(To Die Will Be) An Awfully Big Adventure
by FayJay

Summary

Gerard has always vaguely liked the idea of being a vampire, in much the same way he's always vaguely liked the idea of time travel, or of being a pirate - but it's only when he wakes up dead that he realises that not all his fans (or friends) are actually human. This is rather a shock to the system, but Gerard does his best to deal with the fact that he's now an undead American, and he's lucky enough to get a little help from an unexpected corner. Just as he thinks he's starting to get the hang of being a vampire, however, everything suddenly goes to hell in a handbasket, and before he knows it there are angry vampires slayers chasing him around L.A., and an urgent appointment with the Fairy Queen looming before him...

A story about love, family, metamorphosis, art, trust and geekery.

PLEASE NOTE: I haven't ticked Rape or NonCon in the warnings section because I think that would be highly misleading - the story really isn't pornalicious, and nobody is sexually assaulted. Nevertheless, the first scene (in which Gerard is forcibly turned into a vampire) may be triggery for some readers on that basis, and the question of consent in regard to vampirism is addressed.

Notes

This story is for Jilli. You are 110% the reason this story exists at all, and also the reason that it is THIS story. Love you. So sorry I couldn't be there.

Very grateful thanks to JJ Taylor, Novembersmith, and Cass, all of whom provided
absolutely invaluable help and encouragement whilst I was writing this. Their beta assistance was SUPERB, and any infelicities that remain are entirely my doing.

(Author's note: It took me several weeks to write this, during which time Ashlee Wentz filed for divorce. This made me sadface for their wee family, and I did consider changing the story to reflect their current circumstances, but simply hadn't the heart to. So since you're about to accept a universe in which there are secretly werewolves and vampires and fairies and wizards, let's take another tiny leap and imagine that the Wentzes are still happily married.)

Peter was not quite like other boys; but he was afraid at last. A tremour ran through him, like a shudder passing over the sea; but on the sea one shudder follows another till there are hundreds of them, and Peter felt just the one. Next moment he was standing erect on the rock again, with that smile on his face and a drum beating within him. It was saying, "To die will be an awfully big adventure."

from Chapter 8 of 'Peter Pan', by J.M. Barrie.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this.

It wasn't supposed to happen at all, obviously, but Gerard would be lying if he claimed he'd never idly fantasised about it, because he totally had, and one thing he knew for certain: it wasn't supposed to happen like this. Even through the blinding waves of pleasure, he was aware of a faint sense of disgruntlement, aware that he must look ridiculous, scrabbling at the wall beside a dumpster with warm coffee soaking into his t-shirt and jeans, and the paper cup crushed underfoot. And beyond that there was a panicked prickle of awareness that reminded him he didn't want this at all, and that despite the frantic fireworks going off in the pleasure centre of his brain right now, the consequences were definitely not going to be worth it.

“No,” he said – tried to say, at least. It came out as more of a moan, but he was trying, damn it. “I don't want this,” he tried again, oddly sure that if he could just make himself heard this would all be okay. That it was all a misunderstanding. “Please don’t.” But his tongue was rubbery and useless, and the sound was nothing more than an indistinct mumble of vowels, breathless and bright-edged with mindless bliss, while the world around him was starting to spin away, colours thinning and dwindling like smoke tattering in the wind. It was a long while since he'd felt anything like this – control and consciousness dissolving into inchoate sensation. It was like – it felt like – oh, fuck. Mikey was going to be so disappointed in him, he thought, faintly, and it made him feel sad in a numb, helpless sort of way. Brick pressed into the side of his face and the back of his neck, and fingers tightened around his waist, but the only thing he could focus on was the warm, wet mouth against his throat. He had a feeling that the only thing keeping him upright was the hand pinning his waist and the fingers knotted in his hair. Shit. He was going to black out. Or – no, not just that, he thought, his stomach clenching. This was worse. This wasn't a game, and it wasn't a drunken night. He wasn't going to simply black out.

There was just time for stark terror to cut through the haze of pleasure for the briefest of instants before Gerard Arthur Way died, pinned to the wall in an alley outside ComicCon, his dropped cigarette smoldering unnoticed on the ground by his side.

* * *
“What the fucking fuck?”

Gerard sat bolt upright on the bed, glaring at the kid from the con. And, okay, that probably wasn’t how this scene was supposed to go – he was pretty sure that newly-fledged vampires were supposed to be more respectful to their makers, or more otherworldly or some shit, but right now Gerard was about as pissed as he could ever remember being. Besides, the kid in front of him looked nothing like a vampire, and somewhere in the back of his head Gerard was feeling resentful about that too. It was supposed to be something **dark**, damn it; something mysterious and profound and, and spiritual, or something. Something special. Not waking up with no heartbeat courtesy of some scrappy-looking little scene kid with too much hair product, and smudges of kohl around his eyes and bright rubber bands around his wrist and fucking fangs that looked like – well, okay, they looked pretty convincing, but whatever. The point was, if it was going to happen, it should have been 'Nosferatu', not fucking 'Twilight'. This was just embarrassing.

“I mean – seriously, seriously, dude, what the fucking **fuck**?” He pressed his fingers against the wound on his throat, flinching at the intensity of the contact and not sure whether it was from pleasure or pain. He could feel the raised flesh of the bite beneath his fingers – not an open wound, but it hadn’t healed up to something smooth and scar-like yet, and he was shocked by how wrong his own skin felt – cool and rubbery and **dead**. It was really not even a little bit sexy, as it turned out. In front of him, the dark-haired kid was squirming slightly, and licking too-red lips. “You killed me. You fucking **killed** me, man!” Gerard said, like saying it out loud would make it all make more sense.
“But then I brought you back,” the kid pointed out, his eyes hopeful and a tentative smile pinned to his mouth and fading fast.

Gerard stared at him, still fingerling the wound. “Which makes it all okay?”

“Uh. I - I thought you'd like it,” said the kid, sounding suddenly uncertain – and, shit, Gerard didn't even know this guy's name. This *vampire’s* name. “You said you'd like it.”

Gerard's eyes widened. “Dude – I thought you were kidding. I was being polite. I don't want to be a fucking vampire, for fuck's sakes.” Possibly this was not entirely 100% true, but it was mostly true.

“Oh.” The kid stared at him like Gerard had just drop-kicked his puppy out of a window, and Gerard felt a sudden rush of guilt. “I thought – oh. Shit. Really? I thought you’d think it was cool.”

There was a very awkward silence. Gerard glanced around, trying to get his bearings, and established that they were in some kind of motel room, a little tacky looking but not too bad. He knew, without having any idea how the hell he could know such a thing, that it was late evening on the day after he'd been – changed.

Killed.

“You killed me,” he said again, in a small voice.

“I'm a fan,” said the vampire eagerly, like that was supposed to make some kind of sense. “I've got all the albums, and the limited edition stuff, the action figures from 'Life on the Murder Scene', and I've seen you live, like, twenty times, and – I mean – I thought you'd think it was cool,” he said, his voice petering out. “And I asked for permission,” he added, defensively, a moment later. “It wasn't just about – you know. Feeding. Some casual thing. I wanted to *do* something for you, because I respect you, man. Your music – I mean, I really love your music, and I've read all your interviews, and – I mean, I felt like we had a connection, you know? Like you'd understand. So I totally asked first.”

Gerard gaped.

“I did!” the kid said again, starting to look sullen.

“Well, yeah, okay, yeah – you offered to make me immortal with your bite, yeah, when I was signing your book,” Gerard admitted, feeling very slightly like an asshole, but still pretty sure that he didn't think you *meant* it.

The kid stared at him blankly, and Gerard made a frustrated little growling noise in the back of his throat and flapped his hands around in the air like this could help clarify the situation somehow.

“I mean – c'mon! The guy in front of you was dressed as Boba Fett. The girls behind you were dressed as Sailor Moon characters. I told you I thought your fangs were awesome, because – come on, it's ComicCon! In the daylight! Of course I didn't know you were for real, dude!” He blinked, suddenly distracted. “Hey - how were you even there in the middle of the day? How does that work?”

The kid grinned at that. “You've watched too many movies, Gee,” he said, and it felt a little bit weird to have this stranger calling him Gee, like they were friends – but then fans were like that. And, truthfully, the whole biting thing had been pretty intense too. In fact, this whole scene was feeling uncomfortably like the morning after a one-night-stand. Not that Gerard had done a whole lot of that even before his marriage – he wasn't the most rock'n'roll of rockstars and never had been, drink and
drugs aside – but still, there was this weird mixture of intimacy and unfamiliarity prickling in the atmosphere between them which felt more like that than anything else.

“So – what, sunlight's not a problem?” he asked, because – well, okay, it was kind of cool, if he was totally honest. Cool in a really-fascinating-to-know-about-but-shit-I-don't-want-this-in-my-life-because-it's-all-going-great-right-now-and-this-totally-fucks-with-everything-and-Jesus-Christ-I'm-dead-what's-up-with-that kind of way.

The kid perched on the bed next to him, grinning. “We're nocturnal,” he said, scratching the back of his neck. “We don't do real well in the daylight, same as any other nocturnal animal – eyesight's better with darkness, and your body will want to be curled up and asleep, ideally. But you can deal, you know? It's just like having really shitty jetlag, or something. You'll be kind of awkward and pissy, but you can function. Night time, though – night time, you're basically Batman. Christian Bale Batman, not that dumb kids' show Batman with the guys in tights. Badass.”

In spite of himself, Gerard perked up at that. Batman! There was a moment where he nearly explained that the Adam West Batman was its own kind of kitsch cool, and that there was, moreover, absolutely nothing wrong with guys wearing tights, but then his brain bounced gleefully back to the thought that he was apparently now a badass superhero himself, and a creature of the night like The Goddamn Batman. The kid caught his eye and for a moment they both beamed. “Like – how?” Gerard asked.

“We're strong. I'm talking crazy strong. And fast. And there's the enhanced senses too. And a bunch of other stuff – varies a bit from person to person, but it's pretty wicked. Everyone's got the strength and the glamour, though.” He glanced down at his own faded hoodie and jeans and rolled his eyes. “I mean, you know – magical glamour. Not David Bowie glamour.”

“No, I got that.” Gerard gave a little grin. “I already had the David Bowie glamour thing nailed, anyway.”

“We can mess with people's heads – make them think they're seeing someone they know, make them not notice us at all, make sure they don't see the fangs, that kind of thing. Make them want to be bitten.”

“I could see your fangs,” Gerard said, latching on to what might be the least important part of the whole sentence.

The kid shrugged. “It's ComicCon. And I wanted you to see them. I thought you'd get it,” he added, sounding a bit disappointed. Gerard felt bad about that in spite of himself. He hated letting his fans down. “The fangs are always there, you know – none of this Buffy shit where they're retractable. You just make it so people don't notice. It's pretty easy.”

“Oh.” Gerard stared at the kid blankly. “Right. That's – I guess that's kind of cool, actually.” The kid's face lit up at that. “Sorry – can you tell me your name again?” he added, because he couldn't keep thinking of the vampire who ended his life as 'the kid'; he knew that he'd signed a copy of 'Apocalypse Suite' for the guy, but it had been one of hundreds of signatures that day, and the names all went in one ear and out the other.


“In the line, yeah – no, I know you did. Sorry, Martin.” Martin went right on looking hurt, and Gerard felt like an asshole. “It's just – lots of names, you know. Sorry, dude.”

Martin's mouth twisted into an unconvincing little smile, and he gave a shrug. “Hey, no biggie,” he
said. “I just – never mind. Um.” He glanced sidelong at Gerard, and there was something almost shy about his expression. “So – uh. You were great, by the way.”

“What?”

“With the – I mean, you tasted great.”

“Oh. Oh! Uh,” Gerard said, intelligently, his face heating up at the memory. Because it had been intense and intimate and brain-meltingly good in a way he only associated with sex, pretty much. Sex and some of the drugs he worked hard on not remembering these days, but mostly sex. “Thanks?” he said at last, feeling awkward and kind of stupidly shy himself. And more than a little creeped out too, because even though the pleasure had blown his mind, he didn't know this kid, and he didn't like feeling exposed like this. “Um.”

There was another awkward silence, while Gerard contemplated his whacky, ridiculous life and Martin contemplated Gerard.

“So...does this mean I'm evil now?” asked Gerard, after a while. He wasn't sure how he felt about that. “I don't feel evil.” He frowned. On the one hand, not being evil was – that was great. He really didn't want to go around murdering his nearest and dearest, or hurting innocent fans or whatever. But on the other hand, he was kind of embarrassed at the thought of being an Edward Cullen kind of vampire. He didn't feel like he ought to be a total pussy, if he'd become a creature of the night.

“You're not evil,” said Martin, sprawling back onto the bed. “You're just free. Whether you let that make you do evil shit is up to you.”

Gerard chewed that over, feeling conflicted. “Like the Invisible Man?” he asked, after a moment. Martin looked at him blankly. “I mean – like, there's power and suddenly no consequences? Like – I mean, you know, that whole “with great power comes great responsibility” schtick?” Martin carried on looking blank. “Spiderman?”

“I'm not really into comics,” said Martin, and Gerard gaped.

“But – ComicCon,” he pointed out.

Martin shrugged. “You were there,” he said by way of explanation. “I like the songs. Comics aren't really my thing. I think they're kind of – well, they're for kids, right?”

“Wow. You're – wow. You're kind of an asshole, you know?” Gerard said, after a long, speechless moment. It didn't really cover all the things he was thinking, but it was a start. Martin didn't look bothered. Somehow Gerard swallowed down the rant about how comics were a proper art form, and totally not just for kids, or even mostly for kids, and kept his mind focussed on the fact that he needed to get out of here as soon as possible and get back to his real life. “Christ. So – right, let's – I just need to know these things, then, I guess? So I can get on with never seeing you again, right?”

“Oh,” said Martin, looking disappointed. “I thought – oh. No, that's cool. You don't want to hang out? I thought we could be, like, friends or something. Like a gang, maybe.”

Gerard gave him a very level look. “Okay, Martin – I get that you thought you were doing something nice for me. We have great fans, and they make us some really cool stuff, and – look, it's cool, you know, people getting tattoos of lyrics, or, or making like little plush chibi dolls and stuff, that's cool. I know you meant well. But this isn't like giving me a silk-screened t-shirt, or something. Because - you killed me, Martin, and – I mean, I know the songs sometimes – look, I'm trying to see this from your point of view, and not totally freak out, but you've got to know that this is just not
“cool.” He looked at Martin very earnestly. “Seriously. Consent issues, man. No means no. And, and, okay, I didn't actually say 'no' the first time, but you've got to understand that sometimes “sure, that's cool” means “I think you're wearing pretend fangs and we're playing make-believe.” Seriously. This is – I'm pretty pissed, man. I don't much want to hang out with you. I kind of want to punch you repeatedly in the face. Which isn't like me, but I'm guessing it's a side-effect of this whole undead monster deal. So.”

Martin looked like he might be about to burst into tears. “Sorry,” he said, after a moment. “Shit. I guess I really messed up, huh?”

Gerard sighed. “We all mess up, Martin,” he said heavily, raking a hand through his hair. Shit, he really wanted a cigarette. Or maybe coffee. A cigarette and some coffee. “Just – you shouldn't do this to someone without asking first. It's seriously not cool.”

“A lot of the people who think they want to be vampires are just losers, though,” Martin said. “And I don't want to make it, like – cheap, or whatever. I thought you'd get it. Sorry, man.” He did look genuinely contrite, which Gerard appreciated. Wasn't doing much to help fix things, but Gerard figured that maybe it was the thought that counted. He drew a deep breath, and counted to ten.

“So what else do I need to know? Sunlight's not going to kill me, I'm not actually evil...can I, like, live on cow's blood, or whatever? Stuff from the butcher?”

“Er – yeah, no. Human only.”

“Fuck.” Gerard contemplated that, fumbling half-heartedly around in his pockets in the hopes of finding a forgotten packet of cigarettes, even though he was pretty damn sure they were in his jacket pocket, back at the Con. “That's – okay, that's kind of creepy. Um. I don't have to kill people though, right?”

“No,” Martin said, carefully. “No, you don't have to. It's more fun, but – yeah, you can stop before you get that far.”

“Fun,” Gerard repeated. He swallowed. He felt pretty fucking conflicted about this. On the one hand, being a bloodthirsty monster was, undeniably, kind of amazingly cool. In theory. On the other hand, he didn't want to go around killing people's moms and dads, destroying families, that kind of thing. Shit.

“But you can totally stop!” Martin said hurriedly. “Yeah – if you just – yeah, it'll be fine. Um. You can't feed on werewolves or the sidhe or any of the other weird shit, though – just humans.”

Gerard felt his eyes bugging out at that. “Oh, no way!” he burst out. “You're shitting me? Seriously? Werewolves, fairies, zombies, all that shit? For real?”

Martin laughed at the gleeful tone in his voice. “See, I knew you'd get it,” he said. “It's pretty cool, right?”

“It's – yeah, okay, it is pretty cool. But still – consent, Martin. You gotta ask a person before you do this, I'm serious.” He looked at Martin narrowly, watching the way the guy was picking his nails. “Martin – have you ever killed someone?”


“But – just bad people, right?” Gerard pressed, hopefully.
“Um. Maybe?” Martin said, grimacing. “I mean – you know, everyone does some bad shit some time, right? But, er – I'm not, like, a vampire on a mission, or anything. I pretty much just like to party. And eat people.”

Gerard knew he was wearing his most disapproving expression, but he couldn't help it. He was feeling profoundly disappointed. “But – but, dude, you've got a gift,” he protested. “You've got – it's like you said! It's like Batman! This terrible thing happened to you, okay, but now you've got these powers, and you could be helping people! You could be using your powers for good, Martin! Not just to satisfy your unnatural appetites – I mean, not that I'm judging, because obviously there's nothing really unnatural about – I mean, I'm not trying to be some kind of bigot here about the biting thing, but, but – you see what I mean, dude?”

Martin pulled a face. “Shit, man, you're starting to sound like my mom,” he said. “I thought you'd be cooler than this.”

“Your mom knows you're a vampire?” Gerard said, feeling lost. Fuck, he was really starting to crave nicotine. Or caffeine. Something. He drummed his fingertips on his kneecap and stared at Martin-the-vampire, trying to figure out how old he actually was. The guy looked like he should still be in high school.

“My mom's dead, dude. She died, like, sixty years ago. No, I mean – all this nag nag nag shit. I thought you'd be more fun.”

“Yeah, well – I'm sorry I didn't live up to your expectations,” snapped Gerard. “I like comics, and I don't like killing innocent people. Guess next time you should pick a different celebrity to turn into a creature of the night, like fucking Mel Gibson or someone.”

“Maybe I should!” Martin retorted, jumping up from the bed and glowering down at him.

“Oh, fuck this,” said Martin, turning on his heel and stomping off across the room. Gerard watched him go, and there was a nagging voice in the back of his head insisting that he really ought to stop Martin-the-asshole-vampire and get him to explain all the rules of his new unlife, and that if he let the guy walk out the door right now Gerard was going to be royally screwed. He should apologise.

“Well, fuck you too, asshole,” Gerard yelled instead, and a moment later the door slammed, and Gerard was alone in the room with a half-healed neck wound and an intense craving that he was starting to suspect maybe wasn't for either cigarettes or coffee after all.

* * *

Gerard stared at his reflection in the bathroom mirror, trying to decide whether he looked different. He wasn't really sure whether to be relieved that there was a reflection, or disappointed to find yet another part of the vampire mythos had turned out to be bullshit. That whole no-reflection thing had always struck him as massively cool; he'd spent many an idle afternoon turning over the practicalities in his head, wondering whether the vampire’s clothes would stay visible, like an invisible man kind of thing, or whether the invisible-in-mirrors trick was to do with physical contact, or what.

Turned out that the answer was disappointingly simple: vampires weren't invisible in mirrors after all.

At first Gerard thought he looked just the same as he had when he brushed his teeth in the morning in his own hotel room, before heading out to the convention. He studied his reflection critically with
his head cocked a little to one side. His roots were growing out again, dark and messy, and the Crayola-bright streaks of scarlet were starting to fade. His nail polish was chipped. His t-shirt still had the coffee stain on the hem. He really didn't look like a vampire, Gerard thought, pulling a face at himself.

Except – huh.

He looked harder, and gave an involuntary shiver. It was his face, all right, just the same as always – but somehow not. The overhead lights were harsh and unforgiving, throwing strange shadows onto his features and making him look as pallid as he'd ever managed with makeup – but maybe it wasn't just the lighting. He bent a little closer, trying to pinpoint what had changed. It was almost more like a caricature of his face, everything exaggerated just a tiny bit. A portrait dashed off with stark black lines and splashes of ink delineating the hungry hollows of his eyes, the glitter of his smile. Something a little too sharp, a little too cruel, a little too pretty, too hungry – too much, somehow. He looked - photoshopped. Very nearly human – but not quite. He looked like a still from an old photoshoot, but thinner than he was back then, sharper and harder and much less innocent. Much less human.

Gerard gave a shaky laugh, and looked away for a moment. He was pretty much creeping himself out, and that was ridiculous, because he hadn't lost his soul, he hadn't become some conscience-free monster. He was just – well, okay, yes, he was the walking dead, technically, but he was still basically himself. Probably.

He drummed his fingers on the edge of the sink, and let himself think about the craving that was surging just under his skin, a constant nag of want want want that felt as familiar as breathing, but wasn't about cigarettes, or coffee, or even alcohol this time, even though it made him itch in the same way. Shit. He was pretty sure that Starbucks wasn't going to be able to help with this, and he hadn't the faintest idea how to go about picking up a volunteer blood donor. Or how to be sure he didn't kill someone the first time he – okay, fuck, thinking about blood was a really bad idea, he realised, as the pangs of hunger doubled in intensity.

“Shit,” he said out loud, hating himself just a little bit. “How do I get myself into these situations? This kind of thing would never happen to Ray, damn it.”

What he wanted right now, more than anything – more even than blood, although he wasn't sure how long that would last – was Lindsey. Or Mikey. Or Frank. He wanted to be able to sink into a hug, and feel himself safe and grounded and normal again. Or what passed for normal in the Way household. He wanted to not be alone with this.

“Yeah. Not the best idea in the world, right now,” he muttered to himself, grimly. Sure, he could really use a hug right now, but if he tried snuggling up to anyone in the mood he was in, he was probably going to bite their fucking head off. Literally. Being alone with this pretty much sucked, but he couldn't help thinking it was better than the alternative, because Gerard really didn't think he could endure knowing he'd turned on Mikey, or Lindsey, or Frank.

He still wanted somebody to tell him what the hell to do next, and he was starting to really kick himself for being rude to Martin-the-asshole-vampire, but he couldn't exactly call Lindsey up for advice. This wasn't the kind of conversation you could have over the phone, he was pretty sure – not even with Lindsey. Not even with Mikey. People would think he was being metaphorical, damn it – not to mention unoriginal, and even if they didn't, it wasn't like anyone he knew could actually help him with his problem. What he needed was some kind of vampire Yoda, or something.
Gerard kind of doubted that vampire Yodas advertised in the Yellow Pages.

He sighed, and tried to pretend to himself that he wasn't starting to feel shaky with hunger, and pulled the cellphone out of his back pocket. He stared at it for a long moment before thumbing one of the numbers on the speed dial and listening to the familiar trill of pitches that comprised his mom's home number. It rang half a dozen times before she picked up, and Gerard found the shift in the quality of the silence oddly soothing. He could hear the quiet in his Mom's hallway, and the thought of it made him smile a little in spite of himself. He bit down on his lip reflexively, and then swore in surprise as the razor sharp tip of one fang sliced straight through the skin and blood flooded his mouth.

“Gerard Arthur Way,” his mom said in his ear, sounding affronted. “I will not have that sort of language in front of my only granddaughter.”

“Sorry, Mom,” Gerard said, fingering his mouth gingerly and trying not to sound too much like a blood-thirsty monster. He could taste his own blood, and it was just close enough to what he was craving to make his stomach growl in frustration. It was liking taking a bite of one of Frank's Fake Bacon sandwiches and then realising how much he wanted a crispy slice of real pig, or taking a sip of shitty instant decaf and being ready to have a full on diva rockstar meltdown if someone didn't hand him a cup of proper coffee right the hell then. Shit. He was jonesing for blood, and Gerard had never been all that good at resisting temptation. Redirecting it, he'd been able to manage – but it wasn't like he stood much of a chance of going cold turkey from the only thing he could actually eat. He was pretty sure there wasn't a twelve step program for vampires.

“Gerard?” His mom's voice had taken on a new note, and he realised he'd been quite for kind of an
awkward length of time. “You okay, honey? Nothing's wrong?”

“No, ma. Nothing's wrong.” Gerard said, running his tongue cautiously over the new outline of his teeth and tasting the smokey copper of his own dead blood as he watched himself tell lies in the mirror. “Just wanted to check in with two of my best girls.” His voice broke a very little bit. “I miss you, Mom,” he added.

“So what happened last night?” she said, her voice tart and familiar. “You suddenly forget my number, Mister Bigshot? Bandit missed her bedtime story.”

Geard was the worst father ever. And that was even without having done anything spectacularly evil yet, like trying to eat his firstborn. (Oh, shit. Shit, shit, shit. Did this mean he was going to be a danger to Bee? Because – seriously, who in their right mind would let a man-eating-vampire look after a kid? Really? Oh, shit. Not that he'd eaten any men yet, but he totally could.)

“Sorry, Mom,” he said again, helplessly. “Something – uh. Something came up.”

“More important than 'Goodnight Moon'? Which you missed two nights in a row, now?”

“I'm in more of a 'Where the Wild Things Are' place at the moment,” he said, knowing that this probably didn't make a whole lot of sense outside his head but not able to figure out how to start explaining the whole mess over the phone. “But – no, it really shouldn't have been more important. I fucked up. Did she – was she okay?”

“You're just lucky Lindsey is a wonderful momma. She didn't forget to call her baby girl, even in the middle of her tour. Not like some people.”

“Yeah, I'm a lucky guy.” Gerard said quietly, leaning his head back against the cucumber-coloured tiles and closing his eyes. “Kiss Bee for me, will you? Tell her I love her?”

“You can tell her yourself.”

He didn't squeak, because he was a grown man, and also a terrifying undead creature of magic and darkness, and clearly squeaking was beneath him. “She's still awake?”

“She's still awake. Here, just a minute.” There was a pause, and then a different voice came on the line, small and sleepy and irritable. “When are you coming?”

His daughter's voice reached into his chest and squeezed his heart, just like it always did. She was so tiny, and so fragile, and if anyone ever hurt one single hair of her head, Gerard would track them down, tear them limb from fucking limb and make jewellery out of their intestines. For real. No take backs.

“Soon, Bumblebee,” he muttered, feeling quietly terrified. Because – what if he wasn't enough to protect her? What if he was the thing that needed rending limb from limb and having its intestines making into jewellery? He felt his knees starting to shake, and let himself slide down the wall until his ass hit the floor.

“Story?” Bandit asked, pointedly, and Gerard wrapped his arms around his knees and made himself a promise then and there that he'd kill himself before he ever hurt his daughter.

“Sure thing, baby girl,” he said, tightly. “The night Max wore his wolf suit, and made mischief of one kind and another...”

* * *
Gerard knew it was going to be hellish as soon as he opened the door of the motel room and inhaled the warm scent of unspilled blood that hung on the night air, heady and irresistible as freshly roasted coffee beans. The impact was primal and immediate, and the hunger he'd been denying came crashing down over him like a tidal wave, knocking him off his feet and dragging him under. Gerard stepped out of the motel in a kind of daze and pulled the shadows around him like a cloak. He had no idea how the hell he was doing it, because at this point he was working mostly on reflex – still, he knew that he was, to all intents and purposes, invisible right now, despite the bright streetlights overhead, his feet cat-quiet as he drifted down the sidewalk. He was acutely conscious of all the people on the street, and of the handful who were staying in other rooms in the motel. He could probably have counted their pulses, if he'd concentrated, and the thought of all this plenty made him tremble in anticipation. Gerard could feel himself being pared down to nothing but need, to pure appetite, and he was painfully grateful that he was a plane ride away from everyone he loved, because right now Gerard's self control was shot all to hell, and it was a matter of who, not if.

In the back of his head he tried very hard to remember why he was supposed to exert some kind of restraint, but his thoughts were full of tearing and crunching and splattering.

Not the guy in the baseball cap; Gerard could smell the sickness on him from here. The couple arguing outside the 7-11 were too old to be really tempting. He found himself matching pace with a tall guy in his twenties whose pulse was echoing through Gerard like a half-written song, urgent and tempting and impossible to ignore. Yes. Him. Or – no, there was a girl in a red hoodie, younger and plumper, practically vibrating with life. Gerard switched tracks without thinking about it, and already he knew how succulent she would be, sweet and fresh as a sun-warmed pear.

He had already fallen into step with her when he let the glamour drop, and it was all so simple then, so natural, that he wanted to laugh out loud. He was the Big Bad Wolf, and he was going to gobble up Little Red Riding Hood. As soon as she caught his eye, flinching at the way he seemed to come out of nowhere, Gerard could feel her going under. It was an intoxicating sensation, watching her rabbit-brown eyes glazing over and her little pink mouth going slack. Gerard reached down between them to clasp her hand, feeling the warm thrum of her pulse beneath his fingertips. They looked like a couple, he thought distantly, marvelling at how easy it was to single someone out of the crowd and take possession of them.

A voice in the back of his head was panicking now, some frantic little Jiminy Cricket babble about how with great power one had great responsibility, but Gerard wasn't listening to timorous little whispers any more. He needed to eat, and everything else was slipping away in the face of this basic truth. It was beautiful in its simplicity.

Gerard's smile was wide and crooked and oddly peaceful as they stepped together into the mouth of an alley and picked their way through the discarded trash like they were walking down the aisle together. In an odd way, he loved this nameless girl in her red hood at this moment, loved the rightness of this. He couldn't think of anything more perfect.

There really wasn't any question in his mind that he was going to let her live.

Gerard reached out gently to push a tumbled strand of blue-black hair behind the delicate shell of one ear, and she smiled at him, sweet and vacant. Now that he had all this warm blood right there ready for the taking he was being almost perversely slow about getting to the point, and he was just on the brink of leaning forward, his weight already shifting, when a voice from a place where no voice should be shocked him rigid.

“Back away from the civilian, Gerard, before this gets messy.”

He spun around, hissing, and stared at the tall, blond figure with baffled rage. It was someone he
knew, a familiar face, but Gerard was so far from being himself at this point that he barely knew his own name, let alone the name of this interloper watching him from the shadows. He couldn't hear the man's heartbeat, but he knew it wasn't a vampire in front of him, twirling a slender wooden stick in one hand. It was a human, just – not quite. He was like some kind of blind spot, evading Gerard's new senses as though he were just a rock or a tumbling plastic bag. Gerard had no idea how this could be possible, but it really didn't matter; he wasn't planning to let the guy stick around. He launched himself forward, ready to tear the man limb from limb and decorate the alleyway with his blood – and then he was stopped in his tracks by a fat handful of iridescent dust.

“Sorry, Gee,” the stranger said placidly, as Gerard sank down onto his knees, coughing and choking in the cloud of glitter that clung to his skin and slipped inside his nostrils and his mouth, knocking the world out of balance. “You'll thank me in the morning.”

The last thing Gerard saw, through the silver-spangled blur, was the slender wooden stick twisting in the stranger's hand.

* * *

The next time he awoke, Gerard was bound hand and foot and tied to a chair. It was a very sturdy chair, and very sturdy rope, but by this point Gerard was furious and hungry enough to tear down the Empire State Building barehanded. The only thing that stopped him from tearing his way free of his bonds was the fact that almost as soon as he opened his eyes, someone was shoving the warm edge of a paper cup against his mouth and tipping it, and a second later he had a mouthful of blissfully unexpected blood, and the universe abruptly did a one eighty on him.

Gerard was almost ready to weep from gratitude. He forgot about moving, talking and everything else, and just lost himself in the urgent, greedy slurp of blood. It felt like he'd been saved from drowning, or from suffocation; like he'd been crawling on his hands and knees through the Sahara desert for days and someone had finally handed him a bottle of ice-cold water. His whole being had narrowed down to this frantic, urgent need, and until it was dealt with, everything else could damn well wait.

He'd downed three full cups before he was sufficiently restored to himself to be able to start taking in anything about his surroundings, or the human being behind the cups. There was blood drying in ragged streaks down his chin when he blinked fuzzily up at the man in front of him and felt his jaw drop.

“Bob fucking Bryar!” Gerard said, his voice thick with astonishment. Bob nodded as he pulled another cup out of the microwave.

“You good, Gee, or you need another cup of John Doe?”

Gerard was staring. That was probably rude, but – Bob Bryar, for fuck's sakes!

“Um,” he said, trying to pull himself together. “Well – yeah. If there's more...”

Gerard studied Bob over the rim of the cup as he swallowed this time, wondering just what the hell was going on. He faintly remembered opening the door of the motel, and then – and then...

“Oh, God,” Gerard exclaimed, yanking his head back with sudden horror and ignoring the blood that splashed down onto his lap. “Did I kill her? Little Red Riding Hood, did I...?”

“Relax, Gerard,” Bob said, and his calm, slightly pissy tone was the most reassuring thing Gerard had ever heard in his life. “You didn't commit Murder One. Or common assault, or anything worse
than hand-holding without consent.”

Gerard stared at him, trying to read the truth in his expression.

“Oh, thank fuck,” he said devoutly. “I thought – I almost – oh, thank fuck.”

Bob eyed him thoughtfully, and made a vague gesture with the half-empty cup. For a moment Gerard almost refused it, feeling revolted with himself, but apparently his new instincts trumped his fine sensibilities, because he couldn’t turn down the blood, even if he’d gotten past the earth-shattering desperation he’d felt upon waking. Bob returned the cup to his mouth without comment, and Gerard swallowed down the remains of the blood gratefully. When he’d drained the last drops, Gerard licked his lips and glanced down at the ropes.

“You going to let me go, Bob?” he asked at last.

Bob looked down at the ropes too, and then back at Gerard. He sighed, and dropped the blood-smeared Starbucks cup into a small trash can before pulling a chair over and straddling it, with his folded arms resting on the top.

“That depends,” he said.

Gerard considered this for a long moment, glancing around the room. It was, as far as he could gather, the back room of some office or store, cramped and dingy, with a battered pinboard on the wall above the microwave and an ancient coffee machine, and a couple of half-hearted inspirational posters tacked up on another. For no particular reason, Gerard had a feeling that Bob Bryar had broken into wherever they were. It didn’t strike Gerard as the kind of place Bob would actually work.

“I think – maybe you shouldn’t,” said Gerard after a long moment, staring at his knees. He was hunched forwards as far as he could go while bound to the chair, trying vainly to curl in on himself. He wanted to hide. Some big bad vampire he was. Fuck. He’d been seconds away from ripping that kid apart. Somebody’s daughter, sister, friend, some innocent kid with a head full of hopes and dreams and fears who maybe wanted to be a nurse or a pilot and he’d been looking at her like she was a Kraft Dinner. “I think maybe – maybe you should,” Gerard stumbled, glancing anywhere but Bob’s face. “You know. Not let me go. In a permanent sort of way.”

He wasn’t himself any more. If he’d been at home... he couldn’t stand to finish that thought.

“You asking me to kill you, Gerard?” Bob asked, and Gerard winced.

“Well,” he said. “I mean – I mean, sorry, that’s a lot to put on you, man, but I just...” He swallowed. He wasn’t going to burst into tears. Snivelling like a five year old whose ice cream had fallen in the sand was just not a dignified way to handle this shit, Gerard told himself firmly, blinking hard. He made a stifled little choking noise and tried to pull himself together. Hell, he could probably do it himself, after all. Eat a dozen bulbs of garlic, take a bath in holy water, set himself on fire, stab himself through the heart with a pencil - something had to work, surely?

“Oh, shut the fuck up, Gerard,” said another familiar voice from behind him, and an instant later somebody was smacking him upside the head.

“What...?” Gerard said intelligently, and then he felt his mouth fall right open again. “Brian?”

“The very same. I can’t leave you alone for five goddamn minutes, can I?” Brian said, glaring at Gerard like he’d just vomited whisky and Cheetos all over the sound desk again.
“Brian?” Gerard repeated, scrabbling around for some kind of explanation and coming up completely blank. “Shit, is this – is this some kind of whacked out dream?” He craned his neck to see whether Christina Ricci was in any danger of skipping into the room arm in arm with the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion, and then his eyes skittered back over to Brian Schechter. “I mean – what the fuck, dude?”

“I missed you too,” said Brian. They stared at each other for a moment, and then Brian sighed and sank down into an overstuffed armchair that had definitely seen better days. “I suppose it was only ever a matter of time,” he muttered to himself, looking Gerard up and down with a rueful expression that Gerard knew entirely too well. It was ridiculous that even after all this time he was still feeling a Pavlovian sense of relief just from being in the same room as Brian. Apparently Gerard had a deep-seated conviction that there was no problem on earth too big for Brian Schechter to fix.


“No shit, Sherlock. You got your ass turned into a goddamn vampire,” Brian said, blunt as ever.

“Well – yeah,” admitted Gerard. He wasn't quite sure whether he could still blush, but his face felt hot, so maybe. “But – but, what the hell, Brian?” he said, looking from Brian to Bob and back again. “How did you...?”

Bob twirled his drumstick in one hand, a very small smile playing around the corner of his mouth. “He's a manager-turned-professional-stuntman, I'm a rockstar-turned-sound-engineer. Together we fight crime.”

“Monsters,” corrected Brian without looking at him.

“Monster crime,” Bob said, calmly.

Gerard gaped at them both, and then, against all his expectations, he suddenly burst out laughing. It was amazing what a difference the blood had made to his state of mind.

“You...” he said, looking at Bob. “And you...?” Brian met his gaze, and a moment later he cracked up too. Bob just rolled his eyes and pulled a knife out of his boot. Gerard had a feeling that if he'd had a smidgen of self preservation instinct left, the sight of the blade really should have stopped him from giggling: it looked like something from a Hammer Horror movie, with Latin engraved on the blade and silver wire and a rosary wrapped around the hilt. Apparently, however, Gerard had decided to abandon the good ship Self Preservation and throw himself into the dinghy Hysteria. By the time Bob had finished slicing neatly through all his bonds (and not, as it turned out, cutting off his head), Gerard was laughing so hard he couldn't speak.

“Freak,” Bob said affably. And that, oddly enough, cut through his laughter like a bucket of cold water.

“Yeah,” Gerard said, shakily. He swallowed, glancing from Bob to Brian. “For real, now. I'm – I'm not really human.”

“I think the word I'm looking for is Duh,” Brian said.

“So,” said Gerard, suddenly uncertain. “Um. Thanks? I guess? For - er. Saving the girl? And for the – Jesus Christ, where did you even get all that blood? Seriously, how did you even know that I'd be – I mean, can somebody throw me a bone here? Because I have no idea what the fuck is going on. Please?”

“Still with the puppy eyes,” Brian said, rubbing his nose irritably. “Nice to see that some things don't
“Brian? Bob? Please?”

“Shit, I swear we're going to have to make some kind of fucking Welcome Pack,” Brian muttered. “This is getting ridiculous.

“Stop whining,” said Bob. “You could've just killed him.”

“Oh, fuck you, Bryar,” Brian said, without any heat.

Gerard watched the two of them wide-eyed, feeling about five years old. Brian heaved another sigh.

“Okay, well – long story short: monsters are real. You've probably already noticed that, though, what with being one yourself. So are lots of other things. Some people kind of – well. They police them. Put the mad ones down, and keep the rest in line, that kind of thing.”


“Oh, fuck you Gerard Way. You did not just call me a teenaged girl. There's only one person in this room wearing makeup and girl's pants, and it sure as fuck ain't me.”

“Buffy's cool,” Gerard said in a small voice, trying to sound apologetic. “And Faith's completely awesome. I'd love to be Faith. She's hot, and badass, and looks great in leather pants. She's a real hero. They both are.” He considered this for a moment. “Hey, does that make me Spike?” He felt vaguely cheered by the prospect. Spike was mostly cool, and he had Drusilla, who was one of Gerard's all time favourite fantasy girlfriends. Or had been, back before Gerard somehow won the Girlfriend Lottery and promptly got married to the most amazing woman on the planet before she had the chance to come to her senses.

“No, Gee,” said Brian, with fraying patience. “You're Gerard Way: rock star, comic book writer, occasional artist and newly risen creature of the night.”

Gerard perked up enormously at that.

“Oh, hey,” he said, beaming. “That's pretty awesome!”

“Yep. Right up until you kill somebody, and Bob here has to shove a drumstick through your rib cage.”

Gerard's face fell. “Oh,” he said. “Right. Um.” He drummed his fingers on the chair arm, conscious that he was jiggling his knees kind of awkwardly while he tried to pull his thoughts together.

“So – you guys keep the monsters in line? That's pretty badass.”


Bob looked embarrassed. Brian just shrugged.

“The pay's shit, and it doesn't come with medical insurance, although it sure as shit should do,” he said. He sounded tired. “Also, it's not so much a voluntary thing. More like being conscripted.”
Gerard's mouth twitched. “You mean into every generation a Schechter is born: one girl in all the world, a chosen one. She alone will wield the strength and skill to fight the vampires, demons, and the forces of darkness; to stop the spread of their evil and the swell of their numbers. She is...the Schechter!”

“I can still stake you, Gerard,” Brian said, evenly. “Any time you like. Bob's got a drumstick right there with your name on it, so please do go right on calling me a teenaged girl.”

Gerard gave a half-stifled giggle, and then took in their expressions. “Really, though. How the hell did you get involved in all this stuff?” His thoughts darted back to the fuzzy recollections of the alleyway and he frowned. “And – hey, how come I couldn't hear you? You got ninja skills, Bob Bryar?”

“Yes, Gerard, I am a secret ninja,” Bob agreed gravely.

“You really are, though,” Gerard said, bouncing in his seat. “How the hell, dude?”

“Genetics,” Brian snapped. “It's a thing. Fuck, I was kidding about the handbook, but maybe someone should get on that.” He scrubbed a hand through his hair and Gerard noticed the bags under his eyes and the yellowing bruise on the corner of his jaw for the first time. “It's – it's an inherited condition, okay? We're not the fucking chosen ones, and if you call me Buffy one more time I'll shove a garlic bulb up your ass. But it's – yeah, you don't pick this shit on your High School Career Day, you know? It picks you. And, honest, I don't feel like going into it right now. It kind of sucks, but it needs to be done, so. What you need to know right now is that we took down the little fucker who turned you, and much as I love your ass, Gee, you put one foot out of line and we'll take you down too, so help me God. It's what we do.”

Gerard started to smile, but Brian's expression was icy.

“Oh,” he said instead, small and startled. Then: “Wait. You killed Martin?”

“He was already dead, Gee,” Brian said shortly.

“Well – well, yeah, okay, but – fuck. You really...? Fuck.”

Brian just looked at him.

“Right,” Gerard said in a very small voice. He hadn't much liked Martin-the-asshole-vampire – kind of wanted to kick the guy in the nuts, in fact. But, still...

“He was a fan,” Gerard whispered, after a moment, feeling suddenly terrible. “He only did it because he thought – it was supposed to be a gift.” He swallowed. “He was just trying to be nice.”

“Yeah, well he should've sent you a fucking muffin basket,” said Brian. “He knew the rules.”

“Right,” said Gerard. “I – right. Okay.” There was a choked little silence, and then he added: “Can you tell me the rules, then?”

Brian’s mouth twitched slightly at that. “You'll be fine, Gerard. You can do this. Just be aware that we have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to you killing people. You can live on bags of blood just fine.”

“Like Angel,” Gerard muttered to himself, his expression earnest.

Brian sighed. “Yeah, whatever.” He cocked his head. “You can feed on people if they volunteer, but
– yeah, just don't go there, Gee. Easiest all round if you stick to prepackaged food.”

“Right. Um. How do I...?”

Bob passed him a small business card. “They can get it delivered to you. They're real discreet.”

“That's great, thanks.” Gerard could feel himself frowning. “What I don't get is how you knew where I'd be. How you knew to have all this blood,” he added, waving at the dirty cups and the empty bloodbags in the trashcan. “I mean – was this just the biggest coincidence ever, or what?”

Brian hunched down in his seat. “Yeah – no. I saw it,” he said, looking annoyed.

“What?”

“I get these visions, okay?” Brian snapped. “Sometimes. I knew you were going to be in the alley with the kid. I knew you were going to be turned.”

“You knew I was – what the fuck?” Gerard said, feeling suddenly indignant. “What, you couldn't tell me? Couldn't give me a heads up so I could avoid being bitten by a fucking vampire?”

“It doesn't work like that,” Brian said, glaring. “You think I haven't tried that? I've tried that, Gerard. I've tried suppressing them, and repressing them, and taking every pill and fucking drink known to man to try to get them out of my head, and I've tried preventing them from happening, and believe me when I tell you that this shit doesn't go away, and it always comes true, and if you fuck with it it just comes true worse. The best we can do is get there to pick up the pieces.”

Gerard chewed that over, and didn't ask about Brian's breakdown.

“Okay,” he said at last. “Well – okay. I guess it's cool that you could be there to stop me from – to stop me. Thanks, man.”

“It's what we do,” Brian said, waving a hand dismissively. “So – The Rules. Don't kill any civilians. That's pretty much the first and last rule of Fight Club. And by 'kill' I do mean 'turn into a vampire' as well as 'turn into a corpse'. Other than that – you won't start sparkling in the sunlight or any of that shit, and it won't make you burst into flames. So no need to stop touring, so long as you've got a reliable supply of blood. You can't get by on animal blood. You can't live on fairy blood or were or selkie or any of that shit – and, yes, they're all out there. Just about every damn thing is out there somewhere.”

“Don't piss off the fairies,” Bob interrupted.

Brian nodded. “Good advice, that. They are fucked in the head, and they can do vendettas like you would not believe. Stay away from the Sidhe if you know what's good for you. What am I saying – you have no idea what's good for you. But stay away from them anyway. They're bad news.”

“Check,” said Gerard, trying to sound efficient and serious and grown up, and not like a total flake of a rockstar who'd already let a random fan turn him into a vampire.

“Oh – and you should probably know that your dick's broken now,” Brian added, looking somewhere between embarrassed and amused.

Gerard's mouth fell open just a little bit. “What?”

“You won't be able to get it up any more. Which is really all the conversation I want to have about your dick, dude. Sorry, RIP and all that – sucks to be you.”
“My – what?”


“I'm a – no – what?” Gerard glanced incredulously down at his lap. “But – really?”

They both nodded.

“Shit.”

“Yeah,” Brian said. Gerard had a feeling that he was trying not to laugh, the fucker.

“Wow. Lindsey is going to be so pissed,” he muttered to himself, and Brian did laugh out loud at that. “Oh, fuck you, Schechter.”

“I think we've just established that you won't be doing that anytime soon, Mr Floppy.”

“I hate you.”

“No you don't.”

“Fuck.” Gerard stared down at his lap disconsolately. “You got any more bags of blood? I could really use some candy, or a cigarette, or a fucking coffee. Blood would be like coffee-and-cigarette flavoured candy right now.”


Gerard stood up and walked over to the counter where he fussed around with tearing open one of the bags with his teeth and tried sipping the stuff cold. It was – less good cold, to be honest, but it was still like the best hit he could imagine, soothing and energizing at the same time, somehow, and just a touch intoxicating, so there was that. He also managed to get the stuff all over himself, but at least there was that whole invisibility schtick he could pull – Gerard was never going to have to worry about looking a mess again. Not that he worried much about it right now, to be honest, but it was the principle of the thing.

A sudden thought struck him, and he looked over at Bob.

“So – is this why you left the band?” he asked abruptly, and then felt embarrassed at how blunt that had been. “Because I thought – I mean, we all figured you were pissed about the other album.”

“Schechter needed help with this shit. His last partner...” Bob's eyes darted over to Brian's face. “He died,” Bob said, tersely. Gerard could feel the weight of unspoken words in the room prickling against his skin, and it made him wonder what the hell Brian’s life had been like. Bob wasn't looking at Gerard, and when he spoke again his tone was very careful. “It was kind of fucked up. So – yeah, it was the right time to get back to what I was supposed to be doing.” He looked at Gerard sidelong. “But, yeah, I was pissed about the other album. I worked my fucking ass off, man, and you canned the whole thing. Fuck that noise.”


“Yeah, well. Danger Days turned out okay,” Bob said, after a long pause. “Could've been better with a more kickass drummer, but – yeah. It's not a bad album.” He rolled his eyes. “Can't say I'm sorry that I escaped another round of dress up, though. You'd have dyed my fucking hair blue, wouldn't you?”
Gerard's face split into an enormous grin, because he totally would have. “Electric blue,” he agreed. “You'd look good with blue hair, Bob.”

“Fuck you, Gerard. This is why I'd rather kill monsters for a living. No dress code.”

* * *

Forty minutes surrounded by warm-blooded humans in a stifling metal tube in the middle of the sky, his ears full of the frantic rhythm of their clashing heartbeats, his nostrils flaring at the too-strong scents of sweat and perfume and halitosis, was more than enough to convince Gerard that Brian had been right to veto the four-and-a-half-hour flight to New Jersey. Even having gorged on blood before the flight, and knowing that he didn't actually need to feed, Gerard was still sitting stiff-backed and tense, with his fingers clenching new indentations into the cheap plastic armrests, trying to talk himself down from eating somebody's face. Brain kept sending him sidelong glances, and Gerard let himself wonder what would actually happen if he just cracked and ran amok on the damn plane. Of course, Bob and Brian were their own little self-appointed Homeland Security Squad, and they'd probably take him down as soon as he so much as reached for his seat belt – he still didn't know what the hell was in the glittery shit that Bob had thrown at him in the alleyway, but it certainly worked like a charm. Still, he couldn't quite help thinking about it as he stared out beyond Bob's sleeping profile to watch the rest of the passengers. Especially when the redhead across the aisle had skin so thin he could almost taste the blood from where he was sitting.

“Dude, if you don't stop staring at the nice lady's jugular, I'm gonna stake you right here,” Brian muttered, leaning close, and Gerard gave a guilty start and dragged his eyes away. Brian was just looking at him, his expression entirely too knowing, and Gerard blushed like he'd been caught peering up a schoolgirl's skirt.

“Sorry!” he said. Shit. He'd always kind of thought of vampiric hunger as being badass and dark, or tragic, or maybe wickedly gleeful at least, but right now he felt just plain sleazy. He swallowed, and looked down at his knees, which were jiggling nervously like they belonged to a kid who needed a pee break, and he tried thinking calming thoughts. A moment later his gaze was sliding sideways again of its own volition to watch the tiny vibration of a pulse in the hollow of Bob's throat. Gerard licked his lips. Bob's head had lolled a little to one side on the stem of his neck, and the vulnerability of it was doing something really filthy to the inside of Gerard's head, because apparently he was a bad, bad man who couldn't look at his own friends without thinking of them as snack food.

“Gerard,” Brian said, kicking his shin, and Gerard flinched.

“Sorry!” he said again, hating himself. He closed his eyes and leaned back, trying to compose himself. He could do this. He was doing this, damn it, and it was really no harder than being at a party and dealing with the smell of rum sweet on someone's breath as they laughed, or seeing the condensation dappling the outside of a beer bottle and having a visceral need to close his fingers over the glass and lift it to his mouth. Shit, he was a goddamn expert by now, when it came to resisting temptation. He'd got to have some kind of head start over ordinary vampires, right? Those fuckers probably didn't know a damn thing about self restraint.

He jumped again when Brian patted his knee, and Gerard knew that he probably looked like a skittish cat or something stupid with the faces he was pulling, but he couldn't help it. He was so on edge he was about ready to start chewing on the furniture.

“You're doing great,” Brian said, awkwardly – and, yeah, okay, Brian knew a thing or two about temptation too. “It's cool, Gee. It's all cool. Nearly there, dude.”

Gerard gave a slightly shaky laugh. “Fuck, man, they have no idea,” he said, as the steward paced
down the aisle again, brisk and efficient and oblivious. “This is like fucking 'Snakes on a Plane'. Only I'm the snake.”

Brian snorted. “You want I should get Gabe Saporta to write you a song?” he asked, and Gerard punched him. Gently.

* * *

“Never again.”

When they finally made it out of the airport, Gerard had to sit down on the edge of the sidewalk and put his head on his knees. Technically breathing was optional these days, what with Gerard’s heart having stopped in an alley outside ComicCon, but you still needed to breathe in order to talk, and it was a habit. So Gerard really had no idea whether the deep breaths he was taking were actually helping, or whether they were just some kind of placebo deal. Probably the latter, but he didn't give a flying fuck. They were helping him get his shit together again, and that was all that mattered.

“Seriously, from now on? No more flying,” Gerard said, with feeling. “That was a nightmare. That was – it was like putting a great white in the kiddie pool, and asking it to play nice. I'm a predator. I'm not – I – I mean, come on.”

Brian reached down and ruffled Gerard's hair, and then surreptitiously wiped his hand on his jeans. Possibly there had been a few too many days between hair washes; Gerard was a little prone to revert to his bachelor tendencies when Lindsey was on tour.

“Don't be such a fucking drama queen, Gee,” he said. “You did great. Now you just got to handle a ride back to Chez Way in a cab with me and Bob. We'll even wind the windows down and everything.”

Gerard blinked up through a straggle of greasy scarlet hair, feeling his fangs digging perilously into his bottom lip as he pouted. “Do I have to?” he asked. It wasn't a whine, obviously, because vampires didn't whine. It was just a simple question. He really didn't much want to be stuck in a small space with any tasty humans right now. Not if he wasn't allowed to bite them, at least.

God. He couldn't believe he was thinking of biting Bob Bryar. He felt like such a creeper.

Brian smacked him upside the head, distracting him from this train of thought rather effectively.

“You did get the part where killing you is pretty much our job description, right?” Brian said, pointedly. “Most undead killing machines don't merit this kind of hand-holding crap.”

“Brian,” said Bob, his voice still rough with sleep and disapproval as Gerard hunched his shoulders and wrapped his arms around his knees. “Not helping.”

“I hate my life,” said Gerard, letting chin drop down and hugging his knees closer, conscious that he was being emo, and that this was even more embarrassingly cliched now that he was a goddamn vampire, but still feeling pretty sorry for himself.

“Lucky you're dead, then,” said Brian. He sounded almost cheerful.

“Ha fucking ha. You know what I mean.”

“Oh, for fuck's sakes. Stop whining. You're alive, Gerard, against all the odds and against my better judgment, and we're doing our damnedest to keep you that way. It's going to be fine. You're going to be fine. Here, have a fucking cigarette and stop being such a pissy emo motherfucker already.”
Gerard pounced on the cigarette with an embarrassingly high-pitched squeak of glee that Brian kindly pretended not to notice, and bounced up onto his feet like a jack-in-a-box.

“Light?” he said, imploringly, and Brian rolled his eyes as he produced a lighter and flicked it with his thumb. Gerard gave a tiny little moan of joy as the smoke curled into his mouth, and his eyelids fluttered closed of their own volition.

“Oh yeah,” he said, his voice gone soft and ragged and grateful. “Oh, fuck yeah.”

“Get a room,” said Bob, sounding amused.

“Fuck off, Bob,” Gerard retorted without opening his eyes. “I'm having a moment.”

Truthfully it wasn't like it used to be. Gerard didn't really get a proper hit off the cigarette, but the pleasure was more Pavlovian than chemical by this point - addictive personality and all that. He wondered how the guys would feel about renaming the band. My Pavlovian Romance. My Arterial Romance. Probably not going to happen, though – they had a fucking awesome name. Mikey had a gift that way, he really did. Gerard sucked another blessed lungful of smoke, familiar and normal and just slightly forbidden, and felt himself relaxing. It made him stop dancing from one leg to another, and made his hands stop trembling, and if that was all just his mind playing tricks on him, Gerard had absolutely no problem with that.

“Oh okay,” he said, a couple of minutes later. “Let's do this thing.”

* * *

The house felt all wrong without Lindsey and Bandit. “I'm not supposed to be here,” he explained as he tapped frantically at the alarm keypad. “It's just supposed to be a week of Bee staying at my Mom's while I do ComicCon and then a bunch of signings at bookstores and comic stores between here and New York for the new book. Then we're supposed to all meet up for the end of the tour - let Bandit see her mom being a rock goddess, all that. It's going to be cool. Was going to be cool.”

He hadn't figured any of this out yet. He was quietly terrified of seeing them, because he couldn't stand the possibility that they'd look like food to him now. Shit. And what if Lindsey wanted a divorce, or wanted to take Bee away from him? He couldn't blame her. Shit.

The stupid beeping cut out and Gerard stared around at the hallway of his own home as if he more than half expected a bunch of people in party hats to jump out and yell “SURPRISE!” at any moment. Or maybe Buffy Summers to jump out and stake him.

“Yeah, I know,” said Brian, giving him a gentle shove. “You told me this. Twice. I phoned the goddamn stores for you to cancel, spun them a line of bullshit about you coming down with the Black Death or some fucking thing. Which I should bill you for, incidentally – you're not paying me for this shit any more, you know?”

Gerard shot him a helpless look that was maybe a little bit frantic around the edges, and Brian sighed.

“You'll be fine, Gee,” he said again. “Take it easy tonight. We'll send you someone to help talk through this stuff, help you get things figured out.”

“Here you go,” said Bob, leaning forward and handing Gerard the bag he'd been carrying since they left San Diego. Gerard blinked down into it.

“Is this...?”

you're ready for emergencies. You still got that card?"

“I – yeah,” said Gerard, patting his pocket. “Yeah, thanks man. I – how the hell did you get this on
the plane, though? Because – I mean, Jesus, the TSA...”

“I know a guy,” said Bob, shrugging.

Brian looked down at the bag with an odd expression and shook his head. “Fuck. My momma
would spank my ass into the middle of next week if she knew I was playing nursemaid for a
vampire. Did you buy him cookies too? And a teddy bear?”

“It's Gerard, Brian,” said Bob, reproachfully.

“Oh, don't you start with me, Bryar. You're such a pushover. 'Look at the poor widdle vampire,
Brian! It's so cute and helpless! Can we keep it? Can we? Can we?""

Bob's hand darted out to cuff Brian in a move Gerard had seen perfected over years of dealing with
Frank, but Brian ducked out of the way without even looking at him.

“You guys are like the Three Stooges, or something,” Gerard said, with a wobbly grin.

“There are only two of us.”

“Yeah, well, Abbott and Costello. Whatever.”

“I'm Abbott in this scenario,” said Bob, nodding to himself.

“Oh, fuck you, Bryar. You're Lucille Ball in this scenario. Okay, right – we're gonna leave you here
for now, 'kay?” said Brian, and although his voice was still light he was watching Gerard like a
hawk. “You've got a couple of days' supply of stuff there, and you've got the card to order more, and
you're not going to do anything mind-numbingly stupid that means I have to come around here and
kill your ass. Right?”

Gerard swallowed. “Right,” he said.

“Good. Because it pisses me off when I have to kill people I know.”

“Oh, shut up about Corey Haim already,” said Bob in a long-suffering voice. “You didn't know the
guy. You just liked his movies.”

“Same thing.”


was doing great for a while there, but then he went on a killing spree and we had to take his ass
down.”

There was a startled pause, while Gerard waited for one of them to crack up, but neither of them did.
He had a suspicion that he was looking a little shell shocked, but there wasn't a whole lot he could do
about that. “Ookay,” he said at last. “Well - good to know. I'll try not to go on any killing sprees. All
packaged blood, all the time.”

“That's my boy,” said Brian, approvingly. “Okay, well, we'll be watching you. You should talk to
Mikey and the guys A.S.A.P, and get your shit together.”
Gerard grimaced. “I – I really don't know what to say to them.” He tugged his lower lip into his mouth and sucked on it nervously, not quite biting down hard enough to draw blood. “Any of them.”

Brian gave a noncommittal shrug. “You need to call a band meeting, though, Gee. And I don't think you can exactly Skype this one. Not that I give much of a damn about that side of it all – not my problem these days, you know? But I don't really want to have to hunt your lily-white ass down any time soon. So you need to get your shit together, get the guys on your side, get some routines and safety nets set up.” He gave Gerard another sidelong look. “You'll be fine, man. Those guys would walk through fucking flames for you, and this isn't even the weirdest thing you've ever told them.”

“Yeah, no, I'm pretty sure it is,” Gerard said, after a beat.

“Whatver. They'll deal.”

The crazy part was that he thought Brian was probably right.

“We'll be in touch,” Bob called, his voice gruff. And then the door was closing, and Gerard was alone in his home, clutching a carrier bag full of blood.

“It'll be okay,” he repeated, uncertainly. “Okay then.”

***

By this point it was nearly two days since Gerard had called Lindsey. Oh, sure, he'd sent her texts after Brian and Bob showed up, apologising for the radio silence, making up some shit about losing his phone and explaining that he was coming down with something and was going to have to cancel the book signing stuff, but he hadn't spoken to her. It was unusual enough that he knew she was probably freaking out, and the longer he went without making the call the guiltier he felt, but – he didn't know where to start. And he was afraid that she'd hear a difference in his voice and somehow just know. Even though that was impossible.

He knew that it was stupid to feel like he'd cheated on her. It wasn't like he'd actually had a one-night stand with some random fan as soon as his wife went off on tour, but there was a part of his brain that remembered the sensation of filthy sensual bliss that he'd felt with Martin's mouth on him, and just really felt like he'd cheated. He knew that it wasn't his fault, wasn't something he'd wanted, but he still couldn't quite get past feeling ashamed of what he'd done; what he'd been made to do. He should have been stronger, or smarter. He shouldn't have gotten himself into such a stupid fucking mess in the first place, (although apparently even Brian was unsurprised, and seemed to think it had been only a matter of time before it happened) and he hadn't been strong enough to resist it, and now he wasn't the lover Lindsey had married, and he wasn't a safe person to have around a small child. He'd really fucked up.

Gerard knew that he needed to tell her the truth and start dealing, but instead he sent her short, colourless little texts like “I love u” and “sux 2 be sick”, and stalked her glumly on Twitter, watching her bicker with Jimmy and Chantal. And then he watched Frank and Mike Pedicone and Jamia pulling each other's pigtails in one hundred forty characters or less. The Pedicones had apparently visited the Ieros for dinner, or maybe the other way around, and Jamia had baked a carrot cake, apparently. Mike was now trying to bribe her to leave Frankie and come and bake for him instead. Frankie was threatening to do unspeakable things to Mike using a whole bunch of carrots if he didn't stop hitting on the mother of his children. Mike was offering to let Jamia hold his drumstick. Gerard snorted with laughter, and then felt painfully homesick, and a little left out. He didn't really like all the social media stuff so much, himself; he knew that if he started posting pointless little tweets about every random thought he had, that Frankie would be all over him too, talking shit and posting pictures of his elbow. Probably. Mike was a great guy. A really great guy, and a terrific drummer.
He'd fitted right in, always professional as hell, but it wasn't like he was really one of them. Not like Ray and Mikey were. Obviously Gerard wasn't jealous, because there was nothing to be jealous of, but...

Gerard's fingers hovered over the keyboard, considering, and then he sighed and logged out.

* * *

It was late morning by the time that Gerard made his way out onto into the back yard with a box of kibble, squinting unhappily behind his shades. The sun made his head ache, and his body was insisting that he really should have been in bed at least six hours ago; it was decidedly weird to have that spaced-out four-in-the-morning feeling when the sky was blue overhead and the rest of the world was wide awake. He had every intention of closing the curtains, curling up in bed and sleeping until sunset, but first he felt like he really ought to feed Lindsey's collection of scrappy stray cats. Of course, she'd probably appreciate it even more if he actually called her, but Gerard just didn't know what the hell to say, and he was quietly terrified that once he told her the truth - he didn't think he could bear it if she hated him. If she took Bee away. He was still himself, mostly, but the plane ride had made it painfully clear to Gerard that he wasn't human any more, and that he wasn't safe to be around. He wanted his family to be safe, more than anything, but if that meant they had to be away from him – Gerard just wasn't ready to handle thinking about that, so he was putting off calling Lindsey as long as possible, like the problem was going to somehow go away all by itself.

“Here, kitty-kitty-kitty,” he said, yawning, and sure enough half a dozen members of the tribe came bounding out of nowhere, complaining at the top of their lungs about having been deserted for two whole days already. Gerard hunkered down and topped up the bowls, watching with a small grin as the cats remembered their dignity and slowed down from a mad dash to a nonchalant saunter.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said, standing back up again and raking a hand through his hair. He really should have a shower before he crashed out, he reflected. “Can't fool me, guys – I know the neighbours are feeding you too.”

He was pretty sure that the cats all liked Lindsey a lot more than him, even though he provided them with kibble nearly as often as she did. They were hanging back and eyeing him suspiciously; Gerard wasn't sure if that was because they could all detects some kind of new, eerie supernatural vibes, or just because they'd all learned the hard way that sometimes delicious kibble was a prelude to being stuffed into a cat carrier and driven off to the vet's for invasive surgery. Gerard absolutely agreed, in principle, that neutering stray cats was a compassionate and responsible thing to do, but at the same time he couldn't really blame the little guys if they all thought he was some kind of evil Nazi now. Nothing like surprise genital mutilation to take the trust right out of a relationship. He backed away a little further, raising his hands in a nonthreatening gesture that was supposed to convey “Hey, look, no cat carrier of doom!” Apparently this was enough for the one Lindsey had christened Tina, who darted forward and started wolfing down the kibble like he'd not been fed for a week.

“Here's a good boy,” said Gerard, feeling obscurely cheered. Tina gave him a malevolent look out of the corner of his eye, but carried on eating, and Gerard made hopeful little kissy noises, reflecting that if Lindsey had been here, Tina would probably have been weaving around in between her ankles and purring like a chainsaw. “Hey, dude, this whole vampire thing isn't some kind of karmic vengeance for your balls, is it?” he asked, frowning. “Cause – well, okay, I guess I had it coming, but still.” He sighed. He still hadn't wrapped his head around the whole no-more-sex thing. Truthfully, blood gave him a kind of high that was right up there with a great handjob, but if orgasms were the only good thing about sex, nobody would ever bother fucking actual people. Gerard was really going to miss the intimacy of having sex with somebody he loved. Damn it.
He really should phone Lindsey. Not that he could figure out how the hell to begin to explain, but still. He should.

And Mikey and the guys, of course. And there was another conversation he really wasn't looking forward to having. Gerard sighed, feeling dispirited and empty and not even a little bit like a badass monster, and he sank down on the grass and crossed his legs, watching as Tina hissed at the ginger cat with the ragged ear.

“So what do you guys think?” he asked, after a couple of minutes of watching the cats stuffing their greedy little faces. “How do I explain this? I mean, it would be a whole lot easier to do in person, but I can't handle the whole flying thing right now. It's just asking for trouble.” He sighed, leaning back on his hands and squinting up at the sky, and then nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt a small warm head bumping against his knee. Tina had apparently eaten his fill, and was now giving Gerard a slit-eyed glare that seemed likely to promise bloodshed. Gerard pulled a face and then tentatively reached out one hand for him to sniff. Tina seemed to find it acceptable, and a moment later Gerard was scritching the scruffy little black cat behind the ears with an expression of incredulous delight.

“There's a good boy,” Gerard said, beaming. He waited for the goddamn allergies to kick in, but after five minutes his eyes still weren’t watering and there was no hint of a sneeze on the horizon, and his grin grew even bigger. It was the nicest thing that had happened to him for days. Gerard had kind of zoned out with the scritching and the rumbly purr that it produced, and so when his cellphone suddenly started playing the theme tune to the 1970s Batman TV show he jumped out of his skin all over again, making Tina hiss in disapproval and take a swipe at his hand with one set of claws.

“Owch! Fuck!” Gerard mumbled, scrabbling around for the cellphone and wondering what the hell he was going to say to Mikey – because that was Mikey's ring tone, damn it. He stared stupidly at the screen for a moment, before thumbing the button and raising the handset to his ear.

“Um. Hey,” he said, trying to sound natural.

“What have you done?” Mikey asked, with no preamble.

Gerard swallowed. “I don't know what you mean?” he said weakly – and even though he couldn't see Mikey, he knew exactly what expression he'd be wearing right then.

“Don't bullshit me, Gee.” It was his shit's-gotten-serious voice, his don't-you-even-fucking-THINK-about-lying voice. To the less discerning, it maybe sounded exactly the same as his this-pizza-tastes-pretty-good voice, or his wow-she's-hot voice, and indeed all his other voices, but Gerard pretty much had a Masters in decoding the fine nuances of Mikeyway's verbal and facial cues, and he knew.

“Um,” he said again, staring at a tree and not actually seeing it at all. “I – um. I kind of got turned into a vampire?” he said, wincing as he heard himself. “For real?” he added, in a small voice.

“Oh, you did not,” said Mikey. But not disbelievingly. This was more of a oh-you-stupid-motherfucker-how-could-you-get-yourself-into-another-mess kind of voice, rather than a don't-talk-garbage kind of voice.

“Er,” Gerard said, feeling a little taken aback by this response. “I kind of did.” His eyes widened. “Shit, Mikey – how did you know to call me? You're not, like, psychic or something?” At this point, Gerard was feeling like nothing could surprise him.

“Don't be a dumbass,” Mikey said fondly. “Brian called. He said I needed to speak to you. He said it
was urgent, and he'd told you to call us, but you were probably sitting around having an existential crisis instead."

Gerard stared guiltily down at his kneecaps. “I wasn't having an existential crisis,” he said. “Not really.” Mikey didn't say anything. “Well – maybe a bit. But I was totally going to call! I just had to feed the cats first is all.” Mikey made an incredulous noise, and Gerard found himself starting to relax. There was a lot less freaking out or disbelief than he'd been expecting. “So – yeah. Vampire,” he added, after a moment, and gave an awkward giggle with only a tiny edge of hysteria to it.

“You okay, Gee?” Mikey asked. He sounded worried, and fond, and Gerard knew that tone of voice from before. It kind of killed him a little bit inside to know that he hadn't finished being the melodramatic fuck-up of the family after all.

“Yeah, I'm – actually, no,” he said, which really wasn't what he'd meant to say. “Not so much. Um.” He tugged at the edge of his sleeve, feeling oddly embarrassed. “I – it's not like I thought it would be. I mean, not that I – you've gotta know I wasn't, like, trying to get bitten, or any fucked up self-destructive – I mean, I didn't think they were real, not really real, just story real, you know? Archetype real, and meaningful on like a mythic level, or psychologically, or whatever, but not – I mean – I really didn't see it coming,” he trailed off.

“Oh – yeah, no, I knew that,” said Mikey. “I mean, I didn't know Brian and Bob took him down – that's pretty cool - but I knew he was a vampire.”

There was a pause. Then another one.


“I know people,” Mikey said, sounding a little bit apologetic. “Sometimes they tell me things. Private things. In confidence.”

“Like about them being vampires?” Gerard said. He wasn't shrieking like a thirteen year old girl,
obviously, because he was a grown man and a creature of the night on top of that, but his voice might just possibly have gone up a few octaves out of pure outrage. When there was no immediate reply, he experienced a surge of entirely pointless terror on his baby brother’s behalf, remembering the feeling of being trapped and helpless and bleeding out while his mind whited out in some stupid magical braingasm and he died. “Mikey, Jesus fucking Christ anything could have happened! You could’ve been hurt! You could’ve – Mikey! I can't believe you kept this from me! Who...?” He had a sudden flashback to an old Fall Out Boy video. “Oh my God, was it Pete? Is Pete Wentz a vampire? Did you date a fucking vampire, Mikeyway?”

“No, Pete Wentz isn't a vampire!” said Mikey. “God! Will you listen to yourself? Of course I didn't date a vampire. I'm not stupid. You'd need a major deathwish to get romantic with a vampire.”

There was another uncomfortable silence after that, while Gerard hunched in on himself and thought miserably about his doomed marriage. Tina headbutted his hip, and he reached down blindly to scratch the cat's head.

“I didn't mean...” Mikey said, sounding uncomfortable. “You know I didn't mean anything about you, Gee. You know that, right? I mean, you're you. Just – I meant other vampires. Not you and Lindsey.”

“Yeah,” said Gerard in a very small voice. He scrubbed the back of his hand against his nose and made a snuffling noise. “Okay. No, it's fine. I didn't – I mean, I don't know how to tell her, so I didn't call her yet, but – it'll be fine. I expect it'll all be fine.” It didn't seem like the moment to mention the whole death-of-the-penis thing.

“Fuck,” Mikey said under his breath. “Gee, I'm coming out there. Hang tight, okay? D'you want me to tell the guys, or...?”

“No! No, come on. They're not going to believe you,” Gerard said. “They'll think it's, like, some kind of performance art thing. Something for the next album. I should tell them in person. I will do, I just – it's going to take me a while to be able to handle flying. And Ray's in Acapulco, so – but I'll tell them.”


“Yeah,” Gerard said. It was kind of embarrassing, especially when a person was supposed to be a terrible undead monster and not at all in need of hugs, but he felt painfully relieved at the thought of Mikey coming out to join him. “Cool,” he said softly. “Thanks, man.”

“Love you, asshole,” said Mikey, and Gerard smiled.

“Love you too, Mikeyway.”

* * *

Gerard wasn’t sure what time it was when the doorbell woke him up, but the strip of sky still visible between the curtains had darkened to a blessed blue-black at last. He was lying on Lindsey’s side of the bed with his face buried into her pillow, comforted by the familiar smell and wishing like hell that she was here with him. The faint headache that had dogged him through the daylight hours was finally gone, and he felt perky and refreshed and positively chipper. And a little hungry too, but not in a scary, urgent, eat-the-pizza-boy kind of way. Yet.

It couldn't be Mikey, he reminded himself. Too soon, surely, and he'd have phoned first. Still, Bob
and Brian had said that somebody would be calling on him, some kind of welcome-to-your-unlife guy or girl who could help him adjust to the whole vampire thing, and answer his questions, and help him chill the fuck out. Really, it wasn't so bad. He could have been dead, after all. Gerard was feeling altogether a hell of a lot more positive about things now that the stars were out. He bounced out of bed, yanking on a t-shirt and a pair of Lindsey’s jeans.

He still hadn't phoned her.

He was going to do it soon, though. Just – she hadn't known him, really, when he was a mess. He'd been on top of all his shit, more or less, ever since they'd started dating: making a go of comics and the band and not letting his addictive personality latch onto anything worse than coffee and cigarettes. Sure, she knew that he'd fucked things up in the past, but there was a difference between knowing that and seeing it. He was supposed to be responsible now. Not in a middle-aged, compromise-your-ideals, buy-into-the-safe-corporate-bullshit way, but he wasn't a kid any more. He wasn't supposed to be dangerous. Not this kind of dangerous. Not might-eat-the-baby dangerous.

The most dangerous band in the world. Fuck. Who knew?

Still, now that the sun was down, Gerard's whole body was buzzing with energy and nothing seemed impossible. Things would work themselves out somehow. He was pretty sure that there was nothing he couldn't do, if he put his mind to it.

He bounded down the stairs two at a time, his bare feet feeling as springy as any of those air-pumped sneakers on the TV. In the back of his head he was still, quite unreasonably, half-hoping that it was going to be Mikey at the door. He thumbed the buzzer.

"Hello?"

"Gerard?" Gerard squinted doubtfully at the face on the monitor as he finished buttoning up the jeans.

"Bert?" he said, after a moment, not entirely sure he believed his eyes. Or wanted to. "Bert McCracken?" Bert bobbed his head and pushed his hair back out of his face to grin at the camera. Gerard experienced some decidedly mixed feelings. "Can I help you?" he said, which maybe wasn't the friendliest greeting ever, but surely this wasn't who Brian had meant? Bert was a dick. Gerard hadn't forgotten that stunt with the megaphone.

"So, word is that you've had a life-changing experience," Bert said. He gave an exaggerated wink. "A little birdie told me you were one of the evil undead now."


He sucked on his bottom lip, careful not to bite through the soft flesh, and then went into the kitchen to dig out some mugs and some bags of blood, feeling like an undead Martha Stewart. He had a sudden vision of offering Bert a mug of warm blood topped with whipped cream and cinnamon sprinkles, and burst into helpless giggles. Fuck. He'd really been hoping that his Yoda was going to be somebody a little more...well, a little less Bert McCracken.

Gerard sighed, fiddling with his favourite NASA mug, and then jumped a moment later when he herd Bert rapping on the door. He wondered whether he ought to have put some shoes on, and when he glanced down and saw the chipped blue nail polish on his toes he had a sudden, visceral memory
of Lindsey painting his nails, and missed her like a lost limb.

“Coming,” he yelled, scurrying down the hall and unlocking the door. “Hey, Bert,” he said, smiling uncertainly. And then several things happened in rapid succession.

The first thing was that Gerard registered that Bert was human. Or at least, not a vampire: he was hotly aware of Bert's pulse drumming quick and vital under his skin, and with this awareness came a renewed rush of hunger, for all the world like opening the door decaffeinated to somebody holding a tray of piping hot Starbucks. Gerard felt a flush of embarrassment at objectifying a friend like that – or a former friend, or whatever Bert qualified for now – and he tried to remember exactly what Brian had actually said. Gerard had been assuming he meant there was another vampire out there who was going to show him the ropes, but maybe he’d gotten the wrong end of the stick? Or maybe this was just the very worst coincidence in the history of the world? So he was willing his glamour back into place maybe a hair's breadth too late, and lifting one self-conscious hand up to conceal his mouth even as he met Bert's eyes and gave an awkward, half-hidden smile.

“Um. Hi?” he said.

“Gerard Motherfucking Way,” said Bert, with an air of satisfaction that made Gerard feel guilty for his own ambivalence. “Is this what you call sobering up, man? Blood of the innocents?” He laughed, and Gerard echoed it, feeling wrong-footed and sheepish.

He stepped back into the hallway, shifting from one foot to the other.

“So, are you like Brian and Bob, then? Like some kind of Van Helsing? For real?” Honestly, Gerard would have found Bert a lot more plausible as a vampire, but the guy was clearly alive.
Bert stepped forward, smiling sunnily. “Like Bryar and Schechter? Nah, I'm the real deal. Those guys are chickenshit sellout motherfuckers. Totally pussywhipped.”

Gerard gave a polite little headbob, wishing that he'd gotten Corey Haim or Neil Gaiman or somebody not Bert McCracken to be his Undead Camp Counsellor, or whatever Bert was supposed to be. He could smell the alcohol seeping from his pores, which was almost as distracting as the warm, salt-smoke scent of unshed blood.

“Okay,” he said, trying to smile. “You're totally badass. Check.”

Bert looked up at him through lowered lashes, holding his hands together behind his back coyly like a five year old girl and grinning that wicked, shit-eating grin that Gerard used to love, and Gerard found himself wishing that Bert wasn't such an asshole.

“You'd better believe it,” Bert said, smiling wider, and then he lunged forward and drove a spike of razor-sharp wood deep into Gerard's chest.

It seemed to take Gerard a very long time to reach the ground, as though somebody had hit a remote control and let him experience the fall frame-by-frame, time suddenly flowing sluggish as spilled honey. He could hear somebody yelling his name from a long way off, but everything was contracting to the agonising place where a lump of wood was jutting out of his body like some kind of obscene joke, and Gerard was waiting, shocked beyond words, to feel himself explode into a cloud of dust. It hadn't happened yet, though, and after an endless, staggered second or two he started trying to pluck at the stake, but his arms were rubbery and numb and there was a dull lassitude sweeping through his limbs. Maybe this was how he died. Fuck. He should have called Lindsey and told her he loved her, he thought, blinking fuzzily up at the ceiling. He should have called Frankie and the guys. Fuck. At least he'd spoken to Mikey. At least he'd read Bee her bedtime story.


He knew that voice. It was a nice voice.

“Gerard? Come on, you can do it. Invite me in, Gerard. I can't help you if you don't ask me in.”

He sounded upset, the shouting guy. Gerard felt kind of bad about that, but he was busy dying, so...

“Gerard Way, Bob is going to kick your ASS if you don't invite me in right this minute!”

Patrick. It was Patrick Stump. Huh.

“Hi, Patrick,” Gerard rasped. It was a bloody little wheeze of a sound, but still pretty good for someone with a honking great big chunk of wood piercing their heart, Gerard thought proudly. He couldn't feel his fingers. Or his legs.

“INVITE ME IN YOU FUCKER!” yelled Patrick.

“Fuck, okay – come in,” Gerard whispered crossly, and a second later he was doubling up as the chunk of pine was wrenched out of his chest and dropped to the floor, and the world came slamming painfully back into focus.

“Motherfucker!” Gerard exclaimed in sudden agony. “He stabbed me in the fucking chest!”

“He stabbed you in the fucking chest,” Patrick agreed. Gerard blinked up at him, and for a disorientating moment the only thing he could think was: “Vampire! Vampire! Vampire attacking my
territory!” like some kind of macho shithead. He squashed the reflex down and coughed, pressing his hands to the sticky wound gaping in the middle of his chest and trying not to puke. Oh, God. This was a billion times worse than a tiny little needle. This was to a tiny needle what Godzilla was to a gecko.

“Hi, Patrick,” he said, hoarsely, and Patrick gave him a wide-eyed look and then choked on a little half-laugh.

“Hi, Gerard,” he said. “Welcome to being a vampire.”

“Is there some kind of 30 day return policy? Satisfaction guaranteed? ’Cause I think I preferred not being a vampire,” Gerard said, his voice rough and thready. “Being a vampire kind of sucks.”

He met Patrick's eyes, and there was a little beat while Gerard replayed what he'd just said, and then they both cracked up.

“That joke gets old real quick,” Patrick said, but he was still laughing.

“Fuck,” Gerard gasped. Laughing, as it turned out, really really hurt. “Why aren't I dead? Deader? He just staked me. Fuck. Fucking Bert fucking staked me through the fucking heart.”

“You're not dead because we took the stake out again before he cut your head off or burned your body to ash,” Patrick said tightly. “Don't believe everything you see on TV. We don't turn into a tidy cloud of dust, the vampire slayers aren't usually hot teenage girls, and if there's a demon karaoke bar in LA I haven't found it yet.” He glanced around the room, his eyes skimming the surfaces. “Tell me you have some blood in here somewhere? You're a mess, dude.”

“Kitchen,” said Gerard, and then he made a small, shocked noise as Patrick Stump picked him up effortlessly, carried him into the kitchen and laid him down on the breakfast bar. “Holy shit,” Gerard wheezed.

Patrick didn't waste any time with mugs or microwaves or offers of whipped cream and cinnamon sprinkles; he just hoisted Gerard into a sitting position and shoved a bag of blood at his mouth. Gerard bit straight into it like it was some kind of weird fruit and sucked frantically, liquid spurting down over his chin. His limbs felt like they were made of wet noodles, but the pain in his chest was starting to recede a little more with each mouthful.

“Jesus Christ, I can't believe he staked me,” said Gerard, when he'd drained the first bag. He still felt like a jellyfish, but it was getting better. Patrick passed him a second bag and Gerard bit into it gratefully.

“Yeah, well, McCracken's kind of a dick,” said Patrick. “He's Old School. The chymeras cosigned an agreement to stop murdering the shit out of innocent changelings a couple of years ago, when the Sidhe came back, but Bert just likes having a license to kill. Once the changeling's dead, they can't exactly protest that it was an unprovoked execution, you know? He can just say they were attacking him.”

Gerard gave a pained little nod, like he had any idea what the hell that was all about. Patrick Stump, he couldn't help noticing, had lost a metric shitload of weight since the last time Gerard had seen him, and lost his hat collection, and acquired a new hairline. Also a suit and a bow tie. He looked like a fifteen-year-old going to his junior prom, and more sharp-edged and brittle than Gerard remembered from the Fall Out Boy days. He hadn't really been paying all that much attention to what Patrick Stump had been up to since then, to be honest; he had plenty on his plate with his own band, and with Lindsey and Bandit.
“You look – different,” he said carefully, after he'd drained the second bag. He was starting to get pained pins-and-needles sensation back in his limbs, which he figured was an improvement over the terrifying numbness.

Patrick's mouth twisted into a very small smile. “High protein diet,” he said. “No more carbs. Kind of a one eighty after being a vegetarian, but, ha, the salad days are over.” His grin twitched a little wider. “The vampirism thing does weird shit to your metabolism.”

“You're wearing a bow tie.”

“Bow ties are cool.”

“Oh my God – that's who you look like! Doctor Who! Are you LARPing?”

“What? No.” Patrick looked distracted. “I don't – that's the dressing up thing, right? You're actually not the first person to say that, though.”

“Dude – of course I'm not. You just need a sonic screwdriver and a fez. I saw less convincing Cosplays at ComicCon.”

Patrick looked distracted. “I don't watch the show, it's just – it's a thing. Bowties are my new thing.” He shrugged. “I was in the middle of recording something in my studio when Brian called.”

“Brian called?”

“I was running late, and then he rang me screaming about a vision, and I high-tailed it over here. So. Bowtie.” He looked down self-consciously, squashing his chin into his neck so he could see the bow tie. It was slightly cockeyed.

“You dress up to record in your studio?”

Patrick blushed. “It's just clothes. I'm not great at clothes. I can't go on YouTube in my PJs.”

“No – it looks good,” Gerard rasped, feeling like an asshole. He didn't mention that he'd totally recorded stuff in his PJs, and that it was probably on YouTube. “I'm not exactly, like, the fashion police. Fuck. Ow.”

Patrick looked him up and down critically. “You look kind of different yourself.”

“I have a fucking humongous hole gaping in the middle of my chest,” Gerard said, and Patrick snorted.

“Point.”

“Fucking Bert,” said Gerard again. He very much wanted more blood, like, yesterday, but he wanted to bitch about Bert for a minute first. “Did you kill him? I hope you killed him really hard.”

“God, no!” said Patrick, looking shocked. “I knocked him out. If I killed him, the chymeras would have a warrant out for me before sunrise. Totally unfair, because he was breaking the law by coming here to kill you unprovoked, but they run everything.”


“He's unconscious,” said Patrick, looking cross.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Patrick! Have you never watched a single horror movie in your entire life?”
Gerard wheezed, pushing feebly at the breakfast bar and swinging his rubbery legs over the edge just in time to see Bert coming staggering towards them like a maddened bull.

Gerard screamed. It was maybe not his most manly moment ever, but Bert looked really pissed, and he was clutching the stake – because of course Patrick had just left the damn stake lying around ready to be picked up again – and he was moving pretty damn fast.

Fortunately Patrick could move pretty damn fast too, as it turned out. He was yanking Gerard down off the breakfast bar and half-dragging him across the room before Gerard had finished screaming, and then the world splintered into a thousand glittering and razor-sharp fragments as Patrick punched straight through the window and out into the back yard, yanking Gerard down onto the moonlit grass.

“Think happy thoughts,” Patrick said, looking into Gerard's eyes with a half-embarrassed grin.

“What?” said Gerard, blankly. He could hear Bert swearing loudly behind them, scrabbling over the glass, and he kind of wanted to turn and look, but the only thing stopping him from falling down was Patrick's arm around his waist.

“So, this is one of the bits that doesn't suck,” said Patrick. “Hold on tight?”

And then they were flying.

“Oh my fucking God!” Gerard screamed in terror and delight, as the wind whipped his hair into his eyes and the world dropped away below him. He wrapped himself around Patrick like an octopus, expecting gravity to kick in at any moment, but – it didn't. After a couple more shell-shocked minutes, Gerard burst out laughing in spite of the pain in his chest. “We're flying! Holy shit, Patrick! We're fucking flying!”

“Pretty cool, hey?” said Patrick.

“Oh my God! Oh my God! Like The Lost Boys! Like the – happy thoughts! Shit – you know I played Peter Pan when I was a kid? In school? Stupidest thing I ever did in my life, but – oh my God, we're flying!”

“We're flying,” Patrick agreed, and Gerard could hear the smile in his voice.

* * *

Gerard could not wait to scoop Lindsey up into the air like Lois Lane and show her this! It would blow her mind! And – ah, crap, he'd left his cell phone back in the house, damn it. But he was definitely going to call her as soon as he got his hands on a phone, and tell her he loved her. By this point he'd graduated from clinging limpet-like on to Patrick to flying mostly under his own steam, his fingers tightly laced with Patrick's and his shoulder and arm pressed up against Patrick's shoulder and arm. He had a sense, something he'd have found difficult to put into word, that Patrick was somehow taking most of the strain of keeping him conscious and airborne. That didn't really make sense, since Patrick wasn't holding him up in any obvious way, but then defying gravity didn't exactly make a lick of sense either. At that thought, Gerard felt a bubble of near-hysterical laughter bubbling up inside him.

“Patrick?” he said, experimentally, and the wind tore the word from his lips. He peered sideways, grinding his fingers tighter around Patrick's hand for an instant, and when Patrick looked up he yelled it as loudly as he could, trying not to wince from the pain that shot through his chest at the effort. Patrick arched an eyebrow, looking concerned, and Gerard leaned as close as he could.

“Something has changed within me. Something is not the same...” he sang, hoarse and off key and
drowned out by the roar of the wind, but he could see the moment when Patrick reassembled the tattered sounds in his head to make the opening bars of a song, because the tension momentarily dissolved way, and Patrick's grip on his hand tightened convulsively as he rolled his eyes. Whatever. 'Wicked' was a kickass musical, and Gerard was totally good with being Elphaba.

Flying felt weird. Whenever he'd thought about how it would feel to fly (because, yes, of course he'd speculated about this) he'd always kind of thought there would be some strain involved in staying in the air. The reality was that whatever uncanny power was animating his flesh now that his heart had stopped didn't seem to find up-or-down any harder than left-or-right. Weird. Of course, he was having trouble staying conscious right now, but he wasn't actually finding the flying any harder than walking or swimming would have been.

"Where are we going?" Gerard shouted, after a while, aware that he was feeling increasingly worn out, like a sheet of paper that had been drawn upon, and rubbed clean, and drawn upon, and rubbed clean, and drawn upon, and rubbed clean. A palimpsest scraped tissue-thin, almost translucent, light as a plastic bag carried by the breeze. He needed rest. Better yet, he needed food. Gerard felt his grip on Patrick's hand relaxing by increments, and wondered whether he would fall to the ground if he let go, or up into the sky. Star-spangled blackness above, neon-spangled blackness below. Gerard rubbed unhappily at the hole in his chest, and closed his eyes for a moment. It probably wasn't good that he felt dizzy while floating however the hell high up in the air they currently were.

"Patrick?" he said again, softer than before, but somehow Patrick heard. He glanced sideways again, his expression somewhere between frustrated and concerned, and then he gradually slowed them both down. Gerard felt his legs and torso gradually swinging back down again, and he marvelled at the fact that he was somehow hanging in the middle of the sky, walking on air.

"How are you doing?" Patrick asked, searching his face for clues. Gerard tried to smile back reassuringly, but from Patrick's expression it maybe wasn't a very convincing performance.

"Not great," he said, shrugging. "Are we nearly there? Wherever there is?"

"Maybe ten minutes?" Patrick said. "I figured you'd need to eat, so I thought that a hospital..."

"Fuck that! I'm not eating sick people! Or, or pregnant ladies, or whatever," Gerard said, feeling outraged on behalf of the hypothetical patients. Although a little voice in the back of his head whispered that a hospital was a wonderful idea. He would be able to smell the sickness on the ones he needed to avoid, and there would still be big strong orderlies, and vain starlets wanting nose jobs, and plump, juicy little babies, and...

"Oh, fuck," Gerard said, in a smaller voice, shocked at himself. "I really need to eat. Now. While I'm still me."

Patrick's expression was uncomfortably knowing. "Right," he said. "Think you can hold on for ten more minutes? Because you know what else they have in hospitals? Blood. No need to chow down on the sick people or the pregnant ladies when there's all that blood sitting around in handy snack-pack form."

Gerard's mouth watered at that, but he felt a little stab of guilt. "It's for emergencies, though," he said. "That's kind of bad, don't you think? Taking blood that people have donated to help save lives?"

Gerard had summoned up the courage to try and give blood once, but watching the people in front of him willingly stretch their arms out for the needle had made his legs turn to jelly, and he'd had to have a sit down with juice and cookies and his head between his knees in another room before running away, shamefaced. He thought it was great that there were people who just went and donated blood out of the kindness of their hearts. He was pretty sure that they weren't expecting their
“Gerard, stopping a hungry fledgling vampire from rampaging through the pediatrics ward definitely counts as helping to save lives. Don't even think about angsting over it.”

“Right,” Gerard said, nodding to himself. “No, that's true, I guess. Good point.” He perked up. “Too late for second guessing,” he sang, his voice sandpaper-rough and not quite in key. “Too late to go back to sleep. It's time to trust my instincts, close my eyes and leap...”

Patrick's mouth curved into an unwilling smile. “You are certifiably insane, you know that, right?” But he still joined in with the song. Gerard kind of wished that Patrick's voice was maybe a little bit less awesome, because it made all the flaws in Gerard's singing seem a million times more obvious. He wasn't a bad singer, any more than he was a bad artist – he'd worked at both, because he loved to sing and he loved to draw. But he knew when he was outclassed.

Still, he thought, as they resumed their journey, right now he could blame it on the gaping hole in the centre of his chest.

* * *

By the time they reached the hospital, Gerard was hanging on to his sense of self by the thinnest of threads, and Patrick was the only thing keeping him conscious.

“Come on,” Patrick said bracingly, yanking a window open on the ninth floor, and Gerard found himself wishing that he was with Frankie instead. Frankie would make a kick-ass vampire, Gerard was sure. He'd bite the shit out of people. Frankie wouldn't have left Bert lying around stunned, or left a stake in convenient reach, because Frankie knew his horror movies. He'd have torn the fucker limb from limb and damn the consequences, then bullied Bob into helping hide the pieces. Maybe found a woodchipper, or a disreputable burrito-maker or something. And Frankie wouldn't be wearing a bowtie. Although Gerard was perfectly willing to concede that Patrick was rocking the Eleventh Doctor sartorial stylings, and he respected the fact that Patrick was carving out his own little fashion niche, and fuck the hipsters. Just – Gerard really missed Frankie. Gerard always felt safe with Frankie at his back - like he couldn't really be a loser or a fuck-up, because Frankie knew him warts and all, and wasn't forced to stick with him because of a blood relationship, and still beamed at him like he'd hung the moon and all the stars, and like he shat rainbows and glitter and gamboling zombie kittens. It made Gerard believe in himself on days when that belief was kind of hard to come by.

Still, no point crying over spilled milk. Frankie was safe and sound in New Jersey, looking after his babies and running Skeleton Crew and bitching at Mike Pedicone over the internet, and Gerard was stuck in Bizarro World, breaking into hospitals with a bowtie-wearing soul-funk one-man-band.

Gerard had been loosely aware of the low thrum of human heartbeats down below them in the city, a faint buzz rasping at the edge of his consciousness like white noise, but as soon as they pushed in through the open window and Gerard's feet hit the tiled floor, reality came crashing back down with a vengeance, and he staggered.

“Oh, fuck,” he said, with feeling. He closed his eyes and doubled over, clutching at his knees. He wondered for a moment whether he was actually going to puke, and tried not to think just how gross regurgitated blood was likely to be.

When he looked up, Patrick was nonchalantly checking his phone.

“What the – priorities? Hello?” Gerard gasped, indignat and obscurely humiliated because, come on, Patrick Vaughn Stump was not supposed to be calmer about all this vampire lifestyle stuff than
Gerard Arthur Way. Gerard knew all about being a vampire and he had the photoshoots to prove it. He stood up straighter and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, trying to look a little more dignified. He could do this. Frankie would be mortified if he let Patrick Stump out-vampire him. This was a matter of honour. New Jersey honour.

“Six missed calls,” Patrick muttered. “And a text from Bob. Seems McCracken's already put out an APB on us with the Circle. Damn it. I was afraid of that. They'll have people on their way here, if they're not waiting for us – it's too damned obvious that we'd come to the nearest hospital looking for blood with you in this state. Unless – well. Unless they assume we're just out there attacking innocent people, I guess. That might work in our favour.”

Gerard tried hard to care about any of this, but he was painfully distracted by the knowledge that there were three perfectly healthy women brimming with warm blood walking down the corridor just on the other side of the wall. On the subject of attacking innocent people.

“Blood?” he managed to say, and Patrick gave a guilty, distracted nod.

“Right, right,” he said. “Do you think you can stay put while I go round up some bags of O Neg, or whatever they have lying around? Or are you gonna go feral, and prove McCracken's case for him? 'Cause if you bite anyone in the state you're in right now, you're not going to be able to pull back.”

Gerard thought about that very hard and made a small, unhappy noise. “Be quick?” he said, leaning against the wall and feeling the paint pressing cold against his colder skin. Patrick gave him a long, assessing look, and then vanished into the corridor. The door swung closed. After a moment Gerard slid down onto his ass and wrapped his arms tightly around his knees again.

He really wished he had his cell phone. He wanted to hear a familiar voice, something he could cling onto like an anchor, something to remind him that he was human. He missed Lindsey like he missed his heartbeat. He sighed, and rested his head on his knees, and started slowly reciting in his head all the reasons he wasn't going to burst out into the corridor and start ripping throats out. He was a little embarrassed to realise that “Because it's bad” didn't actually cross his mind until he'd already listed half a dozen more pressing and selfish reasons, involving Lindsey and Bandit and the wrath of Brian.

He was doing great. Really. For an undead, bloodthirsty creature of the night with a freaking hole in the centre of his chest, he was doing really fucking awesome. Right up until some guy came bustling into the store room with a harried expression on his face, a clipboard in his hand, and a heartbeat as strong and richly musical as a choir of heavenly angels singing the greatest hits of David Bowie.

Gerard had him pinned to the wall before either of them knew what was happening, and Gerard felt his appetite uncurl from the tense little ball of gnawing pain into something lithe and warm and sharp-toothed. The burst of adrenaline and the blissful clatter of terrified pulse brought a glazed smile to Gerard's face as he leaned in close, pressing his cold nose into the man's warm throat and inhaling the heady scent of fear. Oh yeah – this was more like it. He was holding the guy like a lover, feeling heat bleeding from the planes of his body as Gerard plastered himself as close as an extra layer of clothing, and he could feel the perfect balance of tension and yielding in the muscles and sinews beneath him. Gerard had reflexively used powers he scarcely even knew he had to cloud and master the man's mind, just as he had with the girl in the alley. Now he was aware of nothing but the rabbit-fast heartbeat and the fierce delight of knowing it was his for the taking.

He'd gotten as far as sealing his mouth over the thin skin of the man's throat, just over the carotid artery, and his teeth were brushing against it on the very brink of piercing, when someone grabbed him from behind and wrenched him away from the panting nurse.

Gerard was up and snarling within seconds, running almost entirely on sheer rage wounded dignity.
He wasn't really feeling himself at this point; he knew his own name, and he did know that he was supposed to avoid feeding on fresh meat, but it seemed like a really stupid rule right about now.

Fortunately for everyone concerned, Patrick Stump was a practical man, and when he threw a bag of blood directly at Gerard's head Gerard's reflexes kicked in, which meant that no sooner had he grabbed it than he'd sunk his teeth into the plastic skin, and promptly lost the ability to concentrate on anything at all other than satisfying his hunger. At some point in the next few moments Patrick presumably hustled the nurse out of the room, because when Gerard looked up from the drained bag, the guy was nowhere to be seen. He felt a quick flicker of rage, but he had backed away from the edge enough to realise that Patrick was doing the right thing, so he quashed it down as best he could.

“Shit,” Gerard said after a moment, blinking unhappily across the room at Patrick. “That was - oh, shit. Sorry.”

“No harm done,” said Patrick evenly, tossing him another bag.

“Yeah, but...”

“Look, you're new,” said Patrick, before Gerard could start beating himself up. “You're bound to be a mass of hunger and impulse control issues right now, even without McCracken trying to turn you into a human doughnut. With that chest wound, your body's frantically trying to heal itself. Of course you want to eat everyone in the building. Still, no dead civilians yet, right?

“No dead civilians,” Gerard agreed, shakily, biting into the corner of his second bag.

“So you're already doing better than I was in my first week,” Patrick said, quietly. He glanced up and met Gerard's eyes for an instant, then looked away. “Brian doesn't know that,” he said, after a beat.

“Shit, man,” said Gerard, spilling blood down his shirt. “The hell?”

“Let's just say that Bob Bryar is a damn good friend in times of need, okay? And that there's a reason why I try to keep my head down and avoid the Circle.” There was another uncomfortable pause. “It wasn't anyone – nice,” Patrick said, still not looking at him. “Not that – I mean, I don't really expect any brownie points for that, you know? But I didn't, like, eat a nun or a girl scout or whatever. But. Still. He must've had a mom, you know? And, God, maybe a kid or a dog or – I mean, it doesn't matter that he wasn't Gandhi. He was still a person. So. I mean, I do get it.”

“Okay,” said Gerard, inadequately. And, wow, how twisted was it that he was as jealous as he was horrified right now? The nurse's artery had been right there, and while Gerard's brain was genuinely one hundred percent glad he'd not bitten down, his appetite – which was apparently conscience-free – regretted the hell out of the missed opportunity.

“So – we can't go back to my place,” said Patrick, raking a hand through his hair so that it stuck straight up in the air. “They'll have eyes on it by now.”

“Can't we just call Brian?” Gerard asked, plaintively.

Patrick winced. “The Butcher of Detroit? Yeah, no – Brian's a great guy to have on your side, don't get me wrong, but if he decides to back McCracken, we're screwed.” He tossed Gerard another bag of blood and Gerard snatched it out of the air and bit through the plastic neatly. He still ached, and he was still exhausted, but that hammered-into-gold-leaf sense of fragility was gone, and he felt like himself again, not like some ravenous thing. He really hoped that his body knew how to mend itself. He didn't want to spend eternity with a hole in his chest, however richly metaphorical that might be.

“Didn't Brian have some kind of vision, though? Didn't he send you to help me in the first place?”
“Yeah – but all I know is that he saw you get staked. I don't know if he saw anything else. Could be McCracken can convince him you had it coming, and that we're the bad guys, in which case...I mean, those two were really tight, back in the day.”

Gerard didn't want to believe that, because this was Brian, but – yeah. Brian loved Bert McCracken to death. And Bert wasn't a blood-sucking fiend, he was just an asshole; Gerard couldn't entirely blame Brian if he believed that Gerard had given into temptation and tried to eat somebody. Because, honestly, he totally would have, just five minutes ago.

“Shit,” he said. “So – any other Lost Boys out there we can crash with?”

Patrick's face went suddenly still. “No,” he said, after a long moment. “Like I said, I keep my head down. I know who some of the LA vampires are – I mean, I can tell you that Cher hasn't actually had any work done, contrary to popular belief - but I'm not pally with any of them. No reason to think they wouldn't turn us in. Nobody wants to piss off the Circle.”


Patrick seemed to be in the grip of some kind of internal battle, but after a moment he sagged.

“Yeah,” he said, looking a lot like a kid who'd just watched his puppy get hit by a bus. “We can probably stay with the wolves for a bit. They won't think to look there.”

Gerard cocked his head. “Because we're locked in an age-old battle with our lycanthropic brethren?” he ventured, curiously.

“Because they're a bunch of assholes,” said Patrick, fiercely. “My feelings on this point are pretty well known. It's the last place I'd look for me.”

“Ooookay,” said Gerard. He waited a moment, sucking on another bag of blood and trying not to wish it were somebody's throat. When it became obvious that Patrick didn't feel like expanding on this, Gerard shrugged, and stepped back over towards the window. “I do believe in fairies,” he said, grinning.


“No – I'm not being a dick. I mean, you really have. Brendon's pretty high up in the Summer Court, and Ryan's unseelie – you've kissed at least one of them, right? I mean, Brendon kisses everyone if they don't get out of the way fast enough. He's like Tigger on E, that kid.”

“Urie and Ross?” Gerard exclaimed, giggling and wide-eyed.

Patrick nodded. “They've been pissing each other off since the dawn of time, the way I hear it. But they always make up again eventually. Right now they're mid-vendetta, because Brendon decided to steal Ryan's pet mortal.”

Gerard gave a gurgle of laughter at that. Shit, this really was pretty cool. Sure, he had a hole in his chest, and there were a load of vampire slayers out to chop his head off, and he was still craving the blood of the living the way he used to crave coffee, and, oh yeah, his fucking dick was apparently surplus to requirements these days – but he could fly, and he was badass, and apparently Brendon fucking Urie was the Queen of the Fairies. Gerard was finding his unlife kind of awesome, in its own way. He really wished Lindsey was here to share his glee.

And Frank, and Mikey, and Ray. Although Mikey probably knew all this shit already, the secretive little asshole.
“So where to, boss man?” he asked Patrick, sunnily, perching on the window ledge and swinging his legs out over the street. “Second star to the right and straight on till morning?”

Patrick's smile was decidedly sour. “Actually, you got it in one,” he said, with a sigh.

* * *

It was almost impossible to believe that Gerard hadn’t spent his whole life flying, because it felt so natural already to swoop through the night sky, an impossible shadow riding the currents of the air high above all the human heartbeats. It filled him up with a sense of pure delight that was almost like the high of performance, all adrenaline and astonished glee. He hadn't forgotten how much trouble he was in, but even with the constant sense of oh-fuck-oh-fuck-oh-fuck in the back of his head, he was already starting to pull ideas and sensations together into something that felt like it could be the framework of the next album. He could almost taste it. Not vampires, though – at least not overtly. He'd kind of been there, done that and gotten blood all over the t-shirt already, and he hated the idea of seeming creatively barren, like he was just recycling his old ideas; he'd always love vampires and zombies and werewolves and all the iconic monsters, but as a pop cultural artifact it was impossible to really do anything fresh with them just now, Gerard thought sadly. People got distracted by what they thought vampirism signified, and started talking about emo, and cutting, and just missed the whole damn point. The kids were all over 'Twilight', and there was that 'True Blood' show, too, with all the naked people (and those goddamn vampires obviously didn't find that getting turned did anything to wreck their sex drives, the lucky bastards), and that other one with the guy from 'Lost'. It was a shame, and kind of painfully ironic, but Gerard really couldn't see any way of saying something fresh and exciting about the world using vampires, even though all the fresh and exciting things he wanted to say about the world right now were a direct consequence of being a vampire. He was going to have to hide it behind metaphors, if he wanted to write about what he was experiencing now.

But this brave new world he'd stumbled upon was setting off technicolor fireworks in his brain, and he kept coming back to 'The Lost Boys', and that led him to 'Peter Pan', and that was something he could work with. He had very mixed feelings about 'Peter Pan'; his grandmother had been so proud of him for getting the lead in that play, and he couldn't completely regret making her happy like that, but, damn, it had made his life miserable for years. But on the other hand, that whole feral 'Lord of the Flies' thing of High School could feed in to it all too, and he definitely could sympathise with the whole opting-out-of-socially-constrained-roles thing, and the refusal to grow up...

Gerard followed Patrick, unable to quash his smile as the wind raked chilly fingers through his hair and stroked his skin like he was a treasured pet. He was flying, damn it! On a whim, Gerard tried flinging himself forward and changing direction, and sure enough he was doing loop-the-loops, his giggles lost in the darkness.

“Don’t waste time,” Patrick called back, sounding irritated. Gerard pulled himself together with some difficulty, reminding himself that they were on the run, and that Patrick was in a shitload of trouble because of Gerard. He still couldn't stop grinning, though. This was probably why dolphins smiled all the time.

God, he wanted to start drawing. There were images already pulling together in his head, something like Sendak and Rackham and Zulli, or maybe more of a Dave McKean vibe, something old-school, glittering and sharp-edged. Poisoned apples and carnivorous flowers and wolfskin cloaks in a shadowed forest designed by Giger. Sounds and images to conjure up how dark and twisted and thrilling those old stories were, and carry some of the horror of bleeding out under a stranger's mouth in an alleyway; something tempting as stolen candy, wild and uncontrolled, something that could convey some of the sheer intoxication of flying over the city streets. Gerard's fingers were itching for
his pencils, his mind's eye full of the Captain Hook and the Green Man and girls turning into trees. Locked windows, childhood caught in amber, gleeful violence, sticky-sweet poisoned cakes, sharp-toothed mermaids with siren voices ready to lure the unwary into the deep, and the tick-tick-tock of the crocodile clock that swam slow and lethal at the stern. Those are pearls that were his eyes - yes, and there had to be terror and transformation - something like 'The Wild Hunt' or 'Spirited Away' - Gerard didn't have a narrative in mind yet, but he had images already etched inside his eyelids, tangles of green and sharp thorns hooking into skin and into clothing, screaming faces contorted in woodgrain and curls of cloud, antlers sprouting from unlined brows. Goblin kings, even – God, it practically had David Bowie's stamp of approval already! He wanted to make songs full of fairytale violence and wonder, something to help explain it all to his daughter, something to combat Disney and the goddamn saccharine Barbie versions of traditional fairy stories. He maybe needed to rewatch 'The Company of Wolves', and 'Pan's Labyrinth', because some of those images...hmm...

“We're here,” said Patrick, cutting through his reverie, and Gerard looked down to discover a good-sized house in an expensive neighbourhood. Beverly Hills 90210. The pool and balconies and manicured lawns looked pretty much the same as countless others they'd flown over in the dark.

“Ha! House of Wolves!” he said, suddenly, unable to stifle a giggle. Patrick didn't react, and Gerard gave an embarrassed cough. He was probably being kind of a dork about this whole supernatural thing. “Okay,” he said more soberly, giving Patrick a tentative smile that wasn't returned. He wasn't at all certain how to interpret the tight, flat line of Patrick's mouth. Patrick just hovered in place for a long moment, looking down at the house, and Gerard felt a little worm of discomfort. “We're not going to get attacked going in there, right? I mean, this isn't some 'Underworld' thing?”

Patrick's expression was difficult to read in the moonlight. “No,” he said at last. “That's – no. They won't hurt us, and they won't hand us over. Pretty sure about that. It's not – never mind.” He sounded irritated.

Gerard wasn't at all sure that he knew what to make of Patrick Stump. He was sure that he needed to get his hands on some paper and pencils, though, and if these guys were supposed to be white hats then that was good enough for him. He launched himself into a swan dive, laughing helplessly as the ground came hurtling closer and closer, then swooping so low he got soaked by the sprinklers on the lawn before curling back up and dropping down lightly on the balcony outside one well-lit room on the third floor.

The room beyond the broad french windows was a strange mixture of plush baroque and Homes-and-Gardens décor. It wasn't entirely Gerard's taste, but he liked the roaring log fire and there were some cool chairs that looked like something out of a gothic castle, not to mention enough red velvet to make a fifteen year old goth girl expire with glee. A skinny woman with short blonde hair was playing with a toddler on the rug in front of the fire, and the sight hit Gerard like a sudden punch to the gut. God. He really missed his family.

Patrick dropped down silently onto the balcony beside him and stared through the window for a long moment before rapping on the door frame. Gerard watched her jump, and look over her shoulder. Her face was vaguely familiar, but it took him a moment to place it. Then his jaw dropped, and he turned to look at Patrick.


Patrick sighed. “Yeah,” he said. He sounded tired. “My life is kind of a soap opera. With more biting.”

Gerard was still staring at him goggle-eyed when Ashlee reached the door. She looked out at them thoughtfully for a moment, then unfastened the latch.
“Hey,” she said, carefully not stepping over the threshold. Her lipstick was worn down to a thin rim around the edge of her mouth, she was wearing striped tights, a short skirt and a hoodie, and the overall effect was pretty much that of a teenager just escaped from Hot Topic. She spared Gerard a glance, nodded to herself, and then returned her attention to Patrick. He stood up a little straighter under the attention, and Gerard thought he looked kind of pissed. “So. This is new.”

“Can we come in?” asked Patrick, tersely.

“Are you going to call us rude names?” Ashlee asked, watching him.

“No,” Patrick said, after a pause. “I never – no. We need somewhere to lay low, and I thought...”

Ashlee laughed, looking genuinely entertained at that. “You thought nobody in their right mind would expect you to come here. Yeah. Point.” She looked like she wanted to say something more, but changed her mind. “He’ll be delighted,” she said instead, softly. “Of course you can come in.” She glanced over at Gerard and gave a rueful grin. “Hi. You too, Gerard. Welcome to the spooky side of the Force.”

“Thanks,” said Gerard, beaming. She seemed like a nice lady, even though her music was kind of – not Gerard’s taste. He really hoped she hadn’t heard any of Frank’s more asshole-like remarks about her songs. “Um – do you have any pencils at all? And paper?” Patrick and Ashlee both stared. Gerard squirmed. “Please?” he added, hopefully. “I’ve got all these – I just need to get this out of my head, you know?”

“Sure,” Ashlee said, half laughing as she padded back into the room in her stockinged feet. “Crayons okay?”

“Crayons are fine,” Gerard said politely, following her and trying not to feel disappointed. “Although pencils or sketch pens would be awesome?”

Ashlee laughed properly then. “Yeah, okay, we can dig those up. Hey, baby, come say hi to your Uncle Patrick,” she added, scooping up a ridiculously photogenic toddler with a mop of white blond curls and turning to look at them with an oddly challenging expression.

Patrick shifted awkwardly from foot to foot, keeping the sofa between him and Pete’s wife and child. He gave a little half wave, and then looked up at Ashlee. “Um,” he said. “I’m not great with kids, actually.”

Ashlee grinned at him toothily. “That’s okay, my boy’s being raised by wolves. He can take whatever you throw at him.”

“Bronx Mowgli,” Gerard said, more to himself than anything, and gave a delighted giggle. “Hi, Bronx!” he added, beaming. “I’m Gerard. You got any paper I can draw on?”

“Sheesh, you’ve got a one-track mind, don’t you?” Ashlee said, grinning at him as she shifted her son onto her hip. “I hear you’ve been causing all kinds of trouble, Gerard Way? Attacking respected members of the Circle and going on bloodthirsty rampages through Los Angeles County?”

“What!” Gerard’s jaw dropped just a little at that. “I never...what?”

“Yeah, Pete was pretty sure it was a crock, but you never know. So did you really try to kill Bert McCracken?”

“No!” said Gerard, indignantly. “He stuck a fucking stake through my heart, totally unprovoked!” he said, yanking his t-shirt up to prove his point.
“Language,” said Ashlee, absently, studying the half-healed wound in his chest with interest. Gerard glanced down at Bronx and blushed. He seemed oblivious, and was studying Gerard's chest with wide eyes, but Lindsey would kick his ass for him for swearing in front of toddlers. He totally knew better. “Wow, yeah – that's a mess,” Ashlee said, raising one hand and almost poking a finger into his wound, Doubting Thomas style. “Guess you really got his goat?”

“Yeah. Turns out he's still pissed about me getting sober,” Gerard said, bitterly. “Or he just likes killing people. I don't know. Whatever. He's an ass...astonishingly unpleasant man,” he finished, catching himself in time and then feeling rather proud of his self-censoring skills.

“I heard that about him,” Ashlee agreed. “Honey!” she shouted, turning towards the open door. “Pete, honey? Your Alphadog's here, and he brought a friend. He says he's going to play nice.”

Gerard was aware of Patrick going statue-still beside him. Wow. Evidently the Fall Out Boy breakup had been kind of messy, then, he reflected, feeling a little embarrassed. There was a sudden thunder of footsteps that sounded very much like somebody running up a flight of stairs, and a moment later Pete Wentz bounded into the room with an expression of incredulous delight on his face.

“Patrick! Trick!” he exclaimed, gleefully, and then he was launching himself across the room and picking Patrick right up off the floor in a hug, swinging him around and then promptly tripping over his own feet and landing them both in a tangle of limbs on the floor. Gerard watched them curiously. Patrick was wearing a slightly pained expression, but Gerard knew for a fact that he could have moved out of the way if he'd wanted to all that badly. Pete looked like all his Christmases had come at once. Gerard glanced over at Ashlee, and wasn't at all sure what to make of the look on her face. Fond, and indulgent, but something else too.

Soap opera was about right.

“Hi,” he said, lifting one hand in a dorky half-wave when Pete's gaze finally fell on him. “So – you're a werewolf.”

“And you're a vampire!” Pete said, beaming. “I heard! Awesome, dude!”

Rather belatedly, Gerard managed to put two and two together and make four. “Oh my God! You're the reason Mikey knew all about this stuff!” he exclaimed. “I knew it! Well – I mean, I didn't know you were a werewolf, but I knew you were up to your ass in this stuff. Except then Mikey insisted you weren't a vampire, and he threw me off the scent, the sneaky little asshole.”

“You told Mikeyway?” Patrick said, stiffly, and then Pete did let go without being asked.

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“Guilty as charged,” agreed Pete, still beaming, but he was darting little looks down at Patrick now, as if uncertain how Patrick would take this particular line of questioning. Patrick was trying to disentangle himself from Pete's hug, but Pete was hanging on like a limpet, and it looked like it was going to take an actual tussle to get Patrick free. Apparently Patrick wasn't prepared to lower himself to something quite so undignified.

“You told Mikeyway?” Patrick said, stiffly, and then Pete did let go without being asked.

“Sorry!” Gerard winced. “But, but – you totally told him! About vampires and shi...things. Didn't you?”

“Language,” murmured Ashlee, but she was grinning.

“Sorry!” Gerard winced. “But, but – you totally told him! About vampires and shi...things. Didn't you?”

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“I'm a good listener,” said Patrick, standing up and brushing his suit down without looking at Pete. “You never told me.”
Pete's face fell. “I – no, but – but you know now,” he said at last, staring at Patrick with huge, sad puppy eyes that Patrick ignored.

“Sure. After you dumped the band live on Twitter, and after some asshole bit me in the neck and killed me - then I found out you were a werewolf.” Patrick's voice was icy. Pete visibly flinched. “But, hey, we're all monsters now, right? So what difference does it make?”

“You said you were going to play nice,” said Ashlee, glaring at Patrick. “You said. This is our home, Patrick Stump. We don't have to let you in here.”

“Ash!” said Pete, sounding shocked. Gerard almost thought he was going to burst into tears, from the way he was looking at Patrick with his heart in his eyes. “Don't even joke about that. They're on the run. Of course they can stay.”

“If he's going to be an asshole to you about stuff that was never your fault, I'll call Bert McCracken myself,” said Ashlee, fiercely. Gerard stared at her with renewed respect, and quelled the impulse to murmur anything about the expletive.

“He's sorry. We're both sorry. Please don't call Bert,” said Gerard, hurriedly. “Patrick, you didn't mean to be an ass – um – astonishingly bad guest, did you?”

Patrick crossed his arms in front of his chest and just looked at Pete, his mouth a tight little line and his shoulders hunched.

“Trick...” Pete said, miserably. “I'm sorry. I never – you know I'm sorry. Don't be like this. Ash isn't going to call Bert. She's just looking out for me.” He got up to his feet clumsily, his whole body vibrating with energy and an unhappy twist to his mouth. Gerard and Ashlee might as well have been wallpaper for all the attention he seemed to be paying them right now. Gerard was surprised that Ashlee wasn't more pissed about this than she seemed to be.

“It's fine,” Patrick said at last, in a small, tight voice. “I didn't mean to offend you, Mrs Wentz. Thank you for your hospitality.”

“Trick,” said Pete, bouncing on his toes and clenching and unclenching his fists spasmodically. “Don't be like this. Please don't be like this? C'mon, honeycomb head – you're here! You never come here! If I'd known all it took was McCracken trying to kill your ass I'd have put a hit out on you months ago,” he added, trying for a jokey tone and completely failing to get Patrick to crack a smile. His face fell.

“So, about that paper,” said Gerard, feeling profoundly uncomfortable. Ashlee looked away from her husband, her expression contemplative.

“Yeah,” she said, after a moment. “Yeah, okay, we can do that. They'll probably be a while.”

* * *

There was something about Ashlee and her son, and Pete, for that matter, that told Gerard they weren't human. It was nothing obvious, not like the whole pointy-toothed vampire thing, but he would still have known straight away that they were – different. He wasn't quite sure how to place it, though, because it wasn't something he registered consciously. Maybe something about their scent? Or a slightly faster heartbeat? Or some kind of – what, aura? Something, anyway. Gerard remembered what he'd been told about not drinking from werewolves, and felt a tiny little flicker of regret, because they did smell kind of delicious. Distractingly so. Not that he was thinking about eating babies, obviously, and he wouldn't dream of biting Ashlee or Pete. Biting was way intimate,
and just thinking about sinking his teeth into the slender stem of Ashlee's neck made him go hot all over and feel like a total creeper, as if he'd visualised her naked. God.

“So – werewolves,” he said, stumbling over the word a little. “That's cool. Um. You been a werewolf long, then?”

“My whole life,” Ashlee said, her lips curling into a small smile. “It generally kicks in when you hit puberty. You can imagine how much fun that can be.”

Gerard's eyes widened. “Okay, wow. Yeah. That sounds – intense.” He ran a hand through his hair. “So it's not passed on by biting?”

“Oh, it's totally passed on by biting. Or any exchange of bodily fluids, really. But it's also hereditary – and the Circle has a zero tolerance policy towards turning civilians, so...”

“Oh,” said Gerard, nodding and trying to sound knowledgable. His attention was caught by a graffiti-style stencil painting on one of the plain white walls that showed Little Red Riding Hood holding hands with a wolf. It looked a little like a Banksy, Gerard thought.

“Pete,” said Ashlee, noticing the direction of his gaze. Her voice was warm. “He's a Renaissance Man, my boy.”

“Huh. Cool. So, this Circle – they're kind of the M.I.B, then?” He didn't like thinking of Bob and Brian that way. Killing monsters was cool – kind of scary when you were one of the monsters, but still cool – but oppressing them was something else. They were like – the man.

Ashlee shrugged. “Well, they try to protect humans. That's a good thing, I guess,” she said, carefully. She led Gerard around a corner and pushed open a door. “But they don't think we're humans.”

Gerard followed her into what seemed to be an office of sorts, cluttered with laptop and paper and pens and scattered toys. “Um. They have a point?” he offered.

Ashlee pulled a face as she hunkered down and pulled open a drawer,”Well, yeah. But we're not, like, cartoon monsters. We're people.” She shot Gerard a victorious grin and waved a set of coloured pens at him.

“Oh, hey! Sweet! Thanks!” Gerard exclaimed, delighted. He was feeling really bad about having had disparaging thoughts about Ashlee Simpson in the past, because she did seem like a very sweet person. Not everybody was passionate about music, after all. She handed him a sheaf of printer paper, and he felt himself beaming. “That's just great, thanks. I really appreciate it.”

“See – people,” Ashlee said, with a twinkle in her eye.

Gerard looked up, feeling suddenly guilty. “Well, yeah – but, I got to admit, if I get hungry and there's no bags of blood around...it's not a pretty sight. I'm not exactly people then. So – I do kind of get where they're coming from, you know? Maybe they need to protect regular people from us.”

Ashlee shrugged. “But you didn't kill anyone, did you?” Her eyes widened. “Did you?”

“No!” Gerard said, scandalised and guilty all at once. “No! But – that's mostly thanks to Bob and Brian. And Patrick. Um.” His eyes darted over to the door, wondering suddenly what was going on back in the other room. He met Ashlee's gaze a beat later, and gave her an uncertain little grin.

“Um.”

“Patrick,” said Ashlee, nodding. Her smile was decidedly rueful. “I can't believe he came here of his
own free will. We owe you for that. I think.”

“Uh,” said Gerard. “You're welcome? Um. So – he's pretty pissed at Pete, then?”

Ashlee watched her son pushing a toy car over the tabletop, making little vrooming noises. “Pete isn't always the most – tactful of people,” she said, carefully. “And you know he's a bit – obsessed. With Patrick.”

“Um?” said Gerard, noncommittally, clutching his package of coloured pens to his chest. “I guess? I mean, the Fall Out Boy songs, I couldn't help noticing...”

“Always about Patrick,” Ashlee agreed, grinning. “Or at least nine times out of ten. Still are. You've heard The Black Cards?”

“Some,” Gerard said, vaguely. He quite liked them, in point of fact.

“Subtlety? Also not one of Pete's best things. He kind of wears his heart on his sleeve,” she said, shrugging. “Not that it's gotten him anywhere. Patrick just retaliates by writing his own songs about selfish love and about not needing him any more. He's - pretty pissed.”

“Because Pete didn't tell Patrick he was a werewolf.”

“Because Pete spent years laying siege to him, and when Patrick finally caved and slept with him, Pete promptly freaked out and pretended it didn't happen, and then dumped the band on Twitter. And didn't mention he was a werewolf.”

Gerard felt his mouth fall open.

“Don't get me wrong, I love the man like I love my eyesight, but he's not always the best decision maker in the world,” Ashlee said, sighing. “And he definitely has impulse control issues. Which, okay, to be fair, most of us do. It comes with the territory. Possessiveness, intense sense of loyalty, obsession with family, and impulse control issues. That's werewolves for you.”

“This is – I think this is probably not any of my business?” he ventured, in a small voice, looking down at where Bronx was driving his little car over the closed laptop.

Ashley laughed. “Hey, you throw yourself on our mercy, you learn stuff you might not want to know. Pete's head over heels in love with Patrick. Has been forever. Always will be.”

Gerard sucked on his bottom lip and glanced down at Pete and Ashley's son, who was busy constructing a garage around his car out of books. “Er,” he said, uncomfortably. “Um. That's – um. You're okay with that?”

She smiled. “Patrick can never replace me,” she said. “I'm Pete's wife, and we're werewolves - we pretty much mate for life. But I can never replace Patrick either, you know? Pete really wanted him to be one of us. Patrick's a total alpha, even though he's oblivious to it, and Pete – well. Pete's devoted, you know? He came this close to biting him again and again, from the sound of it, over the years. Kept dressing him up in fur suits and writing him love songs and licking him...I mean I'm kind of amazed he didn't do it, really, because self-control isn't always my boy's best thing. But they'd have killed him for sure if he did it, so – yeah.” She rolled her eyes. “And also, he's a little conflicted over the whole werewolf thing, or he was for a while there. Didn't want to sully Patrick. Thought he was too – I don't know. Pure? Perfect? Too good for this world?” She stretched, looking more like a cat than a wolf. “Pete had a lot of negativity about what we are, for a long time. Even though his parents are just awesome.” She sighed. “I think he was lonely, really, and being in love with a human messed with his head.”
“Wow. That's – um,” said Gerard. “Why are you telling me all this?”

“You have no idea how much I've been wanting to tell somebody about this,” she said, laughing at herself. “I figure you're new, you haven't had time to be scandalised about Pete wanting to turn Patrick. It's – a pretty big taboo.”

“Huh,” said Gerard. He really wanted to not be talking about Pete Wentz's big supernatural love triangle right now; he had pens and paper, and what he wanted to be doing was drawing. He was aware that would be kind of rude, though. “So now it's too late?”

“Now Patrick's a vampire, which means he's part of our world after all. They just need to figure out how to make it work.” She pulled a face. “Of course, first Patrick needs to stop being an ass...” she grinned. “An astonishingly rude person, and forgive Pete for messing up.”

“He's pretty mad,” Gerard ventured.

“Yeah, well – Pete can be pretty persuasive,” Ashlee said, smiling to herself. “I think that's why Patrick avoids being alone with him as much as possible. Don't tell me he isn't still hung up on my boy, because I wasn't born yesterday. They'll sort it out. Patrick should be part of our family – he's just taking a long time to realise that.”

“Cool,” said Gerard, suddenly distracted. “Speaking of – could I maybe borrow a phone for a minute?”

* * *

The guest room was light and airy, with only a faint touch of an Alice In Wonderland theme to the décor. It was also notably lacking in Patrick, but that was hardly surprising. Gerard perched on the bed with his pile of paper and colours, and tried to figure out how to explain things to Lindsey without sounding like he'd finally had a psychotic break and lost his grip on reality. He was still kind of terrified about telling her that he'd accidentally gotten himself killed, but seeing Ashlee and Bronx together had gone a long way towards calming down his sense of terror about being a danger to Bandit. The Wentzes obviously knew how to balance being creepy monsters with being responsible parents, and so long as Gerard didn't get hungry, like really properly hungry, then he shouldn't be a threat to Bee or Lindsey. It should be fine. So now he just needed to figure out how to break it to her. He stared at the wallpaper blankly for a few minutes, then shrugged, and just dialled her, hoping that strategies would present themselves once he had her on the phone. The old fashioned alarm clock next to the bed read 1am, but he knew that she'd forgive him if he woke her up.

“The cats say Hi,” Gerard said, when she picked up. He couldn't keep the smile out of his voice. “Oh my God, you lunatic, where have you fucking been?” demanded Lindsey in a voice thick with sleep. “You didn't answer my calls, you fucker! I haven't heard your voice for two whole days!”

“I kind of lost my phone,” he said, which was true enough now, and a lot more plausible than saying that he'd spent twenty four hours being dead, and a further twenty four hours freaking out about being a man-eating monster with a broken penis, and then being staked through the heart and going on the run with the former lead singer of Fall Out Boy. Being a vampire was a lot different from any of his previous imaginings. He was really hoping that his second day as an undead American would consist of hearing that Bob and Brian had sorted everything out, and then watching cartoons while drinking mugs of blood. He felt he'd earned that, after surviving his first day. He hurried on, before Lindsey could point out that for a guy who'd supposedly lost his phone he'd texted her just fine earlier on. “Love you.”
“Love you more.”

“Love you the most.”

Lindsey blew a raspberry down the phone at him, and Gerard burst into stifled giggles.

“Are you okay? Shit, I can't believe you dropped out of the signings and went home. Are you taking care of yourself? Should I be DHL-ing you chicken soup?”

“I'm okay. I miss you,” he said, when his breath had stopped hitching. “I really fucking miss you, Lindsey Way.”

“Well, duh,” she said, her voice going soft. “I'm pretty amazing.”

Gerard gave another little snort of laughter. “Damn right.”

“I miss you too,” she said, and there was a little pause while Gerard tried again to think of some way of introducing the fact that he'd accidentally stumbled into this whole crazy supernatural freakshow into the conversation, and came up with absolutely nothing. It was too big for a phone call – and even if she believed him (and he knew that Lindsey might believe him, if anybody would), and even if she wasn’t worried about him being a danger to Bandit, she'd still definitely drop everything and come straight back to LA. He would if it had happened to her, even if he'd been in the middle of a World Tour. No question. And that just wasn't fair, because Lindsey had been looking forward to this mini-tour for months, and she deserved it. She deserved to get that time with her own music and her own band, getting to be a creator and a performer and a star as well as a wife and mother. She was great at that, and it was kind of shitty that she kept getting overshadowed by his success. Gerard had Brian and Bob, and he had Patrick and Pete and Ashlee, and he could suck it up and deal for another week, instead of stealing Lindsey's time in the limelight and dragging her into the middle of his drama.

“Eight days to the Big Apple,” she said, as if she were reading his mind. “I can’t wait to see you and the Bumblebee.”

“Me too,” Gerard said, from the bottom of his heart, trying to damp down the twist of terror that came with it. He was going to have to figure out a way of dealing with the goddamn plane thing between now and then one way or another, he realised. He possibly could fly there himself, Peter Pan style - but the chances of Gerard being able to navigate his way from LA to New York unaided were right up there with the odds of him being spontaneously elected President of the United States. Maybe he could drive. Or get Bob or Patrick or somebody to drive. Make it into a road trip, or something, like ‘Thelma and Louise’ - but with more stops to rob hospital blood banks and less sex with Brad Pitt. And less driving into the Grand Canyon too, obviously.

“How was the gig last night?” he asked, and she started to tell him. Gerard curled up on the bed in the guest room cradling the handset to his ear and listened to the rise and fall of her voice, imagining the way her hands would dart through the air, and the way the corner of her mouth would quirk upwards.

“Hey, I've been thinking about the new album,” he said at last, when they'd both finished giggling about her story about Jimmy and Steve and the Funyuns. “It's – my head's kind of brimming over with images right now, and I think it could add up to something cool. A new direction. Um.” This was about as close as he could come to talking about the vampirism thing over the phone, because, really, he needed to see her for that.

Lindsey made an intrigued sort of noise.
“It's – I need to get some of this stuff down on paper, and I'm going to do that now, actually, but – I wanted to hear your voice. I miss you.” He paused, sucking on his bottom lip, wanting to be more truthful with her. “I – um.” Gerard swallowed. “I love you,” he said. “You know that, right? I'd never ever do anything to hurt you. Or Bee.”

“Okay, what the fuck?”

“Sorry! I just – um.” He scrabbled around for something that would be true, without sounding insane. “Look, I just had a near-death experience, kind of thing. You know how it is, when you don't look both ways on the road and you come this close to being, like, roadkill? I just – I want you to know how much I love you. You just – you never know what's right around the corner. So – I guess I'm really appreciating what I've got right now, how good my life is with you in it, and Bee. And the band and everything.” He sucked on his bottom lip, feeling the fangs grazing against the skin. “I'm really glad you're touring, babe. I mean – I mean, it fucking sucks not to have you here, but – I'm glad you're doing it, and not putting it off, or whatever. Carpe the fucking diem, you know?” His voice broke a little, and he coughed to try to hide it. “And I can't wait to see you again, and take Bee to watch you guys. It's going to blow her mind, seeing how amazing her momma is up there on the stage.”

“See, now you're just making me blush.”

“You're pretty when you blush.”

“Shut up! No fair saying this kind of stuff when I can't kiss your face, Gerard Way!”

He grinned, and kissed the phone. “Sorry,” he said, feeling more light-hearted than he'd felt in days.

“You're forgiven,” she said fondly. “So, tell me about your ideas for the next album?”

* * *

Gerard wasn't entirely sure how long he'd spent sprawling on the biggest bed in the guest room lost in drawing when the door finally opened and Pete Wentz sidled in, looking suspiciously dishevelled and smelling incriminatingly like Patrick and Ashlee and sex. Gerard blinked up at him, his head full of threads of music, Archimbaldo faces and skeletal pirates, and there was a fuzzy moment where Gerard had to shuffle reality and fantasy around in his head like a surreal set of Tarot cards, before remembering that, yes, he actually was a vampire, and Pete really was a werewolf.

“Um – hi,” he said, scrambling to his feet and glancing sheepishly down at all the sketches scattered across the bed covers. “Oh! Er – sorry, I kind of had to get some of it down on paper? I've got a lot of ideas, been thinking about the next album, and I think that I halfway know the song I need to build things around, the shape of it or the, you know, the flavour, kind of thing, but – um.” He ground to a halt, belatedly embarrassed. “Sorry, that's not what I should be thinking about right now is it? Um. Look, thanks for this.” He scrubbed one hand through his hair and shifted from foot to foot. “Sorry about being all – you know. Fugitives from justice and stuff. I guess we should be hatching a plan, or something, right? Not just planning the next album. I just – um. Sorry. I got distracted.”

Pete stooped down to pick up a sheet of paper covered with twisting rose vines, flowers unfurling with tiny zombie foetuses in their hearts. “Cool!” he said, beaming. “Fucked up, but definitely cool.”

“I've got a lot of ideas,” Gerard said, giving a sheepish grin. Talking about his process was a little bit personal, and right now he felt like his skin was stretched tight as the surface of a drum, barely holding in all the images; like they might all rise up to the surface at any moment in curling lines of
ink, tattooing him from the inside out, like that girl in Mike Carey's 'Lucifer'. The pale surface of his right arm was already etched with a pretty decent copy of Lindsey's inner arm tattoo, executed left-handed in smudgy sketch pen while he was listening to her on the phone; now Gerard could visualise the werewolves and rose bushes and empty-eyed girls in blood-stained dancing shoes scrambling out past the black lines he'd hand-drawn and annexing the rest of his body, until he put even Frankie to shame.

“I see that,” said Pete with a nod. “Yeah. And, yeah, we probably do need to hatch a plan, dude, but first I think you maybe ought to see this?”

Gerard tried to read Pete's face to no avail. He looked serious, but not panic-stricken or anything like that, and Gerard didn't know what to make of his expression.

“Did something happen?” he asked, taking half a step forward and then pausing, bouncing uncertainly on his feet. Shit.

Pete gave him an enigmatic smile. “This is one of those picture-paints-a-thousand-words things,” he said. “Just come through into the other room?”

“Um. Okay?” said Gerard, gathering up his papers and straightening them out nervously, clutching them in front of him like the most ineffectual shield in the world before following Pete out into the corridor. “You didn't kill Patrick, did you?” he asked, only half-kidding.

Pete looked very upset at the suggestion. “Dude! Don't joke about that!”

“Just asking,” said Gerard, feeling himself relax a tiny bit. “Sorry, I didn't mean – sorry.”

Pete stood back when they reached the door of the room they'd first arrived in, the one where he'd first glimpsed Ashlee playing with her son, and where he'd left Patrick and Pete to sort out their shit. Gerard peered at the door and wondered why Pete wasn't just opening it.

“After you,” Pete said, with a huge grin curving his mouth like a cartoon. Gerard let himself wonder, for just a moment, whether Pete might possibly have sold them out after all, despite all Patrick's confidence and Ashlee's assurances. Maybe Bert was waiting in there right now with Bob and Brian and a team of drumstick-wielding vampire slayers whose names all began with B, ready to chop off his head and roast his poor corpse into ashes. Gerard swallowed, and didn't open the door.

“Go on,” said Pete, grinning. “It's a good surprise, I promise.”

Gerard wasn't a fan of surprises, or at least, not coming from people he didn't know all that well. He trusted Lindsey and Mikey, and Frank and Ray and his mom, but there was definitely part of Gerard Way that was still the prickly, defensive, chubby little comic book geek who got beaten up in school, and he wasn't 100% sure that he wasn't about to be the butt of some unkind – or lethal – joke.

“Um. Okay,” he said, bravely, and gave the door a push without stepping forward. When no vampire slayers came leaping out to stake him where he stood, Gerard took a deep breath and stepped inside, and an instant later he was being slammed back into the wall by a small, warm, blessedly familiar bundle of limbs.

“Frankie?” Gerard exclaimed, boggling, as Frank tried to climb him like a tree. It didn't work as well with Gerard as it would have done with Bob, because Gerard really wasn't that much bigger than Frank, but apparently little details like that were beneath the notice of Frank Iero right now. Gerard wrapped his arms around Frank and hugged him tight enough to leave bruises. “Oh my God, Frankie!” he said, his voice embarrassingly squeaky. “What the hell?”
“The miracle of modern technology,” Pete said with something that sounded suspiciously like a snigger.

“Motherfucker!” Frank growled into Gerard's neck. “What the fuck, dude? Were you ever going to tell me? Where’s the love, Gee?”

“I don’t – I – I was going to call, I just hadn't figured it out yet. Um. Sorry,” Gerard said, squeezing Frankie closer and appalled to realise that he was in danger of bursting into tears. “I can't believe you're here! Seriously – how?”

“Hey, Gee,” said Mikey, and Gerard spun around, taking Frank with him until he spotted Mikey slouching beside the fireplace and waving.

“Mikey!” Gerard exclaimed, overwhelmed. “Mikeyway!”

He looked almost perfectly nonchalant, but Gerard could read the tension in the way that he held himself and the tight line of his mouth. His eyes were red-rimmed and baggy behind his glasses, and Gerard didn't want to know whether that was because Mikey had been crying, or because it was stupid o'clock in the morning. Probably both.

“So, I told Frank,” Mikey said, ducking his head and peering at Gerard through his clumpy lashes. “Hope that's okay.”

“You – I – you – get over here, you jerk!” said Gerard, feeling like his face was going to crack from smiling at any moment. Frank still had his legs wrapped around Gerard's waist in a pose very reminiscent of the way that Bronx Mowgli Wentz had clung onto his mother, and Gerard was supporting him there as effortlessly as Ashlee had her son with just one hand. Vampire strength ruled. Mikey sidled up and wrapped his arms around the pair of them and Gerard finally relaxed for the first time since he'd woken up dead. Everything was going to be okay.

“I'll leave you guys to it,” Pete said, somewhere behind them. “Some of us aren't nocturnal.”

“You're one of the creatures of the night,” Mikey said, and Frank made a sputtering noise that suggested he was finding this seriously difficult to accept.

“You're cold,” said Frank, his voice half-muffled. His skin felt furnace-hot, pressed into Gerard's neck, his nose warm against the half-healed scar; and apparently Gerard's neck had become one hell of an erogenous zone, or whatever the vampire equivalent was, because he was having serious difficulty not thinking bitey thoughts with Frank's mouth right there and his jugular only inches away. He gave himself a little shake and told himself to snap the fuck out of it and stop being a creeper already.

“Yeah, well – I'm dead, dude,” he said, focusing on the comment about his temperature instead of following this inappropriate train of thought.
Mikey made a horrified noise at the same moment that Frank dug his fingers convulsively into Gerard's arm.

“Oh!” Gerard wondered suddenly if he'd misunderstood something. “Sorry – shit – Mikey, you told him, right? About the – I mean, that I'm sort of – dead?”

Frank punched him and slid down to the ground again so that he could push back far enough to glare at Gerard properly. “Yeah, he told me, you asshole. I can't believe you let somebody get close enough to kill you! Some stranger! What were you thinking? I'm never letting you go out alone ever again, you jerk! You fucking idiot!”

Apparently the hug was over. Frank started pacing back and forth, vibrating with anger, and Mikey hovered a few inches away, looking at Gerard with sad eyes and making Gerard feel like a total heel. He looked from Mikey to Frank and back again unhappily.

“I'm sorry! I didn't – I mean, you know, he kind of tricked me. And then he just – I mean, vampires have these powers!” He waved his hands in front of his face vaguely in a gesture that was supposed to convey freaky mind control skills. “They can fuck with your brain, make you think it's totally reasonable to go outside with them into the spooky dark alleyway. And then – but I didn't want this. I really – I mean,” his voice cracked a bit, and he swallowed. “It wasn't consensual, you know? I just – I had no idea they were even real! Um. And then he – um.”

Mikey and Frank looked about equally horrified at that little speech, and after a second Frank grabbed Gerard into another hug.

“Never. Going outside. Again,” Frank muttered fiercely. “Jesus Christ, I'm going to kill that son of a bitch. How do we kill that son of a bitch?”

“Bob and Brian already took care of that,” said Gerard apologetically into Frank's hair, trying to ignore the rhythm of Frank's pulse. He would have been lying if he said he wasn't enjoying the cuddling, on several levels.

“The who with the what now?” Frank turned to stare at Mikey, which had the unfortunate effect of presenting Gerard with an expanse of smooth, warm skin. Gerard tried not to fixate on the scorpion tattoo.

“Bob's a vampire slayer,” said Mikey. “Brian too, apparently.”

“How do I not know this?” Frank sounded thoroughly indignant, and Gerard dragged his eyes up to Frank's face with some difficulty, feeling scandalised at himself for being such a letch. This was totally as bad as staring at a girl's breasts. He was disgusting. Luckily Frank didn't seem to have registered this yet, though. “How do you know all this and I don't?” Frank was saying, glaring at Mikey, sublimely oblivious to the way that Gerard was objectifying him.

Mikey – who seemed to be equally oblivious, thank God – just shrugged. “Pete,” he said. “Pete knows everybody.”

“And is a werewolf,” said Frank, like he was still test driving this information and more than half expected it to blow up in his face at any moment.

“And is a werewolf.”

“God damn it! I'm the one born on Halloween! I'm the one all this cool supernatural shit should be happening to! I'd make a kickass wolfman, or, like, a zombie or something. Frankenstein's monster – does Pete know any mad scientists? Or, hey, you could just bite me?” Frank swung his face back to
Gerard and Gerard dragged his eyes guiltily back from where they'd just drifted down to. Frank beamed at him. “Hey, Gee, you going to bite me and turn me into one of the grateful dead?”

Gerard was shocked by how his whole body clenched in answer to this question. Fuck. Probably a good job his dick was broken, because the only thing that had ever felt like this was being painfully aroused, and with Frank pressed up as close as he was right now, that would've been totally obvious and awkward.

“Don't joke about it!” he said, suddenly feeling ill. “It's not – I mean – okay, yeah, it is kind of cool, but you don't want to die, Frankie.” His fingers tightened around Frank's waist. “Dying is – it's not cool, dude. Really not cool.”

He wanted to bite Frank. He wasn't hungry any more, really, but he really really wanted to bite Frank. Not Mikey – that would be creepy and wrong, obviously. Not that this wasn't creepy and wrong, but – oh, God. He was a bad, bad man. It was taking a real effort of will not to lean forward and push just a little bit with his mind, with that unholy power thrumming under his skin, and put Frankie under. Make him believe that he wanted it. Gerard was having to try really hard not to do that right now.

He let go of Frank and walked away, horrified at himself. He was shaking when he settled down on the edge of the sofa and pulled his knees up to his chest, wrapping his arms around them. God. Maybe Bert McCracken had the right idea. He really was a monster.

“You don't know,” he said in a small voice, shivering in spite of the roaring fire. Frank stared at him, wide-eyed and guilt-stricken, while Mikey padded over to the sofa and settled down next to Gerard, resting his head on Gerard's shoulder quietly.

“It's okay, Gee,” Mikey said. “It's all going to be okay.”

Gerard sat there stiffly for a minute, trying to get himself back under control, before finally letting himself relax a little and lean into Mikey's warmth. He could feel Frank staring at them both for a long moment, and he managed not to flinch when Frank scampered over and dropped down to the floor by Gerard's knees.

“I'm sorry,” he said, sounding uncharacteristically chastened. “I wasn't thinking. I'm a dick.”

“No, I just – you don't know, Frankie,” Gerard said, a little mortified at how his voice kept cracking.

“No, I don't know,” Frank agreed. He stayed very still and very quiet for a moment, before adding in a quieter tone: “I'm glad you're not dead dead.”

“Yeah,” said Gerard, thickly. “Me too.”

He looped his arm around Mikey's waist and reached down to card his fingers through Frank's short hair, and Frank made a contented little sound and snuggled closer. They sat like that for a long while, and Gerard felt himself being soothed again by the presence of two of his very favourite people on the planet. It was impossible to feel unsafe with them there – even if, technically, he was about a hundred times more dangerous himself than both of them put together.

He didn't notice Mikey was falling asleep until he heard the first snore, and then he realised that Mikey's heartbeat had been gradually slowing down for ages. Hardly surprising – the poor kid had to be jetlagged all to hell. Frank, who had been a warm, quiet presence against Gerard's legs for maybe half an hour now, gave a small huff of laughter.

“I knew it,” he murmured, craning his head back to look up at Gerard – and, in the process, exposing
the long, naked line of his throat in a way that made Gerard's mouth go suddenly dry. “Knew he'd crash before I did. Lightweight.”

“Yeah, yeah, you're the man,” said Gerard, trying to laugh. He looked away.

“Damn fucking right I am,” Frank, whispered, oblivious and cheerfully obnoxious. “And don't you forget it, Mr Hotshot Vampire.”

“Asshole,” Gerard said, and Frank punched his knee. “Um. We should maybe put Mikey to bed. It's, what – must be three a.m. by now, at least?”

Gerard was still feeling pretty wide awake, but Frank looked nearly as exhausted as Mikey. They must have just jumped on the first damn plane, pretty much. Gerard wasn't even sure they'd brought any bags. He was touched – and still staggered that Frank had come along. He'd been thinking of Frank all safe at home with his girls and his business, exchanging tweets with Mike in between changing diapers and yelling down the phone at his Skeleton Crew peeps. And all the while he'd been freaking the fuck out about Gerard's stupid problems, and jetting across the country to come and hold his hand.

It was pretty shameful that Gerard was repaying this kind of friendship by ogling Frank's arteries, so he determinedly dragged his gaze away again and leaned down to pick Mikey up. He felt a little surge of helpless tenderness at the way Mikey's mouth had fallen slightly open. Mikeyway. Gerard swung his brother up lightly in his arms, remembering times when Mikey had been not much bigger than Ashlee's little boy. Gerard was never ever going to let anything bad happen to Mikey.

“You need any help?” Frank asked.

“I've got this,” he replied, half-laughing. Shit, he was strong enough to carry the whole damn band, including Mike and Dewees. “But maybe you could get the door for me?” His eye fell on the little spill of papers that he'd dropped when Frank slammed into him half an hour earlier. “And pick up my sketches?”

Frank scurried forward, and Gerard was suddenly aware that everyone else in the house was asleep. Or at least in bed – after his earlier conversation with Ashlee, Gerard wasn't entirely sure he wanted to speculate any further than that, and he was carefully not listening. He didn't think it was accidental that he hadn't seen Patrick since they arrived, though. Soap opera sounded about right.

“Shit, these are awesome,” Frank said, leafing through the drawings as he followed Gerard down the corridor towards the guest bedroom. Gerard glanced over, feeling self-conscious.

“I was thinking about the next album,” he said. “I didn't get the chance to record anything, obviously, but I've got the start of a couple of songs in my head. Stuff that goes with some of the pictures. One of them – I think – I think it could all be good, you know? Like, a different direction again, not like Black Parade or the Killjoys. Something – well, for Bandit, really. Eventually. I mean, I'm not talking Sesame Street or the Wiggles, but – I want her to know about all this stuff. Who I am now. And all of them – Lily and Cherry, and Bronx Mowgli. I want to make something for these kids, and the ones like them. Something they'll recognise, even if other people don't.”

Frank raised one eyebrow and grinned. “Dude, the first song we ever recorded was 'Vampires Will Never Hurt You'. I think we have these kids covered.” Gerard felt his face fall, and Frank added hurriedly: “But these look great! And, yeah, pretty different direction. Still very you, though.”

Gerard glanced at the picture Frank was holding, which showed two people of indeterminate gender caught up in what looked like a struggle to the death, while on the wall behind them their attenuated
shadows were locked in a passionate embrace. He felt himself blushing, and paused outside the guest bedroom while Frankie darted forward to open the door.

“Thanks. Sorry,” Gerard said, trying not to look at Frank, and meaning several things at once. Thanks for opening the door; thanks for coming with Mikey; thanks for liking the pictures; thanks for not freaking out about the vampirism thing. Sorry for dragging you away from home in the middle of the night. Sorry for being a massive bloodsucking pervert who keeps thinking inappropriate things about pinning you to handy surfaces and introducing you to the pleasures of supernatural blood donation.

Frank grinned at him, that special Frank grin that was just for Gerard, and Gerard blinked and then buried his face in Mikey's hair to breathe in the familiar Mikey smell and lose himself in the sense of family, rather than thinking too hard about Frank's throat. He managed to concentrate on nothing but Mikey as he padded across the cream-coloured carpet, and then Frank was there pulling back the covers on the small single bed. Gerard tucked Mikey carefully into the bed, reminded of Bandit, and of the long-ago days when Mikey was so much smaller that Gerard could pick him up easily. He knew that Mikey slept like a log once he was out, and it made him smile a little, hearing Mikey's snuffling snores. Like touring again, or being back at his mom's house. Mikey made a soft, complaining sound; as Gerard hunkered down and started to unlace his shoes, but he didn't wake up. When both shoes were sitting neatly on the floor beside the bed Gerard bounced to his feet with the intention of removing Mikey’s glasses, but Frank had beaten him to it and was quietly polishing the thumb-smeared glass on his t-shirt before folding them up and setting them on the night stand. It sent something through Gerard, for some reason, seeing Frank doing that in such a matter of fact way. God. Frankie had always been there for them. Not in a fussy way, but just – there. When Gerard was at his lowest point, when Mikey had been depressed, Frankie always had their backs. Not judging, or being an asshole – just there to catch them if they fell.

Frank glanced up and caught Gerard's eye and smiled again, and Gerard had a terrible sinking feeling.

He was not going to do this.

“So – you probably want to crash too,” he murmured, looking away and determinedly keeping the creepy mind control part of his brain in lock down. He wasn't hungry. He really wasn't hungry, so there was no forgiving the impulses that were darting through him right now.

“Nah,” said Frank under his breath, bouncing on his toes and grinning. “I'm too psyched. Mikey's known about all this stuff forever, apparently, but my mind is officially blown. I'm in a house full of werewolves, for fuck's sakes!” he said, padding back over to the door. “A House of Wolves!”’ he added, with a sudden snigger of glee, and Gerard forgot that he wasn't going to look at Frankie, because he had to beam at him for that.

“Exactly!” he said, delighted that they'd both made the same leap. But then he was looking at Frankie, and maybe that wasn't such a good idea at all, because unlike Mikey, or Patrick, or Pete, apparently Frankie made him want to do bad things. Gerard swallowed, and tried not to panic as he closed the guest room door and led the way back to the living room. This was ridiculous. He wasn't going to jump Frankie, or anyone else, because he wasn't feeling that out-of-control animalistic drive to feed that he'd already experienced twice. This wasn't the same at all. This was – well, it was more like craving a drink, or a cigarette, and it might suck to have to pull on his big boy panties and know he couldn't have the thing he wanted, but he still had a choice in the matter. He wasn't going to lay a hand on Frank, because Frank was his best friend. End of story.

“And not just wolves,” Frank said, after a little pause, following close behind him. Gerard gave a
breathless little laugh that was mostly nerves as he crossed the threshold, and then nearly jumped out of his skin when Frank's hand closed over his shoulder. He turned around as if he'd been stung, and found himself staring at Frank as he worried at the spot where his lip ring used to be. “Dude,” Frank breathed, gazing at Gerard like he was something amazing. “Dude. You're a fucking vampire. Do you realise just how cool that is?”

Gerard blushed in spite of himself. “It's not – I'm just me,” he said. And then acknowledged to himself that that wasn't entirely true. He'd always loved it when Frankie looked at him like that, when he was singing, or when he'd come up with some crazy new direction for the band, and Frank was beaming at him with an almost religious fervour, like he was the most inspired and inspirational person ever. It made something hot and hopeful uncurl inside him every time, having that kind of validation. “But it's pretty cool, yeah,” he admitted softly. They just grinned at one another for a moment, because, seriously – vampires and werewolves and zombies, oh my! Then Gerard had another thought. “Oh! Hey – did you know that vampires can fly?”

Frank's eyes bugged out in a very satisfying way, and Gerard felt like he'd just rolled a natural 20 for charisma. It was kind of great not being the last person to know everything.

“Watch!” he said, and let himself drift up to the high ceiling while Frankie went quietly bananas beneath him, staring up with the stunned, adoring, orgasm-stupid face that he often wore on stage when they were caught up in the middle of a song and everything was falling perfectly into place. “Get the fuck out, Gerard Way!” he said, his voice rough and disbelieving.

Gerard did a little flip in mid air, still kind of delighted and surprised at how graceful and in-control he felt with his own body. “Pretty cool, huh?” he said, grinning down at Frank, and Frank bit on his knuckles and jiggled around like a kid who needed a pee break.
“Get back down here, you Peter Pan motherfucker!” Frank said in a strangled tone, bouncing on his toes, and when Gerard let himself alight on the floor he was almost knocked down by the weight of Frankie tackling him again, all greedy arms and legs and stifled giggles, rubbing his warm face into Gerard's shoulder. “Oh my fucking God, Gee, how are you even real?” Frank demanded, breathless with laughter and sounding thrilled. “You're incredible! You know that? Fucking incredible, man!”

Gerard ducked his head, trying to hide a small, pleased smile. “I guess I kind of am,” he said. “Pity nobody gave Bert that memo.”

Frank looked at him blankly.

“Oh! Oh – um,” said Gerard, realising that maybe he should have done a bit more to bring them both up to speed, rather than assuming that Pete had been totally efficient there. “Bert's a vampire slayer. He tried to stake me. That's why I'm here instead of at home.”

Frank froze. “He what? Bert McCracken? He did what?”

Gerard's fingers plucked at the hole in his shirt self-consciously. “Um. He tried to stake me? With a stake?” He gave an embarrassed little giggle. “You know, like Mr Pointy?”

Frank was staring at the hole now with a look that was almost frightening in its intensity. “He tried to kill you? That fucker tried to fucking kill you? After you'd only just escaped death by vampire?”

“Well, technically I didn't really escape death by va...” began Gerard, but then Frankie was tugging his shirt up and Gerard found his capacity for spoken English was diminishing by the second. He watched Frank's thunderous expression as Frank took in the half-healed scar in the middle of his chest, and when Frank slid warm and tentative fingers up over Gerard's chest to touch it, Gerard
gave a helpless shiver. “Don’t,” he said, and Frankie pulled away as if burned. Gerard was pretty sure Frankie thought that the shiver had been about being in pain, and he was good with just leaving it at that, rather than talking about the whole frantic-impulse-to-bite that Frankie kept provoking in him.

“Oh he dead?” Frank asked in a tight, angry voice, and Gerard pulled a face.

“He's kind of – one of the cops, basically. He's like a bad cop, and he's told the rest of them that I had it coming, so they're all gunning for me right now. And for Patrick too, 'cause he saved me. We're vampire fugitives,” Gerard said, trying to make Frank smile. “Like Thelma and Louise – only with fangs.”

Frank, however, was not so much with the smiling. “I'm going to fucking kill him,” Frank said, tightly.

“No!” said Gerard, surprised by the strength of his voice. “No, Frankie. Please. Don't piss these guys off. Don't even joke about it. They're – seriously, they're badass. We’re going to work something out.”

“I can work something out,” Frank said, his voice still hard and mean. “My fist in his fucking face. I can't believe he – Jesus Fucking Christ, Gerard. How could you not mention this?”

“I - er. Forgot?” offered Gerard, because it was the truth. “But it's going to be okay. We'll think of a plan. Bob's on our side, I think – he warned us that Bert had called out, like, an APB, or something.”

“And Brian?”

Gerard pulled a face. “I – don’t know. I hope so. But – well, you know how close he and Bert always used to be. And I am kind of an undead monster now, so, you know, Bert probably looks likely to be the good guy in this scenario.”

“Bullshit. Fucking bullshit. Brian knows you, and he knows Bert McCracken. If he trusts Bert over you I'mma kick his scrawny ass for him,” Frank muttered, looking impressively ferocious. For a moment, quite regardless of any inappropriate biting thoughts, Gerard had an overwhelming impulse to hug Frank tight. But he didn't, because that would just be asking for trouble.

“It's okay,” he said, firmly, walking over to the sofa and settling down to leaf through his drawings. “We'll figure something out tomorrow. Maybe the Fairy Queen can help, or something.”

Frank gave a startled burst of laughter. “Wow, Dorothy – we're really not in Kansas any more, are we?”

Gerard grinned back up at him, then looked down at the sketches again. “Nope.”

He kept leafing through the sketches as Frank snuggled up next to him, like Mikey had done earlier in the evening. Only – not quite like Mikey had done. Or at least, it felt a lot more charged to Gerard, even if the pose was almost identical.

“What was it like?” Frank asked, after a silence so long that Gerard had half-way thought maybe Frankie was drifting off to sleep. “Getting bitten by a vampire? I mean – if you can talk about it?”

Gerard froze up for a moment, thinking back to that moment in the alleyway outside ComicCon. But it was just him and Frankie, after all, and they were safe and warm here beside the fire. Frank just wanted to understand. Gerard couldn't blame him for being curious; he was pretty sure he'd have asked the same question if their places had been changed. Frank couldn't really guess how – intimate
– it was. The weird tangle of wonderful and terrifying and fucked up.

Gerard drew a deep breath, and tried to be truthful. “It felt – great,” he said at last. “At first. At first it felt really, just mind-blowingly great. Spine-turn-to-jelly, fuse-the-pleasure-centre-of-your-brain great. Like the most amazing sex ever, cranked up to eleven.”

Frank had gone quite still against him, and his breath came out in a warm gust that tickled Gerard's bite mark and made him shiver. Gerard knew he didn't mean anything by it, but he was still having to exert some pretty rigid self-control to keep himself from turning this exercise into a practical demonstration.

“Sounds – kind of sexy,” Frank said, and the tremble in his voice was so faint that Gerard wouldn't have noticed it without his enhanced senses. There was something else, too, although it took Gerard a moment to register what it was: Frankie was getting hard. He wasn't touching Gerard, but Gerard could still tell from the change in his pulse-rate and the slight shift in his scent. Frank was getting turned on. That was distracting, and really not helpful, and the last thing Frankie needed was to develop some kind of misguided idea about biting being a good thing, because then they'd both be fucked.

“Well – yeah,” Gerard said, honestly. “It was, because – well, it was really fucking intense. But – he was using me, you know? It was so – it was just totally intimate, like being broken open and spilling out your heart and your secrets and just, you know – everything that makes you you. Like coming apart at the seams, flying into atoms, dissolving into pure sensation.” He drew a deep breath, forcing his voice to stay steady. “But it was a total stranger, and he didn't care about my heart or my secrets or me, you know. My me. He was just using me. Like I was a fucking hamburger, or something – just a thing to him. An idea, not a person. It was just a fucking whim that had him changing me, because he liked our music, you know? But he was still killing me, and I tried to get away, and to tell him no, and I was just – I was tiny next to him, just this powerless little bug of a mortal that he could bend to his will. He just – snuffed me right out, and I could feel it happening, and I was – I was totally helpless.”

Fuck. He was crying, Gerard realised, feeling kind of mortified. He squeezed his eyes closed.

“It was like that song. You know your song? The LeATHERMOUTH one, about being attacked by monsters? I fucking love that song. It's so raw and despairing and – well, it felt like that, by the end. I was just so alone, and terrified, and I didn't want it, and nobody was coming to save me. It was fucking horrible,” he ended, in a tiny voice.

Frank wrapped both arms around him and squeezed him so tightly that a normal person would have had difficulty breathing. “I wish they hadn't killed him already,” Frank said, his voice tight and furious. “I wish I could fucking kill him for you all over again. Fuck. I'm sorry, Gee.” He sounded wrecked. “I'm just – fuck, I'm sorry.”

“It's okay,” Gerard said, reflexively. It wasn't okay, but it was actually not as bad as he'd been expecting. Because Frank was there. And having Frank there, all warm and pissed and cuddly, smelling like sunshine and cigarettes, felt like being home. It was also, to be perfectly honest, making Gerard think about the beginning, when the biting stuff had all been kind of sexy and incredible, rather than terrifying and lethal. He shivered, and Frank misunderstood it entirely, and made an unhappy little noise, and pressed a supremely ill-judged kiss onto the place where Martin had bitten him, like he was trying to kiss it better.

Gerard made a helpless little whimper of his own, at that point, and couldn't help thinking about how much better it would have been with somebody else who wasn't Martin-the-asshole-vampire biting him. If it had been – oh, God, if it had been Frank. If Frank had been the vampire that turned him.
God. Frank was right, he totally would make a kick-ass vampire, and that would have been – that - fuck. Fuck. Gerard's brain stuttered to a halt at the thought.

“Frankie,” he said, drawing a shaky breath, and Frankie went suddenly still.

“Oh!” he said. “Are you – it this, like, weird now?” Because this was them, after all, and snuggling and absent-minded kisses and caresses had been a part of how they were with each other forever, just as a matter of course. It didn't mean anything more specific than 'Love you'. They were family, after all. Only – not really family. Gerard wasn't feeling in a family place right now.

“Um,” he said, reminding himself what Brian had said about biting people. Best to just stick to the prepackaged stuff, he'd said. And Gerard didn't want to objectify Frankie, or hurt him. But – fuck, he wanted this.

“Do you want to bite me?” Frank asked, his voice soft and stupidly startled, with an edge of excitement which really wasn't helping Gerard to keep his composure. He didn't sound scared. He really ought to sound scared, because Gerard was a terrifying predator who wanted to fucking eat him, but apparently Frankie couldn't imagine being actually scared of Gerard. Which was a pity, because since Gerard wasn't in Great White Shark mode right now, exactly, Frankie being scared of him would probably have snapped him right out of the haze of Frank-specific bloodlust that was settling over him right now.

“....No.” Gerard said firmly, with a real effort.

“Oh,” said Frank. He sounded a little disappointed. “Okay.” There was a slightly awkward pause, while Gerard tried to pull his wits about him, and then Frank added: “What's it like, then? Biting someone, I mean. Not being bitten.”

Gerard shivered. “I don't know,” he admitted, after a moment.

There was another pause, this one rather a lot more awkward.

“Dude!” Frank said, sounding taken aback. “What?”

“I don't know,” Gerard said, his face going hot. It felt like having to admit to being a virgin, or never having tried a cigarette or something. Which was stupid, obviously. “I'm – I mean, a couple of times now, when I was out of my head with hunger, I nearly – but Bob stopped me, and then Patrick did.” He stared over at the door and shivered. “I'd have killed them,” he said, knowing it was true. “I was just blind with hunger. I couldn't have stopped myself, if I'd started. I was – kind of feral, you know?” He sighed. “So I've been drinking the prepackaged stuff, like, blood donor stuff, from hospital blood banks.”


“No!” said Gerard, outraged even though he'd just been thinking the same thing himself. His voice was maybe a little bit shrill, but there was really no cause for Frank to go dissolving into startled giggles at his side. Gerard pulled away, feeling indignant and a little bit hurt. “I'm trying to do the right thing,” he said stiffly. “I don't want to hurt anybody.”

Frank pressed closer, and he was smiling, but it was rueful rather than mocking. “No,” he agreed, his fingers finding Gerard's and weaving in between them, warm and firm and calloused from his guitar. Gerard looked down at their interlaced hands. “No, of course you don't.” Frank's voice had an odd note to it that Gerard had some difficulty identifying – he'd been more than half expecting mockery, because Frank could be an asshole that way, but this was more like tenderness, and it floored him.
“Are you out of your head with hunger now?” Frank said, slowly.

“No! No, Frankie – no, I'm safe,” Gerard said, turning quickly and looking into Frank's eyes, feeling kind of horrible. “No! I promise I'm not – I'm me now. I'm not going to hurt anybody.”

“Okay. So – you're you.” Frank licked his lips. “So – what if you weren't starving? What if it was just, you know. Freely offered.”

“Don't do this,” Gerard said, breathlessly.

Frank licked his lips again. “You wouldn't hurt me,” he said, and the absolute certainty in his voice was terrifying.

“I might,” said Gerard, shivering.

“No,” Frank said. “You wouldn't, Gee. I trust you.”

“You shouldn't.”

Frank watched him with dark eyes that knew him better than he knew himself. “Do you want to, though? Because I'd let you, Gee. I'd totally let you.”

“Frankie!” Gerard whispered, his voice scraped raw to an imploring little thread. Frank was staring into his eyes like he could read everything inside Gerard's head, and Gerard was horribly aware that he was going to have to be the sensible one here, because Frank had apparently absolutely zero sense of self preservation. He was about to explain this, and was going to say something really mature and responsible when Frank reached up and traced his finger over Gerard's lower lip, brushing ever so gently over the tips of Gerard's fangs.

“I want you to,” Frank said, his voice barely audible. “I really fucking want you to, Gee. Please?”

Gerard was still trying to find the right words to tell Frank that he was asking something suicidally foolish when Frank leaned in and kissed him on the lips, letting his tongue drift over the seam of Gerard's mouth and slide inside to press lightly against one of the newly sharp teeth. Only a touch, but it was enough to cut into the soft tissue of his tongue, and when Gerard could taste Frank's blood on his lips his hard-fought battle for control dissolved, and he was yanking Frank onto his lap and sucking on his tongue with furious abandon. Frank writhed against him, making some of the filthiest, most fervent sounds that Gerard had ever heard, and Gerard gave a helpless little growl and pulled back just enough to change the angle of Frank's head and then bite down onto Frank's scorpion tattoo. Frank made a frantic sound and clutched Gerard tighter to him, and Gerard – Gerard was blissed out on sensation and shivering with very Frank-specific delight.

It was like drinking sunlight, like drinking music, something purely satisfying on a very basic, primal level but also something more than physical. Better than flying. Better than anything that Gerard had experienced in his short unlife, and almost everything he'd experienced before then too. He wanted it to last **forever**, but he wasn't blinded by hunger this time, and he didn't for one instant lose sight of the fact that this was Frankie, his Frankie, and that he had to be careful. Even with his teeth buried in Frank's throat – fuck, especially with his teeth buried in Frank's throat – he felt desperately protective towards Frank. Frank was his boy, and nothing was going to hurt him, not even Gerard. Especially not Gerard.

He pulled back before he was ready to. It had only been seconds, really – barely half a pint, but it was hot and fresh and alive and **Frankie**, and Gerard was never going to be able to enjoy the packaged shit again now that he knew what a joke it was. Sure, he could subsist on it, but **this** was –
wow. Gerard had no words for it. He licked the wound on Frank's throat and felt Frank shudder against him as he pressed a kiss there, mirroring Frank's own actions from earlier. He felt lightheaded and weirdly tender.

Frank's fingers dug into his sides. "Don't stop," he gasped, squirming, and Gerard registered belatedly that Frank was fully hard now, and thrusting against him frantically like a teenager. Gerard had known this all along, he realised – he just hadn't really been paying it any heed because the blood made every other physical sensation seem insignificant.

“Frankie,” Gerard said, feeling fond and solicitous, and Frank buried his face in Gerard's shoulder and moaned.

“More,” he said, his voice muffled, and Gerard had to close his eyes and count to ten, and remind himself why he wasn't going to drink any more right now. Or he tried to, at least; he'd only gotten to three when Frank was kissing him again, fierce and sublimely unconcerned by the way that kissing Gerard Way had recently become an extreme sport. The tiny cut on his tongue was still bleeding, and the trace of blood colouring the kiss was enough to short-circuit Gerard's brain.

Resisting temptation had never been one of Gerard's best things. He could do it, and he'd more than proved that by this point, but when that temptation came in the form of a small, gorgeous, dark-haired, tattoo-covered guitarist with a penchant for bending over backwards on stage without missing a note – well, apparently that was pretty much his kryptonite, as Lindsey would cheerfully have attested. So it probably wasn't all that surprising that Frankie was able to push him back down onto the sofa, shove his tongue down Gerard's throat and start humping his thigh without Gerard making any kind of protest. It was Frankie, and he never really wanted to deny Frankie anything. And, besides, even this tiny little thread of blood was like a constant low-level buzz of perfect bliss. He wanted to give something back.

He wasn't really able to focus very well on anything physical beyond the taste of Frankie's blood in his mouth, even as faint as it was, so it took Gerard a moment or two to register what he was doing when Frank tugged Gerard's hand down and pushed it insistently into his pants. By the time Gerard was sufficiently alert to properly notice that he'd got his hand wrapped around Frank's cock on some kind of creepy autopilot and was helping jerk him off, it seemed pretty rude to just stop. It wasn't doing anything for him personally, as such, but it was clearly driving Frank quietly nuts, and Gerard loved the hell out of Frank, and really wanted him to feel even a quarter as good as he was making Gerard feel right now, so he got on with being reciprocal. One distant corner of his mind was a little surprised that Frank could manage to get it up despite the blood loss, but then he remembered how he'd reacted himself when Martin bit him, and stopped being surprised. And anyway, it was good that Frank was getting something out of it all, because now that Gerard understood what he'd been missing, he was going to have to make damn sure that Frank stayed within easy reach. Frank belonged to him.

When Frank finally came over Gerard's palm they both broke off from the kiss, shocky and breathless.

“Oh, fuck, yeah,” Frank gasped, his voice completely wrecked.

Gerard stared at the ceiling, abruptly restored to himself and reeling a little at what he'd just done. His hand was wet and sticky, and Frank was a warm, damp, delicious weight wrapped around him, and he'd just used Frankie like he was some kind of juice box. And he'd also, come to think of it, pretty much cheated on Lindsey, which was not something he would have ever imagined could possibly happen.

“Oh, fuck,” Gerard echoed, sounding pretty wrecked himself at the realisation. After a moment or
two he considered wiping his hand clean on the sofa, but that seemed like a rude way to repay the Wentzes' hospitality, so he raised it up to his mouth and licked it clean instead, still staring up at the ceiling in a sort of dull shock while his tongue curled efficiently around his fingers. It wasn't like drinking Frank's blood, but it was still human, still Frank, and it still lit things up inside him in a dull echo of the buzz he got from drinking blood. It also made him feel like a massive creeper who had just seduced his best friend using his newfound vampiric mind control powers, and the thought made him close his eyes and make a tiny little sound of distress, which Frank apparently misinterpreted as some kind of sexy thing, because Frank promptly gave a whimper of his own and dragged Gerard's hand over to his mouth to kiss his knuckles, of all the stupid, sentimental things.

“Love you, man,” he muttered, drowsily, as he snuggled into Gerard's chest - and that was nothing new, and no revelation, but it made Gerard flinch with guilt. He loved Frank back, he really did, and he shouldn't be taking advantage of Frank's vulnerability like this. Gerard was trembling all over, his body buzzing from the rush of Frankie's blood and his mind running around in frantic guilty circles.

“Frankie,” he said, trying to figure out where to begin and wondering miserably just how the hell he could explain this to Lindsey, on top of the whole undead-creature-of-the-night thing. Jesus fuck, Patrick thought his life was a soap opera?

“Love you,” Frank said again, and Gerard felt something give. All he really wanted to do right now was curl up in a ball and not have to think, and that seemed to be right at the top of Frank's agenda too. So he decided to put off his nervous breakdown for later, and just try to enjoy the cuddling right now instead.

“Love you too,” he whispered helplessly, because whatever else was true, that was certainly true too, and always had been, and so he pulled Frank up against him and spooning himself around Frank's back.

* * *

It was just before sunrise when Mikey found him sitting out on the balcony of the guest room with his arms wrapped around his knees. Gerard had spent the intervening hours working himself into a fever of self-recrimination on a whole host of scores, the least of which was the fact that he still wanted to bite Frankie. When the biting had been hypothetical he had been able to convince himself that it wouldn't be cheating on Lindsey because, after all, this was how vampires were designed to eat. Almost. He'd maybe known somewhere deep down that he was lying to himself about how complicated things were, but it had seemed such a reasonable and persuasive sort of lie, and Frank was just so appallingly tempting, and so safe, that...but there was no getting away from the fact that this had been about more than just feeding, even before he ended up with his hand in Frank's pants. It was just so intense, and so irresistible, feeling connected to Frankie like that; it wasn't like anything else he'd ever experienced, and it certainly wasn’t anything like casually having a slice of pizza back when he was human. It was profound, and exhilarating, and passionate, and just about the most intimate thing he could imagine, like crawling inside somebody’s head, like taking up residence in their heart.

Fuck. Gerard hated himself. He totally wouldn't blame Lindsey if she wanted to have nothing more to do with him, because this thing with Frankie had been completely out of line and he knew exactly how he'd feel if she hooked up with Jimmy. It had blindsided him, because it hadn't been about sex, and because he'd been so intimate with Frankie for so many years already that that aspect of it, the cheating-on-the-girl-he-loved aspect of it, simply hadn't been part of his freak out at all until he'd already gone hurtling over that particular line in the sand. He'd been busy freaking out about the possibility of hurting Frank, and about whether he was manipulating things with his vampire mind
control-fu, and panicking about the possibility that he was sliding into another addiction, and before he knew it he was lying on the sofa with a post-coital Frank in his arms, coming down from an amazing high with a terrified sense of oh-fuck-what-have-I-just-done.

If it had been Lindsey instead – oh, fuck, Gerard honestly didn't know whether it would have been better or worse if he'd fed on her. Because he didn't want to use any mind control shit on his wife, or objectify her – but then he didn't want to use Frankie either.

He really wished she had been there, though. It felt like she should have been there for something so huge.

Fuck. Gerard didn't think that Lestat had had these kinds of worries.

“You know that the sun isn't going to kill you, right?” Mikey asked, from behind him, and Gerard heaved a sigh.

“Yeah,” he said heavily. “I know.” He glanced over at Mikey and felt another surge of guilt. “Shit, man – I'm really sorry to drag you into all this mess.” Mikey ought to be home with Alicia, dressing up the cat and playing video games, not running around the country trying to help Gerard cope with his fuckups all over again.

Mikey narrowed his eyes and pushed his glasses up his nose. He was still barefoot, and his hair was sticking out at truly impressive angles, but he managed to radiate fraternal disapproval in spite of these handicaps. “Don't even,” was all he said, but it was pretty pointed.

Gerard felt himself flushing. “Sorry,” he said again, and Mikey rolled his eyes and slid down to sit beside him.

“You're cold,” Mikey said, leaning comfortably up against him. It was more like an observation than a complaint, though, like he was teaching himself to know this new Gerard.

“Sorry.”

“Stop that! It's fine. It's just – different,” Mikey said. And Gerard knew that he meant it, which was incredibly comforting.

They sat like that for a while, and Gerard began calming down. He was heavy-eyed and weary in the gathering dawn, feeling dull and disappointed in himself. It was kind of a pity that the sunrise wasn't going to make him burst into flames, in some ways, because at least that would have ended all his problems pretty neatly. Still, Gerard didn't want to be dead dead. He just wanted to be handling things better, and not fucking anyone over. He wasn't doing too great at that right now, and he had this familiar walking-on-thin-ice feeling that he wasn't going to be able to control himself all that well now that he'd got a brand new shiny craving. He'd managed to substitute Starbucks for Jack Daniels, but that had been tied in with mastering fear and a whole bunch of other things too; going back to drinking the bagged blood when he'd got Frankie right there was going to be terrifyingly difficult.

But he couldn't do that again. Gerard wasn't going to do anything to hurt Lindsey or Bandit or Jamia or the girls. He'd fucked up once, but it wasn't going to happen again. And he wasn't going to go biting anyone else either, because that would be just as bad in its own way, and Gerard didn't want to go getting intimate with total strangers.

He really wanted to talk to Mikey about it, but however hard he tried he couldn't think of a way to explain that he was kind of a pervy creeper who had maybe used his vampire mind control powers to seduce Frank into becoming his lust-addled midnight snack. Mikey was handling the whole vampirism thing so well, and Gerard just hated the thought of disappointing him any further. He
swallowed with some difficulty and turned his attention instead to the matter of Bert McCracken – which, to be fair, was probably more important right now, from most people's points of view.

“So, there's this Circle-thing of chymeras, and they're all pissed at me,” Gerard said, trying valiantly to sound efficient and problem-solverish. “Pete tell you about them?”

“They're the cops,” Mikey said. “They're the reason he was so terrified of biting Patrick.”

Gerard flinched, and felt an unexpected rush of sympathy for Pete Wentz. “Yeah,” he said, trying to keep his voice level. “Brian and Bob are chymeras.” He squinted out at the sky, watching colour licking up from the horizon. “It's a weird name, though,” he added, because he'd been thinking this ever since Patrick mentioned them.

Mikey nodded. “Isn't that, like, some legendary monster?”

“Yeah,” Gerard said, sucking carefully on his bottom lip. “They call us changelings. Which – again, weird. I thought that was just fairies, you know? But apparently it means monsters in general.”

“You're not a monster.”

Gerard laughed unhappily. “Yeah – I really am, Mikeyway.”

“But you're an awesome monster.”

“You have to say that. You're my brother.”

Mikey punched him. Gerard acknowledged that he probably deserved it.

“So why are they mad at you?”

“Because Bert McCracken is a lying shit?” Gerard still felt kind of hurt and indignant about the whole thing with Bert. “He's, like, a rotten cop, or whatever - he just showed up on my doorstep and staked me. I wasn't hurting anybody! Seriously – who does that?”

Mikey made an indignant squawking noise beside him, and squeezed Gerard's hand tightly. God, Gerard had missed his brother.

“Pete said they weren't allowed to just go round killing wolves or vampires or whatever unprovoked,” Mikey said, sounding shocked. “They used to be, but the Fairy Queen outlawed it? Or something?”

Gerard nodded. He was a bit fuzzy on that part too, but he was quite clear on the whole not-supposed-to-get-staked-just-for-existing side of things.

“Patrick says that Bert just likes killing.”

“That I can buy.” Mikey had never been a big fan of Bert. This, Gerard had to acknowledge, was yet another instance of Mikey having damn good judgement.

“He's got them all against me,” Gerard said, sadly. “Maybe even Brian. They all think I went rogue.”

They sat in silence for several minutes, and Gerard thought back to Bert McCracken picketing their gig years ago, and yelling insults through the goddamn loudspeaker.

“He really isn't the guy I thought he was,” he said.
“He's an asshole,” said Mikey, succinct as ever. “Why not talk to this Fairy Queen, then?”

Gerard took a moment to appreciate how strange his life had become over the past week.

“You think she'd help?”

Mikey rolled his eyes. “She's the one who interfered in the first place, right? So she's not, like, anti-vampire on general principles, or whatever. Couldn't hurt?”

“Well – no. No, I suppose it couldn't hurt,” Gerard agreed, considering the idea from all angles. “Maybe Brendon could put in a good word for us?”

“Exactly.”

“Fuck, you knew about Panic too?” He'd been faintly hoping to surprise Mikey with that one, but he really should have known better. “You know everything, Mikeyway! I can't believe you kept all this shit secret. I mean – this is some epic shit, and you never breathed a goddamn word!”

Mikey gave a very small grin.

“The music industry is like some kind of Joss Whedon show,” Gerard mused. “What's up with that? In fact, 'Fall Out Boy' is practically a Joss Whedon show all its own.” He glanced over at Mikey. “Are Andy and Joe, like, zombies or something? Vengeance Demons?”

“Nah. 'The Damned Things' are all regular humans,” said Mikey, consideringly. “Which is kind of ironic. But all of Pete's new band are werewolves.”

Gerard shook his head. “You're like the Fort Knox of secrets!”

He froze when Mikey said: “So, speaking of secrets – you tell Lindsey about the vampire thing yet?”

“No!” Gerard exclaimed, sitting up straight and feeling guilty about the thing with Frank all over again. “I – no.” He blushed. “How can I tell her that over the phone? It sounds so crazy!”

“You told me over the phone.”

Gerard considered that. “You called me,” he said defensively. “And you were all ‘Brian says you have something to tell me’. You took me by surprise.”

“So I should get Lindsey to call you, and give her lots of clues about the mysterious thing you need to tell her, so she can take you by surprise?”

“No! No, I'm gonna – I really want to tell her. God, she'd be the best person, she could help me get my head straight about this shit. But – I don't want to interrupt her tour and make her come running over here, you know? She's loving it, and she deserves to have that, without me being a big drama queen and making her be just, like, my wife, instead of being an awesome rock star in her own right. That's bullshit. She's not just Mrs Gerard Way, for fuck's sakes.” He didn't mention his nagging fear that she'd take one look at the monster he'd become and tell him there was no way she'd let him within a hundred miles of Bandit, because that particular possibility was just too scary to think about, and besides, she'd be able to see past the stupid fangs and know that he was still him. If anybody could, Lindsey could. And she could probably (Oh, God, please) forgive him for the whole no-more-erections thing too, even though the prospect of letting her down like that was just mortifying. So he wasn't going to freak out about either of those things. Much. “And – and I just made stuff a lot more complicated,” he admitted unhappily, thinking about Frank.
“Hmm,” said Mikey. “You want to tell me about it?”

“...no?” said Gerard in a small voice.

Mikey gave him a look that made him feel about an inch high. “Okay,” was all he said, but he packed a whole lot into those two syllables. “Whenever you're ready.”

“Thanks,” said Gerard, sighing. Mikey just shrugged, and after an awkward moment Gerard snuggled in closer, and they watched the sun rise together.

* * *

Gerard had been more than half-expecting to be interrupted, but it was Frank he thought would come bounding out onto the balcony in the rosy dawnlight, not Pete Wentz. Gerard was profoundly relieved, and then a heartbeat later he felt guilt-stricken all over again. Fortunately Pete was rumpled and gleeful and in full-on Tigger mode, and it was more or less impossible to sustain an angsty meltdown in the presence of his glee.

“How much do you love me, Gerard Way?” Pete asked, flinging himself down and sprawling across both their laps. He was wearing blue satin pyjama bottoms that Gerard was fairly sure belonged to the lovely Mrs Wentz, and a Team Jacob t-shirt.

“Er,” Gerard said, wondering whether this was a trick question and pretending not to notice the bite mark on Pete's wrist. He made a mental note to ask Patrick about that later – evidently this whole 'you cannot feed on werewolves' thing had been a little bit of an exaggeration. “A lot?”

“Lots and lots and lots and lots,” sing-songed Pete, happily. “Because I've got the answer to all your problems, my gloomy little friend! You need an audience with the Fairy Queen!”

“I suggested that already,” said Mikey, ruffling a hand through Pete's hair. He had that little half-smile that only a handful of people managed to bring to the surface, Gerard noticed, and seeing it made him like Pete more.

“That, Mikeyway, is because you are a Sweet Li'l Dude, and we clearly have some kind of very special psychic link,” Pete said earnestly. “Go Team!” He angled his head further so he could meet Gerard's eyes, and Gerard paid almost no attention to the way this exposed his neck. “So I called Brendon already, Gerard – dawn and dusk are the best times of day for pestering the Good People. He's on the case.” Pete beamed. “Who's your daddy?”

“Never say that again,” said Mikey, with feeling. “You sound like bad porn.”

“I sound like awesome porn!” Pete said, waggling his eyebrows. Mikey snorted.

“That's great, Pete,” Gerard said politely. “Thank you. And tell Brendon thanks from me?”

“Hey, no worries! Can't have the Circle stalking Patrick all over LA county.”

“Hmm,” said Gerard. “Although that would mean he'd have to hide out with you guys indefinitely.”

Pete looked thoughtful for a moment, then gave a boneless shrug. “If you love something, set it free,” he said. “Besides, I owe you. You brought me my Patrick!”

Gerard found that it was impossible to be grumpy in the face of so much sincere delight, and grinned back in spite of himself.
“He’s not still pissed, then?”

Pete’s answering smile was so wide that Gerard started to wonder whether he secretly had a fliptop head. “I knew he couldn’t stay mad at me,” he said, breezily. “We kissed and made up.” Another eyebrow waggle accompanied this announcement.

“Oh, God - _please_ don't expand on that?” said Gerard, before Pete could launch himself into the murky waters of T.M.I. Pete just laughed instead, and then smacked his forehead.

“D’oh! I almost forgot – we called in some favours and got you guys some blood delivered,” he said, digging a hand into the pocket of his hoodie and tugging out a completely unappetising-looking bag of blood.

Gerard eyed it askance, and then tried to school his features into something appropriately grateful and tempted, rather than looking incriminatingly like a coffee snob being presented with a mug of Nescafe and powdered creamer.

“Thanks!” he said, catching the bag as Pete tossed it in his direction. It made a sad squishing noise, and the plastic was room temperature against his skin. After Frankie, it was kind of like a bad joke. “I’ll, um, I’ll pop it into the microwave, yeah?” he said, awkwardly, reminding himself that it was still blood, and thus awesome, and that he couldn't go expecting to live off of delicious New Jersey rhythm guitarists for the rest of his unlife. Or ever again, really. Damn it. “Where did you get it?” he asked, to distract himself from feeling miserable about the prospect of never biting Frankie again.

“You wouldn't believe me,” Pete said, flipping over onto his belly and grinning up at Gerard.

“I totally would,” said Gerard. “I think I'm beyond surprising.”

“Audrey Hepburn.”


“True. Don't know if you heard, but so's Gerard Way.”

“Well – yes, but – what?” Gerard studied Pete's face suspiciously, waiting for the punchline. “Really?”

“Really. Cross my heart and hope to die. She's, like, three hundred or something.”

“Huh.” Gerard tried to process that. “But – no, but, look, she _aged._ Over time. I saw pictures, and – I mean, she was a really stunning old lady, but she was definitely an old lady, not an immortal teenager.”

Pete shrugged. “Freaky vampire magic, dude. Don't ask me. We just get the actual shape-shifting; you guys are the ones who can pull all the whacky glamour stuff and hide your real appearance.”

Gerard stared from Pete to Mikey, noticing that his little brother looked suspiciously unfazed by this information. That didn't mean it was true, of course – it just meant that Pete had told Mikey this information before. On the other hand, there was no real reason Gerard could think of why it _shouldn't_ be true. There were apparently more things between heaven and earth, etcetera etcetera.

“Okay. So – Audrey Hepburn's a vampire,” Gerard said cautiously.

“Audrey Hepburn's a vampire,” Pete confirmed, without bursting out laughing.
“Huh. And she staged her own death because...?”

“She'd gotten tired of pretending to be an old lady, I guess? I mean, I've met her, but it's not like we're Facebook friends, or whatever,” said Pete.

Gerard shook his head. “That's – wow. Wow. Every time I think I've got to grips with this crazy shit, somebody shows up with another truckload of crazy shit.”

Pete grinned. “It is pretty rad.”

“So – what's she doing in L.A? Isn't she kind of – well. Conspicuous?”

Mikey gave a little snort of laughter. “You're going to like this bit,” he said. Gerard looked from him over to Pete, feeling his eyes going wide.

“She works here,” said Pete. “As an Audrey Hepburn lookalike.”

Gerard gaped. Mikey giggled some more.

“That's pretty awesome,” he admitted.

“You know what's even better?” Mikey asked, grinning. “Apparently some plastic surgeon told her he could make her look way more convincing if she spent ten thousand dollars on surgery.”

Gerard's jaw dropped. “Oh my God. That is so L.A.,” he said, missing New Jersey passionately all of a sudden.

“It really is,” agreed Pete, grinning. He scrambled to his feet. “Hey, look, if you're not ravenous right now then give me back the bag and I'll go heat the stuff up for you. Just thought you'd be ready for a snack, if you were still awake, and I didn't want you snacking on my Sweet L'il Dude here.”

Gerard winced. He could feel Mikey's eyes on him. “No, I'm not ravenous,” he said carefully. “Um – so, yeah. Thanks. That would be great.” He handed the bag back to Pete.

“No worries. So, look, I talked to Brendon like ten minutes ago. He's going to get right back to us. You still planning on being awake for a while?”

“Sure,” said Gerard, rubbing the heel of his hand against his eye and feeling more like a zombie than a vampire. “Thanks, Pete. Seriously, you've been incredible, you and Ashlee. I owe you guys big time.”

“Nah. You brought me my Alphadog,” said Pete, shrugging, a stupidly happy smile curving his mouth all over again. “I'm going to be owing you for a while, man.”

Gerard could feel Mikey's eyes on him as Pete headed off out the door, but he didn't dare look.

“Not ravenous,” Mikey said, slowly. Gerard felt himself reddening. There was a little pause.

“Where's Frank?”

“Sleeping,” Gerard said too quickly. “He – he, uh, crashed out in the other room.”

“Mmm,” said Mikey. “Yeah, I seem to remember doing that myself. I guess you guys moved me somewhere more comfortable? But Frank's still through there?”

Gerard still didn't dare look at Mikey. He knew that tone of voice entirely too well. He stared intently at his knees instead.
“Gee? Look at me.”

Gerard looked up very reluctantly. He could feel himself blushing to the tips of his ears.

“Oh my God, you did!” said Mikey, sounding scandalised. “You totally bit him!”

“It was an accident!” Gerard said, wretchedly. “Or – well, not exactly an – I mean, I didn't just trip and fall on his throat, but – um.” He swallowed. “But I really wasn't planning on doing anything, I swear.”

Mikey was watching him narrowly. “Why Frank?” he asked at last, and Gerard couldn't quite decide how to interpret his voice. “Why not me?”

Gerard felt his eyes bulging at that. “Mikey! Don't – I couldn't bite you!” he said, honestly horrified.

Mikey looked confused. “I've donated blood. It's only the same thing,” he said.

“You've never donated blood,” Mikey pointed out, mildly.

“Trust me on this? I've been bitten and I've done the biting and – and it's really not the same as donating blood. You – look, it would be weird, okay? Squicky and weird.”

Mikey cocked his head to one side. “But if you were starving...”

“It would still be weird,” Gerard said, shuddering. He'd totally do it, if he were starving, of course, but once he had possession of his own faculties again it would be the most horrifyingly awkward thing ever.

Mikey studied him narrowly. “Huh,” he said, at last. It shouldn't have been possible to pack so much into one little syllable, but Mikey managed it somehow.

“Anyway, he's – he's fine, Gerard said, firmly. “He's just resting.”

“Oh my God, stop judging me!” he ran one shaky hand through his hair and then sank his head into his hands. “I really didn't mean to cheat on Lindsey! It just happened!”

And maybe he was freaking out over nothing, because Lindsey had always been A-okay with him being a tactile and affectionate kind of guy with the people he loved, and Frankie had always been right up at the top of that list. Making out and casual groping was all just business as usual. But there was something so shockingly intimate about drinking somebody's blood – and on top of that there was the unambiguous hands-down-the-pants stuff – and there was the horrifying part about it maybe not being entirely consenting. It felt like – it felt like Lindsey should have been there, should have been part of his first time. Like she wouldn't have let him get away with forcing Frankie into doing anything he didn't want to do. It broke his heart a little that she hadn't been. He should have waited.

The silence that followed this frantic little outburst was deafening. When Gerard peeked out through his hair, Mikey looked positively green.

“I know!” Gerard wailed. “I know, I know, I'm a terrible human being!”
“Well – you're not actually a human being,” Mikey pointed out, helpfully.

Gerard winced. “I am a terrible – a terrible thing. And that's what I meant about it not being like donating blood. Unless donating blood is a lot more of a turn on than anyone lets on. Because the whole blood-drinking thing is – well, it's pretty - sexy. So drinking from you would be – kind of awkward.”

Mikey made a flaily gesture with his hands in what looked like a futile attempt to push the words back into Gerard's mouth. “No! Stop, stop! I just meant – well, you're supposed to eat people, right? Or drink them, I guess. So – well, it's like the Circle of Life, or something, right? Nature.” Mikey swallowed, and Gerard could see him trying to wrap his brain around this latest instance of fail. “I mean, people wouldn't let you drink their blood if there wasn't some kind of, um, motivation. Something in it for them. Right? Uh. So – I guess it's not such a big deal, really. And you and Frank are always, you know. You and Frank.”

“Yeah,” Gerard said, staring glumly down at the smudged remnants of Lindsey’s tattoo still visible on his arm.

“You really need to tell Lindsey about the vampire thing,” Mikey said, firmly.

Gerard looked up then, feeling his mouth twist into an unhappy grimace. “But she’s on tour! I don’t want to drag her away from all that!” he said.

Mikey rolled his eyes. “Gee, there will be other tours. Think how you’d feel if she was going through this stuff and not telling you about it!”

Gerard’s mouth dropped open a little at that, and as he let himself really think about that scenario he felt like throwing up. Mikey watched his face knowingly.

“Yeah. See?”

“I need to tell Lindsey about the vampire thing,” Gerard said, staggered by how obvious this was, when he thought about it from that point of view. He got to his feet. “I’ll - yeah. I’ll do that. You’re right, Mikeyway.”

“I usually am,” Mikey agreed.

He could call her, he decided, as he stepped off the balcony and back into the guest room. He could call her up again, once it was a reasonable hour for humans to be awake, and tell her about the vampire thing, and she would believe him. And it would be okay. And he could tell her that things had gotten out of hand with Frankie, with the biting and all. It would be awkward, and he'd feel like a shit, but she knew how much he loved Frankie, and – and they'd work it out. He believed that. He had to believe that, although he hated to think about disappointing her. But she knew who he was, and she loved him for being himself, not for being some other guy.

For who he had been, a tiny voice whispered in the back of his head. Now he was some other guy, of course, to some extent. Now he was some other thing. And maybe somebody ought to be stepping in and saving Lindsey and Bandit and Frank and everyone from him, before he did something really unforgiveable.

He stared at himself fretfully in the dressing table’s ornate mirror for a moment, and pulled a face. No. He was still himself, in the things that mattered. He wasn’t a thing, he was still Gerard Way, and he still loved the people he loved. He wasn’t going to hurt them. He’d fucked up last night, gotten in too deep, but he was going to make it right.
In retrospect it should have been totally obvious that Gerard was going to walk straight into Frankie, but when it happened Gerard froze like a bunny in the headlights and gave serious consideration to whether he could glamour himself invisible. From the way that Frank was currently grinning at him with little cartoon hearts in his eyes, though, Gerard thought that was pretty unlikely.

“Um,” Gerard said, trying not to stare at Frank's scorpion tattoo. There had been the very faintest aftertaste of ink to Frankie's blood – almost more of a scent than an actual flavour – like a reminder of all the art covering Frankie's skin, and along with the physical sensations there had been that ineffable sense of connection – a sort of metaphysical component completely lacking from the prepackaged dead blood Gerard was supposed to stick to. Gerard realised, rather belatedly, that he had drifted closer to Frankie without even thinking about it, and that his hand was already half-way to touching the bite mark on Frankie's neck. He snatched it behind his back, taking a step away from Frankie and dragging his gaze back up to Frankie's face.

“How are you?” he said stiffly. “This morning? How are you this morning? Frank?”

Frankie was still giving him these soft, besotted, post-coital eyes that seemed to strongly imply that Frankie was pretty damned awesome this morning, thank you very much.

“Amazing, Gee,” he said in a low do-me-now voice that Gerard hadn't suspected he was capable of.

Gerard swallowed, and reminded himself that Frankie was an innocent mortal with no defence against Gerard's newfound powers of supernatural seduction. God. It was like he'd dosed his best friend with rohypnol or something. Gerard was painfully ashamed of himself, and promised Frankie silently that he wouldn't go taking advantage of his vulnerable condition. Again. He smiled his very best Platonic Smile.

“That's great,” he said in a Stepford-cheerful tone of voice. “So – ah – I'm really sorry about last night, it won't happen again. Um.”

Frank blinked at him as if Gerard had spontaneously broken into Urdu.

“Haha,” Gerard added, hating himself. “Curiosity solved, right? Now you know what it feels like to be bitten, and I know what it feels like to drink from a – from – from you, Frankie. And, um. It won't happen again.”

Frank's sunny expression started to dim. “But...” he said slowly, and Gerard gave a terrified giggle and steamrollered over him before he could say anything suicidally foolish.

“Anyway, Pete's on the case with my little Bert problem. Did you know Brendon was a fairy prince, or something? He's going to set us up a meeting with the Queen of the Fairies. Seemingly they out-badass the vampire slayers and the vampires and just about everybody else, which is pretty cool, really, considering what a rep fairies usually get. I wonder what she's like? D'you think she has wings? Or maybe – oh, wow, maybe she rides a unicorn, like a flying unicorn, like She-ra? Do you think unicorns are real too, Frankie? I should ask that, right? Unicorns and dragons and shit – I mean, maybe everything is out there somewhere, right?”

Gerard rattled on frantically about fairies and monsters and how exciting everything was, and all the while Frankie's smile was growing smaller and smaller, until finally it had melted away altogether.

“Stop it,” Frank said at last, in a small voice. “I'm sorry, okay? I'm not going to jump you. Jesus. Calm the fuck down, Gee.”
Gerard froze, his tongue welded to the roof of his mouth, and stared back at Frankie wide-eyed. Frank looked kind of shame-faced and miserable, which was completely weird.


“It's okay. I'm sorry, alright? I'm – I'm really fucking sorry.”

“But you didn't...” Gerard said, feeling like he'd just landed in Bizarro World.

“Oh, I totally did. And I'm sorry. I know you weren't into it. I fucked up, okay?” Frank said, roughly. “I made things weird. Sorry.”

Gerard gaped. “Not – not into it?”

Frank gave him a very pointed look, and when Gerard continued to stare at him in a baffled way Frank's eyes darted down to Gerard's crotch and then away, his cheeks flushing.


Frank's jaw dropped. “The fuck?”


“Oh my God, Gee!” Frank said, momentarily distracted from the hideously awkward morning after conversation they were trapped in by this revelation about Gerard's vampirism. “That sucks, man!”

Gerard caught his eye, and they both cracked up.

“Yeah, well – yeah,” Gerard said, through his giggles. “I think that's kind of the point, you know? That biting's the only, um, penetrating I get to do now? So. Um.” The giggles died down again. “I was, you know. Into it.” Frank was still hiccuping with laughter, but the tone of Gerard's voice made him stop. “I was – really fucking into it, Frankie. Jesus. You have no idea. It was – it was amazing, okay? You're amazing.”

Frank was studying him closely now, with an expression that made Gerard want to hide behind the sofa.

“So you were into it? I wasn't just being some kind of pushy creeper?” Frank said, slowly, watching Gerard through lowered lashes. “Taking advantage of you?”

“What? You weren't – no, Frankie! God! You weren't taking advantage of me, that's not even – oh, fuck, I've fucked this up so bad. Look, Frank, Frankie, look – you're not in your right mind. Okay? This isn't you. I've, like, whammied you.” Gerard waved his fingers around in a manner that was supposed to convey spooky mind control powers, but looked rather more like someone trying to do jazz hands through an attack of epilepsy. “I didn't mean to, honest, but I must've just – I don't know. It got away from me because I wanted you so fucking bad, Frankie.” He swallowed, feeling like the sleaziest guy ever. “You're - man, I'm sorry, but you just smell really really good. Is that creepy? It's creepy, isn't it? Fuck. But I couldn't stop thinking about it, and then – but I should have been a better friend, Frank. I'm sorry. You didn't deserve to be objectified like that. I took advantage of you. I'm a horrible person.”

Frank gaped at him, his brows drawing together in an angry little furrow. “You – what? You're apologising for making me come like a freight train?”
“Yes!” Gerard said, miserably. “Yes, Frank! You don't really think about me like that – I just fucked with your mind and your ability to consent. I mean – look, I fucking love you, man, you know that, right? And it was – I mean, it was really – fuck, it was intense, right? Like – man, like having an orgasm for the first time ever. You blew my fucking mind, Frankie! But – but we're not – I mean, this was, like, life-changingly huge, but you're in love with Jamia, and I'm in love with Lindsey, and – I'm not that kind of guy. And neither are you. This was just – this was because I'm a monster now, and I fucked up.” He closed his eyes. “I'm really sorry,” he said again, in a small voice.

There was a very uncomfortable pause.

“Okay, so the only reason I'm not actually smacking you upside the head right now is because you look like the runt of the litter who's been kicked out into a snowstorm while all the other puppies are laughing it up indoors with turkey dinners and a roaring fire. Seriously. Pathetic. If you could bottle this shit, we'd make millions.”

Gerard opened his eyes and gazed at Frank, feeling completely woebegone.

“Frankie,” he began, seriously, but Frank waved his hands in the air and Gerard shut up.

“You're an asshole,” Frank said, clearly torn between exasperation and fondness. “You're a ridiculous, masochistic asshole.” He sighed. “But I love you anyway, Gerard Way, which is the only reason I'm not smacking you upside the head with a chair right now, you dumb fucker.”

“But...” Gerard said.

“Look, Gee – it's cool. Jamia's cool. I'm not – I wouldn't do that to her. I'm not a jerk. She knows, okay?”

Gerard stared at him blankly. “She knows that I'm a vampire?”

“Well, yeah, that too, obviously. Anybody else and we'd've thought it was bullshit, but when Mikey told us we were both, like, 'Yeah, that would totally happen to Gerard.'” Gerard stood up a little straighter at that, and tried not to pout. He didn't really appreciate the way that everyone seemed so unsurprised about his astonishing life-changing experience. He hadn't been walking around with "Vampire Bait – Bite Now!” written on him, for fuck's sakes!

“But that's not what I meant,” Frankie said, staring very pointedly into Gerard's eyes. “We've talked about this, me and her. About this. You and me. Oh, years ago. You're on my Exception List.” He gave an embarrassed little giggle. “Actually, you pretty much are my Exception List.”

Gerard just stared at him blankly. “She knows that I'm a vampire?”

“Well, yeah, that too, obviously. Anybody else and we'd've thought it was bullshit, but when Mikey told us we were both, like, 'Yeah, that would totally happen to Gerard.'” Gerard stood up a little straighter at that, and tried not to pout. He didn't really appreciate the way that everyone seemed so unsurprised about his astonishing life-changing experience. He hadn't been walking around with “Vampire Bait – Bite Now!” written on him, for fuck's sakes!

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Gerard just stared at him.

“Jamia's got Johnny Depp, Christina Ricci and Adam Sandler on hers.”

“Adam Sandler?”

“I know, right? What's up with that?” Frank rubbed the back of his neck absently, his eyes sliding down to Gerard's mouth. “So – I mean, that's totally not why I came out here. I wasn't just hoping to jump your undead bones. But – it's okay. This is okay.”

Gerard knew he must look kind of like a cartoon character who'd been hit over the head by a piano, but he couldn't help it.

“I don't have an Exception List,” he blurted, and Franks' face went shuttered. “I mean – I mean, if I did, you'd be on it, Frankie, right up there with Christina Ricci and David Bowie and Grant
Morrison, but, but – I don’t. Me and Lindsey, we never talked about something like this. It's – I – I don't want to be that guy, Frankie. I love her.”

“Wow,” said Frank, after a beat. “Way to make me feel like a cheating asshole.”

“No! No, I didn't mean – I mean, it's cool you guys have that kind of – I mean, oh, fuck, this is coming out all wrong.”

Frank was looking at him pretty pissily now, and the worst part of all was that Gerard still wanted to bend him over the nearest handy piece of furniture and bite the shit out of him. Because Gerard was a bad, bad man, and Frank was his shiny new addiction.

“And it's – I mean, I'm really flattered,” Gerard added, awkwardly.

“Yeah, well – don't be. Apparently I have really shitty taste.”

“Frankie, don't be like that!”

“Don't call me a cheating slut, then, you asshole,” snapped Frank, and Gerard flinched, and then reached out unthinkingly for Frank's arm. Frank jumped back as if he'd been stung, and they stared at one another wide-eyed.

“I didn't!” Gerard protested. “I would never...!”

“Yeah, you really did, Gee. But you know what? You're off the list now, so we're good. Smug assholes and eunuchs are a major turn-off.”

Gerard's face fell, and he felt himself flushing crimson again. He really was a total freak, and a failure.

“I'm sorry,” he said hoarsely.

Frank shrugged, his mouth tight. “Don't sweat it. I'm going outside for a smoke. Have fun talking to the fairies.”

Gerard watched Frank stalk off, stiff-legged with anger and affronted dignity like a cat that had just been dropped in a bath. When he was out of sight, Mikey pushed open the guest room door and gave Gerard a sympathetic look.

“Well, I think that could have gone better,” he said, pulling a face.

Gerard dropped his head in his hands. “I am an asshole. I am the asshole to end all assholes. Assholio, King of the Asshole People on the planet Asshole.”

“Shouldn't that be Uranus?”

“Shut up. I'm just saying – I'm an asshole.”

“Well – yeah,” Mikey agreed, apologetically. “You sort of are, dude.”

“Fuck.” Gerard sighed. “Okay, let's go see what Brendon Urie has to say about this mess. How much worse can it get?”

* * *

One of these days, Gerard was going to learn to stop asking stupid questions. This, apparently, was
not that day.

“He said what?” Gerard was a little bit embarrassed by how shrill he sounded, but nobody else in the room seemed to notice. He clutched tight at the fabric of the hoodie Frank had left on the sofa, as if it was some kind of comfort blanket.

Pete gave him an apologetic grin and set the tray of drinks down on the coffee table. “It's not so bad,” he said, ducking his head.

“The Fairy Queen is the only person – or being, whatever – powerful enough to overrule these chymera guys, right?”

“Well – yeah,” admitted Pete, sheepishly. Patrick and Ashlee were both scowling at Gerard, but Gerard felt he was allowed to be pissed right now, and he got the impression that Mikey maybe agreed.

“And Brendon says she can't be reached.”

“Well – yeah.”

“Because she's at some kind of mystical spa? Shoe-shopping in fairyland? What?”

The scowling intensified. “Gerard,” said Patrick, glaring daggers at him from over the top of Bronx Mowgli's white-blond mop of curls. The kid carried right on picking the marshmallows out of the bowl of Lucky Charms Patrick was holding for him, oblivious to how pissy Uncle Patrick was starting to get. For somebody who wasn't very good with kids, Patrick did seem to have fallen right into being a favourite uncle rather quickly.

“She's gone into seclusion,” Ashlee interjected, watching Gerard narrowly. “It's something she does.”

“And she's the Fairy Queen, Gerard. It's not like she's listed in the Yellow Pages. God, none of us minor leaguers have ever even seen her. She's – it's like getting an audience with the President. With the Pope, even.”

Gerard made a frustrated noise. “So now what?”

“Now we call Bob,” said Patrick, smiling warmly at Pete as he scooped up his son and Ashlee passed Patrick a Star Wars mug of blood. Bronx Mowgli's curious little sea-urchin fingers wriggled hopefully at the mug, but Patrick kept it out of reach.

Gerard considered Bob Bryar, and felt himself calming down a little. Ashlee passed him a Star Wars mug of his own, and he was temporarily distracted from the matter at hand when he saw it featured Boba Fett. Boba Fett was totally badass. And also almost called Bob, which was possibly a sign.


Patrick fished his cell phone out of his back pocket and thumbed a couple of buttons, then lifted it up to his ear. Gerard watched, and chewed his thumbnail nervously. Fuck. Frankie had totally the right idea, going outside for a smoke. Gerard tugged the hoodie on over his t-shirt, and breathed in the stale sunshine-and-cigarettes smell of Frankie. It was a pale shadow of a Frankie hug, but it was better than nothing. After a moment he pulled the hood on over his head too.

“Hey, Bob,” Patrick said, after a moment. Vampire hearing was pretty damned awesome, because Gerard could hear Bob as clearly as if he'd been in the same room with them.
“Hey, Patrick. You guys okay?”

“So far so good, but we're running out of ideas.”

“You should get Brendon Urie to contact the Fairy Queen for you.”

“Yeah – tried that. Didn't work. She's somewhere Underhill, busy with important Sidhe business.”

“Fuck.”

“Yeah.”

“Um. You could always try approaching the Circle officially,” said Bob, his voice tentative. “I mean – assuming that Gerard definitely didn't attack Bert.”

“I definitely didn't attack Bert!” Gerard said, feeling affronted. Patrick waved a shushing hand at him.

“They wouldn't just stake us on sight?” he asked, sounding dubious.

“They shouldn't. The accords say that you lot are entitled to due process. I mean, it's Fairy Law, not Federal Law, but – they have, like, mind readers and shit. They should be able to clear you guys, and then you're home free.”

Pete frowned, fiddling with the rim of his coffee cup and glancing nervously from Patrick to Ashlee and then back again.

“That's never been tested,” he muttered. Gerard realised a little belatedly that they could all hear both sides of the conversation, except for Mikey. No need for speakerphone around vampires and werewolves.

Patrick glanced over at Pete with something soft in his eyes that made Gerard look away. “Okay,” he said, cautiously. “So – how do we do this, then? Safely? How do we hand ourselves in without just getting staked?”

“Go to the top,” Bob said immediately. “Throw yourselves on the mercy of the First, and he'll have to protect you on his honour. I can bring you guys in, if you trust me – take you straight there. He's actually in LA for once, so, you know, good timing.”

Patrick swallowed. “Mind readers, you said?”

He was looking kind of pale, and Gerard remembered abruptly what Patrick had told him about killing civilians. Shit. He really was bringing a whole world of trouble down on his friends.

“No,” he started to say, but Patrick was ignoring him.

“Give us a couple of minutes to talk it through?” he said, sounding calm and professional. Ashlee had come up behind him and was resting her hands on his shoulders, kneading them gently, an anxious expression on her face.

“Cool,” said Bob. “But – don't take too long, okay? There's some dangerous motherfuckers out there looking for you guys right now. Be careful.”

“I'm always careful, Bobert,” Patrick said, with a tight little smile. “Speak to you soon.”

He hung up and looked around at the others.
“Somebody want to fill me in?” asked Mikey, looking around at all the worried faces and fiddling with his coffee cup.

“We're going to turn ourselves in,” said Patrick.

“Trick – I don't know about this.” Pete's shoulders were hunched and he looked very small and unhappy behind his Corpse Bride coffee mug.

“It'll be okay,” Patrick said firmly, smiling at him.

“It doesn't sound okay,” Mikey said, looking from Patrick to Gerard. “Sounds a little bit suicidal. Aren't these the guys that want to kill you?”

Gerard nodded. He didn't want to undermine Patrick, but Mikey was saying pretty much exactly what he was thinking right now.

“But they aren't allowed to,” Patrick said patiently. “Not officially. Not if we didn't hurt anybody. And we didn't hurt anybody.” He didn't look at Gerard as he said this.

“Yeah, but – that's B.S., though,” Pete said. “I mean, yeah, okay, we've come out of the closet, a lot of us, since the Fairy Queen got the First to sign the accords. And it's not like the Bad Old Days now. Mostly. But you know it's still not safe, Trick. You can't trust those people.”

“I'm not seeing a whole lot of options right now.” Patrick said, sipping blood from his mug and giving Pete an embarrassingly intent look. “We need to buy time until the Queen comes back from Underhill. If the First accepts our parole, they have to do things by the book. That means we don't have to worry about Bert McCracken jumping out from round a corner and staking us.” He considered that statement. “Probably.”

“I don't like it,” said Pete.

Patrick smiled. “I know, Pete. But it's going to be okay.” He glanced over at Gerard. “Okay?”

Gerard wondered what Lindsey would do in this situation. Not get bitten by a goddamn vampire in the first place, probably. He sighed.

“Yeah, okay,” he said, and took a big mouthful of the not-quite-satisfying-any-more blood.

* * *

Afterwards, Gerard had taken a deep breath and sat himself down and tried calling Lindsey and confess about the whole inadvertently-getting-murdered-and-becoming-one-of-the-bloodthirsty-undead thing, only to find that her cellphone was off. So much for that - maybe it was too early? So now he was sitting alone on the balcony carefully re-inking the lines of her tattoo onto his forearm with his left hand. He’d gotten hold of a sharpie this time, which was much more satisfying than the washable sketch pens that Bronx Mowgli used, but it also meant he needed to be careful. When he was done, he sat back and looked at his work with a feeling of satisfaction, and then he sighed, and started to pick absentmindedly at the paint on the knee of Lindsey’s jeans. He kind of wished he'd picked up one of her t-shirts too, back when he’d been busy scrabbling into clothes to go and answer the Bert’s buzz on the door; the one he was wearing was a Green Day tee that they’d both worn to death, but he was pretty sure it had started out as his.

Gerard leaned back against the wall, wishing he had a cigarette, and that led him to wonder just how long Frank was planning on staying outside, which was when the first little worm of fear started nibbling at his brain. And it was barely five minutes after that that he heard Frankie's cellphone
chirping its message alert from the pocket of the hoodie.

He dug his fingers down into the pocket with a sudden, prescient sense of doom, and thumbed the button, telling himself it was probably just a message from Jamia, or from Mike, or...but no.

heya gerard. lose something?

“Oh, fuck,” Gerard breathed, staring at the screen blankly. “Oh. FUCK.”

It wasn't the same kind of phone he used himself, and Gerard could be a bit of an idiot about technology, but he figured out how to call the phone that had just sent the message.

“Frankie?” he said, as soon as somebody picked up, and a breathless little snicker filled his ear.

“Not quite. Although he's here with me, Gerard, and he gave me his number, eventually – but I'm afraid Frankie can't come to the phone right now.”

Gerard punched the wall so hard he left a hole in it. “Bert. What the fuck have you done?” he asked, his voice dropping to its deepest register without any conscious thought. “If you've hurt him...”

Bert laughed. “Is that a joke? That's a joke, right?”

“I'll fucking kill you,” Gerard said, his voice almost a growl.

“That's more like it,” Bert said. “Showing your true colours at last?”

“Where are you?”

“You man enough to come alone, Gerard Way? Or you too chicken shit?”

“Where the fuck are you, Bert?”

* * *

Gerard paused on the edge of the clearing, catching a glimpse of the thing lying in the centre. For a truly horrifying moment, he was absolutely certain that Frankie was dead, and the shock of it was quite as bad as the moment when he understood what was happening to him in that dirty alley behind ComicCon. The way Frank sprawled out limp and boneless in the middle of the circle was too close to all the nightmare images that had been running through Gerard's head ever since he first heard Bert's voice on the phone, and for a long moment Gerard froze perfectly still, his vision clouding over and a dull, painful emptiness settling over him.

It took longer than it should have done for Gerard to start paying attention to his other senses, and actually register what his vampiric hearing and his enhanced sense of smell were trying to tell him: Frank's heart was still beating, slow and drowsy, and there was no scent of fresh carrion on the air. Gerard gave a shocked sob of relief and flung himself forward, so clumsy in his haste that he stumbled and half-fell. And it was that half-fall that took him out of the path of an arrow, so that the wood slammed into his arm, instead of his chest.

Gerard spun, shocked afresh, and stared in the direction the arrow had come from. He could hear nothing, sense nothing – no heartbeat, no scent of another living being – and then, as the next arrow came whistling towards him and he threw himself out of the way, he remembered Bob Bryar somehow creeping up on him in the alleyway in San Diego just the same. He wanted to kick himself – he knew that Bert had these powers, and yet here he was fancying himself terribly clever, wrapping himself in his see-me-not vibes and assuming that he'd be able to detect Bert long before the chymera
spotted him. Apparently Gerard wasn't the best person at thinking straight when his friends' lives were on the line, which was pretty damned unfortunate under the circumstances.

“Bert?” Gerard said, safe behind a medium-sized tree. “What's this all about, dude? Seriously – I'm not one of the bad guys, I swear.” He stared down at the arrow sticking awkwardly out of his left arm, and closed his hand uncertainly around the shaft, wincing. Fuck. It hurt, and although it wasn't weakening him as badly as the stake had done, it was still making his whole arm go rapidly numb. He grimaced, and tugged it free in one go. “Can we just talk this out?” he called, closing his hand uselessly around the wound and feeling the slow, sluggish slide of undead blood against his palm. “Like reasonable people?” The feeling was already returning to his fingers, but he still felt shocky and strange. He should have been expecting something like this, rather than feeling cocky about how little threat guns apparently posed, and priding himself on being able to move faster than Bert.

“Yeah,” said Bert, in a thoughtful tone. “Hey - yeah – why didn't I think of that?”

Gerard squinted between the trees, hating the honeyed shafts of light that cut so prettily through the shadows, gilding insects' wings and dancing dustmotes and lending the forest an air of fairytale unreality. Gerard's eyesight was much better suited to the darkness now, and this mishmash of light and dark was playing hell with his vision. He couldn't make Bert out, but he was still pretty sure of where the guy was standing, because his hearing these days was outstanding, and although Bert was somehow masking his heartbeat and his breathing (and, seriously, how the fuck was that even possible?) his voice had been loud and clear.

“Bert?”

“Oh, yeah – that's right,” Bert called out, helping Gerard to zero in on his whereabouts. “Because I know what you are, fucker.”

So did Gerard. He was a predator, designed specifically to eat things like Bert McCracken. And, okay, Bert hadn't killed Frankie after all, but he was still posing a clear and present danger to both Frankie and Gerard. He was a crazy person with a grudge and a stack of weaponry, and Gerard was finding it a whole hell of a lot easier than he'd ever have imagined possible to contemplate killing somebody in cold blood. He wasn't quite there yet, but with Frankie sprawling in the middle of the clearing, all soft and vulnerable while arrows went whizzing through the air, Gerard could feel himself getting more ruthless by the second.

He was about to make a move when another arrow slammed into the trunk of his tree and sent a dozen leaves fluttering down. Jesus. Eat your heart out, Oliver Queen.

“Didn't you get the memo?” Gerard called, leaning back against the rough bark of the tree and wishing he were a better strategist. Or that he'd played more video games on tour – 'Call of Duty' or whatever. “You're not allowed to just go around killing people, Bert.”

“You're not people any more, Gerard Way.”

Gerard shivered. There was something chillingly matter-of-fact about the way Bert said that. “Brian disagrees with you,” he ventured, running through his options as another arrow thudded into the bark inches away from him. Shit, who'd have guessed that Bert McCracken was some kind of crack shot?

“Brian's a traitor,” said Bert, but he sounded pretty upset about that. And, okay, if Gerard were smart he'd have brought a stack of weapons with him, and back up – but apparently all his higher brain functions had shut down when he realised Frank was in danger because of him, and he'd basically turned into the bimbo in the horror movie who takes a midnight walk all on her own down by the spooky graveyard. Sneaky had never been a major part of Gerard's skill set in the first place.
He sighed, and inched his head just a tiny bit out to the side, angling for a glimpse of Frankie, and then jumped out of his skin when two more arrows smashed into the tree trunk in quick succession. Shit. Bet was good.

“Look, Bert – I get that you’re, like, anti-vampire, and I can respect that as a philosophical stance, but can we please just leave Frankie out of it?” Gerard called, feeling desperate. All it would take was just one of those arrows, and Frankie would be gone. Gone forever gone, not just other-side-of-the-country-with-his-wife-and-kids-gone. He’d never given much thought before to how fragile his friends were, but Gerard had been experiencing a pretty steep learning curve over the past few days, and the thought of Frank's mortality was just terrifying at this point.

“Bert?” he called again. “Please? This – this thing is just between you and me. No need to involve innocent people in it.”

“Leave Frank out of it?” Bert's laugh was a little hysterical. “Kinda late for that. He's in it up to his neck, isn't he? You saw to that. I wasn't going to involve any civilians, Gerard. I was just going to go pick you up – but then I saw his neck. You had to fucking go there, didn't you?”

Gerard winced. He'd signed Frank's death warrant, then, as far as Bert McCracken was concerned. He really was the very worst friend ever.

“How did you find us?” he called, trying to buy a little time for – well, he wasn't quite sure what for, really. The cavalry wasn't on its way. Maybe time for Frank to wake up, or for a genius idea to strike him.

“Your friend Pete isn't the most discreet guy on the planet,” Bert said, snorting with laughter. “He posted some shit on Twitter to Mikey about all his “Sweet Li'l Dudes” being around at the same time, and asking what he wanted for breakfast. Didn't take a genius to figure that one out.”

“Fucking Pete,” muttered Gerard, closing his eyes. That was just typical, goddamn it. An arrow slammed into the ground by Gerard's feet, making him jump as it stood there, quivering. A few seconds later another one hit the tree, and as a fresh rain of leaves drifted down towards him, Gerard had a sudden – if embarrassingly belated – realisation.

“Fuck this shit,” he muttered, with feeling, and let himself come untethered from the ground and go swooping up into the treetops. Bert started swearing in earnest, a low-voiced litany of angry expletives followed by several trick shots with the bow that would have done Robin Hood or Legolas proud. Happily none of them did quite touch Gerard, but one whistled so close that it cut through his hair.

Gerard was getting really pissed off. Like, Bruce-Banner-about-to-turn-green pissed off. He dropped down to the ground beside Bert with enough force to shake the ground, and successfully snatched the bow out of his hands, enjoying the way that Bert's voice broke on a gasp when Gerard was suddenly right there and all up in his grill. Fucker.

“Goddamn it,” Gerard said – and he wasn't going to rip Bert's throat out, he was almost entirely certain, but he wasn't making any promises about not punching the dude. But suddenly Bert was grinning at him, and lunging forward in a way that was so disarmingly like Bert's forthright approach to making out that for a split second Gerard was wrong-footed by memory. Only a split second, but that was all it took for Bert to successfully grapple Gerard to the ground. Behind him he heard a sound that might have been someone moving, but he was way too busy to pay it any attention, because just as he was about to flip them both and pin Bert to the ground, Bert was producing another goddamn stake and slamming it efficiently into Gerard's chest. The pain was, once again, excruciating.
“Deja vu!” whispered Bert, straddling Gerard's waist and carding a hand through Gerard's hair with an almost affectionate expression on his face.

This was really the moment where Patrick Stump, or Audrey Hepburn, or, fuck, Spike and Drusilla – oh, no, fictional, Gerard reminded himself through the waves of debilitating agony – ought to be coming to his rescue. His extremities were growing swiftly numb and leaden, as if the wood somehow leached away the magic that animated his dead flesh. Fuck.

Gerard struggled feebly under Bert, feeling his eyes rolling back like those of a maddened horse. This was completely undignified and not at all badass, and the worst of it was that he still hadn't called Lindsey. Well – maybe the worst of it was that he was probably going to get Frankie killed too, and Patrick, and – and – oh, shit, everything was getting blurry, and Bert was still sitting on him, smug and smiling, leaning right down as his left hand twisted the stake and his right hand trailed a wicked-looking knife gently sideways over Gerard's collarbone.

Bert leaned closer, plastering himself over Gerard's torso like a lover. He was trembling, Gerard realised. Trembling and hard, of all the improbable things.

“Bite me,” Bert said, his voice the barest thread of a whisper as he rubbed his throat against Gerard's face.

Gerard had a single moment of blank bafflement, a reflexive “...did I just hear that right?” before the proximity of Bert's throat overwhelmed his every capacity for coherent thought. There was a stake in his chest that was somehow draining the life right out of him, and Gerard's instincts were pretty clear on the importance of getting fresh, hot, human blood down his throat right the hell now if he were going to stand any chance of staving off unbeing.

Bert's skin was a little bit dirty under Gerard's mouth, and when the blood spurted onto his tongue with the suddenness of a cherry tomato bursting, Gerard was instantly aware of Bert in the way he had been aware of Frank during feeding – not quite telepathy, but still some kind of startlingly potent one-way psychic link, as though he were somehow drinking up Bert's memories with his blood in a chaos of disjointed images and scents and sensations. Bert gave a thoroughly pornographic moan above Gerard and ground his hips against Gerard's belly in a sloppy-frantic rhythm, twisting the stake around in Gerard's chest at the same time with a brutal enthusiasm that made Gerard sob out loud, choking on the blood in his mouth. It was all happening so quickly, had been barely seconds, but Gerard already knew Bert McCracken like he never had before. He knew about the first time Bert had seen a vampire, while he was living on the streets; he knew precisely why Bert hated and despised vampires enough to risk being executed himself for killing them; he knew why Bert had called his band 'The Used'; he knew why despite his loathing, Bert was presently on the brink of coming in his pants with Gerard's fangs buried in his throat. Gerard knew all this, and knew too that Bert never had any intention of hurting Frankie.

It was this last piece of knowledge that disarmed Gerard most effectively, and kept him from doing the sensible thing, and tearing the guy's throat out with his teeth. It would have been the sensible thing, undoubtedly, because Bert still had every intention of killing Gerard, but having seen the inside of Bert's head Gerard found himself paralyzed by a wholly unexpected wave of pity. He didn't want to die, but he wasn't about to kill Bert either, so...

“Get off of him, you mad fucker!”

Bert's head swung away from Gerard with abrupt violence, and then Gerard was lying in the dirt with a chunk of wood buried deep in his chest and sunlight dappling his face, suddenly cold and lonely in all the places where Bert's warm body had been pressed up against him. Dying. Fuck. He was going to die if he couldn't get the damn stake out, and fast. Bert's blood was still hot on his
tongue, salty and human and wickedly good, layered with the faint aftertaste of all the other vampires who had ever tasted Bert. There were a lot. It was delicious, in a filthy, shameful way that drinking from Frank had definitely not been, and something about the lingering flavour made Gerard want to weep for the pity of it all.

“Gee? Fuck, Gee, you okay? Fuck!”

Gerard blinked up into Frankie's stricken face and felt a surge of affection mixed with hunger.

“Hey,” he wheezed, reviewing the past few seconds thoughtfully. “Did you just kick Bert in the head?” he asked, slowly.

“Damn fucking right I did,” Frank said. “And then in the balls for good measure. Psychotic fucker. That's karma in action right there – bastard smacked me upside the head with a fucking rock once he'd gotten my phone number out of me.” Frank was rubbing his own skull with a very bitter expression when his gaze fell on Bert's knife, which was lying on the grass beside Gerard like a lethal snake, where Bert had dropped it, and Gerard had no problem translating the thoughtful look that crossed Frank's face.

“No, Frankie,” he said, his voice rasping. “We're not killing Bert.”

“But...”

“No,” said Gerard. “Although – although we should probably tie him up, or something.” His mind was darting back to the sight of an enraged Bert stampeding down the corridor towards him in his own house, after Patrick had left him lying unconscious. He wasn't planning to fall for that shit again.

“Already done it,” said Frank, unexpectedly. Gerard gaped at him, and before he could frame any questions about where the hell Frank had managed to acquire rope in the middle of Griffith Park, Frank pulled a face and said sheepishly: “With my belt. You can make a pretty good set of restraints with a belt.” His expression was decidedly shifty, and Gerard was suddenly quite sure that Jamia was aware of this particular skill set. He swallowed.

“That's – okay, you're the best boy scout ever,” he croaked. “So definitely no killing Bert, if he's tied up and helpless.”

Frank glared at him with a mutinous expression and Gerard retaliated with his best sad puppy eyes, glancing down at the lump of wood jutting out of his chest.

“Can you – just – help me – with this?” he said, plaintively.

Frank paled. “Shit, that's – fuck, Gee.” Every moment that the wood spent lodging in Gerard's chest he felt himself growing weaker, and some of that must have been obvious in his face because Frankie took a firm grasp of the stake and yanked it out of Gerard's chest with a gross sucking noise.

“Ow,” Gerard said, inadequately, closing his eyes against the rush of sensation that hit him when the numbing effect of the wood was gone.


Gerard managed a watery grin somehow. “Feel a lot better, though, with that thing out.” He was as weak as a kitten, and his limbs all felt like they were stuffed with cotton wool, but at least he no longer felt like his brain was full of molasses.
He *did* feel hungry, though. Not as bad as he would have done without drinking from Bert, to be sure, but Gerard was a mess, and the only cure for this kind of injury was blood, and lots of it. He'd promised himself that he wasn't going to do this again, but that was before the whole stake-through-the-heart business. Gerard wasn't feral with hunger yet, but Frankie was like vampire catnip as far as Gerard was concerned at the best of times, and this definitely wasn't the best of times. His eyes had already slid down to Frank's throat with a covetous expression, and he knew the moment when Frankie understood because of the soft little hiss of indrawn breath.

“Ooh,” he said, huskily. “Yeah, that's – I got you, Gee. It's okay.” He eased Gerard up into a sitting position, with one of Frank's knees raised up high behind Gerard's back and his other leg stretched out across Gerard's thighs – and, huh, okay, it was clear that even just the thought of getting bitten again was having a fairly obvious Pavlovian kind of effect on certain parts of Frank already, since those parts were currently jammed up against Gerard's hip. Shit.

In the back of his head, Gerard was unhappily aware that he wasn't supposed to be doing this for a whole host of reasons, and that Bert McCracken had just provided the perfect After School Special lesson in why nice boys should just say no to playing with vampires – but it didn't matter. He needed Frank, and he wanted Frank, and Frank was shaking with need and wanting of his own, and inclining his neck so trustingly that Gerard wanted to kill anyone who ever laid a hand on his Frankie again.

Drinking from Frank was exactly like drinking from Bert – and completely different. It was the same in the way that the physical sensation automatically flipped a pleasure switch in Gerard's brain, something simultaneously comforting and mind-meltingly hot. But it was different because the tumble of sensation and imagery that he was getting along with the blood was pure Frankie, and Frankie was one of the people Gerard loved best in all the world. Frankie wasn't feeding Gerard a fractured Picasso mishmash of guilt and pain and lust and bitterness, he was supplying Gerard with trust and desire and affectionate concern. With adoration.

Exerting self control enough to stop after draining the first pint was probably the hardest thing Gerard had ever done. When he pulled back, Frank made a wordless noise of protest and leaned into him, pressing his throat towards Gerard's mouth and pulling hard with both arms, and a moment later Frank was sprawling on his back with Gerard on top of him, dragging Gerard close like a particularly affectionate baby octopus, and Frank was pressing half-drunk kisses onto whichever parts of Gerard he could reach.

“I thought he'd fucking *killed* you, Gee,” Frank muttered frantically, and that was so close to Gerard's own fears about Frankie that he shuddered with remembered horror, and reached down to kiss Frank as carefully as he could on the mouth.

“Yeah,” Gerard agreed, breathlessly. “He was planning to, actually. Didn't get around to it. Hadn't figured on you wanting to come to my rescue.”

“Then he's a fucking idiot,” Frank muttered against the corner of Gerard's mouth, incredulously.

“No,” Gerard said, feeling bad for Bert all over again. “He thought you'd be glad to see me dead.” He was going to explain, because after drinking from Bert, Gerard understood a lot of things more clearly than he had before - but then he had Frank's tongue in his mouth, and that was a very effective distraction for several minutes. And - okay, Gerard could justify the blood-drinking thing because that was about saving his life, damn it; that was practically like mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, or something, which just happened to have really mind-meltingly sexy side-effects, but was still totally justifiable under the circumstances. The make-out session, though, was probably not so much about the pragmatic life-saving – but it was Frankie, and Gerard had been making out with Frankie since before Frankie was even in the band.
“Bite me again,” Frank murmured, rubbing up against Gerard in a way that made it perfectly clear that he was all for hands moving into pants as soon as possible, and for a moment Gerard very nearly did, because Frankie was very nearly irresistible at the best of times. “Go on, Gee. Please. Bite me again,” Frank said, his voice rough and needy, and Gerard closed his eyes and told himself firmly that he could live with what he'd drunk so far. He could wait until he got some bags of blood to help him complete the healing process. He wasn't going to risk hurting Frankie, because Gerard knew, even if Frankie was sublimely indifferent to the fact, that a human could only afford to spare a limited amount of blood. Gerard was still kind of fucked up, all weak and achy and undeniably hungry still, but he could get by. And this was already snowballing in a scary way.

“No,” Gerard said, with some difficulty, and then he felt very proud of himself. No more biting, he told himself. And no hands in pants, either, because tempting though that was, and natural though it felt, that was still a step further than he'd gone with anyone else since Lindsey dropped back into his life and quickly become the centre of it, and this wasn't the time to go changing the parameters of their relationship without even talking to her. And, okay, maybe she'd just kick him, and roll her eyes, and say of course it was fine, it was Frank, and didn't he practically give the guy handjobs on stage all the time – but he wasn't going to go making that assumption. They needed to talk about it. Fuck. He needed to get his ass on a plane and manage not to kill anybody for four hours and find his goddamn wife and talk to her about all this shit.

He couldn't wait to see her face when he told her about Audrey Hepburn.

God, he missed Lindsey. He wondered if it had been this bad for her the first time he went on tour. That had been pretty bad too, with having to adjust to being away from her and from Bandit, but at least he'd been with the guys, and they were all so psyched about the new album, and about being on the road again, so there were plenty of distractions. Being the one left behind kind of sucked. 

Gerard had another thought, and his eyes widened guiltily. “Fuck, I should be feeding you cookies and juice, or something, shouldn't I? Isn't that what they do when you donate blood?”

Frank made a frustrated noise, grinding up against Gerard's hip and sucking sloppily on Gerard's throat in an attempt to give him a hickey. “Go on,” he said, and Gerard, to his own surprise, started to laugh.

“No, you pushy little motherfucker,” he said, full of resolve. “No more biting for you.”

“You fucking tease,” Frank grumbled, and Gerard laughed harder, and leaned down to lick the closing bite mark and press a lascivious kiss to Frank's scorpion tattoo, wringing another helpless groan out of Frank.

And it was at this point, to Gerard's very considerable surprise, that Sir Christopher Lee came bursting into the clearing with Brian and Bob hard on his heels.

Gerard blinked at them, still straddling Frank with his mouth pressed to Frank's arching neck, and experienced a rather chaotic little sequence of thoughts that went something like: “Mmm, fresh blood! Hey, just a minute - what the fuck? Dracula? No, Saruman! Count Dooku! No, Sir Christopher Lee! COOL! Sir Christopher Lee running towards me with...oh fuck!” as the elderly gentleman in question flung himself towards Gerard with a stake in one hand and a glinting blade in the other. Gerard summoned up some reserves of strength from somewhere and managed to roll both Frank and himself away in an uncomfortable little tumble of limbs, then wobbled to his feet all Bambi-awkward and stood in front of Frank in a profoundly unscary pose that he might possible have picked up from watching 'Kung Fu Panda'.
“Sir!” Bob was yelling, but apparently Gerard's unlikely new would-be nemesis wasn't in a very chatty frame of mind, because he was paying no attention whatsoever, and so Bob took his own life into his hands and tackled the old gentleman bodily, ignoring the wickedly sharp looking knife. Gerard winced, although whether he was more worried about Bob getting hurt by the blade or about Sir Christopher Lee – who looked rather shockingly fragile and elderly in the flesh – breaking a hip, he really couldn't have said. Frank took this opportunity to yank Gerard backwards and plant himself squarely between Gerard and the trio of vampire slayers like it was some kind of dance move.

“Frankie!” Gerard protested, and Frank made a growling noise.

“Shut the fuck up, Gee,” he muttered. And admittedly Frank looked quite a lot more effectively threatening than Gerard had managed to, but the fact remained that Frank was an awful lot easier to kill. Of course, on the other hand there was no particular reason why anyone would want to kill Frank, what with him not being a blood sucking creature of death and darkness.

“Sir, please, sir,” Bob was saying, his arms wrapped around the old man's waist.

“Fuck – is that Christopher Lee?” Frank exclaimed, as though he'd only just realised what he was looking at.

“I guess?” Gerard said. Seriously, every time he thought the surprises were over...

“Bryar, you overstep your bounds,” the old man said, and, fuck, wow, hello Masterpiece Theater. Gerard was impressed that Bob didn't piss himself on the spot, because old guy or not, that was some serious I-can-fuck-your-shit-up-but-good badassery right there, and he was armed and looking seriously annoyed. Bob, who had somehow ended up on his knees with his arms wrapped around the old man's waist in a thoroughly undignified manner, released his grip and got gingerly to his feet.

“Sorry, sir,” Bob said, hanging his head meekly.

“Um,” said Gerard, peeking over Frank's shoulder at Bob's worried face and Brian's angry one and giving a nervous little half-wave. “Hi?”

Bob was clearly preoccupied, and Brian was busy with throwing himself down beside Bert, cradling him gently and feeling for a pulse. They both ignored Gerard and Frank for the moment, and although that was arguably an improvement on having people run at you with knives, Gerard still couldn't help feeling a little bit put out. He was being a very brave little toaster, damn it, and the least they could do was appreciate the fact that he'd been shot with an arrow and staked through the goddamn heart again, and still had the self-control to avoid killing anybody. He made a cross little huffing sound, and Frankie reached back and laced his hand with Gerard's as though he could read Gerard's mind.


“Oh! Ah – no, I know that looks kind of bad,” Gerard said, shifting from foot to foot and promising himself that he wasn't going to faint, however shitty he felt right now. He squeezed Frank's fingers a little tighter. “But – it isn't how it looks! He was totally asking for it. Um. Hey – I really admire your body of work, by the way,” he added, sheepishly. “It's a crime you didn't get to play Gandalf, sir. You would've kicked ass.”

“The case is clear,” Sir Christopher Lee (Sir Christopher Motherfucking Lee!) was saying, ignoring Gerard completely. Gerard watched him in fascination, mapping the strong features of Dracula over
the sharp features and fine, papery skin. Hadn't he been in the British Secret Service, or something? Gerard seemed to remember Peter Jackson saying something about that on the Lord of the Ring commentaries: something about giving the old man directions about how to cut someone's throat, and Sir Christopher politely correcting him on the basis of first hand experience. He looked kind of like he might blow over if you sneezed too hard, but the old guy was still managing to radiate serious attitude. “It is a rogue. It attacked McCracken, and it is only by the grace of God that we got here in time to save him. It has forfeited all rights.”

“It?” muttered Gerard, feeling rather hurt, and wondering whether this was a dig at the unfortunate anti-viagra side effects of vampirism.

“Yeah, no. With all due respect, that's a crock of shit,” Frank said, glaring ferociously up at the old man. “And nobody is laying a goddamn hand on Gerard.”

Sir Christopher Lee turned a weary look on Frank. “Your master has assaulted a chymera, a member of the Circle in good standing,” he said, his voice rolling rich and resonant through the clearing. “He will be executed for his crimes. Your own life need not be forfeit, but know that we shall have no compunction about executing you along with him.” The way he recited it, there was something of Mirandaizing to the statements, like he’d said this hundreds or thousands of times before. It set off a faint echo of memory in Gerard's mind, and he was suddenly quite sure that Bert had heard this from Brian at some point in his messed up history.

“I – sir, I'm definitely going to have some compunctions about killing Frank,” Bob said apologetically, from behind him. “And Gerard. Can we all please just take a few minutes to establish exactly what's going on here?”

“The creature has fed on McCracken,” said the old man in a voice like a whip. “That is clear. Now it is feeding upon this unfortunate boy. It is evidently a danger to the civilian population, and an affront to the Circle. We do not tolerate such dangers. Your duty is clear, Mr Bryar.”

“Bullshit,” said Frank. “Bert Fucking McCracken kidnapped me, forced Gerard to come running out here to save me, and then he stabbed Gee in the fucking chest and did some fucking kinky sexual assault looking freakshow shit where he made Gee bite him while he was staking Gee through the fucking heart, the sick fuck. He was totally getting off on being bitten.” Frank reddened a little at the last words, and his tone of self righteousness became a little wobbly, as well it might, considering the rather incriminating way his jeans were currently clinging to certain parts of him.

There was a startled, and slightly embarrassed, silence.

“You're a thrall,” Sir Christopher Lee said, after a moment. “Your word is worthless. You have no will of your own. Obviously you will try to protect your master. We do not hold this against you, but nor will we allow you to interfere with our duty.”

“I'm not a fucking thrall! I'll thrall you, you patronising fuck!” Frank exclaimed.

“Kindly refrain from using that kind of language, young man,” Sir Christopher said, sounding deeply disappointed in all of them. Gerard found himself blushing. His grandma would have been mortified.

“Yeah, you kind of are, Frank,” Bob said, sounding apologetic. “You let him bite you, didn't you?”

“Well...”

“You're a Renfield, dude,” Brian snapped, without looking up from Bert. “Deal with it.”

Frank's eyes widened. “But...”
“But he's not enthralled now,” Gerard said in a small voice. Everyone stared over at him, including Frank. Gerard wilted a little under their attention, but he understood a lot more now that he'd drunk from Bert McCracken. “That's why Bert brought him all the way out here – because of the fairy ring.” He nodded at the circle of trees. “We're standing in a circle of birch and beech and hawthorne and elder. They counteract vampire glamour. So as soon as I stepped inside, I stopped being invisible, and my mojo can't work on Frankie right now. He totally has free will.”

Everybody looked around at the trees that surrounded them.

“Huh,” said Bob, nodding to himself.

Sir Christopher Lee was scowling in blatant disbelief. “But he's behaving precisely like a thrall,” he objected. “The body language, the mindless devotion, the willingness to die for his master...”

“Yes, no – that's just Frank and Gee,” Brian admitted irritably. He was still looking thunderous, but apparently he hadn't entirely sided with Team McCracken just yet after all, which came as an enormous relief. Having Brian glowering at him over Bert's fallen body was enough to make Gerard want to burst into tears. “To be honest, I don't think anybody's going to notice any difference. Frankie already thinks the sun shines out of Gerard's ass. Same old same old.”

Frank looked very much like he wanted to punch somebody in the face, and Gerard hooked his free arm around Frank's waist and pulled him back into an awkward hug.

“I didn't know about the thrall thing,” he said, feeling dreadful all over again. “You guys really do need to get a Welcome Pack made up, because I've got to say, so far the vampire orientation process just isn't cutting it.”

Bob actually looked a little sheepish at that. “Patrick...” he began.

“Patrick did a bang up job of saving me when your crazy PTSD slayer there tried to murder me in my own house, but we've been kind of busy since then with all the running away from assassins and the freaking out.” And getting caught up in werewolf soap operas, Gerard carefully didn't add. “Not much time for learning the ropes.” He pulled Frank in closer and rested his chin on Frank's shoulder. “I'm really sorry,” he whispered. “I didn't know.”

Frank shrugged against him. “Not your fault,” he said quietly, but he sounded pretty frayed around the edges. Gerard really couldn't blame him. This was plenty of excitement coming on top of blood loss coming on top of kidnapping and possible head injury.

“Enough,” said Sir Christopher Lee in the tone of a man who has been pushed beyond endurance and is more than ready for a nice up of tea. “Did you or did you not bite McCracken?”


Bob's shoulders sagged. “Gee,” he said softly, shaking his head.

“The law is perfectly clear on this point,” the old man said, sweeping around to glower at Bob. “Attacking a member of the Circle is punishable by death. End of story. We have wasted enough time.”

Brian was still cradling Bert's unconscious body in his arms and from the expression on his face Gerard had honestly no idea which way he was going to jump. Bert was looking pretty small and pitiful and bleeding all over the place right now, after all; Gerard would totally have been on Bert's side himself. He swallowed. He could probably boost both Frank and himself into the air, but he had no idea how long he'd be able to stay airborne in his current state, and even if he managed to pull a
Peter Pan again, he really didn't know where to go. Pete's place would be staked out, and so would his own house, and Bob and Brian knew all the people he knew in L.A...

“Oh fuck,” muttered Frank, a sentiment with which Gerard could wholeheartedly agree. He hugged Frank tighter, and tried to think of some cool last words. On the plus side, he supposed that getting staked by one of the most famous on-screen Draculas of all time had a certain fucked up cachet. But he’d definitely rather pass. He’d not even been a vampire for two full days yet, damn it, and he’d been trying really hard not to hurt anybody.

There was a beat while they all faced off against one another like something out of Reservoir Dogs, and then the air in the centre of the clearing began to warp and glisten like melting glass, and Brendon Urie stepped out of nowhere, pink-cheeked and wide-eyed.

“Stop!” he yelled, one hand upraised as if he were about to break into a dance routine. His expression was almost comically earnest, and there was something like talc-fine powdered glitter sifting down off him and shimmering in the shafts of sunlight.

“Oh my fucking God – is that fairy dust?” Gerard exclaimed, in sudden delight, and his eyes darted up to search for signs of pointy ears hidden under Brendon's hair. In the direct sunlight Gerard noticed for the first time that Brendon's dark hair actually had a faintly iridescent sheen to it, like peacock feathers. He smelled absolutely nothing like anyone else Gerard had encountered so far – nothing like blood or meat at all, but rather some combination of moss and milk and honeysuckle, with a hint of the sea. Gerard's mouth fell open. Unicorns were starting to seem like a real possibility.

“What. The fuck?” Frank said.

“Her Majesty the Fairy Queen accepts the petition of the vampires Stump and Way and will see them given a fair hearing,” Brendon announced breathlessly, fixing his gaze on Sir Christopher Lee. “She reminds the First of the Circle that under the terms of the accords her decision on such matters is final, and that any assault upon the vampires Stump and Way at this time will be interpreted as an attack upon the Queen's own person, and a declaration of war.”

“Oh buggeration,” said Sir Christopher Lee, with feeling, throwing his stake to the ground. He looked, at that moment, about a hundred years old, and Gerard had to stop himself from apologising for not being a more co-operative victim. “Damn and blast that woman,” the old man added, in a querulous voice. He cast one last glower in Gerard's direction, and then turned around and marched stiffly back the way he'd come. Bob bit his lip and looked over at Frank and Gerard apologetically before hurrying off after what was presumably his boss.

“So you're going to take them Underhill?” asked Brian, eyeing Brendon narrowly. He had his fingers tangled in Bert's hair. “I suppose we'll be summoned when Her Majesty's ready to see us?”

“You will,” Brendon agreed. He glanced down at Bert. “I suppose we'll be summoned when Her Majesty's ready to see us?”

“You will,” Brendon agreed. He glanced down at Bert. “You should get that wound looked at,” he said, sounding perfectly unconcerned, and Gerard was surprised that Brian didn't punch him in the face.

“Yeah, well, if I had magical powers of teleportation, that would be a lot easier,” Brian said, glaring. Brendon's eyes widened a little, and he gave them a considering look.

“I could send you both to an E.R, yes. What can you offer in exchange?” he asked, in a voice that sent a wholly unexpected shiver down Gerard's spine. Brian's frown deepened, but he didn't look surprised.

“I'll owe you one favour of your choosing, provided it causes no direct or indirect harm to me or
“mine,” he said, biting his lip. “Although, Christ, I'm going to regret that.”

“Done,” said Brendon, beaming, and a moment later Brian and Bert were both gone.

“Am I the only person freaking out about this Transporter Beam shit?” Frank asked, after a moment, in a tight voice, staring at the spot where Bert and Brian had been a few seconds earlier. “Actually, scratch that – am I the only person working in the music industry who isn't leading some kind of double life? What the fuck?”

“Yes to the first, no to the second,” said Brendon. “Although we do have a higher than average proportion of people with – alternative lifestyles, shall we say?” He glanced from Frank to Gerard. “Come on, then,” he said, and set off into the woods.

Gerard and Frank looked at one another uncertainly, and then followed after him.

“To Fairyland?” said Gerard.

“Yes. The entrance isn't far from here.”


“Can't you just – like, beam us up?” Frank said, after a couple of minutes of picking their way through the forest. Gerard sent him a worried sidelong glance, and made a mental note to get into the habit of carrying candy around at all times. And maybe juiceboxes. Not that he was going to be chowing down on Frankie on a regular basis, obviously, but just to be on the safe side he probably ought to start being a bit more of a boy scout about it. He felt pretty shitty himself, between the arrow and the stake, but at least he'd fed since his own blood loss incident.

Brendon paused and looked back at them, his head cocked to one side. “Well, I could,” he said. “But it would cost you.” He smiled. “What do you want to offer in exchange?”

Gerard gulped, and clasped Frank's arm waringly. “We don't want to offer anything in exchange.” He might not be an expert on Fairy lore, but Gerard hadn't been born yesterday. “Walking is great. I love walking. Walking yay.”

“As you will,” Brendon said, looking disappointed. He turned around and resumed his trek, and they followed quietly behind him, Gerard wiggling his eyebrows at Frank in the universally recognised sign language for 'Jesus Fucking Christ You Know I Love You, Frankie, But Please Don't Get Us In Any More Trouble Than We're In Already!'

Frank stuck his tongue out, but didn't raise any objections, and then Gerard wondered guiltily whether he could raise any objections; they were out of the fairy ring now, and that meant that Frank was back to being – oh God – his thrall. Which was something Gerard felt just terrible about – like he hadn't already felt guilty about treating Frank like a convenient piece of meat, now he knew that feeding on him had long-lasting (permanent?) side effects which probably took away his autonomy and made him into a – well, basically a minion. Argh. No wonder Bob and Brian had told him to stick to the bagged blood. Bad enough using your vampire mojo to seduce somebody into going along with donating blood in the first place, without permanently taking away their ability to say no. God. Being a vampire really did mean becoming a creeper. It was so much sleazier than he'd imagined.

“You okay, Gee?” Frank asked, and Gerard snapped back out of his guilt trip and tried to smile.

“Don't worry about me. How are you doing? D'you need a rest?”
“I’m fine! I wasn’t just staked through the goddamn heart, you dumb fuck,” Frank said, fondly. He didn’t sound like a mindless thrall, Gerard thought. He sounded pretty much exactly the same as usual.

“I got shot with an arrow too,” Gerard said, since nobody seemed to have noticed this apart from him.

“Get out!”

“In the arm.” Gerard pointed at the wound in question and Frank moved closer, wrapping his hand very gently around Gerard’s upper arm and looking at the ragged red hole in his hoodie with an expression of concern. Gerard winced, feeling the arrow wound still barely half-healed but still painful. He wondered whether they’d finally get to have a bit of a rest in Fairy before the next round of craziness kicked off. He’d really like to curl up somewhere and catch some zees, and let the vampiric healing mojo get on with fixing him back up again. It had been a pretty busy two days.

“Man, this is what I was talking about,” Frank said, shaking his head and rubbing Gerard’s arm very gently. “I’m never letting you out of the house again after this. Shot with a fucking arrow! Sorry, Gee. Touring’s off. No more trips to Disneyland. You’re gonna become a hermit from now on. We’ll buy a great big mansion, and me and Jamia and the girls and Mikey and Ray and James and Mike and your mom and just fucking everyone and their families will move in with you and Lindsey. We’ll start a commune. Rename ourselves My Commune Romance. It’ll be like Waco, only, you know, more zombies and less crazy religious nutjobs.”

“And less terrible slaughter,” Gerard added, frowning.

“And less terrible slaughter, obviously. So, not Waco. More like Woodstock, I guess? But with better music. And flushing toilets. And absolutely no more getting shot with an arrow, or stabbed through the heart, or attacked by monsters. Fuck that shit.”

“The way things are going, they’d probably be actual zombies,” Gerard said, wondering if it was bad that he really liked the idea of a commune of all the people he loved. They couldn’t really do that, obviously, but it would be kind of epic. They could have teddy bears’ tea parties for the kids, and movie nights, and massive D&D sessions, and play Guitar Hero, and run around paintballing each other. Lindsey could paint murals everywhere, and Bandit could be like a fulltime big sister to Cherry and Lily, and could help Auntie Alicia dress up her cat in crazy costumes. Jimmy and Chantal might move in too, and they could all play Magic the Gathering. Maybe they could get one of those pits full of coloured balls, for the kids. And, well, for everyone else too, because who didn’t love big pits full of coloured balls? It could be awesome.

“So – Brendon’s, like, Tinkerbell?” Frank asked, in an undertone, interrupting Gerard’s daydream and watching Brendon scamper between the trees. His shirtsleeves were rolled up to the elbow, and the vest he had on over the pristine white shirt reminded Gerard of one of the vests Lindsey used to wear to perform. Brendon wasn’t pairing it with a tiny Catholic schoolgirl skirt and fishnets, though, which was probably just as well; he’d opted for jeans. He didn’t look anything like a magical being from this angle – other than the smudges of powder-fine glitter that he was leaving on every stretch of bark that he patted as he passed, and the way that he seemed to be staying airborne with every Tiggerish bounce just a fraction longer than gravity really ought to allow.

“He’s one of the Sidhe,” said Gerard, knowledgably. “A prince of the Summer Court, Patrick told me. Brendon, I think I love you,” Gerard added, more loudly, ignoring the grumpy little sound of protest this wrung out of Frank. Brendon glanced back over his shoulder and winked at them.

“Seriously – thanks, man. You totally saved my ass back there. Both our asses.”
Brendon's bounding steps took on an almost dance-like quality, and he laughed.

“You know what they say about frying pans and fires?” he asked, without looking back at them.


“We're going Underhill, into Fairy,” Brendon said, and Gerard beamed. Frank gave him an uncertain grin, but didn't seem to share Gerard's sense of delight.

“I know! And that is really fucking cool, man!”

“Mmm.” Brendon sounded amused. Gerard was distracted by the way that his feet seemed to be leaving the ground for rather longer than should have been possible – but then, Gerard was pretty good at defying gravity himself, so he had no room to be surprised. “Gerard, how much do you know about Fairy lore?”

“Er,” said Gerard, glancing up from Brendon's rather dashing piratical boots. “A bit? I mean, I love stories, you know, but I'm not, like, an expert or whatever. Obviously.”

Brendon reached his hands out lazily and ran his fingers over the bark of the trees as he passed them, petting them as though they formed some kind of fractious beast. Gerard watched him, feeling off-balance.

“Let's put it this way: generally when a handsome young mortal catches the attention of a powerful fairy, things don't go so well for the mortal.” He glanced over his shoulder and gave them a cartoon villain grin. “Especially poets and musicians.”

Gerard swallowed. “Oh,” he said, and then felt embarrassed that part of his mind was actually wasting time feeling flattered about the description.

“Does Spencer Smith know this?” Frank asked, watching Brendon with narrowed eyes. Gerard winced a little at the tactlessness of the question, but Brendon didn't seem inclined to take offense. He gave a gurgle of laughter and startled Gerard by dropping into a sudden cartwheel and bounding to his feet again.

“Yes,” Brendon said simply. “Ryan's tastes can be a little – old school.” He plucked a leaf out of the air behind him without bothering to turn towards it, and tucked it in his pocket like it was something important. “Not his fault, of course – he's a prince of the Red Court. Some things are just in his nature. Still, no need to go wasting something as precious as Spencer Smith. We had words on that score.”

Gerard watched, mesmerised, as Brendon fell into some kind of dance step, weaving between the trees. He considered asking about how precious Jon Walker was, but wasn't sure he'd like the answer. “So,” he said instead, “You're saying that I shouldn't count my chickens just yet, in case they hatch out into velociraptors?”

“Precisely!” Brendon replied in a sing-song voice, dropping into another cartwheel. Gerard really hadn't had the faintest idea Brendon was so flexible, although the whole hyper-like-Tigger-after-five-mochas-and-a-double-espresso thing was not so much of a shock. “I know that the First wants you dead, but the Lady is much more dangerous.”

“Huh. Still – I'm not mortal,” Gerard pointed out, tentatively. “You said mortals were in danger. But – I'm not. So.”

Brendon paused, and looked over his shoulder with an intensity and curiosity that made Gerard take
a little step back. “True,” he said, frowning. “And I don't know if that's good, or bad, or indifferent. It might be bad – she has a reputation for being impatient with the vampires.”

“But – but she's the one who made the chymeras stop killing vampires out of hand,” Gerard protested, feeling cheated.

“She has a reputation for being impatient with vampire slayers too,” Brendon said, with a grin, resuming his odd little dance.

Gerard threw both hands up in the air. “Oh, great,” he said, rolling his eyes. “Fucking perfect. Peachy keen. Can't somebody throw me a goddamn bone here?”

Brendon laughed. “You're still alive, Gerard Way. In a manner of speaking. Be careful what you wish for.” Gerard glared at him. He looked entirely too cheerful, as far as Gerard was concerned – he was practically glowing. Actually – scratch that, he was totally glowing! The sunlight gilding his skin wasn't actually coming from anywhere that Gerard could see, and it didn't seem to pay a blind bit of notice to any of the shadows that Brendon skipped through. It was like he'd painted himself in a layer of light, somehow.


Brendon giggled. “We're nearly there,” he said, shrugging. “I'm a prince of the Summer Court – it's hard keeping the glamour up this close to the border with Fairy.”

“You're wearing a glamour?” Gerard asked, and then wanted to slap himself. Well of course he was. Duh.

Brendon laughed again. “Even the most human-looking of us don't look entirely human,” he said. “We have to maintain the illusion around mortals – although it's a lot easier, being a rock star. People expect you to have glitter in your hair and do weird shit. If you're not biting the heads off bats or arriving at the Grammys in a giant see-through egg, they don't even raise an eyebrow.”

“Is Lady Gaga...?”

“Human.”

“Huh.”

He'd been so busy worrying about people thinking that the whole vampirism thing was some kind of lame-ass attack of emo that it hadn't really crossed his mind to feel grateful for the fact that nobody would so much as blink if he was photographed covered in blood and hunched over a corpse. They'd totally assume it was just some rockstar bullshit – and, okay, so they might think that he was creatively barren, and revisiting old motifs, but they definitely wouldn't guess that he was an actual, honest-to-God creature of the night. Heck, Gerard had apparently been on first-name terms with all manner of weird and wonderful creatures, and never suspected for a moment they were anything other than human.

He watched Brendon thoughtfully as they picked their way through the trees, further and further away from the Griffith Park observatory and closer, apparently, to Fairyland. It wasn't that Gerard didn't believe Brendon was a prince of the Summer Court. It was just that he was still pretty much seeing him as Brendon Urie, hyper scene kid and occasional wearer of top hats, rather than some ancient, powerful, Yoda-like being. Because – well. It was Brendon, for fuck's sakes. He was like a springer spaniel puppy in human form. But as they got nearer to the border with Fairy, Gerard began
to understand that Brendon was - *other*. Not just in the way that the vampires and werewolves were inhuman, but in a deeper, more basic and disturbing kind of way – like he was formed from some other, utterly different substance that was nothing like meat and bone. There was something subtly wrong about the way he moved, and it was growing more and more pronounced – as though he had too many joints in his limbs. The moss-and-honeysuckle scent had been growing stronger with every step they took towards Fairy, and now it was almost overwhelming Gerard's senses.

“Will Frank be safe?” Gerard blurted, shocked that it had taken him this long to think of the possibility that Frank was walking into danger. Handsome young mortals, particularly poets and musicians... He ground to a halt. “Oh, *shit*, Brendon. I'm not going in there if this is putting Frankie in danger.”

Brendon spun around and studied Gerard, still walking but doing so backwards and dodging around trees without seeming to need to see them. There was something almost snake-like in the way that he tilted his head to study Gerard, and when he smiled his teeth were sharp little points, bright and even and not like any animal Gerard could think of.

“What do fairies eat?” Gerard asked, distracted. And it was maybe a little late in the day to be thinking along these lines, but he put himself hurriedly between Brendon and Frank.

Brendon's disturbing smile widened. He finally stopped walking, and executed a nimble series of handstands and cartwheels that brought him tumbling and flipping right back into Gerard's personal space. Gerard recoiled instinctively.


There was nothing remotely comforting about Brendon's expression, and Gerard was almost starting to wish he'd taken his chances with Bob and Brian and their unlikely Hammer Horror boss after all.

“Oh,” he said articulately, tangling his fingers tighter around Frank's and not caring if they looked kind of like Hansel and Gretel. “That's – um. Interesting. And you? What do you eat, Brendon?”

“Nothing that need worry you or yours, Gerard Way,” Brendon said, playful and unexpectedly frightening in the slightly ridiculous way that old porcelain dolls could be frightening, or clowns. “You and yours are under the protection of the Fairy Queen, and the only thing on earth or under hill that you need fear now is the Fairy Queen.”

“That – isn't really all that comforting,” said Frank, clutching more tightly at Gerard.

“Why then you are a wise man after all, Frank Iero,” Brendon said, giving a sudden pirouette that was a little bit too fast – or possibly a little bit too slow – to look real. It looked like some kind of CGI effect, not like something that happened in real life. Gerard blinked, and tried to make sense of what his eyes had just shown him, but to no avail. This was starting to feel upsettingly like he'd taken something. A hallucinogenic sort of something.

“Is this it?” asked Gerard, looking around at the trees uncertainly and wondering whether that was why they'd stopped. They did seem to have found another clearing surrounded by a suspiciously perfect circle of trees, and he didn't *think* they were the same kind that Bert had lured him to before – but then, tree identification wasn't exactly a big part of his skill set. He'd known what the other trees were, and what they signified, because it was uppermost in Bert's mind. Generally speaking, Gerard knew that the green bit was the end that didn't stick in the dirt, and that was about it.
“This is the Door of Elm,” said Brendon. His peacock feather hair was being buffeted around his face as though blown by fierce gusts of wind, even though the air in the circle was perfectly still. The sunlight on his skin was growing brighter by the second, giving the disquieting impression that the light was actually contained inside him, flowing through his veins instead of blood. His eyes had gone a dark, flat, beetle-carapace black and he seemed to be listening very carefully to something only he could hear.

Gerard shivered. He was really starting to wish that he'd given ComicCon a miss this year. Or that Lindsey's tour had fallen at another time: because if she'd been there with him, like she ought to be, then no way in hell would she have let him stumble into this kind of mess. It was, he sadly suspected, entirely too much to hope that any of the trees surrounding him would have a secret door to Halloween Town set into their trunks. Not much chance of stepping through into a world where Jack Skellington and Sally and Zero were waiting to whisk them off for wholesomely spooky singalong adventures. Apparently Fairyland was a hell of a lot scarier than Halloween Town.

Frank's fingers were squeezing his so tightly now that Gerard would have feared for his blood circulation, if his blood were still circulating.

“Time to slip down the rabbit hole, gentlemen,” Brendon said, in a voice that no longer sounded quite human, and the ground abruptly vanished from beneath their feet.

Gerard would deny to the end of time that he squealed, but possibly some people might have described his manly exclamation of surprise as a little high-pitched. There was a frantic moment of tumbling into nothingness while clenching tight at Frank's hand, before Gerard abruptly remembered that he could fly, damn it, and made the little sideways mental step that he'd already learned by heart. It made no difference to their headlong descent, and Gerard started to swear fervently under his breath. He'd definitely preferred being Peter Pan to being Alice in Wonderland. Probably that said something about gender roles and empowerment in classic children's literature, and Gerard would be sure to give that all due consideration at a time when he wasn't plummeting into a bottomless pit.

It wasn't a rabbit hole. They weren't whirling down past puzzling pieces of furniture, and Gerard was pretty damn certain that the only thing saying “Eat Me” or “Drink Me” in his immediate future was going to be Frankie. In fact it was really a lot more like a wormhole – or at least, the cliched TV SciFi version of a wormhole. They were hurtling at breakneck speed down something like a waterslide, with walls made of shimmering iridescent light, all purple and turquoise and aquamarine. It was beautiful, in a terrifying and alien way.

Frank, Gerard realised, was laughing like a hyena. Like he wasn't currently plunging into another dimension with a blood-drinking corpse and a possibly-evil fairy, and no guarantee that he'd ever see daylight again. Like this was fun.

Frank was clearly certifiable. Gerard had always suspected as much.

Brendon, meanwhile, had his eyes closed and his hands tucked behind his head for all the world as if he were lying at ease on a comfortable bed, rather than dropping down into an abyss. Gerard glared at him, noticing that, perversely, Brendon's hair was now lying quite smooth and unruffled. It was
also glinting a rather fetching peacock blue in the rippling light.

Afterwards Gerard was never able to gauge quite how long they'd been falling for. It felt like forever, but it might have been only minutes before suddenly the brilliant underwater light vanished, and they were standing on firm ground once more. There was no sense of landing; no slowing of momentum. One moment they were falling, and the next moment they were standing in a new place, perfectly at ease, as if they had always been there.

“Oh my God! Fuck! That was amazing! Fuck! Can we do it again?” Frankie said, jumping up and down like a five-year-old, his eyes sparkling and the most enormous grin stretching across his face. “That was fucking incredible, Brendon!”

Brendon picked an invisible speck of lint off the collar of his jacket and then glanced up at Gerard through his lashes with a sly smile. “What do you think, Gerard? Do you want to do it again?”

“No!” said Gerard, very quickly. “Fuck, no! Are you crazy?”

Frank looked crestfallen. “Aww, Gee!” he said, and Gerard was reminded of the way that Bandit's lower lip could tremble and protrude in a tragic little pout that her doting grandma swore she’d inherited from her daddy. He hardened his heart (he was, after all, a monster, and thus proof against the most disarming of pouts) and ignored Frank's sad puppy face, taking in their surroundings instead.

The floor beneath them was a highly polished mosaic in glittering black and something that looked very much like impossibly large slices of mother-of-pearl, and the design took Gerard's breath away. It was something amazingly elaborate, in which one writhing shape slotted perfectly into the next, as though M.C. Escher had been commissioned by demons to create an answer to the ceiling of the Cistine Chapel. Looked at one way, it showed a ballroom in which tall, slender beings performed a stately, measured dance and held earnest conversations and nibbled daintily on bunches of grapes; looked at another way it was a scene of mayhem and debauchery. Lindsey would have loved it. The intricacy reminded him of her work on 'HUSH', and he missed her with a sudden visceral intensity that made him blink.

“Wow,” said Gerard, his eyes glued to the ground. He really couldn't begin to imagine the kind of labyrinthine mind that could successfully create something so convoluted and perfect. “This is fucking unbelievable!” he said, dropping down to his knees and running his fingers over the surface reverently, trying to decide how old it was.

“Only you could stand here and stare at the floor, Gee,” said Frank in a tone of voice that strongly suggested that eye-rolling was in progress.

“This isn't a floor, it's a fucking art installation, motherfucker,” Gerard protested, fascinated by the way that the calm upraised faces of three dancers shifted to become the negative space around the wing tip of some sort of fallen angel who was in the middle of doing something quite unspeakable to a pony. “Holy shit,” Gerard said, feeling suddenly sad at his own modest talents. He'd learned how to be a pretty workmanlike artist, and he had a great eye for design and colour – but this was so far beyond anything he could ever hope to achieve that it wasn't even funny.

“Gee,” said Frank, insistently, and Gerard dragged his gaze away from the floor to look up.

And up.

And up.
“Oh!” he said, his voice going soft and small as the sheer scale of the hall gradually sank in. They were in what seemed to be the base of a cylindrical tower which stretched up as high as any skyscraper Gerard had ever seen. The walls were formed from that same mother-of-pearl stuff as the floor tiles, and there were thousands upon thousands of mirrors – or windows, strangely Gerard really couldn't tell – set into the walls. Spiralling up elegantly between them was a delicate golden staircase with ivy interwoven through the slender bars, which reached all the way to the top, miles over their heads. There didn't seem to be any roof, but rather a slab of bright blue sky at odds with the term “Underhill.” He could see birds darting past the opening, and clouds drifting by.

“Yeah. Oh!” Frank agreed. Gerard got slowly to his feet, aware of a renewed sense of dizziness, and this distracted him into wondering how Frankie was holding up.

“You okay?” he asked, ignoring all the glories of Fairy for a moment and frowning at Frank.

“M fine,” said Frank, but of course that's exactly what he would say, damn it. Frankie was forever soldiering on when he should be tucked up in bed drinking chicken soup and popping pills, because he'd had more than enough of being sick. Gerard tried to decided whether Frank was just being macho, or if he actually was okay; he looked biteable as hell, incidentally, but Gerard could do self restraint like a motherfucking champ, thank you very much, and he could hold out just fine until he got his hands on some...oh.

“Um,” said Gerard, feeling suddenly very foolish. “Brendon, is there – I mean, you guys wouldn't happen to have a fridge full of bagged human blood somewhere here, would you?”

Frank went very stiff next to him, and Brendon looked at Gerard quizzically.

“You brought your thrall with you,” he pointed out, in the tone of voice generally reserved for the hard of thinking. “You're under the protection of the Fairy Queen; the food he's provided with to keep up his energies should be harmless, and pose no commitment to remain.” He frowned. “Probably. You might want to check on that.”

Gerard blushed. “No, but – and, look, Frankie, I'm really sorry about the thrall business, by the way, really – but, um. I can't keep drinking from Frankie,” he said, his voice dropping low and embarrassed.

“I don't mind,” Frank said, flatly. He sounded hurt beneath the facade of nonchalance. *Fuck.*

“Well, it's either feed on Frank, or feed on one of the Good People, or starve to death,” Brendon said cheerfully. “You certainly wouldn't be the first person to starve to death in Fairy, but I think that the Lady would be pretty pissed about it. And feeding on the Good People is – not a good idea.”

Gerard studied Brendon, temporarily distracted. “Can we feed on fairies?” he asked, curiously. “I thought we couldn't feed on fairies or wolves. But Patrick seemed – well. I maybe got it wrong?”

Brendon grinned. “You can't sustain yourself on werejs or the fay,” he said. “That'd be like Frank here trying to live on nothing but Jack Daniels and Mead. Not advisable in the long run, but a sip from time to time can be fun.” He gave Gerard a pitying look. “But that's without thinking about what it would cost you. If you can't afford to owe me a favour for a little teleportation, I think the last thing you want to go doing is getting yourself in deep like *that* with some unknown fay.”


“Wow. Way to be an ungrateful asshole,” Frankie said, crossing his arms tightly in front of his chest and glaring at the wall.
“No! Look, don’t – please, Frankie! Don’t be like that?” He grabbed Frank and forced him to look around and meet Gerard’s eyes, huge and disconsolate. “I’m trying to do the right thing here. You know I love you. I mean, I totally do love you, Frankie, more than – more than drawing, man. But I’m trying to do the right thing.” After a couple of moments Frank crumbled.

“Fine. *Fine.* God. Okay. Just – stop, okay? Stop trying to protect me from myself. I won’t – you know. I’ll try not to be a creeper. I know this is just, like,” He made an abortive gesture in the air. “Like I’m your new on-tap Starbucks, or whatever.”

“No, but – but, Frankie, I respect you as a person,” Gerard said, looking into Frank’s face and willing him to get it. “Not just as a, you know, a piece of meat, or whatever. Or even a cup of coffee. It’s not – um. Um. I mean, before, in the park, that was – that was an *emergency.* I don’t want to keep taking advantage of you. It isn’t fair.” His voice went a little high and pleading then, and Frank looked up at him and sighed.

“Gee, you’re not taking advantage of me,” he said. “What do you need, a signed invitation? Interpretive dance? Sky writing? I am *into it.* Like, fucking boner-to-end-all-boners into it.” He darted a glance down at his own crotch, and Gerard followed the direction of his gaze and flushed.

“That’s - yeah, that’s actually part of the problem,” he said, giving Frank a helpless look. “Because - you know, me too. Really. Me fucking too. But that’s not just about - uh - like, vampire nutritional needs, you know? It just - it would be a lot easier if there were bags of blood around so I could be sure I wasn’t going to go feral without being *forced* to bite you. This thing with you and me and the biting - it’s not just about being hungry, Frank.”

Frank’s face softened at that.

“Oh,” he said. “Well - good.”

Gerard gave him a wobbly grin. “Sorry. I - it’s been kind of a lot to take in, you know? Like, three days ago I still had a pulse, and now I’m all - and I haven’t even told Lindsey about the vampire thing yet, and now you and me - uh. Fuck. I just don’t like how helter-skelter it’s gotten, when it’s something *important.* Um.” He looked sadly up at Frank through his eyelashes. “I’m *sorry*, Frankie.”

“Oh, stop apologising,” said Frank, giving him a lopsided grin and ruffling his hair. “I guess you’re allowed to have a little bit of a freakout. But you’d better get the fuck on with getting over it, Gee, because I’m not going anyplace, and I’m going to be *pissed* if you start biting other people.” He frowned. “Well - I mean other people who aren’t Lindsey or me.”

Looking at Frank’s fucking gorgeous smile at that moment Gerard had an almost overwhelming impulse to find a handy surface to pin Frank against and just lose a little time kissing him. Not even biting him - just kissing the hell out of him for being *Frank,* and the most totally perfect Frank in all of Frankdom.

And, okay, obviously if he did have an Exception List, Frankie would be right up at the top, even before Grant – but it still wasn’t a conversation he and Lindsey had *had,* and he just couldn’t stand the thought of disappointing her like this on top of already having gotten himself turned into a baby-eating monster with a broken penis as soon as she left him alone for five minutes. So there really shouldn’t be any more hands in pants, and there really shouldn’t be any more sexy biting, because that was – fuck, it was unbelievably intense, doing that with Frankie. Scarily intense. Mind-blowing. But also dangerous, for both of them, in a number of ways, and just not something Gerard wanted to fall into because he needed to eat. Frank wasn’t just a fucking pizza, damn it.
“Are we done with the soap opera stuff now?” Brendon asked, looking from Gerard to Frank and back again. “Because you’re looking at your only source of human blood, and you totally are going to have to feed again soon if you want to start healing from being staked through the heart.” He rolled his eyes.

Gerard sighed. “Sorry, Frank,” he said again, wishing that he had just a little bit more control over his own life. Unlife. Whatever.

“Gee, I swear, if you apologise to me one more time I’m going to stake you myself,” Frank said with a snort, grabbing Gerard’s hand again and squeezing it. “We’re good. It’s all good. Stop being a drama queen.”

Gerard gave a watery chuckle and then looked over at Brendon. “So what happens now?” He glanced around at the hallway, half expecting to see the Fairy Queen materialising in front of them at any moment.

“Now you wait until the Lady summons you,” Brendon said. “You’ll be, ah, a guest of the Summer Court.”

“Prisoners, you mean?” said Frank.

Brendon shrugged. “Call it what you like. You’ll be perfectly safe, while you wait for your day in court.”

Gerard swallowed. “Are we talking dungeons?” he asked, wishing that he didn't have such a vivid imagination, and Brendon threw his head back and laughed.

“Not exactly.”

* * *

“So – not dungeons, then,” said Gerard, a little breathlessly, gazing around at a chamber which looked kind of how Gerard had always imagined the Goblin King's bedroom might have looked, in the David Bowie movie. (Hell yeah, he'd thought about the Goblin King's bedroom, because – hello, David Bowie? In the tightest tight pants known to man? Duh!) There were some excellent grotesque carvings worked into the wooden beams in the ceiling, and a huge fireplace with elaborately decorated mantelpiece and some kind of lush and improbable white-and-purple-and-turquoise striped fur rug in front of it. The floor was tiled with thick slabs of some ancient blue-black rock that had silvery fossils embedded in it; Gerard’s darting eyes traced the shapes of neatly coiled ammonites and ghostly fish and strange, many-legged things that looked like a cross between lizards and scorpions. And other things that looked almost more mechanical than skeletal – like ancient robot birds and clockwork snakes. He kind of wished he had a camera, because Lindsey would freaking love this stuff. The only windows were narrow slits in the wall glazed in thick antique glass that was impossible to see through, but there were torches flickering in sconces along the walls, and a tarnished silver chandelier full of tall white candles hung from the ceiling.

The room was dominated by a four poster bed like something from a museum, hung with vivid blue brocade embroidered with tiny white flowers and curling green vines, and the dainty table beside it bore a cornucopia filled with glistening fresh fruit, and a platter of bread and cheese and butter. A glass jar of honey gleamed like liquid amber beside the bread, and behind it stood a pewter cup and a tall matching jug whose dew-dappled sides promised that the contents, whatever they might be, were icy cold. Gerard was relieved to see that somebody, at least, was thinking about Frankie’s blood sugar level.
“Shit, Brendon. We could totally shoot a video in here,” Gerard blurted out, beaming around the room.

They had followed Brendon through a maze of corridors with impossibly high ceilings and walls made of disturbing funhouse mirrors that distorted their images in ways Gerard was pretty sure were impossible, and through low, rounded corridors more like tunnels bored through the earth, and through corridors covered with elaborate murals which Gerard was sure he could see moving out of the corner of his eye, until at last Brendon paused in front of a large wooden door and produced an old fashioned copper-coloured key out of his vest pocket. Gerard hadn't seen another soul the whole time, but he'd heard voices raised in laughter behind doors that they passed, and something that sounded like the lovechild of a harp and a sitar being played behind another, and some kind of frankly terrifying roaring straight out of a National Geographic special behind another. He'd also heard footsteps following them and overtaking them and vanishing down the corridor ahead of them, and never seen anybody to go with the sounds. Gerard wasn't scared, exactly, but his hand still tightened around Frank's and by the time they reached their quarters they were standing very close.

“Holy shit – there's a flat screen TV!” said Frank, pulling Gerard forward over the threshold and into the room, pointing at a huge silvery screen with an elaborate picture gilt-edged frame. “Seriously?”

He looked over his shoulder at Brendon. “You guys get TV in Fairyland?”

Brendon looked rather pleased with himself. “It's a magic mirror,” he said. “We've always had them. Used to just use them for spying on the mortals, but now we can get HBO as well.”

“That's cool,” Gerard agreed, wide-eyed. His mind darted back to New Jersey, and then to – fuck, what day was it, and where would MSI be today? “So – spying on mortals? How do you...?” He trailed off and cast Brendon an imploring look.

“Just touch the frame and think of them as you speak their name,” he said. Then he frowned. “Might not work for you, though – it's Fairy magic and you're not full blood, so - but give it a try. Well, make yourselves comfortable, gentlemen,” he said, giving an exaggerated bow, and then he pulled the door shut, leaving the two of them alone in the room.

“What did that mean?” Frank asked, looking at Gerard thoughtfully. “It's Fairy magic and you're not full blood’?”

“They really do need to make orientation packs,” Gerard said, sighing heavily. “There's so much shit that Patrick hadn't gotten around to telling me yet. I know some of it now, through drinking from Bert, but I bet that's just, like, the tip of the iceberg.”

Frank's eyes bulged a little at that. “You – what, you can read minds?”

Gerard blushed. Talking about feeding felt kind of like talking about jerking off – and it wasn't that Gerard wouldn't talk about that shit, but it just – there was all this tension now, between him and Frank. Like somebody had taken the normal, manageable level of tension and cranked it up to eleven.

“It's – when I'm drinking somebody's blood, I, uh – there's, like, a psychic backwash, or – fuck, I don't know how to describe it. It's like I'm drinking emotions and memories and, and feelings and shit too, as well as blood. Like I'm tasting bits of the person's soul. It's – um. It's really intimate.”

“You're telling me,” Frank muttered, with a rueful quirk of his mouth, and Gerard couldn't look at him right now, because the impulse to push Frank down onto the bed and slice into his paper-thin skin was a little too intense already. He really really liked tasting Frankie's soul. It felt as natural as breathing used to. It felt like it should rightfully belong to him.
And that, right there, was the scary part.

Gerard swallowed, and tried not to think about it. “So – I understood about the fairy ring after I'd drunk from Bert. And other stuff. Vampires and werewolves – the reason they call us changelings is because we're kind of half-fay. There are all these different kinds of fairies, right, and most of them don't look real human? But some of them do. And we're, kind of – I guess we were an experiment, or something? But basically they made us, centuries ago, by crossing humans with some of the more bloodthirsty fairies – redcaps and things, maybe? And swapping the babies for, like, real human babies. And then they just sat back to see what would happen. Which was pretty fucked up.” He frowned. “I have no idea how that worked, really, because you can't get baby vampires. We don't change. But maybe the first ones did? Or – fuck, I don't know, it was all kind of jumbled up. I don't think Bert was all that clear on the details himself. Just – we're descended from the fairies, somehow. Vampires and werewolves, I mean.”

“Get out!” said Frank, looking fascinated. Gerard met his eyes and gave a nervous little grin.

“It's kind of cool, right?”

“Man, this is all cool, Gee.” Frank waved at the candle chandeliers and the Star Trek-looking fur rug. He walked over to the fireplace and ran his finger along the tangled leaves and fruit carved into the marble. “Fucking insane, you know, but – cool. Definitely cool. Especially that slide thing that brought us here from Griffith Park,” he added, his eyes lighting up at the memory. “That was fucking awesome, man!”

“God, you have no self preservation instincts at all, do you?” Gerard shook his head, smiling in spite of himself. Frank had always been one to throw himself in with both feet, wholehearted and totally fucking fearless. It was one of the things Gerard had always loved about him, that crazy, reckless courage.

“Oh, no, you did not just say that to me,” exclaimed Frank, looking up from the carving with wide eyes. “You're the one who went off alone into an alley with a frigging vampire.”

“And you're the one who followed a vampire into another dimension, knowing that he's going to be put on trial and maybe executed, and with no idea of whether you can ever go home,” snapped Gerard, and then wished he hadn't when he saw Frank's expression. “I mean – I mean, obviously you'll get to go home, Frankie,” he said, tripping over his tongue in his efforts to undo it. God, he was an asshole. He crossed quickly to where Frank was standing and laid a hand on his arm, looking earnestly into his eyes. “I'll make sure of that, I promise. We'll get you home, whatever happens. Even if I – I mean, we'll definitely get you home. Brian will see to that.”

“Shut up. We'll both get home, jackass,” said Frank, but Gerard could hear a trace of fear behind the bluster, and it made him feel just terrible.

“You should eat something,” he said, because changing the subject was better than talking about whether he was going to make it out of this thing alive. If Gerard had felt certain he'd got Brian on his side, he'd have felt a whole lot more comfortable, but – he had bitten Bert, at the end of the day. Even if that was Bert's doing, it still happened. And Brian wasn't his manager any more, after all. They weren't as close as they had been. Brian was Brian, and Gerard had always trusted him, but if Brian had to choose between Gerard and Bert, when Gerard was, well, pretty much Son of Dracula, and Bert was supposed to be one of the good guys – that was a horse of a different colour.

Frank was looking at him from under his lashes, and Gerard realised he still had his hand on Frank's arm.
“Shouldn't you eat something?” Frank said carefully, the corner of his mouth twitching.

Gerard's tongue darted out to wet his lips without any conscious thinking involved, and his fingers tightened around Frank's arm for a moment, before he carefully removed his hand and took a step back.

“It's – God, Frank, don't tease,” he said, turned on and miserable. “Do you think I like objectifying you?”

“Hey – I'm A-Okay with being objectified, Gee,” Frank said with an elaborate shrug, crossing over to the platters of food and helping himself to an apple. He rubbed it on his shirt and studied the polished surface for a moment before glancing over at Gerard again and giving a smile that was both heated and rueful. “It's kind of hot, to be honest.”

Gerard leaned on the mantelpiece with his head in his hands, faintly aware of the fire's heat warming his legs and belly but mostly aware of how much he wanted to push Frank down onto the bed, pin his hands down and make completely certain he knew that he belonged to Gerard, and to nobody else. Gerard was still hungry, and beyond the physical hunger there was this familiar rush of neediness and wanting that reminded him too much of the days when he hadn't known how it felt to wake up without a hangover. Fuck.

And it wasn't just blood he wanted – although he did want blood, anybody's blood, because his body needed to heal and feeding was the only way to get the energy for that. But it wasn't just blood. He wanted Frankie. Wanted to lick the last traces of apple from Frankie's lips, wanted to bite down and taste Frankie's blood in his mouth with the faintest ghost of ink scenting it, wanted to taste Frankie's courage and kindness and devotion. Wanted that visceral sense of possession.

“But I'm changing you, Frank,” Gerard said quietly, without looking up. “This is what happened to Bert. This is – it's a bad thing that I'm doing to you. Even if it's just feeding, and not – um. Even then. It's not right.”

There was a little pause. Gerard could hear Frank biting into the skin of the apple and chewing, and he tried not to think about the juice spilling down over Frank's lips, tried not to think of teeth cutting into fragile skin.

“What happened to Bert?”

It was easier, not looking at Frank. “When he was a kid – I mean, I knew he'd been through some pretty bad shit, you know? But I didn't know it all, not until I was – you know. Drinking from him.” He swallowed. “Guess there are vampires out there who really do deserve staking. Probably most of them, I guess? Them, us - I don't know. And one of them found him, when he was a kid, when he was out on the streets, and – it was fucked up, okay? He was its thrall, like, he was its regular chew toy.”

“But – he's a vampire slayer. He's got these powers, you said,” Frank cut in, sounding thrown, and Gerard risked a glance across the room. He could smell the apple juice, sweet and tart on the air, and Frank's lips were gleaming with it, all innocent temptation. Gerard looked away again, hurriedly.

“Seems some people are born like that, some are made. It's – ha, ironically it's actually a side-effect of being a thrall. If you're a thrall long enough, you start becoming something not-quite-human. Like, it's like a symbiotic thing, I guess?” Gerard felt like he might be about to throw up.

“The fuck?” Gerard heard Frank setting the apple down on the table again, and knew that Frank was staring at him. He didn't look up. It was good if he was freaking Frank out. Frank really ought to be
feeling freaked out about this shit.

“Like, healing more quickly, and increased strength and endurance and stuff, you know? Longevity. Stuff that makes you more – more useful. To the vampire you're. Um. Serving. And if somebody kills the vampire before the vampire kills you, then you're left with these powers. They get passed down from generation to generation – or, they do if both parents have them, I guess. I don't know exactly. But Brian's always been one, I think, and Bob too. But Bert's only a chymera now because he survived after Brian killed his master. I think they used to just kill the thralls out of hand, before they got these new rules in place, but now they're trying to be a bit more humanitarian, or something.”

“Huh,” said Frank, thoughtfully.

“Fuck, I sound like a Wikipedia article. Basically this thing made him its bitch, and it was – bad. And it got him into the drugs too – it liked feeding on people when they were high. It – it really fucked him up, Frankie, and made him like it. Made him want it.” Gerard shivered. “I mean, that's basically rape, right? With, like, Stockholme Syndrome, for added fucked-up-ness. And he couldn't say no, because that's what this means, that's what this power does. It stops you from being able to say no, and makes you think you want to be, like – food. I mean, shit, afterwards, when he got together with Quinn, Jeph and Branden and joined their band he made them change their name from 'Dumb Luck' to 'The Used' – the guy has issues. So – that's why he didn't think you'd help me, once you weren't under the influence of the vampire mojo stuff. He thought I was doing that to you. He thought he was helping you, the way that Brian helped him.” He drew a snotty breath and wiped the back of his hand over his eyes. “Frank, I don’t want to use you. You're better than that. I want to be better than that.”

Gerard had been so caught up in reliving the curdled memories that he hadn't really been paying attention to Frank's movements, so when Frank's hand landed on his shoulder he actually jumped.

“Gee – Gee, look at me,” Frank said, urgently, tugging at him. Gerard let himself be turned around and stared back at Frank through eyes that were maybe just a little bit wet. “Gerard, I can't believe you're comparing yourself to some fucked up vampire who fed on street kids! For fuck's sake, what's wrong with you? You're not doing that to me, you asshole. Gee, I love you, you idiot. I loved you when you had a pulse, and I love you now that you're all badass monster dude. I mean – you're still you. This isn't fucking Stockholme Syndrome, you jackass.” He was shaking his head incredulously, and after a moment he reached up and smacked Gerard upside the head, then rolled his eyes. “Or, you know – if it is, I've pretty much had it since I first started joining in with the dorky high fives after each song, once you guys let me in the goddamn band.” He gave a little snort of laughter at that, then cocked his head to one side. “Are you really that dumb? Fuck, Gee, this isn't – what part of 'I love you' is it that you're not getting?”

“But...” Gerard began, because although, yes, obviously he knew that Frankie loved him, and obviously he loved Frankie right back, still they were talking about freakie mindcontrol powers which messed with your ability to consent and were obviously not at all healthy, and – only then Frank was leaning into him, one hand sliding to cup the back of his head, and then they were kissing. And that felt so normal, so natural and safe and familiar and, when Frank pressed his bottom lip up against Gerard's fangs and let the hot copper-salt splash of his blood warm their tangled tongues, unspeakably hot, that Gerard gave a helpless little groan and lost track of his frantic train of thought entirely.

The creepy rug, as it turned out, had been very conveniently placed.

* * *
“So does this mean I'm going to develop ninja super powers, then?”

Frank was curled around Gerard like an over-affectionate puppy, with his head pillowed on Gerard's chest, and by the flickering golden light Gerard was idly tracing the lines of ink that swirled over his skin. They were sprawling on the rug in front of the fire, still half-dressed, sated and post coital, and Gerard had decided to take time out from his regularly scheduled angsting to enjoy the goddamn moment; after all, it was entirely possible that his days – or even his hours – were numbered. And, more to the point, Frank had gone a long way to convincing him – mostly through calling him every offensive name under the sun – that what was between them wasn't anything like what had been done to Bert, and that Gerard wasn't, even accidentally, taking away Frank's free will. Frank's free will was alive and kicking and pretty damn pushy, and the only reason Gerard hadn't ended up letting Frank actually hold him down and fuck him into the rug was because that was a line he wasn't prepared to cross until he'd had a damn good talk to Lindsey – and depending on how she felt about it, maybe not ever.

But it had been close.

“Um,” he said, blinking. “Well – I guess? But, like, I don't know how long it takes. I don't think it kicks in right away.”

“Cool,” Frank said, pressing a lazy kiss onto Gerard's stomach. “I always wanted superpowers. This is way better than getting bitten by a radioactive spider.”

Gerard grinned in spite of himself, and they stayed like that for a little while. It was – nice. Really nice, in spite of probably being a very bad idea on several levels.

“So – I get why Bert was all up in your grill, and all 'The only good vampire is a dead vampire',” Frank said after a while. “But I don't get why he was making you bite him.” He sniggered, and fingered the bite mark on his neck. “Well – I mean, well, okay, I guess I kind of do, because, holy shit, Gee, that's fucking intense, but – I thought he hated that stuff?”

Gerard felt his face falling. “He's got a problem,” he said. “He's really got a problem. He's hooked on it. Can't give it up, because it's – yeah. You know. But he doesn't want to be a thrall, obviously. So he's been doing this for a while now – killing vampires, but getting them to bite him before they die. Nearly gotten himself killed a few times, but – yeah.” He grimaced. “I could see it in his head. It was pretty fucked up.”

“Huh.” Frank pushed himself up and rolled over, one elbow buried in the disturbing rug while he sprawled over Gerard's belly and looked up at him. “They can't, like, prosecute you for that, then? I mean – you were totally the victim. It's obvious.”

“Mmm,” Gerard said, uncertainly. “I'm not sure how things work with these guys, though. Traditionally they're kind of sticklers for rules. If there's a rule that says I'm not allowed to bite Bert, then even if it was Bert's fault – well. Um. I mean, I don't want to be, like, a downer, but I might be fucked, Frankie. You get that, right?”

Frank scowled. “That's not going to happen.”

“No, but – but it might.” He drew a deep breath. “And if it does – look, I'm not trying to be gloomy, but I think we should be sensible about this, right? So – if it does, I need you to tell Lindsey that I love her, and tell Mikey and Ray that I'm sorry, okay? Um. I should probably think up some kind of cool last words, I guess, but basically it's sorry and I love you guys. Oh! And Mom too, obviously. And Bandit. And Grant.”
“Shut the fuck up.”

“And I love you, Frank. Frankie. You know that, though, right?” He stared up at the ceiling, following the loops of chains carved into the dark wooden beams. “It's okay. I'm not – I mean, I really don't want to die, you know – I want to be there for Bandit while she grows up, and I want to make the next album, and I want to be with you guys. But it's okay, if – you know. If that doesn't happen. Because I've had a fucking amazing life, Frankie, and I really appreciate what I've had.”

“Okay, we are not having this conversation,” Frank said, pushing himself crossly up off the floor and stomping over to the table of food. He tore some bread from the loaf and grabbed a bunch of grapes and then perched on the end of the bed, glaring down at Gerard. “You're not going to damn well die, Gerard, and I'm not going to listen to you being a drama queen about it. We're going to sort this shit out, and then we're going to go back to New Jersey and see Bee and your momma, and we're going to go and find Lindsey and watch her kicking ass on stage with MSI, and we're going to explain about this crazy shit, and tell Ray and Mike and James and your mom and everyone. And then we're going to make another album, and it's going to be totally kickass. And I'm going to develop ninja superpowers, and you're going to fly around over the stage next time we're on tour like an oversized Peter Pan, and we'll tell everyone it's, like, cutting edge invisible wire work shit, or something. And we're all going to live happily ever after.” Frank was very nearly yelling by this point. “So shut up with all this 'tell them I love them' bullshit. You can tell them yourself.”

Gerard pulled himself up into a sitting position and smiled. “Okay, Frankie,” he said obediently. He'd said his piece; he figured he could afford to humour Frank now.

“Now get over here and kiss me, asshole,” Frank said, gruffly.

Gerard grinned. “Okay, Frankie.”

* * *

Gerard wasn't at all sure how long they were left in their not-a-dungeon. Long enough that Frankie had tracked down the half-hidden door that led to a surprisingly modern bathroom with a claw-footed bath and a hilariously ornate toilet, and long enough that the fire had almost burnt down to its embers. They'd tried the magic mirror, and been disappointed but unsurprised when it didn't work for either of them, and Gerard had tried unsuccessfully to use Frank’s phone, just on the offchance that Fairy got reception (since apparently they got cable), and there had been quite a lot of snuggling and making out and lazy feeding-Frankie-grapes, and rather less lazy licking-honey-off-Gerard, and considerably less lazy biting-Frankie’s-inner-elbow-while-jerking-him-off, and eventually they'd both, to Gerard's considerable surprise, fallen asleep.

He wouldn't have thought that he'd be able to sleep, what with the whole death row thing, but apparently his body was determined to take this shit into its own hands, after all the stress and injuries it had sustained over the past couple of days. So they were both in bed, sound asleep, tangled up with one another and down to their underwear, when Brendon showed up to fetch them to the trial.

“Rise and shine, sleepyheads,” he said, and Gerard propped himself up on one elbow, blinking blearily at the blue-clad figure on the threshold. From the sluggish, headachy sense of borderline hangover he was feeling, Gerard gathered that it must be daylight in the world outside; the narrow windows let so little light in that it wasn’t immediately obvious.

“Is it time?” he asked, a little incoherently, and Brendon nodded. “Right. Two minutes?”

“It will not do to keep The Lady waiting,” Brendon said, pointedly, but he stepped back and pulled the door closed.
Gerard looked down at Frank’s upturned face, feeling his heart grow a dozen sizes at the sight, and offered him a tentative smile. “You okay?” he asked, worrying again about Frank’s blood sugar.

Frank rolled his eyes, grabbed the back of his head and pulled him down into a kiss. It occurred to Gerard that they probably should have looked into toothbrushes, and maybe even considered taking advantage of the claw-footed bath since it was there, but it was too late to worry about impressing the Fairy Queen with his personal hygiene skills now. Gerard secretly kind of liked the funky way they both smelled of sex and blood and sweat and honey, and he couldn’t see that it was going to get them into any more trouble than they were already in.

“I’m awesome,” Frank said softly. “You’re awesome. We’re both totally fucking awesome.”

“You make a compelling point,” Gerard agreed, trying to sound serious and then dissolving into giggles as Frank blew a raspberry on his neck. “Fuck. Come on, they’re waiting for us. Let’s do this thing.”

* * *

They piled out into the corridor a couple of minutes later, once they’d rescued their clothes from the various places they’d fallen, and once Gerard had won the argument about who got to wear Frank’s hoodie (Frank), and once Frank had finished off the bread and honey while Gerard stood over him like a guilty mother hen, mumbling about Frank’s health and how it would make Gerard look like a bad vampire if his blood donor (he was trying to avoid the word thrall) went and passed out in the middle of the trial.

Brendon looked them both up and down, his eyebrows darting up to his hairline in a way that suggested crazy greasy bedhead, paint-splattered girl jeans with a couple of new, incriminatingly non-paint-like stains, a smelly Green Day T-shirt and a sharpie tattoo possibly didn’t add up to the ideal court-going ensemble. Gerard pulled a face and looked down at himself unhappily.

“Um,” he said. “I didn’t exactly pack for meeting royalty?” Gerard could do smart and professional looking, when the occasion called for it. Granted, the occasion was only ever a photoshoot or video or something where formal wear constituted part of his artistic vision, but it wasn’t like he didn’t know how to dress to impress. He totally did. Just - this was all he actually had with him.

Brendon heaved a sigh. “Well, if The Lady had cared about appearances, she would have ensured you had fresh clothes in the room. This must be how she likes you,” he said, wrinkling his nose just a tiny bit. Gerard wondered, a little guiltily, whether there perhaps had been fresh clothes in the room somewhere. And toothbrushes. They hadn’t really done a lot of looking for that kind of thing.

Brendon himself, Gerard noticed, was no longer wearing the jeans and pinstripe vest combo. For a moment or two Gerard actually found his attention distracted from the pressing matter of his trial, because Brendon’s outfit was pretty damn spectacular. Not exactly what Gerard would have expected for Fairyland, but definitely spectacular; Gerard had been subconsciously anticipating something a bit more like Peter Jackson’s take on Rivendell, he realised, but Brendon was sporting a very simple knee-length robe with a Nehru collar, worn with matching pants but no shoes or socks. Clean, simple lines, no gratuitous drapey bits and no jewellery. What Gerard found mesmerising, though, was the way that the shades of white and blue shifted and bled into one another; at first he’d assumed it was due to the fabric, one of those Thai silks where different colours were used for the warp and the weft, and that the brightness was tied in with the way that Brendon’s skin was still glowing like some kind of bad special effect, but up close he was pretty sure that it was more complicated than that. The colours were moving, not simply giving the illusion of movement. He stared at Brendon’s chest, watching a cloud drift slowly into view, and then gasped when a flock of birds went swirling past, like delicate calligraphy writing itself across the sky and then vanishing.
“Oh my God, Lindsey would love this!” he exclaimed, boggling like mad. “Is it really the sky? I mean - is it showing a real patch of sky somewhere? Or an imaginary one?”

“Everything you can imagine is real somewhere, Gerard,” Brendon said, grinning as he turned and led them off down the corridor. “So how are you feeling this morning? Ready to face the music?” He giggled to himself at that; if it was supposed to be a joke, Gerard didn’t think it was an especially good one.

“I’m good,” Gerard said, fidgeting with the hem of his t-shirt. Frank’s fingers found their way into Gerard’s a moment later and pulled him closer, and Gerard glanced up at Frank with a nervous twitch of a grin.

“Oh, you two are precious,” Brendon said, watching them over his shoulder and bursting out into more giggles.

Gerard didn’t know what to say to the ‘precious’ remark, so he decided to ignore it. “Does the fabric do that on its own?” he asked instead, watching a bird of prey sail across Brendon’s shoulders and off around his chest. “Would it still work if I wore it?”

Brendon turned around at that and continued to walk backwards down the corridor as if this were just as simple and unremarkable as walking in the right direction. “Good question,” he said, looking intrigued. “I don’t think so - but maybe it would. You’re a special case, aren’t you? Hmm. We could find out afterwards, if you like? If - well.” His face fell. “If you’re still around afterwards, that is,” he finished, grimacing awkwardly and then turning back away from them.

“Ha. Yeah. Right,” Gerard said, choking a little. It was all starting to feel a bit more real now. Ah, shit - Gerard really wished he’d been able to get through to Lindsey. He should have taken advantage of the chance he’d had before, when he was on the phone with her, and at least tried to explain that he’d somehow fallen down the rabbit hole into crazy town in the middle of ComicCon. He shouldn’t have told himself that he could tough it out for a couple of weeks; God, he’d barely lasted a couple of days without finding himself stranded up shit creek without a paddle. Gerard had a feeling that he’d have gotten into a whole lot less trouble if he’d had Lindsey with him. He couldn’t entirely justify this conviction, but Lindsey was the still point of the turning world, the thing that kept him grounded and sane, and he simply couldn’t imagine anything really terrible happening when he was with her. Without her, though - well, things weren’t looking completely rosy right now.

He tightened his grip on Frank’s hand. “So - look, Brendon, if this, uh, Lady - if she decides that I need to be executed,” he began.

“Gerard!” Frank snapped, going suddenly stiff and furious at his side.

Gerard grimly kept on going. “If she does, can you guarantee that Frank will get home safely?”

Brendon turned back to look at them again, his eyes cartoonishly huge. “Ooh! Are you offering a bargain, Gerard Arthur Way?”

Gerard hadn’t been thinking along those lines, actually, but if that was what it took then he was game. “Yeah?” he said.

“No he’s not,” Frank said, sounding worried.

“Yes I am,” said Gerard, frowning. “What did you have in mind, Brendon?”

Brendon gave a little gurgle of delight, and Gerard tried to imagine how this could possibly be a reckless move on his part under the circumstances, but he really couldn’t think of anything. If he did
end up getting killed, he couldn’t just leave Frank trapped in Fairyland for all time. Frank had a wife and kids and a life waiting for him back in the real world, damn it.

“A bargain! Very well.” Brendon’s voice took on a more formal cadence. “Whether The Lady has you executed or not, I promise on my honour and that of my court to see your thrall Frank Iero returned safely to the mortal realm. And if she does not, then you will owe me a favour of my choosing, to be redeemed at my discretion.” He was watching Gerard warily, as if expecting him to protest.

“Sounds good,” Gerard said, feeling puzzled. He felt even more puzzled at the way that Brendon’s eyes lit up with glee.

“By summer sun and winter moon, so mote it be,” Brendon announced, practically skipping.

“Gee, I don’t know how, but I’m pretty sure that you just got had,” Frank said, tightly.

“Too late now,” Gerard said, worrying that Frank was probably right.

He decided to keep his mouth closed as they followed Brendon through the twisting corridors, and down a staircase that descended in an undulating figure-of-eight pattern rather than a proper spiral.

* * *

Gerard didn’t notice precisely when the endless walls of the latest corridor down which Brendon led them had gone from dark green trompe l’oeil of countless gleaming leaves providing the illusion of neatly manicured hedges reaching up to a blue and white ceiling, to actual neatly manicured hedges reaching up to an open sky. He first knew it had happened when they spilled out of the maze into a wide open space of pristine apple-green lawns, surrounded by neat hedges on three sides and a flowering orchard on the fourth. Gerard flinched away from all the brightness, blinking like a mole and backing unconsciously behind Frank. Sunlight didn’t make him burst into flames or glimmer like Bolan, but it hurt his eyes and made his head ache. Frank cast an anxious look at him and ran a comforting hand down Gerard’s arm from shoulder to wrist and back again, trailing his fingers over the copy of Lindsey’s tattoo.

“Gee?”

“Sorry, sorry - just, gimme a minute?” Gerard said, feeling stupid. He didn’t realise how accustomed he’d gotten to the candlelight. He rubbed at his eyes gingerly and peered around the clearing, taking in the ornate flower beds and the chaotic crowd of men and women and God knows what else all busy chatting and gossiping in the garden, staring up at an empty, ivy-draped throne that seemed to have grown out of the base a vast tree. The branches above it were full of tiny balls of light that darted and whirled back and forth like fireflies. As he looked around, Gerard could see minotaurs and horse-headed women; boys with goats’ legs and golden slit-pupilled eyes; girls with coiling snakes for hair and men with coiling snakes squirming between their thighs; glittering bird-faced people with human torsos and rustling pinions; elegant centaurs and squat, ugly creatures with stone-like skin mottled with lichen; tall blue and red ogres with curling horns and mouths full of shark-sharp teeth, wearing incongruous tiger-skin loincloths that made them look like terrifying 70s porn stars; a swarm of eyes; giant paper umbrellas; tiny floating balls of fire; in short, all manner of things that could definitely not have passed themselves off as human and gotten signed to a music label. Probably. And in among this host of marvels, there were also others as human-looking as Brendon, or more so - figures that Gerard would have sworn were ordinary mortals. A few of them even looked familiar.

“Holy fuck!” Frank exclaimed, grabbing at Gerard’s wrist. “Is that John Fucking Lennon?”
Gerard followed the direction of Frank’s gaze and felt his jaw drop. “Um - Brendon?” he said, his voice coming out as more of a squeak than anything else. “Is that - er..?”

Brenson glanced over and then winked at Gerard. “I told you that it didn’t usually go so well for attractive young poets or musicians, when they caught the attention of a powerful fay,” he said, grinning.

“Huh?”

Brendon nodded towards a small figure standing near the surprisingly well-preserved (surprisingly not dead) former Beatle, and Gerard squinted uncertainly at her. She seemed to be dressed in garments made of snow - either actual snow or something that gave a really good impression of it. All things considered, Gerard thought it was probably actual snow. He cocked his head, studying the wet, crystalline glitter of the stuff and wondering how that could possibly work.

“He belongs to the Winter Court,” Brendon said with a little shrug.

“Is that Yoko Ono?” Frank exclaimed, sounding very much like someone whose mind was officially blown, and Gerard stopped staring at the way the light caught on her shifting blue-white garments and snapped his eyes up to her face instead.

“Holy shit!” he said.

Brendon sniggered. “Yuki Ona,” he corrected. “That’s her true name. ‘Ocean Child’ was a joke - water instead of snow.”

“Holy shit!” Gerard said again, like a broken record. He could feel Frank darting worried glances from him to Brendon and back again.

“What’s your name supposed to mean, then?” Frank asked, curiously.

Brendon smiled. “Prince of light,” he said, with a graceful shrug. “Subtlety’s overrated.”

“And Ryan Ross means ‘Prince of Pretentious Lyrics?’” said Frank, grinning. Brendon shook his head.

“He’s a prince of the Red Court. That’s what his name means.” Gerard decided that he probably didn’t want to know why the Red Court was called the Red Court. He was still staring over at Yuki Ona and her pet human.

“I can’t believe that’s John Lennon,” he said, shaking his head. “He doesn’t look a day older.”

“Does that happen a lot?” Frank asked. “Humans getting trapped in Fairyland?”

“Not as often as it once did,” Brendon said, which was a lot less reassuring than it could have been. “That’s Thomas the Rhymer,” he added, pointing at a pale man in antique clothes who was playing some kind of stringed instrument for a group of green women sitting in an ornamental pond. “Kit Marlowe’s somewhere around, probably getting stoned with Kurt Cobain and Janis Joplin again. Oh, and you might spot James Dean - he’s with the Wild Hunt now. Never wise to stray too close to the borders of Fairy if you want to avoid the attention of the Good People.” His lips curled into a familiar, sweetly clownish grin that Gerard would never have thought could be chilling. “Really not a good idea to come wandering into the heart of Fairy, eating our food and drinking our wine,” he added, softly, giving Frank a very pointed look.

Frank gulped.
“You said he was safe,” Gerard snapped, suddenly frightened in a way that he hadn’t been when he thought the worst thing he had to worry about was his own death.

Brendon sniggered again like a naughty five-year-old. “I said that the only thing you needed to fear while you were under the protection of the Fairy Queen was the Fairy Queen. I never said anything about anyone being safe.”

Gerard didn’t actually intend to rip Brendon’s throat out, as such, but the wave of fury that swept down over him at that moment was shocking in its intensity, and he had Brendon pinned to the grass before he even realised he was going to attack the guy. For a moment all Gerard knew was the rushing roar in his ears and the sight of Brendon Urie’s manga-huge eyes blinking up at him with deceptive innocence. And then he was clutching at thin air, with nothing but grass beneath him, and somebody was grabbing him by the scruff of the neck and picking him up off the ground. Gerard’s legs kicked in the air in a thoroughly undignified manner, and instead of feeling like a mighty vampire he felt mostly like a drowned kitten. He tried to will himself into flying the way that he’d done before, but apparently it didn’t work in Fairy. Damn it.

“Now, now, Gerard, don’t make fools of us all like that,” Brendon said, making a clucking noise of disapproval that would have made Gerard laugh if he hadn’t been so furious. “You got yourself into this mess, Gerard Way. No point getting your panties in a bunch about it now. And besides, you have my word that your boy-toy gets safe passage back to the mortal realms if the Queen has you executed. So calm down.”

“And if she doesn’t?”

“Then we shall see what we shall see.”

Gerard made an involuntary hissing noise, his mind darting through possibilities. When he made no further flailing attempts to free himself, however, Brendon lowered him cautiously back down to the ground, let go, then took a step back. Gerard gave himself a few moments to compose himself again before turning around to glare at Brendon. Brendon, who could apparently pull off a full-on Darth Vader grab-you-by-the-throat-and-hold-you-altoft move, despite looking like he was made of twigs.

“If anything happens to him...” Gerard said in a low and menacing voice that he didn’t even know he had.

“Yes, yes - great and terrible vengeance,” Brendon said, rolling his eyes. “I’m getting that. You’re very fierce. Now can we get on? People are staring.”

Gerard glanced over at the amassed crowd and blanched a little. People - or beings, at any rate - were staring. The whole swarm of eyeballs had stopped buzzing around and swung around to give Gerard and his companions their full attention. Gerard stood up a little bit straighter and tried to will himself into his performance headspace.

“Showtime, motherfuckers,” he muttered, swallowing, and Frank took one look at his face and was suddenly wrapped around him like a baby octopus, warm and alive and unwashed and perfect. And normally it was the whole band hugging it out before they went on stage, but this was just as good. Maybe even better, in its own way.

“It’s okay, Gee,” Frank muttered into Gerard’s collarbone. “It’ll be okay.” And, wow, didn’t that make Gerard feel like an asshole - he was the one with the badass powers here, and Frankie was the one running the unnecessary risks. He really ought to be the one offering comfort, not the one needing reassurance.
“Love you,” Frank added, kissing his throat open-mouthed. Gerard shivered. Fuck. He really hoped this thing was going to have a happy ending.

“Love you too, Frankie,” he said, squeezing Frank tightly and then letting go. “C’mon, let’s do this.”

* * *

Under the curious eyes of perhaps a hundred or so denizens of Fairy, Brendon escorted Gerard to the centre of a circle of daisies and then ushered Frank over to one side. Gerard stood awkwardly on the Crayola-bright grass, shifting from foot to foot and wondering whether he was going to get a lawyer, or be expected to speak on his own behalf. He really should have asked Brendon about that kind of thing, he realised, instead of grilling him about the crazy fabric he was wearing. Too late now. He looked over at Frank and offered him a wobbly smile, and at that moment an increase in the sussuration of the crowd alerted him to the fact that something was changing.

Gerard’s head snapped up just in time to see the air shift and buckle the way it had back in Griffith Park, when Brendon made his sudden appearance, and then there was a small crowd of humans standing in the middle of the lawn. Brendon scurried up to them, and Gerard scanned the group with interest, picking out Sir Christopher Lee with Brian and Bob and Bert and a handful of other people he didn’t know. There were also several others whom he knew immediately were vampires, including Patrick Stump and Audrey Hepburn (Audrey Hepburn! Looking about nineteen years old, for God’s sake!), and with them the Wentzes, both looking distinctly worried, and all of them backing very quickly away from the group of chymeras. And then Gerard spotted Mikey, wearing the closest that Mikey ever got to an expression of surprise, and with him Ray and Mike and James. Ray was wearing a Hawaiian shirt and a pair of board shorts, and clutching what looked suspiciously like a Pina Colada, and he would have been hard pressed to look more astounded, but Mikey was already moving in smoothly to make his explanations. How the hell Mikey knew what was going on was anybody’s guess; Gerard secretly suspected that this was some kind of superpower. It was almost embarrassing how much better he felt, just for seeing Mikeyway.

Gerard wasn’t sure whether to be relieved or disappointed that there was no sign of Lindsey. It was kind of great to see the guys, but on the other hand he didn’t like the idea of them being here in Fairy, because he wasn’t at all sure whether they were going to get home safely. He gave them an awkward little wave anyway, and they all waved back in spite of looking like they’d been collectively smacked over the head with a large frying pan. Frank bounced over to speak to them, and Gerard guessed that would have to do for his big coming out speech as far as Ray and James and Mike were concerned. He watched James’s jaw drop, and Ray’s eyes bug out, but Mike looked annoyingly unsurprised. Maybe it was a drummer thing. Maybe all drummers were secretly in on the existence of vampires, and carried their drum sticks with them in order to stake the unquiet undead at the first opportunity. He totally wouldn’t put it past Mike to be a vampire slayer on the sly – and when Mike waved over at Sir Christopher Lee and the chymeras, and got a familiar wave back, Gerard started to wonder for the first time just how 'The Bled' had come up with their name.

The first clue he had that the Fairy Queen was on her way was the distant sound of bells and a sudden flurry of cherry blossom like confetti tumbling through the air, and then suddenly all the many-tailed foxes and antler-headed men and bat-winged girls and creatures out of myth and legend were turning towards the orchard and bowing down low. Brendon gesticulated wildly, and Gerard hurriedly dropped to his knees like all the rest, squinting up through the sticky tumble of his hair to see whether the Fairy Queen was more like Galadriel or Maleficent.

As it turned out, she looked more like David Bowie’s Goblin King, which was pretty fucking awesome, in Gerard’s humble opinion: she was dressed in a long, loose, spiderweb-fine shirt of a vaguely piratical design worn beneath a figure-hugging vest that seemed to be woven of autumn
leaves, and beneath these she had on skin-tight pants in some faintly sparkling dove grey stuff which somehow ended in vertiginous high heels. Gerard wasn’t entirely sure whether it was simply that he couldn’t tell where the boots and pants overlapped, or if it was some kind of bafflingly all-in-one creation, but the effect was ridiculously hot in a totally-impractical-superhero-outfit kind of way.

High heels seemed weirdly out of place in Fairy, but then, Gerard supposed, so did magic mirrors that got HBO.

He couldn’t see her face, though. Or at least - he was fairly sure that she was wearing a mask. It was entirely possible, though, that her face actually was a grotesque Venetian carnival mask affair with hook nose and sharp chin, and that her skin resembled opaque craquelure glass with a rainbow sheen, and that the ragged explosion of grey and white feathers sprouting out of the back of it really did constitute her hair. The odd enamel surface certainly seemed to extend down her throat and onto what was visible of her chest. Gerard frowned, letting his head tilt up further and trying to get a better look as the Fairy Queen stepped out of the edge of the trees and onto the grass, cherry blossoms catching in the feathers, and then he froze when the stark, inhuman face swung towards him as if drawn by a magnet, and she met his eyes. The intensity of her gaze would have made him take a step back, if he hadn’t already been on his knees. Oh fuck, he thought to himself, with feeling, wondering whether maybe she had some special fondness for Bert McCracken that nobody had mentioned. Oh fuck. Gerard ducked down and stared at the perfect blades of grass in front of him and finally let himself start to wonder whether there might be punishments other than execution that he needed to start worrying about.

“Rise, and present the Accused and the Plaintiff to the throne,” said a voice like a rusty hinge. Gerard scrambled to his feet because that, clearly enough, meant him. He glanced over to where the rest of his band were huddled along with the Wentzes and the vampires, and spared a moment, even in the
midst of everything, to worry about the hungry way that Audrey Hepburn was eyeing up Mikey. *Hell* no, he thought, frantically, looking up at where the Fairy Queen had settled herself upon her ancient throne. He had no idea whether the tree was an oak or a redwood or whatever, because tree identification skills had never been a big part of his skillset, but it looked older than God, and the roots and knots and lumps and bumps that jutted out of the trunk to form her chair were polished smooth as glass from long use, and looked like they’d grown into this shape of their own free will rather than being carved or coaxed into shape. Aaand he was babbling in his own head, trying to concentrate on anything but the matter at hand. He let his eyes dart nervously up at the Queen, monstrous and beautiful, and then looked over at Bert McCracken, slouching in his own circle of buttercups.

“Who speaks for the Plaintiff?” This time Gerard was paying attention; the rusty-hinge voice belonged to a tall, lanky figure with the face of some sort of bird - Gerard was reminded, hilariously, of Sam the Bald Eagle from The Muppets - and thousands of blue and silver porcupine quills bristling from his scalp. He was dressed in a long black coat that could have been stolen from any of The Matrix movies, and he wore a black leather collar studded with needle-sharp spikes, but other than that his only covering was the layer of tiny blue feathers. Gerard realised he was staring when the bird-man-person turned its head all the way round, like an owl, and blinked its yellow eyes at him. Gerard gulped. Shit, that beak looked like it could snap a man’s arm right off.

“I do.” Gerard looked back towards Bert, and saw Sir Christopher Lee standing at his side, just outside the circle of flowers. Gerard didn’t realise how tense he’d been, worrying about Brian stepping up, until that moment. That would have been pretty fucking miserable.

“And for the Accused?”

“I do.” Gerard’s jaw hit the floor when instead of Brendon or Patrick or Pete, *Audrey Hepburn*, whom he’d never met in his life or death, rose daintily to her feet and came to stand beside him. She looked radiant, and impossibly young, and Gerard realised that some part of his brain was protesting that she really should be in black and white. Which was ridiculous, obviously, because she’d been in plenty of colour movies and...and he was letting himself get hysterical again. Okay. Fuck. Apparently Audrey Hepburn had designated herself his lawyer, which even in the midst of all the other random crazy shit was pretty stunningly random and crazy.

“Um,” Gerard said, trying not to look quite as dumbfounded as he felt, and suddenly wishing he’d had a bath and found a toothbrush. Audrey Hepburn. Undead, but still the epitome of effortless grace and dignity. She pushed her sunglasses up onto her head and cast him a quick, million dollar smile. “Good morning, Mr Way,” she said, her voice light and charming.

“Hi,” Gerard said again, and then snapped his mouth closed again before he could say anything else desperately stupid. He looked from his lawyer to Bert’s boggling madly. Wow. It was like Ninjas versus Pirates: Holly Golightly versus Saruman. What the actual fuck?

“You will speak when it is your turn, and not before,” said the porcupine-headed bird guy, and Gerard nodded apologetically. The bird guy turned to Bert and his representative. “First of the Circle, you may speak your piece. The Lady will listen.”

Sir Christopher Lee cast a very unfriendly look over at Gerard. “The vampire attacked and bit a member of the Circle in good standing,” he said simply. “The Law states quite clearly that biting a chymera is a capital crime. We ask that the vampire Way be punished to the full extent of the law.”
Gerard was watching Bert’s face while his boss made these pronouncements, and Bert was looking back at him with an almost wistful expression.

“Did the vampire Way bite you?” Porcupine-guy asked, his yellow eyes fixed on Bert like an owl focusing on a field mouse.

“He did,” said Bert. And, crap, if that was all it took then Gerard really was going to be fucked. Damn it.

“I rest my case,” said Sir Christopher Lee.

“Did you bite the chymera McCracken?” Porcupine-guy asked, swivelling his head back around to stare unblinkingly at Gerard this time. Gerard opened his mouth, but a gloved hand was suddenly sliding over it, and Audrey Hepburn stepped closer to the dais.

“Your Majesty, I object,” she said. There was a collective hiss of indrawn breath from the assembled creatures; Gerard was kind of getting the impression that this wasn’t the done thing. But he couldn’t argue, because at the moment it was looking like all that was left was for him to wave goodbye to the band before somebody escorted him off to the chopping block.

“You object? Mistress Bathory, do you deny the accusation?” said the Porcupine-headed guy, cocking his head slightly to one side and blinking.

“Elizabeth Bathory?” Gerard muttered, his eyes bugging out. “You’re Elizabeth fucking Bathory? Oh my God! Oh my actual God!”

Audrey Hepburn - who was apparently an awful lot older than she looked - ignored him.

“I object to this court,” she said smoothly, and the crowd exploded into angry catcalls and hisses and shouts. She smiled sidelong at them, and then returned her attention to the dais. “The Law is half-baked at best, and perilously unbalanced in favour of these halflings who have been persecuting my kind for centuries. When the denizens of Fairy intervened once more in the realm of men, we were promised justice if we came forward. A new order. The opportunity for weres and vampires to remain unmolested, so long as we did no harm. Peace. Instead the killings continued.”

“Your killings continued! Vampires are still murdering innocent civilians, still thralling children,” spluttered Sir Christopher Lee, his expression dark.

“And those who choose to disobey the Law should be punished in accordance with the Law,” she agreed, smiling at him sweetly. “But not those who do no harm. You have turned a blind eye to the corruption inherent in the system. They continue to murder us out of hand, with no reprisals. This Bert McCracken has killed dozens of vampires entirely unprovoked, and poor young Mr Way here is simply the latest of his victims.”

“The Law is clear,” said the blue bird-creature, but he broke off when the Queen raised her hand, and all the audience fell silent at once.

“In what way is he a victim?” The Fairy Queen’s voice was impossible to describe; although the crackle-glass mouth did move to shape the words, Gerard had the distinct impression that they were being uttered inside his head, rather than spoken out loud.

The vampire currently known as Audrey Hepburn smiled again. “First,” she said, raising one daintily gloved finger, “because he did not seek out his current state, but was turned against his will. Second,” she raised another, “because the chymera McCracken attacked him unprovoked in his own home, and third,” she raised one more, “because when Way successfully escaped with his life, the
chymera McCracken lured him out into the open by kidnapping one of his dearest friends and threatening to kill him unless Way revealed himself.”

“Kidnapping his thrall,” interrupted Sir Christopher Lee, his face growing red. “Not some innocent civilian!”

“My honourable colleague concedes that McCracken kidnapped the boy,” Audrey Hepburn continued, smooth as cream. “An innocent civilian and dear friend who had voluntarily given his own blood to help young Way to heal, after McCracken’s vicious assault. Way put himself in harm’s way to protect the boy, and McCracken staked him through the heart and shoved himself onto Way’s fangs, expecting to enjoy a quick high just before Way died. It was only the intervention of young Mr Iero that prevented him from killing yet another innocent vampire in pursuit of his addiction.”

“Is this true?” The Fairy Queen was looking Gerard directly in the eyes. He didn’t know whether anyone else could hear her words - indeed, for a moment it was difficult to remember that there was anyone else there in the clearing with them.

“Yes,” he said, and her attention shifted over to Bert.

“I - yes,” Bert said, his voice shaking. And at the sound, Gerard felt a sudden surge of pity, remembering the horrifying fragments of Bert’s early life that he’d experience while he drank.

“It’s not his fault,” he blurted out, and the Queen’s head snapped back around, her pale face fixed on him once more. “Bert’s addicted to it. To being bitten, I mean. He shouldn’t be expected to work as some kind of impartial cop, or whatever the chymera think they are. He can’t handle it. That vampire hurt him, really fucked him up, and he believes we’re all like that. And you guys haven’t shown him otherwise – he hasn’t had the chance to get to know any of us, and see that we’re not all evil. He thinks he’s doing the right thing, killing us before we can hurt people. He should be getting help.”

Wow. And, yeah, okay, he probably sounded pretty fucking stupid suggesting that they set up a Twelve Step program for the formerly enthralled, but that really was what they needed to do, if they were going to do this thing.

The Fairy Queen studied him for a long moment. Gerard felt about an inch high under her glittering gaze. “You know that for centuries the chymera have been accustomed to killing thralls out of hand? That they have done this for so long they had entirely forgotten their own origins until we chose to remind them that they are the descendants of thralls themselves,” she said. “They would argue that they have already helped him by letting him live.”

“It isn’t enough,” Gerard said, recklessly. He glanced over at Bert, and saw something frantic and half-hopeful in his face. “Bert – I’m sorry, man,” he said, meaning it. “For what happened to you, with that guy. That was fucked up.”

Behind him, Brian was looking guilty and nauseated. “Sorry,” Gerard said, meeting Brian’s gaze. “I mean, it’s great that you didn’t kill him, but he’s just not ready for this kind of responsibility.” He didn't say what they were both thinking – that Brian knew as much as Gerard did about dealing with addiction. “It’s not fair,” he said softly, and Brian bit his lip and looked over at Bert, frowning with concern.

“I have never had any love of red tape,” Audrey Hepburn said, carefully. “But it seems to me that if you choose to push us into making a new order, then it needs to be done properly. Who watches the watchmen?”

Gerard beamed in spite of himself. God, he loved that book. Getting to record a song for the movie had been pretty kickass too.
“I propose a new system of governance,” she continued. “We are not, despite the claims of our detractors, inherently evil. We are simply free. We are not safe, to be sure, any more than humans are themselves, but we have the capacity to exert self control and to choose to do no harm. Many of us welcomed this new order you proposed, and have no qualms about justice being done - so long as it is truly justice. Those who abuse their powers to cause needless pain and wanton destruction should be stopped - whether they are changelings or chymeras. We should be able to work together to ensure this, rather than entrusting the safety of our community to the Circle.” She turned and fixed her gaze on Sir Christopher Lee. “The Circle have long considered themselves the last bastion of humanity, but the truth is that they are as monstrous as we, in their own way. They have no moral highground. They should not be alone in policing our community. Law-abiding vampires and werewolves should be able to join the Circle, working together to ensure that justice truly is both done and seen to be done.” Her smile widened a little. “Moreover, I propose that the current sanctions prohibiting any and all transformation is unrealistic and unjust. It would be possible to have a more regulated system than held sway in former days, without forbidding vampires and wolves from ever transforming genuinely willing mortals. After all, the Good People have been known to fall in love with mortals, from time to time, and take them as their consorts,” she said glancing towards John Lennon and Yuki Ona and then turning back to smile very pointedly at the Fairy Queen. “Can you spare no whit of pity for wolves and vampires caught in a similar plight?”

There was an uproar at this. The vampires and werewolves were on their feet applauding, and Bob was nodding. After a moment, Brian stood up and joined in with the applause, ignoring the furious look that Sir Christopher Lee shot at him. Bob grinned and got to his feet too.

“Your points have been duly noted, and will be taken into consideration,” said the Fairy Queen, and as soon as she spoke the hubbub died away to nothing. “And now let us resume. Your objection is overruled, but I invite representatives of all parties to meet with me at the next quarter moon, where we will discuss amendments to the Accords. I concede that your proposals have merit.”

“Thank you, your majesty,” said Audrey, looking like a cat who’d had the cream and half the pigeons in the loft as well.

“Now - did you bite McCracken?” the spikey-headed fay asked Gerard once again.

“Well - yes,” Gerard said, glancing over at Mikey apologetically.

The fay made a sound that might have been a sigh. “Then your life is forfeit to the Fairy Queen.”

There was a pause, while Gerard took this in.

“So mote it be,” said the Fairy Queen, rising from her throne and striding off across the grass. A moment later she had vanished between the trees, leaving them gaping in her wake.

“What the fuck?” Frank sputtered in the silence. “But - but they just agreed that the system was corrupt! What?”

“Escort the prisoner away,” said the blue fairy in his rusty-hinge voice, making a little flapping movement with his hands. Brendon effortlessly restrained Frank, who was hurling himself frantically in Gerard’s direction, and half a dozen other creatures stepped close as it looked like the rest of the band was about to follow suit.

“Don’t!” Gerard said, having horrified visions of what the claws and teeth and tusks could do to his friends. “Guys - it’s okay. It’s - please don’t.” He swallowed. “I love you guys. Tell Lindsey I love her, and I’m sorry? And tell Bandit - tell Bandit to follow her dreams. And - fuck. I’m sorry, you guys.” Frank made a desperate, wounded sound that went through Gerard like a knife. He dragged
his eyes away from Mikey and looked at Frank miserably. “Sorry, Frankie. I guess this is how it’s got to be.”

The band, unfortunately, didn’t look one bit like accepting this, and neither did Bob or Brian or the werewolves, but before things could degenerate into a full-on fight, the air shimmered with a liquid heat-haze and all of the humans and vampires and werewolves vanished, leaving Gerard all alone in the midst of a crowd of fay.

The quill-headed fairy closed one hand around Gerard’s arm, and Gerard looked up into the butter-yellow eyes. “Are they okay?” he asked, in a voice that only shook a little bit. “Did they all get home safely?”

“Their safe passage was assured,” the creature said. Gerard thought it was actually trying to sound reassuring.

“Thanks, man,” he said, and let himself be marched off into the trees after the Fairy Queen.

* * *

The grass was covered with fallen cherry blossoms. Gerard couldn’t see any sign of the Fairy Queen, not even any marks left by her spiked heels, but evidently his escort knew where he was going. Gerard wondered how they were planning on executing him. He felt numb, more than anything; numb and sad and hollow, like Frank had taken his heart when he vanished into thin air.

Gerard was never again going to sprawl on the couch in his pyjamas with his head in Lindsey’s lap, eating popcorn and watching old reruns of ‘Dungeons and Dragons’. He was never going to hear Bandit’s high, gleeful giggles as he pushed her higher and higher on a swingset. He was never going to watch Frank throwing himself around the stage like he was trapped in a human pinball machine, ricocheting off speakers and drumkits. He was never going to listen to Mikey talking about a new band or book, or see the way Ray’s face lit up when he solved a problem with a new song, or look out from the stage onto a sea of floodlit faces all singing his words. He was never going to help Bandit learn to apply eyeliner properly, or watch her graduate. He was never going to see his mom again.

“Fuck,” he said, soft and miserable. He couldn’t really argue with the Fairy Queen’s decision, because technically he was already dead, after all - and, more to the point, because however passionate and convincing Audrey Hepburn (Elizabeth Bathory!) might have been, Gerard knew he was still a killer in his bones, was still a bloody accident waiting to happen. That frightened the shit out of him, and at least this way he could be sure that he never would snap and hurt somebody he loved.

But it still sucked, and not in the good way.

Gerard was busy wallowing in perfectly reasonable self-pity for some time, and paying precious little attention to how the trees around him gradually changed into columns holding up a painted ceiling, and the blossom-strewn grass soft and springy beneath his feet gradually gave way to thick green carpets.

“You must go alone now,” said his companion, letting go of his arm. Gerard looked up then and blinked stupidly at the fierce blue face.

“What?”

The fairy pointed, and Gerard followed the direction of his claw-tipped finger to find an ornate door
set into a wall he hadn’t even realised was there. Gerard’s eyebrows darted up and he glanced around, finally taking in his surroundings.

“Oh! When did - well. Well, I guess it doesn’t matter.” He looked from his escort to the door and sucked nervously on his lower lip. “In there?”

“In there.”

“Right,” said Gerard. For a split second he entertained a mad fantasy of escape, of dashing away down the corridor and...what? He was alone in the realm of Fairy, with nowhere to hide and no way home. He stood up a little straighter, stuck out his chin and squared his shoulders. He might not be Joan of Arc, but he wasn’t a coward. He could face the music, damn it.

He hoped it was going to be quick.

The doors swung open at his touch, and Gerard stepped into an empty room full of mirrors.

“...the fuck?” he muttered, turning around and around, seeing nothing but his own face reflected back at him again and again. “Hello?” Turning around in a circle, it was impossible to determine which wall had contained the doors he’d just come in by. Gerard drummed his fingers on his arm, and then caught a glimpse of something different. Turning, he saw one of the reflections looking back at him had black hair. And another. And another. And then the dozens upon dozens of identical images splintered off like some strange kaleidoscope and he was looking at countless different iterations of himself: red hair in a variety of lengths; the Party Poison black shirt he’d worn until it finally fell apart, and the one he wore after that; costumes and makeup and hair that took him back to concerts and photoshoots for The Black Parade, and to Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge (blood everywhere and bulletproof vests) and further back to I Brought You My Bullets, You Brought Me Your Love; clothes he’d worn touring and recording, clothes he’d worn to college and to high school, and junior high, and kindergarten. There were a hundred faces, two hundred - he couldn’t begin to count. Some sharp-featured, some soft and round, some hollow eyed and hopeless, some joyous and laughing. All him.

Gerard was mesmerised, caught up in memories, and so it was perhaps unsurprising that he didn’t notice the other figure striding towards him through the reflections until she was right up at the surface of the mirror and stepping through the glass. Gerard gave an embarrassingly high-pitched squeak and fell back a pace, blinking at the alien features of the Fairy Queen and looking nervously down at the blade in her hand.

“Um,” he said, after an awkward moment. “Hi.”

She looked at him for a long moment out of mercury coloured eyes. “Your life is forfeit to me,” she said, as if she thought he might have misunderstood the situation. Gerard grimaced.

“Yeah,” he said. “I don’t suppose I could talk you out of that?”

“You have a choice, Gerard Arthur Way,” she said. “If you wish, you can give me another in your place.”

Gerard stared. “What?”

“Someone who belongs to you. Your first born child, say, or the boy who gave you his blood.”

“Oh hell no,” Gerard said, when he was capable of speaking, tight-lipped and furious. “You did not just suggest that I give you Bee or Frankie. Fuck you, lady.”
The moonstone lips quirked into a smile. “I thought you might say that,” she acknowledged. “If you will not buy your way free, then, your life belongs to me.” She studied him with her head cocked to one side. “But it would be a pity to waste so pretty a thing, and so talented too. We have use in Fairy for such as you. Will you stay with me and be my consort, Gerard Arthur Way?”

Gerard’s jaw dropped.

“Will I - what?”

She looked back at him steadily.

“No, I - uh, that’s very, um, flattering, I guess, but - but I’m married. I’m already married,” he said, pointing at one of his reflections that wore the rainbow unicorn t-shirt with LynZ’s name on it, the one he’d worn on his wedding day. “So - that’s not ever going to happen. Sorry.”

“What can a mortal offer you that I cannot? I am the Queen of all the realms of Fairy. My powers are unimaginable.”

Gerard swallowed, raking a nervous hand through his hair. “And that’s really cool, but - I love my wife. I don’t want to be your consort. Sorry. I’m sure there’s somebody out there who’d be a really awesome consort for you,” he added, feeling suddenly guilty. “I mean, you’ve got a rocking body and I love the David Bowie thing you’ve got going on there, and the, um, feathers.” This was not the time to ask whether she was wearing a mask. “And, you know, obviously you’re a woman of independent means, and - um. I mean, I’m sure there’s a great guy out there for you. Or girl. Or, you know, creature. Someone who will love you for who you are, and want to go round, uh, smiting mortals, and sending princesses into enchanted sleeps and things with you. But I’m not him.”

“So you love this wife of yours?” the Fairy Queen said, sounding dubious. “Yet you never even told her of this change.” She waved a hand up and down in a gesture that indicated Gerard’s newly vampiric state.

“That’s because - fuck, that’s because I am an idiot,” Gerard said, miserably. “I thought she wouldn’t believe me - or that maybe she would, and that would be worse. Maybe she’d keep Bandit away from me. Maybe she ought to keep Bandit away from me. I don’t know - I was freaking out about it all, in the beginning, and I didn’t want to tell anyone. I really wanted her to be there with me, more than anyone, but - I was just terrified she might reject me, because, you know - I really fucked up.”

He glanced down at himself. “I mean - I eat people now. That’s not exactly the kind of father anyone wants for their child. And, plus - oh, yeah, another reason I’d make a really shitty consort? My dick’s broken now. Permanently. Which I guess you know already, but it’s not a great thing to have to explain to your lover, you know?”

He swallowed, feeling embarrassingly close to bursting into tears. Gerard couldn’t believe he was having this conversation with The Fairy Queen, but she didn’t seem inclined to stop him just yet, so he kept going.

“And then when I tried to tell her on the phone, all I could think was how much she’d been looking forward to going on tour, and how much marrying me spoiled stuff for her - like, made her into Mrs Gerard Way instead of LynZ Ballato. All these stupid interviewers who ask us about groupies, or assume that our wives are just these airheaded trophies, and it’s - I mean, she’s amazing, she’s really fucking amazing. She shines. She’s got so much integrity and courage and, and fucking passion, and I just - I didn’t want to spoil it all. I didn’t want to drag her away from the limelight and make her come and deal with my fuckup.”

Oh, man, he was totally crying now. Way to meet your death with dignity, Gerard.
He jumped a little when the Fairy Queen ran one gloved finger over his inner arm, tracing Lindsey’s tattoo thoughtfully, and then reached up to wipe away his tears. She’d sheathed the blade at her hip and was looking at him with an expression that was almost rueful.

“Well then,” she said, after a moment. “Perhaps you do love her after all.”

Gerard wiped the back of his hand against his nose and sniffled, and the Fairy Queen laughed. She reached back behind her head, as if to scratch an itch, and then a moment later the feathers and the strange, mobile moonstone skin were peeling away to reveal a tumble of bright blonde hair and a thoroughly unexpected face. Granted her skin had the same kind of inhuman sparkle as Brendon’s, but other than that it was as normal and lovely as the last time he’d seen it.

“But you really need to learn how to pick up the goddamn phone, Gee, and call me when you’re up to your ass in trouble,” Lindsey said in her normal voice, dropping the mask to the floor. “You stupid, stubborn, beautiful asshole.”

Gerard gaped at her. Then he gaped some more. He probably could have gone on with the gaping for quite a while, but Lindsey was striding forwards in her unspeakably hot heels, grabbing the back of his head just before it bumped into one of the mirrors and pulling him forward into a kiss, and, oh, dear God, that was definitely his wife, and no mistake. Gerard gave a shocked little sob of relief and kissed her like the world was about to end. And either he’d gotten a lot better at kissing carefully, or she knew a thing or two about how to kiss a vampire without slicing open her tongue, because somehow, miraculously, he wasn’t hurting her.

“I’m an asshole,” he said, between kisses.

“You really are the assiest asshole in the Kingdom of Assholia,” Lindsey agreed, kissing him some more. “You should have called me. And told me. You nearly got yourself killed! Twice! What am I saying? You did get yourself killed! At ComicCon, for fuck’s sake!”

“I know,” Gerard agreed, penitently. “I’m sorry. I won’t do it again.”

Lindsey laughed into the kiss, and smacked him upside the head. “Goddamn right you won’t, mister!” she said. “Your life is forfeit to me now, and don’t you forget it.”

“Right,” Gerard said, and then a moment he pulled back. “Holy shit - you’re the Fairy Queen? What the hell?”

Lindsey’s face took on a slightly guilty cast. “Ah. Well - yes.”

“And you’re mad at me for keeping secrets?”

Lindsey considered this. “Yes,” she said. “Still yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? I thought I was going to die!”

Lindsey looked at him very seriously then. “Once it came down to a trial, it was out of my hands, Gee. We had to do it properly. I can’t break the rules. I can bend them, and we’re sticklers for the letter of the law, which is the only thing allowing me to save your life: the wording doesn’t specify execution, it just says that your life belongs to me. There’s enough wriggle room there for me to work with.” She kissed the side of his mouth. “I’m never letting you out alone again, you know.”

“That’s what Frank said.”

“Frank is a smart guy.” She kissed him again. “I can’t believe you got yourself killed, you ridiculous
man.” There was a catch in her voice that he didn’t miss, even though her eyes were dry.

Gerard couldn’t stop staring at her. She looked exactly the same as she always did: shockingly beautiful, and vibrant, and bright. Strong. Precious. “Were you ever going to tell me about all this?” he asked, a little plaintively, and she arched her brows at him.

“Well of course! I mean, I knew I’d have to explain about Bandit once she hit puberty,” she said, as if that were obvious.

Gerard’s jaw dropped. “She’s not - she’s not going to be a werewolf, is she?”

“What? No! What the hell? No, baby, she’s not going to be a furry. Well - I mean, she might like dressing up in costumes, for all I know, but it’s not going to be a time-of-the-month thing. No - she’s a halfling.” Gerard’s brow crumpled, and he drew a breath, but she didn’t let him ask the obvious question. “Not like Frodo, no.” She rolled her eyes. “It just means mixed blood, human and fay. They generally wind up wizards,” she added, watching him through her eyelashes.

Gerard made a high pitched noise. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” Lindsey said, grinning at him. “More of a ‘Books of Magic’ vibe than a ‘Harry Potter’ one, though. She won’t need a wand, and there isn’t any Hogwarts to send her to - we’ll be home schooling her. But - yeah. I knew you’d find out about all this eventually, Gee. I just - I liked being human. I liked us being equals.” She stepped away from him then and looked at him with an expression he didn’t know how to read - almost nervous, if that didn’t seem like such an unlikely idea. Lindsey was never nervous. Lindsey was the bravest person he knew. “It’s not pretend, you know,” she said softly, searching his eyes for something. “I never lied to you. I may have misled you rather skillfully, but nothing I ever said to you was a lie. You know the heart of me, Gerard Arthur Way. Art, and performance, and passion, and doing the thing that terrifies you. Living the dream and making truths out of lies. You know who I really am already. The important parts. And - I liked the way you looked at me, when you thought I was human. You weren’t afraid, and you weren’t interested in power or gain or - you just saw me. Who I am, not what I am. I didn’t want that to change.” She gave a shaky laugh completely out of keeping with the Fairy Queen clothes. “Although I knew it had to, one day.”

He realised, with a sense of shock, that all this time that he’d been running around in circles dreading what Lindsey would think of him now that he was something new, something dangerous, she had been just as afraid of how he would react to finding out about her. Maybe more so.

“Lindsey, I don’t care about that. You know I don’t care about that, baby. I mean, it’s - fuck, it’s totally rad, but - you were already amazing.” He grabbed hold of her hands and stared into her eyes, trying to make her get it. “The way you see the world - Lindsey, I love you. I’ll always love you. You blow my fucking mind, with or without all this..” He flailed vaguely at the mirrors. “All this Wizard of Oz stuff.”

And right then it was impossible to think of her as anything but Lindsey, his Lindsey, the other half of him, his better self, his fucking hero, and so he buried his hands in her hair and pulled her close, and tried to explain that without words for a while.

Long minutes later, he asked: “So how long have you been the Fairy Queen? I mean - I guess it’s not exactly a case of getting bitten by a fairy at ComicCon, right? So - you’ve always been one of the Sidhe? You’ve always been the Queen? Is that, like, a forever thing?”

She shrugged, and fiddled with the edge of her cobweb-fine shirt. “I’m not the first and I won’t be the last, but I’ve been doing it for a while.” She glanced up through her eyelashes at him. “A long
Gerard stared at her, dumbfounded. “...and you decided to run away and form a rock band?”

She caught his eye, and they both cracked up. “Basically? Yes. They really don’t need me for most of the day-to-day stuff, you know? I’m a figurehead most of the time these days - I mean, there used to be a lot more to do, but it’s been a pretty quiet century. So - yeah. I totally ran away, got involved in the art scene, and then joined a rock band. It’s - actually surprisingly easy to multitask. My ministers disapproved of what they called my mindless self-indulgence,” she winked at him, and he groaned. “But at the end of the day I’m the Queen, and I didn’t get to be Queen by being a soft touch. They keep me in the loop - not that they know where I am, or who I’m with, but magic mirrors are a timeless communication classic for a reason. I can cover my tracks pretty damn well, when I want to.” Her eyes narrowed. “Not well enough, though. I’m sorry. I think this whole vampire thing is probably my fault.”

“What?”

“Bathory. I’m pretty damn sure Bathory had this whole thing planned. No offense, but vampires are a sneaky bunch - the old ones are, I mean. It’s all politics and game-playing, and she played me like a goddamn violin this time.” She shook her head. “You had guards, you know. Bandit’s got twenty four hour protection from a squadron of the most badass creatures in Fairy, and you always had a couple of guards looking out for you, when I wasn’t there, just in case. It would take some serious power for a vampire to sneak you out of ComicCon past their noses, and by all accounts the one that got you was pretty young. I think Bathory distracted your guards, glamoured them into seeing what she wanted them to see. And I think she probably had something to do with Bert finding out where you were and what had happened too.” She rolled her eyes. “It’s all goddamn chess games with the vampires.”

Gerard tried to take this in. “Sorry - just so we’re clear: Audrey Hepburn set me up?”

“Pretty sure she did, Gee. Yeah. To get to me. To push me into doing something about the chymeras. Which - well, she has a point. I just hate paperwork, and all that shit, and I’ve been enjoying having my own life. But - she has a point.” She smiled. “Maybe you could help me with that?”

Gerard perked up. “Yes! Because, yes, the system is - pretty fucked.” He frowned. “I think you’re underestimating how important you are. You’re not just a figurehead. You can make these huge, life-changing decisions that effect hundreds - maybe thousands of people. We need to fix things. We need to protect the kids like Bert. I saw what he went through, and that was really fucked up. We need to make it a better world.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Lindsey, smiling at him reluctantly. “Bathory knew exactly what she was doing.”

Gerard ducked his head, suddenly shy. “Sorry. It’s your job - I’m not telling you how to do it. But - it’s people’s lives, you know? And their hearts. I’d like to help with that. With making it better. I think we could make it a lot better.”

“And this is why I love you, Gerard Way,” she said, pulling him into another kiss. “And as much as she was manipulating me by having you turned - I can’t be sorry about the results.”

Gerard stared at her blankly, and she pushed a strand of bright hair back behind his ear with a fond smile.

“I didn’t want to watch you wither and die, Gerard,” she said, and the hint of a shake in her voice was so slight that he would have missed it entirely if he were still mortal. “Bathory gave me a gift as
well as handing me a lapful of troubles, and she knows it.”

“Oh,” Gerard said, wide eyed, and there was a little more frantic kissing that needed to be done for a while there. A nagging thought made him push away after a while, though. “Speaking of chess games - I made a bargain with Brendon Urie.”

Lindsey stiffened. “That sneaky little...go on.” She gave a sigh. “What did you do, Gee?”

“I was worried about Frankie!” Gerard said defensively. “So I struck a deal - only now I owe him a favour of his choosing?”

She sighed. “I guess that answers the question of whether he’s seen through my glamour in the mortal realm. Thought I’d got him fooled, but evidently not. Hmph. Well, I suppose it could be worse. And if he asks for something completely unreasonable, I can always turn him into a frog, or trap him in one of the chaos realms,” Lindsey said, reflectively.

“Ookay,” said Gerard, reminding himself not to piss Lindsey off, like, ever. He figured he probably ought to get all his unburdening over and done with, whilst he was on a roll. “There’s also - look, so you already know about, um, the side effects of being a vampire? The whole penis thing?” He could feel himself starting to redden a little.

Lindsey’s lips quirked at the corners. “Sorry about that, baby. But if you were a girl, we wouldn’t have a working dick between us - it’s not exactly a deal breaker from my point of view, so long as you’re willing to experiment.” Her mouth twitched. “But I can see it’s pretty shitty for you.”

“Right - yeah.” He’d worried about that so much, and she made it sound like nothing. “No - I mean, you know, the whole blood thing is actually better than sex. Who the hell knew that was possible, right?”

“Yeah - about that. You know that you can’t really feed on me, right?” Lindsey added, looking suddenly concerned. “I mean, you can drink from me, cautiously, but it’s going to be pretty - extreme, and it’s not going to sustain you. You need human blood to live on. I - I can’t really give you that.” She grimaced. “I’m sorry.”

“Oh.” He hadn’t really thought about that, but Gerard found that he was kind of glad about it. “Well, the other thing is - Frank. Frankie. He and I are - um.” He frowned.

“Fucking like bunnies?” Lindsey offered, helpfully.

“No! Well - not exactly. Um. Very nearly.” He looked at her uncertainly through his lashes. “Is that - sorry, I mean, I know that when we got together I promised that that stuff wouldn’t go beyond making out - but...”

“Gerard, I never asked you to make me a promise like that,” she said, patiently. “It was really sweet that you did, but I didn’t expect it. I don’t need it. Did you actually look at the murals on the way in? Which are mine, incidentally.”

Gerard bounced. “Oh my God, seriously? They were fucking incredible! Oh my God! Not the Escher thing on the floor?” Lindsey gave a modest little nod and Gerard grabbed her arms and squeaked. “You are incredible! It was unbelievable! It blew my fucking mind! God, I knew you’d love it - I thought of you straight away! Fuck, I should have guessed right then. Have I told you lately how much I love you?” He kissed the tip of her nose. “Lindsay Way, I fucking love you!”

Lindsey giggled. “Right, well - my point is that you might have noticed a certain filthy orgiastic theme going on there?”
“Oh - yeah. And?”

“Yes - that’s pretty much a regular Friday night in Fairy.” She grinned at him fondly. “Gerard, you and Frank were head over heels in love with each other when I first met you, and that’s never going to change. I don’t want it to change, Gerard. Frank’s - he’s Frank. He’s your Frank. I get that, baby.” She gave him a considering look. “Did you let him fuck you? I mean, I could have spied, but it seemed impolite. Jimmy and I had a bet on it, though.”

“No! No, I - what? Jimmy?”

Lindsey dimpled at him. “He escorted you here.”

“The blue guy with the spikes growing out of his head?” Gerard exclaimed incredulously. Then he considered that for a moment. “Actually, yeah, I totally should have guessed that. Oh my God, Jimmy, though?”

“Yeah. So - no?”

“No,” said Gerard, blushing harder at the memory of how close it had been.

Lindsey gave him a very knowing look. “Did you want to?”

“Oh, fuck, yeah.”

“Oh, Gerard Arthur Way, you really are the most delicious morsel I’ve met in all my centuries,” she said, with delight. “Can I watch? Can I watch you drinking from him? And him holding you down and fucking you silly while you do?”

Gerard swallowed. “Yes?” he said, wondering if it was possible to actually burst into flames from the hotness of an image. Hopefully not. “I mean - if Frank doesn’t mind.”

Lindsey kissed him again. “I bet we can persuade him,” she said, smiling, but that actually made Gerard still.

“I don’t want to persuade him,” he said, feeling stricken all over again. “I don’t want to control him. I just want him to be Frank. Not - not a minion. If he wants to say no, I respect that.”

Lindsey ruffled his hair. “That’s not hard, though,” she said, sounding surprised. “The chymeras make amulets for that kind of thing. Well, the wizards do. They’re not exactly Harry Potter, but they do a pretty good job making stakes out of the right kinds of woods, and making amulets that resist vampire glamours. If they’ve forgotten how, we can teach them easily enough. You can get Frankie a guarantee of staying all free-willed-up, if you’re worrying about it.”

Gerard felt like an enormous weight had just been lifted from his mind. “Oh my God - seriously?”

“Seriously.” She smiled. “But I still bet we can persuade him to let me watch. Maybe me and Jamia both,” she said, consideringly. “She’s an open minded sort of girl.”

“I’m feeling kind of - objectified,” Gerard said, squirming a little and trying unsuccessfully to frown.

“Mmm,” agreed Lindsey, kissing him some more. “I guess you could always put a balaclava over your head, if it makes you feel better.” Gerard snorted with laughter at that.

“Oh, hey,” he said, suddenly distracted. “Are there unicorns? Do you have, like, actual unicorns?” He looked at her hopefully, feeling his eyes going suddenly huge as he thought back to all the other
weird and wonderful creatures he'd seen in the clearing.

Lindsey grinned at him. “Yeah. Do you want to go and check out the stables?”

Gerard totally squeaked at that point, and she dissolved into giggles and kissed his forehead.

“God, I do love you, Gee. But we should probably go home and reassure the guys that you aren’t actually dead first, though,” she added. “They’re probably freaking out.” Gerard could feel her smiling against him. “I bet Frank could do with a lot of reassuring. Naked reassuring. We should get on that.”

Gerard felt like his heart was spilling over with joy. That was the only thing missing right now, and the thought of having Frankie in his arms again, having *both* of them in his arms, made him laugh out loud. “We should get on that right now,” he agreed, making a mental note to start planning how to obtain a unicorn for Mikey's next birthday.

“There’s no place like home,” Lindsey said, tapping her heels together three times, and Gerard held on tight and thought about all the people he loved, while the world around them rippled like melting glass.

FINIS

FINAL NOTES:

1) While I figure out how to insert pictures (and work on scanning them, rather than relying on crappy iPhone snaps) you can view artwork for this story here: https://picasaweb.google.com/113104452530052491823/AnAwfullyBigAdventure#

2) The name 'Brendon' means prince, whilst 'Ryan' comes from 'little king'; 'Ross' means red, and although there is debate about the origin of 'Urie', one popular theory is that it comes from the same root as Uriel, meaning firey light. Awesome, eh?

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