realize your arms are wrapped protectively around your stomach.
And you see an opportunity to turn the tables, though it’s definitely not ideal. You’re between a rock and a hard place. There are two roles you can play here, and you’re not sure which will put you in less danger.

Either you killed her husband, or you slept with him.

“I—I didn’t—” you begin to say, but she cuts you off.

“Go,” she says, so quietly you almost don’t hear it. Her eyes are glazed over, her mind working hard to rearrange the puzzle pieces she’s thus far put together.

You don’t give her a chance to change her mind. You take off in a dead sprint, heading straight for the relative safety of your home, not caring that she knows exactly where it is. You want to put as many locked doors between you and Sara Miller as you possibly can.

When you’re finally home, you nearly slam the front door shut behind you, being sure to use every lock you have before turning to press your back against the hard wood.

You slide down until your butt hits the cold floor, and you wrap your arms tightly around your knees. You rock yourself gently back and forth, more terrified than you’ve ever been.

It takes you a full hour to calm yourself down.

It’s late, so you’ve turned all the lights in your house off. If Sara is still out there keeping watch on you, she’ll think you’ve gone to sleep like any other human after a taxing night.

Only this night was far from just taxing.

You search the entirety of Derry for Pennywise’s hum, but come up dry. He’s here, somewhere, but you’re too shaken up to pinpoint his exact location. And even if you could, you’re afraid of the possibility of Sara following you if you tried to go to him. So far, she hasn’t given you any reason to believe she knows about his existence, and you have no intention of changing that.

You think about going to the police, but that thought is quickly shut down. Ryan was a member of the FBI, and Sara is an American veteran. Even if their status wasn’t enough to help keep them out of legal trouble, any attention you bring to the Millers will also bring attention to you. You can’t risk anyone else seeing the connections between you and these kidnappings.

It’s like Pen said, even one human who can see past his spell is too many, and you’ve already dealt with two in your short time of being a devourer.

So for now, it’s up to you. You can either stay home and wait for Sara to come and kill you, or you can get up off of your ass and do something about it.

Don’t get scared, you tell yourself. Get angry.

And you do. Because you refuse to let this woman control your fear. You are a devourer; you feed on fear. You’re the monster in her closet, the moving shadow in the corner of her vision, the nightmares that keep her up at night.

And it’s about time you show Sara Miller exactly what she’s up against.
The Storm

You follow Sara Miller’s scent back to her hotel. She smells spicy and explosive, like gunpowder. It’s surprisingly easy to track, but you suppose that’s probably because you’re so focused on it.

You take the form of shadows until you have her location in your sights. You sidle up to her hotel window, crouch low to use the bushes as cover, and carefully raise your head until your eyes peek over the windowsill.

What you see makes your blood run cold.

Sara Miller’s hotel room is a perfectly organized mess. Stacks of papers and file folders litter the room, but you see the pattern in their placement. A cork board has been tacked onto one wall in a blatant violation of the hotel’s terms of service. On the board are what looks like dozens of newspaper clippings and case files, pictures and police statements.

There are thin red strings of yarn connecting the horrific history of Derry together by the pins holding them in place. It looks like a conspiracy theorist’s basement, but you know whatever discovery Sara Miller has made is probably not far from the truth.

Though you can identify them, the documents are illegible from your vantage point. The board is on the far side of the room, and you can only see the images with any sort of clarity. One of them is a map of Derry, but most seem to be missing persons posters.

There’s no sign of Sara. The bathroom door is ajar, and it’s a small enough room that there’s no practical place to hide.

She must’ve spent so much time in this room that her scent soaked into the very walls. But the scent is fading. She’s not here.

You shift into a form that is barely corporeal, stretching yourself so thin you can navigate through the spaces between atoms and their electrons. You phase through the wall this way, and reappear as yourself on the other side.

You immediately close in on the cork board, taking in everything you couldn’t see before. There are circles on a map of Derry’s sewer system, with names of what you presume are Pennywise’s various meals throughout the years.

That she’s verified her husband’s theory isn’t all that surprising to you. What is surprising is the circle of bright red ink surrounding 29 Neibolt Street.

Derry’s own infamous haunted house. It’s almost comical in how horrific it looks; rotting and dark, with a dead willow in its front yard. Even during the day, the shadows that tree casts look like menacing elongated fingers. You’ve heard kids *swear* they’ve seen them move, reaching out to grab anyone who comes too close…

Everyone’s afraid of it; children avoid walking down the street if they can help it, and adults never even look at the place—

Or… maybe it’s not fear that keeps their eyes away. Maybe it’s that they can’t *see*.

That’s when it hits you.
It’s not just the house that Sara’s circled. It’s the sewers below. She’s found Pennywise’s lair.

She’s found him.

You burn in your panic, dematerialize, disappear into nothing, and you ride light waves in your haste to get there before Sara.

She found him, but she will not hurt him. You would destroy the entire galaxy before you let her take him from you.

You just hope that you won’t have to.

---

Pen. Pennywise. You fucking ass-clown, you answer me right now! I know you can hear me!

You have no idea if that’s true, but you need it to be.

Pen, please, you call in your head. Please listen to me. You’re in danger. She’s coming for you! I’ll stay in the nest like you want me to. I promise. I’ll do whatever you want, just answer me!

Nothing.

Your heart is like a black hole in your chest, squeezing the life out of you. You barely notice you’re no longer corporeal. You’re phasing through concrete walls and solid packed earth and making a beeline for his home, his safest place.

I need you to be safe, you tell him. Or maybe you’re not telling him anything, and your thoughts are simply bouncing around in your skull. I need you to be okay. I need… I need you, Pen.

Nothing. A pained sound not unlike a howl tears itself from deep within your deadlights. It’s so potent that it’s physical, like a shimmer radiating from a sun, ultraviolet waves bursting with desperation.

Finally you phase through that last wall, crashing into the lair with such force that you get a face full of filthy sewer water and sludge. Thankfully, you’re still incorporeal when it happens, so none of it actually touches you.

You pick yourself up from the floor and phase back into this plane of existence. You barely catch yourself from shouting Pen’s name. There’s a chance, you tell yourself. There’s a chance she doesn’t know about him, only the place.

You close your eyes and listen. His hum is far from here. In its familiar tone, you sense his hunger is being satiated. He’s off somewhere else, enjoying his latest kill. You allow yourself to breathe again, knowing he’s safe, for now.

A soft click has you tensing up again. A silent sniff of the air reveals an overwhelming stench of gunpowder.

You raise your arms as slowly and carefully as you can, and begin to turn around to face the gun you know is aimed directly at your head.

Sara’s eyes are wide with horror as she takes in the sight of the floating children. Her gun doesn’t
You don’t answer. You’re too busy trying to figure out how you’re going to get out of this. Sara must realize what you’re up to because she gives you no more time to brainstorm.

“What’s my husband?” she demands. “What did you do with him?”

Your eyes are trained on the barrel of her gun. You can’t help but wonder if the bullet in that chamber has the power to kill you.

Sara doesn’t take kindly to your silence. She aims her gun at your left arm and pulls the trigger.

You scream as it rips through your flesh, lodging itself deep within your upper arm. You fall to your knees and cradle the wound, trying to remember if Ryan Miller’s bullet hurt this bad.

“I said where is he!” she screams, her voice cracking with emotion. Tears fall from her eyes, streak down her cheeks, but there’s so much fire in her sadness that it burns away the weaknesses of weeping. Her breathing is steady, her aim still true. You have no doubt silence will only earn you another bullet.

“He’s dead,” you say, your own voice cracking in pain.

Sara huffs out the rest of the air in her lungs, and you swear you can actually feel the moment her heart breaks in two.

And then as soon as it appeared, the grief is gone, replaced by a hatred so powerful it feels like it singes your skin. Sara takes three steps toward you before pressing her gun directly against your forehead. It’s still hot from the shot she took at your arm, but somehow it also feels cold, like death.

“Why?” she asks, her voice trembling with the force of her fury. “Why did you kill him?”

You look her directly in the eye and allow yourself a manic smile, channeling Pennywise.

“Because I was hungry.”

Before she can even react, you knock her off her feet by slamming yourself into her legs. She falls backwards, and the gun clatters and splashes against the ground. She doesn’t immediately lunge for the weapon, but instead produces her knife from its sheath at her belt.

You know you’re no match for her physically, so you attack her from a different angle.

All around her, rotting corpses begin to rise from the murky sewage water. Sara pales in terror and is momentarily distracted by the mirage. You waste no time and shift your form.

Hundreds of needle-like teeth spring from your gums, and the ends of your fingers become razor-sharp black claws. Something wild surges through you, a type of panic you imagine only cornered animals can feel. This is a fight you can’t afford to lose.

Sara has already dispatched the first wave of zombies. She easily dodges your swipe at her throat and slashes a deep gash into your right leg. You cry out and fall to the floor. Sara tries to pounce on you, but you roll out of the way, then lunge at her once more in an attempt to take a bite out of her.

She evades your teeth, but before she can attack again, one of your zombies manages to tackle her to
the ground. The corpse gnashes its rotten teeth at her face, and Sara screams as she tries to fight it off.

You wince when you try to move your injured leg. You peek down at the slice in your outer thigh and are horrified to see your blood is floating out of your wound instead of running down your leg.

You grind your teeth together and force yourself to stand, making a break for the main tunnel. You manage to get about eight feet from Sara before she breaks free of the zombie’s hold and tackles you both to the ground again.

You turn over in your struggle, but for all your extra strength and stamina, Sara manages to keep you pinned beneath her. Her eyes reflect the heat of dying stars, and you finally witness the power humans can wield.

It is a conversion of energy, like how you turn your fear into anger. That love for her husband has become hatred for you, and it burns hotter than anything else in the universe.

“I don’t know what you are,” Sara says, voice considerably calmer than it should be, “but you’ve been alive for a very long time, haven’t you?”

She has no idea about Pennywise. She thinks it’s only you, that it’s always been only you. And part of you sings in relief, because even though you’re going to die, at least Pennywise will be okay.

“You eat children,” she goes on. “You eat them, and parents mourn. Posters are put up. But people move on. They forget, and then twenty-seven years later, you do it all again.”

You don’t know what twenty-seven years has to do with anything, but you remain silent.

“But after all this time, you were bound to make at least one mistake,” she continues. Her bottom lip trembles, and fresh tears run down her cheeks. “Ryan. You thought he wouldn’t be missed, but you were wrong. You took him from me, you fucking creature. You shouldn’t have done that.”

Before you can even think to say anything, she plunges her knife deep into your abdomen. You let out an inhuman scream, the pain nearly drowned in the horror of what she’s just done.

“First,” Sara says, her eyes wide and crazed, “I’m going to get rid of this disgusting thing.”

“No,” you choke out, your voice sounding so small and fragile. All you can feel is pain, but all you care about is your baby. “Please…”

Sara smiles, twisting the blade in your wound. Your lungs struggle to heave in air, and you can feel your internal organs being torn apart. Blood surges up from your esophagus and pools in the back of your throat.

Your physical form is dying quickly, but all that really matters is your deadlights. You begin to retreat into them, your consciousness dimming. The ground beneath you feels liquid, and gravity begins to invert.

You fight the fade, because you’re not alone in this body. There is another, the blue, and you can feel its fear and pain as Sara tears it apart inside of you. You try to call them to you, but you’re not fast enough.

In seconds, they are gone.

Sara pulls another gun out of her inner jacket pocket, presses it to your forehead. You don’t feel sadness. You don’t feel fear. You just close your eyes, and brace yourself.
“Now it’s your turn,” Sara says, and she pulls the trigger.

You can feel the bullet tear through your skull, destroying your brain and exploding out of the back of your head. Your deadlights are hiding in your heart, but Sara doesn’t know that. She empties an entire clip into you, turning your head into a mess of gore and bone. She keeps shooting until your body is no longer capable of movement; until she thinks you’re dead.

Finally, she gets off of you and stands. Your eyes and ears are just mangled flesh now, but your deadlights see for you. You watch as she wipes blood from her face, turns away from your mangled body, and leaves you behind, believing herself victorious.

Only then do you allow the pain of being torn apart to lead you into the dark.
Warm. Solid. A whisper of ragged breaths in your ear.

You summon the energy to run your fingers along the surface you lie on, but find a soft cushion instead of the cold, hard sewer floor you’re expecting.

You try to carefully open your eyes, but find one of them is still too damaged to obey. Before you is a wall of hard-packed earth, a golden light faintly shimmering on its damp surface. A source you can’t see.

The world is shaking in tiny gasps of movement. At first you think it’s vertigo, but then you notice you’re not alone in this cave.

Pennywise is holding you with such desperation it brings tears to your eyes. You can smell it in the air now, thick and potent. He’s so afraid because he almost lost you, but even more than that, he’s furious. You know exactly who that fury is for. If you weren’t so utterly exhausted, you might feel it, too.

“Pen…”

Talking hurts, but you want him to know you’re okay. Or, at least, that you’re on your way to being okay. Even now, you can feel your physical form regenerating. Your skull fuses itself back together. Your skin regrows.

“Pen?” you try again, pushing past the knives in your throat to reach him. He’s far, far away right now, lost in that dark place you will never truly comprehend. The place of irrationality, of madness. “Pen, please…”

He says nothing. His lips are pressed right against your ear, and even though he’s not really there, he gives you the warmth he knows you need.

But it’s not enough. You need all of him right now. You need him to be here, with you.

“Come back,” you beg softly. “Please, come back.”

He doesn’t respond. You close your eyes and try to concentrate on your deadlights, try to use them to reach out for him. But the effort exhausts you, and you have to stop before you pass out again. You’re not even strong enough to get him to come back to you.

For now, you are alone.

You reach down to place your hand on your abdomen and let out a shuddering breath. The skin has sewn itself back together, but your insides are still very tender. Your organs haven’t finished healing yet.

Other than those few healing organs, there’s nothing else beneath your flesh. No hint, no whisper of that sparkling blue light. Like glistening waves, a clear blue sky. It’s simply, heartbreakingly, terribly gone.

You realize only now that you never doubted the child. You doubted yourself; your broken, monstrous self. You, who turns fear into anger, who thinks that aggression towards people is a healthy coping mechanism for social anxiety.
How could someone like you ever raise a functional child, even a non-human one?

Yet even with all that doubt, you wanted this. You wanted them.

You had felt them living inside of you. They had been so—

So content. To just exist in tandem with you. Like they trusted you, those beautiful little deadlights. They consciously believed you could keep them safe.

Your whole body aches from the force of your sudden and violent sobs, but you can’t stop yourself now.

*It isn’t fair,* you tell yourself. *It isn’t fucking fair!*

You cry, and your tears run like rivers through the canyons of your still-healing face. They pool in areas of missing flesh, in the cracks of bone that are slowly reuniting. It stings, but you don’t care. It doesn’t hurt nearly as much as the hole in your chest.

You cry until you can’t anymore.

It takes what you think is three days for Pen to come back to you on his own. By then, you’ve long since run out of tears, as well as any feeling at all.

After days of being trapped in this broken form, pinned to a vacant yet blissfully warm body, you’re completely numb.

His awareness of you comes at first in the form of soft kisses that he presses against your ear, cheek, and temple. Over and over again, like it’s the only thing he knows; loving you.

And it really is love, isn’t it? He used to be a monster to you, even when you thought you were just like him. He was different, he was *other,* and you were only learning a new normal.

His lips against your ear, his kisses… Why has it taken you so long to see him not as a devourer, not as a creature, an alien—but a man? Not human, but still a being, capable and very much worthy of love.

You take one of his hands, wrapped around your chest—he must know you’re too damaged for him to hold your empty belly—and you entwine your fingers in his. You can feel him staring at the connection, a vague sense of awe radiating from him. He doesn’t fully understand this, what it means.

But you do. You could teach him, if he’ll let you. He’s already taught you how to be a monster.

Maybe he wouldn’t mind learning a few things about being human.

Hours later, he finally talks.
“They called themselves the Losers Club,” he tells you.

You have nothing else to do but listen.

When he’s done with his story, a wave of physical agony washes over you, and you squirm in his arms. He holds you closer, and presses his hand to your stomach, where your organs continue to rearrange themselves. The worst of the pain dissolves quickly under his touch, but it continues to ache.

“We do not feel pain the way they do,” he tells you. “An attack will only wound us if it is laced with intent.”

“Intent,” you repeat softly. “When they want us to feel it.”

“When it is conscious,” he confirms. “When it comes from a place of fear, it means nothing. They must channel. Intend.

“They wanted to hurt me,” Pen continues, squeezing you gently, “and because they wanted to, they did. That is the power humans can wield against us; their will.”

Like when Beverly stabbed him through the eye twenty-seven years ago. She wasn’t trying to distract him, or defend herself. She was trying to kill him. She wanted the spike to pierce him, to ruin him, and it was her will that made it so.

And Sara had plenty of that, didn’t she? She wanted to tear you apart for killing Ryan, and that’s exactly what she did. It wasn’t self-defense, it was a deliberate action.

But if that was the whole truth, why weren’t you dead?

“They thought they’d succeeded,” Pen continues. “But they were children, and did not know how to use their power to its fullest potential. I crawled here, to my safest place, to recover. And I had my long rest.”

“Twenty-seven years,” you mutter. “Why do you sleep for so long?”

“It conserves energy,” he says. “For almost three decades, Derry can forget. I don’t have to work so hard to hold their minds. Time is a powerful ally.”

“Will I have a ‘long rest’ too?” You think of your family, and what few people in your life you consider friends. Are you even capable anymore of missing them? If you suddenly disappeared, would the Derry curse erase you from their minds?

“I don’t know,” he says, pressing a soft kiss to your temple. He pauses, as if unsure of what he’s about to say, before he lets the words come. “The idea that you might not… terrifies me.”

You turn your head to try and meet his eyes, but he ducks away from your gaze, embarrassed to admit he fears anything. You raise your entwined hands instead, bring his knuckles to your lips.

“If it’s any consolation,” you tell him, “I feel like I could sleep forever.”

At that, Pen pops his head back up to stare intensely at you, horrified at what your words suggest.
But the sky is in his eyes, and despite everything that’s happened, you can’t help the teasing smile that blooms across your lips.

“Kidding… maybe.”

He must understand, because his eyes light up and he presses his forehead against yours, and he gives you a big, dumb smile that really makes you question if he isn’t partly human after all.

It takes a few weeks for your body to heal completely. During that time, Pen only leaves your side to bring you food. You can tell by the taste that it’s not fresh, but you can’t complain. You heal faster thanks to him.

You’re surprised to find you’re not afraid to leave the sewers. But then, Sara is gone, sure that she ended a centuries-old threat to a small town in Maine. She has no reason to stay here.

There’s a letter of termination in your mailbox when you return home. You’re not surprised at that, but it is a little unnerving that you’ve been fired before being declared missing after almost a month of not showing up to work. Maybe it has something to do with the curse.

Your house is cold and almost foreign when you step inside. It feels as though it no longer belongs to you. When you think of ‘going home,’ you think of Pen’s little cave. Damp, but warm, just enough space to hold each other and spend the next three decades in hibernation.

Or, maybe it’s not the place you feel at home with, but him.

Regardless, you get a fire started and get comfortable on the seat by the fireplace. Pennywise watches you curiously from the darkness in the corners, and for a while all you can do is count the pulses of his hum.

Soon enough, your brain finally wakes up.

“Did you hear me?” you ask, breaking the silence. “When I called you?”

He doesn’t answer for a long time, but you wait patiently. It’s not like you have anything else to do.

“It was… misty,” he says, finally. “Like being underwater. I was feeding, and it… couldn’t reach.”

“I was screaming,” you say, your voice breaking but otherwise calm. “I thought she was coming for you, that you were going to die. I was screaming.”

“I know,” he says. “I wasn’t fast enough.”

“Yes,” you lie, because it feels good to hurt him. But when the silence stretches on again, you finally give in. “No, actually. I don’t.”

“I do.”
You finally tear your gaze from the fire to meet his. All you can see are his eyes, unnaturally bright given the rest of him is invisible in the shadows of the room. They’re blue again.


“Someone has to,” you tell him. “Breaking is important. If things are being made, other things have to be broken. It’s a cycle, Pen, not an end.”

He says nothing, but his eyes shift down, narrowing as if he’s considering your words.

“You didn’t break your promise, though,” you add. “The promise was to protect me. I’m still here, aren’t I?”

“Through no fault of mine,” he says. “I helped you, but only afterwards. After you’d been—”

He stops himself, makes a strained noise. His eyes screw shut, rendering him invisible for a moment.

“You were… in pieces,” he groans, a catch to his voice that you’ve never heard before. “So much pain, even I could feel it. And even as you slumbered you cried for our— the child. You just kept crying, even though your body couldn’t. I heard you. I couldn’t… I had to…”

“I know,” you say, fighting back tears. “You had to go. It’s okay, Pen. I understand.”

“I came back,” he says, sounding remarkably like a child begging forgiveness. “I came back to you.”

“Yes, you did,” you say. “I knew you would. I just… I wish you weren’t the only one that did.”

“Gone,” Pen whines, and it’s the saddest sound you’ve ever heard him make. “They are… gone. I can’t hear them anymore.”

“Yeah,” you say, finding it harder each second to keep yourself from crying. “Me neither.”

He shrinks in on himself, becoming invisible once more. You realize this is the first time he’s ever lost something. He’s only ever had his existence, his home, and his food. Nothing has ever been taken from him before.

Not only that, but this thing was no toy, no meager possession. This was a being, a child, that he helped create. One of the first things he’s ever created in his life, aside from you.

He’s hurting just as much as you are.

You leave your soft, warm spot to join him in the corner. As you approach, the darkness disappears, and his form becomes corporeal. He’s curled against the wall, his arms pulling his knees tight to his chest.

He makes a low, choked-back wailing sound, but he buries it in his forearms. He doesn’t like feeling this way, like there’s a hole in his chest that aches like a wound. He doesn’t like missing things.

You can agree with him on that.

When you sit beside him you fall into each other, arms winding around torsos and legs intertwining. His muffled, tentative wails become alien sobs, and his whole body shakes like an earthquake as he experiences this new kind of pain for the first time in his long, long life.

Pen is angry, too; you can smell it on him. But he’s too caught up in sorrow that he can’t process
anything else. For now, you allow yourself to feel the rage for him.

The only way to keep it from tearing you apart is to allow yourself to contemplate revenge.

You could go after Sara, but why? She’s already proved she can beat you. Besides, she thinks you’re dead. All you have to do is leave her alone, let her believe she won, and you’ll never see her again. She’ll die in a few short decades, anyways, and you and Pennywise will be safe again.

It would be smart to do nothing. A conservation of energy, like Pen said. Just sleep away the rest of Sara’s life and live on after. Killing Sara will not bring back your baby.

And it hits you, then, that this is like the part of the movie where the hero realizes there’s more to life than revenge. Taking the high road makes you stronger. The real heroes are the ones who understand when it is time to act, and when it is time to spare an enemy.

But then, you’re not the hero in this story, are you?

Every cell in your body, every photon in your deadlights wants to kill her. You’ve never in your life hated someone with more ferocity than you do Sara Miller, and why should petty things like morals stop you now?

Pen took away your humanity. Sara took away your unborn child.

You’re done with people taking things away from you.

You glance down at your mate’s head, which has somehow found its way into your lap. You card your fingers through his hair, and are pleased to realize he’s no longer crying.

“Pen,” you say, “we’re going on a road trip.”
At first, Pen is pretty reluctant to leave Derry behind, even for a short while. He’s used to the atmosphere of the town, has a piece of himself tucked in every crevice. These are his hunting grounds, and the part of him that is pure animal instinct tells him to stay and protect what is his.

But the part of him that wants revenge is much stronger.

There’s no other way to get to Sara. Not without giving up the element of surprise, at least, and any advantage you have over the bitch could be the difference between life and death. So, despite his slight reluctance, Pen doesn’t put up much of a fight when you suggest the road trip.

He does, however, almost throw a literal tantrum when you open your laptop to purchase train tickets.

“Humans are food,” he whines through pouted lips, “not obstacles. I don’t want to have to hide from them. It’s undignified.”

“You already hide from them, Pen,” you remind him.

“This is different,” he insists. “This is… in plain sight. Disguising my form for the purpose of concealment instead of manipulation, hunting. I don’t like it.”

“Well, we’re not hiking the whole way down,” you tell him for the fifth time. “This is faster, easier, and involves a lot less nature.”

“I will not blend in,” Pen insists angrily, crossing his arms. Cute. “You cannot make me.”

“You don’t have to disguise yourself as a human,” you point out. Sure, it’d be easier, but you can understand his distaste for it, especially right now. “What if you shifted into an animal?”

“I could?”

“Yeah, of course.” You can’t resist. “You could pose as my pet.”

His eyes widen and he almost snaps his neck to glare at you. He looks like he’s just been smacked in the face. He marches up to you and bares his teeth – his real teeth – snarling inches from your face. When he speaks, it is in his native tongue.

“I am an ancient entity born of malice and hunger and I will not belittle my very existence by taking the form of your lapdog!”

God, but he’s adorable, you think.

“Who said anything about a dog, Pen?” you ask calmly, kissing the tip of his nose sweetly. It seems to throw him off, and he blinks stupidly and stares at the end of his nose, eyes crossing inward for once.

“What, then?” he asks once his eyes settle on yours again, cautious.

“I’ve got a few ideas,” you say.
Hours later, you walk into the bus station in Bangor, Maine with a large boa constrictor in tow.

Pen’s scales are dark brown, except for a particular half-circle patch of white ones near the top of his body. It pleases you to know that no matter what form he takes, your mark will always be visible.

Most of his body is curled up in your backpack, but his little head is resting on your shoulder. His forked tongue flicks menacingly at fellow travelers, who quickly give you an extra ten feet of room once they spot him.

There are those not afraid of snakes, of course, but not very many. And even those that aren’t must be able to sense the malice in Pen’s gaze, because not one person seems comfortable sharing the room with him.

You wait half an hour before the next bus arrives to take you to the train station in Brunswick. Once that arrives, you board and prepare for the two-hour long ride, which will be nothing compared to the nine-hour one from the train in Brunswick to Washington DC.

For right now, though, you’re on the bus, and you don’t have much in the way of entertainment to keep you occupied. There’s the internet on your phone and laptop, but it seems weird to scroll through memes and random YouTube videos when you’re essentially on a road trip for the sole purpose of committing revenge murder.

But simply sitting there in silence allows your mind to wander between anger and sorrow, and it soon becomes so exhausting that you flip open your laptop anyways.

Snake-Pen has been resting quietly in your backpack until now, coiled up comfortably in your lap. He perks his head up when you rest your laptop on your outstretched legs, curious.

“What is it?” he asks. It’s the first time he’s spoken to you in this form, and it takes you almost an entire minute to process that the words aren’t coming out of his mouth, but are instead echoing in your head. Snake mouths aren’t meant to pronounce human words, you guess.

“Last-minute research,” you finally answer, keeping your voice low. You could respond in your head, but it’s a lot easier just to talk. Thankfully, passengers have taken note of your guard-snake and there’s at least five empty seats between your seat in the back and the next passenger in front of you. “It’s probably a good idea to have some kind of plan. Our last fight didn’t… end so well.”

“It will be easier this time,” Pen says. She is outnumbered, and out-willed. Her purpose has been exhausted, and ours… very much strengthened.

“Still,” you say. “I’d rather have some knowledge going into this instead of having to rely on a battle of wills.”


“What the fuck is a ‘chood’?”

“The Ritual is how we hunt, he explains, ignoring your sass. We conjure visions, will our prey to witness them. If they fear, we feed. If they understand the Ritual, they can choose not to see, not to fear. They can use the Ritual against us. It is the only way to kill us, and the only way for us to kill.

“To kill devourers,” you say, suddenly realizing something. “Not me; not if part of me is still human. Which it is, right? The—”
You think of the boy in the Barrens, running for his life from a giant bear with bright yellow eyes…

“…the empathy,” you finish quietly.

Pen is silent, his head tilted slightly as he watches you think. Finally, he gives you a slow nod of confirmation. You’re not fully a devourer, then. Not yet, because of that last shred of human empathy. And though you’re certainly nowhere near human, you’ve still got a solid idea of what it is to be one, what it is to be inventive. To push boundaries, to shatter expectations. To be unpredictable.

Maybe that’s why Sara didn’t succeed in killing you. Part of you was still human, just enough to null the full effects of the Ritual. And then the rest of you, the devourer part, allowed you to recover from the physical damage.

Your last shred of humanity is what kept you alive. Maybe Pennywise could use some of that power, too.

“Pen,” you say. “You’ve taught me so much since I first met you. I want to return that favor.”

You want to teach me? His head tilts in confusion, but he leans forward, curious, and it occurs to you that curiosity is one thing he’s learned from you already.

“Yes.”

And what knowledge could a previously-mortal being impart on a powerful, ancient creature like me? He sounds amused, but you aren’t laughing.

“The only knowledge you can’t possibly know,” you answer. “What it’s like to be mortal, and powerless. What it’s like to be human.”

I know humans, Pen says dismissively, and with an air of disgust.

“No, Pen,” you tell him, “you really don’t.”

I know what they fear, Pen says, and that the only time they are not pathetically feeble is when they utilize the strength that love gives them.

“Then why did you choose me?”

What? he asks.

“I was human, that first night,” you say. “You could have eaten me, but you decided to turn me instead. Why?”

Pen is uncomfortable, but you only know that from the bond between you. His snake body doesn’t exactly display emotion very well.

You were… he says eventually, sounding uncertain of his own response, not afraid.

“But I was.” Pen’s surprise resonates through you, but you press on. “I just knew how to hide it. I’m not the only person who can do that, Pen. Humans can be so good at lying that they convince themselves it’s the truth. That’s why Sara beat me, even though she didn’t know about the Ritual. She was afraid, but she made herself believe that her fear was anger. Just like I did when I first saw you.

“Her strength didn’t just come from her love for her husband,” you explain. “It came from her fear. Which means we can’t treat this fight like the last one. We can’t rely solely on the Ritual to work in
your favor.”

*What do you propose we do, instead?* Pen asks.

“Not instead,” you say, “in addition. We’ll do what humans do.”

You wrap your arms around him to rest your fingers on the keyboard and begin typing. Pen stares curiously at your screen.

*And what do humans do?* he asks, eyeing what you’ve typed in the search engine.

[major arteries on the human body]

“Adapt,” you reply.

---

The bus drops you off at Brunswick Station in lower Maine. From there, the train will take you all the way to Union Station in Washington, DC.

The ride is about nine hours long, but you don’t need to take breaks for food or sleep, so you have plenty of time to focus on your research. Research that mostly consists of torture methods and different types of restraints.

It turns out that, for all the wonders of the human body, they are actually incredibly easy to kill. Even without your claws and hundreds of teeth, a simple nick in the right area can cause someone to bleed out in minutes.

But then, you don’t want that to happen. Sara doesn’t deserve to die that quickly. So when you commit the locations of these weak points to memory, it’s with the intent to keep Sara *alive*. It’s a fact you have to explain more than once to Pennywise.

“Of course it’s easier to bite her head off,” you say, exasperated, “but then it’s just no fun.”

---

By the time you make it to Union Station, you’re confident you won’t accidentally kill Sara before you’re done with her. This station’s far more crowded – and guarded – than the one in Brunswick, so you keep Pen hidden away entirely so you don’t draw attention to yourself. As soon as you’re outside, you unzip your pack and he takes to the sky in the form of a crow.

*Can you hear me, Pen?* You can’t use your actual voice out here, so you opt for the one in your head.

*Yes,* he responds. You watch him circle above you for a moment before taking in your surroundings.

*I thought we could find her by tracking her scent,* you admit, watching as people flood in and out of the station. *But…*

*There are too many,* Pen agrees. *There are millions more here than in Derry. It’s overwhelming.*
And frustrating. I don’t like it. 

Quit your griping, you say. There has to be some way we can find her in all this mess.

We must adapt, Pen says, though he sounds less than pleased about the idea. Why don’t you try using your magic screen? He asks this with a healthy dollop of sarcasm, but it makes you wonder how much he actually knows about technology. Humanity has come a long way in twenty-seven years.

Already tried that, you say. She’s too elusive for Google. Probably has something to do with her military status, or being married to an FBI agent.

You found nothing?

Nothing that would help us, you answer. Her personal information isn’t exactly up for grabs. Or, if it is, I don’t know how to get to it.

Pen doesn’t respond, and after a few minutes you realize standing in front of a train station with a crow circling above your head might look a little weird.

Come on, you tell Pen. Let’s go find a better place to think.

Pen has been silent for the better part of an hour, now. He sits perched on a tree branch above your head, but otherwise refuses to act like an actual bird. He doesn’t preen or adjust his wings, just sits completely still about five feet from the top of your head.

A teenager stares openly at you and the mysterious bird, her hot dog frozen mid-bite. A dollop of mustard lands on her shoe, snapping her out of her concern.

Look at that, you tell Pen. Even when you’re not trying you can still scare the pants off people.

I think I know a way we can find her, Pen says, ignoring your teasing.

I’m listening, you say. Pen hesitates, and you frown. Am I not going to like it?

I don’t know about you, Pen says, sounding quite annoyed. But I know I will not.

Does it involve Maturin? you ask astutely. Pen doesn’t respond, but you can feel his irritation clearly. We have to ask him for help, don’t we?

Only if there is no other option, Pen answers. He finally moves, shuffling his pitch black wings before flying down from his branch to perch on your knee. The teenager drops her hot dog. You know how much I despise him.

I do, you say. Even though he doesn’t despise either of us. That doesn’t mean he’ll help us, though. He doesn’t like to get involved.

He prefers humans, Pen says with disgust. He may already be on her side.

You’re not so sure about that. He warned you about her because he knew what she was capable of. He knew what she’d do to you, and your unborn child, if given the chance. He didn’t want that to happen.
It can’t hurt to ask, right?
“What kind of help would he give?” you ask Pen out loud once the teenager with the hot dog has moved on. “You know, if he agreed.”

_He will know where Sara is_, Pen says. _He’s watching us, and her, very carefully, now._

“Why do you think that?”

_Maturin sees what he wants to see_, explains Pen. _He’s still in crow form, nestled in your lap. He doesn’t like to influence, but he does like to observe. It is a very rare thing to slip past his notice if he wants to know where you are._

_And if he doesn’t want to know?_ you ask, continuing the conversation mentally because you’re unsure whether Maturin can hear it. _Say, if he’s occupied._

Pen freezes for a moment, but quickly catches on.

_Then it is a possibility_, Pen answers, _to slip past him unnoticed._

You absently stroke the top of Pen’s head as you think about that.

---

_Minutes later, you are floating once again in the vacuum of space._

“You already know I will not do it,” Maturin says, voice firm in his resolution.

“I was hoping I could change your mind,” you admit.

“Then perhaps you will allow me the chance to change yours,” he replies.

“Only fair,” you say.

“As you are now,” he says, “you cannot defeat Sara. To do that, you would need to sacrifice something very precious, an act which cannot be undone. You walk along a dangerous path.”

“I’ve killed children and eaten their corpses,” you remind Maturin. “I think it’s a little too late to try appealing to my sense of empathy.”

“Is it?” Maturin asks. “I know you still question this, deep down. You do not want to kill this woman.”

“If you really believe that, you don’t know me at all.”

“I know at the very least you are conflicted,” Maturin insists. “I feel it dwelling within you. I would not sense it, were it not there.”

“I’ve made my decision,” you say coldly. “And I will find her, with or without your help. She killed my child; she will die by my hands.”
“Only if you believe there is no other way.”

“There is none,” you say. “For either of us!”

“That is where you are wrong,” says Maturin. “If you want to be human again, you need only ask.”

That gives you pause. You forget for a moment that you need to keep talking, to keep Maturin talking.

“What do you mean?” you ask.

“Pennywise did not destroy your humanity,” he explains, “though he is of course quite capable. Rather, he rearranged it. I doubt he even knows it himself.”

“How wouldn’t he know that?”

“It is one of his flaws,” says Maturin. “He believes creation and destruction are somehow opposites, that all living beings in existence have different amounts of worth and that, to make you in his image, he would need to destroy what you already were.”

“But he didn’t?”

“When he remade you,” Maturin explains, “he did not make you less than human, nor did he make you more. He made you different, but if he wanted – if you asked it of him – he could remake you as you were.”

You could see your family again. You wouldn’t have to eat children to satiate an endless hunger. You could travel without worrying about being seen in a different form because you would only have the one – the one you were born with. The one you were meant to be.

“Being human is overrated.”

“No, it is not,” he says softly. “It is a frail, fragile existence compared to the one you are currently in, but there is meaning in a temporary life. Why else do you think I spend so much time watching your planet?”

“I’d imagine you don’t have much else to do in the vacuum of space.”

“Neither would you,” he says sadly. It feels as though the entire universe breathes through his sigh. “This is what awaits you, if you lose the rest of your humanity. A cold void, an eternity of emptiness.”

“That’s where you’re wrong,” you say. “I’d have Pen, and he’d have me.”

“You must know he cannot love you,” says Maturin. “Not in the way you perceive the word. Love is human, and it belongs to them alone. Whichever path you choose, you will lose him. It simply cannot be.”

“It already is,” you say. “But I wouldn’t expect you to understand. Just like I don’t expect you to understand why I have to kill Sara. I’m not asking you to help me kill her. I’m asking you to help me find her.”

“I can’t,” Maturin says, but his tone is pleading, begging for you to understand.

You don’t.
"I know you don’t like to take sides," you say. "So it must be difficult for you to stand up for Sara. She’s just as much of a child-killer as I am."

For once, the great Turtle has nothing to say.

“But that’s okay,” you tell him. A dark figure, a supermassive shadow, looms up behind Maturin, its cosmic being eclipsing his. All at once he is orbited by three golden suns. “Pen and I never really expected you to offer. So we’ll just have to take the help we need, instead.”

“What—"

“Where is she?” you ask before he can finish that thought.

You witness the moment Maturin realizes what it is you’re doing, but he’s far too late to stop you. Pen’s deadlights attack him like distant comets, shooting straight through his head and into his mind. The Turtle’s eyes go wide in shock, but he’s quickly rendered immobile. You watch anxiously as Pen rummages around in Maturin’s head, grasping the last piece of knowledge to flow through his consciousness, the last thought you forced the Turtle to have.

The location of Sara Miller.

---

You didn’t hurt him, is the first thing you say when you fall back down to Earth.

You didn’t want me to, Pen says, like the answer is that simple. Maybe it is.

The sky is a bright, dying orange, now; night swiftly coming in to take its place. There are still a few people in the park, but they’re far away.

“Do you think he’s mad at us?” you ask. You don’t want that, either.

He wasn’t, Pen says. He felt betrayed, but also sad. He… truly believes we are making a mistake.

He looks down, as contemplative as a crow can look.

“Pen?” you ask.

You could be human, Pen says, and even the voice in his mind sounds sorrowful. Even now, you could be…

“Not if it means I have to leave you,” you say.

You would give it up? he asks. A life of meaning? For me?

“You are the meaning, Pen,” you say. You smile at the blank, confused bird-look he’s giving you. “Don’t worry. Maturin didn’t get it, either.”

You stroke the speckled-white feathers on the top of his left wing, only visible from this proximity.

Is it like this? he asks, blissed out from you petting his mark. The meaning?

“Kind of,” you say. “Love is a little bit more than that, though.”
More than a promise?

“It’s not just about protection,” you say. “It’s an adoration. You care about someone so much that you even start to like the things that you know you’re supposed to hate.”

Like how grandpa would talk about politics at the dinner table. Like how that one aunt kept trying to shove her insecurities on you when you were growing up.

“Sometimes you can love someone you don’t even know,” you say, resisting the urge to press your free hand to your abdomen. You look away. “There’re a lot of ways to love.”

Do you love me? he asks. He shrugs his left wing, brushing the mark further against your fingers. Like this?

“Yes,” you say, and you’ve never been less afraid to admit that. “But I adore you a lot, too.”

Even though I’ve hurt you, Pen says. You shrug. You truly do not want it back?

“Do you want to give it back?”

No! he answers immediately, just as you expected. What you don’t expect is the feeling of shame that floods through him.

You didn’t know he was capable of that emotion. By all accounts, he shouldn’t be. That’s one of those human things, to feel guilty for wanting. Since when has Pen ever cared so much about seeming selfish?

I’m s—… No. I… I don’t want to give it back. No. You’re mine, why should I? Why should I want…? No! I won’t give it back!

“Pen—”

No! He suddenly takes to the sky, inky black wings slapping your face in his haste to get away. I won’t!

“I’m not asking you to!” you shout up at him before realizing how this looks. Thankfully, though, there’s still no one around to hear you screaming at a bird. Just to be safe, you go back to mental communication. Pen, it’s okay.

You don’t see him anymore; he’s flown off. His hum is still nearby, but it’s growing distant. You force yourself to stay calm.

Pen, please, you tell him, whatever that was, we’ll figure it out.

He doesn’t respond, just keeps on flying. You curse, and will yourself to shift into something with wings to follow after him.

He hasn’t stopped flying for close to an hour. You can probably catch up to him, but it seems better to give him his space.

You’re not even sure what he’s so upset about, though you can take an educated guess. It just feels
too weird for it to be anything but false. Pen isn’t human; his very existence is based solely on hunger and chaos. He eats to survive, he hides to survive, and even the reason he made you was to survive. As far as you can tell, he’s never expressed guilt—

Except… he has. He’s been sorry before, back when you first found out what he’d done. Before even telling you, he’d given you an apology. It had given you pause but you hadn’t thought too much about it. You figured he was only saying sorry because he didn’t want you to be mad at him, not because he meant it.

And then after, when he’d begged your forgiveness, he’d done so at a moment when he could have instead begged for your hands, your tongue. That hadn’t been an accident. He did it on purpose, to show you how much your forgiveness meant to him. He ignored his basic needs in favor of effectively surrendering to you.

What did that have to do with survival?

Pen lands on a rooftop, shifting back into his clown form once his feet hit the ground. He then sits crouched on the building’s edge, overlooking the dark streets below. You quietly follow his lead, landing on an air conditioning unit before shifting back into your own preferred form.

You’re not sure what to say, but thankfully he’s the first to speak.

“I don’t want to change,” he says, his back still to you.

“Everyone changes, Pen,” you say. “Eventually. You know, given enough time. Considering you’re probably older than this planet, I’d say it’s been enough time.”

“I know of change,” he says. “I’ve seen it. Sometimes it takes many years, sometimes not at all. Things are constant, but they change. I know that. But this… it’s not a good change. For me.”

You decide Pen won’t take off on you again if you approach, so you come sit by his side.

“I know how much you hate humanity, but—”

“It’s not just about being human,” he says quickly. You turn to see him frowning, almost pouting in frustration and… something like sadness, but not quite. “It’s about not being me.”

“You’re still you,” you tell him. He moves to scoot away, to hide or maybe even fly off again, but you take his hand, entwine your fingers, and he freezes, stuck to his spot. He looks down at your hands with something like fascination, but also a great deal of confusion. You squeeze gently, and after a beat, he squeezes back. “You’ll always be you. I promise.”

His gaze travels from your clasped hands to your eyes. His irises are blue again, strikingly innocent.

“But it will hurt,” he says, brows furrowing, willing you to understand. “If I change like this, it will hurt to kill. And then I won’t want to kill. I won’t want to eat.”

“Maybe,” you admit. His face twists into something so close to fear that you almost want to take back your honesty, but you can’t. You can’t lie to him. You care too much, too. He begins to shake, and your heart breaks. “Pen, listen—”

But he’s far away, now, his eyes wide and burning that dangerous yellow, again. You try not to panic, and gather him into your arms. He’s shaking—terrified.

“Hey, listen. Listen to me. Maybe it will. But if that happens, I’ll be here. I’ve hunted with it, okay? I
You and Pen both fall backwards onto the roof, landing in a heap on the gravelly surface. He’s clinging to you, desperate, and you do the only thing you can think of. You tear aside his costume to expose his left shoulder, and sink your teeth into your mark.

It seems to do the trick; Pen calms immediately, and in response you begin to sing that high, cooing sound to further soothe him. After a short minute, he closes his eyes and sings back in response.

_That’s it, you say to him. Everything’s going to be okay. I’m here, Pen._

You only get a whining trill in response. Once he’s significantly calmed down, you retract your teeth, licking them clean of his blood. _Better? you ask._

In answer, he turns his head to capture your lips with his own. Pleasantly surprised, your hand threads through his soft hair, keeping him close. He jerks a little, like he didn’t expect you to do that. With a purr, his own hand comes up to mimic your movement.

It’s… sweet, the gesture of him trying to learn, even though he’d just panicked about such changes seconds prior. But you can’t help remembering what came of the last time you two got up to this. And the reminder hits you like a punch in the gut.

“You know, it’s not that I don’t like where this is going,” you tell him, after reluctantly pulling away, “but if I recall correctly, we came down to DC on business.”

“Business?” he asks, still a little dazed from your kiss.

“Yeah, we had a previous engagement,” you say, “something about revenge?”

“Oh,” says Pen. He pulls away and sits up, looking back over the ledge of the building. “Did you think I landed here for no reason?”

“Kind of, yeah,” you say, pulling yourself up to look over the ledge, too. Pen points to a residential three-story building across the street. It’s old, made of brick, complete with iron fire escapes along the sides. “Is that…?”

“Yes,” Pen answers. You glance over to see him staring at a window on the second floor, his gaze fixed and intense. “When you asked Maturin where she was, this is what I saw.”

Your eyes find the window Pen was looking at. If you focus, you can smell her on the air. It’s still dampened from the smells of everyone else who lives on this street alone. There’s also the scent of car exhaust and alley dumpsters, but under it all you detect the unmistakable smell of gunpowder.

“Got you, bitch.”
You stand in the middle of her living room, drenched in darkness. Your form is incorporeal, pure shadow, so you know that even if she somehow sensed your presence, she wouldn’t be able to see you.

Pen hides the same way, his essence stretched along the walls and filling out the corners of the room so that even you have trouble perceiving him. He’s distancing himself as much as he can while still being present. Devourers don’t hunt together, after all. But this is no ordinary hunt, and so he deigns to watch from the sidelines, insisting that this is your kill alone.

Show me what you can do, he says, and you can hear the manic smile in his words. I will be here, watching.

You slither through the air, floating like a dense cloud of pure malice. Maturin didn’t know what he was talking about; you absolutely want to kill Sara Miller. She murdered your baby while they were still in your womb, blew your brains out with a gun, and then left you to die. Now, you’re going to make sure she dies screaming.

But first, you have to make sure no one will hear her. You flex your power, an ancient thing that you now understand is a consequence of being unmade and reborn. It solidifies into a barrier, blocking out the rest of the universe. In this moment, it’s only you, Pen, and Sara.

If it was within your power, you’d make it so that she died completely alone. As it is, you think you can stand to witness the life leave her eyes.

She’s asleep in her bed – just a bit too large for her alone. This is probably where Ryan slept, before he made the mistake of looking too closely into Derry’s case files. Before he made the mistake of underestimating you.

He’ll never share a bed with his wife again.

You push the thought aside; mistake or not, he was a presumptuous dick who endangered you and Pen both. You killed him because he gave you no choice. Sara had a choice, and she chose not only to avenge her husband, but to murder an innocent, unborn child, too. Everything that happens to her tonight is well deserved.

Before you can question yourself further, you drift towards her, hovering just inches above her sleeping face. Her brow furrows a bit, like she can almost feel you there, even while completely unconscious.

You don’t give her the chance to wake; you will into existence heavy metal chains that slowly, stealthily coil around her body like hungry snakes.

At first, she doesn’t feel them, but then you clenches a fist, and the chains tighten around her, locking her in place on her mattress. She starts awake, and you relish in the scared shock her scent feeds you.
You remain invisible for now, just to watch her struggle.

“What the fuck?!?” she cries, trying in vain to break free of the chains. She looks around the room, but of course there’s nothing. Nothing that she can see. “Who are you? What is this? Show yourself!”

Pen begins snickering in the corner, delighted to watch her squirm. Sara tenses, hearing his laughter but seeing no one. The smell of her fear makes for a delicious appetizer. Your stomach begins to growl in anticipation. She hears this, too.

“What…” she trails off, now looking truly horrified. You weren’t expecting it to be this easy. Just as you think that thought, Sara closes her eyes tight and mutters something under her breath. You lean in, and hear her say, “Just a dream…”

Even without knowing it, she’s performing the Ritual – a game piece you cannot allow her to play. You concentrate your hatred to pull the chains even tighter, until she gasps for air, her airway constricted. The lack of oxygen flowing to her brain renders her unable to think of anything else. Only when you’ve forced her to believe this is real do you manifest beside her bed.

Her eyes find you instantly, and though it doesn’t register on her face, you can practically taste her fear.

“I… killed… you…” she chokes out.

“Almost,” you agree. “I might’ve ignored that slight if you hadn’t killed my baby.”

“I’m… glad… it’s dead…” she says through clenched teeth, trying so hard to put on a brave face. “Now… it won’t… hurt… anybody… else…”

Her words stoke the fire burning within you. It’s almost physical, the warmth of it very real. Your blood is boiling, your insides charred. It’s your deadlights, you realize, the most inhuman part of you screaming out for vengeance. It expands and contracts, trying to fill every last crevice of your being.

Trying to take over.

Sara continues to struggle against the chains, but it’s no use. You can feel the power flowing through them, your rage keeping the metal tangible.

“I’d refrain from talking, if I were you,” you tell her, your voice deceptively calm. You loosen your hold just enough so she can take in a lungful of air. Wouldn’t want her passing out on you, after all. “Screaming, though. I’d like to hear more of that.”

“Fuck you!” she spits, thrashing now against the chains. But she doesn’t know they’re not really there, and so her physical efforts are futile.

Your claws itch to tear into her flesh, but something holds you back. Tears come to your eyes in frustration. You came here specifically to release this stored hatred onto her, but you can’t help reigning it in, keeping it tame. What are you waiting for?

“You didn’t have to do it,” you say. Your voice doesn’t drip acid like you want it to; it breaks, betraying the sorrow that overwhelms your anger. “You killed my child, a fucking baby—”

“You think it was innocent?” she hisses. “I had to kill it, and you. Did you expect me to just let you go after I found out everything you’ve done? Do you have any idea how many people’s babies you’ve killed?”
“I don’t care about them,” you say, and this is another lie, but one you can at least pretend to believe. “Besides, at least they had a chance at life.”

“Is that what you tell yourself so you can sleep at night?” Sara sneers. “You really think you’re not an abomination?”

“I’m doing what I have to in order to live!” you shout. “Do you cry for the antelope that gets eaten by the lion?”

“You’re no lion,” she says. “You’re a fucking monster. And one day, you’re going to die like a monster. Someone’s going to come along and put you down like a sick dog. I only wish it could be me—”

“You must think you’re so brave,” you growl through a mouthful of clenched, needle-like teeth. Her breath catches when she sees them, and a new flood of fear-scent permeates the air. “Fearless, even. You’re not fooling me.”

Without warning, you slash your claws across her gut. Blood wells up from the inch-deep gashes, staining the fabric surrounding the new rips in her shirt. She gives you a scream, but it’s behind a firmly closed mouth, trapped in the back of her throat. It’s not nearly as satisfying as you hoped it’d be.

Sara must see it in your face because she bursts into laughter. She does her best to force humor into it, but fails miraculously; it’s pure hysteria. She’s trying so hard not to show her fear.

“You think I’m afraid of you?” she says through panicked gasps that she attempts to disguise as amusement.

“I know exactly what you’re afraid of,” you tell her. “Call it a specialty of mine.”

Just for fun, you delve into her mind, seeking out that delicious morsel of utter terror that fuels her nightmares. Undead corpses, coming to claim her life as payment for their own stolen ones. You force her to see herself as you do – an amalgamation of terror disguised as courage.

“So you see,” you say, speaking softly and slowly to ensure she hears every syllable, “you are afraid of me. I’ve come back for you, Sara. You thought you were safe; you thought you’d killed me. Such a stupid mistake…”

You can feel the exact moment when Sara realizes she’s going to die. She goes strangely calm, the fight leaving her body as she gives in to the inevitable. She turns to stare defiantly at you.

“I would do it again,” Sara promises. Her entire body is trembling with fear, but she soldiers on. “You killed the love of my life. He was a good man, and you murdered him. At least now you know what that feels like, to have someone you love ripped away from you. Can you really blame me for wanting revenge? I would do it again, you heartless bitch!”

Your deadlights burn, scream, thrash, and you want to kill, ravage, obliterate her, but—

But.

There’s a wall built inside of you, made of you. It’s the only thing keeping you from unleashing that raw force. It’s the last piece of yourself, stubbornly standing between you and total carnage. It’s nothing, just a slip of sanity, a breath of doubt, but it’s annoyingly strong, far too willful for you to simply ignore. With that in your way, you’re inhibited, the force of your destructive power dampened. You could kill her, but it wouldn’t be nearly enough—
And suddenly you understand what Maturin meant, when he said there was something you would have to sacrifice. You want to destroy her. Mind, body, and soul. And in order for that to happen, you need to destroy part of yourself.

The last part of you that remains human.

_Pen_, you say, and you’re shocked to feel tears hot on your cheeks. _You have to destroy it._

Pen says nothing, though you feel his eyes land on the back of your head. An emotion flickers tentatively across your mind, coming from his. Confusion. He doesn’t understand, and you can’t blame him.

_My empathy_, you clarify. _You can’t just rearrange it, like you did before. You have to get rid of it._

Pennywise just stares at you, and even though you’re bound to him, you can’t tell what he’s thinking. Maybe he doesn’t know, himself. Just when you’re about to justify your decision, he shifts away from the shadows, comes to stand before you.

He’s a clown again, the first form you ever saw him take. Except back then, his eyes were golden like his deadlights. When he’s hungry, by any meaning of the word, those gleaming irises are ringed by a shock of blood red. Sometimes, like right now, his eyes are painfully blue, deep and full of awe, just like your baby’s deadlights were.

You have to do this for them.

Your hand rests on his cheek, your thumb tracing the blood red lines of his makeup. You know exactly what it is you’re giving up; somewhere in that empathy is your ability to love.

The mark on Pen’s shoulder is permanent, a lifetime connection that promises mutual protection and care, but you worry now that it’s not the same, that it’s not enough. Maturin warned you about this, told you this is something you cannot have.

You refuse to do anything but prove him wrong.

_Take it_, you tell Pen.

_Take… it…_ he repeats, tasting the words on his tongue. You feel his mind working, contemplating, but before you can ask him what he’s thinking, he continues. _Okay._

His hand sneaks around to press against your lower back, pulling your body flush against his. His eyes remain open when he kisses you, staring into your own with intent. Distracted, you barely feel the tugging sensation at first. Soon enough, it’s too hard to ignore. It begins to sting, then burn, like your skin is being peeled from your body. Just when it becomes too painful to bear, your very soul snaps back into place like a rubber band, and you are left in a cold, dark fire.

Burning; alone.

You look upon your prey with new, omniscient eyes.

It takes no effort at all to delve into her brain and prise out the pieces of information you’re looking for. Not just the greatest fear that you already knew, but _all_ of them.

Every minuscule thing she’s ever remotely been afraid of comes alive at once under your direction. Spiders crawl into her eyes, shadow beings play knives across every inch of her skin, unseen animals snarl and growl in the corners of her vision.
Her screams are ambrosia, but you are nowhere near done with her yet.

You reach further, deeper, into her most abstract anxieties. She falls endlessly towards a ground that never claims her, everyone she’s ever known and loved dies viciously before her eyes, a dark abyss of death and misery leaves her sobbing and broken.

Only then do you deign to grace her with true pain.

Utilizing a distant memory, you are careful to avoid the weakest parts of her human body as you take her apart. Removing the skin is a delicate process that takes time, but you find you are quite patient. She is so flavorful that you can’t resist a bite or two. You make sure she’s present enough to watch you consume her. Her pupils are blown wide, eclipsing the color of her irises. The human mind can be such a fickle thing; it brings you great pleasure to watch hers shatter.

“You took them from me,” you breathe against her ear, and this time there is acid. It burns holes in her flesh, but she is so far past sanity that she doesn’t even react. “You shouldn’t have done that.”

What remains of her mouth opens and closes like a fish, though her throat is no longer able to properly enunciate words. Her mind, however, replays them over and over, like a broken record.

*I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m sorry—*

“I bet you are,” you say, smiling until your lips stretch above your eyes. Your irises glow, aflame with ultraviolet light. “Time to float.”

You are turned inside out, your face splitting open, peeling back to reveal your true visage. Your youth is prevalent; deadlights like newborn stars. But what you lack in maturity and experience you have in zealousness, a potency that allows you to thrive in your corruption.

The human breaks, fragmenting into nothingness. Everything she once was is pulled apart like cotton candy, dissolved on your tongue. The very last thing she sees before her end is her blood painting every surface of the room, glowing luminescent in the face of your deadlights.
The Human

Chapter Notes

I'm back, bitches. ;)

Come back.
Please.
I need you.

You lick blood from your lips, savoring every last drop of your kill. The children have more flavor, but you can’t deny how satisfying this one was.

After admiring the bloody artwork on the walls one last time, you send it all away. You still don’t know exactly where it goes, but this time, now that you are completely without a human’s limited perception, you can see it.

It is the place where all lost things go, and it is dark, and lonely. You don’t linger for more than a brief glimpse.

You return, and the bedroom is dead silent save for the sound of your own hum, a monotonous buzz that you barely recognize. You press a hand to your chest, over where your heart used to beat strongly beneath the skin.

Nothing. But you suppose that makes sense.

The hum is louder than normal, and it takes you a minute to understand why. Yours and Pen’s both exist on the exact same frequency; a consequence, perhaps, of the bond. Or maybe this is how all devourers are meant to sound.

Are you back?

You turn to face the one who bears your mark. He’s pressed into the farthest corner of the room, huddled in on himself, hiding his face. He’s afraid, and you look around for the source, but find nothing. You are the only two in the room.

Yes, you answer, though you’re not sure if that’s accurate since you don’t understand what he’s asking. You never left to begin with.

No, he says. No, no, no you’re not. It’s different. It’s all different now. I don’t like it. Take it back, please. I want to go back—

“Pennywise,” you say out loud, slowly approaching him. His fear confuses you; he has to know you
can’t hurt him, that you wouldn’t even if you could. “What’s wrong? Are you in danger?”

The thought of anyone even attempting to harm him angers you, and you gather him fiercely into your arms. He throws himself into you, wrapping all four gangly limbs around your body and refusing to let go. You’re just about to soothe him with a mark bite when you feel wetness on your shoulder. His body trembles, but this time there is a staggered rhythm to it – he lets out some of the most pathetic sobs you’ve ever heard.

Pennywise is crying.

You pull away just enough to take a closer look at his face. Tears spill from quickly reddening eyes, trailing down his cheeks to pool and drip from his chin. He stares at you, blue eyes lost, uncertain. You can’t sense things like you used to mere minutes ago, so you attempt to scent the air for clues. He smells like everything, all at once.

“You told me to take it,” he explains, still sniffling. You shake your head, uncomprehending. “So I did.”

“What are you talking about?”

His mouth goes slack as he studies you, tracing the shape of your lips with his fingers. In awe of what he sees in you, like it’s only now that he can process it.

“You told me to take it.” the last piece of it. I think you meant for me to destroy it, but I couldn’t. It’s a part of you, so I…”

You go very still as you realize what he’s telling you. You reach for his lights and find them shimmering, like golden bubbles in a glass of champagne; effervescent. Something foreign, a mist glowing just a little too brightly, swims amongst them.

“You absorbed it,” you say, unsure how to feel. You’re not sure you’re able to feel anything about what he’s done. All of your more complex emotions are with him, dancing before your eyes. In your sight, but not within your reach.

Pennywise smiles, unlike anything you’ve seen before. This is no sneer, no show of malice or ill intent. He looks like a human being in a clown costume. You can’t even tell if you like it or not.

“You never told me it was like this,” he says, though it’s not accusatory. He’s still transfixed with what you now understand to be new, foreign sensations. Emotions. Before you can come up with a response, he starts sniffling again, new, hot tears welling up. “It’s so much. It’s too much.”

You don’t know what to say. You don’t know what any of this means. But when you hear a distant police siren, permeating even the barrier you placed around this apartment, you do know at least one thing.

“We should go.”
The journey home is… awkward.

You no longer feel like the human form suits you. It feels like a costume, a different skin. It’s easy to understand why Pen was happier as a snake than a man on the way down. It is far more difficult to act a human when you are not one.

This time, though, he seems to have no problem with the form.

You can’t help but stare at the attractive man sitting in the seat facing you. His eyes, though puffy from crying, are wide and blue; the same eyes he wears sometimes as the clown. But other than that, he bears little resemblance.

So you just sit there, a human turned monster, and a monster turned human. It’s safe to say neither of you knows what to do now.

Pen stares right back at you, and if it weren’t for his (perhaps instinctual, now) blinks, he would look like a corpse. Even with his clear signs of life, he was unnerving your fellow passengers, so you had to drag him through each cart in the train until you’d found an empty one.

The little table between you is bothersome, so you get up and sit beside him, instead. His eyes don’t follow you; he continues to stare straight ahead, now at nothing.

“How are you feeling?” you ask, though you’re pretty sure you know the answer.

“Everything,” he mutters.

“What?”

“I’m feeling… everything,” he repeats. You definitely didn’t know the answer.

“You don’t seem to be enjoying it,” you point out.

“No,” he agrees.

“Do you want me to take it back, now?”

To your surprise, his answer is quick, calm, and certain. “No.”

“Why not?”

At that, he finally comes out of his trance. He swallows, Adam’s apple bobbing. You wonder if these things come naturally to him now, whether he would do that if he didn’t have your humanity swimming around inside of him. Though, is it really yours anymore?

“It’s not…” He looks at you, and actually blushes. Looks away. “It’s not all bad.”

“Really?” you ask, mildly amused. “And what is it about being human that isn’t ’so bad,’ Pennywise?”

“I’m not human,” he reminds you with a low snarl. His eyes flash their familiar golden yellow for a moment, taking your breath away.

“Not fully,” you admit.
“Not at all,” he insists. “This is you, remember? These aren’t… this isn’t me.”

You tactfully neglect to bring up the sliver of humanity that does belong to him, cultivated as a consequence of your bond. Perhaps he doesn’t consider it his because you contributed to its existence.

“Why hold onto it at all?” you ask. “Just because it used to be mine?”

“It isn’t yours,” he says. “It’s you. I can’t destroy it.”

You barely hold back a growl of frustration. “Then what the hell are we supposed to do with it?”

“You don’t want it back?”

“I…” You stop right there, because you don’t actually know the answer. You don’t particularly desire anything, save for wanting to keep you and Pennywise alive and as close to satiated as you can possibly get, but you’re not sure that’s all you should want.

Are you supposed to want it back?

“I don’t know,” you say eventually, settling for honesty. “I don’t particularly care what happens to it, but if you won’t have it, I guess I will.”

Pen is quiet for a long time. He doesn’t meet your eyes, electing to stare out the window into the dark forests speeding by.

“We could share it.”

You raise an eyebrow, confused. He seems absolutely miserable in this new state; why would he make such an offer?

Besides, hadn’t he taken it from you with the purpose of returning it after you were done with your kill?

Then, it dawns on you.

“You don’t want to give it up,” you say. You don’t have to feel emotions to be able to read them, not when they’re so clearly written on his face. “You like it.”

He winces, and looks down at his hands in his lap, ashamed. But that’s not what you intended to make him feel, so you take one of his hands in yours, clasping your fingers. There is a distinct absence of the sentimental sensation this action is supposed to elicit, but you’ve only been without your humanity for a matter of hours; you haven’t forgotten what this means, what this feels like.

Even though you can no longer feel it yourself.

“I’m sorry,” you say, fairly certain those words are the right ones. “I’m just confused. Last night, the idea of developing human emotions scared you.”

“This is… different.”

“How?”

“Because it’s you,” he answers, like it’s obvious. “And because now I know.”

“I don’t…” He closes his eyes, and you frown. “…understand.”
“I can’t…” he mumbles. “I don’t have… words. Not enough.”

“Then show me,” you say. You tap a finger to your temple. “Up here.”

The distress slowly falls from his expression, and his blue eyes burn into yours.

“Okay.”

“On that first night,” he says, “I… saw you.”

He’s just been sated, so his hunger is not loud enough to drown out his newest decision.

He sees you, and follows. You notice him almost immediately, and he just barely tastes a hint of your fear before it is transformed, changed utterly into the purest anger.

The bitterness of your rage is like the sting of fire on his tongue, and he knows right then that you are stronger than most he has encountered.

“What a funny creature you are.”

“When I gave you the mark,” he says, “I felt you…”

In the peak of heat, swamped with desire, and instinct even he did not know existed bursts forth and binds you to him for eternity.

It is only after, when he is cleaning the mark of blood, caring for the area as though it is his own flesh, that he feels it. Another taste of your fire on his tongue, but this time more potent. He almost craves it; a new flavor just for him.

It is the sweetest poison, your fire. It corrupts him from the inside out, but he cannot stop himself. Each drop brings him closer to you, and he finds that he wants to be closer.

“And when you left,” he says. “I needed you…”

You ask him to take the last shreds of your humanity.

“Take… it…” he says, knowing that is not what you asked, but that it is the only thing he can do.

He understands that what you are asking for is freedom, to be unbound by even the slightest touch of empathy. He cannot destroy a part of you; you bear his mark, and the mark is a promise.

But there is another option, and if it means he must serve as host to your burden, he will.

So he takes it, and almost immediately it is far too much for him.

First, there is fear—an emotion he unfortunately has felt before—triggered by the sudden snap in his mate’s focus. He feels your form begin to take your mind, transforming you into something he doesn’t recognize and there’s so much fear that he presses his back against the wall and crumbles.

He listens as the Sara human screams, blood gurgling in the back of her throat and choking her. You peel back her skin, take your time and you are gone—so far gone that he cannot reach you and
suddenly there is sadness.

“Come back,” he begs, hot-wet on his cheeks and a catch in his throat. “Please. I need you.”

And now he feels those words as truth. He needs you like he needs food. No, more. Because without you he would despair, and fall like leaves in autumn. He has come too far to make you his and he would rather die than be alone again.

But as the hours pass, he believes less and less that you will return to him, that you will come back to pick up the pieces he’s now in.

He doesn’t know what he’ll do if you don’t.

“And now,” he says, voice heavy with emotion as you’ve never heard before. “Now I know you.”

But you do. You do come back.

And when he sees you for the first time, with sight filtered through this borrowed power, he finally feels something he has never once felt before in his many eons of existence.

He is loathe to even think the word, but you know it. In this brief glimpse into his mind, your deadlights entwined, you know it.

He places his hands on your cheeks, stares into your eyes, and loves you.

“I don’t want to go back,” he admits as his vision falls away to reveal the present him. He is still holding your face in his hands, reverently, staring at you with the same intensity and feeling he had back when he first got this taste of you. “I don’t want to lose this one, even if it means I must feel all others. Even if it means I will suffer. And I want… I want you to feel the same way. About me. The… adoration. More than the mark.”

“Love,” you say for him, and despite the wince and the way his gaze breaks from yours, he also gives you a stiff little nod of affirmation. His hands fall from your face and into his lap, but you take them with your own.

“Okay,” you answer, giving his hands a squeeze. He squeezes yours in return. “We can share it.”

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!