Riders in the Sky
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Summary

Twenty years before the Emersons came to Santa Carla, the Lost Boys staked their master, Max. The city has changed a lot since the bad old days, and with less vampires around there's plenty more entertainment on the boardwalk. Michael is more than just a meal, and Sam's got some weird friends convinced Santa Carla is run by aliens. Nothing is ever going to be normal here.
Chapter 1

"Hey, mom, is this really the freak capital of the world?" Sam asked, just as Michael's eyes landed on the billboard they were leaving behind. It was scrawled in graffiti, with some other word crossed out. Maybe they'd pull over once they got closer to town and he could pull out his bike for some fresh air. This non-stop car ride straight from Phoenix to Santa Carla was driving them all crazy.

"I don't know Sam, it was always nice when I was growing up here," Lucy replied, distracted by her radio station flipping. Every once in awhile her eyes would light up when she found something she liked. Michael couldn't blame her. Over ten hours with a broken tape deck was pretty rough.

"Are we there yet?" Sam asked after a moment of silence. Sam was getting on Michael's nerves to put it mildly and this was close to being the final straw. First chance they got, it was wet willy city.

"Not yet," Lucy told him patiently. Her ability to remain calm in the face of Sam's constant harassment was the same strength that motivated them to finally leave Phoenix in the first place. Michael kinda hoped she'd stuff a sock in his mouth. Just for a healthy alf hour. Or a tiny bit longer.

"Just read some comics," Michael advised, shifting his legs to try to relieve his muscles. Maybe he'd be lucky and Santa Carla had a sports team or something he could check out, or he'd find a girlfriend before the summer was over. He didn't look forward to that conversation with his mom tonight about dropping out of school. There was no way she'd be able to support all three of them on her own.

Sam glared at him, "you can't tell me what to do," he looked at Lucy, "moooom, tell him to be nice to me."

She sighed heavily, this was a common enough occurrence after all, "Sam, leave your brother alone." It also happened to be one of the few times it backfired on his little brother.

"So is grandpa's house just as bad as dad said?" Michael asked, looking at his mom, "house filled with all those freaky rodents and dead animals he brings when he visits?"

She was quiet for a moment before answering, "he enjoys doing taxidermy and his home reflects that." So, that was a yes.

Sam groaned, "mom, can't we just stay in a motel? Grandpa's weird."

"Sure," Michael teased, "if we sell your comics."

Sam's eyes went wide, "don't even think about it asshole!"

"Sam! Language!" Lucy snapped, "I don't want to hear another word out of you until we get there or you're grounded."

Michael stifled a laugh, reaching forward from the backseat to ruffle his little brother's hair, just narrowly dodging Sam's attempts to hit him in the process. Nanook perked up beside him and tried to climb over Michael's shoulder to join in on the fun.

"Michael!" Lucy chided, "put your seatbelt on. Honestly, sometimes you three are just too much."

Michael managed to pull Nanook back before he managed to climb into the front seat, "are you going to crash?" He asked, looking at her in the rearview mirror, "no? Then I'm perfectly safe."
"Alright," Lucy replied, "you asked for it." She leaned forward to fiddle with the radio knob, cranking up the Young Rascals loud enough to shatter windows.

Sam and Michael groaned in unison, covering their ears, just as Lucy began to sing along.

David stepped down hard on the wrist of the latest interloper into their territory. Ever since Max had been killed twenty years ago by an encroaching pack, David had become the leader of the area. He and the boys destroyed the rival pack and made their presence felt. They had also cut back on hunting in their territory, preferring to travel when possible and keeping others out so pickings weren't as slim in the off season. No longer was Santa Carla the murder capital thanks to David and his pack.

"I thought we warned you before to keep out." David growled, grinding his foot into the vampire's wrist. Just enough pressure to make tendons snap like twigs, eliciting a pained howl from his prize catch.

He didn't look young, nor was the intruder strong by any definition of the word. Just a middle aged drifter from another time, too cheap to even change his ragged clothes that sported stains from multiple dozens of old meals. "There are more of us," the vampire threatened weakly, still attempting to pull his useless arm from underneath David's boot. Dwayne had already relieved him of the other one, tossing it halfway across the unkempt field they found themselves in tonight. Unholy food for the worms.

"How many more?" David pressed, "and why do you feel it necessary to invade our territory?"

"Plenty," he hissed back, "and there's plenty of blood to go around."

"You know what? I'm thinking we haven't made a proper impression. You still think it's open season here. It's not. This is our territory, our city, and none of you are going to come in and ruin it for us. So, here's what's going to happen. We're going to make an example out of you, send your severed head back as a gift to your sire with a warning that if we see any more of you even close to our city we will kill you and toss your bodies in the ocean." David growled, bending down to lean closer.

The kill was quick. The cleanup was easy. There was a reason Dwayne never bothered to wear a shirt under his jacket. Black hid stains nicely, too. Marko was the only one of them who ever had to carry a spare tank.

"Want me to take it home and meet up later?" Paul asked, tossing their victim's head into the air with a laugh. Marko ran by and caught it, tumbling to the ground like he'd just barely managed to catch a soccer ball hurtling into the goal.

David chuckled softly, "yeah, go deliver our message." He looked at the other three, "the rest of us will head into town."

Maybe they'd celebrate tonight with a couple of tourists. They were fair game. The only locals who ever ended up on their radar were the stupid ones. Dwayne and Marko were the first to their bikes, with Paul shoving the head into a pannier behind him. With a two-fingered salute, he rode out, tossing his head and howling into the night sky.

"Always has to make a stupid exit," Dwayne remarked, watching him leave.

"He wouldn't be Paul if he didn't." David replied, swinging his leg over his bike, "let's go."
"Don't you have something better to do than follow me around all night?" Michael asked, rounding on Sam. His little brother been annoying him since they'd left the concert.

Sam gave him his typical open-mouthed smile, seeming to realize for the first time that they were in the only part of this city with things to actually do, "yeah. Yeah, I think I do!" He sluggd Michael in the shoulder, dodging a noogie before slipping through the crowd and hopping off to cause trouble for someone else. Probably.

Michael rolled his eyes, hooking his thumbs into his jean pockets and strolling towards his bike. He could turn in early tonight and see about that beach cleanup job he saw in the papers that morning. Get a couple of extra bucks to tide him over before he found a real job. His eyes lit up when he noticed a pair of girls giggling beside a snow cone stall. Maybe he'd stay up late after all.

The familiar rumble of bikes drew his attention to the edge of the boardwalk. There were three of them, all with bikes that he was immediately jealous of. They all dismounted, practically in unison, before taking in the boardwalk. Pretty young to have rides like that, he thought. None of those guys could be over twenty-three at most. Maybe even younger. Michael's eyes slid over to his own bike that wasn't parked very far from theirs, and he could help the slight pang of jealousy. Maybe they had rich parents.

He crossed his arms, leaning back against the wall of a sunglasses hut as he watched them. Didn't even notice the girls walking away with their snowcones. The guy with the spiky hair and trench coat strode ahead of the other two, while they trailed behind him. There was something about the bikers, maybe just their bikes, that held Michael's attention. He couldn't look away.

The spiky haired blonde looked out over the crowd before locking eyes with Michael. It seemed like everything stopped. As if they were the only ones in the world.

Shit. Michael finally managed to tear his eyes away after a few seemingly endless seconds. That didn't make him look like a fucking weirdo or anything, he thought, uncrossing his arms and heading towards his bike, trying not to make it look too obvious. What the hell was that?

As he climbed onto his bike, he tried to just focus on going home, but he just couldn't help himself. He looked back. The trio stood watching him, seeming to be waiting for something or someone. His thoughts were broken when somehow, Sam found him, looking far too excited.

"Mike! I found a comic shop!"

Michael cringed, looking back at his little brother. He'd come this close to accidentally ditching him. "Yeah? You didn't spend your emergency money, did you?"

He glared at him, "no…"

Michael's eyes settled on a rolled-up comic tucked into his brother's over-sized shirt pocket, "then what's that?"

"They gave it to me, for free."

Unable to resist, Michael snatched the comic out of Sam's pocket, holding it just out of reach as he read the title, "Aliens Everywhere? Really, Sam?"

"What? It was free!"

"I thought you only liked superhero junk. Are you ready to go?" He was doing his best to focus on Sam, but Michael honestly thought for one crazy second he could actually feel them watching him
still. He rolled the comic back up and passed it back to Sam, patting the back of his seat. "Come on."

Sam held his comic close, getting on his bike behind him, "wanna come back tomorrow?"

"I'll bring you over in the morning when I pick up that beach gig, but you're on your own if you want to stay later. You'll have to hitch a ride back with mom." He paused, "or grandpa. Maybe he'll even let you ride shotgun if his stuffed badger doesn't get first dibs."

Sam nodded against him back, "alright, let's go home."

He tried to focus on the sound of his bike and the wind, but his mind kept wandering back to the bikers, despite himself. Santa Carla really was full of interesting people.

Marko's eyes danced with silent laughter, "what was that about?" He nudged David's shoulder, "thought you were hungry."

"I am but there's something about that guy." He narrowed his eyes at the bike as the kid drove away.

"We could follow him," Marko suggested, "those two don't look like locals. Nobody'll miss them." His claws were just itching to tear into something fresh and warm.

David narrowed his eyes at him, "no, let them go, I'm wondering if he might be worthy."

Marko's grin widened, and he stopped just short of biting his thumb, "that's always fun." Every once in awhile, they played around with the idea of adding a new member to their pack, but it never really worked out. If they didn't just fall spectacularly off the bridge, their bodies rejected the blood, or they just did something flat out stupid to ruin it. The last one was pretty stupid. Starved to death.

Dwayne nodded towards their bikes, where Paul very swiftly pulled in and parked, "he's here."

"So what's the plan?" Marko looked back at David, "you want us to track the guy down, or…?"

"Let's wait for tomorrow. If he doesn't show up then we'll hunt him down. It will be better if he's drawn to us and we don't pursue him." David looked over at Paul as he approached, "how did it go?"

"I think they got the message," Paul told him, grinning wide, "kinda wish I could've held onto it. Souvenir, y'know?" He clapped Dwayne on the back, laughing.

"You already saved Max's teeth after he was offed, do you really need a full skull?" Marko asked, rolling his eyes.

"Hey, gotta put something in that shitty cabinet we raided from his little barbie dreamhouse, don't we?" Paul asked, "guy's gotta have a hobby."

"It would fit with the seagull bones you hoarded two summers ago." David said thoughtfully, "but, no, we're not saving shit like that. No bones in the hotel. You're lucky I let you keep fangs."

Marko exchanged a look with Dwayne, "we've gotta bring leftovers back for the dog tonight, though, David. Hell hound's probably getting hungrier than us."

David nodded, "Thorn can keep bones, Paul can't." He agreed, "let's hunt, we'll get to play more tomorrow."

Marko could feel the underlying excitement and fed off it, they all did. The possibility of a new pack
member was exciting. Through a few errant thoughts, Paul caught on quick enough, and relished in it with them.

"I missed all the fun tonight?" He asked Marko, resorting to the silent communication they all shared in their minds that made the humans around them so uncomfortable whenever one of them would laugh aloud for no apparent reason.

"Saw a guy and he saw us, was drawn. At least that's how it seemed." Marko replied.

Dwayne looked thoughtful, "how about we save the party for later. Just grab a bite outside the city tonight?"

"Sounds like a plan, shall we go harass Luna Bay or did you have somewhere specific in mind?" David asked, looking at his de facto second in command.

"Well—" Dwayne began, before Paul hopped up behind him and clapped him on the shoulders with both hands.

"Strip club!" Paul shouted aloud, drawing no attention whatsoever. The people in this town were freaks.

Marko bit the thumb of his glove, smirking around it, "yeah, let's go get us a stripper."

"6 am?" Sam asked, not for the first time that morning as he dragged himself across the kitchen to grab their box of Wheaties on the counter, "they've got you working at 6 am?! That's not just wrong. It's evil. You're working for monsters, Mike."

Michael rolled his eyes, leaning back in his chair at the kitchen table, "just hurry up and fix breakfast, Sam. You want a ride or not? It's a first come, first serve gig."

Sam grumbled, pouring cereal and milk into the bowl. He was proud of himself, he didn't actually spill any this time, "fine."

"Coffee ready yet?" Michael asked, looking back at him, "I need coffee. Don't burn it this time, Sam." Neither Sam, nor Michael were 'morning' people. They'd had legendary scuffles in years past to prove it. Their dad could be even worse. As far as their mom was concerned, she was already sitting out on the front porch enjoying the morning air and leisurely browsing through the paper.

"Didn't mom already make coffee? Get it yourself." He grumbled, taking a bite of his cereal.

"Fine. Good luck walking to the boardwalk today, Sam."

"Wait, what? But Mike! You promised!" He dropped his spoon, sending milk splattering across the table.

Michael tapped the table impatiently, "coffee. Now. You've got three minutes to finish eating." His dastardly plan to blackmail Sam for a morning brew was finally revealed. The jerk.

A loud hacking and coughing sound followed by several grunts heiled the arrival of their grandfather in the kitchen, tiredly walking in with his plaid bathrobe bundled tightly around him and a pair of sunglasses secured over his eyes, "you boys already up? Good. Got a lotta chores you can help me with around the house."

"Got a job today, gramps," Michael held up his hands, "sorry."
Sam looked between them for a moment before scampering to pour Michael's coffee while trying to shovel wheaties into his mouth at the same time. "Mike's taking me to the boardwalk." He said quickly before he could get roped into something.

"Hmph," grandpa Emerson grunted, pulling open the fridge and reaching for a bottle of root beer, "maybe tomorrow, eh? Show you my baby out in the garage, how's that?" He peered over the top of the door, wiggling his eyebrows at Sam, "ain't another ride like her in the world."

"You have a car? I thought you just had that old jeep." He said, shoving the full mug of coffee at his brother. Michael took it, giving Sam a dirty look as the coffee very nearly sloshed over the rim.

"Sure. Baby blue caddie. You want, we can take a quick ride in her. Just gotta help me with the lawn, couple of things in the house. Shouldn't take long."

Sam looked torn, "tomorrow, tomorrow I'll help with whatever you want." He really wanted to go back to the comic shop today, maybe get one that he would actually like. The aliens one was kind of freaking him out a little. All kinds of stories about strange lights, crop circles, body snatchers-he just knew he was going to have nightmares.

"Well," Michael tossed back his coffee, cringing as he set the mug back on the table when the heat caught up to him, "better get going."

Sam scrambled after him, leaving his half eaten bowl of cereal on the table. He wasn't about to let his brother leave without him.

"When does it open?" Michael asked, "because I'm going to be combing the beach for a couple hours. You can't tag along."

"I'll find something to do if it isn't, just go do your stupid trash job. Maybe I'll hang out on the beach."

"Okay, don't forget sunscreen then. You're like a ghost," Michael told him in that annoying older brother way, "I'm serious," he went on, climbing onto his bike, "you'll cook fast."

Sam got on behind him, "just don't go getting abducted by aliens and we're good."

"I'll keep that in mind," Michael agreed, starting his bike just as Sam grabbed onto his shoulders.

Sam knew better than to bother his brother when he was taking him somewhere. He had a habit when he got annoyed that he would drive like a maniac. Sam was sure that he was going to die young. So he held on, burying his face between his shoulders and not letting go as Michael sped down the street.

By the time they'd reached the boardwalk, it was lighter outside, enough for Sam to at least be a little more confident he wasn't going to be mugged if he took a wrong turn. "You got grandpa's phone number if you need to call anyone?" Michael asked, climbing off of his bike and turning towards a flight of steps that led down to the beach.

He pulled out a crumpled piece of paper, "yeah, I'll be fine, I'm not a little kid, Mike."

"I just want to make sure you've got a ride home if you need it," Michael told him, glaring back at Sam before turning to walk away, "I'll see you tonight."

Sam stuck his tongue out at his retreating back before walking to the comic shop, hopefully it was open, he didn't want to have to find something to do.
David leaned back against the railing along the beach barrier, eyes skimming over the crowd on the boardwalk. He was waiting, the others having gone off for their own fun. Even though Santa Carla was relatively safe people were still weary of them and knew not to get on their bad side. He was still hoping the young man from the previous night was going to show up but so far he had been disappointed.

A security guard passed by, but not without delivering a very stern look in David's direction, one hand comfortably seated over his belt. Must be new. The vampire gave him a smirk and a little wave, he would have to pay him a visit later, make an impression. If the guy could learn then he could live.

The man let out a huff of air, turning to leave. Even if he could do anything to David, he didn't have a reason to pull anything. Yet. Before he could pursue that line of thought, he saw him, the guy from the night before was leaving a small shop examining the lapel of a leather jacket and adjusting the collar as he crossed the boards. A passing girl caught his eye for a moment, but then he looked up at David. Surprise flitted across his features for an instant. David smiled at him, a real, honest smile, not one of his trademark smirks, no, he didn't want to scare him off after all.

Casually, the young man tucked his hands into his jacket pockets and strolled towards him, lingering beside a jewelry stall feigning interest before moving on. "Hey," he greeted David coolly, "saw your bike over there. Nice ride." Under the scent of sticky cotton candy and sweat that permeated the boards beneath them, he smelled clean. Probably never broke a rule in his life.

"Yours isn't bad either." He replied, pushing up from the railing.

"Gets me from one place to another," the human replied, shrugging and taking the compliment in stride.

"I'm David." He held out his hand.

"Michael. Mike, usually." He took David's offered hand and shook it briefly. One of the many occasions gloves became useful. Beneath the leather his skin was icy cold. Hard to blame it on a hot summer night.

"Nice to meet you, Mike." He tried out the shortened name, immediately deciding he prefered Michael, "you new in town?"

"Yeah. We're staying with my grandpa until we get on our feet. How about you? Just visiting or…?"

He shook his head, "nah, lived here all my life." He replied, "would you like a tour, Michael?" He asked, half smiling at him.

"Sure," Michael met him with his own smile, "got nothing better to do."

David took a chance and slung an arm around his shoulders, guiding him onto the boardwalk, "it will be my pleasure to show you around and you can meet the boys."

"Got a whole gang, huh?" He didn't seem to care about the guiding arm, walking alongside David easily enough. Lucky for him he wasn't going to be dinner.

"Saw you looking at getting your ear pierced, it's a scam, I can do it for you if you want." And thus, the tour began. The walking tour, anyway.

"So, now we've run you through all the basics, you got any questions-Mister Phoenix?" Alan asked,
eyeing Sam up and down at the counter.

"Yeah," Sam said, hesitant, "can you ring me up already?" Somehow just hanging out and browsing comics had turned into a serial killing alien autopsy conspiracy, and he'd gotten the deluxe package. Should've just stayed home and done chores for grandpa. God, they even had a newspaper scrapbook.

"This is serious business, aliens are out there, they take people all the time and replace them." Edgar pressed.

"Oh, no, I totally get that. Those pictures you guys have are really cool, but I don't have this issue here, and I'd like to buy it." Sam tapped on the comic he held at the counter. One of many Superman comics he actually had, but this one was in mint condition. He needed it. He'd ransacked his piggy bank for it.

Alan's upper lip quivered in a simile of a tough guy sneer, as he turned to his brother, "I think it's time we tell him about the house."

Edgar nodded in agreement, "there's this house, boarded up, it's full of ash and bones, someone was vaporized in there. No one will buy it, no one will go near it, not after what happened there."

"Owner was a big whig," Alan added, "we're pretty sure he made his money off of back deal trades with the FBI. Bought and sold alien fetuses, then when the parents found out? He was toast."

Sam looked at them skeptically, "yeah, sure," he was a little nervous, at least now he was getting the point, finally, "can I just buy this now, please?"

"Sure," Edgar nodded, slowly reaching for Sam's cash, "but you just remember. Any funny lights in the sky, you call us. You've got our number. Remember that. It could save your life one day. Pray that you never need to call."

"Yeah, sure." He grabbed his comic, not even waiting for the little bit of change he was expecting, and left. Thank god he'd already called his mom on a payphone earlier to pick him up, because Mike wasn't anywhere to be seen. Big jerk probably got lucky. He was gonna be in so much trouble tomorrow.

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Michael felt weird. Like all of that anger after their race to the bluff had disappeared altogether, the moment David smirked at him and led the group away from the bluff towards what he could only assume was an old mine shaft. How very wrong he was, he thought, following them inside. At first they were met with darkness, then Dwayne and Marko split off from the group with torches they'd lit outside and tossed them into a couple of oil drums, illuminating a massive room. The first thing Michael noticed was the massive poster of Jim Morrison staring back at him, the lizard king welcoming him to his underground palace. He looked towards the ceiling, and amidst veins of cracked rock, he saw a chandelier sparkling down at them, catching licks of light from the crackling flames in the oil drums.

"Wow," he whispered, following them towards a sitting area in the middle of it all, where a wheelchair, a nice couch, and an old coin fountain awaited them. It was filled to the brim with change and odd metal trinkets. Like a pirate's treasure chest open to the sky.

David settled into the wheelchair, looking rather like a king in his kingdom, "well, what do you think?"

"It's nice," he admitted, "just a little creepy, but nice."
"Welcome to the club, Mikey," Paul taunted, standing atop the couch with one boot on an arm and the other on the back as he lit his joint with a match and tossed it aside.

"Marko, food." David ordered, "it isn't every day we bring someone down here. This place, it used to be one of the most impressive pieces of architecture on the west coast until the earth quake. Now, it's ours, and we've done some work on it, repaired what we can, but it's an ongoing project." He explained.

Michael sat down on the edge of the fountain near David just as Marko hopped out of the lobby with a secretive smile on his face. He ignored it in favor of talking to David, "it's pretty cool. Plan on getting some electric in here, too?" He joked, noticing Paul proffer his joint to David as if he were presenting a gift to a king. The guy had a flair for dramatics.

David chuckled, taking it from him before closing his eyes and taking a drag off it, "haven't planned on it. We do fine with the barrels and candles, it adds a certain ambiance that electricity just can't compete with." He opened his eyes, looking at Michael and holding out the joint.

He thought about it for a moment, noticing that all eyes were on him and relented, taking it.
"Thanks," he said, taking a brief pull and quickly passing to Dwayne, who leaned across from the couch to take it.

Marko chose that moment to bound inside, cartons of Chinese takeout in hand, "who wants rice?"

David leaned back in his seat, eyes locked on Michael. It was almost time. Michael had been fed and was relaxing along the edge of the fountain, taking a drag of Paul's joint. Ever since Max had been disposed of they had gone away from the gaudy bottle that he had used to hold his blood. David had a much subtler way to do it now, a flask he kept hidden in his jacket. Sure, the bottle had been good for a kind of ritualistic flair but it drew too much attention. A flask, now, no one looked twice at that and was much more willing to drink from it. Slowly, he pulled it out as Michael turned to look at him, holding out the joint in offering.

"Want a drink, Michael?" He asked softly, holding out the flask as he took the joint from between his fingers.

The others exchanged dark looks and sharp grins, remaining silent as they leaned in to watch. Michael eyed the flask for a second or two before finally leaning forward to take it. "What is it?" He asked, sniffing it curiously.

"Something special, I created the mixture myself. I think you'll like it."

Michael's eyes darted around the group, a little doubtful. His curiosity and desire to fit in got the better of him, though, and he took a good long swig. Once past his lips, the first taste of the blood would hit him immediately.

David smirked, clapping slowly, "bravo, Michael." The instant the blood began its work a connection flared to life between them. He could feel Michael in his mind, just like the boys. He wasn't pack yet, not until he made his first kill, but he was one of them nonetheless.

The rest of them cheered with him, welcoming Michael into the fold, even as his eyes were half-lidded, mind becoming clouded by the blood. There was no drug more powerful than fresh, warm blood. Michael blindly held the flask out for David to take, blinking several times to clear his vision.

David pressed it back toward him, "don't you want more?" He asked, voice quiet.
He tried to hide his eagerness, drawing the flask back, "you sure? Don't wanna hog it all." It wasn't a real concern, otherwise Michael wouldn't have taken another drink from the flask so quickly after asking, wiping at his mouth as a drop trickled past his lips. He peered at the rich red liquid for a moment, before ignoring whatever passing concern that popped into his mind and licking it from the back of his hand.

"Alright, let's party!" Paul crowed, shaking his wild mane of hair as he tossed his jacket across the lobby and hopped from the back of the couch to land neatly beside his boombox he'd tucked behind it. Michael didn't seem to notice. His dazed attention was focused on David.

David chuckled softly, "have as much as you want Michael, I can always make more."

"It's great," Michael admitted, "the best." The minute the words were out of his mouth, music tore through the lobby, echoing against the cave walls and stretching into the twisting tunnels beneath and around them, while Dwayne and Marko began to tussle beside the couch.
He should have grabbed the paper that morning after mom headed to her first day of work. He should've circled what he could, made some calls, gotten dressed and found a way to make a living. He should've made breakfast. Michael should have done a lot of things, but by the afternoon he just barely managed to drag himself out of bed. It was a miracle he even managed to throw on his robe and do a few reps with his weights before falling back in an exhausted heap. How much did he drink last night? He couldn't even remember. A lot. Possibly more.

"How long are you planning on baking on the front lawn?" Grandpa's voice cut through the haze from his hangover.

"Hm?" Michael peered up at his grandfather through sunglasses that somehow didn't manage to block any light, "how long was I out?" His voice sounded like he'd been gargling with sandpaper.

"About an hour so far but it didn't look like you were gonna wake up anytime soon. Should at least flip over to cook evenly." He looked down at him, the sun forming a halo around his head, "I was about to water you with the rest of the yard if you didn't wake up."

He did sort of feel like he was going to turn extra crispy if he didn't go inside soon. Honestly, Michael couldn't even remember when he got home last night. "Mmh," Michael grunted in response, lurching up. He dreaded toting his weights back to the porch. "Gonna go back to bed."

"Get some sleep, kid, and stop staying out so late, you're gonna worry your mom."

"It was just last night," he said defensively, sitting up and shaking some of the grass clippings from his hair. He didn't see what the big deal was. Not like he killed anyone.

Grandpa grunted at him before going back to pulling the hose out so he would water the lawn, "you only live once, remember that." He warned.

With that bit of cryptic advice, that judging by his grandfather's tone seemed like a semi-threat, Michael toted his weights back to the porch, pausing every once in awhile to take a short break. He was just so damn tired!

When he pushed the screen door open and slumped into the house, the first thing he noticed wasn't the blessed darkness of the entryway, but Sam hard at work cleaning and polishing a large mirror on the wall. He wasn't doing a very good job. There were streaks everywhere. "You're making it worse," he remarked, heading for the stairs.

"I am not!" He shouted after him, "it just doesn't like your ugly mug!"

Michael smirked, "careful, Sam, you're gonna crack it if you stare too long." He dodged an inexpertly thrown bottle of windex with a laugh, scrambling up the stairs.

Sam picked up the bottle of frothy windex he'd thrown at the staircase, glaring back up at his brother just as he disappeared around the corner. "Yeah, well you'd crack a windshield if you looked at it, buttface," he retorted under his breath, cursing the law of the universe that made the best comeback lines strike when they were no longer useful.

He rounded on the mirror, frustrated. Michael was right. It did look worse. Cleaning glass was stupid. Maybe he'd go make a sandwich and try to sneak one of the old man's root beers. When he
stepped into the kitchen he found his grandpa sitting at the table with a stack of oreos and a bottle of rootbeer sitting in front of him. He looked up when Sam stepped in.

"Hey, kid, come, have a sit." He motioned to the chair across from him.

For a split second, panic set in. Had the old man read his mind?! "Uh—yeah, sure," Sam edged forward, pulling up a chair as far away from his grandpa as he could manage. "What's up?"

"Wanted to see how you were liking it here. Settling in alright?" He took a drink of his rootbeer before smacking his lips.

Sam brightened up a little, "I kinda wish we had a tv, you know?" If stocking up on comics with those weird guys at the boardwalk meant a three hour speech every time, he'd die without some MTV to keep him sane.

"TV is overrated. Rots your brain, those comics you like are better, they at least make you think." He paused, his look softening a little, "not being distracted all the time will help you keep an eye out for your brother too."

It took a Herculean effort not to roll his eyes right then. Was he about to get the big 'drugs and thugs' lecture? Mike was dumb sometimes, but it wasn't like he ever broke the law or anything. "Okay," he replied, "I'll do that."

He gave him a hard look, his eyes narrowing slightly, "Sam, Santa Carla has a hidden side and I'm afraid your brother may have gotten himself into something he won't be able to get out of on his own."

"Grandpa, you've got pot growing by the kitchen window," Sam pointed out, "and Mike hasn't touched it."

He sighed heavily, "Sam, just do this for me. Keep an eye on your brother."

Ugh. "Alright, but trust me, you don't have anything to worry about. He was in key club."

"I hope you're right." He said softly, seeming distracted.

Sam looked back at him, a little nervous, "uh, grandpa?"

"Yeah?" He ate an oreo, his attention going back to Sam.

"Can I have one of your root beers?"

Grandpa was silent for a moment, eyeing his grandson, "if you promise to keep an eye on your brother you can have one." He finally said after what felt like forever.

He grinned, reaching forward to grab one of the frosty bottles on the table, "You got it!"

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That night, before their boots hit the sand, Marko thought about the last dozen or so failed attempts at inviting new members into their pack. He was the last one to successfully turn, and the last one hand-picked by David. After him, all of the others were Max's choice. He didn't miss the old bastard.

Tonight, they took to the sky and left their bikes at home. With the wind stinging his ears and their laughter ringing down on the beach of Luna Bay as they picked up passing drifters, Marko couldn't help but think about when he'd first met them. David, Dwayne, and Paul. The blood on his lips now was a far cry from the cheap whiskey he'd shared with his brothers in a rundown dance hall.
"I've got work in the morning," Marko informed them, cringing at the taste of cheap liquor he 
wouldn't even toss on fruit cake. "I can't keep palling around with you guys this late. The old lady 
I'm staying with is starting to lock the door on me." He didn't regret for one minute running away 
from his parents house almost a year ago, but it didn't make his life any easier. Too many people 
asked questions, and he was tired of answering them.

David slung an arm around his shoulders, "come on, Marko, do you really have to go to work? Why 
don't you just stay with us tonight?" He asked, "I have something far better for you to drink."

He knew where they stayed. That nice new hotel by the bluff. These guys were only hanging out with 
him to slum it for a few days. Marko knew they'd probably leave him high and dry when they got 
bored, but...

"That might be fun," he admitted, picking at his patchy threadbare vest, "What kind of drink?"

David snapped his fingers and Paul ran off, coming back with a gold and gem encrusted wine 
bottle. David took it from him almost reverently, closing his eyes as he took a drink, before offering it 
to him, "join us."

They dug a pit in the sand for the tide to fill, washing the blood from their hands and faces in a 
nightly baptism. Pieces of sticky flesh and pink stains filled the sand pit before they were done. A 
snack for the fish, while a feast of victims lay twisted on the shore.

"Have enough, David?" Marko called out to their leader, who stood in a halo of shifting beams from 
the coastal lighthouse. Cigarette smoke curled out from his lips. He'd shared a lot of his own blood 
with the new guy the night before.

"Yeah, was a good meal. You guys got enough?" He asked, looking over his shoulder at them.

"Never," Paul replied, leaning on Dwayne's shoulder.

David turned and looked at their youngest, "you look like you were thinking about something." 
David, unlike Max, didn't pry into their minds if he didn't have to, preferring to let them share on 
their own.

Marko stood, dusting sand from his jeans, "just thinking. Remember when Max lost his shit when he 
found out about me?"

"Yeah, he locked me in the basement and beat the shit out of me, he was pissed." He let out a soft 
chuckle, "you were the last one we chose."

"I've tried to be patient," Max snarled, his face twisted in anger. Marko had just barely been able to 
stumble back against the hotel wall to avoid the deadly claws reaching for his throat.

"Leave him alone!" Paul snapped, held back by Dwayne's firm grip around his shoulders.

David snarled, glaring at Max, "patient? Patient with what?" He bit out sharply, moving between 
him and Marko.

"I let you get away with too much. This," he swept an arm out, "is mine. You are mine. All of you." 
Max pointed a claw at Marko, who stared back at him in confusion, and just a little fear. He hadn't 
done anything to this guy! "You bring yet another rat into the family without so much as telling me. 
You left it for me to discover the dead maid in my closet! You, David, need to remember your place. 
All of you do."
"You're not killing him." David rarely stood up to their sire but when he did he was vicious and stubborn.

The molten gold in Max's eyes cooled, and his face became closer to a semblance of something human, "I wouldn't kill one of my own children, David. Not this time. From now on, though, I will decide who joins us. You will spend the next few days with me to absorb that lesson."

David's lip curled back in a snarl, "fine, but leave Marko and the others alone."

Dwayne gave Paul a playful shove, "I don't miss him," he remarked, looking back at David, "Do you?"

"Not even a little bit." David replied, taking another drag from his cigarette.

It would be nice to pass on the title of 'youngest' to a new brother, Marko just wished the guy was a little shorter too. "Do you think he'll look for us tonight?" He asked, remembering well how much even Max's blood had drawn him back to the others before he had made his own first kill. It was like scratching an itch. He hadn't been able to ignore it.

"He will," David said, sure of himself, "he won't be able to stay away."

After dinner, which Michael could only pick at, he took care of the dishes and left without a word. Mom would only tell him to keep Sam company or go to the boardwalk as a family, or flat-out tell him it was way too late to ride his bike. Tonight he promised himself he'd stay far away from whatever that mixed drink was in David's flask. It wasn't worth the hangover. Even if he was sort of craving it now as he silently kicked his bike off down the road before starting it.

By the time he reached the boardwalk, the sun had long set, and they were already there by the rails as if they'd been waiting for him. Maybe they had. There was even a space for his own bike between David and Dwayne's.

David smirked at him, "Michael! It's good to see you." He spread his arms in welcome, "care to join us for the night?"

He left his bike parked with theirs and joined them by the rails. "Sure," he agreed, turning his head only briefly to watch a girl with a lime green Mohawk pass him by. He looked back at David and the others, "what's up?"

"We're going out for a ride to play a game." David said, the smirk never leaving his lips.

That sounded—"you're not gonna screw with me and get me killed this time, are you?" Michael wasn't too sure he could handle another race like the one last night.

David chuckled, "don't worry, Michael!" He clapped a hand on his shoulder, "you're not going to die."

"Not tonight, Mikey," Paul chimed in.

"Maybe tomorrow," Marko added, grinning. They all had very white teeth, Michael noticed. Maybe there was something in the water here.

"Alright," Michael agreed, "but I gotta get home sober tonight. That hangover…" he shook his head, not even feeling the need to finish his sentence. It was the worst hangover in the history of booze.
"But how do you feel now?" He questioned.

"Pretty good," he admitted, "after I slept it off."

Dwayne crossed his arms, "always works for us."

"Don't worry so much! It's summer, isn't it? Who needs to be awake during the day anyway?" David said, moving to straddle his bike, "come on, let's get going, we don't have too much time before it happens."

"It?" He looked between them, not quite sure why he trusted these guys so much, but he did. Michael returned to his bike, hopping on almost eagerly. They all seemed to be giving off a vibe of excitement; it was infectious.

"Yeah, it. Think of it as a rite of passage." David said, starting his bike, "it's fun."

"If there's sheep or something, I'm out." He joked, just as their laughter was drowned out by crashing waves and roaring bikes.

The boys' laughter echoed through the night and Michael couldn't help but join in. In that moment he felt as though he was one of them, as though he had been with them forever, and would remain until the end of time.

David caught Michael as he fell. That brief moment of flying he knew had been exhilarating for the halfling. Of course he couldn't maintain it, he wasn't turned completely yet nor did he have the necessary practice, but in that moment he had flown, something humans really weren't meant to do. Now, as he held the halfling against his chest he wanted Michael to take it from the vein, he wanted Michael to drink from him. He wasn't sure where the urge came from but he was more than happy to fulfill it.

"Hey, Michael." He whispered in his ear, "hungry?"

Eyes wide with fear, and an excitement he hadn't yet grasped, Michael was too hoarse to reply as he clung to David to avoid plunging to the ground. His stomach, however, roared to life at the mere mention of food. "David!" He hissed in the pack leader's mind without even knowing it.

David ran his fingers through his hair, tipping his own head to the side and slicing his throat with a claw, "come on, Michael, drink."

Instinct, not thought guided the halfling. He pressed his lips to David's neck, letting the fresh blood fill his mouth. David knew sparks were igniting in Michael's nerves, human blood cells quickly being consumed by vampiric with each drop pouring down his throat. Tomorrow, he'd think it was all a dream. Might not even remember most of it, but tonight, tonight he would revel in the feeling of powerful blood pouring through him.

Below, Marko gave a shout, calling to them. The echo summoned Paul and Dwayne's howls into the fray, ghosts in pea soup fog.

Michael drew his face back from David's neck when the blood flow trickled to a stop, lapping at the flesh as it knitted itself back together. David looked down at him, lowering them slowly to the ground, "how was that?" He asked softly, "like it?"

"It was—wow." Michael murmured, standing on shaky feet. Paul drew up alongside him to clap a hand on his back.
"Enjoy it while it lasts, Mikey. No way he'll let you chow down like that again," he told him with a
toothy smile. Michael was too lulled by the drug of fresh blood to really know or care what Paul
meant.

David chuckled softly, "mmm, I dunno, I might let him feed again."

"How about me?" Marko hopped up behind him, clapping his hands on David's shoulders, "I
could use a bite!"

Dwayne rolled his eyes, "you eat too much. You'd bite his head off."

"Fuck you, Marko." David said, swatting at him, "dunno why but I want to let him feed again." He
shrugged, it didn't bother him as much as he thought it should, it wasn't like Max had taught them
anything. No wonder the old bastard wanted a big 'family'.

Michael looked around, seeming to register their surroundings for the first time, "where are we?"

"Used to be the major river through Santa Carla before the dam came." Dwayne explained, "now it's
just a dried out riverbed."

"What happened to him?" Max demanded, kneeling beside the body they'd only just fished out of the
water as he arrived. They wanted him to see.

"He didn't make it, fell in the river." David said, standing over him.

"You should have been more careful," Max told them, examining the dead teenager's eyes to make
sure he was truly dead. The only concern lacing his voice was that he had been defied. He had no
real bond with anyone who shared his blood, "This is the third time I have tried to pick a new sibling
for the four of you. I am getting exhausted with the whole business, David. I think what you need is a
guiding hand. A mother."

David froze, eyes narrowing, "they have to be tested." David said firmly, "if the ones you choose are
too weak and can't hack it they shouldn't be alive. As for a mother, that's a horrible idea." Standing
up to Max was a stupid idea but he had to make this clear.

Max stood, kicking the body back over the bank and into the water with as little care as one might
expect. "It isn't your choice to make."

"Before it dried up," Dwayne interrupted David's thoughts, bringing him back to the present, "a lot
of people died down here."

"Too many to count, was a common suicide point." David went on, "now though, it's our
playground."

Confusion flitted across Michael's face when he looked up towards the bridge towering above them,
bringing his fingers to his lips as if he were trying to piece together the last several minutes, fighting
the fog of satiated hunger in his mind, "by drowning?" He asked, "or jumping?"

"Drowning." David replied, "it isn't the jump that kills you but the water below."

Michael glanced at David as he spoke, "how do you guys know all this?" He let David guide him
over the rough gravel below, while the others drifted around them in-step. The tracks above them
had grown silent now, and all they could hear was the crunching sound beneath their shoes.

"We're at the library every week," Paul explained, "blowing all the bookworms."

David punched his arm, "Dwayne enjoys history and shares what he knows."

"Seems like you're the one telling all the stories," Michael said with a smirk, peering up at the sky. The fog was still heavy, but a few stray stars peeked through. The ones that burned the brightest.

He shrugged, "Well, no one said I didn't like it too." He followed Michael's gaze, "we're like the stars," he said after a moment of thought, "we're gonna be around a long time, Michael, and only those who shine the brightest are going to survive."

For once, Marko and Paul actually kept their mouths shut.

"Yeah?" Michael's eyes locked on David's. He wasn't entirely lucid, but the intensity was still there. He may not know it yet, but Michael had the eyes of a predator, the yellow shine that was there in all of the boys when the light hit their eyes just right.

"Yeah, and you're gonna be around with us." He said, meeting his gaze.

"Yeah, mom?" Sam shouldered the kitchen phone as he continued slathering a slice of toast with peanut butter. It was already pretty late in the day, and Michael still hadn't come downstairs for breakfast or lunch.

"I have an extra shift tonight. Can you give the phone to your brother? I need to talk to him."

"He's sleeping," Sam told her, taking a large bite of toast before pulling it back and licking the end of the butter knife he'd spread the peanut butter with, "you gonna be mad if I wake him up?"

"Actually, I'd like you to wake him up, he's been sleeping far too long, it's already afternoon." She sounded frustrated and Sam was glad it wasn't with him. For once.

"Okay, mom, hold on." He knelt down to leave the phone hanging off the hook. This would be fun. Sam shoved the toast into his mouth and rushed towards the stairs, taking them two at a time while keeping one arm braced against the railing to keep himself from stumbling over his own feet. By the time he reached his brother's bedroom door, Sam had managed to smear a bit of the peanut butter on the end of his nose in his haste. He rubbed it off, licking his fingers and taking several more bites to finish his meal before he threw the door open and rushed towards the phone near Michael's bedside stand, yanking the phone off the hook. He scrambled towards the bedroom window to yank open the shades, "hey, get up. Mom's on the phone!" Sam shouted, holding it out.

Michael jerked, fumbling around for something on the table. Sam thought it might be the phone, but then he was shoving a pair of sunglasses onto his face, "I'm up, I'm up," Michael rasped. He looked like shit.

"Man, Mike, you look like shit!" He exclaimed, "mom wants to talk to you!" He tried to be as loud as he possibly could while keeping his distance to avoid the wrath of Mike.

"I heard you the first time," Michael grumbled holding his hand out for the receiver as his head fell back against the pillow. His nails looked like they hadn't been trimmed in days.

"Pick it up yourself, I left the one downstairs off the hook. Just grab it off the floor, it's closer to you anyway." He didn't want to get closer to him than he had to.
Michael tried to sit up, and Sam just knew he was glaring at him behind those stupid shades, "then why are you holding my phone right now?"

Sam looked down at it guiltily before throwing it at him, "there, take it."

"Jesus Christ, Sam," Michael mumbled, grabbing the receiver and holding it to his ear, "yeah, I'm up." There was a long pause. "Sam's old enough to look after himself now," he snapped. In that instant, Michael looked and sounded just like their dad. It was creepy.

Sam shuddered slightly, biting his lip, yeah, his brother looking like their dad was a bad thing.

"Right," Michael's voice softened, and just like that he was Michael again. "Okay, fine." He held the receiver out to Sam, "I'm babysitting tonight. Guess we'll fingerpaint or something."

"Does she want to talk to me?" He asked softly, scowling at the phone, "and I'm not a baby."

"She hung up," Michael informed him testily, "it's too bright in here, Sam. Close the shades." When they'd left Arizona, he'd had a tan. Why did Mike look so pale all of a sudden? Was he sick? Sam briefly remembered that stupid comic the Frog brothers had given him about bodysnatchers, but reminded himself it was just a dumb story.

"Mike? Umm, are you alright?" He asked softly, closing the blinds before inching his way toward the door.

Michael grabbed his blanket and pulled it over his head, "I'm fine," he called out, "stop yelling." It suddenly struck Sam at that moment that his brother hadn't even changed out of the clothes he was wearing the night before. His sand-covered sneakers poked out from beneath the comforter.

He needed to go read that comic, fast. If his brother was about to be taken over by aliens he had to save him. Maybe Grandpa was right! Maybe he knew something was going on! Not even for a minute did Sam pause to remind himself why his mom had explicitly forbid him from reading horror or sci-fi comics. He had a bit of an overactive imagination, but maybe this time it was real. He ran to his room, locking himself and Nanook inside before digging through his comics and finding the alien one he had gotten from those two weird boys. Hopefully there was something in there that could help him.

"It's getting late," Dwayne mused, leaning back against the railing and slowly rolling his head from one side of the other in a languorous stretch.

"I'm hungry," Paul complained. "How long are we gonna wait here?"

David sighed, glaring out over the beach, "well, if he won't come to us, we'll go get him." He pushed back from the railing, moving to his bike. Michael hadn't come out yet and that just couldn't stand. There was a need in David to collect their newest member and show him what he was missing. More importantly, to draw him away from his human family. They didn't blindly take in new brothers on a whim, certainly not since Max was dealt with. They weren't going to let this one go.

"Are we going on a hunt tonight or just picking up scraps later?" Marko asked, hopping on his own bike eagerly. Whenever David led, he was always the most anxious to follow.

"Depends on Michael. I doubt he's ready to feed yet so if we get him to come out then we're going after scraps. If he refuses to come with us, well, we'll go on a hunt tonight and make him regret not coming with us tomorrow." David said, starting his bike.
The look on Paul's face was enough for Dwayne to punch him in the shoulder before he even got his mouth open.

"No," Dwayne stated firmly in their minds as they took off from the boardwalk, skirting sand and grass.

"I'll be doing the punishing, not you." David said, glaring at the blonde rocker, "besides, it has to be subtle."

It wasn't hard to find the place. They'd helped him get home twice. Even if they hadn't, following the call of the blood he shared was as easy as following breadcrumbs in a fairytale. Except in this story, he'd wring the necks of any birds who got in his way. They pulled up outside the house, keeping a good enough distance that what they were about to do would be a little more scary than if they were fully seen. Michael would know though, he would sense that it was them, and David would be calling for him. David began, howling, and flashing the lights on his bike, calling for Michael to come to them. The others soon followed suit, whipping up the wind for good measure as if they were about to take flight.

Someone inside the house began to scream Michael's name, just as he threw open the screen door on the porch and came outside, looking directly across the lawn towards them. They immediately cut their lights and let the wind die down.

"Michael, come on, join us." David called to him, eyes locked on him across the grass.

"I'm babysitting!" Michael called back, unaware that even at a whisper they'd hear him. Or a thought.

"That the screaming thing inside? Sounds like a baby, you got a baby, Michael?" David smirked, leaning across the front of his bike.

He still hadn't caught on to the fact that David's voice was in his head, calm and clear. Michael was fun, but, well at least he was smarter than Paul.

"Mike, please, come back in the house!" The baby inside demanded.

"Calm down, Sam," Michael waved the kid off. He redirected his attention to the bikers, "he's my little brother! Sorry, maybe tomorrow. Mom would kill me if I ditched him."

"Tomorrow, Michael, come find us tomorrow." It was as much an order as a request.

"I'll-" Michael began, jerking when his brother reached forward through the open screen door to grab the back of his shirt.

"Mike!" He snapped.

"Gimme a minute, Sam." Michael shrugged him away, giving one last look across the lawn, "I'll try."

"See you tomorrow, Michael." With that, David started his bike and they sped off into the night.

"So," Paul began, "he gonna like what you've got planned tomorrow night?"

"Probably not, but I won't be the one doing anything to him. No, I'm thinking the surf nazis are going to have some fun tomorrow."
"Strange lights, long fingers—do nails count? Acting like a different person, unusual sleeping patterns..." Sam read each panel aloud, growing more and more anxious by the second. He closed the comic book and flipped it over to look at the phone number the Frog brothers had scrawled on the back. "I hope I don't regret this," he mumbled, reaching for his bedside phone and pulling it into his lap. His hands shook as he dialed the number, hopefully he wouldn't regret this.

"Listen, stop calling, I told you they don't live here." Edgar answered the phone, his voice gruff and frustrated.

"Ed?" Sam asked, suddenly confused. It was definitely him.

"Mr. Phoenix?" Edgar sounded relieved, "something happen?"

"There were strange lights outside my house. I think-" Sam hesitated, unsure how to even begin to explain this, "-I think I believe in aliens now. They might be after my brother."

"It's a good thing you called us, tell us exactly what happened. Can't help if we don't know what he did."

"Well, he's been sleeping all day for the last couple days. He's pale, and kind of a jerk. Then tonight, after the weird lights, he started just yelling at someone outside, but there wasn't anyone there!" Sam squeezed the receiver as he spoke, eyes nervously darting towards his bedroom door. Nanook perched on the edge of Sam's bed, whining and panting.

"Invasion of the body snatchers, you're gonna have to keep him at home, maybe lock him in a closet or something. You can't let him go back to them. There's still a chance to save him but you gotta act quick."

Sam let out a long sigh, "I dunno why, but for a second I thought you were gonna tell me to kill him or something."

"Well, if goes full on psycho alien, yeah, you're gonna have to kill him." He said nonchalantly. He could just picture his mom's face if he even tried to explain doing something crazy like that. No, there was no way. No way he'd kill his brother, even if he was the plant baby of some giant space monster. He was still Michael. Right?

"How am I gonna keep him home?" Sam asked, helpless. He couldn't exactly take his brother on. Not without fighting dirty. Then he'd have to contend with being grounded.

"Dunno, but don't you wanna save him? Do whatever it takes."

Sam licked his bottom lip, "do you think you guys could come over tomorrow? Help me boobytrap his door or something? I can pay you with a couple of comics now, and maybe if I get a paper route or something later..."

"Yeah, sure, we'll be there, what time?"

"We don't need your comics, you can owe us." Alan chimed in, apparently they were both there the whole time.
"Uh—thanks. Maybe around 2 or 3? He didn't get up until like 6 today, so that gives us plenty of time."

"Alright, see you then, Mr. Phoenix."

"Sam, it's Sam." He sighed as the line went dead. Just because these guys knew about alien hunting didn't mean they had to know anything about normal human interaction. Maybe that even helped.

With sunlight as an effective barrier in their sleeping quarter, Paul had to resort to sitting on the ground in the darkest corner when he couldn't sleep. Not that the supernatural pull of the setting sun wouldn't eventually force him back to his perch, but for several minutes, he sort of liked just sitting back and listening to the echoing waves outside crashing into the bluffs.

"What's on your mind?" Dwayne always seemed to know when he couldn't sleep. He had drifted down from his perch so silently that Paul hadn't even noticed him at first.

Paul looked up at him, "you, uh—you remember how long it took me to make my first kill?"

Dwayne settled down beside him, "too long." He replied, looking out at the sun.

"You have been given something wonderful," Max explained patiently, examining his glasses closely to ensure he'd properly polished them to his satisfaction. "I would have preferred if my two boys had consulted with me first, mind you, but I shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth too closely. Now, tell me, will you be joining us tonight, or will I have to continue to keep this door locked until I get the proper answer from you?"

Paul glared at him, clenching his teeth in frustration and hunger, "where's David?" He didn't want to be around Max and he certainly didn't want to do anything he asked.

"There, you see, that's just the sort of thing I don't want to hear. Show your loyalty to me, first. After all, it is my blood that is working its magic on you at the moment. When you are prepared to speak to me respectfully, then you can see David. Dwayne, as well, though I daresay he isn't still waiting outside as if I were about to let him in any minute now." This asshole talked too much.

He wrapped his arms around his stomach, closing his eyes to try and focus, "I'm hungry." He bit out sharply, it had already been two weeks since he had drank the blood David offered him. Thought it was just old wine.

"Truly, that's a shame, my boy. It really is," Max replied lightly, replacing his glasses and leaving the room. The click of the lock was deafening.

"Let me out! David!" He pounded against the door, before losing what little energy he had and sliding to the floor, "I need to eat, please." He was beginning to break. A fracture in his psyche formed that night, and it never quite healed.

Paul stretched his arms above his head, peering up at David and Marko, who slept (literally) like the dead. "We shouldn't hold off too long on the kill," he remarked. "Does funny things to a guy."

"We won't let what happened to you, happen to him. Max is long dead, he can't hurt any of us anymore."

Paul smirked, "don't think David could wait that long even if he tried." They all knew that determined look in their leader's eyes.
Dwayne laughed, "true, for as patient as he tends to be there are those times he is more than happy to jump the gun."

Even though he was silently resting, Paul didn't doubt David heard every word they said. "He's a little nuts," in Paul's mind, that was a compliment.

Dwayne nudged him with his shoulder, "and you're not?"

"Oh, I'm batshit," Paul replied, snickering, "but I make it look good."

Dwayne shook his head, "come on, let's get some sleep, we have a halfling to play with tomorrow."

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**Santa Carla, Frog residence, entry #43, journal #27. 1600 hours.**

As of 1500 hours, Thursday, first mission with Mister Phoenix proved successful. Truth, justice, and American way is safe for now. Brother accompanied me to the Emerson residence. Was forced to threaten dog into silence. Mister Phoenix did not appreciate. Alan distracted his mother while I assisted Mister Phoenix in examination of possible pod person posing as brother. Suspicions confirmed when pod person woke and threatened us into leaving the room.

Currently discussing possible extermination options with Mister Phoenix. Possible infestation of Santa Carla.

"Ed, will you put that book down and help me pick Mike's lock?" Sam whined, yanking a paper clip from the doorknob and trying to turn it unsuccessfully.

"This is important, we have to document everything."

Sam scowled at him, retorting "kinda hard when you're not doing anything. How was lifting his shirt supposed to help us figure out if he's an alien again? Because you know, it really looked like you were just trying to get busy with my brother."

"Gotta look for marks! They all have them." He said, sounding annoyed.

"Listen, I just want you to help me save Mike-if aliens really got to him," Sam explained, keeping his eyes focused on the doorknob as he shoved the paperclip back in to try to jimmy it again, "can you try not to touch him in the process? Everything looked normal under there, and he really will kill you if you try to pull anything else."

"Can't promise anything, Mr. Phoenix. Gotta find out the truth first. If he's got no belly button, we're gonna just have to take care of it."

"There's seriously nothing else you can do? I'm pretty sure I saw a belly button when you were trying to feel him up."

Edgar clapped a hand on his shoulder, turning him slightly, "Sam, if he's a pod person there's nothing we can do except stop him before he helps the aliens take over the world."

"No!" Sam shrugged him off, "we're not killing him! That comic-it said aliens can control people's minds. Hypnotize them. What if he's just my idiot brother, huh? Anyone could probably do it to him, not just aliens. He even failed home ec last year! He's that dumb!"

The door swung open, and the devil himself stood, fuming in front of them, "Sam, you shit-head, leave me alone and stop shouting!" He pointed a finger at Ed, "you keep your distance, you corn-
chip smelling freak. I don't know what the hell you're both planning, but I'm not afraid to kick someone's ass right now if I have to."

Cont. entry #43

Suspicions being confirmed in real time. Alien pod freak threatening assault. Only a pod person would have something to hi-

Sam punched Edgar's arm, making his pen go haywire off of the page, "Ed! Stop writing!"

"Ow!" He hissed, glaring at him, "I told you, I have to keep a record!" He held the little notebook close to his chest, "what do you want to do about him now? Gotta keep him here so he doesn't try to leave."

Michael lashed out, grabbing Edgar by his shirt collar and hauling him forward until they were nose-to-nose, "you wanna repeat that?"

"You're a pod person dude, we can't have you go report back to your alien masters." He managed to say, grabbing his hands.

Michael's look of righteous anger quickly shifted into one of intense confusion, "wh—he let go of Edgar's shirt and shoved him away, rounding on his brother, "Sam are you—I don't…" Unable to form even a response, he stepped back and quickly slammed his door.

"Look what you did, Sam, now we gotta go to plan b." Edgar said with a sigh.

Sam looked visibly shaken, glancing over at Edgar, "plan b?"

"Gotta kill 'im." He said calmly.

"No!" Sam hissed, keeping his voice lower now that they'd woken the beast twice, "can't we just find the mothership and destroy it or something?"

"I guess we could follow him when he goes back."

Sam looked doubtful, "maybe grandpa could give us a ride to the Boardwalk tonight…"

"Well, we gotta do what we gotta do if you're so set on not doing the right thing and just killing him."

He scowled, "he's my brother, no matter what, Ed."

Cont. Entry #43

Mister Phoenix might be potential pod person as well. Will have Alan keep an eye on him during tonight's recon mission.

The hottest bath in hell still wouldn't be hot enough to clear Michael's mind. He finished drying off and quickly got dressed, determined not to track down his little brother and his insane Stallone-wannabe bitch buddy to beat the crap out of them both. He still didn't know what all that weird schizo act outside his bedroom door was about, and frankly he didn't want to. Tomorrow he'd tell mom Sam was probably smoking dope, but right now he was itching to hop on his bike and get out of the house as quickly as possible. He grabbed his jacket from his bedroom and stalked downstairs as quickly as he could manage, dodging Lucy before she noticed him stalking by the kitchen door.
Michael was not expecting agony the moment he got off his bike. He hadn't seen any of the others so just pulled his bike up where they usually parked only to find a sharp pain waiting for him in the form of a bat to his shoulders blades. It took two swings to knock him to the ground. After the first one, he'd gotten his arm hooked around his bike handle and couldn't pull away quick enough.

He'd been in a couple of fights before, but nothing like this. Michael screamed, gripping at his shoulder as he tried to scramble away. He was surrounded by six punk wannabes in sun-bleached shirts, their hair in various states of bright color fired nightmares and styles. They had him trapped.

"Listen," Michael gritted, trying to gulp for air through the throbbing pain in his shoulder and arm, "I don't have any money, alright?"

"Fuck you man, bet you'd like that though, fucking fag." Green mohawk said as the bat came down again.

Out of the frying pan and into the fire, Michael had gone from a house with a couple of nutjobs assaulting him to a whole posse of psychopaths on the boardwalk. If he had at least expected it, or seen them coming, he almost thought he could've held his own. He was on his knees trying to stand up when the bat connected with his other shoulder, knocking him back to the ground again, just as the bat came down one more time and hit home right on his chest where he felt a rib cracking down to his core. The white hot pain searing through him was so intense, he couldn't even summon a scream. Holy shit, he knew he was going to die, could see the intense hatred in the asshole's face as he lifted his bat one more time. Distantly, Michael almost felt like he could take this guy on if he just let go-of something. He didn't know what. He tasted salt and iron on his tongue. As the bat descended one more time a black gloved hand lashed out, grabbing the bat inches before contact.

"I warned you assholes before not to fuck with us." David's voice was cold as he stood over Michael's prone form, blue eyes locked on the punks who had been wailing on him.

Dwayne, Paul, and Marko appeared behind him, each in turn looking less like the guys Michael knew them to be, and more—vicious. There was something dangerous about them tonight. A look. An unspoken vibe Michael could actually feel. A weird thought struck him in that moment as the pain in his shoulder and ribs seemed to numb. He was one of them.

The six punks glared at the newcomers, looking ready to fight before they seemed to see something in David's gaze. Green mohawk scoffed at them, looking down his nose as though he were better than them. "Come on, they're not worth it." He said, tugging his bat out of David's grasp and walking away.

They waited until the punks were well out of sight before Paul offered Michael a hand. He looked back at them, "I need a hospital," Michael rasped, afraid to move.

"Easy Michael," David pulled the flask from his coat, "we can get you to one but take a drink, it'll help with the pain, it's not like it'll be easy to ride like that."

Unconsciously, he licked his lips the second the flask came into view, and eagerly took it as Paul helped him sit up. Michael bit back a groan of pain when his ribs and shoulder seemed to scream at him even from that small movement. He didn't know how to break it to them that there was no way in hell he'd be able to ride at all for awhile. The flask was empty before Michael even realised it, the strange wine burning a trail down to his stomach. He was getting addicted to this stuff.

"Just sit and relax, we could take you to the hotel, it's closer than a hospital and Dwayne knows how to take care of injuries." David said calmly, urging him to accept.
His mom would freak out if he had to call her from the ER. Michael wasn't sure he wanted to do that to her. Besides, he actually didn't feel as bad as he thought. David was right. The wine did help with the pain. A lot. He almost felt he should decline the offer for help altogether, but when Michael met David's gaze, locking eyes with him, he felt compelled to accept.

"Okay," Michael nodded, as a sudden feeling of calm washed over him, "sure." He didn't need their help standing. Maybe he wasn't hurt as bad as he'd thought.

"Ride with me, one of the boys will bring your bike." He said, walking over to where they had parked. He kept an eye on Michael as he moved, looking worried.

Michael looked at his bike and then David's a little doubtfully, but didn't complain. Just this once, it was okay. He could ride home on his own in the morning if he really had to.

Dwayne, Paul, and Marko followed David to their bikes, with Michael close behind. He passed his keys reluctantly to Dwayne.

"What if they come back and take a potshot at your ride?" Michael asked.

"I'll make sure they never walk again." He deadpanned. Somehow Michael knew he would.

"What did you do to piss them off?" Michael asked, climbing onto David's bike behind him, feeling only a little weird about it. He really would like to know why that group of complete strangers tried to kill him tonight, because he didn't doubt they would have if David and the rest of the bikers hadn't shown up in time.

"They don't like that we run this town, have never liked it, so they saw a new guy with us, figured they'd take you out in a kind of temper tantrum. Proof of dominance, well, attempted proof. All this did was piss me off, you should really stay with us Michael, safety in numbers. You know they'll come after you again."

Less than a week in Santa Carla, and somehow Michael was in a gang. That should probably bother him, but it didn't. He wasn't hurting anyone.

The ride back to the hotel seemed to be over in the blink of an eye. Throughout, Michael didn't even feel so much as a twinge of pain. Even as they climbed off the bikes together and made their way into the gated entrance. His eyes scanned over a few warning signs in passing. "How are you not paranoid this place is going to fall apart or collapse?"

"We've reinforced it and the signs keep out unwanted visitors. Well, most of them, thrill seekers are still a problem." David said, keeping an eye on him as they headed inside.

Marko lingered beside David in the doorway, whispering something Michael didn't quite catch. David nodded and Marko skipped out of the lobby through a passage hidden in the back. Michael gave David a questioning look, but shrugged it off and made his way over to the couch. Paul hopped onto the edge of the fountain, balancing precariously as he circled it with his arms held out.

"Sit down and relax, you should be resting, Dwayne will come take a look at you and I'll get you something to drink." David said, heading off the way Marko went.

Michael relaxed, settling into the couch cushion. Paul stopped on the very edge of the fountain lip with one foot in the air and both arms still out to hold his balance.

"Took us awhile to get this place fixed up," he remarked.
Michael looked back up at him, "fixed up?"

"Yeah, after it crashed into the crack, when we found it the place was practically in ruins. We fixed it up, made sure it wasn't going to collapse." He started walking again, balancing perfectly on the fountain.

He was talking about it as if the earthquake that swallowed the hotel happened only yesterday. Like they were even old enough to remember it. Michael's eyes traveled around the lobby. There were signs here and there of their work. A beam propped up in a corner where a patch of old roof seemed to sag. Odd bits of fresh plaster where there should have been rock. There was no way these guys had kept this place together without help. Maybe it was a local hangout that got passed down from one group to another, because left alone it should've fallen apart years ago.

Michael looked back at Paul with a wry smirk, "must've taken years."

Paul smirked at him, "oh, you have no idea." He glanced toward the entrance, "Dwayne! Your patient awaits!" He said with a grin.

"I think I'm fine," Michael said, rubbing at his injured shoulder. It only really hurt when he touched it now. He hardly believed it. Either he hadn't been hit as hard as he'd thought, or whatever was in that wine had some mind-blowing painkillers mixed in.

Just then, what sounded like a woman's scream tore through the air, and Michael jumped up, "what the fuck was that?!" He looked around, eyes darting back towards the corridor David and Marko had disappeared behind. A large white dog appeared, gliding towards them and leaping towards Dwayne to greet him.

"Just Thorn," Dwayne replied, "he likes to howl."

Michael frowned, grabbing his chest when a sharp twinge in his ribs forced him to sit back down. "Didn't sound like a dog," he said quietly.

"Definitely a dog." Paul laughed.

Marko soon joined them in the lobby, hopping up beside the fountain to shove Paul aside and play his own balancing game, "did I miss anything good?"

"No," Michael shook his head, watching Dwayne crouch down beside the dog, "I didn't know you guys had a pet.

"Thorn? Yep, he's a good boy, aren't you, Thorn?" Marko grinned, looking at the happy dog.

Paul gave Marko's hair a playful tug, dropping down beside the fountain to dig around the treasure trove of watches and trinkets they'd managed to fill it with. Michael didn't ask how they managed to get so many rusty-looking valuables. Maybe they liked to hit up junkyards on the weekend.

"Got it!" Paul shouted in victory, pulling out a long, dirty bone and tossing it across the lobby for Thorn to chase. Dwayne gave him a dark look and strolled over to the couch to sit down opposite Michael.

"Take your jacket and shirt off so I can take a look at your ribs."

He complied easily enough. It was one thing to make sure he hadn't been injured so badly that he might need some serious medical attention, at least he wasn't being molested by his little brother's weird friend. Michael tossed his jacket over the back of the couch, peeling his white shirt off and
pulling it over his head. No broken skin, thankfully, but he had several gnarly bruises on his chest and shoulder. Yet he couldn't shake the feeling that it should be a lot worse...

Paul just couldn't seem to help himself, Dwayne mused as he watched Thorn bring the femur right back for one more game of fetch. Soon enough the hellhound would be stripping it apart and enjoying the fruits of his labor. These last few nights, they'd kept him in the back of the hotel until David had shared enough blood with Michael for the creature to realize he wasn't a snack. Under David's command, Thorn would behave himself, but he didn't want to take the risk.

"It's not so bad," Dwayne remarked, examining the patchy bruises. If he were fully turned, they'd practically be gone by now. As it stood, he'd still need more of David's blood to finish the job. That, or make a kill, which they hadn't quite planned for just yet.

"Felt like I was gonna die," Michael replied, reaching for his shirt.

"You'll be alright," he prodded slightly at his ribs, "nothing's broken. I've seen worse, experienced worse, you'll be fine. Some rest will do you good. You should stay here for now, did they hit you in the head at all?"

Michael shook his head, "no," he said, "guess I got lucky."

Dwayne nodded, "no risk of a concussion then, still, rest, we'll get you something to eat and drink."

Michael nodded, laying back on the arm of the couch and letting his shirt fall to the ground. It was hot in the hotel tonight, and there was no rush to get dressed again. Dwayne could sense David's approach behind them without needing to turn to look.

"I'm dying," Dwayne whispered calmly, resting his head on the discarded saddle bags. At least the thieves had left him that much, even after they took his horse and shot him in the gut. No thanks for small favors. At least he wasn't going to die alone, he reasoned, staring up at the blonde hovering over him. Could be a devil, or it could be an angel. Hard to tell.

"Dwayne, do you want to live?" He asked, crouching down beside him, his black duster spreading out across the ground behind him.

He'd nod if he thought it was worth the effort. "Who are you?" Dwayne asked, twisting his fingers into the blood that had puddled on his shirt and pants. He was colder than he'd ever been in his life, and hotter than hell all at the same time.

"David," he said, slitting his wrist, "the man who's going to save your life." He held out his wrist, blood welling up, "drink and live."

No, definitely not an angel.

"What were you doing back there?" Michael asked, interrupting Dwayne's thoughts as David drew up behind the couch.

"Making sure Marko wasn't getting into things he shouldn't. We just can't leave him alone, he likes to go through our stuff."

"Hey," Marko blurted out, hopping off of the fountain and slamming down beside Paul, "I didn't see your name on anything back there."

David shook his head, tossing the flask to Michael, "refilled it for you too. How're you feeling?"
Michael caught the flask easily, "I'm alive," he replied, "not too sure I will be much longer if you guys keep trying to get me hammered." He unscrewed the lid, not visibly upset at the idea, "do you have a barrel on tap back there or something?"

David laughed, "you could say that." He looked over at Dwayne, "you alright?"

"First time you've shared your blood with a human in years," Dwayne mused, fishing an unlit joint from his jacket pocket and checking the ends to make sure it wasn't torn or crushed too badly. Max had seen to it after David turned Dwayne, it was only Max's blood that could be shared. They hadn't tried to bring a new member into their pack since they'd killed him. It took some getting used to.

"Can you feel him?" David asked, glancing between them.

Dwayne looked at Michael thoughtfully. The brunette's eyes were closed in relaxed bliss as he enjoyed David's blood, freshly drawn into the flask.

"Yes," Dwayne admitted, "a little more now than last night, and more then than the night before. He's lucky."

David raised an eyebrow, "lucky?"

Dwayne rolled his eyes, smirking and looking away as he leaned his head against his hand and propped his elbow up on the armrest beside him, "no bullet to the gut. No one locking him up until he goes crazy," he paused, glancing back at David, "no one threatening to kill him for existing. He's lucky. Sooner or later you're gonna have to tell him what we are."

"No Max," he said as though that explained everything, "this should push him past the point of no return."

Michael lowered the flask, licking his lips. The haze of thirst wasn't quite as strong as it might have been the first time, and certainly not the night they'd jumped from the bridge when David had bared his throat to the human. Still, he was calm, relaxed. Hardly concerned about the punks who'd tried to kill him on the boardwalk anymore.

"No return?" Dwayne asked. The only way to end this now would be if someone killed their pack leader, and the chances of that happening were slim. Why would this be a point of no return? Even one drink would have seen to that.

"You can turn from just the blood. Taking in enough of it without a kill will still turn you but at a certain point not even the sire's death will stop the turn."

David was always full of surprises. Even now. "So at some point there's..." Dwayne trailed off, beginning to eye Michael intently as the patches of bruises along his chest and shoulder began to slowly fade. Like ink spots melting off of a white cotton sheet.

Michael seemed to suddenly notice the attention on him, and looked down. At first, it didn't quite seem to dawn on him what was happening, and he drew a hand up to press at the skin where the last of the bruises were disappearing.

"What the fuck?!" He blurted out, dropping the flask and scrambling off of the couch. They probably should have waited for him to put his shirt back on before giving him the blood.
Chapter 4

Sam looked worriedly toward the door. Mike still hadn't come back yet and he was getting more and more worried as time went by. Who knows what those aliens could be doing to him right now but they had no idea where he went.

"Let's go over the plan again," Edgar suggested, shining his flashlight in Sam's face. "Do you remember the plan?" It was hard to see his or Alan's intense look of scrutiny with the damn light in his eyes. There seemed to be no point where this pair would be anything but absolutely ridiculous.

"We wait until he gets back, wait for him to sleep, wrap him in a blanket so we can hold him, and tie him up with a couple of his stupid jump ropes." Sam said with a sigh, this was a horrible idea but it was the only one they had. Mike needed to be protected from himself, or from aliens, or whatever.

Edgar lowered the flashlight, turning his head to peer out of Sam's bedroom window in such an obvious way that Sam only assumed he was trying to look dramatic. "There's a lot of stuff out there we don't know, Mister Ph—Sam, things ready to take on the human race and blow us into smithereens." He clapped a hand on Alan's shoulder, dropping his flashlight to do the same to Sam, "and we're the only ones who can stop them."

The rumble of Michael's motorcycle split the suddenly uncomfortable silence, "shit, he's back, he's here, we gotta be ready."

"Thought you said he liked to stay out all night," Alan grumbled, reaching quickly for Edgar's flashlight and hefting it up like a weapon.

"He has been! I don't know why he's suddenly back." Sam said worriedly, fingers closing on the nearest thing within reach, not even caring that it was one of grandpa's creepy projects.

"No problem, we just change the plan a little," Alan stated gruffly, hopping to his feet and destroying the blanket fort they'd constructed on Sam's bedroom floor. Nanook leapt from the bed to join the trio, thinking it was a game.

The door slammed and Michael's voice echoed up the stairs, "son of a bitch."

He sounded freaked-out. "Nanook, calm down," Sam whispered, pushing his dog away even as the husky tried to playfully gnaw on his hand. "Guys, maybe we should come up with a different plan. Mike sounds pissed," and Sam knew his brother was even worse when he was ticked off. "He could've found out we were right about aliens!" Sam suggested. That would actually make things a lot easier, too! No need to hogtie him or trap him with a blanket or anything else verging on being absolutely insane. Sam kept one hand on the stuffed animal anyway, despite his hopes that maybe they could just talk this through. Better safe than sorry.

"How can this be happening?" Mike mumbled, taking the stairs two at a time, "fuck!" He stopped in front of Sam's door, "Sam? What are you doing?" He asked, voice almost deadly calm, "does mom know you have those corn chip smelling brothers here?"

"Mike!" Sam yelped, lifting the-badger? Maybe. It kinda looked like a badger, "just be honest with me, Mike, are you a-" Before he could get his sentence out, Alan and Edgar gave a war cry, lifting both ends of the blanket from their demolished fort and charging at Michael.

"Die, alien scum!" Alan bellowed.
For as little time as he had to react, Michael was surprisingly not caught by the blanket wielding brothers. He sidestepped gracefully out of the way, growling low in his throat.

"Holy crap!" Sam shouted, "Ed, Alan!" He stood up, raising the badger above his head, "Mike, I don't wanna do this, but you gotta be honest with me! Tell us where the aliens are, so we can fix you!"

The Frog brothers cursed, stumbling into the wall and getting nearly tangled in the blanket in the process. Just enough time to reason with Mike before they went on the attack again. They were just lucky mom had to take sleeping pills tonight or she'd be livid.

Michael scowled, "aliens? The fuck you talking about? There's no aliens," his lips pulled back from his newly grown fangs, "just vampires."

"What?!" Sam squeaked, clutching the badger close just as Nanook padded around him and pulled his own lips back in a protective snarl.

"Don't believe him, Sam," Edgar warned, "he's a pod person. Everyone knows vampires aren't real. He just wants to inject you with his venom."

Alan gave yet another war cry and yanked the blanket above his head, diving towards Michael yet again. Michael grabbed the blanket, jerking it out of his hands, and wrapping it around him instead.

"Let's see how you like it you little shit!" He snarled angrily.

"Mike!" Sam yelped, rushing forward. He didn't want anyone getting hurt, least of all his brother, but he also didn't want his brother killing Alan or Edgar tonight.

"Let him go, galactic space-dick!" Edgar demanded, leaping onto Michael's back as Alan struggled in his grasp.

It was when Sam finally managed to reach the trio, ready to bust the badger wide open on someone's head, that grandpa came stomping down the hallway in his house slippers and bathrobe hanging wide open over his hairy old-man belly and sagging boxers. "Enough!" He shouted, causing them all to halt in their steps.

Michael turned to face him, his eyes flashing gold but the fangs were gone, he just looked, angry. "Get off me." He shrugged, sending Edgar plummeting to the floor.

"Rules," grandpa Emerson grumbled, "we got rules around here." He leveled a stern glare at each and every one of them, even Alan who'd been released from Michael's grasp and held the blanket over his head now like the Virgin Mary. The old man's eyes finally settled in Michael.

"You boys follow me down to the kitchen. Now." He turned around, shuffling towards the stairs, "most dumbasses just get crabs in high school. Maybe even knock a girl up. My own grandson has to go one step further."

All four of them followed him downstairs, walking in silence as they were properly cowed by the old man.

"Lucky your ma sleeps like the damn dead," grandpa Emerson snapped, yanking open the fridge door. "Now sit. All of you. We gotta talk," he pointed a finger at Edgar Frog just as he looked like he was about to open his mouth, "you say one word, boy, your hide'll see the backside of my paddle. Don't think I don't have one parked in the coat closet."
"But grandpa! Mike's a pod person! Aliens are trying to take him over!" Sam exclaimed.

Michael glared at him, "I'm not a damn pod person."

"No," the old man replied, grabbing a bottle of root beer and rounding on them as he slammed the fridge door behind him, "you're just a goddamn vampire. Thought they was all wiped out twenty years ago when the locals stopped washing up on the beach so much." He popped open his root beer and flicked the cap towards the kitchen table as all four of the boys sat down.

"So he's not an alien?" Sam asked, not sure whether he should be relieved or even more horrified.

"No," the old man gave Sam a look that may very well be questioning his intelligence before he redirected his attention to Michael, "seeing as you was walkin' about before daytime yesterday, and you came back home early tonight, I take it you ain't killed no one yet."

Michael scowled, "no, I haven't killed anyone, what does that have to do with anything?"

"You ever watch Dracula? Kills people, Michael. Vampires kill people. So you tell me right now what got you so worked up you came home stomping up the stairs like you had ghosts bitin' your ass, if you wasn't out there thinking about killin' someone."

"I wasn't thinking about killing anyone but I am now." He shot a look at the Frog brothers, "I was thinking about the fact that I've been drinking blood."

"Gross!" Sam shouted, gagging a little, "Mike, what the Hell?! You drank someone's blood?"

Grandpa Emerson sighed, "I take it you didn't know you was drinkin' blood? How's that work?"

"It was in a flask, thought it was alcohol." He replied, looking offended, "it tasted good."

"Sure as hell lucky you wasn't some bimbo at a bar," the old man grumbled, taking a long gulp of root beer. He wiped the froth from his chin stubble, "never figured you for a genius, but that was stupid, Michael."

"How was I supposed to know?! What? Am I supposed to look at an offered drink and say, 'oh, I wonder if this is blood'?"

"No, but you tell me how well you knew whoever gave you this flask before you went hog wild on it. You know anyone real well before you came down to Santa Carla? What if it was poison? What if they was just trying to kill and rob you? Woulda been a hell of a lot cleaner just giving you a flask of drain-o."

"What the fuck, grandpa, do you think everyone is trying to kill you?" Michael said and Sam's eyes went wide, unbelieving that he had actually sworn at the old man.

"I ain't the one with a set of grade A chompers in my mouth, boy!" Their grandpa snapped back, "besides, lotta commies around here. Never know for sure."

"It's true," Edgar agreed, immediately closing his mouth when the old man glanced at him.

"What do you expect me to do? It's not like I can go back and change anything."

"Nothing for it now, I suppose." Grandpa shrugged, "you're gonna have to kill whoever gave you that blood if you wanna go back to normal."

His eyes went wide and Sam could see fear there, "I..." he swallowed hard, "how?" His voice came
out strained.

The old man looked thoughtful, "lotta ways. Get it out in the sunlight, though can't see you keepin' your eyes up long enough to make it to the front door. Could ram a stake through its heart. Cut off its head. Any of it'll work. There more than one of them?"

"Him, he's not an it." He said softly.

The old man frowned, a hint of sadness creeping into his eyes, "guess you can't bring yourself to do it, can you?"

"I…" he looked away, sighing heavily, "I don't know."

"Alright," Grandpa Emerson stated simply, "then stay home. He comes looking for you, we'll deal with it then. If ya don't leave the house, and ya don't kill anyone, then everything'll be okay. I think I can see about getting you some pig's blood from my butcher in the morning, get some variety mixed in once I've got my new batch of critters come in."

Sam knew he'd probably grown visibly pale at the thought, but he managed not to say anything. His head was reeling with all this new information, and he didn't doubt the Frog brothers were equally as confused. He glanced over at the pair, gratified to know that for once they looked like they were at a loss for words. Right now, anyway.

Michael looked disgusted at the thought of animal blood, "and what? Are you going to go kill them?" His eyes narrowed, turning golden.

"That's up to you. Up to them too. They threaten us, I'm not gonna hold back, Michael," the old man replied, "but right now I don't see you being the sort to chew us all up for a late night snack. Am I wrong?"

He glared at the brothers again, "I'm tempted, especially if they come after me again, I'm not sure I'll be able to hold back."

"They won't!" Sam promised, "please don't kill them, Mike, they just wanted to help." Even to him it sounded like a lame excuse, but in their own way the Frog brothers had the best intentions.

"How the hell did you get the idea for aliens? I mean really, Sam, I didn't think you were that stupid." Michael said, "what were you going to do if you got that blanket over me? What was your grand plan?"

Sam looked down at the table sheepishly, "I dunno. Ask you where the mothership was, find out why they tried to abduct us the other night when they were shining their lights in the kitchen…" It sounded dumber and dumber as he explained himself, but at least he was right about something. Michael definitely wasn't on drugs.

"Mothership?" He looked confused before seeming to realize what he meant, "they rode their bikes, were wondering where I was. Didn't you hear them?"

"No. You were just shouting random sh-" Sam glanced over at his grandpa, "-stuff. Frog brothers said aliens can talk in each other's heads because they have transmitters."

"It's just a theory," Alan mumbled defensively.

"Just, keep them away from me. I almost died tonight, I'm not in the mood for any of this shit."
"Deal," Sam agreed quickly.

Grandpa Emerson finished off the last of his root beer, "you boys, all of you, go to bed. We'll talk about this later once it's just the three of us. Better not drag your ma into this either." He paused, "Michael, those boys are stupid, but I think saying they almost killed you is a little far."

"They didn't, some assholes on the boardwalk tried to beat me to death."

"What?" Sam blurted out, "why?!" Never mind that he had pretty much attempted assault with a stuffed badger on his brother, he hadn’t been looking to use lethal force.

He shrugged, "because they're assholes and I was an easy target. They don't like guys with bikes."

Grandpa Emerson scratched his chin thoughtfully, "you're havin' one hell of a bad week, Michael."

Michael gave him a wry smile, "tell me about it."

David fell asleep with the others, his thoughts on Michael and what he was going through. Turning wasn't easy and David's had been much harder than any of the other boys'. Michael's was going smoothly, was actually relatively gentle.

Max forced him down, the blood pouring past David's lips as he struggled against the stronger man. He didn't want this. Max had taken him from his home, from his family, had slaughtered them all in front of him, and was now forcing him to drink his blood. He had refused the man once. Max had approached him with the offer of eternal life and David had refused. He didn't fear death, no one really did in this day and age, death was common place enough that David really had no fear of his life ending. So he had refused but Max didn't want to take no for an answer.

"Let me go," he gasped for breath, the blood burning down his throat as he struggled beneath him, fingers gripping at Max's wrist where his fingers were wrapped around his throat.

"I wish you'd made this easier," Max bemoaned, keeping him pinned as easily as he would a difficult puppy, "don't worry, David. You'll enjoy your new life. Welcome to the family, son."

David screamed, sobbing into the night as the blood began its dark work. He cried for the loss of his family and the loss of his life with the bastard who did this to him standing over him smugly.

"I'll kill you for this, one day, I'll kill you for what you did to my family." David vowed, looking up at him with tear tracks down his cheeks.

David was wrenched from his dream, the memories still fresh even now, more than a century after his death. Raw. Bitter. Even more jarring, because he never dreamed. None of them did. Michael. He could feel the link between them and in that moment knew that he had seen the dream, that they had shared it.

"Michael, now you know." He whispered into the halfling's mind. Maybe it would ease some of the night's unpleasant conversation, when Michael had found out what they were and David had been forced to come clean. It might have been easier if Paul wasn't cracking jokes the whole time. Now it was just a matter of waiting for Michael to come to them. He was part of the pack after all.

When Michael was wrenched from his nightmare, the sun slicing through his window shades made him recoil under his blanket and snatch his sunglasses from the bed stand in the process. God, it was even worse than yesterday. He was sure if he really tried, he'd smell himself cooking. It was too
bright to sleep now. Somehow he knew the dream he'd just had wasn't just his own, either. A memory? How was that even possible.

He pulled his blanket even tighter around himself. How was any of this bullshit possible? He wasn't even safe in his own home. Sam had brought home a pair of idiots just itching to kill him, or at the very least perform some bizarre experiment. He didn't put it past them not to try to molest him in his sleep again, which was why he had the dresser barricading his bedroom door.

David was old. They all were. Michael could feel it in the dream. Old enough to have lived through his grandpa's lifetime at least three times over. Just thinking about it made him feel almost insignificant in the grand scheme of things. His fingers twitched around the top of his comforter where the sun hit them, and he immediately pulled his hands into blessed darkness. He knew he'd regret it later, but Michael couldn't stay in the house today. He had to go back. Something was pulling him there, twisting his stomach into knots and making his head ache with a dull throb. He couldn't fight it.

Michael told himself it wasn't that bad. He told himself he just needed some extra sunscreen. He'd pick it up at the boardwalk. He told himself he could fix everything as he crawled out of bed across the floor and grabbed his jacket from the edge of his desk chair. There were a lot of empty lies he told himself, throughout the long and hazy journey to his bike. Lucy was in the front garden, tending to a fresh patch of roses with a pair of dark sunglasses and a floppy hat. She just barely missed him.

He was so busy focusing on the ride, on the way the sun made him want to shrivel up inside himself and die, the way it seemed to get better as he got closer and closer to the hotel-he didn't notice his grandpa's car kicking into gear as he drove way, or his determined brother and henchmen following at a distance inside.

David was waiting for him when he made his way into the hotel, the blonde vampire was sitting in the shadows, rocking back and forth slightly, seemingly lost in thought.

Michael glared back at him, his temper cool enough for the time being to keep him from doing something really stupid. "I don't want this. I don't want to be a monster." He couldn't quite tack on the unspoken words 'like you'. That dream still clung to his thoughts. Bothered him.

"There's no going back, Michael. I've made this as gentle on you as I can." His eyes were golden as he looked at him, "you must be hungry, come, drink." He offered his wrist out like a sacrifice.

"What?" Michael blurted out, torn between disbelief and the sudden roar of hunger springing to life as if it had been lying in wait all along. He couldn't look away from it. David's blood. Painting his wrist in one mesmerizing thread of rich ruby satin pooling to the floor.

"Making your first kill isn't the only way to turn. If you drink enough you will as well."

"Then I won't drink," Michael told him, his voice faltering. Somehow in only a few days he'd become an addict.

David chuckled, "alright then, suit yourself." He clenched his fist slightly, watching the blood well up from the cut he made in his wrist, "you know," he said conversationally, "even if you could somehow kill me it wouldn't change anything. Not that I can see you actually killing me and that old man is way past his prime." It was as if he knew the conversation he had had with his grandpa.

Michael clenched his jaw, feeling the unfamiliar and familiar itch in his gums as he just barely managed to keep control. If he could just look away. "How did you know about him?" He managed, trying not to breathe in the scent of David's blood. It would be too much for him if he did.
David tapped his temple, "you were broadcasting the conversation. We're connected, Michael, I can feel you just as I know you can feel me." His blood dripped to the ground in fat drops as it slid down his fingers, wasted.

Michael told himself he was going to leave, go home and bury himself under the covers like he should have, but somehow his feet seemed to have other plans, and he inched closer to the source of all his problems and the solution to his hunger. "I don't want this," Michael reaffirmed weakly.

"I know but you'll like it, trust me." He said, sounding sure of himself, "this is what you were born for."

He was close. So close. He could leave now. How had it come to this? Michael fell to his knees, reaching for David's bleeding wrist, and even the voice in his mind trying to pull him back was growing weaker with the passing seconds now that he was so close.

"Go ahead, take as much as you want, as much as you need." David said softly, looking down at him with blue eyes tinged with gold. He sat there in his wheelchair throne like some dark god, blood dripping slowly to the ground from the still open wound in his wrist.

This man in front of Michael was every selfish desire he had ever denied himself, and god, he was too weak to turn away from what was freely offered. Michael pressed his lips to David's wrist, the dream of the night at the ridge returning in brilliant, bright clarity. It wasn't a dream, and he was still falling.

David's fingers came up and ran through his hair, "that wasn't so hard now, was it?" He asked softly, the sun finishing its descent, the last rays disappearing behind the horizon.

"So what do we do now?" Sam asked, squeezing the steering wheel and staring towards the rickety stairs that led up into the condemned work site. They weren't exactly sure what this place was, but it sure as hell didn't look very safe.

Edgar puffed out his chest, "we go in there and find the self destruct button." He said, sounding sure of himself.

"Grandpa said they were vampires," Sam pointed out, "maybe we should come up with another plan. Do you know anything about vampires, guys?"

They both shook their heads, "come on, they have to be like vampire aliens or something, let's just go in there and take a look at least." Ed said adamantly.

Sam groaned, "okay, we can go inside and look—but we can't make a scene! If there's vampires or aliens or vampire aliens in there I don't want to be dinner! I don't want my brother getting hurt either."

Slowly, the trio made their way inside, the sun was setting, it's rays slowly disappearing. The sight inside made them all freeze, Michael was on his knees, grasping the blonde's wrist, his mouth sealed over it. He was drinking his blood.

"Holy shit, Mike!" Sam blurted out, immediately blowing their cover and the element of surprise in one disgusted exclamation.

"Dude..." Alan mumbled, wrinkling his nose.

Michael pulled back from the blonde's wrist, wiping at his mouth as he turned back to look at the
trio, a little dazed and very irritated.

The blonde laid a hand on his head, looking at the trio.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in. Hello, boys."

"Let go of my brother!" Sam shouted, eyes darting around for a weapon, unsuccessfully. He didn't even have a stupid stuffed badger.

"Damn it, Sam, you followed me?" Michael asked, exasperated. He didn't pull away from the monster at his side.

The blonde held his hands up, "I'm not holding him here."

"Mike, I don't know what they're making—well, I guess I do know what they're making you do here, but come home! We can fight them!"

Michael scowled, "seriously, Sam? Go away. I'm fine." He looked like he was high, or under some weird spell. They had to do something!

The blonde was unimpressed. "Go home, Sammy, you don't want to be here when the others wake up." He paused, "there's nothing for you here, you're too late anyway, Michael is mine."

For a second, an instant, Michael looked like he was going to say something in his defence. Maybe he was breaking through the hypnosis. Instead, he just closed his eyes and leaned back against the monster's leg, too exhausted to talk, blood staining his lips.

"Mike, please," Sam whimpered. "What about mom? What's she gonna say?"

"I think we need to come up with a better plan," Edgar whispered into Sam's ear. "He's a space cadet now."

The blonde's eyes locked on them, "hungry, Michael?"

Michael opened his eyes, and Sam but back a horrified gasp at the sight of his brother's eyes. Gold. Creepy. "I'm thinking about it," Michael admitted, looking at viciously at Edgar and Alan in particular.

Edgar and Alan grabbed Sam by the shoulders and began to back out, "maybe we need to do more research," Edgar mumbled.

"Yeah," Alan agreed, "lose the battle, win the intergalactic war, y'know?"

"Could have a little takeout before the boys wake up." He said softly.

Sam squeaked, stumbling back with the Frog brothers as they began to practically drag him to the door, "Mike!" He shouted, "Mike!"

Michael cringed pressing his hands to his temples, "I'm not gonna eat him," he told David flatly, leaning back against him. "Not tonight," he added irritably as they both disappeared from sight once Sam was safely pulled outside.

Winning felt so very good and having Michael relaxed and pliant against his leg was even better. Their connection was strong and David knew he could have forced him to eat one of his brother's little friends but when he made his first kill of his own volition it would be even better.
'How're you feeling?' He asked, trailing his fingers through his hair gently. It was becoming a habit.

'I have a headache,' Michael replied, 'and my little brother just had a shit-fit about a minute ago to make it even worse. Other than that, I'm feeling pretty good.' After this last feeding, some of the fight had gone out of him. A little more humanity, gone forever.

'Good, we should go out and get you something to eat tonight, if you're up for it.' The boys were looking forward to a good hunt after all, 'if not we can just stay in, relax, you can drink from me if you're hungry.'

Michael sat up, pulling away from him slightly. 'This is so fucked up,' he said softly.

David pulled him back over, 'relax, man, what's fucked up about it? This is the way things are, just relax, no need to freak out.'

'I'm not freaking out,' he replied defensively, though the heat wasn't really there, 'I drank blood. You guys drink blood. Don't you think that's just a little fucked up?'

He chuckled softly, looking down at him, 'no, humans eat cows, we eat humans, circle of life.'

The silence between them was, in essence, too quiet to be a simple coincidence. The others were lingering in other parts of the hotel on purpose to give them some space. Obviously Dwayne would have ensured that. He couldn't trust Paul or Marko not to butt in where they weren't wanted.

'I'm still human,' Michael said, 'I am.'

David shook his head, 'not really. Does the sound of a nice juicy burger make you want one or would you rather have this?' He asked, slicing into his wrist again, the blood welling up immediately. He had fed well the previous night in preparation for this.

Michael's nostrils flared, 'that's not fair.' His healthy appetite made this much easier than it might have been otherwise. 'I'm not a killer, though,' Michael went on, eagerly pulling David's wrist back to his mouth. He didn't make a very convincing argument.

'Sure.' David replied, shaking his head, 'we'll see.' He laughed softly, watching him drink, watching the humanity continue to drain away. Maybe convincing him to go on a real hunt tonight wouldn't be as hard as he thought.

Once he was satisfied, Michael drew back from David's wrist, instinctually lapping at the cut so it could heal cleanly. 'I was supposed to get a decent job and a girlfriend when we moved here. Now what?'

'Now? Now we go out and have a night on the town, the future is wide open, Michael. Party all night, live forever, this is our city.' David said with a smirk as he got to his feet, 'come on, let's go have some fun!'

Paul's cackle immediately sliced through the air, as the rest of David's pack filtered into the lobby. Marko grinned, looking between them, 'about time.'

Dwayne was the last one in, moving a step behind David as their leader headed outside and into the night.

'I think there's a party tonight.' Their bikes roared to life as the five of them mounted their metal beasts, David making a mental note to get Michael a new bike. He could keep up, but the with way
they partied, sooner or later his tinker toy was going to fall apart.

There were always parties. Always places to go. So many people ready to burn out like aging stars, the boys were doing a service when they helped them along the way. It was no coincidence that the punks who'd assaulted Michael the night before were enjoying themselves with cheap drugs and cheaper beer less than a mile or two from Hudson's bluff, where the lights of the boardwalk were too distant for anyone to see them. The cops too far to care.

They left their bikes in their usual spot, they didn't want to alert their meals that they were coming, it was better to walk, or fly, but Michael hadn't learned that little trick yet.

"Breaking the rules tonight?" Paul asked eagerly, casting his eyes over several groups in passing as their boots hit the sand. It was an evening wonderland of bright bikinis and beer-glazed smiles.

"Yeah," David laid a hand on Michael's shoulder, "it's a celebration! Our new brother is hungry, aren't you, Michael?"

Michael's eyes darted around, restless. David's latest dose of blood still working it's magic. He was lucky he had the rest of them to keep him calm. Instinct could be a very dangerous thing when you were surrounded by fresh, warm life.

"Starving," Michael admitted, his earlier concerns muted, fading away.

"Don't worry, we'll be there soon, think you can hold out a little longer?" They left the crowds behind, heading further down the beach.

He nodded, blinking several times as the light around them dimmed. The gold in his eyes was evident, the very last of what made him human finally burnt away. There was no turning back now. No fighting what they were.

The group of teens that had attacked Michael were blaring music and dancing around a bonfire, shouting taunts and jeers at the sea. David strolled forward, his pack at his back.

"Hello boys, long time no see." He grinned as the music stopped.

Paul looked around, disappointed, "no chicks? Boner city, man."

"What the fuck, man! You punks want more? Last night wasn't enough to make our point. This is our town!" The one who had wielded the bat shouted, striding forward without fear. He practically had beer seeping from his pores as the heat of the bonfire wrapped around him.

Paul, Dwayne, and Marko stood behind David, patient. Even Paul knew not to move an inch unless directed. Thoughts were rushing through Michael's mind, brushing David's. Images of muscle tearing, of blood, curiosity and intense need. He licked his bottom lip, impatient. Desperate. All of it was laced with the single, burning desire for payback.

David smirked, holding up his right hand, making sure Michael could see it, before twitching his fingers, signaling him that he was free to let loose.

Never were few things more satisfying than stripping prey bare of the illusion they had any power. In the end, they were only food. The punk with the bat drew to a halt as Michael dropped his mask, allowing the bones in his face to shift, his fangs descend and ready to tear flesh for the first time. He launched himself forward, claws and teeth tearing into him with all of the repressed glee of a true killer.
"Let's just stop by the comic shop and pick up some research material. The folks are watching the place tonight."

"I don't think we have anything on aliens drinking blood."

"Then we'll have to grab some stuff on vampires and aliens and-uh, we could circle stuff that looks similar. There's got to be a link!"

Alan and Edgar had been arguing back and forth since they got in the car. Ed insisted on taking the wheel, and Sam didn't fight him. If they were going back to the boardwalk, he could probably get away and go back to find his brother. He didn't have a clue what he'd do when he got back, but just reading comics wasn't going to do them much good. They didn't have time to screw around!

They had just made it to the comic shop when he saw them. The whole group of brother stealing alien vampires and Michael was with them, looking perfectly at ease with the other four. He had to go after them, he had to stop his brother before he did something stupid, not that he ever really did anything smart. This whole thing was an effort in stupidity. Of course Sam was the only smart one, he was going to save his brother, one way or another.

"So it's decided," Edgar declared, interrupting Sam's thoughts. They'd gone off on some tangent, and he only half-heard anything they'd been saying up until now. "We secure an alien doll and find the best stabbing points," Edgar went on, "test the best tactics, go from there."

An alien doll? He turned away from them, his brother's back was slowly disappearing down the stairs to the beach and Sam knew what he had to do, he gave chase. He left the Frog brothers behind and ran after Michael. He would have to be careful, he didn't want to get caught, but he would save his brother.

He didn't have a plan, or any ideas what he could really do. The only thing that sprang to mind was just getting Mike away from those guys. It was like all at once he'd become a different person, but Sam couldn't bring himself to believe that there wasn't something left of the brother he knew. They stalked across the beach for what seemed like ages, Sam almost couldn't believe they hadn't noticed him following.

When they finally stopped it was in front of a bonfire party. Sam rushed forward when he saw his brother growl and launch himself at the punks' leader.

In that instant, the others joined in, just as viciously, and Sam witnessed a blood-soaked nightmare worse than anything in a comic or a bedtime story his asshole dad used to tell them when they were little kids. This was real, and Michael—he was a part of it and he looked like he was enjoying it. Sam's world fell apart.

Before he could scream, a pair of rough arms grabbed him from behind and pressed a hand firmly to his mouth, "don't make a sound," grandpa Emerson whispered in his ear.

Sam whimpered, struggling in his arms and making muffled sounds against his hand. The old man was stronger than he looked. The vampires fed and killed and destroyed and Sam couldn't look away.

"C'mon," he hissed, pulling Sam back, practically dragging him away from the carnage, "it's too late to stop, I'm takin' you home."

Sam whimpered and went limp, tears running down his cheeks. His brother was a murderer, what was he going to tell mom?
"He just ditched us!" Alan exclaimed, dumbfounded. "We're trying to help him, and he runs off!"

"We'll just have to save the city ourselves," Edgar replied, "I guess he won't stop us from killing the pod person now."

Alan squinted into the crowd, crossing his arms, "we left our sleeping bags and supplies at his house."

"We'll have to go get it before he gets home." Edgar looked toward the car, "guess we should take it back."

Alan's eyebrows shot up, "you still got the keys?" That made Sam's running off even more unbelievable. Maybe he saw something.

Edgar reached into his pocket, fishing them out, "yeah, I got 'em."

Alan was suddenly stricken with inspiration, "Hey, we can't save the space vamp, but maybe we can soften the blow a little. Tell his mom we saw him drive off a cliff."

"That could work." Edgar said thoughtfully, "come on, let's go get our stuff."

It made perfect sense. They'd be protecting Sam's mom from the truth. Who'd want a pod person for a kid? Nobody in their right mind. Better if he was fish food. Maybe she'd even thank them for telling her.

"Hey," Alan blurted out as they reached the car, "we could say he drove off the cliff because he was fighting aliens off with us. Defending Santa Carla. She'll be real proud to hear that." Then they'd all look like the heroes they were.

Ed nodded, looking quite pleased with the prospect before getting into the car and starting it up. He wasn't the best driver. Stalled out several times before he managed to get her cruising, but in no time they were back at the creepy dead animal manor.

Alan glanced quickly at his brother, "hey-you think maybe that old guy is one of them too?"

"He seemed to know an awful lot, tried to steer us in the wrong direction. Maybe he is."

It made total sense, of course. "So what was Sam's brother doing back there, if he's not really a vampire?" He could swear the guy was actually drinking blood.

"Merging with his alien master. Like communing."

"Dude!" Alan was horrified, "you think if we hadn't interrupted, he'd have-" he hesitated, looking towards the front porch to make sure no one else was listening, "-you think he'd have like merged into one weird mega body? Two heads, gnarly skin, the works?"

Edgar nodded, "it's the only explanation." He replied before they slowly headed toward the porch.

"Something feels wrong," Alan observed, looking around, "I don't trust it."

The old man stepped out of the door as they started sneaking up the steps, his arms crossed over his chest, "get inside, boys, the two of you and Sam are in a world of trouble." He said firmly.
Alan gripped his brother's shoulder firmly, "we'd better do what he says, Ed," he whispered, looking around. They were too late to make a break for it. Didn't have any weapons to defend themselves.

Edgar steeled himself, puffing out his chest and striding forward, seemingly without fear. Sam was sitting at the kitchen table, head bowed, looking dejected, as the brothers walked in, the door closing behind them with a finality that made Alan shiver.

"I'm sorry," Sam mumbled, "I didn't" his voice cracked a little, "-I just wanted to save Mike!"

Alan exchanged a look with his brother as the old man pointed to the kitchen table, and they both quietly sat down together. This was going to be nasty.

"Now I'm a fair man. I'm not gonna rail on you for doing what you thought was right, Sam, but you don't give a man's car keys to a couple of chuckle-heads with less sense than a bag of old apples," the old man grumbled, glaring at the Frog brothers, "what kinda friends let a boy run off after what he went through tonight?"

"He just ran, not like we had time to stop him or anything." Edgar grumbled, glaring at the old man, "we were trying to do the right thing. We have to save the city from pod people."

"You've got to get yourself some professional help!" Grandpa Emerson snapped back, "now all three of you are gonna tell Lucy when she walks through that door that Michael's got some kinda night job and didn't want to work up a fuss about it. He's staying with a friend tonight because he was too tired to ride his bike home. We'll figure it out from there. Understood?"

Alan didn't want to lie, not about something this big, but clearly this guy had no idea what he was doing. He wasn't about to get into a fist fight with a geriatric possum stuffer. Maybe keeping Sam's mom entirely in the dark about aliens was a good thing. For now.

Edgar looked like he was about to protest but the old man cut him off, "don't argue with me, this is how it's gonna be. Think of it as payback for taking my car out for your little joyride."

"We were bringing it here," Alan replied defensively, "we didn't think he was coming back."

"You're all damned lucky I noticed my car went missing, knew you'd pull some stupid stunts and saw Sam on the boardwalk before he went and got himself killed," the old man grumbled.

Just as Edgar was opening his mouth, Sam looked at the pair and quickly shook his head, begging them with his eyes to stop talking. No backbone, this guy.

"Dad," Sam's mom called out from the screen door at the front porch, "I don't see Michael's motorcycle in the yard. Did he go out again?" There was a soft creaking sound of the door opening, followed by a loud clatter and clicking heels as she marched into the kitchen with two paper sacks of groceries held tightly in both arms. "I picked up a few things for the week. Eggs. Celery. Odds and ends."

Grandpa Emerson cleared his throat, "Lucy, I told him he should talk to you first, but Michael went and got himself a night job."

Lucy set the groceries down on the kitchen counter, "what?"

Sam and the Frog brothers looked at each other. "Yeah, mom," Sam added, slowly turning to look at her, "I think he's got a girlfriend too."
Michael was the last to wake. Even so, the others waited for him, relaxing at their perches, stretching clawed fingers and shaking away the last of daylight's death-like hold on them. It was still strange how comfortable he felt around them, in this sunken hotel halfway between hell and earth. He was in no rush to leave.

Opening his eyes, he looked up—or rather, down at the floor below and then at the others surrounding him. He'd never slept so deeply. Now the question was how he was supposed to get down? Just let go and what?

David released himself first, flipping over mid air before dropping smoothly to the ground. "Good morning, Michael."

Dwayne followed soon after. Then Paul. Finally, with a cheeky smile and wave, Marko. They made it look so easy. It was hard not to think back to the bridge and wonder if that near-suicide was just practice.

"Follow your instinct, if you fall I'll catch you."

It seemed easier said than done, but Michael couldn't hang upside down forever. He was always an athletic guy. This should be easy. He let go, twisting in the air and hoping for the best. It wasn't a perfect landing and one of his legs did skid in the dirt a little, scraping his feet, but he managed to make it in one piece.

Paul grinned, patting him on the shoulder, "don't worry, Mikey. If you broke your neck, it'd heal. Eventually."

Marko punched Paul's shoulder, "you would know."

"I give it a five out if ten, decent form in the air, the landing was a little rough." David said after a moment of thought.

Michael lifted a foot, plucking a small rock that had embedded itself in his heel. It didn't feel as bad as having his ass kicked a couple of nights ago, but it still hurt. "Would've been easier if we weren't so high up."

"It's safer," Dwayne said simply, "not perfect, but safer."

"Better safe than sorry." David agreed, "I believe it's time for Michael to have the grand tour."

Michael glanced around doubtfully, "I think I've pretty much seen it all."

"Oh, Michael, there's so much more for you to see!" David smirked, "trust me, this was a hotel after all."

The energy tonight was almost as palpable as when he'd first sipped from David's flask, or when they'd raced into the night together, teasing death at the edge of the cliff. "Alright," Michael agreed, "lead the way."

David began walking, the stone walls slowly changing into peeling wallpaper. Gold fixtures lined the wall, shedding faint light from old bulbs. Michael was surprised they had power here at all.

"This hall used to lead from the entry hall to the ballroom." He explained, "we saved what we could, which is more than you would think."

"Generators," Dwayne added, as if that explained everything.
It was a little hard to take in, but no more unbelievable than vampires, Michael supposed. "This must've taken ages to fix up," he remarked, taking it all in.

"We've had a long time to work on it." David said as they stepped into the ballroom. Or, what used to be a ballroom.

There were still mirrors on the wall in some spaces, which he could only imagine covered the entire room at some point, though most of what remained was cracked or in desperate need of polishing. In some spots, the floors had remained intact, but stained rusty-brown from old blood. At the far end of the ballroom, all of their bikes were neatly lined-up, even Michael's. Someone else must have brought it inside for him.

"Keeps the salt air from rusting it," Marko explained, "plus, it's raining outside."

He wasn't lying. Michael could distantly hear the whisper of water trickling into the lobby, pummeling the eroded cliffside beyond the hotel.

Thorn padded into the ballroom, a bone firmly in his jaws. Paul knelt in front of him and began a ruthless game of tug o war with the dog.

Dwayne rolled his eyes, "he's been digging in the pit again."

"We each have rooms out in the wings, you can pick one or two out too." David said before leading the way back out of the ballroom and into the hall, "there was a pool, we didn't manage to save that."

"It'd be a bitch to keep clean anyway," Michael replied, "so how do you guys bathe?" They'd stopped by a beach shower on their way back from the hunt last night, but using it every time they wanted to clean the blood from a kill, or just the sand and dirt from a day of riding seemed like a hassle.

"Well, this was a hotel." Marko said as they walked down the hallway, past the entrance to the entry hall.

"The fanciest hotel, you think they let the unwashed masses in?" Paul continued.

"How'd you get in?" Dwayne looked at Paul as he spoke, waiting for an answer.

"Boyish charm and naturally good looks," he replied, slinging an arm around Dwayne's shoulder and making an exaggerated effort to smooch him on the cheek.

The first door they approached had the number 101 on it in gold numerals. David pushed open the door, revealing a basic room. There was a bed with surprisingly clean sheets on it, the frame was intricately carved wood. "Think of this room as a blueprint. We kept it as close to the original as we could." David motioned inside, pointing to another door, "there's a bathroom through there."

"Don't think about it too much," Marko advised, when a million questions started to run through Michael's mind, "we have a lot of free time."

"And Dwayne loves his books." Paul said in agreement.

It seemed best to just nod and accept it. Michael had flown with their aid, killed people, turned into a monster, and slept upside-down from a pipe embedded into a cave ceiling. Figuring out the mechanics of a pirated water supply or electric wiring setup was the very last thing he should be mystified by.
"It's a nice room," Michael remarked, determined not to give himself a headache thinking about it all, "are there a lot left like this, or am I going to have to fix one up?" Not that he saw much reason to even have a room, since they all slept in the same place together. Unless it was just temporary. Somehow the idea of being isolated from them during the day was disconcerting.

"Sometimes we need our own space." David explained, intruding into Michael's thoughts. He wasn't sure he'd ever get used to knowing they could do that.

They slipped out of the room and down a corridor together, the dog padding behind them. There was something freaky about that thing. Maybe it was just the human femur in his jaws. Or the way he almost seemed to understand and hang onto every word that passed between them.

"If you're wondering about Thorn, he's a hellhound."

Michael glanced back at David, "literally?"

Paul grinned, crouching beside Thorn and tussling the dog's snow white coat, "mom's a jackal, dad's a horny imp. Got the papers to prove it."

Michael rolled his eyes, "somehow I doubt that." He was beginning to pick up on some of Paul's bullshit now.

"He was my dog, when I was human." David said, glaring at Paul.

"Until an old bastard kept him on a leash of his own for awhile," Dwayne added, leaving Michael to wonder exactly how that could happen. He looked at David questioningly.

"He tried to save me from Max and bit him, vampire blood in a dog makes them a hellhound, bound to follow commands." David stroked through the thick fur as he spoke, "I'm glad I have him back."

Michael tucked his hands into his pockets, "and Max is…?" This was the first time he'd even heard the name before. He didn't like the sound of the guy one bit.

"Max is the asshole who thought himself our daddy." Marko growled, "he turned most of us, except Dwayne."

"Daddy," Michael repeated, not quite questioningly. His immediate thoughts erring on the side of disgust. "There weren't whips or chains or anything weird like that involved, right?"

Paul grinned, "David would've killed him a lot sooner if the old fuck was kinky. Nah, he was just a dick with a complex."

"There were whips but not in the good way." David smirked at him, "bet I can show you they can be good."

Michael's eyebrows shot up, and it was everything he could do not to awkwardly laugh or stammer. "No, I'm good," he said quickly, not quite sure what to think about the oddly intense look in David's eyes. Was he joking? He had to be.

He shrugged, "too bad."

Standing, Paul stretched his arms above his head, "that's most of the tour for the night, Mikey. Unless the imp wants to show off his collection-" he nudged Marko with a suggestive eyebrow wiggle, "huh?"
Marko gave Paul a playful but rough shove, "not tonight, dick-brain."

Paul didn't even have the self-respect to look offended, instead deciding to hop on the balls of his feet and yank on one of Marko's braids before dodging behind to avoid being swiped at with suddenly sharp claws.

"A guy could get lost down here," Michael mused, looking back at David to change the subject from both whips and Paul's intense masochistic desire to have his own ass kicked.

"Some do," Dwayne said simply, "when we want to play with our food."

"I do so enjoy a good game of chase the tourist." David said before pausing for a moment, "alright, Michael, what do you want to do tonight?"

His mind wandered to his family. Things with Sam hadn't ended on a great note the last time they saw each other. Then there were all his things at the house, and what was he going to tell his mom? A sharper, colder side of him didn't especially care. Still, he wasn't entirely ready to let go of that part of his life just yet.

"I don't know," Michael admitted honestly. "Is there a gym or something around here?" He hadn't had much of a chance to explore Santa Carla, beyond the boardwalk and the back roads.

"Yeah, not that it does us much good."

That hit him like a punch to the gut. "What, really?" Not that he was a juicer or a gym rat with one of those weird lycra fetishes, but he liked his weights. Working out was a nice outlet. "Shit, I don't know then, what do you guys want to do?"

Marko grinned, replacing his glove he'd removed when he'd taken a swipe at Paul, "we could pick up a couple of chicks. Play around." He glanced over at David, "how about it? Bet he'll love the girls around here. They're a riot."

David growled softly, "how about, no." He said firmly.

"Let's grab some beer, play cards, just hang out tonight," Dwayne suggested. He gave Marko a quick look that was subtle enough for Michael to nearly miss it. Maybe there was some dumb joke he was missing.

"That sounds alright," Michael agreed. He'd worry about his family tomorrow. He had to admit, though, he was getting a little hungry too.

"Dwayne, stay here with Michael and Paul. Marko and I will go get some dinner and beer." David ordered, giving Paul a pointed glare.

"C'mon," Dwayne clapped a hand on Michael's shoulder, "I'll show you one of our shortcuts to the lobby."

David wanted him, wanted Michael. He knew that now as he and Marko headed into town. The reason he wanted Marko to come with him was to take the time to speak with him. Dwayne was the most insightful, was his voice of reason, but he couldn't trust Marko and Paul together. Marko on his own could be nearly as knowledgeable as Dwayne but the moment you added Paul to the mix it was like the little imp lost his damn mind.

It wasn't until they'd safely parked and were roaming the aisles of their favorite gas station that
Marko snatched a small bag of cheetos from a wire rack and tossed them in David's direction, "why are you so quiet?" He asked, trying to appear playful, but a thread of wariness creeping into his mental tone as he eyed David.

"Thinking too much, I feel a need. I want Michael." He replied, deftly catching the bag.

"You? Seriously?" Marko asked, dragging his gloved fingers along the shelf as if at any moment he might sweep several bags and boxes of snacks to the ground on a whim. He didn't even bother glancing at the anxious cashier.

"I'm not sure what to do," He said, honestly.

Marko grabbed a package of jerky and feigned intense interest, "that's not like you." He glanced back up at David, "just take what you want. Like we always do. He'll get over it."

David raised an eyebrow at him, "just throw him down and make him mine?"

At some point, Marko tore open the bag of jerky and began to tear into one of the pieces of dedicated meat, just to get a reaction out of the cashier. He smirked, "I mean you can get him flowers and chocolates first, but yeah. Basically."

"It's a little different when you're with someone for eternity than for a one night meal." David smirked, "toss me a piece."

Marko paused thoughtfully after tossing several pieces of jerky in David's direction and wiping his hand on his jacket, "shit, you're that serious about it?"

He bit into one of them viciously, "haven't been more serious about anything since offing Max."

"Just keep blood bonding with him," Marko suggested, "I mean more than the rest of us. That'll help, right?"

David looked thoughtful, "good idea, should get started on that when we get back. I guess at first I'll have to trick him into it."

Marko snickered, drawing even more concerned looks from the cashier. He sauntered over to a cooler door and grabbed a twelve pack, all but blowing a kiss at the human. ID cards were never an issue for them. Nor was paying, once David had a nice little chat.

"Just spike all his beers for awhile," Marko joked, "not like he'll be able to taste anything after he feeds anyway."

David laughed, "alright, Marko, it's your job to help me make sure he only drinks what I give him. I'll make it worth your while."

Marko grinned, dropping the beer on the counter in front of the cashier, who by now was practically hyperventilating.

"Look, guys, I don't want to fight you, but I can't sell alcohol to minors," he said, avoiding eye contact with both of them.

"Deal," Marko agreed, waiting for David to work his magic. They couldn't make every store a murder scene. Then where would they get their beer and smokes?

David strolled up to the counter, locking ice blue eyes with the brown of the clerk's, "you like living
here, right? You like feeling safe. Do you want that to continue?” He leaned forward, putting a twenty on the counter.

He nodded quickly, "yes sir, I do. Very much. Y-you…” he took a deep breath, afraid to even touch the money, "you don't worry about that beer or food. It's on me. Just have a good night and stay safe."

"Charmer," Marko remarked, winking at David.

David chuckled, leaving the money on the counter, "let's get going, should be able to have some fun with what we've got or do you wanna stop for some Chinese on the way?"

There were few times in her life that Lucy had a bad feeling. A truly awful, horrible coldness at the base of her spine that told her something was definitely wrong. When her mother had passed, she’d felt it. When she’d found out about her husband's affair, she'd felt it. Now, with Michael all but gone and not so much as a word in almost a week from him, she could feel it again.

"Sam," Lucy pushed open her youngest son's bedroom door gently, "can we talk?"

"Yeah, mom, what's up?" He was sitting on his bed with Nanook beside him, almost like he was standing guard. He'd gotten so distant so quickly. Was the move upsetting her sons that much?

"I just wanted to check in on you," she explained, walking towards the foot of his bed, "how is everything going?" She stopped short of asking about Michael.

"Fine, I'm just a little worried about Mike." He looked up at her, his fingers clenching in the dog's fur.

"Sweety," Lucy sat down beside him, "is he really working nights? I haven't seen him in days, not even his motorcycle in the driveway. Be honest with me, and I won't be mad. What happened to your brother?"

He shrugged, biting his lip. It was obvious he wanted to tell her but she didn't know why he wouldn't.

"Did you happen to see him this morning?" She pressed for more details, "I didn't see him come home, and I've been here all day. Is he upset at me?"

"No, no, I don't think he's mad at you but I haven't seen him either." He said quickly.

"Oh," she said simply, placing her hands in her lap. Brief images of twisted metal on the side of the road flashed through her mind. If he was tired, and he had an accident, lord knew nobody else would find him on the back roads of Santa Carla for hours. "When was the last time you saw him?" She asked, a little too quickly. Dad would be driving the same roads, she tried to reason with herself. He'd have found Michael by now if something did happen.

"The other day." He said vaguely, "he, umm, made some new friends."

Friends. It was summer, a boy needed friends. Lucy relaxed a little, "and have you met these friends?" She knew her boys well enough to firmly believe neither of them would do drugs or make stupid choices, but she'd be lying if she said she didn't immediately worry that was exactly what Michael was doing.

He shook his head, "no, but I saw them, on the boardwalk."
"Will you let me know if you see him come home before I do? I'd really like to talk to him and make sure everything is okay." She also wanted to just set eyes on him alive, in one piece.

He nodded, "I'll tell you the minute I see him."

She smiled weakly, leaning forward to kiss him on the cheek and smooth back his hair, "okay. Thank you. Are you going to visit with your friends tomorrow? I can take you to the comic book store on my way to work if you like."

He leaned against her, half closing his eyes, "yeah, please, that'd be nice." He was never this, cuddly, it was kind of a nice change, like she had her little boy back. At least-one of them.

"Do you want to sleep in my bed tonight with Nanook?" She asked, looking down at him.

Sam pushed him gently, "umm, mom, can I sleep with you too?"

"Well I wasn't offering to switch places, honey. Of course you can." She wrapped an arm around his shoulder and gave him a gentle, reassuring hug, "come on, I'll go make us some cocoa before bed."
"Are you going to deal, or are you just gonna stare at their tits?" Michael demanded. The maniac who gave Paul a stripper deck must've hated actually playing poker. He'd been ogling the Ace of spades for a solid minute and a half now.

Dwayne reached over and thumped the blonde on the back of the head, "play, Paul." He ordered.

Paul flinched, folding the deck together, "we playing for cash?"

Michael shook his head, "I don't have any."

Paul nodded towards the treasure-filled fountain, "just grab a wallet, we've got plenty."

"Doesn't that make the betting kind of pointless?"

"We share pretty much everything so money doesn't matter. If you don't want to play for cash, Michael, how about another kind of bet? We play for favors." Dwayne suggested.

That was promising. Michael leaned back against the couch behind him. They were seated on the ground so there was plenty of space to play. "Are there any rules?"

"Cheaters pay the penalty and immediately must do as the others order." Dwayne said, giving Paul a pointed look. Paul didn't even feign offence.

"Alright," Michael agreed, "how about the loser cleans and waxes my bike?"

"Blowjob," Paul decided, grinning wickedly.

"Dude, what the fuck?!" Michael blurted out, "hell no!"

"Paul," Dwayne's tone held a note of warning in it, "just for that, the loser cleans and waxes all the bikes."

"Fine by me," Paul agreed, "you use your teeth too much anyway." He didn't seem to be joking as he quickly dealt out the cards. The guy was a total freak.

Michael quickly scooped up his hand and sorted through it, careful to make sure they were well hidden, "how do you guys play poker if we can just read each other's thoughts?" He asked, glancing over at Dwayne. It seemed like the only way they could actually play this game was just figuring ways to out-cheat each other.

"That's cheating and the penalty must be paid. No one wants to pay the penalty."

"Penalties can be fun, it just depends on who's dishing it out," Paul added, "Marko's a little bitch when he's in charge."

"And all Paul wants while he's in charge is blowjobs." Dwayne shot back.

"At least I keep it simple."

Michael was finding it hard to focus on his hand, eyes flitting over to the lobby entrance every so often. The others seemed to be taking their time. "You need a girlfriend," he told Paul simply, pulling three cards from his hand to trade out.
Dwayne gave him a sidelong glance, "looking for something?" He asked as Michael glanced toward the entrance again.

"I'm just hungry," he said simply. It was sort of true. He was anxious, and Michael really couldn't figure out why. It could have something to do with that whole pack thing. "Do you guys feel weird when you split up?"

"In the beginning, when Max would force David and I to be apart it hurt, he was trying to assert his dominance over me since he wasn't my sire and David was. So, yeah, it feels wrong to be split up."

Paul silently traded a pair back to the deck, examining his hand in an uncharacteristically serious change of mood. "He locked me up alone for the first month. Fed me rats. Nearly starved to death."

"And he was Paul's sire so you can imagine what he did to me." Dwayne continued, "pack is important and the bond with your sire even more so."

This was all way too much to take in. Michael and Paul patiently waited for Dwayne to finish his turn. Not because they were so engrossed by the game, but because bad memories had soured Paul's mood, and Michael, well, he just wasn't sure how to process the knowledge that he was for better or worse tied to all of them so permanently, and especially David. It was weird. Good. Bad. He couldn't really decide one way or the other, so he just watched the entrance and zoned out, unaware that Dwayne had traded his cards out already.

"Your turn, Michael." Dwayne said softly, drawing his attention back to the game.

He quickly jerked his head away, "yeah," he replied, "uh..." Michael tossed a pair to the ground, "two threes." Shit. Paul had better have a worse hand, or Michael would sooner beat the hell out of him than do whatever twisted bet Paul had in mind.

Paul looked smug, "pair of fives."

Dwayne looked as stoic as ever, "you both lose." He tossed his cards down revealing a full house, aces over eights.

"That's crap!" Paul whined, scooping up his cards, "you cheated."

Michael shrugged, "If he did, I can live with that." He glanced at Dwayne, "you never said what you wanted to bet."

"You have to agree with everything David or I says for a month."

Paul looked incredulous as he spoke, "both of us?"

Dwayne smirked, "Michael only has to for a week."

It could be worse. Hopefully.

"Should I be scared?" Michael asked, leaning closer to Paul to whisper.

Paul swallowed hard, staring at Dwayne, "fuck, man. Not cool."

Dwayne's smirk turned vicious, "we're going to have fun, Paulie. I'll be sure to let David know about our little gamble."

Dwayne felt rather smug, he hadn't even cheated, Paul and Michael were just horribly unlucky, and
he had a surefire way to get Michael and David together. He felt the way his sire wanted his new
fledgling and Dwayne felt that it was his duty to give his sire something good.

"You don't have much to worry about, Michael. At least you don't have to listen to Paul and Marko."

He felt them before he heard their bikes approaching, David and Marko were back.

"Drink up, boys!" Marko crowed, toting a case of beer in front of him as he skipped into the lobby
ahead of David. He looked proud of himself, which could only mean he was hiding something.

Dwayne caught David's gaze over Marko's shoulder. "What are you planning?" He asked softly,
knowing no one else could hear.

David smirked and Dwayne instantly knew what he was doing. Michael. Well, he could help with
that. He stood, snagging one of the bottles from Marko before lightly tossing it at Michael, his eyes
staying locked with David's.

"Drink up." He ordered, turning to look at their newest member.

For an instant, Michael looked sceptical. Maybe he was more observant than he let on. Then again,
not even a second later, he was popping the lid from the bottle and taking a swig.

"Where's the food?" Paul asked, leaping to his feet. They didn't need to eat, or drink, but the
satisfaction was still there. Subconscious compulsions to enjoy some of what they had when they
were alive.

David moved around Marko, tossing a Chinese takeout box at him, "here, brat. What were the three
of you up to while we were gone?"

Paul scowled at Dwayne as he spoke, "getting our asses handed to us." He flipped open his takeout
box, just as Marko set the case of beer down and slapped a pair of chopsticks into his hand.

"Bon appetit," Marko cooed, patting Paul's cheek. He sat down beside the rocker with no
repercussions except for a bitter glare. If Paul's mouth wasn't full of noodles, it might have been
intimidating. Marko chuckled, popping open his own carton of fried rice and stirring the contents
with gusto as he watched the others around him, seemingly waiting for some sort of show.

Michael lowered his beer, "we played poker. Paul got off on some card porn. We're just lucky he
didn't ruin the deck."

"I take it Dwayne won." David said, settling down beside Michael, popping open another box,
"chicken?" He held it out to Michael.

"Yes, Michael and Paul have to do whatever we tell them to."

"Steep bet," Marko remarked with an appreciative whistle.

Michael took the chicken, setting his bottle down on the ground between his feet. He was still sitting
comfortably in front of the couch. "Yeah," he agreed, "better than Paul winning, I guess."

David glanced at Michael, "what did he want?"

"Same thing he always wants," Dwayne said simply.

Michael cringed, glancing over at a very self-satisfied Paul. "Does he ever win?"
David shook his head, glaring at Paul, "no, he either loses or cheats and gets caught."

Trying to teach Paul a lesson was so insanely pointless, that it was always a given if he won a round of any game, he was cheating. That didn't stop him from trying.

"What's the point of making a bet if you're gonna lose?" Paul demanded, wiping at his chin to mop up a stray drop of soy sauce, "sooner or later it's gonna work. Then you know what'll happen? Blowjobs. For days."

"Holy shit, Paul," Marko gagged, "you're one sick fucking puppy."

"No more blowjob bets." David stated, eyes locking with Paul's.

Paul stared back, visibly struggling to decide whether or not he'd make a snappy retort or directly defy the command. This went beyond his agreement with Dwayne. He broke in less than five seconds, lowering his eyes submissively. "Damn," he mumbled under his breath, focusing his energy on his room temperature lo mein noodles.

David smirked, "eat your food, Paulie, have a beer."

Dwayne was surprised Paul lasted even those five seconds before giving in. Even since Max died David had gained an aura, one that demanded obedience, he just never used it, but Dwayne was glad he had this time.

Michael took a bite of chicken, passing the carton back to David, "not as hungry as I thought I'd be," he told him. "That normal?"

"Yes, we don't really need human food, it's more of a taste thing." He motioned to the beer, "drink your drink."

The next several minutes passed in relaxed silence, save for the occasional moment when Marko would flick a piece of egg from his fried rice in Thorn's direction to watch him lick it up. The hellhound preferred something of the bloodied raw variety, but he took what he could get.

When Michael finished the last dregs of his beer rather quickly, he began to rub at his temples, "I think I'm becoming a lightweight." He stifled a yawn, absent-mindedly letting his head lull against David's shoulder.

David chuckled softly, "rest, Michael, just close your eyes for a minute and you'll feel better."

Dwayne could practically feel the blood working on his new brother. How much blood had David put in that beer?

Paul looked and Michael and David, a little confused, "what just happened?" He was smart enough, at least, to know beer could only do so much for a vampire. It would take cases of the stuff to have any real effect without a little help.

It was Marko who elbowed him, leaning in close, "blood bond."

Paul's eyebrows shot up in surprise, but he elected not to say anything and instead focused on his noodles.

It wasn't often that they dined in silence at the hotel. Usually they'd have the boombox running, or even the odd human entertainment to distract them. The sounds of shifting soil and echoes bouncing off of the cave walls was oddly comforting in a way.
"I scouted out a beach party tomorrow night in Luna Bay," Marko broke the silence, "do you guys want to head over there, or what? It's pretty small."

David nodded, his fingertips absently trailing through Michael's curls, "sure, sounds fun."

"Gotta grab Mikey some new threads first, though," Paul pointed out.

"Especially shoes." David agreed. One more flight would shred his cheap sneakers. Plus, the Lost Boys liked to ride in style. It was one more thing to bring their brother a little closer to the pack.

"Why am I doing this?" Sam asked himself. It was stupid. Beyond stupid. Edgar and Alan Frog were crazy. Maybe even crazier than he'd thought they were before Mike went and got himself turned into a fang jockey. His only other option was doing this alone. Going back to that cave, convincing his brother somehow that they could fix everything, and-what? Killing the rest of them? He was just one kid. A kid with incredible fashion sense, the coolest comic collection in the world, and cool hair, yeah-but still just a kid. He needed help. Grandpa wasn't going to do anything. He told Sam they'd be lucky Michael didn't come home for a midnight snack. So here he was. Standing right in front of the Frogs' comic shop, waiting for Ed to lift the bars.

Sam waved at them once he caught sight of the brothers peering at him from the back of their shop, "hey guys. Uh-I guess we should talk about the…” he trailed off, not sure exactly how to describe his brother. "Them."

"The aliens?" Edgar prompted, "we gotta gather supplies then we're going after them." He sounded so sure of himself. Sam shouldn't have expected anything less.

"Yeah, right," Sam nodded, tucking his hands into his jacket pockets and compulsively looking over his shoulder. If he was stuck in Santa Carla, he didn't want people to think he was just as crazy as Edgar and Alan frog. "What sort of supplies? I mean," he licked his bottom lip nervously, "did-did you have a plan in mind?"

"Gotta figure out what kind of weapon, there's so many options, we gotta know what's gonna work." Alan said, crossing his arms over his chest, "we need a Guinea pig."

What the hell did that even mean?! Sam took a step back, suddenly very aware that the pair of them were easily stronger and dumber than him combined, "uh, guys, what're you planning to do? Cause I can tell you right now, I'm not now nor have I ever been an alien. Or a vampire. Or a yeti. I'm not guinea pig material."

"No, we gotta get one of them." Edgar said, "gotta capture one."

"Oh god," Sam barely restrained himself from literally slapping his forehead, "guys, you can't do that. There's like-four of them, not counting my brother. They eat people. There's no way you're gonna get one of them alone long enough to hogtie him and drag him back to the comic shop!"

"What do you want us to do, Phoenix? We don't know what kind of freaky powers they have, they're aliens!" Alan asked sharply.

"Well, first," Sam began, trying not to huff in frustration, "call me by my name. It's Sam. Second, I don't know. If they're vampire-aliens, there's probably all kinds of stories about them. Why don't we find out about these guys first? Figure out their weaknesses before we do anything else?"

The brothers shared a look before turning back to Sam, "fine, guess you need to go to the library." Edgar said.
Sam crossed his arms, "and what'll you two be doing in the meantime, huh?"

"We'll be reading through comics here." Alan said.

"Comics," he repeated, "you're just gonna sit around reading comics?! That's bogus, guys. I need help. I need you two to actually do something."

"Like what? We can't go to the library, you don't want us to try and catch one of them, what do you want us to do?" Alan asked, sounding frustrated.

"Wh-" Sam drew in a deep breath, trying to gather his patience and the right way to phrase this without freaking out and ending their friendship (or whatever they had) forever. "Why can't you go to the library?"

"We were banned." Edgar said sullenly.

Of course. They'd probably accused the librarian of being a brain-sucking troglodyte from the eighth dimension. "Fine," Sam agreed, not even bothering to hide his deepening scowl, "but we don't have a lot of time. Mike-the longer he's with these guys, the more people are gonna die." If he wasn't super careful, it might even be them!

"I'm sorry," Michael repeated into the receiver for the eighteenth time as he huddled against the payphone, "I knew you'd try to talk me out of it, but I've been thinking about finding a place of my own for awhile, and grandpa's friend needed some help fixing up his place. Yeah. I don't know, maybe next week," he astonished himself at how quickly he'd slapped the lie together. The old man wouldn't argue, or he'd have told her already what Michael was. If he had, they'd be talking about the looney bin Lucy was sending him to, and not having an emotional chat about Michael's moving out.

"Michael, you're almost an adult now but I wish you had talked to me about it first." She said with a heavy sigh.

David looked smug from his place leaning against the shop they were in front of, as if to say, I told you so. He had. He had warned him that his mom wasn't going to just let him off scott free, that she would keep him on the phone as long as she could. It was getting annoying.

"You'd have said no," Michael told her bluntly, maintaining eye contact with David. He didn't want to admit the older vampire was right. "I've gotta go, mom. My break is almost over."

"Michael, come over tomorrow, we need to talk about this." She said firmly and he knew in that moment that he wasn't going to go.

"We'll see," he replied softly, right before hanging up. It was easier than telling the truth.

He checked for change in the slot before turning back to David and the boys, "that was fun," he remarked dryly.

"I hope you're not actually considering going over tomorrow. Unless it's for dinner." David said with a smirk.

"Nah," Michael shook his head, "not until she calms down." Or if she ever did. He just didn't want to deal with that. Then there was Sam, and it wasn't like the last time they saw each other was going to be easy to talk about. He just wanted to forget about his family for awhile until all of his problems magically solved themselves.
He crossed his arms, leaning against the side of the phone booth, "is this going to get any easier?"

"What? The humans? It's better to just eat them and get it over with." Paul said, laughing loudly.

"He has a point, Mikey, if they're dinner then you don't have to worry about them anymore." Marko said before anyone else had a chance to refute Paul's idea.

"I don't want to eat them," Michael snapped, "you said the same fucking thing when that clerk inside couldn't make change, is that how you seriously deal with everything? Eating people?"

Dwayne shrugged, "thinking isn't their strong suit."

"It was funny watching him try to count while Davey glared at him." Marko said thoughtfully.

"We need to get you more than just boots, Michael." David said, changing the subject.

"What's wrong with my clothes?" Michael asked, plucking at his jeans a little self-consciously. The boots were amazing. Soft, supple black leather with a steel toe tip. He could easily admit he much preferred those to his old sneakers Nanook had treated like chew toys on more than one occasion.

"It's not just the clothes," Marko said simply, glancing at David.

"You need a new bike." David said firmly.

Michael brightened up considerably, "really?"

"Yeah, you think the one you've got is gonna hold up for much longer? We push harder than we did the night of the race."

He wasn't wrong. Michael had taken a fall earlier and badly scratched the side of the bike. It still worked fine, but a few more nasty turns and sooner or later it'd be as good as scrap metal. Losing his sense of delicate mortality had already made him more reckless. With Paul, or Marko, or Dwayne, or David especially egging him on, Michael was only going to get worse.

"Anybody even open this late?" He asked, doubtful. The quieter sides of Santa Carla seemed to have an early curfew.

Paul grinned, "oh, we know how to take care of things. Being open or not doesn't matter to us."

"Dealerships aren't in the business of hunting vampires," Dwayne added helpfully, "and if they were, we'd just have a nice snack to go with the new ride."

He didn't feel guilty at all about taking whatever he wanted, but that didn't stop Michael from worrying just a little about the consequences. The whole 'not stealing' thing had been drilled into his head by his parents. It was going to take some time to get used to.

He glanced over at the line of their bikes, his own looking very out of place. A symbol of who he used to be, "what should I do with the old one?"

"Well, we could use it to fake your death, would take care of your mom at least." David supplied.

"What if she sees me after that?"

He shrugged, "we can mess with minds."

Michael shook his head, "no. I don't want to do anything like that unless I have to." He paused, as if
just now processing what David had just said, "you can?"

"Yeah, we can make people see things, do things, forget things."

It was tempting. He wouldn't have to worry about Sam, or mom, or his grandpa. Then again, it would mean never seeing them again. Or never talking to them. There was still that stubborn shard left at the back of his mind. The innate loyalty of a son and a brother. "If something bad happens, maybe. For now I can just deal with the phone calls," he decided.

"Suit yourself but if they become a problem I will take care of it." David said, locking eyes with the youngest vampire. It wasn't a threat, or even a promise. It was a statement of fact.

Michael reluctantly tore his gaze away from David, exhaling a harsh breath in acceptance. He wasn't sure what to think about the odd chill he got when staring into the blonde's eyes for too long. It made him want to go on the defensive, and at the same time-he didn't really know.

"Now, shall we go find a party or a bike?" David asked, changing the subject, as if talk of his human family had never come up.

"How about both?" Dwayne suggested, nudging Marko, "we can scout out a good spot on the beach. Should be a few bonfires tonight. The weather's perfect."

Michael's mood was somewhat spoiled but maybe getting the new bike would help him shrug away the feeling that sooner or later David would have to make good on his promise.

"Come on, Michael, we'll even let you pick out which party." Marko said, slinging an arm around his shoulders, "don't worry so much, it's not fun."

"I'm not worrying," Michael argued, allowing Marko to lead him to his bike. "I'm fine."

"You're killing my buzz, man," Paul complained, flicking the last of his bud to the ground and kicking at the dying ashes, "hey, why don't we pick someone to hide in the pits tonight? Should be fun to find them tomorrow." He directed his attention to David as he spoke, giving their leader the final say.

"Sure, why not, a party, a new bike, and a lost little lamb. Let's make it a good one this time, not that chick you picked that just huddled in a corner and cried."

"Let's leave this one with a flashlight," Marko suggested. "Or tape their mouth shut at least, that last one kept me up all day."

Dwayne shook his head, heading towards his bike, "as long as this one doesn't piss himself. Those are even worse."

It was bizarre hearing them discuss sick head games and only being able to feel excitement at the thought of playing cat and mouse with a potential meal in a very literal sense. Instinctually he had a feeling that lacing the blood with fear really did make them taste better. He didn't need to voice the question aloud, climbing onto his bike and looking up at David, "does it?"

David smirked at him, "oh, yeah, it does." He kick started his bike before tossing his head back and howling, "we'll get a new bike first."

"That's a nice one," Marko remarked, eyeing Michael's choice with just a hint of envy. It would be too much of a hassle to throw out two old bikes tonight, and he'd only gotten his current one a couple
of months ago. He'd have to wait if they had any chance of avoiding a longer trip to find a better
dealership than this one. Used and new rides alike, the rich red Triumph Michael picked out was
perfect.

David nodded in agreement, "I like it."

"We need to grab the keys," Dwayne pointed out, nodding towards the door to the dealership Paul
was already jimmying open.

Michael ran a hand over the body of his future bike, the appreciative look in his eyes banishing his
earlier bad mood. He was getting a little touchy about his old family. It would be a sore topic until he
really got used to what they were, and what humans were. They were trying to avoid making that
lesson as painful as David's had been. Despite the temptation. Part of David wanted to drive home
the fact that they weren't human, that their ties to their human lives were worthless, but he didn't want
to drive Michael away or make him want to take revenge.

"Paul, how's that door coming?" David shouted over at him.

"Almost open!"

A distant memory scratched at the back of David's mind. It was hard to recall the finer details. The
lines of his mother's face frozen in death. How much of his little brother's blood had puddled on the
cabin floor when Max tore through him like tissue paper. He did, however, remember what Max said
in gruesome victory.

"I wish you wouldn't fight me, David. It's so much better when they don't fight."

David snarled at him, "I swear I will kill you." He stayed on the ground, glaring up at him, covered
in blood, not all of it his own, "I'm never gonna stop fighting you, ever."

Max smiled back, casual, dismissive, "yes, I suppose you won't. Still, you seemed to enjoy your first
taste of the kill. That's why I picked you. Hate me all you like, but in time you'll forget them," he
gestured at what was left of David's family, "you're mine now."

"Got it!" Paul crowed, kicking the door open.

David shook off the memory, he never forgot and he didn't want Michael to become another him. He
didn't want to always have to be looking over his shoulder. "Michael, go grab your keys."

Michael nodded, following Paul into the building. Marko dodged through the door behind them.
Any chance to take a souvenir, the little imp would gladly take.

"We should hold on to the old bike," Dwayne remarked, walking up to David, "just in case."

David nodded, "I agree, good thing we left it back at the hotel." He smirked, remembering the look
on Michael's face when he found out he had to ride bitch to get to his new bike, it was well worth it.

The three younger vampires took their time inside while Dwayne and David waited patiently outside.
Plenty of time. The night was young. They seldom encountered anyone working late.

"I already know, but I'd like to hear you say it. Are you going to tell Michael you want him?"
Dwayne asked, "or are you waiting for him to crack first?"

David glanced at him out of the corner of his eye, "you think I should tell him?"
He shrugged, "doesn't matter what I think," he said simply, clapping a hand on David's shoulder and leaning close enough to whisper, "but dosing him with your blood every night is going to backfire if he finds out about that first."

Dwayne was right and David knew it. He was going to have to tell him, maybe after the party tonight.

"Get that fucking camera out of my face, Marko!" Paul shouted, running out of the building while Marko chased after, cackling as he hit the flash again and again, ripping out the pictures from the Polaroid as soon as they printed and tossing them aside. Michael slipped outside behind him, kneeling down to grab one of the discarded photos and examining it. He was spinning a set of keys in his free hand.

"You've got bad aim, Marko," he said quietly.

"We don't show up in pictures, Michael." David said.

He looked up, clutching at the picture, sharp blue eyes stricken with that new discovery, "what? Not at all? How?"

David shrugged, "honestly I'm not sure how it all works. If we're in our own home or invited into someone else's the rules no longer apply and we can be seen in mirrors and I assume pictures."

None of them really understood it. Maybe, once or twice, Dwayne would come up with one reason or another that seemed to make sense. Hard to say, as long as they'd been alive. There was nothing that a living person could understand or truly know about being undead. Science simply wasn't a factor. That's all pictures were. Just science.

Michael tossed the picture aside, seeming to shrug away his confusion for the time being, though it lingered in the back of his mind. Hell, even David wondered from time to time what he looked like. He couldn't really remember and didn't care much for mirrors anyway.

"I'm hungry," Michael stated, changing the subject.

"Let's head out then, hop on your new bike and we're gone." David decreed.
There was something very wrong about snacking on popcorn and Pepsi while his brother was out there somewhere eating people. Sam wanted to flip the coffee table over right then and there, storm out of the living room of the Frog brothers' house like Rambo, and kick some serious alien vampire-or just vampire ass. Instead he found himself taking another handful of popcorn and staring intently at the screen. This was supposed to be research. Sure, he checked out a stack of books, but this was the important stuff. The Thing From Another World on a 12 inch screen.

"I just don't get it," Sam sighed, "how is this going to help us?"

"It's research, it'll give us ideas on how to take them out." Alan told him flatly, not tearing his eyes from the screen. You could put a pre-recorded message in both of these guys and it would still come out exactly the same.

"Maybe freezing them would work," Edgar mumbled, reaching for Sam's popcorn bowl.

"How did you guys find out about the aliens, anyway?" Sam asked as Ed grabbed an overflowing handful of popcorn, spilling kernels on the way to his mouth. At home, his mom would've nagged his ear off about the mess they were making. It was kinda fun to just let go and be a slob.

Edgar looked thoughtful, chewing his popcorn until Sam could hear the kernels cracking in his teeth, "it all started with the school janitors in middle school," he decided, "they'd walk into the supply closet together as a group, and Alan and me noticed smoke coming out from under the door."

"Spaceship, pocket dimension," Alan added helpfully, slurping his Pepsi.

Or just a couple of guys smoking in the middle of the day. "But why aliens and what did you do next?"

"Can you think of anything else that makes sense?" Edgar asked, waving a greasy hand in the air after licking the butter from his fingers, "mummies don't make any smoke unless you light them on fire. Werewolves? In the middle of the day, no full moon out?"

Alan shook his head, "we confronted them. They didn't deny it."

"What did they say?" How could they immediately go to aliens and not cigarettes? What kind of childhood did they have?

"Well..." Alan trailed off, focusing on the tv in a very obvious way.

"They threatened to suck our brains out," Edgar told him, suddenly very grave. "We had no choice. Alan acted as fast as he could, but I was the one who pulled the fire extinguisher on them."

"We were suspended for three weeks," Alan added, just as serious, "but we didn't see them again. We decided then and there we had to protect Santa Carla."

"Lucky we had so much research taken care of at the comic shop," Edgar agreed, reaching for more
Ahh, maybe Michael was right and comics did rot your brain. If that was the case maybe these two were poster children for the abolition of comics but if vampires were real maybe aliens were too, they just took it a little too far.

"Have you always been into alien comics?"

Alan reached for the television remote, rewinding the movie a few seconds back to repeat a sequence as if he were trying to decipher some deep, dark mystery.

Edgar looked at Sam, "Superman's an alien. All the good heroes - they're aliens. Except Batman. Anyone who reads comics ends up reading alien comics too. It's universal, because they're everywhere, Sam." This must be pretty serious if he was dropping the Mister Phoenix moniker.

He was quiet for a moment, "ever read anything about vampires?"

Edgar frowned, bringing more popcorn to his mouth in the process and popping a few pieces before he spoke, "we've got a couple books buried in the bins. I guess we could dig them out." He lowered his fist of greasy snackage long enough to level Sam with an almost normal look, "you really think they're vampires, don't you?"

He shrugged, "that's what grandpa said they were, vampires, it can't hurt to look into it, can it?"

Letting out a deep sigh, Edgar relented, "fine. We'll find them tomorrow. Happy?"

Sam gave them a small smile, "thanks, let's finish the movie.

Back home, Michael rarely had time for parties. Between practice and going home so his mom had someone to talk to, he'd just sort of kept his schedule simple. Maybe that was why he'd fallen in so easily with David and the others, before the blood. Even so, this small beach party felt familiar. Just a bunch of teenagers and a couple of creeps helping them keep their beer stocked.

What came off to most people as predatory, or off-putting, made the Lost Boys fit right in. They were 'bad boys' Michael had heard a pair of girls giggle about, sipping beer from frosty cans and giving each and every one of them not-so-subtle side eyes. Maybe they needed to visit Luna Bay more often.

"Man am I glad they're not locals," Paul said conspiratorially in the mental communication they all shared together, "didn't realize how hungry I was." He'd already found the true life of the party and was happily forking over a couple of bucks for a small bag of multi-colored pills. He'd get the money back soon enough.

"Tonight, we feast." David smirked, heading toward one of the girls.

Michael lingered at the outskirts of the party, watching David make his move. They weren't all immediately going for the throat tonight, it seemed. Marko was palling around with a trio of can-crushers by the boombox. Dwayne was relaxing on a lawn chair beside someone else who looked like she was nearly comatose with whatever she'd drunk or smoked, or a combination thereof.

Somehow Michael found his gaze wandering back to David, who'd wrapped his arm around his chosen meal's shoulder and was casually making some sort of gesture as he spoke to her. Michael felt a bitter pang, directing his attention to another girl with a red braid just as far on the outskirts of the party as he was. Maybe he was just jealous David found one so fast. He really needed a girlfriend if
he was getting that confused about it.

"Hey," Michael approached her, "name's Mike."

She smiled at him, "hi" she moved closer to him, "Denise."

He could smell fresh sweat on her skin from the heat of the bonfire, cheap body spray, and something absolutely intoxicating - - fresh, warm blood. Despite his urge to look back at David to see how he was getting along with his own spontaneous date, Michael managed to remain calm and cool. "There's some punch over there in that ice chest," Michael told her with a lopsided smile, "gonna grab one myself. You want one too?"

"Sure! I'd like that, Mike." He liked the way she said his name. Maybe he could convince her to go for a ride with him before the killing started. It was a great plan. Finding a girlfriend tonight. But the screaming started the second he got to the ice chest pretty much trashed that plan.

David had his fangs deeply embedded in Denise's throat. His sire had decided to eat his date. With that as their sign, the rest of them eagerly dove into the hunt. Michael bit back a growl, stalking towards David, just barely grabbing at the shirt collar of one of Marko's companions for the night and throwing him to the ground, pinning him under a leather boot.

"What gives?" Michael demanded, locking eyes with David, too far away to speak aloud and be heard between the screaming and the music.

David glared at him over her shoulder, drinking deeply, "she looked at you funny."

"It's called flirting, asshole. Ever heard of it?" Michael retorted, kneeling down to cold-cock his victim so he wouldn't have to deal with the struggle when he tore into the guy's throat.

"Well, maybe I didn't like it." David dropped her corpse, licking his lips slowly.

Michael angrily pulled the unconscious man's throat to his lips, tearing flesh like rice paper to get to the prize beneath, all the while never once looking away from David. There was an odd thrill to it. David moved forward, crouching down in front of Michael, licking his lips again. "You look good like this."

Michael closed his eyes, letting the warmth and life pool in his stomach, his irritation subsiding with David so close. By the time he opened his eyes again, he was dropping the dead man in the sand, "so you..." He trailed off, wiping at the blood on his chin, "you don't want me to have a girlfriend, do you David?" Something seemed to finally click.

He looked out over the water for a moment, "no, I don't." He said honestly.

Some of the chaos around them seemed to be dying down. Paul had busted the boombox over someone's head. There weren't many people left at the party now. Michael followed David's gaze, "I don't suppose it's because you don't want to deal with another pack member?" He knew very well that wasn't it, but Michael wasn't going to embarrass himself if he was wrong.

He shook his head, "no, you're mine." He bit out softly, "I'm not letting some bimbo have you."

Michael arched an eyebrow, "you could've asked me first." Granted, David really wasn't the type to 'ask' for anything. Otherwise Michael wouldn't have found himself where he was now, on a beach in Luna Bay surrounded by death and not even remotely phased by it.
He shrugged, "I don't really ask, it's not my style."

Leaning back in the sand, Michael relaxed a little while he used one arm to prop him up, "no. It's not." The crashing waves carried pink foam as the tide drew back from the party. Dwayne had kicked his discarded victim as far into the water as he wanted to go without risking his shoes.

Michael ran a hand through his hair, "I need to-uh, think about this. We're both guys, y'know?" It was a pretty empty excuse. Honestly, the idea of-well, David didn't really bother him much. A small part of him was sort of curious. Or maybe intrigued. Michael didn't really know, but he did like the strangely comforting presence of his maker. There was something there.

David let out a snort, "so? Does that really matter?" He shot back.

"It used to," Michael admitted, "not so much anymore. I guess." He glanced over at the others, who were relaxing together, keeping their distance from Michael and David. "Fuck. They already knew, didn't they?"

David glanced over at them, "yeah, they knew." There were no secrets between them, after all. Especially not now.

"So what now?"

He shrugged, "I can tell you what I want to do but it's up to you, I'm not going to force you."

But the fact was that whether David forced his hand or not, it looked like Michael didn't have any other choices if Denise's experience was anything to judge by.

"You'll give me time to decide, then?"

"Yeah, but don't take too long." David leaned forward, kissing him hard, "I can only be patient for so long."

Michael stared back at him, dumbstruck. He drew his fingers to his bottom lip, nodding absently, "right. Yeah…" The snickers of Paul and Marko escaped his notice.

Lucy sighed heavily, looking at what could only be called a wooden stake, she found herself at a loss for words. What was Sam getting into? Why was there a cache of these things under his bed? He hadn't been reading horror comics, at least none that she had noticed. Of course she could just ignore it and go down to breakfast, maybe this was just a strange hobby he had picked up, maybe he was taking up whittling, that could be a good thing. Maybe something he and dad could bond over. Before taxidermy he did a lot of woodworking. That had to be it, she would just let it go for now and go sit down to breakfast with her youngest.

It could be so much worse. In the last few months, Michael had only visited them a few times, and he had begun to look so pale. Lucy was convinced he was doing-something. Pressing for any details only ended up cutting their visit short, though. She really didn't know either of her sons anymore. At least, it certainly felt that way sometimes.

"Mom!" Sam shouted from the kitchen as she descended the staircase, "the milk's old!"

She gave him a small smile, "well, honey, how about I make us some eggs instead?" She moved over to the fridge, pulling out eggs and butter.

"Is there gonna be enough time before you take me to school?" He asked, looking towards the
kitchen window where just now it was beginning to grow a little lighter.

"Of course, honey, I'll make time."

Sam smiled. He genuinely smiled. Since Michael left, he hadn't done much of that lately. It was nice to see.

"Wouldn't mind if ya popped a couple in the pan for your old man," grandpa Emerson spoke up, shuffling into the kitchen in his morning robe and house slippers, immediately yanking open the fridge door to grab a root beer.

She smiled at him, "good morning, dad. Don't you think it's a little early for root beer?" She asked, cracking some extra eggs before scrambling them together.

He chuckled hoarsely, scratching his stomach as he lumbered towards the kitchen table, "let an old man have his simple pleasures."

"Are you excited about school, Sam?" She asked, pouring the eggs into the heated pan.

"Well..." Sam trailed off, "my friends are weird, mom. Everybody at school probably already knows that."

She gave him a sympathetic look, "I thought you had gotten them a little more, grounded, lately."

"I did," he said, just a little too quickly, "but y'know, sometimes Ed just goes off on these tangents—and you can't stop him. I just don't wanna get beat up."

If Michael were here he would protect his brother, he always had, but it didn't seem like he was planning on coming back or going to school. She dished up the eggs, handing them out before taking her seat.

"I'm sorry, honey, is there anything I can do?"

"Nah," Sam said, scratching idly at the kitchen table before reaching for a fork as she passed it to him, "I don't think so."

"Could stitch a wild squirrel to your backpack," grandpa Emerson teased, "no fool messes around with the boy with the attack animal."

Lucy shook her head, "well, let me know if there's anything I can do to help. You know I'm here for you, don't you?"

"I know, mom," Sam said, looking back up at her, "and if anything ever happens, like something really bad—you know I'll keep you safe."

"Of course, but Sam, it's my job to keep you safe."

"Sure, I get that," he agreed, shoveling a mouthful of eggs as if it was just an excuse not to talk.

"Boy's grown up a lot since he came down here, Lucy," her father pointed out, his tone far more serious than usual. Perhaps they'd bonded at some point and left her out of the loop. Sam did need some sort of male role model in his life, though. If it had to be anyone, she was glad it was her own.

She went quiet, eating her eggs. She didn't want Sam to grow up and disappear like his brother. She could only hope that everything would turn out alright.
David was getting tired of waiting. Summer was over, Fall was in full swing, and Michael had done nothing. He tossed his coat onto his bed before stripping off his shirt and toeing off his boots. He was going to have to do something himself, soon, before he snapped.

Even Paul could sense this was not a night to screw around with him, and after their hunt he and the others had given David a wide berth, all too anxious to distance themselves from him. Michael especially.

He almost violently turned the water on. Maybe a shower would do him good.

"David?" Michael's voice cut through the sound of running water like a razor.

"What?" He replied, stepping under the spray.

Footsteps echoed on stone. "You were pretty quiet tonight. Everything alright?"

He leaned forward, pressing his palms against the wall, "I'm fine." He bit out, closing his eyes.

"You sure?" The sound of rustling cloth could only mean Michael was fucking with David's coat. Had Paul or Marko talked him into playing a stupid prank? That wasn't like him. "You seemed kind of pissed off."

He tipped his head, glancing through the curtain, trying to catch a glimpse of what he was doing. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing," he lied. Unconvincingly. For a moment, all David could hear anymore was the running water. Then, suddenly, the opposite end of the shower curtain was drawn aside and Michael peered back at him, a towel drawn about his waist.

David froze for a moment, looking him over, "well, this is a pleasant surprise."

He shrugged in response, a wry smile on his lips, "my shower's broken."

David stepped to the side, "well, come in."

Discarding his towel, Michael stepped into the shower and closed the curtain behind him. This time, he was the one to pull David in for a bruising kiss, just barely refraining from letting his fangs appear to nick his lips. David let out a groan, kissing back with equal fervor, pressing close against him, his fingers moving up and threading through his hair. The tension building between them seemed to have almost immediately dissolved under the hot water.

"You want me to what?" Michael repeated, leaning on the doorframe in the kitchen, eyeing his mom incredulously. He knew coming over tonight was a dumb idea.

"To pick Sam up from school. He's having a hard time without you there and I thought it would be a nice surprise for him." She said, washing the last dish and putting it to the side to dry.

He did make a small attempt not to look sour or leave wordlessly like he usually did when she pushed him too much about coming back, but it was a struggle. "I'm working until after dark, he's gonna have to wait a couple hours."

She gave him that look, the one that never failed to make him feel guilty, "please, Michael. He needs his brother."

Michael let out a long suffering sigh. Push came to shove, he knew Sam would get his neck broken
if he didn't watch his mouth around the guys. "Okay, but I wanna talk to him first. Is he in his room?"

She nodded, "yes, he was going through his comics," she paused, "thank you."

"No problem," he said over his shoulder, heading for the stairs. He didn't want to admit David was right. The passing days really had seemed to make his family more of a burden and a chore than a link to his humanity. If there really was any of it left. Plus, he knew Sam had seen him on his first hunt. Couldn't help hearing the memory screaming from Sam's thoughts every time he came over. It was annoying.

"Hey, Sam," Michael called out, rapping his knuckles against his brother's bedroom door frame once he reached the second floor.

Sam jumped slightly, "h-hey, Mike, what's up?" He was sitting on the floor, Nanook beside him, flipping through a, rather small, stack of, wait, were those vampire comics?

"I'm picking you up from school and babysitting tomorrow. Is there a McDonalds or something around there you can hang out at for a couple hours?" Why the hell was he reading vampire comics? Michael scowled at them, peering into his brother's mind to find out.

"I don't need to be fixed!" He snapped, catching the drift of Sam's plans.

Sam yelped, jumping slightly, "what? I didn't say anything!"

"Sam, you're reading vampire comics, I'm not stupid. You think there's something in there to 'fix' me."

He looked guilty down at his lap, "soooooo, what about after school?" He asked, changing the subject.

"I'm picking you up tomorrow night from school, so just don't do anything stupid and I'll meet you there. Sound good?"

He nodded, "yeah but Mike, why?" Now that he got a good look at his brother he did look a little roughed up.

"Because mom said so," he answered simply, approaching Sam, "you get in a fight with your brain-fried buddies or something?" He'd kill them.

He shook his head, "no, some stupid jocks cornered me after school a couple days ago." He said softly, obviously not wanting to tell him but feeling like he had to.

Michael nodded, kneeling down beside Sam and glancing down at a dumb drawing of Dracula getting a face full of garlic. "You want me to deal with them?" He hadn't fed in a couple of days. They were due for a good hunt anyway.

Sam's head snapped up, eyes wide, "umm, well, if you're picking me up from school then I'm sure once they see you they'll leave me alone. I mean, everyone's seen you with your, ummm, friends, and there are all kinds of stories about them. I think just seeing you would work, ya know?" He was rambling, automatically in nervous Sam mode, it seemed like his brother wanted him to starve. Michael might have argued if it weren't for the 'no locals' rule they usually followed.

"Have it your way," Michael replied with a shrug, "but if it's not them, it'll be someone else if you're worried."
"Hey, Mike? Do you, umm, \textit{like} drinking blood? Isn't it gross?"

He rolled his eyes, standing up, "how long you been holding on to that question, huh? Do you like eating burgers, Sam? It's the same thing for me. I like it. That's just what I am."

Sam looked down at his comic before looking up at him like he had questions but wasn't sure he wanted to ask them. He looked back down at the comic.

Michael sat down on the edge of Sam's bed, "if you think I'm gonna eat you or mom or grandpa, I'm not. As that what this is about?"

"How can you sound so, so, calm about this? This whole eating people thing? Is it true about the crosses and the sun and running water?"

"Are you looking for tips?" Michael asked sarcastically. This conversation was bound to happen sooner or later. "I'm calm about it because I am. I'm not human anymore, Sam. We think and act \textit{and feel} different. The second you turn, it's like—" he snapped his fingers, unable to really put it properly into words, "—and nothing is the same. Holy shit burns, from what I can tell. Haven't had to deal with that yet, honestly. Can't go out in the sun. Running water is bullshit. I shower all the time." And more frequently he wasn't alone when he did that anymore, either. Sam could probably live without \textit{that} little bit of enlightenment, though.

Sam mumbled something that he almost didn't catch, "what kills you?"

The air in the room suddenly shifted, as Michael went on guard. "You want to kill me?"

"No! No, I don't want to kill you! You're my brother!" He held up his hands defensively, "I'm just, curious."

"Curiosity killed the cat," Michael said, an edge to his tone. "I think we're done. I'll pick you up tomorrow," he stood up, walking to the bedroom door and stopping with his back to his brother, "and Sam? I'm bringing the guys with me. So don't ask any other stupid questions."

"A-Alright." Sam audibly swallowed, "Mike? You're still my brother."

Michael absorbed those words. "Yeah," he agreed, "you are too." Hopefully Sam was smart enough to realize what that meant.

David and the others were waiting for him when he came outside. "How'd the visit go?" He asked, leaning against his bike. Not that he didn't already know.

"Sam's got a couple bullies, but he doesn't want me to eat them," Michael replied simply, crossing his arms. "I don't want them fucking with him anymore." More and more he was beginning to regard his old family with a clinical distance, maybe like pets. Or livestock he'd grown fond of. Regardless, he didn't want Sam getting hurt as long as he didn't push him too much.

"So, what are we going to do? Eating them is the easiest way to deal with idiots." David asked, looking him over, "Sam was asking stupid questions, wasn't he?"

"A couple," Michael admitted, "he's not going to ask any more. We're babysitting him tomorrow night, by the way." If Sam didn't learn his lesson about stupid questions tonight, he wouldn't get a second strike tomorrow.

"Hungry tonight, Michael?" He asked, changing the subject.
Michael grinned, "always."

"I think it's time we had a little fun, Paul, Marko, go find us a good meal, two of them, we're going to turn them loose and have a nice hunt." David said with a wicked smirk.

Paul and Marko exchanged excited looks, not even pausing to ask questions before starting their bikes and riding off into the night.

Dwayne looked thoughtful, "you really trust them alone?"

"No but they're good at finding the right kind of meal for this kind of thing." David said, watching them go, "let's head back to the hotel, we need to check the batteries in the flashlight."

Michael hadn't seen them play this game through yet. The one attempt they'd made had been with dead batteries in the flashlight because Paul forgot to check first. That guy had broken his neck falling into a pit in less than ten minutes after waking up. It was a bit of a letdown.

"So what's the longest they've ever made it?" Michael asked, climbing onto his bike. Sam wasn't wrong. He'd changed a lot. What might have horrified him a few months ago when his heart was beating and he had a real conscience was entertainment now.

David looked to Dwayne for an answer to that one. The brunette answering almost immediately, "four hours."

"Really? Only four?" Michael shook his head in disbelief, "that's pathetic."

"Hopefully adding an extra person in will be enough to make them last longer." Dwayne said, starting up his bike.

"So we just feed on them after they die?" That sounded a little—weird.

"Sometimes we just kill them ourselves when we get bored." David said as they headed out into the night.

Chapter End Notes

This time around we decided not to use the 'running water' rule. Just in case you've been following most of the fics thus far and were confused as to why the shower didn't boil David and Mike alive/undead.
Chapter 8

Aaron had no idea what happened. One minute he was flirting with a pretty girl and the next he woke up here. His head was killing him. He wished he knew what had happened and where he was. It was dark and there was something cold and cylindrical in his hand. His fingers moved over the long object in his hand, finding a switch and pushing it. Immediately light flooded the area around him. Whoever brought him here had at least given him a flashlight, thank God for small favors. The room he was in was more of a giant cavern. Craggy stone walls surrounded him and the girl he had been talking with was laying on the ground next to him.

Jesus Christ, just his luck. He'd popped a couple of pills in her drink and some crazy fucker had done the same to him. God only knew what kinky shit the guy probably had in mind.

"Mhh," the girl groaned, stirring on the ground, "what's-" she rolled over, drawing a hand to her forehead, unable to formulate a full sentence as she got her bearings.

"Hey, you alright?" He did his best to sound sincere but it wasn't really his strong suit.

With the light shining on her face, she flinched, looking up at him blearily, "I think. Maybe." She took a deep breath, slowly sitting up, "what's going on?"

"I dunno but we should get out of here."

Lucidity came roaring back all at once, and her head snapped up, "where are we?!" She demanded, her voice squeaking, painfully high pitched.

"I dunno but we gotta stay calm."

"Shit," she cursed under her breath, "my purse is gone." It was hard to tell with what little light he had from the flashlight, but the girl sounded like she was crawling along the ground now, searching for it. "I had a pager in there."

He turned the light to follow her, "I don't think it's still here. Whoever grabbed us didn't leave us with anything except the flashlight."

She reached for him so quickly, he almost thought she was going to try to wrest the flashlight away from him. Instead, her hand settled on his elbow and she used him to steady herself as she climbed to her feet. "This isn't good," she remarked, the statement so obvious it was almost painful.

He nodded, starting to walk, the flashlight illuminating the way. "Let's start looking for a way out."

"Why would someone do this? Why did they leave you with a flashlight?" She whispered, pressing closer to him to get better access to their one source of possible salvation, "it's like a sick game. That's what it is." Just as she said that, a trio of roaches skittered over his right foot when he took a step forward. He quickly remembered why roofies seemed like the easy choice for this chick. She didn't shut up.

"Would you shut up? What if they're still around and they hear you? Do you wanna draw attention to us?" He hissed sharply.

She drew to a hard stop, "how do you know it's a 'they'?" She asked suspiciously.

He could swear he heard laughter. But there was no one else but them.
"Them, they it, whatever, what does it matter how many there are? I have no idea if there's one or twenty, it's just a word!"

She reached for his flashlight, "give me that. I'll lead. I don't trust you."

He held the flashlight closer, "no, come on, let's go. No point in arguing." He said, glaring at her.

"I don't want to die-here!" She waved an arm, struggling to come up with a way to describe the subterranean hellhole they'd found themselves in, "I don't see why you think you have to be in charge."

"Because I woke up with the flashlight!" He bit out sharply, "come on, I'm getting out of here." He started walking, turning his back on her.

She yelped, scrambling forward after him in the dark, "wait!"

He stopped, turning, "what?"

"We should leave a trail. So we know we aren't walking in circles," she whispered, following his advice about being quiet, apparently.

He looked around, at a loss for what to use, "what kind of trail?" He asked, lowering his voice.

She peered in the direction his flashlight was aimed, "well…"

From what he could tell, they were in a cave, maybe. Until his eyes landed on an odd patch in the ground. It almost looked like old wood flooring.

"We could make a line of tiny rocks!" The girl exclaimed excitedly.

He gave her a skeptical look, "alright, I guess there are plenty of rocks around. How about you get some and we can try to get out of here."

She nodded, reaching for the flashlight, "I need something to see with if you aren't going to help me."

He trained the light on her, "this way you can gather more, two hands."

It was hard to tell what her reaction was, beyond a slight tensing of her hands as she knelt down and turned away from him to begin scrabbling through the dirt, "figures," she hissed under her breath. For a minute he got to enjoy the view of her tight skirt while she did all the work following through with her dumb plan. Maybe they'd get out of this place after all. Or maybe not.

"HOLY SHIT!" She screeched throwing herself towards him and digging her nails into his legs, "help me! Holy shit! I'm gonna fall!"

He yelped, kicking at her, "hey! Get off!"

"Please, don't let me die!" She screamed even louder, wrapping her arms in a vice-like grip about his knees, struggling to climb or stand. This chick was insane. She was gonna get them killed!

"I'm gonna hit you if you don't let go!" He hissed lowly.

"I'm falling, I'm slipping!" Her wails echoed painfully loud against the walls, bouncing back at him a thousand times, as she struggled to hold him even tighter, enough to bring his knees close against each other if she wanted to knock him over.
He swung, bringing the flashlight down against the side of her head. The screaming immediately kicked up another notch, as blood began to drip down the side of her face. Before he could lift his flashlight again to deliver another blow, a large shape dropped down from the cave ceiling and ripped her off of him, dragging the girl, kicking and screaming into the dark. Then there was silence.

His eyes went wide, the light from the flashlight swinging back and forth, trying to see what had happened, what had taken her. He backed up, pressing against the cave wall.

"Now who's impatient!" A male voice echoed around him.

An echoing growl in response stopped him cold, in his place, and Aaron spun around, running into the dark with his flashlight bobbing around him as fast as his feet could manage.

It seemed to easy, watching Dwayne play head games with the chick first, making her think she was falling into a chasm.

"It hasn't even been ten minutes since they woke up," he complained, "impatient much?"

Of course, then the guy busted her head open, and before Michael even registered what he was doing, he found himself huddled over her body in the dark, squeezing a hand over her mouth to stifle the screams while he drank from her torn throat. He didn't even pull away to reply to their taunts.

"Now who's impatient!" David shouted out loud, laughing at him.

Distantly, he registered the sound of shuffling fabric, and could only assume the others were following the asshole with the flashlight. He tore his mouth from his prey's neck just as the blood loss had weakened her enough to stop trying to struggle, "she was-well, I'm hungry," he said in his defense.

David came up behind him, crouching down, "how's she taste?"

Michael licked his lips thoughtfully. He could see David perfectly fine in the dark, "cheap," he replied, "but good enough. You wanna try?"

David grasped her wrist, eyes locked on Michael as he drew it to his mouth before sinking his fangs in and drinking. After a moment he pulled back, licking his lips, "not bad, not the best though."

Over the last month or so, Michael had noticed that blood seemed to vary, person to person. Fear made it better, among a variety of drugs and drinks, but this one was a bit of a letdown. Maybe he really had been too impatient to feed.

"You think they caught up to him?" Michael asked, idly drawing her other wrist to his mouth to tear a fresh hole in the skin.

"Yes, but they're not going to eat him yet. He's going to taste better than her."

"Why's that?" Michael asked, eyes locking on David's as he continued to drink. This was probably the first time they'd shared a meal together. It was kinda nice. In a twisted, serial killer sort of way.

David sank his fangs back in, "add more flavor, more fear, if Dwayne has his way he'll send the guy near catatonic before eating him."

That explained why party crashing seemed to be the best hunting, even if the parties were few and far between. Couldn't rack up a dozen murders every week.
Once she was lifeless, drained of fear and blood, they pushed her to the side. Something for Thorne to track down and enjoy later.

Michael examined his claws as he spoke, "are you going to go with me to pick up Sam tomorrow?"

"Yes," he said, standing over him, "as if I would let you go on your own."

"What, you don't think I'll come back?" He teased, glancing back at David. He wouldn't put it past Sam to at least try to convince him to go home, even if he had become frightened of his older brother.

David let out a snort, "you couldn't stay away, so no, I know you'll come back."

He didn't bother arguing the point. The thought of being isolated from his pack was hard to even consider. Saying it made him anxious would be an understatement. The mental link between them, and the undefinable pull of their blood—especially David's—Michael couldn't imagine anything but physical pain at having those bonds severed.

"So," Michael sat up, licking the blood from his lips as he felt the bones in his face shift into something between fully human and vampire, "You think my little bro would try to stake me? Or…?" He didn't see much reason for David to be worried. Even Sam's dumb friends would be easy to deal with on his own.

"I think his idiot friends might try and I'm always up for an easy dinner."

He grinned, "shame about that 'no locals' rule, huh?"

David smirked, "I'm always willing to make an exception."

Michael had promised Sam he wouldn't kill anyone, but wrapping his mind around the reason why was becoming more difficult with the passing days. If push came to shove, he had no problem breaking his promise.

"Sam saw me killing the first night," Michael mused, "I see it in his thoughts over and over again, every time I visit. Can we fix that?" Skirting the topic was getting annoying. It'd be easier altogether if he could just make Sam forget everything about them, honestly.

"Sure, that's easy, but why do you want him to forget? He's just going to forget he's supposed to be afraid of you. I mean, come on, Michael, we eat people." David leaned back against the wall, "he needs to remember that."

He knew it was stupid, but Michael was notoriously stubborn, even before routinely dining on teenagers and drifters had become a lifestyle. "Well," he began, "I don't wanna forget who I used to be. Keeping them around helps."

The older vampire rolled his eyes, "really? Michael, you have to let go. You aren't human, you aren't that person anymore, hell, you're not really a person anymore."

Michael frowned, "I don't want to let it go. Why should I?" He just wasn't ready. The minute he let go of Sam, grandpa, his mom—they'd be gone. If he forgot them, then some day they'd probably do the same. They were still his. His family.

Michael leaned back, glaring at David "Not like they'll be around forever. I don't see what the big deal is."
"Hunters, Michael. Your human family is a weakness that can be used by them, hell, your brother has already tried to use your relationship to separate you from us. You can't keep clinging to them."

"So wipe his mind and he won't!" Michael snapped, the air suddenly growing a little tenser. "If he doesn't know, there's no reason any hunters should find out about me either."

"You think he wouldn't try to convince you to 'come home'?"

"I'll say no, and that's it. He's not stupid."

David let out a snort of derision, "but he is, he's an idiot. You just don't see it because he was your brother."

"Okay," Michael admitted, "he does dumb things, but that doesn't make him stupid. Can't you just convince him not to push me on it?" It wouldn't hurt to get his mom to drop the subject too.

"Do you want their minds broken? That's what's going to happen. You fuck with a mind too much and it snaps, no more thought, just drooling in a corner."

"What? Seriously?" He didn't even need to ask. Michael knew David couldn't really lie to him. Or wouldn't. No, he didn't want to break them. He just wanted-shit, Michael didn't even know what he wanted. Maybe part of it was just having something that was his alone. Pets. A distraction. An act of passive defiance. Maybe he just didn't want to admit David was right.

"How much stress can a mind take? We've tested it more than once and it depends on the person. Sam wouldn't last long." He moved closer to Michael, "we could test it if you really want to."

It wasn't easy to stay on the defensive when a part of him knew he was probably right, and another part was suddenly very aware of the older vampire's scent. Cloves and earth, shrouded in cigarette smoke. He'd gotten accustomed to the smell very quickly. Michael relaxed a little, closing some of the space between them, "maybe we just scare Sam tomorrow. Enough to make him drop the subject. If that doesn't work-" he hesitated, absent-mindedly licking his bottom lip, "-then I'll let them go. Make them think I'm dead or something."

David closed the distance, licking his lips softly, "alright, deal."

"C'mon, Mike!" Sam hissed under his breath, shouldering his backpack. There weren't any dumb fast food joints near the school to wait, so he'd been stuck hanging out for four hours outside the front of the school hoping desperately it got dark sooner than later. He'd seen the jerks who gave him shit all the time cruising down the street more than once. Like they were actually searching for someone to pummel. Someone like Sam with a stupid shit-sucking brother who couldn't pick him up until dark or he'd be pan fried by the sun.

The sound of bikes cut through the evening as the sun finished its descent and Sam couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief, finally! The only problem was-

"Hey Sammy!" Michael hailed him as he drew his bike to a stop, not even remotely aware that maybe bringing the four horsemen with him to Sam's school might not be a great idea. Memories of what they'd done roared back into Sam's mind, petrifying him where he stood. It was easier to pretend he hadn't seen his brother murder people when they were alone together, playing house with mom and grandpa. Surrounded by the others though. It made Sam's blood run cold.

David smirked at him, "hey, Sammy, heard you were having some, issues." He leaned forward over the handlebars.
Sam squeezed his backpack straps, feeling smaller than a mouse. Wishing he was. His eyes darted towards his brother. Mike wouldn't-he wouldn't let them hurt him, would he?

Licking his lips several times, Sam looked down at his shoes. It was a lot easier to talk when he wasn't looking at them. David's eyes were chips of ice. "A few," he admitted, "but I'm good." The sound of a car engine revving as it pulled into the school parking lot didn't escape his notice.

David stepped off his bike, moving to the blonde boy, "those the guys?" He asked, nodding toward the car.

Sam glanced over at the car, quickly, "no, it's not," he lied. They were dickwads, but he couldn't live with himself if tomorrow they turned up as dead dickwads. They weren't getting out of the car, now. They were just sort of sitting in the parking lot with the top down, watching him. Watching the vampires. Maybe they were waiting for a show.

David smirked, "you're a horrible liar, Sammy." He looked at the car while Marko gave them a little wave, "we should go talk to them. Shouldn't we boys?"

Paul bobbed his head in agreement, grinning like the cat that got the cream as he looked over at Sam. He didn't like the glint in that guy's eye.

"You wanna stay here or come with us?" Michael asked, the subtext of possibly eating someone tonight not escaping Sam's notice.

Sam whimpered, "come on, Mike, don't do this, please?" He gave him his best puppy dog eyes. Michael climbed off his bike, approaching Sam and throwing an arm around his shoulder, "don't worry. We're just gonna chat. Right David?"

David smirked, "right, we need to make clear who owns this town."

A ripple of soft laughter echoed among them, like they were playing a game. Sam didn't doubt they were, but he was too terrified to fight as his brother pulled him forward while the others disengaged from their bikes and casually strolled across the parking lot.

"Hello, boys, what brings you out here tonight?" David asked, sauntering forward.

The guy in the driver's seat, Nathan, revved his engine, "just going for a ride, man. We weren't bothering you." He looked about as pale as his bleached blonde hair, and Sam wasn't too sure he'd drench his green letterman jacket with sweat if they stuck around much longer.

David leaned against the car door. "Nice ride you've got here." He slid his gloved fingers along the side of the car.

"Mike," Sam hissed in his brother's ear, only to get a warning look in response. What were they gonna do?!

"It's my mom's," Nathan told him, "we need to get home now."

"Before you go, we need to have a little chat." He slung his arm around Nathan's shoulders, "you see that blonde dork over there?" He asked, motioning to Sam, "leave him alone."

Nathan and his cohorts nodded together, and Sam could swear he even heard a slight whimper from one of them.
"No problem." Andy agreed, "we're friend, right bud?" He gave Sam a pleading look. Hard to believe the cro-magnon was capable of fear.

David patted him on the head, pulling away from the car, "I'm glad we understand each other." He pulled back slowly before grasping his shoulder and looking him in the eyes, "if you even think about hurting the little shit you're going to be so filled with fear of what I am going to do to you."

"Y-yeah," Nathan practically whimpered, "please just let us go."

Sam felt like an asshole, but he was sorta glad they did this now. As long as nobody got hurt.

"See?" Michael told him, "not so bad, Sammy."

David patted the car, "get lost." He turned to Michael, "what now?"

"Mom's on the closing shift," Michael remarked, "why don't we take my little bro on a ride? Show him around?"

*Holy shit.*

David smirked from his side of the table, an arm wrapped around Michael's shoulders as they picked at a shared plate of fries. Sam had barely held on during their ride, he was a little surprised he had managed to but the little shit was resilient and determined.

Paul and Marko were on the verge of competitive catcalling nearby, bored to death with Sam. They liked screwing with humans who were more of a challenge. Dwayne was the lucky bastard sitting beside Sam giving him a menacing smirk. He was always good at that.

"I'm not that hungry," Sam mumbled, staring at David and Michael like they were animals in a zoo.

"Eat, Sam, gotta keep your energy up. We wouldn't want you to keel over and die." David snagged a fry, dipping it in ketchup.

"You're having fun," Michael observed, not bothering to say it aloud to his little brother, casually glancing at the arm that rested comfortably on his shoulder.

"Should I not be?" He asked, biting viciously into the fry.

Michael rolled his eyes, tapping the table, "having fun yet, Sam?"

"As long as you're just eating fries," Sam told him, squirming in his seat. The kid wanted to run, with every fibre of his being. His blood was probably an adrenaline cocktail of fear right now. Shame he wasn't dinner tonight.

"Hey, we aren't going to eat you. No worries there. At least as long as you stay out of our business." David leaned forward, locking eyes with Sam as he picked up another fry, "you know what Michael is to me. He's my business, so stop trying to turn him away from me."

Sam grew considerably paler, looking at his brother for help, "I didn't do anything! I—he's my brother! You guys don't need him. Why can't you just let him go?"

Michael glared at him, "doesn't work like that, Sam."

"He's my partner, Sammy. I've been nice, letting you have your little human family time, but, listen to me when I say this, you are being stupid, trying to go after us." David's voice was low, for Sam
and Sam alone. Of course the boys could hear it. Even Paul was smart enough not to butt in.

Sam looked between Michael and David, a mixture of shock and disbelief flitting over his features before he shrank back in his seat. "Okay," he whispered, "I won't."

David leaned back, a cordial smile gracing his lips, "good, you do have some brains in there after all."

Michael took a fry from the plate, biting into it as if they'd all been carrying on a perfectly normal conversation, "he's gonna have nightmares now."

David smirked, "isn't that the point?"

"No, the scary shit is fine," Michael glanced at David, "the kinky sex nightmares, though? That's gross."

"Kinky sex nightmares? Do I even want to take a peek at his mind?"

"It's vivid. His imagination is—scary."

"Hey, why don't we grab some comics, huh?" Marko suggested, hopping up from his seat at the table with Paul.

David stood, popping a fry in his mouth as he went, "sure, why not. You want a new comic, Sam?"

Sam looked to his brother for an answer, which didn't come. Aside from a nonchalant shrug as the younger vampire stood and pushed the plate with the last few remaining fries towards him.

"Mike…" Sam trailed off.

"I've still got you for two more hours, Sam. Your choice whether you want to spend it being a baby or having some fun," Michael told him, beginning to sound exasperated. That was the problem with scaring humans too much. They became annoying very quickly.

"Come on, Sammy, let's go get a new comic." David patted him firmly on the shoulder as he walked past. The subtle threat was enough to get his ass in gear.

"It's close enough to walk," Dwayne observed, looking over at their bikes parked beside the boardwalk railing, "sooner or later one of us is gonna have to give you a lift home. You want to try for Michael again? Those sharp turns are pretty nasty." He wasn't wrong. Michael did start to drive a little more recklessly once he got the new ride.

"Just think about it, Sammy, you got time to decide." David said, strolling down the boardwalk toward the comic shop. It was going to be three idiot birds with one stone tonight. They could easily just dispose of two of them, but once in awhile it was nice to lift something from the comic shop. It'd be a hell of a lot harder if they just ate them. People had a funny habit of closing up shop when their staff went missing in Santa Carla.

"I've got a great idea," Paul mused, popping a stick of gum in his mouth and giving Sam a sly wink in passing. They were all having fun palling around, keeping him on his toes.

"What's your grand idea, Paul?" David asked, shoving his hands in his pockets.

Paul grinned, "let's see how many fights we can pick. Whoever gets someone to throw a punch wins."
"Against one of us or with each other?" Marko asked, biting the thumb of his glove.

"Nobody around here is that stupid," Dwayne cut in.

Michael patted Sam's shoulder, "your friends ever talk about us, Sammy? Besides the twerps at the comic shop?"

"Yeah, I've heard some stories..." he trailed off, looking around, staying a little closer to Mike than the others.

Paul perked up, "yeah, little man? Like what?"

"Umm, there was one story about how you're all ghosts of dead bikers who went off a cliff on a foggy night." Sam said nervously.

Marko stifled a laugh, punching Paul's shoulder, "told you someone saw us when we ditched those old rides."

"I heard another one that you were vengeful dead from the earthquake." Sam seemed to be on a roll now, a little more relaxed with telling stories.

Dwayne smirked, "we started that one. Keeps dickheads from snooping around the hotel when we're sleeping," he gave Sam a pointed look, "doesn't always work."

Sam squeaked, shrinking back a little, "well, ummm, sorry?"

Michael laughed, "chill out Sam," he advised, leaning closer, "relax, alright? You're safe."

He swallowed hard, nodding, "the, umm, story with you, Mike, is that you, umm, are a spirit raised from the dead to serve them."

Michael scowled, his smile immediately disappearing even as Paul snickered. "Shut up, Paul," he snapped.

Well, that was an interesting thought, but spirits were impossible to have any fun with. David almost enjoyed the thought of Michael serving, him at least.

"We're here," Marko proudly announced before Paul could make any jokes to get on Michael's nerves, "Looks like the place is packed tonight. Think they'll notice us?"

"I hope they do." David said with a smirk.

They strolled inside in their usual order, though Michael did hang behind to usher his brother into the shop. He had no real ties to the kid anymore, but was somehow still determined to play the part.

Naturally, a wide berth was made for them, or as wide as could be managed in such a cramped place. David hummed softly, strolling right up to the counter.

"Hello boys." He leaned against the counter, looking at the pair of teens.

Almost in unison, their eyes grew comically large, and the one with the long hair aggressively tugged on the other's shoulder, hissing, "Alan, get the garlic!"

"Don't move a muscle," he hissed, "we just want to have a little chat, don't we boys?" He said, his voice friendly.
Dwayne, Paul, Marko, and Michael stood a few feet away, pretending to flick through comics as they watched the exchange, just as the two idiots caught sight of Sam trying to hide behind a rolling rack.

"Sam! They got you!" Alan gasped in horror.

Sam held up his hands, "no, no, I'm fine, mom made Mike pick me up from school."

"We have a little proposition for you." David said, ignoring their outburst.

Alan looked at his brother, "Ed, I think we should listen. The little one in the back is holding a limited edition." The irony that their lives were in even more danger escaped him.

"There ya go, at least one of you has a brain." David flipped through a comic on the counter, "see, you boys want to continue living your menial little lives, right?"

Ed put on what David could only assume was his most intimidating face, which was a joke. He had to have a screw loose. "What, you planning to abduct the whole city?"

"Now, why would we do that? You don't care about their lives, do you?" He asked, putting down the comic and locking eyes with him, "aren't you more worried about your own?"

The bravado nearly evaporated, with Ed going two shades paler, "what're you getting at?"

"You stay out of our way, keep to yourselves, and you will continue to remain among the living. If you keep attempting to meddle in our affairs, well, I think you'll just find that you'll be joining us for dinner."

"You-" Ed hesitated, "you want us to join you?" His skull was thicker than lead.

David rolled his eyes, "no, you idiot, we're going to eat you."

A loud clang of metal hitting the floor and the rustling of paper signaled that David had made his point, as Dwayne pretended to stumble into one of the rolling comic racks.

"G-got it," Alan stammered, putting an arm around the other teen's shoulder protectively. "No problem."

Sam looked guiltily at the comics splayed across the floor, trying to ignore the pointed looks he was getting from other people in the shop, because they'd seen him come in with the others. Not like he'd ever have to worry about getting hassled at school anymore.

Michael drew up alongside David at the counter, smirking at the pair that stared back at them in sheer horror before redirecting his attention to the older vampire, "mom's gonna expect us at home when she gets out of work. Want to head to the house and raid the fridge?"

David grinned, "yeah, let's go see what's for dinner." He pushed off the counter, "let's go boys."

Dwayne stepped over the fallen rack, with Paul at his heels, while Marko lingered to wave at Ed and Alan, "see ya soon. If you're lucky."

Sam tried to stay in the store, but Michael grabbed the collar of his shirt and dragged him away, "gotta get you to bed, Sammy. School night."

Sam squirmed for a moment before finally relenting when he realized he wasn't getting free. "Yeah, fine, just don't kill me on the way home, please?"
"Marko," Michael called out, "you wanna give my little brother a ride? Drive safe?"

David snagged Sam's arm as he walked past, "I've got him, come on, Sammy, let's have a nice ride."

"Uh—I can ride with Mike, really…" Sam trailed off, suddenly smart enough to know arguing too much wasn't good for his health.

"Nah," he got on his bike, pulling Sam up behind him, "hold on." He turned the key with a grin, the bike rumbling to life. It was a fun ride back to the house. Good thing the wind drowned out the kid's screaming.
Chapter 9

Chapter by Ranranbolly

An hour after they'd made their threats and very nearly killed Allan, if not for Ed's brave presence keeping them at bay, Edgar Frog realized they had to do something quickly. It would have to be something subtle, though. The alien vampires knew about them. Sam hadn't been very useful tonight, either, leading them into the shop. He might as well have served the Frog brothers up to those space-hopping bloodsuckers on a silver platter with parsley on the side. Edgar hated parsley.

"I think I know what we need to do," Edgar stated calmly, drawing the gate down in front of the shop as they stepped outside together and closed up for the night.

Alan fitted the lock into place once the gate was all the way down, "yeah? What's that?"

"We need to write a personal ad. For vampire hunters. Keep it anonymous, send it to the paper. Make it subtle so they don't think we're crazy. Something like 'bloodsuckers at the old hotel ruins by the bluff'."

Alan nodded, "that's a really good idea. Try to get some other professionals out here."

"They'll probably want money."

"That's why you said anonymous, right? If they don't know who put the ad in, they can't ask us for money. Right?"

Edgar nodded sagely, "you're right. We can say we left an unmarked envelope near where they sleep, something like that."

Alan nodded, "so, we put an ad in, what should it say?"

He had to think about that one. Something short to get the right person's attention. "How about this-" Edgar held out his arms in front of him like he was spreading his hands across a sign board, "-galactic neck biters in the old hotel. Need help. Will pay with packet of moolah. Deniro. Dough. Hidden where they sleep, just supply staking." He looked proudly back at his brother, "what do you think?"

"Think it'll work?" Alan sounded a little skeptical but he would go with whatever his brother decided. He always did.

"If it doesn't," Edgar began, looking out across the boardwalk as one-by-one different pockets of glowing lights died, "we're toast."

Was his bed a strong enough barricade, Sam wondered? He whimpered, hugging Nanook close as he sat on his bedroom floor staring at the door where he'd moved his bed to block any unwanted visitors, just in case tonight had all been some elaborate game to catch him off guard. He'd seen his brother kill, he knew that. Mike wasn't well he was still Mike, but he wasn't really the brother Sam knew anymore. The gay thing didn't bother him, even if it was a little weird. His brother always had a girlfriend in Phoenix at any given time, but maybe vampires were different. What Sam was more concerned about right now was his safety, not his brother's sex life. Ugh! They probably did that too.

Sam looked down at Nanook, who gave him a long-suffering look and whine.
"I know, boy," Sam mumbled, running a hand through his dog's coat, "why'd grandpa have to go out the same night mom's closing? It's like he's handing me to those shit-sucking vampires on a platter." At least they'd left him alone once they got to the house, let him go to his room. Give him a head start?

"Hey! Root beer!" He heard one of them exclaim from downstairs. Oh no. Grandpa was gonna blame him if his stuff went missing, he just knew it.

"Shit," Sam hissed under his breath, "Nanook. What's worse, vampires or grandpa?" He asked his dog, receiving a blank stare in response. "Yeah, guess I should—ask them to leave it alone." The question was why Mike hadn't already.

"Oreo's too? Why're they hiding the good shit?" That was that rocker, Paul.

"Keep mom safe, boy," Sam whispered, stalking toward his bed to drag it away from the bedroom door. He was about to risk his life for stupid junk food.

They were all in the dining room when he finally made it downstairs, each of them, even Michael, had either a root beer or an oreo in hand.

"Hey, Sammy, want an oreo?" David asked, holding one out.

"You know those are my grandpa's, right?" Sam asked, eyeing the Oreo suspiciously.

David shrugged, popping it into his mouth, "so? What's your point?"

"I—" Sam shook his head, "I just can't believe you guys are eating his stuff, that's all." He made direct eye contact with his brother, "he's gonna skin me alive if he knows you brought these guys over."

Michael shrugged, "just tell him it was either you or the Oreos and root beer. I think these taste better."

The other boys snickered, continuing to eat and drink the root beer and Oreos. "So, Sam, what're you going to do about it? About us?" David asked, leaning against the counter and taking a drink of root beer.

Sam let out a breath he didn't realise he was holding, "why are you guys such assholes?" They'd kill him if they wanted, Sam didn't see much point in holding back. They were assholes.

"No one goes against us so we do what we want." He said with a shrug, "what's the point in catering to anyone else?"

He was at a loss, "you don't want people to like you?"

"Why would we want them to?" David honestly looked a little confused at that idea.

Sam looked at him, then the others, bewildered, "because it's a hell of a lot easier than having everyone hate you!" He blurted out.

"But we eat people. Do you want the cow you eat to like you? We don't socialize with dinner." David said with a laugh.

Marko snickered, shoving a fistful of Oreos into Paul's mouth and shoving back from the kitchen table to avoid a swift punch to the stomach.
"Guys!" Sam whined, running to find the broom and dustpan.

"Dumbasses," Michael remarked, grinning at David.

David chuckled, "as always. Hey, don't make a mess. I'll make you clean it up."

Dwayne thumped them both upside the back of their heads before snagging another root beer, "don't make me kick your ass."

By the time Sam had managed to clean up the cookie crumbs on the floor, they were all relaxing on the front porch passing something back and forth. It was sort of hard to tell through the kitchen window. Sam edged to the screen door to get a better look. Just a cigarette. Hopefully.

"Wanna sit with us, Sam?" Michael offered.

Sam didn't nod, but he did step outside, edging towards an empty corner of the porch beside a stuffed badger dressed in gardening gear.

David held out the supposed cigarette, "want to try it?"

He stared back as if the thing would rip his arm off the second he touched it, eyes darting back to his brother.

"I don't know…" Sam mumbled.

"It's not going to bite you." David said, holding it closer. It wasn't a cigarette, at least not by the smell of it.

Sam looked at David, "mom might," he replied, "she'll bite my whole freaking head off."

He smirked, "come on, Sam, what she doesn't know won't hurt her. Don't you want to try it?" Why wasn't Michael saying anything? Why wasn't he stopping the blonde asshole?

"It's—don't you ever watch TV?" He was grasping for straws now. Could feel all of them bearing down on him in that funny way they had. Like they were sharing the same fucking brain or something. Hive mind. Maybe they were pod people.

When Paul made a move as if he was going to do something to Sam, he immediately reached for the cigarette, only to find Michael snatching it away.

"She'll bite my head off too," he said simply. The grin he gave Sam almost reminded him of the old days, when the jerk would tease him but then Sam wouldn't actually get hurt or in trouble. He relaxed, finally, for the first time. Just a little.

Michael on the other hand had no qualms about taking a hit off it before passing it to Paul. "Aww, why you gotta spoil the fun, Mikey?" Marko asked, practically pouting at him.

He shrugged, letting a stream of smoke drift from his mouth, "why waste a good hit?" He paused, "plus, it's from Paul's stash. Probably threw rat poison or some shit in it for an extra kick." A quick look at Paul's wicked smile confirmed it.

Sam was horrified. He'd very nearly died, just like in some dumb after school special, and he hadn't even known it.

"So, we still got some time before heading out, what do you want to do?" David asked, looking at Sam but it seemed like his words were meant for the boys and not him.
"It's a nice night," Dwayne mused, "could show you the stars up close and personal."

David smirked, "I like that idea, what do you think, Sammy? Wanna see the stars?"

"As in lay a blanket out in the yard and set up grandpa's telescope?" Sam asked, completely at a loss as to how that was even remotely interesting.

David looked at Michael and smirked, giving a small nod of his head, "go on, Michael, show your brother the stars."

Michael stood up from the railing he'd been leaning against and sauntered towards Sam, offering his hand to him, "c'mon. It'll be fun." The look in his eye gave Sam a sneaking suspicion he was lying.

Sam swallowed hard, hesitantly reaching out and taking his hand, "you're not gonna kill me, right?"

"I can't make any promises," he snarked, dark curls beginning to lick at his cheeks and forehead as the wind around them began to still. Michael grinned, pulling Sam closer and locking an arm around his back and shoulders, "ready?" He asked.

Sam screamed as Michael pulled him into the air. "What the fuck?!" Was he taking him to the mothership? Were they really aliens?

"Don't squirm or I'll drop you," Michael warned him, and it was hard to tell whether he was amused or irritated, because the wind tearing at them was harsh enough that Sam had to bury his face in his brother's shoulder.

Was that howling just the night air, or were they all laughing?

"Having fun, Sammy?" Marko taunted from the ground below as they sailed from the porch and above rustling trees in the yard, their leaves sounding like clacking bones.

"Let me down! Oh god, I'm gonna die!" Sam screamed again, clinging to him as tight as he could.

"Sam," Michael whispered, not letting go, "just enjoy it. We're brothers, remember?" He sounded like he was trying to convince himself of that, "I know you saw me. I'm not sorry, Sam. It's what I am." They slowly began to descend, "I can't help it."

Talk about killing his buzz. Michael didn't really know what compelled him to be honest with Sam. It was only going to make life a hell of a lot more annoying when he came to visit. Now that it was out in the open that he knew Sam had seen him kill, he'd probably want to talk about it.

They'd been at the hotel for a good hour or so after riding home when mom finally showed up, and Michael lost count of how many minutes he'd spent staring into the glittering light of the chandelier in the lobby, stuck in his thoughts. It sucked.

"Michael, you're staring." David said, moving over to him, "your mind keeps wandering, talk to me."

He didn't even bother pretending he was fine, "nothing will ever be normal with them. Now I can't even pretend because I opened my big mouth."

David sat down beside him, "what do you want to do?"

"I don't know," Michael admitted, "I want things with them to be how they used to, but I don't want to lose this. I want both."
"You can't have both, you're not like them anymore. You need to let go."

In response Michael just looked back at the chandelier, letting out a frustrated huff and crossing his arms.

Dwayne watched them from his relaxed position on the couch, stretching his arms above his head, "holding on too much can do funny things to a vampire," he advised, "false guilt. Makes blood start to taste sour."

"I don't want to see you fall into depression, I'm going to have to wipe their minds, at least Sam's." David said firmly.

Michael jerked up, looking back at him, a little shaken, "and what're you gonna replace those memories with?"

He shrugged, "I haven't decided yet, figured you should have a hand in that."

Why did all of this have to be so fucking complicated?

"Right," Michael said, letting his shoulders slump, defeated. "Can I have a couple of days to think about that one?"

David nodded, "yeah, doesn't have to be done now, just soon."

They'd already talked about this before. It was a one time only sort of thing if he didn't want to break his brother, or the others. If he made the wrong choice, the only other options were far more bleak.

"Eating them is always on the table, bud," Paul called out from his perch on the fountain.

Marko punched his shoulder, "he doesn't wanna eat them, just play house, never turns out well."

"Max tried that a couple of times with us," Dwayne mused, "realized he couldn't house train us when Marko finally pissed on his favorite couch. Remember that, David?"

David chuckled, "brought home a girl and bled all over that fucking white monstrosity too."

They didn't talk about Max very often, but Michael had gathered enough to know he didn't like what he heard. Things could be worse, he supposed.

"What about when Dwayne shattered the back door?" Paul asked, grinning.

"With your head?" Marko shot back.

"There was nothing else around to do it with," Dwayne joked, eliciting a round of soft laughter. Even Paul, though the humor was at his own expense.

Michael shook his head, "how did you deal with him for so long?"

"We didn't have much of a choice. Killing your sire isn't easy add to that how old the bastard was and it made it even harder." David explained.

Michael glanced over at Marko and then Paul, "so you two aren't uh…" he trailed off, unsure exactly how to phrase it, "you're close, so why aren't you mates?"

Marko let out a snort of indignation, "and be stuck with his ass forever? I think not."
"I like to play the field, not the dog park," Paul shot back, winking at Marko.

Marko punched his shoulder, "honestly, just haven't found the right person yet." He said, a little more serious.

Dwayne nodded, "plus, after the first fifty years or so, when you're pack, if you haven't done anything yet than it's just weird after that."

"Makes you lucky, Mikey." Paul pointed out.

Michael rolled his eyes, electing not to stroke David's bottomless pit of an ego. If he agreed, he'd never hear the end of it. If he disagreed, he'd never hear the end of it. Still, it was hard to avoid looking over at David to catch his self-satisfied smirk. A cat who got the world's supply of cream.

Paul yawned, in a freakishly over-the-top way, "I think I'm hitting the perch early."

"Lazy bloodsucker." David said, smirking at him, "hey, Michael, want to do something fun?"

His brother finally forgotten for the time being, because thinking about Sam when David suggested doing something 'fun' was just weird, Michael matched his smirk with one of his own, "what did you have in mind?"

Erica had been at this for a few years now and never once had she seen such a strange ad in the personals section. Sure, that's where most hunts were posted if you knew where to look but they were usually in code, this one was way too blunt to be from a professional but it never hurt to follow up. Even if this was a prank it was better to be safe than sorry.

She walked quietly into the sunken hotel, taking in the open space before her. It was well lived in, someone was here, now it was just a matter of finding where they slept.

Hard to believe she hadn't checked this place out before. It was cold, hidden away, dark, and clearly very lived-in, if the furniture and discarded clothes with suspicious stains on them were anything to judge by. Funny, people said Santa Carla was the safest place for miles. Luna Bay was usually where she bagged most of her kills.

There were a few flashlights piled up against the wall beside some discarded denim jackets. They looked well-used. She moved forward, leaving the light of day behind for the moment to sink into a crevice in one of the walls. It didn't take long for her to find an open area with five vampires hanging from an old pipe. Well, the ad wasn't some prank at least.

Erica didn't have a whole lot of experience dealing with more than maybe one or two vampires at once. She'd never encountered a whole pack of them. It was a little unnerving. One wrong move, and if they were old enough, they'd be on her before she could set a bolt off. Here was hoping her aim was good. First, though, she wanted the money the ad promised her. It would be somewhere nearby in an envelope.

She kept an eye on the vampires as she looked for her pay. Nothing. There was nothing. Was this some ploy by the vampires to get a meal?

Seemed like a dumb one. In the middle of the day, they were at their weakest, no matter how old they were. No, this was something else. She'd find out later. Right now Erica wasn't leaving without making one good kill tonight. At least it'd be something to put in her trophy case. The little one would be the easiest to pick off but that one with the long blonde hair, there was something about him that just rubbed her the wrong way.
A brush of cool air sent a few locks of her hair licking at her face, and the vampires above seemed to shift with it. One of them even opened his mouth to yawn. The one with the long black hair. She could see his fangs on full display, deadly, sharp. It was now or never.

The one she didn't like cracked open an eye and she fired. Time didn't slow down, as an inexperienced beginner might expect. It happened almost instantly. The bolt flew, cutting into the dark while the flashlight she'd dropped beside her feet barely illuminated her surroundings. Then, all at once, the others were awake as his gruesome screams broke through the cave, shaking dust from a rusting grate above that had been embedded into the ceiling. Erica's heart stopped, and she made a break for it, her bolt having found its home right in his chest.
Saturday morning. Time to finally relax without school crap ruining his day, to catch up on the horror comics he’d stock-piled from the Frog brothers, and maybe figure out a way to convince his mom to ease up on trying to guilt Mike into coming home. She was taking a shower, so he had plenty of time to figure out what he was going to say over his bowl of frosted flakes. Or he would have, if grandpa hadn't lumbered into the kitchen with his robe wide open to expose the glory of old man belly and boxers, before tossing a folded up newspaper right into the bowl.

"You gonna tell me what all that crap right there is about, Sam?" The old man demanded, slamming himself down into a chair at the kitchen table, "thought you knew better than that."

Sam scowled, "what're you talking about?" He asked, taking a bite of his lucky charms.

"You can't kill four of them and expect him to come home. Chances are, someone actually follows this stupid little stunt, your brother's gonna be killed. You understand me?"

"Grandpa, I don't know what you're talking about." He put his spoon down, had the old man finally lost it?

"You mean to tell me that wasn't you?" The old man asked, "galactic neck biters in the old hotel. Need help. Will pay with packet of moolah. Deniro. Dough. Hidden where they sleep, just supply staking. Help us defend truth, justice, and the American way?"

Sam froze, "those bastards."

Grandpa Emerson relaxed, just a little. It was honestly hard to tell, and if Sam hadn't been paying attention he'd have missed the subtle slackening of the old man's shoulders. "So you weren't part of it, then?"

"No, I would never, I mean, yeah, I wanna save Mike but not like this. Not risking him."

He shook his head, "can't save him. Too late. Been too late for awhile. All you can do is make sure he knows about this, or just keep quiet and hope for the best. If your friends wrote it, they're gonna be roadkill real soon."

"They are? You think they're gonna find out? I mean, the vampires, are they gonna find out?"

"Hard to say. Depends on whether they're the reading sort," grandpa Emerson told him frankly. "Whether they do or not, you may wanna steer clear of those two friends of yours until this blows over." He ran a shaky hand through the wisps of gray hair curling about his ears, "shoulda told your ma to keep you boys in Phoenix." All at once, the dismissive, relaxed nature of Sam's grandpa seemed to disappear. He was scared.

Sam scowled, "why?" He asked, "I'm not gonna do anything stupid. I was gonna try to talk to mom and get her to leave Mike alone too."

Instead of answering him, like a normal person, grandpa Emerson just leveled Sam with a sad look, stood up from the table, and hobbled over to the fridge to grab a root beer. "You can pay for those Oreos you ate out of your chore money," he sighed, leaving Sam to his newspaper tainted cereal.

"I didn't eat them!" He said, instantly defending himself.
He paused in the kitchen doorway, his back to Sam, "Yeah. Figured."

"So why do I have to pay for them?" He asked, looking down at his cereal. "you threw the paper in my breakfast, aren't we kind of even?"

"You've got a point." That was all he said before shuffling away, neither confirming nor denying whether he really was going to cut Sam's chore money. Shit. He had to talk to the Frogs today—before sundown.

"Do you think she did it?" Alan poked his brother's shoulder, just barely avoiding stumbling into him as Edgar drew to a stop between the rolling racks at the comic shop. It sucked handing over the fun job to some random hunter, but they'd both agreed to try this. Test the waters. If the chick who called them that morning ended up as worm chow, well, nobody had to know it was them who sent her after the space vampires. That was the most they'd agree to. Yes, vampires—but they had to be from space. It was the only thing that made any sense in a world that was becoming more and more insane.

"We'll find out tonight." Ed said, looking outside.

Alan nodded, looking towards the wide open space outside of the comic shop, where the light of day shone through. "Did we do the right thing?"

Edgar looked at him like he was crazy, "of course we did, gotta take care of those aliens before they cause problems."

It was hard to argue with his brother. In fact, sometimes it was impossible. Edgar always led, and Alan followed. Even if maybe, just a small part of him wondered whether they were both…

"We gotta be sure we're safe, I mean-" Alan hesitated, "I mean if they do come after us, we should be prepared, shouldn't we?"

Ed scoffed, "we'll be fine, I'm sure she got 'em."

"I know you're right, but still," Alan put a hand on his brother's shoulder, "Ed. We need a back-up plan, man. Even Rambo plants extra traps."

"Like what?" He asked, looking him in the eye.

"Those comics we've been reading," Alan suggested, lowering his voice just as two customers slipped by to oggle some magazines, "they say garlic works, right? We could spill some bird seed outside to stall them if they have to count it. Maybe offer them bottles of holy water and communion wafers."

"Fine, we'll do the birdseed and I bet mom has some garlic we can snag." Ed relented with a sigh, "but I don't think we're gonna need it."

"You're gonna need a lot more than garlic and bird seed!" A familiar voice snapped, and they both jerked up to find Sam Emerson stomping into the comic shop.

"Phoenix, what're you doin' here?" Ed asked, scowling at him.

"You guys could get my brother killed!" He snapped, ignoring the customers that quickly shuffled out of the comic shop to avoid the scene he was dragging in with him.
Ed clamped a hand over his mouth, "hey, you're scaring away the customers. We don't even know what you're talkin' about." He bit out sharply.

Sam glared at him, reaching up to try to pry at Edgar's fingers, mumbling through them, "newspaper. Grandpa showed me. You-" he managed to shove Edgar's hand off of him, lowering his voice considerably, "you guys really think I don't know who put out that ad?!"

Alan and Ed shared a look, so he knew, was there a point in denying it? "They gotta be taken care of before they kill everyone." Alan said after a moment of silence.

"You didn't even tell me, didn't even run it by me-I thought we were in this together. I woulda been fine with getting rid of the others, if it was even possible. For all I know my brother is dead now because of you," Sam went on, voice breaking, "I don't like what he does. He's a monster, and I know that but we were gonna fix him."

"Nothing in any of the books says we can save him, we did you a favor, Sam." Ed said, crossing his arms over his chest.

His shoulders slumped, and Sam seemed to regain some semblance of composure, "what would you guys do if it happened to one of you? What're you gonna do if your stupid ad didn't work, and they show up? You seriously think garlic is gonna be enough? There's five of them."

Edgar looked confident, "it's gonna work and we'd fix the problem if it happened to one of us. Alan would stake me and I'd stake him."

Sam shook his head, "if what you did got my brother staked, Ed, I'm not gonna forgive you. Or let it go."

Alan didn't doubt he was serious. The look in Sam's eyes was bleak. Even if what they did really was the right thing to do, because they were killers, he felt a pang of guilt. They should've told Sam first. Softened the blow. This had to be done. The brothers remained silent as Sam turned and stormed out of the store.

"Dude," Alan mumbled, "if the ad didn't work, we're toast…"

"Of course it worked," Edgar looked confident but the tone of his voice said he wasn't sure, "it had to of."

If not, then shit. They'd just burnt their one bridge. "It's just me and you, Ed."

David growled low in his throat as he pulled the crossbow bolt from Paul's chest. His own chest throbbed as he felt how much pain that damn piece of wood caused. He tore into his wrist, forcing it to Paul's slack lips, hoping it wasn't too late. The rocker was pale enough already, but as it stood, he was practically ashen now.

"Shit," Paul's waning thought whispered in their heads, weak.

"Fuck you, blondie, you don't get to die." Marko growled from beside them.

"Swallow, dammit." David hissed as the blood spilled down his cheeks.

Paul struggled just to keep his eyes open, tongue fluttering over the gash in David's wrist, not nearly fast enough. Most of the blood was pouring out around him, and the gaping wound in his chest continued to expel more than he was able to take in.
"Paul, for fuck's sake, drink!" Michael shouted, perching beside David and gripping at his blood-soaked jacket to give him a good shake.

"Marko, Dwayne, go dig a hole, quickly. Gotta get his ass buried since the fucker won't drink." David ordered, watching the blood spill worthlessly to the ground. It was a hell of a lot slower, but the earth would stop the bleeding, if they were quick.

Dwayne moved quickly, dragging Marko to his feet, pausing only to meet David's gaze, "get Thorne to catch her before she gets far. You'll need more blood."

Michael looked at David, "what do you need me to do?"

"Put pressure on the wound, hopefully we can keep enough blood in him until we can get him buried."

He nodded, immediately tearing off his jacket and wrapping it in a bundle to help apply extra pressure without tearing at Paul's skin where the flesh was struggling to knit together. Heart's blood was more valuable, one of their few weaknesses. How the fuck had that bitch found them?

Paul was still with them, conscious. Barely. "David," he whispered in his leader's mind, "hurts, man. Real bad."

"I know, Paulie, we're gonna get you buried, alright? Just stay with us. Thorn's gonna bring that bitch back for you to eat, alright?"

"Sounds good," he replied, closing his eyes. He was cold. They always were. Undeath had a funny way of doing that to a guy, but there was a distinct difference between the supernatural chill they wore about them and true death. Paul was far closer to the latter now.

Summoned at a whim, their hellhound approached them, head bowed to the ground as he sniffed at the scant scent left behind. It had been maybe three or four minutes now since the event. It would only take a word to send him away.

"Thorn, go get her and bring her back, alive enough for Paul to eat." David ordered, looking at his beloved dog. He was off in an instant, white fur awash in the tunnel with odd shafts of light David couldn't go beyond. They'd really fucked themselves sleeping so close to the exit, just so it'd be easier to take flight for early evening meals. Now they were paying the price. They would have to find a new place to sleep, deeper in, much deeper in.

Dwayne re-appeared, kneeling beside Michael and David, his calm exterior shaken. "Only a few people know we're here," he remarked quietly, gripping one of Paul's hands tightly. A distant scream signalled Thorn's success.

"I bet I know who did it." David said with a growl, it had to be those two shits on the boardwalk, maybe even Sam, but he couldn't see the brat putting his brother at risk.

Michael met David's gaze, and they didn't need to say anything for all three of them to easily make the connection together.

A hiss of fabric and some anguished gurgling signaled the arrival of their loyal hound, dragging a badly injured woman with him by the neck. How she managed to survive the treatment, they didn't know, but she'd clearly sustained some broken bones in the process. There was no fighting a demon-driven hell beast.

"Hey, Paul, we're gonna move you into your nice hole in the ground and feed you, stay with us."
David said, motioning for Michael and Dwayne to help move him.

"Hurry up!" Marko shouted, his voice echoing across the hotel. There were a few spots where the earth was pliant and rich down here, but only one they'd ever saved for a night like this. They never thought they'd really need it. The journey to his temporary grave was not an easy one. Every few steps or even the slightest jostle drew more blood from the wound in his chest, and the healing had almost entirely stopped. His body was giving up.

"Fuck, Paul, talk to me." David ordered sharply, growling at him as he held pressure to the wound, "you're not going to die, you hear me?"

The heavy pause between them might have stopped their hearts if they were even beating, before Paul finally weakly snapped out a stubborn "no," and it was hard to tell whether he was just making one last attempt to be a smartass or done fighting off death. They settled him in the earth as best they could, while Thorn left the dying woman curled up on the ground, waiting patiently for any other direction.

David turned his attention to the hunter, glaring down at her, "who sent you?" He wanted confirmation, not that it really made a difference but knowing for sure could be the difference between Sam's life or death.

She coughed several times, struggling to breathe, frantic to try to scramble away with what little strength she still had. They'd have to tear her mind apart to get what they wanted, it seemed.

David wrapped his hand around her throat, "answer me and we'll make it quick. Refuse and I will make sure you suffer before you die."

"I don't-" her lips formed the words, roughly trying to force sound out through her teeth, ",-know!"

David snarled down at her, "how did you find us?"

The bravado of a hunter was so easy to shatter with the right motivation. "Newspaper," she managed to whisper, "personals."

"Marko, find the paper, let's see this ad." He kept his eyes locked with hers, "did you talk to anyone?"

"No."

Marko scowled, eyeing the woman's jacket and stepping around David to poke at one of the pockets. He reached inside and flipped it out, finding nothing, then proceeded to check the other jacket pocket, turning it out again and finding a cut-out newspaper print with the line "cash reward" circled in red several times. He handed it over to David, making sure to not-so-gently pat the woman's cheek in the process, claws sharp enough to shred skin. He only drew a few droplets of blood on her no-longer-pretty face.

"Liar." He glared at the ad before handing it to Michael, "see any of your brother in that little message?"

Michael scanned through the paragraph quickly, shaking his head. "No. He's a better writer than that."

David, almost gently, took her hand and promptly broke a finger, "you lied once, want to try again? Who did you talk to? Are they really worth keeping quiet about?"
Her screams, while weak and gratifying, were only the beginning if she didn't get her story straight. "Teens!" She rasped, in-between whimpers of agony, "dumb kids on the phone. Said there'd be a reward here. Two boys."

He patted her cheek, "see, was that so hard." He turned his attention back to Paul, "come on, asshole, get up and eat your dinner."

Paul drug his eyes open, reddened and very nearly glowing in the darkness. He tried to sit up, but a fresh stream of blood oozing from his chest quickly diffused that plan. He did, however, manage to drag a hand up over the side of the hole they'd settled him in, reaching out for her. David pulled her close enough for him to grab, helping get her into the hole.

"Eat, you'll feel better. At least you're moving a little more now. Stay with us Paul." He ordered firmly.

As much as she tried to struggle, it wasn't difficult to lower her enough for Paul to get a firm grip on the woman's neck and pull her close, his haunting grimace made all the more stark by near-death. It was not a pretty kill.

"Once you're all healed we'll go get those little fucks and teach them a lesson they'll never forget, I promise." David vowed, sitting beside Paul's grave.

"Grandpa," Sam said, looking over at the old man in the driver's seat, "my soup's cold." They'd been there for half the day. Should've kept his lid on the thermos. Sam looked up from the disappointing slush of what should be steaming tomato soup, "you sure Mike's-I mean you don't think he'll kill us?"

"We got insurance," he patted under the seat, "hopefully they'll be willing to listen."

This was grandpa's idea. Meet them outside the minute they woke up. If nothing was wrong, nothing bad would happen. Then they could just tell Mike and his stupid shit-sucking friends to be careful. If someone got hurt, they'd try to talk them down. Figure out anything they could to dig Edgar and Alan out of the stupid mess they'd made. Like it or not, Sam knew his brother was a killer. He just didn't want to know anybody Mike killed. Even if they were assholes.

"Shouldn't be long now." Grandpa said with a grunt, eyes locked on the decaying stairs.

When he'd been praying for nightfall, hoping against hope everything was okay, the sudden shifting of the grass around grandpa Emerson's jeep suddenly made Sam wish it was still light.

"They're coming," he whispered, hand shaking on the passenger window crank.

David was the first one up, coming to a stop beside the jeep. "Well boys, what do we have here?" He growled, he looked angry. Sam hadn't seen this guy with anything less than a smirk on his face in their limited encounters. This was not good.

Sam tried to smile, peering around, "where's Mike?" He hated himself for how weak his voice sounded. Practically a squeak.

David looked over his shoulder as the rest of the boys came up the stairs. The rocker, Paul, didn't look good. What had happened?

"What are you doing here, Sam?"
It took every ounce of strength he had not to look at his grandpa for assurance. The old man was only there to keep him safe. This was sort of Sam's fight. "We read the paper this morning, and we wanted to make sure you were okay." He hesitated, "Ed and Alan put out a dumb ad, and they weren't thinking, and it was really stupid." He was babbling now, and he knew it.

"We know." David snarled, glancing at Paul, "stay out of our way, Sam, if you want to keep your hide intact."

"Please!" Sam exclaimed, looking over at his brother, who didn't budge from his spot behind David. "I'll do anything, they didn't know what they were doing. Don't kill them. I know they shouldn't have done it, but you can't! You can't!" He directed the second plea to his brother, hoping against hope it would get through to him.

David slammed a hand down on the hood of the old jeep, "they sent a hunter after us, they might as well have shot Paul themselves. They're not getting off, a life for a life and they almost took his." He snarled, eyes golden in his anger.

"Safer to kill the pair of us, too," grandpa spoke up, "we know too much. So what do you wanna do?" There was little force behind his words, but it chilled Sam to the bone.

David locked eyes with the old man, "Michael doesn't want you dead but that doesn't stop me from stripping this whole thing from your memories." He said, his voice icy.

He gave a short grunt in response. Something like a laugh. "A kid tries hard enough, he can fight that. May break him a little, but I know damn well how those things work. You kill his friends, sooner or later Sam's gonna remember. Can't erase something like that. Not all the way."

"I'm more than happy to do it as many times as I have to, even if he winds up a vegetable. He's hopefully smart enough not to fight it too hard."

Sam bit the inside of his cheek, relying on the stubborn old man at his side to stay strong, "you kill people every day. They know that. They'd be psychopaths if they were okay with it. Me, I've got a brother. I don't want him hurt, even if he's..." Sam trailed off. The words 'one of you' hung in the air like an unspoken insult. "Please. Erase their memories, and mine, and grandpa's—even mom's if you have to. I'll never ask you for anything again, and I won't fight it. Please."

David raised an eyebrow, "with how much your little friends know they might wind up braindead, are you ok with that too?"

Sam bowed his head, "it's worth the risk. I just don't want you to kill them." He felt like he was giving up everything, but maybe that's what it was going to take. "I'm sorry. For everything." He didn't just mean tonight. He was sorry for letting this happen to his brother, and sorry to be so helpless through it all. He was sorry that he was saying good-bye.

David looked at the others, it seemed as though they were having a conversation. After a moment he spoke aloud, "Michael, what do you think?"

Michael kept his eyes focused on Sam, softening just enough for him to see the part of Michael that was still him, Sam's big brother. The guy who'd beat the shit out of anyone who so much as touched him, and still made time to give him an Indian rub burn afterwards.

"I think I'm okay with that," Michael said softly, looking at David, "let them go."

David looked back at the pair in the jeep, "I'll come for you later tonight. Don't fight me, if you do, the deal is off and those two idiots are dead." He said, moving away from the jeep, "let's go, we're
going to pay them a visit first."

Sam gave his brother one last, long look, before looking back at David, "thanks."

Modifying memories was tricky work, especially when ideas were so ingrained in someone's mind that it bordered on paranoia, like the Frogs, but David had done it. Not without some side effects, but he was successful in removing all ideas about vampires and hunting from their minds, no more aliens either, but the nightmares, well, those were unavoidable. Sam and Lucy, had been much easier to deal with, he had left Grandpa alone. The old man could be used to keep an eye on the others just in case.

The family thought Michael had crashed his bike the month they first came to Santa Carla. To add to that false memory, the boys trashed his old ride they'd been holding on to. Not a week went by that Michael didn't find himself searching the crowds to be sure neither Sam nor Lucy would show up trying to find him. Even with David adding the compulsion for both of them to stay away from the Boardwalk at night. Still, it got easier. He was sort of able to finally let them go.

They were free to live their lives again, to enjoy the night without fear of idiot teens trying to off them while they slept. They had left their previous sleeping area, moving deeper into the hotel. Any hunter would be hard pressed to find them now.

Marko and Paul were fighting over a new jacket on the shore, having just torn it away from a fresh kill. Dwayne was patiently letting the water lap at his hair to clean the worst of the mess from it. Michael and David sat and watched.

"Does this ever get boring?" Michael wondered aloud.

David shook his head, looking up at the sky, "nope, never."

Michael smirked, turning to look at David. His eyes as intense as ever. "I think I'm okay with that."

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