**Hell is empty (the demons are all up here)**

by *ThatOneGirlBehindYou*

**Summary**

Wirt loves Gravity Falls and its rarities but sometimes things still manage to catch him by surprise.

**Notes**

Another installment of the fluffiest, dorkiest ship ever, for popular demand! :D

Warning: Don’t hate me

See the end of the work for more *notes*.
Chapter 1

Wirt likes Gravity Falls.

It took him a while to admit it, eternally paranoid that something was going to happen as soon as he did and ruin this for him, but after the six months mark he had to face the music.

He loves the little town, with its eccentric residents and funny little traditions, the way everyone pretends not to notice the guy doing his shopping is actually 7 gnomes in a trenchcoat, how the manotaurs have opened a gym and everyone appreciates their fitness advice but disregards everything else they say because they’re still douchebags, the gobblewonker who’s a terrifying beast that loves belly rubs, and how everyone has Dipper and Mabel Pines in their speed-dial.

The level of acceptance he encountered was also surprising, sometimes bordering on uncanny. No one really cared that he sometimes spoke in a Language Not Meant for This World, or left the pepper shaker smeared with black tar. Mayor Tyler only ever acknowledges his “circumstance” when they meet at Lazy Susan’s one morning, and he asks him cordially to please not fulfill any deals to grant victory at the annual Gravity Falls’ Best Yard contest, because that would be cheating and Wirt, of course, agrees.

He has Greg over for summer, and he’s learned to love his little apartment down at the Corduroys’ basement, warm and cozy and full of books and with little sprouts of plants not entirely from this dimension growing between the planks and the soft blue lightning coming from nowhere and anywhere at the same time.

He loves his little new family, Wendy his landlady-slash-self-declared-sister-in-law, Soos and the show he’s now a regular on, not so much fixing stuff as having comfortable chats with Soos as he puts things back together, and the amusing arguments between the Stan brothers everyday.

Even Grenda and Candy, who love his mixtapes and his poetry and don’t think he’s a nerd, and Pacifica who thinks he’s the biggest nerd but apparently likes him, because he’s good for her nerd.

More than anything though, he loves Dipper and Mabel.

The girl is always there whenever he’s feeling overwhelmed with his true nature, that dark and inhumane side of him he’s still unwilling to show Dipper. She covers him with warm blankets and flower crowns Wirt can bring to a full bloom on his brow, and feeds him berry muffins, secrets and meaningless deals -a lock of her hair for cute nail art, a few minutes of her voice in exchange for some maple candies- that nourish him and ground him to what remains of his humanity, and Wirt gets the feeling that Mabel understands, that she knows what it is like to have something ugly and selfish inside of you, but not letting it consume who you truly are.

And then there’s Dipper who, along with Greg, has the unexplainable power of making Wirt feel like a human again, and Wirt can’t even begin to explain how the taste of normality he gets whenever they’re together is enough to make what happened in the Unknown feel like a bad dream. His boyfriend studies supernatural creatures, and solves problems between them and humans as part of his daily living, but then they go out t the movies and they just argue because Dipper is way too into musicals and he doesn’t appreciate foreign films like Wirt does, and he prefers Pepsi to Coke and Wirt just won’t allow that, and when he notices it’s been hours since he’s last thought of what he really is.

Wirt would give every single slice of power he has to have any of them here with him right now.
It’s been years since he’s heard Greg cry, and it rattles him to his core.

He wants to go over, to hold him close and make whatever is making him upset go away, but the blonde woman with the cold hard eyes and the grotesquely plump lips is holding a sharp bladed knife to his neck, and he he can’t move.

“So what do you say young man?” asks the man, calling Wirt’s attention back to him. He, like the woman, is wearing an attire that despite looking expensive, has clearly seen better days. His smile is sinister, and Wirt has never felt this kind of energy come from a human being. “Your brother’s safety, for your loyalty to my family”

Preston Northwest offers a hand, and Wirt takes it almost desperately, eyes returning to his brother to remind himself he has no other choice.

“Deal” says Wirt.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Reposted because i´m an idiot and forgot half of the chapter

“I don’t know brobro. I think you’re worrying too much” Mabel says. She’s sitting upside down on the couch, legs up on the backrest and head hanging of the edge as they watch a new episode of Duck Detective, and she’s somehow managing to eat popcorn without choking to death.

Beside her, Dipper chews on his nail nervously. “It’s just… he hasn’t texted me in two and a half weeks, and he’s never home when I go by Mabel. What if I did something wrong and he’s mad at me?”

Mabel blows a raspberry. “Then he can grow up and speak to you about it.” she says “Besides, wasn’t Greg coming over exactly two and a half weeks ago? He even told you he was picking him up from the bus station didn’t he? Maybe they’re just camping or something”

“I… Guess that could be it” Dipper concedes, but something inside him is still burning, because even though he and Wirt are 19 and dating and not 42 and married, he just knows this is a very un-Wirt-like thing to do.

He doesn’t want to be overbearing though, because if he actually did something wrong and Wirt doesn’t want to talk to him, forcing it will just make it worse. Dipper tries to remember then, if he accidentally used any holy words or salt in food in the last few weeks -two months ago he’d been creating a new protective circle and doodled one of the symbols in his whiteboard. Wirt hadn’t been able to come near his bedroom without being teleported back to the front door, and it had made him a bit sulky for days, until Dipper noticed and promptly wiped it off- but nothing comes to mind, and he knows he’s been as careful as he always is…

The ending theme of the show starts coming out the speakers, and he sighs in relief before escaping to the kitchen -he can hear Mabel’s chuckles and his face reddens- and fishing his cell phone out.

It takes him approximately 0.000001 seconds to bring up Wirt’s contact and set up the call, and then he’s standing there with the phone beeping into his ear. His heartbeat speeds up gradually as the beeping continues, only to come to a skip when the call is finally dropped and he’s sent to voicemail.

“Oh… Hey honey” he starts, trying to force a smile on despite his crushing nerves “I just wanted to know how you’ve been doing, since we haven’t… had the chance to meet in a while? Say- say hello to Greg for me will you?”

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Wirt watches the phone ring as he fixes his hair, but he doesn’t even make an attempt to reach for it. He’s tried before, and his hand has never been able to get close enough to reach it. Of course “No contacting the Pines” would be Mr. Northwest’s first formal command. Still, it hurts when the phone goes silent, and he imagines what Dipper is thinking.

The mirror is empty when he looks into it, and for the first time he’s glad. He doesn’t want to see
himself, all dressed up like a puppet in the expensive vest and long-tailed coat with its silver buttons engraved with the Northwest emblem. Those are what he hates the most, as they feel like a nametag on a dog, telling everyone just who he belongs to.

“You´re late” says Mrs. Northwest when he walks into the study. She´s writing and crossing out numbers in a ledger, and Greg is sitting on a couch next to her, reading a book. Knowing the Northwests, it´s something classical and terribly boring for Greg´s overactive imagination, but he´s trying his best and for him, Wirt will too.

“I´m sorry ma´am” Wirt gives her a short bow “Is there something I can do?”

“My husband sent me a message. The investors in the Bahamas are having second thoughts about signing the contract. I want that fixed” she says without even looking at him. “But before you do that, wine. Screaming Eagle Cabernet, from 92”

Wirt nods. Greg looks up at him and gives him an encouraging smile, but they´re not allowed to talk to each other when the Northwests are present. If they try, Wirt´s throat closes off and his voice goes away for hours.

He reaches inside himself for his powers, sticky and dark and thorny, and he brings them out. There´s a blue flash of flame, and a bottle of the most expensive wine in the world appears on a tray on his hand, next to an already served glass. At the same time, thousands of miles away in Nasau, a man is suddenly convinced that signing this contract is the best thing he can do for the future, and gives away three quarters of his hard earned fortune.

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She doesn´t think much when they move back to the manor. Pacifica has long since learned that asking questions or engaging in any sort of conversation with her parents is never going to end well, so she merely packs her bags and moves them back to her old room. It´s no secret that Old Fiddleford spends exorbitant quantities of money in jewelry for his racoon wife, so she assumes he merely went over his limit and had to give the manor back to her parents. She chooses not to think on how they got the money to buy it from him.

The first thing she notices after that is that the butler is back. The same one they´d had before, with his perfectly tailored suit and a new and uncanny ability to be there just when she needed something. Day after day, things change. They go back to the way they were before. Pacifica can´t take it for too long, she ends up spending most of the day out with her friends or Mabel, because her father´s diamond studded cufflinks shimmer like silver and her mother´s jewelry rings in just the right way, and sometimes she wakes up sweating and tangled in silk sheets, scared that this is the day the damned bell comes back and she too falls back to how she was.

Seeing Wirt is almost a relief, a breath of normality into a life that´s slowly becoming suffocating, and the smile that curves her lips is pure relief.

“Now what do we have here?” she says in greeting. It´s a bit teasing, because she loves how easily flustered her new, deliciously nerdy and annoyingly cute friend is.

Wirt turns to look at her, and if she were looking for it, she´d notice there´s something different about him, his shadow moving erratically behind him even when the light illuminating the dining room is static.

“Hello, Miss Northwest” he responds in a wooden voice. What Pacifica does notice, however, is the strange formality and the fact that Wirt is dressed to the nines.
“Wow, that’s stiff” she arches an eyebrow, and evaluates the way the suit’s lines profile Wirt’s slim frame perfectly. Whoever tailored it for him knew what they were doing, he looks amazing... In fact, she’s willing to bet Dipper would have a heart attack if he saw him.

Huh. Dipper.

Pacifica’s grin turns teasing, and she leans forward with her hands on her hips. “Picked up a summer job to get the cutie a gift didn’t you? Do I get to boss you around?” she smirks

Wirt’s eyes widen, and something suspiciously like hurt crosses over his features. Pacifica knows the expression intimately, used as she was to cause it willingly before she changed for the better, and what brought her joy before only causes her stomach to churn with guilt now.

“Wirt-”

“You may if you wish, Miss Northwest” he says coldly. Literally. Pacifica can swear the panoramic window in the dining room is beginning to frost over. “I believe your father calls for me”

And then, with just a flash of blue flame and the scent of pine needles and tar, Wirt is gone and Pacifica is left standing alone and confused in the empty living room.

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“What’s up Paz?” Mabel smiles as she speaks into the phone. She lodges it between her neck and shoulder, to keep taking Waddles’ measurements for his new sweater.

”Mabel?” Pacifica’s voice comes through the line, and Mabel frowns. She sounds upset, nose stuffy and not at all like high-and-mighty-Pacifica should sound. ”I think I screwed it and made Wirt feel bad”

Mabel drops the measuring tape. Waddles begins to chew on it. “Wait what?” she asks “Wirt? You know where he is?”

”Stop playing, I mean it” Pacifica says, irritated ”I made a joke about him having a job to get Dipper a present, and now he’s mad at me, or sad or... I don’t know Mabel! I don’t deal with people’s emotions, it was just a joke!”

”A… Job?” Mabel frowns “Wirt doesn’t have… Paz where did you see him?”

An exasperated sigh reaches her, and Mabel waits for the entirety of its 8 seconds length. Pacifica can be just as dramatic as her when she wants to.

”At the manor dummy. He’s working there as a butler or waiter or whatever, I don’t know. Now tell me how to apolo-”

“Paz, I’ll meet you at Lazy Susan’s in thirty minutes” Mabel interrupts then and hangs up the phone, shooting up to her feet.

She’s never been as brainy as Dipper, not in the same way and she knows it, but she’s far from stupid, and what’s more important in this case: She’s intuitive, and her gut feeling is ringing like a gong with Pacifica’s unvoiced worry, frustration and fear.

As much as she adores Pacifica, her parents are always bad news. She had mentioned the manor, which meant the Northwests were somehow in possession of money again, and Wirt’s presence in her house had no logical explanation, especially coupled with Wirt’s suspicious absence over the last
she looks at her “Days Dipdop´s been freaking out for” whiteboard- 19 days.

Mabel sighs, and takes up her grappling hook and knuckle dusters from their place on her arts and crafts planning-and-conceptualizing-but-not-actually-crafting-because-art-shouldn´t-be-restricted-to-a-desk desk.

“Dipper?” She calls up the stairs, and waits for his answering groan. “We gotta go to Lazy Susan´s… I got some news you´re not going to like”
Deep down, Dipper knows Mabel is right. It’s grating and annoying just like any other time Mabel happens to be right, but the fact that this is so important to him makes him grit his teeth harder, makes him want to do it anyways much more.

But Mabel is right, and they have to wait.

“We… Don’t know what sort of deal the Northwests have with Wirt” he explains, and it feels like chewing on glass, as he forces out the words. All around the living room, his family listens and nods along. “It’s something that keeps him from contacting us, but I can’t think of anything they could’ve promised him to force him into it”

“I can” says Mabel. It sounds dry and emotionless and so un-Mabel like that every head snaps to her where she’s sitting, an arm around Pacifica at the foot of Grunkle Stan’s couch. Grunkle Stan himself grumbles in agreement, and suddenly Dipper, everyone knows as well.

“Greg” Wendy’s soft whisper breaks the silence that’s settled over them.

Soos sighs sadly “Aw man… The little dude’s never hurt anyone”

It goes without saying, the kind of scum you have to be to be willing to harm someone as intrinsically good as Greg, but no one wants to voice it aloud. Not when Pacifica is pale as a ghost, when she hasn’t said more than two words since they connected the dots, since she understood what was really happening at the manor, and how her words sounded in Wirt’s ears. Mabel squeezes her shoulder.

“Well, this changes the situation, of course” it’s Grunkle Ford who finally stands up and begins pacing the room. Dipper’s eyes follow him like a shadow, because he might be a damned good investigator and deal with dangerous creatures on a regular basis, he might have gone toe to toe with the demonic incarnation of chaos, but these people have the boy he lo… They have Wirt, and they have Greg, and Dipper is all for risking himself but now his family’s in danger, and he doesn’t know what to do, how to save them. “We cannot take the direct approach and storm the manor, as we don’t know the exact terms of Preston and Priscilla’s deal-”

“Get to the point Sixer” Grunkle Stan groans, resting a hand on Mabel’s head. “What do we need?”

“Ahem, as I was saying” Ford gives his brother a glare, and the air is for a moment filled with that silent war of wills between twins that seems to be the default environment of the Pines house. It ends, as it usually does, with both parts of the battle rolling their eyes, and Ford shifts his gaze to Pacifica. “What we need is an inside agent”

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Her hand shakes as she extends it towards the door of the dining room.
The rings on her fingers are made of gold, and sapphires instead of twisted copper wire and hand-polished quartz, and they weigh a ton. She hates them, but if she’s to play this part then she needs them, needs the expensive leather boots, the silk blouse and the tailormade leggings. Old Pacifica’s armor.

“Mother?” she asks, and how she hates the cadence of her voice, the careful lack of emotion she’d almost forgotten how to project. “May I enter?”

It takes a moment, before the voice she’s waiting for comes. “Come in, Pacifica”

The door opens, and it’s Wirt who holds the doorknob on the other side. His eyes are still cold and hurt, entirely human as he looks at her, and Pacifica tries to speak with her own, to tell him that now she knows, and that she’s here to help.

“Thank you” she says dryly. Wirt averts his eyes with a scoff.

“My pleasure, Miss”

It sounds mocking. Pacifica would have never thought Dipper’s kitten of a boyfriend could be purposefully hurtful, but she also wouldn’t have thought her parents capable of kidnapping a child, and yet here they are, with Greg sitting next to her mother, having a caviar appetizer and drinking plain water and not the fizzy grape soda he loves so much.

“Will you join us for dinner?” Priscilla asks, and Pacifica hears the soft threat under her words. Will you behave as you were taught, or will you go hungry tonight?

“I’d love to” Pacifica nods. It’s disconcerting, how easy it is to slip back into her old role. Years of pavlovian training will do that to you, she guesses. “I did not know we had a guest” she comments as she sits across the table, and the maid begins setting her service.

There’s a cruel tilt to her father’s smile as he nods.

“A somewhat unexpected visitor, but a welcome one” he explains “We’ve had to accommodate him to ensure our newest employee’s full cooperation”

The lights flicker for a second, and Wirt scoffs where he stands in wait by the door.

“I noticed him” Pacifica says neutrally. Carefully. “I must admit, he doesn’t fit our usuals standard for house personnel, does he?”

“Hm no, he doesn’t” Priscilla agrees “But we had need of his special skillset. I’m sure you know all about it, with the company you keep these days”

Pacifica’s fist tightens around her fork, because what does her mother know? What does she know of Candy’s quiet genius, of Grenda’s charming bluntness, of the way Dipper held her whenever her first retail job was too much for her, when people were rude and mean but she couldn’t quit because her fortune, her entire way of living had vanished in a single night and now she had to join the rest of the normal folk and earn her keep?

What did she know of Mabel’s smile?

“He’s certainly a powerful demon” she agreed finally, washing the foul taste in her mouth with a sip of wine. “I would’ve thought you wouldn’t risk his kind again though, not after what happened that summer”
It’s a small victory, to see her father down the rest of his wine glass and her mother’s lips purse in disapproval.

“We have been… much more careful this time” Priscilla speaks in clipped tones. “Your father sealed a very adequate deal”

“Oh?” Pacifica asks, all polite but disinterested curiosity. Her parents always did like having their egos stroked. It works like a charm, as usual. Preston lifts his glass towards Wirt, and it’s full again when Pacifica blinks. Then he turns to her with a smug smile.

“His brother’s safety for his loyalty to the family, of course”

Pacifica wants to puke. She meets Greg’s eyes, and his sad smile breaks her heart even more, because this child is being held hostage and forced to watch his brother be enslaved, and he’s still trying to reassure her that he’s ok.

“That sounds a mite inconvenient” her voice is a bit hoarse when she finally brings herself to responding. “Do you have to maintain the child in danger then, to keep the demon’s servitude?” only after the words have left her mouth does she realize her mistake. She said “you” instead of “we”, and right now it’s so important that they believe she’s on their side… She sees Wirt’s eyes widen, and thinks he might be starting to understand.

“It’s a figure of speaking Pacifica” Preston replies. He sounds annoyed, and Pacifica flinches. That tone of voice usually predicts the bell. “Demonic laws are quite simple, once you get down to it. He accepted the deal in a moment of weakness…” and of course he’d think it’s weakness, caring for another human being, self sacrifice “… and now his word is binding. If he breaks his loyalty to us, then by law we have no obligation to not hurt his brother.”

An alarm goes off in Pacifica’s head, and only then does she realize maybe she’s been spending a bit too much time with Dipper, if she’s instinctively picking up on the gaping hole in her father’s words. If their words are binding, and one party breaking the vow is enough for the contract to break, and Preston said “family”…

She never expected she could move this fast, but adrenaline is one hell of a drug. Her wineglass, made of the finest crystal without the slightest imperfection, cracks and breaks easily against the marble table, and then Pacifica’s flinging herself over the top, brandishing the sharp remains with her eyes fixed on Greg’s little hand.

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“We can’t just leave her alone there” Dipper exclaims, and Mabel nods by his side. She’s been uncharacteristically quiet since Pacifica texted her that morning to tell her she’d confront her parents at dinner.

Wendy asked Dipper if she was worried, but Dipper knows his twin well enough to know she’s withdrawn because if she lets go she will storm the manor and step over Preston Northwest’s broken teeth to drag Pacifica and Greg out unharmed. Taking two people important to her sister had been stupidity, risking a third had been a last resource they’d had to take.

“She’s a smart girl” Grunkle Stan tries, sliding a plate in front of Mabel. “As long as she sticks to her role, her parents won’t suspect. The dimwits are too willing to believe everyone’s as stupid as they are, and they’ve forgotten they’re not the biggest fish in this pond”

That rips a small smile out of Mabel, and Dipper feels his eyes widen in realization.
“Bigger fish” he turns to Grunkle Ford, nerves and determination warring in his mind. “Grunkle”

“Hm?” Dipper clenches his fists by his sides.

“We need to summon Bill Cipher”

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Greg doesn’t move when she comes at him with the makeshift weapon, and Pacifica has a moment to feel disgust when she notices that her mother is covering herself instead of protecting the child, when her father’s voice booms like thunder.

“STOP HER” he screams, and when the lights flicker again Pacifica’s frozen in place. Her eyes are the only thing she can move, and when she turns them towards Wirt she finds her looking straight back, his expression pained but understanding.

“Have you gone crazy?!” her mother’s shrill voice is grating in her ears and Pacifica feels like drowning, because she failed, it was her only shot and she failed.

“I should have known” Her vision is suddenly filled with her father’s sneering face though, when he stands from his chair and walks over to push Greg aside. “I should’ve known it was too late for you, that you’ve gone rotten” he says “Years of education, millions of dollars, all wasted on you”

She would spit at him if she could, because she remembers each of those years, learning to be the cutest little doll with the quietest voice in the manor, and the biggest bitch with the sharpest words out in the world.

“What happened to you Pacifica?” her mother stands too, looking at her like she were a spot of dust on her impeccable clothes or hair. “What happened to your loyalty to this family, to us? We’re your parents!”

“It’s the Pines kids” Preston continues pacing, though it’s become more thoughtful than enraged. “It all started going downhill when she met them, they turned her…”

“Common” Priscilla finishes, spitting the word like bad milk.

I’ve gone real Pacifica thinks desperately, furiously. This is the me your damned bell couldn’t kill, I’m REAL

She watches, enraged tears sliding down her cheeks as her father turns to Wirt.

“Come here” he orders, and Wirt steps forward obediently. “I want you to change her back. Make her the way she was before”

Only then does Pacifica begin to feel the tight grip of panic in her guts, and she sees Wirt’s eyes darting in desperation between her father and her. If he complies, if she’s back to the trained dog she was before, then the Pines have lost what little advantage they had. She hates herself for not waiting, for believing she could fix this whole mess by herself, for thinking she was strong.

The lights flicker.

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There’s the sound of a plate breaking; Grunkle Stan has dropped his own dinner.

Dipper forces himself to not flinch or fidget as Grunkle Ford’s stare becomes steely and ice cold.
“This is not a light suggestion to make, Mason. I hope you know what it entails” Grunkle Ford says finally. “Why would we need Cipher here?”

“He-” gosh, his mouth is dry “He outranks Wirt. As a demon I mean I- Wirt is not that high in hierarchy, and Bill is the concept of chaos, it’s… If anyone can override his deal with the Northwests it’s Bill”

“Dipdop, we don’t even know if the deal the Northwests put on Wirt is that strong” Mabel speaks up, voice worried. Each and every one of the ugly truths Bill laid bare before her eyes still torment her to this day, Dipper has heard her muttering in dreams. “Pacifica will find a way-”

“It’s not their first time dealing with demons” Dipper cuts her “If Pacifica thought she could break the deal, she’d have done it already, you know she’s smart. After what happened with Bill, they won’t let Wirt any wriggling space”

“And how do you propose we control this demon? May I remind you he nearly destroyed our entire dimension last time he was set free?” Ford asked again. Dipper heard someone behind him take a deep breath, and turned to see Mabel standing up to let Grunkle Stan sit on her chair. “Not to mention that, if he’s even alive, he knows better than to come close to us”

“He will come if I call” Dipper wishes he didn’t have this certainty “We can’t kill a demon like Bill, he’s above those kinds of concepts, you know it Grunkle Ford! He won’t be able to resist, not if I summon him”

If possible, Grunkle Ford’s stare grows even harsher.

“Are you suggesting using yourself as bait? I thought you were smarter than this” he says. It’s cold and barbed, and it stings even though Dipper knows it’s coming from a place of care.

“He can’t possess me” Dipper says, pulling down his collar. The anti-possession sigil tattooed on his skin has long since healed, and he’s been adding small sigils here and there over the years to strengthen it “If I do the binding circle right, he won’t be at his full strength”

This he knows, this he can do. Managing creatures, this is his specialty, in this at least, he can help.

Eventually, Grunkle Ford sighs and rubs a hand down his face. “Will you do it even if I don’t agree to it?”

Dipper exhales. He looks at Mabel.

Her eyes are scared and worried, but they’re also determined and he knows that her sister will follow him to hell and back, even if she doesn’t believe on what he’s doing. She believes in him, and it makes Dipper feel stronger.

“I will”

“Then you better start sketching that summoning circle”

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Pacifica opens her eyes, and she’s standing next to her chair. So Wirt literally put her back. Huh.

She turns to look at him, and freezes when a weight she hasn’t felt in years accompanies her movement. She reaches at her nape, and sure enough her hair has grown back in the span of two minutes, a waterfall of long, silky tresses that reach all the way down to her lower back.
Her hands, when she looks at them, are smooth and unmarked, and there’s no sign of the burn scar she got when she first started working at Greasy’s Diner, or the arrow shaped tattoo on her inner wrist. Her nails are perfectly manicured, and even the shape of her body feels different, softer, less worked.

“... What did you do?” she asks. Her voice has a subtle, droll cadence it hasn’t had in years and she has to focus to get rid of it when she next speaks. “Wirt?”

The demon in question is standing by her father, shaking but with a defiant expression in his stupid, cute face.

“I turned you back to how you were before” he says. “Had to guess at how you would have aged, but I think I did a good job” Pacifica takes a couple steps back to look at her reflection on the dark window, and sure enough there’s the pretentious makeup, the long hair, her extra piercing holes have disappeared, and only two heavy silver loops hang from her ears. Her arms are thinner, her chest is slightly bigger; this Pacifica never did a single day of physical labour in her life.

It feels like looking into another world, seeing what she could’ve been like if the twins had never come into her life. She has a surge of bittersweet fondness for this girl that would have never known true friendship, true family or love.

Her mother’s enraged scream brings her back to the dire situation she’s in.

“How dare you try to cheat us?! Who do you think you are?!” she yells at Wirt, and pulls Greg against her

“I complied with the order” is all Wirt says, and suddenly there’s a crack in the air, and Wirt’s face has turned to the side. Pacifica winces; her father’s slaps are no light caresses.

“Stop fooling around” he says simply “Do it right this time” Wirt turns back, cheek reddening and lip bleeding. One of Preston’s heavy gold rings is stained with black blood. “I cannot fulfill the same deal twice. It’s against my nature” Pacifica knows he’s lying, she’s seen him summon an entire shop’s worth of fabric until Mabel found the exact shade of mauve she liked, and she feels like crying. Wirt is fighting back.

“Well, we’ll have to find a different way to change the past won’t we?” Pacifica stiffens where she stands. It’s not always that her mother sounds so delightfully entertained, and sure enough when she looks at her, she’s stepped forward to drape her hand elegantly around her father’s forearm, looking for all in the world like the cat who ate the canary.

“What are you thinking of, dear?” Preston asks, an eyebrow arched in curiosity. Pacifica is about to try again, maybe she can use her new nails to scratch Greg’s face -he will forgive her, and that will break the Northwest end of the deal- when her mother speaks again.

“I want you to make it so that Mabel and Dipper Pines never survived that fight with Gideon Gleeful’s ridiculous robot” Priscilla says with a soft sweet smile, like she’s not asking to have two twelve year olds murdered. Pacifica feels her grip on consciousness begin to fade, because Wirt can’t not take a deal this big.

The demon in question is shaking, keeping his arms by his side by sheer willpower alone, like his own body is rebelling against him.
“That… That needs to be a separate deal. It’s too big to be encased in our old one” Wirt says in the end, voice strained and raspy “I can’t take a human life without payment”

Priscilla’s face spasms into distaste for a second, before her sickly sweet smile returns.

“I made a human life once. I nursed her and raised her, and loved her” she continues. Pacifica feels her lips curl into a snarl. Her mother doesn’t know love if it’s not for gold and silver

“Mrs Northwest, that doesn’t-” Wirt begins, but Priscilla cuts him with a sharp look.

“I offer you my daughter’s free will, demon”

---

The circle is a familiar, if unwelcome sight. The triangular symbols, the eyes and the letters in the long dead language of demons. Here and there Dipper has scrawled his personal symbol, to bind Bill to his will, to restrain his powers to what Dipper himself can control.

Grunkle Ford and Stan and Mabel, they’re all standing around the circle with vials of mountain ash and witchkiller bark, ready in case things go wrong. Dipper winces when he slices his skin with the knife, and his blood drips on top of their intertwined symbols.

Suddenly the walls are made of flesh, and the air feels superheated, and the circle is on fire. Dipper stands firm. If he moves, if he steps out of the circle, it’s all over.

“You just couldn’t stay away too long, huh, Pine tree?”
Chapter 4

It’s warm.

“Mmmyes, I’ve heard aaaaaall about your thing with beastie” Bill’s voice resonates all around the room, even if he’s confined to the summoning circle “It’s quite the talk in our dimension Pine tree, I mean the investigator and the demon all cuddly and playing house? Scandalous”

“His name is Wirt” is all Dipper responds. Maybe grunkle Ford had been right, and Dipper is not ready for this, can’t handle this.

Bill’s only eye winks down at him, as his entire shape shakes with laughter.

“I’ve known him from eons, Pine tree. I think I know who he really is”

Dipper grits his teeth together “I think you better shut up before I decide to just send you back” he says, and hears grunkle Stan’s appreciative grunt “If you know him so well I’m sure you know where he is right now?”

He vaguely hears the others around him, wondering what happened. Dipper can’t even look up to meet their gazes, because his hands are trembling and it’s… it’s so warm…

“A tight deal. Those are bothersome” Bill shrugs. He’s chosen that moment to become bidimensional, and the gesture looks off but the annoyance is conveyed all the same “This would never have happened if he’d stayed in his realm, if you ask me, minor demons should know better than to go around sneaking into other dimensions”

Dipper has to restrain the urge to roll his eyes. “Well I’m not asking. I brought you here to help me fix this.

Bill’s eye narrows in glee, and Dipper feels himself shiver. “You can’t be under the impression that we’re friends, can you Pine tree? I remembered you being smarter what was it? Five years ago?”

“Seven” Dipper corrects automatically. “Seven years ago, when a twelve years old kid and his sister took you down” now that makes Bill’s demeanor change. It’s subtle, tense shoulders and the fire flickering more erratically, but Dipper knows it’s gotten to him. “Besides, I’m not asking for help. I’m making a deal with you”

The demon remains quiet for several seconds, just staring into Dipper and forcing him to stare back, before he speaks again. “I’m guessing you want me to override the deal? Because I can’t do that actually” he says, examining his nonexistent nails. “It’s rude to get into another demon’s deals, you see.”

“I want Wirt and Greg’s freedom.” he says. Bill rolls his eye

“Pine tree did you listen to a single word I said? It’s not polite” he says condescending, as if Dipper believed for a mere second that demon manners actually mattered to him. “You’d have to offer something pretty juicy for this…”

Dipper swallows.

“Mason, what is the meaning of this?” Finally, grunkle Ford’s voice brings him back to the present, and Dipper forgets about the deal, about what he promised Bill, and focuses only on his uncle’s
voice and the warmth in his hands. “Did Cipher trick-”

“He didn’t” Dipper interrupts him. It feels as though his mouth is full of cotton, and he can’t breathe. He knows what this mean, he’s heard Wirt tell the story, he knows just how important… “I… He gave me… He gave Wirt to me”

“What?” Mabel kneels next to him on the summoning circle, frowning. “Dipdop, that’s just-”

“It’s his soul” Dipper interrupts again. He lifts the lantern carefully for them to see, aware that a simple slip could quite possibly kill the soul it contains. “This… This is Wirt”

----

Wirt can feel it like poison running through his veins. It’s an amazing deal, and his magic is fluttering in excitement at the prospect, but he forces it down, fights the demon inside with every scrap of humanity he has left, until he’s rasping out from a sore throat.

“I need-” he begins, before clearing his throat “A token”

Priscilla’s eyes narrow dangerously, before she speaks “Excuse me?”

“A token… of her will” he says, as it’s the first thing that comes to his mind, and honestly, he’s spewing so much bullshit right now… Hopefully the lightwork and icy wind he’s putting on will scare the Northwests into believing him. “A deal such as this…” he lets his eyes glow brighter, if his demonic nature is trying to get free, he better use it to intimidate, he thinks as he feels his skin begin to dry and harden. “A deal this big, this delicious” it feels disgusting, talking like this about something as important as Pacifica’s mind and Dipper and Mabel’s lives, but the Northwests are SO buying it, if their satisfied smirks are anything to go by. “I require a ritual, to anchor me to the present… to take me to the past”

“A symbol of her will…” Preston mutters under his breath and why does Pacifica look so scared all of a sudden? Does she not get that Wirt is trying to stall? Then her father smiles, slow and depraved, and Wirt fights back a shudder of his own. “I believe we have just the thing, don’t we?” and he leans forward to pinch Pacifica’s chin. Wirt doesn’t miss the way he squeezes more than what would be an affectionate gesture, that Pacifica’s skin remains red for longer than it should after he lets go, or that her face went carefully blank as soon as the contact was made.

“Tell us what you need for this ritual of yours” Priscilla says, and she drags Greg forward by the shoulder. Just like that Wirt is reminded that he literally can’t try his luck, that the only reason he’s able to allow himself this little squirming space is because he’s still being loyal to Pacifica, who is a Northwest, and thus is not breaking his deal and allowing them to hurt his brother.

“I need these symbols” he says, snapping his fingers, and one of Dipper’s handsketched journal entries burns into existence, with Wirt’s carefully designed summoning circle in it. “I cannot draw them myself, and they must be drawn with oak charcoal” it’s the closest wood, given that Edelwood doesn’t grow in the land of the living “and have an object or image that represents your bond with your daughter… on every branch” he adds, and holds his breath.

Apparently though, the request is not too ridiculous, because Preston and Priscilla nod.

“I have her baby clothes somewhere” says the woman, as if her daughter wasn’t standing a few steps away from her, still expressionless and hearing her talk about turning her into a doll. “Take her to her room” she orders Wirt, dragging Greg behind her as she walks out the dining room.

Wirt is about to snap his fingers, when Preston’s voice reaches. “Make sure no one enters or leaves
through that door, do I make myself clear?"

And Wirt sighs as he feels the order wrap and clench around him just as blue fire envelops him and Pacifica.

-----

This can’t be happening, it can’t. Pacifica tries the door as soon as they’re back on firm ground, pulling and twisting at the knob, even as she hears Wirt sigh behind her she redoubles her efforts, but the stupid fucking thing doesn’t even seem to be turning and her stupid hair is in her face and…

She screams.

She screams until her throat goes sore, and she scratches at the door. It will take her parents no time at all to find the bell, to find whatever stupid mementos they thought it would look “loving” of them to keep, to draw the circle, or… She screams as Wirt’s lanky arms wrap themselves around her.

It’s a bit awkward, Pacifica is pretty sure they have never really touched each other before, but at least it’s the touch of someone on her side, someone who is fighting as hard as she is. Her screaming subsides eventually, and she notices she’s scratched several quickly darkening marks into the back of Wirt’s hands. Dipper is gonna be pissed.

“I’m sorry” she rasps out

“I think we’re even” Wirt responds, with a bitter sort of humor in his voice that makes Pacifica croak out a dry laugh. “We’re not getting through that door” he adds.

It’s a testament to how tired they both are, how hopeless, that they stay there on the floor, merely holding to each other and not even trying to get up anymore, to get out. In this moment they’re alone, even when they have the other. There’s no Greg, no Pines to save them.

And then the knotted sheet taps against the window.

-----

Pacifica and Wirt’s faces are fun to watch, when they poke their heads out the window. Greg merely waves at them, smiling.

“Greg? What are you doing there?!” Wirt asks in that hurried whisper that indicates he wants to yell but he’s trying real hard not to yell at Greg. He appreciates it.

“This is my room, brother o’ mine” he explains calmly “And Mr. and Mrs. Dumbface didn’t say anything about going out the window”

He feels a bit guilty talking about Pacifica’s parents that way, but she gives a sort of hiccup-laughter, so Greg guesses it’s not at all that bad.

“This is… This won’t reach the ground” Wirt says and oh his brother, ever the pessimist…

“Of course not dummy. You’re supposed to take this and tie them to Pacifica’s” Greg instructs. It’s easy really, but then again older people seem to lose more and more sense as they age. “Then she can go get Dipper and Mabel. Ready?” and he lets go of his edge of the sheet. He stays at the window for long enough to see Wirt and Pacifica fumbling with the falling sheet and pulling it into the room, before he ducks back into his.
It’s a very ugly room, if he does say so himself. The furniture is bolted to the floor, Greg couldn’t even move his bed next to the window to see the stars at night like he usually does. There are no lightbulbs other than the one in the very high ceiling, and other than the bed, a chair and a table there’s nothing else in the room. Even the walls are lightly padded and at first Greg found it kind of funny, how he could bounce right off them, but it wore off soon enough.

The door locks from the outside, and he knows perfectly well Mrs. Dumbface has the key with her and that the only way he’s getting out of the room is by asking to be escorted to the washroom.

Wirt will fix this. He fixed it when they were in the Unknown, even though he had to become the beast to do it.

Wirt and Dipper and Mabel and the Misters Pines and Soos and Wendy… Someone will fix this.

Slowly, Greg lets go of the ever-present smile on his face, the one he puts on every time he knows he will see Wirt, because he knows Wirt needs him to be well order to keep going.

He doesn’t feel so well right now.

Greg is a happy boy. If he curls by the foot of the sheet-less bed and breathes heavily for a few minutes, if his eyes sting when he looks back up…

Well, no one is here to see.

-----

*Ding dong!*

Everyone looks up at the ring of the doorbell. They’re bent over a blueprint of the manor that Grunkle Ford got from Old Fiddleford, trying to find the best place to get in.

“Maybe it´s Paz…” Mabel starts getting off her chair, but Soos shakes his head

“Nah dude, it’s probably the pizza I ordered, sorry” he says “I think better on pizza”

“I´ll toast to that” Wendy stands to get the door, but it´s pushed in as soon as she turns the knob, and she´s being pushed aside. Dipper gets to his feet because this delivery guy is about to get a boot to the face, if he knows Wendy.

Pacifica looks… Different. The most noticeable change is her blonde hair that falls way past her waist, and the heavy makeup on her face. Also noticeable is the fact that she looks like she´s ran all the way from the manor.

“I… I think I scared the delivery guy” she pants out, and only then does Dipper notices the box in her hands. Huh.

“No problem dude, I paid for it online” Soos waves Pacifica hello from the table. “Grab a piece if you want by the way”

“I´m… I´m good” Pacifica hands the box over to Wendy, and Dipper hears Mabel get to her feet at the same time he does. Pacifica is stumbling worryingingly, and Dipper somehow doubts it´s just the run.

“What happened?” he asks. By his side, Mabel is silent, and he can imagine her knuckles going white.
“I had to escape” Pacifica responds, her voice light and airy and not at all there. “I tried to break the deal, but they made… They asked Wirt to make me how I was before and he- he cheated”

So that explains the expensive manicure, the hair and the makeup.

“Is he ok?” Dipper asks. Pacifica looks lost, but she’s safe now, and he can’t say the same for the others “Is Greg ok?”

“Dipper shut up” Mabel snaps. Dipper turns to look at her, but she’s still looking at Pacifica as she takes a step forward and pulls her to sit on her unoccupied chair. She bends forward to whisper in her ear, and Dipper pretends he doesn’t hear the soft “they can’t touch you here ok?” because neither his sister nor Pacifica have ever made it clear what their relationship is, but he’s not an idiot.

Slowly, the rest of the Pines and Wendy and Soos gather back around the table. Mabel is twisting Pacifica’s long hair into a thick braid with deft fingers, and it seems to do the trick to begin calming her down.

“They’re ok. Physically at least” Pacifica says. She gives her nails a disgusted look, and Wendy gets up immediately. Dipper hears her steps on the stairs, and going into Mabel’s room. “The deal is… Difficult. As long as the family doesn’t hurt Greg or allow Greg to get hurt, Wirt has to obey.”

Grunkle Ford nods “We’d expected something similar. We might have found some leverage but-”

“Your old cut?” Mabel interrupts. She has the kitchen scissors in her hand. Pacifica nods, and Wendy comes back into the room and places Mabel’s manicure kit on the table. Grunkle Ford looks at Dipper with a bewildered expression in his face, but Dipper shakes his head as Wendy begins to scrub Pacifica’s nails free of polish.

The scissors slice through the braid, and it falls to the ground leaving Pacifica’s face framed in a somewhat awkward bob cut.

“Why did you have to escape?” he asks then, as Mabel begins trimming the edges and shaping it into Pacifica’s normal look. “Did they threaten you?”

“They…” Pacifica starts, but her voice fades, and she has to clear her throat. “I tried to hurt Greg. I just to break the deal, but they stopped me. And when Wirt didn’t turn me back to who I was before… They gave him another order” Mabel’s hands are steady as they card through Pacifica’s hair, but Dipper can see her face becoming more stony with each word said.

“What was the order?” Dipper asks, though he’s afraid of the answer.

Pacifica looks up at him, green eyes wide and terrified, a look he hasn’t seen since the night at the manor when she cowered before a bell.

“He’s trying to buy me time Dipper. He lied to them, I could see it hurt him but he saved me enough time and Greg helped me escape and-” her voice cracks this time, and Dipper is convinced he’s never seen her as close to tears as she is right now. Mabel’s hands drop the scissors and rest on her nape and shoulder. Pacifica takes several deep breaths before she can speak again.

“She’s going to kill you and Mabel”

-----

"Has she given any trouble?” Asks Mrs. Northwest’s voice. Wirt steels himself before straightening and turning to meet her.
"Not at all. She cried for a while" he responds. He doesn't mention the fact that this all happened last night, that there has been no sound ever since, that the breakfast tray he transported inside the room is untouched and cold. What she doesn't know -yet- won't kill her. Sadly.

"She does that sometimes. Will this suffice as a token of her will?" She asks then, and the demon has to stop himself from curling his lip in disgust at the way this woman refers to her own daughter.

Then the question caughts up with him, and he refocuses in time to see her hold something up, and then his whole being is flooded by warring emotions.

His magic, his demonic nature is delighted, like a fat cat presented with a treat. The part of Wirt that's still human is reeling back, alarm bells ringing all over in his mind because this object reeks of despair.

It's a simple silver bell with an ornate handle, small enough to fit in Mrs. Northwest's palm.

He's encountered a bell like this before, but that was meant to protect rather than hurt, and even though the last was wielded by an old mean looking crone, this one's presence was much more menacing.

"It's good" he says, voice strained. If possible, he's even happier that Pacifica went away, somehow he doesn't think she'd have been able to leave after seeing this tainted thing.

"Wonderful. My husband is getting the keepsakes and the butler is painting the circle. We should be ready in an hour or so" she informs him.

Wirt feels himself starting to shift into panic mode, and he forced himself to look confused rather than scared.

"Hm... I thought you knew... Well, whatever pleases you, ma'am" He says finally. Mrs. Northwest frowns.

"Know what?" She asks with an ugly sneer on her face "Tell me"

"The full moon" Wirt shrugs simply. It's a lame excuse but he knows this is not the kind of woman who'd know the current phase, and making a decent amount of clouds to cover the decidedly waxing moon was not outside his capabilities "I am a nature born demon. My powers stem from nature, the forest, the weather, the-"

"Get to the point"

Wirt pinches the bridge of his nose. "The point is, free will is the one thing humans have over beings of my kind. Ripping it off is sort of a big thing, even if it's in payment for a deal, not to mention going back to the past and changing everything that happened after the Pines survived that thing with the robot" he says, and he doesn't have to fake the annoyance in his voice "ideally we'd be doing this at the forest, under a full moon, and with a sacrificed animal. I didn't even suggest the first and the last because of the secretive nature of our... Arrangement, but I thought you and your husband were competent enough to know where I drew my power from"

The woman's heavily made up eyelids lower to half cover her eyes and her lips curl in disgust.

"I will notify my husband." She says finally. "I don't want to hear a word from you until then, you insolent brat"

She turns on her heel and stalks away. Wirt is already feeling his tongue stick to the roof of his
mouth, so he settles for flipping the bird at her retreating back.

At least this will cut the Pines a few more hours, he thinks, even as the other side of his mind repeats the question that's been echoing in there since Pacifica disappeared into the woods last night.

Where are they?

-------

In the faint part of his mind that's still capable of conscious thought after the news, Dipper feels like a pit is opening under his feet after Pacifica's explanation.

Now the lantern resting innocently on the table seems to have a purpose, and he thinks dryly that this is just the kind of thing Bill would find funny.

Kill your boyfriend if you want to live.

If you want your sister to live. If you want your grand-uncle who spent thirty years trapped in the demonic dimension to remain there for the rest of his existence.

He can't bring himself to reach for the heavy iron ring that forms the handle of the lantern, and he averts his eyes from the warm glow behind the clouded glass.

He can't look at Wirt's soul when he's considering destroying it.

Grunkle Stan is outside smoking a cigarette. Grunkle Ford is in the living room, perusing an old looking tome with narrowed eyes.

Dipper knows they'd both have pushed the lantern off the table, if it weren't for him.

Wendy's gone back to Wirt's apartment to see if he can find anything of use amongst his books, and Soos is rummaging through the shack's inventory of charms and amulets to see if there's still some of the real ones Dipper snuck in there last summer.

Both things are useless right now and they know it. Dipper also knows, however, that even though none of them are willing to effectively kill someone they know and like as much as Wirt, they also don't know how to deal with the outcome of that choice. Mabel and him are parts of their lives, and soon they won't be.

Pacifica is sitting, limp-limbed and empty-eyed on a chair next to Mabel. She's got little to say about the matter, and Dipper sees her holding Mabel's hand under the table, as if she knows that any moment could be the one that extinguishes her ability -her will- to do so.

Dipper takes a deep breath, and stands up.

Two pairs of eyes follow him as he straightens his shirt, and grabs the lantern by the ring.

He turns to Mabel then, and he means to ask if she's coming, but even his still somewhat shocked mind knows it's a stupid question, because all that comes out of his mouth is

"Are you ready?"

Without missing a beat Mabel nods and climbs to her feet as well. One of her hands -the one with the sygil-engraved knuckle dusters- goes to pat her hip in a gesture Dipper has learned is a tic to make sure the hook is there. The other pulls Pacifica up, and the motion seems to wake her from her stupor.
"I'm... You want me there?" She asks, and the doubt in her voice makes Dipper want to punch someone -a very Mabel-like impulse- because of course she thinks this is her fault.

Before he can say something, Mabel winks an eye at her.

"Sure we do. Wanna tell her why Dipdop?" She asks, wrapping an arm around Pacifica's shoulders. Dipper gives her what he hopes is an encouraging smile.

"Your parents have to know it was you who took them down"
Chapter 5

They take the golf cart with them, but only after pushing it far enough that no one will hear it start up. After that it’s easy, just a quick drive across town and up the hill they go.

The Northwest Manor lurks in the distance.

----

He cannot do this anymore. He cannot delay it more than he already has, he-

“Does this meet your standards?” Mr. Northwest’s voice pulls Wirt out of his reverie, and he looks up at the man. He can feel his eyes and the corners of his mind brimming with black smoke. His magic is excited, hungry for this deal, and Wirt knows -he’s not sure how he knows, just that something inside him is telling him- it will change everything.

He’s never taken a human soul, or a human life. In this deal, he will take both cleanly, without giving anything in return. It’s a deal any demon would drool over, but Wirt can’t help but to wonder what that means for his humanity, or what’s left of it, and he feels dizzy every time he looks at his self proclaimed summoning circle.

“It… It does” He says finally.

On each of the five branches, just shy of the symbols that spell out Wirt’s True Name in the other dimension’s language, are five objects.

A rattle that’s a thin cage of gold mesh, with five delicately carved gold balls inside. A cashmere teddy bear with Swarovski crystal eyes. A pair of minuscule ballet shoes, made of pure white silk. A white blanket with the Northwest’s emblem embroidered in gold thread. A pageant dress with delicate lace and crystals sewn into the fabric.

At the middle of the tree, right above the lantern: The silver bell.

“On with it then” Preston Northwest orders, and Wirt feels his stomach drop even as his feet pull him towards the circle.

He can’t bring himself to look at Greg where he’s standing behind Mrs. Northwest. He doesn’t feel human right now, his body reacting to his base instincts, pushing him to take this soul he doesn’t want to harm, these lives he loves.

He doesn’t want his little brother to see just how far gone he is.

The entire circle lights up in blue flames as Wirt steps in the center of the lantern, and he feels his power extend like roots into the wood the manor is built with, into the dirt itself.

“Bring the girl from her room” orders Mrs. Northwest, and Wirt is surprised that he can still smile when his lips curl to let a chuckle out.

“I’m sorry ma’am, but I cannot” he says, and snaps his fingers uselessly. There’s no blue fire.

“I- What?!” The woman’s face is contracting into an ugly rictus of anger. Even without looking, he can just imagine Greg’s shoulders quaking with silent chuckles. “Why?!”

“Because she’s not in her room, I’m afraid” Wirt shrugs.
“Sixer?”

It takes Ford a second, but then his brother´s voice registers in his brain, and he looks up to see Stan at the door.

“Yes?”

“Have you been reading this whole time?” Stanley asks. His voice is tainted with that barely restrained annoyance that always makes Stanford go on the defensive.

“Well of course, I´m trying to figure out a way to rescue Mason´s boyfriend without the Northwests altering temporal continuity, Stanley. What have you been doing?” he accuses

“Smoking. I needed an excuse to not smash the fucking thing to pieces” Stanley admits. Ford rolls his eyes, even if the thought crossed his head as well.

“Knucklehead”

Out the corner of his eye he sees Stanley roll his eyes too. “I presume your dusty old books are more effective then?”

“Well of course” Stanford bristles. “I am about to-”

“You´re about to find out the kids left while we weren´t looking” Stanley interrupts him.

Ford blinks.

“… That is an unexpected development”

“Whatever, get ready while I get the car nerd”

----

“No no no! You have to- Dipper you´re going to snap the cable!”

“Mabel stop yelling they´ll know we´re here!”

“I landed a freaking perfect hook, it´s not my fault your climbing game is weak”

“Could you two PLEASE get it together?! You may be comfortable with the idea of getting killed by now, but I certainly am not”

“Sorry Pacifica”

“Sorry Paz”

----

The manor is silent, once they finally make it in. All the lights are off, and the corridors are deserted.

“Uh… guys?” Mabel asks, and Dipper turns towards her. She´s frowning, looking out a window

“Was there a full moon when we were coming here?”
Huh

Dipper opens the window and sure enough when he pokes his head out, the moon is in its right waxing state, but when he comes back inside a full moon is staring at him through the crystal.

“... Wirt is certainly making them jump through hoops” he concludes, and he can´t help the pang of pride in his chest. He hugs the lantern tighter.

----

“What on earth are you talking about?! You had orders to not let her escape!” Priscilla screeches.

Wirt rocks back and forth on the balls of his feet, but a cheery light voice perks up before he can speak.

“Oh, Wirt didn´t do it Mrs. Northwest” says Greg, and Wirt has to look at him then. The kid is looking up at the woman with an absolute shit-eating grin Wirt never in a thousand lives would´ve thought was in his facial repertoire. “I gave Pacifica my sheets to make a rope. She had to tie them together with hers though, so technically I was just an enabler I believe”

The amount of restrain Mrs. Northwest is putting into not slapping Greg is almost tangible, and Wirt can´t help the grin that spreads across his face.

“Enough” Mr. Northwest´s voice is calm, and that more than anything is what brings Wirt back from his amusement into the true seriousness of the situation. “This little game has gone too far. But we will fix your brother´s rebelliousness once we´ve dealt with my daughter”

Wirt feels the words like cold water running down his back, and he has no doubt that he´s going to be using this same summoning circle in no time at all

“Now” Preston Northwest takes a step forward and clasps his hand around the back of Greg´s neck, which effectively dissolves his smile. Wirt feels a hot pit of anger burning in his stomach, and he sees a few stray snowflakes begin to descend from the ceiling. “Bring my daughter here. That is an order”

“Oh but I´m here, father dear”

----

Dipper has to concede here. All of Pacifica´s dramatics make for perfect timing.

The Northwaters are on the foyer, and between the stretched arms of the imperial staircase someone has drawn one of Dipper´s tentative summoning circles, drawn in charcoal and lit on fire, and Wirt is standing at one edge of it. Dipper can see in his face the very moment Wirt notices he has the lantern, his skin goes pale and his eyes are full of fear and a sort of hopefulness that´s painful to see.

Pacifica´s parents are standing outside it, and her father -who is still gaping at his daughter´s words- has a firm grip on Greg.

Dipper is just beginning to analyse all of this, to formulate a plan that will work just the way they need it, when Pacifica takes a fucking running start and jumps out the handrail to land with a crash against her father.

This is life then.

All hell breaks loose after Pacifica´s father pushes her rough off of him, but her trick worked and he
´s let go of Greg. Priscilla goes to get him, but Mabel -who followed her decades old rule that if a staircase has a slide-able handrail you have to slide down- slams into her side.

“Hey Mrs. Northwest! It´s great to see you got the house back!” Mabel exclaims before punching the woman on the side of the face.

Pacifica is still wrestling with her father as Dipper finally gets to his senses and heads for the last set of stairs, when Preston kicks her in the stomach and sends her flying away before standing up.

“She´s here! Complete the deal, now” The man screams, and Dipper sees Wirt´s shadow -waving and shifting with the firelight- contort and grow even as Wirt himself tries to step away from the circle, but the fire is pulling him back in, and Wirt is crouching in pain and something is growing out of his temples and-

“Dipper!” Greg screams, a shrill, terrified sound. Dipper crosses eyes with the kid, and he sees he´s crying. He´s never seen Greg cry, but he understands at one why he´s doing it.

Pacifica has stopped moving, she´s just laying on the polished marble floor with a blank look on her eyes, and Dipper feels his strength begin to fade, sees Mabel fall unconscious next to the immobile Mrs. Northwest. With a last burst of energy, he stretches a hand to lift the lantern over the railing.

And he lets it fall.

----

It's as if time has slowed down. Wirt sees the lantern fall in slow motion, his soul tracing an arch of light towards the floor, and his vision goes black.

All of a sudden he's surrounded by the smell of snow, of burning edelwood oil and the cries of all those who've gone lost in The Unknown, all of those he's failed to guide and something in him is squirming, clawing its way out his chest.

There must always be a Beast in The Unknown.

It doesn't matter if it's a menacing Beast that scares stragglers out of staying where they shouldn't linger, one that tricks them into fading for its own survival, or one who guides those souls to where they're meant to go.

The Beast guards The Unknown and all that dwells within, and it must always exist. If the flame is extinguished another soul must take its place, The Beast must always survive.

He feels his power snap, feels himself going into his true form and grabbing and tearing and snapping, and he only has enough presence of mind to make sure none of the bodies he's grabbing are important people, before he loses control altogether.

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As soon as his legs work again Dipper is running down the stairs and taking the bend to see just what he did.

He just let Wirt die, and he owes it to him to see it with his own eyes.

Then he sees Greg, curled over himself with his eyes shut tightly and lying on his side, as if he had slid to that position.
Cradled in his arms is the still burning lantern, and Dipper’s legs lose their strength again.

He falls next to the child without a word and pulls him into a hug, burying his face in his hair. Greg did it, Greg saved him, Greg-

Dipper forces himself to open his eyes when the current situation starts processing in his head. They just released the Beast.

And the Beast is still alive.

After the screaming, the destruction and the sound of splitting wood, ripping flesh and cracking bones, and knowing the predator is still there, still thirsty, the silence feels loaded.

Dangerous.

There's a step. Then another, and another, and Dipper holds Greg closer against him, because Greg has Wirt's soul and Greg is Wirt's heart, and he has to keep them safe.

"You are not meant to bear the lantern" says a voice. It's at the same time Wirt's and not, with a reverberating echo and evoking a feeling of despair, and Dipper knows, he knows he's not worthy of caring for the lantern, not after what he's done, but hearing Wirt say it still hurts like a blow.

"I know Wirt, I just- I couldn't think of."

"Give it to me" Wirt interrupts his babbling, and it's the lack of emotion what makes Dipper finally look up.

Wirt's skin is made of wood, veins and knots clearly visible amongst its surface. When he moves, Dipper thinks he can see faces in it, features contorted in a rictus of pain. His elegant suit has been replaced by a navy cloak, the edges torn and ripped and dripping black oil, and the pointed hat stop his head is wrapped in thorn covered vines.

His eyes are giving off more of a glow than ever, and they hold none of the warmth Dipper has come to associate with Wirt. More alien than anything though, are the branch-like antlers sprouting from his temples, fanning to his sides and dripping yet more oil.

"I can't" whispers Dipper. Greg and him and their fragile human lives are the only thing standing between Wirt's true nature and his humanity, and it has to count for something, it has.

"Can't? Or won't?" Asks the beast, bending to loom over him.

"I... I won't give it to you" Dipper forces out.

He's dealt with demons, banished them, destroyed them. There's about fifteen incantations on the top of his tongue that could reduce a demon more powerful than Wirt to sulfur and ash, but this is different, this is so different than any creature he's ever dealt with...

The beast tilts its head to one side, regarding him with the curiosity of a cat about to pounce.

"Why?" It asks. "Do you seek to destroy me? I thought you fashioned yourself infatuated with my vessel. It was very sweet I admit, and very useful, to have the unconditional protection of a hunter" it adds, the corner of its lips curling up in a cruel smirk.

More than anything it's hearing it like that, like Wirt is mocking him for loving him, what makes Dipper flinch. He feels a trail of warmth run down his cheek.
"Wirt you- snap out of it!" Dipper tries again. His voice breaks, and Greg looks up.

"He doesn't mean it Dipper" says the child, squeezing Dipper's hand with his own, the one he's not using to hold the lantern. "My brother loves you. I know that"

The shadows shift, and suddenly the beast is even closer; close enough that Dipper can smell wood and snow and death in its breath.

"Your brother died many a year ago, child" it says. "He has no heart with which to love, no feelings to return. He is me and I am him, and whatever is left of who he was this human just tried to destroy" it gestures towards the lantern in Greg's grip "Why shouldn't I kill you both, who presume to keep my soul from me?"

The room around them grows colder, and heavy blobs of snow topple from the ceiling. Dipper feels himself begin to shiver, and he has a brief flash of admiration for the way Greg stands his ground, until he remembers this boy has faced the beast to save his brother before.

"Because you're scared of us" Greg says, holding the lantern tighter. "You know we could kill you right now if we wanted to, and if no one blows the flame you won't have a new body" the boy sums up, calm and collected.

The beast's face curls into an ugly snarl, fangs elongating from Wirt's straight teeth and antlers growing thorns.

"Why won't you then? Why won't you smash the lantern, if you're so powerful right now? Humans are ever the selfish ones, why would I trust you to not destroy me?"

Greg lets out a breath, and squeezes Dipper's hand again, as if to indicate it's his turn to talk. Dipper looks up at the demon before him, and tries to think of Wirt. The real one, the one who bakes cookies for Gobby and has a shelf for the gnomes' offerings and blushes terribly when Dipper kisses his nose.

The answer comes by itself, natural as breathing.

"Because we love you" says Dipper, and his voice doesn't break this time.

The beast's eyes widen, and they flash back and forth between the natural dark brown of Wirt's human eyes and the iridescent rainbow of color. It takes a step back, and Greg takes one forward.

"Do not touch me, child!" The beast snarls in panic, eyes still switching colors frantically

"It's true" comes another voice, and Dipper turns. Mabel is there, with her bloodied eyebrow where she hit the floor when she fainted, and holding to Pacifica just to be able to stand, but she's staring straight at the demon without an ounce of fear in her features "we love you Wirt, we all do. Even if you're kinda being a jerk right now"

"SHUT UP" the beast roars

Dipper takes the lantern off of Greg's hands, and steps forward.

"Look at me Wirt" he orders.

When the beast doesn't comply, when it averts its eyes in fear, Dipper takes another step towards it. And he offers the lantern.
Mabel watches curiously as Dipper offers the lantern. She knows from so many evenings cuddling under handmade quilts that Wirt's demonic power are not the problem so much as his demonic nature is, that even though Wirt can usually keep it under control, the urge to take, to survive, to destroy is always there, and she wonders how Wirt will fare now that his human mind seems to have been taken over.

She also briefly considers she might be in shock after the near death experience, and after feeling the true nature of Wirt's powers on herself. She can still see the nice pumpkin telling her to wait just a moment while her case sorted itself out, and having her sit by a turkey-pulled wagon.

She would love to think it a mere hallucination, but she's much too savvy for that.

When she focus her sight on the living world, she sees Wirt -or The Beast?- has made no move to take the lantern.

She also sees his face twisting and morphing in a way that wouldn't be out of place in a CGI-heavy horror movie. One second it's Wirt's normal, dorky face, albeit with black oil tears running from the corner of his multicolored eyes, the next it's a tree someone with little idea of how faces look like and little artistic skills tried to carve into a human face, the next a mixture of the two, sometimes plain smooth wood with no discernible figures, like a mannequin and then only a light so bright she can't stare directly for long.

At the same time his face changes, his hands make stilted, shaky movements back and forth, like he's trying to reach for the lantern and then stopping himself, and all the while there are voices screaming in pain and in frustration and a thousand other emotions. Mabel hears Wirt's in there somewhere, but she also heard dozens others, and she wonders for a moment how many times The Beast has changed vessels.

Then Wirt goes up in blue flames which is, to say the least, a little distracting.

Dipper almost drops the lantern again at the sudden combustion, but he manages to hold his grip, and suddenly all he can do is watch, as the fire surrounding Wirt gets brighter and hotter, until they can't even see his silhouette behind the flames.

"Beans..." He hears Greg mutter softly, and he places a hand on his shoulder to give it a reassuring squeeze.

"Think he's ok?" Asks Pacifica from the other side of the room, dragging Mabel along as she comes closer.

"Well... We're not dead, so I'd say he's got it under control" Dipper responds, unwilling to admit just how freaked out he is as the fire begins to die down and there is no sign of Wirt.

"Gotta say brobro" Mabel pipes in then. Her voice is a bit pasty. Dipper wonders if she's still thinking of the boat with the frog band. "You ended this much faster than I expected"

"Can't do dramatics when you're about to be erased from existence, sis" he says. His hand feels sweaty around the lantern ring, and he really wished he could pass it onto someone else.

"I'll give you that" Mabel shrugs. "He stopped burning"
And he has, Dipper notices as he focuses forward again. The fire has burned down to embers, leaving a sooty black circle in the middle of the floor and a blundled up blue cloak.

"Uh... Wirt?" Dipper asks with a tentative step forward. The bundle twitches, but no thorny vines shoot out at him to rip him to shreds so he figures he's fine. "Wirt? Are you ok?" And he crouches, placing the lantern on the floor before stretching a hand to uncover the bundle

Underneath is what can only be accurately described as a ball of darkness. Dipper has seen it once or twice, when Mabel surprises Wirt by sprinkling fake salt or fake holy water in his direction, and when he pokes a finger at it, the feeling is soft and warm as usual.

"Hey babe" Dipper smiles at the coiled up darkness. It makes a faint buzzing noise, and makes a sort of aborted hop in his direction. Dipper takes the hint, and lifts Wirt into his arms, before handing him carefully to Greg. Out the corner of his eye, he sees the lantern vanish in a flash of blue fire, and he sighs in relief. Wherever it is, it's safe now.

"Is he in fuzzball form?" Mabel asks curiously, looking over his shoulder. "Hey Wirt."

Wirt buzzes again in Greg's arms, and the child chuckles and squeezes him.

Just then, the double doors burst open with a bang, and grunkle Ford and grunkle Stan are there, portal gun and regular gun pointed down and serious frowns on their faces that quickly melt down into confusion as they both realize there's nothing and no one to shoot at.

"Uh... Kids?" Asks grunkle Stan, and Mabel chuckles and limos her way to him, wrapping him in a hug.

"You're both super late" she chastises, and Dipper rolls his eyes fondly as both old men give them an identical unimpressed stare.

"Well, I dare say we wouldn't have been as late, if someone hadn't sneaked out without us" grunkle Ford grumbles out.

"They had it all under control" says Pacifica. "A few near death experiences, a side serving of murder, you know, the usual. Can we get into the car please? I need an espresso"

"Murder?!" Both grunkles ask in unison, and now it's Dipper who gives them an unimpressed stare. Fucking hypocrites.

"I'll tell you all about it, but for now" he places a hand on Greg's shoulder, and the shadow ball that is Wirt nuzzles his knuckles. "Let's all go home"

End Notes

Repeated Warning: You promised you wouldn´t hate me

Love you all XOXO thanks for reading and commenting!

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